The professional vocational educator

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Accepted 28 September 2007

This is a non-empirical research paper. The paper basically examines who a professional vocational educator really is in the academic and industrial world. In pursuance of this goal, the author first examined the term “professionalism” and proceeded to discuss the roles of a professional vocational educator both in the private and public organizations. Relevant review of literature was used in the explanation of some concepts in the paper. The paper goes further to itemize ways in which a vocational educator can contribute meaningfully to technological development focusing on “resource development” as well as technical skill acquisition. The paper concludes with some suggested recommendations for future professional vocational educators and how such recommendations can be effectively utilized.

Key words: Professional, educator, manpower, development.

INTRODUCTION

Professionalism is an all inclusive term covering a variety of activities in arts and crafts educational field such as teaching, nursing, secretarial services, agriculture, telecommunication services, military services, and so on. But it seems everybody agrees that professional activity would encompass a particular level of systematic knowledge and proficiency. Thus, a professional educator is a person who has gained mastery or proficiency in a particular domain of knowledge and skills and can effectively inculcate same unto others. A professional educator, as defined by Mager (1962), is anyone who is professionally qualified and competent and can know the difference between practicing a skill and teaching it. Another school of thought, Gilli (1976) defined a professional education as a teacher of general academic subjects who is generally qualified for his position through completion of a degree and certification requirements in a post-secondary institution. Gilli’s definition for a professional educator implies that the individual teacher must hold a university degree plus a completion of a professional education certificate. Thus, a professional educator according to Gilli, refers to some-one who has completed a university degree programme and also completed either a National Diploma in education or any other equivalent professional certificate in education. A professional educator, in our perception, does not have to hold a university degree. Many educators in various field of education are without a university degree though, Gilli did not specify what a university degree should be (either a first degree or a diploma degree).

However, suffice it to say that there are competent teachers in our various polytechnics and technical institutions without university degree. These teachers are professionals in their various educational fields as (professional vocational – technical educators).

Therefore, the question as to whom a professional vocational educator is, his roles and his contributions to the manpower and technological development of a nation is examined in this paper. The motivation for this is because professionalism is a dynamic concept. In other words what constituted the roles of a particular profession some years ago may have changed. This is much more so that technology is impacting on diverse facets of human endeavour. In addition; philosophy of education varies from nation to nation. It is on this note that this paper attempts a crucial discourse of who a professional educator is in Nigerian context.

A professional vocational educator

Vocational education is the total of those organized and purposeful experiences essential to the career development in a trade, industrial or technical occupation. The programme enables individuals to learn about, explore and prepare for a trade. These occupations are found in any of the career clusters (manufacturing construction,
communication and transportation) and identifiable in the dictionary of occupations which functions in the designing, producing, processing fabricating, assembling, testing, modifying, maintaining, servicing or repairing of any product or commodity (Usoro, 2000). It involves a broad range of activities, including occupationally specific, general labour market and consumer and homemaking coursework; school and work-based experiences, integrated academic and vocational curricula. Informal observation had revealed that participation in the vocational curriculum has declined over the years; the Nigerian National Policy of Education (2004) had reformed and popularized vocational education in high schools and technical colleges. It thus remains to explain what a professional vocational educator is in the light of these definitions.

Finch and Crunkilton (1979), define a professional vocational educator to be somebody who specializes in a specific area of vocation or occupation. In addition, a professional vocational educator should be able to teach the mechanical arts, of vocational education. He is somebody who is knowledgeable in theory and practice of his profession and is able to impact what he has learnt to other people. The authors reviewed various vocational programmes which are offered in the polytechnics and technical colleges such as carpentry, bricklaying, plumbing, painting, decorating, cabinet making, auto-mechanics, installation mechanics, bricklaying welding, blacksmithing, cabinet-making and so on.

The concept of a professional vocational educator however goes beyond polytechnic and technical college level. Wenrich and Wenrich (1974) perceive a professional vocational education to include specialized technical education programmes such as medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, etc. Though, equality believe that professional vocational education prepares people for employment through polytechnics and technical colleges, they argue that vocational education preparation goes beyond technical college level. The Wenrichs' perception of the term "professional vocational educator" is in line with that of Gill's because medicine, dentistry, law and engineering programmes are normally in the university. For example, agricultural engineers are usually graduates from the university or graduates from other higher institutions of learning. These graduates who have acquired professional experience can be employed to teach in the following subjects as professional vocational educator: a) Plant Science b) Animal Husbandry c) Social Science d) Economics e) Management Principles.

Although, the functions of an Agricultural Engineer are different from that of a carpenter, the two groups of people are professionals in their disciplines. The two sets of people are professional vocational technical educators. The roles and functions of a Professional Technical Educator as explained by Oni (1995) is that teachers should provide students at the pre-vocational level with occupational information and prepare them for employment. It is a phase of the total process of discovering and developing an individual's potential for work. Vocational – technical education can be found in many kinds of institutions across the nation (both public and private), and takes many different forms. In any form of vocational – technical institution, especially public institutions, three basic objectives according to Evans (1971) must be performed as follows: 1. Meeting the manpower needs of the society. 2. Increasing the options to each students. 3. Serving as a motivation force to enhance all types of learning.

Much discussion in developing countries today surrounds the relationship between that section of the society concerned with the supply of manpower – the educational system and the world of work. The discussion has tried to focus on such issues as: (i.) The increase in unemployment of primary and secondary leavers (ii.) A general lack of fit between what goes on in the schools and the reality of life and work that awaits those who emerge from them. In order to remedy the situation, educational planners and policy makers in Nigeria have been confronted with the need to provide appropriate manpower that will facilitate or enable economic and social progress. This is believed to be possible through vocational education. The objectives of the NPE (2004) included: (i). A free and democratic society. (ii). A just and egalitarian society. (iii). A united, strong and self reliant nation. (iv). A great and dynamic economy. (v). A land of opportunities for all citizens.

Oyenuga (1981) posited that social studies and communication skills were designed to achieve the first three objectives, while the syllabi on vocational education are aimed at the last two objectives. But the problem has always been that practical skills are not emphasized and as a result, it becomes difficult to produce competent and skilled graduates from the program.

The teaching-learning strategies employed in the implementation of the curriculum were mainly lecture and project method. The strategies employed are often contentious and not child-centered. Thus, the professional vocational educator in Nigeria has the task of: (a.) providing general education. (b.) providing training and competence in selected occupations, their opportunities, requirements and working conditions. (c.) help the trainee develop skills, attitudes and abilities necessary for securing and retaining a job. (d.) project to the learners that vocational education is for skill development which is useful for self-improvement as well as manpower development of the society. (e.) constantly provide the learners with update manpower occupational needs of the nation. (f.) design the mode of training of the learners so as to be gainfully employed after graduation. (g.) design the learner's training mode towards industrial needs and make. (h.) provide learners with motivation and encouragement to effectively complete their programmes.

Enforcing discipline in the school and with effective communication relationship with which learners can do
this.

**Contribution to manpower development**

The National Policy on Education (2004), places emphasis on the objectives which education should help Nigeria to accomplish in technical development. These are citizenry awareness and reduction of class structure through the teaching of skills. This means that education was given the onerous responsibilities of not only developing the society but also of ensuring that the cultural heritage shared by everyone remains intact. It also means that every educator needs to contribute his quota to the development of the society.

One of the ways an educator can contribute his quota to the national development particularly at high manpower level, as claimed by Oni (1991), is through teaching and research. Evans (1971) has also suggested that the major objectives of vocational education are to supply the manpower needs of the society. Wenrich and Wenrich (1974), have also emphasized on manpower development and the role of educators. According to them, “the name of the game is jobs” and only programmes which result in employment which is satisfying to both the employee and the employer, should be considered by educators for manpower development.

In view of the above claims, it should be reiterated that a professional vocational educator can contribute significantly to the manpower development of a nation by performing the following task: 1. To teach and research in relevant areas of the nation’s manpower needs. That is, be aware of where jobs are today and will be in future. 2. Organize workshops, conferences in the communities and institutions on various occupations for the nation’s manpower needs. 3. Constantly visit manpower and employment office to be conversant with where jobs are and the qualifications for each job. 4. To regularly visit educational planning agencies who need to be knowledgeable about the manpower needs within the service areas of their schools. The planners need to be constantly reminded and be informed about the migratory patterns of people in their areas. 5. To effectively train the students to be aware of manpower trends. The trend is usually in the sharp reduction in the number of unskilled workers in the labour force. If graduates of vocational education programmes are well trained and well informed of the nation’s manpower needs, they will be able to contribute their services to sustain themselves and contribute meaningfully to the technological development of their nation.

Today, concept of manpower planning has mostly been replaced by the term Human Resource Development. Human resource development (HRD) is a framework for helping employees develop their personal and organizational skills, knowledge, and abilities. Human resource development according to Robert and Mitchel (1996) is an organized learning activities arranged within an organization in order to improve performance and personal growth for the purpose of improving the job, the individual and the organization or institution. It includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development, succession planning, key employee identification, financial assistance, and organization development.

The key focus of all aspects of HRD is on developing the most superior workforce so that the organization and individual employees can accomplish their work goals in service to customers. Human resource development can be both formal and informal. Formal aspect involves classroom training, programmes development and planning activities. The informal aspect involves coaching by occupational specialists and health organization setup.

In addition to the aforementioned basic objective functions and contributive tasks which should be executed by a professional vocational educator, he is also expected to perform the following human resource development functions as stated by the Department of Labour, Occupational Outlook Handbook (2006-07 edition) thus: (1) Collect and examine detailed information about job duties to prepare job description; (2) Conduct research, usually in large firms, industries or organizations. He is concerned also vocational or occupational classification systems. He studies the effects of such organization and the occupational trends upon workers’ relationships. (3) Serve as a technical liaison between the organization and the government as well as the labour unions (4) Assist in the organizational planning and training activities, recruitment exercise, staff orientation and development and job design projects.

Apart from the basic objective functions and contributive roles of a professional vocational educator, Losh (2000) emphasized that a vocational-technical educator should also acquire necessary knowledge and skills needed to improve his behaviour on job performance as well as developing instructional strategies in an organization. After the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills required for effective job performance, the professional educator should be able to demonstrate and execute the following three main roles: (1) Assist in the training and development of personnel in the organization. (2) Part-take in industrial or institutional research activities (3) Assist in the economic growth, and educational development of the industry and institution.

**Recommendations for future professional vocational educators**

Professional vocational educators’ future depends on the effective implementation of the following: 1. Adequate funding of vocational—technical programmes by the government at the Federal and State levels. 2. Proper maintenance of the teachers who are currently in the profession with adequate motivation and incentives. 3. Developing appropriate curriculum for the training of future students in vocational-technical programmes. 4. Provision of good educational training for students with the supply of
proper equipment and adequate facilities to the Polyte-
chnics, technical colleges and other higher institutions offer-
ing vocational programmes. 5. Proper maintenance of
institutional facilities, equipment and personnel (both aca-
demic and administrative staff) in all institutions offering
vocational – technical programmes across the nation.

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