

Vocational Education and Employability: The Nigerian Situation

Oresanya T.O, Omodewu O.S, Kolade T.T and Fashedemi A.O
Center for Entrepreneurship Development, Yaba College of Technology, Yaba, Lagos.
tolulopew@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Vocational education is the form of education whose primary objective is the acquisition of skills and attitudes for gainful employment in a specific occupation or professional area. On the other hand, Employability skills are those essential skills required to secure and retain a job. These skills are required by young undergraduates to prepare them to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation. Today, the quality of graduates in terms of requisite skills development such as communication, technical abilities, human interaction, social, conceptual and analytical capacity, is on a rapid decline. This paper therefore seeks to look into the possible relationship between vocational education and the acquisition of employability skills. It also discusses basic requirements of employers worldwide in this regard. For our young graduates to be found as being employable, employability skills should be incorporated into the curriculum of Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Employability Skills, Graduates

Introduction

Vocational education is defined as any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupations (Okoro, 1993). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) defined Vocational Education as a comprehensive term referring to the educational process where it involves, in addition to general education; the study of technology and related science and the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupation in various sectors of economic and social life. This form of education covers the process of producing skilled manpower for self reliance and National Development.

The primary objective of vocational education and training is the acquisition of skills and attitudes for gainful employment in a specific occupation or professional area (Audu et al, 2013).

Employability according to Hillage and Pollard (1998) is an individual's ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment if required and (ideally) secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work. Employability skill is referred to as the skill required securing and retaining a job. It also refers to the training or foundation skills upon which a person must develop job specific skills. They are those essential skills necessary for acquiring, keeping and performing well on a job (Shafie and Nayan, 2010). These skills include; managing resources, communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork and problem solving. It also includes acquiring and maintaining a job (Audu et al, 2013).

Generally, employability skills are required by young undergraduates to prepare themselves to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation.

Vocational education has been part of the curriculum of the Nigerian Tertiary Education system for quite a while. But in spite of the adequate training being received by our young undergraduates, employers have been found to require well grounded graduates who possess not just these technical skills but also interpersonal skills, problem solving skills and decision making skills. They also require employees with initiative, who can work well with little or no supervision.

Therefore it has become imperative that employability skills be incorporated into the curriculum of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions.

This paper therefore seeks to look into the possible relationship between vocational education and the acquisition of employability skills. It also would discuss some basic requirements of employers from employees worldwide as well as challenges being faced by our young undergraduates.

This paper is a review paper on already established research work by other authors.

Relationship between Vocational Education and Employability Skills

Vocational Education is the training of technically oriented personnel who are to be the initiators, facilitators and implementers of technological development of a nation (Uwaifo, 2005). Oni (2007) defined it as the type of education which fits the individual for gainful employment in recognized careers as semi-skilled workers, technicians or sub-professionals.

In the working place, vocational skills are referred to as the procedure, techniques or methods of carrying out specialized or practical tasks that can easily be measured and quantified. These skills are easily transferred to young undergraduates. They are much more easily trained in such skills than in employability skills which are usually referred to as generic or core skills or non technical skills (Audu et al, 2013). According to Shakir (2009), these skills are not easily taught in schools although they are highly essential in the workplace today.

Employability skills have been grouped into three main categories such as interpersonal skills, problem solving

skills and decision making skills (Audu et al, 2013). According to research findings by Bennet, Dunne and Carre (2000), generic skills can be presented in four broad areas of management skills namely: management of self, management of others, management of task and management of information.

Vocational skills and employability skills so complement each other that Spencer and Spencer in (Ali et al, 2012) stated that superior performers in the workplace possess both specialized vocational skills as well as generic employability skills. Employability skills complement the vocational skills in order to fulfil a vital role of shaping an individual's life (Schulz, 2008).

Challenges facing Young Graduates

According to Ramlee (2002), vocational education graduates usually master their technical skills but their employers normally feel dissatisfied of their employees when it comes to employability skills because they lack motivational skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, problem solving and entrepreneurial skills.

In the opinion of Syed Hussain in (Ali et al, 2012), vocational education graduates do not fulfil the basic needs and requirements of employers because the vocational education curriculum is designed only to prepare graduates with basic knowledge and specific practical skill acquisition, but this knowledge is not necessarily relevant in the industry. According to Shere and Eadie (Kathleen, 2005) these generic skills are not job specific, but are skills which cut across all industries and jobs from entry level to top management level.

Basic Requirements of Employers from Employees and Young Graduates

According to Harvey et al (1997), employers are looking for people who not only fit within their organisation but they also seek those who are intelligent and well rounded, who have a depth of understanding, can apply themselves, take responsibility and develop their role in the organisation.

Some of the critical employability skills mostly sought after by employers of labour anywhere in the world are:

- 1) **Communication Skills:** this is the skill that shows the employee's ability to listen, write and speak effectively. To be effective and proactive in the workplace, the individual needs to be able to communicate effectively. Each person needs to be an exceptional listener and communicator who effectively convey information verbally and in writing.
- 2) **Analytical/Research Skills:** This is the type of skill that deals with the graduates ability to assess situations, seek multiple perspectives, gather more information if necessary and identify key issues that need to be addressed. The graduate is expected to possess highly analytical thinking with demonstrated talent for identifying, scrutinizing, improving and streamlining complex work processes
- 3) **Computer/Technical Literacy:** almost all jobs nowadays require a basic understanding of computer hardware especially word processing, spreadsheets, and email. The young graduate is expected to be computer literate with extensive software proficiency covering wide range of applications
- 4) **Interpersonal Abilities:** This refers to the ability of the employee to relate with co- workers, inspire others to participate and mitigate conflict with co workers. This is essential because a lot of time is spent at work each day. The graduate should be a proven relationship builder with unsurpassed interpersonal skills.
- 5) **Problem-Solving/Reasoning/Creativity:** This refers to the ability to find solutions to problems using the employee's creativity, reasoning and past experiences along with the available information and resources. The graduate is expected to be an innovative problem solver who can generate workable solutions and resolve complaints.
- 6) **Flexibility/Adaptability/Managing multiple priorities:** This skill deals with the employees ability to manage multiple assignments and tasks, set priorities and adapt to changing conditions and work assignments. The graduate should be a flexible team player who thrives in environments requiring ability to effectively prioritize and juggle multiple concurrent projects(Hansen & Hansen)

Young Undergraduates and Employability Skills in Vocational Education Institutions

Vocational education has been known to prepare undergraduates for gainful employment in a specific professional area. But there is a need for the incorporation of employability skills in the curriculum because these skills can accelerate employment. Without these skills these young graduates can be considered to be handicap in competing for employment (Audu *et al*, 2013)

Young undergraduates in the Nigerian tertiary institutions should acquire employability skills while in school. These skills can be learned through classroom instruction, in the field or outside the classroom. These skills are abstract in nature and require a measure of time to train these young undergraduates to fully acquire employable skills

Conclusion

Vocational educational institutions in Nigeria have to make a conscious effort to ensure that the young

undergraduates acquire these above mentioned employability skills required by many organisations. For our young graduates to be found as being employable, employability skills should be incorporated into curriculum of Nigerian tertiary institutions. This will ensure that the graduates that are churned out each year are better equipped to with the required skills for employment anywhere in the world

References

- Ali, F.A, Y. Long, F.A. Zainol and M. Mansor (2012): Students' Self Perceived Importance of Employability Skills needed: A Case Study in University of Sultan Zainal Abidin (UNISZA), Malasia. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Management held between 11th-12th June at Langkawi Kedah, Malaysia.
- Audu R., Yusri Bin Kamin And Muhammed Sukri Bin Saud (2013); Acquisition of Employability Skills in Technical Vocational Education; Necessity For The 21st Century Workforce. Aust J Basic and Applied Sci. 7(6):9-14
- Bennet, Dunne and Carre (2000): Skills Development in Higher Education and Employment. Journal of Higher Education. Volume 42 (1): 141-142
- Harvey, L., Moon, S., Geall, V. & R. Bower. (1997); Graduate Work: Organisation Change And Students Attributes Birmingham; CRQ and The Association Of Graduate Recruiters
- Hillage J. and E. Pollard (1998): Employability: Developing a framework for policy analysis. Research brief 85, Department for Education and Employment, London.
- Kathleen C. (2005): Developing Employability Skills. Regional Educational Laboratory. School Improvement Research Series (SIRS).
- Okoro O.M (1993): Principles and Methods of Vocational and Technical Education, Nsukka: University Trust Publisher.
- Oni, C.S., 2007: Globalization and its implication for Vocational Education in Nigeria. Essays in Education: 21(1): 30-34.
- Ramlee (2002): The Role of Vocational and Technical Education in the Industrialization of Malaysia as Perceived by Educators and Employers. Doctoral Dissertation; Purdue University.
- Randal S. Hansen and Katherine Hansen: Quintessential careers; What do employers really want? Top skills and values employers seek from Job seekers. www.quintcareers.com/job_skills_values.html
- Schulz B. (2008): The Importance of Soft Skills: Education beyond Academic Knowledge. Nawa Journal of Communication; 2(1): 146-154
- Shafie L.A and S. Nayan (2010): Employability Awareness among Malaysian Undergraduates. International Journal of Business Management; 5(8): 119-123.
- Shakir R. (2009): Soft Skills at Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning. Asia Pacific Education Review 10 (3): 309-315
- Uwaifo, V.O. (2005) .Vocational Education And General Education ;Conflict Or Convergence; Nigerian Journal Of Educational Research4(1);Institute Of Education ,Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma.