

Vocational Education in Nigeria: A Recapitulation of the Prospects and Challenges for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Over the years, vocational education has been a vital part of man and has been demonstrated to be a means for sustainable economic growth and development. It has been used in many societies of the world to provide skills for work. This study employed the qualitative research method using an interview guide and participant observation to identify how vocational training impacts the necessary practical proficiencies for the growth of a nation's formal and informal sectors. This paper attempts to examine the prospects of vocational training by highlighting the likely skills and employment opportunities in the sector. It also discussed the challenges facing vocational education in Nigeria. The study identifies skills acquisition as a means for sustainable development. It recommended among others that vocational training should focus more on the aspects of skill acquisition and feasible business opportunities for economic empowerment.

Keywords: *Vocation, Education, Visual-Arts, Agricultural-Science, Prospects and Challenges.*

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Background to the Study

Nigeria is a country with vast human and material resources. It is also a nation where paper qualifications and white-collar jobs are highly valued. The craze for degrees and paper qualifications used for white-collar jobs has resulted in the neglect of the skills and capabilities of the individual, thereby causing economic, social and psychological issues. The issues arise from the fact that the majority of people are unemployed and a large percentage of the populace still live below the poverty line. For this reason, there has been a high incidence of societal vices like prostitution, rapes, cyber frauds, assassinations, kidnappings, car snatchings, armed robberies, political thuggery, human trafficking, and ritual killings, among others (Ebodili and Izogie, 2013). The ongoing rise in the rate of societal ills has also led to the call for mass development of the entrepreneurial environment throughout Nigeria. This involves the implementation of a robust educational system that will equip the teeming youths and adults with saleable skills, which can enable them, to become gainfully employed or self-sustained. Such a system should provide for training geared toward the production of potential entrepreneurs that will inevitably become employers of labour thereby reducing some of the many challenges confronting the nation. However, Nigeria's prosperous future is a function of producing youths who are prepared and equipped to take their place in tomorrow's society (Ebodili and Izogie, 2013).

Paper qualification or a university degree is a means but not an end to a wealthy life. Acquisition of vocational skills does not need a degree to become a success, rather, the creative ingenuity and entrepreneurial ability of the trainee. Nigerians are creative but the prevailing system has not favoured vocational training to thrive among the people. The system is slowly killing the spirits of skill acquisition to the extent that people no longer show interest in vocational training. Vocational skills could be used in shaping many of the observable challenges of the world. It could also be used in influencing the way people interact, learn and live. Acquisition of the necessary vocational skills will help people to earn a sustainable income. Despite the abundant prospects in the vocational sector, people still live below the poverty line. For these reasons, if properly implemented, vocational training could produce entrepreneurs that may probably become successful farmers, tradesmen, craftsmen, draftsmen, and artisans among others. These prospects in no small measure will help to abate the high incident ratio of Nigeria's unemployment. Hence this study is hinged on identifying the prospects and challenges of vocational training for sustainable growth and development.

Vocational Training and Skill Acquisition

In addition to general education, vocational training is a comprehensive educational process, which involves the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills relating to occupations in various sectors of economic life (UNESCO, 2003). It also involves knowledge, attitude and skill acquisition by the learner, in a formal way that is both theoretical and practical, in the classroom, workshop and field settings (Ezekiel and Ndimbita, 2009). In other words, vocational education covers the process of creating skilled manpower for solutions and improvements to man's environmental challenges (Upongson, 2000). This type of education is intended to produce a classification of workers. Hence, Dike (2009) sees vocational training as a planned course and learning experience that begins with the exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills and enables the triumph of high academic standards, leadership, and preparation for industry-defined work.

The vocational education programmes as identified by the NCCE minimum standard (2008) include but are not limited to Agricultural Science Education, Home Economics Education, Fine and Applied Arts Education, Business Education, Music Education, Wood, Metal, Electrical and Electronics Works. These subject areas are intended to teach the individual the necessary skills, and the right attitude and inculcate the habit or spirit of self-reliance. The skills in these vocational areas will empower and re-engineer wealth creation and contain the potency to catapult employment opportunities in the life of the trainee, group and society. Hence, vocational education is a reliable tool for reshaping the weak and upcoming economy (Apagu and Andural, 2010).

Among other vocational educational programmes being implemented in Nigeria's educational system, fine and applied arts (visual art), and agricultural science possess the cogent ingredients capable of catapulting any economy fruitfully. The creation of objects or production of products that could be seen, touched or eaten is the primary assignment that is germane to visual arts, and agricultural trade. For a lasting and meaningful change to emerge, education in these fields is undoubtedly an instrument of excellence for effecting national development in Nigeria. The acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental and physical abilities, and competency are tools for the individual to live and contribute to the growth of the society (Ebodili and Izogie, 2013).

Prospects of Vocational Education

Vocational education has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. It is a comprehensive term referring to the aspects of the training process involving general education, in addition to the study of vocational and acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, and knowledge, relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Ebodili and Izogie, 2013). It is the aspect of education that handles vocational guidance and counselling, preparing one for entry into an occupation, and takes care of the upgrading of skills or potential as well as retraining for paid or unpaid employment. It deals with the preparation of persons for entry into recognized occupations and is offered at secondary school and higher levels of education. In Nigeria, vocational education is acquired through informal or apprenticeship means or formal means via primary, secondary and tertiary education. Vocational training should satisfy the needs of society to fill required positions, necessary for the efficient operation of the economic system as well as the needs of individuals to find personally satisfying positions in the occupational structure (MaAji, 2010). More so, in any developmental efforts, vocational education has a role to play by providing the much needed skilled manpower in various spheres of human endeavour, without which the engineers, scientists, inventors, administrators and managers of men and women will find it rather impossible to operate.

Vocational education is extremely important because of its prospects of harnessing a nation's workforce for sustainable development. The perceived benefits and prospects of vocational education, therefore, can be seen in the following ways:

1. It leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills needed for output thus, creating income and empowering people economically.
2. It is geared towards the provision of trained manpower necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic developments.
3. It provides training that impacts the necessary skills for craftsmen and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant
4. It provides the platform for individuals to have an understanding of the increasing complexity of the global business world.
5. It impacts positively on home productivity thereby helping to improve child welfare, especially in the rural areas.
6. It functions in the provision of qualified and well-equipped personnel to apply vocational knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems.
7. It educates people with relevant skills and competencies for occupations, careers and vocations in life aimed at self-sustenance, self-employability, self-reliance and self-actualization.

Visual Arts Education

Visual arts education is a tool for sustainable development and can be used in shaping the challenges of unemployment in the world. It is an enterprise that provides jobs and career opportunities for a creative economy (Ebodili and Izogie, 2013). Visual arts covers all that is creatively produced and visually expressed. It implies visual experience or idea formed with the skilful use of a medium and connotes the conscious use of skills in the production of aesthetic objects (Ebodili, 2020). Visual art is a mode of expression that uses imagination and the skill of the individual in the making of aesthetic forms, objects and environments. The creative process involves materials manipulation and visual mechanisms that are expressed with the human hands and encompass diverse media used unconsciously or consciously to achieve desired visual objectives. To analyse any art form or object requires some clarifications to establish its visual typology such as paintings, sculptures, printmaking, drawings, decorative arts, photography, crafts and installation arts among others. Hence, each of these arts embodies various aspects of skills and visual experience (Ebodili, 2020).

Several opportunities are available within us if conscious efforts are made in discovering them. In the visual arts, there are more opportunities today than there have been in history. The opportunities arise from social and technological change. Despite the opportunities that thrive in visual arts, unemployment still holds its pride of place. Everyone is gifted to conceive, create or produce goods and services to satisfy economic, social and societal needs and wants. Hence, the creative and entrepreneurial spirit in us must be activated by seeking out the visual arts business opportunities right before us. Opportunities in visual arts are a two-way field, involving the creative aspect and the business area. For those with creative ability, you can use saw-dust with gum to make gift items, use the discarded tyres to make shoes or create souvenirs, turn grass into a domestic foot mat, or turn waste cow horns into bracelets and bangles. Those with a business mind could be involved in the collection, marketing and sales of arts and crafts products. These are some of the many areas you could be empowered through visual arts.

Vocational Skill Acquisition in Visual Arts

Vocational skills acquisition prospects flourish in visual arts. Some of the important areas where visual arts can be in tremendous demand include arts and crafts, sales and production of textiles, graphics, sculpture, ceramics, painting, metal works and fabrication among other fields. A person can also engage as an art collector, curator, tradesman, artisan, craftsman, and draftsman. These areas are very lucrative art trades. It is worth reinstating that any unemployed or underemployed graduate that enrolled for any or combined areas of these trades shall be saved from poverty and unemployment. Education in these fields needs to be encouraged and supported (Ebodili, 2011).

In textile design, such opportunities are in the area of printmaking, batik, tie-dye, weaving, embroidery and fashion designing among others. Engaging in textile designing also involves creating designs for sales to the textile industries or fabric manufacturers and seamstress/tailors. The field of graphic designing has a wider area of specialisation and opportunities. Someone could be engaged in computer graphics, advertising, cartoon creation, photography, video services, book illustration, making of gift items, signwriting, printing and publishing. In the field of sculpture, entrepreneurial skills flourished in such areas as wood carving, bronze casting, blacksmithing, metal fabrication and joinery, and POP casting among other areas. Ceramists are also known as potters who could work in ceramic industries where household items and accessories like WC, flower vases, teacups, plates, and refractory objects are made. They could also set up their own business of sales of gift items on ceramic and pottery. The art of painting involves portrait painting, landscape painting, seascape painting, and life and still life paintings. The individual could also be engaged as an art collector, curator, tradesman, craftsman, draftsman and artisan. Entrepreneurship in these fields needs to be encouraged and supported.

The art and crafts sector creates jobs through the entrepreneurial skills and dexterity of individuals. Skill acquisition in crafts will help to teach people the necessary skills that will enable them to become entrepreneurs. Crafts or handicraft, for instance, involves the making of decorative or functional objects, wholly or partly by hands. Power tools may be combined with hands to execute crafts items. Nigerian crafts are now practised and taught in our schools. Craft wares like leatherwork, pottery, cloth weaving and dying have been contributing to the improvement of the Nigerian economy. Other craft works include; metal works, calabash decorations, beadworks, basketry, jewellery and cane crafts. The significance of craftworks and financial benefits derived therein has enabled it to command good respect over the years (Ebodili, 2011).

Agricultural Science Education

Before the beginning of the oil boom in the 70s, agriculture was the key sector on which the majority of the Nigerian population depend for their daily livelihood. Agriculture grew at an apt rate to offer enough food for the growing population. Akinwumi Adesina, president of the African Development Bank, stated that; "*Nigeria is known for nothing else than oil, and it is so sad because we never used to have oil – all we used to have was agriculture.*" He stated further that; "*Nigeria's oil has come with the sacrifice of its agriculture sector, hence Nigeria had a rising poverty situation*". We were having growth but without robust growth able to impact millions of

people because it is not connected to agriculture (Udemezue, 2019). The role of agriculture in fast-tracking economic growth and the development process of any nation should not be taken for granted, because it is the solid rock upon which countries depend for their economic growth and restructuring. Agriculture was the pillar sector of the Nigerian economy which accounted for more than 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and more than 75% of Nigeria's export earnings before Nigerians' independence in 1960. Agriculture accounted for 62.50% of the nation's GDP between 1960-1964 and thereafter its contribution to GDP started decreasing from 1970 to 1975 due to the oil boom in Nigeria (Udemezue, 2019).

Career Opportunities in Agricultural Science Training

There are a lot of employment opportunities in the agricultural sector. The prospects will make the youths to be self-employed, employers of labour and less reliant on white-collar jobs. Again, the prospect is capable of reducing the incidence of unemployment. Engagement in agriculture careers will help to boost food production and reduce hunger in our nation Nigeria. Most industries depend on agricultural products and by-products for their raw materials and this will reduce the importation of raw materials for production. Agriculture is a source of foreign exchange for Nigeria, when the produce from agriculture is exported to other countries it is used to generate more income. Careers in agriculture will help to control rural-urban migration and make life easier and cheaper in the rural areas. It could also help to improve economic development and contribute to national income; this can be done through the generation of taxes. Careers in agriculture will go a long way in the development of the rural areas through generated tax to provide social amenities in the villages. There are numerous opportunities in agricultural science education. Among the career prospects include;

1. Agricultural Engineer
2. Agricultural Economist
3. Farm manager
4. Soil scientist
5. Crop / plant scientist
6. Horticulturist
7. Agricultural salesperson
8. Food scientist
9. Water/Wastewater Engineer
10. Agricultural Extensionist / Agent
11. Animal scientist
12. Agricultural Educationist
13. Agricultural zoologist/ wildlife biologist
14. Crop protectionist
15. Agricultural processing officer
16. Agricultural environmentalist
17. Agricultural Researcher
18. Irrigation Engineer
19. Agricultural lawyer
20. Animal Geneticist
21. Animal physiologist

22. Animal Nutritionist/ Productions
23. Apiary worker/ Beekeeper
24. Fisheries
25. Forestry Ranger, forester
26. Agricultural inspector

The Challenges of Agricultural Careers in Nigeria

The challenges of the careers in the agricultural sector are so numerous but this study shall be discussing just a few.

Careers in agriculture are regarded as a job for the poor. For the youths to be fully engaged in agricultural jobs, the agriculture sector should not be neglected but should be given pride of place in Nigeria's national policy and development plan. There is also the need for our teaming youths to take up jobs or employment in agriculture. For instance, the youths see agriculture as back yard business and an odd job that is meant for only illiterates and rural people. The bulk of the food supply chain in the country lies in the hands of ageing and illiterate farmers whose number is on the decline. The youth and the educated are no longer attracted to or interested in farming and agriculture because they consider it to be an occupation for the underprivileged or less privileged. Before now, so many Nigerians see agriculture as the rearing of animals and cultivation of land but now agriculture is far more than the cultivation of land and the rearing of animals (Laurenz, 2017). Iwuanyawu *et al* (2014) noted also that the youths and graduates of modern Nigeria are more interested in working in the government ministries and parastatals than going into agriculture.

Use of crude farm implements: Nigerian farmers are still making use of the manual and local tools used by our forefathers such as cutlass, hoes, etc. instead of the modern equipment and machines that will make work faster, easier and make agricultural activities interesting. The use of these crude farm tools brings about setbacks to the country's food security and agricultural output, thereby making the youths not to be interested in agricultural careers.

Lack of scientific and technological know-how: the technological and scientific know-how is very low and under-developed in Nigeria. Most colleges, polytechnics and universities do not have functional laboratories for scientific experiments to teach and stimulate students' interest in agricultural jobs. Rather, the teaching of agricultural practicals is theorized and in the end, graduates see jobs in agriculture as difficult and uninteresting and abstract. The main cause of this includes low support from the government, poor government policies and lack of research.

Lack of social amenities: The lack of amenities such as water supply, electricity, access to good roads, schools, and even health care facilities in agricultural settlements is also a major factor. The areas where the youths will have enough land to practice their agricultural jobs and careers, are devoid of basic amenities thereby, making the youths contribute less to the economic advancement and progress of Nigeria through agricultural production. Youths now migrate to the cities where these amenities are available and join odd jobs like ritual killings,

and advance fee fraud (419 and yahoo plus). The food produced in the rural areas is not easily transported from the villages where there are produced to the market because of the bad roads in our local communities. For this reason, the government should construct better roads in these areas because a well-fed population is more productive and healthier (Laurenz, 2017).

Lack of storage and processing facilities: This is a major challenge because during the harvesting seasons there are surplus farm products that should be well processed and preserved for future use and continuous supply of farm products in the market, and as a result of this, the farm products are likely to be attacked by storage pest and diseases which reduces the quality and quantity of farm produce which leads to wastage and reduces the farmers' income because a lot of harvested farm products perishes as a result of lack of storage and processing equipment.

Climate change also referred to as global warming: affects agriculture in a variety of ways. Extreme climate conditions like flooding and extreme heat have led to soil degradation resulting in low crop yields and animal production. The failure in agricultural output depresses farmers which may lead to change in livelihood most especially in the rural areas (Walliams, 2007). A lot of our farming communities in Nigeria who depend solely on rainfall are now faced with severe droughts, erosions, landslides; deforestation and excessive massive loss of crops and animals. All these are some of the real impacts of global warming on Nigeria's agriculture and food production (Udemezue, 2019).

Land Tenure System In Nigeria: land ownership in Nigeria still belongs to the family unit, and thus the land in our local communities is fragmented into small portions and does not encourage large-scale/commercial farming which causes low productivity because farm machinery cannot be used in fragmented lands.

State of the nation's security: insecurity in Nigeria has not helped matters. Interested farmers and youth are now afraid to go to their farms which are usually located outside their homes because of the activists of the herdsmen that use their cattle to trample upon the crops thereby leading to the destruction of their farms.

Challenges of Vocational Training in Nigeria

Vocational education has several opportunities for actualising sustainable development goals. However, the sector in Nigeria is fraught with numerous problems. The challenges have hampered its ability to produce adequate and quality skilled manpower required to lift Nigeria from the unenviable state of technological irrelevance and economic depression. Among the challenges as enumerated by Ebodili and Izogie (2013), Uko-Aviomoh (2018) and Newman (2021) include but are not limited to; poor attitude towards vocational courses, low students turnout, poor/inadequate funding, inadequate human capital and skilled teachers, lack of strong institutions of governance, slow economic growth, long-lasting corruption and embezzlement of available funds, and lack of political will to transform development into sustainable long term practices. Others are ethnicity, unfavourable demographics, institutional fragmentations, exclusions, poverty, poor sectoral coordination, unsustainable supply and use of resources, and epileptic power supply.

Conclusion

Vocational education is the pivot for sustainable economic growth and development. From the observation of vocational training activities in Nigeria, it was clear that it is an income-generating venture with many entrepreneurial skills. The skills exist in the areas of agribusiness, the sales and production of textile, graphic art, sculpture, ceramic and painting products, as well as cane crafts, metals and fabrication works among others. However, the more people are empowered to establish their business, the more income they may generate.

Besides, capital has often been blamed for the inability to establish medium or small scale businesses by unsuccessful entrepreneurs with the case of their failed ventures. Experience has shown that most people fail due to a lack of mission, foresight, skill and strategic plans. Nigeria's government should therefore take the giant stride of seriously investing in vocational education and skill training as no nation can compete effectively in the emerging global marketplace with a poorly educated and unskilled workforce. Again, corporate and concerned bodies should invest in vocational skill acquisition programmes. A conscious engagement in vocational training programmes shall empower people with the relevant skills that could rejuvenate the economy of Nigeria.

The researchers, therefore, recommend that:

1. There should be training centres in strategic areas to train people in the acquisition of vocational skills and the training centres should be made more accessible to both the rural and urban populace.
2. Enlightenment campaign programmes should be promoted to educate the populace on the need for vocational education
3. The quality of instructions at all levels of education should be geared towards inculcating among others the competencies for self-reliance.
4. Government and other stakeholders should provide enough funding and resource materials to help boost vocational training programmes.
5. The teaching of right attitudes should be emphasized more in the training centres as it would encourage participants to develop some risk-taking behaviours and to perceive business opportunities in the environment.
6. Students should be taught vocational skills right from elementary to a higher school level to reduce the influx of graduates to non-existing white-collar jobs and over-reliance on paper qualifications. This is to encourage graduates to be self-sustained after school to reduce the incidence of unemployment.

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