

Vocational Counselling: A Strategic Tool for Promoting Entrepreneurship Training among Nigerian Youths

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ABSTRACT

This review thus assesses vocational counselling as a strategic tool for promoting entrepreneurship training among Nigerian youths. The major aim is to trace the origin of “skillless” education system in Nigeria and the attempt to reverse the trend at independence. It expatiated on the new emphasis on entrepreneurship skill acquisition and the place of vocational counselling in ensuring its success. During the course of the study, it was revealed that entrepreneurship education is the strategic tool for national development the world over. Consequently, as the society becomes more and more service-oriented and as graduate unemployment goes high each passing day, Nigerian youths should be orientated towards self-employment and business ownership. To this end, the new senior secondary school curriculum and entrepreneurship education should be implemented in practical terms in order to inculcate entrepreneurship skills into our youths.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, skill acquisition, vocational counselling*

INTRODUCTION

Many educators maintain that the education system should go beyond imparting academic knowledge to students. In the face of globalization, the education and training in Nigeria should provide all individuals with the opportunity to expand and sharpen their knowledge in order to adapt to the demands of an ever-changing socio-economic environment. Thus, a well organized vocational counselling in particular and guidance and counselling in general need to be high on the national policy agendas. African traditional education, which predated the western education heralded by the Christian missionaries, emphasized functional and utilitarian education. The entrepreneurial component of the training was largely run on the apprenticeship system. It was a time-honored device for educating millions of African youths and adults (Nwogu and Nnorom, 2013). Skills training and skills acquisition were the focus. This created a situation where there was no idle hand in the various African communities. Education was for life and living. According to Fafunwa (2004), the indigenous system of education, “taught as part of the Nigerian child, weaving, sculpturing, blacksmithing, carving, farming, fishing, cattle rearing, hair plaiting, dress-making, leather working, pottery making, glass and bead working, catering, dying, tinkering and many more”. However, this inherited informal educational tradition, had to give way with the introduction of western education. The original aims and objectives were jettisoned. In the new dispensation, the

educated man was conceived to be that individual who could read, write and do simple arithmetic. The product of their system was only fitted for employment as clerks, interpreters and basic education instructors. The system was just knowledge based with a sprinkling of moral instruction. Thus, the psychomotor domain of educational outcome was relegated to the background. In fact, Okebukola (2012) opines that there are four main components of any educational framework. These are knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. According to him, there are inter-linkages among the elements and hence education is taken to be complete only when we acquire bits and pieces of all rather than digging in with some. This gap and shortcoming inherent in the education system bequeathed to Nigerians by the British colonial masters prompted the convening of the 1969 curriculum conference, which at the end of deliberation, recommended that education should be adapted to the aptitude, and mentalities of the people and that care should be taken not to alienate the people. Indeed education was designed to be related to the employment market and to ultimately be a basis for technological development. It was in the attempt to implement the resolutions/recommendations of the conference that an educational policy – the famous 6-3-3-4 system was implemented. This gave vocational training especially at the junior secondary education level a priority. However, the implementation programme was sabotaged as students graduated from the school system without acquiring any vocational skill.

Both the United Nations and the commonwealth define “youth” as people within the age 15 to 30 years. Sociologically, youth denotes a stage of life between; childhood and adulthood. In many African societies, however, marriage constitutes a major stage of responsibility and therefore signifies adulthood. Thus whatever a person’s chronological age, he or she is usually deemed to remain a youth until when married (Egbue, 2006). The Nigerian society has been bedeviled by a lot of criminal activities perpetuated by mainly these youths. These vices include armed robbery, kidnapping, political thuggery, cultism and very recently the Boko Haram terrorist activities in northern Nigeria. According to Nwogu and Nnorom (2013), a well educated citizenry with good entrepreneurial skills capable of being employed and employing people may not likely be involved in such social vices. Indeed the high rate of unemployment among the products of the education system has taken a worrisome dimension (Ogonor, 2013). Many of the products of the educational institutions are half-baked and unemployable. According to the World Bank (2009) 55 percent of Nigerians of working ages are unemployed. It added that 1 in every 10 graduates get a job. It is in the light of the above serious situation that the National Universities Commission (NUC) restructured the curriculum of universities to incorporate entrepreneurship education.

Thus, university undergraduates are supposed to acquire skills in entrepreneurship before graduation so that they can be in a position to create jobs. From Ogonor’s (2012) studies, it appears that this intention is not being achieved as findings showed that beneficiaries of the programme do not feel that they were sufficiently trained by the programme to be in the position to do so. A well integrated vocational counselling programme will assist in arousing the interest of undergraduates in the programme. Entrepreneurship education has been recognized as a strategic tool for national development the world over. According to

Henry (2003) entrepreneurship is the engine driving the economy of the nations, creating new industries, young entrepreneurs, employment and wealth. Similarly, Agbionu (2008) says that entrepreneurship involves a process aimed at creating wealth for the purpose of growth and development of the environment and eradication of unemployment for national sustainability. Indeed entrepreneurship education centres on developing understanding and capacity for pursuit of skill acquisition. Still Okebukola (2012) explains entrepreneurship to mean all activities aiming to foster entrepreneurial mindsets, attitudes and skills and covering a range of aspects such as idea generation, start-up, growth and innovation. The rationale for entrepreneurship education have been itemized by Nwufu (2012) in Nwogwu and Nnorom (2013) to include:

1. To offer functional education for the youth that will enable them to be self employed and self reliant.
2. To provide the youth/graduates with adequate training that will enable them to be self employed.
3. To serve as catalysts for economic growth and development.
4. To offer tertiary institution graduates with adequate training in risk management to make certain risk bearing feasible.
5. To reduce the high rate of poverty.
6. Create employment generation.
7. Provide the youth/graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium size businesses.
8. To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youth and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on.
9. Create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy.

Okebukola (2012) advances four reasons for entrepreneurial education. The first is to boost economic development. According to him “no entrepreneurial education, no vision 20-20-20”. The second reason is that entrepreneurial education lowers poverty level and elevates living standard and the quality of life of Nigerians. Thirdly, it translates to job creation which will lower crime rate. The fourth reason is that entrepreneurial education will improve the relevance and public acceptability of our universities.

Vocational Counselling

As social beings, the human organism is at the same time very complex. Humanity is faced with a lot of problems and challenges on a daily basis. The Nigerian youths are not left out in their complexity of human nature. They are faced with a plethora of social adjustment which needs educational and vocational concerns. Thus to be able to adequately gain mastery of their life adjustment needs and become properly functional individuals, there is a compelling need for guidance and counselling services at all levels of our educational programme. Counselling is a helping relationship which assists individuals to change their perspective or attitude for better achievements (Egbe-Okpenge and Orhungur 2012). Also according to Fuster (2000) counselling is neither giving of advice nor offering solutions to problems but helping counselees to change their attitude, perception of self or others or

of habits. It is also a process designed to help students cope with their problems with the assistance of a professionally trained guidance counselors. Counselling has three broad domains which include educational counselling, vocational counselling and personal and social counselling. Vocational counselling which is the thrust of this work is defined by Akinade (2005) as a facilitative process, a service rendered to the individual in choosing and adjusting to an occupation. Olayinka (1993) has defined it as a decision-making process in the realistic choice of career, a course of study and how individual subjects relate to the future mental health of students and therefore prerequisite to economic growth and manpower needs of the country. The importance of vocational counselling to the entrepreneurship development of students and youths in general cannot be overemphasized.

According to Uba (2010) counselling will intensively equip students and youths for sound public relations, self-understanding and better management skills which will facilitate entrepreneurship development. This is more pertinent in the wake of the new university and senior secondary school curriculum which focuses on entrepreneurship education. The curriculum which was introduced in 2011 was designed to reduce the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The curriculum was geared towards wealth creation, entrepreneurial development, and skill acquisition training for self employment (Abosedo, Oyenuga and Owoye 2012). The basic features of this new curriculum are:

- a) It provides support for higher education.
- b) Introduction of ICT, civil education and trade entrepreneurship as compulsory cross cutting core subjects.
- c) ICT enables students become globally competitive.
- d) Civic education enables students become more responsible and responsive citizens.
- e) Trade/entrepreneurship provides required strategic skills for job creation and poverty eradication.

In all, thirty five trade and entrepreneurship subjects were introduced into the senior secondary school curriculum. The need of vocational counselling to aid students makes appropriate choices from among these varied vocational skills becomes imperative. Students need to assess their needs, interests, aptitude, attitudes and aspirations and match them with their occupational demands. This understanding helps in worthwhile decision-making. Secondly, there is a compelling need for counsellors to work in the psyche of our youths who see paid employment as the only viable option to attaining material and economic wellbeing. Counter-conditioning techniques could be utilized to reorientate them to developing high values for self-employment. Group counselling sessions with inspirational resource persons from the business, or economic world will help inculcate these values. Thus, provision of work opportunities should be complemented with emphasis on inculcation of “doing” orientation in the educational system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The introduction of guidance and counselling at all tiers of education is imperative in order to identify and detect the latent abilities of our youths. The early detection of the talents of our youths will ensure adequate nurturing towards the attainment of appropriate skills

acquisition for national development. Vocational counselling services come in handy as a strategic tool for rationalizing manpower across the various career lines in order to ensure even development, thereby ensuring optimal utilization of manpower. From the foregoing, it is hereby recommended that guidance and counseling which is a third force in education be vigorously implemented at all levels of education. To this end, counselors posted to educational institutions should be relieved of all routine instructional responsibilities in order to ensure full concentration in the discharge of their helping duties. The new senior secondary school curriculum and entrepreneurship education programme should be implemented. Thus there should be a way of incorporating the trade/entrepreneurship subjects into the secondary school time table.

In addition to this, the right type of personnel (instructors) for the various trade and entrepreneurship subjects should be engaged on full or part-time basis. Also, facilities for training in the various vocational subjects should be provided in schools in order to avoid the pit fall of the vocational component of the defunct 6-3-3-4 system. Government inability to vitalize introductory technology option in secondary schools, demonstrate the “lip-service” nature of past policy emphasis in this direction. The provision of necessary infrastructures and manpower in our educational institutions will make them more amenable to the pursuit of human dignity. Above all, counselors should orientate teachers on how to integrate entrepreneurship education into subject-matter areas. They should be able to explain the relevance of their various disciplines to the world of work.

Since polytechnic education which was the pivot of technical and vocational education is wearing the face of irrelevance due to "object derail", stakeholders in the education sector may consider it beneficial to establish and fund sufficiently such institution as "Institute for Entrepreneurship Management and Technology. The target students should not only be literate people but also the illiterates' ones who have the potentials and know-how in local technology or artifacts. Such system should be organized in a way that both the literate and the non-literates are taught in the language that fosters their understanding. It should be noted that majority of the illiterates who because of western education are not considered relevant in the system are carriers of the basic potentials that can transform a nation to a vibrant one. Most of the products that are imported today into Nigeria from China and other developed economies are not manufactured by people who can read and write English or French and are their local vernacular.

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