

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

**Sunday Olawale Olaniran, University of Zululand, South Africa.
Dumsani Wilfred Mncube, University of Zululand, South Africa.**

ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (EVE) has been considered as a vital key that opens the door of youth employment and employability in this 21st century. While several studies have been conducted to echo the importance and values of youth entrepreneurship and vocational education in Africa, there is dearth of research on challenges facing youths which constitute threats to their enrolment and completion rate in EVE. This study specifically examined the barriers to youth entrepreneurship and vocational education in Nigeria with a view to pointing the attention of governments, institutions and other stakeholders to these challenges. Descriptive research design of a survey type was used to carry out the study. One hundred and two (102) youths in various entrepreneurship and vocational skills acquisition programmes responded to the questionnaire designed to gather information which provided answers to the three (3) research questions raised in the study. Findings from the study revealed poor perception of EVE by the public, mismatch between training and labour market skill demand, and uncertainty of funding for self-establishment as the major barriers to EVE in Nigeria. The study recommends, among others, the training of Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education based guidance and counsellors by the universities who are not only skilled in different areas of EVE but also able to guide young people rightly towards choosing the right and relevant skill training that match the current labour market skill demand.

Keywords: Youth, Entrepreneurship, Vocational Education, EVE.

INTRODUCTION

Giving opportunities to young people to acquire entrepreneurship and vocational skills is an essential step towards developing the socio-economic and political sectors of any nation (Abisuga-Oyekunle, & Fillis, 2017; Olaniran, 2018). The reason is simple; Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (EVE) do not only facilitate young people's ability to start a business, but also enable them to become active player and valuable contributors to their nation's economy. "The future of Africa's economic development lies with young entrepreneurs", this statement was made by Issam Chleuh, a young African entrepreneur from Mali, while giving a speech at the United Nations first Forum on African Youth in 2017. In fact, the rapid growth and interest in the entrepreneurship and vocational education in Africa today could be attributed to the global youth unemployment arising from the scarcity of "white collar jobs". In the face of the current huge unemployment on the continent, promotion of entrepreneurial and vocational skills acquisition among young people becomes the only way out. Issam Chleuh confirmed this when he said:

“Given Africa’s demographic dividend, its related unemployment and the inability of current companies to absorb all the job seekers, entrepreneurship becomes a necessity on the African continent. However, the question is: will African youth deliver or disappoint? I believe entrepreneurship could help Africa and African youth deliver” (Gabreski, 2017:1).

The good news is that more than 80 percent of the working class youths in the Sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in self-owned vocations in the form of small and medium enterprises (Gindling & Newhouse, 2012). Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contributes more than 54 percent of Nigeria’s GDP (Mwantok, 2018), and most of these MSMEs are operated by young people below the age of 40.

Nigeria, despite its abundant human and natural resources, is plagued with high rate of unemployment. Close to 50 percent of her estimated 180 million population falls below the poverty line (Kazeem, 2017). Similarly, the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) from its data released in the late 2016 revealed that *“out of a total youth labour force of 38.2 million, a total of 15.2 million of youths were either unemployed or underemployed in 2016, representing a youth unemployment rate of 42.24%”* (The Cable, 2016). To address the problem of youth unemployment, Federal government of Nigeria introduced various entrepreneurship and vocational education initiatives aimed at attracting the interest of young people to skill acquisition aimed at boosting employment generation. One of the giant steps taken by the Nigerian government was the establishment of Vocational and Technical Colleges across the States of the Federation. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), the main objectives of Technical and Vocational Education are:

- 1) To enable individuals acquire vocational and technical skills.
- 2) To expose the individuals to career awareness by exposing useable options in the world of work.
- 3) To enable youth acquire an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.
- 4) To stimulate creativity.

Apart from the government’s effort in promoting EVE among youths, there exist numerous private and individual-led entrepreneurship and vocational skill centres that are accommodating Nigerian youths, especially those that are out-of-school, to undergo training in form of apprenticeship for a given period of time. This study particularly focused on the youths that are undergoing apprenticeship-based entrepreneurship and vocational training.

While there is broad consensus about the importance of entrepreneurship and vocational education to youth empowerment and economic development of nations in Africa (Chimucheka, 2014; Olaniran, 2015; Premand et al., 2016; Adenle, 2017; Dzisi et al., 2018), there is limited research about the challenges encountered by young people while undergoing entrepreneurship and vocational skill acquisition programme. Young people running social enterprises also faced similar challenges which prevented them from expanding their social ventures beyond the starting point. This study makes three distinct contributions to knowledge. First, it leads to the generation of new knowledge about the factors that pushes young people into joining EVE programmes and how these factors contributes to their success or failure in the programmes. Such knowledge enables better understanding of what expectations are held by the participants of EVE programmes and what preparation must be made by the organizers to meet these expectations. A second important contribution of this paper is the dialogue it opens with private providers, government and other stakeholders on the quality of entrepreneurship and vocational education that is capable of meeting the needs of today’s young people as well as meeting the social and economic needs of the society. It is expected that this dialogue will chart a new course

for innovations towards restructuring the already existing EVE programmes in Africa in order to meet up with the 21st century labour market skills demand. Lastly, the study provides an insight into the challenges encountered by young people while acquiring entrepreneurship and vocational education and training and the need for the stakeholders to pay close attention to these challenges so that the training programmes are able to attract, retain and produce competent and skilled entrepreneurs that will contribute to the nation's socio-economic development.

In view of the above, therefore, the study raised the following questions:

1. What are the push factors for youths 'enrolment in EVE?
2. What types of EVE programmes are prominent among the youth?
3. What are the challenges facing youths in their bid to participating in EVE?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education

Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education is generally seen as a form of education or training that gives specialized professional knowledge and skills to individuals that enrolled for it. Kotsikis (2007) sees vocational training as an activity or a set of activities specially designed to transmit theoretical knowledge or professional skills that are required for certain types of occupation. Ojimba (2012) as a kind of education targeted towards preparing individuals for employment in a recognized occupation or field of human endeavour which include agriculture, fine and applied arts, soap making, tailoring, hairdressing, and computer graphic design, among others. Similarly, Iheanacho (2006) defined vocational education as an important aspect of education that deals with business education, farming, book keeping, and bricklaying, among others with the goal of acquiring skills in these fields. However, it is very important to stress that it is not enough to empower or equip an individual with a skill or knowledge of a vocation. Such an individual must display the capacity to use that knowledge or skill to set up a venture. When an individual is well equipped and is able to establish a business, either micro, small or medium, such a person automatically wear the title "*entrepreneur*". Hisrich et al. (2008), while supporting this view, opined that entrepreneurship is the process of initiating something novel after devoting the necessary time and effort to acquire skills, and assuming the accompanying financial, psychic and social risks and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence. Hassan and Olaniran (2011) view entrepreneurship in four dimensions:

- 1) Entrepreneurship involves the making process towards forming something new that is valuable (e.g. a product, brand, service). In other words, the creation has to be of value to the entrepreneur as well as to the audience for which it is created.
- 2) Secondly, entrepreneurship requires dedicating necessary time and effort to acquire a skill or knowledge and using it to establish income generating venture. Only the individuals who have passed through entrepreneurial process that will appreciate the amount of time and effort it takes to create something new and make it operational.
- 3) The third dimension of the process involves the rewards of being entrepreneur. The most significant part of these rewards is independence, followed by personal satisfaction. For profit-oriented entrepreneurs, monetary rewards becomes the pointer of the level of success achieved.
- 4) Accepting to jump at every necessary risk is the final aspect of entrepreneurship. The boldness to take a step towards creating new products, new services, and new ventures to compete with the existing ones comes with a great risk which entrepreneurs bear occasionally.

Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education (EVE) have been recognized worldwide as a tool for empowering young people for sustainable livelihood and social-economic vibrancy. United Nations, through the International Labour Organization (UNESCO & ILO, 2002) encouraged nations to see the investment on young people as a necessity especially towards encouraging them to acquire practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Yusuff and Soyemi (2012) summarised EVE to be:

- 1) An essential part of general education.
- 2) A means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work.
- 3) A portion of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship.
- 4) A tool for promoting sustainable environmental development.
- 5) A method of alleviating poverty.

Furthermore, the promotion of entrepreneurship and vocational education is vital to economic development for two major reasons. First, technical and vocational skills are required for enterprise development that could aid national development. When necessary entrepreneurial and vocational skills are not resident among citizens, national development can be seriously slowed down.

The second reason development of entrepreneurial and vocational skills is important is because it is necessary for individual economic sustenance and prosperity. Skills enable the individual to maximise income and productivity. Schuller et al (2002) highlights the social and economic benefits of EVE to be job creation, improved health and quality of life, among others. This is why the need for entrepreneurial and vocational skills is growing because of myriads of factors such as transformation in ICT, unemployment and global economic recession, among others. The fact cannot be disputed that EVE can provide young people with the requisite skills required to operate in today's competitive world of work and to function in modern societies. Thus, every willing citizen have the right to basic EVE as part of the responsibility of all nations to meet their basic learning needs, and that such an education should result to enhanced status and increased numbers of youths acquiring entrepreneurial and vocational qualifications.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology in a study is simply referred to as "*the act and science of doing research*" (Olaniran et al., 2017). Methodology usually supply answers to the 5W questions in a research study, i.e. what, why, who, which, and where. The method adopted in carrying out this research was explained in details below:

Research Design

This study adopted quantitative research method to collect data for the study. There are two popular approaches to a research study can employ namely quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative study attempts to provide answers to incident by explaining these phenomena from the perspectives of the study participants (Leedy & Ormond, 2001). This quantitative study was conducted through survey that employed semi-structured questionnaire completed by selected young people who were involved in entrepreneurship and vocational training programmes in Akungba-Akoko, a university community in Ondo State Nigeria

Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection is a structured questionnaire. The instrument was divided into two sections. Sections A of the questionnaires dealt with personal data of the respondent while sections B of the questionnaire were designed to obtain information on the challenges they face while undergoing EVE programmes from the participants.

Participants

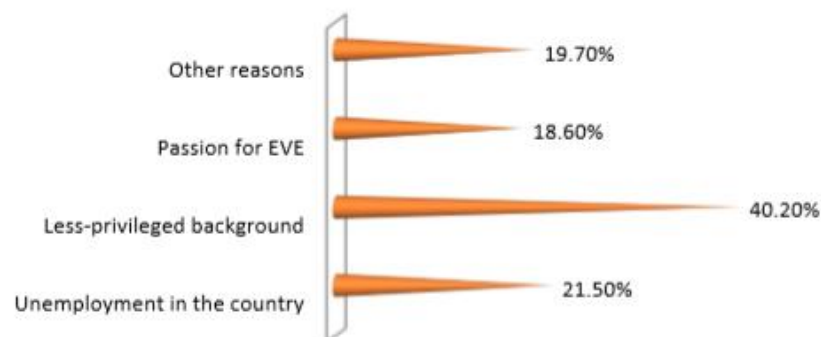
Youths between 18 and 35 years of age who enrolled in EVE programmes as at the time of the study served as the participants. The relevant demographic characteristics of the participants are displayed on the Table 1.

Demography	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Total (%)
Gender	Male: 20.9	Female: 79.1	Others: 0.0	100%
Highest Education Attained	High School: 61.2	Elementary: 29.6	No formal Education: 9.2	100%
Household Location	Urban : 37.2	Rural: 58.0	Semi: 4.8	100%
Sponsorship	Parents: 26.8	Self: 71.2	Others: 2.0	100%

Findings of the Study

1. Push factors for youths enrolment in EVE is represented in Table 2.

Push factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Unemployment in the country	22	21.5
Less-privileged background	41	40.2
Passion for EVE	19	18.6
Other reasons	20	19.7
Total	102	100



**FIGURE 1
FACTORS THAT PUSHED THE YOUTHS INTO EVE**

As can be noticed on the Figure 1, the vast majority of the participants (40.2%) chose to enrol for entrepreneurship and vocational education due to their less-privileged background, followed by those who enrolled because of the fear of unemployment in the country (21.5%). Only small percentages (18.6) of the participants are driven by passion for EVE. Cardon et al., (2009) defined entrepreneurial passion as a positive and strong feelings experienced by an individual from engagement in activities associated with roles that are meaningful to the self-identity of entrepreneurs. Lack of passion for EVE by the youths, as revealed in this study, calls for a serious concern and action by the government and other stakeholders in the country as passion has been identified by scholars as an essential ingredient of being a successful entrepreneur (Cardon et al., 2008; Opong, 2011; Hassan & Olaniran, 2011).

2. Prominent EVE programmes of interest to the Youths is mentioned in Table 3.

Eve Programmes of Interest	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Catering	33	32.3
Carpentry and joinery	13	12.8
Barbing and Hairdressing	19	18.6
Tailoring & Fashion Design	29	28.4
Others	08	7.9
TOTAL	102	100

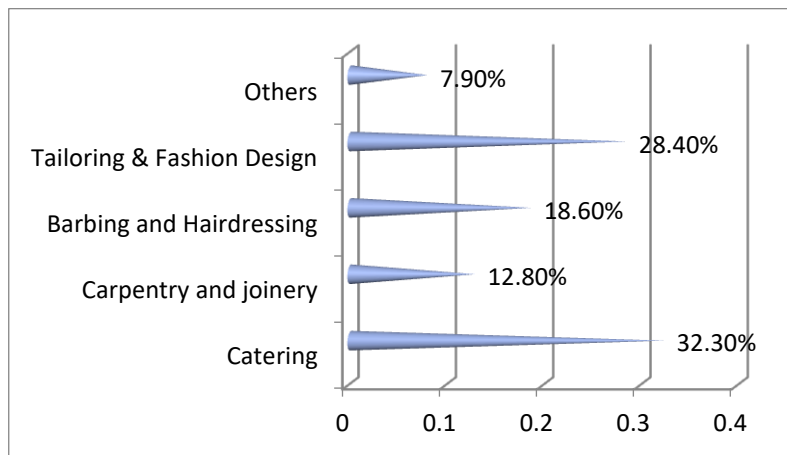


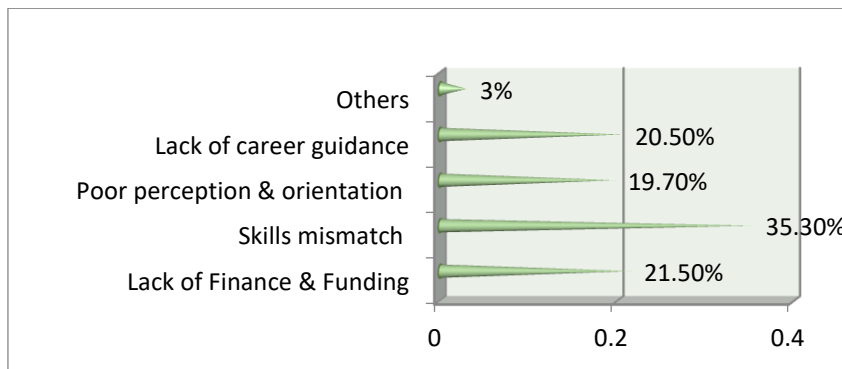
FIGURE 2
PROMINENT EVE PROGRAMMES OF INTEREST TO THE YOUTHS

Figure 2 revealed the responses of the participants on the entrepreneurship and vocational education programme of interest. Those acquiring skills on catering are the majority with 32.3% followed by those in tailoring and fashion design. The youths who are into barbing and hairdressing are few in numbers (18.6%) followed by those in carpentry and joinery (12.8%). Although, those who are into other EVE programmes are indicated on the Figure 2, what is obvious is that the gender of the participants has a significant influence on their choice of EVE programmes. This supports the findings of a study conducted by Hill and Giles (2014) on

“career decisions and gender” that female youths are more likely to be interested in some female-dominated vocations or careers than male, and *vice-versa*.

3. Challenges facing these youths in their bid to participating in EVE (Table 4).

Challenges of Youths in EVE	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of Finance & Funding	22	21.5
Skills mismatch	36	35.3
Poor perception & orientation	20	19.7
Lack of career guidance	21	20.5
Others	03	3.0
TOTAL	102	100



**FIGURE 3
CHALLENGES FACING THESE YOUTHS IN THEIR BID TO PARTICIPATING IN EVE**

Prominent among the challenges experienced by youths in entrepreneurship and vocational education, as highlighted on the Figure 3 are skills mismatch (35.3%), lack of finance and funding to establish on the vocation acquired (21.5%), lack of career guidance (20.5%), poor perception and orientation about EVE (19.7%), among others.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The important role of entrepreneurship and vocational education in enhancing socio-economic situation of a country cannot be overemphasized. This is why many developing countries, including Nigeria, are exploring the opportunities in EVE to solve the problem of youth unemployment. From the data analysis, some significant knowledge has been gained into the challenges facing youths while acquiring entrepreneurship and vocational education. Some of the findings are summarised as follows:

Poor Perception and Orientation about EVE

Over a period of time in Nigeria, vocational education has been considered as a career path for the less academically gifted individuals due to too much emphasis on degree-based Western education. As a result of this, the wish of many parents is to send their children to universities and not to study vocational or entrepreneurial related courses. This, to a large extent, affects the psyche and morale of many youths in EVE as many of them see themselves as “*not-good-enough*”. A relationship has also been established between family involvement in a business and young people’s positive perception and orientation of entrepreneurship (Charbel et al., 2013).

Mismatch between Training and Labour Market Skill Demand

Many youths were not guided on their choice of career before they ventured into acquiring entrepreneurship and vocational skills. This accounted for high incidence of unemployment among entrepreneurship and vocational education graduates who desire to seek skill-based employment as their skills of expertise do not match the demands from employers. Many people have attributed the reason for this situation to lack of guidance and counselling in EVE.

Lack of Passion for EVE

The study found that some of the youths in EVE did not have passion for the programme, perhaps due to poor orientation and perception. This is a serious problem because passion is an essential ingredient that can make young person to complete or abandon a programme.

Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation

Unlike the formal institutions or colleges where government set up regulatory agencies/committees to monitor and evaluate the programmes offered, private entrepreneurship and vocational education centres in Nigeria do not have bodies or mechanisms to evaluate the impacts of their programmes on beneficiaries. These centres, obviously, do not track the employment destination of their graduates. Consequently, valuable feedback from past beneficiaries of their training programmes, especially the quality of training they have received and the opportunities accessed are lost.

Scarcity of Funding Opportunities

Less than 30% of the participants in this study received sponsorship from parents and other sources as majority of the youths in EVE programmes sampled are self-sponsored. This is a huge challenge for many youths from the less-privileged background and this account for a large percentage of drop-out cases in EVE programmes.

Based on the findings of the study, therefore, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Career-based counselling for youths in EVE programmes both before and after the programme. In other words, adequate training of Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education based guidance and counsellors by the universities is necessary, to produce those who are not only skilled in different areas

- of EVE but also able to guide young people rightly towards choosing the right and relevant skill training that match the current labour market skill demand.
- 2) Introduction of bursary and scholarship programmes by the government and private bodies for the less-privileged youths with desires for entrepreneurship and vocational skills acquisition programmes. This will not only solve the problems arising from lack of finance or funding to undergo EVE programme but also trigger the interest and commitment of young people to the programme.
 - 3) Efforts should be made by the government and higher education institutions in the country to widely promote entrepreneurship and vocational education as one of the best ways of alleviating massive poverty and unemployment among youths. The promotion should be targeted towards changing the negative perception and orientation of young people about EVE programmes being a training programme for the second-class youths.
 - 4) Lastly, government and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should intervene in the monitoring and evaluation of the apprenticeship-based EVE programmes operated by private individuals and organizations. Many of these privately operated EVE centres lacks capacity and resources to do this and the assistance from the government and HEIs will go a long way in refining and restructuring their training programmes towards meeting the 21st Century employability skills training demands.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study examined the barriers to youth entrepreneurship and vocational education in Nigeria. Though this research study is conducted to reveal some cogs in the wheel of development of entrepreneurship and vocational education among youths, it is imperative to note the limitations of the study which can serve as the starting points for the future studies on EVE.

- 1) The number of the respondents sampled may not be the true representation of the entire young people who are into entrepreneurship and vocation education programmes in Nigeria as the study only focused on youths in Akungba-Akoko, a university community in Ondo State Nigeria. It is important for the future researchers to focus on the other States or Geo-political Zones in the country in order to capture the challenges being experienced by the youths in other regions.
- 2) Also, the study investigated the challenges experienced by youths in entrepreneurship and vocational education without minding the variations in gender or other demographic background of the participants. It is imperative for the future researchers to also find out in their studies the impact of gender of youths on the challenges they experienced while undergoing EVE programmes.

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