

Incorporating Traditional Vocational Education into Nigerian Educational System: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper discusses the problems and prospects of incorporating traditional vocational education into the Nigeria educational system. It looks at the traditional education with functionalism as its main guiding principle before the introduction of western education which was purely theoretical because its aim was religious. It examines how functionalism cave-in, in the face of new education that provides white-collar jobs thereby eroding the economic value of the traditional vocations. The paper also looks at the relevance of the 1969 Curriculum Conference, which was convened to overhaul the education system and make it more relevant to the need of the society. The outcome of the conference was the 6-3-3-4 system of education which incidentally included some traditional vocations and raised peoples' hope that children will become self-reliant. However, its implementation failed because there was no partnership that works between the school and the community. But in the face of dwindling white-collar jobs and the rising unemployment, the writer is suggesting ways by which these traditional vocations could be incorporated into the educational system. The paper recommended among others that; master craftsmen/women should be brought to school to teach the students some of these vocations to impart the skills that will make them to become self-reliant.

Key Words: Traditional Vocational Education, Functionalism, National Policy on Education

Introduction

Before the introduction of western education in Nigeria by the Christian Missionaries in 1842, there existed a form of traditional education which aimed at the development of a total man and, functionalism was the main guiding principle. But the establishment of western schools gradually pushed to the background the traditional vocational education as a source of income. Incidentally, the aim of the new education then was basically religious, and by 1960 when Nigeria got her independence, western education had taken firm root and traditional vocations like calabash carving, cloth weaving, leather works, blacksmithing, pottery, tie and dye and the like had almost gone into extinction. The 1969 Curriculum Conference that came up between September 8 and 12 was to overhaul the educational system, especially the curriculum to make it more relevant to Nigerian needs and evolve a new national system. The outcome of this conference was the formulation of the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the evolution of the 6-3-3-4 system of education launched on September 8, 1982 to mark the beginning of the 1982/1983 academic session. This paper will therefore focus its discussion on:

- Traditional education before 1842
- The 1969 Curriculum Conference and its outcome - NPE and 6-3-3-4
- Some traditional vocations incorporated into the NPE.
- Problems of incorporating traditional vocational education into Nigerian educational system
- Prospects of incorporating traditional vocational education into the Nigerian education system.

Traditional education in Nigeria before 1842

Traditional education had existed in Nigeria long before the introduction of western education by any European/Christian Missionary group. This education is as old as the society itself. An aspect of this traditional education is the vocational education which serves as the economic base of both the individual and the society. Fafunwa (1974) roughly divided the various traditional vocations into three groups.

1. Agricultural education: For example, farming, fishing and veterinary science (animal care and animal rearing)

2. Trades and crafts, for example weaving (baskets and cloth) smithing (iron, silver, gold e.t.c.) hunting, carving (wood, calabash and bronze) sculpturing, painting and decorating, carpentry, building, barbering, drumming, dancing and acrobatics, hair plaiting, dress-making, boat-making, leather-working, bead-working, gold-washing, iron-ore working, threshing, glass-making, brass- working, dyeing, 'Esusu'-collecting (banking), catering (frying, baking, grinding) food-selling, wine- selling, wine-tapping and trading in all kinds of merchandise (manufactured goods and agricultural products).
3. Professions: For example, doctors, priests, witch doctors, heralds, shrine-keepers, police and messengers etc.

Vocational training in Nigeria traditional society is largely run on the apprenticeship system and it is timed depending on the vocation and the master apprentice. To ensure discipline, children are not trained by their parents in the same vocation, but by relatives, master craftsmen in particular fields or friends and graduation is then determined by practical performance of the skills acquired during training.

The 1969 Curriculum Conference and the National Policy on Education

By 1842, missionary activities started in the Coast of Badagry with the arrival of the first English-speaking Christian Mission - the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) - followed by other mission bodies. To start a school, there was no formality to observe. The important element was the children. The aim of education was mainly religious. It provided for the children and the adult converts who had to learn to read the Bible, the prayer book and the commentaries and to sing the hymns. A number of the children were sufficiently proficient in reading and writing to become teachers or catechists in the church, clerks and interpreters in the government service and the commercial houses and, gradually, traditional vocational education was being jettisoned. This made youths to become dependent on white-collar jobs.

A National Curriculum Conference was therefore held in Lagos from 8 to 12 September 1969, mainly to review old and identify new national goals for education in Nigeria at all levels and provide guidelines on what the system should be accomplishing with respect to:

1. The needs of youths and adult individuals in our society.
2. The socio-economic needs, values, aspirations and development of our society.
3. The curriculum substance, the subject content of the system which is the means to the goals.

The Conference reviewed the old goals and identified new ones with a view to setting goals according to the needs of the society. The outcome of the Conference is what culminated into the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the eventual emergence of 6-3-3-4 system of education. The first 6 years will be for general basic education offered at the elementary or primary school, followed by three (3) years of general education in Junior Secondary school, the next three (3) years in the Senior Secondary school followed by four (4) years of university education. The junior secondary was supposed to be both pre-vocational and academic and to teach all the basic subjects which will enable pupils to acquire further knowledge and develop skills. The curriculum was structured as follows.

Table 1: Junior Secondary School Curriculum

Core Subjects	Pre Vocational Subjects	Non-Vocational Electives
Mathematics, English, Nigerian Language, Science, Social Studies, Arts and Music, Practical Agriculture, Religious and Moral Instructions, Physical Education	Wood work, Metal work, Electronics, Mechanics, Local Crafts, Home Economics, Business studies	Arabic Studies, French

Source: National Policy on Education 4th Edition (2004)

The Senior Secondary School, according to NPE, is for those able and willing to have the complete six-year secondary education. It has a core-curriculum designed to broaden pupils' knowledge and outlook. The core-curriculum is the group of subjects which every pupil must take to enable him/her offer arts or science in Higher education in addition to his or her specialties as listed in table 2.

Table 2: Senior Secondary School Curriculum

Core Subjects	Electives
English Language, One Nigeria Language, Mathematics, Chemistry, Arabic Studies One of the following alternatives Subject; Physics, Chemistry and Biology One of Literature in English, History and Geography Agricultural Science or a Vocational Subject	Biology, Bible Knowledge, Physics, Islamic Studies Chemistry, Arabic Studies, Electronic, Technical Drawing, Additional Mathematics, Metal Work, Commerce, Economics, Book-keeping, Wood work, Typewriting Auto-mechanics, Music, Shorthand, Art, History, English Literature, French, Geography, Physical Education, Home Economics, Health Science, Government etc.

Source: National Policy on Education 4th Edition (2004)

Traditional Vocational Education in the 6-3-3-4

When the 6-3-3-4 system began, few of the Pre-vocational subjects that was introduced happened to be part of the traditional vocational education. For example, wood work, metal work, local crafts and agricultural science. The idea was seen as novel and expectations were high that self-sufficiency will gradually be developed in students which will benefit them for years to come. But because the courses were electives not much impact was made as regards students becoming self reliant after secondary school, most especially those who were not capable of furthering their academic pursuit in the higher institution. The implication is that the system failed to impact on the lives of the pupils as to make them independent.

By 1989, employment problem had become one of the key issues in Nigeria and it is in realization of this fact that the Federal Government considered it imperative to have a permanent institution to be charged with the responsibility of combating the menace of unemployment in the country. The Federal Government therefore established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in November 1986, to combat mass unemployment in Nigeria. In order to actualize her mandate, the NDE developed various strategies/trainings that have mass employment generation potentials. The training involves the use of informal sector operators such as master craftsmen/women as training outlets for unskilled school leavers through apprenticeship for periods long enough for them to acquire the requisite skills.

Problems of Incorporating Traditional Vocations into Nigerian Educational System

By September 1982, when the 6-3-3-4 system started, hope was high that traditional vocation education would be revived and made relevant, more so, that some of the vocations were included in the new school syllabus. The expectations of the people include a situation where schools will be inviting the local instructors to teach the students and teachers and the school in return will impart modern technology to the local artisans to improve their skills. Therefore, there was the felt need for integration in any form, for education to be effective and relevant to the needs, aspirations and cultures of the society. But this was not to be, for, after the introduction of the 6-3-3-4, modern technologies were imported into the nation from foreign countries. These countries also indicated their willingness to supply technical teacher-trainers on a technical assistance basis and some Nigerian students were also sent abroad for training in technical and vocational fields.

But a more beneficial approach would have been to commission local manufacturers to design and fabricate the simple tools and equipment needed. This would have afforded some students the opportunity to gain immensely by undergoing industrial attachment under such manufacturers. Obanya (2004) rightly observed that, for any society to move, its members have to create ideas and try them out. The efforts, the risk, the preference and the learning experience involved in trying out novel ideas are what entrepreneurship is all about.

Prospects of Incorporating Traditional Vocational Education into Nigeria Education System

Education has been accepted the world over as the only way to national development. However, an aspect that is very relevant now in the face of rising unemployment is technical and vocational education. Twenty-eight (28) years after the 6-3-3-4 was introduced, there have been accusations and counter accusations. Addressing a two-day National Summit on Education in Abuja, Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan agreed that the system of education in Nigeria requires major overhaul. He said that, "what the country needed is action and practicable recommendations on how to move education forward, make it more functional and productive to Nigerians."

Of particular concern to him is the 6-3-3-4 system, which he said had not made practicable impact, thus, imploring the initiators of the policy to apologize to Nigerians over its apparent failure. Reacting to this, Professor Aina said that, the executors, not initiators failed Nigeria in the 6-3-3-4 system of education. According to him, the President's target should have been those who failed to faithfully and diligently implement the letter and the spirit of the system.

One important thing that is clear from these arguments is the admittance of failure of the 6-3-3-4 education system in Nigeria. The main point being the lack of marketable skills for either wage employment or to become self employed as earlier identified by NDE. This is where the incorporation of Traditional Vocational Education (TVE) becomes imperative. The incorporation could be in three ways namely:

- (a) Inviting local craftsmen/women to teach during practical periods in the school
- (b) Attaching students to local craftsmen/women for a period to be decided by stakeholders; like the NDE does
- (c) Improving the skills of the local craftsmen/women through formal practical education in their chosen career.

This third technique was employed recently by the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, when it introduced a certificate programme for mechanics, because of its felt need to retrain artisans for greater efficiency. Unlike the regular students who are subjected to all manner of tests, assignments and seminars, these special students are only restricted to learning new auto-technologies and how to handle them. 75% of their work schedules are practical and the condition for admission is not tied to the mandatory five credit passes at the West African School Certificate Education.

In developing the curriculum for the programme, the authority decided that the language of instruction should be Pidgin English and Yoruba or any of the nation's local languages predominant among a particular set of students. The Director of the programme, Prof. Egbokhare, believes that this is the way we should go as a nation if we must develop in the area of technology. He stressed further that, there is no nation that has developed technologically with the use of a foreign language. The Chinese, the Japanese and most of the countries in Asia use their local languages to teach their children and it is these children that grow up to become graduates of vocational and tertiary institutions that develop most of the gadgets we use. Speaking on his experience with the students a lecturer, Femi Olorode, said he discovered that the auto-mechanics had coined local names for most parts of the vehicles. The ultimate aim of the programme therefore, is to retrain some roadside mechanics that technology wants to throw out of job.

There are traditional vocations like cloth weaving, blacksmithing, tie and dye, leather works, as well as calabash carving that could be incorporated into the educational system using the University of Ibadan method to enhance the output of the craftsmen/women to become more self sufficient. On the other hand, these local craftsmen could be invited to the school to teach the students practical of the vocations. The fact that these students are in schools gives them the opportunity to learn faster and in no time master the skills that may be difficult for an illiterate. The implication of this process is that the students will acquire both academic and practical skills. Eventually, a student that is not capable of furthering his/her education for what ever reason must have gotten something to do to earn a living. Also, some of the students in the process of being involved in the practical may eventually design better ways of doing these jobs making it more profitable and worth while in the future, thus reducing unemployment in the country.

Some of the vocations shown below could be improved upon in the school in so many ways that could lead to large production and exportation to generate income for individuals and the nation in general.



Figure 1: A local fabric weaver in Iseyin Oyo State, Nigeria



Figure 2: Locally woven fabrics displayed for sale in a shop at Iseyin, Oyo State, Nigeria



Figure 3: Locally fabricated farm implements by Blacksmiths in Oyo town, Nigeria



Figure 4a:



Figure 4b

Some blacksmiths in their local factory (figures 4a & 4b)



Figure 5: A calabash carver at work



Figure 6a



Figure 6b

Leather works displayed in a shop in Oyo town, Nigeria. (Figures 5a&5b)



Figure 7a



Figure 7b:
Traditional tie and dye (Figure 7a&b)

Conclusion

The relevance of practical and traditional vocational skills cannot be overemphasized, especially when theoretical education is no longer fashionable in the face of dwindling white-collar jobs and rising unemployment. In this age of technology, the individual has to develop novel ideas and bring out latent potentials in him/her to be relevant in the world of work. Taken that not everybody will have the opportunity to go to the university to become professionals, there is the need for alternative means of survival, which the traditional vocations can easily provide if properly incorporated into the Nigerian Education system. The big lesson to learn is that when new cultures are being introduced, there is the need for integration. This is in line with Obanya's (2004) view that,

... We teach computer-simulated designs, modern management techniques and organisation theory, when our simple folks do design the buildings in which we live on simple cardboards (and even on the bare ground) and repair our vehicles without being able to interpret the manufacturer's drawings. Our simple folks advertise their wares appropriately, organise their businesses and maintain parallel banking and insurance systems. And our institutionalised vocational courses have failed to take advantage of such conventional wisdom.

Recommendations

To make traditional vocational education relevant in the modern education, it is therefore recommended that the government should overhaul the system of education to make it more relevant to the needs of the society. In this vein traditional vocational education should be incorporated into the school curriculum. There must be a partnership that works between the school and local craftsmen/women. Ingenuity should be rewarded and encouraged among the youths. There had been occasions when young Nigerians have displayed their potential innovative skills but they were never encouraged further to improve on whatever they had built or to empower them. If they are empowered, it will encourage others to put to use latent skills. Technical colleges and trade centres should be in the priority list of the government, so as to accommodate those who are dropping out after junior or senior secondary school.

The NDE should be further empowered to continue in its apprenticeship scheme; that is, attaching unemployed persons to master craftsmen/women to learn a trade. In the year 2009, 197,367 persons were trained. (NDE; 2009)

Productive work should be integrated into the objectives, the methods, the materials, and the content of Education. The conventional wisdom of non-formal system of education (especially in areas concerning vocational/technical education) will have to be tapped. While it is true that the non-formal apprenticeship system still needs to be developed, it still has a great deal of lessons for formal system.

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