THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION IN NIGERIA

Amadi, Samuel A.

Abstract

The idea of economic and social reconstruction programme is now a national issue. The paper started the discussion with detailed definitions and clarifications of a few vital concepts. The aims and objectives of vocational technical education were outlined and details of various courses and occupational areas achievable in the above vocation were also presented. There was also emphasis on training and skill acquisition as a major source of employability and increase in productivity. The paper further looked at the role of vocational technical education in rural industrialization and mobilization of skilled labour force to enhance the economic viability of numerous rural dwellers. The need to inject more science and technology education into the curriculum of our schools and colleges was elaborately emphasized. In the end, the paper presented useful suggestions and the way forward to achieve a sustainable socio-economic base in Nigeria.

Introduction

Today, Nigeria is in dire need of revamping her educational system in order to achieve economic and social reconstruction. To achieve this laudable goal, it is expected that Nigeria should pursue vigorously a type of education that can provide a sustainable basis for the modern technological revolution. Judging from the world economic scene, the entire world (Nigeria inclusive) is at the threshold of technical information explosion and micro-electronic revolution which will create a new way of living and working. This will certainly make new demands on the education system. The type of education to carry out these functions according to Ezeagu and Eze (1999: 30) should be able to effectively harness a nation's human and material resources. It should be able to develop the productive capacity of the individuals within the society.

For many years, Nigeria kept on relying on foreign governments to provide technical manpower to boost her manpower shortage. The shortcomings of literary education have led people to advocate that vocational and technical education be pursued vigorously (Mohammed, 1999: 151). In the words of Olaitan in Ezeagu and Eze (1999: 30), vocational technical education is the most reliable instrument for individual and societal survival and development in a constantly changing world.

The main proposition of this paper is that economic and social reconstruction in Nigeria can effectively be achieved through vocational technical education. The thesis indeed answers the questions - how and why there can be no meaningful economic and social development without a well planned vocational technical education. To begin with the level of any country's economy in today's technological age depends on the level of the nation's technological grasp.

At this juncture it will be necessary to have a brief explanation of a few vital concepts such as vocational education, technical education, economic and social reconstruction. But before this, there is need again to make some clarifications.

Clarifications

Vocational technical education as currently being used to include any or all aspects of vocational education, is an aspect of education which prepares the learner to earn a living in an occupation or be self-employed. The terms vocational education or technical education or technology education are used interchangeably. Technical education is an aspect of vocational education. Osuala (1995: 96) pointed out that vocational education has seven major occupation areas of which technical education is one of them.

The Concept of Vocational Education

Vocational education has been described and defined by different individuals in various ways based on purpose. Vocational education is an education for vocation. That is to say, it is a work oriented education. Despite the differences in definition and nomenclature, there is a common concept in most of the explanations of vocational education which refers to the idea of providing the individual with the knowledge, skills and attitude required to enter into the world of work and progress in a chosen occupation (Olowu, 1999: 59). Olaitan (1992) buttressed this by saying that
vocational education provides the individual with increased employability and higher job mobility. It increases the earning capacity of its recipients. It also creates employment opportunities and stimulates technological and industrial development.

From the foregoing, one can infer that the aim of vocational education is to produce the manpower who will apply the acquired knowledge towards improvement and solution of their environmental problems.

The Concept of Technical Education

Technical education as defined by the National Policy on Education, (FRN, 1981) is "that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge". Osuala (1995: 145) postulated that "technical education is an education designed at upper secondary and lower tertiary levels to prepare middle level personnel (technicians, middle management etc) and at the University level to prepare engineers and technologists for higher management positions. Banjo (1974: 5) opined that vocational education intended to provide the skilled manpower for industry and other engineering services required by the society. While Aghenta in Ezeagu and Eze (1999: 4) pointed out that "technical education stressed the engineering aspect of vocational education such as electronics, electrical, mechanical and automobile work".

The Concept of Economic and Social Reconstruction

The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language refers to reconstruction is rebuilding, that is completely build up again. In the context of this paper, economic reconstruction proposes a complete reformation of the nation's stand economically. This is with a compassionate idea of establishing better economic strategies and policies and ushering in a better planned educational curriculum. The terms economic development, economic reconstruction, economic growth, economic building etc. are conceptually centred on improvement of the present status of the country's economy. If we are reconstructing, it means that we are going to take more time to examine those antecedent factors inherent in our economy that led to its decline and to modify the policies. Akubuilo and Mgbada (1998) defined economic growth as increased productivity measured by the Gross National Product (GNP) or national income.

On the other hand social reconstruction refers to rebuilding or reformation strategies that can raise the standard of living of the citizenry. Ezeagu and Eze (1999) defined social rebuilding or reconstruction as consisting of modernization, material advancement, industrialization, scientific and industrial growth, improvement in standard of living, decrease in cost of living and increase in social security as well as availability of job opportunities.

Oranu in Ezeagu and Eze (1998: 1) and Ezeliora (2000: 140) are unanimous in the view that for individuals in a society to live a comfortable life where social amenities are adequately available, such a situation is achieved nationally by a buoyant economy. They agreed too that the imperatives of raising the standard of living of the people in a society are predicated on a total review of the curriculum content of technology education and vocational technical education (TVTE). Others include improvement in the production of quality and quantity of manpower of the workforce and most importantly commitment on the part of leadership. Ezeliora (2000: 140) in her contribution emphasized that the key to revamping the socio-economic status of any nation is undoubtedly the utilization of science and technology.

Ultimate Goals of Vocational Technical Education

There are five commonly accepted objectives of vocational technical education (VTE). These include:
(a) To prepare a learner for entry into employment and advancement in his chosen career;
(b) To meet the manpower need of the society;
(c) To increase the skill options available to each student;
(d) To serve as a motivating force to enhance all types of learning;
(e) To enable the learner to wisely select a career.

Section 6 of the National Policy on Education (1998: 28) went further to give the aims and objectives of vocational technical education as follows:
(a) To provide trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and commerce at professional and/or sub-professional levels;
To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial, and economic development;

To provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;

To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies, etc.

Olowu (1999) points out that the concept of vocational technical education emphasizes training and skill acquisition on vocational occupations which include Agriculture, Business Education, Home Economics, Technical Education, Fine and Applied Arts, others are computer studies and industrial education. Vocational technical education has a definite role of preparing and equipping students with skills that increase their chances of employment opportunity. It also equips them with knowledge and skills they need to create their own employment.

Apart from enabling the individuals to hold productive employment, vocational technical skills developed in the course of training increases the productivity and earning capacity of the recipient.

For more explanations, Olaitan and Sowande (2000: 26) said that in pursuance of these goals, vocational technical education courses are offered in technical colleges, in the following trades: Mechanical engineering, Electrical engineering, Building, wood, agriculture, visual arts, business trade, Home-economics, printing trades and cosmetology. From these courses many craftsmen and technicians have been produced and they are rendering services all over the country at intermediate levels, e.g. automobile mechanics, welders, fitter mechanics, air-condition and refrigerator mechanics, radio, television mechanics, bricklayers, painters, plumbers, carpenters, furniture makers, caterers, stenographers, and their like. Some of these technicians and craftsmen are in salary employment while the rest are in private practice.

**Vocational Technical Education and Socio-Economic Reconstruction**

There is no doubt that Nigeria needs as urgently as possible, a total reformation or reconstruction of its socio-economic base. It is observed from the look of things that Nigeria's economy is battered and the standard of living of the citizens leave more to be desired. This is why Ezeliora (2000: 140) said that Nigeria like many developing countries has her populace wallowing in poverty and poor economy with its resultant poor living condition and hardship.

Nevertheless, the position of this paper is that vocational technical education if properly implemented is an instrument par excellence for providing a solution to the nation's socio-economic problems. In the words of Olowu (1999: 61), "... it is true that since the colonial era various institutions and organizations in the country have been established to provide vocational technical education and training services to the general public and special segments of the population. In spite of these efforts, coupled with huge and intensive public funds invested in vocational technical education, the nation is still grappling with the seemingly unending problems of youth unemployment."

Nigeria could not have become all that distressed economically if not that she neglects her abundant natural resources and fails to make use of available indigenous technologies. It is quite appropriate for Nigeria to make use of "Appropriate Technology". This refers to a type of technology that requires the use of newly created, invented and fabricated machines capable of converting our local raw foods to desirable forms (Amadi, 2000: 9).

Todaro (1977) as reported by Aboyi (1997) totally agrees that Nigeria is abundantly rich in natural resources but she could not exploit them because of lack of serious commitment in acquisition of technological development. He added that "... it is the human resources of the nation and not its capital nor its material resources that ultimately determines the character and pace of its development. That is to say, human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. While Aboyi (2001: 2) emphasizes that "... the wealth and power of a nation depends on the successful education of its citizens and in the number of highly talented men and women...." This is why Olowu (1999: 61) contends that the government should de-emphasize the call for technology transfer and rather promote indigenous technology. The researcher added that the young ones should be motivated and enlightened on the way of getting out of the present unemployment syndrome in the country. It is this need that motivates youngsters, graduates and non-graduates to get up on their own as automobile mechanics, welders, stenographers, refrigerator mechanics, radio/television mechanics, as well as barbers, hair-dressers, fashion designers, artists, cabinet makers, etc.
Olowu (1999) encourages indigenous approach during the process of economic recovery of this type when she said that a nation is said to be self-reliant when it is able to look inwards not only for such things as the design of high-tech machines; but their repair and maintenance. It is equally better to build and maintain modern roads and bridges without relying on foreign experts. While it will be worldly acclaimed that Nigeria has succeeded in launching an atomic war-head missile, we shall remain condemned if the simple basic necessity of life - water, food, health and shelter are grossly neglected (Bajah, 1991).

Vocational technical education can be utilized in the rural communities to the greater advantage of reaching the poor masses. Over 90 per cent of the rural dwellers are engaged in production of food crops who require the appropriate application of vocational skills and technology in the processes of production.

In order to improve the standard of living of the rural dwellers and enhance their earning capacity, the government should provide them with industrial centres and supply them with necessary infrastructural facilities for manufacturing and small-scale trade activities. Functional industrial estates need to be established at strategic locations as business incubation centres. These industries will be manned and maintained by the people from the locality (Ezeliora, 2001: 144).

Such industrial estates will be established according to the food and cash crops produced in the locality to ensure steady supply of raw materials. This in turn means a steady income to the rural populace. Ojobo (2000) in Ezeliora (2000: 144) listed cereal-based industries, legume, fruit and vegetables as well as cassava-based industries as basic components of the agric-based project.

**Recommendations**

The present strategy to reconstruct the socio-economic status of Nigeria using vocational technical education as a vital tool is certainly a pragmatic approach, but the capacity to achieve this objective depends largely on the education and skill levels of the workforce.

This paper is therefore projecting a number of suggestions which need to be considered in order to make this programme realizable. These recommendations are as follows:

1. It is advocated that there should be active participation of women in the workforce so as to enhance the economic well-being of the nation. Society is the loser when women are confined to certain approved occupational roles and life styles and when their vocational self-concepts are restricted as they are today.

2. Also, further curriculum will emphasize maintenance skills in training leading to the development of multiple inter-disciplinary skills.

3. Nigeria should adopt indigenous technology and possibly de-emphasize technology transfer. There are appropriate Nigerian technologies which can be developed to suit our cultural, environmental and social milieu. Appropriate technology is regarded as the modified indigenous technology. It is a technology invented, created and developed through local experts and efforts come about through the use of local raw materials and harnessing of local talents and natural resources.

4. There is need for curriculum shift to all levels of the education enterprise from theoretical platforms to more job related approaches.

5. Computer education should be a major/core subject in all vocational technical education programmes.

There is need for material development. Material development basically refers to the processing of raw materials into finished products. This is essential because of various advantages accruing from it such as: (a) utilization of our natural resources; (b) provision of gainful employment and reduction of poverty among the citizenry; (c) satisfying the nation's quest for industrial development so that the country may become a producer economy instead of a consumer economy.


The government and/or philanthropists should encourage this programme and motivate the students who have chosen vocational education as a career by supplying such institutions with adequate funds, equipment and necessary infrastructure at various levels.

7. The poor social image of vocational technical education teachers should be corrected through the use of news-media, publications and national conference and government organized seminars.
8. Adequate funds need to be made available for research purposes, workshops, seminars, conferences that will help in updating the technical knowledge and skill of teachers.

9. For meaningful vocational technical education that will address the issue of socio-economic problem and self-reliance, technical education should be given attention at all levels right from primary school.

**Conclusion**

This paper has so far attempted to explore available facts in support of the assertion that vocational technical education can effectively be utilized in the nation's socio-economic reconstruction programme. Many writers and researchers have submitted that vocational technical education, if seriously pursued will help to reduce poverty in Nigeria and not only that, it will help to solve the nation's unemployment problem. From the facts so far presented and the on-going economic and social development, vocational technical education is the nation's hope to create a pool of skilled manpower who are better equipped to convert our natural resources into useful goods and maintain peak productivity. It is that part of education that can provide job opportunities to both sexes, particularly to a greater percentage of the nation's population who are rural dwellers.

Vocational technical education is the bedrock of the nation's technological take-off. This is made possible by its acquisition of multiple disciplinary skills. With increasing emphasis on vocational technical education, there will be stimulation of productivity, increased employability with higher job mobility and increased earning capacity of the individual recipients. For vocational technical education to play its role efficiently in the present world of technological revolution, there should be more emphasis placed on the study of technologies and related sciences. In this way, the socio-economic life of both the individual and the society will improve.

**References**


