

Towards a Paradigm Shift

In the Production of Vocational Education Teachers in Nigeria

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Abstract

Modern education the world over now envisions achievement of science and technological advancement for economic growth and poverty reduction. The imperative is for teachers to deliver instruction in vocational skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge related to occupations in various sectors of the Nigerian economic and social life. If we believe that the quality of an educational system is a correlate of teacher quality then, logically, the teacher should be the first to acquire this vocational identity and orientation to be able to transmit the same to students. Today, schools have 'talk-and-chalk' teachers teaching vocational education students with traditional skills - dictate long notes, memorize books, drill and indoctrinate skills rather than skills that reduce classroom experiences to real world situations. This means teaching without teachers and represents a fundamental missing link. A paradigm shift is required. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher training (production) programmes (in terms of curricula, content, pedagogy and funding) be reformed to produce sharp and appropriate teacher response to this new concept of education.

Keywords: Paradigm shift, Production, Vocational education, Teacher

1. Introduction

In the world today, education is experiencing huge changes both in concept, content and application suitable for a scientific and technological age. Societies are no longer satisfied with an educational system that ends in possession of paper certificates not relevant to the solution of socio-economic problems.

Vocational skills development is an imperative which stimulates industry, agriculture and commerce thus drives economic growth, increases productivity and reduces poverty (World Bank, 1995; UNESCO, 2007; Abimbade, 2008). Actualizing this imperative fundamentally requires that teachers, at all levels, are attuned with contemporary vocational skills identity and orientation.

The teacher occupies center stage (Igwe, 2002) in education development and requires adequate training and orientation for effective response (Abraham, Leigha & Asodike, 2007) because the best way a teacher can impart any specific skill, ability and/or competence to students is to acquire same. If vocational skills acquisition is our education development imperative then our policy thrust should now focus on "who teaches in Nigerian schools" (Okeke, 2004: 60). Concerted efforts should be directed towards the quality of instruction teachers acquire and the method by which they deliver what is acquired to the learner.

The teacher quality we produce today may not deliver our future educational goals. Also the methods of teaching are rapidly evolving from traditional theory-based techniques to modern practical emphasis, particularly in teaching vocational/technical education. The teacher quality we produce today may not deliver our future educational goals. Also the methods of teaching are rapidly evolving from traditional theory-based techniques to modern practical emphasis,

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We suggest that teacher quality should mean more than mere possession of paper certificate such as Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), Master of Education (M.Ed.), or even the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in education and other related areas. It should now be seen as the totality of subject-specific, job-related and society-directed experiences, abilities, exposure and competences that a teacher acquires and effectively applies to transform or reconstruct society through the conduit of a learner. He should be able to initiate action, spot problems, surmount obstacles, avert crises and make significant contribution to vocation development, particularly in the new millennium.

Logically, it is what the teacher thinks, understands, believes and is able to transmit (teacher quality) that shapes education and the nation. The process is an internal activity and must build up from the inside-out in the course of a well purposed production or training process. Besides general education, a teacher requires subject-specific training, job-related skills, knowledge and competences in the process of his training and preparation to be able to function in this identity and orientation. Though difficult to predict, but that teachers schooled in vocational (real-occupation based) skills, knowledge and orientation can only impart the same quality to students is highly likely.

2. What is Vocational Education?

Vocational education involves the acquisition of skills, abilities and competences related to the real economic occupations in society. The adjective 'vocational', Hornby (2000:1707) believes is "connected with the skills, knowledge, etc that you need to have in order to do a particular job". The Encarta Dictionary (2000) notes that 'vocational' means relating to job or career skills: relating to education designed to provide the necessary skills for specific job or career. The American Heritage Dictionary (2000:1926) also perceives 'vocational' as "relating to, providing or undergoing training in a special skill to be pursued in a trade". Chambers (2001:1588) thinks vocational education is seen as "education aimed at preparing students for their present or future employment which may take place in colleges of further education, universities or in the work place itself and is increasingly being offered to secondary school pupils in the form of work experience". To Abimbade (2008:278), it is "a phase of education wherein emphasis is laid on preparation in occupation of social values".

Indeed, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004: 29) says vocational and technical education is "a comprehensive term referring 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, understandings and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life". The statement further understood vocational and technical education to be:

- (a) an integral part of general education;
- (b) a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work;
- (c) an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship;
- (d) an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development;
- (e) a method of alleviating poverty (p.30).

3. Aims and Values of Vocational and Technical Education

Vocational skills development is a philosophy rooted in the value and ethics of dignity in labour. The concept enables an understanding and appreciation of self-actualization in the world of work as well as satisfying the individual's socio-economic needs. It provides self-confidence and the understanding that economic independence is the beginning of social and emotional liberty. However, Giachino and Gallington (1964) in Abimbade (2008: 281) believe that the specific objectives of vocational and technical education are to develop:

- (i) specific skills and related knowledge associated with the occupation involved;
- (ii) an understanding of labour and management;
- (iii) pride in work and appreciation for craftsmanship;
- (iv) occupational safety habits and understanding;
- (v) ability to cooperate with fellow workers in the occupation involved;
- (vi) individual initiatives and responsibilities as a worker;
- (vii) ability to solve problems;

- (viii) stimulate leadership equalities;
- (ix) foster self-reliance, and
- (x) competence in social responsibilities

These positions closely approximate FRN (2004: 30-31) objectives as stipulated in the National Policy on Education that the goals of vocational and technical education are to provide economy with:

- (i) trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- (ii) technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development;
- (iii) training and impart the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

From this perspective, it is obvious that vocational education is a society-related, job-specific, skill-specific and individual-oriented training which offers potentials for employment and self-sufficiency. It reduces economic realities such as industry, agriculture, commerce, technical and business areas to classroom experiences thus make school education equipment for social integration.

Realization of these lofty goals has opened two imperatives for education administration: (1) the training (production) of teachers proficient in vocational and technical education teaching, both in demeanour and action; and (2) the provision of appropriate curricular and facilities for vocational education development. Currently, the federal government intends to expand facilities for the training (production) of vocational and technical teachers for secondary education. And to provide:

In-service technical teachers programme at junior secondary school level, enhancing the status and remuneration of technicians/technologies in relation to graduates and other professionals (already holders of the Higher National Diploma (HND) are placed on the same scale as university graduates). The curricular of trade centres and technical schools were broadened to include plumbing, decoration, carpentry and joinery, furniture-making, bakery, shoe-repairing and making, printing, sign-writing, metal and television servicing, and so on, as these courses would address the occupational needs of communities across the country (Abimbade, 2008: 282).

While all these efforts currently made to address the area of provision of facilities, what is the present capability of the Nigerian teacher in teaching vocational education?

4. Present Perspectives on Vocational Education Teaching

Apparently, in Nigeria, teacher pedagogy may not have developed beyond preparing youths to acquire mere paper certificates (Anyanwu, 2008:35). Evidence abound that:

Classroom teaching styles are dominated by Frontal Teaching: the teacher standing in front of the class and talking down on the learners. Talking and chalking: the teacher saying things and immediately writing these on the chalkboard, with no interesting discussion. The textbook as a god, and not a guide: the tendency to follow textbook exactly the way it is ordered, and the habit of not supplementing what is contained in the textbook.

Ike (2007:17) contends that “most of our teachers... are not properly trained and educated to be able to function optimally because they do not possess sound knowledge of the subjects they teach”. Ezeliora (2005) in Boucouvalas and Aderinoye (2008:402) also asserts that: “there is high percentage of unqualified science (and vocation education) teachers in our school system”. She believes that, “a handful of teachers in the primary schools are generalists – without any specialized ability or competence” to teach subjects like vocation education.

In the same vein, Jegede (1982) also contends that most of the teachers who teach integrated science (also vocation based) are traditional single science specialists often without basic teaching background and are strangers to integrated science teaching. Hence, when teaching of vocational education is considered, Nigerian schools may be “teaching without teachers” (Obanya, 2006:35). Obanya, (2006:35) believes that mostly “mathematics and technical/vocational subjects are top on the list of core subjects taught with poor pedagogy.

Even our examination system (WAEC and NECO), Okali, (2007:17) says “recognize dry practicals leading to poor students’ performance, particularly in the science and vocational subjects. They (teachers) tell students about microscope, yet they (students) have not seen it”. The situation, as it concerns who teaches in our school system, has become so pathetic that:

The only thing that confers on an individual, the status of a teacher in Nigeria is the fact that he or she goes to the classroom and claim to be teaching. However, in practical terms, the expected outcome cannot be achieved because the practitioner lacks skills, knowledge, ethics, qualification and other such criteria expected of the profession (Ciwar, 2008:3-4).

It is highly likely that the present preparatory programmes still produce telling, note dictating, theory-based teacher quality. The food-stuffs, engineering networks, bore-hole water and electricity, health care system, etc, our education provides only exacerbates hunger, diseases, poverty, unemployment, brain-drain, etc. This production matrix, if not reversed, may lead not only to “educational and economic eclipse” (Okonjo, 2008:43) but also ‘educational melt-down’ in the country.

It is very instructive to note that successful operation of a vocational education culture requires a teaching personality that is vocation literate, well informed and enlightened; one that embraces its principles and practices and not just its theory, puts nail on wood in a workshop; and finally that readily embraces the virtues of dignity in labour, industry and performance since a teacher’s ability to impart depends on repertoire.

In the end, what is germane is not what we give teachers but what teachers offer the nation through education. Production engineering demands that where structural or technical shift in the economy antiquates quality of goods supplied then, a fresh technology needs to emerge.

5. Need for a Paradigm Shift

We are well aware that only a teacher can shape the capacity of an education system. The ability of vocational and technical education to provide food, roads and bridges, health care, jobs and create wealth for individuals and the nation largely depends on the pre-acquisition of such vocational skills by the school teacher. Therefore, “if we believe in the capacity of educational systems to promote rapid and directed social and economic change then, we should be concerned with who teaches in the Nigerian schools” (Okeke, 2004:60).

Teachers, and especially vocational education teachers, must school in vocational skills, principles, practices, pedagogy, and in the culture and orientation for vocational goals delivery. As Hargreaves (1995) in Awotua-Efebo (1999:1) contends: “it is what teachers think, what teachers believe, and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shape the kind of learning that young people get”. Indeed, “teachers have been responsible for shaping the destinies of nations and individuals without them there would be no pharmacists, architects, agriculturists, engineers, chemists, lawyers, accountants, doctors, administrators and even teachers themselves” (Wonkwo 1992 in Igwe (2002:1).

Indeed, education system bases its development on teachers produced to specialize in the principles, practices and ethics of individual subjects. For instance, pre-colonial apprenticeship education system developed on craft masters (teachers) who specialized on the training of specific craft (Fafunwa, 1974). Vocational “literacy is most likely to result from the interaction of good curricula materials and good transformations made by good (vocation-inclined) teachers” (Collins, 1989 in Ezeliiora (2008:402). As it is now, Nigerian schools may be “teaching (vocational and technical education) without teachers” (Obanya, 2006:35).

It is noteworthy that in Nigeria, production evidence indicates that teacher quality can no longer guarantee quality education for successful living. Note taking, dictation, and book memorizing are his signature. The apparent lack is institutional arrangement or enrichment purposed to enrich school teacher quality, particularly in vocational skills such as participatory, activity-based teaching and learning techniques related to real-life situations, events and phenomena as well as life skills development for significant impact on vocation teaching.

Imperatively, teacher production processes need to change in consonance with this new emphasis. Curricular materials (textbooks), instructional methods and techniques, as well as principles and practices for teacher preparatory programmes would have to renovate to foster a culture and orientation of skills transformation. Persons deciding for vocational education teaching must train, both in character and demeanour, to think, believe, and be able to apply vocational principles and practices even beyond the classroom to qualify as teachers.

This means that quality teacher concept must go beyond mere possession of the minimum acceptable qualification of Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education or related certificates and degrees to possession of subject-specific and society-related skills, knowledge, attitudes and aptitudes that ensure the skill development process (Okeke, 2004; Obanya, 2006; Obanya, 2008).

Teacher education reform must necessarily precede education reform if education must become a tool for national development in the sense envisaged by the National Policy on Education. In tandem, production theory postulates that

the quality of output in any production venture, is a function of the quality of input that goes into production. Vocational output in society would fundamentally depend on the vocational inputs (curricular, pedagogy, etc) that go into the production system, meaning an advocacy for skill-based, subject-specific pedagogy.

6. Conclusion

In Nigeria, traditional teacher production signature over the years has only produced frontal teaching; largely bookish, memory-related and theory-based which has been unproductive. The paradigm has only produced school teachers in terms of generalists for subject specialists, universal-related for society-related, liberal skills for vocation/technical skills, etc.

Since quality of teachers determines quality of education, the lack of teachers to first initiate into desired education quality may represent a significant missing link in the growth and development of vocational and technical education in particular, and education in general.

This paradigm must shift to modern participatory, subject-specific, society-related competences and orientation suitable for vocational skills teaching for socio-economic development. Imperative steps are required to reform the concept of teacher quality in tandem with social dynamics for optimal vocational goals achievement in Nigeria.

7. Recommendations

Based on the above, the following are recommended:

- 1). Existing teachers should retrain in vocational skills and orientation to effectively teach vocational subjects in Nigeria.
- 2). Teacher production programmes should now include subject-specific training aimed at producing subject specialists rather than generalists.
- 3). Concerned authorities should implement requisite vocational curricular recommendations for effective teacher response.
- 4). Since all these steps would involve money, authorities should implement the UNESCO 26% Gross Domestic Production (GDP) education funding requirement for proper development of vocational education in Nigeria.

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