

EFFECT OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ON YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA – A CONCEPTUAL EXPOSITION

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Abstract

Human capital is the most important resource or asset any nation can boast of in the 21st century because a nation's human capital is vital for future technological breakthrough, international competitiveness and sustainable economic development. Building the requisite human capital for the attainment of sustainable development requires both a new ideology of life and innovative approach to education if the nation is to overcome the global socio-economic and ecological crisis. This paper emphasizes on the significant roles that of vocational and technical education plays in enhancing employability skills and consequently driving sustainable development of nations This paper posits that vocational and technical education will provide citizens with skills and knowledge with which they can be self reliant and employers' of labour. The paper concludes that vocational and technical education when engendered leads to employment generation, inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. The paper recommends that educational institutions at all levels must inculcate and intensify the integration of entrepreneurship and vocational education into its curriculum.

Keywords: Capital Development, Technical and Vocational Education, Human Sustainability

Introduction

Excellent education and research systems are prerequisites for innovation, social participation, employment and economic growth; the acquisition of professional skills and qualifications enhances an individual's social and economic status. Many African countries have developed functioning higher education systems. Still, they are faced difficulties in promoting mid-level occupations, technical and vocational occupations, as well as the associated entrepreneurial, technical and vocational education and trainingsystems. This pathway provides youths with occupation-specific knowledge, practical skills and attitudes that are independent of the place, content, and the provider of education.

Furthermore, a recent survey of school-to-work transition exhibits that such skill and educational mismatches are prevalent in Africa. 17.5% of employed youth are over-skilled and 28.9% of them are under-skilled; 8.3% of them are over-educated and 56.9% are undereducated. Also, both over-skilled and over-educated reduces job satisfaction and

increase youth's likelihood of on-job search. Skill and educational mismatches of youth are persistent over time and skilled youth are more likely to transition to better-matched jobs than youth with inadequate education. (Morsy & Muksasa, 2019)

This lack of support for the transition to the labour market can be called the 'missing middle in post-school education' (Lolwana, 2017). Effectively, this missing middle results in a large proportion of young people in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) being neither in education nor in employment due to a lack of opportunities that correspond to the skills acquired during their education. Eliminating this shortage of skilled workers in SSA is both the subject of specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and essential for the achievement of SDGs in general.

However, by 2050, the number of inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is expected to double to two billion people. Some of the challenges related to population growth include meeting food needs, increased urbanisation without adequate energy, transportation facilities, infrastructure, and increased strain on the environment. The average age on the continent is 18 years, and youth unemployment is high (Desjardins, 2019; World Bank, 2020). The result of all of this is that many people see migration within Africa, to Europe and beyond, as their easiest option. Therefore, to realise the continent's potential, citizens need to acquire skills that will enable them to engage in gainful employment or embark upon their own enterprises

Afeti(2006) opined that Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) is one the most effective human resource development initiative that should be embraced by African countries in order to provide effective training and modernization of technical workforce. For the purpose of industrialization and national development, technical and vocational education provides support for economic growth, poverty eradication and wealth creation (Ayoo, 2022). Therefore, the training of youths at various institutions of learning must be of high quality and competency based; it should also be relevant to the need of the society as well as the industry The main objective of technical and vocational education is to provide training to individuals in order to acquire relevant knowledge, attitudes and practical skills for the purpose of employment in a particular occupational area. One of the most significant features of TVE is its designed orientation towards training for the world of work as well as the curriculum emphasis on employable skills acquisition (UNESCO, 2013).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation(UNESCO) in furtherance and recognition of the critical role of Technical and Vocational Education Training developed a strategy (2016-2021) which is aimed at ensuring that youth and adults to have decent work and enhance entrepreneurship as the way to inclusive society(UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, the UNESCO-UNEVOC international center for technical and vocational education developed Medium-term strategy (2021-2023) in accordance with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4). The targets suggested for achieving SDGs 4 are to provide equal opportunities for quality education including TVET, regardless of gender; to enhance youths to have work-related skills for a decent job; and to provide education and training opportunities to the vulnerable. This strategy puts priority on African countries (UNESCO, 2021). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also emphasizes the importance of TVET as a means for youths to improve a positive outcome for individuals, employers and society (OECD, 2008, as cited in ILO Policy brief, 2021); Blunch and Castro (2007) state that TVET is particularly crucial to economic growth and social inclusion in developing countries.

African countries still adopt TVET in public education systems (Oketch, 2007). It is the contention of this paper to examine how vocational and technical education programmes in two SSA countries can enhance youth employability skills.

Literature Review

A. Conceptual Analysis

I. Technical and Vocational Education.

Technical and Vocational Education is used as comprehensive term referring to those aspect of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO, 2001). The concept of Vocational Education aims at equipping individuals to use their mental and skills in order to survive in a world that is essentially work-oriented. The philosophy of Technical and Vocational Education is basically to enhance human dignity and enthrone work and labour by making individuals acquire and/or develop enough saleable and employable skills, competencies, attitudes as well as knowledge to enable them gain and maintain basic employment or self-reliance for a comfortable living. Technical and vocational education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life” (NPE, 2004).

Technical and vocational education has been an integral part of National development in many countries, its contributions to economic development and productivity is highly significant in terms of employment and business. Youth’s employment plays an important role in building life skills in young people and also supports communities and families (Mujumdar and Khambayat, 2010). The youths of any country represent the future and hope of the nation, therefore, their potentialities must be harnessed through sound education

ii. Employability Skills

The International Labor Congress (ILC) at its 88th session in year 2000 defined employability skills as the combination of knowledge, skills and competence a worker should possess in order to obtain and retain job. The employability skills considered by the congress for worker to be employable are basic and portable high-level skills, broad-based education and training, teamwork, problem solving, communication and language skills Information and Communication Technology (ICT), (ILO, 2008). Employability skills are the collection of knowledge, skills and competencies that enhance the ability of the worker to secure and retain a job as well as cope with the labor market more easily at various stages of life cycle. Clarke(2007) defines employability skills as set of skills which help in supporting the ability of an individual to perform effectively in the workplace. It is non-technical skills and sometimes called ‘transferable skills’ or ‘soft skills’ or ‘generic skills’. The employability skills comprises of basic skills, thinking skills, resource skills, information skills, interpersonal skills, system & technology skills and personal qualities. Employability skills become an integral part of the career and technical curriculum by

engaging students in project- and inquiry-based learning, internships, school-based enterprises, and career and technical student organization activities (Idris, 2013). Employability skills enables individual to adapt to various changes in the work place due to dynamics of world of work today which paves way for further training and re-training. Clearly, there are great advantages to acquiring a broad range of core skills at a young age (David, 2008).

Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), Nigeria

Nigeria, with its large youth population, has implemented various youth empowerment initiatives to address unemployment and skill gaps. This analysis examines key aspects of youth empowerment projects across the country. There are several youth empowerment projects in Nigeria that are aimed at empowering young people and equipping them with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed (Okwonko, Nwakike & Nwafor, 2021). Some of the key youth empowerment projects in Nigeria include: Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI): YEDI is a non-profit organization that works to empower young people in Nigeria through education, health promotion, and leadership development programs. YEDI operates in various communities across the country, providing training and support to young people to help them build successful futures. Another one is Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Program. The Tony Elumelu Foundation runs an annual entrepreneurship program that provides funding, training, and mentorship to young entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The program aims to help young people start and grow their own businesses, creating jobs and opportunities for themselves and others in their communities (Bartik, 2020). Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP), The NIYEAP is a government-led initiative that aims to create employment opportunities for young people in Nigeria. The program includes skills training, job placement services, and financial support for young entrepreneurs, with the goal of reducing youth unemployment and poverty in the country. Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISAN): YISAN is a youth-led organization that works to promote sustainable agriculture and rural development in Nigeria. The organization provides training and support to young farmers, helping them to improve their agricultural practices and increase their incomes. LEAP Africa Youth Development Program, this initiative is a non-profit organization that runs a youth development program aimed at empowering young people to become effective leaders and agents of change in their communities. The program includes leadership training, mentoring, and support for youth-led projects and initiatives (Allen & Thomos, 2021). These are just a few examples of the youth empowerment projects that are making a positive impact in Nigeria. By providing young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed, these projects are helping to build a brighter future for the youth of Nigeria.

iii. Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), The Gambia

In 2017, the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), Gambia was launched by the government of the Gambia. The project was established to enhance employability and self-employment opportunities for youth through vocational training and the creation of micro and small sized enterprises, and support in catalyzing value addition and internationalization in selected sectors (Sekiluckiene, 2017).

Furthermore, the project addresses the economic root causes of irregular migration by supporting youth economic root causes of irregular migration thereby supporting them with market led approach to develop and improve the skills and employability of potential and returning migrants according to the demands of the job market that potentially create employment opportunities along Gambian value chains. (Kuyateh, 2023)

YEP, takes a market-led approach and sets out to strengthen existing youth development systems, structures and services to create employment opportunities. It aims to scale up skills among youth in the workforce in response to market demands. The project offers possibilities for youths interested in moving into the commercial agriculture, service business or tourism sectors.

Skills upgrading through technical and vocational training programmes

Existing technical and vocational skills programmes are strengthened to better match the needs of businesses. YEP, builds partnerships between training institutions and industry associations and assist in the development of their programmes. The effectiveness of learning is increased by adopting accessible and flexible learning models and tools. Furthermore, The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) has offered technical and vocational skills training to 965 Gambian youth through eight local TVET institutions. The technical and vocational training opportunities are provided under the pilot phase of the Skills for Youth Employment (SkYE) Fund launched by YEP. The project encourages entrepreneurship among youth through business skills training and support programmes. Targeted business support services, help improve the performance and growth of youth-owned businesses. (Kuyateh, 2023)

iv. Youth Employment and Social Support (YESSO)

The Youth Employment and Social Support (YESSO) Youth Jobs and Social Help (YESSO) was launched on August 7, 2013 and is intended to reduce the level of poverty in Nigeria. The World Bank supports the initiative. The World Bank has provided financial assistance to the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to facilitate the introduction of YESSO (World Bank, 2019). The support activity has been planned in close cooperation between the FGN and Nigeria's 36 States. However, in the first round, only the following eight states were qualified to participate: Bauchi, Cross River, Ekiti, Kogi, Kwara, Niger, Osun, and Oyo. The YESSO Unit in the Federal Ministry of Finance (FMF) is the coordinating unit for YESSO at its inception, with other participating Federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) playing important roles in the FOCU, such as the MDG Office, NDE, and NPC Durokifa & Abdulwasiu (2016).

YESSO is a flagship operation aimed at improving net social security structures at the state level and reducing the insecurity of disadvantaged youth and women by increasing access to job opportunities and supporting the production of human resources. YESSO efforts are a net support for social security that encourages synergy and uniformity, as well as a paradigm change from how previous initiatives have performed (World Bank, 2018). YESSO supports existing structures and systems to help strengthen their capacities for poverty alleviation, this is achieved through its coordinating units at the federal level called Federal Operation Coordinating Unit (FOCU) and at state level called

State Operation Coordinating Unit (SOCU) using a partnership between the private sector, local government (LGAs) and communities (Koleva, 2016).

The project has four components. Reinforcing the social safety net framework is the first step of the initiative. The operation through this component will help the government to define and consolidate the institutional responsibilities and implementation arrangements to ensure effective coordination among all units of the federal and state governments and all stakeholders involved in the implementation of social safety nets in Nigeria. The project's second component is public workfare program. The goal of this portion is to help the participating state governments to provide unskilled young people from poor households with immediate labor-intensive job opportunities. Skills for job programs which is thrust and focal point of this research is the third aspect of the project. This aspect will pilot a new approach to skills training that would enhance the effectiveness of government efforts, particularly among young people, to tackle unemployment. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program is the fourth aspect of the project (Koleva, 2016).

b. Theoretical Framework -Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory is a type of theory that focuses on education and training of individuals in order to raise the productivity of an employee by imparting useful skills, knowledge, values, abilities and social assets towards raising employees' income thereby increasing their hopes in their socio-economic well-being (Xiao, 2001). Hence, education and training is considered crucial for enhancing human capital (Asadullah & Zafar, 2019). It enhances skill and knowledge of individual and thereby facilitates employment in the labor market (Vandekinderen et al., 2018; Dean, 2003; Schultz, 1960). Human capital theory advocates education as a tool for improving human capital, stimulating labour productivity and boosting the levels of technology across the globe (Robert, 1991). This is so because Human capital is the most important resource or asset an organization or a country can boast of in the 21st century workplace since organizations are run and steered by people and it is through people that goals are set and objectives attained. Human capital consists of skills and knowledge that individuals acquire through investments in schooling, on-the-job training, and other types of experience.

Human capital is recognized as the most critical in development. It has been directly linked to the ability of nations to transform from underdeveloped to developed economies. Indeed, the quality of a country's human capital is central to promoting and sustaining innovation as well as the adoption of appropriate technology for accelerated sustainable development (Ajibade, 2013). That human capital was largely accountable for the transformation of resource-poor countries like South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore The knowledge gained from education and experience represents a resource that is heterogeneously distributed across individuals and in effect central to understanding differences in opportunity identification and exploitation (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Anderson & Miller, 2003, Gartner et al, 2005,)

c. Empirical Review

Opara (2023) conducted a study that thesis explores why a group of young people within a developing context (Nigeria) who are able to participate in traditional academic

education choose to rather participate in TVET. These students were studying engineering related courses in TVE. Drawing on Bourdieu's critical sociological theory, the study adopts an interpretivist leaning, a qualitative approach and a case study strategy. With the aid of semi-structured interviews, the life grid and some observations, data was collected from twenty-five students participating in TVET across three TVET centres in South-Eastern Nigeria. Findings show that participants' decisions regarding TVET are shaped by familial and social ties (parents, family, friends and teachers) and sociocultural and economic factors (ethnicity, social class and depressed labour market). A high rate of unemployment, though, seemed to drive the entrepreneurial spirit in students because TVET was synonymised with a quicker way to financial independence. However, there were paradoxes: while university education was seen as prestigious, prestige was seen as symbolic because it was perceived to lack material benefits. University graduates were frequently narrated as being without jobs and skills. Still, TVET was often perceived as a place for those with low academic ability, but availed one employment in some capacity, assurance of skills and an income.

Yoonseon (2021) conducted a study that investigated the Impact of TVET on Income Growth and Employment of Trainees. The study uses the data collected from Kenya Life Panel Survey (KLPS), which is a longitudinal dataset of 7,527 respondents from 2003 to 2019. The data includes education, health, socioeconomic, demographic and other outcomes from students of primary schools in western Kenya. This study used the panel data studies to find the short-term and long-term effect from TVET. This study finds that unemployed trainees have higher employability in the short run over employed trainees. According to the result of this study, however, trainees without work experience and training experience have a higher income growth rate in short run compared to experienced trainees. It contradicts the assumption of TVET in that work-related experience strengthens the individual's skill and thereby reflected in higher income. This study explained the findings can be attributable to mismatch between skill and job and limitation of training at individual-level.

Fabiya and Olanipekun (2021) conducted a study that focused on technology-based social entrepreneurial programs in the Gambia that have benefited from International Trade Center (ITC) support. The study was exploratory in nature and adopted survey as its research strategy. Primary data with the aid of a structured questionnaire were used to elicit information from respondents. The study findings indicated that tech-based social entrepreneurial programs had a significant positive impact on economic, social, and sustainability.

Brimah et al (2021) conducted a study to examine the impact of Skill for Job component of Youth Employment and Social Support Operation Programme on Unemployment reduction in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State, Nigeria. Data for the study were obtained from primary sources with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The study in its descriptive nature adopted a survey design. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis at 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that there is significant relationship between YESSO Skills for Jobs program and employment generation, economic well being of beneficiaries and skill – job enhancement. The P-values were all found to be higher than 0.70 hence signifying a strong positive relationship between Youth Employment and Social Support Operation Programme and employment generation.

Olanipekun *et. al* (2021) conducted a study that examined the impact of entrepreneurship within the context of SMEs on youth empowerment in Nigeria. Providing an empirical evidence to answer the research question required the extraction of data between 1991 and 2019 from the World Development Indicators. The data were subjected to various pre-tests such as unit roots and Co-integration tests before the adapted models were estimated using Fully Modified Least Squares (FMOLS) and Granger causality techniques. Findings revealed that self-employment and youth unemployment had a significant negative relationship in Nigeria. In the same vein, population growth rate and youth unemployment had a significant negative relationship. However, commercial banks loans to SMEs and youth unemployment had an insignificant positive relationship in the country. By and large, self-employment generated by SMEs reduces youth unemployment significantly in Nigeria. Furthermore, a long run convergence existed among the variables of interest in one hand, a unidirectional causal relationship running from youth empowerment to SMEs financing existed in the study. Also, a unidirectional causality running from self-employment to population growth rate was discovered.

Brimah *et al* . (2021) conducted a study on Entrepreneurial Training Strategy and Intention of Serving Youth Corp Members in Kwara State, Nigeria. Data for the study were obtained from primary sources with the aid of a structured questionnaire. The study in its descriptive nature adopted a survey design. Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 5% level of significance. The findings from the data analysis revealed that Entrepreneurial Training (measured by NYSC skill acquisition and entrepreneurial development programs) had significant impact on entrepreneurial intention). Based on the findings, the study concluded that entrepreneurship training significantly impact on entrepreneurial intention among serving youth corps members.

Brimah *et al* (2014) conducted a study on the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum on Unemployment Reduction – Evidence from Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. Questionnaire administration technique via a structured questionnaire was used to source for data and information from the final year students of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin who have taken the compulsory GSE 301 on graduate self-employment. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to analyse the data. The study revealed that there is relationship between the introduction of entrepreneurship education and unemployment, with a coefficient of determination of 0.866.

Idris (2013) conducted a study on *Implimentation of technical and vocational education in Nigeria*. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used using concurrent design. The instrument for teachers and students was adapted from Employability skills for Australian small and medium sized enterprises. The teachers' questionnaire contains 50 items while students' questionnaire contains 41 items to examine the training of students at technical and vocational schools, students' competencies as well as challenges of technical and vocational education in Nigeria. Two hundred and twenty (220) teachers and two hundred and thirty- three (233) students participated in the quantitative aspect. In selecting the respondents for this research, simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. T-test and Regression analyses using SPSS version 17 were used to measure the differences among the dependent and independent variables. Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) version 16 was also used to identify the factors that influence

the Implementation of Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria. Interviews were conducted with five principals and five heads of department in order to identify the challenges of implementation of technical and vocational education in Nigeria. The study found employability skills, learning skills, technical skills, and teaching methods play a significant role in the training of students towards skills acquisition. No significant difference was found between the teachers in terms of importance of teaching methods. The students' level of competency was found to be low in all the aspect of skill areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Vocational and technical education plays very crucial roles in the development of any country and its importance cannot be overemphasized especially to a country whose unemployment rate is very high coupled with non-inclusiveness in its growth dimension. Vocational and technical education in many developing contexts has been addressed in government policies as a sustainable solution to myriads of malaise that bedevils countries nation's economically. It is undoubtedly a source of work-ready human capital or as an educational practice that helps to initiate young people into responsible and relevant forms of life. It is the position of this paper that inclusive growth and sustainable development in African countries can be accomplished through rigorous and massive vocational and technical as well as entrepreneurial education, training and development that will make enhance employability skills. There is therefore a need for continuous review of the education curricula to meet the ever changing dynamism in education development. Institutions must evolve a culture of entrepreneurship by supporting, training and rewarding their self-reliant graduates. This would help foster among students offering entrepreneurship innovation, invention and creativity.

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