



Vocational Education: Pathway to Sustainable Economic Empowerment in Nigeria

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Abstract: It has long been believed that vocational education will eventually replace all other forms of education as the key to economic growth. The acquisition of applicable skills has been a source of sustenance at the individual level and is contributing to the broader national economic progress, according to several studies in the social and management sciences and education. The purpose of this qualitative study on vocational education as a route to national integration and economic empowerment is to ascertain how it can pave the way for economic growth. Therefore, the exact sectors, dimensions, features, or routes via which vocational education can enable such economic empowerment will be the focus of this study. As a result, the study concentrated on small and medium-sized firms as well as entrepreneurship as means by which vocational education promotes economic empowerment. Secondary sources were used as the method of data collecting. According to data, entrepreneurship activities help people become more economically empowered by ingeniously and intuitively creating business prospects that lead to job opportunities. It was also established that small and medium scale enterprises are the bedrock of any nation and the absence of these is capable of crumbling an economy. Accordingly, it was advised that vocational business education be reformulated to reflect current practices and events in the country based on the study's findings. This is done to make that the program achieves its intended goals.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Pathway, National Integration, Economic Empowerment

1. Introduction

Due consideration must be given to the growth of an economy's industries, which should be staffed by skilled professionals with the necessary technical knowledge. A huge quantity of goods and services had to be produced on a small scale before the industrial revolution of 1760–1840 [11]. However, this transformation in the industries was brought about by dynamic economic needs. This shift to new manufacturing frontiers resulted in development of many nations' economies, prosperity, and advancement [12].

The terms "vocation" and "vocational education" are frequently used in discussions of economic growth. As a result, McKay [15] defined vocation as a person's employment, trade, or means of subsistence. Vocation is often used interchangeably with the word occupation. According to Okpara [19], vocation is a series of occupations that a person engages in or occupies over the course of their lives. A vocation is, psychologically speaking, a part that a

person plays and controls. Therefore, vocational education is training that aims to provide students the skills they need to be successful in their many fields of expertise.

Vocation and vocational education have long been associated with discussions about economic development. So, according to McKay [15], vocation refers to a person's employment, trade, or means of subsistence. Vocation is often used interchangeably with the word occupation. According to Okpara [19], vocation is a series of occupations, tasks performed or held during a person's lifetime. In terms of psychology, a vocation is a role that a person plays and controls. Therefore, vocational education is instruction designed to prepare students to gain appropriate skills that will enable them to work effectively in their various fields of expertise.

Given that manufacturing was founded on practical manipulative abilities, where machines and other supporting devices were manipulated for large production, the industrial revolution cited above is evidence that

vocational/entrepreneurship skills are the lifeblood of any economy. According to the aforementioned viewpoint, every participating individual must be given the required entrepreneurial skills to be able to contribute to any economy's development. The ability of a nation's labor force to compete successfully in the global economy is crucial. The quality of the nation's education and training systems in turn affects the skills and competencies of the labor force. Therefore, it is believed that one of the key components in raising economic productivity is vocational education [14].

From a different angle, another way that vocational education training affects the national economy is through the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that are enabled in part by it. According to SMEDAN [21], a micro business is defined as an organization with a staff of no more than ten people and total assets of less than five million naira (excluding land and buildings). Small businesses are defined as those with total assets (excluding land and buildings) of over 5 million Naira but under 50 million Naira and a workforce of over 10 but under 49 employees. Medium-sized businesses are those with total assets (excluding land and buildings) of more than 50 million naira but less than 500 million naira, as well as a total workforce [16].

The micro, small and medium sized enterprises are the backbone of successful economies like the USA, EU and the People's Republic of China; where over 43 million small businesses employ more than 50% of the workforce and generate more than half of the nations' gross domestic products (GDP) [1].

Table 1. Contribution of SMEs to Economic Development (Developed Countries).

Country	Economic output	Employment
USA	65%	80%
JAPAN	45%	80%
WESTERN EUROPE	45%	55%

Source: Akingunola (2011).

Table 2. Contribution of SMEs to Economic Development (Developed Countries).

Countries	Export	Value Addition	Contr. to GDP
PAKISTAN	18%	29%	5%
INDIA	34%	40%	7%
WESTERN EUROPE	45%	55%	

Source: Akingunola (2011).

In Nigeria, the contributions of micro, small and medium scale businesses to economic development include creation of employment, development of local resources, contribution to exports, improvement of GDP, amongst others.

1.1. Problem Statement

This essay tried to discuss how vocational education may help with issues like unemployment, the recession, and poverty. In Nigeria, an increasing number of people are experiencing poverty, which is becoming an increasingly serious issue. In a fruitless effort to escape and forget the

suffering and humiliation of poverty and need, drug misuse and high crime rates are caused by unemployment. Unemployment also leads to dissatisfaction and despair. As more and more tertiary graduates and school dropouts have gone years without finding gainful job, the unemployment crisis has gotten worse. The problem of unemployment has seriously harmed people's welfare as well as the welfare of their families and the whole national economy. Many physically fit and highly qualified individuals who were unable to find lucrative employment have continued to be financially dependent on their parents. This is due to their lack of the professional abilities required for self-employment and efficient operation in the workplace of today. The study investigated the potential of entrepreneurship and micro, small, and medium-sized companies (MSMEs) as strategies for addressing Nigeria's current economic difficulties, particularly in the area of employment creation. Consequently, it has become imperative to write this essay on the role of vocational education in promoting economic empowerment and national integration.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This paper aimed at addressing some concerns of how vocational education can act as a pathway to national integration and economic empowerment. Specifically, it sought to:

- 1) Determine the contributions of entrepreneurship skills acquired in business education to economic empowerment.
- 2) Ascertain the contributions of micro, small and medium scale enterprises to economic empowerment.

2. Literature Review

The majority of the 151 respondents (75.5%) to Muritala, Awolaja, and Yusuf's [18] study on the "Impact of Small and Medium Enterprises on Economic Growth and Development" agreed that there is a substantial association between SMEs and economic growth and development. Ndubuisi [18] investigated "constraint on growth of small and medium enterprises in Enugu state" and discovered that, statistically speaking, the empirical result shows that there is a positive relationship between small and medium scale enterprises, that they constitute a true tool for economic growth and development, and that they have an impact on the economy [16].

Between 2006 and 2013, Zacheus and Omoseni [24] conducted research on "The Impact of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises on Economic Development of Ekiti State, Nigeria." They discovered that the number of these businesses has increased and that they are helping to reduce poverty in the State. In the same spirit, the study demonstrated how important small and medium-sized businesses have been in Ekiti State in terms of creating jobs and how the government's efforts to combat poverty have aided in the growth of the industry there. Additionally,

between 2006 and 2013, small and medium-sized businesses made various contributions to the economic growth of Ekiti State [3]. From the analysis above, one can see that various empirical studies maintain the findings that small and medium scale enterprises improve the economic gains of the nation. This is so because according to the studies cited above, small and medium scale enterprises helped tremendously in areas of employment generation.

3. Theoretical Perspective

Bertalanffy's 1956 System's Theory of Input-Output Model

The theoretical perspective of this study is the input-output model of General System's Theory developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1956 and furthered by Ross Ashby in 1964. The theory, according to Koontz and Weihrich, (1988) in Kyoshaba, (2009) postulates that an organized enterprise does not exist in a vacuum; it is dependent on its environment in which it is established to succeed. This is to say that the economy as an organized system cannot function effectively when individual subsystem contributors like educational institutions established to provide the economy with needed *trained* manpower do not function well. Koontz and Weihrich were of the opinion that the inputs from the environment (vocational education) are received by the organization (economy), which then transforms them into outputs. Von Bertalanffy (1968) in Clark (2014), asserted that a system is a complex of interacting elements and that they are open to, and interact with their environments (economy and vocational education). In addition, they can acquire qualitatively new property through emergence, thus they are in a continual evolution. When referring to systems, it also generally means that they are self-regulating (they self-correct through feedback).

In this study, the general system is likened to be the economy, while one of the subsystems is vocational education. This is to say that it is the various subsystems that determine the overall performance of the economy. That it, if the individual subsystems become redundant, docile and inactive, the General System would be greatly influenced and this is what we see in the case of the Nigerian Economy.

4. Methods

This study is a qualitative one, hence, it dealt on textual database method of data collection and analysis. In the conduct of this study, secondary data from secondary sources were used. Secondary data is the data that have been already collected by and readily available from other sources. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data and also may be available when primary data cannot be obtained at all.

Thus, information were derived from printed materials like official publications, journals, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, constitutions, commission reports, and non-printed electronic materials from the internet etc. In the analysis of this work, the descriptive and qualitative data interpretation

method was adopted. Therefore, this research is historically, exploratory, and descriptive in nature. The study adopted a descriptive research design, with an infinite population and sample. Hence, relevant secondary sources of data were used for data collection and analysis.

5. Analysis of Data

5.1. Contributions of Entrepreneurship to Economic Empowerment

There is a strong consensus among researchers that entrepreneurship is a key sign of economic expansion and advancement. Finding out if such beliefs and assertions are true has therefore become crucial. Entrepreneurship was described as having the ability and willingness to plan, organize, and run a company venture while accepting any risks involved in doing so by The Business Dictionary [7]. But Shane and Venkataraman (quoted in Alvaro, Domingo, and Salvado, [5]) pointed out that entrepreneurial activities involve the identification, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities. In other words, it entails the identification of fresh markets for previously untapped goods and inputs, as well as fresh tactics, organizational structures, and production processes. In his definition of entrepreneurship from 1921, Knight distinguished between risk—which can be quantified—and uncertainty, which cannot. The early writings of Schumpeter [20], who believed that an increase in the number of entrepreneurs leads to economic progress, demonstrate the idea that entrepreneurship and economic growth are very tightly and favorably related to one another. This finding is due to their abilities—more specifically, their capacity for innovation—being expressed in concrete ways [2].

According to Thaddeus [22], countries with higher levels of entrepreneurial activity experience rapid economic growth. Entrepreneurship requires the capacity to recognize resources, to understand their economic potentials, the capacity and willingness to use these resources, and the investment in their development while prioritizing short-term gains above long-term gains. Entrepreneurship is the demonstrable ability and willingness of individuals to recognize and create new economic opportunities, new products, new production, new production methods, new organizational schemes, and new product market combinations, as well as to introduce their ideas in the market in the face of uncertainty and other obstacles, by making decisions on the use of institutions, resources, and other factors such as location, form, and timing [2].

Entrepreneurship, in both advanced and least developed economies, leads to growth and the creation of jobs, claims Naude [17]. As more micro, small, and medium-sized businesses are established, entrepreneurship expansion does contribute to economic development by producing employment. According to Chang [9], the nation's high percentage of self-employment models has proven effective in spurring economic growth. In their study article, Carree and Thurik [8] came to the conclusion that there are three

distinct levels of analysis that must be present when linking entrepreneurship to economic growth. In other words, the macroeconomic realm could be connected to certain levels. These levels include the individual firm and the macro levels of analysis. According to Bruce, Deskins, Hill, and Rork [6], an entrepreneurial action typically takes place at the level of the firm; as a result, they need a vehicle that can translate their personal goals and strengths into practical actions. Entrepreneurs are essential to the growth of the economy, which makes them a major force in product innovation and advancement. It is one of the key components to the production of new jobs and the development of communities that can provide such opportunities [2].

5.2. Contributions of Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises to Economic Empowerment

The role of micro, small and medium scale enterprises to the economy remains an important aspect that a nation cannot do without. Hardly can any major industry succeed in isolation of the services and contributions of small business enterprise. The relative strength of their importance and role vary from one industry to another. In fact, the importance of micro, small and medium scale enterprises in any economy cannot be underestimated. Firstly, continuous growth in the economy of any nation depends to a large extent on the number of start-ups of small businesses. Even on a recessionary economy, micro, small and medium scale enterprises are a legitimate and viable component in any strategy for reconstructing the economy. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the small-scale enterprises make the possibility of the equitable distribution of national income more realistic by providing employment opportunities on a large scale. By creating more employment, they help in mobilizing capital and human resources that would otherwise be left idle [23]. According to Ezech [10], some small businesses no doubt, provide certain distinct services that in most cases may not be matched with success of large businesses. Implicitly, if the small businesses would by and large find themselves over saddled with a myriad of activities that they would only be able to manage minimally.

The role of micro, small and medium scale businesses in the development of the Nigerian economy has made it very possible for firms to depend less on imported goods or materials. They often rather depend on locally made machines and raw materials as inputs. One can buttress this point further by the fact that non-dependence of small businesses on imported raw materials as inputs leads to a reduction in the demand of foreign raw materials thereby saving the foreign exchange earnings of the nation. Worthy of mention also is the advantage of solving payment problems as a result of less dependence on imported inputs. This has an attendant blessing of creating an interest in the promotion of home made products. In this way, small business ventures generate revenues and strengthen the Nigerian economy [23].

Small industries have a shorter gestation period and as a result, yield quicker returns on investment. They facilitate

balanced industrial development in that, only such small-scale ventures can easily be established in many rural areas. In this regard, it presents a potent means of reducing rural urban migration and its consequential urban congestion, unemployment and other social vices. Small businesses also serve as a training school for indigenous entrepreneurs and provide the opportunity for acquisition of skills for a large number of workers. They facilitate a speedy development of the Nigerian economy [4].

6. Discussion of Findings

From the analysis of the secondary data above, it was established from the findings of the various authors that vocational education contributes immensely to economic empowerment. To establish this, the authors ascertained the dimensions as well as parameters of vocational education. What are the parameters of vocational education that can independently contribute to economic empowerment? In this study, the authors looked carefully at entrepreneurial studies as well as micro, small and medium scale enterprises as embedded in vocational education and how they empower the national economy. According to Thaddeus [22], countries with higher levels of entrepreneurial activity experience rapid economic growth. Entrepreneurship requires the capacity to recognize resources, to understand their economic potentials, the capacity and willingness to use these resources, and the investment in their development while prioritizing short-term gains above long-term gains. Entrepreneurship is the demonstrable ability and willingness of individuals to recognize and create new economic opportunities, new products, new production, new production methods, new organizational schemes, and new product market combinations, as well as to introduce their ideas in the market in the face of uncertainty and other obstacles, by making decisions on the use of institutions, resources, and other factors such as location, form, and timing [2].

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7. Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the authors concluded that for any economy to be independent, buoyant and progressive, such nations must pay attention to its small-scale businesses as they are the root causes of the success of such economies. The Nigerian nation as a case study must therefore, take entrepreneurial activities seriously as it can create the pathway to economic integration and empowerment.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the authors proffered

the following recommendations:

Vocational business education must be redefined to suit current practices and occurrences in the nation. This is to ensure that the programme achieves its planned objectives.

Internet marketing practices should be embedded in the curriculum of vocational education. This is to ensure that trained entrepreneurs understand the notion of creating a better channel and frontiers of product communication to the public.

Entrepreneurship education in vocational studies should be made compulsory and enforced in such a way that within the university environment, passing entrepreneurship courses will be dependent on whether students are able to conceptualize, develop a business and make actual sales.

Students should be taught how to establish small-scale businesses even in the face of lack of funds. This is to ensure that unavailability of funds do not pose a challenge to emerging entrepreneurs.

Since government funding of vocational education has been epileptic, attention should be paid inward to find ways of funding the programme internally. This will create efficiency and sustainability.

Vocational business educators should be proactive and be up and doing. Their docility over the years have caused dormancy in the teaching and learning of vocational education. Hence, each vocational educator must represent the field especially in the social world as it is one of the ways of reaching out to the uninformed public and declaring the gospel of vocational education.

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