

Formal Education and Skills Acquisition Amongst Students in University of Benin, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between formal education and skill acquisition amongst University of Benin (UNIBEN) students. Specifically, the study aimed at finding out if UNIBEN students commercialize vocational skills and the ability to balance it with their academics. The functional theory was used to explain the importance of combining both formal education and vocational skills acquisition. Using the survey research design, 155 respondents who are involved in skills acquisition, were selected from the two main hostels, Akanu Ibiam hall (male hostel) and Tinubu hall (female hostel) within the UNIBEN campus, participated in the study. The systematic and simple random sampling techniques were used in reaching out to the respondents for the gathering of the quantitative data with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire. The study found out that most UNIBEN students with skills, commercialized their skills and this did not affect their academics as they mostly carried out such job functions after classes, weekends and holidays. More so, commercializing their acquired vocational skills such as hair dressing, sewing, phone repairs and make-up artistry empowered them financially. It is therefore recommended that seminars, symposiums and conferences should be organized to further stimulate student's interests in vocational skill acquisition as well as educate them on how to balance academic work and the commercialization of their skills.

Keywords: Commercialization, Formal Education, Monetary satisfaction, Skill acquisition and UNIBEN.

Introduction

The assessment of any nation's workforce for the sustenance of technological and industrial growth of its economy can be attributed to the place given to its education system. Different problems bedeviling the nation might have been drastically reduced if only primacy had been given to the education system (Mpendulo & Mang'unyi, 2018). Education, which is the transmission of knowledge and skills, can occur or even occurs everywhere and at all times, sometimes, even without the learner's volition and can be transmitted through a number of different ways depending on the context, intention and resources available (Huitt & Monetti, 2017). Education could be through skill acquisition or informally or formally imparted.

Fafunwa (1974) in Inyang and Agwadu (2017) posits that skill acquisition in form of apprenticeship system started as a form of education in which indigenous Nigerians in various societies passed their skills and cultural heritage from one generation to the next. Ikpe (2010) and Akpan, Usoro and Ibitram (2015) agrees with this view as they further explained that the genesis of skill acquisition can be traced to pre-colonial era where it was mostly practiced in families. Furthermore, it is argued that skill acquisition is the oldest form of education in the world (Akpan et al, 2015). Nwosu and Micah (2017) affirm this as they further posited that God himself was the first instructor in skill acquisition and Adam the first apprentice in the Garden of Eden where Adam was taught to work the soil and take care of the garden.

However, missionary schools excluded it from the curriculum in favour of literary education (Ikpe, 2010). According to Akpan *et al* (2015), skill acquisition first started as home apprenticeship system where it was passed from father to son and mother to daughter. Families or groups who "owned" skills highly valued and guarded them (Ikpe, 2010). The first meaningful effort by the colonial administration towards skill acquisition programmes were the establishment of the Yaba Technical Institute in 1947 and some trade centers around the country (Ikpe, 2010). Section 5(42) of the National Policy on Education provides for the establishment of skill acquisition programmes that should be made available by each State and Local Government in collaboration with appropriate agencies. But this is not so as Inyang and Agwadu (2017) hold that most apprenticeship trainings are still being organized by the private sector.

This is necessary as it encourages individual self-development, creation of employment opportunities, financial freedom, revenue generation to the government and so on for young Nigerian graduands and the government. Thus, formal education in Nigeria seems to gradually introduce various types and patterns of skill acquisition materials and knowledge into schools ranging from kindergarten to polytechnics and universities such as crafts and arts, make up, shoe making, bead making, and so on.

Formal education and skill acquisition, being two branches of the educational system, cannot be over-emphasized because of their obvious importance to individual, families, organizational and societal growth (Inyang & Agwadu, 2017). But it seems that many individuals, students inclusive, do not take interest in skill acquisition because it is believed to be old-fashioned and tailored for school drop-outs and the academically unsound, having other negative connotations in some quarters (Ikpe, 2010). This is a major problem in reconciling the relationship between formal education and skill acquisition, especially among formally educated students and this belief seems to have paved way for the disinterest and tendency of students to look down on avenues to acquire vocational skills while pursuing formal education and its degrees and certifications in the study area of University of Benin.

Due to the number of hours students spend daily on their academic pursuit, it is usually difficult for students who wish to commercialize their skills to cope with academic work

(Akpan *et al*, 2015). As a result of this, Mpendulo and Mang'unyi (2018) opined that most students in South Africa who engage in skill-based businesses do not usually top their class academically. This is because they spend their leisure time working, with not so much time to focus on bookwork. Mpofu (2013) agreed with this assertion and further posited that students who are able to commercialize their skills and do well in both will definitely be more empowered to face life after school.

Education in all forms is seen as a medium of empowerment (Baines, 2001) but it seems this medium cannot be measured especially the aspect of skill acquisition as there are usually no statistical records of skill acquisition programmes and even of those practicing or working with vocational skills in Nigeria. This dearth of statistics is largely because provision of skill acquisition trainings and even persons or students working with their skills are mostly on a small scale and it is largely uncoordinated and outside state control (Ekong & Ekong, 2016). Also, due to the dearth of statistics of practicing skilled workers and lack of standardization of practice as it is with individuals practicing with formal education, it is difficult to measure the quality or standard in provision of skilful services as well as the success rate of past programmes (Inyang & Agwadu, 2017). For example; there is no regulated standard on the materials needed by a fashion designer before he or she establish a business, there is also no certification needed before one can do same. In essence, there is no required license for operators of skill rendering businesses to have before they can be inducted into the system. The existence of such perhaps would prevent quacks from practicing and could, one day, lead to standardization of operation of skilled businesses. There is also lack of recognition of skilled work in comparison with works of academic qualifications (Allais, 2012). As a result, the importance of skill acquisition programmes is not fully recognized and the opportunities to use it are not fully realized.

Therefore, this study sought to examine the relationship between formal education and skill acquisition among University of Benin students. Specifically, it sought to examine the ability of the students who have vocational skills and who commercialize it on and off-campus to balance it with their academic work in University of Benin, Benin City.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions are posed:

- i. How do students who commercialize their skill create a balance between the skill-based business and their formal education?
- ii. What is the gain (monetary) from commercializing their acquired skills as students in University of Benin?

Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine University of Benin Ugbowo campus students' ability in commercializing vocational skills and balancing it with their academic work.

- ii. To find out if there is a gain (monetary) from commercializing their acquired skills as students in University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus?

The Concept of Skill Acquisition

There are several definitions for the concept of skills acquisition. According to Allais (2012), skill acquisition refers to “occupational education and workplace-based training programmes such as apprenticeships or shorter training programmes in the workplace”. Similarly, Olaitari (2015) defined it as “the acquisition of skills and techniques in a chosen occupation or profession to enable an individual earn a living”. Allias (2012) and Olaitiri (2015) definitions of skills acquisition seem to be limited to the organizational setting. More closely related to student’s skills acquisition set, is that of Dashen (2012), who defined skill acquisition as knowledge and training in the area of using intellectual thinking and skilful manipulation of instruments and equipment to produce functional designs and products, and such training acquired by skilled workers is a job that cannot be performed by anybody. McGrath (2010) believes that skill acquisition strives to incorporate the economically disadvantaged into the social and economic mainstream by improved ‘employability’. However, this may not always be the case.

Ikpe (2010) gives a general view of the concept- vocational education as he defined it as that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. Skill acquisition, which can also be referred to as vocational education, is the acquisition of skills and techniques in a chosen occupation or profession by any individual in order to enable them earn a living, contribute to societal growth or for personal satisfaction. Kpanja (2003) further views vocational skill acquisition as the education, which focuses primarily on the performance aspect of work’s role. To Onyeneke (2008), skill acquisition is the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience.

Adeyemo (2010), in respect of skill acquisition, ascertained that “the great advantage of any task is that, if properly undertaken, helps both to develop and reinforce skills”. Skill acquisition programmes specialize or prepare people for specific professional tasks and it requires the professional or expert use of hand. Skill acquisition programmes produce skilled and semi-skilled individuals who may specialize either in construction of a new project or repair or modification of an old one.

Relationship between Formal Education and Skills Acquisition

Among the three major forms of education, our focus is on two; the formal education and skill acquisition (which is under the umbrella of the non-formal education). The main points of these two are: Basic skill acquisition programmes are usually easily accessible, that is, they have low entry barriers, are more flexible, less structured, and most times involve less financial costs which makes it easier for young people and adults to access unlike formal education services which is the opposite especially in terms of entry, such as trying to gain admission into a formal tertiary institution (Allais, 2012). Skill acquisition

teaches one to do the job not only know or talk about it. The job and competence of a craftsman is measured by what he or she can do (representing skill acquisition) as against how well he or she can describe what he or she can do (representing theoretical formal education) (McGrath, 2010).

Skill acquisition trainings take place outside of the state-regulated education system, though some states in Nigeria now organize skill acquisition programmes and even have schools for them such as technical colleges but the certifications are not widely recognized as with the formal education system (Adeyemo, 2010). Formal education improves the efficiency of the skill formation process, that is, with formal education at hand, skill acquisition is easier (Adeyemo, 2010). Also, students' exposure to entrepreneurship education courses from primary to tertiary institutions affects their passion to acquire vocational skills (Huitt & Monetti, 2017).

Skill acquisition trainings and programmes are characterized by diversity, flexibility, shorter and more-targeting practical courses. They are structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time and learning support) to fit the average individual's need. It is intentional from the learner's perspective. (Inyang & Agwadu, 2017). Skill acquisition, being an essential part of the educational process, should be recognized in terms of the contributions it can make to the individual, the family and the nation at large (Egbezor & Okanezi, 2008).

In conclusion, according to Allais (2012), there should be "more focus on strengthening the educational side of skill acquisition – building strong curricula based on well-defined areas of knowledge, and developing a better understanding of how to assist students to acquire this knowledge". Formal educational systems alone cannot handle the technological, economic and social changes that are rapidly and continuously occurring in society, so they should be strengthened by skill acquisition trainings and programmes (Baines, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Functionalist Theory in explaining the relationship between the formal education and skill acquisition among University of Benin students. The functionalist theory was popularized by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). This theory posits that society is made up of parts or "organs" which function together or cohesively for the stable existence of society (Eremie, 2014). Functionalism, as a theory, "interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society" (Obaro, 2019). To functionalists like Émile Durkheim, society is analogous to an organism; every part of an organism, no matter how small, exists for the stability of the whole organism and should a part or organ become dysfunctional for any reason at all, the whole part of the body will feel its impact and this will lead to crisis known as sickness or health problem, and the other parts of the body must adapt to fill the void, or treatment must be administered to revive the ailing part

(Eremie, 2014). So is society. Society is made up of core institutions which are family, education, media, economy, politics or state, and religion. These institutions just like organs or parts in organisms, serve vital roles but they cannot function alone as they need each other to find expression. Dysfunctions would lead to social illness or social problems which would result in social change and most likely, creation of new bodies to meet them.

In applying the theory to this study, both formal education and skills acquisition are functional to produce a stable, cohesive society. While they both speak of empowerment, Brussels (2001) proposed that skill acquisition should be seen as a de-facto partner and a necessary component in the education system. Also, Baines (2001) posited that the formal education system should be strengthened by skill acquisition trainings as no one of them can handle societal issues and changes independently. Allais (2012) also affirmed these assertions and reiterated that both aspects should be given regard in the education sector.

Just as functionalism posits that all institutions are necessary for the cohesive functioning of society, likewise is formal education and vocational skills necessary for the continuous and stable existence of the educational system, and consequently, the individual and the society. Both vocational skills and formal education are necessary for the survival of the nation as the disregard of one or preference for one over the other will cause crisis and imbalance in society, as seems to be the case in the Nigerian society. Vocational skills acquisition and formal education both contribute to make individuals employable and even self-reliant (Ikpe, 2010; Egbezor and Okanezi, 2008). A disregard of one aspect of education can pose some level of instability to the economy. This can be reflected in the number of unemployed graduates in the society; the rate of unemployment reduces as more students acquire skills and commercializing the skills acquired. In the long run, these skills can become a source of income for them as well as contribute to the economy's gross domestic product. Therefore, these two aspects of education are very essential and interdependent; the disregard of one will result in societal instability and dysfunction. Hence, formal education and vocational skill acquisition are necessary for the cohesive existence of the Nigerian society and young students can be encouraged to adopt both and have a balance.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design, in examining the relationship between formal education and skill acquisition amongst University of Benin Students living within the school campus as well as their interest level in skill acquisition and how they balance the commercialization of these skills with their academics. The scope and population of the study was restricted to University of Benin students who reside in Tinubu Hall (female hostel) popularly called Hall 2 and Akanu Ibiam Hall (male hostel) popularly called Hall 4 in University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus. Tinubu Hall also has a number of shops that provide services to students. It includes several shops that sell provisions, food and clothing, shops which provide skill acquisition such as the fashion designer shop which repairs and sews female attires, a carpentry shop, and a hair styling shop, make-up artistry and 'gele'

tying shop. On the other hand, Akanu Ibiam hall equally has several shops that sell provision and food, two shops that specialize in fashion designing, two barbers' saloon and a mobile phone repair shop. Thus, the study focused on seven core areas of fashion designing, make-up artistry, hair styling, shoe making, bead making, events and venue decoration, and mobile phone repairs in the study area.

The target population is 342 students and this is basically the number of students involved in various skills acquisition programmes. The sample of this study consists of 50% of the total population of 342 students. According to Nworgu (2015), the sample fraction is given as; sample/population . Thus, $171/342 = 0.5 = 50\%$. Hence, the semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the 171 respondents selected from the target population of 342 students. Administering of the semi-structured questionnaires to the sample size was done with the use of the systematic sampling technique for selecting the rooms in the hostels, and with the usage of the simple random sampling techniques (using the manual lottery method), which gave every resident of these hostels an equal opportunity of being selected without bias. Thus, 171 respondents were selected across the systematic selected rooms in both hostels. However, only 155 copies of questionnaire were properly filled and valid after the fieldwork. The analysis of the quantitative data was done using frequencies, percentages, tables, charts, and cross tabulations using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21.

Result of the Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The gender distribution of the respondents as shown in Table 1 indicates that the males are 61.9% and the females 38.1%. The results show that the male respondents outnumbered the female respondents. The reason for this is as a result of the numerical capacity of the halls of residence; while Akanu Ibiam Hall (male hostel) accommodates 1,913 male students, Tinubu Hall (female hostel) accommodates 1,184 female students even though the target population for this study focused only on those students on skill acquisition, which amount to 342.

Table 1. Demographic data of the study participants is presented below:

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	96	61.9
Female	59	38.1
Total	155	100
Age group		
14 – 18 years	21	13.5
19 – 23 years	100	64.5
24 – 28 years	29	18.7
29years-and above	5	3.2
Total	155	100

**Distribution of
Students by Level**

100	43	27.7
200	26	16.8
300	31	20.0
400	47	30.3
500	4	2.6
600	4	2.6
Total	155	100.0

**Distribution of
Respondents by Hall
of Residence**

Tinubu Hall	59	38.1
AkanuIbiam Hall	96	61.9
Total	155	100

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Table 1 also depicts the age distribution of respondents that participated in the study. From Table 1, it can be observed that 64.5% of the respondents were within 19 – 23 years age interval, 18.7% were within 24 – 28 years age group, 13.5 % within 14 – 18 years age range and 3.2% were 29years and above. The findings with regard to the age distribution of the respondents suggest that the bulk of the respondents were within 19 – 23 years of age.

In relation to the academic level of respondents, Table 1 shows that 30.3% of the respondents were in 400 level, followed by 27.7% in 100 level. 20.0% of the respondents were from 300 level, 16.8% were from 200 level, while 500 level and 600 level each had 2.6% of the respondents. These respondents were selected using systematic random sampling and the simple random sampling techniques (using lottery method), hence the unequal distribution.

Students’ Ability in Commercializing Vocational Skills on and off-Campus and Balance it with Academic Work

Table 2 revealed that only 73.55% of the respondents had skills and commercialized the skills while 26.45% had vocational skills but did not commercialize it. Thus, this reveals that majority of those who acquired vocational skills among the respondents commercialized their skill.

Table 2: Students’ Ability in Commercialization of Vocational Skills

Items	requency	ercentage
Do you commercialize your skill?		
Yes	14	3.55
No	1	5.45
Total	55	00

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 3 reveals that of the 73.55% of the students who commercialized their skills, 71.93% said they worked only during weekends and holidays, 9.65% agreed to working after class if their service is required, 6.14% claimed to work both during weekdays and weekends/holidays, 7.02% of the total respondents revealed that they sometimes leave classes for work if their services are required while 5.26% of the respondents asserted that they worked only during holidays. This reveals the ways in which students that have vocational skills and commercialize it, balance it with their academic work. Therefore, it can be deduced that an increased set of students largely believe that their skill-based businesses do not affect their academic performance due to their ability to balance both well, majority of them get their desired monetary satisfaction from practice using their skills while practicing mainly on both on-campus and off-campus with some specializing in offering their skill-based services off-campus only, and other on-campus only. Only a minimum left their classes to commercialize their skills, precisely, only 7.02% of them are most likely to not be able to balance their academics and the commercialization of their skills. Others (over 90%) ensured their academics were not jeopardized.

Table 3: Student allocation of time for both studies and skill-based business

Items	Frequency	Percentage
How are you able to allocate time for both your studies and your skill-based business?		
Work during weekends and holidays	82	1.93
Work after classes	11	9.65
Work both during week days and weekends/holidays	7	6.14
Sometimes leave classes for work if there is a demand	8	7.02
Work during holidays only	6	5.26
Total	114	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 4 addresses students' perception on whether commercializing their skills affect their academic performance. The findings revealed that 24.56% of the students who commercialized their skills believed that it does affect their academic performance while 75.44% asserted that their skilled-based businesses did not affect their academic performance. Thus, majority of the students who commercialized their skills believed that it wasn't affecting them academically.

Table 4: Effects of working with the skills acquired and academic performance

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Do you think working with your skill affects your academic performance?		
Yes	28	24.56
No	86	75.44
Total	114	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

Table 5 shows that 92.98% of those who commercialize their skills (114) get monetary satisfaction from commercializing their acquired skills while 7.02% explained that they do

not get the monetary satisfaction they desire. The study therefore, shows that majority gain financial satisfaction from commercializing their skills.

Table 5: Does working with your skill or handwork give you the satisfaction you desire, in monetary term?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Does working with your skill or handwork give you the satisfaction you desire, perhaps in monetary terms?		
Yes	106	92.98
No	08	7.02
Total	114	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

Discussion of findings

The objectives assessed how students of University of Benin were able to balance utilizing their vocational as well as being academically engaged and the monetary gain from commercializing their skills. From the study, it was discovered that majority of the students who had one vocational skill and commercialized the skill largely believed that their skill-based businesses do not affect their academic performance due to their ability to balance both properly. Table 4 revealed that 75.44% asserted that their skilled-based businesses did not affect their academic performance. Thus, majority of the students who commercialized their skills believed that it wasn't affecting them academically. Those who revealed that it affected them may probably amongst the few who abandoned classes to commercialize their skills. Nevertheless, the findings from the data collected shows that majority of the students have a good balance commercializing their skills and studying. Therefore, the formal education can accommodate the informal education –skills acquisition. This finding negates the argument of Ikpe (2010) as he argued that the acquisition of vocational skills has the negative connotation of being old-fashioned and for students who can barely cope with academic work or even for drop-outs. This is because the findings showed that students' academics are not affected by the commercialization of their skills as can be seen in the data collected. On the other hand, the finding supports the position of Baines (2001), as he posited that the formal education system should be strengthened by skill acquisition trainings as no one of them can handle societal issues and changes independently. Similarly, Allais (2012) affirmed that formal education and vocational skill acquisition should be given regard in the education sector.

Furthermore, majority of the students got their desired monetary satisfaction from practice using their skills while practicing mainly on both on-campus and off-campus with some specializing in offering their skill-based services off-campus only, and other on-campus only. As seen in table 5, from the 114 students who commercialize their skills, 92.98% of those who commercialized their skills asserted that they received monetary satisfaction from their practice. This data signifies that the acquisition of skills and commercializing them provides the students financial stability that probably improves their standard of

living on campus. It is also functional to them as it barely affects their academic responsibilities and performance. This affirms the notion of Inyang and Agwadu (2017) as they explained that skill acquisition is structured to fit the average individual's need. More so, Egbezor and Okanezi (2008) mentioned that skill acquisition, being an essential part of the educational process, should be recognized in terms of the contributions it can make to the individual, the family and the nation at large.

Conclusion

The study has shown that residents (students) of Akanu Ibiam and Tinubu hostels in University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus have acquired some vocational skills such as shoe making, fashion designing for both male and female attires, carpentry, hair styling, make-up and 'gele' tying: Majority of those who have acquired these vocational skills commercialize these skills within and outside the campus but mainly done after classes, weekends and holiday period. More so, majority of the students who commercialize their skills have been able to balance it properly by scheduling it for different times in order to accommodate their education. Furthermore, majority of those who commercialized their skills got monetary satisfaction from doing so and as a result have reduced their total dependence on friends and family for survival.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are provided on how University of Benin students can find a proper balance between their formal education (academics) and commercializing their acquired skills:

- i. National universities commission in collaboration with the federal ministry of education in Nigeria should make it mandatory that vocational skills acquisition should be included in the curriculum of every department in all the universities in Nigeria. This signifies that every department, irrespective of the focus of the discipline, should have periods where students are taught different vocational skills. By so doing, societal problems accruing from unemployed youths would be drastically reduced in Nigeria.
- ii. Seminars, symposiums and conferences should be organized in all the universities in Nigeria on vocational skills acquisition to further stimulate students' interests in it. Students should be enlightened on how to balance academic work and the commercialization of their skills acquired. It is important that they are also enlightened on the benefits of vocational skills so that any possible negative perception about it would be eliminated. Such negative perceptions that skills acquisition is meant for the academically unsound individual or even drop-outs should be cleared by proper enlightenment, so that the benefits can be attained.
- iii. More so, the choice for students to commercialize their skills may be largely dependent on financial gains and the fear of being unemployed after graduation: Thus, it is recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria should invest in

skill acquisition for willing students of Tertiary institutions: This can be done by encouraging them with funding and grants and other starters packs such as sewing machine, hair dryers and clippers and so on. It will empower the students financially to afford their bills as students and further encourage them to be Entrepreneurs after graduating.

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