



Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The study determined the Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. Two purposes, two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rivers State. The population of the study was 101 respondents, comprising 45 female lecturers and 56 male lecturers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rivers State. The entire population was used since the population is of manageable size. Thus, purposive sampling technique was used. A structured questionnaire instrument was used to collect data for the study titled 'Vocational Skills Acquisition Questionnaire (VSAQ)'. The instrument was structured on four-point response options of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) with values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively for each item. The instrument was face-validated by three experts. 30 copies of the questionnaires were administered among lecturers in Rivers State University; hence this did not form the part of the main population of the study. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient formula was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. This yielded 0.68 reliability index. The finding of the study revealed that to a high extent would school/industry collaboration enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. It was recommended that Government and policy makers should strengthen the Collaboration between schools and industries as this would enhance vocational skills acquisition by students.

Keywords: Vocational Skills Acquisition, Schools-industries Collaboration, Expanding Work-Based Learning.

INTRODUCTION

Concept of Workplace Training in Technical Vocational Education and Training Workplace training has been widely recognized as the most efficient method for skills development. According to the Australian National Training Authority (2003), workplace training and learning is the training or learning undertaken in the workplace, usually on the job, under normal operational conditions. Similarly, the European Centre for Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2011) defined workplace training as a form of training that takes place in a workplace based on the principle of learning by doing and includes demonstrations by a more experienced employee, performance under supervision, and coaching, job rotation and participation in specific projects. CEDEFOP further asserted that workplace training can be associated with formal training programmes as well as informal or incidental learning that may or may not result in some form of credential. The works of Lave & Wenger (1991), Brown & Duguid (1991) & Lave (1995) in Uwameiye (2010) emphasized the need for learning and practice to be in context, for learning to be effective and meaningful. To these authors, knowledge is a product of the activity, context and culture in which it is developed and

utilized. This implies that enabling learners to work and learn in stimulating environment can enhance learning and productivity.

Workplace training can take various forms such as formal apprenticeships which typically involve a contract, lasting for a period of two to four years and leading to a formal qualification or other shorter and often less formal training and work experience programmes for youths as well as training for employees. CEDEFOP stated that workplace training generally involves the use of experts (trainers) who play a leading role in transferring the needed knowledge and skills to the learners or workers. Through workplace training, people are motivated to learn (Uwameiye, 2010). Uwameiye added that the workplace is the primary location in which the pedagogic values can be appreciated by relating 'what is learnt' to the application and development of identities. Here, learning becomes a natural process that occurs as people participate in the work situation. A key advantage of workplace training is that it provides opportunity for immediate application of the acquired knowledge and skills to the workplace (CEDEFOP, 2011).

The laudable objectives of TVET cannot be achieved without an effective connecting workplace-school collaboration relationship. Emphasizing the need for TVET workplace-school collaboration, Lave & Wenger (1991), Brown & Duguid (1991) & Lave (1995) in Uwameiye (2010) provided the following theoretical supports: the rejection of formal and informal learning dualism; the rejection of the transmissions, teaching and learning model which portrays the learner as a passive recipient of knowledge; among others. According to Lave (1995) in Uwameiye (2010), the recognition that the knowledge can be produced in practical as well as academic setting; and knowing is never context free; learning should be recognized as a social, collective phenomenon, rather than the individual psychological phenomenon. To this end, the purpose of instruction is to enhance the quality of learning and to make it purposeful and methodical. According to Amu MEK & Offei-Ansah (2011), the ingredients for effective learning include: ensuring that individuals have access to theoretical and experimental knowledge; the opportunity to engage in authentic task and interaction with others; the chance to develop critical and intellectual capacities through the application of concept and theory in practice; and the opportunity to have their thinking and understanding enhanced through the guidance and teaching of others. Workplace-School collaboration is a mutual work experience learning relationship between educational institutions and the workplace where the students for training acquires workplace experiences for a period of time.

Workplace-School collaboration has in recent times gained increasing popularity due to the enormous benefits that such arrangement always brings in delivering skill acquisition. Workplace collaboration, according to Eze and Okorafor (2012) is a relationship based on the satisfaction of mutual as well as separate interests given by both parties to those interests. It is the relationship or agreements between the TVET institutions and the world of work to device, finance, build, manage, preserve and equip the students with the required work skills needed for purposeful employment upon graduation. Workplace collaboration offers potential work benefits to the industrial training students through the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) programme, and a good relationship with the local and international community (Scott, 2014). Contextually, Workplace-School collaboration refers to a wide variety of agreements between TVET institutions and the world of work by which workplace delivers infrastructures and services that should have been provided in the school without compromising the profit objectives of the workplace, the sole aim of which is to provide opportunities for practical training of students for skills development. Through this relationship between school and workplaces, TVET students are exposed to industry operations and use of industrial work tools and machines, management structure of industrial organizations and good work habit in their specialized areas through industrial attachment in order to improve the quality of TVET programme as well as gain valuable practical experiences for participants in the training (Ideh, 2013). Collaboration are diverse and address concerns unique to different TVET institutions and industries, but best global practices that are geared towards developing alternative education programmes for TVET students to gain valuable work experience with industries found within and around the educational institutions is a key for meeting manpower need in industries (Soares, 2010). The key elements of smooth transition of school classroom theories to work practice in an occupation of work to be according to Scott (2014) are: collaborative partnership; integrated curriculum; technological advances; adaptable friendly workers (industry-based supervisor); comprehensive career guidance; work-based learning; and a step-by-step approach. These practices and key elements to school-to-work transition use collaborative resources, relationships, and activities to build alternatives to

classroom theoretical instruction that would develop a student towards manpower needs of the 21st century workplaces. These best practices amongst others may include: Funding and Shared Resources for Sustainability; School-workplace collaboration can contribute to sustaining newly developed educational innovation and reformation in vocationalization (Ikeoji and Agwubike 2006), over time as well as create avenues for financing TVET on specific research into job task as required by funding industries to meet a given need or modernization of the workplace. In so doing, industries can develop school workplace collaboration relationship of the industry that would enhance a sustainable workforce that would meet the industries manpower needs. To this end, Offiong, Akpan and Usoro (2013) opined that funding of TVET institutions through endowment, partnership with companies and nongovernmental organizations, establishment of internally generated revenue projects, parent Teacher Associations, and Alumni Associations would improve expansion of work-based learning.

Work Base Learning (WBL) is an institutional arrangement in which learners are concurrently exposed to both work and learning environments (Johnson, Sword, and Habegger, 2004). WBL literally is an attempt to expand the walls of classroom to include the community as a learning resource. It therefore, extends the frontiers of the classroom to the work-world (National centre on secondary education and training (NCSET, 2011). WBL affords learners ample opportunities to learn a variety of skills that guarantee synergistic relationship between the school and the world-of-work. It is an attempt to narrow the gap existing between theory and practice thereby, making meaningful learning possible. Okon (2011) defined WBL as experiential learning programmes that use the work environment as an important component of the curriculum. Through WBL, structured learning experiences are provided to the learners through the collaborative efforts of employers of labour and the school. This arrangement avails learners opportunities to acquire a variety of skills upon exposure to rigorous academic engagements simultaneously with hands-on career development experiences.

Each work-based learning program is structured educational experience that integrates classroom learning (school-based) with productive, structured work experiences (work-based) which should be related to a student's career goal. Most work-based learning models are dependent upon local business and industry to provide work experience (either paid or nonpaid) for students and on the abilities and skills of a work-based learning coordinator who has the responsibility for managing the specific work-based training program (Umunadi, 2012). Types of work base learning include:

Career-related student competitions: are work-based learning activities that require students to demonstrate mastery of career-related skills through presentations. Presentations represent culminations of student's effort over time, often involving teamwork.

Internships: are sustained work-based learning experiences designed to enrich and expand classroom learning, showing students how their learning is applied in the world outside of school, and offering access to tools, equipment, facilities and expertise that generally are not available at school

School-based enterprises produce goods or services for sale to or use by people other than the students involved. Examples include student-run cafes or video production studios that serve clients and generate revenue. Benefits include the development of entrepreneurial, technical and academic skills in a school-based environment.

Social enterprises for learning Similar to school-based enterprises, social enterprises for learning (SEfL) focus on social rather than commercial activity. They build communities of practice that provide authentic and reciprocal learning experiences in which all parties inform the process in some important way. Social enterprises for learning can be either group or individual projects.

Service learning is a work-based learning activity in which the method of teaching and learning combines academic work with service. Students complete a planned series of activities and apply their skills and knowledge to help meet a need in the school or greater community. Service learning involves structured time for students to reflect on their service experience and may include recognition of the students' contributions. It differs from "community service" in emphasizing students' learning as much as service to the community. It is also generally a sustained rather than a one-time activity.

Work experience offers students the opportunity to explore careers and understand the nature of work through first-hand exposure to the workplace. Traditionally a means to prepare students for employment, work experience is considered work-based learning in this study to the extent that it is connected to classroom curriculum and/or is used to enhance or extend students' in-school learning.

Youth apprenticeships combine classroom and workplace experience to provide opportunities for high school students to try out one or more crafts or trades. They allow students to explore essential workplace skills, strengthen their academic and vocational skills, explore careers in the trades, and enter apprenticeship training when they complete high school.

Statement of Problem

Vocational/technical education is designed to offer people the opportunity of improving selves in general proficiency, especially in relation to peoples' present or future occupation. Nuru (2007) opined that changes 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. May, Ajayi, Arogundade and Ekundayo, (2007), 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 technical/vocational education. Asogwa and Diogu (2007) maintained that there is an urgent need for the Nigeria's attention to be redirected towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which technical/vocational education provides. Technical and vocational education cannot contribute greatly to the reduction of abject poverty, hunger and unemployment because it is handicapped by numerous challenges as mentioned above. As a result, majority of graduates of vocational and technical education are dependently roaming around the street with great hope of Federal and state Government providing job opportunity. Hence this paper seeks to access the Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition By Students In Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education, Rivers State.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study was to determine the Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. In specific terms, this paper determined the following:

1. Collaboration of schools' industry For Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State
2. Expanding work-based learning For Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

Research questions

Two research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent does the school/industry collaboration enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State?
2. To what extent does the Expansion of work-based learning Enhanced Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05% level of significance:

There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which Expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) a survey research is a method of data collection in which questionnaires or interview is utilized in collecting data from a sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized. The survey research design was considered suitable because the study elicited data/information on Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rivers State. The university offer vocational courses such as technical education, agricultural education, home economics and hospitality management, computer science education and business studies education.

Population of Study

The population of the study comprised all 101 lecturers in the study area, comprising 45 female lecturers and 56 male lecturers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rivers State.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The entire population was used since the population is of manageable size. Thus, purposive sampling technique was used to select only the technical/vocational lecturers in the study Area.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire instrument was used to collect data for this study titled 'Vocational Skills Acquisition Questionnaire (VSAQ)'. The instrument was developed after the review of relevant literature on Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. The instrument contains four sections A-C. Section A elicited information on personal data of the respondents. Section B elicited data on Collaboration of schools industry and Section C elicited data on Expanding work-based learning For Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. The instrument was structured on four point response options of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) with values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively for each item.

Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was face-validated by three experts. One from the Department of Technical education, and one from the Department of Home economics/Hotel Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rivers State and one from vocational and technology education, Rivers State university. The experts were requested to read through the questionnaire items in terms of clarity and appropriateness based on the research questions for the study under investigation. The expert's comments and suggestions were utilized to structure the new questionnaire instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

To establish the reliability of the instrument, 30 copies of the questionnaires were administered among lecturers in Rivers State University. Hence this did not form the part of the main population of the study. On the return of the instrument the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient formula was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. This yielded 0.68 reliability index.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher administered the questionnaire personally together with the help of a research assistant. The researcher informed the research assistant on the procedures required in administering the questionnaire instruments. The completed copies of the questionnaire were also retrieved by the researcher and the research assistant to help maximize the return rate of the questionnaire for data analysis. The questionnaires were filled and collected in two days interval.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents were analysed on four-point scale using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 probability level of significance. The decision was to accept an item if mean calculated is greater than or equal to 2.50. On the other hand, reject an item if mean calculated is less than 2.50. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test. The data were analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft excel software.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *To what extent does the school/industry collaboration enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent to which school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students

S/N O	ITEMS	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		X	SD	RM K	X	SD	RM K
1	Industries and Technical Colleges sharing of facilities can improve school-industry collaboration	3.68	0.56	HE	3.39	0.79	HE
2	Provision of programme of studies based on high academic standard can improve school-industry collaboration	3.59	0.69	HE	3.76	0.42	HE
3	Involvement of industries in evaluating students relevant learning experiences acquired in the technical/vocational colleges can improve school-industry collaboration	3.26	0.78	HE	3.00	0.83	HE
4	Organizing cross training between industries and technical/vocational institutions personnel can improve school industry collaboration	3.57	0.67	HE	3.31	0.83	HE
5	Involving industries in setting and marking of practical examinations in technical/vocational colleges can improve school-industry collaboration	3.11	1.01	HE	3.15	0.84	HE
6	Industrial training attachment for students in industries can improve school industry collaboration	3.49	0.70	HE	3.37	0.63	HE
7	Engaging electrical engineering professionals in industry in part time teaching in technical institutions can improve school industry collaboration	3.29	0.85	HE	2.92	0.85	HE
8	Organizing part time courses for industrial personnel to acquire theoretical knowledge by technical institutions	3.57	0.60	HE	3.29	0.80	HE
9	Organizing cooperative work study programmed for electrical installation and maintenance engineering craft students by technical institutions can improve school industry collaboration	3.21	0.79	HE	3.37	0.83	HE
10	Keeping comprehensive data of industries that are equipped with modern equipment/facilities by technical colleges	3.82	0.38	HE	3.51	0.64	HE
Grand Mean		3.45	0.71	HE	3.30	0.75	HE

Results in table 1 revealed that male lecturers had a mean range of 3.11-3.82 and standard deviation range of 0.38-1.01 while the female lecturers had a mean range of 2.92-3.76 and standard deviation range of 0.42-0.85. The close range of the standard deviation shows the homogeneity of their opinion. The respondents agreed to a high extent that school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the expansion of work-based learning Enhance vocational skills acquisition by students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the extent to which the Expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students

S/N O	ITEMS	Male Lecturers			Female Lecturers		
		X	SD	RM K	X	SD	RM K
1	engage and motivate students in learning by connecting classroom work to students' personal and career interests	3.15	1.06	HE	3.34	1.02	HE
2	reinforce and improve academic learning (as defined by the content of core academic classes)	3.75	0.62	HE	3.78	0.57	HE
3	engage students in new modes of thought (e.g., higher-order critical thinking and problem-solving)	3.31	0.75	HE	3.26	0.57	HE
4	develop students' career/vocational skills as a means to learning	3.55	0.54	HE	3.65	0.71	HE
5	advance students' social and emotional development toward adulthood, including their identity formation and their sense of self-efficacy	3.15	1.03	HE	3.27	0.83	HE
6	expand students' social networks and access to opportunities	3.43	0.72	HE	3.47	0.70	HE
7	enhance students' general workplace competencies, such as communication, teamwork and project planning	3.26	0.76	HE	3.15	0.80	HE
8	enable career exploration through breadth of exposure at the worksite	3.59	0.60	HE	3.47	0.75	HE
9	enhance students' understanding of particular careers through depth of experience	3.24	0.86	HE	3.24	0.71	HE
10	It enables youth to learn and master skills and competencies through problem-solving and can help address students' diverse learning styles	3.71	0.61	HE	3.55	0.67	HE
	Grand Mean	3.41	0.76	HE	3.41	0.74	HE

Results in table 3 revealed that male lecturers had a mean range of 3.15-3.75 and standard deviation range of 0.54-1.06 while the female lecturers had a mean range of 3.15-3.78 and standard deviation range of 0.57-1.02. The close range of the standard deviation shows the homogeneity of their opinion. The respondents agreed to a high extent that expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State.

Hypotheses

HO₁ There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State.

Table 4: t-test analysis of male and female lecturers responses on extent in which school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	α	DF	t-Cal	t-Crit	RMK
Male Lecturers	56	3.46	0.71	0.05	99	-.53	1.65	No Sig
Female Lecturers	45	3.31	0.75					

Result in Table 4 revealed that t-cal (-.53) is less than t-crit (1.65) which indicates that the hypothesis stated is accepted. Therefore there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State.

HO₂ There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which Expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

Table 4: t-test analysis of male and female lecturers responses on extent in which expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students

Respondents	N	X	SD	α	DF	t-Cal	t-Crit	RMK
Male Lecturers	56	3.41	0.76	0.05	99	-1.24	1.65	No Sig
Female Lecturers	45	3.42	0.73					

Result in Table 4 revealed that t-cal (-1.24) is less than t-crit (1.65) which indicates that the hypothesis stated is accepted. Therefore there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which Expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of the study revealed to a high extent that school/industry collaboration enhanced Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which school/industry collaboration would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. This finding is in line with Amu & Offei-Ansah (2011) they outlined the ingredients for effective learning to include: ensuring that individuals have access to theoretical and experimental knowledge, the opportunity to engage in authentic task and interaction with others, the chance to develop critical and intellectual capacities through the application of concept and theory in practice and the opportunity to have their thinking and understanding enhanced through the guidance and teaching of others. Workplace-School collaboration has in recent times gained increasing popularity due to the enormous benefits that such arrangement always brings in delivering skill acquisition.

The study finally revealed to a high extent that expansion of work-based learning Enhanced Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers on the extent in which Expansion of work-based learning would enhance Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with Eze and Okorafor, (2012) in their opinion, noted that the intent of preparing students for work is not to take them away from academic excellence, but instead, to integrate academic and occupational curriculum to connect school and work. In addition, Makoju, (2000) recommends that students should be given every opportunity to receive academic and occupational preparation that equips them with the necessary skills for obtaining employment and/or entering postsecondary education

CONCLUSION

Technical/vocational education can only lead to the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes and knowledge relating to occupational sector and economic life when it is properly harness according to the findings of the study. The primary aim of technical/vocational education is to equip its recipients with manipulative skills for gainful employment. Technical/vocational education is a formidable force that will imbue the individual with appropriate skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies that will enable the person become self-employed and self-reliant towards sustainable economic development. These skills would be appreciated when there is schools-industry collaboration and expanding work-based learning For Enhancing Vocational Skills Acquisition by Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:
 Government and policy makers should strengthen the Collaboration between schools and industries as this would enhance vocational skills acquisition by students
 School and industries should be encouraged to expand work-based learning through the involvement of industries in the curriculum planning and implementation process.

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