



VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A PIVOTAL FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Education is the most powerful instrument man has devised towards shaping his own fortune. Vocational Technical Education (VTE) was viewed as the cornerstone for sustainable technological development of a society. Its relevant components hold the key to transforming Nigeria technologically. This paper focuses on VTE as a key to Nigeria's sustainable

Introduction

Sustainable employment is a situation in which a person is employed in a job that allows him or her to work productively continually while maintaining his/her health and well-being. In some ways, it is similar to decent work because having a job like that sounds amazing. People like to feel productive and effective in their lives and careers. Sustainable employment helps employees and organisations grow. Sustainable employment consists of productivity, health and well-being at work. Hence, sustainable employment is creating and maintaining fulfilling jobs capable of bearing economic and social changes. It is the commitment to long-term job security, fair wages, and healthy working conditions while supporting employees' personal and professional development. Sustainable employment is



employment (SE). It explored SE, employability and education as better measures to rescue poor employment. This paper also considered the concept, philosophical, goals and objectives, barriers, benefits and features that set VTE in Nigeria sustainable development (SD). Employability and Vocational Education (VE), a better option for SE and developments, were also enumerated. Thus, this paper is expected to empower the stakeholders, especially the policy- makers, so VTE will be readily accepted and adopted as an important component of achieving SD goals through the total learning system that provides relevant knowledge, skills and competencies for employability, quality living and learning outcomes. Consequently, VTE can be seen as the master key with the ability to open all the doors of life-long learning, improve vocational expertise and provide the quality of living that is a component of SD. Hence, VTE should be integrated properly into the general education system. The government should provide adequate funds to support VE, ensure that facilities are provided and maintained and develop a culture of entrepreneurial thinking by integrating entrepreneurship into the nation's education system. It then recommends VE and its adoption as a better option for SE in Nigeria.

Keywords: VTE, a pivotal, Sustainable, Employment, Employability

not just economic sustainability; it can also involve social and environmental aspects, positively contributing to the external landscape and stakeholders of the business.

The six core elements of SE can be summarized to include;

- 1) Fair compensation and benefits thus, employers should ensure regular salary reviews to keep up with inflation and industry standards; transparent pay structures and practices to promote fairness and equity; and additional benefits that support employees' physical and mental well-being.
- 2) Healthy and Safe working conditions; this could be achieved by: adhering to occupation health and safety regulations, providing regular health and safety training and promoting a work –life balance to prevent burnout and stress.



- 3) Continuous learning and development; this involves investing in employees' growth through: regular training and professional development opportunities and encouraging a culture of lifelong learning.
- 4) Inclusive and diverse workplace, employers should aim to: implement inclusive hiring practices to attract a diverse talent pool, enforce a culture of respect and inclusion where all employees feel valued and address and prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace.
- 5) Employee engagement and empowerment, can be achieved by encouraging open communication and feedback, involving employees in decision making processes and recognizing and rewarding contributions and achievements.
- 6) Environmental responsibility: Companies committed to sustainable employment should implement eco-friendly practices and reduce their carbon footprint, encourage employees' behaviors, and support initiatives and projects that promote environmental conservation.

Sustainable employment is crucial for the following reasons; It enhances job satisfaction and employee well-being, reducing turnover rates and associated recruitment costs. It also builds organizational resilience, enabling businesses to navigate economic downturns and market changes more effectively. Thirdly, it promotes a positive company reputation, attracting top talent and fostering customer loyalty. Sustainable employment also contributes to broader societal goals, such as reducing inequality and supporting sustainable economic growth. Vocational education is the type of education that prepares recipients to solve problems by the use of brain and manipulative skills. In Nigeria today, general education attracts the youth more than vocational education and the resultant effect is unemployment. In essence, it is paramount to inform the youths and people of the facts and potentials of vocational education for a better knowledge, understanding and comprehension for them to make a career out of it to be able to contribute their quota to the development of the nation aside from self-reliance or employers of labour. According to Osuola (1998), Vocational education is seen as education that prepares individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled or skilled workers, technicians and sub-professionals in recognised occupations and in new and emerging occupations or to prepare individuals for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes.



Vocational Technical Education (VTE) facilitates sustainable society by transmitting to local citizens certain values, knowledge and attitudes that are necessary to perform certain skills in the modern sector of the economy. For these reasons, VTE with its relevant practical training components, has been adjudged as one of the keys to achieving a sustainable society. The general consensus is that Vocational and Technical Education has the potential to stimulate and sustain socio-economic development by enhancing employment, improving quality of life, reducing poverty, limiting the incidence of social vices due to jobless and promoting a culture of peace, freedom and democracy (National Policy on Education, 2013). Hence, vocational and technical education has the potential to stimulate and sustain socio-economic development by enhancing employment, improving quality of life, reducing poverty, limiting the incidence of social vices due to jobless and promoting a culture of peace, freedom and democracy (National Policy on Education, 2013).

Nigeria has not fully realized VTE potential and has been considered as a “second best option” to academic education. However, the present reality necessitates the need to rethink Vocational Technical Education (VTE) as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. Based on this premise, this paper reviewed the concept of VTE and examined the philosophy of VTE in relation to personnel training and development for sustainable development. Similarly, Vocational/Technical Education has always enjoyed low status in Nigeria, and this explains why many youths prefer conventional universities. The emerging social and economic changes in the world appear to have forced many employers to seek employees who possess some technical skills to remain competitive. Despite the increasing demand for advanced technical manpower, policymakers are slow in developing appropriate strategies to promote this sector. Karen van Dam (2018); has argued that any nation that wishes to remain politically relevant must strive to raise the people’ standard of living through scientific and technological knowledge. He further suggested that organizations can foster employees’ sustainable employment through job design and climate interventions.

Employability and Sustainable Employment

Employability refers to an individual’s ability to adequately fulfil work in current and future jobs, inside and outside the current organization (Fugate et al. , 2004; Berntson et al., 2006). Although the opportunity to retain or find work might also



depend on labour market characteristics, it is generally noted that individuals' characteristics, such as their abilities, skills and knowledge, contribute to employability and labour market participation (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). To remain employable and avoid skills obsolescence, it is important for employees to continuously develop and update their skills and expertise (Van Loo, de Grip, and de Steur, 2001). Employability directly affects individuals' attractiveness for the internal and external labour market (Fugate *et al.*, 2004), therefore crucial for employees' sustainable employment (SER, 2009).

Sustainable employment was indicated by three scales: employability, work engagement and affective commitment. Employability was measured by Bertson *et al.*, (2006) using a seven item scale ($\alpha = .92$) indicating one's employability inside and outside the organization (e.g. 'My skills are highly sought after at labour market' and 'I could get another, similar job without many problems'). Affective commitment was measured with five items of the Dutch translation (De Gilder, Van den Heuval, and Ellemers, 1997) of Allen and Meyer's (2001) affective commitment scale ($\alpha = .81$) (e.g. 'I feel emotionally attached to this organization').

Problem Statement

Nigeria got her independence in 1960, alongside other countries like India, Malaysia, Singapore, Ghana, Cameroon and Pakistan to mention but a few, who formed the third world countries; but today there is a wide gap in term of development between these countries and Nigeria. Most of the products that are consumed these days in Nigeria were imported from overseas; especially from countries which got independence alongside or even ahead of. This has a result of inadequate skilled personnel's and poor maintenance culture (Abdulkarim and Ali, 2012).

In the same vein, the population of Nigeria is increasing with the attendant increase in unemployment rate in the country. There are insinuations that there is increasing number of youths and graduates which are unemployable. This could be attributed to lack of requisite skills (Chinedu and Olabiyi, 2015) needed in industries or work environment among other factors. There are several employability factors including communication skills, ICT skills, and technical skills, among other factors employers of labour look out for during the search for workers (Ismail and Mohammed, 2015). There is great importance of employability skill and competence among the work force in which the following researchers:



Candy and Crebert, (1991); Billing, (2003); Crebert *et al.*, (2004); Hewitt, 2005; and Dunne and Rowlinson, (2000) corroborated on getting a job and staying on the job (Ismail and Mohammed, 2015).

The desired structure of the National Output Plan developed by 2020 envisioned that by 2020, Nigeria's population would reach about 200 million. To achieve the goal of being in the top 20 economies in the world by 2020, the nation's economy and GDP had to grow at an annual rate of about 13% (doubling the growth rate in 2009 of 6.5%). The economy had to be transformed from basically a primary one to tertiary services and production as revealed by the plan structure. The output plan showed that the importance of agriculture was to decline from the existing over 40% to less than 15% while industrialization, manufacturing, and services were to increase substantially. The economy was to transform into a 'knowledge-driven' one. Education and human resources development were pivotal in achieving all these. Goldman Sachs, the company that advised Obasanjo on the Vision, pointed out that conditions for ensuing solid growth performance must include getting the right institutions and policies (Okebukola, 2013). Many authors have anchored the importance of education in unlocking natural resources as an antidote for poverty eradication and the key to economic development. They readily point to the Asian Tigers and what has been termed in certain quarters as the Asian Miracle. (Okebukola, 2013; Okuma *et al.*, 2013 and Sanni, 2009).

Measures to rescue poor employability in Nigeria; Vocational education the better Strategy for sustainable employment

The main purpose of education is to provide the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that will enable people to develop their full potential and become successful members of the society. The School does not just involve letters and numbers but also teachers and the entire education system where students are taught critical thinking, honesty, and humanitarianism. These are invaluable lessons that stay with a person throughout their lifetime. Moreover, the role of education includes preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century, learning strategies and techniques, and adequate preparation for future jobs. Thanks to a good education, students will be prepared for all the challenges that await them in their professional and private lives. The mass movement of Nigerian youth to overseas destinations has become a significant concern for the nation.



This portends adverse implications for the nation as explained above, demands urgent attention.

The first implementation Plan (2009 to 2012), emphasizes the importance attached to education in the plan by ensuring that the nation's human resource endowment is knowledgeable, skilled, productive and healthy to enable the optimal exploitation and utilization of other resources to engender growth and development. It is people that drive the economy; improving their productivity, protecting the vulnerable in the society and enhancing their wellbeing and quality of life are the essence of development planning. While the nation aspires to grow the economy at a high rate, there is a need to ensure that the growth is inclusive for societal harmony and sustainable development.

Education was to be the catalyst for realizing Visions 20:2020, meeting the MDGs and providing access and opportunities to all in a knowledge- driven society that ensures equity and justice to all, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or gender. The goal of education is to establish a modern and vibrant education system that ensures the maximum development of the potential of individuals and promotes a knowledge-driven society that propels the nation's development (Vision 20:2020, (First Implementation Plan 2009 to 2012). However, to address this issue, one potential solution is to prioritise vocational education as a means to provide opportunities for the Nigerian youth in the country. The enhancement of Vocational Education to achieve a sustainable employment, prioritizing vocational education is crucial. (Adekunle, (2021) asserts that vocational education equips the youth with practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable in the job market. By strengthening vocational education programs and providing opportunities for hands-on training, Nigeria can address the unemployment issue and offer viable career paths within the country.

Vocational education prepares people for skilled crafts as artisans, trade as trade persons, or work as technicians. Vocational education refers to a form of education that focuses on providing individuals with specific skills, competencies, and knowledge related to a particular trade or occupation (Jenkins, 2021). It emphasizes practical training, hands-on experience, and the acquisition of job-specific abilities required for successful employment.

Concept of Vocational Education

- i. Vocational education is designed to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled workers, technicians, or sub- professionals in



recognized occupations or for enrolment in advanced technical education programmes.

- ii. It is designed to prepare skilled workers for industries, agriculture, commerce, etc. which is usually provided at the upper secondary levels.

The Philosophical Concept of Vocational

- i. The occupational choice of an individual should be based on individual's orientation (interest, ability and aptitude). Each individual should have opportunities for employment in the occupation, and resources for education must be provided to develop all the human resources needed for national economic development. Nigeria as a developing nation, requires young men and women to be sole proprietors in small and medium- scale industries that are emerging everywhere in the country.
- ii. Vocational education has the inherent ability to equip individuals with the required skills.
- iii. Well-acquired skills and competencies can help individuals function productively in industries and commercial occupations and become self-reliant and self-employed.

Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of vocational education is to prepare individuals for the workforce by equipping them with practical skills that align with industry demands (Brown et al., 2019). It aims to bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring that graduates have the necessary competencies to meet the job market's needs.

Vocational education is basically life and need- based education, which can convert an unskilled, inexperienced, and illiterate population into human resources.

In this circumstance, as the alternative to formal education (FE), it is very much necessary to evaluate vocational education so that we can determine the extent of its success and weakness at any stage of poverty reduction, as it is considered the best way to bring about longer lasting socio-economic change and self-development.

Vocational Training versus Academic Training

General education systems had not been effective in developing the skills that many [adolescents](#) and adults needed to secure employment in industry. The late



1980s and early 1990s saw the introduction and expansion of new vocational [curricula](#) and courses, often developed in collaboration with the industry, and increased the variety of work-based learning routes offered to young people (UNESCO, 2018).

College education often provides theoretical or broad knowledge that could be applied to various professions within a certain field. Vocational training teaches students the precise skills and knowledge needed to carry out specific crafts, technical skills or trades, such as plumbing or cooking.

Also, college education often includes courses on various subjects that may not directly relate to a student's major and that a graduate may not use in their career. Vocational school, on the other hand, skips this type of broad academic study and instead provides direct knowledge and instruction for a specific field or position. ***Vocational education is a different learning option from the path of the college or the universities. It offers a path that imparts the skills and knowledge needed to work in a given occupation. It is coordinated with the requirements of the labour market and is an integral part of the education system.***

Features that Set Vocational Training Apart (Key components):

It makes a student job-ready: Vocational training provides skill based learning and focus on how to teach practical skills. This means that upon completion of the programme, a student has gained the knowledge and hands on skills needed to perform specific occupation tasks. This is the importance of practical knowledge as compared to the theoretical.

It is based on competency: Instead of receiving a passing or failing grade as is done in the college, student performance is based on competence that is defined by meeting certain criteria.

The training provided focuses on preparing a student to meet these criteria. By the end of the vocational program, a student must demonstrate satisfactory performance on each of these criteria to be considered competent in their chosen profession. For example, a culinary arts student would need to show competence in certain cooking methods and skills to show they could work in this field upon completion of the program.

Barriers to Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria

There are many barriers to the development of VTE in Nigeria and these are summarized below:



- Most elite parents think that their children should not become a laborer. Even when their children are less academically able, parents try to push their children into higher education.
- The quality of VTE is poor and cannot provide sufficient significant knowledge for jobs. Most VTE schools are also located far from rural areas meaning village students cannot have access to them easily (World Bank, 1991). Gallart (1988) claims students of VTE suffer anxiety about the purpose of VTE, being only preparing labourers to get more profit from them, saying it is a moral obligation to eradicate such anxiousness and help them understand that VTE has two roles in preparing VTE students for the world of work, and opening the door skilled manpower to pursue higher education with a solid foundation. Unfortunately, higher education is very limited for VTE school graduates in Nigeria.

Under these circumstances, if VTE graduates join their jobs after completing secondary and higher education, they cannot return to further education (Rafique, 1996). Higher educated people in general discipline areas can work anywhere, but higher –educated people from VTE-related placements, which is low in terms of social prestige. Therefore, the top authorities enjoy the respect and favour of general graduates rather than VTE graduates.

In these circumstance VTE graduates are neglected, so bright students do not have much interest in studying VTE (Rafique, 1996). Providing good TVE requires more money for practical workshop facilities and also demands Industrial attachments for internships (World Bank, 1990). Lauglo and Lillis (1988) say that vocational and practical subjects 'pedagogic systems have unusually multifarious expensive requirements (such as equipment"s, materials, resources, curriculum, support system, personnel, managements requirements, etc.), which are not easily met. As a developing country, achieving a high budget for education is a real challenge for Nigerian It is also added that budget for TVE is very low in comparison with other sectors of education (Banbeis, 2007).

Benefits of Vocational Education

- i. Vocational Education helps people perform better in their jobs as they acquire a great learning experience. Working professionals get a chance to own their skills while making money.



- ii. VE is a sort of introduction that gets employees ready for the workplace and comes in handy while performing various tasks.
- iii. Due to the nature of the skills it imparts, a student doesn't consider it a futility as compared to academic education.
- iv. Vocational education as the term itself denotes that the students are specialized and therefore they have more opportunities of employment as compared to others.
- v. Many students who are in a dilemma whether they should attend college or not, VE really opens a completely new door.
- vi. It makes an individual responsible and independent whereas those who study regular courses lack in this sphere.
- vii. The career of one's choice is one of the major benefits of this education, a vast majority of people are caught in the wrong because they were in it for the sake of job, money, lack alternative and professional compromise whereas an individual pursuing VE is already pursuing his dream job.
- viii. This type of education is a great asset to the economy. Our government need not import foreign technicians on higher wages as our own can do the required work.
- ix. Certain vocational skills acquired from vocational education teach students the importance of manual work. The physical labour carried out under certain jobs makes them strong, healthy and active.
- x. Majority of vocational skills is applicable all over the world and these create employment opportunities in foreign countries.
- xi. Vocational education as develops the economy by the bridging the demand and supply gap with highly skilled workers. It also gives students the opportunity to take marketable skills from the classroom directly into the working world.
- xii. Better vocational education also attracts foreign investments and foreign exchange in form of a foreign working platform.
- xiii. School dropouts and adults can also receive this type of education as it provides an opportunity to learn a skill and trade. There are many well-paid career fields in which a college degree is not required.
- xiv. Another benefit is that hands-on work activities allow direct application of the acquired knowledge.
- xv. This education provides stable jobs as these are the jobs whose demand is never fulfilled.



Employability and Vocational Education, a Better Option to Sustainable Employment

Skills for Employment, employment opportunities, and staying on the job demand worthwhile skills that are needed to achieve that satisfaction. Olaitan and Ike, (2015) described employability skills when quoting Robinson (2000) as the basic skills or general work skills of importance for being employed, keeping and staying well on the job. The skills include computer literacy, individual competence, communication skills among others. Oresanya et al (2014) enumerated the following employability skills in their work: communication skills, analytical/reasoning skills, computer/technical literacy, interpersonal among others. Whereas technical skills are job specific related skills needed to do a specified job expressed by Robinson (2000). Technical skills involve specialized knowledge, analyzing ability within a specialty and faculty in the use of tools and techniques of the specified discipline. Technical skills are important for reasons such as efficiency, boost confidence, competence to perform their daily assignment to the best of their abilities. The importance of technical

A key driver toward a sustainable economy is a competent workforce. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2021) defines a competent worker as one who is appropriately qualified, adequately trained and has sufficient experience to execute work safely without or with minimal supervision. To be competent, a person must undergo an assessment from his or her employer to determine whether the required work -related skills, also known as employability skills, were performed. Employability skills help employees secure and keep jobs, according to the ILO (2013). Most employable individuals have comprehensive communication, teamwork, IT, and problem-solving education. These skills enable workplace adaptability. Mello et al. (2017) also defined employability skills as non-technical abilities that include productivity, comprehension, and personal traits that help people get jobs and succeed in their careers. Legg and Jack. (2014), on employability skills of Technical graduates, showed that skills mismatches are manifestations of misalignment between policy and programmes that influence the stakeholders concerned. In today's highly competitive labour market, technical skills alone are not sufficient to guarantee employment. Employers now seek graduates with employability skills, also known as soft skills, including interpersonal skills, teamwork, problem-solving, flexibility and leadership.

Technical- Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates who are primarily trained for positions in technical fields must possess employability skills to increase their employability and career advancement opportunities. Studies have revealed that many TVET graduates lack the employability skills required by employers, resulting in high unemployment and under-employment rates among them. Ismael and Mohammed (2015) revealed in their analysis of the TVET curriculum the lack of integration of problem-solving skills, lifelong learning skills,



and competencies in specific TVET disciplines such as electrical, where the curriculum has given attention more to theoretical courses than practical. The absence of problem-solving and lifelong learning skills could limit their ability to adapt to changes in the labour market and acquire the necessary skills.

Conclusion

It has been proved that the economic implications of VE are many, especially for a country like Nigeria, which has a vast population of adult illiterates or youth. So, the time has come for us to explore VE as a measure towards poverty reduction. We must also identify measures to make VE more effective in poverty reduction. Thus, addressing VE is a key pivotal for SE in Nigeria. Prioritizing VE, improving job opportunities, and promoting entrepreneurship are the key components of a multifaceted approach. By investing in vocational education and creating an enabling environment for the citizens, Nigeria can provide viable alternatives, such as employability and vocational education, a better option for sustainable employment and building a brighter future for the nation. Finally, a proposed enhancement programme for the employability skills of TVET graduates is multifaceted based on the key findings of this study to ensure that all graduates are equipped with the necessary skills to acquire and maintain employment. The Federal Government needs to develop targeted policies and initiatives to attract and improve the employability of workers by increasing funding for education and ensuring its access. All these can be addressed in political process, including funding curriculum, teacher training, school development plans and access to vocational education. Vocational education can be a powerful tool for enhancing education, especially for the disadvantaged youths or less privilege that may not have access to the same resources as their peers. With the focus on sustainable employment this study builds on the sustainability paradigm that seeks to design economic and social activities that promote sustainable development in social, economic and ecological resources. Hence, vocational education can be seen has a key pivotal for sustainable employment in Nigeria.

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