

**ALLEVIATING POVERTY IN NIGERIA THROUGH DYNAMIC
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VOCATIONAL/ TECHNICAL EDUCATION
COMPONENT OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION**

By

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Abstract

Education is the process through which an individual is developed and full prepared to live comfortably and function meaningfully and also contribute gallant to the development of the society where he finds himself. The acquisition of relevance education is therefore expected to help in solving all perennial problems b devilling any society. A major epidemic problem that Nigeria is confronted with f many years is poverty. It has consistently defied all solutions applied by successive Nigerian governments. The reason is because there has not been any serious pursuit of skill-oriented education which is indeed a better way out of the problem. This paper therefore presents the role that Vocational/Technical Education can play alleviating poverty in Nigeria. Key concepts used in the body of the paper such as poverty alleviation, Vocational Technical Education, National Policy of Education are operationally defined. A number of textbooks, journals and seminar papers relevant to the topic have been consulted to enrich the paper and to ascertain the causes, manifestations, consequences of poverty in Nigeria and the past effort made by Nigerian government to alleviate it. The Vocational/Technical Education component of the National Policy on Education was highlighted and the need to dynamically implement it in Nigerian schools in order to effectively breed self-reliant and functional individuals, which will eventually lead to permanent elimination of poverty in Nigeria. The paper concluded by stressing the need to dynamically implement the vocational technical component of the National Policy on Education and specifically recommended the roles to be played by Nigerian government Vocational technical Education teachers, and other stakeholders especially the; industrial sector so as to effectively employ vocational technical educational as a tool for the eradication of poverty in Nigeria.

Introduction.

Education in Nigeria has been recognized as an instrument "par excellence" is effecting national development. Education is a force that liberates and frees man from suffering. It is capable of ushering in freedom from poverty and other suffering-oriented experiences. One of the aims of education is to help an individual to develop his potentialities to the fullest in order to become useful to himself and aid the development of the society. Education is supposed to be the surest avenue for self-reliance to thrive. The question of poverty alleviation will therefore arise in a situation where education has failed.

It will not be out of place to note that the lukewarm attitude of Nigerian past and present governments coupled with their lopsided approach to educational policy implementation have led to the problem of poverty which is almost engulfing our society today. Poverty has given rise to dehumanizing conditions in our country. Unfortunately, Vocational/Technical education, a skill-acquisition education needed for gainful self-employment which is also capable of increasing productivity and employment opportunities have not been given the desired attention and the needed pragmatic approach by the Nigerian government.

The problem has not just started. It is an age long problem. The problem can be traced to the theoretical and irrelevant curriculum made available to Nigerians before 1960 by the colonial administration. It will be recalled that the Phelps-stoke commission report of 1925 on the quality of education in all the British colonies showed that the colonial education curriculum was to a great extent basically literary and irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians. The report revealed that the colonial education was not designed to effectively cater for the economic emancipation of the people. (Alloy, 1988).

According to Fafunwa (1974) and Osokoya (1989), though Nigerians criticized the colonial education and clamoured for practical, skill-oriented curriculum, the colonial masters who wanted above all things to maintain the master-servant relationship that was existing between them and their subjects gave deaf ears to their agitations. Nigerians were therefore made to believe in the efficacy of the literary education which was and still seen by many today as a great avenue forgetting fixed up in to offices as white-collar and file operator workers. Nigeria by and large preferred office jobs to occupations which would roughen their hand and portray them as "ruffians". The main channel for technological advancement economic

emancipation and self-reliance was seen as a source of irritation to be shunned as much as possible. Hence the perennial experience of poverty by tin-masses.

Shortly after Nigeria became independent, It was with joy that a curriculum conference was organized in 1969 to review and correct the age long British designed school curriculum to allow for relevance and the desired educational advancement. Nigerians wanted a more viable, functional and self-reliant education. The national curriculum conference review exercise later gave birth to the national policy on education which was first published in 1977.

With the introduction of the policy on education, Nigerians thought that the surest avenue for self-reliance had opened. The policy on education has since been revised several times to further meet the needs of Nigerian society which has kept changing as a result of modernization and developments going on worldwide.

However, since the policy was formulated, it has not been able to adequately prevent or help to alleviate poverty in the country. This is because the Vocational/ Technical component of the policy has not been given the desired attention by the government. Lip-service has always been paid to the encouragement of practical, functional and self-reliant avenue aspect of Nigerian education, which would have ushered in self-employment and the sustainability of the country.

Definition of Key Concepts

The key concepts to be briefly defined are: poverty alleviation, Vocational/Technical education, skill and national policy on education (NPE)

Poverty

The World Bank (1990) presented poverty as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living encompassing inaccessibility to food, clothing, shelter, education, health services etc.

Oxford Dictionary (1959) defined poverty as a state of being poor. Those in poverty are seen as paupers who are always experiencing negative situations such as hunger, poor nutrition, inadequate health care, low educational opportunities etc. Poverty is viewed by Sen (1980) as failure to meet the basic requirements of a decent life. Sen (1980) added that it is a state where one is incapable of providing for himself/herself the basic needs of life. Poverty can also be seen as a state where one

who has not reached a level of providing for himself but is still depends on others for provisions of his basic needs. Hence, poverty can be understood through the indicators of basic needs such as food, water, health, shelter, housing, public transportation etc. Whoever is unable to comfortably enjoy these needs is a poor person. Poverty is indeed the lack of goods and services that are necessary to maintain an adequate standard of living.

Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation is the effort made to reduce the level of poverty of the indigenes of a country to the minimal and barest level. Mackinnon and Reinikika (2000) perceived poverty alleviation as reduction strategy which is essentially designed to make policy more focused on and effective in reducing poverty. Poverty alleviation refers to the process whereby policy statements and efforts are made to improve the conditions of living of people classified to be poor. Tools adopted to alleviate poverty sometimes include identification of those who are poor, creation of job opportunities, payment of social welfare package to the poor ones especially in the developed countries.

National Policy on Education

This refers to government's way of realizing that part of the nations goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. In line with this definition Osokoya (1987) saw it as the statement of intentions of the government and the envisaged means of achieving those aspects of its national objectives that have to rely on the use of education as a tool.

National Policy on Education as it relates to this paper refers to the official and documented plans and statements of intentions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on what Vocational/Technical Education means, its contents and its significance to the promotion of self-reliance nation. The aims and objectives are made explicit and the need to seriously pursue it as a departure from the literary education that was prevalent in Nigeria school previously.

Vocational Technical Education

As it is being used in this paper it refers to all programmes in Nigerian schools which expose students to the basic skills required to become craftsmen, technicians

and sub professionals. It refers to all courses that prepare individuals for gainful employment through the acquisition of relevance skills, knowledge, and attitudes which leads to employment in specific occupations.

Vocational Technical Education is the education that makes a person to be self-employed and producer of goods and services needed for human survival. Thus, helping to prevent or alleviate poverty.

Having defined the relevant concepts as given above, there is the need to briefly consider the causes, manifestations and the consequences of poverty in Nigerian society before considering the role that the adoption of dynamic implementation strategies of Vocational Technical education can play in alleviation poverty in Nigeria.

Possible Causes of Poverty in Nigeria

According to the First Bank of Nigeria Plc (1997), some causes of poverty in the developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) are:

- i. The problem of income distribution resulting from inequality of income.
- ii. The quality of the society's, labour force. Ukpene (2002) opined that poverty in Nigeria is caused by various things'. According to her, poverty could be inherited, e.g. illiteracy. Large family sizes, and social redundancy. She further explained that poverty could be ascribed that is, being caused by circumstances prevailing in the society such as unemployment, sudden death of bread winner, prolonged delay in the payment of gratuity and other benefits. Poverty, judging from the circumstances that are prevalent in Nigerian society, can be experienced as a result of persistent pursuance of non-skill oriented or literary education, breeding unskilled labour force, lack of good governance, national disaster, and inadequacy access to assets like land, poor rural development with all leading to deprivation and poverty.

Some Consequences of Poverty

The effects or consequences of poverty in Nigeria are myriad. Poverty in Nigeria has perpetuated crime of diverse types, such as armed robbery, 419 advanced fee fraud, child labour, prostitution, corruption, child abuse, child and women trafficking, nepotism, etc. Poverty in our country has led to high maternal and child mortality rate, ignorance, living in slums, illnesses, sudden death, depression,

economic backwardness etc. Presently many youths are roaming the streets because of lack of employment, this has led many into several social vices which our nation is presently battling with.

Dakolo (2000) pointing out the level of poverty in our country made reference to the 1998 Human development report of United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) concerning Nigeria which revealed that:

- i) Life expectancy in Nigeria is 52 years compared to 75 years in developed countries. While one third of the people will not live up to 40 years as a result of poverty.
- ii) Infant mortality is 79 out of 1000 births, compared to 10 in developed countries;
- iii) Mortality rate of children under five years is 146 per 1000 births.
- iv) 45 per cent of children under five years are stunted as a result of malnutrition
- v) 44 percent of the adult population is literate.
- vi) 49 and 70 percent respectively have no access to safe portable water.
- vii) 49 percent have no access to basic health facilities, and
- vii) 48.5 percent are living in poverty.

The situation itemized above shows that poverty is indeed an epidemic that Nigeria has to wake up to combat with the necessary rigour. Several efforts have been made by the past government to alleviate poverty in Nigeria but the efforts have not yielded appreciable results.

Efforts made by Nigerian Governments to Combat Poverty

Nigerian government has made efforts at poverty alleviation since decades. Some of the programmes put up to eliminate poverty include the following:

- Free and compulsory primary education;
- Adult and mass literacy scheme;
- Rural electrification;
- Operation feed the nation;
- Green Revolution; Rural Basic Development
- Rivers Basin Development Authority;
- Low cost housing scheme.

Other programmes consciously designed to alleviate poverty include;

- Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI);

- National Directorate of Employment (NDE);
- Better Life for Rural Women
- Family Support Programme (FSP);
- Family economic programme (FAEP)

Some recent programmes initiated by President Olusegun Obasanjo for the same purpose are:

- National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) aimed at job provision for the masses.
- Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP) to aid the acquisition of relevant skills.
- Capacity Attachment Programme (CAP) for the empowerment of primary and secondary school students.
- Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) designed to help graduates to practice their professions.
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS).
- Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS).
- Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE), and
- National resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NARDCS).

Anybody going through the listed programmes above will give credit to the past and present government of Nigeria for mounting what can be transparently seen as concrete steps towards poverty alleviation in the country. However, laudable as the programmes are, they have not been able to put a final stop to the problem of poverty in our country. Several Nigerians are still wallowing in poverty and the consequences are still very pronounced in the society. Statistics gathered by Anyakoha (2001) from the federal office of statistic shows that up till now about : 70% of Nigerians are living below poverty line and most of them consume less than one third of the minimum required protein and vitamins intake because they are poor. That is why cases of diabetics and other nutrition-related diseases are on the increase in our society.

The question to be addressed here is "what are the more viable avenues: that Nigerian governments can employ to be able to successfully alleviate poverty in the country? Without gain saying, turning back to the provision of our national policy on education on Vocational Technical education and implementing this section with the

desired vigour and pragmatic approach seems to be the surest approach for alleviating poverty in Nigeria.

Vocational Technical Education Component of the National Policy on Education

The five national goals of Nigeria which serves as the basis for the philosophy of Nigerian education and the curriculum contents among other things stress the need for the building of a united, strong and self reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens

As contained in the National Policy on Education, education is also seen as an instrument par excellence to usher in a strong, self-reliant, united and progressive society. The policy stressed the need to make school programmes relevant, practical and comprehensive.

If individuals are to be developed into sound and effective citizens as stipulated in the National Policy on Education, Nigerian education has to be geared towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. This policy on education stressed the need for the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies of individuals as equipment to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

Based on the above, Nigerian education is expected to focus more on the kind of education that will enhance self reliance and productivity. The Junior and Senior Secondary schools as well as Technical College curricula have been so designed to emphasize the teaching of Vocational Technical courses as means for the acquisition of relevant skills that will by and large aid poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Some of the skill-oriented courses, mounted at the secondary and technical colleges include: Agriculture, Home Economics, Fine Arts, Business Studies, computer Education, Electronics, Accounting, Auto Mechanics, Clothing and Textiles, Food and Nutrition, Home Management, Building Construction, Applied Electricity, Technical Drawing, Typewriting and a host of others.(FRN, 2004 pp 9-22).

Nigerian government, as stated in the policy document section 7 sub-section 40, saw and still sees Vocational Technical education as a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world or work. It is also seen as an aspect of life-long learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship and

instrument for promoting environmentally-sound, sustainable development and also a method of alleviating poverty (NPE 2004, p. 30).

The National Policy on Education has indeed opened a wide door through which poverty can be effectively "chased" out of the nation based on its provisions for the pursuance of vocational, Technical education as stated above. The possibility of skill-acquisition through Vocational Technical education is enough to alleviate poverty in Nigeria, why then are Nigerians still being swallowed up in poverty? This question will be exposed as we consider the problems that are confronting the effective teaching of Vocational Technical education in Nigerian schools.

Problems Confronting the Effective teaching of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria

Nnaka (2000) identified the following as problems confronting the effective teaching of Vocational Technical education in Nigeria,

i) Problem of Funding.

Vocational education is capital intensive, and no meaningful learning will take place in the absence of adequate funding which enhances learning. Presently, Vocational Technical education is grossly under funded at all levels of education in Nigeria. The minimum percentage of nation's annual budget of 26% prescribed by the United Nations is yet to be attained in our country.

ii) Vocational Technical education is practical-oriented and modern equipment and instructional facilities are required for effective teaching. Wherever the need materials are lacking, acquisition of relevant skills and the industrial experience are jeopardized. That is why most of the products of Nigerian schools are o good in theoretical knowledge but are found wanting in the practical demonstration of the acquired skills.

iii) Lack of qualified teachers

Nigerian schools are still facing the problem of inadequate supply Vocational Technical education teachers.

iv) Inappropriate Focus for some Vocational Technical Education Programmes

It is sad to note that some programmes put up at the various levels of Vocational technical institutions have not been properly channeled to ensure care prospects. However, the entrepreneurship education being currently incorporate into students Industrial Technical education will help to correct this problem.

The above and several other problems are serving as barriers on the way positive skill acquisition in Nigerian schools. Hence the persistence of poverty in our country.

What then are the vital steps that should be taken to revitalize vocations education in order to ensure the effective eradication of poverty from Nigeria. The fact still remain that vocational education is a veritable tool and the surest means of getting rid of poverty in Nigeria. There is therefore the need to intensify and adopt dynamic and pragmatic approach for the teaching of Vocational Technical education in Nigeria.

Alleviating Poverty in Nigeria Through Dynamic Implementation of the Vocational Technical Aspect of the National Policy on Education

- For students and Nigerian masses to possess the saleable skills which will aid income generation and means of live hood, self sufficiency, national security, balanced economy, promotion of industrialization enhancement of foreign exchange reserves and for Nigerians to live above poverty line, the following dynamic and pragmatic steps will have to be seriously considered and pursued with vigour by Nigerian government and school teachers.
- Government should be more committed to read the laudable goals of Vocational education in Nigeria.
- Nigerian government should as a matter of urgency fund vocational Technical education adequately. Enough funds should be provided. For the procurement of modern equipment and provision of relevant facilities.
- Nigerian youths should be advised to take interest in Vocational education since it will make room for self employment.
- Competent teachers should be employed to teach the various vocational courses. While on-the-job training should be provided for the sake of updating teacher's knowledge and skills.

- Teachers morale should be enhanced as much as possible. Their remunerations and other conditions of service should be at par with those of their counterparts elsewhere.
- Vocational Education programme should be reviewed periodically based on the feed back information collected by accreditors in order to allow for effectiveness and functionality.
- Female students should be encouraged to go more into the vocational areas that are tagged men exclusives such as Electronic, Building, Carpentry, Painting, Plumbing, Mechanical and Automobile Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Welding and Fabrication etc.
- Enlightenment programme should be organized in schools on the perennials problems and dangers of poverty in Nigeria as well as the viability and surabilrty of vocational education in combating the problems thereby sensitizing the students on the need to go vocational in or outside the school programmes.
- Teachers should be encouraged to emphasize and practicalise every areas that demands for such in the teaching of the school curriculum especially where the facilities for practical teaching are available.
- Students should be given the freedom to practise individually what has been theoretically acquired instead of declaring the workshops and laboratories as no-go-areas for the students.
- Students offering vocational courses should be given better incentives beyond the allowances received during the SIWES programme.
- More loans should be made to graduates of vocational education who are willing to set up their own private businesses. Etc.
- Industries, as it is being done in most advanced countries like Singapore, Japan, America, and Britain should work along with the schools to provide the necessary practical experiences to students and assist more in employing them after graduation. When all these are put in place, poverty will be successfully eroded in Nigeria.

Conclusion

It is true that poverty has become a menace in Nigerian society. Most efforts made in the past did not yield enough desired results. The discussions above have shown that Nigerian government will have to pay more attention to vocational education for the acquisition of relevant skills which will lead to self-employment, functionality and self-reliance. Vocational education has the potentiality if properly channeled and vigorously pursued to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. Recipients of Vocational education will be equipped for gainful employment and self-reliant. This is what the paper has extensively considered. The National Policy on Education has stated the objectives of Vocational education which are quite laudable. Nigeria will definitely become poverty-free as long as the policy on Vocational Technical education is considered and pursued with the desired vigour. The suggestions made above are means by which the goals of vocational education will become realizable.

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