

# THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Vocational Education (VE) constitutes the local base on which technological development of the nation must be based. There is a popular view that people are schooled to accept a society but they are educated to create or re-create one. Thus, no nation can grow and develop without education. More importantly, no nation can grow and develop without technological education which has abundant potentials of making people absorb new ideas for reacting to the environmental challenges. This paper attempts to look at the origin of Vocational Education, the Importance of Vocational Education, and Vocational Education as meeting manpower need, recommendations are given.

## Introduction

The Nigerian educational philosophy is now inclined towards self improvement and self sustenance, being useful to the society by how much one can contribute to the economic, social, political well being of himself and other members of the society. Any education acquired which cannot meet this objective among others could be regarded as being worthless in the present socio-economic dispensation of Nigeria. No wonder then that more attention is being focused on Vocational Education especially since 1982, when the 1981 National Policy on Education was revised with some amendments in it.

Vocational Education is of vital importance to individuals and the Nigerian nation at large. This is more important as the population is constantly changing as they pass through the various stages of social and economic development.

Esene (1997) stated that, the number of jobless adults in this country is increasing daily by leaps and bounds. Majority of our people are without any meaningful skill to sustain a living. The solution to these problems demands the attention of good vocational education programmes. This is because the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, both mental and physical, are equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society. There is a great urgency for the development of effective and functional workers.

The survival of Nigeria as a self-reliant, economically sufficient and technologically advanced nation largely depends on the production of practical men and women who are knowledgeable and skilled, to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

## Origin of Vocational Education

Vocational Education is as old as the human race, man, since the beginning of time, has worked for his livelihood, and this necessitated that man should learn how to work. For example, the boys followed their father to the farm where they were taught methods of farming, while girls usually stayed with their mothers at home where they learnt home-keeping jobs. This gradually leads to the evolution of what is today known as the "apprenticeship system". Later man learnt new ways of working and later discovered that some individuals developed special skills and practiced such as trades, pottery, metal work, stone and wood carving, dyeing, gardening and home keeping to mention but a few. This was the evolution of the present day apprenticeship system, which was the first unorganized form of vocational education.

## The Concept of Vocational Education

The current Vocational Education (VE) as a subject in Nigeria's educational system, is a relatively recent introduction when compared with other disciplines such as Mathematics, Medicine, Agriculture and so on. Vocational and Technical practices are as old as man. The Committee on Research and Publication of the American Vocational Association (1954) defines it (VTE) as "Education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habit and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to centre and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis". UNESCO (1974) defines the term as "that aspect of the education process involving the study of technologies and other related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills". The National Policy on Education (1981) defines the term as that aspect of education that leads to acquisition of practical, applied skills and basic scientific knowledge<sup>1</sup>. Morman (1979) understands it as "The sum total of all knowledge, skills and methods related to

production, distribution and consumption of goods and services". Ayodele (1984) describes it as, "The education geared towards the transformation of inputs into outputs - which involves rational organizational incorporation of scientific knowledge into a system of production.

In Makoju (2003), cited Eyibe (1987) defines it as, "All man's activities, which enable him to acquire a particular skill dealing with scientific, industrial, commercial or even traditional methods and their use so that he may become a productive human being or citizen". Vocational Education can be defined as the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge, which prepares individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers or technicians.

### **Concept of Manpower**

Hornby (1998) defines manpower as the number of people working or available for work. (A need for skilled manpower). Manpower is the skilled available to the development of a nation.

Encyclopedia (1999) defines manpower as "the training of workforce for skilled required for available jobs.

Development means the process and result of improving the well being of the society. From the writer's understanding, manpower development is developing the skills to meet the technological requirement of the nation, with a view to generating a pool of indigenous manpower sufficient to meet the need of the economy e.g. vocational courses, accountancy, secretaryship, electrical/electronics/computer engineering, technical courses etc.

### **Objectives of Vocational Education**

The importance of Vocational Education programme thus, leading to providing skilled manpower to modernize production is recognized in Nigeria, and finds expression in the National Policy of Education (1981:28) which has its broad objectives as follows :-

1. To provide trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and commerce, particularly at sub-professional grades;
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural industrial, commercial and economic development;
3. To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;
4. To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;
5. To give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant; and
6. To enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology. To the above objectives of vocational education, according to Towe (1987), maybe added the lost item; such as:
7. To provide the student with good general education to enable him communicate fluently and also have an understanding of various sectors of economic and social life.

### **Curriculum**

In discussing the importance of Vocational Education in manpower development, we have to look at the curriculum. Vocational curriculum should be able to integrate school knowledge to community knowledge. The real development of any developing society hinges on the combination of valuable elements of school knowledge and community realities. The curriculum should have relevance; it should be useful and matching realities in term of conformity with existing circumstances.

The core vocational curriculum is not necessarily a compulsory curriculum. What is relevant and essential today and needs to be integrated into the school core curriculum may not be relevant in ten years time. The needs of society are often at odds with the needs of the individual; similarly, the needs of urban areas may contrast sharply with those of rural areas. Community based curriculum, asserts Leby and Lutz (1982), "aim to transform the villages into economically viable communities",

and at the heart of such transformation is the willingness of all the people to respect the dignity of manual labour.

The Vocational Curriculum should be such that Nigerian youths will be prepared for what Alaezi (1989) call "post industrial society" or "society which people move beyond the industrial mode of production" in the sense that it is no longer the dominant mode. Cottage industries and craft based economics are equally honoured. Technological improvements may be sought but new technologies would have to be considered in terms of their humanistic values. The curriculum of vocational education in all its ramification should normally foster the achievement of these goals and meeting the manpower needs in the society.

### ***The Importance of Vocational Education in Manpower Development***

#### **The Importance of Vocational Education in Manpower Development**

The importance of Vocational Education is very vital for survival of man, though very expensive to provide. Vocational Education is the type of education provided in the National Policy of Education (1981) for the purpose of the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. The epoch of vocational education heralded great opportunities for all and sundry. It has its basic goals, the preparation of the learner for entry into employment and advancement in his chosen career, meeting the manpower needs of society, increasing the options available to students and adults and enable learners to wisely select a career (Osuala, 1981). This important aspect of vocational education has usually been misunderstood and misrepresented as education for school dropouts or for social maladjusted, mentally and physical retarded or the underprivileged. Despite these misconceptions the Federal Ministry of Education in its National Policy Revised (1981) advocates for greater emphasis on vocational education.

Nigeria is a country rich in natural resources, some of which are not utilized because of lack of technical manpower.

Vocational education is greatly needed in conserving and developing these resources. It can also help the Nigerian youth acquire training in relevant fields, since most of them are under-developed and under-utilized. Nigerian adults could also be trained or retrained, as a case may be, to fit into new vocations that are emerging due to technological changes that can move the nation forward. No nation can become self-reliant or indeed survive if it continues to rely on the importance of foreign consumer goods for its population. Time has come for Nigerians to encourage the innovative, creativity and industrious nature of the "Igbos". The people are known for their doggedness and hard work. Their ingenuity in the local manufactures of consumer goods, spare parts and equipment compare their efforts to those of the Japanese of the 1960s who transformed Japan into an industrial giant.

Vocational Education is of great importance to people, to society and to the economy of the nation. The development of vocational education programmes will give confidence to the workers and encourage expansion of industry and commerce. It is therefore worthwhile for vocational teachers to continually look for new methods of learning, new approaches to skill building and horizons in their fields as well as to search for better motivating devices to aid the students. This is necessary because the nation's ability to provide its own indigenous technical manpower for the future industrial and economic development depends on Vocational education.

#### **Vocational Education as Meeting Manpower Needs**

Some of the areas by which vocational education can provide valuable manpower need to develop the country's economy are in area of communication. Communication. Oil Exploration. Agricultural Building and Construction.

#### **Communication**

The nation still lacks requisite manpower to handle our communication network. Installation are still contracted to foreigners to handle. Communication equipment and spare parts are imported. We still don't have the know-how and capability to produce most of these equipment. We are not yet enjoying information communication technology at affordable rate.

### **Oil Exploration**

Exploration, Drilling and Refining are areas where Nigerians have not made their marks. It is very sad to find out that when our refineries breakdown the foreign experts are called upon to put them in shape.

### **Vocational Teachers**

The nation also lacks enough trained vocational teachers in our educational institutions. The Government had made concert effort to build technical workshops in almost all her Secondary Schools but it is rather unfortunate that today most of them have not seen the light of the day due in part to the lack of vocational and technical teachers to manage them.

### **Agriculture**

There has been many national programmes (e.g. Operation Feed, the Nation, Green Revolution, Back to Land etc.) geared towards improving agricultural output many of which died naturally without much achievement. Experts in the various fields of agriculture are needed for these laudable objectives to be achieved.

## **Building and Construction**

The construction of roads, skyscraper buildings, bridges etc. are still being contracted to foreign companies. Other areas where we need more vocational manpower are accountancy, secretaryship, electrical/electronic/computer engineers among others. Virtually, all fields of vocational education are yet to produce enough manpower. In fact, there is desire need of Nigerians in these areas.

Many Technical Colleges of Education have been set up to train Vocational and Technical teachers. All this measures are laudable but they are being played by inadequate funding, poor management, obsolete equipment and manpower resources. To make them variable tools at meeting our vocational and technical manpower needs, these inadequacies are to be removed. Education to which vocational education belongs should be given the lion share in our national budget. Establishment of vocational education schools at all levels should be encouraged, adequate funding of the obsolete equipment in our training schools should be replaced with modern ones (e.g. Digital equipment) and emphasis should be placed on SIWES training and scholarship awards.

## **Recommendations**

Technological development and economic prosperity are anchored on Vocational Education. Vocational Education should gear towards producing what one would refer to as "people technologies". It is necessary to examine and adopt the followings recommendations:-

1. There is need to establish more Vocational Schools and Colleges of Education (offering vocational courses), polytechnics to actually develop our indigenous technologies through the use of local raw materials.
2. Total rehabilitation and improvement of existing Technical Colleges, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (offering vocational courses) should be undertaken.
3. Both Federal and State Governments should provide adequate facilities for vocational programmes.
4. Vocational Education should be adequately funded.
5. More Colleges offering vocational education should be established.
6. Poor staffing; not enough qualified trained staff to handle vocational education courses.
7. Existing Universities of Technology should be encouraged to offer vocational education programmes and those already doing so should increase their turn-out.
8. Funds should be provided to implement the recommendations.
9. The private sector, as the main beneficiary of the proposed expansion scheme should help finance the project.

## **Conclusion**

Vocational Education is the aspect of education through which **scientific and** technological requisites are to be fulfilled. It is a gateway to education for living or for **self-reliance**. One can safely say that looking inwards and the use of local raw materials will be better achieved with a working harmony between the indigenous crafts and the research of Colleges of Education, Colleges of Technology/Polytechnics, Universities rather than calling on big industrial establishments. The technologist who works with indigenous craftsmen and technicians will be able to use the local raw materials to make intermediate products that will feed the big industries. That way, we should be establishing the Nigerian world of work. In conclusion therefore, it is obvious that Vocational Education if adequately attended to will eventually bring an end to poverty in our country and meet manpower needs.

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