

Acquiring Maximum Vocational Business Education Skills and Competencies for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article discusses acquiring maximum Vocational Business Education (VBE) Skills and competencies to boost sustainable development in Nigeria. At the introduction, the paper defines terminologies such as vocational business education, maximum skills acquisition and competencies as well as sustainable development. The paper goes further to highlight the importance of skills acquisition in Nigeria and examines major skills and competencies inherent in VBE. It also explores the components of sustainable development and how VBE has enhanced it. Lastly, the paper discusses some impediments to maximum skills acquisition by VBE students in Nigerian tertiary institutions and concludes by making recommendations on how such impediments can be reduced.

Keywords: Vocational business education, maximum skills acquisition and competencies, sustainable development

1. Introduction

Practical skills acquisition is an important aspect of Vocational Business Education (VBE) programme at the various levels of the Nigerian education. In support of this, one of the National Educational Objectives states that the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical are important for all Nigerians to live and contribute to the development of their society (Federal Government of Nigeria - FGN 2004). Consequently, the National Educational Policy document (2004) states that the Nation's educational activity should be centred on the students in order for them to acquire maximum skills acquisition for self-development and fulfilment in the labour market. Unfortunately, due to certain impediments, the level of practical skills acquired by these students, compared with the demands of the labour market and technological advancement, is nothing to boast about. This explains why most employers of labour in this nation and abroad consider the products of VBE as half-baked and unusable without further training (Ekpenyong, 1988). As a result of this, many graduates of VBE are found all over the nation without gainful public employment. These graduates too cannot be self-employed because they are not able to put to practise what they studied in their tertiary institutions. It is against this backdrop that this paper is written to explore ways that the acquisition of maximum skills and competencies by VBE students could help to boost sustainable development in Nigeria and to recommend ways of reducing impediments to skills acquisition.

2. Meaning of Terminologies

Vocational Business Education (VBE) is defined as that education that provides skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes necessary for effective employment in specific business occupations. According Udo (2008) VBE is a comprehensive activity-based educational programme that is concerned with the acquisition of practical skills, understandings, attitudes, work habits and competencies that are requisite to success in a chosen business occupation while skill is defined by Ekpenyong (1988) as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution of performance; technical expertness, a power or habit of doing any particular thing competently. He opined that this definition is stressing that a skill is based on using knowledge expertly; the objective of which is to bring that knowledge to maximum level of competency. Hence maximum skills acquisition involves that ability to perform any given tasks with ease, competently and expertly without much stress and sweat. On the other hand, World Commission on Environment and Development Report – Our Common Future (1987) defines sustainable development as that development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs.

Indeed, people who are concerned about sustainable development suggest that meeting the needs of the future generation depends to a large extent on how well the present-day decision makers can balance social, economic and environmental objectives when making decisions today (The World bank Group, 2001). By adopting sustainable practices, recipients of VBE can impact positively on these objectives to boost sustainable development in Nigeria.

3. Importance of Skills Acquisition in Nigeria

According to Okorie and Ezeji (1988) the acquisition of the requisite skills is a means of increasing the productive power of any nations. Consequently, they added that the Nigerian society should recognize the fact that every citizen should be equipped to contribute effectively to the welfare of the country. The acquisition of such practical skills is important because when efficient and skilful hands are employed in any fields of human endeavours, high productivity is usually achieved. Economically, maximum skills acquisition by VBE students and others will help to enrich the Nigerian society and in this way, tend to make possible sustainable development. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) opined that a rich nation is one that is capable of meeting the economic, social, moral and political needs of the citizenry. Nigeria as a nation will enjoy sustainable development if VBE students in particular and all other students in general acquire maximum skills acquisition and competencies in their specialties.

Furthermore, politically, practical skills acquisition tends to promote personal and national greatness. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) pointed out that the behaviour of an individual in a society or the behaviour of a nation in a community of nations may be influenced by the skills and competencies possessed by that individual or nation. Socially, the acquisition of maximum skills helps a person to provide amusement, happiness, love, affection and enjoyment to other individuals as well as the entire nation at large. It also helps to reduce criminal activities such armed robbery, kidnapping, and other social vices among the youths. To the VBE students, maximum skills acquisition helps them to be engaged in productive work either for themselves or for employers of labour. This enables VBE students to qualify for and hold productive employment as well as increases their productivity and earns more remuneration. Other importance of acquiring maximum skills and competencies includes: it reduces the drop-out rates among the Nigerian youths, it helps to make the youths intelligent users of the products of technology as well as the most reliable vehicle for economic prosperity and diplomatic supremacy of the Nigerian nation. These benefits of maximum skills acquisition are still there for us if VBE students will think twice and change their negative attitudes towards them and turn to develop themselves sufficiently in the skills and competencies inherent in VBE programmes of their institutions.

4. VBE Skills and Competencies Needed for Sustainable Development

4.1 Accounting Education Skills

Accounting is one of the major occupational areas of vocational business education (VBE) that can prepare the Nigerian workers and students for a job or employment within a wide range of business career such as pay-roll clerks, purchasing clerks, audit clerks, book-keepers, cashiers and business teachers who undertake the teaching of accounting to other learners. According to Osuala (1998) accounting is the process by which data relating to the economics activities of an organisation are measured, recorded and communicated to interested parties for analysis and interpretation. He pointed out that accounting had its root on the need to keep the records of business transactions and that the chief reasons for keeping accounts are the need of the trader to know how much he owes, how much he owns, how much profit has been made and what his financial position is at a given time. Udo (1996) defines accounting as the process of identifying, measuring, sorting and communicating financial information to permit informed judgements and decisions by users of the information. He added that the role of accounting activities in the operation of business enterprises entails recording, classifying and summarising the enterprise monetary transactions and interpreting the results for both the internal and external end users of such information. On the personal uses of accounting to VBE students, Udo (1996) opined that it helps:

- To develop in the VBE students the ability and desire to keep records for personal use.
- To develop in the VBE students the ability to interpret and analyse business papers and records in the capacity of a final consumer.
- To give the VBE students preliminary training for the advanced study of accounting.
- To develop in the VBE students an understanding of some of the problems and characteristics of a business enterprise.

- To train the VBE students with knowledge of records keeping necessary to carry out a small business.
- To train the VBE students to become book-keepers, cahiers or accountants in the business enterprises or in their self-established business ventures. The above listed skills and competencies assist the VBE students to live and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development in Nigeria.

4.2 Economics Education Skills

Another component of Vocational Business Education programme is economics education skills component. This component provides VBE students with the following skills and competencies which they are able to use to enhance sustainable development in the country.

- Equips them with the basic principles of economic literacy necessary for useful living and for higher education;
- Prepares and encourages them to be prudent and effective in the management of scarce resources;
- Raises their respect for the dignity of labour and their appreciation of the economic, cultural and social values of Nigerian society and
- Enables them to acquire knowledge for the practical solution of the economic problems of society; and that of Nigeria as a developing country and the world at large (Udo, 2012).

In brief, the Economics curriculum objectives emphasize economic literacy, prudent management of resources, respect for the dignity of labour and acquisition of economic knowledge for solving the economic problems of the society. Consequently, the Economics equips the VBE students with all the above knowledge, competencies and economic understandings. Consequently, economics education skills and competencies instil general business ideas to VBE students in order to enable them carry out effectively their daily business activities centred about the home and their personal business lives. Such skills and competencies also assist to understand and participate in the business life of the community and of the nation as these affect them personally and relate to the well-being of every other citizen. Lastly, they help them to have an understanding of business and economic as factors in world relations and in world economic well-being. With these types of skills and competencies imparted to them during their training, VBE students can help to boost sustainable development in the country.

5. Distributive Education Skills

This is another skills component of Vocational Business Education programme. The word "distribution" has much to do with exchange of goods and services and as such refers to the various hands and agencies through which commodities pass from the manufacturers to the final consumers (Udo, 2012). The curriculum objectives here state that distributive education was designed to give students an overview of the world of business and to enable them to develop a better understanding of the individual's relationship with business and the place of business in a developing economy (Ekpenyong, 1995). The general objectives of education here at the senior secondary school level are to:

- Enable the student to have a broader understandings of the importance of commercial activities,
- Enable the student to cultivate the right attitude to commercial activities,
- Provide useful general notions and commercial skills necessary for those who will immediately enter into the world of work,
- Provide commercial knowledge for personal use and for further education,
- Develop the habit of the wise use of the services offered by commercial institutions (Udo, 2012).

The above objectives lay emphasis on commercial activities, skills and knowledge (Udo, 2012). Therefore Commerce was designed to equip the students with the marketable knowledge and skills inherent in commercial education and in the context of this study, commercial activities are more likely to be seen as performed by women rather than men (Udo, 2012). According to Udo (2012) distributive education is a programme of vocational instruction in marketing, merchandising and related management, which is designed to meet the needs of persons who have entered or a preparing to enter a distributive occupation. The American Marketing Association (1968) defines marketing as the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers or users. Udo et al (2005) defined marketing as getting the right goods and services to the right people at the right place and at the right time, at the right price, with the right communication and promotion. Marketing is also defined as the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from the producer to consumer or user in order to satisfy customers. However, a market is a process of exchange between individuals and/or organisations which is concluded on the mutual benefit and satisfaction of their parties. According to Osuala (1988) marketing is considered from a broad

based context to mean a total system of interacting business activities designed to plan, price, promote and distribute want-satisfying products and services to present and potential consumers. He added that the main responsibility of any marketing manager is to see that the marketing functions are performed in such a way that the firm makes a profit. According to him, the marketing manager will need to perform the functions of planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling. Osuala went on to state that the general objective of distributive education is to prepare students for gainful employment in distribution and marketing. Therefore, the objectives of marketing education should meet the social, vocational and personal needs of the business students.

5.1 Office Technology and Management (OTME) Education Skills

This is the fourth component of business education skills and competencies inherent in the programme. It was formerly known as secretarial education (Udo, 2012). According to Ekpenyong (1995) a secretary is defined as an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills and who demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision. He/she can exercise initiative and good judgement in decision making. The definition given above describes a special class of secretaries who by virtue of their training, experience and scope of responsibility have become assistants to their bosses. Ekpenyong (1995) describes secretarial work as involving the following activities:

- General Office Work – relieving executives and other company officials of minor executive and clerical duties.
- Taking down dictation from the boss using shorthand or stenotype machine.
- Transcribing dictation or the recorded information reproduced on a transcribing machine.
- Making appointments for the executive and reminding him or her of them, that is, the appointments.
- Interviewing people coming into the office, and directing to other workers those who do not need to see the chief executive.
- Handling personal and important mails, writing routine correspondence on his/her own initiatives.
- Making and answering telephone calls.
- Supervising other clerical workers.
- Keeping personnel records of events in the offices.

According to Ekpenyong (1995) the secretarial profession is remarkable for its appeal to men and women who have obtained post secondary education. This is so because the secretary often works with important people and the remuneration is always very attractive. However, the secretarial profession provides a challenging job after graduation from institutions of higher learning because of changes in business technology. Ekpenyong said that even with the advanced technology now in use in the developed countries like UK, USA, China, Japan and Australia, there is yet to be found a good substitute for the secretary.

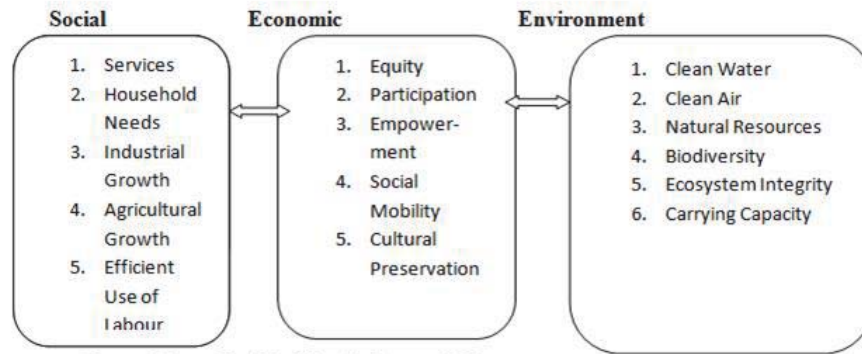
The present day secretaries are exposed to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their day-to-day training and working lives. According to Lucey (1997) information technology is the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information by a micro electronics-based combination of computing and telecommunication. The National Policy on Information Technology (2001) describes information technology as the bedrock for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment. Additionally, ICT can be defined as recording and use of information and communication by electronic means. It is not just the use of computers in business. For example, machines can be used to transmit documents overseas and information technology has a variety of applications. The present-day secretarial students are trained in the various applications of information and communication technology. This is because information technology has greatly changed the business environment and the teaching and learning methods in office technology and management education programmes (OTME). Consequently, the Nigerian workers and students require a sound knowledge of ICT if they must do well in their business careers.

5.2 Entrepreneurship Education Skills Component:

This is another skill component of vocational business education programme. According to Telsang (2007), the word “entrepreneur” has its origin in the French Language “Entrepreneur” which means to undertake or organise. An entrepreneur is one who organises, manages and assumes the risk of an enterprise. An entrepreneur visualises a business opportunity, takes bold steps to establish the undertaking, co-ordinates various factors of production and gives a start to the business (Telsang, 2007). Entrepreneurs are the owners of businesses who contribute the capital and bear all the risks of the businesses. Entrepreneurship refers to a process of doing new things or doing things that are already

being done in a new way (Telsang, 2007). It can also be described as a creative and innovative response to the environment. It constitutes the circle of activities starting from the conception of the investment opportunity to successfully transforming the activity into viable business reality. These skills are inherent in the business education programme of schools, colleges and the universities. In fact, the Nigerian workers and students should learn to acquire the entrepreneurship skills so that they will help them in planting business ventures of their own choice at designated places in their community. This will go a long way to make them self-reliant and self-sufficient.

Three Components of Sustainable Development



Adopted from the Worldbank Group 2001

The three components of sustainable development are explained below: According to Oxford University Press (1987), the Social Aspect of sustainable development looks at issues that impact people's lives directly and that either helps or hinders the process of improving the quality of lives. From the diagram above, the social aspect of sustainable development includes elements such as services, household needs, industrial growth, agricultural growth and efficient use of labour. In Nigeria, the curriculum contents of VBE equip the recipients with skills and competencies in direct and personal services, and other commercial services and business activities that help men and women to carry out productive processes that contribute to sustainable development. Apart from that, VBE skills and competencies of accounting, marketing, ICT and entrepreneurship tend to support industrial and agricultural growth and household needs by creating employment opportunities for households, thus enhancing sustainable development in one way or the other. Indeed, over the past ten years, service occupation is estimated to have accounted for almost 80 per cent of non-agricultural employment, over 60 per cent of urban employment and over 90 per cent of new jobs in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, the informal sector accounts for three-quarters of non-agricultural employment, having increased dramatically over the last decade from about two-thirds (NBS, 2008). In sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector outside of agriculture is large. Seventy one (71%) percent of job opportunities are for men while it also represents the vast majority (92%) per cent of job opportunities for women outside of agriculture sector (ILO, 2002). Moreover, in sub-Saharan Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, street vending predominates in much of the informal economy with women traders forming the majority in a number of countries (ILO, 2002). In Nigeria and other African countries such as Angola, South Africa and Uganda, it is estimated that over half of the informal workers are engaged in the retail trade (ILO, 2002). Considering the large size of the informal economy, formal retailing establishments, distributors and manufacturers often use informal workers in order to expand their markets to low-income groups and those in rural areas who can be reached most easily by itinerant traders and street vendors. The major sources of livelihood for women in informal activities include home-based tasks, domestic service, food-processing, street vending and hawking as well as other forms of petty business trading activities. Despite all these roles, it seems to us that women's breadwinning role in the traditional Nigerian society has often been ignored in the scheme of things. Even though all those roles are performed by women in their households and within their society, the economic activities carried out by them in informal sector employment tend to be socially and statistically invisible (Kabeer, 2003).

Economic aspect of sustainable development highlights the system that determines how limited resources needed to improve people's lives are distributed and used. The VBE curriculum contents of economic education impart VBE skills and competencies in social mobility, cultural preservation, empowerment, participation and equity. As earlier pointed out, the recipients of VBE are equipped with Economics curriculum objectives which emphasize economic literacy, prudent management of limited resources, respect for the dignity of labour and acquisition of economic knowledge for solving the economic problems of the society. Consequently, the VBE students are equipped with all the above knowledge and

economic understandings. The implication of this is that roughly equal numbers of boys and girls chose to study economics. It also raised interesting questions about the aspirations of girls in electing to study this subject, as it equipped them with general life skills which in turn prepared them for the university and for professional and managerial jobs. Lastly, the environmental aspect of sustainable development looks at how the natural resources both renewable and non-renewable that make up our surrounding can help to sustain and better the lives of the people. Indeed, the acquisition of maximum VBE skills and competencies by students of the programmes help them to be engaged in the tapping and conversion of natural resources to the form that satisfy the needs of the Nigerian people nationwide.

6. Impediments to Maximum Acquisition of Skills and Competencies in VBE

However, the effort to improve the standard and quality of acquisition of skills and competencies inherent in VBE courses to maximum level seems to be slowed down by a number of factors such as VBE students low interest in the skills and competencies, curriculum structure, inadequate personnel, inadequate equipment and facilities for the teaching and learning of the skills, inadequate material resources for training and others.

Many of the VBE students have very low interest in the skills and competencies inherent in VBE courses. This has made them to develop poor attitudes towards the skills and competencies inherent in the VBE courses. Because of such negative attitudes, the personal interest and willingness to concentrate and acquire maximum level of skills expected of them are not there. One of such negative attitudes is failure to sit down and make wise use of their time and energy in acquiring maximum skills for self-development and fulfilment. This is because time is a critical matter in everybody's lives. Consequently, the VBE students fail to find time to engage themselves in practical exercises in courses such as in accounting, typewriting, word-processing, and shorthand to mention just but a few. When assignments and home work are given in any of the subjects listed above, it is often discovered that about ninety percent of the VBE students in the class did not find time and/or take time to do it. Such students fail to take their studies seriously as they often come late to the lesson and even when they know that they are terribly late, yet they would be listening to pop music/other music or talking to people with their phones. A careful examination shows that they put more efforts in playing with their mobile phones and in making calls than they do with their studies. In fact, many of the VBE students often left practical subject lessons to stand outside to answer calls as well as make calls. A great majority of them does not consider the length of time spent outside the classroom for such calls neither do they consider that they have lost quite an important part of the lessons.

In view of the utilitarian nature of maximum skills acquisitions, VBE students should cultivate the habit of working hard, commitment and dedication to studies in order to achieve maximum skills acquisition needed by the employers of labour. Indeed many business students who enrol for VBE programmes do not show commitment and dedication to their studies because they are often attracted by very many unimportant issues during their studies. Such unimportant issues range from peer group pressure to friendship issues and joining the group of students popularly known as NFA – No future Ambition. The latter group can be said to be students who do not worry or who are not concerned about their poor performances at their varsities. All business students should regard hard work, commitment and dedication to studies as the sole reason why they are in school. When they are driven by such forces, they will discover that they are breaking new grounds in their area of specialties and that they are acquiring maximum level of skills expected of them by labour market.

Furthermore, all business students should be determined to overcome the poor reading culture prevalent in the Nigerian society. In fact without a strong determination to overcome it, they will not be able to read their study materials and textbooks intensively and extensively. Globally, very many Nigerians are often associated with poor reading culture. In fact, there is a dictum among the people of colour, that if you have something worth millions of dollars to be given to Nigerians, then hide that inside a textbook and give it to the Nigerians to read and discover it, they said they are sure the Nigerians will never read the textbook to discover that treasure. Poor reading culture has affected the fabrics of our society so much so that many Nigerian students are held captive to it. Intensive and extensive reading is very pertinent because it equips the readers with all the information and knowledge required for success in the acquisition of VBE skills and competencies. However, many Nigerian students hate being given voluminous materials to read and in this way miss out the knowledge, skills and competencies that go with such materials. Some of them will even nickname the lecturers trying to involve them in intensive and extensive reading exercises as a way of discouraging them. Such students forget that a well read student is bound to do far better than a poorly read one in all facets of life.

Another issue that affects maximum skills acquisition among VBE students in particular is their refusal to use their money to buy material resources for their own training. Indeed, most of them prefer to use their money to buy expensive

handsets and recharge cards to phone their parents, friends and relatives at the expense of their studies. They forget that there is no substitute for having the correct textbooks and other necessary materials when it comes to learning a skills to the maximum level of it. The VBE students should remember that having a personal laptop nowadays can help them to obtain knowledge, skills and competencies in information, and communication technology which in turns will help them to secure a lucrative job in the labour market. In disregard of this, VBE students prefer to use their money to go for anything that does not help them to learn business subjects at all. The other issue about the negative attitude of Business Education students is their unwillingness to change their thinking and behaviour positively. It is common place that one hundred (100%) percent of Business Education Students' success in life or in their studies is dependent on positive attitude to whatever they are taught. Indeed, the willingness to change positively their attitudes and behaviours help the students to acquire maximum skills expected of them for the labour market. Unfortunately, many of the business students are often unwilling to change their negative attitudes. In fact, a majority of the business students in our schools and colleges are often unwilling to concentrate and study the skills content of business education to maximum level. For example, in the teaching and learning of typewriting, many students only want to operate the typewriter or computer keyboards with two or three fingers instead of their nine fingers. When teaching the students that they should use their nine fingers to type so that they could achieve maximum skills level, those who are used to operating the keyboard with two or three fingers would remain adamant and would be unwilling to change. Consequently, such students would not be able to achieve maximum skills level for the labour market.

The next issue that we would like to discuss here about impediments to maximum level of skills and competencies needed to enhance sustainable development in Nigeria is not accepting to be hard-working enough in their chosen careers. It is quite unfortunate that many business students choose to study a particular business subject and yet to refuse to work hard enough to acquire enough skills expected of them. In fact often times, when business teachers want their students to become serious and very hard-working in their studies; such teachers are often called nicknames by those lazy students. A majority of the business students would not appreciate the efforts of their teachers who want them to be hard working for wellbeing in the future; instead they looked at them as being wicked, cruel and not cooperating with them.

Another impediment to acquiring maximum VBE skills acquisition and competencies is the failure of governmental agencies, private organisations and local communities towards investment in the purchase of relevant equipment and facilities needed in the training of their VBE students. The governments, parents and others lack the will to invest in the education of their children. They are not ready to buy and install modern facilities and equipment needed for practical assignments in their classes. For example, there are inadequate number of manual and electric typewriters in almost all our schools and colleges. Also, there are no computers for the teaching-learning of information and communication technology (ICT). However, this is not the case in schools and colleges in Britain, China, America and other countries abroad. In fact, in those countries, primary pupils play and learn with computers right from kindergarten. Here in our nation, kindergarten children study under shades of trees, sitting down on the fields, or blocks without seeing anything like a computer or a manual typewriter. Indeed very many VBE students often go from one class to another without properly learning what are expected of them. In the end, such children cannot do well in their studies in schools and colleges.

The other factors impeding maximum skills acquisition in our schools and colleges include: inadequate trained personnel to teach the skills and competencies plus too many students admitted into one class, poor maintenance culture, lack of electricity and dishonest students and leaders. In the case of having too many children to be taught at a go, it is not surprising to see over five hundred students in one VBE subject class. Many of them have no seat and no writing table. Even when there are tables and seats, too many children are squeezed into one seat. Consequently, they lack the comfort and conducive atmosphere needed for maximum skills acquisition. Again, the curriculum structure seems not to allow enough hours for practical work, thus the VBE students learn more of theory than practical work.

In addition, there is poor maintenance culture in our schools and colleges. Consequently, the buildings in schools and colleges are dilapidated, and windows and doors are often broken down. The headmasters and principals are often not disturbed about the poor state of facilities and equipment in their learning institutions. The government in power does not release money for yearly maintenance culture. In fact, most of our schools and colleges are worst than piggery farms in abroad. There is also lack of electricity in our schools and colleges for practical work and we have many dishonest students and leaders are all out to steal and destroy whatever the government has made available in our schools and colleges.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the above impediments to maximum skills acquisition in VBE, the following recommendations are made:

- The VBE students should be willing to cultivate keen interest in the skills and competencies inherent in the VBE programmes
- The VBE students should determine to be industrious and to appreciate teachers who make them to work harder.
- They should learn to do away with poor reading culture and be prepared to read intensively and extensively. They should be seriously committed and dedicated to their studies.
- Both VBE students and their student leaders should learn to do away with all forms of dishonesty.
- Provision of basic facilities, equipment and material resources for the teaching-learning of VBE subjects should be made available.
- Proper investment should be made towards boosting the teaching and learning of business subjects in our schools and colleges.

As VBE equips the recipients with firm-specific, industry-specific and general skills and competencies, this paper therefore appeals to all VBE students to make sure they acquire maximum and sufficient skills and competencies that will help them to live and contribute to sustainable development in Nigeria.

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