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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR ACHIEVING THE SEVEN-POINT AGENDA IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The genesis of 7-Point-Agenda is rooted in Nigeria's problems of economic growth and industrialization. The solution to the problems identified by 7-Point Agenda involves pursuit of its objectives which are subsumed in the objectives of vocational and technical education (VTE). The instrumentality of vocational education in achieving the Agenda-Vision 2020 lies in the fact that VTE can train manpower in more than 1000 careers for national development. However, the problems which appear to hinder the dream of Agenda-Vision 2020, are: time scheduled for vision accomplishment and challenges of VTE in enhancing reforms for a prosperous future. Challenges include lack of recognition, low adult literacy rate, poor funding and lack of integrating vocational education into Nigerian culture. The authors recommend that VTE should be statutorily recognized and integrated into the culture beginning from the home. In conclusion, the progress of Nigeria lies in the productivity of its citizens and quality education and genuine vocational programmes hold the key.

Introduction

The Seven-Point Agenda is the brain child of Yar' Adua's administration. It is a dream or visualization of an era of prosperity, comfortable and secure living for all Nigerians by the year 2020. The agenda can be thought of as a reform process for Nigeria. There is apparently a link between 7-Point Agenda and Vision 2020 (Dike, 2007). Vision 2020 is the target while the agenda is the strategy of substance for reaching the target. According to Dike (2009) the Agenda custodies the decisions and actions for achieving the vision. The 7-Point-Agenda has present goals and objectives to achieve by the year 2020. The major goals of the Agenda-Vision is to develop a united and secure society by strong democratic principles and a modern industrialized economy which is fair, just and especially socially inclusive, environmentally responsible and a key player in the regional and global economy (Dike, 2007). The Vision is a long-term project, but the 7-Point-Agenda constitutes the strategy for addressing basic immediate development needs afflicting Nigeria as a nation.

The objectives, which the agenda seeks to achieve according to Ola (2009) include:

- 1. Address the current development challenges facing the nation.
- 2. Make significant progress towards the attainment of MDG's
- 3. Propel Nigeria into one of the 20 largest economies in the world by 2020.
- 4. Run a responsible, accountable and transparent government
- 5. Reform and strengthen the democratic and political process

The contents for meeting the stated 5 objectives are clearly spelled out in the 7-Point-Agenda. The items on the agenda constitute the contents for pursuing the foregoing objectives. The Agenda items are power and Energy, Food Security, Wealth Creation, Transport, Land Reforms, Security and Education-qualitative and functional.

The two special interest issue namely Niger Delta and Disadvantage Groups (http://www/nigerian muse.com retrieved 26-2-2010) are outside the scope of this paper.

The question to raise at this juncture is: Why does the Agenda focus on the foregoing targets? What is really wrong in the seven areas identified for attention? There are two answers to the foregoing question. Firstly, the 7-Point Agenda was one of the president's political campaign promises to the people. Secondly, the seven areas have been problems afflicting most Nigerians over the years. The seven points in the agenda when achieved can be seen as the goals of freedom from the sinister dimensions of the targets.

In the light of the above observations, Ola (2009) has outlined the several problems afflicting Nigeria and needing planned reformation:

1. Nigeria with a population of 140 million is experiencing inadequacy in power supply. The current supply is 200 MW out of the 6000 MW expected. This is by far below what South Africa, USA and other industrialized nations are producing. By virtue of its population, Nigeria should be generating 174000 MW. Power is now

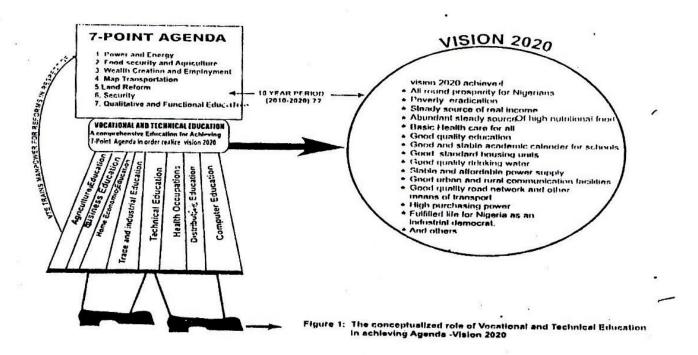
concentrated in areas where the privileged reside at the expense of the poor majority. In many instances when a community requires over ten transformers only one is made available. Many factories have closed down due to inadequate electricity thereby leading to lay-off of workers. The consequence is increase in unemployment figures. The PHCN staff are not even improving matters with their gross corruption in the bid to augment their low wages. Electric power is the tonic for national development and in its absence, the nation is at cross roads.

- 2. The Land Use Act which was promulgated to make land easily accessible to every Nigerian is failing in its objective and is less available to the ordinary Nigerian than it was before the Land Use Act and consequently, the majority of the citizens are held in a perpetual state of tenancy of development. The failure of the governments, past and present, to resolve the land use problem has caused millions of Nigerians to continue sleeping under bridges and in slum s throughout the country.
- 3. Nigeria as an agricultural nation with over 60% of her workforce engaged in farming is still witnessing the use of old or traditional implements like hoes, and matchetes to cultivate their land. The modern farm equipment are beyond the reach of an ordinary farmer. Thus the pace of farm work is slow with subsequent low productivity. Additionally, 70% of arable land is not used. In the circumstance, agriculture cannot keep pace with Nigeria's population growth. To solve the problem, Nigeria has to rely on an import to feed itself (Uhi and Nkanu, 1998).
- The present state of education in Nigeria is pathetic. Nigeria has a low literacy rate 4. compared to those of the industrialized or newly industrialized nations (Susu, 2010). The present engineering/technical curriculum is unsuitable because it was borrowed from Britain and the U.S.A where there are very substantial technical infrastructures based on more than a century of industrial development. Pupils sit under trees to learn. They learn in roofless buildings and uncemented classroom floors. Teachers' wages are grossly poor and it is difficult for them to look after their health while they are also not properly trained. Instead of making education free and compulsory at all levels, governments have introduced tuition fees in almost all the public schools with standards dropping on daily basis. Students who cannot afford the high tuition become dropouts roaming the street. The recent students riot in the university of Nigeria Nsukka was due to raised tuition fees. The literacy rate in Nigeria is at the moment less than 20% while Asia, Japan record literacy rates of 90% and 100% respectively. In Nigeria's case the rate keeps on dropping due to improper funding. Nigeria allocates less than 10% of its national budget to education as against the 26% recommended by UNESCO. About 80% of Nigeria's youths are unemployed and 10% are underemployed due to improper education.
- 5. Transportation system in Nigeria is beset with poor road network. Most roads are death traps. Poor transport system has caused high cost of food items which have to be transported with serious difficulties from production sites to consumers.
- 6. Nigeria has one of the worst environments for doing business in the world. This is inimical to wealth creation. The poverty incidence rose from 15% in 1960 to over

66% in 1996. It has been rising since then. More than 91 million Nigerians are said to live on less than one dollar or N130.00 per day. Higher institutions in Nigeria lack training tools for equipping the students with skills the employers need. Wealth creation becomes an uphill task under the aforementioned conditions. Factories that are expected to employ people are folding up due to lack of power and high cost of running generators to maintain production.

7. The high rate of unemployment among the educated men and women does not guarantee security of life. Armed robbery and kidnapping incidents render security expectation a ridiculous goal. The ruling class in Nigeria is insensitive to the well-being of other fellow Nigerians.

It is against the above background that the Seven-Point Agenda came into existence even though in a dream state for now. However, time is not on the side of this Agenda if the vision must be achieved in 2020 which is ten years from now. The Seven Point Agenda, though in the mind and on the paper is visionary in outlook. Its focus on making Nigeria a Great Nation may not be in 2020, but sometime in the future. Unrelentless efforts by all agents are essential in the pursuit of the dream. One of such agents or instruments is vocational and technical education which has not been given the attention it deserves despite its proven contributions to the manpower needs of Nigeria (Dike, 2009). The neglect of vocational and technical education in the scheme of things has apparently been one of the causes of shooting unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. The potentials of vocational technical education as an instrument for achieving the 7-Point-Agenda are fantastic as conceptualized by the authors and illustrated in figure 1.



The 7-Point Agenda is apparently the mind of the present democratic dispensation while vocational and technical education constitutes the limbs for moving the agenda towards the achievement of an anticipated prosperous Nigeria in 2020. The authors have

mentioned the potentials of vocational and technical education in facilitating the attainment of the 7-Point Agenda mission. Let us recall the definition of technical and vocational education as provided in the National Policy on education. According to the said source technical and vocational education refers to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

Technical and vocational education is five dimensional namely:

- 1. an integral part of general education.
- 2. a means preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work.
- 3. an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship.
- 4. an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development.
- 5. a method of poverty alleviation.

On the bases of its definition and dimensions of concern, vocational and technical education is designed to accomplish the following goals:

- 1. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- 2. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- 3. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

To facilitate the achievement of the foregoing goals of vocational education it is instructive to focus attention on the specific objectives which include gainful employment, responsible citizenship, skilled craftsmanship, creative tendencies, leadership, safety consciousness, self-reliance, problem-solving ability and cooperative attitude (Evans, 1979, Thompson 1973 and Elias, 1980). The pursuit of the foregoing specific objectives serves to prepare the much needed manpower with "wholesome" skills for the world of work. "Wholesome" skills are not just psychomotor or psycho productive skills, but include cognitive, affective and perceptual skills. It is just vocational and technical education that can play that role. By its very nature, vocational and technical education occupies a useful place in almost all departments of human endeavours, economic, social, industrial, medical, crafts, technology etc. Its suitability as an instrument for achieving the 7-Point Agenda for national development is therefore undoubted.

Vocational and Technical Education, as an Instrument for Achieving 7-Point Agenda

A close look at the objectives (identified earlier) of the 7-Point Agenda indicates the following targets:

Academic Excellence

- Tackling development challenges facing the nation
- Progress towards attaining MDG's
- Propel Nigeria into one of the largest economies
- Run responsible, accountable and transparent government
- Reform and strengthen the democratic and political process

Compare the foregoing agenda objectives with those of vocational and technical education. Consider the agenda objectives in the light of definition and dimensions of vocational education. The interwoven nature of the two sets of objectives is striking and worthy of note. In the light of the above observation, vocational and technical education is a very comprehensive and versatile instrument for preparing the manpower needed to pursue the 7-Point Agenda to its conclusive end-Vision 2020 and all the attendant blessings for the Nigerian populace. The question to arise at this juncture is: Has vocational education been recognized as the key to Nigeria's development? The answers to this question are considered under the next subheading.

Vocational Education and Manpower Development for 7-Point Agenda-Vision 2020

The role of vocational education in manpower development cannot be over emphasized. All educational systems in the world give priority to vocational education. Gone are the days when people who attended commercial, technical or vocational institutions were viewed as intellectual inferiors. The situation is changing with every day economic demands and emerging technologies (Nwagwu, 2007).

During the second world war, the U.S.A gained substantially from the contributions of vocational technical education in the area of manpower development (Roberts, 1971). This role is a reflection of the goals and objectives of vocational education on human endeavours. Evans (1971) Thompson (1972) and Elias (1980) for instance have identified such vocational goals/objectives as influencing human development. These goals/objectives include:

- 1. Prepare the learner for entry into employment and advance in his or her chosen career.
- 2. Meet the manpower needs of society.
- 3. Increase the options available to each student or learner
- 4. Serve as a motivating force to enhance all types of learning
- 5. Enable the learner to wisely select a career.

More specifically, vocational educators have formulated specific objectives in support of vocational education mission part of which is to develop manpower needs for society. These objectives are to:

- 1. Develop specific skills and related knowledge associated with the occupation involved
- 2. Develop an understanding of labour and management

- 3. Develop occupational safety habits and understandings.
- 4. Develop ability to cooperate with fellow workers in the occupations involved
- 5. Develop ability to solve problems (economic commercial, industrial, health etc).
- 6. Stimulate the development of leadership qualities
- 7. Foster the development of self-reliance, develop pride in work and an appreciation for craftsmanship (Evans, 1971; Giachino and Gallington, 1974 and Elias 1980 in Eyo and Usoro, 2006)

The definition, goals and objectives of vocational and technical education subsume the foregoing objectives which are also the concerns of 7-Point Agenda.

The above objectives clearly touch on the four aspects of the development a man's work behaviour namely, the cognitive, affective, psycho productive and perceptual aspects (Bloom and Associates, 1956, Moore, 1970; Simpson, 1966; Erickson and Wentling, 1986). Manpower developed in consonance with the goals and objectives of vocational education is what Nigeria requires to effect reforms in the problem areas of 7-Point Agenda. Manpower development and its appropriate use appear to be the solution to Nigeria's problems: technological, economic and social.

The question to raise again at this juncture is: How can vocational education make its contributions in the area of manpower training for national development vis-avia the challenges in 7-Point Agenda? The answers to the foregoing question may not be readily provided unless the major occupational areas in vocational education are identified and analysed into careers which are germane to the 7-Point Agenda accomplishment.

The Major Service Areas of Vocational Education and Career Training for National Development

The Dictionary of Occupational Titles (D. O. T.) (1977), Elias (1980), Thompson, (1973) Evans (1971) and Fryklund (1970) have identified the following major service areas of vocational education for career development: Distributive education, Home Economics Education, Health Occupations, Trade and Industrial Education, Business and Office Education and Technical Education. To the above list has been added computer education. Computer education is the eighth member in the family of vocational and technical education.

A breakdown of the eight service areas yields well over one hundred occupations. Most of the occupations in vocational education are multi-block in nature (Fryklund, 1970) while very few others are single block. A multiblock occupation of industrial nature is made up of divisions of work each of which is practically an occupation in itself. For example automobile technology consists of auto electricity, automechanics, autobody repair, vulcanization, wheel alignment, spray painting etc. Each division is an occupation in which training is provided for skills development. A single block occupation just has one division. Drafting technology is another multiblock

occupation. It has over sixteen (16) divisions which are full careers in themselves (Spencer, Dygdon and Novak, 2003). Animal production in Agriculture is also a multiblock occupation having 10 divisions.

Since almost all the occupations in the eight service areas of vocational are multiblock, a breakdown of all the occupations contained therein yields over one thousand careers (Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 1977). Skills training in more than one thousand careers can produce more than the required manpower for reforms in 7-Point Agenda-Vision 2020. Here lies the hope of 7-Point Agenda for national development and vocational and technical education is evidently a viable instrument for achieving the purpose.

In pursuing the attainment of Vision 2020 through vocational and technical education, the nation must not loose sight of the reality of timing among other constraints. This year is 2010. In ten years from now (2020) Nigeria is to become one of the 20 industrialized nations of the world. Nigerians will enjoy all-round prosperity, good and sufficient food, stable school calendar, steady and affordable power, good health and a host of other blessings of miraculous technologies. The question to raise at this juncture is: How feasible is it for Nigeria to attain the Agenda-Vision in ten years from now? The industrial development of a nation is not a magical venture, it requires proper education based on realistic curriculum, talents, patience, commitment and sincerity of purpose. All of these put together consume time which is a commodity no one can pass by.

The aforementioned requirements imply that the foundations for the achievement of Nigeria's dream could have been laid long before now. For example it took European countries several centuries to develop the great technologies that sustain the revolutionary leap from poverty to prosperity. The Americans accomplished this within a century. It took the Japanese even less and China and the Asian Tiger countries lesser (Susu, 2010). These countries were able to jump start the technological hurdle because they all embrace the technological code. Susu (2010) further pointed out that to reap the fruits of technological innovations evolved through centuries of sweat and toil, these countries developed a trend of strategies for rapid integration of science and technology in their national life. In other words science and technology constitute part of the culture of the foregoing nations. The implication of Susu's observation is that Nigeria must make science and technology the bases of vocational education, a part of her culture. Up to this moment formal technology as offered within the four walls of Nigerian schools is an alien. Children in the said and other countries are exposed to technology right from their homes. Technology exploration takes place in the elementary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Whatever skills the youth acquire are perfected in the world of work. Vocational education as an instrument for national development suffers a disadvantage in the above regard.

The attainment of Agenda-Vision 2020 in the light of the above information becomes elusive. It will take Nigeria beyond 2020 to achieve her vision even through vocational and technical education with its impressive potentials for reforms. The evolution of technologies for solving any nation's economic and industrial problems takes time, hardwork and commitment. An acceptance of this point places a big question mark against Nigeria's attainment of 7-Point Agenda and her Vision in ten years from now. However, the relatively short period before her should not discourage efforts towards the target even if it is to be achieved in a later period. The most important concern is to get there like other developing countries have done.

There are other factors that interfere with the efforts of vocational education in its task of enhancing national development. These, as reviewed by Susu (2010) are:

a. Low Adult Literacy Rate As Compared To Those Of Industrialized Or Newly Industrialized Countries

The adult literacy rate (15 years plus) is 66.5% for Nigeria as compared to those of China (95%), Singapore (92.5%) and even South Africa (865) exceeds that of Nigeria.

b. The Level Of Government Sector Expenditure On Education

Nigeria's total expenditure on education is 0.6% of GDP compared to 43% for South Korea or 4.9% for Mexico, 4.8% and 5.0% for UK and USA respectively.

c. The Percentage Of Degrees Awarded In Sciences In The Universities

For Example, the figure for South Korea is 48.4%, South Africa, 18% and Nigeria 11%. The number of scientists and engineers engaged in Research and Development per million of population. For Nigeria, the number is 15, 165 for Brazil, 459 for China and 158 for India. The above factors constitute the indicators for assessing economic development of nations. It is from the Research and Development group that a modern economy derives its stock of technological and scientific innovations (Susu, 2010).

Other problems hindering the contributions of vocational education towards national development include lack of integration of computer services into vocational education related to technical training, unsuitable curriculum, dearth qualified teachers, large class sizes, lack of indigenous texts, weak dependence on locally produced training materials, lack of training equipment, inadequate teaching aids etc.

Vocational and technical education has suffered an unnecessary neglect to the detriment of national development. Dike (2007) has observed that not every one needs university education. In Nigeria, technical degrees are regarded as inferior to regular academic degrees, but in the industrialized nations, those vocational-technical degrees are highly regarded.

Academic Excellence

Vocational and technical education system is yet to admit students on the basis of aptitude test, into vocational technical institutions. The importance of aptitude test is to identify learners who are likely to excel in vocational-technical education pursuits. The current JAMB and aptitude test measures are grossly inadequate for vocational educational system admissions.

Summary

Nigeria government's 7-Point Agenda focuses on Power and Energy, Food Security and Agriculture, Wealth Creation and Employment, Mass Transportation, Land Reforms plus Qualitative and Functional Education. These are the needs to be met in the year 2020. The detailed objectives of the 7-Point Agenda are subsumed in the objectives of vocational and technical education considered an instrument for the achievement of the Agenda for national development. Vocational and technical education is capable of training more than the required manpower for Agenda reforms because is covers over one thousand careers which are germane to the national vision. The timing for mission accomplishment appears to be one of the problems facing the efforts. The evolution of technology for solving economic and industrial problems takes time, hardwork and commitment. The envisioned 10 years before the nation is too short for her to reach the goal. Furthermore, vocational and technical education with its impressive potentials for enhancing reforms in the nation's problem areas faces a lot challenges. These challenges range from low adult literacy rate, lack of recognition, inadequate funding, poorly equipped laboratories to inappropriate curriculum among others. If Nigeria must be a truly industrialized nation, it has to integrate technology in all its ramifications into her culture because the technological development is cultured-based.

Conclusion

The Seven-Point Agenda-Vision 2020 is a fantastic dream worthy of pursuit into manifestation. The time to achieve the goal is too short and therefore must be extended beyond the deadline. Without integrating technology into the Nigerian culture, her strive to belong to the industrialized community of the world is apt to be an uphill task, wasteful or impossible. Technology must not continue to be an alien to Nigeria. Vocational and technical education, on the bases of its skills-based potentials, is the engine for economic growth. The progress of Nigeria lies in the productivity and resourcefulness of its citizens, quality education and genuine vocational education programmes hold the key.

Recommendations

Sequel to the discussion on vocational and technical education as an instrument for national development, the following recommendations are proffered:

- 1. The period for the achievement of the Agenda-Vision should be extended beyond 2020. While extending the time for continued efforts towards Agenda achievement the nation must maintain its focus prudently on the target.
- 2. Rising of the level of adult literacy rate is imperative. This is apt to assist those who could not complete their primary and secondary education to acquire basic skills for

the retired who constitute greater part of the unemployed group in the society, to retrain for a second career.

- 3. Vocational education should be made a major part of the business of Agenda Vision for national development.
- 4. Vocational and technical education should be accorded the statutory recognition it deserves and properly funded for the wellbeing of the nation.
- 5. The Federal Government of Nigeria should empower its citizens for a prosperous future by laying adequate foundation for it. It is not just enough to predict the future but also to create it. The Nigerian governments should encourage families to establish mini vocational and technical workshops for their children. The strategy will give the children vocational awareness at home. This awareness will lay the foundation for the pursuit of vocational education at primary, secondary and tertiary, levels. The skills so developed will be polished at workplace. This is a way of integrating technology into our culture and a dependable foundation for the industrialization of Nigeria.
- 6. Vocational and technical education staff who do not have the depth of training skills necessary for manpower preparation should be periodically exposed to current industrial practices through deliberate school-industry interactions fostered by the government.
- 7. Computer services and other aspects of Information Communication Technology (ICT) should be integrated into vocational and technical education training.
- 8. The present curriculum in vocational and technical education is unsuitable. It was borrowed from UK and the USA where vocational education has undergone more than one century of industrial development. Nigeria should develop a new curriculum based on her culture, types of environment, social needs and the level of technology it is trying to evolve.
- 9. Vocational and technical staff should be encouraged and financially aided to produce curriculum guides to facilitate student's skills acquisition in the various vocational education careers. Dependence on foreign texts is expensive and can lead to abstract reasoning by students.

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