

Skills Acquisition in Vocational Agricultural Education: A Panacea for Employment Generation among Youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study was conducted to ascertain the use of skills acquisition in vocational agricultural education as a panacea for employment generation among youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas of Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria. Descriptive Survey Design was used for the study whose population and sample were 2400 and 220 youths respectively. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. A 30-item researchers' self-structured instrument called Skills Acquisition in Vocational Agricultural Education for Employment Generation Questionnaire designed on a 5-point Likert scale was used for the study. The instrument was face validated by three experts in Agricultural Education from Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained via Cronbach's Alpha method and a reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researchers with the support of two research assistants. The findings of the study revealed among others, that skills acquisition in vocational agricultural education is an alternative for massive employment generation among youths in Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that the Rivers State Government of Nigeria should provide loans for the youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas to encourage their participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation and poverty reduction in the society.

Keywords: Skills Acquisition, unemployment, poverty, youths, TVET.

Introduction

In every society, the youths are tools for economic development and social transformation. Youths as defined by the National Policy on Youth Development (as cited in Olelewe (2016) is any individual who is a citizen of Federal Republic of Nigeria between the ages of 18-35). Similarly, Akande (2011) defines youth as an age of adventure; a bridge between the adolescent and the adults or old age. The bulk of the workforce in any country across the globe is constituted by youths. Okwelle and Ayonmike (2014) posit that youths are the engine room for meaningful development in any country. In Nigeria, youths formed two third 2/3 of the nation's population which implies that they form the active workforce of the nation. According to the National Population Commission (NPC) (2007), about 80 million which represents 60% of Nigerian Population is made of the youths. These youths are very active and willing to

contribute their quota to the economic development of Nigeria but unfortunately, they are faced with a monster called unemployment. About 80% of Nigerian youths are unemployed (NPC, 2007). According to Owo (2017), youth unemployment metamorphosed to societal ills such as youth restiveness, hooliganism, thuggery, rape, armed robbery, prostitution, kidnapping, cultism among others. One of the reasons for alarming unemployment rate in Nigeria is the inability of youths to acquire relevant technical and vocational skills capable of generating employment for them. Alhasan and Abdullahi (2013) submitted that many of the Nigerian youths who drop out of school together with those who manage to complete high school lacked basic skills to compete in rather weak economy and tight labour market. Thus, there is need for the youths to embrace technical vocational education and training (TVET) for skills acquisition and subsequently, employment generation.

TVET serves as an indispensable tool for youths' employment generation in Nigeria. According to the united nations education scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) (2013), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is widely seen as a tool to tackling youth unemployment across the globe. This is because the aim of establishing TVET is to address the shortfalls in skills acquisition for job creation and economic development. Adepoju (2014) described TVET as an educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities, capacities, and all other structural experiences for securing jobs in the various sectors of the economy or even enabling one to be self-dependent by being a job creator. TVET is seen as the type of education which prepares individuals for the world of work; an instrument for sustainable development (Nande, Awua & Mlumum, 2017). Similarly, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Badawi (2013) defined TVET as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational processes involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. This TVET is geared towards the skill development of youths for self-reliance and employment generation.

Skill as defined by Okorie (2000) refers to human capacity to perform any activity with dexterity and competence. Skills can be seen as special abilities in a given occupation acquired through learning and practice (Samuel, 2017). In the view of Ogbuanya and Bakari (2014), skill refers to individual's capacity to control element of behavior, thinking and feeling within specified contexts and within a particular task domain. Skills refer to unique abilities gained through committed learning and practice which enable an individual to be proficient in his work role in a chosen vocation. Skills in Vocational Agricultural Education are paramount for the youths not only for them to create jobs for themselves, but also to become employers of labour. For instance, youths who acquire skills in fish farming, poultry, snail rearing, animal feed production, crop science, among others can create job opportunities for themselves and others thereby contributing to poverty reduction and economic development of the nation. This is a way forward for employment generation among Nigerian youths.

The Federal Government of Nigeria over the years had set up different youth empowerment schemes to help tackle the menace of youth unemployment across the

nation. Notable among these youth employment generation schemes according to Mohammed (2017) include the following: The Youth Corpers Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (YCEDP) which was targeted at fresh graduates, The Rural Enterprise Development Initiative (REDI) which was aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship/enterprise development in the rural communities owing to Government's observation that some of these rural communities possess abundant natural resources capable of generating employment, create wealth and reduce poverty. The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU WIN!), a programme that was run in synergy with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Communication Technology (CT), and the Ministry of Youth Development in agreement with the Federal Government's drive to create more jobs for Nigerians. Others are N-Power, SURE-P, GIS to mention but a few. These employment schemes have done so much in the area of job creation among Nigerian youths but unfortunately, due to the extent of unemployment prevalent in the land and the population explosion experienced in the country, there is need for more job creation to cater for the employment needs of the teeming youth population.

Statement of the Problem

Youth are the livewire of any society in all over the world. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the youths are at the receiving end of the tunnel as they suffer a great deal from a cankerworm called unemployment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), third quarter 2018 Labour Force Survey Reports, Rivers State records the second highest unemployment rate at 36.4% after Akwa-Ibom State. Rivers State also records the highest number of unemployed population having a labour force population of 4,601,135. Furthermore, Ezie (2012) posits that youth unemployment in Nigeria led to poverty and increased crime rates in the country. According to World Bank (2011), the poverty rate in Nigeria is at 33.1% despite the abundant natural resources the nation is blessed with. The unemployment saga which has affected Nigeria and by extension, Rivers State brings about so much societal vices such as kidnapping, prostitution, armed robbery, pipeline destruction, among others. These nefarious crimes are mostly committed by the youths and when challenged to find out why they perpetrate such crimes, they usually attribute it to poverty and hunger due to their inability to secure paid employments. Skills acquisition in Vocational education is seen as a tool for employment generation among the youths to overcome the menace of unemployment. Hence, the essence of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the use of skills acquisition in vocational agricultural education as a panacea for employment generation among youths in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.
2. Determine the areas in which vocational agricultural education can generate employment among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

3. Determine Possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria?
2. What are the areas in which vocational agricultural education can generate employment among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria?
3. What are the possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria?

Null Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on the vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on the areas in which vocational agricultural education can generate employment among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on the possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Youths' unemployment is as a result of skill-mismatch between graduates' skills acquisition and industrial skills demand for a given job role. According to Daily Trust (2013) the federal government recently acknowledged that about 80 % of Nigerian youths are unemployed and 10 % underemployed. Youth's unemployment, poverty, social unrest and insecurity are among the most pressing challenges presently facing many countries across the globe (Ogbuanya, & Udoudo, 2015). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2012), one of the main reasons for high youth unemployment across the world is a growing mismatch between the supply and demand for skills, which disproportionately affects young people in developing countries. In about 23 sub-Saharan African countries, most of the young people aged 15-19 lack basic literacy and numeracy skills because they never attended school or dropped out early (UNESCO, 2012). In some countries, unemployment among young people who have not completed secondary school is nearly twice as high as among those with tertiary degrees (Scarpetta & Sonnet, 2012). Youths constitute a greater percentage of the world's population, thus, their prospects for employment affect future economic growth, both in their countries and globally (UNESCO, 2012). According to Ogbuanya and Michael (2015), the rate of unemployment in Nigeria is alarming and could promote social vices some of which are kidnapping, armed robbery, child trafficking, Cultism, Drug peddling and ritual killing capable of threatening national security. However, to create employment for the teeming youths of Rivers State, Nigeria, skills acquisition in vocational education is crucial. Technical vocational education and training creates more jobs than tertiary education qualifications because it focuses on

the skill training of the learners especially in line with the demands of the industry (Kuepie, Nordman & Roubaud, 2009; Herschbach, 2009). According to UNESCO (2012), some of the reasons for youth unemployment include inadequate relevant life skills for industrial job roles, poor information about job vacancies, poor entrepreneurship skills for job creation, lack of relevant work experience among others. However, the youths can possibly create employment by upgrading their skills in formal or informal learning environments to make themselves more employable (ILO, 2012). Inyiagu (2014) reports that youths lack of interest in skills acquisition through technical and vocational education over the years may have contributed to the high rate of unemployment and rising poverty among them. Vocational education being the education and training of skilled workers and employees aims at preparing young people for life through the development of their skills, aptitudes and talents for employment generation (Inyiagu, 2014). Adebayo (2013) posits that unemployment in Nigeria brings about increased poverty and crime rates in the society.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. A population of 2400 youths (male and female) from seven communities in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas of Rivers State was used for the study. These youths who are mostly unemployed graduates from the area had discovered that the formal educational training they received in their respective disciplines in the university could not offer them paid employment reason being that they lacked core life skills needed for employment generation. They however decided to embrace vocational agricultural education to develop their vocational and entrepreneurship skills for self-employment. Accidental sampling was used to select 220 youths (128 males and 92 females) from Ngo, Ataba, Unyeada, Ikuru, Opobo, Kalaibiana and Nkoro as the study sample. Three research questions and three hypotheses formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The instrument for data collection was the researchers' self-constructed 30-item questionnaire titled "Skills Acquisition in Vocational Agricultural Education for Employment Generation Questionnaire (SAVAEEGQ)". SAVAEEGQ was constructed on a 5-point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree corresponding to numerical values of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was face validated by three experts in Agricultural Education in Rivers State University Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was established using 48 youths (30 males and 18 females) who were not part of the study sample and a reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained via Cronbach's alpha method. Out of the 220 questionnaires distributed to the respondents by the researchers and two other research assistants, only 190 representing 86.4 % of the total number of questionnaires distributed were successfully retrieved and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were statistical tools used to analyze the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision is that any item whose mean is less than 3.00 was rejected while any item whose mean is greater than or equal to 3.00 was accepted. Standard deviation values close or wide apart were used to test homogeneity in the responses of the respondents. If the table value, t_{crit} is less than the calculated value, t_{cal} , the hypothesis will be rejected but if otherwise, the hypothesis will be accepted.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1: Vocational Agricultural Education Skills for Youth Employment Generation

S/N	Item Statement	Males			Females		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	Decision	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	Decision
1	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Fish Farming Skills for employment generation.	4.16	0.69	Agreed	4.68	0.48	Agreed
2	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Poultry management skills for employment generation.	3.98	0.93	Agreed	3.88	0.87	Agreed
3	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Snail rearing Skills for employment generation.	3.86	0.78	Agreed	4.09	0.90	Agreed
4	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Crop Planting Skills for employment generation.	3.74	1.05	Agreed	3.65	1.07	Agreed
5	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Animal Feeds Preparation Skills for employment generation.	4.02	0.88	Agreed	3.96	0.77	Agreed
6	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Pig Rearing Skills for employment generation.	4.08	0.79	Agreed	4.29	0.84	Agreed
7	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Agricultural Products Management Skills for employment generation.	3.97	0.94	Agreed	3.88	1.06	Agreed

8	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Food Preservation Skills for employment generation.	3.69	0.83	Agreed	4.15	0.82	Agreed
9	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas require General farming skills for employment generation.	3.78	0.78	Agreed	3.92	0.98	Agreed
10	Youths in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas need Cassava Processing Skills for employment generation.	3.82	0.92	Agreed	4.12	0.93	Agreed
	Grand mean	3.91			4.06		

Table 1 reveals that all the respondents believe that the items represent vocational agricultural education skills needed by youths for employment generation. This is seen from the mean reference points in the table which are all greater than the criterion Mean value of 3.00. Standard deviation values showed homogeneity in their responses.

Research Question 2: What are the areas in which vocational agricultural education can generate employment among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria?

Table 2: Areas of Vocational Agricultural Education for Youth Employment Generation

S/N	Item Statement	Males			Females		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	Decision	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	Decision
1	Fish Farming	3.60	1.04	Agreed	4.65	0.65	Agreed
2	Horticulture	3.49	0.88	Agreed	3.94	0.85	Agreed
3	Poultry farming	4.15	0.79	Agreed	4.22	0.74	Agreed
4	Pig rearing	4.10	0.94	Agreed	3.89	1.03	Agreed
5	Snail farming	3.89	0.86	Agreed	3.98	0.76	Agreed
6	Honey making	4.21	0.98	Agreed	4.04	1.04	Agreed
7	Garri production	3.69	0.67	Agreed	4.16	0.87	Agreed

8	Vegetables planting	4.02	0.92	Agreed	4.02	0.97	Agreed
9	Eggs Supply	4.06	0.83	Agreed	3.88	0.81	Agreed
10	Animal feeds production and marketing	3.78	1.02	Agreed	4.68	0.48	Agreed
	Grand mean	3.90			4.15		

Table 2 revealed that all the items are possible areas of vocational agricultural education for youth employment. This is evident in the mean responses of the respondents which are all above the criterion mean of 3.00.

Research Question 3: What are the possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria?

Table 3: Ways of Promoting Youths Participation in Vocational Agricultural Education Skills Acquisition Programmes for Employment Generation

S/N	Item Statement	Males			Females		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	Decision	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	Decision
1	Provision of incentives to farmers by the Rivers State Government.	3.89	1.02	Agreed	4.02	0.93	Agreed
2	Provision of Loans for farmers and Fishermen from Agricultural Development Banks.	3.68	0.83	Agreed	3.92	0.86	Agreed
3	Distribution of free farming implements to young farmers.	4.01	0.91	Agreed	4.03	0.81	Agreed
4	Favorable Agricultural policies by the Rivers State Government.	3.97	1.09	Agreed	4.12	0.88	Agreed
5	Sensitization programmes for awareness creation by Rivers State Ministry of Agriculture.	4.11	0.89	Agreed	3.76	0.51	Agreed
6	Making Agricultural trade subjects compulsory at Secondary School level.	4.02	0.92	Agreed	3.73	1.07	Agreed
7	Encouraging the consumption of locally made goods.	3.79	0.86	Agreed	3.58	0.89	Agreed

8	Establishing Fisheries Institutes in strategic locations across Nigeria.	4.06	0.69	Agreed	4.20	0.85	Agreed
9	Establishment of Agro Skills Acquisition Centres in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas.	3.92	0.81	Agreed	4.03	0.79	Agreed
10	Free distribution of fertilizers to farmers by Rivers State Government.	3.69	0.74	Agreed	3.58	0.81	Agreed
Grand mean		3.91			3.90		

Table 3 showed that all the items are possible ways of encouraging youth's participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation. This is seen from the mean values of the respondents on all items which are all greater than the criterion mean value of 3.00.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

Table 4: T-test Analysis on Vocational Agricultural Education Skills for Employment Generation in Rivers State.

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	α	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	110	3.91	0.86	188	0.05	0.83	1.96	Accepted
Female	80	4.06	0.87					

Table 4 indicated that the calculated mean tcal (0.83) is less than the critical table value tcrit (1.96) at a degree of freedom 188. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria is accepted.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on areas in which vocational agricultural education can generate employment among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

Table 5: t-test Analysis on Areas of Vocational Agricultural Education for Employment Generation in Rivers State.

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	α	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	110	3.90	0.89	188	0.05	1.41	1.96	Accepted
Female	80	4.15	0.82					

Table 5 indicated that the calculated mean tcal (1.41) is less than the critical table value tcrit (1.96) at a degree of freedom 188. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on areas in which vocational agricultural education is needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria is accepted.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on the possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria.

Table 6: T-test Analysis on Ways of Promoting Youths' Participation in Vocational Agricultural Education for Employment Generation in Rivers State.

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	α	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Male	110	3.91	0.88	188	0.05	0.06	1.96	Accepted
Female	80	3.90	0.84					

Table 6 revealed that the calculated mean tcal (0.06) is less than the critical table value tcrit (1.96) at a degree of freedom 188. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

From Table 1, the result showed that skills acquisition in vocational agricultural education is a substitute for employment generation among the youths in Rivers State, Nigeria. This assertion is supported by Inyiagu (2014) who reports that youths lack of interest in skills acquisition through technical and vocational education over the years have contributed to the high rate of unemployment and rising poverty in Nigeria. In the same vein, UNESCO (2012) reports that some of the reasons for youth unemployment include lack of relevant life skills for industrial job roles, poor information about job vacancies, poor entrepreneurship skills for job creation, lack of relevant work experience among others. therefore, Rivers youths need to embrace vocational agricultural education in order to acquire relevant skills for employment generation

Table 2 revealed numerous areas of in which vocational agricultural education can be utilized for employment generation by youths. This statement is in line with Adepoju (2014) who posits that Technical Vocational Education and Training is an

instrument for job creation in agriculture, applied sciences, and other allied vocations. Similarly, (Kuepie et al, 2009; Herschbach, 2009) in their separate studies submitted that different aspects of Technical vocational education and training programmes create more jobs for the unemployed youths across the globe more than tertiary education qualifications will do. Thus, it is imperative for the youths of Rivers State, Nigeria to identify and utilize effectively, any of the vocational agricultural education trades of their choice for employment generation to support poverty and crime reduction in the society.

Table 3 showed possible ways in which the youths can be encouraged to embrace vocational agricultural education for employment generation in Nigeria. This implies that if government is ready to support the youths in vocational agriculture, many jobs will be created and unemployment rate in Nigeria will drastically reduce. This assertion is buttressed by UNESCO (2012) which reports that the youths constitute a greater percentage of the world's population, thus, their prospects for employment affect future economic growth, both in their countries and globally. Hence, unemployment and poverty which pose a great challenge to the economic and socio-cultural development of Nigeria can be tackled through the instrument of vocational agricultural education. Therefore, Nigerian youths are enjoined to embrace skills acquisition for employment generation and societal transformation.

Table 4 revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on vocational agricultural education skills needed for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria. This assertion was supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2012) who posits that the youths need skill upgrade in both formal and informal environments for job creation and this, they can achieve by effectively utilizing the numerous opportunities available through technical vocational education and training (TVET) programmes.

Table 5 showed that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on areas in which vocational agricultural education can generate employment among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria. This statement is in agreement with the views of Adepoju (2014) who posits that Technical Vocational Education and Training is an instrument for job creation in agriculture, applied sciences, and other allied vocations.

Table 6 indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female youths on the possible ways of promoting youths' participation in vocational agricultural education for employment generation among youths in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria. This assertion is in line with Ogbuanya and Bakari (2014) who submitted that adequate skills acquisition is necessary for excellent job performance in any chosen vocation and recommended that Government should create more opportunities for the youths to acquire relevant skills for employment generation.

Conclusion

The youths are the most affected by unemployment and its adverse consequences. Some of the youths have lost their lives through cultism. Others have resorted to prostitution,

drug addiction and abuse, kidnapping, armed robbery, human trafficking among other vices with the sole intention of overcoming the pains accompanying unemployment but to no avail. Thus, there is a dire need for youths to embrace skills acquisition programmes to create employment not just for themselves alone but also for others. Assuredly, this is a formidable approach to fighting the dreaded monster called unemployment in Rivers State, Nigeria and the world at large.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested based on the findings of the study:

1. Rivers State Government should provide loans to the youths in Andoni and Opbo/Nkoro Local Government Areas to enable them start-up vocational agricultural businesses.
2. Rivers State Government should create more skills acquisition centres across the state especially in Andoni and Opbo/Nkoro Local Government Areas to cater for the vocational skills developmental needs of the youths.
3. Rivers State Government through the Ministry of Agriculture should encourage the youths through adequate sensitization to acquire relevant life skills in addition to their academic fields of specialization for employment generation.
4. Federal Government of Nigeria should make vocational trade subjects compulsory at Senior Secondary level of education in Nigeria.

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