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Global Practices in Vocational Education and Emergence of Latent Entrepreneur-Based Businesses in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The correlation study examined the global practices in vocational education and the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses. 60 postgraduate students from Business Education and Vocational Technology Education Departments in Rivers State University of 2021/2022 academic session were sampled for the study. Questionnaire was constructed to collect data for the study. The reliability of the instrument was established with a coefficient of 0.76 using test re-test method. Data collected from respondents were analyzed with using correlate statistics to test hypotheses. The findings show that the relationships between industry-based collaboration and Research and Development in vocational education are significantly high. The statistical evidence further suggests that vocational education is highly desired and sought after occupational skills because of its relevance to their career choice. Based on the findings, it is recommended amongst others that vocational education in Nigeria should be revamped to increase its capacity to engage in workable collaboration with industries, business organizations and attract funds from government agencies and private donors.

Keywords: Global practices, Vocational Education, Latent Entrepreneur-based businesses

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education is central to the development of human capital and for contributing to economic growth. Governments in most countries recognizing its economic value chain developed initiatives and legislation to strengthen vocational education. Vocational education and training is now adopted by developed countries as economic development policy and strategy for improving the skills and knowledge of their workforce for achieving economic competitiveness in the face of globalization. As Mouzakitis (2010) had noted that to meet the current globalization impacts and challenges we must make significant improvements and effectively maximize the benefits of vocational education and training instruction based on specific design curricula. This situation also demand more specialized labour market, higher levels of skills and diversified vocational education so as to meet global economic transformation governed by knowledge and technologies. Vocational education and training instruction should be significantly based on specific design curricula build to purpose reflecting the market needs assessment identified by appropriate market research. This is a major foundation for successful and competitive organizations, individual transition into and continuity in the workplace, and increase productivity. Occupational knowledge acquired by the workforce direct their action and entrepreneurial behaviour towards value creation. Vocational

education knowledge is key to value creation but its effectiveness depends on its transfers and practical applications. Knowledge is a strategic resource and important contributor to the emergence of new ventures, entrepreneur or organization competitiveness. Recent empirical evidence has supported strong academic foundation in vocational education that can make its graduates not only more adaptive to new skills in an ever-changing workplace but also advance toward higher career levels. The United States 1984 Carl Perkins Act recommends the need to strengthen the academic foundation of Vocational Education to deliver valuable academic and occupational competences. Hull in Cheung and Tsyrlina-Spady (2016) supporting the integration of academic and vocational education in preparing students for useful and effective occupational or technical education insists that students should not just be trained for entry-level job tasks but have solid foundation in academics. Vocationally educated labour contributes significantly to industrialization and technological economy of countries. In the past decades even presently, highly-skilled labour is industry valuable assets that make various organizations dominate the economic space of countries, attracts foreign direct investment from different countries. Skilled workforce builds industries and is the key driver of innovation through application of new knowledge and processes in both high and low –tech industries. As Curtain (2004) had observed skilled employees are the innovators that help enterprises take new ideas and turn them into a product or service and then market the result.

The concept of vocational education and training has attracted several opinions and criticisms. Statistical evidence obtained from studies associated vocational education with status problem (Cheung & Tsyrlina-Spady, 2016), industry strong preference for general education (Pring,1995), the selective nature of vocational education, lack of flexibility and it is not a favourable preparation for job training (Halsall and Cockett, 2012), offer limited choices of occupation and promotes vulnerability of those with low qualifications in the labour market, unusual focus on skill training without addressing related business systems (Scarpetta et al., 2010, Quintini, 2007, Blanchflower & Bell, 2011, OECD & ILO, 2011, Sandirasegarane, Sutermaster, Gill, Volz & Mehta, 2016). VET does not necessarily produce workers needed by employers and the success of the economy has little correlation with it (Jervis, 2011). Beyond these criticisms, the devaluation of the status of vocational education in the past is today changing especially now there is increasing impacts of globalization and every country seek for specialized labour, in-demand skills and diversified vocational education while employers look forward to hire bilingual employees who can work outside their home country. Vocational education is all about having relevant knowledge, skills and attitude relative to world of work and economy. From available literature, vocational education is knowledge-based and skill-based training that is designed to advance competence, especially to prepare people for the present or future occupations. It is the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life; a means of preparing for effective participation in the world of work (Majurin, & ILO, 2016). The provision of material, activities and teaching designed to prepare people to function, at specified level, in specific roles within the context of paid employment (Lucas, Claxton & Webster, 2010). Vocational education in other words produces the right workforce needed in the industries that

have the right skills and knowledge (Guthrie & Dawe, 2004). However, critical comparative study of literature reveals number of global practices that make vocational education and training unique education for entrepreneurship and innovation distinctive from general academic education.

Across the world, vocational education in its current global outlook is learner -focused enterprise education that encourages collaboration, promote inquiry, and support lifelong learning opportunities for students and external stakeholders. As Mouzakitis (2010) had suggested lowering the gap between academic and vocational education while we strengthen the cooperation between education authorities, employment organizations and industries in order to meet the new demands created by current economic transformation. Vocational education providers in most developed countries engage in strategic collaboration with industry partners to provide more flexible and relevant training solution for the industry. The collaboration with industries has always been the major driver of research and development that facilitates the innovation and scientific breakthroughs and technology transfer. Curtain (2004) points out Australia economy should focus less on scientific discovery of innovation and embrace the process of continuous learning, apply new knowledge and processes to low-tech industries, government research and development funding should be focused on processes and development rather than pure research to bring VET sector closer and direct to business innovation. Innovation forms a critical part of national policy in higher education and an additional mandate of vocational education institutions. Toner (2004) citing countries such as Finland, Germany and the United States noted that public vocational colleges are integral part of national innovation policies. As Callan (2004) had observed partnership promotes innovation, technology transfer through research and empowers VET providers at all levels to evolve new and different ways for meeting the training needs of employers and help organizations device ways to share their new skills and knowledge. Mouzakitis, 2010) point out the efforts to strengthen the links between science, research and development, industry and business should be a topmost agenda of government policy. According to Curtain (2004) people are the innovators and organization needs people with the right skills and knowledge to help them to achieve innovation and competitive advantage. According to Curtain, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Western Australia is excellent example of college participant in the knowledge economy. The college provides linkages to clusters of industry partners and they include manufacturers, suppliers, educational and research institutions and government agencies. TAFE Central Innovation Model use industrial cluster approach specifically to identify areas of their utmost strength and commit its resources in that part. TAFE acquires cutting –edge equipment through fund support from Science and Technology Innovation Fund created by Western Australia Department of Training in collaboration with State Training Board. Students also actively participate in the linkage programmes which in turn enhance their skills acquisition and increased satisfaction (Veenker, 2001).

Research and Development generates the flow of technical ideas and constant renewal of the pool of technical skills. Research and development in most developed countries attracts high level of investment from the public and private sources. Increasing the investment in R&D provide the climate that triggers innovation.

Government research and development funding in developed countries, unlike the practice in Nigeria vocational education sector, is solely focused on small and medium–sized enterprises. This critical function in Nigerian universities just witnessed a major boost when TETfund launched Centres of Excellence in Research in twelve public universities with a 12 billion Naira grant to twelve beneficiary public universities and two universities each selected from the six geo-political zones. Bogoro (2021) avowed that R & D is the only true path to socio-economic and technological advancement. The new centres of excellence in research are the heart of the mechanism for the attainment of national aspirations. The massive investment in R&D was aimed to drive strategic expertise with potential industrial applications; promote national and global competitive R &D in strategic and applied sciences to generate innovations in government–defined priority sectors. In addition, the intervention is bridging the gap between researchers and users, stimulating and strengthening triple helix relationships thereby making universities more responsive to industry needs. The centers also are expected to mobilize complementary resources and engage in multidisciplinary and translation research competence to further the development of products, processes and services. Examples of beneficiary universities include University of Abuja (TETfund Centre of excellence in public governance and leadership), University of Jos and Tafawa Balewa University are both (TETfund Centre of Excellence in food security), Usman Dan Fodio University (TETfund Centre of Excellence in urology nephrology), University of Benin (TETfund Centre of Excellence in aquaculture and food technology) among others. The most competitive economies such as Singapore, US, Hong Kong, Netherland, Switzerland, Japan, Germany, UK and Denmark are notably ranked among the top 15 R&D funders by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

Vocational education is a key contributor to entrepreneurship growth. Entrepreneurship and enterprising behaviour are important objectives in the education and lifelong learning policies of European member states (European Community, 1999, Onsenk, 2003). Entrepreneurship competencies is therefore introduced and integrated in education especially vocational education so as to trigger the development of enterprising behaviour needed in the labour market and as well make entrepreneurship a natural career possibility. Sandirasegarane et al., (2016) proposed context-driven and integrated entrepreneurial approach for VET curriculum to address context-specific market needs by applying practical and transferrable skills. Also corroborating this position, Mouzakitis (2010) points out that most educators have now recreate and expand the operational curriculum of VET in many universities to infuse courses such as management, management information system, marketing and finance in attempt to upgrade the qualifications of the workforce and provide knowledge-based and skill-based instruction. Entrepreneurship is intended to create career flexibility and stimulate innovation and employment opportunities for the economy; it is an interesting possibility for achieving personal fulfillment and citizenship. Innovations in the higher and vocational education competences in most cases translate into entrepreneurship, enterprising behaviour and employability. On the other hand, students develop innovative problem identification skills and value creation, increase their human capital that accelerates long-term professional growth. These skillsets are facilitators of emerging entrepreneurship-bound businesses, or

productive self-employment and national economic stability (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010, Sandirasegarane et al., 2016, Van Praag & Versloot, 2007, Chankseliani & Relly, 2016, Gedeon, 2012). Entrepreneurship training triggers the emergence of nascent and latent entrepreneurs who consequently leads the creation of entrepreneurial society, employment creation and innovation. Such strong desire and entrepreneurial intention has been found to result in ownership of businesses in the future. As Onstenk (2003) however noted the chances to start and run a successful enterprise depend significantly on personal assessment of available and developable competences possess by starting entrepreneur which may be sometime inaccurate. In some studies, nascent entrepreneurs have attracted researchers' greater attention rather than latent entrepreneur –based businesses for inclusive economic growth. It is the desirability or preference for self-employment rather than being an employee. These categories of people although engage in economic activity they stimulate job creation and contribute also to national long-term economic growth. The weakness of latent entrepreneurship is the inability to convert their desire to start businesses into real time business. Any intended people who may or may not be strongly supported with action are labeled latent entrepreneurs (Blancflower, Oswald & Stutzer, 2001, Blanchflower, 2004). Latent entrepreneurs have the desire for self-employment while still engaged in wage employment. They are oftentimes in dilemma over their choice so they become indecisive. Grilo and Thurik (2005) using the 2004 survey data from 15 old European Union member states and the United States (U.S) make a clear distinction between latent and actual entrepreneurship.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) examined the drivers of economic growth in (OECD) countries in early 1990s and reported that availability of a large pool of qualified personnel aided growth while shortages of skilled labour acted as a constraint (OECD, 2001). A study published by the UK National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts reported that two –thirds of UK's private–sector productivity growth between 2000-2007 was stimulated by innovation. Innovation is main driver of the new economy, knowledge-based economy. The key drivers of innovation according to Curtain (2004) is competition, it is the key driver of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship to always seek for innovation in the business space so as to have competitive advantage. Vocational education has been successfully linked with entrepreneurship which significantly contributing to economic development. Economic development broadly encompasses the production, employment and consumption triggers by increasing number of entrepreneurs. Latent entrepreneurs though prefer self-employment but still engage wage employment. The desirability of this category of people to become entrepreneurs can be motivated by government supports that would consequently increase number of new owners. New owners are individuals working for rich families and having access to informal investors. Government support may include simplifying bureaucratic procedures, improve access to financial and build trust in judicial systems in order to boost their economic activities. Entrepreneurial activities promotes inclusive growth through the participation of the vulnerable population especially women and young adults engaging in private sector either as employee or business ownership. Consequently, these activities are great stimulus of competition, productivity, personal success, achieving long-term economic growth. Increasing numbers of successful

entrepreneurs provide the distinction between developed economies and underdeveloped economies. High level of start-ups mortality cause by insufficient preparation for start-ups and lack of support from key investors could be the reason why Onsenk (2003) suggests the integration of entrepreneurship competencies in general and vocational education related curriculum. Entrepreneurial competencies such as achievement motivation, determination and commitment, independence, leadership creativity and competitiveness are propelled by individual action. Entrepreneurial personality, education and cognitive factors do not influence success directly in life and business but indirectly through the entrepreneur's action (Ikpesu, 2020). A wide range of constraints face by latent and nascent entrepreneurs includes underdeveloped financial markets, perception of administrative complexities, and political and economic instability affect large majority of the population desirability for self-employment. Critical review of literature revealed a considerable gap in research and the need to investigate this argument to support the current study. The reason for this void in literature as the researcher has observed could be attributed to paucity of knowledge about global practices in vocational education and emerging latent entrepreneurships in various economic sectors in Nigeria. The current study is therefore commissioned to examine whether industry-based collaboration, investment in Research and Development as global practices in vocational education in Rivers State University have significantly inspired the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses.

Research Questions

1. In what ways can industry-based collaboration in vocational education lead to the emergence of latent entrepreneur–based businesses?
2. In what ways can investment in research and development in vocational education contribute to the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between industry-based collaboration in vocational education and emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses in Rivers State University
2. There is no significant relationship between investment in research and development in vocational education and emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses in Rivers State University

METHODOLOGY

This research study has been designed for the collection of numerical data to establish the correlation of the identified variables. The bivariate data was analyzed and presented explain the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. In achieving this purpose, population of 60 postgraduate students of Business Education and Vocational Technology Education Departments of Rivers State University Ph.D, M.Ed, M.Sc students in the two Academic Departments in 2021/2022 academic session all in Rivers State University. Questionnaire was constructed after critical reviewed of literature to collect quantitative data with five categorized measurement scale ranging from Highly desire (HD-5), mostly desire, (MD-4), desire (D-3), less desire (LD-2) and rarely desire (RD-1) to address the

research questions and test the hypotheses. The questionnaires contain 14 items for the independent variable and 5 items for the dependent variable designed purposely to gather numerical data from the research respondents. Instruments for the reliability adopted test re-test method to administer the constructed questionnaires to 10 graduate students of Business Education and Agriculture Education within one week from the University of Uyo through a research assistant. Internal consistency of .76 coefficient was obtained. The researchers used two survey questions to collect data from two categorical variables. The bivariate data from the two sets of questionnaire items generated and the value obtained were paired statistically so as to find out whether possible correlation exist between the sets of values. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23) was used to analyze mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses had been tested using Pearson correlation statistics for bivariate data analysis of both independent and dependent variables. The analytical framework for the interpretation of correlation adopted Salkind in Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) is as follows:

0.8-1.0 = very strong relationship
0.6-0.79 = strong relationship
0.4 -0.59 = Moderate relationship
0.2 -0.39 = weak relationship
0.0 – 0.19 =very weak relationship

RESULTS

Research Question 1

1. In what ways industry-based collaboration in vocational education can lead to the emergence of latent entrepreneur –based businesses?

Table 1

Ways Industry-based collaboration in Vocational Education leads to Emergence of Latent Entrepreneur-based Businesses

S/N	Items	Mean	SD
1	Acquiring occupational intelligence increases the desire for business.	3.92	.907
2	Higher per capita income makes students have strong desire to be latent entrepreneurs	3.42	.591
3	Industry-specific exposure increases students creativity during training	3.00	.000
4	Creation of value by VET increases one's passion to become entrepreneurs	3.63	.736
5	Enterprise-focused training is strong inspiration for business	3.20	.403
6	It makes students react to emerging market needs	3.62	.715
7	Industry exposes students to new technologies in their academic fields	2.82	.390

The descriptive table shows higher mean scores which imply that respondents generally share the opinion that industry–based collaboration in vocational education could lead to the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses.

Research Question 2

In what ways can investment in research and development in vocational education contribute to the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses?

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of investment in research and development in Vocational Education and emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses

S/N	Item	Mean	SD
1.	Investment in R & D promotes the sharing of new knowledge and skills for the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses	3.67	.857
2.	Investment in R & D encourages Creativity in VET and that inspires trainees for entrepreneurship	3.76	.429
3.	R&D in VET triggers innovation and desire for business	3.15	.360
4.	R&D in VET leads to emerging SMEs in the economy	3.00	.902
5.	R&D bridges the gap between theory and practice in business	3.43	.673
6.	Investment in R & D increases business related expertise and competence	3.62	.825
7.	Investment in R & D encourages strong preference for business ownership over wage employment	3.38	1.043

The descriptive results showed higher mean scores suggesting that investment R & D in vocational education could contribute to the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between industry-based collaboration in vocational education and emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses in Rivers State

Table 3

Correlation analysis of industry-based collaboration and emergence of Latent entrepreneur-based Businesses

		OCI	PCI	INDST	LEN
Pearson Correlation	**OCT**	1	.198	-.556**	.703**
Sig. (1-tailed)			.065	.000	.000
N		60	60	60	60
Pearson Correlation	**PCI**	.198	1	.403**	.153
Sig. (1-tailed)		.065		.001	.122
N		60	60	60	60
Pearson Correlation	**INDST**	-.556**	.403**	1	-.472**
Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.001		.000
N		60	60	60	60
Pearson Correlation	**LEN**	.703**	.153	-.472**	1
Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.122	.000	
N		60	60	60	60

. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Key: OCI – Occupational intelligence, PCI- Per capita Income, INDST- Industry-specific Training, LEN- Latent Entrepreneur

From the above correlation analysis, it was found that a strong and significant relationship exist between industry-based collaboration in vocational education (Occupational intelligence and Industry-specific trainings) and emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between investment in research and development in vocational education and emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses in Rivers State University

Table 4

Correlation analysis of investment in R & D and emergence of Latent Entrepreneur-based Business

		SNKS	CRV	INN	LEN
Pearson Correlation	**SNKS**	1	-.901**	.555**	-.538**
Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000
N		60	59	60	60
Pearson Correlation	**CRV**	-.901**	1	-.399**	.414**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000		.002	.001
N		59	59	59	59
Pearson Correlation	**INN**	.555**	-.399**	1	.139
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.002		.291
N		60	59	60	60
Pearson Correlation	**LEN**	-.538**	.414**	.139	1
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001	.291	
N		60	59	60	60

****. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Key: SNKS- Sharing new knowledge and skills, CRV – Creativity inspired, Entrepreneurial business, INN- Innovation and desire for business
LEN – Latent Entrepreneur-based business

From the Table above, it was found that significant relationships exist between Sharing new knowledge and skills and Creativity inspired as measures of investment in Research and Development, and the emergence of Latent Entrepreneur-based businesses.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Vocational education high desire has not been unconnected with institution-industry collaboration. Available evidence from the study showed that industry-based collaboration in vocational education has been closely associated with emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses. This finding agrees with those by a number of researchers who have earlier suggested strong academic foundation, improvement in VET to effectively maximize the benefits of its instruction and strengthening cooperation between education authorities, employment organizations and industries in preparing students to meet the new demands created by the present economic transformation (Tabbron & Yang, 1998, Callan, 2004, Palmer, 2006, Mouzakitis, 2010, Cheung & Tsyrlina-Spady, 2016). Vocational education is mostly desired by graduate students (training participants) and some key values enumerated include development of occupational intelligence, industry-specific training (becoming employee) or assuming entrepreneurial function. As both academics and students are motivated to use new technologies either to perform their day-to-day work functions or carry out research. This new work environment motivates many to development enterprising skills to create value and innovation that leads to the emergence of new

SMEs responding to new market needs. In addition to above discussed hypothesis, the study also established a strong relationship that significantly subsists between investment in R& D in VET and the emergence of latent entrepreneur-based businesses. The empirical evidence obtained from this study equally shows that R&D offers several possibilities and opportunities to the VET institutions and training participants in particular. Research and development creates the climate where partners, students and stakeholders share new knowledge and skills, inspire creativity, innovation, emerging SMEs or preference for ownership of business to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This study outcome is in congruent with Bogoro (2021) when he noted that R&D is the only true path to socio-economic and technological advancement and the new centres of excellence in research are the heart of the mechanism for the attainment of national aspirations. Furthermore, he encouraged increase investment in R&D in order to stimulate strategic expertise with potential for industrial applications; promote national and global competitive R &D in strategic and applied sciences to generate innovations in government –defined priority sectors. The intervention is expected to bridge the gap between researchers and users in creating and strengthening triple helix relationships thereby making universities more responsive to industry needs. Dowrick (2002) also concludes that education is closely linked with innovation, economic growth and that greater investment in knowledge economy through education and training is strategic to the discovery of new knowledge and innovation. This notion is quite strengthened by the new growth theory that is rooted in increased human capital and the attainment of higher economic growth (Bennett, Brunker & Hodges, 2004). Greater investment in training stimulates growth by increasing labour productivity through the provision of greater skill levels and by giving employees the skills needed to complement new technologies. The flows of technical ideas and the application of new knowledge are what stimulated developed economies. In a study published by the UK National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts reported that two-thirds of UK's private –sector productivity growth between 2000-2007 was generated by innovation. Innovation increases the numbers of entrepreneurs and the main source of SMEs economy. As Curtain (2004) has noted innovation brings about competition and motivates entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship to always seek for innovation in the business space to have competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

Vocational education is embraced by number of countries as strategic economic policy for responding to the increasing demands of globalization and economic transformation. The economic value chain of vocational education can be greatly maximized through industry-based collaboration and increase capital investment in R & D. Industry-based collaboration or cooperation offers both academic and students key opportunities for developing occupational and practical intelligence, experience industry-specific training, use new technologies in their day-to-day work functions or carrying out research. Development of enterprising skills, create value, innovation that leads to the emergence of new SMEs responding to new market needs. These occupational intelligence and values in VET institutions would be highly desired when VET is driven by R&D. Investment in research and development is directly related to human capital development, creativity and

innovation. Innovation drives economic growth through application of scientific discoveries by the industries and SMEs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, VET in Nigeria should be revamped to boost its capacity to engage in workable collaboration with industries, business organizations and attract funds from government agencies and private donors. This will make VET to be sought for and turn out globally relevant graduates. In addition to the above, investment in R &D should be dedicated to VET and such action of government will reposition VET to produce innovation and scientific discoveries.

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