

BUILDING THE SKILLED MAN FOR THE ENTREPRENEURIAL AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY THROUGH VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract:

This paper explored the critical role of vocational and technical education (VTE) in developing a skilled workforce capable of thriving in an entrepreneurial and contemporary society in Rivers State, Nigeria. As the economy shifts towards innovation and technological advancement, traditional educational models must evolve to meet the demands of the labour market. The study emphasized the necessity of a curriculum that aligns with industry needs, incorporating essential skills such as digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving. It advocated for strengthened partnerships between educational institutions and local industries to facilitate practical training through internships and apprenticeships. Additionally, the paper highlighted the importance of modern infrastructure, community engagement, and financial support systems, including scholarships, to enhance access to VTE. By fostering innovation through incubation centers and continuous assessment mechanisms, Rivers State can cultivate a resilient workforce that not only meets local economic demands but also contributes to sustainable growth. This approach ultimately positions vocational and technical education as a cornerstone for empowering individuals and driving economic development in the region

Keywords: Skilled Man, Entrepreneurial and Contemporary Society, Vocational and Technical Education,

Introduction:

In an increasingly dynamic and competitive global economy, the need for a skilled workforce has never been more pressing. Rivers State, with its rich resources and potential for industrial growth, stands at a pivotal crossroads. The integration of vocational and technical education into the fabric of society is essential for cultivating a generation of entrepreneurs capable of navigating the complexities of contemporary challenges. This educational approach not only empowers individuals with practical skills but also fosters innovation and self-reliance, crucial attributes for thriving in today's entrepreneurial landscape. Recent studies underscore the transformative power of vocational training in enhancing employability and economic resilience. For instance, a report by the World Bank (2023) highlighted how targeted vocational programs can reduce youth unemployment

rates and promote sustainable economic development. Also, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (2022) emphasized that enhancing technical education in regions like Rivers State can bridge the skills gap, aligning education with the demands of the labour market.

As Rivers State seeks to harness its human capital for economic advancement, a concerted effort to bolster vocational and technical education will be instrumental. By equipping individuals with the necessary skills, the state can nurture not only competent workers but also innovative thinkers who will drive entrepreneurship and contribute meaningfully to the community. In this context, the building of a skilled man emerges as a cornerstone for achieving broader socio-economic objectives, ultimately positioning Rivers State as a leader in Nigeria's quest for sustainable development.

The Concept of Skilled Man

The concept of a "skilled man" refers to an individual equipped with the practical abilities, technical knowledge, and competencies necessary to thrive in various professional environments. In today's economy, the definition of a skilled person has evolved to encompass not only traditional trade skills but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability to new technologies. As industries increasingly demand specialized skills, the emphasis on vocational and technical education has grown, highlighting its importance in developing a competent workforce. Recent studies underscore the role of vocational training in bridging the skills gap in many economies. For instance, the World Bank (2023) emphasized that aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs is crucial for enhancing employment opportunities and economic growth. In Nigeria, where unemployment rates remain a pressing issue, the need for skilled individuals is particularly acute. Research by the Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) indicates that fostering an entrepreneurial mindset through vocational training can significantly contribute to job creation and economic resilience.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has further illuminated the importance of skill adaptability. The International Labour Organization (2022) reported that the crisis accelerated the shift toward digitalization and remote work, necessitating a workforce that can swiftly acquire new skills. This adaptability is a hallmark of the modern skilled individual, reflecting a blend of technical expertise and the ability to navigate a rapidly changing job market. Ultimately, the development of a skilled workforce is not merely an educational challenge but a societal imperative. By investing in vocational and technical education, communities can empower individuals to realize their potential, contribute meaningfully to the economy, and foster innovation. This holistic approach is essential for creating a sustainable future in an increasingly complex and dynamic global landscape.

The Concepts of Entrepreneurial and Contemporary Society

The concepts of entrepreneurial and contemporary society are intertwined, reflecting the dynamic interplay between innovation, economic development, and social change. An entrepreneurial society is characterized by a culture that encourages risk-taking, creativity, and the pursuit of new business opportunities. In contrast, a contemporary society is marked by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and evolving social norms. Together, these concepts highlight the need for adaptability and resilience in an ever-changing environment. Entrepreneurship serves as a vital engine for economic growth, driving job creation and fostering innovation. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023), nations that nurture entrepreneurial ecosystems—through supportive policies, access to funding, and education—experience higher rates of economic development and social mobility. This underscores the importance of creating environments that facilitate entrepreneurial activities, particularly in regions facing economic challenges.

In a contemporary society, the digital revolution has transformed the landscape of entrepreneurship. Businesses today leverage technology not only to enhance efficiency but also to reach global markets and engage with consumers in new ways. The rise of e-commerce and digital platforms has democratized access to business opportunities, allowing individuals to launch enterprises with relatively low barriers to entry. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) highlighted that digital transformation has the potential to add \$13 trillion to global GDP by 2030, emphasizing the profound impact of technology on entrepreneurial ventures.

Moreover, contemporary society increasingly values social entrepreneurship, where the focus extends beyond profit to encompass social and environmental impacts. This shift reflects a growing awareness of sustainability and corporate responsibility among consumers and businesses alike. As noted by the Stanford Social Innovation Review (2022), social enterprises not only address pressing societal challenges but also inspire traditional businesses to adopt more sustainable practices. The concepts of entrepreneurial and contemporary society are crucial in understanding how individuals and communities adapt to and shape their economic realities. By fostering a culture of innovation and embracing the challenges of a rapidly changing world, societies can empower individuals to become agents of change, driving progress and sustainability in the process.

The concept of Vocational and Technical Education:

Vocational and technical education (VTE) plays a critical role in preparing individuals for the workforce by equipping them with practical skills and specialized knowledge necessary for various trades and professions. This form of education is designed to meet the demands of a rapidly changing labour market, emphasizing hands-on training and real-world applications. As economies worldwide seek to enhance productivity and innovation, the importance of VTE has become increasingly evident. Recent research highlights the transformative impact of vocational and technical education on economic development. According to the World Bank (2023), effective VTE programs can significantly reduce unemployment rates by aligning training with labor market needs. The report emphasizes that countries investing in VTE not only enhance employability but also stimulate local economies by providing skilled workers who can adapt to diverse industries.

Moreover, VTE addresses the skills gap that often plagues economies, particularly in developing regions. A study by the International Labour Organization (2022) indicates that there is a critical shortage of skilled workers in many sectors, which can hinder economic growth and social progress. By focusing on skill acquisition that is directly applicable to specific jobs, VTE plays a pivotal role in bridging this gap, empowering individuals to secure stable employment and contribute to their communities. In addition to economic benefits, vocational and technical education promotes lifelong learning and adaptability. The rapid advancement of technology requires workers to continually update their skills, and VTE programs are uniquely positioned to facilitate this process. As highlighted in the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2022) report, lifelong learning initiatives within VTE frameworks help individuals navigate the complexities of modern employment landscapes, fostering resilience in the face of change. Ultimately, the concept of vocational and technical education is not just about training for specific jobs; it is about cultivating a skilled workforce that can drive innovation, enhance productivity, and contribute to sustainable economic development. As countries recognize the importance of VTE, investments in these educational pathways will be crucial for addressing current challenges and preparing for future opportunities.

Essential Skills Necessary for Thriving in an Entrepreneurial and Contemporary Society

Here are ten essential skills necessary for thriving in an entrepreneurial and contemporary society:

1. **Critical Thinking:** The ability to analyze situations, evaluate options, and make informed decisions is crucial for entrepreneurs. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), critical thinking remains one of the top skills required for success in the modern workforce.
2. **Creativity:** Innovation is a key driver of entrepreneurship. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) highlights that creativity fosters new ideas and solutions, making it essential for problem-solving in today's complex environments.
3. **Digital Literacy:** Proficiency in digital tools and technologies is imperative. The International Labour Organization (2022) notes that digital skills are increasingly demanded across all industries, enabling individuals to adapt to new technological trends.
4. **Communication Skills:** Effective communication is vital for networking, marketing, and collaboration. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023) emphasizes that strong interpersonal skills enhance an entrepreneur's ability to convey ideas and build relationships.
5. **Adaptability:** The capacity to pivot in response to changing market conditions is essential for sustained success. A report by Deloitte (2022) indicates that adaptability is one of the most sought-after traits in employees and entrepreneurs alike.
6. **Financial Literacy:** Understanding financial concepts and management is crucial for entrepreneurs to make sound business decisions. The World Bank (2023) highlights that financial literacy is a fundamental skill that impacts business sustainability and growth.
7. **Project Management:** The ability to plan, execute, and oversee projects is essential for achieving business goals. According to the Project Management Institute (2023), project management skills enhance efficiency and effectiveness in resource utilization.
8. **Networking:** Building and maintaining professional relationships can open doors to opportunities and collaborations. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) emphasizes the role of networking in entrepreneurship, as it can lead to valuable partnerships and support.
9. **Emotional Intelligence:** Understanding and managing emotions, both one's own and those of others, is key for effective leadership. Research from TalentSmart (2022) shows that emotional intelligence significantly impacts workplace performance and team dynamics.
10. **Resilience:** The ability to bounce back from setbacks is crucial for entrepreneurs facing the challenges of starting and growing a business. The Harvard Business Review (2023) asserts that resilience is a defining trait of successful entrepreneurs, enabling them to navigate obstacles and maintain focus on their goals.

Challenges of Building the Skilled Man for the Entrepreneurial and Contemporary Society

The following are ten challenges associated with building the skilled man for the entrepreneurial and contemporary society:

1. **Mismatch between Education and Industry Needs:** Many educational programs do not align with the specific skills required by employers. This gap leads to graduates who are unprepared for the workforce. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) highlights this issue in the Nigerian context.
2. **Inadequate Quality of Vocational Training:** The quality of vocational and technical education varies widely, with many institutions lacking the necessary resources and trained instructors. According to the World Bank (2023), this leads to insufficient training opportunities for students.
3. **Limited Funding for Education Programmes:** Economic constraints often result in insufficient investment in vocational training programs, hampering the development of infrastructure and resources. The

International Labour Organization (2022) emphasizes that financial limitations impede effective skills development.

4. **Cultural Stigma against Vocational Education:** In many societies, there is a prevailing belief that academic education is superior to vocational training. This stigma can deter students from pursuing vocational paths. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023) points out that such perceptions limit the appeal of vocational careers.

5. **Rapid Technological Change:** The fast pace of technological advancement creates a continuous need for new skills, making it challenging for educational programs to keep up. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) warns that without timely upskilling, workers may become obsolete.

6. **Insufficient Industry Partnerships:** Effective vocational education often requires collaboration between educational institutions and industries to ensure training is relevant. However, many regions lack these partnerships, as noted by the Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022).

7. **Low Enrollment in Vocational Programmes:** Many young people opt for traditional university education instead of vocational training, leading to a shortage of skilled workers in key industries. The World Bank (2023) indicates that low enrollment rates hinder the development of a skilled workforce.

8. **Ineffective Career Guidance:** Many students do not receive adequate career counseling to understand the benefits and opportunities associated with vocational education. The International Labour Organization (2022) highlights that effective guidance can significantly influence career choices.

9. **Geographic Disparities in Access:** In some regions, particularly rural areas, access to quality vocational training is limited, exacerbating regional inequalities. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) discusses how geographic barriers can restrict opportunities for skills development.

10. **Economic Instability:** Fluctuations in the economy can lead to unpredictability in job markets, making it difficult for educational institutions to forecast the skills needed for future employment. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) notes that economic uncertainty can impact both training programs and job availability.

Importance of Modern Infrastructure in Building the Skilled Man for the Entrepreneurial and Contemporary Society

Here are ten important aspects of modern infrastructure that contribute to building a skilled workforce for the entrepreneurial and contemporary society:

1. **Enhanced Accessibility to Training Facilities:** Modern infrastructure, such as well-equipped training centers, ensures that students have easy access to quality vocational education. According to the World Bank (2023), improved transportation networks and facilities significantly increase enrollment and participation rates in educational programs.

2. **Access to Technology and Digital Resources:** Infrastructure that includes high-speed internet and modern technology enables students to engage with digital learning platforms. The International Labour Organization (2022) highlights that access to digital tools is crucial for developing tech-savvy professionals.

3. **Improved Learning Environments:** Up-to-date classrooms and training facilities promote better learning outcomes. Research from the McKinsey Global Institute (2023) indicates that modernized learning environments foster engagement and enhance skill acquisition.

4. **Facilitation of Industry Partnerships:** Modern infrastructure can support partnerships between educational institutions and industries by providing spaces for collaboration, such as innovation hubs. The Nigeria

Economic Summit Group (2022) notes that these partnerships are essential for aligning educational outcomes with market needs.

5. **Support for Lifelong Learning:** Infrastructure that supports adult education and continuous training programs is critical in a rapidly changing economy. The World Economic Forum (2023) emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning facilities in preparing the workforce for evolving industry demands.

6. **Promotion of Entrepreneurship:** Modern infrastructure, such as business incubators and co-working spaces, fosters entrepreneurial initiatives. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023) highlights that access to such resources can significantly enhance the likelihood of startup success.

7. **Increased Research and Development Opportunities:** Robust infrastructure facilitates research activities, essential for innovation and the development of new skills. The International Labour Organization (2022) underscores that investment in R&D infrastructure can lead to job creation and economic growth.

8. **Networking and Collaboration:** Infrastructure that supports networking events and professional gatherings allows for knowledge sharing and collaboration among aspiring entrepreneurs. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) notes that such networking opportunities can lead to partnerships and mentorships that are vital for success.

9. **Attraction of Investment:** Modern infrastructure attracts both local and foreign investments, which can create job opportunities and stimulate economic growth. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) reports that regions with better infrastructure are more likely to attract businesses looking for skilled labor.

10. **Enhanced Quality of Life:** Good infrastructure contributes to an overall improved quality of life, making regions more attractive to skilled workers. According to the World Bank (2023), better living conditions, including transportation, healthcare, and education, play a significant role in retaining talent.

Roles of Vocational and Technical Education in Developing a Skilled Man Capable of Thriving in an Entrepreneurial and Contemporary Society like River State.

Here are ten key roles of vocational and technical education (VTE) in developing a skilled workforce capable of thriving in an entrepreneurial and contemporary society, particularly in regions like Rivers State:

1. **Skill Acquisition:** VTE provides hands-on training that equips students with specific skills required in various industries. The World Bank (2023) emphasizes that targeted vocational training enhances employability by directly addressing market needs.

2. **Entrepreneurial Mindset Development:** VTE programs often incorporate entrepreneurship education, encouraging students to think creatively and develop business ideas. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) highlights that fostering entrepreneurship within VTE can lead to job creation and economic growth.

3. **Adaptability to Technological Changes:** VTE helps students stay current with technological advancements in their fields, preparing them for a rapidly evolving job market. The International Labour Organization (2022) notes that continuous upskilling is vital in adapting to new technologies.

4. **Promotion of Lifelong Learning:** Vocational education instills a culture of lifelong learning, encouraging individuals to pursue further training and education throughout their careers. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) supports this, stating that continuous skills development is essential for workforce resilience.

5. **Collaboration with Industries:** Many VTE programs collaborate with local industries to ensure training aligns with real-world requirements. This partnership is crucial for providing students with relevant experience and enhancing their employability. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) underscores the importance of such collaboration.

6. **Economic Diversification:** VTE contributes to the diversification of the economy by training individuals in various trades and professions, reducing reliance on a single industry. The World Bank (2023) indicates that a diverse skill set can strengthen local economies and promote sustainability.

7. **Reduction of Unemployment Rates:** By equipping individuals with marketable skills, VTE plays a significant role in reducing unemployment and underemployment rates. The International Labour Organization (2022) highlights that effective vocational training can lead to higher employment rates.

8. **Empowerment of Marginalized Groups:** VTE provides opportunities for marginalized populations, including women and youth, to gain skills and improve their economic prospects. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023) points out that inclusive vocational training fosters greater economic participation.

9. **Fostering Innovation:** VTE encourages innovation by teaching students not only technical skills but also problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. The McKinsey Global Institute (2023) suggests that innovative thinking is essential for entrepreneurial success and economic growth.

10. **Improvement of Local Communities:** As individuals acquire skills and become employable, the overall quality of life in communities improves. The Nigeria Economic Summit Group (2022) asserts that VTE contributes to community development by enhancing economic opportunities and social stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, building a skilled workforce in Rivers State through vocational and technical education is essential for fostering an entrepreneurial spirit and ensuring economic resilience in a rapidly changing world. As the demands of the labour market evolve, it becomes increasingly clear that traditional educational pathways alone are insufficient. By prioritizing vocational and technical training, Rivers State can equip its citizens with the practical skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in various industries, from agriculture to technology.

The integration of entrepreneurship education within vocational programmes will not only enhance individual employability but also stimulate local economies by nurturing a culture of innovation and self-reliance. Partnerships between educational institutions and local industries are crucial in this regard, as they ensure that training is relevant and aligned with market needs. Furthermore, addressing challenges such as resource limitations, cultural biases, and the need for continuous adaptation to technological advancements will be key to maximizing the impact of vocational education. Ultimately, investing in vocational and technical education represents a strategic approach to workforce development that can transform the economic landscape of Rivers State. By fostering a skilled and adaptable workforce, the region can enhance its competitiveness, reduce unemployment rates, and empower individuals to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This holistic approach will not only benefit individuals and businesses but will also contribute to the broader goal of sustainable development in the community. Through a concerted effort to promote and enhance vocational education, Rivers State can lay the foundation for a prosperous and resilient future.

Recommendations/Way forwards

Here are five recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of vocational and technical education in building a skilled workforce for the entrepreneurial and contemporary society in Rivers State:

1. **Strengthen Industry Partnerships:** Establish robust collaborations between vocational and technical institutions and local industries to ensure curricula are aligned with current market needs. This can include internships, apprenticeships, and direct involvement of industry experts in curriculum development, allowing students to gain hands-on experience and relevant skills.

2. **Increase Investment in Infrastructure:** Advocate for increased government and private sector investment in vocational education infrastructure. This includes upgrading training facilities, equipping them with modern technology, and ensuring access to digital resources, which are essential for delivering high-quality education.
3. **Promote Entrepreneurship Education:** Integrate entrepreneurship training into vocational programs to encourage students to develop business skills alongside technical expertise. This can help cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, enabling graduates to start their own ventures and contribute to local economic growth.
4. **Enhance Career Guidance and Counseling:** Implement comprehensive career guidance programs in schools to inform students about the benefits and opportunities available through vocational education. This initiative can help shift cultural perceptions that prioritize traditional academic pathways over vocational training.
5. **Facilitate Continuous Learning Opportunities:** Develop programs that promote lifelong learning and skills development for both current students and the workforce. This can include short courses, workshops, and online training modules that allow individuals to update their skills and adapt to technological changes in their respective fields.

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