
THE INFLUENCE OF THEORIES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ON CHOICE OF AREA OF SPECIALIZATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper highlighted the role of vocational theories in the choice of areas of specialization among business education students, leading to career choice generally. The theories examined include the Developmental Vocational Theory, the Trait Factor Theory, among others. All the theories recommended an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual, the social background of the individual, job requirements and ascertainment of whether the individual's strengths could match the job requirements for satisfactory job performance. Recommendations made include provision and strengthening of guidance and counseling in formal and non-formal schools.

Introduction

Human history is full of efforts geared towards improvement of mankind and the environment. This is because no one is an Island unto himself. The world, from guidance perception, would be a better place for all if everyone is assisted to develop his potentials in a manner that is useful to himself and the society.

As regards theories, they are more than collections of testable hypotheses and concepts. They also include more than abstractions translated into words, which facilitate communication pertaining human behaviours. According to Ezeji (2001), theories are representative of systems of belief about the nature of people, objects and phenomena; they contain, the author observed, assumptions about the extent to which human beings and phenomena can be modified through experiences and the limits that have to be placed upon human aspirations.

Osuala (2004), stated that vocational education was defined in America Public Law 94-482, the Education Amendments of 1976 as "organized educational programs which are directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid employment, or for additional preparation for a career requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree".

Similarly, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), in the National Policy on Education, described technical and vocational education 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 practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to

occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

Historically, vocational education as an academic consideration began in the United States of America with legal provisions providing government recognition. This, according to Osuala (2004), was because the first significant federal legislation in America for vocational education was the Smith-Hughes Act (PL 64 - 347) passed in 1917, which provided funds for programs in Agriculture, trades and industry and home economics. There have been many legislations affecting vocational education since that time, the author added.

Vocational Education and Training in Nigeria

Education in Nigeria, before the advent and intervention of the British in Nigeria, in the later part of the nineteenth century, was mainly vocational. According to Idris and Haruna (2007), an important function of education in those days was to teach people how to earn a living by becoming expert producers of goods and services. The authors observed that young men and women acquired the rudiments of occupations from their parents or expert craftsmen and women to whom they were apprentices. Agricultural skills, medical and technical expertise were passed from one generation to another, and remained part of the culture of the people.

Regarding the advent of vocational education in Nigeria, Osuala (2004) stated that the first recorded vocational training in Nigeria was the apprentices training by an expatriate company, John Holt, in the early 1930s. He added that by 1939, a formal school, with places for twelve trainees, was established in Warri for selected company

employees. The author further added that the major development for firm-sponsored vocational training dated from the opening of the United Africa Company's first training school in Burutu in 1954.

Osuala (2004) further observed that by 1959 the company operated five schools, with a total enrolment of almost five hundred students. Of the total enrolment, five-year apprentices accounted for 358 trainees in seven trades and various employees in five "booster" evening courses accounted for 194 trainees, Osuala added. The author further stated that many other British companies, e.g. the Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company made similar efforts at various times in various Nigerian towns.

Current Development in Vocational Training in Nigeria

Vocational training in Nigeria has progressed from its relatively disorganized beginning to more elevated status. Currently, vocational education is offered in public institutions, a number of government agencies and in few business firms in Nigeria.

As regards vocational education and training in public schools, Osuala (2004) stated:

In primary schools, vocational training is offered in the form of organized courses of instruction, geared towards the inculcation of vocational awareness and orientation. In the secondary school, vocational preparation is through such programmes as agricultural practices and home economics education. Vocational skills in typewriting, bookkeeping, shorthand, and accounting are acquired in some comprehensive secondary schools and other commercial secondary schools.

Vocational training is also given in some colleges of education and universities in Nigeria. These institutions provide the nation with vocationally competent teachers needed for the secondary schools and lecturers in the relevant tertiary institutions. Osuala (2004) observed that many larger technical institutions and government agencies in Nigeria provide vocational training to various categories of employed and unemployed youths and adults. Examples of such agencies are the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), and the various skills acquisition programmes instituted by the various states of the federation, e.g. the Local Apprenticeship Scheme (LAS) of the Adamawa State government, currently in place.

Rationale for Vocational Guidance

Many Nigerian youths make tentative occupational choices on entering the secondary schools and even the universities. These choices are

however often changed as they gain a more realistic view or picture of themselves and the world of work. Examples of this could be seen in cases of students writing for change of programmes in the universities for reasons, based on lack of interest in the programme for which admission was given or inability to perform satisfactorily well in the subjects of such a programme. As example, a good number of students changed from the Departments of Geography, Management and Physics to the Business Education Programme in the last three sessions in the Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola. These students need to be provided vocational guidance and occupational information to be able to assess themselves against the realities of future occupations.

In line with the understanding above, Ezeji (2001) recommended early teaching of occupations in order to expand the knowledge and interests of all students. He opined that information gained early in the secondary schools might reduce unrealistic occupational identifications and rejections, made for unsound reasons.

Vocational Theories

The majority understanding is that vocational choice is a process, not a once-for-all decision. As a result of this understanding, there has been an increasing interest in the process by which individuals approach, enter and progress, and exit in the world of work. Some of the theories developed and tested in an attempt to provide answers to questions about vocational development and choice include:

1. The Developmental Vocational Theory

Super (1953) and Ginzberg, E, Ginzberg, S.W., Axeirad, S, and Herman, J.L (1956) developed the developmental theory which states that individuals develop more clearly defined self-concepts as they advance in age and that occupational life of the individual involves a number of different periods, phases and life stages. The theory implies that occupational choice is a life-long process, involving different stages of human development. To the extent that personality and career development are inter-related, occupational decisions are made or unmade during the individual's maturation process. The National Policy of Education (2004) also stated that vocational education should be understood to be "an aspect of life-long learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship".

In line with the above, Super (1953) identified five phases of vocational development which are:

(a) The Growth Stage

This is the earliest stage, characterized by work. The child at this stage, looks at himself as a multi-talented individual, which leads him to experience some psychological problems. This stage takes place between four to six years of schooling.

At this stage, the child would be at the primary school where provision is not known to be made for employment of guidance counselors. However, class teachers at the senior primary school level can help determine each child's strong aspects and advise, playing guidance role, in favour of career to which the child's study should be tailored.

(b) The Exploration Stage

The individual, at this stage, narrows his choice or options and begins to have a more realistic appraisal of himself and potential jobs. The individual recognizes his assets and liabilities (strengths and weaknesses) in relation to different jobs in the world of work. The stage extends from the end of elementary school into the secondary school. This period calls for guidance and counseling abilities to help the individual make adjustments.

Appropriately, in line with the understanding above, the National Policy on Education (2004), sub-section 41, Pre-Technical and Vocational Education, provided that the preparatory aspect of pre-vocational training offered to students at the junior secondary level is for the purposes of :

- a) Introduction into the world of technology and appreciation of technology towards interest arousal and choice of a vocation at the end of junior secondary school and professionalism later in life.
- b) Acquiring technical skills.
- c) Exposing students to career awareness by exploring usable options in the world of work.
- d) Enabling youths to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

In further response to the demands of this stage, the federal government of Nigeria has established, and is encouraging individuals and organizations to establish, business in the cottage industries in areas of mechanical trades, computer craft practice, and electrical engineering trades. Others are building trades, wood trades, hospitality, textiles, printing, business, among other trades.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in realization of the problems that may arise at this stage, made provisions in section 6, Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, sub-section 32 under goals of the section. The relevant goals to this discussion are:

- (i) provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills; and

- (ii) provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

It is the understanding that workers who receive encouragement through on-the-job training and short-term releases to undertake self-development courses in areas related to their jobs are less likely to make unnecessary movements within or outside their organizations.

However, to retain well trained workers, they need to be encouraged by ways of promotion, increased pay and higher recognition after completion of such training programmes.

In realization of the government's vocational education goals, many graduates of the secondary schools and technical colleges who could not go to tertiary institutions are currently in gainful employments, others are entrepreneurs, owning their own businesses and more are in tertiary vocational institutions, while may have completed their various degree programmes in the area.

(c) the Establishment Stage

At this stage, the individual settles down to a position, but may move from that position to another within the same organizational structure. He may also move from one organizational structure to another as his choice changes. This can be referred to as "preparation for an Occupational Field" as well as "Continuing Education".

The federal government of Nigeria has, in response to the demands of this stage, made provisions in the National Policy on Education (2004), section 7, sub-section 42, on goals of technical and vocational education. Trainees completing the programmes under this sub-section would have the option of securing employment, setting up their own businesses or pursuing further education in the relevant areas.

(d) The Decline Stage

This is the period in which the individual moves towards the end of his vocational activities. It is a period of transition from work to retirement. Hansen, Stevie and Warner (1972), noted that period of non-work is very difficult to cope with.

They also summarized vocational development into a series of phases through which most persons move with relatively, little difficulty. The uniqueness of each phase requires the guidance counselor to make provision for differential assistance and next information when counseling an individual.

The authors observed that there is no clear cut time when one phase ends and the next begins, but the counselor may quickly learn to recognize the referents of each phase, and the characteristics of the extent.

One perceives that it is in recognition of the difficulties of workers at this stage that the Federal Government of Nigeria has introduced entrepreneurship education as part of the curricular of tertiary institutions in the country. Also, various employment agencies, especially government owned, have introduced pre-retirement courses for their employees preparing for retirement. A very good example is the Armed Forces Resettlement Scheme at Oshodi, Lagos, for retiring military personnel.

(2) The Trait Factor Theory

This theory assumes that an individual's abilities and interest can be attached with the vocational opportunities in the world of work. It also assumes that once the matching is accomplished, the problem of vocational choice of the individual is solved, once and for all.

The proponents of this theory include Parsons (1928) and Kitson (1925). The trait factor gave birth to several testing movements, such as the Strong Vocational Interest Bank (SVIB), the Kuder Preference Record (KPR), the Guilford-Zimmerman Aptitude Survey (GAS) and the Differential Aptitude Test (DAT).

This theory holds that a person should have a complete and clear understanding of himself, his aptitudes, interests, ambitions, resources and limitations prior to making an occupational choice. According to Parsons (1928), an individual must be aware of the requirements, conditions for success and prospects in different occupations. The proponents believed that the adequacy of the choice made by an individual depends on how well he knows of his abilities, interests, limitations and how he knows about the requirements and opportunities of different occupations. The trait-factor believes that it is possible to "trait" or "track" an individual into an occupation, using the trait factor.

While this can be seen as a strong contribution to vocational development and choice theory, there is need to remind that it is not all traits that are effectively measurable. Proctor (1920) supported this idea when he found that although intelligence quotient (IQ) is a reliable predictor of success in some school subjects, there are some non-measurable attributes of an individual which contribute significantly to occupational success.

This theory is closely related to the efforts of the federal government of Nigeria in its strive to provide knowledge and skills development in schools, especially at the secondary school level. This is recognized in the provision of the National Policy on

Education (2004), section 5, subsection 22, where it provides, among others, that secondary education shall:

- (i) offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- (ii) provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- (iii) provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

Through appropriate and effective guidance and counseling efforts, students with beneficial traits can be identified and placed appropriately. Those whose traits may be presumed not very beneficial to them and the society can be trained to appropriate career areas.

2. The Sociology Model of Vocational Development

The main assumption of this theory is that circumstances beyond the control of the individual can contribute in large measures to the choice of career that the individual makes, and that the major problem facing the individual is that of developing strategies to cope effectively with his environment. The proponents of this approach include Calplow (1954) and Miller and Form (1951). Miller and Form (1951) indicated that sociological factors such as the home, school, peer influence and pressures and the individual's role perceptions influence career development of an individual. The implication of this theory is that individuals often choose occupations which are incompatible with their aptitudes.

The sociological theory in Ezeji (2001) holds that circumstances beyond the control of the individual, such as his environment determine, to a large extent, the individual's career choice and progress on the job in the career. The theory maintained that the father's occupation, income and education, financial aid, influential contacts and other historical circumstances and socio-economic conditions are forces which influence an individual at different times, helping to determine his occupational choice.

This is largely the case in respect of most individuals' choice of occupation. Most people are on jobs in occupations with relatively, low remuneration, not because of their low intelligence quotient (IQ) but due to sociological factors such as lack of financial and other economic support for their education.

However, as a way of providing solution to the problems enumerated in the theory, government and many social organizations have risen to the occasion

by providing scholarships and similar arrangements to the less privileged in their education efforts. Several state governments have free education and similar policies in aid of students to enable their education. The federal government has a scholarship programme to aid students' education, ensuring that lack of money does not prevent students from developing their traits. The NPE (2004) specifies that vocational education should be understood to be "an instrument for promoting environmentally sound sustainable development".

3. The Personality Theory

The theory proposes that every individual inherits a tendency to expend his energy in some particular way. Osipow (1972) in Ezeji (2001) believed that this innate predisposition toward a manner of expending psychic energy, combined with various childhood experiences, mold the general style an individual develops to satisfy his needs through out his entire life.

The proponents of the personality theory include Roe (1957), Hoppock (1957) and Holland (1959). Roe (1957) and Holland (1959) in Ezeji (2001) hold that an individual has psychological, social and economic needs which he must satisfy through occupational choice and productive work.

According to Osipow (1972) in Ezeji (2001), Roe's personality theory has three important components, namely:

- i. that the experiences of early childhood are likely to be related to vocational choice,
- ii. that need theory postulated by Maslow (1954) is significantly related to Roe's Theory of Vocational choices; and
- iii. that the genetic background of an individual influences vocational decisions as well as the development of need hierarchies.

Hoppock (1957), showed that vocational development education tends to increase the knowledge of students concerning the world of work,

increase subsequent job satisfaction and reduce unemployment.

Pre-independence vocational education in Nigeria was through the apprentice system where trainees understudied their parents in crafts and technical skills, and others were attached to expert masters. Then, there was relatively no unemployment as everyone was largely skilled in one way or another, so there was job satisfaction.

However, inspite of modernization of vocational education after independence, not many employees are satisfied with their jobs, inspite of having received improved vocational education. This can be deduced from the number of changes in occupations, resignations from one organization in favour of employment in other organizations as greener pastures.

Choice of Area of Specialization in Business Education

Students admitted to the Bachelor of Technology Degree in Business Education in the Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola decide their areas of specialization at the end of the second year of the 5-year degree programme. The areas of specialization available to the students are Accounting Education, Marketing/Distributive Education and Office Technology Management Education.

Generally, the lecturers in the various specializations, armed with their knowledge and experience in guidance and counseling, guide the students in their choice of areas of specialization. Other factors taken into consideration to achieve this include students' interest, academic performance, need for balance in number of students in the specializations and availability of lecturers in specific areas.

The table below shows the number of graduates in the various specializations for the last three sessions.

Table 1: Number of Graduates in the Areas of Specialization in Business education, MUTECH, Yola.

Academic session	Accounting Education	Marketing/Distributive Edu.	Office Technology Management Edu.
2009/2010	43	147	12
2010/2011	43	20	NIL
2011/2012	13	62	NIL
Total	99	229	12

Source: Exam Office Records, Vocational Education Department, MAUTECH, Yola.(2010,2011,2012)

In spite of consideration for balance of number of students in the three options, the picture shown in the table above indicates that the largest number of students preferred the marketing/Distributive option, followed by Accounting Education, while only very few did the Office Technology Management Education. A thorough counseling effort is needed for a change in the picture with regards to the Office Technology Management Education specialization.

Similarly, the position of choice of area of specialization at the Department of Vocational and Technical Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is not different. According to Umar (2012), the picture of students' choice of area of specialization for 300 Level students in the 2011/2012 session is as shown below.

Table 2: Choice of options in Business Education Programme ABU, Zaria for 300 level, 2011/2012 Session

	Accounting	Marketing/Distributive	Office
Male	63	9	2
Female	22	18	3
Total	65	27	5

Source, Umar (2012)

Umar (2012) stated that majority of the students chose the accounting option, majorly on the basis of job prospect. The positions exhibited in both institutions agree with the personality theory which states "that an individual has psychological, social and economic needs which he must satisfy through occupational choice".

Conclusion

The theories examined, all emphasized determining the traits, aptitudes, interests, strengths and weaknesses of students in their efforts to make vocational choices. Teachers/lecturers and guidance counselors should then take the above into consideration in guiding and counseling the students to make informed carrier choices, especially at the exploration stage (the end of primary school into the secondary school).

The students, on completion of their courses, would enter jobs in which they would perform, hopefully, satisfactorily. These new workers (employees), their employers and the society, generally, would derive satisfaction at the end.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made, based on the discussion of the paper.

1. There should be the realization that it is not every individual in the society that has the

opportunity of early education, up to the secondary level where guidance and counseling is available. Some individuals may have opportunity, only of adult education, hence there is the need to enrich adult education institutions with guidance and counseling facilities.

2. Governments at various tiers, should intensify provision of education opportunity to all strata of the society, both the young and adults.
3. Since early education opportunity may be hampered principally by parental social factors, governments and other societal authorities should increase efforts in provision of individuals with economic empowerment for societal good.
4. In addition to encouraging entrepreneurial development of individuals, governments and other employers should establish more cottage industries and ensure adequate remuneration of their workers, enabling them live up to their responsibilities including being able to effectively educate their children, meeting current job skills demands.
5. In order to have graduates specializing in all relevant areas offered in a university programme, lecturers and guidance counselors should be untiring in educating prospective graduates on marketability of all the specializations.

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