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Access, Equity and Quality of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education in the Face of Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education (VEE) system face significant disruptions due to escalating insecurity, including insurgency in the Northeast, banditry mostly in the Northwest and North central, and communal clashes in Plateau and Benue States. These challenges hinder access, equity, and quality in skills development, exacerbating unemployment and socioeconomic instability. This paper examines the impact of insecurity on VEE through the lenses of Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach, and Resilience Theory, arguing that systemic barriers-such as displacement, gender disparities, and institutional fragility-demand urgent policy interventions. The study highlights how conflict erodes human capital, restricts marginalized groups' capabilities, and necessitates adaptive education models. Proposed solutions include mobile and digital training platforms, gender-inclusive programs, public-private partnerships, and psychosocial support to enhance accessibility and learning outcomes. By integrating theoretical and practical perspectives, this paper provides a framework for policymakers to strengthen VEE as a tool for economic recovery and social equity in Nigeria's volatile climate.

Keywords: vocational education, insecurity, human capital, equity, resilience, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is the pillar of development the world over; as such, nations and individuals have all agreed that the way out of various problems in life is through education. Thus, the educational standards set up by every nation must be challenging to meet the needs of the students and the society (Atsumbe, 2020). Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education (VEE) is the part of education that plays a very vital role in skills acquisition, youth empowerment, employment creation and economic development of any nation. In the landscape of modern education, the fusion of vocational training with entrepreneurial acumen stands as a transformative force, equipping individuals with not only the technical skills pertinent to their fields but also the business savvy necessary to navigate and succeed in today's dynamic market environments. Establishing accessible, equitable, quality and functional system of VEE system is essential to foster attitudes that steer individuals away from negativity (Emeka, Nwamaka & Manasseh, 2024). This type of education equips citizens with knowledge, understanding and freedom to recognize their capabilities and innate potential. It empowers individuals to think creatively about ideas and issues across various disciplines. VEE empowers students with the right attitudes, skills and knowledge to set up their own businesses and become employers of labor contributing to the socio-economic wellbeing of the country. Nigeria faces significant security challenges, including Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest, and communal clashes in other regions. These crises have disrupted education, particularly Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education (VEE), which is vital for youth employability and poverty reduction. Despite governmental efforts and commitments to combat these issues, the trend persists and intensifies, leading to high unemployment rates, food insecurity, soaring living costs, rampant inflation, and widespread loss of life (CBN, 2022; FAO, 2022). Insecurity severely limits access and quality of vocational and entrepreneurial education in Nigeria particularly in rural and conflict affected areas. Recognizing these challenges, there is a growing acknowledgment of the need for holistic and contextually relevant approaches to leverage education as a catalyst for peace and security in Nigeria. By addressing systemic barriers



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to quality education and promoting inclusive and equitable access to learning opportunities, policymakers can empower individuals and communities to become agents of positive change, fostering a more peaceful and prosperous society (Oluwatobi & Ige, 2021). This paper aim to analyze the impact of insecurity on access and quality of VEE and proffer ways forward as strategies for improving access, equity and quality in the sector.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concept of Educational Access and Equity

Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on "equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system (NPE, 2013). This means that in order to attain a free, just and egalitarian society, Nigeria requires an atmosphere that is conducive enough to accommodate equal educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels. Access refers to the availability and affordability of education opportunities. Insecurity has led to school closures, displacement of learners, and destruction of infrastructure, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups (Eze, 2020). Equity ensures fair distribution of educational resources. Insecurity exacerbates disparities, as marginalized groups (women, rural dwellers, and the poor) face greater barriers to VEE participation (UNESCO, 2020). In the opinion of Astumbe (2020), the principle of equity in education has the following features:

- i. Education should be free, universal and compulsory to some extent.
- ii. No one should be left out for one reason or the other from opportunities of education and of funding in public education
- iii. Equal social benefits – benefits of access to higher education, finance, influence, position, amenities and other social needs.
- iv. Equal educational benefits – learning outcomes, knowledge, and skills-knowledge and skill achievable in private schools should also be available in public schools.
- v. Equal educational treatment – procedure and practices should be equal in all educational institutions, be it private or public and at all levels.
- vi. Equal distribution of resources and facilities – particularly teaching and learning facilities such as chairs, desks, classrooms, machines, tools, workshops, laboratories, equipment libraries, books, etc.
- vii. Equal opportunity to a large number of people for earnings through education – job opportunity for a large number of educated people.

Quality Education

Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality have often been used synonymously (Ogona & Anele, 2021). Quality education should be considered as a holistic concept that goes beyond basic literacy and numeracy. It encompasses a learner-centered approach, focusing on the overall development of the individual, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical well-being (Oluwatobi & Ige, 2021). This includes a safe and supportive learning environment, qualified and engaged teachers, relevant and inclusive curriculum, and positive learning outcomes that prepare individuals for life and active participation in society. According to the World Bank (2019), quality entails relevant curricula, qualified instructors, and adequate facilities. Insecurity disrupts teacher availability, practical training, and accreditation processes, diminishing learning outcomes. Considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today, however. Quality education includes: Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities; Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities; Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace; Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society (Humphrey & Crawford, 2015).



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Insecurity

Security is defined as a situation in which citizens of any country are at liberty to go about their normal daily activities without threat to their lives and means of livelihood, safety from bodily harm, disease and human rights violation wherever they may find themselves (Nwoku & Ogayi, 2021). Chris (2021) describes insecurity as lack of stability and continuity of livelihood (unstable and unsteady income), unpredictability of daily life (not knowing what to expect), lack of protection from crime (not feeling safe), and lack of freedom from psychological harm (lack of safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the lack of assurance of knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in one's community or neighborhood and by people around.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The following theories are relevant to this study:

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964)

Human capital theory, advanced by economists such as Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, posits that education enhances economic potential and productivity, benefiting society as a whole (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). The theory posits that education enhances productivity and economic growth while insecurity undermines human capital development by limiting skill acquisition, reducing workforce readiness, and stifling entrepreneurship. It serves as a framework that examines the knowledge and experiences of business owners, positing that the human capital of a founder enhances the likelihood of small firms' survival. Investment in human capital via accessible, equitable and quality VEE can drive economic growth and development. High quality VEE can equip individuals with the right skills for entrepreneurship enabling these individuals to become self-employers and also employ others. This will in turn reduce unemployment and poverty which are the primary drivers of insecurity in Nigeria often leading individuals to engage in illegal activities such as theft, kidnapping, and radicalism (Eze, 2020).

Social Justice Theory

The concept of social justice emerged during the Industrial Revolution, as people became aware of the vast inequalities between the wealthy and the working class. Early efforts focused on issues like wealth distribution and the exploitation of labor. The theory was further articulated by scholars such as Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000), with emphasis on the importance of social networks, trust, and cooperation in addressing insecurity. Social justice theory focuses on the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within society. It aims to address issues like inequality, discrimination, and injustice, promoting policies and practices that uphold human dignity and equality for all individuals and groups, especially those who have been historically marginalized or oppressed (Emeka, et al, 2024). Social justice emphasizes the importance of ensuring that everyone has access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive, regardless of their background. By promoting educational strategies that enhance community engagement, cooperation, and trust, accessible, equitable and quality VEE can significantly reduce insecurity in Nigeria.

Impact of Insecurity on Access to Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education

As mentioned earlier, access refers to the availability and affordability of education opportunities (Eze, 2020). Insecurity has affected access to VEE in several ways:

- i. Led to school closures particularly in the banditry affected areas.
- ii. Displacement of learners, teachers and destruction of infrastructure, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups.
- iii. Destruction of educational infrastructure (e.g., training centers, equipment) leading to Infrastructure and Resource Constraints for human development
- iv. Access to resources needed for supplies and equipment are extremely poor.
- v. Access to new technologies is virtually non-existent.
- vi. Aggravate the number of out-of-school to 15 million children roaming about on the streets of cities in Northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2020)

Impact of Insecurity on Equity in Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education

Nigeria faces a significant north-south educational imbalance stemming from colonial legacies, religious differences, economic disparities, and geographic factors, with the south historically receiving more resources and engagement with western education (Umar, Ismail & Abdul-Hakim, 2014). This imbalance is evident in lower educational attainment,



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particularly for girls in the north, and contributes to socioeconomic disparities and challenges, such as the high number of out-of-school children in the northern regions. Insecurity has also caused rural vs. urban disparities in access to occasional and entrepreneurial training by causing inequalities in enrollment and between urban and rural settlements. In addition, gender disparities are also exacerbated by insecurity (e.g., girls' education disproportionately affected as it reflects in the enrollment patterns between boys and girls (UNICEF, 2020).

Impact of Insecurity on Quality of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education

There has been a growing concern about the decline in the quality of the Nigerian education system (Atsumbe, 2020). Earlier literature indicates that the quality of education in some Nigerian institutions in the 1970s was comparable to high quality education offered by top world universities. As a result, there is high unemployment amongst graduates, especially in fields such as engineering (Uzuka & Igwe, 2015). There is also concern about the lack of recognition of Nigerian degrees by overseas universities (Atsumbe, 2020).

Other factors contributing to the decline in quality are:

- i. The unstable environment due to frequent communal clashes and banditry.
- ii. Inadequate funding has resulted in problems such as the breakdown and deterioration of facilities
- iii. Problems of high turnover and difficulties in recruitment and retention particularly in the troubled area
- iv. The teaching and learning materials were inadequate to support the delivery of qualitative education
- v. Lack of adequate facilities to encourage entrepreneurial skills acquisition
- vi. Dominance of theory in the delivery method of teaching entrepreneurship in place of practical and behavior simulation
- vii. Lack of synergy between academia and business/private sector to create a strong link and collaboration.
- viii. Outdated curricula and teaching methods that do not meet the needs of today's job market.
- ix. Skills mismatch, where graduates lack the skills that employers are looking for.

These factors need to be taken into consideration in rethinking promotion of quality education.

Challenges posed by Insecurity on Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education

Insecurity has posed enormous challenges which generally exacerbated inequalities in access to education. Insecurity undermines the quality of educational programs particularly VEE which has suffered enormous setback in Nigeria because of its capital-intensive nature and the need for costly instructional materials and facilities. Other Challenges include:

- i. The disruption and closure of institutions- Insecurity leads to the frequent closure of vocational and entrepreneurial institutions. This forces the internal displacement of students and teachers, making it impossible to maintain a consistent educational process (Jacob, Ndubuisi & Constance, 2021). These issues are linked to the frequent closure of vocational institutions and the internal displacement of students.
- ii. Infrastructure Damage: Attacks and conflicts can result in the destruction of essential infrastructure, including workshops and equipment, further debilitating the learning environment (Umar, et al., 2014).
- iii. Loss of qualified personnel through brain drain scarcity of experts. Teachers and qualified personnel are often forced to leave areas affected by insecurity, leading to a loss of expertise in vocational and entrepreneurial fields.
- iv. Insecurity creates economic uncertainty and instability, which deters private investment and reduces overall funding for educational initiatives, including vocational and entrepreneurial education programs.
- v. Without a stable and safe environment, students cannot effectively learn the practical skills needed to become self-reliant and employable, undermining the core objectives of vocational and entrepreneurial education. This results in low learner outcomes and poor skill acquisition due to disruptions.
- vi. Unemployment-Ultimately, the challenges posed by insecurity exacerbate unemployment and poverty by preventing the cultivation of a skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of the job market.

Strategies for Improving Access and Quality of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education

Increase funding for vocational education in insecure regions.

- i. Strengthening partnerships between government, private sector, NGOs and Community
- ii. Curriculum Reform: Integration of digital skills, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding into vocational training.
- iii. Capacity-building programs for instructors in insecure regions and Incentives to retain skilled teachers in conflict zones
- iv. Infrastructural provision and rehabilitation of existing buildings.



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v. Safety on campuses and creation of conducive learning environment

Examples of successful vocational training programs in conflict-affected regions (e.g., Nigeria: Northeast Nigeria, other African countries e.g. Rwanda)

1. Northeast Nigeria-The training of 800 youth including women provided under a UNDP project to support early recovery of the conflict-affected community in the North-East Nigeria. The area of the skill provided include farming, tailoring, furniture making, livestock production, computer craft, electrical installation, and maintenance, among others. The training sessions will last for 2 months and trainees who complete the targeted courses and meet the key requirements on various vocational skills will be provided with cash grants to be used to start or enlarge their own businesses UNDP, 2020)
2. Kenya- Kenya Youth Employment Opportunities (KYEOP); A Kenyan government initiative designed to improve young people's well-being and economic prospects by providing them with training, internships, and business grants. The project equips youth with necessary skills for employment and entrepreneurship, addressing the mismatch between training and market demands and ultimately aiming to create sustainable livelihoods and reduce unemployment. Key aspects include empowerment, skills development and employment and entrepreneurship (The National Youth Opportunities Towards Advancement <http://mis.kyeop.go.ke/>)
3. Sierra Leone: A Business Development (BD) program was implemented as part of the nation's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategy. While initially successful, the program faced challenges like donor funding decreases and the need to address social inequality and youth unemployment, which contributed to renewed instability.
4. Morocco: Morocco is a case study of adoption of good skills acquisition programme that suits modern technology-derived work practices. It has established over 300 vocational training centres with the capacity to enroll 500,000 trainees to be trained in 87 different trades in the areas of technical, vocational, entrepreneurial, agricultural, creative, entertainment etc. The Moroccan model has the potential for meaningful skills acquisition by trainees.

Conclusion

Major educational transformations are required in the Nigerian education system. The tasks ahead are numerous and daunting but with focus and good educational policies, planning, implementation, motoring and supervision, the problems can be tackled. It is important to note that Government alone cannot surmount all the identified issues of concern. As such it will be impossible for these tasks to be tackled without the support of the private sector and community development efforts. Therefore, addressing the challenges requires a holistic and inclusive approach

Recommendations

Based on the issues raised by the study as pertains to access, equity and quality of vocational entrepreneurship education (VEE), the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. Enhance the safety of campuses and creation of conducive learning environment
- ii. Increase funding for vocational education in insecure regions.
- iii. Strengthen partnerships between government, private sector, NGOs and Community and for infrastructural provision, rehabilitation of existing buildings and enhance synergy between academia and business/private sector to create a strong link and collaboration.
- iv. Curriculum reform to reduce dominance of theory in the delivery method of teaching entrepreneurship in place of practical and behavior simulation and integrate conflict resolution and peace building. These measures will help to reform the outdated curricula and teaching methods that do not meet the needs of today's job market.
- v. Improve access to resources needed especially new technologies that are virtually non-existent and other supplies and equipment are extremely poor.
- vi. Improve incentives to retain skilled teachers in conflict zones to reduce the problems of high turnover and difficulties in recruitment and retention particularly in the troubled areas.



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