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*Editors*

E. B. Usoro, Ph.D, H.S. Usoro, Ph.D & Prof V.C.J Akpan, PhD

*Department of Vocational Education*

*University of Uyo.*

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## CHAPTER 13

### PUBLIC OPINION AND WORK MORALE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By

ETIM, ANTHONY EKPENYONG  
& A. O. EKONG, Ph.D.

#### Abstract

*This paper focuses on public opinion and work morale of vocational education teachers. As a facet of education that has more to do with practical work leading to a particular occupation or career, vocational education has been observed to be a tool for the technological advancement of any nation. The opinion of the public about vocational education teachers is changing in recent times, in favour of giving the teachers a better status. Factors that influence vocational teachers' morale are highlighted while strategies are suggested for building the morale of vocational teachers. The laudable objectives of the programme of vocational education can be achieved only to the extent that the work morale of the vocational education teacher is boosted and the implementation problems are aggressively addressed.*

#### Introduction

The primary goal of education is the total or comprehensive development of the whole person, physically, morally, spiritually and mentally so that he or she can be useful to himself/herself and the society. Vocational education, if properly implemented has a role to play in achieving the goal in relation to total human development. The level of civilization and capability of nations are often determined by the level of scientific and technological development. It is therefore, important that for any nation to be economically self reliant and respected for its technological advancement, she should strive to expand and consolidate her technological base. This could only be achieved through a well planned and organized programme

of vocational/technical education.

It is in the above regard that innovations in vocational education are necessary in Nigeria not only as a means of achieving technological breakthrough but as a way of reducing waste of talent often associated with conventional schools. The rationale for the vocational needs is the provision of a more productive stimulus to the economy. In recognition of this fact, the Policy on Education has not only advocated the integration of productive work into learning but also stimulated the establishment of multipurpose vocational centres which apart from providing the individual with the opportunities for developing manipulative, creative and analytical skills seemingly encourage and prepare the individual to be self reliant (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

In spite of the growing awareness of the need for skill training in developmental efforts, there is apparently lack of adequate information on the concept of linkage between education and working life leading to various misconceptions by the public about vocational education. Coupled with this, is the fact that vocational education teachers who are faced with the enormous tasks of imparting skills, knowledge and attitudes to those who enrol in training programmes are not adequately compensated. The situation in which vocational teachers are not adequately compensated has led to low work morale in these teachers. This is the background of this paper.

### Concepts and Definitions of Vocational Education

Roberts (1971) opined that vocational education is concerned with learning to work: a view supported by Cote (1980) while Risher (1983) defined vocational education as the education which addresses itself primarily to the performance aspect of the worker's role. Olaitan (1985) conceived of vocational education as a highly useful education as its occupational content is such that the trainee acquires skills, attitudes, interest and knowledge to perform socially and economically the work that is beneficial both to himself and to the society. He further added that vocational education is designed to develop applied skills, attitudes, confer knowledge needed to enter and make progress in occupations on a useful and

productive basis. Vocational education has been identified as a vital form of education for the advancement of the status of the nation in a variety of sectors (Ibitoye, 2008). Vocational education, in addition to providing the required knowledge and skills also prepares an individual for the world of work. Ibidapo (2008) shared in this view and opined that vocational education develops in an individual the right attitudes which are necessary for entry into job and development in the field.

All of the foregoing views about vocational education have been subsumed in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) as follows:

1. An integral part of general education.
2. A tool for preparation into occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work.
3. An aspect of life long learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship.
4. An instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development.
5. A way for achieving self-reliance and alleviating poverty as well as production of an economic man or woman.

In the light of the above definitions, the concept of vocational education anchors around man, education and work. Anything outside this is an expansion of this original concept.

### Public Opinion and Vocational Education Teachers

Public opinion refers to the beliefs, judgements or views held by people in general or by society. Public opinions about vocational education are most often based on the misconceptions people hold about this form of education. It connotes prejudices, like and dislikes all of which are inculcated in the minds of people by teaching or experience, at school or in society. Vocational education is a form of education that has more to do with skills acquisition leading to a particular occupation or career. It provides activities for learning by doing and enables individual differences to be catered for. In spite of the pressing need and overwhelming advantages derived from vocational education, the society's (public's) antipathy

and parents avowed disapproval of vocational training for their children seem to exist (Olaitan, 1985). Similarly, there is a general disapproval of people who take up employments as vocational education teachers. Parks (1983) attributed this situation to low status, lack of respect, poor salaries and allowances, limited assistance, public criticism and poor working environment accorded vocational education teachers. The misconception generally held by people is that those who accept employments as vocational education teachers are those who failed in academic pursuits and could not succeed in getting employments into other areas, a situation which reduces the image of vocational education teachers in the public eye. This prompted the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) to express its disapproval of the general public attitude which regard to vocational/technical education as somewhat inferior to other forms of education. With such inherent hatred for vocational education, literate parents advise their children against the choice of vocational subjects at the senior secondary school level and invariably against the choice of vocational education as a career. Makinde (1987) opined that parents attach prestige to grammar school subjects because they lead to lucrative and prestigious jobs rather than vocational/technical subjects which attract relatively low image in the eyes of the public. The parents do this without considering the aptitudes, interest and capabilities of the children.

Most students take vocational school subjects at the junior secondary level because these subjects are made compulsory. At the senior secondary school level only a negligible few choose vocational/technical subjects. This is also reflected in the number of secondary school leavers who eventually pursue careers in vocational education. They are always few. Though policy statements and issues, scholarly lectures and discussions at seminars and conferences explicitly point to the need for vocational education, the training of top-cadre elites through the grammar school type of education has essentially remained the dominant practice. Sequel to the foregoing, Akpan and Akpan (2010) observed that the majority of Nigerians especially the elites whose educational orientations were liberal in content are still vexed with the whole idea of vocational

education. This has created a paradoxical situation where there is need for vocational education, which is yet to be appreciated as a vital tool for self and national development. Fafunwa (1984) reported a unanimity of both literate and illiterate parents on their dissatisfaction with primary and secondary grammar education, yet opinions are that vocational education, which was designed to correct the lapses of the former system, is still low on acceptability scale arbitrarily and ignorantly designed by public opinion.

Adesina and Ogunsaju (1984) noted that there has always been an imbalance in distribution of students between secondary grammar and secondary vocational/technical institutions. This preference has come to stay because of the prestige and job opportunities for graduates of non vocational education. Each year, few vocational education teachers are employed to teach in the schools as compared to their counterparts in other fields such that vocational education continues to be theory-based rather than workshop-based training. Many people do not understand what vocational education is all about. They think this type of education is synonymous with special education. They conceive of vocational education as education for the physically challenged and erroneously conclude that those who would eventually take up careers as vocational education teachers are school drop-outs and the never-do-well students. There exist situations in which parents, students, teachers in other fields and often the public look down upon vocational education teachers and students as second class citizens. It may be shocking to observe that even the frontline advocates of vocational education find it extremely difficult to allow their own children take up careers in vocational education. The poor image of vocational education, though apparent, has serious effects on the financing and administrative patterns at all levels of the programme. Ndukka (2003) opined that one of the government financial policy-makers who falls into the group of Nigerians fails to understand what vocational education is all about and tends to under finance the programme, as against the attitude of an enlightened policy-maker who has interest for vocational education. The same is applicable to

school administrators who do not see the essence of vocational education and feel reluctant to support and encourage vocational education practice by prompt release of funds/materials to ease the work of the teachers and enhance their effectiveness.

Vocational education teachers are both professionally and occupationally competent like their counterparts in other fields such as medicine, law, banking and industry. It is regrettable that the professionals in these fields who are products of training handed down by vocational education teachers are held in high esteem by the public, whereas vocational education teachers are looked down upon and rejected by the society. This situation, Okpleko (2003) observed must change if laudable objectives of vocational education as provided in the National Policy on Education are to be achieved. Societal positive reaction is an essential ingredient in the successful and effective implementation of life-saving education such as vocational education. In recent times, however, there has been lots of changes within the society. For instance technological changes to the effect that the requirements of the society and those of the individual can only be satisfactorily met through a well-planned vocational education programme under the guidance of qualified professionals in the field. Vocational educators must be recognized as major stakeholders in the educational system. In line with this, Inwang (2008), contended that there is an improvement on the status accorded vocational education teachers by the public. People have come to realize that technological development cannot be achieved in any nation that does not accord vocational education and her practitioners (teachers) a pride of place in the scheme of things. This is a healthy development which is also evidenced on the improved government expenditure on training (in and outside Nigeria) and employment of vocational education teachers. It is therefore, in the interest of the Nigerian nation for the public to change their opinions which place vocational education among the low socio-economic class in the society.

### **Work Morale of Vocational Education Teachers**

There is an overwhelming recognition of vocational education as a veritable tool for of preparing individuals for general living, occupations, responsible citizenship, promoting sound environment and sustainable development and as a strategy for alleviating poverty. This recognition suggests the need to raise the work morale of the practitioners or teachers of vocational education for sustainable pedagogic practice. The term morale has been thought of variously as a feeling, a state of mind, a mental attitude and an emotional attitude (Mendel, 1987). Morale is the feeling a worker has about his or her job based on how the worker perceives himself or herself in the organization and the extent to which the organization is viewed as meeting the workers needs and expectations. In the context of this paper, work morale is a person's emotional and enthusiastic response to aspects of work or to the work itself. Work morale is also subject to the content aspects of vocational education teaching which include: working conditions, school policy, supervision, salary and allowances. On the other hand Evans (1973) associated the content aspects of teaching vocational education subjects with achievement recognition and the work itself.

Whether work morale is high or low depends on a number of factors. Pulakos and Schmit (1983) outlined the factors to include how well needs and wants of workers are met through work, working conditions themselves, the extent to which the individual defines himself or herself through work and individual personality traits. Vocational education teachers have an instructional role that is different from that of many other teachers. The nature of their teaching is primarily the problem-solving approach, frequently utilizing one-on-one instruction. They possess skills which can be utilized in business and industry employment, at salaries and benefits that are frequently greater than what they receive in teaching. It is generally agreed that a major objective of schools is to promote the scholastic achievement of the students. Vocational education teachers are directly involved in and responsible for the

academic progress of their students. Research evidence has established that a relationship exists between teacher's work morale and student achievement (Doyle and Forsyth, 1973; Stanton, 1974). The findings generally indicate that teachers in secondary schools whose students achieve relatively high performance have higher morale than those in schools with relatively low student achievements. Similarly, vocational students' achievements tend to increase under vocational teachers with high morale and decrease under those with low morale.

However, Nadler and Lawler (1977) pointed out that focusing solely on raising the work morale of workers will not result in high performance and productivity. The relationship may be the other way around, in that, high performance may cause high work morale, which is re-inforced by the rewards that accompany performance. The implication here is that, the performance (high) of vocational education teacher will lead to rewards that in turn produce high work morale. The rewards may be in terms of better conditions of service, cash awards, promotions, feeling of accomplishment, higher esteem/recognition from the public etc. In the light of the above it is obvious that a higher work morale is an essential factor in the success of vocational education programme which is what the government seeks to achieve.

### **Factors Influencing the Work Morale of Vocational Education Teachers**

Adams (1992) has cited the following factors associated with the work morale of vocational teachers:

1. **Availability of a Healthy School Environment:** A healthy school environment raises the morale of the teachers and the teachers feel good about each other and at the same time feel a sense of accomplishment from their jobs.
2. **Administrative Style of the School Principal:** The principal's ability to create a positive school climate and culture can influence the work morale of vocational education teachers. According to this source principals who control many of the

contingencies in the work environment are the source of much reinforcement for teaching behaviour and hold the keys for improving the morale and self esteem of teachers.

3. **Good Student Behaviour:** The work morale of vocational education teachers is raised when their students are well behaved and disciplined.
4. **Parental Support:** The work morale of vocational education teachers in any school setting which receive parental support is higher than the one which does not.
5. **Vocational Teachers' Perception of Students and Students' Learning:** Students' responsiveness with enthusiasm to learning is a major factor that raises the morale of vocational education teachers.
6. **Stress:** This affects morale in that it can result in emotional and physical fatigue and in reduction of work motivation, involvement and satisfaction.

In addition to the foregoing, Asele (2010) has identified twenty factors that directly or indirectly work against the morale of vocational-technical education teachers. Some of these factors are lack of insurance policy for the safety of teachers and students, gross inadequacy of workshops and classrooms for pedagogic activities, irregular power supply and non-provision of materials for students' psychomotor learning.

### **Importance of Work Morale**

The work morale of vocational education teachers can have a positive effect on students' attitude and learning. Raising the work morale of vocational education teachers does not only make teaching more pleasant for teachers but also makes learning more appealing to the students. There is a positive relationship between teachers' morale and achievement. Ellenberg (1992) opined that where morale is high, schools show an increase in achievement. High level of student achievement is a boost to vocational education teachers' work morale. Conversely, low levels of work morale and satisfaction can lead to decreased productivity of vocational education teachers. It can culminate in the loss of concern for and detachment from the people with whom one works, decreased quality of teaching.

depression, greater use of sick leave, efforts to leave the profession and a cynical and dehumanized perception of students. Mendel (1987) pointed that enhancing the work morale of vocational education teachers can have far reaching implications for students' learning, quality of the vocational education programme and the health of the teacher.

### **Ways of Influencing Vocational Education Teachers' Work Morale by School Administrators**

There are strategies for influencing the work moral of vocational education teachers. They are:

1. Allowing teachers to have a voice in matters that affect them.
2. Empowering teachers to raise their work morale.
3. Giving teachers a chance to contribute meaningfully and significantly to the achievement of vocational goals for the nation.
4. Supporting the teachers; self determination and purpose as well as the tendency to relate with their students in academically qualitative manner.
5. Involving vocational teachers in decision-making about policies and application of knowledge and expertise.
6. Supporting teachers in their efforts to control indiscipline among students and enforce policies on disciplinary matters.
7. Nurturing, supporting and valuing teachers by the broader school community.

The students as well as the vocational education teachers are sure beneficiaries when the necessary needs are provided to encourage inspiration and enthusiasm of both parties. The work morale of vocational education teachers must be raised if the laudable objectives of vocational education are to be achieved.

### **Summary/Conclusion**

Vocational education is the form of education designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills, basic and scientific knowledge and attitudes required for gainful employment in recognized occupations and for entrepreneurial ventures. It is a

major vehicle for technological advancement. The attainment of vocational objectives to the favour of national development is largely dependent on teachers who act as midwives witnessing the birth of the needed skills in the youth. Raising their work morale for the foregoing intent is imperative. In the past, the public image of vocational education teachers had received a great threat, but in recent times, it is interesting and encouraging to note that there is a gradual change that favours the image and personality of the teachers in the nation. The work morale of vocational education teachers require continuous improvement through a concerted efforts of government, students, administrators, parents immediate community and indeed the public in general.

### **Recommendations**

- The Nigerian society should be enlightened about vocational education and its potentials in shaping individuals for a brighter economic future.
- The public should accord vocational education teachers their pride of place taking cognizance of their important role in shaping the society for the good of all.
- The governments, students, administrators, parents and indeed all should join hands to raise the morale of vocational education teachers for their sustained productivity and optimum performance in favour of national development.
- Vocational education is for all and all hands must be on deck to give it the attention it deserves.
- School administrators should ensure that the schemes of their educational programmes are in line with the national goals and objectives.
- Workshops and seminars should be jointly organized by government, vocational and technical educators, schools, accrediting bodies and industries for the purpose of enhancing the understanding of the public about vocational education. This understanding is apt to build a good image for vocational education teachers and raise the level of their work morale.

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