

# **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT LEARNERS IN NIGERIA THROUGH SKILLS ACQUISITION SCHEMES**

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**Abstract.** A number of persons in any society may not, in spite of the availability of chances for education, acquire formal education up to the level that would position them for sustained personal growth in paid employment or in self-employment. Also, the concept of life-long learning requires continuous exposure to methods and knowledge generally in the chosen trade or profession of the individual. Programmes are therefore designed to meet the needs of persons that did not acquire enough formal education or none at all as well as those that need to sustain learning for self-development. Skills acquisition programmes are therefore designed under structured programmes of adult education to meet the needs of adult learners. This paper reviews the concepts of adult education and skills acquisition, the latter as an aspect of adult education with emphasis on Nigeria. It reviews a case involving a tertiary institution in Nigeria as sponsored by petroleum producing companies. The paper highlights the need for greater emphasis on practice during training under skills acquisition.

*Keywords:* adult education, practice, self-reliance, skills, vocational training

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## Introduction

Nigerians generally view adult education as a programme for persons who are advanced in age but who are desirous of being able to read, write, and communicate particularly in English Language. But adult education should better be seen in the context of life-long education. The national government currently works towards mass literacy of which adult education is a component. The programme is aimed at adult persons and those who could not, for various reasons, complete their education in a formal setting when they were young.

An important thrust of Nigeria's national education policy is that of education for self-reliance. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme, launched in September 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo has self-reliance as its central theme. The UBE scheme was however mooted since 1981 in Section 1, Sub-section 7 (5) of the country's National Policy on Education (FRN, 1981), and apparently given a fillip by the Jomtien and Dakar Forums on Education for All. The 1981, 1998, and 2004 National Policies on Education lay a lot of emphasis on education for self-reliance.

For adult learners, one route to achieving education for self-reliance is through entrepreneurship education that is the bedrock of vocational education. Some tertiary educational institutions in the country have programmes that focus on adult learners with the aim of providing skills that promote private investment opportunities primarily, and employability secondarily. One of such programmes is skills acquisition in vocations and trades such as carpentry and joinery, catering, air conditioning and refrigeration, hairdressing, electrical installation, welding and fabrication, metalwork, computer/secretarial studies, among others.

Teaching of skills for adult learners should be regarded as a component of a package that should include provision of enabling facilities for take-off as well as post-training monitoring, evaluation, and periodic retraining. These constitute what is known as entrepreneurship development. Some crude petroleum producing companies in the Niger Delta of Nigeria have since 1999 been cooperating with the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in Rivers State to train youths of the oil producing communities with a view to positioning them for self-employment. The scheme, expected to reduce youth restiveness by providing them with trade skills that will keep them productively engaged, is briefly reviewed in this paper.

## Vocational Education and Self-Reliance

Adult education that also includes skills acquisition is simply the practice of teaching or educating adults. The programme is offered through outlets or media such as adult high schools, distance learning, continuing education schemes, lifelong learning schemes, and e-learning. Two distinctions between teaching of young people (pedagogy) and adult learners (androgogy) have to be made. The first is that adults have accumulated experiences that affect, positively or negatively, their ability to learn new things presented to them in a formal system such as a school or structured programme. This is relatively different from teaching involving the bulk of young people, some of which fall into the education concept of 'tabula rassa' or clean slate. The second is the need for a strong emphasis in practice rather than in theory. There must be a goal of a practical nature concerning every new knowledge acquired. In pedagogy, liberal education expects that a 'broad' or 'total' citizen should be produced, with knowledge that may not be of immediate practical importance or significance.

The exposition on the curriculum and expectations of the Federal Government of Nigeria with respect to the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme is as presented in the Minimum Standards issued every five years by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The 2002 edition (currently under review) summarizes the nation's expectations of the NCE programme in the philosophy and objectives of the Agricultural Education specialty. No other programme in vocational education is presented that way. The document states, „The philosophy of NCE (Agricultural Education) programme is tied to the national philosophy on agriculture for self-reliance based on provision of teachers endowed with a balanced approach between principles and practice of agriculture for academic and vocational ends“ (p. 1). Self-reliance and a proper mix of theory and practice is the hallmark of vocational education as different from the group of courses starting in antiquity dubbed liberal arts.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), places considerable emphasis on vocational education, skills acquisition, and life-long education. Although the Policy is at present undergoing incisive review, the document did much to place emphasis on vocational as well as science and technical subjects. The document submits that technical and vocational education as a composite concept is used „as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practi-

cal skills, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life“ (p. 29).

Even at the pre-vocational level (the junior secondary school level), acquisition of skills is emphasized. The pre-vocational electives at that level include agriculture, business studies, home economics, local crafts, computer education, fine arts, and music. The vocational electives are presented as a breakdown of the components of the listing under pre-vocational electives. For instance, typewriting and shorthand are listed under Business Studies.

The technical/vocational education programmes in Colleges of Education indeed are made up of the subjects listed under pre-vocational electives at the secondary level. As a matter of fact the ‘regular’ Colleges of Education run one School for vocational/technical education while Colleges of Education (Technical) run three Schools for the same composite programme. The three Schools are Business Education, Technical Education, and Vocational Education.

The leaning towards greater practice rather than theory informs the American system of vocational education. The bottom line is practical application of what is taught whether to regular students (full-time equivalent students) or to part time students. The relevance and utility of vocational education lies in the practical application of what is taught. Rogers (2001), observes, „the economic and social benefits of literacy do not spring from learning skills literacy but from using literacy skills“ (p. 21). Teachers, curricula, and schools teaching vocational courses have to emphasize the practical aspects of the different specialties in vocational education.

### **Adult Education in Nigeria**

Adult literacy rate in Nigeria in the year 2000 was 49% of the adult population (The World Bank, 2000). The United Nations Fund for Population Control (UNFPA) <sup>1)</sup> puts the adult literacy rate in 2005 at 74% for men and 59% for women. Meanwhile the view that adult education means the acquisition of the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, Arithmetic – that is, functional education required for the satisfaction of basic living needs in the society) by aged persons or a ‘second chance’ for those who dropped out of school is still strong in Nigeria. However, the national government has been making efforts to change this view.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), provides a Section for Mass Literacy, Adult, and Non-formal Education (Section 6). The policy

provides for functional literacy for adults and youths that did not benefit from formal education. It also provides facilities for nomadic populations as well as young persons who could not complete secondary education. Also provided are in-service, on-the-job, vocational, and professional training for acquisition of skills. A National Commission is running the programme for mass literacy, adult, and non-formal education.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme operates within the framework of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The UBE has the following broad outlines (FRN, 2000):

- Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy, and life skills especially for young adults (persons aged 15 years upwards);
- Special programmes for nomadic populations, out-of-school, and non-formal programmes for updating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning;
- Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youths who have not had the benefit of formal education;
- Development of the formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

The UBE scheme took off in year 2000, but to date, emphasis is on the formal school system in which the first nine years of a child's schooling (excluding kindergarten), is made free and compulsory, that is Primary 1 to Junior Secondary School III. The adult and non-formal components are yet to be fully articulated.

### **Skills Acquisition**

Skills acquisition is best defined from the point of view of the learner, as the process of obtaining knowledge of a technical and practical nature from an individual, group, or institution that can impart such knowledge. Skills are more commonly used in the context of trades, occupations, and vocations and are usually aimed at practical purposes. A common opinion of the concept of skills is that it refers to crafts and trades at the lower level of the economic ladder. To moderate the tag of inferiority that this vista confers on the concept of skills acquisition, a less objectionable description should be „technical training“ or „technicians training“ as training is understood to be different from the broader concept of education.

In essence, skills acquisition – call it technical training – is aimed at ensuring self-reliance for the end products and thus practice must be emphasized over theory. Rogers (2001), as earlier noted, emphasizes the need for practical training so as to make literacy skills more functional. Entrepreneurship skills (an aspect of vocational skills) are life-skills of a practical nature where they are properly delivered. Where theory takes a higher proportion of a skills training scheme, the outcome may not meet the expectations of either the trainees or the society.

### **Skills Acquisition Scheme in Nigeria – A Case Analysis**

The Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku in Nigeria's Rivers State, is one of the tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. It was established by law (Decree, now Act, Number 4 of 1986) for the primary purpose of training teachers for primary and junior secondary schools in the country. The College commenced academic activities in the 1988/89 session. It awards the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in courses it offers through four schools – Business Education (Secretarial and Accounting options); Science Education (Computer/Chemistry or Mathematics or Physics, and Integrated Science options); Technical Education (Auto Mechanics, Building, Electrical/Electronics, Metal Work, Technical Drawing, Wood Work options); and Vocational Education (Agricultural Education, Fine/Applied Arts, Home Economics options). The fifth School, the School of Education, aside from teaching education courses to all the students in the College, runs the Technical Teachers Certificate (TTC), a post-graduate certificate with specializations in business, science, vocational, and technical education.

As part of her statutory mandate to service the community of location, the College commenced skills acquisition programmes in 1993 with „the aim being to make the trainees self-reliant and business-like at the end of their training.“ In May 1999, the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) sponsored 99 youths and adults from the oil producing communities where the company operates, on skills training. TotalFinaElf (TFE), another oil company, joined in February 2000 while Addax Petroleum Limited joined in 2001. The distribution of students in the schemes was as follows:

**Table 1. Skills Acquisition Scheme in Federal College of Education (Tech), Omoku – Distribution of Students in the Programmes (1999–2001)**

S/No.	Course	Number of Trainees		
		NAOC	TFE	Addax
1.	Welding & Fabrication	24	45	9
2.	Pipe Fitting & Plumbing	24	–	–
3.	Electrical Works	17	33	–
4.	Electronic Works	4	–	9
5.	Auto-mechanics	10	–	–
6.	Computer Studies	20	–	–
7.	Building Construction	–	6	–
8.	Catering	–	13	3
9.	Carpentry & Joinery	–	3	–
Total		99	100	21

*Source:* Continuing Education Centre, Federal College of Education (Tech), Omoku, 2002.

The aim of the oil companies was to provide skills to the trainees so that they can become self-employed while also creating jobs for others, ultimately reducing the tension and restiveness among youths in their areas of operation. The College on her part apparently conceived of the Boston paradigm of providing a cozy environment for the trainees to acquire what a master craftsman in the city could provide in his shade. The College also aimed at giving the participants the basic theories that have to do with their trades as well as basics in general areas such as citizenship education, language and communication, health and safety, among others. The programmes lasted for 12 months during which intensive theoretical work along with practical applications were carried out.

At the end of the training, the College as requested by the sponsors, organized graduation ceremonies during which the trainees not only dressed appropriately for the occasion, but were awarded graded certificates in 5 categories – Distinction, Upper Credit, Lower Credit, Merit, and Pass. A few of the trainees could not pass the examinations.

The sponsors provided ‘starter packages’ comprising Naira (N) 250,000.00 in cash, about \$2, 083.33 at the average exchange rate of \$1: N120.00 in year 2001 when the first batch joined the programme (the current

value is \$1965.56 at the Central Bank of Nigeria approved selling rate of \$1: N127.19 as recorded by the Businessday of July 03, 2006), and equipment for each specialization (such as welding equipment, tool boxes, deep freezers, generating sets, among others). It appears that the bias towards theory might have contributed to a large number of the graduates going back to the sponsors for paid employment or seeking admission to universities for further studies.

The College has since changed the approach to pedagogy for skills acquisition (all the trainees so far have been youths). In 2003, the College approached the Shell Petroleum Development Company Limited (Shell) and presented a proposal for sponsorship of a scheme on skills acquisition. 45 youths from oil producing areas in the Niger Delta communities in Delta and Bayelsa States were selected through an interview process for participation in the scheme christened „Shell Warri Youth Development Scheme (Skills Acquisition for Neighbouring Youths). The first batch of the trainees were admitted in January 2004 to take courses in Automobile, Electrical/Electronics, and Welding. The teaching structure used a mix of 80% practical training and 20% theory for a period of 9 months. The last 3 of the 12-month programme were used entirely for industrial attachment for hands-on training in the workshops of artisans in Omoku community, that is, welders, motor mechanics, and electrical and electronic technicians.

In July of the same year, the second batch of trainees, also numbering 45 were admitted for Computer/Secretarial Studies, Fashion and Designing, Catering and Hotel Management, and Hairdressing/Barbing. It is evident from the type of courses that emphasis was on common areas that can easily be developed in local areas. The distribution in terms of courses is shown in Table 2.

The College has plans for a Skills Acquisition Scheme Alumni Unit for the purpose of monitoring the performance of her products after graduation particularly for those that will establish owner-operated businesses. As at now, Shell has not given a feedback on the engagements of the youths that graduated from the programme. However, the trainees were made to understand that they will not be offered employment by Shell; rather, they were to be assisted to start owner-operated small-scale businesses in their areas of specialization.

**Table 2. Shell Petroleum Development Company Skills Acquisition Programme – Distribution of Students in the Programmes (2004)**

Course	1 <sup>st</sup> Batch (Jan. 2004)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Batch (July 2004)
Automobile	9	–
Electrical	18	–
Welding	18	–
Computer/Secretarial Studies	–	18
Fashion & Designing	–	9
Catering & Hotel Management	–	9
Hairdressing	–	9
Total	45	45

*Source:* Continuing Education Centre, Federal College of Education (Tech), Omoku, 2005.

### **Experiences of Some Other Countries**

Acquisition of practical skills as in on-the-job training (OTJ) vis-à-vis emphasis on class work where theory is emphasized over practice differs among countries. Where training is carried out and the institutions involved also vary. OTJ is strongly emphasized in Germany such that nobody can commence work directly after school without a reasonable period of attachment. In Japan, it takes about 14 years of supervised on the job training before one can become a *kacho* or Section Chief (Paul, Ickis, & Levitsky, 1989). In contrast, a lawyer fresh from the National Youth Service Corps scheme in Nigeria can set up his or her own chambers and run a private legal firm. Sadly still, a majority of those handling chalk from the kindergarten to the university have neither an educational qualification nor the cognate experience for the job. This later case is however being addressed with the commencement of operations by the Teachers Registration Council (TRC).

With respect to where adult education and skills training take place and the institutions involved, the Scandinavian countries and Germany offer them in 'folk' high schools while in the United States of America (USA) and Canada community high schools are mainly used. However, evening and

weekend programmes are emphasized and the environment is expected to be cozy and generally conducive for adult learning. In Nigeria, adult education is virtually confined to primary schools and community halls that are in most cases not conducive for teaching and learning (Ubong, 2000).

In the United Kingdom (UK), adult education, which includes skills acquisition, is handled by various agencies including the government, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)<sup>2)</sup> that serves England and Wales works to „support an increase in the total number of adults engaged in formal and informal learning“ in England and Wales through advocacy to national bodies, institutions, and industry. The approach is by effective networking, collaboration, and monitoring cum evaluation. The institution has individual and corporate members.

The US Department of Education (Office of Vocational and Adult Education<sup>3)</sup>) regards students in adult literacy and remedial education classes as those who dropped out of school or who have passed through the school system without adequate education. The difference is more evident in the facilities provided as well as the approach to delivery. For instance, the Boston Center for Adult Education<sup>4)</sup> provides a relaxed and enjoyable setting for learning. The Center offers more than 500 courses in a wide range of specialties. Also, the Center for Entrepreneurship Education and Development<sup>5)</sup> of the Province of Nova Scotia, runs an integrated curriculum that „works best when it is developed in an environment outside the traditional classroom. This allows for the freedom of individualized learning and facilitates the link between the educational process and economic reality.“

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also involved in skills imparting programmes aside from institutions and government agencies. The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE)<sup>6)</sup>, for instance, is involved in advocacy, dissemination of requisite information, and organization of national and international conferences on adult and continuing education. Vocational and adult education at the Federal Government level in the USA is coordinated by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the Department of Education<sup>3)</sup>.

In nearby Ghana, the Geodora Skills Acquisition Centre<sup>7)</sup> was established in 1999 to impart ‘marketable skills’ to youths in the areas of business, technology, creative arts, computers, and vocational studies. The Centre, as indicated in its website (2005), makes use of modern techniques to meet its objectives. At the international level generally, associations and governments can belong to the International Council for Adult Education,

a forum for exchange of ideas and experiences on matters concerning adult education.

## **Certification**

The emphasis on what trainees receive at the end of the training in the opinion of the authors of this paper should not be certificates but skills that have become part of the trainees and skills that are to be honed by practice in their businesses or trades and even while in paid employment in cognate areas. In Nigeria, certification is a big issue. Even in the evolving Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, certification is a problem that will show up in the future (Ubong, 2001) (and also<sup>8</sup>). As mentioned earlier under the experience in the Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku Skills Acquisition programme, trainees even had to pass through a graduation ceremony that involved considerable fanfare with hierarchy of certificates, academic gowns, and press relations. This was good for the sponsors but as indicated, probably because of the high academic content, the graduates have not met the expectations of the sponsors and the general society.

It is recommended that a simple certificate of completion evidencing competence in the skill area be issued to the trainees at the end of the programme. The College under the Shell programme however registered the trainees for the Trade Test Certificate and encouraged those that have interest in further technical education to register for the City & Guilds Certificate of the United Kingdom or enter for the examinations of the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) so as to obtain the National Certificates (NC) and Advanced National Certificates (ANC) in the skill areas.

In the USA, participants in adult education and skills acquisition programmes in schools undergo the General Education Development Test (GEDT) and on passing, are awarded certificates. The GEDT certificate is equivalent to a high school diploma.

## **Conclusion**

Entrepreneurship education provides skills for self-reliance for adult learners. Where training is followed up with facilities for establishment of owner-managed businesses, it becomes entrepreneurship development. In the process of training, practice must be emphasized over theory and follow-up activities are necessary to ensure that the new investments take root.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Fund for Population Control (2006). State of the world population.

[http://www.c.org/swp/2005/images/e\\_indicators2.pdf](http://www.c.org/swp/2005/images/e_indicators2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. Skills Acquisition, <http://www.niace.org.uk/organization>

<sup>3</sup> Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Skills Acquisition, <http://www.edu.gov/about/offices/list/oval/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup> The Boston Center for Adult Education, <http://www.bcae.org/aboutframe.html>

<sup>5</sup> The Center for Entrepreneurship Education and Development, <http://www.ceed.info/programs/curriculum.php>

<sup>6</sup> American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, <http://www.aaace.org/general.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Geodara Skills Acquisition Center, <http://www.esemployment.com/dcforum/DCForum1D4/494.html>

<sup>8</sup> Wokocha, A.M. & Ubong, B. (2003). Meeting Educational and Social Goals through Assessment and Certification: The Case of the Universal Basic Education Scheme in Nigeria, <http://www.umalusi/AEAA%5Wokocha%20AM%and%20Ubong%20E%20B.pff>

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