

Indigenous Vocational Trades in South-Western Nigeria in Historical Perspective

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Abstract

In South-western Nigeria, indigenous vocational trades or crafts are clan bound. Vocational trades/crafts are identified with particular families or clans. This trend, to a larger extent, is no longer as it was used to be. The craving for civil employment and ‘white collar’ jobs has adversely affected acquisition of indigenous vocational trades/crafts along family lineage or clan by young men and women. This study, therefore, appraises acquisition of indigenous vocational skills using the instrumentality of history with a view to bringing to fore, those factors which made acquisition of indigenous vocational skills thrive then as opposed to what obtains in the modern day situation. The study aims to highlight various indigenous vocational trades/crafts in which prospective trainees could acquire vocational skills, determines the prospects of indigenous vocational trades/crafts, examine the prerequisites for acquiring indigenous vocational skills. Using available literature and research reports on vocational education development in Nigeria as a basis, the study observes that indigenous vocational trades/crafts are no longer thriving as they used to be. This limitation is evident in the high rates of joblessness, unemployment, and high level of poverty among the youths especially. The study concludes that making indigenous trades/crafts attractive and lucrative will go a long way in reviving the interest of the youths in acquiring indigenous vocational skills. This implies ensuring availability of the necessary amenities that will facilitate thriving of indigenous vocational trades/crafts. This is with a view to working towards recreating a highly industrialized indigenous society which will eventually culminate in industrialized Nigeria.

Keywords

Vocational Trades, Family/Clan, History, Indigenous Society, Vocational Education

Received: April 16, 2015 / Accepted: May 15, 2015 / Published online: June 18, 2015

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1. Introduction

It is the belief of the Yoruba people in the South-western Nigeria that education devoid of handiwork is not complete. The contrary is what obtains nowadays where many highly educated and degree holders are jobless. The reasons for their joblessness are not far-fetched. Coupled with economic recession is lack of relevant and employable skills that should have earned them employment in the labour market. Joblessness is considered as a social aberration in the indigenous society. Much dignity is therefore attached to having a good vocation. According to Zonkwa (2005), the

balance members of any social group will see well ahead and will cautiously feel their way through the building up of solid but slowly changing body of tradition. One of the most cherished bodies of tradition in the indigenous south-western Nigeria is the tradition of work – hard work.

Indigenous education in south-western Nigeria was highly vocational in nature. Acquiring indigenous education is tantamount to acquiring vocational skill through which individuals earn their living. The importance and virtue attached to possessing vocational skill in indigenous society is reflected in the following axiom taught children for recitation every morning with a view to instilling in them the desire for and the belief in dignity of labour.

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Table 1. Yoruba Traditional Folklore on Dignity of Labour.

Yoruba Language	Transliteration into English language
Ise loogun ise	Work is the cure for poverty
Mura si ise ore mi	Be hard working my friend
Ise la fi n di eni giga	Through working you become great
Bi a ko ba ri eni fi ehinti	If you do not have a helper
Bi ole laari	You seem to be a lazy person
Bi a ko ba ri eni gbokan le	If you do not have a supporter
A tera mo ise eni	Be passionate about your work
Baba re lee lowo lowo	Your father may be rich
Iyaa re si lee lesin leekan	Your mother may have an horse
Ti o ba gboju le won	If you depend on them
O te tan ni mo so fun o	You will soon be put to shame
Ohunti a ko ba jiya fun	What you do not labour for
Se ki lee tojo	Will not last long
Ohunti a ba fi ara sise fun	It is what you work for
Lounpe lowo eni	That endures tides of life
Apalara	Your arms are your relatives (supporters)
Igunpa ni iyekan	Your shoulders are your relations
Ti aye ba n fe o loni	If people cherish you today
Ti o ba lowo lowo	If you have money (are rich)
Won a maa fe o lola	They will still cherish you (more) tomorrow
Tabi ki o wa ni ipo atata	Or you are in high position of honour
Aye a ye o si terin-terin	The people will cherish you with laughter (delight)
Je ki o di eni tio nrago kiri	If you then suddenly become a poor person (a beggar)
Aye a maa yinmu si o	The people will wince at (despise)you
Eko sit un n soni dogo	Learning makes you become great
Mura ki o ko daradara	Ensure you learn it very well
Bi o ba si ri awon eniyan	If you see persons
Ti won n f'eko s'erin rin	Making jest of learning
Dakun, mase fara we won	Please, do not emulate them
Iya nbo f'omo ti ko gbon	Suffering is imminent for a child that is not wise
Ekun n be f'omo ti o n sa kiri	Weeping is imminent for a child wandering about
Ma f'owuro sere, ore mi	Do not play with your youthful time, my friend
Mura si ise, ojo nlo!	Work hard, time is far spent!

Source: Yoruba traditional folklore

The above folklore emphasizes that regardless of an individual's parental status or background either rich or poor (especially having rich parents); having one's work is the most expedient and dignified thing. This paper thus peeps into history of indigenous vocations in the South-western Nigeria with a view to bridging the gap between education and world of work.

2. Concept of Indigenous Vocational Education

According to Fafunwa (2004), indigenous education is a process by which a child develops his abilities, attitudes and all forms of behaviour that are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Indigenous vocational education can therefore be viewed as a process by which individual child imbibes culture and value of work that culminates in the acquisition of relevant skill for the same. Indigenous vocational education to Virginia (2003) served the immediate

needs of practical induction of the youth into the society's pattern of life, practices, customs, beliefs and value system. Vocational trades in South-western Nigeria, as in most parts of Africa, were family or clan-bound. Apart from farming, which is general vocation for every human being, most other local trades/vocations are clan-specific. For example, traditional medical practitioners (herbalists) were usually from the family of Ifa worshippers or Ifa priests; Iron bender/fabricator (Agbede, in Yoruba Language) was usually from the clan of Ogun (god of iron) worshippers; Tie and dye (local textile design) fashioners were usually from the family/clan that have something to do with the Oya (river goddess) worshippers; some other vocations such as embroidery (hair dressing), barbing, weaving, carving and painting, circumcision and incision of tribal marks, cobbling and shoe making have specific families or clans in which the practitioner hailed from. The transference of the skills for trades went on along the family lineage as informed by individual child's talent and disposition to learning the trade. This is, however, done via apprenticeship. According to Sanni and Alabi (2008), apprenticeship arose in Nigeria as a family institution and as a means of supplying artisans for the various crafts then in existence and as a means of propagating the heritage of the family. Abiri (2003) noted that since traditional education in Nigeria emphasized the acquisition of skills in particular field of human endeavour, the apprenticeship was used to enable children and youths grow into and practice different family occupation. In the same vein, Uwameiye and Iyamu (n.d.) emphasized that the apprenticeship was an institution that was jealously guarded by customs, lineage and rituals. They noted that every male child born into a family was expected to learn his patrilineal craft, and that it was easy to identify a young male child as a member of a lineage found to be proficient in the lineage craft.

In the history of mankind, according to Virginia (2003), education has been a constant factor in the life of every society, pre-modern or modern, since every society tends to reproduce itself not only biologically but also culturally and technologically through training and socialization for its preservation and continuity. Oni (2006) warned that the wholesale adaptation of British system of education in Nigeria was not in the best interest of the developmental needs of Nigeria because of the cultural differences of both societies. Virginia (2003) emphasized that any form of education evolved to respond to the educational challenges of a society is the society's indigenous education. Thus, indigenous vocational education essentially solved the problems of unemployment as it equipped the recipients with adequate work skills to function productively and be self-reliant in their immediate or larger community. As a matter of

fact, workmen/artisans were never too many not to be employed in the indigenous setting unlike nowadays when graduates of various higher institutions in Nigeria are too many than the available jobs. Thus, in the indigenous setting joblessness was very minimal and only for those who did not learn any trade or vocation. That has been the trends. The people who suffer unemployment more in the modern society are those who lack vocational skills.

All pre-literate societies, according to Virginia (2003), had unorganized, practical but functional education, carried out individually on the basis of self-preservation. Fafunwa (2004) emphasized that the aim of education in traditional society is character-training and job-orientation. This is true because, one's character cannot be totally separated from one's vocation or job. Virginia (2003: p20) asserted that:

Children learned from parents to perform tasks that adults do in order to live. Learning was not separated from doing, under the supervision of an elder, children were brought up in the image of the elders, thus they become acceptable members of culture in whose custody the perpetuation and continuity of such a culture reposes (p.20).

According to Mkpa (2013) indigenous education represents the type of education offered in the pre-literate era, within the community, by community members who possessed specialized skills or abilities in various fields of human endeavours. Mkpa argued that in most communities, prior to the introduction of formal education, boys were brought up to take to whatever occupation their father engaged in. In some cases, the boys were sent to other masters as apprentices to learn various vocations and life etiquette. As in the case of the girls, according to Mkpa the girls did almost exactly what their mothers trained them to do.

Parts of the goals of Nigerian indigenous education centred on indigenous vocations as reiterated by Virginia (2003) are to develop the child's latent physical skills, and to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour. According to Amoor (2012) Vocational and technical education is the core of both the individual's and the society's economy. Amoor (2012) viewed that young people took on the tasks of their parents when production remained, over generations. All they needed to know was what their parents knew. In every society, According to Amoor (2012), knowledge is power, but as long as the knowledge needed remained local and specific, Amoor believed that it could be transferred directly from parent to child. According to Mkpa (2013) traditional or indigenous education, in most parts of Nigeria, trained individuals to fit usefully into their society by learning and practicing economic skills for self-sustenance, adapting to their role expectations and contributing to the development of their

society. There were little or no cases of unemployment in the indigenous Nigerian societies (Mkpa, 2013).

Although Africa generally has reference for a utilitarian traditional education, Oni (2006) believed that yet African tradition relies more on practical service than on mental cultivation. He further reiterated that though the type of education Nigerians sought and acquired served the immediate political needs of job placement in the colonial government, it was not forward looking for the technological needs of the country. Oni (2006) is therefore of the opinion that Nigerians need to create a new approach for the concept of vocational education and its purpose to the society. He regretted that vocational education for some decades has been perceived to mean the education for the mentally retarded, physically handicapped and socially maladjusted students. Vocational Education is a highly useful education because its occupational contents offer the trainees the opportunity to acquire skills, attitudes and knowledge which are needed for the technological growth of Nigeria (Oni, 2006).

3. Some Vocations/Trades in the Indigenous Society

Fafunwa (2004) grouped various indigenous vocations into three. These groups according to him are:

Agricultural education

According to Fafunwa, this comprises of farming, fishing, and veterinary science (animal care and animal rearing).

Trades and crafts

Fafunwa under these categories, grouped weaving (basket, mat and cloth), smithing (iron, silver, gold etc), hunting, carving (wood and bronze), sculpting, painting and decorating, carpentry, building, barbing, drumming, dancing and acrobatics, hair plaiting, dress-making, boat-making, leather-making, soap-making, gold-washing, dying, Esusu-collecting (banking, thrift or cooperative saving), catering (frying, baking, grinding), food-selling, wine-selling, wine-tapping, and trading in all kinds of merchandise (manufactured goods and agricultural products).

Professions

These, according to Fafunwa, include: doctors, priests, witchdoctors, (herbalists-mine), civil servants, village heads, chiefs and kings, tax-collectors, heralds, judges, councillors, police and messengers, shrine-keepers, and soldiers (warriors) (pp.19-20).

Daramola, and Jeje (1975) identified textile/weaving (ise aso ofi), welding (ise agbede), carpentry (ise gbenagbena), mat

making (ise eni hihun) among others as vocations/trades in indigenous society. Adebisi (2011) also listed fashion designing, poultry, gari (cassava powder) processing, welding (iron bending & fabricating), computer business/training & repairing, candle making, fishing, livestock farming, drum manufacturing, typing and shorthand, shoe making/leather works, photography, catering, hair dressing, block (bricks) making, automobile mechanic, 'Pure' (sachet) water production, vulcanizing, carpentry, weaving, plumbing, and house painting among others as available vocations from which youths can learn and acquire skills even in the modern society.

It is time curriculum of vocational education took into full account the rejuvenation of all these vocations including others. Nigeria's present predicament as compared by Apagu and Andural (2007) with similar experience had by the United States of America (USA) which the country's Advisory Council on Vocational Education (1968: p.v) explains:

Vocational education faces a unique challenge in the years ahead – a challenge – rooted in the social and economic welfare of people. In the contemporary social scene with its large city problems, the ghettos, school dropouts, and variety of disadvantaged groups, the need for vocational education stands out clearly.

According to Apagu and Andural (2007), Nigerians can do better at curriculum development if they consider it as a curriculum to first prepare Nigerians to live a happy and satisfying life in Nigeria using Nigerian indigenous technologies and materials. They are of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with learning basket weaving along-side the use and maintenance of computers, television, automobiles and so on, provided there is demand for the weaving and use of basket in Nigeria. Vocational education is expected to prepare people to come up with products or render services in areas of local needs, not only in modern imported technologies (Apagu and Andural, 2007). Apagu and Andural (2007) lamented that the Nigeria's over dependence on imported vocational education curricula has resulted to the present high rate of unemployment even among the vocational education programme graduates. This is so because what is needed by society is not taught or learnt, they regretted.

4. Modes of Vocational Training in the Indigenous Society

According to Fafunwa (2004), usually, the children are not trained by their parents but by relatives, master

craftsmen/women in particular fields or friends in order to ensure discipline and concentration. Such children are attached from their youth to master craftsmen/women who trained them in the rudiments of the vocations they so desired to learn. Fafunwa (2004) further wrote that:

This vast apprenticeship training system began as a part of a wider education process in which the indigenous societies of Nigeria passed on their cultural heritage from one generation to the next. The skills owned by a family were highly valued, and in some lines such as native medicine, secrets were zealously guarded, as they are indeed today. Evidence of the passing of skills within families is still strong ...and even an ordinary village will usually show that pottery-making, for example, centres around certain families with the skills taught by a mother to her daughter or niece, or a father to his son or nephew; depending on the customs of the area (p.20)

To Fafunwa (2004), learning a craft often began with personal service to the master. Fafunwa said that the child naturally just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people and imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, according to Fafunwa, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imitates and mimics the actions of his elders and siblings (Fafunwa, 2004). Indigenous vocations in different forms were objects of observation for young people as they grow up in the traditional society. Observant youths learned a great deal both consciously and unconsciously in the process of keen observation. Thus, the major pre-requisites for acquiring vocational skills in the indigenous society are willingness on the part of the prospective apprentices, and mutual agreement between the parents of the prospective apprentices and the master craftsmen/women.

5. Job Prospect of Indigenous Vocational Education

Apagu and Andural (2007) said that if public education, meant for everybody cannot prepare citizens for work, who else can do it? According to Apagu and Andural, the problem of Nigerian youths' unemployment can be reduced to a very drastic low level through relevant vocational training programmes. We cannot escape the conclusion that the real power for survival of any given social group is the discipline with which its individual members set about the job of corporate living with intelligence they bring to bear on the solution of immediate problems (Zonkwa, 2010).

Unfortunately, it appears the Nigerian system of education is more interested in sieving the academically talented youths from the non-academically talented, and then allowing the non-academically talented human resources to waste away

(Apagu & Andural, 2007). In the indigenous society, jobs always were available for the trained. So, the case then was not that of searching for jobs years after graduating from training unlike what the order of the day is in the modern society. Apagu and Andural (2007) lamented that the neglect of vocational and technical education in Nigeria has increased youth unemployment. To this end, Apagu and Andural (2007) emphasized that vocational and technical education at that point stand very tall in helping the nation get out of the problem of lack of appropriate manpower and therefore, needs just refocusing to produce the desired result. According to Idehen (2012) provision of vocational and technical education in secondary and post-secondary schools has a long and rewarding history for countries that have successfully applied it. Idehen (2012) argued that the medium and long-term implications of global unemployment amongst youths which has formed points of discussions at several forums in Nigeria and across the world, can be addressed through the provision of vocational education. Apagu and Andural (2007) said that we should satisfy the needs of society to fill required positions necessary for the efficient operation of the economic system as well as the needs of individuals to find personally satisfying positions in the occupational structure.

According to Dike (2009), the neglect of technical education is socially and economically injurious because it is robbing the nation the contributions the graduates would make to national development. Technical and vocational education provides students with life skills to become productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas, enlarge the economic pie, and increase personal freedom. Dike (2009) wondered that most so-called “expatriate engineers” who are being paid millions of dollars to build Nigeria roads and bridges are graduates of technical and vocational colleges. Zonkwa (2010) blamed prevalent incidences of unemployment and joblessness on what he termed misappropriation of foundation, which tends to reflect in Nigerian schools today. He argued that it was because the research activities were started with major emphasis on export crops while work on food crops and maintenance of soil fertility was of secondary importance. He lamented that that situation had deprived us Nigerians with early interactions with science education and its vocational consequences.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, there is need for Nigeria as a country to go back to the bases. Handicrafts learnt in the indigenous society had been a panacea to unemployment from time immemorial

in the traditional society. There is need for every youth and graduate of our higher institutions to be encouraged to acquire vocational skill if the prevalent situation of high rate of unemployment must be alleviated. To this end, I wish to join Apagu and Andural (2007) to make the following recommendations as they had earlier suggested. The Nigerian education system needs to include the study of handicrafts in its curriculum because these aspects of education mark the introduction of the teaching of Nigerian indigenous technologies in the formal school system. Not only this, there is need to inculcate positive attitude towards vocational technical and indigenous technological education among the Nigerian youths throughout their formal education. To this end, Idehen (2012) explained that what the government needs to do will be to deemphasize paper certification or qualification, and instead, enact policies that will emphasize hands skills and competences.

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