ENHANCING PSYCHOMOTOR SKILL ACQUISITION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: STRATEGY FOR BRIDGING GAP BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH

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Abstract

The level of development of any nation is anchored on the quality of her vocational status. The key facilitator in this respect is psychomotor skill acquisition. Psychomotor skill is learning that is demonstrated by physical skills such as manipulation, coordination etc. Skill acquisition brings about rapid economic development which leads to a rise in income of any country. It is against this background that this paper examines the importance of vocational education for psychomotor skill acquisition in bridging the gap between teaching and research. Vocational Education enables an individual to possess skills in a formal setting that will enable him to be productive, self-reliant and instrumental to the technological and industrial development of his nation. It also highlights major strategies in practical skill acquisition. Amongst these are laboratories and facilities which should be functional and well-equipped with good instructional materials which will enhance teaching and research.

Key Words: Psychomotor Skill, Vocational Education, Skills Acquisition.

The policy framework for the establishment of Vocational education appeared more thoughtful than its implementation. Disappointingly, government’s laudable programmes on Vocational Education in Nigeria have not been matched by action. Therefore, Vocational Education in Nigeria has been saddled with myriad of problems resulting in the gap between teaching and research. Vocational education is a discipline which intensifies exposure of students to practical work where acquisition of skills and knowledge is required. Such practical experiences according to Awo (2005), contributes to a large extent to the understanding and utilization of what is learnt. Olaitan (2000), defines vocational education as the form of education emphasizing the development of occupational skills needed in preparation for a profession. This education also equips individuals with knowledge and skills that can make them highly functional in the society. It provides the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.

Therefore, the teaching and learning activities in Vocational Education should sufficiently furnish an individual with saleable work skills and competences to fill the gap between teaching and research. To realize these objectives, vocational education curricula at higher institutions need to be restructured to be work oriented. New approaches of transferring of relevant skills, are equally important. It is against this background that this paper focuses on the following.

i. Place of practical’s for skills acquisition in Vocational Education programme
ii. Importance of skill acquisition through Vocational Education
iii. Challenges to the teaching of vocational courses
iv. Basic considerations for the establishment of skills acquisition centers.
v. Ways of enhancing psychomotor skills

Vocational Education and Skill Acquisition

Education is a profitable investment that develops the abilities, skills and impact knowledge to individuals to meet the challenges of living. Okorie (2000), Lemechi (2006) reported that vocational education is a skill oriented field of study which is known for its capacity of equipping learners with saleable skills that make for self-reliance or self-employment and paid employment.
Among the vocational courses are Home Economics Education, agricultural science Education, business Education and fine and applied arts where students are expected to acquire master skills that will make them to be effective as teachers and in other areas of endeavor.

Skill is the ability to do something expertly and well. It is an organized sequence of actions, proficiency, executed and usually displaying a flexible but, systematic temporal patterning (Okorie2000). To possess skill, is to demonstrate the habit of acting, thinking and behaving in a specific activity in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual through repetition or practice. Skill acquisition helps in developing intrinsic potentials in individuals.

Objectives of Courses in Vocational Education for Skill Acquisition in Home Economics Education

i. Acquiring ethical ideals and appreciation for high standards
ii. Developing the individual to his/her maximum capacity
iii. Creating a home and community environment conducive to healthy living. (Anyakoha2001) The objectives of Home Economics Education at NCE level as stipulated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NNCE 2004) are;
   i. To train home economics teachers with sound basis for professional growth and personal development in home economics education
   ii. To exhibit of job skills and career opportunities in home economics
   iii. To demonstrate positive human relationship and ability to work with people
   iv. To prepare teachers to qualify them for a full time two year post NCE degree programme in home economics in Nigeria universities.

Objectives of Business Education

The general objectives of Business Education is to develop knowledge and competencies in the area of;

1. Developing basic awareness of the contribution which business and office employee make to the nation’s economic system.
2. Improving personal qualities and building attitudes necessary for adjustment to personal and employment situation.
3. Developing the abilities of students to their maximum.
4. Guiding individuals for suitable placement in business and office employment

Business Education makes significant impact on the nation’s economy through.

1. Preparation of clerical workers for entry into the labour force.
2. Offering of instrument in economic understanding and personal economic competencies for other Vocational and Non-vocational students.

Vocational Education is an important strategy in bridging gap between teaching and research. It is career-oriented with many occupational prospects. Skill training is the central nervous system of the programme. (Umaneiye1998), noted that vocational and Education is a medium of providing students and teachers with sound understanding of concepts, exposing both the experiences that provide the manipulative, cognitive and attitudinal skills needed.

Practical work embedded in Vocational Education helps in enhancing the manipulative skills of students thereby, translating their cognitive knowledge into psychomotor skills. This helps in molding the minds of students about the world of work thus, bridging the gap between teaching and research. Okorie (2000) opined that practical work in vocational education enables learners to develop logical thinking that can challenge their imagination, abilities and enables them to exhibit their creativity.
Concept of Skill Acquisition

Skills acquisition is a natural force in man, in the individual who makes the good use of his experience in the most intelligent way to expose Nigerian creative aspect of the educational system to the society as well as to develop and maximize skills potential in the society.

Kemiand Iwerlara (2010), posited that skill acquisition includes the mastery of practical skills and knowledge in any vocational and technical field of study. This is done through training and practical experiences on the Job training. In line with this, Okori and Ekpo (2010), stated that skill is the ability to do something well. Therefore, skill acquisition is the process of gaining ability to do certain jobs very well and with dexterity. Skill acquisition can be in different fields of human activities such as food and Nutrition, clothing and textiles, home management and child development and family living.

In Odu (2010), skill acquisition varies in nature and complexity according to the trade involved. It is an effective means of bringing about rapid economic development. Odu concluded that skill acquisition leads to a rise in per capital income of an individual. This is because everybody will be involved in independent production of goods which will lead to increase in the country’s foreign exchange.

Importance of Skill Acquisition through Vocational Education

A nation is reckoned with through its capability and requisite skill possession. Countries like United States of America, Germany, Britain to mention but a few became famous today because their citizens possess one form of skill or the other. Here in the country, it is still improvised in the shackle of informal system of skill acquisition, hence the country is less productive. Most of the artisans seen all over the country engaged in one form of trade or the other acquired their vocational skills in the informal system which makes them less proficient and at times they operate at a loss without knowing.

Olaitain (2001), noted that vocational education enables an individual to possess skill in a formal setting that will enable them to be self-reliant, productive and instrumental to the technological and industrial development of the nation

The importance of skills acquisition through Vocational Education cannot be over emphasized. Some of its importance’s are.

i. It helps in the conservation and development of a country’s natural resources. The conservation and development of natural resources deposited in any country will be harnessed through indigenous skilled man power.

ii. **Increase Wage Earning Power**: Practical training through the acquisition of skills in any pursuit will bring about both immediate and lasting economic returns due to increased production and wage earning capacity.

iii. **Skill acquisition is needed to meet the increasing cost of living**: Acquisition of salable skill brings about an additional income that will meet the increasing cost. Politically; Nigeria is nowhere among community of nations because of the level of her skill development. Because of the level of her skill, all her political utterances cannot be backed up by action. Unlike the developed countries, like America who because of her skill are feared in the political area. Therefore, the respect an individual or a nation commands is synonymous with the level of skill possessed.

iv. Skill acquisition prevent waste of human labour:

Skill acquisition will bring a remedy to the growing rate of unemployment which is currently experienced in the nation. By means of training through the acquisition of skills, the productive power of the society will be enhanced.
Challenges to the Teaching of Vocational and Technical Courses in Nigeria

Skills can be acquired in vocational and technical courses when students are given the opportunity to practice what they are thought. Technical skills call for understanding, and proficiency in a specific activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, procedures or technique. Unfortunately, a greater proportion of problems currently confronting the teaching of vocational and technical courses in Nigeria hindering meaningful development to take place. They include the following:

1. **Inadequate Funding**
   Funds provided are grossly inadequate for the effective teaching of Vocational Education courses most of which are practical oriented. The courses includes nutrition, clothing and textiles, etc. Olaitan (2001), observed that inadequate funding is a major constraint which can limit the level of students and teachers participation in practiced work.

2. **Shortage Of Qualified Teachers**
   Olaitain (2001), pointed out that there are insufficient number of teachers in Vocational and Education sections in Technical Colleges/Schools, who are adequately trained to teach technical skills. This has called for regular training of teachers where the pre-service training period is not sufficient to provide the vocational and technical teachers with adequate preparation to handle the technical aspect of the course.

3. **Shortage Of Laboratories/Facilities**
   Anumnu (2001) pointed out that tools, equipment and materials are essential for acquisition of skills. Okoro (1993) stressed that students have to work in well-equipped laboratories for learning to take place in any skill oriented subject and for maximum output in practical works. Oparasi (2002) stated that the absence of well-equipped vocational and technical laboratories makes a mockery of the whole concept of the programme as it will be absurd to teach students only theory without the required equipment to carry out the practical aspects which calls for the use of psychomotor skills.

4. **Insufficient/Period For Siwes And Practicals**
   Adequate time is required to complete the theoretical aspects of courses in vocational and technical education which at time, is inadequate thus, the practical aspect suffers. According to Olaitain (2001), students will definitely not have adequate opportunity to cover enough ground in the practical courses. The Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) should last for six (6) months and not just three (3) month as it does at moment. This will enable them to have more skills on the experiences which will expose them to real life situation in the field hence enhancing their psychomotor skill acquisition.

5. **Poor Public Opinion**
   Some individuals in the society still discourage their wards about vocational and technical education. Some parents take decision for their children on what to do in life. They would want their child to be an engineer or a doctor thereby confusing the children. Thus the attitude of the parents becomes a serious barriers to the teaching and learning of vocational subjects.

**Basic Consideration For The Establishment Of Skills Acquisition Centers**

In developing skills acquisition centers, some basic considerations are necessary as stated. By National Directorate of Employment, (NDE 2002). These include:-

1. **Prospect Of The Trades**
   Experts in Vocational Education are to forecast the prospects and demand rate of trades in the immediate environment. Dedication of trainee for easy skill acquisition may rely on the assurance given to them for self-employment.
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2. Skills Proprietorship
   The proprietor should be skilled in the trades to be established. The situation shall not enable the trainers in the employment at the center to hold the management to ransom.

3. Location of Establishment
   Skills acquisition centers should be established in places of less competition. Trades can only be established in a particular place where the raw materials are available for instance, a skill like pottery should be sited where the soil is available.

4. Needed Materials
   Basic materials must be on the ground for establishment of skills acquisition centers. These materials include infrastructures such as houses which must be constructed to meet the need and objectives of the skills acquisition centers.

Enhancing Psychomotor Skill Acquisition Towards a Reflective Nigerian Society.
   As a first step in skills acquisition, government should set up skill acquisition, committee at the national level and at six geo-political zones. The committee should comprise the representatives of employers unions, vocational educators, and ministry of education. The committee should first identify areas of needs and the number of manpower required. A census of businesses should be conducted to ascertain the type of labor required to be able to regulate the number of trainees. Having determined the area of needs, trainees can then be recruited, having regard to their interest, aptitude and ability. The trainee is then attached with the industries where they will receive free training in Vocational Skills.

   Vocational Education policy should be put in place. The Federal Government should immediately put in place a mandatory policy that will make it a right for everyone studying vocational education. This is essential because, in a democratic society with freedom of choice in the labor market, all workers need to be equipped with psychomotor skills to be self-reliant. Vocational Education is a medium of providing people with employment in industries, commerce and other enterprises by exposing them to experiences that provide skills that make qualify for a career.

Conclusions
   Vocational Education is inevitable in the acquisition of skills in the classroom, it is an education that infuses its learners with a sense of destiny and purpose that empowers them to effectively apply their expertise to the problems and issues that affect human life. The paper also discussed the importance of skills acquisition gotten through vocational education to include acquisition of skills in formal settings which enables one to be self-reliant. The paper further pointed out few challenges facing the course amongst which are poor public opinion, and inadequate funding. The paper concluded that as a skill-oriented course, Vocational Education knowledge is a natural force in man in the individual who makes the good use of his experience in the most intelligent way.

Recommendations
   The following recommendations are proffered:-
   1. Vocational Education should be adequately funded by both the State and Federal government
   2. Adequate infrastructural facilities should be made available to enhance learning and teaching of practical skills.
   3. Vocational acquisition centers should be encouraged in every community.
   4. Mobilization and self-reliance awareness concerning the importance of Vocational Education should be encouraged.
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