

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was on vocational education as a tool for reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is growing astronomically for the past two decades with increased social malaise among youths. In the society, many youths today have made thuggery, arm robbery, kidnapping and other social vices as means of livelihood just to survive the economic hardship in the country. In order to reduce the level of unemployment among youths, there is need for youths to acquire vocational skills which will enable them to be gainfully employed, develops skills, have, economic benefits, become entrepreneurs and self-reliant.

Keywords: vocational education, and youth unemployment

Introduction

The social and economic problem of Nigeria started in 1960 on the attainment of independence. Unemployment among youths became very pervasive. In an effort to develop Nigeria and tackle the issues of unemployment, numerous commissions were set up to analyze the educational and manpower prerequisites in various divisions of the economy. Such reports were the Ashby commission titled "Investment in Education" in 1960 and Cottiers/Caunce report on the development of technical and commercial education below professional level between 1961- 1976. The Ashby commission report suggested measures which would help to establish the foundation upon which Nigeria could build a balanced system of vocational/technical education. The important aspect of the report was the recognition of the fact that there was need to develop and increase vocational and technical education in Nigeria. And this informed the establishment of National Directorate of Employment (NDE), by Decree No, 24 of 1989, to train young people on vocational education and skill acquisition, with the aim to reduce unemployment (Makinde, 2021). vocational education is that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. Vocational and technical education is directed towards the preparation for occupational life, since the recipients are equipped to face the challenges of the world of work for national development. In a related way, Kolmer (2021) attested that the objective of vocational education and training is to influence the fundamental practical skills, potential, work propensities, attitudes and different qualities to the beneficiaries. This is aimed at preparing the students for self-reliance through self-employment. In confirmation of this assertion, Makinde (2021) noticed that vocational education furnishes the beneficiaries with all the important work qualities, pragmatic skills and abilities, knowledge and attitude to empower them live independently after graduation. In most developed nations of the world, vocational education and training are given an intense consideration and are viewed as an important investment. This is the reason many youths through vocational training have acquired the right skills that will enable them secure employment which at the long run benefit them and the society.

Vocational education and training promotes self-reliance among the students on graduation. Unfortunately, after numerous years of independence, Nigeria despite everything is still practicing the pre-independent type of education, which just prepares graduates to look for civil service and other related employments, in spite of the establishment of specialized institutions such as universities of technology and polytechnics which are yet to produce the required result to address these issues. In Nigeria, the interest of prospective graduates is on white collar jobs but not necessarily to acquire skills that will lead to self-reliance after graduation. Agi (2018) noticed that, governments of different administrations, have endeavored to improve educational delivery particularly as it identifies with vocational and technical education. This is because of the recognition of the role which vocational education would play in the development of the country, by a way of reducing unemployment and youth restiveness in Nigeria. Hence, this paper seeks to evaluate the role of vocational education in reducing unemployment in Nigeria.

Concept of Vocational Education

Vocational education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations (Okwelle, 2018). In the same vein, Emma (2018) observes that vocational education is education designed to prepare individuals for employment as semiskilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals in recognized occupations or to prepare individuals for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes. Kolmer (2021) opined that "vocational education is designed to prepare skilled workers for industries, agriculture, and commerce which is usually provided at the upper secondary level". In Nigeria, the white paper on National Policy on Education NPE (FME, 1981) uses the term technical to embrace vocational education and defines it as "that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. Vocational Education is that aspect of education that provides an individual with knowledge, skills and attitudes required to enter into the world of work and progress in a given occupation. It involves the acquisition of skills and competencies that can help an individual function productively in industries and commercial occupation

The philosophical concept of vocational education, according to Macquerrey (2019), maintains that the occupational choice of an individual should be based on orientation (interest, ability and aptitude) of the individual. That is, each individual should have the opportunities for employment in the occupation and that resources for education must be provided to develop all human resources needed in national economic development. For the purpose of this research, vocational education will be seen as that aspect of education that provides and prepares the youth with the prerequisite practical skills and attitude necessary to enter into the world of work and excel in any occupation and become self-reliant. This is because Nigeria as a developing nation requires young men and women with entrepreneurial spirit to engage into small and medium scale industries that are emerging here and there in the country. Therefore, vocational education possesses such inherent ability to equip youths with the prerequisite skills and competencies that can help individuals function productively in industries, agriculture and commerce.

Aim of Vocational Education in Nigeria

The aims of Vocational Education as enumerated by National Board for Technical Education (NBTE, 1987) amongst others include:

- Provision of trained manpower in engineering, technology, and commerce at professional level.
- Provision of qualified and well-equipped personnel to apply scientific knowledge to improve and solve the environmental problems for use and convenience of man.
- Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for Agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development
- Provision of training and imparting necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, technicians, technologists, engineers and other skilled personnel who would be self-reliant and enterprising.

The Importance of Vocational Education for Youth employment

Vocational courses are fields of work in which employees apply hands-on trade school experience in a professional setting. Vocational training is a viable option to four-year university degree, which can be costly

and prohibitive to entering the workforce quickly with employable skills. According to Robbin, (2021), vocational jobs can also serve as stepping stones to advance education or training opportunities. Vocational education is relevant for career development in the following ways:

1. Skill Development

Vocational learning opportunities play a critical role in skill development. The importance of vocational development can largely be summed up as the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. In non-vocational studies, students often spend hours of their time exploring a variety of different subjects. Their class time tends to be only a few hours per week, as they will spend many hours in the library and on computers conducting research and writing papers that help them continue to build their theoretical knowledge in a variety of fields. The skills for work and vocational pathways are significantly limited for these students, as their theoretical knowledge does not have the work experience that helps them transit a classroom study topic into their actual profession. This can sometimes cause challenges when the students graduate and move into the working world. However, for students in a vocational education and training setting, this situation gets corrected. Students spend hours in the practical workshops each week learning hands-on practical skills related to their chosen field. This practical experience enhances their skill development and makes them employable and valuable employees.

2. Build Employee as an Asset to Organizations

Acquisition of vocational skills makes individuals become an asset to employers who are looking for new employees to join their organization. In today's work place employers are looking for employees with practical skills to do the job well and can adapt quickly to the work environment. Being an asset to an organization reduces huge amount of money that this organization would have deployed on new employees for on-the- job training.

3. Vocational skills help with bridging the skills gap between work and education.

Vocational skill closes the gap or reduces the time people spend without employment after graduation. Individuals with vocational education skill have specifically worked in different situations throughout their education under the supervision of their trainers. This helps them gain immediate employment.

4. Easy Employment

Many graduates struggle to find employment immediately following graduation. But with vocational skills, finding job opportunities is a bit easier and stress-free. According to Miller, (2021) , people with vocational skills have the experience to list on their resume and employers know they have a significant portion of the training they need. Often, they even have started building a professional network through their job placements and internships they could potentially leverage. This helps to open doors to new possibilities. Throughout the studies, students gain hands-on opportunities through internships and practical learning opportunities. Completing real work projects, as they do in a variety of classes, helps students build employable resumes before they even graduate. This help in gaining immediate employment opportunity after graduation.

5. Economic benefits

Students who go through vocation-based schools also have the chance to receive a variety of different economic benefits from their education. Most importantly, they often do not have to spend as much on their schooling while still receiving an education that prepares them exceptionally well for their field. Vocational schools are often cheaper in tuition as it is a low-cost education. Additionally, students who graduate from specialized programs like this can enter their career path faster and start making money at the early stage of life. Vocational graduates can decide to set up their own businesses and trade and become an entrepreneur. It is an "earn as you learn" that many vocational training paths offer. Here students have the ability to earn some money and program, hence reduces the financial impact of studies through paid internships as part of some curricula.

Vocational Courses and their Career Prospects for Youths

Few vocational courses and their career prospects include:

Gym/Physical Education: The world is becoming more and more health conscious and a trend of people today spend less on fast food chains and more on gyms. No wonder, the demand for a good fitness coach is

on the rise among the youth. According to Khan, (2016), physical education which is the key to the holistic development of a kid is now a course that students can further explore and make a career in it with the help of vocational courses in the field of physical fitness.

Career prospects: The career options are health club instructor, gyms coach, sports coaching and sport commentator.

Beauty Course: If food doesn't go out of style, beauty is another sector which shows no sign of slowing down its growth (Adreana, 2020). With people becoming more and more conscious of their hair and the way they look, this industry has seen a spike like never before in the recent years. There is no age bar to start a career in this sector, as you might not want to work directly, but you might to start your own beauty cosmetic line.

Career prospects: cosmetology: hair styling, aesthetics, manicure, and pedicure and estheticians.

Information Technology: the study and use of computer and telecommunication devices for storing, retrieving and sending information is on increase in this twenty first century. Technology helps the business world in more than ways people can imagine such as in faster communication in data exchange, in electronic data storage, and also in business secrets and records protection.

Career prospects: Vocational courses are available in different fields including software development, application management, hardware/desktop support, network architecture, Chief Information Officer and System administrator are the key job roles to aim for with a vocational course in this sector/field.

Nursing and Healthcare: According to the U.S Department of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook, the demand for healthcare workers is anticipated to grow at an above-average pace of more than 25 percent through 2026. A fast-growing field with high demand, a variety of nursing vocational opportunities can be learned in a vocational education setting.

Career prospects: Nursing aides, Certified nursing assistants, Licensed practical nurses, Medical technicians, Surgical prep technicians, Dental hygienists, Dental assistants, Phlebotomy, Sonography, Pharmacy technician, Mammography, Laboratory technician, Veterinary assistant and Veterinary technician.

Emergency Services: Emergency service professionals are often vocationally trained. Some careers prospects in this field include: Fire fighters, Paramedics, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and first AIDS instructors.

Automotive Industry: Those with a passion for working on cars can find a variety of vocational career paths in the automotive industry.

Career prospects: General automotive and diesel mechanic.

Summary and Conclusion

From the study above, it is clear that vocational education is a strong tool for engaging the teeming youth in developing country like Nigeria with visionless leaders to the plight of the teeming youth. Vocational education helps students acquire on the hand employable skills after graduation or stating up their own business in their chosen career without having to wait for government jobs.

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