

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRAINTS OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATION BUILDING

Eya, Gloria M. (Mrs.)

Abstract

Vocational Technical Education has been neglected for so long in this country. **Unfortunately**, no nation can be successfully built without vocational technical education. This paper has given different concepts of vocational technical education and its historical development in Nigeria. The paper identified problems of vocational technical education to include Government based, teacher based, students based, poor funding - evaluation and gender problems. It discussed (the solutions and implications of these problems for nation building.

Introduction

Concept and Definition of Vocational Education

Vocational education has many definitions. These definitions differ with authorities, countries and time. Vocational Education according to Olaitan (1998) is a designed area of study for development of skills, attitudes and appreciations including information and knowledge needed by workers to enter into and progress successfully in a chosen vocation. The programme is defined by Baird (1972) as the preparation for occupational endeavours in agricultural education, home economics, trade and industrial education, distributive education and business education.

Vocational education is a type of education that focus on skill development for self employment or paid employment. The philosophy, objectives and components of technical education depend on the geographical region and countries.

In Nigeria, vocational technical education focuses on skill development, knowledge, interest and awareness, and to meet the desired manpower level and quality. The training in vocational technical education vary depending on the needs of the countries. The training areas include auto-repairs, diesel mechanics, electronics, electricity, computer repairs, masonry, carpentry, metal work, office and secretarial studies, business, metal fabrications, graphic arts, food processing and marketing, agriculture, commercial fishing, dental assistances, etc.

Individuals are confronted with the problems associated with vocational and technical education and making progress in it. All these could be designated as vocational problems. A man's calling is the most important aspect of his life and nearly all his experiences revolve around it. As a result of this, man needs assistance in choosing his career, preparing for it, entering into it and progressing in it.

Development of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria

The aim of education in traditional society is character training and job orientation. The historical development of vocational technical education in Nigeria can be discussed/viewed from three dimensions:

- Pre-Colonial /Traditional Era
- Colonial / Missionary Era
- Post Independence / Current Era

1. Pre-Colonial / Traditional Era

Vocational education is as old as man. The main purpose of pre-colonial education was to integrate the young African into his society and family living. The system of education was designed to train the youth for 'social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values' (Fafunwa, 1974). Family was seen as the basis for learning about society and those things that were acceptable to the public. Also there was highly developed vocational technical skills and people were apprenticed to one type of trade or the other.

Trades such as weaving, carving, blacksmithing, farming, hunting, iron works, etc. were practiced in Africa. Traditional vocational education look the following forms:

i **Family Training**

Different crafts and trades were taught to the children in the family by the fathers, mothers,

brothers and sisters.

ii ***Apprenticeship***

Parents at times sent their children out to live with masters and mistresses in order to learn certain trades. In this case a specified period of training was agreed upon and the trainees will serve the master and mistresses in domestic duties. After the training the apprentice may be employed by the master/mistresses for a pay or may establish his/her own. This system is still practiced today.

Hi ***Imitation***

The young ones learnt from their parents and elders around them by imitating them while performing different trades. This continues until they attain the stage of perfection to be able to work independently,

iv ***Guild Membership Initiation***

Initiation into a trade guild created opportunity for advanced development of the skill acquired depending on the trade.

Vocational technical education in the traditional society was unorganized, uncontrolled and unstructured. These notwithstanding, the system is still practiced today.

2. **Colonial / Missionary Era**

The missionary gave Africans Western education in the 3Rs reading, writing and arithmetic to enable them perform interpretation and clerical duties. They knew too well that the training in the 3Rs was not enough to achieve their objectives, and introduced some kinds of industrial education to enable the students develop the use of their hands. The British Governor in Nigeria (Governor Freeman), felt that the ideal was good but could not grant these mission financial assistance to run the programme. Nonetheless, the Church Missionary Society embarked on vocational training of youths by establishing industrial schools at Abeokuta, Lokoja and Onitsha in order to encourage agriculture in multinational trade between Nigeria and Europe.

In 1870, the Church Missionary Society also started a brick field where students were trained to learn brick-making. With the establishment of agricultural schools, a simple machine for producing garn was invented by 1878. The development of vocational technical education started to gain ground during the early part of the twentieth century. The emergence of trading companies like U.A.C. and John Holt gingered the thought for organized technical training for skill development and technical occupation.

During this missionary era particularly between 1931-1954 with vested private and individual participation in technical and vocational education. According to Eya (1998) Nigerians who went to America to study and saw the need for technical vocational education formed the National Education Movement. They opened secondary schools that were technically-oriented. Such schools include the West African Peoples' Institute (WAPI), Calabar. Similar institutions were opened at Lagos, Ibadan, Aba, Buguma, Arochukwu and, Ikot-Ekpene.

The major problem that faced Vocational Technical Education was the poor attitudes of both the parents and students. The government also paid lip service to this type of education. It is to be noted that these are problems facing Vocational Technical Education today. During this era too, commissions like Phelps-Stokes, Asquith and Eliot made strong cases for vocational technical education.

3. **Post Independence / Current Era**

Vocational Technical Education has continued to receive attention since the country's independence in 1960. The Federal, State and Local Governments as well as missionaries and private individuals have done a lot in Vocational Technical Education. The 1969 Curriculum Conference, gave Vocation Technical Education a deserved position and prominence. Likewise, National Policy on Education (1998) slates that Government deplores the public attitude, which regards technical education as somewhat inferior to other types of education. The policy also stated 3 1 measures for the development of technical education.

Most of the measures are currently being implemented. Today the country has:

- a. 22 State and 16 Federal Polytechnics
- b. 3 State and 9 Federal Colleges of Education (Technical)
- c. 3 State and 5 Federal Colleges/Universities of Technology.

Many Universities have Departments of Vocational Teacher Education where Vocational Technical Educators are trained. Scholarships and other special privileges are given to students of vocational technical education.

Problems of Vocational Technical Education

Vocational Technical Education was misconceived as a low-level non-challenging education meant for drop-outs from the school system and the handicaps in the society (Olaitan, 1996). From the start of the colonial administration the British colonial government's need for education centred on the development of clerical manpower to support the colonialists in running the affairs of the territory. As a result, the government had no use for graduates with vocational technical training. This idea quickly helped to kill the enthusiasm for vocational and technical education. This wrong perception of vocational technical education created many problems. The problems of vocational technical education can be categorized into six sub-heads:

- a. Government based
- b. Teacher based
- c. Funding based
- d. Student based
- e. Evaluation problems
- f. Gender problems.

(a) Government Based Problems

From the very start of colonial administration in "Nigeria, the British colonial government de-emphasized vocational technical education. The need of the colonial government for education centred on the development of clerical manpower. As a result, government was interested more in literacy education. This idea helped to kill the enthusiasm for vocational and technical education. The proof of government's lack of interest in education and vocational education can be rooted in the kind of support given to education as reported in Fajana (1978):

In 1872 a vote of \$1,000 was again proposed in the estimate but was later reduced to 330 and ultimate to 30 to be equally divided among the three larger societies: the C.M.S., Wesleyan and Roman Catholic. Despite the paltry amount concerned, It is remarkable that no money was paid out at all in 1872, because in that year the Lagos colony incurred a debt of more than \$14,000.

Fajana inferred that technical education was not really supported by the government, since the money voted was reduce to thirty pounds and was never paid out (Taiwo, 1980). Even when the schools were granted aid to run their activities, no specific reference was made to vocational and technical education.

During the Curriculum Conference of 1969 it was decided that education should meet the needs of the people. The National Policy on Education (1981) gave technical education its right place in the nation. In the policy, the importance of vocational technical education was emphasized. This led to the establishment of Technical Schools, Polytechnics, Colleges of Technology and Universities of Science and Technology.

According to Adaralegbe in Eya (1997), from the period of the early missionary education to the present, Nigeria has not lacked an adequate policy on technical and technological education. The problem has been that of bridging the yawning gap between intentions (policy) and implementation (achievement) of the stated policies. Eya (1997) opined that the major problem of technical education is that Nigerian governments have been emphasizing technical education without supporting the emphasis with adequate resources. The Federal Government has beautiful proposals for vocational

technical education, which are never fully implemented. This government altitude toward vocational technical education is a problem for the achievement of the aims and objectives of vocational technical education.

(b) Teacher - Based Problems

Vocational Technical teachers are scarce. The few products of technical colleges do go in for teaching. Even those few ones teaching are leaving the profession. The Federal Government (1981)

stated that a conscious effort will be made to expand the facilities for the training of technical teachers but this measure has not been fully implemented. In the mid-1980s, the Federal Government sent some young Nigerians abroad to receive technical education. Some never come back. Most of those that came back never went to the classroom. Currently there are more women teaching in the primary and post primary institutions than men but unfortunately only very few women are found in technical education.

Olaitan (1993) observed that for ten years 1967-1977, the Department of Vocational Teacher Education of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, which was the only University that offered vocational technical education programme up to 1981, produced only 222 graduates for the entire nation. This is grossly inadequate. UNESCO (1979) remarked that common problems to vocational technical education in virtually all the developing countries are inadequate facilities such as buildings, workshops, and laboratories. Nwafuluaku (1997) opined that shortage of qualified science and technical teachers has reached a crisis point in science and technical education in Nigeria. He also remarked that these quack teachers used inappropriate teaching techniques and forecast that teachers produced by these quacks produce handicapped teachers who cannot launch Nigeria into the technological world.

The problem of teacher quality and quantity in vocational technical education cannot be over-emphasized. The problem has really reached crisis point. A blind man can never lead another blind man without both falling into a pits.

(c) ***Funding Problems***

The economic depression in Nigeria since 1980 has affected everything within the nation. Although attention is now being focused on vocational technical education, the economic depression has itself a great limitation to the achievement of qualitative vocational technical education. The funding of vocational technical education in Nigeria has become difficult even though it is a form of education that holds the greatest guarantee for economics survival.

From the on-set of vocational technical education, the funding was from foreign agencies like UNESCO, Ford Foundation, Michigan State University etc. Now these agencies have withdrawn their support and the programme is entirely funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria (Olaitan, 1996).

Vocational Technical Education is capital intensive. It requires heavy plants, costly equipment, electronics etc. These also require costly consumables. The high cost of equipping institutions limits the establishment. Many students do not offer the course in secondary schools because of the cost. It is also very costly to maintain the few existing ones. Many courses that are supposed to be offered in these institutions are not offered because of the cost of maintaining them.

(d) ***Students - Based Problems***

Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria has some problems that are student-based. Vocational and Technical subjects are not popular among students. They have a poor attitude towards the subjects. They regard these subjects as subjects meant for dropouts. They feel that the subjects do not lead one to prestigious professions. The poor attitude leads to neglect and eventually results to poor academic performance in these subjects.

Studying vocational technical courses at the tertiary level requires a credit pass in Mathematics among other science subjects. Students dread Mathematics and perform poorly in it. With the poor performance they cannot continue with the courses in higher institutions and vocational technical courses continue with very low students' enrolment at all levels of education. According to Oriafu(1984) there has been an overwhelming negative attitude to vocational technical education due to misconceptions that they are the inferior forms of education for the not so brilliant students. Many students want to avoid being branded dropout so they avoid vocational technical courses as they

consider jobs of vocational technical education as less dignifying. With this mentality **of the** students they abandon vocational technical courses and go for other courses that they will take them to the University to read Law and Medicine.

(e) ***Evaluation Problems***

Some of the functions of evaluation in vocational technical education are:

- i Selection,
- ii Grading / Classification.

- iii Identification of special students for special attention,
- iv Promotion.

Olaitan (1996) noted that the observed end result of any teaching learning is based on the students¹ ability to perform satisfactorily and independently on such activity or its application on production.

National Policy on Education (1981) states that Continues Assessment at both Junior and Senior secondary school should be liberalized by basing them in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of an individual. Assessments in vocational technical courses are skill based and require a more pragmatic approach and performance based than the paper and pencil style. Assessment in this area is not easy and teachers find it very difficult because of the demands that encroach into their private time. Some do it anyhow to fulfil all righteousness,

Obodo (1997) said that there is evaluation crisis in science and technology education especially in tertiary institutions. He observed that examination grades are now for sale. Prices are currently fixed for certain grades by some lecturers. He lamented that evaluation and its procedures are debased. A situation where some lecturers award arbitrary scores and others attach "pass" on the purchase of handout and "fail" for those who could not buy the handout. Cheating in examinations is almost legalized. There is a lot of examination malpractices in the secondary school. Vocational technical subjects are also involved. This situation has resulted in many school products parading the streets and offices with beautiful certificates they can never defend. The situation is worse with vocational technical subjects that are practical oriented.

(f) *Gender Problems In Vocational Technical Education*

Research studies abound showing that there are more men in science and technology than woman. Aghenta (1989) confirmed the disparity from sources including Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), National Universities Commission (NUC). There are also empirical studies showing that gender has some influences on students' enrolment and performance in technical subjects. For instance, there is a low perception and participation of girls in technical courses when compared to boys. In this connection, Enyokwa (1977) observed that girls do not offer technical subjects as much as boys do probably because they (girls) think technical subjects are for boys. He further proffered some reasons, which he thinks prevent girls from offering technical subjects. These, according to him,

1. Many do not perform excellently in Mathematics and Science courses, which are needed in technical education.
2. Girls feel that the course is difficult.

Enyokwa's observation was supported by the study on women's perception of industrial technical education as a career by Okoro (1983) as cited in Okeke (1988). Okoro noted that very few women are in the programme (industrial technical education) and this deters the interest of the younger women from enrolling in the programme. He concluded that women feel that they are not able to perform effectively in the technical tasks that are inherent in the programme,

Eya (1997) found that out of 775 students enrolled at Government Technical College Enugu in 1977 only 18 (2.3%) were girls while the rest 757 (97.7%) were boys. The 18 girls enrolled in only five trades out of 13 trades. Even though more females are found in the Secondary School especially in the Eastern States than males, males offering vocational technical subjects are still greater than their female counterparts.

Solutions And Implication For Nation Building

Based on the problems discussed above, the following solutions are recommended for nation building.

- i The governments - Federal, State and Local - should organized regular conferences, workshops and seminars to promote vocational technical education among women.
- ii The cut off point for girls in the admission into vocational technical institutions by JAMB should be reduced to encourage girls.
- iii. Automatic scholarship should be awarded to women studying vocational technical education in post secondary institutions.
- iv The Ministry of Women Affairs should mount a serious campaign for women education and vocational technical education in particular. They should use both electronic and print media as

well as the churches, mosques and town criers in the campaign. Women organizations like Woman in Nigeria (WIN), Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA), Christian Women Organization (CWO) etc. should help in promoting vocational technical education among women. Immediate employment for women who studied vocational technical education. Nation building is for both men and women.

- v There should be training and retraining of vocational technical teachers to provide the required manpower needs of the nation. There should be in-service training for teachers on the job.
- vi Teachers in vocational technical education should be given scholarships. The conditions of service for teachers in general and vocational technical education in particular should be improved. No nation can be built without teachers.
- vii The students should be given proper orientation to create awareness of (the importance of vocational technical education. Guidance and Counselling service to advise students on the benefits of vocational technical education professionals in the area of vocational technical education should be invited to talk to parents during Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meeting on the importance of vocational technical education. Students of today form the men and women who will build the nation tomorrow.
- viii The government should not end up making policies without implementation. All the beautiful plans, proposals and policies on vocational education should be implemented to achieve the desired aims and objectives in nation building.
- ix Vocational technical education is capital intensive and as a result should be properly funded. Equipment and materials should be purchased in bulk for distribution to schools.
- x Government should give automatic employment to graduates of vocational technical education.

The government should attract project and sponsorship from foreign organizations and countries like USAID, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, etc. for the promotion of vocational technical education.

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