THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN QUALITY EDUCATION

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Abstract

The colonial, the post-independent governments and private individuals and groups promoted education in Nigeria. However, there was no serious emphasis in vocational/technical education. An attempt to introduce vocational/technical education into secondary schools in the 1970's through the launching of a national policy on education was bewildered by haphazard implementation and apathy on the side of parents and students who preferred grammar school type of education to vocational/technical education. The paper opined that Nigeria's current industrial and technological backwardness and youth unemployment is traceable to her not giving vocational/technical education the needed emphasis in her educational development. The paper therefore, suggests that to reverse this trend, Nigeria must vigorously and purposefully pursue vocational/technical education at all levels.

Introduction

The history of Secondary Education in Nigeria indicates that the missionaries, the colonial and post-independent governments, private individuals and groups pursued education vigorously for a variety of reasons, (Fafunwa, 1974). However, vocational/technical education was relegated to the background for a very long time by both government and the private individuals and when Government finally decided to embark on vocational/technical education, through the establishment of Craft Schools and later Technical schools; they were made to look inferior to the grammar (conventional) schools. It was unconsciously impressed on the minds of the people that Craft schools and technical schools were fir the dull, the handicapped, dropouts, the poor and those that have no academic prospects (Olaitan, 1986; Werich and Werick, 1974). Consequently, these types of schools did not experience appreciable growth in terms of number of new schools or enrolments like the grammar schools and as expected, the product were comparatively few.

To fill the gap created by lack of technical manpower, several corporations, Companies and organizations established institutions for training and retraining of their staff. These bodies include Nigeria Railway Corporation, Post and Telecommunication (P & T, now NITEL) NNPC, NTA etc. government also established several specialized institutions, for instance, Nigerian Institute of Journalism and Schools of Nursing and Midwifery for similar purposes.

Prior to the launching of National Policy on Education in 1977, secondary education was organized into grammar (conventional), vocational, technical and commercial schools. Private individuals owned the few comprehensive secondary schools offering a combination of grammar school and commercial types of secondary education. There was no serious attempt to integrate vocational/technical education into the grammar school type of secondary education.

The delay in recognizing the pivotal role of vocational/technical Education in our educational development from the onset was a fundamental flaw in our educational planning and can be regarded as the genesis of the alarming youth unemployment in the society. As a result, graduates of our grammar schools lack the knowledge and skills required in the labour market and were ill prepared to start business on their own in the informal sectors of the economy. They were employed mainly as clerks in the few openings in government establishments and private companies and corporations. Without vocational/technical education they lack the basic skills for useful living in a technological society (Odoma, 2003). Okorie and Ezeji (1988), argued that stable skills at the moment demand both intellectual and manipulative skills and economic development is likely to be difficult in Nigeria except our educational system is geared towards skill development. Odoma (2003), called for introduction of a technology based secondary education programme as a necessity for early preparation of our youths for future educational and industrial challenges.

It is with the above in mind that the paper attempts to review efforts at introducing vocational/technical education into the school system, the consequences of their failure and suggests the way forward.

Vocational/Technical Education and National Policy on Education

In 1977, the Federal Government of Nigeria took a bold step to re-organize education in Nigeria by the introduction of a National Policy on Education (NPE). The National Policy on Education was further revised in 1981. The policy popularly referred to as the 6-3-3-4 system of education. Provides for 6 years of primary schooling, 3 years of junior secondary education, 3 years of senior secondary education, and 4 years of university education. The policy abolished the Higher School Certificate of the Sixth form and also introduced vocational/technical education into the conventional secondary schools or grammar schools. In effect, every secondary school became comprehensive, offering vocational, grammar and technical school subjects.

The policy load emphasis on the study of pre-vocational subjects in the Junior Secondary School (JSS). For instance, it was made compulsory for students to study any two of the following four pre-vocational subjects in the JSS class: Introductory Technology, Local Crafts, Home Economics and Business Studies. In addition to the two selected pre-vocational subjects, every student must study the following core courses: English Language, Mathematics Language of the environment or locality and one major Nigerian Language (Hausa, Ibo or Yoruba), Integrated Science, Social Studies, Creative Arts (Music or Fine Arts), Practical Agriculture, Religious Studies, Physical and Health Education. At the Senior Secondary School (SSS), the following core subjects are compulsory: English Language, Mathematics and one Nigerian Language. One of the subjects must also be taken: Physics, Chemistry and Biology. One subject must be chosen from English Literature, History or Geography; plus Agricultural Science or a vocational subject. In addition, every student must offer three subjects not already offered as core subjects.

The expectation was that the combination of these core and elective subjects would enable graduates of the scheme to offer Liberal Arts, Science and vocational subjects/course in tertiary institutions, and equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills required in labour market (Federal Ministry of Education, 1992). It was expected that these curriculum experiences would held achieve the broad aims of the policy, that is, preparation of young people for useful living in the society and for higher education (The Federal Government, 1981). These broad objectives are in line with UNEDCO (1974) guideline that secondary education should stress technical and vocational education as they are essential to meet me developmental needs and aspirations of individual students for entry into the labour market for admission into higher institutions to acquire more knowledge and skills. The policy represents the first attempt to introduce vocational/technical education into secondary schools in Nigeria. It was hoped that graduates of the system would be prepared to go into full-time employment, apprenticeships or other skills training in the universities, polytechnics and other skills training in the universities, polytechnics and other tertiary institutions. To ensure the success of the education policy, Federal Government spent millions of Naira importing Introductory Technology equipment into the country between 1977 and 1980 and distributed them to schools. For instance vocational/technical education received an allocation of 20.5 million Naira in 1977 alone (Ajeyalemi, 1990).

In a study of selected secondary schools in Eastern Senatorial zone of Kogi State the author discovered that all government secondary schools, Technical Colleges and some private secondary schools were supplied with Introductory Technology equipment. However, in most of the schools the equipment are not in use for a variety of reasons including vandalisation of the equipment, lack of teachers, lack of power supply and others.

Implementation of National Policy Education (NPE)

There has been widespread criticism of the implementation of National Policy on Education from several quarters. Principals and teachers of secondary schools were criticized for failed to take the teaching of the technical and vocational subjects seriously. On the part of principals and teachers of secondary schools they blamed the government for failed to provide the relevant teachers, instructional materials facilities, equipment and operating funds. They also blamed parents and students themselves for putting too much emphasis on the grammar school type of education and thereby not taking vocational subjects seriously, (Iwu, 1996). Analysts have argued that the content of vocational education in the secondary school curriculum is inadequate, that the programmes have been haphazardly implemented, (Nwagwu, 1989; Olotu, 1987) and that the lofty objectives of the programme remained unattained. Some have criticized the compulsory learning of vocational and

technical subjects in secondary schools along with the traditional arts, science and social subjects. They argued that it is better to train those who are technically oriented in technical schools than in the comprehensive secondary schools as provided for in the National Policy on Education, (Heyneman, 1987). Some vocational/technical education in secondary schools, we expected too much from graduates of the programme, (Foster 1987 and Blaug 1977). In their view, the level and type of skills acquired by these students in the secondary schools could not be linked directly and effectively to the labour market.

In addition to the problems of implementation, the attitude of parents and students who perceived vocational/technical education as inferior to grammar school type of education and therefore desired university education rather than vocational training to acquire skills in polytechnics and other similar institutions was a major hindrance to the success of the policy.

Though the policy and its implementation guidelines provides for the following structure of enrolment: Conventional Secondary School 50% , Technical Colleges 10%, Vocational Centres 10%, Apprenticeship Centres 10%, the situation on the ground indicate gross imbalance in the structure. For instance Aina (2000) reported that while there are about 4,448,991 students enrolled in about 5100 approved Secondary Schools nationwide, only about 43000 are enrolled in 138 accredited Technical Colleges nationwide. The combined effect of these factors hampered the effective implementation o the National Policy on Education and consequently the aims and objectives were not realized.

Our secondary education system has failed to achieve one of the broad objectives of the National Policy on Education of equipping the graduants with necessary knowledge and skills for the labour market or for self-employment and the UNESCO objective of preparation for useful living in the society. Any educational objectives and if it cannot solve problems of unemployment, under-employment and shortage of critical skilled manpower (Adesina, 1982).

Vocational/Technical Education and Universal Basic Education (UBE)

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was launched on 30th September 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo. Among the specific objectives of the UBE as outlined in the implementation blueprint, (FGN, FMOE 2000), was ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeric, manipulative and life skills (as well as ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. This objective is not attainable without vigourously pursing vocational/technical education.

Despite this lofty objective, the reality in our schools showed that vocational/technical education is not being embraced in our primary schools. A study of some primary schools in Ofu Local Government Education Area (LGEA) of Kogi State showed that arts and crafts as taught in schools, where they are taught at all, have not grown beyond what it was in the fifties and sixties. The arts and crafts consist of brooms, baskets, native fans and the likes, (lyaji, 2000).

It has been observed that countries of Eastern Europe owed their economic development to the introduction of what they called Polytechnic in their primary and secondary schools, (Evans and Herr, 1978). For this objective as outlined in the UBE to be achieved there is need to emphasize vocational/technical education right from the primary school. This could be easily and effectively achieved by using artisans and craftsmen found in the locality as resource persons in the primary and junior secondary schools. In Ebira area, of Central senatorial zone of Kogi State local craftsmen are employed to teach weaving, which is the major craft in the area, in the primary schools. Artisans and craftsmen in welding, motor mechanic, electrical/electronics, woodwork, building, painting and metal work, air condition, refrigeration etc found in the locality should be employed as resource persons to teach in the primary and junior secondary schools.

Recommendations

The pattern of vocational/technical education to be adopted by Nigeria must take into account the local environment, the global environment, the experiences of other nations and the historical development of her vocational/technical education. It is with these in mind that the following are recommended.

1. There should be a vigorous promotion of vocational/technical education from primary school and through all levels of education.

2. The local craftsmen and artisans should be used in the vocational/technical education from primary school up to junior secondary school levels.
3. Vocational/technical course like, welding, motor mechanic, electrical/ electronics, woodwork. Building, painting and metal work air conditioning refrigeration etc. should be introduced into Senior Secondary Schools and examined at the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination levels.
4. There should be post-Secondary institutions dedicated for vocational/technical education and training in partnership with business community to cater for graduates of our secondary schools.
5. Vocational/Technical Education in Nigeria should develop a strong partnership with the business community and other employers of labour so that training should take care of knowledge and skills required by the employers of labour.
6. There should be adequate funding for Vocational/Technical Education at all levels and special scholarship for the students.

Conclusion

No meaningful industrial and technological break through can take place in any nation without a vigorous and purposeful promotion of vocational/technical education. The industrial and technological break through in Europe, America and Asia countries are precipitated on a very strong and virile vocational/technical education. On the contrary, the industrial and technological backwardness of Nigeria and the alarming rate of youth unemployment is also the consequence of our failure as a nation to vigorously and purposely pursue the same. To be able to experience a breakthrough industrially and technologically, and redress the problem of youth unemployment, Nigeria must embark on a carefully marked out plan of vocational/technical education and vigorously and purposely purse the same. To be able to experience a breakthrough industrially and technologically, and redress the problem of youth unemployment, Nigeria must embark on a carefully marked out plan of vocational/technical education and vigorously and purposefully pursue it.

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