

Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria, 1946-1983

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Abstract

The level of unemployment in Nigeria is extremely high. Not less than 23 million youths are jobless in a country with abundant and rich opportunities. One of the reasons for this ugly situation is due to the increasing number of youths without vocational and technical skills. Therefore, the relevance of vocational education in a country such as Nigeria is not in doubt. Ironically, hundreds of youths prefer university education with a false hope of securing white-collar jobs after graduation, while several of them are eager to travel out of the country. This study, therefore, examines a history of vocational and technical education in Nigeria between 1946 and 1983, with a view to understanding the gap between technical education and national development in Nigeria. The paper identifies unemployment as a major challenge hindering national development in the country; and argues that the latter would remain an illusion until technical and vocational education is prioritized. Archival records coupled with other primary and secondary source materials were utilized to carry out the study.

Introduction

No doubt, there is a strong correlation between education and national development in every country of the world. Indeed, there are several studies on education and national development in Nigeria.¹ Ironically, development whether local or national is yet to have noticeable impact in Nigeria. One of the core reasons for the above challenge is unemployment. As a matter of fact, the level of unemployment among the youths is scary and mind-boggling.² This issue of unemployment among the youths could be explained largely in terms of Nigeria's educational system based on programmes with little or no skill acquisition. This form of education is far from being accidental; it has strong connection with

what Nigeria inherited from the missionaries and colonial administration as well as the attitude and lack of concern on the part of Nigeria's authorities to vocational and technical education.

Paradoxically, there is hardly any country that developed with educational policy based largely on literary and academic programmes. It is evident that vocational and technical education is accorded the right position in developed countries such as Germany, U.S.A, and China. Some countries have dual-track vocational training programme that accommodate and produce thousands of apprentice every year. In Germany, for example, there are about 1.3 million apprentices every year.³ At the end of the training, they do not have to look up to the government for employment. The reverse is the case in Nigeria. The government has little attention for education generally and its concern for vocational and technical education is almost nil. Admittedly, there are technical colleges in Nigeria, but there is little or no indication which shows that these schools are meeting the national needs in terms of employment. This situation is traceable largely to the lackadaisical approach of the government to vocational and technical education.

Given the poor attention devoted to technical education and vocational training in the country, there is currently dearth of artisans. It is pathetic that employers in need of artisans have to travel to countries such as Benin Republic and Togo to seek for artisans.⁴ Ironically, hundreds of Nigerian youths are jobless and unemployed. Consequently, there are several studies on vocational and technical education in Nigeria.⁵ However, there is room for more because the challenges connected with educational system with little or no skills are becoming more damaging and uncontrollable with dire results on national development. It will be appropriate at this juncture to review some studies on vocational

and technical education in Nigeria.

Undoubtedly, several studies exist on vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Most of the publications are concerned with the relevance of vocational and technical education to the development of the country. Significant among the studies included Tyowuah and Chen, who contend that there can be no sustainable national development without vocational and technical education and there can be no vocational and technical education without skills acquisition.⁶ This position is understandable taking into cognizance the questionable attitude of Nigeria's leaders who believe in vocational and technical education without required materials and financial support. In any case, challenges confronting vocational and technical education in Nigeria are in legions.

Of course, the challenges appeared formidable. Among the studies concerned with this issue included Johnathan Fabi and Kolawole Bashir's who examine the Nigerian educational policy on technical education and the challenges confronting the policy from producing desired results.⁷ In the same vein, Daso Ojimba examines the issues, problems, and prospects of vocational and technical education, highlighting ways to improve the teaching and learning of vocational and technical education with endeared enthusiasm and vibrancy.⁸ Mutiat Oladejo equally assesses the complicated realities of technical and vocational education in Nigeria. She strengthened her position by analyzing the invention and reinvention of technical and vocational education in Nigeria. She argues further that the learning system in technical and vocational education was in a phase of disorientation before its re-invention in the 20th century.⁹

Another article with challenges as its thrust but from a different angle was Olawale's Technical and Vocational Skills depletion.¹⁰ The article assesses the impact of the erosion of technical and vocational education on technological capability building in Nigeria by commercial motorcycling transportation mode. Besides, some articles dealt with the history of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Akpan et al. analyse the evolution of

vocational education in Nigeria and its roles in national development.¹¹ In a similar vein, Akinseinde surveys the history, problems and prospects of technology education in Nigeria. He concluded by indicating that technology education is essential to development as it cannot be isolated from training, job creation and employment in any country.¹² This position became reinforced with Nwosu Johnathan's Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The paper reveals the historical background, goals and scopes of technical education. It also brings to the limelight the various variable tools required for national development.¹³

Grace Akanbi's discusses the prospects of technical and vocational education and training in Nigeria through bridging the gap between the policy document and practice.¹⁴ Indeed, it is noteworthy that all the articles highlighted are relevant, helpful and insightful to the comprehension of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. However, Akanbi's study appears more relevant to the issue under discussion. She was more concerned with bridging the gap between the policy document and implementation. However, there is a need for re-evaluation of the issue she addressed. The article did not cover any specific period in the economic history of Nigeria. In consequence, the paper could not explore and exhaust adequately the issue of continuity and change which is the livewire of historical scholarship.

Therefore, this study surveys a history of vocational and technical education in Nigeria from 1946 to 1983, with a view to analyzing the gap between vocational education and national development. Attempts would equally be made to highlight the consequences of such a gap on national development. It is instructive to note that the period covers by the article is not fortuitous. The colonial authorities due to some issues (as we are going to see subsequently) took some steps in 1946 to reinvigorate vocational and technical education. And 1983 witnessed the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system. The paper is divided into four sections: Section 1 is the introduction. Section 2 deals with Vocational and technical education prior to 1946 and Section 3

addresses Vocational and technical education between 1946-1983. Section 4 concludes the paper.

Vocational and Technical Education Prior to 1946

It would be a great error to assume that the idea of vocational and technical education in pre-colonial Nigeria is strange, alien and totally unknown. The fact is that elders in various Nigerian societies imparted moral and religious education, with clear precepts reinforced by taboos. They provided instructions based on the etiquette and conventions of the society. In addition, they trained the minds of the children in the handling of farm products, giving of answers to the conundrums as well as repeating in their own words the fables of the family history. Children were equally taught stories associated with values required in civilized societies. Significantly, there was a system of apprenticeship for different kinds of occupation available during the period under study. Nobody could practice a particular craft or industry if he/she had not been properly apprenticed as there existed guilds of blacksmiths, weavers, drummers, herbalists and medicine-men.

Admittedly, the Christian missions were more interested in the ability of the local people to read the Bible than in their ability to turn screws and prime water-pumps; yet the beginning of a formal institution for vocational and technical education could be traced back to 1845.¹⁵ The year witnessed the formation of Native Agency Committee by Henry Venn. Members of the body included Sir Robert Inglis, T.A. Acland, E.N. Buxton and others of the disbanded African Civilization Society. Their sole objective was to encourage the social and religious improvement of Africa by means of her own sons. Subsequently, a school came into being for the technical training of the boys; and by 1851 the Committee invited a German mechanic, I.V. Huber, who came to Abeokuta.¹⁶

On the other hand, the missionaries also pioneered an educational system in Nigeria incongruent with acquisition of skills. The

first secondary school established in the country by the Rev. T.B. Macaulay, C.M.S Grammar School (1859) demonstrated clearly that vocational and technical education was neither the concern nor priority of the church. Among the subjects offered in the institution included Grammar, Composition, Arithmetic, Geography and History.¹⁷ Courses such as Plumbing, Carpentry, Printing and similar ones did not cross the minds of the authorities of the institution. In a similar vein, the premier female institution, pioneered by Rev. Mann and his spouse did not in any way provide a curriculum in tandem with vocational and technical education. The above picture reflected the educational programme provided by other missionary bodies. The Methodist Boy's High School, Lagos (1879) stated with unambiguous message: to prepare young men for a commercial and literary life. The subjects offered were English, Reading, Writing, Orthography, Classics and Grammar.¹⁸

The colonial educational system which followed and to some extent operated concomitantly with the mission schools did not have any radical departure from the ones provided by the latter. It was based on imperial utilitarian considerations driven by two objectives: to increase semi-skilled labour and to create a cultural and political atmosphere favourable to the maintenance of colonial economy.¹⁹ The content of colonial education was attuned to the realization of some objectives. Among the objectives was the need to inculcate basic literacy in aspects of western culture. The idea was to inculcate some minimal skills in reading, writing, western thinking and accepting the colonizer's ideology.²⁰ It would be naïve to expect any sound educational system different from the above arrangement. The mission of colonialism was purely exploitation and not philanthropy; and consequently, colonial educational system could not support a system in favour of acquisition of practical skills by the indigenous population. Such an educational system would make the local population to be

self-reliant which negates the basis of colonialism.

Yet, the colonial administration took some steps which supported vocational and technical education. In 1906, training of Survey Assistants begun with the opening of the School of Survey initially in Lagos (but later moved to Oyo). By 1909, the Nasarawa School opened in the northern part of Nigeria with technical courses in leather work, carpentry, smithing, and book binding. In 1920, the American Baptist Foreign Missionary became interested in the quality of education provided in Africa. Subsequently, a body was set up, the Phelps-Stokes Commission – to make a comprehensive enquiry into the needs and resources of Africa with particular regard to the quality of education available on the continent. The body visited Nigeria and some other countries; it discovered that the educational policies of the government and the missions were inadequate and far from meeting the needs of Africans. The report established that the mission's educational programme as that of imparting information, developing the mind and teaching the three R's.²¹ Besides, the mission's educational programme lacked organization, effective supervision and cooperation. Among other things, the Commission recommended the acquisition of agricultural and industrial skills. The report compelled the British government to issue the 1925 Memo on Education policy in British Tropical Africa. The policy statement of the above Memo invited the government to take a more active part in the provision of technical education which required costlier equipment and properly qualified staff.

Accordingly, the Yaba Higher College came into being in 1932. Among the courses available in the school included Agriculture Engineering, Surveying, Commerce, Forestry and Veterinary–medicine. The economic depression of the early 1930s compelled some establishments to set up training school for middle level manpower acquired by these organizations. This development became inevitable because the depression made it uneconomical for the colonial authorities to continue to bring in expatriates needed for

technical purposes. It should be noted that the institution was for the production of intermediate category of self-respecting artisans. However, by the early 1940s, shortage of artisans and technicians became apparent and this challenge constituted a basis for a ten-year plan for technical education in Nigeria.

Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria, 1946-1983

Colonial records clearly demonstrated that the Nigerian society up to 1945 was completely unbalanced due to its lack of matrix of self-respecting artisans.²² This challenge was attributed to the neglect of technical education in the country. Efforts made by the colonial administration to train artisans prior to 1945 were regarded as sporadic attempts without properly directed and sustained measures. This situation made it imperative for the colonial authorities to seek for free grant of £401,000 under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, meant for training of artisans and technicians.²³ The plan sought to train high grade artisans in well-equipped Trade Centres; to give those artisans further theoretical training in Technical Institutions and to give Handicraft Centres to the school children, so that they may appreciate craftsmanship and be able to use their own hands.²⁴ For the youth who is already engaged in industry the technical institutes would provide continuation classes and if employers were prepared to release them, short full time courses could be arranged in the Trade Centres.

In consequence, a new branch for technical education was created in the Education Department with its newly built headquarters in Lagos. The technical institute in Lagos became expanded. By 1947, trade centers in Kaduna, Enugu and Yaba started the training of artisans and technicians. Except for Enugu which only recruited its first set of students in 1950, the other two gained experience in recruitment and training of apprentices in the fundamentals of their crafts and practical training. The Centers gained an instant reputation for training

excellent craftsmen in carpentry and construction, electrical installation and plumbing as well as providing careers for those who detested teaching. Besides, handicraft centres dotted all over the country. Even with the above development, manpower supply in terms of artisans and technicians was grossly inadequate whereas graduates in literary courses abound.

The Western and Eastern Regions of Nigeria achieved self-rule in 1957 and the Northern Region in 1959. In anticipation of manpower needs of the country at independence, the Federal Minister of Education set up a Commission in April 1959 to conduct a thorough investigation into Nigeria's needs in the area of post-school certificate and higher education over the next two decades. The Commission headed by Sir Eric Ashby consisted of three Nigerians, three Americans and three British men whose experience and interest in higher education were widely recognized. Obviously, the body's recommendation had a positive effect on the development of vocational and technical education in the country. It recommended as follows:

- (i) Vocational education should be included in the primary and secondary school's curriculum.
- (ii) Students should be encouraged to take courses in Technical Drawing and Craft Subjects.
- (iii) Existing technical institutes in Enugu, Ibadan, Kaduna and Yaba should be expanded while new institutes should be established at Benin City, Port-Harcourt and Kano.²⁵

As indicated above, the Ashby Report had the greatest impact on the development of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. It facilitated the 6-3-3-4 educational system. Lamentably, this educational system associated with much expectations did not become materialized until after two decades. When it became operational, the educational system was not managed effectively (as we are going to see). The government failed to implement the report with determination and seriousness. The implication of this lackadaisical approach of the government

towards this educational system is grave as the positive hope associated with the system could not be realized. Currently, unemployed youths and adults are in millions.²⁶ Assuming the 6-3-3-4 system had been implemented with seriousness, employment situation in the country possibly would have taken a better shape. This is unlike what obtains in developed climes (and less developed like Bangladesh) where vocational and technical education is promoted and well supported. This consequently made vocational and technical schools attractive to the youths in Germany and other European Countries. In Nigeria, the reverse is the case where government is less interested in technical and vocational education. Even some parents prefer that their children should study Law, Medicine, Banking and Finance or Accountancy when it is evident that such children are well talented in vocational and technical courses.

In any case, the challenges of unemployment traceable to the colonial era became aggravated with Nigeria's independence. In 1964, a conservative estimate of 20,000 school leavers were jobless in Ibadan alone.²⁷ Other cities in the country had thousands of unemployed youths. With this undesirable situation, it became imperative for the government to devise means to overcome unemployment among the youths. One of the ways was the organization of a National Curriculum Conference in 1969. No doubt the Conference had a great effect on educational development in Nigeria. It provided ample provision for technical and vocational education in Nigeria. It clearly stated that technical education should aim among others at:

- a) Providing technical manpower in applied science, technology, and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades;
- b) Providing the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

The Conference and the indigenous seminar which came up in 1977 led to the publication of the first national policy on

education. This policy favoured public recognition and development of vocational education in Nigeria.²⁸

By 1983, the above policy became operational with the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system. The core of the new policy was the three-year junior secondary school. The junior secondary school is both pre-vocational and academic and all the students regardless of their later callings: Medicine, Engineering, Technology, Commerce, Law or Accounting will be exposed to both courses and one or two Nigerian languages. The specific objectives of the afore-mentioned are to develop the student's manipulative skills, inventiveness, respect for dignity of labour and above all, healthy attitudes towards things technical. The overall goal of the junior secondary education within the 6-3-3-4 is that the future doctors, teachers, lawyers, economists and administrators will know how to repair their bicycles, change their car tyres and tend their own gardens while the artisans will strive to be the best in their calling. Consequently, the government planned and promised to take the following measures in favour of development of vocational and technical education. The measures included the following:

- a) Conscious of the fact that only limited facilities existed for technical teacher education, the government planned to expand the facilities for the training of technical teachers particularly since the new structure proposed for secondary education would require many more teachers.
- b) In recruiting teachers for the technical education institutions the industrial experience of candidates would be given the highest premium. In addition, the government decided in-service training including industrial attachment would be recognized as necessary for up-dating the competence of technical teachers.
- c) At the very early phase of the education system, efforts would be made to inculcate an attitude of respect for and appreciation of the role

of technology in the society. To accomplish this, elementary technology would be introduced into the school curriculum as early as possible. Pupils would be exposed to using their hands in making, repairing and assembling things.

- d) Science and technology would continue to be taught in an integrated manner in the schools to promote appreciation by students of the practical implication of basic ideas.
- e) To assist in directing technical graduates to the fields and industries where they were needed, colleges of technology, polytechnics and vocational schools will be ready to have placement officers on their staff. In addition, they would have career offices to advise trainees on suitable areas of choice, taking accounts of their aptitudes.
- f) Recognising that technical education forms the basis of our technological development, a greater proportion of education expenditure would continue to be devoted to technical education by the government at both the federal and state levels.
- g) State government should establish multipurpose vocational centres or other similar institutions for artisan training. A junior secondary school with properly equipped workshops or a tech school or trade centre should be used to accommodate artisan training centre. The courses should run about three or four a day in the afternoon and evenings.
- h) To ensure that effective practical training is carried out every technical school would have its own production unit which should endeavor to operate on commercial lines.²⁹

Obviously, these were laudable measures that would have fostered vocational and technical education. Regrettably, the Government either at the federal or state level

failed to take adequate steps to implement these measures. Paucity of funds coupled with other challenges such as shortage of teachers, non-availability of materials and poor implementation severely stifled opportunities attached with vocational and technical education. These challenges and the lackadaisical attitude of the government in Nigeria paved way for unemployment to appear insurmountable. Whereas, if the measures listed above had been carried out with passion, the frightening level of unemployment in the country would possibly have being minimal.

Conclusion

From the forgoing, it could be seen that vocational and technical education has not been utilized judiciously as a strategy to address unemployment. Admittedly, there was a ray of hope with the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system, but the inability of the government to support the system created a wide gap between this educational policy and national need. The policy became bedeviled with different challenges such as paucity of funds, shortage of teachers until 2008 when the system was dumped. Expectedly, the promises associated with the programme became dashed and regrettably, educational colleges in existence before and after 1983 were equally not supported. Consequently, vocational and technical education in Nigeria is yet to be regarded as a priority for development and until it is seen as such with a curriculum wholly based on entrepreneurial skills, unemployment will continue to be a major challenge in the country.

Endnotes and References

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