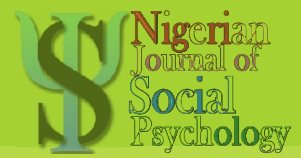


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Investigating Nigerian University Students' Vocational Experiences and Its Implication for Curriculum Integration

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Abstract

The development of secondary skills during higher education is becoming a global trend. The need for such skills has promoted dual engagement, whereby higher education students are engaged in vocational learning during their studies. Despite its possible impact in tackling Nigeria's unemployment problem, no known studies have assessed university students' vocational learning outside their curriculum regarding motivating factors and implications. This study investigated the students' vocational learning experiences, motivating factors, and their influence on their academic performance. Descriptive survey research design involving qualitative methods: In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed to collect data on a sample of 30 Nigerian undergraduates. After a reflexive thematic analysis, the result shows that the motivating factors for dual engagement were fear of unemployment, potential multiple sources of income, and avoidance of classroom monotony. The experiences vary across students and industry. This highlights the necessity for academy-government-industry collaboration to build a curriculum in that students can engage in talent development and still obtain grade points.

Keywords: *Dual engagement; talent development; placement outside the curriculum, learning experiences*

INTRODUCTION

The drifts in the societal reward system shape peoples' responses, choices, and behaviour. The recent realities of reorganization, downsizing, and redundancy that replaced the old world's job security and gradual success (Kourdi, 2009), evoke an evolving response from youths and students alike, to stay ahead in the increasingly competitive world. One of these new approaches is the development of talents and acquisition of secondary economic skills, which in recent parlance is known as vocational training. Vocational training, therefore, refers to skill-based programs that are designed for skill acquisition at a lower level of education. The development of vocational skills translates to increased entrepreneurial start-ups in the future. Entrepreneurship is a potential panacea to the belligerent unemployment rate, especially among the educated (Brownhilder, 2014; Igbongidi, 2017; Nwabufu, & Mamman, 2015), which is fuelled by the informal nature of the Nigerian economy and its limited capacity for the educated person into formal employment, (Osakede, et al., 2017) coupled with the widening deficiency of employable skills by Nigerian graduates. The Nigerian Government introduced Entrepreneurship Education as a curriculum in Nigerian Universities, through the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Olorundare, & Kayode, 2014), in response to the deficiencies of the curriculum in higher education, which seems not to be holistic enough to cater to students' needs and maximum engagement of youthful energies as most courses are mono-tailored. Entrepreneurship education is an integral part of human capital development as it provides students with entrepreneurial skills for problem-solving, business opportunity discovery, and development (Otache, et al., 2020, Mamabolo et al., 2017).

Work-integrated learning

The idea of work-integrated learning (WIL) is taking centre stage in global higher education. WIL could be defined as “*An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the student’s discipline of study and/or professional development*” (Zegwaard, et al., 2023, p. 38). The authors emphasized the defining elements of WIL, therefore for any practice or learning to qualify as WIL it must contain the above prerequisites. There are different forms of WIL in practice that include; Co-operative Education, Field Placement, Internships, and Professional Practice (practicum and clinical), Apprenticeship, Entrepreneurship, Applied Research, Service Learning, and Work Experience.

A typical model of the application of WIL is the Germany Duale Hochschule Baden-Wuerttemberg (DHBW) which has been successfully replicated in Latin America and in some Chinese universities (Reinhard & Gerloff, 2020). In Germany, for instance, this occurs as a combination of theory and practice. Learners are exposed to theoretical knowledge in vocational schools (Berufsschule) while practice-based knowledge is gained at the companies outside the school walls. These companies provide on-the-job training for apprentices, who gain hands-on skill experience in their chosen careers. The German government coordinates this through nationwide standardized course content and examination. (see: www.aus-und-weiterbildungsallianz.de)

WIL in Nigeria

In Nigeria, there are aspects of WIL in practice, the main one is the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). SIWES is a compulsory skill training programme, structured to prepare and expose the student to the line of work that they will meet in the workplace. In WIL, the above is called Field placement. Here, students depending on their course of study are placed on 3 – 6 months of industrial training as a part of the curriculum. Other types of WIL in practice in Nigeria are the Graduate Internship (GI), practicum or clinical placement, and non-placement work-integrated learning simulations involving external stakeholders as practised in the delivery of some entrepreneurship courses delivery. In our context, it is mostly students who are taking courses in Science, Technology, Engineering and mathematics (STEM), communication, criminology, education and foreign languages that are exposed to SIWES. Other students especially those in the social sciences and humanities are predominantly not exposed to industrial training at the undergraduate level in the university. WIL is more inclusive in Nigerian Polytechnics, colleges of technology, education and Agriculture.

In our study area, entrepreneurship as a form of WIL is offered as a general study for all students. In the study, students are taught theoretical aspects of skill development, and representatives from different industries are invited to do practical demonstrations once in a while. From the demonstrations and the introductory lessons in the course, some students become interested in acquiring entrepreneurship skills. As a result, students began engaging in vocational learning in industries outside their school’s regular curriculum to deepen their knowledge and gain practical

skills that can enable them to start up. It is this additional vocational engagement of students that this paper focuses on.

Dual engagement

Dual engagement in this paper refers to when students take both curricular and non-curricular vocation learning during the school year.

However, there is a paucity of literature on the non-curricular aspect of dual engagement that this study presents. Ninety-three per cent of students in the sample population took a different vocation from what they are studying in the university; a few others undertake vocational skill acquisition in the same subject line but outside the school curriculum. Our study therefore highlights the need for proper synchronization of these practices, to achieve an approach that will integrate the active engagement of students in significant work practice that will form part of their curriculum.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical efforts have been made in earlier literature to describe individuals' impetus for entrepreneurial activities. Amongst them is the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). The TPB by Ajzen (1991) opines that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control govern intent. Recent studies adopting the TPB using student participants have presented mixed results on the influencing factors of entrepreneurial engagement (Nguyen, 2017; Ayegba, & Omale, 2016; Kume et al 2013).

The self-determination theory (SDT) of Ryan, and Deci (2000), was adopted to explain students' motivation for engagement in learning activities. The SDT accounts for the conditions that motivate or demotivate and thus posits that the levels of fulfilment or deprivation of the psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness influence engagement or alienation. This study is particularly interested in this theory because it focuses on the social-contextual factors that affect self-determination. Socio-environmental conditions in Nigeria are also a strong factor in influencing students' engagement in vocational learning.

Studies on students' perception of dual engagement of vocational learning outside the school curriculum but within the school years are scarce. There is rather literature on WIL (Burford, et al 2020; Venville, et al 2018). In Nigeria, there is a gap between the education curriculum and the industry needs, which creates a void that pushes students to take up learning vocational and employability skills in the workplace. Igwe, et al (2021) in an Entrepreneurship Education system-wide study of teaching, learning, and doing entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, advocated for a problem-based pedagogy and industry-academy partnership. This partnership will help integrate and maximize the energies that Nigerian students expend in skill acquisition outside their school curriculum but within their school years. This accentuates the theoretical call by Ajjawi, et al (2020) for greater integration of the education stakeholders. See Billett (2015) for a conceptual model of the fusion of educational procedures and students' workplace experiences.

Looking through the constructivist lens of Lynch (1997, p. 27), it behoves vocational education "to facilitate construction of knowledge through experiential, contextual, and social methods in real-world environments". However, as Hyerle (1996) argued, most WIL in practice is framed to

"create the environment for constructivism but do not centre explicitly on how an individual learner constructs knowledge" (p. 15). Burford, et al (2020) maintained that the focus of studies on workplace learning has been on "educating academia" largely forgetting the experiential knowing of students during the learning process. Their study of students' stolen knowledge brings to the fore the convoluted nature of learning that can only be acquired in the workplace.

Consequently, this paper foregrounds what Burford, Cooper, and Miller (2020) called "stolen knowledge", which is unpredicted nor accomplished by the school. It sheds light on the learning that students acquire not only outside the school walls but also outside the school curriculum. By examining how students engage and coordinate the acquisition of vocational skills within the school year but outside the school curriculum and most times different from their course of study, this article contributes novel knowledge that deepens the understanding of WIL. In Nigeria, existing research on work placement studies centres on internships within the school curriculum, and on the motivation for entrepreneurial intentions (e.g. Osakede, Lawanson, & Sobowale 2017). There is no known study about vocational learning engaged in by students outside the school curriculum and how students perceive these learning experiences. As a result, the present study investigated what motivated students toward dual engagement; their experiences and the impact on their academic performance. It further argues for the inclusion of vocational learning into their curriculum. It is expected that the study contributes meaningful data to experiential knowledge in work placement learning- an under-researched area within the Nigerian context.

RESEARCH AIMS

Arising from the above, the specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine what motivates students to engage in non-curricular vocational learning in addition to their school Programs;
- ii. determine the basic experiences that students had while in dual engagement;
- iii. determine the influence of dual engagement on students' school academic performance;
- iv. recommend means of inclusion of Nigerian students' non-curricular vocational learning into the curriculum

METHODOLOGY

Design and Reflexivity

Descriptive survey research design involving qualitative methods, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed to collect data. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), this approach is exploratory, iterative and flexible, and as such underscores knowing. They conceptualize themes as "creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (Braun & Clarke, 2019: 14). The organic, iterative and exploratory nature of the approach, offers researchers the flexibility needed to explore lived experiences. Therefore, it is an appropriate method to seek meaning and

understanding of students' experiences and incipient learning in the practice of vocational learning outside the curriculum under-researched area, especially in the Nigerian context.

Participants

The participants were drawn from students of Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike (AE-FUNAI). The University's vision is to become a vibrant centre of learning and research that will be reputable nationally and internationally and a hub for the economic transformation and development of the region through creative and innovative endeavours. It was created in 2011 and is located in Ebonyi state, which is one of the poorest and educationally less advantaged states in Nigeria. Faced with the challenges of location and age, the university is geared towards entrepreneurialism to enable its students to develop the right mental disposition and competencies to rise above the limitations of the times.

The research focused on students who were studying various disciplinary programs at the university while learning vocational skills simultaneously. The selection criterion for participants consists of undergraduate students who were engaged in vocational training outside their school curriculum. This category of students was chosen because they possess some vital and ongoing experiences which make reflection and reporting effective. The researcher contacted about 100 students through the university employability centre and their faculty representatives, but only 30 students passed the selected criterion and as well agreed to participate in the study. Out of the 30 participants, fourteen (47%) were females while sixteen (53%) were males. The involvement of both males and females as participants was to recognize the importance of gender in research of this nature.

Procedure

The study focused on students of Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike, Nigeria (AE-FUNAI). AE-FUNAI was selected based on key informant interviews that revealed that it has some students who are engaged in vocational training while still undertaking their undergraduate programs. The study was carried out in five faculties of the university. The five faculties were selected because there was a presence of potential participants within each of the faculties. Again, since the number of faculties was small, the census technique became necessary. A census approach, according to Lavrakas, is a statistical effort to identify all components of a population and measure how these components relate to the study being conducted. Thus, it ensures that data are collected from every unit of the population. This implies that all the faculties that had students engaged in vocational training were selected for the study. The initial study took place between July and August 2019 while follow-up studies were carried out in 2021 after the COVID break. Both the interviews and focus group discussions were done in phases and audio-recorded. They were conducted in the English language (the official language of learning in Nigeria) at the researchers' office. Each episode of the interview lasted between 50 to 60 minutes. Non-participants were not allowed into the office during the interview sessions. The resultant data were transcribed.

The data (age, sex, faculty, CGPA industry and hours spent on the vocation) were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented as percentages and frequencies. Reflexive thematic analysis was carried out on the rest of the qualitative data. This followed a deductive approach based on

the aims of the study. First, the transcripts were read as an initial stage of data analysis to obtain an overall sense of the data. The transcripts were read again by three lecturers who were engaged as research assistants in data collection to assign codes and labels. Their works were shared among the team members to reconcile areas where the labels varied. This helped to determine the various themes therein as well as the relationships involved in the themes. At this stage, themes were developed and reviewed severally to ensure suitability. Accordingly, the data were inspected to get an in-depth understanding of the experience of the participants to better understand the meaning of each case. Following the recommendations of Braun & Clarke, (2019). Each theme was given a distinct name, and appropriate data extracts were used to support them. The data was presented in a narrative style. Although quotes from the participants are used in the presentation of results, codes were used instead of names in the quotes. This is to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Ethics

The research proposal was submitted to the Directorate of Research and Development of Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike, Nigeria and approved (FUNAI/R&D/2020/0012/Vol.2/00288).

Instrument

Data were generated through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions with these students. The questions for the interview and focus group discussion were developed after a review of existing literature based on the research aims and on the reflexive knowing of the author. The interview questions were designed to elicit information about what motivated the student to engage in dual learning, the student's experience with dual learning, and the impact of the dual learning on the student's academic performance, and having their talent hunt infused in their curriculum. Some of the questions asked include; "why did you enrol in the vocation? What are your experiences in your vocational hunt? Do you think your performance in class was affected by your outside vocational hunt? How often do you engage in your vocation? What do think about acquiring the same skill in both school and the workplace? Additional questions were asked as a follow-up to clarify ambivalent answers. Questions asked include; do you feel fulfilled with what you do? How much time do you spend on your vocation daily? Would you prefer that your vocation is built into your school lessons or have a dual skill different from your university education?

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Participants

Students who participated in the study were between the ages of 19 to 27years with 23.80 as the mean age (Table 1). Male participants represented 55%, while 47% were female. The participants came from five faculties: Biological and Physical Sciences, Medical Sciences, Humanities, Management Sciences, and Social Sciences. Out of the thirty participants, 47% of them came from Social Sciences, 20% from Humanities, Biological and Physical Sciences 13%, Management Sciences 13%, and Medical Sciences 7%. The CGPA of the participants as well as the vocations

they are engaged in are shown clearly in the table. The table also indicated the time duration invested by the participant per week.

Table 1: Characteristics of Sample

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	19 – 21 years	6	20
	22 - 24 years	14	47
	25 – 27 years	10	33
Sex	Male	16	53
	Female	14	47
Level	100	2	7
	200	10	33
	300	12	40
	400	6	20
Faculties	Biological/Physical Sciences	4	13
	Humanities	6	20
	Management Sciences	4	13
	Medical Sciences	2	7
	Social Sciences	14	47
CGPA	4.50 – 5.00	0	0
	3.50 – 4.49	18	60
	2.40 – 3.49	10	33
	1.50 – 2.39	2	7
Vocational engagements	Fashion making	6	20
	ICT	6	20
	Marketing/Advertising	5	17
	Music	3	10
	Media/Film making	4	13
	Construction	4	13
	Politics	2	7
Hours spent on vocation per week	1 – 5 hours	5	17
	6 – 10 hours	16	53
	11 – 15 hours	6	20
	> 15 hours	3	10

N=30

Motivation for dual Engagement

It was found that all the participants agreed that their major aim of engaging in vocational training outside their school curriculum was to overcome the problem of unemployment after graduating from college. They believed that it is always difficult for graduates to obtain jobs after graduation in Nigeria. For them, it is better to have alternatives before the completion of their various Programs. One of the participants (AB6) put it this way:

My brother was unemployed for three years after graduating as an Economist. My sister also spent one year at home without a job... She later decided to learn dressmaking... These experiences made me learn this vocation while still in school. This is to ensure that I do not experience unemployment at all... Presently, I repair phones for my friends

and coursemates for a little fee.

Another participant (AB2) who was a student of social sciences explained what pushed him to go into vocational learning thus:

I have seen many friends and relatives who graduated from universities for several years without any source of income. I doubted if I could get a job easily after completing my course of study. To allay my fears, I decided to train in photography/film production.

Some of the participants (68%) also stated that another thing that motivated them to engage in dual training was to have multiple sources of income after leaving school. They believe that survival is difficult in Nigeria. According to them, if a person has only one source of income, and suddenly loses that source, it may spell disaster. Therefore, to keep themselves afloat, they need to engage in vocational training while in the university. As a result, AB 26 (student of physical sciences) says: Even if I get paid employment, it may not be enough. Therefore, I must do extra work to measure up to my expected financial obligations as a man.

Another participating student (AB 11) pointed out that as a woman, the time will come when circumstances may not allow the woman to be engaged in paid employment. Then, she can use her vocational job to carry on. She puts it this way:

My mother told me that a married woman's paid job may be affected by childcare. Then if she has a vocational skill she can work from home and still make money while determining her own job pace and time.

It was also found that about 27% of the participants stated that they engaged in non-curricular vocational training because they wanted to avoid the monotony of classroom activities and also follow their passion. They want something different from their course of study. According to AB 8,

... from primary up to university, I have almost been doing the same things – listening, reading, writing assignments and examinations. Nothing changes.
... now I am learning how to play the piano and other instruments, it gives me joy.

One respondent said that it was his friend who introduced him to the vocational training. According to him (AB 13),

My friend who was studying advertising to take the Advertisers Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) examination, took me to their study Centre... I was intrigued by the topic. I felt that I could learn this in my spare time. The following day, I registered for the foundation course. Today, I am studying Microbiology and advertising.

Students' Experience in Dual Engagement

From our data on students' experiences, we discovered that learning experiences are relative to the learner and the learning context. Most of the participants complained that dual training is very stressful. They hardly had time for leisure activities. Their hours of sleep are also reduced. However, they explained that the stress does not result in frequent illness. According to AB 5 (a student of History and International Relations) who was also learning building construction,

... most weekends I work at the construction site... after carrying the blocks, I usually feel pains all over my body... The most stressful part of the work is the plastering of a decking. The first day I practised it, I could not turn my neck for three days... after work, I still had to stay awake sometimes to do my assignments.

Another participant (AB 10) who was a student of chemistry pointed out that he has been training in furniture making. He stated that the stress comes up as a result of an overload of activities. In school, he is either in the lecture hall or the laboratory. However, any day he has lecture-free hours, he spends at the workshop where he was learning furniture making. He puts it thus, "In school, I am always busy with either lectures or lab experiments. On my free days, I do go for training. I am either running to and from school or the workshop. On Saturdays, I spend a full day at the workshop. It is not easy but I have a target"

The above response shows how students coordinate their inside and outside learning, their sense of time, and their multitasking abilities. Our participants' responses indicate a range of disparities in the structure and schedule of the training. Some of the respondents reported attending training twice monthly, on weekends, on holidays, or lecture-free days, while for others there is no fixed structure as their training depends on job availability. "Coordinating both activities is very challenging because what I do demands all the focus it can get. Secondly, the training system is structured in such a way that you are not in charge of the situation and duty can call any time my band secures a contract" (AB14).

Another predominant element is that while learning in practice, students encounter tasks and situations that are overwhelming. A student who was undergoing training in ICT narrated how he was thrown off balance when he was suddenly assigned to attend to a client who brought a job regarding his computer network. "The client has already been directed to my desk, I did not know where to start, my hands were visibly shaking, I almost had a heart attack due to fear" (AB12). In this situation, the student in the eyes of the customer is a professional. The student was thrown

into a crisis because of the paradox of the professional expectation of the customer and the knowing that he could not perform as expected.

In the same vein, the majority of the participants believe that dual training is highly rewarding despite the stress. Some of them said that sometimes, they earn little money from their vocation. For instance, AB 5 pointed out that most of the time, his master gives him a stipend of up to ₦5000 a week depending on the nature of the job.

... since I started this vocation, I don't usually disturb my Parents over upkeep allowance. ... my master gives me money every week. Sometimes he gives me ₦5000 or less in a week. So, even as an apprentice, the vocation is rewarding. Sometimes the experience I acquire from the site helps to handle some philosophical questions. The experience helped me at one time to solve register questions In a general studies course (Use of English).

A female participant (AB 11) put her own experience in this way:

I always feel excited when going for training. Since I started my apprenticeship as a fashion designer, I have not spent one naira on the sewing of my dresses. Sometimes, I help my friends in school to sew theirs and they give me little money.

Effect of Students' Dual Learning on Their Academic Performance

The study also assessed the effect of dual engagement on students' academic performance. It was found that vocational training sometimes affects students' class attendance. However, some of the participants pointed out that they struggle to augment for the time lost in their vocational hunt. They do this by staying up at night to study and do their assignments. AB7 a Medical student engaged in Modelling reports "My academic performance was not affected by my talent hunt because I always go the extra mile to make up for the time spent doing photo shoots".

It was also revealed that the students also performed well in their academics. From Table 1, it can be seen that 60% of them had a CGPA of between 3.50 and 4.49 while about 33% had a CGPA of between 2.40 and 3.49. This shows that most students are also doing well in their school Programs. The cumulative grade point average (CGPA) in our institution is a five-point grade average; 4.50-5.00 is first class, 3.50-4.49 = second class upper, while 2.40-3.49, and 1.50 -2.39 is second class lower and third class respectively. Any score below 1.50 is a failure.

To understand the academic performance of the students, the study further investigated the number of carry-over courses that participants had. Results showed that about 27% of them have had carry-over courses since the beginning of their Program. Further analyses showed that some of the failed courses were linked to other factors other than their involvement in vocational training. For instance, a female participant (AB 14) stated that, in my 100 level, I failed two courses... No! It is

not because of my training. I was very sick and was hospitalized at the school clinic. I left the clinic that morning to write the two papers.

AB1 an extra-year student commented, thus:

... the courses that I failed and the extra year that am doing now are because I do not like the course that I am studying in school... So I focused more on Modelling and makeup training; I could not balance my time well. Sometimes, I left school for weeks, and my passion for the job took over me.

It was also revealed that aside from the extra year student, none of the students has had probation. They all proceeded to the next level after each academic session. All the participants agreed that their involvement in vocational training has enhanced their performances in entrepreneurship courses as well as other department courses in the university.

Situating Students' Vocational Learning in the Curricula

The participants expressed their view that studying the same course/vocation will be beneficial and help reduce the mental drain of trying to coordinate the two training. For instance, AB3 said "It will be fun and less stressful because I have gotten the basics in the classroom, going outside will be to showcase the knowledge and learn more from contact with others" "It is good because it will make students to get extra knowledge and become independent". However, other participants enjoyed the variety that came with doing a different course outside their course of study. I love modelling, doing the same thing in school and outside will deny me access to my modelling class but it would help students to only accept the course they would like to follow in life" AB1

Other Findings

Our result revealed from the analysis of the course of study of our participants that (24 out of 30) enrolled in non-professional courses. 93% registered for talent development which is different from their course of study at the university.

DISCUSSION

Data revealed that economics is the major motivating factor for students' dual engagement. The participants were aware of the difficulty that students have in obtaining jobs after graduation. Therefore, to overcome the problem of unemployment after leaving school, students tend to learn vocational skills while in the university. As shown in our results, students taking courses leading to a career path for white-collar jobs tend to register in talent development more than those studying professional courses leading to an independent career path after graduation. The most plausible reason for this response from students is the high rate of graduate unemployment in the country. So, students who enrol in courses with low demand in the labour market learn additional skills. This finding aligns with the position of Chukwuedo et al (2021) when they said that fostering students' dual engagement in the present-day knowledge-seeking environment and dwindling economy has become imperative. In other words, they believe that students must have alternative skills outside their school program to enhance their economic future. The result of the study also supports the views of Haden (2018) and Johnson and Brophy (2006) who pointed out that what

motivates students to engage in dual learning include finances, the desire to challenge oneself, and social and future rewards. However, this result is quite different from the position of Susanti and Trisusana (2017) when they posited that vocational studies motivate students in their school programs.

It was also found that another factor that pushes students to dual engagement is that vocational training provides multiple sources of income for the students at the point of graduation and possible employment. This will enhance the economic base of such a person. This result is in line with the argument of Hyerle (1996) that work-integrated learning in practice is framed to create an environment for the enhancement of one's welfare. It also aligns with the view of Lynch (1997) that vocational training facilitates knowledge through the real-world environment to promote human lives. The result also supports Grant-Smith and McDonald (2016) in their argument that vocational learning helps students increase their competitiveness in the labour market.

The result also revealed that students engage in vocational learning while they are still in school because they want to do something different. This result provides support for the self-determination theory (SDT) of Ryan and Deci (2000). In this case, the students' socio-environmental conditions in the classroom or school Programs force them to study something different and more practical-oriented. Apart from self-determination, sometimes the students are influenced by their peers. The present study confirmed this. It was found that some of the participants noticing the positive impact of what their friends were doing, decided to partake in vocational learning Programs. This is not different from the social factors that motivate students as was postulated by Johnson and Brophy (2006) in their study of rural Washington high schools.

The present study also investigated students' experiences. Data from the study showed that the experience is highly rewarding. The participants expressed satisfaction with what they were doing. They believed that their hope of a better life tomorrow made them feel fulfilled. Apart from that, some of them even made money while learning the skills, while others saved the money, they would have spent to get something because they could produce those things for themselves. The paucity of literature in this area, made Fuline (2018) state that the dual enrollment experiences of students are poorly understood leaving stakeholders without the proper information. The present result is helping to provide such knowledge.

Furthermore, the result revealed that students pointed out that dual engagement also reduces their free time. In other words, every moment for them is useful and precious. In the long run, they may not be able to engage in activities that may jeopardize their interest and future.

On the other hand, the study also showed that the participants experienced a lot of stress both physically and psychologically. However, the results showed that the participants see dual engagement as fun and challenging. This supports the argument of Rose (2020) that there are variations in students' experiences of dual learning. It also corresponds with the position of Gherardi (2015) that workplace experiences are personal and unique. The result also confirms the report of Antwi et al., (2020) that despite the time pressure and stress involved in dual learning, they are self-fulfilling and valid experiences. This is why Jackson (2018) and Ferns et al (2019) said that dual training holds enormous potential as it presents students with a double gain of professional learning and acquisition of employable skills.

In the case of the impact of vocational training on the student's academic performance, results revealed that dual engagement affected classroom participation and time for other academic activities. Most of the participants maintained that it did not affect their academic performance negatively. This is also confirmed by the students' CGPA (see Table 1). Only a few participants have had carry-over in a few courses, with one of the participants on probation because of poor academic performance. This performance the student attributed to a lack of interest in her course of study. This finding supports the view of Osakede et al (2017) that students' engagement in talent development and other entrepreneurial activities has no significant effect on their academic performance. In the process, students developed multi-tasking capabilities and time management skills to overcome possible constraints.

The finding on integrating students' vocational learning into the curriculum showed that most students in our study welcomed the idea that it will reduce stress and distraction and help them to develop practicable skills that will boost employability. Furthermore, the increasing trend of most university students enrolling in vocational training outside the curriculum is a testament to the disconnect between theory and practice in the Nigerian school curriculum. Some courses are taught theoretically and students graduate without having opportunities for practice-based learning in work placements. In some subjects, an alternative to practical is done instead of the practical itself which will help students understand clearly. Graduates like this are unemployable as they lack the practical skills needed in the industry. This also prevents entrepreneurial start-ups as the graduates are not well equipped with practical skills for independent business. Longe, (2017) found the non-alignment of the educational system to the industry needs among the causal factors of high graduate unemployment in Nigeria. There is a need for apposite alignment of students' expectations, university curriculum, and industry partnerships, to fix the dislocation between what students do in school and what they do in the world of work in placements (Ajjawi, Tai, Nghia, Boud, Johnson, & Patrick, 2020). This finding further accentuates the call to infuse work placement learning into the curriculum of Nigerian universities. When students are sent on work placements that are related to their course of study, they develop practical skills and become employable instead of dissipating energy on different areas and graduating not fully equipped for the labour market.

STUDENTS DUAL ENGAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The implication for students' engagement in dual learning is that Nigerian students are hungry for practicable and employability skills to stay on top of the unstable labour market. The increasing enrollment for vocational skills acquisition also connotes that the theoretical skills that most graduates come out of the university with are no longer enough for them to find a job or build a career or a business. This calls for a review of the Nigerian educational system and a synchronization of current industrial needs into the curriculum. Work-integrated studies are a valid option to achieve the above-advocated integration. Students' dual engagement is an under-researched area in Nigeria, and this serves as a wake-up call for more research.

LIMITATION OF STUDY

The small scope of this study is a limitation; further studies should cover a wider range of students from higher institutions and follow their academic performance over time.

CONCLUSION

This explorative study of students' experience of dual engagement showed it allowed students to engage their youthful energies and learn effective time management. Even though our participants identified some negative outcomes, especially in the areas of time, distraction, and support, they agreed that generally, their experience is rewarding and worthwhile. This paper contributes to studies in work-integrated learning by expanding knowledge on an aspect of learning gained outside the school curriculum but within the school year which possesses the potential for curriculum integration. By this, our study provides more evidence of investigating learning from the learners' perspective and without being compelled by the need to obtain a grade. It also donates knowledge on the trending pursuit by students for secondary vocational skills, most often completely unrelated to their course of study. By documenting students' experiences of dual engagement, this study accentuates the call for the infusion of talent and work-related learning into the curriculum of higher education in Nigeria to employ the youthful potential of students and equip them with employability skills. The infusion will also take care of the negative effects of the time constraints on class participation. Evidence of students' experiences of dual engagement is integral for the development of future models.

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