

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, THE UNCOVERED GOLD MINE!

Early days of darkness...

In my young ages, I thought and saw vocational education and training as befitting for the less privileged, or should I say the unflavoured and economically disadvantaged groups. It was not until the mid-2000s when I saw builders, welders and operators of technician shops earning in US dollars which some professional graduates, until tomorrow, can only dream about.

The logic unveiled

First, Vocational Education looks and actually is a short-cut to graduation. A P.7 leaver studies for three years (Community Polytechnic Certificate) and is able to earn a leaving before the would be S.4. Ideally, this UCPC graduate can decide to progress with studies as a self-sponsored student or call him a personal guardian.

The overall cost is a fraction of the conventional training courses. As we consider reduced training span, we inevitably see a substantial reduction in costs. Such expenditure as tuition, student requirements and to mention but a few are tremendously reduced. A wiser parent could decide to use this significant balance as start-up capital for the Vocational training graduate.

The look at the earnings during the training course. A student, during his holidays is able to employ the skills acquired to earn by participating in on-going projects such as construction. This doesn't disqualify the student or mean a cessation of studies—it only thrusts one to perform even better in class given the competence-based assessment now in play.

The purpose of an education system is to create jobs. This is synonymous with the skills-based training and assessment offered in the vocational training education system of Uganda today. In Europe and some developed countries in Asia, interviews for jobs are based on practical tests in line with the job descriptions. I see Uganda following these footsteps. In the current system of the Vocational and Technical training and (assessment), students have been compelled to undertake practical tasks in class and outside class such as practical lectures, real-life projects, industrial training as course work of even final assessment. This deliberate training enhances an improved attitude towards jobs. In its special way, Industrial Training creates a direct link between the student and potential employers such as companies and economically empowered individuals.

The realisation of a Middle income economy is only possible if youth employment is perfect. Job creation and labour exportation are such a wonderful avenue to achieve our national goal. As such, the deployment of vocational skills in this country and our great lakes region or even the

East African Community alone shall be fundamental. As Uganda champions the operationalization of a free labour market in the EAC, we must create the labour that shall be exported. Gross National Product and the Country's Purchasing Power Parity will be boosted by exportable skills. Economic heavy weights such as China, Germany, France and USA have wasted no time embracing vocational and technical training. Uganda's time is now. The ease to comprehend concepts as a student progresses. Once one has the skills such as estimation of materials, injection of animals and alike, it becomes easier to pass more complex programmes such as Engineering and Veterinary Science among others that would have been a bitter taste if met at first encounter by students. In Europe, medical schools prefer students with Certificates in Medical Courses to direct secondary graduates for Bachelor degree programmes. The essence is that the former are better practically equipped. Pass rates for such double trained students are higher at advanced levels of training. Uganda has learned the lessons and we surely have to leave the slumber.

Finally but equally fabulous is when we acknowledge the avenue by Vocational training to University education. All roads lead to heaven. The most important is the destination not the formula. The dream of every child is a University degree. How to get there varies from person or family to another. So should we condemn those that don't attend advanced level secondary education? No, we cannot! Vocational training offers an opportunity for one to actually attend University education in the working class. Here is the dream come true! The equivalent of advanced secondary school education is a post-"O" Level 2-year Certificate. This way, we incubate and hatch chicks with an obvious result-success.

In a nut shell, employment, economic empowerment, regional integration, common labour market, socio-economic prosperity and guaranteed community development are all embedded in vocational and technical training.

Not for my sake, but for the better of our Nation, may you join us and become better ambassadors of this credible cause.

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