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Philosophical and Sociological Overview of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Vocational Technical Education is any kind of education which has the main purpose of preparing one for employment in recognized occupation. The foundation of vocational technical education is based on philosophy which was mainly established for self-employment and self-reliance of the individual(s) who partake in it. Viewing the philosophy and sociology of vocational technical education in the Nigerian school system, it is not a hidden fact that the impact of the philosophy is not felt in the society. By now, Nigeria ought to have been competing favourably with the developed nations of the world technologically. Today it is unfortunate to mention that the country cannot boast of manufacturing a single pin by themselves. How could they have achieved this task when the philosophy of vocational education is not judiciously followed and implemented. The sociological influence of the society on vocational education has made the matter worse. Vocational technological education has remained a subordinate discipline in terms of societal recognition, adequate funding and parental/children choice. It is in view of this fact that the paper made a critique of the various aspects of the philosophy of vocational technical education and analysed the influence of the society on this profession and also made recommendations on how vocational education in Nigeria can move forward.

Introduction

Vocational technical education is defined by different authors in different ways. Okoro (1999) defined vocational education as all those experiences whereby an individual learns to carry on successfully any useful occupation. These experiences may be organized and institutionalized or unorganized and haphazard. Simply put, vocational education may be looked at as a series of controlled and organized experiences arranged to prepare a person for socially useful employment. The statement explains that all education is vocational in so that the individual may serve happily and far as it prepares for satisfactory living.

In the views of Thompson (2002), vocational education aims at the development of human abilities in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding so efficiently in carrying on the activities in the vocational pursuits of his choice. Winer (2000) in his contribution opined that vocational education is designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding attitudes, work habits and appreciation

encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. It is an integral part of the total education programme and contributes towards the development of good citizens by developing their physical, social civic, cultural and economic competencies.

For vocational education to be self-reliant and productive, it needs not be operated in a vacuum. It has to be hooked unto factors that will help learners and all stakeholders in vocational technical education to be practical and not only theoretical in their approach to making vocational technical education meaningful and life-long. These factors according to Ezekiel and Usoroh (2009) are:

- i) appreciation of dignity to work;
- ii) utility and culture in vocational education;
- iii) democracy in vocational education;
- iv) plights of school dropouts;
- v) economics of vocational education;
- vi) needs of youths and adults;
- vii) needs of the society; and
- viii) basic rights of the citizenry.

Philosophical Concepts of Vocational Technical Education

Hornby (2000) defines philosophy as “a particular set or system of beliefs resulting from the search for knowledge about life and the universe”. The major philosophy of vocational technical education from National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) is to give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

The philosophy of vocational/technical education according to (Okorie, 2001) is:

- The occupational choice of individuals should be based on the orientation of the individual such as interests, aptitude, ability etc.
- All honourable and honest occupations are worthy of considerations in making the decision about life’s work.
- Each individual should have the opportunity to select an occupation in harmony with his orientation and the opportunities for employment in that occupation.
- The worth of an individual to society grows out of his contribution of skills, knowledge, and applied productive capacity to tasks that need to be completed, rather than out of artificial status connotation attached to some glamorous jobs.
- Resources for education must be provided to develop all human resources: otherwise, some individuals may possibly menace other individuals.
- Allocation of resources must reflect the needs of people. Priorities must be adjusted to provide resources in direct proportion to the cost of the investment required.

Another philosophy of vocational/technical education is stated by Prosser (1949) in Odu (2007). The items in the philosophy are:

- For vocational technical education and training to be effective, the training should be fashioned in the same way, same operations using the same tools and machines in respect of the occupation being prepared.
- Vocational technical education is effective to the extent that the individual is trained directly and specifically in the thinking and manipulative habits required in the desired occupation.

- The environment in which the trainee is prepared should resemble the environment he must eventually get employed in.
- For every occupation, there is a minimum level of preparation needed in order to enable the trainees obtained and retain employment in that occupation and if the preparation is not attained up to that level, the occupation will neither benefit the trainee nor the society.

Extent of the Implementation of the Philosophical Context of Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria

Vocational technical education and training is practiced under the following sub-sections (FRN, 2004):

- Pre-vocational
- Vocational
- Technical colleges
- Colleges of education (technical)
- Polytechnics and
- Universities

In all the above levels of vocational technical education, it is pertinent to note that their philosophies are quite similar, only with a little difference. Therefore, the extent of implementation of their philosophies will be analysed holistically.

In all levels of vocational technical education and training the philosophy of Prosser that “for vocational technical education and training to be effective, the training should be fashioned in the same way, same operations using the same tools and machines in respect of the occupation being prepared”, have not been accomplished.

In the school system today, the training received by learners in vocational technical education is quite different from what they will meet after graduation. In schools and colleges, emphasis on skills acquisition which is the hall mark of vocational education is an illusion. Vocational technical teachers now turn the programmes into a literary kind of education where only theoretical aspects of vocational education are taught to the detriment of the practical aspects of the lessons. There is dearth in qualified technical teachers and those that are on the job were not perfectly taught practical in their school days so that is why the problem is a vicious cycle. The over-riding requirement for practical is the ability of the learner to be able to do the job rather than to talk about it only (Odu, 2001). According to Chauhan (1983), the job and competence of any craftsman are measured by what he can do as against how well he can describe what he can do.

Practical in vocational technical training are found in many subject areas such as: woodwork, metal work, building construction, tailoring and dress making, dyeing, plumbing, electrical installation, block laying and concreting, carpentry and joinery, furniture making, motor vehicle mechanic works, electronics, radio and television servicing and technical drawing. Studies have revealed that the degree of the contributions made by educated people on the job is dependent upon the degree of the appropriateness of the vocational training (Nneji, 1997). The emphasis laid on the appropriateness of vocational training in the developed countries emanates from the fact that such training is said to have on job performance (Nneji, Ibid).

In the soviet Union, vocational education and training receive much attention of the government, training institutions and industries and as a result, the curriculum, method of training, staffing, equipment are carefully developed to ensure a high standard and appropriate vocational training

(Osuala, 2004). Ike (2004) revealed that as much as 72 percent of the time allotted to the training of vocational technical students is given to practical training to ensure that the vocational technical graduates perform well on the job. In the United States (Urevbu, 1988) and Germany (Nwaokolo, 2003), the emphasis is the same.

Okeke (1988) viewing the method of vocational training in Nigeria opined that the vocational training is classroom oriented. The UNESCO mission to Nigeria discovered that vocational training in Nigeria lacks practical orientation. Gana (1988) questioned the structure and content of vocational training in Nigeria while Okorie (2001) attributed the poor vocational training in Nigeria to the lack of industrial base; hence much of the vocational training is the theoretical.

In the areas of tools and machines, it is a different ball game entirely. The tools in the school workshops are at variance with the tools in the industries where the graduates will work. Tools and machines in school workshop are short in supply, obsolesces and non-functional and cannot meet the facility requirements of the schools and colleges. Imarhiagbe (1992) said that the impact of inadequate educational facilities is that training of the students becomes impeded and they end up not acquiring skills to go into the labour market.

Prosser second philosophy states that “vocational technical education is effective to the extent that the individual is trained directly and specifically in the thinking and manipulative habits required in the desired occupation”. To a great extent, this philosophy is realizable in the technical colleges where the modular approach of curriculum is practiced. The students are trained on the various tasks comprising the operations of the job. For instance students of building construction in technical colleges can choose block-laying as a module. They will be trained in the thinking and manipulative habits required in block-laying. The duration of the programme could be three months, six months or even a year. At the completion of the programme they are awarded a certificate in block laying. Other modules could be battery charging, loosening and fixing a tyre in a car etc. unfortunately this modular or competency curriculum has not been implemented as it supposed to be (Ozoro, 1982). In other sectors of the education industry like senior secondary schools polytechnics, college of education technical and universities, implementation of this philosophy is a mirage.

Thirdly, according to Prosser, the environment in which the trainee is prepared should resemble the environment he must surely get employed in”. In Nigeria, this philosophy is still far from being realized. Facilities like classrooms, workshops, laboratories, studios, equipment and materials are grossly inadequate in our schools and colleges. The difficulty in the procurement of facilities does not give room for the practical acquisition of skills by learners. Therefore, the environment in which the students are trained is quite different from that of the industries where they will work because the industries are equipped with modern hand tools and machines (Idirisu, 2007).

Fourthly, Prosser states that for every occupation, there is a minimum level of preparation needed in order to enable the trainees obtain and retain employment in that occupation and if the preparation is not attained up to that level, the occupation will neither benefit the trainee nor the society”.

Applying this philosophy to our present vocational education and training signifies that nearly all our vocational technical education programmes ought to have been scrapped or closed down because the trainees are not equipped with any saleable skill. All the vocational technical institutions are guilty of this assertion. They are supposed to be closed down by the virtue of Prosser’s fourth philosophy of vocational technical education.

The society recognizes the fact that every citizen should be equipped with skills to contribute effectively to the welfare of the society. The highest possible welfare is achieved only when each

individual produces to the limit of his capacity. For this reason according to Ezekiel and Usoroh (2009) the necessity for equipping each citizen with saleable skills for life-long endeavours is a fact that even the most primitive society has recognized.

The minimum level of preparation for vocational education is not satisfactory that is why vocational education could not benefit the trainee nor the Nigerian society. This is the reason why the country is backward in technology breakthrough and emancipation.

Sociological Argument

Hornby (2000) defines sociology as the scientific study of the nature and development of society and social behaviour. In the opinion of the writer of this paper, sociological overview of vocational technical education is the societal opinion about vocational technical education.

The importance of vocational education in sociological point of view cannot be undermined. Unemployment, juvenile delinquency, adult crime, unstable and unsatisfactory homes have been attributed to lack of vocational education and training. Some social reformers, professional sociologists, educators and writers have been so convinced of the broad social value of vocational technical education that ascribe most social ills to vocational incompetence and therefore, conclude that vocational technical education is the answer to many of them; for example, unemployment – the alienation of youth and lack of respect for social institutions. Indeed, they perceived vocational education as anything less than the salvation of civilization.

Democracy in Vocational Technical Education

Calhoun and Finch (2001) asserted that some individuals are of the opinion that it is undemocratic to teach a boy to become a carpenter because by doing so, he may be prevented from becoming a lawyer, a doctor, a computer analyst, an engineer etc. Individuals who proposed this point of view contend that it is more democratic and productive to provide each person with broad general education and leave him to his own devices in the matter of vocational preparation.

Access to Vocational Technical Education

Enrolment rate in vocational technical education programmes are low. People prefer courses in general education that will prepare them for professions like law, medicine, pharmacy, nursing, engineering etc. with apathy to vocational technical education.

Parents are not far from blame in this awesome discrimination against vocational technical education. They encourage their children, wards to read glamorous courses that do not involve practical skills. They prefer working in air conditioned offices. The writer of this paper feels that the impact of general education from the colonial masters is still in vogue today. The reason is that the Nigerian value system and orientation is tilted towards general education. Most people choose an occupation because of social status and prestige in their community as well as opting to satisfy their friends and associates undermining their aptitude for the course (Okorie, 2001).

Vocational and technical education has remained a subordinate discipline in terms of societal recognition, adequate funding and parental/children's choice. It is not surprising, therefore, that transition from junior secondary school to the technical college as at 1985 soon after the National Policy on Education, was almost 100 per cent in favour of general education (liberal education curriculum) in many states in Nigeria (Okoro, 1991). The issue of poor transition from junior secondary schools to vocational technical education programmes is still a common phenomenon

today. No improvement has been made in terms of vocational technical education enrolment. The reason is not far-fetched. Vocational technical education right from its inception has been tagged "education for the handicapped, for the drop-out and for the never-do-well (Odu and Brose, 2003). Students' loss of interest and apathy towards manual work can be attributed to society's apathy towards manual work. Therefore, the findings support Olaitan (1996) assertion that the Nigerian society of our time regards vocational/technical education as a form of education meant for people who are backward academically, and as such, there is a general apathy towards manual work, even though the current high rate of unemployment should teach otherwise.

Vocational Education and General Education

Vocational education is any kind of education with the main purpose of preparing to prepare one for employment in recognized occupations. It is education that provides the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective employment inspecific occupations (FRN, 2004). Education which is useful to an individual irrespective of his future life vocation is general education. Also general education is received for the general cultural development of the individual and while it may be useful in several occupations, it is not normally an essential part of most occupational preparations.

Both general and vocational education is part of the total education process. A functional vocational education is usually based on a solid foundation of general education. Vocational and general education complements each other. Both are important in the total process of producing an efficient and effective workforce (Okorie, 2001).

The classification of the contents of education into the categories of vocational and general education has led some authorities and individuals to suggest that vocational education is associated with utility and general education with culture. According to Roberts (2003), two alternatives are prevalent among those who accept this point of view. One suggests that the two terms-culture and utility are not antagonistic but that they have nothing in common; the other suggests that the two terms are antagonistic and unless vocational courses are severely restricted, culture will perish.

Individuals who hold to the theory that utility and culture are not antagonistic suggest that the curriculum should consider the proper balance between vocational and general education and this balance may be achieved by the selection of certain subjects, some of which are broadly cultural. The proper balance of these two will contribute to the development of well rounded individual (Osuala, 2004).

Conclusion

The philosophy of vocational technical education in Nigeria is very laudable. The main purpose of the philosophy is to give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically. The extent of implementation of this philosophy leaves much to be desired. There are so many challenges facing the implementation of the philosophy in schools, colleges and universities. These are: dearth in qualified vocational technical teachers, hand tools, machines and materials; poor image and status of vocational technical education, inadequate funding, and societal preference of general education to mention but a few. However, government intervention in providing human and infrastructural resources will give vocational technical education a facelift philosophically, sociologically and psychologically.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to achieve the philosophy of vocational technical education:

- a) Government should employ vocational technical education who must have sufficient work experience and knowledge of world of work to be able to realistically train the students practically. This task can only be achieved by teachers going for training and retraining in the industries.
- b) Technical teachers cum artisans should be employed by the government to teach technical students on practical skills.
- c) The mass media should be used to disseminate information about the value of technical education to the public. This campaign for vocational technical education will improve Nigerian technological culture and national development.
- d) About 10 percent of the education tax fund should be voted for vocational technical education for the procurement of tools, equipment, training materials and infrastructural facilities.
- e) Vocational technical education should be separated from the administrative and operating umbrella of general education. Any attempt to combine the two will definitely result in failure because they have different goals.
- f) Vocational technical education in all areas should be sufficiently funded because it is capital intensive.

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