

## Vocational And Textile Education In Nigeria: A Panacea For Mass Employment And Poverty Alleviation

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### **Abstract**

For the fact that the federal government of Nigeria has shown commitment to the development of vocational education in Nigeria (NEEDS,2005), there is need to create awareness among the youths about vocational subjects that would enable them to achieve this purpose. A case therefore is made in this paper for reassessment of our educational policies and programmes to make it vocationally focused to enable the graduates to be self-reliant and to achieve other goals which include: promoting private enterprise, wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation. This paper highlights the importance of teaching textiles as a very important vocational subject in Nigerian schools, colleges and universities. It discussed various aspects of textiles and suggests the need for diversification of skill among the youth who would be interested in the vacation. It concludes that textiles has diverse options that would act as a panacea for wealth creation and poverty alleviation.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is currently facing economic challenges which need urgent solution. One of these is the high level of unemployment which has increased poverty and other social problems. The depressed economy has affected both public and private sectors that they can no longer meet the employment needs of Nigerians after graduation from higher institutions. As a result, the school leavers are no longer optimistic of securing employment in almost all the sectors of the economy. The implication is that the people are falling deeper into poverty. NEEDS (2005) report shows that “more than two-thirds of the Nigerian people are poor, despite living in a country with vast potential wealth”. This has made a case for re-assessment and review of our educational policies. Presently, the nation has geared her educational programmes towards preparing graduates and school leavers to acquire knowledge and skills, which would make them to be competent for useful living in the society.

Nigeria has in the past evolved a number of good policies and programmes which no longer seem to be effective due to poor management and financial constraints. In the 1970s, the government established the Universal Primary Education (UPE) aimed at educating every Nigerian child of the school age at least to acquire the primary school certificate. The emphasis of this programme was on basic education. In the 1980s, the 6-3-3-4 educational system was established to cater for technological and vocational aspects of education for the benefit of the Nigerian child. This system demands that the child should study for six years at the primary school, three years at the junior secondary

school, three years at the senior secondary school and four years at the tertiary level. These two educational systems could not achieve the desired goals because they lacked proper management and implementation due to poor funding, corruption and technical lapses. Obiefuna; Ifegbo; Ike-Obioha and Uwazulike (2010) identify some problems associated with education at the primary and secondary schools levels. They note that the learner is not exposed to practical skills or learning made relevant to daily life situation rather children are taught more of theory that make them akin to memorization. They further observe that the learners see no relevance between what they learn in school and what is within their environment and they are equally not aware that things learnt in the class can make them become great innovators and producers of goods and services and above all create wealth and become self-reliant. However, the federal government of Nigeria has recently structured its nine year basic education, such that graduates at any level must have acquired a skill or skills that could be further developed to help the learner actualize himself/herself.

For instance, in Nigerian secondary schools, vocational and technical subjects such as Fine and Applied Arts, Home Economics, Introductory Technology, Clothing and Textiles, Food and Nutrition and Computer education among others were introduced into the curriculum for skills acquisition. These subjects were not adequately and effectively taught for lack of studios, laboratories and workshops. Materials for teaching of the practical aspects of these subjects were scarce and some of them were non-existent. Moreover, there were few qualified teachers to handle the subject. The above are some of the impediment to the realization of the goal. However, there is lack of public awareness about some fields of study or vocation that can easily lead one to self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood. Counseling units in schools have not achieved enough success to advice students on possible vocational options. The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of textiles as a vocation which has the potential to engage many youth without much fund for establishment. To identify the various options where textile education can impact skills among the youth and discuss some of the current development in the field, which would encourage the growth of textile education.

### **THE CONCEPT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

The concern of this paper is primarily vocational education, and by extension, textile education in Nigeria schools. Textile art is a vocational subject. Vocational education is aimed at skill acquisition primarily designed to equip the people with practical or technical skills for self-reliance and meaningful contribution to the society. It seeks to train and prepare people, particularly the youths to be enterprising individuals who will make contributions to individual and societal growth and development.

Osuala (1997) defines vocational education as “the education designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers or technicians, sub-professionals in recognized occupations”. National policy on Education (1981), states that vocational education is “that aspect of education that involves the acquisition of practical skills as well as some basic scientific knowledge leading to production of craftsmen, technicians and skilled personnel”. Consequently, any education, formal or informal aimed at inculcating in an individual the practical skills that would prepare him for self-reliance can be regarded as vocational education.

The national policy on education described one of the aims of vocational education as the training and imparting of necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians, and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant. Similarly, Osuala (1992), and Ochiagha (1995) share this same opinion about the

aim of vocational education. They note that it is the preparation of a citizen for work-job situation, for self-reliance, and to meet the manpower needs of the society. The need for skill acquisition is becoming a global phenomenon and developing countries including Nigeria have embraced it by facilitating the establishment of vocational and technical colleges for the training of the youths. The United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) has been in partnership with Nigeria to achieve this objective.

The three tiers of government in Nigeria, in addition to the efforts of the UNDP at economically empowering the rural populace, generating employment to alleviate poverty, through the establishment and equipment of skill acquisition centres, are also doing their best to arrest the excruciating pangs of unemployment in the country. The Federal Government has evolved a number of economic and educational policies and programmes among which include National poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Direct Labour Agency (DLA); 6-3-3-4 system of education, Universal Basic Education (UBE) and others. All these are economic and education programmes and policies aimed at economic empowerment and education for self-reliance. The church is also not left out in the fight against unemployment and its attendant problems of poverty and crime. They also established technical and skill centres, and human resources development centres among others in an effort to stem the tide of unemployment in our society.

Despite governments' input in education so far which is in the right direction, a lot of work still needs to be done to bring economic stability in the system. It is pertinent to opine that what is more appropriate in our present situation is repositioning of our educational institutions at all levels by initiating new policies and programmes that will emphasize practical oriented courses that will prepare the youth for entrepreneurial ventures. Examples of such courses include Fine and Applied Arts, Home Economics, Engineering, Woodwork, Introductory technology, Theatre Arts, Foundry and Computer Education to mention only a few. At the completion of their education or training, the trainee would not waste time in getting employment. Also, with a little support from their parents or friends, they could establish an enterprise.

### **TEXTILES EDUCATION IN NIGERIA SCHOOLS**

Textile is ranked second among the three basic needs of man after food (Giles, 1976). Most African countries such as South Africa, Morocco, Ghana, Algeria, Egypt and Zimbabwe to mention a few, are heavily investing in clothing industry (Textile News, 2013). The emphasis particularly in Ghana is on human resource development and cultivation of genetically modified cotton. Morocco in their projected textile plan (2013 to 2025) is focusing on three areas- textiles and clothing, home textiles and textiles for technical applications. Nigeria should revive interest in the textile sector and regain her glory. It can use this sector to provide mass employment for the citizen as well as reduce poverty.

Home textile is an aspect of textiles which has diversification and can be produced under arts and crafts. It can also be taught in schools with basic equipment and materials. The products are functional and used at homes on daily basis. These products include rope/twine, bed mat, door and bed-side foot mat, room dividers, wall hanging, woven tray, tie and dye fabric, batik fabric, installation materials, slippers and bangles, hand bags, hand fan and cap to mention a few. The making of these textile and related products should be taught in schools as a means of encouraging entrepreneurship among the youth. At primary school level for example, pupils should be taught how to weave

rope, fan, mat, basket and local tray. At this level, effective and efficient craft programme should be developed.

At the secondary school level, textile education covers a wide range of speciality among which are cloth weaving, cloth dyeing (batik and tie and dye), Basket/hat/fan weaving, block printing, knitting, crocheting and among others. Although aspects of these have been introduced at the secondary school level as crafts, its instructional implementation has not been effective. Moreover, information about its entrepreneurial potential has not been fully initiated by school administration. The government is doing its best to give the Nigerian child the opportunity to acquire useful creative skills and through its national policy on education (1981) is “giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively in the society within the limit of his capacity”. It is also providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

### **Option for Mass Employment**

Textile production has always been integrated into all short skill training programmes of both government and non-governmental agencies aimed at economically empowering the rural populace. Such agencies as Direct Labour Agency (DLA), National Directorate of Employment (NDE) among others are non-formal educational institutions, which have taken responsibilities to provide short skill training for the less-privileged in the society. Also, they provide soft loans especially to their trainees for establishment of cottage industries. This is one of the ways the government is directly providing mass employment for its citizens.

Besides, various institutions of higher learning are not left out in the training and educating the youths in textiles. Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities offer courses in textile and award National Certificate in Education (NCE), Diplomas, Certificates and Degrees to their graduates. Some universities also offer post-graduate programmes in textiles for training higher manpower for administration and research development.

For conformity and to ensure that the educational goals and objectives set by the respective bodies charged with such responsibilities are attained, the Federal Government through the bodies has set a minimum academic standard known as a benchmark. These bodies include National Universities Commission (NUC) for universities, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for polytechnics and monotechnics, and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for colleges of education. These are the approved bodies empowered to enforce the minimum academic standards on the educational institutions respectively. With the surveillance of the above mentioned bodies, a “well-planned and implemented textiles programme has been established to provide opportunity for national growth through manpower development.

### **PROSPECT OF TEXTILE AS A VOCATION FOR MASS EMPLOYMENT**

Textiles, as earlier stated, cover a wide range of areas. It is concerned with all the materials that could be formed into yarns, or fabricated into fabrics by means of weaving on loom, netting, knotting, crocheting, knitting or plaiting. It is also concerned with the art of designing and production of fabrics, and related products such as straw hats, baskets, cords, twines, ropes, local mats and foot mats, among others. An individual can choose to be a professional basket weaver, hat maker, mat producer and rope weavers, among others. Entrepreneurship culture can be built on any of these trades. Crown and Jungerman (1969), note that these vocations steadily grow with the economies. They described it as ubiquitous vocations which belong to the long

established aesthetics and technologies as well as about social and economic needs of the people. It is one of the vocations that encourage experimentation with new forms and media in response to changes and challenges in materials, cultural, social, and aesthetic needs of the people. This response has introduced crucial changes and innovations central to its continued existence. These changes and innovations are mostly observable in loom development, patterns, materials, and size of the woven fabrics.

In the past, looms used to be the traditional horizontal and vertical looms constructed with sticks from the gardens. These looms produce small pieces of cloths, which demand extra labour to produce a sizeable cloth. Moreover, the looms are not comfortable to work with. But in recent times, comparably big and more stable looms were developed. Although, the construction of modern looms is capital intensive, they permit manufacture of wider and better refined cloths. Also, they are very convenient and comfortable for the users. The cloths manufactured on the looms can complete favorably with some machine woven fabrics in terms of patterns and size.

Another important development in textile design process is that equipment for production can be improvised with local materials. The looms that can be improvised are the box loom, rectangular/ vertical loom and inkle loom. There are also today different kinds of devices which can be used to weave patterns. Students are introduced to these facilities in schools.

Motivating the indigenous industry by patronizing their products also means motivating the growth of other allied sectors that need manpower such as the agricultural sector that grows the cotton fibres used for production of yarns, cotton spinners and dealers to mention only a few. Another aspect of textile, which deserves consideration, is the art of dyeing, batik and tie and dye, because of its invaluable contributions to the economy. This ancient art of dyeing which is as old as the history of man itself has always been a profitable business although many people do not realize it. Dyeing is the art of changing the colour of a fabric in a dye solution. Dyed fabric is always current in fashion. In spite of this, the ancient art cannot be said to have been developing, due to lack of awareness and inadequate counseling of the youth in the society. It appears that the craft is currently losing ground to imported printed textiles (Oguntona, 1986). However, in different regimes, Federal Government has banned the importation of textile materials to encourage the local textile industry. The government should therefore in addition to the ban, do something tangible to support the dyeing industry to supplement the locally produced commercial textiles. This will not only improve our economy but would also create job opportunities for individuals in distributive trade.

At the tertiary level of the educational system, fashion design and clothing and textiles courses have been introduced but very few students are aware of the significance of these courses and the impact it can make in their lives. The main problem is lack of effective counseling about the value of clothing and textiles. Clothing and textiles/Fashion design is concerned with creative transformation of fabrics or cloths into particular shapes of ordered designs or styles to be used as apparel or bags, throw pillows or other forms of interior decorator objects such as bedcovers, windows and door blinds, among others. This area of textiles also offers a wide range of job or career opportunities to people who may wish to venture into it.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Textile, as a vocation has contributed immensely to national development especially with regards to manpower development through skill acquisition. However, to keep pace with the fast developing global economy, those engaged in the vocation need to be motivated and encouraged and those who are not aware of the entrepreneurial potential of the vocation need to be sensitized and informed. In addition the following measures should be considered by the government to support further growth of textile education:

(a) Individuals need access and good knowledge about textiles in schools and colleges and this should be emphasized and implemented in the educational system. (b) The youths need to be allowed access to technical and financial resources to enable them improve their skills and to become self-reliant after graduation from schools.

(c) They could be given subsidy for the purchase of equipment such as looms, sewing machines, embroidery, weaving and knitting equipment.

(d) Organization of workshops and seminars is imperative. Through these artists would acquire new techniques for production, get latest information on materials and methods, and entrepreneurial skills. The knowledge acquired in workshops and seminars would not only encourage experimentation with media, but would also introduce changes and innovations, which are crucial to the survival of the vocation. Moreover, innovations would aid diversification of designs and products.

(e) The government should regulate the importation of foreign textiles to encourage local initiative. Our experience based of the ban on imported fabrics in the 1990's forced people to patronize local fabrics. This measure should be revived because it will act as a catalyst to technological development.

(f) Government should play a facilitative role through the use of motivational policy instruments to encourage those in the vocation. This view supports Eboh (1999) who posits that the facilitative role of the government should include among others, creating an atmosphere conducive to private investment by "evolving stable political and infrastructural conditions for policy continuity, sustainability and credibility"

### CONCLUSION

This paper has made a case for vocational textile education as a subject would help to solve the problem of unemployment in the Nigerian society. It argued that textile as a vocation to inculcate entrepreneurship skills in the youths is realizable, and proposed that the government and non-government organizations should harness its full potentials for the benefit of the society. The need for specialization in a textile related options was emphasized as this would encourage innovation, quality assurance and mastery of design process and technique.

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