

**THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION ON ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

**OSUNDAHUNSI, Kayode Festus**

Department of Economics,  
School of Secondary Education (Arts & Social Sciences Programmes)  
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, Oyo state  
Corresponding Email: [osundahunsikayode1838@fcesoyo.edu.ng](mailto:osundahunsikayode1838@fcesoyo.edu.ng)

**Abstract**

*The study aims at assessing the roles of vocational and technical education on economic growth and sustainable development in Nigeria. Secondary data was used for the study. These include information from journal, theses, conferences, workshops and seminar papers. To revive the Nigerian economy, adequate exposure and sound base on technical education holds the key to the nation becoming technologically relevant and internationally competitive in the world market. It is the most effective means of empowering the citizenry to stimulate sustained national development, enhance employment, improve the quality of life, hinder poverty, limit the incidence of social vices and the knowledge of technical and vocational education helps in the conversion of local raw materials, this reduces the importation of foreign goods which lessen our import dependency and encourage exportation of our local products. Despite the prospective and enormous contribution of vocational and technical education for sustainability of economic growth and development still suffered many setback for its effective operation which includes; Poor Public Perception and Apathy to Vocational Education, Government Lukewarm Attitudes/Poor Funding, Shortage of Qualified Vocational Technical Teachers, Lack of Adequate Equipment and Training Infrastructure among others. In conclusion, some useful recommendations were given for effective operation of vocational and technical education in Nigeria which include; Investment in the provision of modern facilities for vocational education, reinvention of vocational education in Nigeria in order to empower youths for self reliance and self-employment, Government to encourage youths in science and technology based course in schools among others.*

**Key words:** *Economic, role, vocational and technical education, sustainable development*

**Introduction**

The National Policy on Education (2013) gave a blue-print into the necessity of training youths for gainful employment so that the goal of poverty eradication can be achieved at all levels of governance. This is the reason why most tertiary institutions have been empowered theoretically to offer saleable skills in vocational education in order to train beneficiaries for self-reliance. This is perhaps predicated upon the assumption that vocational education remains an option to solving Nigeria's problems of poverty, unemployment, incompetence, and lack of hard work at the national level and have a direct link to corruption and other social vices such as armed robbery, kidnapping and so on (Afolayan, 2008). The most valuable asset of any

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nation is her population. However, if adequate and constructive policies are not formulated to improve the quality of life of the people, their potentials cannot be harnessed towards sustainable national growth and development. Although Nigeria is endowed with abundant national resource, ranging from mineral to fertile soil for agricultural productivity to feed her people, in addition to talented and creative citizens.

Vocational education is a type of education designed for the preparation of persons for useful employment in a particular occupation. It requires a blend of intellectual ability and practical skills. It is intentionally, designed for the development of skills and knowledge which can be useful to both the concerned individual and the society in general (Oyenuga, 2002). Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) therefore, has an important role to play in raising the quality of work and competency of TVET graduates, increasing job satisfaction and motivating workers as well as enhancing productivity (Manfred & Jennifer, 2004). Putting succinctly, TVET prepares human resources for the ever changing world of work. Vocational and technical education have had a slow start and developed less quickly than other forms of education in Nigeria. This was partly due to the fact that the voluntary agencies that pioneered western education in Nigeria were unable to popularize vocational and technical education on the same scale as the literary education. In any case, the Christian Missions were more interested in the natives' ability to read the bible and literary subjects than in their ability to turn 'screws and prime water pumps'. The situation was further complicated by the fact that most of the British policy makers were literary men and women who had studied classics at the University of Oxford or London. Fafunwa in Ovbiagele (2007) captured it when he declared "the highest level of Technical and Vocational Education was the degree course in mechanical, civil, electrical, agricultural and chemical engineering run by all, but one of the six Nigeria, universities in the late 60s and early 70s. Though there were about five post secondary vocational and technical colleges in the same period, these institutions only trained people in commerce, accountancy, secretary, civil, mechanical and electrical studies at diploma level and for professional bodies like the City and Guild Institute of London.

Today, the National Policy on Education document in Nigeria attaches great importance to Vocational Education. This is because it is one of prime movers for achieving the desired technological and economic development of Nigeria. Prior to this new consciousness there had been a two-fold criticism of Nigeria education and training system. First, is the fact that the system was not geared effectively enough towards the realities and needs of the labour market; that is, it was not adequately employment- oriented. Secondly, there was insufficient application of the system's facilities and manpower towards solution of the country's most pressing problems, it was not adequately service oriented.

Generally, education is a variable tool for national development which requires deliberate plan to suit the development needs of a nation. More so, it is geared towards the system producing the right type of manpower in the right quality and quantity for nation building. It is an exercise that engages every one. It is a process that enables the individuals to live as useful and acceptable members of a society. An individual may go through liberal, general education or acquire knowledge and be useful to him and to the society at large. Education means more than just going to school (formal education). An adult, who did not have an opportunity of formal education, maybe directly or indirectly involve in education in the informal way. Okoye (2002) opined that an educated man is the gentleman, who is socially, morally, intellectually and physically useful to the society. It is no gain saying that societal norms and values are prerequisites for a person to fit into any society, hence the need for the acquisition of vocational skills and competence for self relevance. For any developing nation, the level of economic

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growth is tied to the level of technology that exists therein. Technology, by this we mean the ability to improve on the ways things are done for better performance, and it is only through the application of appropriate technologies that the skilful but jobless can be made functional in our society. There is no doubt that the nations of the world that are technologically and economically strong have the story of their success rooted directly to investment in vocational and technical education. Today's world of work which is ruled by information and communication technology (ICT), is a complex one hence the need for the individual to obtain the kind of education that would equip him with knowledge and technically variable understanding in order for him to be highly functional in the society.

To say ICT has taken over almost every sphere of life is an understatement, as it covers educational instructions, banking and commerce, health, building construction, forestry elevating, environmental population to mention but a few. The worldwide constant innovative changes have shown that the future is unpredictable especially as it concerns education, technology, Skills and competencies which were considered the bed rock of economic, social and political mobility and growth. In line with this view, Romer, (1990) stated that countries whose populations have high levels of education are fertile soil for information based technology. Topel (1998), Krueger and Lindahl (1999) also stated that increase in a country's overall level of educational attainment have caused corresponding increases in their overall rate of economic growth.

### Literature Review

Nwadioha (2009) stressed that the terms "vocational" and technical education are in most cases used interchangeably. However though similar, they are not the same. Vocational education is an aspect of technical education that lay emphasis on skills acquisition and functional education for the development of the society. That is, it leads to employment in a job, a trade or occupation. Technical education is an aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. It gives both quality and quantity of the manpower required for transformation of a country in a technical world. The National policy on Education (2013) defined vocational education as "that form of education which is obtainable at the technical colleges. This is equivalent to the Senior Secondary Education but designed to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills. Basic scientific knowledge and attitude required as craftsmen and technicians at sub-professional level" it is pertinent to state' here that vocational education is synonymous with technical education. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is the form of education deliberately designed to help man improve his skills. It places emphasis on skill development of the individuals in chosen occupations (Abubakar & Jimritu, 2013). The aspect of the general school curriculum according to Ogwo and Oranu (2006) that is concerned with acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for securing and advancing in a given occupation is called technical vocational education. It includes sub-professional training or retraining offered in and outside the school system for a gainful employment in any occupation. In more recent times, United Nation Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2002) and Federal Ministry of Education (FRN) (2004) define VTE as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to

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occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. VTE is regarded as workforce education particularly, in its traditional role, facilitates the adjustment of the skills and knowledge of man to the changing demands within the society. Osula (1995) explained that "vocational education is education that includes preparation for employment in any occupation for which specialized education is required for which there is societal need, and which can most appropriately be required in schools". This definition, explains that vocational education, makes persons more employable in one occupation than another and that it is for gainful employment.

Manfred and Jennifer (2004) advocated that vocational technical education comprises all more or less organized or structured activities that aim at providing people with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to perform a job or a set of jobs whether or not they lead to a formal qualification. These definitions show that the relationship between VTE and employments is undeniable. Iheanacho (2006) defined vocational education as that aspect of education that deals with business education, farming, book keeping, bricklaying, among others with aims of acquiring vocational skills in these fields. Uwaifo (2009) posited that technical education is the training of technically- oriented personnel who are to be initiators , facilitators, and implementers of technological literacy that would lead to self reliance and sustainability . The author stresses that technical education has direct impact on national welfare. Banjoko cited in Dokubo (2013) summed it all stressing that skill is a major distinguishing aspect of vocational.

### **The role of Vocational and Technical Education on economic growth and sustainable development.**

Nuru (2007) stated that changes in a country's economy is required to prepare young people for the jobs of the future and technical and vocational education have important roles to play in this process. Vocational and Technical education has been an integral part of national economy development. According to Van Ark (1992) the Dutch school system is said to pay attention to "high standards in mathematics and the provision of technical education at ages 14-16 for a third of all pupils, and widespread vocational education at 16 +. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not seem to give vocational and technical education the attention they deserve and this appears to be one of the reasons for rising unemployment and poverty in the society. Ajayi, Arogundade and Ekundayo (2007) also suggests that the neglect of vocational and technical education in the area of adequate personnel, financial support and facilities to encourage vocational and technical education are robbing the nation of the contribution their graduates would make in the economy. Furthermore, Asogwa and Diogu (2007) maintained that there is an urgent need for the people's attention to be redirected towards self-reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which vocational and technical education provides. Youth unemployment appears to be rising-up to the sky because many of them lack "employability" skills that are often acquired from vocational and technical schools. As Edukugho (2004) noted, youth unemployment rose to 4.3% in 1985 to 5.3% in 1986, to 7.0% in 1987 and jumped to 60% in 1997. The report shows that in 2003 primary school accounted for 14.7% unemployment, secondary school 53.6%, and tertiary schools constituted 12.4%. The nation's poverty level was put at 70% and more than 91 million Nigerians are said to live on less than one dollar per day. Most analysts agree that today's employers demand more skills than they did in the past (Yang, 2008). Oranu (2010) reported the several factors that have contributed to the rising demand for skills in the labour market to include: technological and organizational

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change, trade, deregulation of key industries, and the decline of unions. Bennell (1996) observes that all countries, especially developing countries, need balanced development through all of the educational sectors in order to make significant progress in terms of national development. Presently Nigeria is offering education in general subjects, but to achieve development, it must offer a variety of courses for disciplines such as technical, vocational, professional, agricultural, and so on, because the country needs a balanced distribution of manpower for all professions (Alam, 2003, 2007), so that the vast population of Nigeria can contribute to economic growth by participating in different professions. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) systems play a crucial role in the social and economic development of a nation. Owing to their dynamic nature, they are continuously subject to the forces driving change in the schools, industry and society. Mechanized farming requires technical skills that could be obtained in technical and vocational schools. The real tests of success of VTE are the employability of the graduates, personal development, opportunities for further education and career development, public acceptance and image. Ultimately, the effectiveness and responsiveness of a VTE system would be measured by its impact on the social and economic development of the nation. Promotion of the Nigerian Economy: It promotes the national economy through foreign exchange by exporting our products. The knowledge of technical and vocational education helps in the conversion of local raw materials, this reduces the importation of foreign goods which lessen our import dependency and encourage exportation of our local products. For instance, Haq and Haq (1998) observed, unemployment rates in the East Asian economies remained low essentially because the population possessed employable vocational and technical skills. However, the relationship between demand for vocational education and economic development may not be linear. When the economies move away from reliance on its agricultural and manufacturing sectors and in favour of service sector, the demand for VTE may indeed decline. A review of the experience of the East Asian countries led Mundle, (1998) just to conclude the same: enrolments in vocational education in the region has been substantial until a threshold level of gross national product (GNP) per capita (say about \$8000) was reached; thereafter the share of vocational education in senior secondary education seemed to have declined.

### **Challenges Facing Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in Nigeria**

There are numerous challenges facing vocational technical education and training which has affected negatively both our national life and development. Among the challenges are:

**i.Poor Public Perception and Apathy to Vocational Education:** Vocational and technical education in Nigeria has a very low image and there is need for a turn around on its perception for public acceptance. Observations have shown that many parents especially the elites, the rich and the political class do not encourage their wards to make VTE a career and those people who opt probably for VTE programme either by accident or chance are not motivated or encouraged because the society does not place any significant value or dignity on the programme.

**ii.Government Lukewarm Attitudes/Poor Funding:** The three tiers of Government in Nigeria have not fully come to appreciate the contributions of vocational and technical education to national economic development even though it is an indispensable tool for tackling unemployment and poverty in the society. This is because successive governments have not found it necessary to adequately finance both the planning and implementation of standard and sustainable vocational and technical education programmes in the country. In support of this

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statement, Okorie (2001) and Okeke and Eze (2010) stated that insufficient finance is a realistic and practical factor inhibiting the implementation of vocational and technical education sector is holistically on science education. Too much noise is made on the pages of papers and television about vocational and technical education, but little is done to improve the teaching/learning of vocational and technical education programmes in Nigeria.

**iii.Shortage of Qualified Vocational Technical Teachers:** Many tertiary institutions across the country are inadequately staffed both qualitatively and quantitatively. In most departments especially in vocational education programmes, the number of qualified VTE teachers for each specialized area is in short supply. It is an indisputable fact that without quality VTE teachers, practical works which is an essential component of VTE programme will be difficult to implement. Oluwale, Jegede and Olamide (2013) stated that attracting qualified staff into teaching and teacher training in technical and vocational education was a problem for most countries including Nigeria.

**iv.Lack of Adequate Equipment and Training Infrastructure:** Most vocational education departments in our higher institutions do not have well equipped laboratories, workshops and usable infrastructures. Where these exist, they are grossly inadequate, obsolete and in a dilapidated state. Oduma (2007) posited that what is seen and referred to as vocational education laboratories in various institutions today are eye-sores as the laboratories only have items or equipment that were provided at the point the departments were established.

**v.Non-Uniformity of Course Contents:** Most of the Nigerian universities and colleges that offer vocational education programme do not have uniform course contents. Non uniformity in the course contents usually creates problems for students who may wish to transfer to another institution to complete their studies. This disparity in course contents of vocational education programme in Nigerian universities and colleges poses a great challenge for the standardization of the VTE program.

### **Possible techniques of solving the identified challenges**

**a. Orientation:** Concerning implementation of VTE curriculum, government should ensure that there is an orientation in form of sensitization to the non-vocational principals so as to change their attitude towards vocational subjects.

**b. Teacher Education Programme:** for quality assurance in teaching of students in vocational and technical subjects, there is the need to have high quality teachers to impart high quality knowledge, skills in competencies that are required in Vocational and Technical Education. Teacher education should aim at producing high quality teachers who are well equipped with variety and effective ways of teaching in and out of school setting. Also, there should be opportunity to train the untrained and re-train the trained. A system of feedback should be devised to monitor deficiencies present in vocational teachers and effort made to remedy, observed lapses through seminars, workshops, in-service training etc.

**c. Provision of Facilities:** To teach Vocational and Technical Education, there must be adequate provision of facilities in terms of space, equipments, to ensure quality of education in VTE. The training environment should be like the work environment. Teaching with real materials and real situation can help to encourage the students to learn and enhance quality.

**b. Adequate Funding of Vocational and Technical Education:** VTE needs to be funded adequately to enable the programme achieve its aim of empowering the learners after graduation. The funding needs of VTE are quite enormous and they need to be addressed promptly, these needs include the purchase of equipment and materials for teaching,

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maintenance of equipment, funding of students work experience scheme, payment of allowances to Vocational and Technical teachers. Also, the government should provide funds for vocational education to have a meaning in the country. Effort should be made by the schools to generate funds through Parents Teacher Association (PTA), host community contribution, etc.

**e. Teachers' Motivation:** Teachers in Vocational and Technical Education should be motivated to enjoy the profession instead of enduring it in their salaries, allowances and their entitlements like promotions, in-service training should be given to them as at when due.

### Conclusion

Improving skill acquisition through vocational and technical education will no doubt solve Nigerian's multiple problems regarding human capital development, empowerment, unemployment and economic instability. The world has recognized that no meaningful social and economic progress could be recorded when majority of the populace is unemployed. This is why nations are striving to overcome the problem of unemployment especially among its youths and Nigeria is not left out. From the foregoing is very lucid that the position of vocational education is a prerequisite in the development of any nation, this can be advised through the acquisition of relevant vocational skills, knowledge and abilities for self employment or paid employment. Since many programmes introduced to tackle the issue of unemployment in Nigeria has failed the nation, it now becomes obvious that the easiest way to achieve the goal is by improving skill acquisition through vocational and technical education for youth empowerment and sustainability. When all these strategies and solutions are adhered to, VTE in Nigeria will definitely take a new outlook in line with the trend in the global world.

### Recommendations

The following were suggestions for improvement on the implementation of vocational and technical education curriculum for sustainable development for National Economy.

- The government should train qualified vocational and technical education teachers and experts to operate the complex machines and equipment during the implementation of technical college programme and use such skills acquired by teachers to educate and empower the youths of Nigeria.
- The industries, non-governmental agencies and private enterprises should provide laboratories, equipment, workshops, facilities and machines in the existing technical colleges as stated in the curriculum for effective implementation of the technical college programme.
- Scholarship and research grants/loans should be given to individuals in the field of vocational and technical education to assist the technical education programme to grow academically and also to meet the target of sustainable youth empowerment and self-reliant individuals.
- Government and other stakeholders should invest heavily in the provision of modern facilities for vocational education.
- Reinvention of vocational education in Nigeria in order to empower youths for self reliance and self- employment
- Government to encourage youths in science and technology based course in schools.

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