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EFFECTIVENESS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on the effectiveness of vocational education on youth empowerment for community development. The highlights of the paper include vocational education, youth empowerment, types of empowerment, community development and challenges of vocational education in Nigeria. The paper concludes that vocational education remains an indispensable and effective tool for youth empowerment and community development. It inculcates in the youth new skills and competencies which empower them to function effectively in their chosen carrier and participate actively in community development activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment has been a current phenomenon on discourse in recent times. This is so because the youth are faced with so many heartbreaking and unprecedented challenges. In the world of over seven billion population and Nigeria with over 180 million, governments and policy makers are increasingly finding it difficult to grapple successfully with youth unemployment, and this has given birth conflict and social vices like assassination, armed robbery, kidnapping, militancy etc. Nigerian youths have been denied opportunities to develop in diverse realms of human endeavors. According to Ibrahim (2013), ineptitude, mediocrity and intellectual dearth have become the three hallmarks of the Nigerian youth. The results of a national survey jointly sponsored by the National University Commission (NUC) and the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) in Ibrahim (2013) clearly indicated that 61% of 20 organizations rated Nigerian science graduates poor in skills needed in the work environment such as literacy, oral communication, information technology, entrepreneurship, analytical problem-solving and decision making. Okafor (2011) viewed that sections 17 and 18 of the Nigerian

constitution emphasizes the provision of free and compulsory education by the government, in order to promote science and technology, eradicate illiteracy, etc, opportunity for securing adequate and suitable employment is not accessible due to unenforceability by the governments. Governments at all levels have continued to lay claim to several jobs created, yet the jobs are nowhere to be found by the massive unemployed youths. According to Otumba, Alao and Emeh in Ibrahim (2013), dwindling economy resulting from corrupt practices, lack of entrepreneurial skills, lack of job creations and lack of marketable and productive skills, have been identified as the root causes of unemployment. The crux of the matter remains that greater percentage of these youths are not employable because of their gross incompetence and lack of requisite skills. Governments, both at the federal, state and local levels, Multinational companies and Non-governmental organizations have embarked on many empowerment programmes. Among such programmes are the Federal Government Amnesty Programme established in 2009, by the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua which aimed at curbing the youth restiveness in the Niger Delta through various skill acquisition programmes and skill acquisition programmes organized by some state and local governments. Industrial Training Fund (2014) noted other vocational skill acquisition programmes initiated in the country to include.

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1. National poverty eradication programme (NAPEP) in 2001.
2. National economic empowerment and development strategy (SEEDS) in 2004.
3. State economic empowerment and development strategy (SEEDS) in 2004.
4. Local economic empowerment and development strategy (LEEDS) in 2004.
5. Family economic and advancement programme (FEAP) in 1997.
6. Poverty alleviation (PAP) in 2001.

Also Idoko (2014) noted that the Federal and State Government have initiated various vocational skills acquisition programme for the youth. Such programmes includes;

- The green revolution programme which was in response to the programme of operation feed the nation 1976.
- The school –to- land programme and skill acquisition programme of 1978.
- The youth employment and vocational skill development scheme of (NDE) in 1986.
- The small-scale industrial and graduate farmers programme of NDE in 1988.
- The national open apprenticeship scheme of 1988.

Despite these varieties of empowerment initiative, the situation still remains precarious with a wide gap between employers' needs and employees' skills. The commonly suggested way to come out of this situation is functional and sustainable empowerment programme, which is vocationally oriented. This form of education is viewed as that training which consists of the acquisition of knowledge, skills, competences, structural activities, through formal, on-the-job or off-the-job training and which provides the trainee the opportunity of employment in different industries and the capability of being self-employed. This form of education will help its clientele development appropriate skills and competencies. Some of these vocational education programmes that will bring empowerment to the youths according to Hassan and Oyebamiji (2012) include, hunting, weaving, home economics, agriculture, house building, carpentry, sculpture, gold smiting, blacksmithing, tie and dye. However, in modern times many other vocations have evolved due to the introduction of formal education, science and technology and information and communication technology. Some of them include food processing, medicine, commerce, agriculture, trading, automobile, furniture, tailoring, computer work, etc undergoing vocational education as a course in school or as a programme of adult education can engender empowerment to the youths. Many youths have interest and capability to establish business enterprises for vocational purposes; however, they lack this requisite knowledge (Hassan and Oyebamiji, 2012). Therefore, the vocational knowledge gained would be useful for such categories of people.

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Vocational Education: Fredrick in Hinojosa (2003), defined vocation is as place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. Based on this definition, vocation is that which an individual finds pleasure in doing in order to satisfy the needs of the community. It entails practicing that which defines person. Hinojosa (2003) further

explained that it is something very personal with high social implications. It is the fulfillment of a desire which becomes actualized when it connects with the actual needs in the society. According to Conyers (2004) vocation is about being raised from the dead, made alive to the reality that we do not merely exist, but are called forth to a divine purpose. Having a vocation is about bringing to reality those skills that have been acquired in order to fulfill a purpose. Belonging to a particular vocation puts an individual in a position to fill a gap and to transform from nothing to something. It is about professionalism and career identity. According to UNESCO in Nuttavuthusit (2017) vocational education refers to the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. It is also viewed by Fagerlined and Saha in NJuttavuthisit (2017) from the policy perspective, as being part of an intervention to increase people's productivity and increase the workforce capacity in designated areas of economic activity. Vocational skills acquisition as asserted by Amoo in Okolocha and Baba (2016) is the very essence of both individuals and society's economy. He stressed that, through the acquisition of skills, people can explore their environment and harness the resources within it, which could be beneficial to them and the society, since the wealth of any nation serves as a determinant of its development.

Vocational education is any kind of education which has the main purpose of preparing one for employment in recognized occupation. Vocational education is defined as by different authors in different ways. Okoro in Kennedy and Oji (2003) defined vocational education as all those experiences whereby an individual learns to carry on successfully, any useful occupation. These experiences may be organized and institutionalized or unorganized and haphazard. It may at as series of controlled and organized experience arranged to prepare a person for socially useful employment. In the view of Thompson in Kennedy and Oji (2003) vocational education aims at the development of human abilities in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding so efficiently in carrying on the activities in the vocational pursuit of his choice. Winner, in Kennedy and Oji (2013) in his contribution viewed that vocational education is designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment or on a useful and productive basis. It is an integral part of the total education programme and contributes towards the development of good citizens by developing their physical, social, civic, cultural and economic competencies. The development of any nation hinges on the social and economic contributions of her citizens. Vocational education plays a major role at promoting community and national development. Oguntayi in Ozoemena (2013) view that vocational education facilitates the acquisition of applied skills and basic scientific knowledge.

Olaitan in Ozoemena (2013) observed that unemployment 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 associated with poverty and lack. Okorie (2001) in Ozoemena (2013) asserts that vocational education can be conceived as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of practical skills, attitudes understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Abdullahi (1994) maintains that vocational education involves the acquisition of

techniques and the application of the science for the improvement of man's surrounding. The concept of vocational education is said to be common property of everyone, and in a facet, the most complex human endeavor (Galadina, 2003; Ammani and Ogunginka, 2011) in Ozoemena (2013). In other words, it is the only means through which a society can become better. Olaitan, defines vocational education as the form of education which emphasizes the development of occupational skills needed for preparation of work. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) stipulated aspects of vocational education as:

- An integral part of general education
- A means of preparing for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work.
- An aspect of life-long learning and preparation for responsible citizenship.
- A method of facilitating poverty alleviation.

These are consistent with those found in UNESCO (2002) reports in Ozoemena (2013). Vocational education therefore gives individuals the skills to live, learn and work as a productive citizen in a global society. Vocational education plays a crucial role in the social and economic development of a nation Nwogu cited in Ozoemena (2013). Ayodele in Ozoemena (2013) identified the problem of irrelevant education that is bookish, theoretical and "white collar job" oriented. The high level of insecurity as exemplified kidnapping, prostitution, armed robbery has relationship with unemployment and unsustainable acts. It is against this backdrop that the study is looking as vocational education as effective tool for youth empowerment. It has to be hooked unto factors that will help learners and all stakeholders to be practical and not only theoretical their approach to making vocational education meaningful and life-long. These factors according to Ezekiel and Usoro in Ozoemena (2013) are;

- Appreciation of dignity to work
- Utility and culture in vocational education
- Plights of school dropouts
- Economics of vocational education
- Needs of youths and adults
- Needs of the society
- Basic rights of the citizenry.

The Concept of Community Development

Community development as a concept does not have one generally acceptable definition writers view it from different perspective however, it can be defined from three perspectives (Onyenemezu (2016).

- As a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation, and if possible on the initiative of the community.
- As a process of social action in which the people of the community organize themselves for planning an action, define their goals, make plans to meet their needs, and execute this plans relying mainly on community resources.
- As an educational approach by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of the government to improve the conditions of the community and integrate them to the lives of the nation.

However UNESCO in Onyenemezu (2016) defines community development as:

The process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.

In the above definition community development is the process which people in a particular community unite with those of governmental authorities, nongovernmental organization (NGO) corporate organization etc to improve people living conditions in human environment. This plays important roles in improving people's socioeconomic, political, cultural and environmental conditions.

The Concept of Empowerment: Empowerment is a process of liberating individuals from the state of hopelessness. Empowerment refers to a process of enabling people to act or perform (Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008). It is described as a process to change the distribution of power both interpersonal relations and in institutions through society. The Oxford Advanced Learners' defines empowerment as the action of empowering; the state of being empowered. Bookman and Morgan in Lincoln (2002) see empowerment as the recognition of the forces which act to oppress women and the motivation to change those factors in each human's life which allow them to act. Empowerment is defined by Solomon contain in Lincoln et al (2002) as the process whereby persons who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and performance of valued social roles. According to Lazo in Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008) empowerment could be seen as a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access, to take control over such means and resources. According to Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008), empowerment has the following forms

- i. Economic empowerment, which may come in the form of acquisition of new skills or improvement on old ones. For instance, vocational training, provision of short or medium term loan, provision of professional equipment or resources are all meant to empower individuals economically.
- ii. Educational empowerment, which may come in the form of introduction to new ways of doing things, literacy education and acquisition of new knowledge through formal and non-formal processes.
- iii. Political empowerment, which may come in form of giving local people leadership skills, allowing them to take political decisions, and training to understand the political structure and process in the country.
- iv. Capacity building, which means bringing out the potentials in an individual. This could be to make him perform better on his daily job and activities. Vocational education and workers education are examples of capacity building programmes.

Significance of Empowerment

Empowerment is important for the following reasons:

- i. Empowerment provides local people with the will and power to combat poverty. When people are given

saleable skills or improve on existing ones; the tendency is that more income would accrue to them, thus they would be able to walk themselves out of poverty.

- ii. Empowerment also provides means of enabling individuals to actively participate in programmes designed to improve their well-being. This is because possession of skills, knowledge and improved financial condition of skills, knowledge and improved financial condition are necessary background people need to function effectively in community programmes.
- iii. Empowerment enhances productively through improved skills and performance effectiveness.
- iv. It enhances the possibility of individuals to effectively contribute to the social, economic and political development of their immediate community and the nation at large.
- v. Empowerment allows for adequate understanding of government policies and programmes. This is necessary because when people are empowered educationally they would be able to analyze and interpret information correctly.

Empowerment is inextricably linked to education. Education is not only a crucial part of all empowerment programmes but it also acts to empower in itself. The idea is that empowerment can both refer to a substantive form of change at the individual level and a more symbolic form of change at the societal level. In the educational literature, empowerment has tended to be focused either on the teachers, or to a smaller extent, on student.

Youth Empowerment: Youth empowerment is a process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement change in their own lives. For example, in Nigeria Omotore (2011) youth empowerment occurs in homes, at schools through youth organizations, government policy-making, reality TV shows, and community organizing campaigns. Youth empowerment encompasses the economic empowerment, social empowerment, ideological empowerment, educational, technological and political empowerment. According to Omotore (2011), youth empowerment with the African context is a means of encouraging young people to gain the skills and knowledge which will help them overcome obstacles in life. According to him, youth empowerment does the following for African youths:

- The ability to make decisions about personal/collective circumstances.
- The ability to access information and resources for decision-making
- Ability to consider a range of actions from which to choose.
- Ability to choose assertiveness in collective decision making.
- Having positive- thinking about ability to make change.
- Ability to learn and access skills for improving personal/collective circumstances.
- Ability to inform others' perceptions through exchange/education and engagement.
- Involving in the growth process and changes that are never ending and self-initiated.

- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.
- Increasing one's ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong.

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural processes whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives. Toeing the path of values and Fletcher cited in Adegun and Akomolafe (2013), youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including adults. In his own view, Fletcher (2005) defines youth empowerment as creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. To him, youth empowerment simply means assisting the youths to overcome the difficulties which might prevent them from achieving their potentials.

Challenges of Vocational Education in Nigeria

Awuwa (2018) noted the following as the challenges of vocational skill in Nigeria

1. Quantity and quality of manpower. This is a problem of availability and qualitative manpower (teachers) to handle vocational courses. In many schools these departments are hardly accredited by their respective bodies of inadequate and sufficient men power.
2. There has been a structural defect in the curricula of studies in vocational education. Most of the courses offered do not graduate the students as experts in their specified option. And do not consider the Nigerian or even African situations.
3. An insignificant financial encouragement of educational sector economic in the federal state and even local government budgets in Nigeria.
4. As already stated by Yussuf and Soyemi (2012), there is the problem of low quality of training among vocational students. Emphasis is much on theory and certification rather than skill acquisition and proficiency training.
5. There is general dissemination against graduates of vocational schools.
6. Comparatively, people still consider it as a course for the dullards.

In tandem with the above Onyema, Ikenge and Ojogbeane (2010) identified the following as factors hindering the development of vocational educational in Nigeria.

1. Government policy
2. Lack of equipment and workshop
3. Lack of qualified vocational teachers
4. Inadequate funding
5. Poor societal attitude towards vocational education.
6. Inadequate research and teaching facilities/workshops
7. Lack of indigenous textbooks
8. Dearth qualified/teachers/instructor
9. Poor perception of the society towards vocational education
10. Nonchalant attitude of policy makers to genuine and suggestions

Effectiveness of Vocational Education on Youth

Empowerment for Community development

Vocational education is a very effective instrument for empowering youths of any nation. UNESCO in Adams (2011) advocates vocational education, claiming that vocational education that is driven by market demand is more effective in enhancing employment and income for the disadvantaged and enhancement of community development. Generally, there is an expectation that vocational education facilitates economic growth and poverty alleviation by serving as a mechanism to prepare people for occupational fields and by enhancing their effective participation in community development, UNESCO in Hagos and Kemenade (2013). The skill acquisition nature of vocational education makes it relevant for self-reliance, job creation, wealth creation, effective functioning in work places more than other forms of education. According to Olaitan (1996), the major focus of vocational education remains as skills development for community development. Osita (2013) noted that the major purpose of vocational education in Nigeria is to resolve the issues of self-reliance, job creation, youth unemployment, poverty reduction and enhance international competitiveness and community development among youths. As a result of this, Adebisi and Ayeni (2013) concluded that due to on-going changes in workplaces, the work itself and the development of advance technology will definitely acquire advance knowledge in the area of work, high skills, vocational mindset, broad initiatives for the development of workforce skills as well as improved vocational skills capable of enhancing life-long learning and encouraging entrepreneurship in the creative industries.

Oguntuji (2013) maintained that the most important feature of vocational education is its orientation towards the world of work while the major contents of the curriculum cover the acquisition of employable skills. Salami (2011), viewed that we can see that vocational education contributes positively to the enhancement of skills necessary for employment, job mobility, labour efficiency as well as making the beneficiaries financially independent. Orah (2002) posited that vocational education helps to resolve the problem of inadequate manpower that has constituted nuisance to genuine economic development in Nigeria. Lama (2012) holds that vocational education and training have the capacity for generating employment and producing skilled technicians and workers required by the communities. Uwaifo (2009) added that vocational education, apart from the development of the practical skills, it also makes the beneficiary creative and successful. The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) Section 7, No. 40 states that the goals of vocational education are to:

- a) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- b) Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;
- c) Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

Vocational education is a very vital instrument for empowering the youth. The skills and competencies gained from vocational education have the capacity to empower them to function in every endeavor of their livelihoods.

The significance of vocational education programmes as an effective tool for the promotion of youth empowerment cannot be overemphasized. Adebayo (1998) states that vocational education can assist Nigerians to acquire the necessary skills and competencies for occupation. He also observed that from time immemorial, vocational skills and abilities were passed from one generation to another. Akinpelu in Onyenemezu (2016) highlight the objectives of vocational education to include;

- a) It releases the person's power and energy to act;
- b) It frees him from all shackles in the way of his authentic self-development;
- c) It restores his humanity; his self-pride in being the subject, rather than a passive recipient of other people's benefactors;
- d) It enables him to read the word, reflect on what he had read, and imposed meaning on this environmental reality; and
- e) It takes him beyond the mechanical or technical mastery of a written word to quality of consciousness, critical reflectiveness, and a changed awareness and perception of his existential situation.

Kolawole and Adepoju (2007) noted that vocational education is the ability to use one's skills gainfully and display one's intellectual and economic horizon well enough to be able to tackle very effectively many of the economic problems confronting individuals and the country as a whole. Omoruyi and Osunde (2004) observed that vocational education is capable of ensuring gainful employment opportunities to other members of the society.

Factors Militating Against the Effectiveness of Vocational Education for Youth Empowerment

- a) **Inadequate Facilities and Counseling Resources:** There is a problem of inadequate facilities and supply of materials for effective vocational education.
- b) **Inconsistent Government Policy on Vocational Education:** Inconsistencies in the formulation and implementation of vocational education policies has been a major setback on vocational education programmes.
- c) **Lack of Vocational Teacher Training:** The instructors are not given appropriate training that will make them abreast with current issues. Vocational facilitators are not properly trained.
- d) **Poor Funding:** The success and development advancement in vocational education which has been actualized over the years has been frustrated to failure as a result of poor funding.
- e) **Poor Learning Conditions:** According to Inyiagu (2005), the conditions under which knowledge is imparted in the most Nigerians institutions are experiencing poverty of training equipment, shortage of staff, inadequate funding, inability to provide variety of training programmes and equipment such that recipients turn out to both national development and entrepreneurs capable of reshaping the economic system in Nigeria.
- f) **Lack of Modern Equipment:** Most institutions and all providers of vocational education according to Ekpenyong (2005), lack modern equipment relevant to societal needs. Most schools and vocational centers use

obsolete materials while some do not have equipment at all.

- g) **Policy Makers are Non-entrepreneurship Trained Persons:** Many administrators of entrepreneurship development training programmes at policy levels are non-entrepreneurship trained persons. Hassan (2005) noted that in spite of all the programmes floated by various government of the country, the economic is still in shambles.

Conclusion

The high unemployment rate of youth in Nigeria in general pose serious challenges to the development of the country. To tackle this menace, various youth empowerment programmes have been established by government at different levels and multi nationals. Vocational education inculcates in the youth new skills and competencies which have the capacity to empower them to function effectively in their chosen profession. Vocational education remains indispensable for effective youth empowerment delivery for community and national development.

Recommendations

1. Government, as well as educational stakeholders should ensure that more vocational education centers are made available for all the youth in the various communities.
2. Both government and private agencies should provide adequate fund and necessary facilities for vocational education programme.
3. Regular seminars, conferences, workshops should be organized for the youth to raise their awareness and interest about vocational education.
4. Non-governmental organizations should, as a matter of importance support vocational education programmes in various communities. This will to a very large extent empower the youths to become self-reliance.

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