

## VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR NATION BUILDING

*Udoye, R.N. (Mrs.)*

### **Abstract**

Vocational and technical Education is a sub-sector of education universally acclaimed as a major source of knowledge. In order to contribute maximally to national development, sustained efforts have been put into intensifying the status of vocational and technical education in our national life but not much has been achieved. This paper raises some fundamental issues as to why it has not made the desired impact. The problem identified as responsible include inadequate teachers, lack of teaching tools and equipment, unemployment, importation syndrome, poor societal altitude, lack of indigenous textbook and government policy. As a way forward, this work recommends improved funding of vocational and technical education programmes, enhancement of the status of teachers, creation of area vocational centers, improvement of vocational workshops and a determined effort enhance the image of vocational graduates.

### **Introduction**

Vocational Education has been in existence in Africa as far back as in the pre-colonial days although not in a formal sense. With many African nations gaining political independence from Britain, in particular, vocational education become formalized in our institutions. Vocational education was set up to:

- > Alleviate unemployment.
- > Re-orientate student attitude towards rural society, and therefore halt urban migration and
- > Transmits skills useful in employment (Lillis and Hogan, 1983).

The National Policy on Education (1981) defines Vocational/Technical Education as that aspect of education, which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. This policy on education stressed the survival of the individual by acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies as equipment to enable individuals to live and effectively contribute to the development of the society.

Vocational/Technical Education is defined as that aspect of education which utilizes scientific knowledge in the acquisition of practical and applied skill in the solution of technical problems. It has also been referred to as that aspect of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO).

According to Okon (1995) vocational technical education is conceived as instrument for the attainment of self-realization, for individual and national efficiency, economic, scientific and technological development.

Vocational education is described as that aspect of education which prepares one for the world of work (Oranu, 1990).

Vocational education prepares students mainly for occupations requiring manipulative or nontechnical occupations in such fields as Agriculture, Business, Home Economics, Painting, Decoration and others organized to secure confidence and experience by the individual students. It is designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work-habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by worker to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis (Roberts, 1954).

### **What are the Objectives of Vocational Education**

The philosophy of vocational education can be abstracted from the philosophy of education in Nigeria as contained in the National Policy on Education since vocational education is a subset of total education.

Vocational education as a subset of total education shares in significant proportions from the national educational objectives and this is particularly noticeable in objective number four which refers to the acquisition of appropriate skills; abilities and competences to enable the individual contribute to the development of his society. A close examination of the philosophy and aims of education will reveal that education in general, and technical vocational education, in particular, is conceived as a tool for achieving self-reliance, individual and national efficiency, economic, scientific and technological progress. In one word, it is conceived as an instrument for nation building.

The National Policy On Education stated six objectives of Vocational technical education. A close look at these objective shows (hat they are actually human resource development functions of technical education

The objective are:

1. Providing trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades.
2. Providing the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.
3. Providing people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.
4. Giving an introduction to professional studies in engineering and oilier technologies.
5. Giving training and imparting the necessary skill leading lo production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self and-reliance.
6. Enabling the nation's young men and women lo have intelligent. Understanding of the increasing complexity of technology (EME, 1999).
- 7.

Effective vocational education is key to the production of skilled manpower who would be able to utilize the resources available in fulfilling the national objective of Nigeria, vocational and technical educational is glaringly seen as that aspect of education which, going by its definition is significantly responsible for a sound and capable work force expected to serve as a bedrock for economic success of a nation.

Vocational education also makes people intelligent consumers of products of technology in a world of unbridled commercialism.

### **Vocational Education and the Economy**

Man is the prime mover of the economy, and if economic growth is the result of the effectiveness of the productive process, and then man is the primary catalyst of that growth to take place, the work behaviour patterns of man must necessarily change for the better.

Education is the process of bringing about behavioural changes that are worthwhile in individuals. These behavioural changes include the acquisition of new knowledge attitude, skills and abilities.

We live in a world of constant industrial and technological changes. The past few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are-called the jet age not because jets were developed in our time but by observation, it is because the rate at which the novelties of yesterday become obsolete can be compared to the speed of a jet. The effect this has for vocational/ technical education is that as new pieces of equipment and technologies are introduced, new skills are needed to man them. Therefore, vocational/technical education must be keep pace with changes in the world of work and manpower demand so as to remain relevant to national economic development. Where vocational/technical education facts to dove-tail into the actual setting it becomes a pain for worse than "general education" in the beck of the nation. This pain is felt in the form of vocationally skilled unemployed citizens. These people become unemployed because the skills imparted to them are irrelevant to current needs. This is very dangerous because people who have been equipped with vocational technical skill that are not useful to them may decide to put the skills into undesirable uses. '

Vocational education if properly run, should reduce unemployment, increase domestic product (GDP) of the nation and above all improve the much canvassed science and technology base of the country. Some of these skilled also may, become self-employed, creators of jobs instead of job-seekers and add to the overall productive capacity of the nation for home consumption and export purposes.

### **Have these Objectives Been Achieved?**

Yes, but to a large extent no. From the above objectives, it is obvious that vocational technical education is oriented to essentially skilled manpower for commerce and industry in any nation. This has been proved correct in countries likes like the United States of America, Japan and Germany to mention but a few. But in Nigeria, there is shortage of relevant skilled manpower, consistent lack of essential goods and persistent failure of services and unemployment e. t. c. The following questions then arise, why do these laudable objective appear difficult to achieve in Nigeria? What are the problems? What efforts are being made to solve them?

In this country, Nigerian we have so many problems as regards the programmes of vocational/technical education in our schools thus, militating against the realization of the goal of vocational/technical education.

**What are the Problems?** In fulfilling vocational technical education in Nigeria, there are some critical problems. They are:

### **Lack of Qualified/Adequate Personnel Vocational Technical Teachers**

The growth of vocational technical education is hindered because of acute shortage of suitably trained and qualified vocational teachers.

The instructor is himself a master of the skills and the knowledge he imparts. Unfortunately, we do not have enough of them in the classroom because of poor incentive and poor vocational teacher status. This explains why many vocational educators are lured into the industrial sector. Liven when efforts are made by the state and federal Government to train vocational technical teachers by establishing more Colleges of Education (Technical) and instituting scholarships under the Technical Teacher Training Programme (TTTP) as observed in

Nwaokolo (1993), many trained personnel shun the classroom for the industry. The net effect is that there are very few vocational teachers available to implement the vocationalization programme of the National Policy on Education. The paper believes that until this low prestige and status/ problems are addressed by the authorities we will continue to experience dearth of vocational teachers in the classroom.

### **Lack of Vocational Workshops Equipment**

The miming environment is like working environment itself or a replica of the working environment. This implies that the environment in which learners are trained resembles the work environment for which they are being prepared. Here the paper is emphasized on sound vocational workshops. What you find in most secondary schools are buildings for equipment but no machines or equipment/machines. In some cases, no electricity in the workshop resulting in the equipment and machines not installed.

### **Importation Syndrome**

Most items of equipment in use in the areas of vocational/ technical education are not made in Nigeria. They are, in effect imported importations of a lathe machine, for instance, requires a huge amount of foreign currency. In fact, workshop items of equipment were imported on a large scale for secondary school introductory technology programmes in this country in the early eighties. Most equipment imported into Nigeria were vandalized when they arrived at the ports, courtesy of the sea pirates, known as "port rats" sure we don't have competent hands, so the ability in terms of skills to repair them when broken down is an immense problem. We are living witnesses to the fact that some imported "Bulgarian" machines were never installed for lack of either funds, manpower or electricity to run them.

### **Unemployment**

Where vocational/technical education fails to dovetail into the actual work setting, it becomes a pain far worse than literacy education in the neck of the nation in terms of productivity of goods. This pain is felt in the form of vocationally skilled unemployed because they were not taught how to be self-reliant or the skills imparted to them are irrelevant to current needs. This is very dangerous because people who have been equipped with technical skills that are not useful to them many decide to put the skills into undesirable use or remain unemployed because of our ailing economy.

### **Poor Societal Attitude**

Vocational/technical education is not valued in the society. Some people believe that it is for another person's child and that it is for the "never-do-well". This attitude affects the growth of vocational technical education. The public sees the vocational teacher as one who is academically deficient. Ulinfun (1992) says that the teacher would lose if he were to compete with another person for a girl's hand in marriage. Sellers in the market see teachers as misers, persistent bargainers in the market even as one who measures the remains of yam, garri, after cooking and so on even when all teachers enjoy the same conditions of service with other public/government officers.

The vocational teacher unfortunately suffers from two angles-being a teacher and being a technician (Nwaokolo, 1993).

### **Lack of Indigenous Textbooks**

This has affected the development of vocational technical education in Nigeria. Though the books may be available they are foreign in nature and the students find them difficult to interpret (Ekwue, 1993). Ekwue and Udoye (2004) observed that efforts are being made by our Nigerian authors to write books in vocational and technical area to reflect the Nigerian context, but then most publishers find it very difficult to publish the books. This is indeed most depressing. According to them they cannot find a wide enough market for the books.

### **Government Policy**

National Policy on Education states that the senior secondary school will be for those able and willing to have a complete six-year secondary education. So if you are not able, you drop after three years of junior secondary school and go into vocational technical apprenticeship training. This makes the public to see no dignity in opting for vocational and technical education since it is meant for academic failures. This policy statement has now been amended and the word "able to" deleted (Okoro, 1991) but the harm done to the image of vocational education remains.

### **Lack of Fund**

It is very true say the vocational and technical education is a more expressive endeavour than liberal education. We must, therefore declare it a special "grant" area. Until this is done, we will be deceiving ourselves discussing and making policies for vocational and technical education on daily basis.

Ulifun (1992) held that this problem has become a hydra-headed monster that cannot be conquered by government subventions. Because of this poor funding, what you see and have are empty or out dated machines in workshops/laboratories. Experts have identified that inadequate funding slows down the pace of any project.

### **The Way Forward**

#### **Issue of Vocational Teachers**

Teachers in ail education systems should be given special attention to ensure increased productivity. Vocational teachers must therefore, be offered sufficient motivations in order to retain them.-If nothing is done to prevent the drain of master-trainers from vocational programmes in no time the quality of training given will be affected. Presently, science vocational teachers receive allowances, the vocational teachers can join them to enjoy such allowances. A 30% to 40% teaching allowance has been suggested by "Nwaokolo (1997). There is no doubt, also that teaching as an activity holds some satisfaction for some people (Farrugia, 1995). Such people would not mind staying with little encouragement.

#### **Issue of Vocational Workshops and Equipment**

Presently, it may not be possible for the nation to build vocational workshops in all secondary schools, colleges of education and universities and also equip them with relevant machines and tools. What needs to be done is to provide simple vocational tools in all the schools such as hoes, hammers, sewing materials like needles, measurement tape etc. All these can be afforded by schools or the students themselves. The school can raise money through Parents Teachers Association (P. T. A). Since, Medical students and law students can afford to buy textbooks as much as £460,000 to W10Q,000 so also a home economics students or secretarial students can buy a sewing machine or a manual typewriter respectively.

Very costly equipment items may then be provided in vocational centers in some local government areas/towns within the state for the benefit of the schools around who visit such centers on agreement for workshop practice, We are aware that the Education Tax fund (CTF) is now embracing the idea of community centers for information technology and other technologies.

#### **Issue on Unemployment Reduction and Poverty Alleviation**

There is this casual reference to self-employment and/or self-reliance in the national policy but nothing was done to prescribed a curriculum for what Afonja (1999) called 'technical entrepreneurship". That entrepreneurship skills amount to vocational skills is fallacious, li has lo be candidly addressed now that unemployment has become a thorn in the flesh of the Nigerian economy. The recent introduction of Entrepreneurship in the curriculum of students is something very good. This should be made compulsory for all programmes so that on graduation, a student who cannot obtain a paid job can embark on a sell-employment enterprise.

#### **Change Negative Public Attitude**

The present efforts by the government al raising the vocational teacher's socio-economic status should be encouraged. Teachers in the public sector are currently enjoying the same condition of service as with other service sectors. An additional vocational allowance as suggested above will go a long way in enhancing the social status of the teacher and thus encourage him/her to put in more qualitative work.

#### **Issue of Indigenous Textbooks**

Experts in the field of vocational education in Nigeria should be encouraged to write books. On the side of the government/employers, educational institutions, granting of soil loans lo these experts will enable them pay for the publications.

### **Issue of Government Policy**

Now that there's increase in public awareness of the importance of vocational/technical education, government should increase job opportunities for graduates of vocational courses knowing full well the role they are expected to play in the nation's technologies development.

### **Issue of Funding**

Vocational education is capital intensive and so the issue of funding is seen as the central problem facing the programme. Thanks to the Federal Government for the creation of Education Tax Fund (ETF) which is now operational. It is believed that Education Tax Fund must and will continue to spend a good proportion of its earnings on technological education since we all rightly agree that technological development is very important for the survival and development of the nation for economic rehabilitation and reliance.

### **Conclusion**

Vocational education is absolutely essential for the economic survival of any nation. Sequel to this, Nigeria's school system became vocationalised by the National Policy on Education (1981). Unfortunately, the programme has been less than successful because of implementation problems such as unqualified vocational teachers and absence of sound workshops and equipment among others.

Since our interest is to improve vocational technical education for our economic well-being, we must search for ways to enhance vocational technical education in Nigeria. -

### **Reference**

- Ekwue, K.C. (1993). Teaching of Accounting in Secondary School an Appraisal of Instructional Materials. *Business Educational Journal* 111.
- Ekwue, K.C and Udoeye, R.N. (2004). Functionality Vocational Technical Education. A Paper Presented at the National Conference of " the Academic Forum for Interdisciplinary Discourses with Institute of Education ESUT, Held at IMT, Enugu. •
- Farrugia, C.J, (1985). *The Status of Teachers In Malta. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis. University of London, London.*
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NBRDC Press.
- Idialu, J.O. (1991). An Appraisal of the Philosophy and Objectives of Vocational/Technical Education in Nigeria. *Nigerian Vocational Journal* Pp 86-93.
- Lilis, K and Hogan, D. (1983). Dilemmas of Diversification: Problems Associated with Vocational Education in Developing Countries. *Comparative Education Review*. 19. (1).
- Nwaokolo, P.O (1991). Philosophy and Objectives of Vocational Educational in the Nigerian Secondary Schools: An Appraisal. *Nigerian Vocational Journal*. Pp 28-35.
- Nwaokolo, P.O (1993). Social Perception of the Status of Teachers in Nigeria with Particular Reference to Vocational Teachers: Case Study of Edo and Delta States of Nigeria. (Unpublished) Ph. D. Thesis, University of England, Lancaster.
- Nwaokolo, P. O. (1997a). Vocationalisation of Schools in Nigeria: The Way Forward. In A All (Ed) *Perspectives on Crucial Issues on Nigerian and African Education*, 2 (25-34): A Publication of Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Onitsha Publishers International Limited.
- Okon, E.J. (1995). Towards the Preparation of National Workshop on Technical Education. Unwritten Preambles in Federal Ministry of Educations, Lagos.
- Okoro, D.C.U. (1991). Support Paper: Senior Secondary School Educational. In O.

Ohuche (Ed) • *Moving Educations in Nigeria Toward the Year 2000*, Pp 42. Nigerian Academy of Education.

Olaitan, S. O. (1993). Human Resource, Vocational Technical Education and the Economy. *Journal of Technical Education Review*. Pp 1-9.

Oranu, R.N. (1990). Training of NCE for Vocational and Technical Education. A Paper-Presented at a Workshop Organized by (he National Commission for Colleges of Education, Zaria.'

Roberts, R.N. (1954). *Vocational and Practical Arts Education*. New York: Harper and **Row Publishers**.

V UNESCO Institute of Education (1Q9S). UIE Case Studies S; *Vocation Education on Transition: A Seven Country Study Of Curriculum for life-long Vocational Learning*, UNESCO,

Ulinfun, F.E.. (1092). Some Emerging Issues and Problems of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria. A Paper Presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Nigerian Vocational Association (NVA) Held at ]•. C. 1.-. (T) Umunze.