

CHAPTER TWENTY

ATTITUDES OF POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS IN BENDEL STATE TOWARDS TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Education attaches great importance to Technical and Vocational education because it is a primemover for achieving the desired technological development. It will help to achieve manpower, professional and economic development. Vocational Education develops good work habits and attitudes, technical job skills and computational abilities. What has been operating in this country before 1982 is the grammar school system that appears to ignore the vocational aspect of Education. Such a narrow focus is perhaps a major cause of youth unemployment and technological underdevelopment. The predicament can be attributed to the lack of esteem given to skills in doing, making, designing and manufacturing, compared with the high esteem given to liberal studies. The attitudes of students and the society towards Technical and Vocational Education can affect the achievement of the objectives of the National Policy on Education. It is expected that the 6-3-3-4 system of education will perform the same 'miracle' as it did in developed countries. Since the Government and the general public are committed to the success of the new system of education, it is necessary to determine students' attitudes towards Technical and Vocational programmes.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There has been a great bias against vocational education by the Nigerian society. Early efforts by the missionaries did not yield much fruit because many students and parents did not appreciate the value of the programme. In 1876, the Roman Catholic Mission established an Agricultural School at Topo in Badagry. Also, in 1895, the Hope Waddell Training Institute was established in Calabar by the Missionaries for vocational training. Other philanthropic bodies also

made their contributions. Most of those sent abroad for vocational training by the missions deflected and took to other professions that carried greater social prestige. Vocational programme was seen as education for the poor, the handicapped, the drop outs and the low intelligence. A later development by the former Western Regional government was the establishment of secondary modern schools to train pupils in manual skills. Onabamiro (1983 pg. 2) remarked that the scheme failed because the government was unable to provide schools with workshop equipment and pre-vocational subject teachers. It can be safely said that the public had a negative attitude towards vocational education because of the colonial orientation and indoctrination that the grammar school education is superior to vocational education. However, the new education policy (known as the 6-3-3-4 system) has restructured the secondary school system to include training in occupational skills.

National development planning from 1944 have been contributing to the development of Vocational Education in Nigeria. A specific example is the 10 year Technical Education Development Plan (TEDP) under the Colonial development and Welfare Act 1940. The Phelps - Stokes report of 1922 and the Ashby report of 1960 cooperated in no small measure to help in manpower planning and appraisal. Developments after 1960 began to modify societal attitude towards vocational Education. The programme began to be seen as a viable means of meeting the manpower needs of the nation.

During the Second National Development Plan (1970 - 74) the Federal and State Governments had a total allocation of £12.3 million for Technical Education projects. Within the period, existing Technical and Trades Schools were expanded and new ones established. During the third National Development Plan period (1975 - 1980) the Government increased training for specific technical and business occupations and incorporated educational programmes in Monotechnics, Polytechnics, Universities and industries to meet the needed manpower. The fourth National Development Plan (1981 - 85) dealt with the implementation of the new National Policy on Education which incorporates pre-vocational and vocational programmes in the School system and puts

them on the same platform with liberal studies.

The Federal Government has established Federal Colleges of Education (Technical) in Asaba and Bichi. Others have been proposed for Omoku, Omunze, Portiskum and Gusau. Universities that offer Business and Technical programmes are increasing as a result of the need for vocational graduates in Nigeria. The effort of the Government in this direction is commendable having regard to the equipment purchased, teachers trained and funds provided towards achieving the goals of the National Policy on Education.

If the Government can put in so much into vocational education, the society in general as well as the students in particular ought to develop positive attitudes towards the programme. It is important therefore for students to have the proper mental orientation for vocational programme in order that their goals and that of the government will not militate against one another. Students ought to have the right attitude in order to justify the huge investments of the Federal and State Governments in Vocational Education.

Kenyon (1968b:96) defined attitude as "a latent or non-observable complex but relatively stable disposition reflecting both direction and intensity of feeling towards a particular object whether it be concrete or abstract". Evans (1972 p.9) remarked that students coming from a variety of homes and schools have varying attitudes towards social, economic, political and religious questions. The thoughts and feelings of students who go for technical and vocational education are obscured by their appearance. Nevertheless, their ideas, values, expectations, enthusiasm, talents, limitations, hope and fears influence their performance and success in the chosen vocation. In order to remove barriers that are likely to affect the achievement of the educational objectives, it was important to analyse, in a ranking order the reasons for students' participation in vocational programme.

This study therefore, attempted to investigate students' attitudes towards vocational and technical education with the hope of ranking the reasons for the choice of vocational programmes. It is by so doing that one can appreciate factors that contributed to student's choice of the programme and make recommendations on the basis of the goals to be achieved. The knowledge of students' attitudes will also provide useful information

for vocational and educational guidance services.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

Since the post-secondary school was the level of education involved in the study, the investigation was directed towards post-secondary institutions and their first year students as the target population. A total of four post secondary institutions in Bendel State constituted the population. Altogether, 492 students (100% of the population) were selected. First year students in each of the institutions constituted the target population because they are new in the system, and will be ready to say why they are there. This population also constituted the sample of the study.

INSTRUMENTATION

Eight statements were used. The students were required to rank the eight statements in the order in which they conform with their reasons for the choice of technical/vocational education. Every student was required to place number (1) by the most important reason, number (2) by the second most important reason, and so on to number (8) which will be the least important reason for choosing a technical/vocational education programmes.

A class of vocational education students was asked to write an essay on "what I expect to gain from being in the institution".

Their write-up were collected and classified. Eight reasons that occurred often in most of their responses were used as variables. The following eight main factors were responsible for their decisions:

- i factors traceable to frustration
- ii factors traceable to parental influence
- iii factors traceable to status
- iv factors traceable to employment
- v factors traceable to societal trend
- vi factors traceable to counselling
- vii factors traceable to desire to acquire skills
- viii factors traceable to love for vocational studies

My colleagues were used as pilot jurors and they ascertained whether the questions were relevant, clearly and carefully stated. The Ranking of Choice for Vocational education (RCVE) was distributed to post secondary institutions that offer vocational/technical education in the State and collected. There was 100 percent return of the questionnaire.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Numbers obtained for each statement were recorded and the number for each item added. The percentages were computed for each of the factors. The percentages for the factors were then ranked according to weight.

FINDINGS

After the analysis and computation of the responses, the reasons for the choice of vocational programmes were ranked in the following order:

MAIN FACTORS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
To gain a means of livelihood through self employment	25%
To acquire skills through the use of hands and tools	23%
Love for vocational and technical studies	22%
I was not admitted in the course I wanted, so I accepted to be in this programme.	17%
Government emphasis on Vocational and Technical Studies	6%
To have higher education so that my contemporaries will not look down on me.	4%
A result of advice from my parents/relatives	2%
A result of guidance and counselling done by my School/Teacher	1%
TOTAL	100%

DISCUSSION

(a) Employment

The result established that the desire to gain a means of livelihood through self-employment is the main reason for choosing vocational and technical education. Factors traceable to employment ranked first with 25 percent among all other reasons. The need for paid or self-owned business has become critical because a good number of graduates from post secondary institutions have no employable skills. They are equally disillusioned because they cannot turn around a liberal arts education to their advantage. As a result, people now look before leaping. Students now take to courses that provide both academic and vocational components. Vocational education should be seen as one of the ways of preparing our youths for diversified market needs.

(b) Acquisition of skill

Factors traceable to acquisition of skills through the use of hands and tools ranked second in choosing a vocational education programme. Acquisition of skills is an effective vehicle for eliminating or reducing unemployment as well as its social consequences. It seems to me that the society now measures the success of any educational training essentially by the scale of the occupational benefits attached to it. Most students want their schooling to be meaningful, relevant and exciting to them. As a result, they go for programmes that will achieve these educational goals. Here lies the challenge to vocational educators and the Government. Competent vocational teachers who have the "know how" are needed to impart the needed skills so that the expectations of the students in choosing this programme will not remain as mere dreams.

(c) Love for vocational and technical students

The love for vocational and technical studies ranked third. The interest in vocational and technical studies could be as a result of family occupational wishes, the school or social groups. Environmental influences often play important parts in determining students' interest.

(d) Frustration

There is no doubt that some students could have chosen vocational education out of frustration. The choice of vocational programme as a result of frustration ranked fourth with 17 percent. Sometimes students have ambitions to do certain courses but they do not have realistic assessment of their own abilities and limitations. After wasting their own time on fruitless attempts, they go in for a second-choice or anything available because they could not get the first choice. This is a pity in one way because the student acted out of frustration. On the other hand, such students do not really need vocational Education and are not likely to profit by it. They are likely to be unsuccessful and their attitudes will not be in tune with the spirit and philosophy of Technical Education as enumerated in the National Policy on Education (NPE: Para 44 & 49).

(e) Government emphasis on vocational and Technical studies

This factor ranked fifth among the reasons for choosing a vocational programme. The educational aims and objectives, as specified in the National Policy, emphasised training in the use of the brain and the hands for the improvement of the quality of life and for survival in a competitive and fast changing age of technology. This trend made more people embrace vocational education since this is the direction the Government is moving in.

(f) Social status

It is interesting to note that social conformity is an important reason for the choice of a career. The desire to belong to a social class made some students opt for vocational programmes. This stems from the desire to have higher education or academic degrees like their contemporaries. This is one of the factors that cause mad rush to obtain certificates by hook or by crook. What is their worth after acquisition? Mere display of certificates and diplomas for the purpose of boosting ones ego is not sufficient in a nation where the effect of economic recession is more on those without salable skills.

(g) Parental advice

Factors traceable to advice from parents/relatives ranked seventh with two per cent. The low percentage in this case can be attributed to poor parental care and guidance. It has been found that the attitude of parents is not encouraging. Most parents do not guide their children but mainly run after money. They do not even know what is happening to their children. Even the progress of the child is not being monitored. The result is parental isolation. The children are therefore left open to the wild world. Attitudes are learned and if parents and teachers do not guide students, they will find undesirable guides outside.

(h) Guidance and counselling

Factors traceable to guidance and counselling ranked eighth and considered least in the hierarchy of choices. A likely reason is the lack of guidance and counselling services in the school system. The new system of education in Nigeria calls for guidance services for pupils. Guidance services assist the student in understanding himself/herself in his/her present situation and planning the future in the light of his/her needs, interest, abilities and limitations. Every post-primary institution ought to have well trained school counselor(s) that will provide guidance and counselling services in general and career placement in particular. The school guidance programme is to help students to maximally materialize their potentials as human beings.

During the secondary school years, students express liking for a number of professions without the accurate ideas of what they involve. Evans (1972 p. 119) suggested that guidance on educational or vocational programmes should not be based on expression of interests. It can be safely said that the choice of a vocational programme should not be based on expression of interests per se but a combination of intelligence and interest. Criteria for selection into specific vocational courses should incorporate individual needs and interests, capability of succeeding, as well as projected manpower needs.

CONCLUSION

Attitudes play a central role in our everyday lives. They could be learned in the course of socialization in one's socio-cultural groups. Attitudes can help or hinder progress. This study has established that students exhibit differences in attitudes towards vocational and technical education. It has been found that factors traceable to employment are largely responsible for the choice of technical and vocational education programme by the Bendel State students at the post secondary institutions. Students now want to acquire skills that will enable them earn a living through self or paid employment. Factors traceable to acquisition of skills also hinged on economic reasons.

Factors traceable to frustration, social trends and social status are likely to militate against the spirit and purpose of the National Policy on Education. The popular aspiration is that learning should focus on problem-solving and that learning should help students to achieve intellectual and vocational goals. These aims can be achieved if students have the right attitude towards technical and vocational education.

In as much as attitudes are learned, they are modifiable as new experiences or information provide effective replacement. Since the society is committed to high quality education for everyone, it is desirable for the home and the school to cooperate in inculcating the right type of attitude in students.

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