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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF TVET CURRICULUM ON THE WELL-BEING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION STUDENTS: A FOCUS ON AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

The transition from youth to adulthood in higher education institutions presents a delicate phase where students grapple with mental discomfort due to various pressures. This study delves into the impact of the TVET curriculum on the well-being of agricultural education students. Employing a phenomenological approach, ten students from Modibbo Adama University Yola, Nigeria, were interviewed to explore their experiences within the TVET curriculum. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: integrating wellness material into the curriculum, evaluating, stimulating, and providing academic assistance, and fostering social connectivity and engagement. While students appreciated practical aspects of the curriculum, concerns arose regarding workload balance, theoretical emphasis, and assessment diversity. Collaborative learning environments, academic support services, and social connectivity emerged as crucial factors influencing students' well-being. The findings emphasize the need for a balanced curriculum, diverse instructional methodologies, and comprehensive support services to enhance the overall educational experience and well-being of agricultural education students within the TVET system.

Keywords: TVET curriculum, Higher education students, Agricultural education, Well-being, Phenomenological research

Introduction

Globally, there is a significant occurrence of mental discomfort among students in higher education institutions (Auerbach et al., 2018; Tabor et al., 2021). Upon entering Higher Education (HE), several individuals undergo the transition from youth to adulthood. This phase is particularly delicate, since the majority of mental health problems manifest before the age of 24 (Kessler, et al., 2007). The demands arise from the desire to achieve more financial and social autonomy, to exercise parental independence, to acquire new learning methods, and to adjust to a different social setting while formulating professional objectives in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (Macaskill, 2013; Choo & Gee, 2024). The pressure to fulfil these expectations is burdensome and may have adverse effects on mental health and hinder the ability to acquire knowledge and skills in TVET (Wang, et al., 2023; Kilpatrick, et al., 2020). Impaired mental well-being negatively impacts attendance, involvement in examinations, focus, and belief in one's abilities, motivation, and self-assurance (Marks, et al., 2021). Mental health treatments may assist in reducing the increasing occurrence of this phenomenon (Eichenberg et al,

2022). Nevertheless, when academics in the area of TVET recommend students for counselling, they may be wrongly pathologizing their pain, suggesting that the source of and remedy for distress only rest with the individual student (Jayakumar & Duvvuru, 2022; Ugochukwu, et al, 2020). Given the significant occurrence of mental anguish at modern institutions of higher learning, it is pertinent to inquire if the academic setting plays a role in causing this misery. The environment refers to the viewpoint adopted by models that are based on specific settings, such as the University Mental Health Charter (Tudor, 1996; Priestley, et al., 2021). The University Mental Health Charter promotes a comprehensive strategy that addresses wellness by implementing changes in the organization, structure, and environment. This approach is supported by Hughes and Spanner (2019) and Dooris and Doherty (2010). The method used by the whole institution is both preventive and applicable to everyone (Thorley, 2017).

"Learning", including both instruction and evaluation, is one of the four focal points delineated in the University Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). The classroom, whether it is conducted online or in person, serves as a definite point of interaction between the teaching staff and students (Willis, 2022). Hence, the pedagogical methods used by scholars have an influence on every student in the institution. When inquired about how universities might enhance well-being, several suggestions from TVET students pertain to the curriculum, such as modifications to course structure, teaching methodologies, or evaluation methods (Baik et al, 2015; Haynes, et al., 2016). Some TVET students see the methods of instruction and evaluation as a possible cause of suffering (Mukhtar & Ahmad, 2015). Within this particular setting, scholars are including activities that promote wellbeing into their educational programmes and examining teaching methods from the standpoint of wellbeing.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has proposed a number of initiatives to include well-being into the curriculum. These strategies including linking course material to well-being and encouraging teaching methods that promote peer connection, active learning, and autonomy (Houghton & Anderson, 2017). Additional suggestions including modifying the curriculum to minimize excessive pressure, improving the availability of advice and assistance, creating inclusive evaluation techniques (Careemdeen, 2023), and cultivating study skills (Milburn, 2010).

Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of data supporting interventions in modifying curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment design in TVET programmes in Nigeria (Udoudo & Ikeji, 2023; Allais, 2022). Two studies investigating the effectiveness of setting-based, curriculum-embedded methods in promoting the wellbeing of university students yielded equivocal findings. This was mostly owing to limitations in internal validity, such as the absence of control groups, as well as inadequate and inconsistent reporting of results (Jakovljevic, Çaliskan et al., 2022; Upsher et al., 2022). Hence, the sector requires more evidence to design interventions and assess their efficacy.

Prior to conducting more research and testing of interventions, it is essential for the sector to get a more comprehensive knowledge of the current curriculum-embedded techniques and the viewpoints of TVET students on these approaches. In order to fill this void, the researchers conducted interviews with undergraduate TVET students to investigate their perspectives on how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment design influence their wellbeing.

This study presents the qualitative research methods used to investigate the influence of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum on the well-being of students in higher education institutions, specifically focusing on those studying agricultural education. Qualitative approaches play a crucial role in getting a deeper understanding of students' views, experiences, and subjective interpretations pertaining to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum and its impact on their overall well-being.

Problem Statement

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a crucial phase characterised by a multitude of difficulties and demands, particularly for students enrolled in higher education institutions (HEIs). Within this group of students, individuals who are currently enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes, particularly in the field of agricultural education, experience distinct sources of stress that have an effect on their overall well-being. These problems include the need of harmonising hands-on training with theoretical understanding, efficiently handling academic workloads, and successfully navigating the demands of professional preparation within the TVET framework.

Although TVET plays a crucial role in imparting practical skills and industry knowledge to students, there is a significant lack of research about how the TVET curriculum impacts the overall well-being of these students. Previous research suggests that the happiness and satisfaction of higher education institution (HEI) students are impacted by several aspects, such as the organisation of the curriculum, teaching methods, evaluation methods, and the accessibility of support services. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research that particularly examines the TVET curriculum's influence on the mental health and overall well-being of agricultural education students in Nigeria.

This research seeks to address this deficiency by examining the experiences and perspectives of agricultural education students about the influence of the TVET curriculum on their overall well-being. The study aims to comprehend the impact of including wellness content, maintaining a balance between practical and theoretical components, having diverse assessments, and fostering social connectedness within the TVET curriculum on students' well-being, using a phenomenological method. The results of this research will provide valuable information on the required modifications in curriculum design, teaching approaches, and support services to improve the educational experience and well-being of agricultural education students in the TVET system.

Objectives of the Study

This study is underpinned by a single research objective, which serves as the foundation and driving force behind the investigation. This objective provides a clear and specific direction for the study, guiding the research design, data collection, and analysis.

The single research objective is:

"To investigate the impact of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum on the well-being of agricultural education students at higher education institutions."

Methodology

The study used a phenomenological methodology to conduct a qualitative investigation, with the objective of revealing the subjective experiences and interpretations of agricultural education students on their educational progression within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum at Modibbo Adama University Yola, Nigeria. Phenomenology enables a thorough investigation of people' subjective experiences and the distinct ways in which they interpret their educational encounters.

Participant Selection

The research specifically targeted agricultural education students who are now enrolled in TVET programmes at Modibbo Adama University in Yola, Nigeria. By using purposive sampling, the selection process was designed to ensure a comprehensive representation of the student population. The selection criteria included academic year, comprising from first to fifth year, as well as demographic variety. This research comprised a total of 150 students studying agricultural education, with two persons chosen from each academic level. Participants were asked to voluntarily participate in semi-structured interviews in order to collect their opinions on the topic being studied.

Data Collection

The primary method used for data collection in this qualitative study was semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face. An extensive interview guide was developed to examine several aspects of the TVET curriculum's impact on students' well-being, including academic experiences, career aspirations, personal growth, and encountered challenges. As an example, one of the questions asked during the interview was: “What are your thoughts on the addition of wellness issues in the TVET curriculum, and how does it affect your general well-being as an agricultural education student?”

The interview guide underwent a thorough evaluation by a team of specialists specialising in educational research and curriculum development to assure its accuracy and reliability. This procedure included many phases, which included conducting a pilot examination with a limited cohort of students to evaluate the lucidity and pertinence. The feedback provided by these experts and pilot participants was used to enhance the clarity, impartiality, and thoroughness of the questions, ensuring that they properly addressed the desired issues. The validation method ensured that the interview guide will effectively elicit relevant and accurate data from participants. Each interview was recorded using audio technology with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim to precisely represent the profoundness and intricacy of their narratives. Field notes were collected alongside interviews to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations that might possibly enrich the interview data.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data acquired from the interviews was subjected to thematic analysis. The transcripts were methodically coded and categorized in order to find recurrent themes, patterns, and sub-themes pertaining to the influence of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum on the well-being of students. The process of iteration included the continuous comparison and improvement of codes in order to guarantee the creation of complete and relevant themes. The researcher used NVivo 12, a programme designed for qualitative data analysis, to efficiently manage, categorise, and

retrieve data. The investigation was done with transparency and careful consideration to ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings. These outcomes were accomplished via the use of techniques such as member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling.

Ethical Considerations

The study method was conducted with a strong emphasis on ethical issues in order to safeguard the rights and maintain the anonymity of the participants. All participants provided informed permission, and their identity was maintained by using pseudonyms while publishing the results. The research took measures to mitigate any possible hazards or inconveniences, and participants were given the freedom to resign from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences.

Results

The following responses are a direct outcome of the primary objective of this study, which aimed to explore practical strategies for integrating well-being into the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum tailored for agricultural education students in higher education institutions. The aim was to address a significant gap in the current agricultural education curriculum, which primarily focuses on the development of technical skills while neglecting the crucial matter of students' holistic well-being.

Participant A

Question: What are your thoughts on the addition of wellness issues in the TVET curriculum, and how does it affect your general well-being as an agricultural education student?

Answer: “From what I know, the focus on actual parts in the TVET programme has sparked my interest and prepared me for future work. I may find it hard to control the amount of work that goes into these practical parts, though, and it may affect my overall health”.

Participant B

Question: How can practical learning opportunities in the TVET curriculum help you develop as an agriculture education student and improve your overall well-being?

Answer: “I can see that the real learning chances in the TVET programme have helped me grow, but I think there should be a better mix of intellectual information to make everyone healthier”.

Participant C

Question: Could you please share your thoughts on how networking opportunities and industry exposure given by the TVET programme affected your well-being as an agriculture education student?

Answer: “I believe that the networking and business contact chances in the TVET course have made me feel better. Using a variety of evaluation methods, on the other hand, may improve well-being by taking into account different ways of learning”.

Participant D

Question: What impact does the TVET curriculum's emphasis on community have on their overall well-being as agricultural education students?

Answer: "I think the TVET course improved my wellbeing and helped me feel more connected to the community. Still, I think professional guidance to enhance student wellbeing may be improved".

Participant E

Question: How does the TVET curriculum's focus on practical skills impact your overall well-being as an agricultural education student, and how may critical thinking and problem-solving skills improve it?

Answer: "Though the TVET curriculum has done an excellent job of emphasising practical skills, I believe that in order to increase overall wellbeing, critical thinking and problem solving should take precedence".

Participant F

Question: How do you rate the TVET curriculum's impact on your well-being as an agricultural education student, taking into account vital skills and infrastructure?

Answer: "In my opinion, the TVET programme taught me essential skills; nonetheless, more infrastructure is required to improve the overall educational experience and student well-being".

Participant G

Question: How do practical learning experiences in the TVET curriculum affect their overall well-being as agriculture education students?

Answer: "Although my practical learning experiences in the TVET curriculum have been fantastic, combining them with theoretical studies may be difficult at times and have an impact on my well-being".

Participant H

Question: In your opinion, how have the flexibility and interdisciplinary cooperation possibilities in the TVET programme improved your well-being as an agricultural education student?

Answer: "In my perspective, the flexibility of the TVET curriculum and the opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration have improved my well-being by enabling me to modify my learning experience and participate in a variety of learning activities".

Participant I

Question: How would you describe the TVET curriculum's impact on your well-being as an agricultural education student, taking into account the development of practical knowledge and the need for support services?

Answer: "My view would be that the TVET curriculum has helped students gain practical skills; yet, there is still a need for support services to assist students deal with stress and challenges while also improving their general well-being".

Participant J

Question: How has the TVET curriculum benefited your well-being as an agriculture education student, including experiential learning and instructional variety?

Answer: "According to my understanding, although the TVET curriculum's experiential learning component has been good, more instructional variety is required to increase general well-being and enrich the educational experience".

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum on the overall wellbeing of students at higher education institutions, specifically those pursuing agricultural education. The study's findings highlight three primary priority areas: fostering social connection and engagement; evaluating, promoting, and offering academic support; and integrating wellness materials into the educational curriculum. In addition to examining how instructional techniques affect students' general well-being, this study looks at how students perceive the incorporation of well-being components within their educational experience.

The first theme section examined how students felt about the inclusion of wellness material in the curriculum and how it influenced their overall health. The replies of the participants indicated a broad comprehension of the practical parts of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum, according to the findings of Lee, (2017). This environment consists of fieldwork, lab work, industry exposure, and networking possibilities. Experts considered these elements essential for enhancing engagement and preparing students for future careers in agriculture. However, students raised concerns about task distribution, the emphasis on theoretical understanding, and the necessity for a broader range of evaluation techniques to accommodate diverse learning preferences (Agbaria, & Bdier, 2020). As per the previously stated poll, students hold practical experiences in high regard and acknowledge the need for an all-encompassing teaching strategy that incorporates both theoretical and applied elements. The influence of the pedagogical practices used in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum on students' well-being of students was the main focus of the second issue. According to Williams (2020), collaborative learning spaces are important for encouraging students to feel inclusive and supportive of one another. However, the study revealed issues with managing workload, academic stress, and the need for expert advice and assistance (Adams et al., 2020). The results emphasise how important it is to provide enough resources and academic support services to students in order to address their varied requirements and enhance their general wellbeing.

The third subject of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum examines the significance of social engagement and connectedness in enhancing students' overall well-being. The participants highlighted the advantages of engaging in experiential learning activities that apply knowledge in practical settings and promote cooperation within academic disciplines. Azer (2023), however, expressed concern about the narrow variety of teaching tactics and emphasised the need to use novel

pedagogical approaches to enhance the learning process. The aforementioned results emphasise the need for developing inclusive and engaging learning settings that foster students' critical thinking skills, creativity, and active participation.

This research highlights a variety of ways in which technical and vocational education and training (TVET) curricula influence agricultural students' general well-being. The curriculum, according to Willis (2022), gives practical experiences and exposure to the industry top priority while also recognising the need for a stronger focus on theoretical knowledge, a variety of assessment methods, academic support services, and innovative teaching strategies. It is essential to address these specific areas of concern if we are to enhance the overall welfare and educational experience of students in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system.

Conclusion

This research highlights the crucial significance of customizing educational curricula particularly for students in agricultural education to cater to their distinct requirements and enhance both academic achievements and overall welfare. In spite of the unique circumstances surrounding agricultural education, the findings revealed in this study exhibit a significant parallel with those seen in other fields, highlighting a collective desire among students for pedagogical approaches that promote favourable psychological well-being. While students studying agricultural education often exhibit enthusiasm towards academic difficulties, it is crucial to provide sufficient scaffolding to mitigate excessive stress and promote effective learning experiences.

Furthermore, fostering significant connections between instructors and students in agricultural education, along with facilitating peer-to-peer interactions within the agricultural education community, are crucial elements in enhancing student well-being. This highlights the need of not alone offering academic assistance, but also fostering social and emotional support within the contextual framework of agricultural education. The results of this research support the idea of using a comprehensive strategy to promote the well-being of students studying agricultural education in institutions of higher learning. By integrating support mechanisms directly into the agricultural education curriculum, higher institutions may enhance their ability to effectively cater to the diverse requirements of students pursuing agricultural education. In addition, this study establishes the foundation for the creation of future interventions that are especially designed to improve the welfare of agricultural education students in higher education settings.

Ultimately, this study illuminates the complex correlation between the TVET curriculum and the well-being of students studying agricultural education in higher institution. Although agricultural education places great importance on practical experiences and industry exposure, it is crucial to acknowledge the presence of problems such as academic stress and the need for varied teaching styles. It is crucial to tackle these difficulties in order to enhance the overall well-being and academic achievement of agriculture education students in the TVET system. Educational institutions must regularly assess the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum to determine its alignment with students' needs and well-being. Incorporating input from students, educators, and industry stakeholders is essential in the assessment process.

Professional development is crucial for educators as it enables them to get the necessary skills and support to effectively execute a wide range of instructional approaches that foster student engagement and well-being. When designing professional development programmes, it is important to prioritize the cultivation of collaborative learning environments and the provision of academic support services. The provision of comprehensive student support services, including counselling, mentoring programmes, and academic aid, is vital for universities to effectively cater to the varied requirements of students within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curriculum.

Recommendations

The findings of this research lead to the following recommendations:

1. Integrate a harmonious combination of practical skill development and academic knowledge to enhance the overall well-being of agricultural education students.
2. Implement explicit protocols to effectively regulate the level of exertion demanded by practical components in order to prevent any adverse effects on the well-being of agricultural education students.
3. Employ diverse evaluation techniques to cater to distinct learning preferences and enhance the overall welfare of agricultural education students.
4. Increase industry exposure and networking opportunities to benefit agricultural education students' well-being.
5. Maintain and cultivate a sense of friendship among agricultural education students, as well as explore supplementary measures to improve their overall mental and emotional health.
6. Prioritise the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills to improve the overall well-being of agricultural education students.
7. Strengthen the infrastructure to facilitate the educational experience and enhance agricultural education students' well-being.
8. Promote the amalgamation of theoretical and practical learning experiences to mitigate stress and enhance the well-being of agricultural education students.
9. Offer assistance services to help students cope with stress and difficulties, enhancing their overall well-being in agricultural education.
10. Maintain hands-on learning opportunities and provide a wider range of teaching methods to enrich the educational experience and promote the well-being of agricultural education students.

By incorporating these recommendations, the TVET curriculum may more effectively cater to the welfare of agricultural education students at higher education institutions, equipping them for prosperous and satisfying careers in the agricultural industry.

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