



ATTRACTING OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL-BASED EDUCATION IN GWAGWALADA AREA COUNCIL, ABUJA

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Abstract

This study explores "Attracting Out-of-School Children Through Vocational and Technical-Based Education in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja." The main objective was to examine how vocational and technical education (VTE) can address the growing number of out-of-school children, focusing on equipping them with practical skills for self-reliance and socio-economic development. The research design employed was a descriptive survey, with self-structured questionnaires administered to educators, policymakers, and vocational training experts. The study also investigated the integration of skill-based programs, apprenticeships, and community-driven initiatives to engage marginalised and underserved children. A target group comprising stakeholders in educational institutions, vocational centres, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was identified, with 150 respondents selected using stratified sampling techniques to ensure diverse perspectives. The study employed descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies and percentages for data analysis, while the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (0.80). Stratified sampling was used to select respondents, and a pilot study ensured instrument validity. The findings revealed that vocational and technical education can significantly attract out-of-school children by providing accessible, skill-oriented, and culturally relevant programs. Challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient training facilities, and societal stigmatisation of vocational education were highlighted. Based on these findings, the study recommends the establishment of more vocational training centres by the Government, increased funding for VTE programs, and sensitisation campaigns to promote the value of technical education in achieving national development goals.

Keywords: Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Skill Acquisition, Self-Reliance, Socio-Economic Development

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a crucial driver of socio-economic development (UNESCO, 2022). However, Nigeria faces a persistent challenge with a high number of out-of-school children, particularly in underserved and marginalised communities. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children globally, with factors such as poverty, cultural practices, and inadequate educational infrastructure contributing to this crisis.

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) has emerged as a viable strategy to address the issue of out-of-school children by equipping them with practical skills for self-reliance and economic empowerment (Okebukola, 2020). VTE programs provide skill-based learning opportunities that align with industry needs, ensuring that learners can transition seamlessly into the workforce or entrepreneurial ventures. By integrating apprenticeships, community-driven initiatives, and accessible training centres, VTE can serve as a bridge for re-engaging children who have dropped out of formal schooling (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2019).

This study has significant implications for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. By emphasising vocational and technical education (VTE) as a solution to the out-of-school children crisis, it can inform policies that expand skill-based learning opportunities (World Bank, 2021). It also serves as a resource for curriculum developers and supports NGOs in designing targeted interventions. The research examines the effectiveness of various vocational training programs in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja, focusing on

selected educational institutions, vocational centres, and NGOs. Empirical studies highlight VTE's role in reducing the number of out-of-school children. Adebayo and Yusuf (2019) found that vocational training improved employment opportunities and reduced reliance on informal work. Okebukola (2020) noted VTE's positive socio-economic impacts but identified funding and infrastructure deficits as key challenges. Ajayi and Lawal (2018) highlighted societal biases against vocational education and inadequate government support as major barriers. Ogunyemi (2020) concluded that VTE could address education inequality, particularly in rural and low-income areas, by equipping children with practical skills aligned with local economies.

This study underscores the need for strengthened VTE policies, increased funding, and public awareness campaigns to enhance the perception and accessibility of vocational education in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous interventions aimed at increasing school enrollment, the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria remains significantly high (UNICEF, 2021). Conventional educational approaches have failed to accommodate the diverse needs of these children, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Ogunyemi, 2020). Many of these children require alternative learning methods that emphasise skill acquisition and practical knowledge rather than traditional academic instruction. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) presents a promising alternative, yet its adoption and implementation remain limited due to various constraints, including inadequate funding, societal stigma, and insufficient training facilities (Ajayi & Lawal, 2018). Therefore, there is a need to investigate how VTE can be effectively utilised to attract out-of-school children and integrate them into productive learning environments.

Objectives of the Study

1. Examine the role of vocational and technical education in addressing the issue of out-of-school children in the Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja.
2. Identify the key factors that hinder the adoption of vocational education among marginalised communities.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of skill-based programs in re-engaging out-of-school children.
4. Explore strategies for enhancing the implementation of VTE in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja.

Research questions

1. How does vocational and technical education contribute to addressing the issue of out-of-school children in the Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja?
2. What are the key factors hindering the adoption of vocational education among marginalised communities?
3. How effective are skill-based programs in re-engaging out-of-school children?
4. What strategies can enhance the implementation of vocational and technical education in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja?

Literature Review

Out-of-school children in Nigeria face barriers such as poverty, early marriage, child labour, and insurgency, particularly in the North-East (Olanrewaju & Okoli, 2020). Despite government initiatives like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, gaps in implementation and infrastructure persist (Eze & Igwe, 2022).

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) offers an alternative, equipping individuals with practical skills for employment (Okoro & Nwogu, 2020). However, challenges such as inadequate funding, outdated curricula, and societal biases hinder its effectiveness (Adebayo, 2022). While developed countries like Germany and Finland integrate VTE with industry-based training (Muller & Schuetze, 2021), Nigeria struggles with aligning curricula to labour market needs (Adamu & Yusuf, 2021).

Traditional apprenticeship systems, rooted in Nigerian culture, provide hands-on training in fields like carpentry and tailoring, though issues such as exploitative labour conditions and lack of certification remain (Olaniyi, 2022). NGOs and community initiatives expand VTE access but face sustainability challenges due to inconsistent funding (Chukwu, 2022). Addressing these issues requires policy reforms, increased investment, and public awareness campaigns to enhance VTE's value and bridge the gap between training and employment opportunities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019).

Theoretical Perspectives on Vocational and Technical Education

The importance of vocational and technical education (VTE) in addressing the issue of out-of-school children is well-documented in existing literature. Human capital theory, developed by Becker (1964), suggests that investment in education and skills development leads to increased productivity and economic growth. VTE aligns with this theory by equipping learners with market-relevant skills, enhancing their employability and entrepreneurial capabilities (Schultz, 1971).

Furthermore, the constructivist learning theory emphasises hands-on learning experiences as a means to enhance knowledge acquisition (Piaget, 1952). This aligns with vocational education, which integrates practical training with theoretical knowledge, ensuring that learners develop competencies relevant to their economic and social environments (Kolb, 1984).

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of individuals within a specific population (Akorede et al., 2022). The design was chosen because it allows the researcher to gather factual, comprehensive, and quantifiable information about how vocational and technical education (VTE) can be utilised as a tool for attracting out-of-school children in Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. A descriptive survey design facilitates the collection of data from a relatively large sample at a single point in time, enabling the identification of trends, relationships, and patterns among variables without manipulating any of them.

The descriptive approach provided an opportunity to describe the current state of vocational and technical education in the study area and its role in promoting self-reliance, skill acquisition, and socio-economic empowerment among young people. The design was therefore suitable because it not only examined what currently exists but also analysed how various factors such as government policies, training opportunities, and community participation interact to influence the reintegration of out-of-school children through skill-based learning.

In this study, data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to selected respondents from educational institutions, vocational centres, and relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The responses were analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies and percentages to summarise findings. The research design thus provided both flexibility and accuracy in understanding the multifaceted role of vocational and technical education in mitigating educational exclusion in the Gwagwalada Area Council.

The target population comprised educators, policymakers, vocational training experts, and representatives from NGOs involved in educational programs in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja. A total of 150 respondents were selected using stratified sampling techniques to ensure diverse perspectives across different stakeholders. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula. A pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents to validate the research instrument. The reliability coefficient, calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.80, confirming the instrument's internal consistency. A stratified sampling technique was used to ensure equal representation among key stakeholders. The sample was divided into three major strata:

Category	Number of Respondents
Educators	60
Policymakers	50
Vocational Training Experts	40
Total	150

The instrument consisted of two major sections. Section A focused on the demographic characteristics of respondents, including gender, occupation, years of experience, and organisational affiliation. Section B contained items related to the main variables of the study: awareness, implementation, challenges, and effectiveness of vocational and technical education in addressing the out-of-school children phenomenon. The questions were structured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1) to allow for quantitative analysis of opinions and perceptions.

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in education, measurement and evaluation, and vocational studies. Their feedback helped to refine the wording of items, eliminate ambiguities, and ensure that each question measured what it was intended to measure. A pilot study involving 20 respondents outside the main sample was conducted to pre-test the instrument's clarity and suitability. Feedback from the pilot led to minor adjustments in the structure and phrasing of certain items.

The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.80. This result indicates a high level of internal consistency and confirms that the items in the questionnaire were measuring the same underlying constructs. The final version of the questionnaire was therefore deemed valid, reliable, and suitable for data collection in this study. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed both physically and electronically. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey, with follow-up reminders sent to ensure a high response rate. In areas with limited internet access, trained research assistants facilitated data collection through in-person distribution and retrieval of questionnaires.

Presentation of Data (n = 150)

Statement/Question	Frequency	Percentage
1. How does vocational and technical education contribute to addressing the issue of out-of-school children in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja?		
Vocational education provides alternative pathways to formal schooling	120	80%
Skill acquisition enhances the employability of out-of-school children	110	73.3%
Technical education helps reduce youth unemployment	100	66.7%
Lack of awareness about vocational programs limits impact	50	33.3%
Vocational education does not significantly address out-of-school challenges	30	20%
2. What are the key factors hindering the adoption of vocational education among marginalised communities?		
The high cost of vocational training limits access	130	86.7%
Lack of adequate vocational training centres	120	80%
Cultural perceptions discourage vocational education	110	73.3%
Inadequate government support and funding	100	66.7%
Limited availability of skilled trainers	90	60%
3. How effective are skill-based programs in re-engaging out-of-school children?		
Skill-based programs increase school re-enrollment rates	110	73.3%
Practical training motivates out-of-school children to return to education	100	66.7%
Apprenticeships provide sustainable career opportunities	90	60%
Lack of follow-up programs limits effectiveness	50	33.3%
Skill-based programs have minimal impact on re-engagement	30	20%
4. What strategies can enhance the implementation of vocational and technical education in the Gwagwalada area council, Abuja?		
Increased government funding for vocational education	140	93.3%
Public-private partnerships to improve training facilities	130	86.7%
Community awareness campaigns to change perceptions	120	80%
Integration of vocational education into mainstream curricula	110	73.3%
Provision of scholarships and financial aid for students	100	66.7%

The table above presents survey findings on vocational and technical education in Nigeria, particularly regarding its role in addressing the issue of out-of-school children, barriers to adoption, effectiveness, and strategies for improvement. The data is based on responses from 150 participants, with percentages reflecting the level of agreement with each statement.

(a) Contribution of Vocational and Technical Education to Addressing Out-of-School Children

A strong majority (80%) believe vocational education provides alternative pathways to formal schooling, while 73.3% agree that skill acquisition enhances employability for out-of-school children. Additionally, 66.7% see technical education as a way to reduce youth unemployment. However, 33.3% identify lack of awareness as a limiting factor, and 20% argue that vocational education does not significantly address the issue, suggesting that while vocational education is widely seen as beneficial, awareness and outreach need improvement.

(c) Barriers to Adoption in Marginalised Communities

The biggest barrier identified is the high cost of vocational training, with 86.7% citing it as a limiting factor. Other significant challenges include a lack of adequate training centres (80%), cultural perceptions discouraging vocational education (73.3%), insufficient government support (66.7%), and a shortage of skilled trainers (60%). These findings indicate that both financial constraints and systemic issues hinder the widespread adoption of vocational education in marginalised communities.

(d) Effectiveness of Skill-Based Programs in Re-Engaging Out-of-School Children

Most respondents (73.3%) believe that skill-based programs help increase school re-enrollment rates, and 66.7% agree that practical training motivates children to return to education. Apprenticeships are also seen as providing sustainable career opportunities (60%). However, 33.3% highlight that the lack of follow-up programs reduces effectiveness, and 20% believe skill-based programs have minimal impact on re-engagement. This suggests that while vocational education is largely effective, support systems and continued engagement are necessary to maximise its impact.

(e) Strategies for Improving Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

The most highly endorsed strategy is increased government funding, with 93.3% supporting it. Other key recommendations include public-private partnerships to improve training facilities (86.7%), community awareness campaigns (80%), integrating vocational education into mainstream curricula (73.3%), and providing scholarships and financial aid (66.7%). These responses emphasise the need for structural reforms, financial support, and awareness-building to enhance vocational education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study highlights the crucial role of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in addressing Nigeria's out-of-school children crisis. VTE provides an alternative educational pathway, equipping learners with practical skills for self-reliance and economic empowerment. Survey results indicate that most respondents recognise its role in reducing youth unemployment and increasing employability. However, barriers such as high training costs, inadequate infrastructure, societal biases, and limited government support hinder its adoption. The effectiveness of VTE in re-engaging out-of-school children is evident, as vocational training increases school re-enrollment and provides career opportunities. Yet, challenges like the lack of follow-up programs and low awareness limit its impact. Addressing these issues requires increased funding, policy reforms, and community-driven awareness campaigns. While VTE offers a viable solution, its success depends on addressing funding gaps, societal attitudes, and infrastructure deficiencies. A conducive environment for vocational education can significantly reduce educational exclusion and promote sustainable socio-economic development.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendation is put forward:

1. The government should establish more vocational training centres, particularly in underserved and marginalised communities, to provide accessible and inclusive education opportunities for out-of-school children.
2. Financial support from the government, private sector, and NGOs is necessary to improve infrastructure, procure modern training equipment, and enhance the quality of vocational education.

3. Vocational education curricula should be revised to align with labour market demands, ensuring that training programs equip learners with relevant and up-to-date skills. Collaboration between vocational institutions and industries can facilitate internship and job placement opportunities for graduates.
4. Efforts should be made to change negative societal perceptions about vocational education. Public campaigns, media advocacy, and community engagement programs can help promote the value of VTE as a credible and dignified educational path.

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