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## The Evolution of Vocational Education in Nigeria and Its Role in National Development

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### **Abstract**

*The genesis of vocational education in Nigeria dates back to pre – colonial era. People adopted it to meet their daily needs. It was practiced in families while training in it occurred under apprenticeship system. Missionary schools excluded it from the curriculum in favour of literary education. Early 1930's saw vocational education in two missionary schools: Hope Waddell Training Institution, Calabar and Nassarawa School. Post independent Nigeria witnessed the publication of the National Policy on Education which favoured the development of vocational education. Since then it has positively influenced individuals and national development. However, its growth has been hindered by implementation problems. For effective manpower development, vocational education requires megabucks, reliable power and favourable societal attitude.*

Vocational education, the oldest form of education in the world (Roberts, 1971) has passed through several stages of transformation both in nomenclature and in

practice over the years to be what it is today. It first started in an informal form within the family circle (between father and son or between mother and daughter). This was known as home apprenticeship system. In every culture, it took a unique approach which resulted in people working to satisfy their daily needs as well as cope with their physical environment.

Vocational education with its characteristic comprehensiveness in nature and responsiveness to emerging technologies remains a veritable tool for training manpower needed for national development anywhere. As a workshop – based education, it is concerned with the methods of processing materials using tools and equipment, into products of economic value. It is also involved in providing services as in home economics, health occupations and other service areas. In the light of the foregoing, vocational education holds the key to national development.

### **Developmental Trends of Vocational Education in Nigeria**

As already noted, the origin of vocational education dates back to the beginning of human communities (Roberts, 1971). Vocational education existed in traditional forms and people had to work for their survival. It was practiced within family circles. Under indigenous system or traditional vocational education, the Nigerian child was taught various skills through weaving, sculpturing, blacksmithing, carving, farming, fishing, cattle rearing, hair plaiting, dress making, bead weaving, leatherwork, pottery, brick making, basket weaving, raffia works, mat weaving and others (Nduka, 1982 and Fafunwa, 1995). The foregoing were forms of vocational education in pre – colonial Nigeria.

During the colonial era in Nigeria, vocational education was not accorded a worthwhile recognition by the missionary school system. Education was literary as in most former British colonies. For almost a hundred years in Nigeria, educated people were those who read classics: Latin, Greek, Milton and Shakespeare. Most of Nigeria's early scholars were famous for their literary erudition or “much book learning” (Fafunwa, 1995).

In the light of the foregoing, vocational education had a very unpopular beginning in Nigeria. As the “mother” of all forms of education, it was not given such an overwhelming official recognition as was accorded grammar school education (Okoro, 1993; Ibritam, 2001; Datol, Danwanzam and Associates, 2004). Many authors blamed this unfortunate situation on the influence of missionary education in Nigeria. The missionary education system focused mainly on training catechists and clerks. There was no programme for vocational skills training in the formal education curriculum until 1909 when some form of vocational education programmes were opened in the country. The Nassarawa School, opened in 1909 in the North, had a technical wing attached to it: leatherwork, carpentry, smithing, weaving and book

binding were taught. The Hope Waddell Training Institute founded by the end of last century (1895), also had a technical wing attached to it: tailoring, carpentry, among other crafts were taught to students.

These institutions were nevertheless pioneers in vocational education (Nduka, 1982). Other early attempts at encouraging vocational education in Nigeria include: Boys' Vocational School, Ididep, Ibiono, Akwa Ibom State in the forties, trained teachers in various types of crafts (erroneously called "Handwork"), making use of local raw materials; Blaize Memorial Industrial School in Abeokuta ran a vocational programme for the youth. The foregoing were trends in the evolution of vocational education between late 1800 and 1909 under the missionary era.

In 1925, Memorandum on education policy in British Tropical Africa was issued. The policy statement invited governments to take a more active part in the provision of technical education which required more costly equipment and properly qualified staff (Nduka, 1982). Sequel to the foregoing the government opened trade centres and technical institutions. Yaba Higher College was an instance of a technical education institution established in 1934 (Nduka, 1982; Okoro, 1993; Imarhiegebe, 2003). Technical and scientific education was provided by the government, commercial and industrial organizations in Nigeria during the period under review. The memorandum also encouraged the government to create departments for training technicians required for national development. Public Works Department, the Post and Telegraph Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Nigerian Railways and other commercial and industrial ventures were among the government's contributions towards the development of vocational technical education in Nigeria.

Upon the official opening of the Yaba Higher College, engineering, medical, teacher training courses and agriculture were offered to the first set of students. The ten-year development plan established in 1946 recommended an expansion of technical education which led to the establishment of 14 craft centres in the North, 9 in the East, and 2 in Lagos. The education given at Yaba College was mainly vocational that led to the award of the college diploma. In 1946, the ten year development plan for the welfare of Nigerians was established. The plan recommended an expansion of technical education to meet the demands for technicians and craftsmen.

By 1952 there were three technical institutions located at Yaba, Enugu and Kaduna and seven trade centres and eighteen handicraft centres dotted all over the country.

In 1953 the first Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was opened in Zaria. After a while, similar colleges were opened in Enugu and Ibadan. These colleges offered courses in mechanical, electrical and civil engineering,

telecommunication, and agriculture. However, the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was short-lived. The publication of Ashby Commission Report in 1960 saw the opening of Universities in the North, East and West of the country. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the East offered the first organized Vocational – Technical Education (VTE) programme to be seen in West Africa. The Commission report also recommended the introduction of technical streams in the secondary schools and three levels of technical education in the country namely: 1. Pre-vocational and Pre-technical levels of training for secondary schools; 2. Craftsman training for technical colleges, trade centres and vocational schools; 3. Technical training for Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology (Nduka, 1982, Okoro, 1993 and Fafunwa, 1995).

In 1977 the Federal Government of Nigeria issued the first National Policy on Education. This policy has favoured the development of vocational education in the country since its formulation. The current issue of this policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) seeks to achieve the five goals which emphasize technological development of Nigeria and subsequently provide solutions to the prevailing economic problems.

To empower vocational education in the pursuit of the above goals and monitor its efforts in achieving quality learning, the government has set up agents of quality assurance to do the job. These agents are National commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC). Each agent has provided minimum standards for use by the training institutions.

In 2005 the National Council on Education (NCE) in response to government declaration of a nine-year basic education programme approved a new curriculum structure namely: lower basic education curriculum (primaries 1-3), middle basic education curriculum (primaries 4-6), and upper basic education curriculum (JSS 1-3) with subject listings. The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), was mandated to re-structure the curriculum with the following objectives in view: Develop interest in science and technology; Acquire basic knowledge and skills in science and technology; Apply their scientific and technological knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the society; Take advantage of the numerous career opportunities offered by science and technology; and become prepared for further studies in science technology.

Basic technology as pre-vocational education subject at the upper basic level is designed to accomplish the following goals: inculcation of technological literacy, that is basic understanding of and capability in technology; exposure of students to the world

of work to match their talents and interests for wise vocational choice and inculcation of positive attitudes towards work as a source of human identity, livelihood and power (NERDC, 2007).

The above account indicates that vocational education is recognized as the key to technological development of Nigeria and sequel to its official recognition, vocational education has made some positive impacts on individuals and Nigeria as a nation.

### **Impact of Vocational Education in Nigeria**

The impact of vocational education in Nigeria is enormous in socio-economic lives of the people. Vocational education (formal and non-formal) is the best known veritable tool for training manpower for national growth. It has trained more manpower than other forms of education. It also has the potential for developing manpower in over one thousand careers represented in all departments of human endeavours (Usoro, Akpan and Otu, 2010). There is no socio-economic sector of the nation that is does not benefit from vocational education. For instance, the technical knowledge, technical information and the skills needed for effective assimilation of the modern technological products are acquired through training and re-training in vocational education.

In 2004 the Federal Government of Nigeria adopted the home-grown National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in response to global reforms in the social and economic context. The core elements of NEEDS are value re-orientation, poverty eradication, job generation, wealth creation and using education to empower the people. Many Nigerians have been empowered through various skills acquisition of that programme. This can be noticed everywhere as there are more self employed young men and women now than was before as a result of vocational training. Information communication Technology is an innovation to which vocational education has responded. This innovation is increasing the potentials of vocational education in its role in simplifying labour, improving standard of living and using computers to solve problems of instruction and administration of vocational programmes.

The quality services now offered in the nation's medical institutions, agro-based sector, Information Communication Technology (ICT), auto-mechanical shops, construction industry, entertainment industry, hospitality industry, transportation sector, are possible via vocational education. In view of its impressive characteristics and potentials, vocational education has been identified as an instrument for achieving Nigeria's dream of industrialization: Vision 2020.

### **Constraints in the Development of Vocational Education in Nigeria**

Even though vocational education holds promise in the development of the nation, it has equally faced offensive constraints in fulfilling its mission. Some of the constraints have root causes in the past, while others are the consequences of social, political, psychological and philosophical forces operating to its disfavour.

After independence in 1960, the hangover of the colonial mentality with regard to vocational education was still with the planners and providers of education in the post-independence Nigeria. Most of the constraints against the development of vocational education in Nigeria originated from the colonial era are now amplified into national issues. The low regard accorded vocational education has affected its image, student's enrolment in vocational technical programmes, and inadequately equipped workshops for the development of occupational skills. Products of vocational education programmes have experienced discrimination when it comes to appointment of individuals into key positions in the government establishments. Furthermore, vocational education is always given the shorter end of the stick during statutory allocations of monies to government organs in the nation.

The instructional phase of vocational education has suffered a lot of disadvantages which include dearth of qualified teachers, lack of training materials and genuine texts based on the familiar background of the Nigerian students. The snail – paced progress of Vocational Technical Education has been blamed, among other factors, on gender imbalance with respect to student enrolment in and practitioners of vocational education. This imbalance has been the consequence of discriminatory attitudes of colonial era and post independent Nigeria (Nduka, 1982; Fafunwa, 1995; Usoro, Ibritam and Usoro, 2011 and Owenvbiugie, 2011). However, today, vocational education has taken an improved posture, but with another level of constraints. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) has placed vocational education on an appreciable level of recognition in view of its incomparable relevance to national growth. Ahmadu Bello University, University of Port Harcourt, University of Uyo, Benue State University and many other tertiary institutions and post primary institutions are offering organized vocational – technical education to the Nigerian youth. However, one major constraint still working against vocational education is that of poor funding (Duwa, 2009). Erratic power supply or complete lack of power is yet another serious problem. Skills training in vocational education involves operation of equipment, machines, and power tools to process raw materials into products or provide services. The problem of power supply is now a national issue which is detrimental to manpower production for national growth.

There is the problem of dearth of qualified vocational education teachers. However, in terms of number of available vocational teachers as already noted, there is

no problem, but when the issue of qualification is considered then most of the vocational teachers are handicapped due to their lack of the needed skills (Ibritam, 2004). Other developmental constraints are inadequate number of workshops, inadequately equipped laboratories, absence of recognized legal status of vocational education, exodus of qualified teachers to greener pastures, weak school – industry relationship, use of inadequate aptitude test to select students for vocational training, inadequate curriculum for training teachers, and lack of follow – up studies to monitor the performance of programme products in the world of work. Vocational education programme in Nigeria has never enjoyed life insurance coverage for both students and teachers.

### **Prospects of Vocational Education in Nigeria**

While vocational education in Nigeria has faced offensive developmental problems, there are prospects awaiting fulfillment by the efforts of all stakeholders. The prospects of vocational education in Nigeria lie in the aggressive control or eradication of already identified constraints. Proper handling of constraints is apt to make Nigeria witness and enjoy the prospects of vocational education. (Usoro, Usoro, Akpan & Otu, 2010). These prospects include the potentials of vocational education to: 1) Create jobs for the jobless through entrepreneurial skills training 2) Reduce or eliminate complete dependence on paid job system 3) Train manpower in over one thousand vocational careers represented in Nigeria's departments of human endeavours. 4) Increase female participation in activities associated with national development 5) Equip more individuals with balanced work behavior needed for employment success in the world of work 6) Bring basic technology (technical, agricultural, business, home economics etc.) to the door steps of most Nigerian families 7) Train individuals who will compete favourably with their counterparts from purely academic disciplines 8) Utilize locally available materials in training the youth in skills acquisition for the world of work 9) Create opportunities for meeting the occupational demands of special needs individuals in the interest of national development. More functional and state- of- the- art skills have been introduced into various levels of vocational education curriculum which make product of the programme better off than their counterparts from grammar schools. Time is fast approaching when most Nigerians would want to send their wards to vocational schools, because vocational education holds the key to Nigeria's developmental problems.

### **Conclusion**

Vocational education is an instrument, par excellence, for technological advancement of any nation. Its development in Nigeria has experienced long winding and snail-spaced processes. It started long before the arrival of the European missionaries. Its development throughout the period of colonial administration was slow until after independence in 1960.

The 1969 great national conference and the first indigenous national seminar in 1977 led to the publication of the first National Policy on Education. This policy favoured public recognition and development of vocational education in Nigeria. Its development has faced serious implementation challenges. In the face of these challenges, vocational education is seen as the key to national development. The challenges against the development of vocational education include: poor funding, erratic power supply, and dearth of qualified teachers all of which constitute the roots of the problems hindering the attainment of the goals of vocational education in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The funding of vocational education must be backed up by law and aided by interested agencies.
2. Functional workshops with modern equipment and tools should be provided in every vocational education institution in the country.
3. Vocational education teacher training institutions should be redesigned for competency-based teacher training involving the use of information communication technology.
4. Government should do everything within its power to ensure steady power supply in the country or provide appropriate standby generators to all vocational education programmes for the operation of machines and tools involved in skills acquisition.
5. Vocational education should be accorded a separate legal recognition for its role in national development instead of being covered under the umbrella of science and technology.

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