

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE AND SELF-EFFICACY AMONG VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

A knowledge-based economy requires citizens to develop entrepreneurial skills as well as lifelong and sustainable workforce and self-efficacy due to the glaring and rising rates of unemployment, as well as the high incidence of school dropouts and social vices visible in the Nigeria society today. This study therefore examined the entrepreneurial skills and life-long learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among VTE students in Colleges of Education in Plateau State Nigeria. Two objectives two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study is 1,175 students, a sample of 117 VTE students in Colleges of Education in Plateau States was used for the research. A structured questionnaire with a four-point rating scale was used for collection data. A coefficient of .88 Cronbach alpha as obtained for the instrument. The data collected were analyzed using the mean and Standard Deviation while the null hypotheses were tested using the t-test statistic. The study revealed that Vocational and Technical Education does not have the capacity of developing entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy in a knowledge-based economy among students. There was no significant difference between the mean score of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy. It was concluded that if VTE policy is implemented as expected, it will aid in the growth of students' self-efficacy, lifelong learning, and entrepreneurial abilities for a sustainable workforce. It was recommended among others that stakeholders in VTE should make conscious effort to maintain a balance between theory and practice as this can help VTE students gain entrepreneurial abilities, and right instructional facilities and equipment should be acquired, alongside sufficient supply of both high-quality and cost-effective human resources in colleges of education were proffered.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Skill, Lifelong-learning, Sustainable workforce, Self-efficacy, Knowledge-based economy.

Introduction

As the face of the world changes, so does that of the global business community. Businesses are not only challenged with moving forward in this new world to keep up with their competitors, but they must also embrace entering new technological times, progressively building, adapting and growing and most importantly, taking their employees with them on that journey (Cantele & Zardini, 2018). Given the current economic challenges facing many countries across the globe, the notion of engendering greater entrepreneurial activity has become a prominent goal for many governments. The relevance of entrepreneurship to economic development has been highlighted by many researchers (Browder, Aldrich & Bradley, 2019). A well-recognized education and training opportunities play a

key role in cultivating future entrepreneurs and in developing the abilities of existing entrepreneurs to grow their business to greater levels of success (Eunice, 2018). According to the European Commission (2008) the aim of entrepreneurship education and training should be to 'develop entrepreneurial capacities and mindsets' that benefit economies by fostering creativity, innovation and self-employment.

With the increasing rates of unemployment, together with the high incidence school dropouts and social ills in our society today, investigation must be made to determine whether skills development programmes are capable of relieving Nigeria from these disturbingly social problems. Successive governments have increased efforts to implement skills development

programmes to curb these social problems. Entrepreneurial skill in Vocational and Technical Education is one of the skill-development programmes that has been established by the Government to solve these societal issues.

The National Policy on Education defined vocational and technical education 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 economic and social life (Okoye & Arimo 2016).

Bagale (2015) defined vocational education as any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations. Vocational training deals with the training or retraining designed to prepare individuals to enter paid employment in any recognized occupation (Olaniran & Mncube, 2018). Vocational and technical education therefore is designed to offer people the opportunity of improving themselves in their general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupation. Ngor and Tambari (2017) opined that change in any nation's economy is required to prepare young people for the jobs of the future of which technical and vocational education have crucial roles to play. Okoye and Arimonu (2016) observed that technical and vocational education are very much still neglected in the aspect of adequate funding, personnel, modern facilities, staff motivation which consequently are robbing the country of the economic development to be contributed by graduates of vocational technical education. Ogbuanya and Arimonu (2015) stressed that there is an urgent need for the Nigeria's attention to be redirected towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which technical and technical education provides.

The menace of unemployment in Nigeria which has obstinately been on the increase even though the country is endowed with abundant human and natural resources have become one of the full-scale financial issues that each dependable government has relied upon to screen and manage. This could be because of the absence of strong and effective policies on social welfare, improper orientation of the youths and societal attitude towards vocational and technical education. The ability of students to identify opportunities in their environment could be greatly influenced through training received from entrepreneurial skills acquisition

which is an integral aspect of VTE programmes in the Colleges. This observation has been supported by career socialization theory which proposes that the decision to engage in a career is influenced by many social factors including exposure to educational experiences (Entrialgo & Iglesias, 2018).

Given that most graduates are unemployed coupled with the rising unemployment rates are even more worrisome, as most graduates are best suited for white-collar jobs; and do not possess the vocational abilities that would enable them to confidently engage in entrepreneurial activities in life (Maxwell, Stephen, Hezekiah, Paul & Oyafunke-Omoniyi, 2018). The vocational skills gap among graduates spurred the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) through the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) to integrate entrepreneurial studies into the curriculum of colleges of education in Nigeria in 2004 (Ekpoh & Edet, 2011) to curb the ever-increasing unemployment rate and all other social burdens (Edokpolor & Somorin, 2017).

Entrepreneurial skills are a person's ability to combine ideas, innovation, and creativity through behavior to be able to run a business that has more value by using techniques, management, and careful planning. The indicators for this variable of entrepreneurial skills consist of basic skills, which include the skills to work together, manage finances, and communicate; management skills, including managing resources, marketing and controlling the business; and personal maturity skills include skills to be responsible and have entrepreneurial insight. Entrepreneurial skill is important not only for future entrepreneurs, but also to prepare students for changing job market in a rapidly developing and dynamic economy (McDonald & Hite, 2018). The economy of the 21st century, which relies on knowledge, service, and information, requires a workforce with higher levels of skills to ensure business success in the light of the growing competition in the market (Boyles, 2017).

Education, whether general or specific can influence lifelong learning activities (Kruger, Duch, Parellada, Osborne, Mariani & Jiménez, 2015). The Council on Higher Education (2019) stipulated that the educational system would open its doors in the spirit of lifelong learning to professionals. Hence, an experientially acquired knowledge through VTE is expected to impact an individual's decision to engage both in entrepreneurial and lifelong learning career activities. It is not an overstatement to say VTE is the

engine of economic growth. Nigeria as a nation cannot thrive and develop without well-equipped technical and vocational institutions. This is why government must invest heavily in education with specific attention given to vocational and technical education. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and teachers in this area should take up the campaign for the provisions of more funds for vocational and technical education and to launder its image in society, it has been this way in many societies (Ojimba, 2013). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) noted that revitalizing this sector is among the ways to improve economic opportunities for the youths, towards a sustainable workforce.

Sustainable workforce is one where the work environment is caring and supports employee wellbeing. Employees are not seen as primarily resources that can be deployed to serve employers' economic ends. Their skills, talent, and energies are not overused or overly depleted (Willemse, Jonge, Smit, Visser, Depla & Pot, 2015). In other words, sustainable workforce refers to a workforce that is resilient, adaptable, and able to maintain its productivity and well-being over time, while also contributing to the long-term health and success of the organization and the environment. A sustainable workforce is essential for organization to contribute to the well-being of the environment and the society. By prioritizing the well-being and development of their employees, organizations can build a sustainable workforce that drives long term success and positive impact which could be possible through lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning involves the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates individuals to acquire all the necessary abilities they require throughout their lifetime and apply them with confidence in all circumstances and environments. Thus, lifelong learning and self-efficacy can be seen as the acquisition of cognitive attributes that stimulate the individual's decisions to learn throughout their entire lifespan (Edokpolor & Omiunu, 2017).

Lifelong learning provides VTE students with skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Lifelong learning builds upon the skills and knowledge acquired through VTE training, enabling individuals to adapt to changing work environments and technological advancement towards a knowledge-based economy. The knowledge-based economy is an economic system in which the production of goods and services is based principally on knowledge-intensive

activities that contribute to advancement in technical and scientific innovation (Svarc & Dabic, 2017). A knowledge-based economy is one where organizations and people acquire, create, disseminate and use knowledge more effectively for greater economic and social development. Increased importance of knowledge provides great potential for countries to strengthen their economic and social development by providing more efficient ways of producing goods and services and delivering them more effectively and at lower costs to a greater number of people. Wealth creation through application of human knowledge and creativity is steadily outpacing wealth creation through extraction and processing of natural resources. Knowledge has increasingly become an important means for value creation (Ghirmai, 2010).

Looking at the high rate of unemployment among NCE graduates, it became imperative that colleges of education programmes to be reviewed to include not only the philosophy of entrepreneurship, but also equipping students with necessary skills to become entrepreneurs (Okoro, 2015). It is hoped that with teaching of entrepreneurship education in colleges of education, students will be well prepared for the labour market after graduation. This can further curb the menace of unemployment which is accompanied by prostitution, drug abuse and trafficking, kidnapping and other social ills. Despite the recognition that education influence people's decision, entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy has remained relatively unexplored. Therefore, the question of whether VTE can develop entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce in a knowledge-based economy and self-efficacy among students is still far fetch, hence requires further research. This therefore formed, the basis of this paper.

Statement of the Problem

Entrepreneurial skills provide its recipient with the ability to navigate uncertainty, identify opportunities and create value. Lifelong learning is essential for entrepreneurs to adapt to changing environments, innovate, and continuously grow. This in turn helps the students to be self-reliant owing to the experiences gained from VTE training after graduation. However there has been much lamentation by citizens over the increasing rates of unemployment alongside the high incidence of students' dropout and social ills in Nigeria. These social problems have reflected the poor perceptions of Nigerian youths towards entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning towards sustainable

workforce. Successive governments have increased efforts to implement skills development programmes to help in developing entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning among students, and one of these skills development programmes expected to address the social problems is VTE. Nonetheless, not many researchers have taken up the challenge to empirically determine if VTE has the capacity to develop entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students. This no doubt has created a noticeable gap in academic literature. It is based on this identified gap that this research attempt to provide an empirical data regarding entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and career self-efficacy among students in Colleges of Education in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This research examined entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students in Colleges of Education in Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, the research sought:

- i. to examine the impact of VTE in developing entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students.
- ii. to determine the impact of VTE in developing lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided study:

- i. What is the impact of VTE in developing entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students?

- ii. What is the impact of VTE in developing lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

- i. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.
- ii. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.

Methodology

This research adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive research design is useful for investigating a variety of educational problems and issues (Eyisi, 2016). The respondents were selected from three (3) Colleges of Education in Plateau State Nigeria, they are: Federal College of Education, Pankshin, College of Education, Gindiri and Oswald-Walla College of Education, Shendam. A proportionate Stratified Random Sampling Technique was used, to select a sample of 117 respondents out of a total population of 1,175. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire, validated by two experts. With the help of three (3) research assistance, the instrument was administered to the respondents and retrieved as soon as it was completed. The data were analyzed using mean, Standard Deviation for the research questions while the t-test statistics was used test the hypothesis at .05 level of significance.

Results

The data collected from the respondents were presented in Tables as seen below:

Research Question 1: What is the impact of VTE on entrepreneurial skills and self-efficacy among students?

Table 1: Mean responses and standard deviations of VTE students regarding entrepreneurial skills for self-efficacy

S/NO	ITEMS	X	SD	DECISION
1.	skills and ability to create a needed product or service for potential customers, hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.22	.64	Disagree
2.	skills and ability to improve on an existing product or service, hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.18	.60	Disagree
3.	skills and ability to sell a needed product or service to potential customers, hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed.	2.15	.63	Disagree
4.	skills and ability to concentrate on any business venture, future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.12	.69	Disagree
5.	an entrepreneur is apprentice for a long period of time, hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.10	.71	Disagree
6.	skills and ability to work cooperatively with others, hence future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.13	.76	Disagree
7.	practical experience in performing exercises related to specialized field, hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.11	.74	Disagree
8.	acquired the skills and ability to maintain safe and organized conditions when tackling any business activity, hence future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.07	.69	Disagree
9.	skills and ability to perform self-discipline no matter the activity, future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.75	.89	Agree
10.	high level of interest for my specialized field; hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.16	.82	Disagree
11.	the skills and ability to set goals and try to achieve those goals through implementation of adequate resources, hence my future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed.	2.12	.83	Disagree
12.	ability and skills to influence others to meet their social and psychological needs, future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.79	.85	Agree
13.	the skills and ability to monitor an employee's performance and/or activities; future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed.	2.07	.73	Disagree
14.	skills and ability to develop a document that describes current state and presupposed future of an organization; future entrepreneurial activity is guaranteed	2.13	.65	Disagree

The results presented in Table 1 revealed the mean responses of VTE students in the Colleges regarding the impact of VTE in developing entrepreneurial skills for career self-efficacy. The results revealed that 14 items had the mean scores that ranged from 2.07 to 2.16, while the corresponding Standard Deviations values ranged from .64 to .89 respectively. These mean

scores simply implies that VTE do not have the capacity of developing entrepreneurial skills for career self-efficacy, while the corresponding standard deviations values simply means that VTE students' responses regarding the influence of VTE in developing entrepreneurial skills for career self-efficacy are very close irrespective of their gender differences.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of VTE on lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students?**Table 2: Mean responses and standard deviations of VTE and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.**

S/NO	ITEMS	X	SD	DECISION
1.	skills and ability to collect or retrieve information using existing resources in my specialized field leads to confident to perform well in future occupation	2.06	.74	Disagree
2.	acquired the skills and ability to manage and evaluate information using existing resources in my specialized field	2.07	.70	Disagree
3.	acquired the skills and ability to evaluate the quality and usefulness of information using existing	2.03	.81	Disagree
4.	skills and ability to generate accurate information using existing resources	2.05	.77	Disagree
5.	Research skills and inquiry mind using existing knowledge	2.04	.73	Disagree
6.	awareness of how knowledge is created using prior knowledge	2.08	.72	Disagree
7.	sense of positive self-concept as a learner using prior knowledge	2.03	.83	Disagree
8.	acquired the skills and ability to use different learning strategies for different situations	2.03	.82	Disagree
9.	skills and ability to integrate knowledge from different subject areas	2.17	.72	Disagree
10.	the skills and ability to assess learning outcomes using existing knowledge	2.16	.71	Disagree
11.	gained some positive encouragement from lecturers and other entrepreneurs	2.32	.69	Disagree
12.	observed the successes and failures of staff and students	2.81	.77	Agree

The results presented in Table 2 reveals the mean responses of VTE students in the Colleges regarding the influence of VTE in developing lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy. The results show that 12 items had the mean scores that ranged from 2.00 to 2.29, while the corresponding Standard Deviations values ranged from .70 to .83 respectively. These mean scores simply implies that VTE do not have

the capability of developing lifelong learning for career self-efficacy, while the corresponding Standard Deviations values simply means that VTE students' responses regarding the influence of VTE in developing lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy are very close irrespective of their gender differences.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of entrepreneurial skills for Sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.**Table 3: t-test analysis between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.**

Variable	Respondents	N	Aggregate		df	t	p	Decision
			X	SD				
VTE and the development of entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy	Male	30	2.16	.51	116	.72	.46	NS
	Female	87	2.25	.59				
	Total	117						

Source: Field Study, 2023

The results presented in Table 3 showed that the aggregate mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy are 2.16 and 2.25, while the corresponding Standard Deviation values are .51 and .59 respectively.

The Table also showed that t-value is .72 at df of 116, while p-value (.46) is greater than the alpha value (.05); therefore, the null hypothesis is retained. Hence, there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the

development of entrepreneurial skills for career self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.

Table 4: t-test analysis between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy

Variable	Respondents	N	Aggregate		df	t	p	Decision
			X	SD				
VTE and the development of lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy	Male	30	2.17	.60	116	.17	.88	NS
	Female	87	2.12	.64				
	Total	117						

Source: Field Study, 2023

The results presented in Table 3 showed that the aggregate mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the influence of VTE in developing lifelong learning career self-efficacy are 2.17 and 2.12, while the corresponding standard deviation values are .60 and .64 respectively. The Table also showed that t-value is .17 at df of 116, while p-value (.88) is greater than the alpha value (.05); hence, the null hypothesis is retained. Hence, there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female students of VTE regarding the development of lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy.

Discussions of Findings

This paper investigated entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students. The results in research question 1 showed that VTE is not capable of developing entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students. The reason for this finding may not be unconnected with the fact that career development services are not in place and hence, VTE students may not have the capability of developing entrepreneurial skills for sustainable workforce for self-efficacy. This finding conforms to the assertion of Amalaha (2017) who noted that career development services in Nigeria today are relatively inactive in the education sector and are still on a trial-and-error basis. Thus, providing opportunity for VTE students to acquire skills that are compatible with their intrinsic abilities will play an important role in instilling confidence so that they can continuously participate in entrepreneurial activities throughout their lifespan (Edokpolor & Omiunu, 2017).

Furthermore, the findings of the research also show that VTE does not have the capability of developing lifelong learning for sustainable workforce and self-efficacy among students. This finding can be attributed to the inadequate provision of human and material resources which has further affected the instructional delivery of VTE as opined by (Snell and Morris, 2022). This finding also agrees with the position of Okoye and Arimo (2016) who observed that technical and vocational education are still neglected in the aspect of adequate funding, personnel, modern facilities, staff motivation which consequently are robbing the country of the economic development to be contributed by graduates of technical/vocational education. Ogbuanya and Arimonu (2015) stressed that there is an urgent need for the Nigeria's attention to be redirected towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which technical education provides. The successful delivery of VTE teaching will be ensured through resource optimization, which will also aid in building students' self-efficacy and encouraging them to pursue lifelong learning. Giving students the chance to learn through practical experiences (internship, teaching practice, SIWES, field trip etc.) can potentially play an important role in developing lifelong learning self-efficacy in knowledge-Based economy.

Conclusion

Fostering entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning among vocational and technical education students is crucial for developing a sustainable workforce and promoting self-efficacy. By integrating entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning into their education, students can acquire the knowledge, skills

and mindsets necessary to succeed in an ever-changing work environment. This enables them to adapt, innovate and thrive in their chosen fields, contributing to a sustainable workforce and driving economic growth. Entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning enhance self-efficacy, empowering students to take ownership of their learning and careers. By developing a growth mindset, resilience and creativity, students can overcome obstacles, navigate uncertainty and achieve their goals. This, in turn, boosts their confidence, motivation and overall well-being, leading to a more fulfilling and purposeful life.

In line with the findings of this study, it was concluded that if the VTE policy is implemented as expected, it will aid in the growth of students' self-efficacy, lifelong learning, and entrepreneurial abilities for a sustainable workforce. By doing so, we can cultivate a future workforce that is equipped to address the complex challenges of the 21st century, drive innovation and sustainability, and achieve their full potentials.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Government and other major stakeholders of VTE should endeavour to collaboratively

improve funding of VTE so that qualified manpower and state-of-the-art instructional facilities can be made available to help in developing entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning for career self-efficacy among students.

- ii. TVET policy makers and curriculum designers should endeavour to implement practical learning strategies so that theoretical foundations and practical applications would be in harmony to help in developing entrepreneurial skills and lifelong learning among students.
- iii. VTE policy makers and curriculum designers should endeavour to implement career development mechanisms so that VTE students can be provided with relevant information, practical experience, and one-to-one or group advice to inculcate in them the spirit of entrepreneurship and lifelong learning.
- iv. TVET teacher training institutions should be redesigned for competency-based teacher training involving the use of modern technology.

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