

# THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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## **Abstract**

Every nation should develop and direct the talents of its citizenry towards making constructive contributions to the society in order to meet the challenges of technological and economic changes in the world. The need for youths and adults to participate effectively in the economic development becomes greater in nations moving towards sustainable economic growth. This paper, therefore highlights the role of Vocational Education in the development of Nigeria's economy, the problems that engulf the effective implementation of the programme and the possible solutions to the problems.

## **Introduction**

Vocational education has been described as education that prepares youths and adults for employment in a specific occupation or family of occupation by providing those experiences which will enable them to develop the competencies needed to qualify for employment (Osuala, 1993).

Denga (1983) also stresses that vocational education is a form of education which specifically prepares an individual to perform in his chosen occupation. With the above view, vocational education may be defined as the training for the acquisition of vocational skills and competencies needed in vocational occupation. It is a systematic learning experience designed to give individuals gainful employment in the areas of Accounting, Secretaryship, Data processing, Catering Industry, Marketing, Agriculture, Communication, Mechanical, Wood Technology, Textile Industry etc. Vocational Education includes Business Education, Technical Education, Agriculture Education, Distributive Education and Home Economics Education.

Vocational educators are therefore those involved in the production of people that would play effective role in the vocational life of a country either as employers of labour or as employees. Nigeria today needs dedicated and trained succession of vocational educators for the continuous production of the different level of manpower to keep the citizenry above subsistence level; to give opportunities for all to be self-fulfilling, to provide a sound base for multi-cultural economy; to reduce, if not to eliminate over - dependence on foreign economics and to participate competitively in the activities that promote global industrial supremacy.

## **Objectives of Vocational Education**

The objectives of Vocational Education include:

- i) To provide appropriate skills and competencies both mental and physical needed in vocational world,
- ii) To inculcate the right vocational attitudes and values for the survival of the individual and the society.
- iii) To provide career information that will help individuals relate their interests, needs and abilities to occupational opportunities,
- iv) To produce Vocational educators who will impart the needed skills and competencies to others.

## **Vocational Education For National Development**

Vocational Education as a provider of service - oriented skills play a vital role in the economic revival of the nation. There is a general contention that society can only survive with educated, skilled, literate population. It was on the recognition of these needs that the national policy on education places emphasis on vocational skills at the secondary and tertiary institutions. These skills when acquired are saleable on the labour market either by employing or being employed. Below are the roles of vocational education for national development.

### **(i) Vocational Education for Self-Reliance**

Vocational Education enables young men and women to be self-reliant in areas such as Technical, secretarial and distributive education thereby encouraging entrepreneurship. To reduce the

problem of unemployment in any given society is to direct educational efforts towards developing skills, attitudes conducive for self-employment. Denga (1983) further stresses that vocational skills would provide equal opportunities for youth and adults to become employable and maintain their employable status regardless of the economic and social change that inevitably affects them. To succeed in this direction, vocational education is the key. The continuous increase in employment in this sector reduces the level of unemployment in the country. Scarcity of investments in private sector leads to slow rate of economic growth and limits the net increase in the employment opportunities. One of the problems of educated unemployed person is manifested in scarcity of skills to invest.

### **(ii) Vocational Education for Economic Development**

Vocational education places emphasis on the needs for individuals to understand and to act intelligently in dealing with the crucial problems that face the country's economy. Eni (1987 p. 54) stated,

As the economy expanded, and as more opportunities arose for trained business workers, as factories brought more people from rural to urban towns, and as industrialization spread and increased the demand for clerical and other business workers, vocational education became a recognized type of education offered in public schools supported by tax money.

Vocational education enable different countries of the world to meet technological changes and advancement in office automation and to deal with day to day business economic issues and problems. The ability to tackle these technological changes, make judicious socio-economic decision as citizens and to prepare for future changes are the philosophy of vocational education.

### **(iii) Vocational Education for Attitude Formation**

Business education which is an integral part of vocational education emphasizes the development of habits, knowledge and attitudes that control the behaviour of persons towards entrepreneurship. Eni (1987 p.52) points out that:

Business Education survey and reveal the desirable kinds of business behaviours and the proper knowledge, habits and attitudes that are needed by business workers to control their desirable performance.

Vocational education also promotes efficiency in the production of useful goods and services and seeks to develop efficient distribution of useful goods and services for the welfare of the public.

### **(iv) Vocational Education as Career Education**

Vocational education educates individuals on those educational experiences and abilities provided in post-primary and tertiary institutions that will facilitate individuals on making intelligent occupational decisions; specialization and to progress in the chosen areas.

These decisions, skills, experiences and interactions when taken consciously result in the formation of viable vocational careers and also provide the means in which the abilities and experiences could be applied on non-vocational areas. Robert (1981) concluded that career education guide individuals to fit into the job opportunities available within the system.

### **(v) Vocational Education for Consumer Education**

Business education which is part of vocational education helps in the development of consumer business and socio-economic competencies, which make people to become more intelligent consumers of goods and services and the development of a better understanding of the individual relationship with business and the place of business in our socio-economic system. Business Education as a part of vocational education, educates the public on the consumption of goods and services, foster conservation and discourages exploitation which could deter the socio-economic growth of the society. It also promotes efficiency in the production of useful goods and services and seeks to develop efficient distribution of useful goods and services for the welfare of the public. Uduma (1990) stresses that these economic understandings, knowledge, and skills are needed by all people in life regardless of their vocation.

## **Problems of Vocational Education**

Vocational education which is perceived to be the gear box needed to prepare youth for vocational competency and to enable them fit into the world of work is fraught with many problems. Some of these problems are as follows:

### **1. Wrong Perception of Vocational Education**

Vocational education is perceived by many to be education for the drop-outs and for children from the poor family. Many people still have the false impression that Vocational Education are meant for those who cannot gain admission into science and grammar secondary schools. This attitude tends to make Vocational Education profession inferior.

### **2. Insufficient Finance**

The funds provided for vocational Educators to procure and maintain instructional materials and equipment for teaching and learning are often grossly inadequate. Federal and State Governments do not make enough budgetary allocations to institutions offering vocational subjects for them to be able to procure equipment and maintain studios and make replacement of non-functional equipment when necessary.

### **3. Insufficient Instructors**

Vocational instructors are inadequate in institutions of learning due to the few vocational teachers available in the vocational field of specialization. Most of the few available ones are not well equipped with proper orientations. The absence of experienced vocational education teachers make the achievement of vocational objectives difficult.

### **4. Poor Design and Implementation of Curriculum**

Curricula are not designed especially in Business and Technical Education to meet the local, state and national manpower needs of the technological changes of the society. Curricula for technical subjects are not broadened to embrace certain basic areas such as food processing and preservation, clothing manufacture and the technology of machines servicing, while the business curricula are yet to emphasize the introduction of computer and entrepreneur ship training as an integral course to meet the current national needs. In view of the above, Stubbe (1982) suggested that business education curriculum must be redesigned to meet students future needs. The changes suggested include:

- (i) A new course offering called introduction to computer.
- (ii) Emphasis on key broadening rather than the traditional beginning of typewriting.
- (in) Integrating the micro-computer into a greater variety of business education classes.

Where the curriculum is to be implemented, it is not properly implemented to include typewriting and shorthand in pre-vocational studies due to inadequate equipment and teachers.

### **5. Inadequate Training Facilities**

There are few equipped workshops, typewriting studios and other equipment in all components of vocational education in our institutions of learning, few that are available are left in crates and containers rather than installed in workshops and studios. Ulinfun and Nwokolo (1989) observed that one of the major contemporary problems facing vocational education in Nigeria is inadequate office machines and business equipment such as typewriters, photocopiers, accounting machines and duplicating machines. Ikpe (2001) also added that the few schools where these facilities are available, they are usually old, obsolete and non-functional as they need repairs and replacement. In addition to inadequate modern equipment, there are insufficient textbooks and most of the existing few textbooks available do not reflect the socio-economic values of the Nigerian environment but foreign background which eventually reduce the rate of students' comprehension.

### **6. Inadequate Motivational Incentives**

Educators of Vocational Education programme are not adequately motivated in terms of condition of service and welfare package. This makes teaching job to be non-lucrative when compared to other occupations. This equally leads to the resignation of qualified teachers in order to

take up jobs in other lucrative areas. The inadequate motivational incentives for vocational teachers have continued to deny the Nigerian school system of experienced vocational educators.

### **7. Appointment of Non-Professionals as Administrators and Supervisors**

Competent graduates of vocational education in our institutions of learning are not given the opportunity to articulate policies, administer and supervise various aspects of vocational education, such opportunities are given to non-professionals because of politics. This situation deters the progress and proper implementation of the programme.

### **8. In-Service Training for Vocational Educators**

Vocational educators are not often given in-service training in order to update their knowledge, skills and to improve on their methods of instruction to meet the changing societal needs.

### **9. Uncooperative Attitude of Commercial and Industrial Firms to Accept Students for Industrial Work Experience**

Most industries and commercial firms do not accept students on industrial work experience scheme. The refusal of these firms is not in the interest of national development since the students would not be able to bridge the gap between the theoretical experience and the practical experience in the real work situation.

### **Solutions to the Problems of Vocational Education**

1. Enlightenment programmes through seminars and conferences should be mounted to correct the wrong perception of vocational education: Public enlightenment programmes through information centres, seminars and conferences should be created in schools, towns and cities to create awareness of the needs of vocational education, this will correct the wrong perception of vocational education.
2. The Federal and State Government should make enough budgetary allocation to institutions offering vocational education for the procurement of equipment and maintenance of studios, workshops and for the replacement of non-functional parts when necessary. These will enhance an effective instructional and learning atmosphere. Institutions offering Vocational education should in addition generate income internally through sales of goods and services. This will be achieved by creating customer - service units that will be responsible for sales of furniture, farm produce, repairs and maintenance of machines and cars, typing and photocopying of documents for members of the public at moderate costs. The income realized through this process should be used for maintenance of studios, workshops and replacement of non-functional parts when necessary. This will go a long way making the programme to sustain itself.
3. All tertiary institutions in the country should be made to create awareness and offer courses on vocational education. Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in the country should offer courses in vocational education. These will increase the number of students enrolment and in a long run increase the number of vocational instructors.
4. Vocational education curriculum should be revised to cater for the need of the society it serves. In order to keep abreast of the constantly changes in the world of work, vocational education curriculum must be continually assessed, revised to incorporate the values that are basic in business in order to produce well trained and better informed citizens who will know where the jobs are in today's economy and where they are likely to be in future.
5. Special grants should be made available to lecturers and researchers by the government for the purpose of conducting research in all areas of vocational education and publications of textbooks that will reflect the socio-economic values of the Nigerian environment.

6. Enough teaching and learning facilities should be provided in all areas of vocational education in order to equip the students with the needed skills and technology in our society.
7. Adequate motivational incentives in terms of conditions of service and welfare package should be given to vocational education teachers. The government should provide working conditions comparable to what professional colleagues are enjoying in industries. These will induce them to take up teaching jobs,
8. In-service training programme for vocational educators:  
 In-service training programmes that would enable vocational teachers to improve and up-date their knowledge on the methods of instruction should be offered in all the Nigerian tertiary institutions to accommodate the interest of the vocational teachers. The present Technical Teachers Training Programme (T.T.P) organized by the Federal Government is a good step in the right direction but should not be concentrated on few universities to allow greater percentage to benefit from the programme.
9. Competent graduates of vocational education should always be given opportunity to be administrators and supervisors. This will enable them to articulate policies, administer, implement and supervise various aspect of vocational education programmes.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined the role of Vocational Education to be the provider of training requirements for self-reliance, economic development and attitude formation to prospective individuals and employers of labour to meet the needed economic and technological challenges in the society. It also suggested that facilities be provided in adequate number and enlightenment programmes through seminars and conferences be mounted in schools, towns and cities to create awareness that will correct the wrong perception of vocational education.

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