

CONTRIBUTION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF YOUTH GRADUATES IN AKWA IBOM STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the contribution of vocational education to employment opportunities of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom state. The population of this study consisted of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design while stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents. Data was obtained using a research instrument titled “Contribution of Vocational Education to Employment Opportunities of Youth Graduates Questionnaire (CVEEOYGO)”. Data obtained from respondents on the research questions were analysed using descriptive statistics and pearson product moment correlation analysis, while regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha levels. It was concluded that there is significant relationship between vocational education and self-employment of youth graduates. It was also concluded that vocational education has significant relationship with paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State. Finally, there are various factors hindering hitch-free vocational education in Nigeria, including inadequate funding, low student enrolment, poor teaching/learning environment, shortage of qualified teachers, poor retraining policy, inadequate staff motivation, low societal estimation of VIE and lack of accrediting of courses. One of the recommendations was that the Nigerian government should invest enough money on vocational educational education to boast the programme in schools and colleges.

KEY WORDS: Vocational education, self-employment, paid employment, prevailing constraints.

Introduction

The high rate of unemployment, poverty and poor socio-economic status of most Nigerian graduates has generated an outcry of many, non-governmental organizations, parents, government bodies and international organizations. Unemployment is a global trend, but it occurs mostly in developing countries of the world, with attendant social, economic, political, and psychological consequences. Unemployment has posed a serious problem not only to the welfare of individuals but also to that of their families. Many able bodied and highly qualified persons who could not secure gainful employment have remained economically dependent on their parents. The National Planning Commission (NPC 2009) corroborates that the Nigerian

economy is growing without appreciable employment opportunities for its teeming population, which has serious socioeconomic consequence. The growth in crude oil revenue in Nigeria is accompanied by relatively limited employment growth, and deteriorating education standard. Graduates are intelligent and creative people with the ability to think critically (Grareth, 2011) and who competes for the job in the domestic and global labor-market places. Unemployment according to Olaitan (2006) leads to frustration and disillusionment which may result in crime or drug abuse in a futile attempt to escape from and forget the pains and humiliation of poverty and lack. The problem of unemployment, he further stated, has worsened as millions of school leavers and graduates of tertiary institutions have not secured gainful employment over the years.

It is not therefore a gain saying that Nigerian Youths are faced with economic problem which among other things have given rise to high rate of unemployment, poverty and hunger. This is very common among the secondary and tertiary institution graduates who roams about in the streets in search of white collar jobs which are equally very scares. The more the youth graduates do not engaged in gainful employment, the more the entire economy deteriorates. Hence, the future prospect and prosperity of Nigeria lie in the production of youths who are well prepared and equipped with employability skills to take their places in the future society. This requires the implementation of educational system that will equip our youths and adults with sealable skills and competencies which will help them gained employed.

It is obvious that our youths are lacking the necessary occupational skills to be self employed and to effectively function in today's world of work. These occupational skills can be provided by technical and vocational education. Vocational Education is a career education or occupational education. Nwokdo, cited in Ezeguine an Ukpore (2011), Vocational and Technical Education were introduced with the objectives of inculcating saleable Vocational and Technical Skills to our youths for employment and self reliance, alleviating unemployment, re-orienting students' attitudes toward rural society and thus, halting urban migration and enhancing social and occupational mobility. According to Abdulahi (2004) vocational education is that aspect of education that involves the acquisition of skills, techniques and application of the knowledge of the science for the improvement of man's surrounding. Technical and vocational education therefore prepares one for the world of work with which the individual becomes self reliant and can make contributions to the development of the society. As employers look for new talents every year from new graduates, it is important to not only have a solid education, but graduates that have technical, scientific and technological features that stand out from the rest of the graduating students. With the economy being more globalized than ever, it is important to have a background and a skill set that allows graduates to become immersed in the global economy right from graduation (Cote, 2007). It is important for these students or graduates to have skills in innovation in technology education and entrepreneurship to be ready to fit into the global market place in which today's economy depends on.

Statement of Problem

Nigeria is bedeviled with a myriad of problems, which despite her oil wealth, inhibits her development. Unemployment is one of the developmental problems that face every developing economy in this twenty-first century, and Nigeria is not exempted. Since the establishment of the

National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Nigeria, which was aimed at designing and articulating policies to tackle general unemployment problem in the economy, NDE has been grappling with the nagging issue of employment creation through its various programmes such as employment counseling services and job linkages, vocational skills acquisition etc. It is observed that despite these policies and programmes, youth unemployment remains a major challenge to the developmental process of the Nigerian economy. Youth unemployment appears to be shooting up the sky as many Nigerian youths lack appropriate skills that will empower them after graduation from school. This study therefore seeks to investigate the contribution of vocational education to employment opportunities of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom state.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to determine the relevance of vocational education to employment opportunities of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom state. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the relevance of vocational education to self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.
2. To determine the relevance of vocational education to paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.
3. To determine the prevailing constraints against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State

Research Question

The following research questions will be answered:

1. How related is vocational education with self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State?
2. How related is vocational education with paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State?
3. What are the prevailing constraints against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between vocational education and self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State?
2. There is no significant relationship between vocational education and paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Vocational Education and Training

Vocational technical education is an aspect of education designed to prepare students for industry, agriculture, craft, commerce, book-keeping and accounting, office practice, computer science and home economics etc, which are usually provided at the secondary or lower tertiary level. According to the National Policy on Education (2002), it is defined as that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. In this sense, it forms a practical segment of education that involves skill acquisition.

Vocational education can be explained in terms of: – training designed to advance an individual's proficiency in relation to his or her present or future occupation, training or re-training which is given in schools or classes under public supervision and control; provision of systematic training experiences which are designed to fit individuals in recognized occupations. Thus, vocational education is that part of total educational system, which offers courses leading to the acquisition of specific skills to enable one to perform certain job. Sometimes, vocational education offers re-training to up-grade workers already in employment. It is directed towards the preparation for occupational life since its recipients are equipped to face the challenges of the world of work. It entails the transmission of knowledge and acquisition of skills that are related to various occupations. It also entails the enrichment of the capabilities that influence the effective, psychomotor or cognitive domains of individual in readiness for entry into the world of work in order to satisfy their intrinsic and extrinsic values, work goals and aspirations such that local and national needs will be met.

The Advanced Programmes in Vocational Education and Training include Agricultural Education, Business Education which is also an umbrella to Secretarial or Office Education, Accounting Education, Computer Education, Distributive/ Marketing Education. Another unit is the Industrial and Technology which has Electrical Education, Mechanical Education, Building Education, Woodwork Education and Metal work Education. Others are:

Trade: This is a unit in vocational education that provides education in skilled trades such as plumbing, car repair and construction. It provides approximately 3 years of classroom work accompanied by workshop instructions before you seek any job from a potential employer. After completing this training, you will obtain a license to freely practice the trade.

Administration: This is a program that is intended to equip and prepare students for such careers as; administrative assistance, medical assistants, office clerks or legal assistants. This program takes one to two years for

Aesthetic: This is a program that offers creative vocations. It offers programs such as interior decorations, cosmetology and hair styling. It is a training that takes two to three years of study and does not usually requires any apprenticeship after you complete your degree.

Adult Education: It is also known as continuing education. It's a form of vocational training for those adults that are already employed. Many employed people choose to undergo this training

due to such reasons as to be considered for promotion or for career development. Often, the employers choose to pay for their employees to undergo such a training so as to keep them motivated and remain competitive in the market.

Internships: This is a form of training for people with the need to get hands-on training from the ultimate source. It is a **vocational training** that is intended to give you the desired experience in your field of study hence helps you acquire a position in an industry of your desire.

Vocational Education and Employment of Youth Graduates

Vocational education helps to create wealth and reduce unemployment amongst graduates, it produces creativity, innovation, and increases the total production of a country (Shane, 2003). Toby (2000) assert that vocational education can also be seen as that education designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled worker or technicians or sub-professional in recognized occupations and in new and emerging occupations or to prepare individual for enrolment in advanced technical education programme. People become gainfully employed through vocational training and skill acquisition (Ebong and Asodike, 2011). Globally, vocational programs introduced into educational institutions were meant to provide the level of education or knowledge needed to exploit entrepreneurial opportunity which could help the economic development of such countries (Emaikwu, 2011), According to Ekpe (2012), studies have shown that skill acquisition is the most critical factor in the utilization of entrepreneurship opportunity for self-employment. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, through her National Policy on Education (2013), state categorically that trainees of vocational and technical education completing business and apprenticeship programmes shall have three options:

1. Secure employment either at the end of the whole course or after completing one or more modules of employability skills;
2. Set up their own business and become self-employed and be able to employ and
3. Pursue further education in advance business oriented programmes.

In conjunction with this, the Nigerian government has put in place several vocational education programs, including the introduction of entrepreneurship courses and establishment of entrepreneurship departments in various universities in the country in order to train aspiring entrepreneurs. The aim of Government statement and programmes was to impact skills, attitudes, aspirations and competencies mostly in the youths, and provides micro-credit, to enable them practice entrepreneurship or create self-employment as well as help generate employment for others (Samian and Buntat, 2012).

Amadi (2012) and Ojo (2009) have agreed that vocational education is positively related to opportunity for self-employment. However, self-motivation can aid or hamper this relationship because a graduate who had received entrepreneurial skill acquisition may not venture into entrepreneurship practice if he/she is risk-averse characterized person, has a negative attitude to hard work, and misuses the acquired knowledge, talent or skill.

Usman and Tyabo (2013) assert that the need to secure a society with adequate job opportunities, job security and a balanced economy is necessary for the youths of this nation.

Vocational and technical education is practical skills oriented therefore, it helps in the maximum creation of jobs. Skills development can therefore contribute to strengthening the social links of a community by promoting employment creativity and sustainable means of life subsistence. The majority of African youth continue to face unemployment, underemployment and poverty due to lack of skills, lack of relevant education, denied access to capital, and many unmet expectation (African Union, 2012). This shows that the basic requisite for curbing unemployment and underemployment among Nigerian youths is equipping them with basic vocational and technical skills, relevant education that leads to self-reliance and self employment and empowering them with capital to startup their business.

The critical role of vocational education is to improve productivity, income and equitable access to employment opportunities. It is widely accepted that vocational training is an essential instrument for poverty reduction especially for those with no formal employment in our society (Bennel, 2008). The general strategy is to design and implement youth employment action plan to facilitate and support provision of effective, efficient and transparent service for promoting of youth mobility and employment. The challenge therefore is to design integrated employment generating macro-economic policies that create decent opportunities for young men and women who represent majority of the population and in the labour force (Semboja, 2007).

Vocational education and training is designed to prepare, update or retrain artisans for employment or self-employment at the semi-skilled level in any branch of economic activity. The transformation from agrarian to an industrial infrastructure demands a drastic expansion of the vocational and technological education. The broad policies of education and vocational training on employment aimed at facilitating the growth of culture and education for job creation through increased availability of job opportunities. International Labour Organization (2012) reported that education and vocational training policies are especially important and must impart employable skills to youth entering the labour market, while labour market institutions should assist youths in finding appropriate employment. The aims and objectives of the Educational and Training Policy is to produce trained and skilled youth and adults who will provide the needed labour for improved performance in industry and other economic and social service sectors, to provide young and adults persons with opportunities to acquire skills in production, service, entrepreneurship and business management and to enable the productive and service sectors to train and develop their human resources (URT, 1995).

Constraints against Vocational Education in Akwa Ibom State

Vocational education is the education that is meant to produce well skilled vocationally trained and competent personnel. Vocational education has been faced with the challenges of inadequate funding. Indeed vocational education requires adequate funding if its objectives must be realized. Funding refers to the process of sourcing, allocating and managing public school revenues in the production of vocational education services for the attainment of vocational and technical educational objectives (Okunamiri, 2001).

Educational funding should not be the sole responsibility of the government. Other sources of revenue generation need to be explored. It is embarrassing to note that basic textbooks are not even available in vocational schools. As Fabusuyi (2009) posited, one of the most formidable problems confronting instruction in Clothing and Textiles Education is the acute shortage of

suitable textbooks. This is not peculiar to Clothing and Textiles Education. The problem cuts across all other courses in vocational education at all levels.

One of the effects of the inherent constraints in vocational education in Nigeria is the difficult positions in which some vocational institutions have found themselves as regards the accreditation of courses. For instance, some Colleges of Education are finding it difficult to get some of their vocational courses accredited by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). In extreme cases, the NCCE ordered that such courses be phased out. The same is true of the Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology. These institutions are also not having it easy with the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) which oversees the accreditation of technical courses besides other functions. Other constraints to Vocational Education in Akwa Ibom Include; low students enrolment for the programme in tertiary institutions, Poor teaching/Learning environment, shortage of qualified teachers, low societal estimation of the programme, poor retraining policy and inadequate motivation of teachers. It is believed that if these challenges are removed or reduced to the barest minimum, Vocational and Technical education would be utilized to curb the current unemployment of our youth graduates.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Descriptive survey design is used for the study. This design fits this study, because it focuses on the investigation of the relevance of vocational education to job opportunities of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom state.

Population of the Study

The population of the study has to do with all the youth graduates of Vocational and Technical Education in Akwa Ibom State which are estimated at 3000

Sampling and Sampling Technique

The respondent for the study consist of 300 youth graduates in the study area. This represents 10% of the population. The sample was obtained through the stratified random sampling technique from the three Senatorial Districts of Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo), North South (Eket) and North West (Ikot Ekpene) respectively.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed an instrument tagged: “Relevance of Vocational Education to Employment Opportunities of Youth Graduates Questionnaire (RVEEOYGG)”.

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was face and content validated by two experts in test, measurement and evaluation all from the University of Uyo, Uyo. They assessed the validity of the items to ensure that it measures what it purports to measure. All the corrections and comments were incorporated into the final copy of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot test was conducted on 20 respondents who were not part of the main study but possess the character of the population. The reliability co-efficient was 0.87 showing that the instrument is reliable.

Method of Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics is used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analyses and Regression Analyses are used in testing the null hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Answering the research questions and Test of hypothesis

Research question one and hypothesis one are treated together in table 1 to find out the magnitude or degree of relationship between vocational education and self employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 1

How related is vocational education with self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 1:
PPMC Analysis of the Relationship between Vocational Education and Self Employment of Youth Graduates in Akwa Ibom State**

Variables	N	$\sum X^1$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum XY$	R_{Cal}	Remark
		$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$			
Vocational Education		4774	76882			
	300			80744	0.92*	Very High Relationship
Self Employment of youth graduates		5026	84954			

***Significance at .05 level; Critical Value of 0.139, and df of 298**

Table 1 presents the results of the analyses of the relationship between vocational education and self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State. From the table, it is observed that the computed r-value is 0.92 which portrays a very high relationship between the two variables. Comparing the computed r-value of (0.92) with the critical r-value of (0.139) we found the result significant due to the fact that the former r is greater than the later r at .05 significant level and degree of freedom of 298. The result therefore means that vocational education is significantly related with self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2

How related is vocational education with paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 2:
PPMC Analysis of the Relationship between Vocational Education and Paid Employment of Youth Graduates in Akwa Ibom State.**

Variables	N	$\sum X^1$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	R_{Cal}	Remark
Vocational Education		4774	76882			
	300			85518	0.86*	Very High Relationship
Paid Employment of youth		5326	95306			

***Significance at .05 level; Critical Value of 0.139, and df of 298**

Table 2 presents the results of the analyses of the relationship between vocational education and paid employment of youth graduate in Akwa Ibom State. From the table, it was observed that the computed r-value is 0.86 which portrays a very high relationship between the two variables. Comparing the computed r of 0.86 with the critical r-value of (0.139), we found the result significant due to the fact that the former r is greater than the later r at .05 significant level and degree of freedom of 298. The result therefore means that vocational education is significantly related with paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question Three

What are the prevailing Constraints against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State. The research question sought to find out the prevailing constraints against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 3
Percentage analysis of the prevailing constraints against Effective Vocational Education in Akwa Ibom State.**

Prevailing constraints against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State	Freq	%	Ranking
Inadequate funding	46	15.33**	1 st
Low Student Enrolment	39	13	3 rd
Poor teaching/learning Environment	38	12.67	4 th
Shortage of qualified teachers	34	11.33	6 th
Poor retraining policy	35	11.67	5 th
Inadequate Staff Motivation	32	10.67*	7 th
Low Societal Estimation of VIE	41	13.67	2 nd

Lack of Accrediting of Courses	35	11.67	5 th
Total	300	100%	

Sources: Field Survey

**** Highest Percentage frequency**

*** Lowest Percentage frequency**

The above table 3 presents the percentage analysis of the prevailing constraints against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest prevailing constraint against effective vocational education in Akwa Ibom State was identified as “inadequate funding” (15.33%) while inadequate staff motivation (10.67%) was the least prevailing factor against effective vocational education.

Test of Null Hypothesis

Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between vocational education and self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.

TABLE 4:

Regression Analysis of the Relationship of Vocational Education on Self-Employment of Youth Graduate in Akwa Ibom State.

Model	Sum of Squares	d	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	613.56	1	613.56	821.37	.000b
Residual	222.61	298	0.75		
Total	836.17	299			

The above table presents the calculated F-value as (821.37) and the P-value as (000). Being that the P-value (000) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant influence of vocational education on self-employment of youth graduate in Akwa Ibom State.

The result therefore was in agreement with the research findings of Abdulahi (2004) who observed that vocational education is that aspect of education that involves the acquisition of skills, techniques and application of the knowledge of the science for the improvement of man’s surrounding. The result also agrees with the findings of (Shane, 2003) who highlighted that vocational education help to create wealth and reduce unemployment amongst graduates and that it produces creativity, innovation, and increases the total production of a country. However, the result did not agree with the findings of Shane (2003) who noticed that vocational education if well implemented builds practical and applied skills in an individual which are essential for national development in aspects of commerce, agriculture, industrial, economic and socio-economic development. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between vocational education and paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State.

**TABLE 5:
Regression Analysis of the Relationship between Vocational Education on Paid Employment of Youth Graduate in Akwa Ibom State.**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	639.50	1	639.50	1697.84	.000b
Residual	112.24	298	0.38		
Total	751.75	299			

The above table presents the calculated F-value as (1697.84) and the P-value as (000). Being that the P-value (000) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant influence of vocational education on paid employment of youth graduate in Akwa Ibom State.

The result also agrees with the findings of URT (1995) that stated that the aims and objectives of the Educational and Training Policy is to produce trained and skilled youth and adults who will provide the needed labour for improved performance in industry and other economic and social service sectors, to provide young and adults persons with opportunities to acquire skills in production, service, entrepreneurship and business management and to enable the productive and service sectors to train and develop their human resources. However, the result did not agree with the findings of Ndunguru (2002) cited by Nzali (2007) who comments that vocational educational and training policies promote equitable access to vocational training regardless of geographical locations physical disabilities and sex, so even the vulnerable groups are able to contribute toward poverty reduction and its eradication. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research work, it was concluded that there is significant relationship between vocational education and self-employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State. Also it is factual that vocational education has significant relationship with paid employment of youth graduates in Akwa Ibom State. Finally, there are various factors hindering hitch-free vocational education in Nigeria, including inadequate funding, low student enrolment, poor teaching/learning environment, shortage of qualified teachers, poor retraining policy, inadequate staff motivation, low societal estimation of VIE and lack of accrediting of courses.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. That Nigerian government should invest enough money on vocational educational education to boast the programme in schools and colleges.
2. There is great need for introduction of entrepreneurship courses and establishment of entrepreneurship departments in various universities and other tertiary institutions in the country in order to train aspiring entrepreneurs.

3. Government and other educational funding organizations should make vocational education a top priority when funding educational researches.
4. Vocational and technical education should be introduced and implemented in all forms of youth empowerment programmes, graduate internship and youth employment training schemes.

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