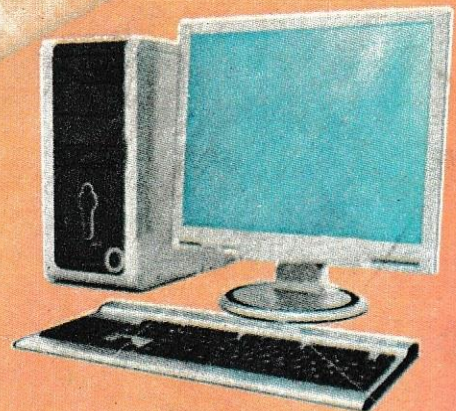


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CAREERS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: INTEREST FACTOR FOR CHOICE

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Abstract

Vocational education is a comprehensive educational programme with various occupational options such as Business Education, Home Economics Education, Agricultural Education, Technical Education and Computer Education to satisfy the diverse interest of the people. This underscores the reason individuals should develop realistic occupational interest in it as it prepares people to acquire various skills for both white and blue collar jobs. Interest plays important roles in occupational choice. It makes an individual to develop sustained likeness for a programme no matter its nature. Vocational education programme can only profit those who want it, need it and have realistic interest in it. Therefore, the deeper the learner's interest, the greater the level of concentration and effectiveness in a career. Indeed, interest promotes the desire of the trainee to learn a skill, do a job well and take pride in his/her work. When appropriate choice of career is made in line with interest, there would be avoidance of occupational slippage, redundancy or obsolescence. Parent, teachers and government at all levels should encourage individuals to show more interest in the choice of Vocational Education Programme through vocational guidance and counselling and vocational policies.

Introduction

The pursuit of any career in life involves choice. There is a general contention by Educationist, Counselors, Psychologist and Employers of labour that the choice of careers which are normally affected by several factors can affect the life of an individual, (Ochiagha, 1995). Choosing a career poses one of the major problems on development task of adolescence (Eke, 1990). For effective career choice, students need a lot of information. The information varies in terms of students' potentials and awareness of their growth, knowledge, educational opportunities and the world of work suitable as well as their abilities to make realistic decisions and implementing them successfully (Denga 1996). The students therefore have to be matured in decision making to choose among alternatives.

Concept of Vocational Education

Vocational Education is a comprehensive and complex instruction programme that facilitates career development through the effort of career orientation, exploration, decision making, job preparation and placement experience (Olaitan, 1986). He further describes vocational education as a very often misused and misunderstood programme.

According to him vocational education is defined as that of total experience of an individual whereby he learns successfully to carry on a gainful occupation. Okirie and Ezeji (1988) defined vocational education as education designed to prepare skill workers for industries, agriculture, commerce etc.

Furthermore, a number of professionals in Education have defined Vocational Education as any form of specialized education directed primarily towards developing competence for employment in a particular occupation. According to Osuala (2005) Vocational Education, proudly, is the part of the total experience of the individual whereby he lives successfully to carry on a gainful employment.

Vocational Education can be defined in terms of:

Training designed to advance an individual's proficiency in relation to his or her present future occupation;

Training or re-training which is given in schools or classes under public supervision and control;

Provision of systematic training experiences which are designed to fit individuals in recognized occupations.

Vocational Education in summary is that part of total educational system which offers training courses leading to the acquisition of specific skills to enable one perform certain job. Sometimes, vocational education offers re-training to up-grade workers already in employment.

Programme Options in Vocational Education

The scope of Vocational Education Programme covers five distinct areas of agricultural education, business education, computer education, home economics education and technical education. Agricultural Education is aimed at providing intellectual growth, services and leadership vital to agriculture and society. Agricultural Education produces graduates who will be skillful in the agricultural sub-sector, such as crop production, animal husbandry, food processing, agricultural marketing, agricultural extension, public relations as well as professional teachers in the vocational agricultural subject and courses in both secondary and Post-secondary school levels.

Business education is sub-divided into accounting and office management education. It provides skilled manpower for the banking industries, data processing, personal secretarial and typing skills for commercial development of the country. Technical Education skills are provided in variety of technical disciplines such as Electrical/Electronics, Carpentry, Woodworking, Architectural and Building, Pipefitting etc.

Home Economics Education as a programme, offers courses that provides skill for Home Management, Catering Services and Hotel Management among others. Lastly, Computer Education trains competent manpower for teaching computer literacy in Primary and Secondary Schools, as well as trained computer personnel support who could work in Nigeria Computer Industry (Student handbook, 2006/2007).

Vocational Education therefore, is both liberal and skill education that aims at providing skills, attitudes and knowledge needed for employment in both the industrial and private sectors of the economy. For the programme to succeed according to Akpan (1997), there must be effective supervision and control through the provision of the needed equipment and facilities that will provide the needed experience for the graduates of the programme.

Objectives of Vocational Education

Bassey (2005) opined that the significant objective of vocational education is to provide saleable skills for manpower development in the economy. These skills when learnt would promote self-reliance, reducing the perennial problem of unemployment and other social vices. According to Osuala (2005), Vocational Education tends to ensure that they are competent in their discharge of the skills in the both industrial and commercial sector.

In her contribution, Akpan (1997), reasoned that, one of the objectives of secondary education is to enable the graduates of such programme to gain employment after leaving the system. Yet this cannot be achieved without the efficient working vocational education. Akpan concluded that a desirable objective of vocational education is to provide the student with opportunities for variety of options or courses to choose from that will enable the graduates to be employed in the labour market.

In a corroborative statement, Danwanzan (2004) noted that vocational education fits one into intricate experience of the real world, as it provides job oriented training for the trainees to develop the appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and understandings.

In summary, the ultimate goals of vocational education include;

Preparing the learner for entry into a chosen field of occupation and enables him or her to progress and preserve in it.

Opening up a wider range of options or job openings for all citizens in the labour market.

Servicing the supply and demands of job trend in the labour force.

Ensuring that each trainee attains the adjustive, distributive, and motivational qualities that are relevant to career information, career development and work behaviour.

Equipping individuals in training or in the work setting with the relevant skills, work habits, attitudes, knowledge and information such that their input and output in their respective occupational fields match the expected efficiency. (Ochiaga, 1995).

Essential Elements of Vocational Education

According to Olaitan (1986), essential elements of all vocational education include

The availability of adequate facilities,

Provision of guidance and counseling for all at all stages of training,

A wide range of occupational areas to cater for the various career options that are chosen by aptitude and personality characteristic,

The provision of occupational areas that are relevant to the culture and needs of the people,

The presence of competent career officers to measure the strengths/weakness of prospective trainees to ensure that career choice, aptitude, ability and interest are matched,

A covered of the theoretical and practical knowledge which includes field or laboratory work sometimes under the supervision of competent hands,

Ensuring that the period of industrial attachment (IT) that is, a period of induction into industry is provided to individuals before the completion of their training,

Evaluating the trainees in the affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains throughout the courses of their training, and

Ensuring that the mode of training is carried out on full-time or part-time basis in school or non-school setting.

Interest as a Factor in Career Choice

Interest is an important element in occupational planning. Strong (1983), described interest as a 'responsible of liking'. In operational terms, interests are likes and dislikes for activities and objects. An interest is something one spends his or her time on or what one enjoys. Generally, interest is inferred from the activities one would like to be involved in. Interest is required for one to achieve well or be dedicated in any vocational undertaking.

Interest is the factor that influences students in their choice career. Interest, when combined with intelligence and specific aptitudes, helps to point the direction on which one has to go. It shows the area in which a student is likely to be motivated (Denga, 1982).

According to Vaughan (1980), all young people undergo some phases of wanting to do one thing or the other. At first, they move from fantasy period to tentative period but later become more realistic and more concrete in what they can do. Fantasy period is a period when a student feels that he should be a lawyer today, a medical doctor tomorrow and accountant the next day. It is usually a period of confusion. Tentative period is when the child begins to get settled to a career that appeals to him. Realistic period is when the individual is intellectually matured to make a concrete decision on the type of career he thinks is good for him bearing in mind his interest and the extent of job opportunities after schooling.

In a research paper on the importance of business subjects in the school curriculum, Udoh

(1980) stated that the interest of students varies in each subject and leads to differences in achievements. He further stated that a student with high interest in typing is sure to become a secretary while the one whose interest is in accounting may certainly be an accountant. Similarly, Jordan (1974) in his own contribution maintained that, it is interest that makes the individual to persist no matter how tedious and tasking it may be. For example it may be emphasized that lack of interest in choosing welding or craft as a career may cause a student of high capacity to obtain only a mediocre success (Denga, 1982).

Udoh (1985) felt that if interest and abilities were disregarded in favour of prestige or glamour or some others factors, it would lead to job dissatisfaction. However, high interest in a subject does not mean the student has ability in it, though the two of them often go together. Supporting the above view, Okoro (1993), noted that the resultant consequences of students' lack of interest are, absenteeism during periods for the subject, malingering and general nuisance attitude detrimental to effective learning and retention. To remedy the situation, Okoro advises that the teachers should call the students to order through appropriate counselling and regular persuasion.

In a recent study, Onyejiaku (1987) showed that the occupational choice of Nigeria youths is influenced to an appreciable extent by their personal perception of the occupation and also what is available in the environment to which the individual exposed. The sample for the study was drawn from cross section of the country involving 671 classes 4 and 5 students (351 boys and 320 girls). Among other requirements in the questionnaire the students were asked to indicate the occupation they have either chosen or would like to do when they leave school, and also to state the most important factor influencing their choice or aspiration. Both boys and girls exhibited similar trend in the factors that were influenced their choice.

1. About fifty percent of the students stated that they were influenced by personal interest or liking or attraction to the occupation. However, there was a wide variety in the choice of occupations between boys and girls.
2. The second factor in the hierarchy was the wish of parents. A considerable proportion of the students indicated that they were influenced by their parents. This reveals the impact of Nigeria parental pressure on their children's occupational choice.
3. The third factor on the totem pole of influences was good pay, salary or assurances of enough income. This economic factor is expected because money takes precedence for most Nigerians.
4. The fourth significant factor was qualification for the occupation. A close examination of the qualification factor showed that it was based solely on the subjects the students felt they were doing better in school.

Other factors given by the students were personal needs, prestige, and friends and last on the hierarchy was counsellor which was indicated by two boys and girls out of the entire sample. This is clear evidence that most Nigeria youths do not benefit from the services of vocational guidance counsellors because they are not available in most of the schools. In the 62 secondary schools sampled for the study, only two schools had guidance counsellors, one in each school.

Types of Interest

Interest is defined in terms of personal likes and dislikes for things related to work. Ochiaka (1995) distinguished four categories of interest, namely:

1. **Expressed Interests:** These are verbal expression or statement or mere claims an individual makes concerning his specific interests. Most of the statements have little or no foundation on objective understanding of the areas of interest. They are usually taken at their face value. When an

individual says that he wants to become a medical doctor, an engineer, or an accountant, it is understood that he has interest in such occupation. But he may not be practically acquainted with the occupation of his interest. In most cases, his interest may be based on what he has learnt from his colleagues who might have expressed their interest in any of the occupations, or some of the people he happens to know might have made spectacular progress in the occupations.

2. Inventories Interests: These are also expressions of likes and dislikes for some occupations. They are estimates of interest based upon responses to a set of questions concerning likes and dislikes which are summed up and compared with the response of others.

3. Manifest Interests: A manifest interest in any occupation is expressed through action and participation and not just by verbal expressions or statements. Take, for instance, if Okafor says that he likes to be a fisherman but he has not gone out for fishing, one may infer that he has expressed interest in fishing but this desire has not been manifested to show that he actually means what he said. This desire or likeness becomes manifest interest only when he bases this interest or desire on some form of fishing exploration.

4. Tested Interests: This is an interest which has been manifested under controlled situations. Tested interests are defined by what a person learns, if a person is genuinely interested in a particular work, he should learn about the demands and peculiarities of work. One of the ways to determine an individual's level of interest in a particular occupation is by measuring his knowledge of information with regard to the work.

Positive Impacts of Appropriate Career Choice

Guards against Occupational Slippage

Occupational slippage is leaning on the job either by elimination, pick up or trial and error. Individuals will be equipped to face the world of work with some degree of confidence and flexibility. They will be exposed not only to professional skills but also some professional and technical skills; which will open a wide range of work possibility to the individuals in response to changing circumstance.

Guards against Occupational Redundancy

Vocational development is a life long process and during this developmental process, the individual may make series of occupational preferences in the light of what he knows of the occupational world as well as what he has been made to know about himself whether at home or in school. Thus occupational skills are used to refer to the decision an individual makes, whether tentatively or decisively, to prepare for, or accept a job in one occupation rather in any other.

Discourages Occupational Obsolescence

This involves pursuing jobs that do not exist of individual's extinct thereby becoming jobless after spending money, time and training on it. Relevant and up-to-date information on different available occupations is very essential for a realistic occupational choice. The extent to which an individual has knowledge of the occupation and of himself will determine the extent to which the individual will make worthwhile Occupational choice. Information about occupation affects occupational choice by helping individuals to discover the occupation that may meet their needs and to anticipate how well satisfied they may hope to be occupation as compared with another.

Guards against Occupational Momism

Momism is a situation where the parents force their children to choose certain occupation so that they will get respect. Denga (1986) said that the treatment a child receives early in life from his parents determines the dominant needs. These dominant needs manifest themselves in interests which determine vocational selection. In Nigeria, some people think that some occupations are more important than others. But it is not necessarily true. Each occupation in the society contributes to the social stability in general. With appropriate career choice, there is no one single occupation which when it is removed from the world of work that will not hamper the social set-up in some way. Occupations are interrelated in one way or the other. What is necessary is that there is need for one to excel in any work he has chosen.

The importance of different occupations in the society depends on what the workers themselves make out of their work. History records that civilization is made by people drawn from several works of life.

Promote Individual Status in the Society

Anagbogu (1988) pointed out that to a large extent work determines how much a worker receives, where he or she will live, what kind of recreation he will enjoy, who he will meet socially and those he will avoid meeting. There is a very close relationship between the individual and the world of work as well as the individual and the society at large.

Neither the individual nor the society can function effectively in the absence of the other. Career choice is an effective means of guiding individuals to develop self-awareness through work within the society. Occupational choice improves as individual becomes better able to anticipate how well a prospective occupation will meet his needs.

Conclusion

One of the most significant decisions an individual (student) will ever make, is his choice of career. The choice of career has an important influence on a person's future happiness, self-fulfilment and well-being. Yet unfortunately, career interest in vocational education often seems to be based on insufficient information, analysis, and evaluation about the programme for dullard or drop-out. An important key to a wise career decision in Vocational Education is getting as much information about a wide range of option provided by the programme, as is reasonably possible. Therefore, one needs to broaden his/her search in order to discover some interesting fields that he knows nothing about in Vocational Education. This will enable individuals make a good career choice that will become concrete foundation in their working field for the future.

Suggestions

The following are the recommendations based on the write up;

1. Students should analyze each choice career effectively before making decision.
2. Parents should avoid choosing a career for their children, but guide them towards making good decisions.
3. Student should consider their aptitude, limitation and abilities before making choice of a particular career.
4. Students should consider the possibility for future advancement and self-satisfaction in their chosen career.

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