

# VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A SINE-QUA-NON FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RE-ENGINEERING

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## Abstract

Nigeria today has problems of unemployment, untapped natural resources, and over dependence on foreign made goods and low per capita income. These, among others, lead to under-development of our economy. It is against these militating factors that the vocational and technical education option is being examined to reduce unemployment and consequently, boost the economy.

## Introduction

In a situation where a larger proportion of able-bodied persons are unemployed, the economy is bound to dwindle. This is the situation in Nigeria where there is high rate of armed robbery, prostitution, assassination of defenceless citizens, 'area-boys' syndrome whose remote causes are traced to joblessness and take to the street to halt economic activities at every opportunity.

It is in the midst of this worrisome situation that the conventional education has been identified to be defective and in its place, vocational and technical education option is being advocated. Thus, this topic will be examined under the following headings: indigenous education, colonial education, vocational and technical education, the problems facing vocational and technical education in Nigeria, using vocational and technical education to boost the economy, summary and recommendations.

## Indigenous Education

Learning is central to the process of education which begins with the unborn child and continues till death (Omatseye, 2003). In stressing this fact further, Omatseye (2000) in Peters (1974) and Frankena (1972), see education as a collective of techniques used by the society to instruct youths in the values and accomplishment of its civilization; a process of socialization, enculturation and transmission of values to enable individuals in a society conform to social norms; or some processes aimed at developing a desirable state of mind that would enable people contribute to what the society values most.

Thus, the aforementioned values were richly provided for in our indigenous education. Consequently, Nwaokolo (1994), citing Ajayi and Awoyele (1985:95) identified people engaging in vocations such as: farming, fishing, hunting, carving, carpentry, sculpturing, painting, building, decorating, blacksmithing, catering, boat-making, dyeing, bronze and ivory carving and the like, as the education that are indigenous. These vocations taught people to be self-subsistent and self-reliant through self-employment that permit a larger proportion of the population to contribute to economic development.

It has been argued in some quarters that if our educational system has been allowed to develop side-by-side with the aforementioned vocations, it should have resolved the problems now associated with our colonial education today.

Arnold (1976) pointed out that there are two reasons for educating children. The first, being to elicit and develop their humanity and the second is to make them economically independent and useful. Our indigenous education richly provides for these two objectives.

## Colonial Education

Colonial education has been defined as formal education. It came largely as literary and as religious education. It was geared towards white-collar jobs seeking. And hence, helped to bridge the communication gap between the colonial masters and the indigenes that form their targets for transformation. Thus, colonial education possesses the following qualities for learning:

- (a) Conducive environment for learning;
- (b) Well laid out classroom systems;

- (c) Good sitting chairs and sitting arrangements;
- (d) Well trained teachers to impart the knowledge;
- (e) Instructional materials like: textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines, video cassette recorders, overhead projectors, television sets, computer programmes, etc. that facilitate teaching and learning situations.
- (f) Carefully drawn out scheme of work;
- (g) Good school administration to coordinate learning activities;
- (h) Good funding by the individuals, the three tiers of government and philanthropic organizations in form of grants.

From the foregoing, it will be observed that colonial education is far lesser expensive than vocational education. This was observed by Coleman (1963:131) as cited by Nwaokolo (1995) that:

The main interest of the missionary was evangelization of the Africans and a literary education was deemed adequate for the purpose. Moreover, such training was the least expensive since equipment for technical and agricultural training was costly in men and money, (P. 3).

Colonial education has been tested and it is seen not to be contributing enough to economic development of Nigeria. This is buttressed by the fact that joblessness, robberies, and general lack of patriotism on the part of beneficiaries amount to the huge loss to the Nigerian economy. And the need to address this method of education was highlighted in a report of the Commission on Higher Education (1945), and cited by Igwe (1995) that:

The first Western schooling brought to Nigeria was a literary education, and once civil rule was established, the expatriate administrators were graduates, most of them in arts. And so the literary tradition and the university degree have become indelible symbols of prestige in Nigeria; by contrast, technology, agriculture and other practical subjects, particularly at the sub-professional level, have not won esteem. It is small wonder then, that training for qualifications other than degrees, especially in technology, is not popular, (P. 16).

Thus, there is the need to redress vocational and technical education for social and economic re-engineering.

### **Vocational and Technical Education**

The National Policy on Education (1998) defined vocational education as that "form of education which is obtainable at the technical colleges. This is equivalent to the senior secondary education but is designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills, basic and scientific knowledge and attitude required as craftsmen and technicians at sub-professional level."

Olaitan (1992) observed that for an individual to meet up with the demands of the society, he needs some skills, and with these skills, he can explore his environment for both himself and the society. These observations were drawn from the goals of vocational and technical education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (1998), thus:

- (a) To provide trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- (b) Provide skills necessary for agricultural, commercial, and economic development;
- (c) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

For a country like Nigeria that is richly endowed with vast and largely untapped natural resources like: petroleum, limestone, tin, and columbite, kaolin, gold and silver, coal, lead, zinc, clay, slate, marble, graphite, iron-ore, stone, zircon and natural gas, etc. (Anyanwu, et al, 1997), obviously need to develop her vocational and technical education to fully tap, process and export these products to boost her foreign reserves, as well as satisfy domestic consumption.

## **The Problems Facing Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

Vocational and technical education was not given adequate attention at a time Nigeria's quest for education was at its peak, a period communities raised money to send their brilliant ones to schools. And, a time gainful employment was not hard to find. Vocational and technical education started to receive attention when lapses were observed in literary education and were noticed to be retrogressive to economic development. Hence, Oranu (1994) observed the following problems as facing vocational and technical education in Nigeria:

**Societal Attitude:** Nigerian society attitude is not very favourable for vocational and technical education to thrive. Generally, it is believed that technical schools are a design for drop-outs from secondary schools. Even the 6-3-3-4 system highlights this when it claims that graduates of the junior secondary schools that are not academically strong enough should take to trade of their choices, while others could proceed to senior secondary schools and universities, respectively. This suggests to the society that products of vocational and technical schools are inferior, and are so treated in work places. Agbebi, (1984) clarified this, (as cited by Oranu, 1995):

The attitude of the public for a long time has been biased against technical education and aspersions cast upon it as a subject for grammar school "drop-outs". The cost of running secondary technical schools and technical colleges have always been frighteningly high in terms of capital and recurrent expenditure. The absence of requisite infrastructure and readily available equipment, material and adequate physical facilities, made schools authorities to shelve the idea of including technical studies in the curriculum. In schools that can afford it, technical subjects have always been relegated to the status of extra-curricular activities, and at best, one or two subjects are offered, (P. 145).

**Low Student Enrolment:** As a result of societal negative attitude for technical schools, the enrolment is generally low. This is obvious when one compares the ratio of secondary schools to technical colleges in every state of the federation.

**Implementation:** Vocational and technical education was not implemented with the same vigour of the literary education. Vocational and technical education was broken into sections called the 6-3-3-4 system. The junior secondary school stage of the programme was haphazardly implemented. Where equipment and machines for it were purchased, either there was no expertise to put them into use or no electricity to effect the use. Ulinfun (1993) noticed that up till 1990, only seven states of the Federation were known to have fully accepted and implemented the policy.

**Lack of Qualified Personnel:** Vocational and technical education in itself is a more expensive project. The first set-back it suffered was to get enough qualified staff to run it in a system that has so emphasized literary education. Few qualified staff that were gotten, were often attracted away by the industries who offered higher wages. To ameliorate this problem, Olu (1992) noticed that this led to the employment of under-qualified artisans and in some cases, personnel technicians in the profession. This contributed to hinder realization of the scheme's objectives.

**Funding:** Vocational and technical education today still suffers from insufficient funding. Funding vocational and technical education like the literary education amount to dwindling attainment of its laudable objectives. Vocational and technical education requires a lot of financing in the areas of provision of modern machining, equipment, vocational and teacher education, and the need to keep vocational and teacher education at abreast with modern innovations through training and retraining in the use of modern equipment. Insufficient funding of vocational and technical education 'was summarized by Ofaitan (1993) when he stressed that a programme that is starved of funds, kills the ingenuity and motivation of teacher training and leads to the production of half-baked teachers.

**Using Vocational and Technical Education To Boost The Economy:** Through vocational and technical education, individuals are equipped with knowledge and skills that would help them to take up employment on graduation. Vocational education reduces the loss associated with inadequate training of workers.

Retraining of Workers: Workers still often become obsolete with invention of new technology. To be able to fit into the new demand of a recent technology, vocational education offers the relevant courses which will add to the workers' worth. It helps to improve on the efficiency of the workers.

**Reduction of Unemployment:** Vocational and technical education is currently being advocated as a means of reducing joblessness. Therefore, in achieving this goal, vocational and technical education should resolve the following problems:

- (i) Lack of specific occupational skills;
- (ii) Unsatisfactory attitude to work;
- (iii) Inadequate information.

Vocational and technical education should provide an individual with skills and knowledge that will develop him along his line of interest. This could be done along with giving the trainee the right attitude in the work place.

During vocational education lessons, the trainees' attention could be drawn to areas which their skills would be needed and how to employ the skills for gainful employment. Vocational education teachings should be directed at the popular slogan of 'dignity in labour'.

**Promotion of Economic Development:** Nigeria's endowed natural resources has earlier been listed. Thus, there are vast opportunities for employment, but the lack of the needed skills has largely made these resources untapped and partly contributing to low per capita income we suffer in Nigeria today.

With vocational and technical education, individuals being equipped with the right knowledge and skills, to turn our rich natural resources to the advantage of the welfare of the individuals, will be enhanced and consequently, economic development would grow at a steady rate. This will be so because a large proportion of our work force will be contributing their quota to national development. Vocational and technical education will equip the individual for gainful employment, and will help to tap the natural resources, provide goods that are of international standard and have enough to meet both local consumption and export to increase the foreign earnings.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

Boosting vocational and technical education is a right step in the right direction, considering the abundant opportunities available to it. As already mentioned, we have occupations like blacksmithing, carving, fishing, etc., and national resources like petroleum, tin, columbite, gold, silver, coal, iron-ore, clay and others, require the knowledge and skills taught in vocational and technical education to tap them in order to improve on our per capita income and consequently, our living standards.

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