

HARMONISATION OF FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL VOCATIONAL TRAININGS IN NIGERIA: ROLES OF VOCATIONAL COUNSELLORS

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Abstract

The concern of this paper is on the need for, and possibilities of, harmonizing the programmes of non-formal and formal vocational centres in Nigeria. The study pays a significant attention to the description and features/realities of formal and non-formal vocational training programmes in Nigeria. On some occasions, the study compares the Nigerian vocational training programmes in Nigeria with what is obtainable in the German system. The paper explains that professional and education competence of the trainers in the Nigerian non-formal vocational training centres are often low and the trainees, at such centres are often treated with abuse, maltreatment and brutality. The paper explicated that the harmonisation programme will help the vocational training programmes, especially the non-formal centres, to improve significantly. The study concludes that, for the harmonisation programme to materialise and succeed, the trainers, trainees, guardians, parents, the government and non-governmental agencies, corporate bodies and international organisations need to be actively involved.

Keywords: Formal vocational training, non-formal vocational training, Vocational counsellors.

Introduction

This paper advances views on the possibility and necessity of harmonising the currently divergent systems of formal and non-formal vocational training programmes in Nigeria. It suggests as well roles that a vocational and career counsellor can play in the process. Non-formal vocational training means the common apprenticeship system in which artisans and technicians take on some boys and girls, often in their teens or early twenties, with the aim of training them for vocational work. These artisans and technicians often have a very little or no formal education, they often have no significant formalised contracts with the trainees and they often practise in make-shift outlets or shops.

In the efforts to revitalise vocational education and training in Africa, attention has majorly, almost solely, been devoted to formal vocational programmes and technical schools. *Strategy to Revitalize Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Africa*, a mimeograph commissioned by the Bureau of Ministers of Education of African Union (COMEDAF, 2007) acknowledges the fact that "vast numbers of young people are outside the formal school system, and consequently recommends the integration of non-formal learning methodologies and literacy programmes into national TVET programmes." In spite of this, the researcher's observation is that the monograph's attention, all through, is focused on conventional vocational trainings and technical schools. This paper, therefore, explores the possibility of harmonising the

training programmes of the “road-side”, non-formal vocational training system¹ and the governmental and/or private formal Vocational Training system in Africa, especially Nigeria.

As already stated and going by what is contained in their policy document cited above, TVET’s efforts in Africa are geared towards working out strategies of revitalising formal technical and vocational training programmes but they have little or nothing for non-formal training programmes. Countries like Ghana, Benin, South Africa and Singapore are said to have achieved a considerable measure of success in revitalising and harmonising the two sectors (Nanga, 2007). It is also recognised that some of these countries (precisely South Africa and Singapore) have been able to build their economy to a worthy standard (Meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF II+); 43). The activities of the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammen Arbeit (GTZ) in most African countries, especially Nigeria, focus in the direction of effective formal and non-formal vocational trainings, especially on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The activities of different organisations are not without their drawbacks even in institutionalised and formal sectors. Another complaint against the operations of TVET, in Africa, is that the costs of the projects it undertakes are often too high. Also, for training, the class size demanded is too small and it cannot make much difference in a situation where there is a large number of people who need to benefit from such projects. In addition, the equipment required for the training is expensive for developing countries that the project is designed to assist. Therefore, materials or facilities are hardly available for training.

GTZ has three partner institutions in the northern part of Nigeria and it is with the assistance of the three partner institutions, which are Federal University of Technology (Mina), Federal Polytechnic (Bida) and Federal College of Agriculture (Lafia), that it prosecutes its Competency-Based-Economies through the Formation of Enterprise (CEFE) project. As designed, the projects in these institutions are geared towards improving the competence of teachers involved in training the candidates of vocational programmes. Indeed, if teachers are competent, the teaching/learning process will be smooth. CEFE’s projects are targeted at improving competence in entrepreneurship. The organisation wants those who benefit from their programmes to be able to run micro and medium – size businesses. Feedbacks from the CEFE’s “Training-of-Trainers” project indicated some measures of success at the three partner institutions but the feedbacks had no indication that the trainees in the informal sector really needed helping hands in order to facilitate a better training programme at the centres (Raji, A Report on Consultancy Job submitted to GTZ, 2009).

The argument of this paper is that the training concept of the non-formal Vocational Training Centres in Nigeria needs to be harmonised with formal Vocational Centres. This will help to improve the quality of training given at the centres. To achieve the harmonisation programme, governmental, non-governmental and international agencies need to work together in a coordinated manner. The professional services of Vocational and Career Counsellors will also be required in the standardisation and harmonisation process.

A Short Description of the Nigerian Educational System

“Road-side-non-formal Vocational Centre” in Nigeria represent where majority of the children of the Nigeria masses who cannot afford to pay the school fee in the formal Vocational School (Technical School) receives their Training.

Nigeria operates a 6-3-3-4 system of education. The six (6) years at the beginning is for basic education which is compulsory. The three (3) that is next to it refers to the first three years of secondary education. This can be compared with the German High School Class 9 Level. This is also compulsory. The other three (3) applies to the advanced secondary school years and is not compulsory. Four (4) simply refers to the years that a young or adolescent person, who so desires and is gifted, spends in an appropriate tertiary institution which can be at the Polytechnic, College of Education or the University.

The foregoing makes it clear that children who demonstrate no aptitude for intellectual work can stop normal schooling after the first nine years. If they so desire, they can further pursue their training in technical schools. However, the quality of training in this institution is low, especially when the environment and available learning facilities are compared with what is obtainable in such developed countries as Germany, United Kingdom, United States of America, etc. For this reason, most parents, in Nigeria, do not like to enrol their children in technical schools.

Comparism of Formal and Non-Formal Vocational Education Centres in Nigeria

In Nigeria, a child who, for one reason or the other, is not able to pursue an academic career in the University, Polytechnic or College of Education has a choice of enrolling for vocational training. There are two forms of such trainings in Nigeria. The two of them are explained in the paragraphs below:

There are formal vocational schools where children can undertake approved courses of studies in a profession of their choice. Here, the method of training can be described as similar to those found in vocational schools (Berufsschule) in Western European countries as well as the United States of America, though, as stated earlier, the standard cannot be compared with what is obtainable in the latter countries. For example, "the dual system of vocational training in Germany allows for learning to take place in a vocational school and in a privately-owned but properly registered business or entrepreneurship agency concurrently. Approximately, 70% of all school leavers aged between 15 and 19 years in Germany undergo training under the dual system. The dual system facilitates promotes collaboration and cooperation between formal vocational schools and the world of work (Meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union, 2007). Nigerian vocational schools lag behind in opportunities of dual exposures for trainees but those who pass through them go through a well defined course of training and they are awarded a state recognised certificate, when they successfully complete the training programme.

The non-formal vocational training system in Nigeria is mostly referred to as "road-side training points." In this case, there is no formalised training programme. What is obtainable is that a child would simply be apprenticed by his/her parents or guardian to an artisan who has established a practice for him/herself in the specific field in which the child wishes to be trained. This kind of apprenticeship can be in electrical fittings and/or installations, carpentry, bricklaying, automobile repair work, house painting, sewing/tailoring, etc. This practice is widespread in the country and, usually, the child undergoing the training has no say in the mode of training that he/she is being enrolled for and the number of years that will be spent on the training. The entire arrangement is often informal and wholly between the sponsor(s) of the child and the trainer(s). Due to the fact that the programme is completely unregulated, trainees in the targeted non-formal vocational training centres often experience a lot of abuse. They are often assaulted, battered and beaten, at will, by their bosses and "senior trainees". They are often

made to run errands that have absolutely nothing to do with the trainings they are undergoing and they carry out domestic chores for their trainers and the trainers' spouses, relatives, etc. The training itself is ad hoc and non-systematic – this is due, largely, to the fact that there is often no formalised schedule of training and no syllabus to follow. This system of training is widespread in Nigeria. Indeed, it is at such training points that most young persons who, for one reason or the other, dropped out of school are found.

This researcher considers it important to work towards standardising the training programmes and methods of training at the said targeted non-formal vocational centres in Nigeria so that they can conform, at least partially if not fully, to the kinds of methods and programmes found in formal vocational schools. The paper will dwell, at some length, on how this can be achieved and will elucidate as well on the role a trained vocational counsellor can play in the process.

Formal and Non-Formal Vocational Trainings in Nigeria: Strategies for Harmonisation
The major factor that facilitates the abuse and illegalities perpetrated at the non-formal training centres (informal sectors) in Nigeria is inadequate education and/or illiteracy. As stated earlier in this paper, six successive Nigerian governments (at state and federal levels) have failed to enforce the policy of compulsory schooling for children of age fifteen and below. In other words, the policy stipulating a minimum of nine years of basic education for all children exists merely on paper. These days, as a consequence of poverty and illiteracy, many parents or guardians do not care whether or not their children or wards complete the first six years of basic schooling before enrolling them at one of the several training centres to acquire skills in a particular trade.

To affirm this observation, this researcher interviewed a group of seventeen (17) apprentices at the auto-mobile mechanic village, located in Ladipo Oluwole Street, Ikeja, Lagos. Out of this number, only three (3) completed the high school education (the German equivalence of class 12) and three (3) others went only as far as completing junior secondary school. Two (2) others started junior secondary school but they dropped out after about one or two years. Of the remaining nine (9), some went only as far as completing the six years of primary education programme while others stopped after just two, three or four years of primary education.

The point is that, because many of the people that often enrol for training in the non-formal centres have little or no education, they are often ignorant about their rights and entitlements. Therefore, they often accept the abuse and exploitation perpetrated against them, in the course of their training, as part of what they must pass through or endure, if they must properly master what they are being taught. Several years after graduation, they also become established in their trades and they also often inflict the same kinds of brutalities (or worse) that they experienced, in the course of training, on their apprentices.

To ensure the reality of the proposed programme of harmonisation, the Nigerian governments, at different levels, have to make sure that the nine year compulsory education programme is truly compulsory and qualitative. This researcher realises that achieving this is a daunting task, especially in Nigeria where governments have no sense of duty or responsibility, ineptitude is the law and negligence is venerated. A programme of harmonisation can hardly be realised in a situation where target trainees cannot follow simple instructions in English, read and understand basic literatures in their fields of specialisations, grasp simple theoretical issues and be properly informed about their rights and entitlements. This is why non-governmental agencies and civil society groups have to come together, in collaboration with international organisations like

UNESCO, and mount pressure on the government to ensure the enforcement of law on basic and compulsory education.

There is a need to establish registration bodies for the specialist groups that constitute the non-formal sector. The registration bodies should keep a comprehensive register of practitioners and training centres in the non-formal sector, they should design standard programmes/syllabus of training for the centres, they should work out appropriate codes of practice which would guide the activities of the centres and they should monitor the centres closely in order to ensure that they (the centres) adhere strictly to the codes of practice. Other issues to be examined by Government and other Stakeholders in Technical/ Vocational Studies may include the following:

1. A programme of adult education to should designed for the trainers of the targeted non-formal Vocational Training Centres. This is important because, originally, it is either many of the current trainers themselves do not receive adequate formal education or they received none at all. The adult education programme should be flexible enough to accommodate and suit trainers of different levels of exposure. It is important for all of them to acquire basic literacy and those who cannot cope may be made to quit their practice, after due compensation by the government.
2. The new training programme, for both the trainers and trainees at formal Vocational Training Institutions, should be made free. There should be no school fee or other expenses attached to receiving the training exercise. It is important to ensure that trainees receive formal and recognised certificates after a successful completion of their programmes. With such certificates, their chances of securing jobs or continuing their trainings in formal vocational schools will be possible.
3. The formal Vocational Training Centres in Nigeria should develop new curriculum to accommodate the level of literacy of the trainees and trainers of non-formal Vocational Training Centres. This will help to achieve the aims and objectives of the harmonisation programme. The curriculum should be designed and constantly improved to meet up with current labour market demands and challenges. The Training should be a life-long concept.
4. The idea of the German "Dual System", for example, should be considered or adapted to afford the trainees of non-formal Vocational Training Centres in Nigeria a period of exposure to relevant theoretical issues in the formal Vocational Training Schools. Students of formal vocational training centres should also be made to spend some time observing the methods of operation of those in the non-formal and informal Vocational Training Centres.
5. It is important to give the trainer of the informal sector the opportunity of writing a practical qualifying examination, if such trainer thinks or believes he/she possesses enough practical competence in his/her area of specialisation. In a motivated method, such trainer should be encouraged to participate in formal adult Vocational Training so that he/she can acquire the current methodological and theoretical experiences that are needed to improve on methods of training the learners. This practice exists in Europe and USA. It is a good way of certifying the vocational knowledge that is acquired through informal learning in the west.
6. As a motivation strategy, it would not be bad if the associations of both the trainers of informal sectors and those of the formal sectors establish a joint union (a voluntary association). The union would help to articulate the needs of the two sectors and it (the union) would enhance the growth and progress of the two sectors.

7. Regular follow-up and feedback mechanisms should be put in place by the harmonisation programme /the union and the Vocational and Career Counsellor in the group in order to continuously check the successes recorded in and the challenges facing the harmonisation programme.

The Place of Vocational and Career Counsellor in the Process of Harmonising Formal and Non-Formal Vocational Training Programmes in Nigeria

The pieces of empirical information received from experts in Guidance and Counselling, at the University of Ibadan, and close analysis of literatures on the undergraduate programmes in the discipline indicate, clearly, that the major aim and objective of training Guidance and Counsellors in Nigerian Universities is to make them able to render professional vocational and career counselling to the young people in the school system, especially secondary schools. Graduates of the programme are expected to be able to render professional services that will give young people, at the secondary school level, the orientation and current information they that they need to be able to determine their future Vocation or Career (Raji: 2007).

According to Oladele (2007), giving young people this opportunity will help them to adjust satisfactorily to their society and improve on personal attributes. Oladele presented the required school guidance services in the Nigerian 6-3-3-4 system of Education as appraisal, information, counselling, Vocational, Academic, Personal, Planning, Placement and Follow-up, orientation and Referral Services. Modo (2008) shares the same opinion on the said services. She argues that they (the services) are factors that facilitate excellent academic performances among adolescent people in secondary schools that fall within her research state.

For this researcher, the services of Vocational and Career Counsellors should not only be targeted toward "excellent academic performance" of school goers, it should also provide young people (who have low ability to pursue academic career) a good orientation to determine their vocational choices. Once they are able to determine the vocations that match their talents, interests and aptitude, they will be able to undergo training in the appropriate areas. Thus, they will acquire skills that will make them able to compete favourably in the labour market.

The services should be extended to young people who, for one reason or the other, have dropped-out of school. The young people who, due to circumstances beyond their control, have no opportunity to attend school should also enjoy the services of a Vocational and Career Counsellor. They should be guided to make wise choices that complement their talent, interest and aptitude, not what the society or the parents impose on them. Different testing instruments that the professional guidance/counsellor uses in detecting young people's interests, talents, aptitude and learning problems, etc, should be used to assist trainees of non-formal vocational centres to find their ways through life as well and, where necessary, the testing instruments should be translated to the people's indigenous languages for proper understanding. Giving up-to-date orientation, information and motivation to the trainees, as they struggle to choose a vocation, will afford them the opportunity to acquire skills and competence that will make them live a worthy life and contribute significantly to the society.

Experts in vocational and career counselling need to work, as a team, in the process of harmonising the informal vocational training and the formally recognised schools. It is the position of this researcher that the vocational and career counsellors also need to work hand-in-hand with the sector's (non-formal and Formal Technical/Vocational Training Centres), teachers

or trainers, administrators, parents and government bodies to make head way. There should be regular seminars to raise the awareness of stakeholders in the both sectors. This will help in discovery of the need for, and the benefits of, the harmonisation programme. Awareness talks and programmes should involve parents, trainers and trainees of the both sectors, government agencies and the private sponsors of the projects. These are the expected roles of vocational and career counsellors in the process of harmonising the programmes of the two sectors.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Giving the non-formal sector a formal recognition by harmonising its programmes with that of formal vocational training Institutions through a collaborative effort of different professional groups mentioned in this paper will be beneficial to all the parties concerned, including the Nigerian state. It will afford both the trainers and the trainees of the non-formal sector a formal theoretical knowledge of the content of their training and it will improve the method of training adopted by their trainers. It will also alleviate the suffering of the trainees and give graduates of the sector a hope and better chances in the future. Standardising the mode of training in this sector is crucial in our search for technological advancement.

The author of this paper makes the following recommendations:

- (i) There is a need to establish registration bodies for the specialist groups that constitute the non-formal sector.
- (ii) There should be a new training programme in which the trainers should be re-trained and new in-takes should also be accommodated. The programme should be made free for all.
- (iii) The formal Vocational Training Centres in Nigeria should develop new curriculum which will accommodate the literacy levels of the trainers (who are to be re-trained) and the trainees (the new in-takes).
- (iv) The trainers and the trainees of the so called road-side outlets should be made to undergo both written and practical entrance examinations. This will help to determine their competence and literacy levels.
- (v) A joint union should be established by members of both the formal and the non-formal sectors to collaboration and a sense of partnership.
- (vi) There should be appropriate codes of practice which will guide the activities of the centres.
- (vii) Regular follow-up and feedback mechanisms should be put in place by the harmonization programme to effective and efficient management of the two sectors.

Achieving the harmonisation programme is possible only with a great will and efforts on the parts of the government, private organisations, parents, the trainers and the trainees of the non-formal sector and the vocational and career counsellors. It is the hope of this paper that Nigeria will be ready to give this recommendation a chance.

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