
Regenerating Vocational Education for Poverty Eradication, Self- reliance and National Development

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Abstract

This paper examines vocational education as a viable tool to eradicate poverty, and build a strong self-reliant and developed nation. The problems and prospects of vocational education were identified, and strategies for regenerating vocational education were profered; this includes: retraining of teachers, curriculum innovations, awareness/ orientation to be carried out, provision of soft loan scheme to graduates etc.

The global economic recession of the early 80's brought in its wake, a number of economic challenges. Unemployment and poverty are among these challenges and have far reaching implications for the well being of the nation's economy and development. The nation must therefore respond to these challenges and undergo a systematic change to be economically vibrant and competitive. In Nigeria such response saw the adoption of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and National Policy On Education (NPE) schemes which focus on access to education and skills acquisition respectively. The overall objective of the strategies is to place Nigeria in its right place in the world economy using education as a springboard. Onoriode (2005) asserted that the height of development of any nation finds it's root in education as it pervades every sphere of the nation's life in pursuit of self development. However, a critical examination of the Nigerian system of education portrays a picture of a system that is yet to be fully integrated and focused to brace up to the challenges of the changing world and propel the nation to self development. The National Planning Commission (2005) noted that the Nigerian system of education emphasized theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational and entrepreneurial education. Consequently, the unemployment index, according to Oshewolo (2011) is rising not just because there are no jobs but essentially because the skills available are not sufficiently relevant to the

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needs of industries. In the opinion of Onoriode and Odjegba (2010) the school curriculum therefore needs urgent review to make the system relevant and practice oriented. This implies that, there is need for more attention to be paid to functional practical skill- based education in Nigeria to be able to harness the nation's vast natural resources for economic prosperity. Vocational education offers this type of education. It is against this background that this paper seeks ways of regenerating vocational education as a tool for poverty eradication, self – reliance and national development.

Conceptual Clarification of the Core Issues

Poverty Eradication

For the best part of 1960's, poverty eradication efforts of Nigeria centred on education, which was seen as the key economic, technological and intellectual development “show the light and the people will find the way” was at time an oft – quoted mantra of Nigeria's first president, the late Nnamdi Azikiwe. Thus, education programmes were implemented alongside agriculture. In spite of this, Nigeria poverty index continued to increase. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS)(2010) poverty index increase from 15% in 1960 to 28% in 1980. By 1985 it was 48% although it dropped to 43% in 1992. However in 1996 poverty incidence rose to 66% which accounted for 76.6 million Nigerians out of a population of 110 million. By 1999 the UN human poverty index credited Nigeria with 41.6% and this placed Nigeria as among the 25 poorest Nations in the world. It is on record that Nigeria earned/realised over \$300 billion from oil and gas revenues and development aid, yet presently it is estimated that two – third of the country's 140 million people or 80 million are said to be poor. The cause of this state of poverty in the country has variously been traced to many factors; Corruption, bad governance, debt overhang, unemployment, low productivity, burgeoning population growth, globalisation, unfocused government policies and lack of effective skills training legacies.

Government has made several attempts to ameliorate these problems through programmes like: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), People's Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), Youth Empowerment Schemes (YES), Establishment of skill acquisition centres, National Directorate for Empowerment (NDE) and currently through National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEEDS). However these attempts have not yielded the desired results, hence Eze (2009: 447) explains that, the level of poverty is still increasing geometrically. While Soludo(2003) lamented that poverty is deep and pervasive with about 70% of Nigerian population living in absolute poverty that is (less than US \$1 per day).

The Nigeria Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) aims at freeing all men, women and children from abject dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty by the

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year 2015, can successfully be achieved if emphasis is put on vocational education in our school system.

Self – Reliance

In vocational education, self – reliance means using one’s acquired skills to achieve self employment in order to ensure economic survival in a depressed economy. Ngwu (2010) sees Self – reliance as one relying on one’s abilities, effort, confidence for making his or her own earnings and not depending on anybody for employment. In the view of Anide and Eya (2011), self-reliance is all about self-sufficiency, independence, able to do or decide things by self rather than depend on other people. Every body both graduates, youths, men and women must make vocational education a priority to boost the Nigerian economy.

Vocational Education

Vocational education according to Ogunmola and Ugiagbe (2003) could be defined as that type of education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. UNESCO (1978) equally viewed vocational education as that type of education deliberately designed for the development of skills and knowledge which can be useful to the individual concerned and the society.

The National Policy on Education (2004): deliberately introduced vocational education with the following goals :

1. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advance craft and technical levels;
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development;
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

National Development

National development as put by Okoro(1999) is a progressive transformation of economic, social and political structure of a society from a relative less complex, less sufficient and more desireous while Osagie (2011) sees National development as the full realisation of human potential and maximum utilization of the nation’s resources for the benefit of all.

For full potentials of economic, social and political factors to be realised, human factor is very essential. For the human factor to be developed, education is very paramount. Therefore, the role of vocational education to development of any nation can not be over emphasised. It must be made more functional to achieve its goals.

Prospects of Vocational Education

If vocational education is properly implemented in schools, starting from primary to tertiary institution will go a long way to helping the citizens to be self-reliant, eradicate poverty and enhance stability in the nation's economy hence develop the Nation.

The following are prospects of vocational education according to Ogunmola and Ugiagbe (2003).

- a. **Bridging the gap between theory and practical :** Vocational the education has the prospects of bridging the gap between theory and practical works in schools. Students will see things done practically as it has been taught in the theory class. The teachers will demonstrate the skills to the students if the laboratories and workshops are well equipped. Students will be exposed to the use and handling of machines and changes and innovations of various equipment in various occupations. This will make them fit into the world of work, and gain full employment in factories or industries after graduation.
- b. **Encouragement of indigenous technology:** Vocational education always keeps pace with the level of technological development in any country. And so influences various courses and programmes to be offered in schools, colleges and university ,which will in turn bring about curriculum change and innovation to suit the needed technology. This therefore will assist the country to develop her own technology rather than depend on imported ones. In so doing, industrial growth, and expansion in the various careers of vocational education will be encouraged.
- c. **Promote the taste and consumption of home -made goods and services:** The prospects of vocational education will encourage the consumption pattern of Nigerians. If the indogenous or cottage industries in Nigeria are producing equality goods and services, Nigeria will have a preference for home-made goods to imported ones. This will as a matter of fact, encourage more cottage industries and improved employment of youths and adults in the country.

Problems of Vocational Education

Despite the prospects and the good intentions of the Federal Government in establishing vocational education, many problems have hindered the full achievement of these goals. Ogunmola and Ugiagbe (2003) enumerated the following problems :

1. **Missionary and colonial factors:** According to Okafor (2011), the western education came with the agenda and motives of satisfying the needs of the missionary. That is in areas of evangelism and proselytization. It is obvious that the type of education pursued by the early missionaries was heavily religious;

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imagine the teaching of the R's – Reading, writing and arithmetic which is aimed at getting interpreters to bridge the communication gap and a few clerk that would help them in plundering mission. This led to the establishment of grammar schools and no technical college at all.

2. **Lack of economic self-reliance awareness:** Lack of awareness of the importance of skill acquisition has led many students to offer courses in liberal arts and has ended up as job seekers. No wonder, Awodiya (2005) advised that students of higher institutions, irrespective of their areas of specialization, should be retrained towards skill acquisition in vocational and entrepreneurial studies.
3. **Inadequate funding:** Vocational education actually is very expensive as it is capital-equipment based. Even though all the tiers of government in Nigeria are interested in funding the course, they have only approved lean resources to implement it. This has led to inadequate infrastructure, poorly equipped laboratories/workshops e.t.c
4. **Parental influence:** some parents have cultivated the idea of influencing the course(s) to be taken by their children/wards. In most cases they want to be called parents of lawyers, doctors and so on.
5. **Students interest/laziness:** Students are no longer interested in learning vocational skills. They do not want to handle tools. Some are very lazy and so looking for white collar jobs where they can sit under air conditioner. They do not want to “suffer”.
6. **Corruption:** There have been cases of money launder and other forms of looting government funds by public officers. Agholor and Obiazi (2011) noted that this money ought to be plunged into developmental strides but are usually diverted for selfish interest.
7. **Erratic power supply:** For industries, small scale businesses, artisans, technicians to do well and be effective they need electricity but unfortunately Nigeria's erratic power supply has hindered them. Many foreign investors have turned back because of this problem. If this country must move forward and be developed, as matter of urgency, the power supply system must be addressed appropriately.

Strategies for Regenerating Vocational Education

Vocational education programmes are viable tools that if properly implemented will go a long way to reducing the poverty level of the citizens, and promote economically self-reliant and developed nation. For this to be achieved

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and for the problems of vocational education to be conquered, the following strategies should be adopted to re-generate vocational education. The following strategies were outlined;

1. Curriculum planners should ensure that teachers give room for demonstration and practices.
2. Local experts such as engineers, mechanics, cobblers, tailors etc should be involved in the implementation of curriculum. They can serve as resource persons in teaching and learning process.
3. Government should establish more vocational schools, supervise and inspect schools regularly, and ensure that all schools follow the approved curriculum and conform to National Policy on Education. There should be regular inspection to make sure that the facilities in the schools are used well.
4. There should be retraining of the vocational education teachers through seminars, workshops, conferences to enable them learned to handle and operate the equipment and machines
5. Field trips should be organised for the students to institutions and organisations related to the skills they are exposed to:
6. There should be awareness and orientation of the students and the general public about the benefits of acquiring vocational skills.
7. Equipment/tools should be provided and maintained.
8. Government should find a lasting solution to the problem of erratic power supply.
9. Soft loan schemes should be provided as take off for trainees.

Conclusion

If Nigeria must have a stable economy, a self-reliant nation and eradicate poverty, vocational education must be re-generated. The recommendation above must be adopted. The youths should be equipped practically. With this Nigeria will be like America, Britain, Germany, Japan and even China who have rehabilitated drug addicts, school dropouts, several destitutes with skill acquisition programmes.

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