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## Strategies for Enhancing Youths Participation in Vocational Agricultural Education Programme for Employment in Post- Oil Boom Economy, Rivers State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*The study assessed 'Strategies for Enhancing Youths Participation in Vocational Agricultural Education Programme (VAEP) for Employment in Post-Oil Boom Economy in Rivers State, Nigeria'. Three objectives three research questions and two hypotheses which was tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. The design of the study was descriptive survey with a sample size of 139 respondents (97 VAEP lecturers, 42 VAEP graduates), the instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire which was validated by three experts. A reliability coefficient of 0.86 was established using Cronbach Alpha coefficient method. Data collected were analyzed descriptively mean and standard deviation for research questions and t-test for the hypotheses. The study found out that oil palm production, palm oil mill, orchard production, cassava tuber production among others are some of the VAEP skills that can enhance youths employment, secondly graduates of VAEP are not educated, it is not a professional course, people perceived it as apprenticeship training amongst others are some of the factors discouraging youths participation in VAEP, finally establishment of policies that will favour VAE programmes, VAEP employees should be well paid and remunerated, farm employment should be based on skills, provision of incentives for VAEP trainees amongst others are some of the ways of encouraging youth participation in VAEP. It was recommended that government should establish agricultural projects such as oil palm plantation, palm oil-mills, orchard plantation to engage youths who are interested in VAE programmes. Government should abolish the poor image attached to VAE graduates and trainees by creating awareness of the need and importance of VAEP in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria at large. Government in collaboration with mom-governmental organizations should find ways to encourage youths' participation in VAEP by provision of incentives for VAEP graduates and trainees.*

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**Keywords:** *Strategies, Enhancing, Youths Participation, Vocational Agricultural Education, Post-Oil Boom Economy.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is widely acknowledged as a means of transforming and empowering youths and communities. Through education, the youths gain skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them become productive members of the society. In pre-colonial Nigeria, learning (education) was

through traditional apprenticeship which involved cultural transmission of knowledge from adults in the society to the younger ones (Nlebem 2018). Later, with the coming of the missionaries who introduced the 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic, less emphasis was placed on skill development as was provided by traditional apprenticeship, non-formal aspect of education (Nlebem 2018). As a result, the nation witnessed a crowded market, populated by youths who lack relevant skills to venture into productive sector of the economy.

Youth comprises of persons between the ages of 18-40 years, the term youth according to Nigeria Youth Development Policy of 2001 is a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence and awareness of interdependence as members of a community (nation). Youth involvement in Vocational Agricultural Education (VAE) programs will aid them to be independent in their adulthood through self-reliant or being employed in the society. Egbule (2004) underscores this point when he posited that skills acquired by youths would aid job creation, youth employment and alleviate poverty and in turn has the capacity to solve various problems including unemployment reduction, youth restiveness and election ballot box snatching. Tubman (2014) asserted that Nigerian streets are littered with youth hawkers who ordinarily would have found gainful employment in some enterprise. On his part, Anyanwu (2002) had attributed the high rate of youth unemployment especially among educated youths as a result of lack of vocational skills.

Vocational Agricultural Education is a tool for economic and societal development. Obibuaku (2004) described vocational agricultural education programme (VAEP) as education and training given in agriculture from primary school through secondary and special schools, to the university. (VAEP) is therefore an important school programme that is offered at all levels of education ranging from home to the school and the community; Implying that it can be formal and informal and non-formal. Osinem (2008) highlighted that vocational agricultural education provides learners with sound academic knowledge and skills as well as ample opportunity to apply this knowledge through classroom activities, laboratory experiments, and project participation and supervised agricultural experiences. Osinem (2008) went further to say that (VAEP) emphasizes skill development in all aspects of agribusiness such as planning, management, safety, finances and leadership. It also furnishes learners with necessary communication and interpersonal skills as well as knowledge at all levels. Justruan (2010) also added that (VAEP) equips learners to be self-employed or work in agricultural extension services, foreign services, in business or industry and as agricultural educators. Briefly stated, the scope of (VAEP) covers the areas of teaching, research, and public service outreach programmes. According to the author these programmes are designed to prepare youths for employment in various occupations such as horticulture, agribusiness, rational resource management, agricultural mechanization, crop production, animal husbandry, fisheries, soil testing, sailing of agricultural products, agricultural consultants, bee farming, and mushroom production and landscaping amongst other occupations. According to Olaitan and Mana (2008) (VAEP) is the form of education that advocates development of the head (knowledge), training of the hand (dexterity), and enriching the heart (conscientiousness and painstaking) and living in (good health) –the 4Hs. Egbule (2004) said that the focus of (VAEP) is on man's total existence, hence it is specially needed in a post-oil boom economy.

The need for Nigerian youths to embrace (VAEP) in the post-oil boom economy cannot be underestimated. An oil boom economy is characterized with economic benefits in terms of Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) growth, employment opportunities and so on. The discovery of oil in commercial quality in Olobiri in Niger Delta region of the country in 1958 according to Onuoha (2015), coupled with oil-boom in the nation recorded in the 1970s, 80s, 90s and early 2000s, affected the agricultural, manufacturing, commercial and other sectors of the Nigeria economy adversely. The economy became heavily dependent on oil; with oil revenue accounting for about 96 per cent of exports and foreign exchange income while manufacturing sector account for less than one to two percent of total export (FRN, 2017). According to FRN (2017) during the years 2000-2004 oil boom era in particular, real GDP grew at an annual average rate of 4.8 percent and real output has been increasing continuously but recorded particular growth in 2003 at 10.9 percent, this sharp increase in oil –GDP of 26.5%, was mainly on account of higher production quota granted by Organization of Petroleum Exporting Country (OPEC), Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO 2018). The oil boom afforded the government much needed income; in return it also created serious structural problems in the economy. Majority of Nigerians remain under the burden of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Onuoha (2015) commented that general economic performance was seriously undermined by deplorable infrastructure, corruption and mismanagement of public finances. It resulted also to a period that provided employment opportunities based on certificate and paper qualification where skills were neglected.

Today the fall in the price of oil (crude) has the more magnified the country's woes with higher level of unemployment, youth restiveness and economic recession among others? After more than a decade of economic growth, the sharp and continuous decline in crude oil prices since 2014, coupled with failure to diversify the sources of revenue and foreign exchange in the economy, led to a recession in the second quarter of 2016 (Federal Republic Nigeria, 2017). A recessed economy shows a shift and shortage of the country's source of income. This deplorable state of the nation's economy has necessitated several efforts of government; aimed at tackling these challenges and changing the national economy in the new order of post oil boom era. Nigeria economies need these young (VAE) workers more now than before, the reason been that this section of the population are strong to work, produce and stimulate domestic demand to ensure rapid economy recovery and regeneration. Regrettably the youths are also the most unprepared skill wise, to take their rightful place in the economic development of the country. Therefore in the post oil boom economy VAEP is an essential ingredient in the economy as it is an instrument through which youth can acquire relevant skills to fit into the productive ventures and become self-reliance.

VAEP prepares an individual for skillful performance on agricultural productivity. It involves the acquisition of VAE skills and competencies that can help youths to function productively in individual farms and commercial farms (Crunkilton and Hemp 2006). According to Onuka & Olaitan (2007), skills in poultry, fishing, bee production, goat farming, mushroom production, orchards, crop production, pest control, herbicides production, farm management, marketing of agricultural products and agricultural products processing amongst others are the VAE skills that can be acquired for self- reliant and paid employment. These skill areas are needed in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The need for Nigerian youths to participate VAEP in the post-oil boom economy cannot be under estimated. Crowther, Lindly, Bruenmg, Doron (2007) and Maguire (2000) opined that lack of productive and marketable (VAE) skills had been identified as the major cause of unemployment

as many youths are not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy and cannot provide the services that can generate sustainable income. (VAEP) is a tool for nation building and must be utilized by energetic individuals capable of driving the nations' agricultural workforce such as the youth. It is against this background that this paper seeks to address the strategies that can be adopted in enhancing the youths to participate in (VAEP) for employment in the post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to determine the strategies of enhancing youths' participation in VAEP for employment in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Identify VAEP skills that can enhance youth 'participation for employment in a post-oil boom economy in River State, Nigeria.
2. Examine the factors discouraging youths' participation for employment in VAEP in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. Determine strategies of encouraging youths' participation for employment in VAEP in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the VAEP skills that can enhance youths' participation for employment in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What factors can discourage youths' participation for employment in VAEP in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. What factors can encourage youths' participation for employment in VAE programmes in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance in the study

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of VAE graduates and lecturers on the factors discouraging youths' participation for employment in VAEP in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of VAE graduates and lecturers on the strategies of encouraging youths' participation for employment in VAEP in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a descriptive survey design which sought the responses of the respondents on how to enhance youths' participation in vocational agricultural education (VAE) for employment in post-oil boom economy in Rivers State. The institutions are Rivers State University (RSU), Nkpolu Oroworukwo Port Harcourt and Ignatius Ajuru University of education (IAUE), Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt. The sample size of the study was 97 VAE lecturers and 42 VAE graduates were purposively chosen due to the manageable size, given a total of 139 respondents. A well-structured questionnaire designed in 4 point rating scale of agreement was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by 3 experts from the two universities. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient and it was found to be 0.82. Frequency and percentage was used to analyze research question 1. Items with 50% and above were considered accepted. While research questions 2 & 3 was analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with an acceptance mean value of >2.50 and z-test statistics tool was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Discussions:

### VAEP Skills that can Enhance Youths 'Participation for Employment

**Table 1: Respondents Opinion on VAE Skills that can Enhance Youths Participation for Employment in Post-Oil Boom Economy**

S/No	VAE Skills	VAE Graduates			VAE Lecturers		
		Yes	No	(%)	Yes	No	(%)
1.	Milling Palm Oil	39	3	(92.86; 7.14	97	0	(100.00)
2.	Cassava tuber Production	31	11	(73.1; 26.19	63	34	(64.95; 35.05)
3.	Maize Production	42	03.	(100.00)	97	0	(100.00)
4.	Groundnut Production	40	2	(95.24; 4.76)	88	9	(90.72; 9.28)
5.	Tilling	37	5	(88.10; 11.90)	69	28	(71.13; 28.87)
6.	Hard leaf Production	31	11	(73.81; 26.19)	71	26	(73.20; 26.80)
7.	Cocoa Production	42	0	(100.00)	97	0	(100.00)
8.	Pumpkin Production	36	6	(85.71; 14.29)	67	30	(69.07; 30.93)
9.	Yam Production Service	33	9	(78.57; 21.43)	78	19	(80.41; 19.59)
10.	Sugar cane Production	36	6	(85.71; 14.29)	75	22	(77.32; 22.68)
11.	Truck Driving	41	1	(97.62; 2.38)	80	17	(82.47; 17.53)
12.	Snail Production	40	2	(95.24; 4.76)	73	24	(75.26; 24.74)
13.	Fish Farming	38	4	(90.38; 9.52)	69	28	(71.13; 28.87)
14.	Bee Production	32	10	(76.19; 23.81)	76	21	(78.35; 21.65)
15.	Food/Catering Services	39	3	(92.86; 7.14)	73	24	(75.26; 24.74)
16.	Flour Processing	30	12	(71.43; 28.57)	64	33	(65.98; 34.02)
17.	Veterinary Services	37	5	(88.10; 11.90)	61	36	(62.89; 37.11)
18.	Oil Palm Farm	34	8	(80.95; 19.05)	76	21	(78.35; 21.65)
19.	Tomato	31	11	(78.81; 26.19)	80	17	(82.47; 17.53)
20.	Feed Milling	38	4	(90.48; 9.52)	88	9	(90.72; 9.28)
21.	Feed Marketing	38	4	(90.48; 9.52)	91	6	(93.81; 6.19)

22.	Pig Farm	34	8	(80.95; 19.05)	66	31	(68.04; 31.96)
23.	Dog Farm	32	10	(76.19; 23.810)	72	25	(74.23; 25.77)
24.	Okra	37	5	(88.10; 11.90)	89	8	(91.75; 8.25)
25.	Orchard Production	36	6	(85.71; 14.29)	70	27	(72.16; 27.84)

### Researchers' Field work 2020

The finding of the study in Table 1 showed that skills such as milling palm oil, cassava tuber production, maize production, groundnut production, hard leaf production cocoa production and so on can enhance youths' employment opportunities in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State Nigeria. The finding is in support of the work of Igben, Anyanwu and Brown (2010) that skills in feed milling, feed marketing, oil palm production, orchard production, cassava tuber production, groundnut production, maize production, pig farming, pumpkin production, fish farming and flour processing among others are VAE skills that can be acquired for self-reliant and employment in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Factors Discouraging Youths Participation for employment in VAEP:

**Table 2: Respondents mean Responses on Factors Discouraging Youths Participation for employment in VAE Skills in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State Nigeria**

S/No	Factors	Graduates		Decision	Lecturers		Decision
		SD <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>1</sub>		SD <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	
1.	Graduates of VAE are not Educated	3.22	0.56	Undecided	3.55	0.70	Accepted
2.	It is not a professional course	3.34	0.87	Undecided	3.13	1.04	Undecided
3.	It lacks societal value	3.86	0.81	Accepted	3.03	0.93	Undecided
4.	People perceived it as apprenticeship training.	3.85	0.74	Accepted	3.90	0.47	Accepted
5.	Its relevancy is dominated by related discipline	3.95	0.74	Accepted	3.82	0.74	Accepted
6.	Its graduates are not well paid	3.90	0.66	Accepted	3.72	0.70	Accepted
7.	VAE job vacancy is scarce	4.56	0.79	Accepted	4.36	0.47	Accepted

8.	VAE Education is to cater for dropouts.	3.95	0.74	Accepted	3.84	0.67	Accepted
9.	VAE is for low achievers	4.27	0.82	Accepted	4.63	0.56	Accepted
10.	VAE programmes are not always implemented	3.27	1.08	Undecided	3.18	0.75	Undecided
11.	Lack of incentives to encourage the trainees	4.03	0.49	Accepted	3.57	0.68	Accepted
12.	Poor image and status attached to VAE	4.13	0.88	Accepted	4.08	0.81	Accepted
	Average	3.86	0.76		3.73	0.71	

Researchers' Fieldwork 2020

Data in Table 2 showed the respondents mean responses on the factors discouraging youths' participation for employment in VAE in Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that graduates of VAE are not educated, had a mean value of (3.22 & 3.55), it is not a professional course (3.86 & 3.13), it lacks societal value (3.86 & 3.03), people perceived it as apprenticeship training (3.85 & 3.90), its relevancy is dominated by related discipline (3.95 & 3.82), its graduates 'are not well paid (3.90 & 3.72), VAE job vacancy is scarce (4.56 & 4.36) VAE education is to cater for school dropouts (3.95 & 3.84), VAE is for low achievers (4.27 & 4.63) VAE programmes are not always implemented (3.27 & 3.18) lack of incentives to encourage the trainees (4.03 & 3.57) and poor image attached to VAE (4.13 & 4.08) The findings is in line with Oseni, Ehikioya & Ali-Momoh (2011) in their work titled 'Technical and Vocational Education the Perception of the People'. They noted that people look down on technical vocational education graduates, that it is a type of apprenticeship training, that its relevancy is dominated by related discipline that is a type of education for school dropouts amongst others.

### Factors that can Encourage Youths Participation for Employment in VAEP:

**Table 3: Respondents mean Responses on Ways of Encouraging Youth Participation for Employment in VAEP Post-Oil Boom Economy in Rivers State Nigeria.**

S/No	Strategies	Graduates		Decision	Lecturers		Decision
		X <sub>1</sub>	SD <sub>1</sub>		X <sub>1</sub>	SD <sub>2</sub>	
1.	Establishment of policies that will favour VAE programmes.	3.99	0.63	Accepted	3.29	0.99	Undecided
2.	VAE employees should be well paid and remunerated.	4.16	0.70	Accepted	3.95	0.61	Accepted

3.	Farm employment should be based on skills.	4.04	0.55	Accepted	3.50	0.90	Accepted
4.	Provision of incentives for VAE trainees.	3.94	0.75	Accepted	4.04	0.57	Accepted
5.	Giving of starter packs for VAE farm trainees.	3.86	0.81	Accepted	3.37	0.84	Undecided
6.	Provision of students' industrial attachment.	3.69	0.83	Accepted	3.29	0.99	Undecided
7.	Provision of loan facilities to encourage VAE graduates.	3.49	0.54	Accepted	3.23	0.63	Undecided
8.	Organizing agric. shows to display VAE products.	3.79	0.80	Accepted	3.13	0.73	Undecided
9.	Provision of scholarship for VAE trainees.	4.15	0.66	Accepted	3.17	1.09	Undecided
10.	Adequate implementation of VAE programmes	4.04	0.72	Accepted	4.14	0.58	Accepted
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.92</b>	<b>0.69</b>		<b>3.51</b>	<b>0.79</b>	

Researchers' Fieldwork 2020

Data in Table 3 showed the respondents mean responses on ways of encouraging youths' participation for employment in VAE programmes in a post-oil boom Rivers State, Nigeria. Finding revealed that establishment of policies that will favour VAE programmes had a mean value of (3.99 & 3.29), VAE employers should be well paid and remunerated (4.16 & 3.95), and farm employment should be based on skills (4.04 & 3.50) provision of incentives for VAE trainees (3.94 & 4.04), giving of starter packs for VAE farm trainees (3.86 & 3.37), provision of students industrial attachment training for VAE trainees (3.69 & 3.26), provision of loan facilities to encourage VAE trainees (3.49 & 3.23), organizing agricultural shows to display VAE products. (3.79 & 3.13), provision of scholarship or grants for VAE trainees (4.15 & 3.17), while adequate implementation of VAE programmes had (4.04 & 4.14). In all both VAE graduates and teachers had mean values < 2.50 which mean agreed. The finding is in agreement with Ekong (2010) in his work titled 'The Impact of Government in Encouraging VAE programmes in Niger Delta Region

with particular reference to Akwa Ibom State. He noted that to encourage VAE programmes government had to provide incentives for VAE trainees, organize agricultural shows to display VAE products, establish policies that will favour VAE programmes, farm employment should be based on skills amongst others.

**H01:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating of VAE graduates and lecturers on the factors discouraging youths' participation in VAE for employment in a post oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Table 4: t-Test Analysis of Respondents on Factors Discouraging Youths Participation for Employment on VAE Skills**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	tcal	tcrit	Remark
Graduate	42	3.86	0.76				
Accepted				137	0.94	1.960	
Lecturers	97	3.73	0.71				

Table 4; shows that since tcal (0.94) is less than tcrit (1.960), the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in mean response of VAE graduates and lecturers on the factors that discourage youth participation on VAE skills for employment in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**H02:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating of VAE graduates and lecturers on the strategies of encouraging youths' participation for employment in VAE in post-oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Table 5: t-Test Analysis of Respondents on Factors Encouraging Youths Participation for Employment on VAE Skills in Post-Oil boom Economy in Rivers State, Nigeria**

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	tcal	tcrit	Remark
Graduates	42	3.92	0.69				
				137	3.04	1.960	Rejected
Lecturer	97	3.51	0.79				

Table 5; revealed that since tcal (3.04) is greater than tcrit (1.960), the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in mean response of VAE graduates and lecturers

on the strategies of encouraging youth participation for employment in VAE skills in a post-oil booming economy in Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Conclusion:**

Based on the findings, It was concluded that Oil-palm production, palm oil milling, orchard production, fish farming, and cocoa production amongst others are some of VAE skills that can enhance youths employment, secondly poor image attached to VAE, lack of incentives to encourage the trainees, VAE programmes are not always implemented, VAE lacks societal value, people perceived it as apprenticeship are some of the factors that discourages youths participation for employment in VAE. Finally provision of incentives for VAE trainees, adequate implementation of VAE programmes, provision of scholarship or grants for VAE trainees, establishment of policies that will favour VAE programmes, farm employment should be based on skills amongst others are some of the ways to encourage youths participation for employment in VAE skills in a post oil boom economy in Rivers State, Nigeria

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

1. Government should establish agricultural projects such as oil-palm plantations, palm oil-mills, orchard plantations, cocoa farms, groundnut farms, feed mill processing factory, farm products marketing boards to engage youths who are interest in VAE programmes.
2. Government should abolish the poor image attached to VAE graduates and trainees by making the youths and the public aware that VAE are not a programme for school dropouts, non-professionals or education for low achievers. Also awareness should be made of the need and importance of VAE in a post-oil boom economy in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general.
3. Government in collaboration with non-governmental organizations should find ways to encourage youth's participation in VAE, by provision of incentives for VAE graduates and trainees, adequate implementation of VAE programmes, provision of scholarship or grant for VAE trainees and VAE employees should be well paid amongst others.

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