

Perceptions on Vocational Education as a Tool for Addressing Unemployment for Self-Reliance in Nigeria

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Abstract

This research examined perceptions on vocational education as a tool for addressing unemployment for self-reliance in Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. Survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised of all the 476 lecturers in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 46.5% resulting to 221 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a modified four point likert scale questionnaire titled: Vocational Training and Self-Reliance Questionnaire (VTSRQ). The reliability estimates obtained using Cronbach alpha reliability were 0.76 to 0.89. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to answer research questions. Findings revealed that vocational training has the capability of equipping students and graduates with skills, including carpentry, shoe making skills among others, to reduce unemployment. Findings also indicate the challenges of vocational skill acquisition to include inadequate funding, poor interest by students and graduates, lack of sponsorship, among others. It was recommended that students and graduates should be encouraged and sponsored to partake in vocational training so as to create jobs for themselves and to be self-reliant.

Keywords: vocational, education, training, unemployment, self-reliance

Introduction

The rate of unemployment facing the Nigerian society has become very unprecedented and modalities to curb its excessive escalation is nowhere in sight coupled with the thousands of graduates being produced by higher institutions of learning in the country irrespective of government unpreparedness to absorb this products into the various

sectors of the Nigerian economy is a pointer to the fact that there is a disastrous problem that needs immediate attention to save the nation from its consequences if left unaddressed. Observations and literature have shown that most products of the Nigerian higher institutions of learning are without skills, aside academic certification of which today hardly gets one employed in the highly politicized and retrogressive economic situation of the country. To save the future of the Nigerian youths, there is an urgent need for vocational training, or education as the case may be, so as to equip them with requisite skills capable of making them job creators, getting them employed by the private sector; and by implication reducing the rate of unemployment and culminating into useful living, self-reliance and equally contributing to national growth and development.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in her education policy document captures the aims of technical and vocational education to its recipients as manpower development strategy that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge for useful living within the society. Skill acquisition in Nigerian educational system could be through technical and vocational education. This is done through teaching, training, retraining, practical experience and on-the-job training (Uzoka & Bayode, 2010).

Vocation training is a form of education administered within formal and non-formal school set up to equip individuals with requisite knowledge and skills capable of improving their livelihood through the exhibition of creative and pragmatic prowess. Ngure (2013) stated that vocational education is designed to train skilled and entrepreneurial workforce that are needed to create wealth and reduce the menace of poverty and unemployment. According to Obidile (2014), vocational and technical education is a training programme which equips its recipients with the required skills needed within or for a particular job for self-reliance. Oladejo (2019) defined vocational education as the type of training that provides its recipient with the competencies necessary to start and succeed in an occupation. Similarly, Edokpolor and Owenvbiugie (2017) posit that vocational education is a programme for the acquisition of skills needed in the world of work to raise prospects for productive work, personal empowerment and socio-economic development, for sustainable livelihood in the speedily changing work climates.

From the foregoing lines of thoughts, it becomes imperative to state here that vocational training is a viable economic tool capable of addressing unemployment challenge in Nigeria. Skill acquisition in vocational education requires mastery of practical skills and knowledge in any vocational area of endeavour.

Daso (2013) in Ngure (2013) stated that the issue of youth unemployment appears to be shooting up the sky because many of them lack “employable skills” that are often required by employers of labour. The nation’s poverty level was put at 70% and more than 91 million Nigerians are said to live on less than one dollar a day. This is very pathetic and must be blamed on the economic policies. Every aspect of Nigerian economy has been affected by lack of skilled and trained technicians that will move the country forward. In the area of textiles, the country needs not only the raw materials but the skilled technicians too that will transform the raw materials into finished product.

The role of vocational training in creating employment opportunities should not be treated with levity as it has the potential to propel job creation, thus minimizing unemployment and poverty among Nigerian youths. Given credence to this, Tiamiyu and Babalola (2013) asserted that vocational education could serve as one of the ways to address the problem of unemployment; that vocational education was introduced in Nigeria to impart skills and entrepreneurial spirit needed to create wealth and enhance the economic development of the nation. Oladejo (2019) opined that vocational education has great prospects for tackling poverty, enhancing employability through skill acquisition and boosting sustainable development. Rufai (2013) opined that technical and vocational education training is an aspect of education that exposes students to the acquisition of demonstrable skills that could further be transferred into their economic benefit as well as sustainable livelihood. The role of vocational education in equipping individuals with requisite skills that could enable them to effectively participate in social, economic and technological innovation processes cannot be neglected. To this end, it is crystal clear that vocational education and training is one of the best ways to engage Nigerians in legal and meaningful profit oriented activities to eradicate poverty, and bring about self-reliance among youths.

Adagba, Ugwu and Eme (2012) also noted that unemployment and poverty among Nigerian youths are major causes of social vices. Similarly, Adebayo (2013) agreed that youth’s unemployment and its attendant rising wave of crime are part of the major social problems affecting the growth and development of Nigeria. It is therefore important that the productive capabilities of these youths should be enhanced through vocational training as the effectiveness of hands on training cannot be overemphasized.

Ogah, Uko and Oshi (2013) evaluated entrepreneurship involvement among undergraduate students of Cross River State University of Technology, Ogoja Campus. Data was obtained through the administration of a structured questionnaire to undergraduate students with personal business irrespective of the scale. Result

indicated that family knowledge and natural ability did not determine students' entrepreneurship involvement but the need for money, desire to become self-dependence and the desire to be employers of labour. The study identified university entrepreneurship programme and parental occupation as the main sources of entrepreneurship awareness accruable to university students. Based on the result obtained, they suggested that universities in Nigeria should add more values to their graduate by incorporating into their curriculum elements that enhance the development of entrepreneurial attitudes and self-efficiency.

Statement of the problem

The issue of unemployment in Nigeria has been and is still a national burden on every state of the federation, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged the global economy of which Nigeria and Cross River State in particular are not exception. Although several efforts such as agro-industrialization drive by the current administration in Cross River State, N-power programme, You-win, Sure-P and a host of others have been made by current and past administration to curtail the escalation of unemployment, all these were to no avail and if this problem is left unaddressed, the effects of unemployment would become the order of the day. This ranges from banditry, armed robbery, kidnaping for ransom and the recent "End SARS" protest which are all indicators of what is to come if the government does not look into innovative means of getting the youths engaged in creative and income yielding ventures for self-reliance. To this end, there is an urgent need to save Nigeria and Cross River State in particular from the impending danger of unemployment.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine vocational training as a tool for addressing unemployment for self-reliance.

Research questions

1. What are the ways in which vocational training can help to reduce unemployment?
2. What are the challenges of vocational training acquisition?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of all the 476 lecturers in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 46.5% which resulted to two hundred and twenty-one (221) lecturers being sampled. Self-developed sixteen (16) item instrument titled "Vocational Training for Self-Reliance Questionnaire" (VTSRQ) was used to collect data. The instrument consisted of two

parts; part A consisted of 8 items eliciting information on ways vocational training can help address unemployment for self-reliance while part B contained 8 items on the challenges facing the acquisition of vocational training; making a total of 16 items. The draft instrument was presented to experts in the fields of Educational Management, and Educational Measurement and Evaluation, University of Calabar, for validation. Respondents were required to respond to the instrument using modified four point likert scale SA-Strongly Agree (4), A-Agree (3), D- Disagree (2), SD-Strongly Disagree (1). In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was conducted using 50 lecturers who were not part of the sample. Cronbach alpha reliability estimate of the instrument was done to determine the internal consistency of the items of the instrument. The result of the reliability estimate of the instrument ranged from 0.76 and 0.89 indicating that the instrument was reliable in achieving the purpose of the study. Descriptive statistics such as, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions

Presentation of results

Research question 1: What are the ways vocational training can address unemployment?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on ways vocational training can address unemployment

| S/N | Items | \bar{x} | SD | Decisions |
|-----|--|-----------|------|-----------|
| 1. | Train students on carpentry skills | 3.15 | 1.20 | Agree |
| 2. | Train students on shoe making skills | 2.82 | 1.20 | Agree |
| 3. | Equip students with skills to promote economic self-reliance | 3.03 | 1.36 | Agree |
| 4. | Equip students with plumbing skills for self-reliance | 2.69 | 1.10 | Agree |
| 5. | Train students for wealth creation | 2.95 | 0.85 | Agree |
| 6. | Equip students with tailoring skills | 2.72 | 0.97 | Agree |
| 7. | Reduces over dependence on government | 2.75 | 1.23 | Agree |
| 8. | Train students for leadership | 2.45 | 1.36 | Disagree |

Findings in table 1 shows that respondents accepted items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 as ways vocational training can address unemployment as their mean scores were above the criterion mean of 2.50, but rejected item 8 as a way vocational training can address unemployment.

Research question 2: What are the challenges of vocational training skills acquisition?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on challenges of vocational training skill acquisition

| S/N | Items | \bar{x} | SD | Decisions |
|-----|--|-----------|------|-----------|
| 1. | Inadequate funding | 2.82 | 1.19 | Agree |
| 2. | Poor interest by graduates | 2.72 | 0.20 | Agree |
| 3. | Lack of sponsorship | 2.40 | 0.66 | Disagree |
| 4. | Preference for white collar job | 3.02 | 1.36 | Agree |
| 5. | Lack of vocational training equipment | 2.55 | 0.98 | Agree |
| 6. | Too much emphasis on paper qualification | 2.81 | 1.32 | Agree |
| 7. | Cost of enrollment for vocational training | 2.82 | 1.19 | Agree |
| 8. | Lack of vocational training infrastructure | 2.55 | 0.98 | Agree |

Results in table 2 show that respondents agreed to items 1,2,4,5,6,7 and 8 therein as challenges of acquisition of vocational training but disagreed on items 3 as not constituting a challenge to acquisition of vocational training as it falls below the criterion mean of 2.50.

Discussion of the findings

The study revealed that vocational training addresses unemployment. This finding corroborates Tihamiyu and Babalola (2013) who asserted that vocational education could serve as one of the ways to address the problem of unemployment; that vocational education was introduced in Nigeria to impart skills and entrepreneurial spirit needed to create wealth and enhance the economic development of the nation. It is also in accord with Oladejo (2019) who opined that vocational education has great prospects for tackling poverty, enhancing employability through skill acquisition and boosting sustainable development. The role of vocational education in equipping individuals with requisite skills that could enable them to effectively participate in social, economic and technology innovation processes cannot be neglected. To this

end, it is crystal clear that vocational education and training is one of the best ways to engage many Nigerians in legal and meaningful profit oriented activities to eradicate poverty, and bring about self-reliance, especially among youths.

On research question two, the study established that inadequate funding, lack of interest by graduates, lack of infrastructure, poor power supply among others constitute some of the challenges of vocational training skill acquisition. This finding shares similitude with that of Oseni, Ehikioya and Ali-Momoh (2011). These researchers pointed out that there are inadequate infrastructure/facilities like good road and power. There are challenges of electricity in Nigeria and the problem is still the same till date. The issue of technology education has been a major problem of the country. The institutions in Nigeria lack the technical know-how and most of the science oriented courses are taught theoretically and the practical aspect of the courses are not given thorough consideration.

Conclusion

Vocational training can be seen as a tool for bringing out creativity thus yielding pecuniary and non-pecuniary gains. The findings of the study showed that vocational training is a tool for addressing unemployment and thus bringing about self-reliance in that it equips individuals with creative skills thus resulting in gainful employment and job creation for the betterment of self and the nation at large, and culminating in poverty reduction.

Recommendations

- i. The government and the private sector should de-emphasize paper qualifications so as to encourage the teeming populace to engage and appreciate vocational training. Through this means, government's entrepreneurial development programme will have impact on the teeming unemployed populace.
- ii. Also the government and the private sector should collaborate and provide adequate infrastructural facilities like electricity supply and equipment to facilitate the acquisition of vocational skills to solve the problems of employment in Cross River state and Nigeria.

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