

Vocationalism in Nigerian Education

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ABSTRACT The paper examines the concept of Vocationalism in Nigerian Education. In pursuance of this objective, the author takes a look at the historical background of vocational education in Nigeria, student enrolments, staff, and financial problems in vocational institutions in the country. The paper concludes with suggestions on how Nigeria can create technological value that will reflect on the concept of vocationalism in Nigerian Education.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Historically, vocationalism is not a new concept in Nigerian Education. Before the advent of colonial influence in Africa, there was a traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa societies.

In the pre-colonial era, Nigerian parents asked for the establishment of Secondary Grammar schools and vehemently opposed vocational schools. This is because, according to Ajayi (1963), Nigerian parents considered secondary grammar school as the only route to professional and material success.

The wholesale adaptation of British system of education in Nigeria was not in the best interest of the developmental needs of Nigeria because of the cultural differences of both societies. For example, British culture and society encouraged elitism, privilege, aristocracy and hierarchy. This was reflected in her educational system, the training of the privileged and the leisure class. But, Nigeria had no such socio-cultural structure. Thus, according to Ajayi (1963), the African lacked the environmental influence, which supported this type of education.

Fafunwa (1974), in his own view of vocational education comments that this type of education emphasizes individual's ability and skill towards doing a certain job. He stated as follows:

1. That Nigerian higher education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, vocational exploration, and political participation, spiritual and moral values.
2. That children were involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, knitting and so on.

The author explains further that, although, African generally has reference for an utilitarian traditional education, yet our tradition relies more on practical service than on mental cultivation. The author concludes that, even though, the type of education Nigerian sought and acquired served the immediate practical needs of job placement in the colonial government, it was not forward looking for the technological needs of the country.

This conclusion stresses the importance of science as a necessary tool for technological development. Consequently, in the 1970s, the teaching of science began to assume significance in the curricula of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Integrated science came into the programmes of primary and junior classes in secondary schools. Colleges of technology and polytechnics were established and more attention was focused on university of technology. These efforts were directed towards striking a balance between tertiary and science/technical-oriented programmes for vocational education in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Government took a giant step to promote the concept of vocationalism by stating the objectives of vocational-technical education in her National Policy on Education (1981, Revised) as follows:

- (a) to provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades;
- (b) to provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
- (c) to provide people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution

- of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man;
- (d) to give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies;
 - (e) to give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant; and
 - (f) to enable our young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

These objectives were stated 24 years ago to redeem the bias against vocational-technical education. To this day, even though more vocational-technical institutions have been established across the nation as compared with the fewer numbers of institutions in 1981, the initial bias against, and the disdain for vocational-technical education is still evident. Students in polytechnics and technical institutions reflect this bias against vocational-technical education in the enrolment response across the nation.

Obviously, a sound vocational-technical education programme should recognize the important and the relevant areas that generally pose problems of implementation. Example of such areas are concerned with getting enough students who are interested in vocational-technical field, staffing and financing of vocational-technical education.

STUDENT ENROLMENTS

Enrolment of students in vocational-technical institutions has been low within the past three decades when compared with our secondary schools. As reported in the Fourth National Development Plan (1981-85), there were 1,513 secondary schools in Nigeria in 1975-76), academic year, with 704,917 student population. In contrast, 250 vocational-technical colleges enrolled only 123,627 students.

During the 1980-81 academic year, the number of secondary schools rose from 1,513 to 4,334 with a total number of 2,226, 124 students. Thus, within 5 years, Nigerian secondary schools recorded an increment of 2,821 schools (65.1%) and student enrolment increment of 1,521,207 (68.3%).

In contrast, 285 vocational-technical colleges in operation during the 1980-81 academic year, enrolled only 263,495 students. Thus, within 5

academic years (1975-76 to 1980-81), the number of vocational-technical colleges in our country rose from 250 to 285. This is an increment of 35 colleges (14%) of the total colleges established in 1975-76. Also, a total of 139,868 (53.1%) student enrolment increment was recorded as compared with the 68.3% of the secondary school enrolment increment of 1,521,207 students.

In addition to the above findings, Onwueme (1985) conducted a study on student enrolments in Nigerian Secondary schools and Vocational-Technical Colleges. The result of findings from the study confirmed that enrolments in our vocational-technical colleges have been low over the years when compared with those in our secondary schools.

Onwueme reported that, during the 1968 academic year, 102 secondary schools were in Bendel State with 23,481 student population. In contrast, 22 vocational-technical colleges enrolled only 2,903 students. In 1973, five years later, the number of secondary schools increased from 102 to 126 while the number of vocational-technical colleges reduced from 22 to 12.

Thus, a reduction of 10 vocational-technical colleges that were phased out amounts to 45.1% of the 22 colleges in existence in 1968. In contrast, the 24 additional secondary schools amounts to 23.5% of the 102 secondary schools in existence in 1968 and 54.8% of 28,482 student enrolments in 1973.

Table 1 shows a 10 year data on the number of existing institutions and

their annual student enrolments between 1991 – 2001. Precisely, the number of secondary schools and vocational-technical colleges with their enrolments are presented on the Table.

In 1995, student enrolments in 190 vocational-technical colleges were 72, 136 students. In the same year, there were 5,948 secondary schools with 1,865,189 student population. In 1998, three years later, the number of secondary schools in the country reduced from 5,948 to 5,859 while that of vocational-technical colleges increased from 190 to 252.

Thus, a difference of 62 colleges within 3 years recorded 17,400 students (19.4%) of student enrolment in 1998. In contrast, although, the number of secondary schools was reduced by 89 schools in 1998, student enrolments for this year were 2,941,781. Thus, a difference of 1,076,592 students (36.6%) was recorded as an additional enrolment when compared with 1995.

Table 1: Enrolment in Nigerian secondary and vocational-technical institutions 1991 - 2001

Year	Number of secondary schools and their enrolment		Number of technical colleges and their enrolment	
	No	Enrolment	No	Enrolment
1991	3,854	1,653,891	208	46,083
1992	5,840	1,814,000	202	40,878
1993	5,948	1,865,189	190	72,136
1994	6,092	2,794,498	300	72,136
1995	5,991	2,934,349	240	76,434
1996	5,859	2,941,781	252	89,536
1997	6,001	2,923,791	261	1,179
1998	5,860	2,901,993	261	1,426
1999	6,008	3,123,277	261	1,425
2000	6,009	3,600,204	261	1,835
2001	5,959	4,032,083	261	1,835

Source: Compiled from Social Statistics in Nigeria 1995; Annual Abstracts of Statistics 2001; Federal Office of Statistics; Nigeria.

In 1999 however, a total of 261 vocational-technical colleges across the nation had only 1,179 student population. Although, the number of colleges increased by 9, student populations reduced from 89,536 in 1998 to 1,179 in 1999 while that of secondary schools rose to 2,723,791 students.

Thus, a dramatic shortfall of 88,357 students (98.7%) of the 1998 student enrolments was recorded in 1999. In contrast, only 117,990 students (4.0%) of the 2,941,781 student enrolments in our secondary schools were recorded during 1998 academic session.

Problem of Staffing

Currently, vocational-technical education faces some staffing problems. As in science, vocational-technical teachers are few compared to teachers in traditional secondary schools. In the past, the Nigerian government gave financial incentives to science teachers to encourage students to study science and to retain those already in the profession.

Today, these teachers no longer receive such allowances and where they do receive them they are irregularly paid because of the current socio-economic crisis in our country. In addition, majority of the teachers are discouraged because of the inability of our government to provide science laboratories and equipment in our institutions.

Certainly, vocational-technical education is expensive to run because it requires large amount

of money to build workshops, classrooms and to maintain competent staff as well as provide adequate equipment and facilities.

Nigeria has more than 250 vocational-technical institutions offering various technical programmes without adequate number of teachers. Recruitment of technical experts from abroad is no longer advisable as a solution to shortage of technical teachers. The few technical teachers in our technical institutions must be encouraged by their employers and be retained with adequate facilities and incentives.

Financial Problems

The problem of financing vocational-technical education appears intractable. And, according to Onwueme (1995), "if vocational-technical education is considered crucial for our technological needs, then a reappraisal of national priorities is required so as to give vocational-technical education the place it deserves."

A reappraisal of this education for financial viability will involve our vocational-technical colleges being attached with business and industrial organization for practical training of students. Through this attachment, industries and business corporations can subsidize vocational-technical education.

In addition, employers and governments at the state and federal levels should encourage on-the-job- training of workers in public and private sectors. Attachment of middle level technicians to businesses and industries for upgrading of skills can help diversify vocational-technical training at minimal costs to government.

Also, individual efforts in technological production should be encouraged. For example, about two decades ago, a man built a 'car' that was powered by a generator. Another Nigerian in the early 1980s, exhibited a locally made 'car' at a National Trade Fair in Lagos. Some Nigerians could still remember that the late Professor Awojobi invented a car. Nigerian federal government needs to encourage young potentials who are contributing their impact technologically to develop our society and give them incentives for their talents.

CONCLUSION

Nigerians need to create a new approach for the concept of vocational education and its purpose to the society. This is because vocational

education, for some decades now has been perceived to mean the education for the mentally retarded, physically handicapped and socially maladjusted students.

We are at the beginning of a millennium. It is regrettable that many Nigerians still believe that vocational education is for students with low intelligence and dropouts from formal school system. Vocational education is a highly useful education because its occupational content offers the trainees the opportunity to acquire skills, attitude and knowledge which are needed for the technological growth of our nation.

Nigeria, therefore, can create technological value that will reflect on the concept of vocationalism in Nigerian education with the following suggestions:

1. Vocational-technical educators to organize workshops, seminars and conferences in primary and secondary schools on the value and the relevance of vocational education to individual and national development.
2. Government at both federal and state levels should provide adequate financial support to polytechnics and technical colleges to effectively manage their academic programmes, maintain facilities and provide benefits and adequate incentives for their workers.
3. Primary and secondary school teachers should be more involved in the orientation of students towards the relevance of vocational education to their communities and they should be constantly informed of the nations manpower needs: The administrators in the

schools should ensure that qualified and competent teachers are employed to teach pre-vocational and vocational courses as recommended in our National Policy on Education.

4. School counselors should reach out to parents and educate them about the importance of vocational education for the development of their children and the society. Providing parents with relevant vocational education information required for technological development will motivate them to encourage their children to enroll in vocational programmes.
5. Graduates from the programme should be given meritorious awards. This will encourage student enrolment and motivate them to perform well in their programmes.

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