

## VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A CATALYST FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN A DISTRESSED ECONOMY

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines vocational and technical education: a catalyst for socio-economic development in a distressed economy. The paper discusses the various ways that vocational and technical education can serve as catalyst for socio-economic development in a distressed economy. It draws attention to the purposeful efforts made to ensure that the country's potential is realized as well as the significance of vocational and technical education in the process of national development. Even for those who dropped out of high school or post-secondary education, there were always employment available with perks throughout the early 1950s and 1970s. The remarkable shift in the job market demands that vocational education programs be prioritized and expanded in order to address the issue of unemployment, which has grown to be a significant social crisis in Nigeria. According to the study, Nigeria must increase its investments in vocational and technical education if it hopes to fulfill its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and become a part of the technology-driven global community. Ultimately, the government and the private sector should collaborate, according to this report, in order to sustain and grow vocational education and training in Nigeria. The programme's vision and mission should be clearly stated by VTE stakeholders, and they should be completely carried out. In order to maintain the commitment of employers and the business sector to VTE, legislators had to propose legislation pertaining to fresh reform measures.*

**Keywords:** *vocational education; technical education; socio-economic development; distressed economy.*

## **Introduction**

Economic depression or distress economy has existed since the third century, which is as old as human history. A "depression" in the economy is merely a difficult or unpleasant period when there are declines in consumer spending and revenue production across the board. Several things, including a sharp reduction in spending following a financial crisis, a shock to the external trade system, an unfavorable shock to the supply chain, and a decline in investment, consumption, government expenditure, and net export activity, can cause an economic crisis. During this time, planned expenditures across the board must be curtailed. This is partially due to the risk to the sources of revenue creation. Like other countries, Nigeria has experienced economic depressions from time to time (Emmanuel, 2017).

The most well-known downturn in modern history started as a regular financial panic in 1929 and continued until World War II. Following the 1929 crash, policymakers and economists decided such a catastrophe could never occur again. The simplest method to succeed was identifying and characterizing "depression" as nonexistent.

The term "distress economy" refers to an economic situation characterized by significant hardship, financial instability, and overall distress within a given population or economy. Various factors, such as economic downturns, political instability, natural disasters, or social unrest, can cause this distress. In a distressed economy, individuals and businesses may need help to meet their basic needs due to high unemployment rates, reduced income opportunities, and limited access to essential resources. This can lead to widespread poverty, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare services, and housing challenges. Moreover, the psychological impact of living in a distressed economy can also be profound as individuals face heightened stress and anxiety about their future well-being (Tsai, 2014).

From a broader perspective, a distressed economy can have far-reaching consequences on a region or country's overall economic stability. It may decrease consumer spending power, weakening demand for goods and services. Businesses may struggle with declining revenues, which can lead to closures or layoffs, further exacerbating individuals' economic hardships.

Government intervention is often necessary to address a distressing economy through policies that stimulate growth, create employment

opportunities, provide social safety nets, and offer support for struggling businesses (Hackett, 2014).

Nigeria is Africa's largest economy, yet it has one of the highest unemployment rates, particularly among youth. The World Bank reported and projected that by 2024, Nigeria's unemployment rate will be approximately 38.8%, with youth unemployment reaching alarming levels. The heavy dependence on oil revenues, coupled with fluctuating global oil prices and mismanagement, has exposed the vulnerabilities of the economy. In light of these challenges, diversifying the economy and enhancing the skill set of the workforce through Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) emerges as a viable solution.

In the face of economic distress, vocational and technical education emerges as a crucial tool for driving socio-economic development. This form of education equips individuals with practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to the workforce, thus addressing the pressing need for a skilled labor force in a distressed economy.

Vocational and technical education has a long history of being offered. Since 1900, the number of vocational schools in the United States, both public and private, has significantly expanded. During World War II (1939–1945), there was a surge in vocational education as the military forces needed technicians badly, and the civilian sector was unable to meet their demands. These initiatives support the development of the labor force in the country and guarantee that youth with physical and/or economic disabilities have access to vocational training. Vocational and technical education produces abilities that are valued by societies beyond the United States. High standards in mathematics and vocational education are prioritized in the Dutch educational system, and many other development-conscious countries also have vocational institutions that offer lifetime skill training in addition to general academic courses. For example, without significant investments in technical education, India and the "Asian Tigers" would not have become what they are today. However, many technical and vocational institutions have moved their focus to computer and information technology training due to recent developments in the global economy (Olaitan, 2015).

Nigeria has overlooked this facet of education, despite the fact that technical and vocational education has flourished in many societies. As a result, there is a shortage of qualified technicians in society, including competent vocational nurses, laboratory and pharmacy technicians, carpenters, painters, and auto mechanics. Hospitals are now places where people go to die rather than to get their illnesses addressed. There are many stories about people dying from mild

illnesses or during procedures. When hired to service automobiles, the society's half-baked roadside mechanics do more damage to the cars than they do to them, and some commercial drivers have killed a great deal of people prematurely due to inadequate training. It is no longer news that Nigerian house builders, bricklayers, etc., perform poorly. In view of this, people working on significant projects increasingly hire qualified technicians from nearby nations. Not to mention the chaos that technicians with inadequate training have created in the power industry. Nigeria's most significant impediment to national development is the sporadic provision of energy. The over 200 million people in the country could not be fed by working all day in the fields with knives, hoes, and shovels. Technical knowledge that can be acquired at technical and vocational schools is necessary for mechanized farming.

The nation is losing out on the contributions that technical education graduates would make to national progress, which has negative social and economic effects. The current focus on university education in Nigeria limits the economic options for individuals who choose their career over their studies. A university degree is not necessary for everyone. Due to the poor quality of the country's postsecondary education, a large number of graduates lack "employability" skills that could be easily obtained from technical and vocational colleges. However, because everyone has a university degree, who would hire them? The fact that the country's youth unemployment rate has been skyrocketing is no longer news. It was recently admitted by the federal government that over 80% of Nigeria's youth do not have a job, and 10% are underemployed (Ikpe, 2000). Nigeria's educational system is badly designed. One barrier to the development of a country is the disregard for technical education. The severe lack of qualified teachers at all vocational technical education levels is one of the issues impeding the expansion of vocational-technical education in Nigeria, among other issues. Programs for vocational education are not adequately funded at all levels. lack of equipment and facilities for contemporary training. problematic colonial mindset that Nigerian school officials inherited on vocational-technical education. Not enough postgraduate training programs to prepare lecturers and teachers. The public has a negative attitude toward technical education, believing that vocational-technical schools are just for dropouts and kids from low-income families. Vocational education programs are administered by non-professional vocational technical educators who are appointed to teaching and administrative roles (Ikpe, 2000).

Technical degrees are seen as less respectable than normal degrees in Nigeria. However, they are highly valued in developed countries.

Years of field expertise are combined with academic degrees to form a workforce. In fact, a worker's value is determined by their knowledge and abilities rather than by how many degrees they have earned from universities. Theory by itself cannot accomplish anything worthwhile, thus Nigerian education must learn to integrate theory and practice.

### **The Concepts of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE)**

Vocational and technical education, according to Olaitan (2010), is a kind of education provided to a person in order to help them develop their creative potential and manipulate it for the benefit of others. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) has prioritized vocational and technical education due to its significant contribution to Nigeria's industrial and technological advancements. It has been acknowledged as a component of education that contributes to the learning of fundamental scientific information as well as practical and applied skills. Vocational education was previously defined by Osuala (1987) in Olaitan (2015) as technical and vocational training that is provided inside or outside of schools. It is a methodical educational process intended to prepare people for profitable employment in recognized fields or for financial emancipation. UNESCO (2005) defined vocational and technical education as; “a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors in economic and social life”. Akinseinde (2009) believed that vocational and technical education focus on occupational preparation. He also stated that VTE may not necessarily create job but the principal purpose is to equip individuals with skills and knowledge that will allow them to be economically productive. Vocational and technical education is the instrument for having skilled men and women who are relevant to the demands of labor market. Ogundu and Omofonmwan (2011) observed that vocational education is an integral part of national development strategy which help to develop the growth of productivity, economic and human resources. Quality vocational and technical education and training will help to develop the individual's knowledge of science and technology in a broad occupational area. Nonetheless, many countries have seen a continuous success of technical and vocational education. Regretfully, technical and vocational education is not given enough attention in Nigeria. Vocational and technical education can give students the abilities to start successful businesses and generate original, creative ideas that would boost personal freedom and the size of the country's economy. Neglecting vocational and technical

education can have negative societal effects since it deprives the country of the potential contributions made by its graduates towards national progress. Essentially, for Nigerian society to function properly, it needs skilled truck drivers, auto mechanics, carpenters, plumbers, electricians (for the upkeep of our power plants), web/network and computer database technicians, medical technicians, and vocational nurses.

### **Aims and Objectives of Vocational and Technical Education**

The Federal Government of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education (2013) stated the aims and objectives of vocational and technical education as follows;

1. To provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
3. To give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

### **Issues of Unemployment and Underemployment**

One of the primary challenges in a distressed economy is high unemployment and underemployment rates. Vocational and technical education offers a viable solution by providing individuals with specialized skills that are in demand across various industries. By nurturing a skilled workforce, this form of education directly contributes to reducing unemployment and underemployment, subsequently bolstering economic productivity and stability.

Moreover, vocational and technical education facilitates the integration of marginalized groups, such as youth and individuals from low-income backgrounds, into the workforce. By offering practical training and industry-relevant skills, it creates pathways for individuals to secure gainful employment, thereby fostering inclusive economic growth.

In addition to addressing unemployment, vocational and technical education plays a pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurship and innovation. In a distressed economy, the cultivation of entrepreneurial endeavors is essential for revitalizing economic activity and driving sustainable growth. Through specialized training in areas such as technology, engineering, and trade skills, individuals are empowered to establish their own businesses and contribute to the diversification of the economy.

Furthermore, vocational and technical education nurtures a culture of innovation by encouraging students to develop creative solutions to

real-world challenges. This not only leads to the creation of new businesses and industries but also enhances the overall competitiveness of the economy on a global scale.

The integration of vocational and technical education into the fabric of a distressed economy enhances its resilience in the face of adversity. By aligning educational offerings with the evolving needs of industries, this form of education ensures that the workforce remains adaptable and responsive to changing market demands. Consequently, the economy becomes better equipped to withstand external shocks and transitions towards recovery and growth more effectively.

### **The Role of Vocational and Technical Education in Economic Development**

Vocational and technical education plays a crucial role in driving economic development by equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge required to contribute to a dynamic and competitive workforce. This form of education focuses on practical applications of skills and knowledge, preparing individuals for specific trades and careers. Ibikunle, Orunbon and Akinyemi (2018) advanced the multifaceted impact of vocational and technical education on economic development, considering its influence on employment, innovation, and overall prosperity.

**Skill Development and Employability:** Vocational and technical education provides individuals with the opportunity to acquire specialized skills that are directly applicable to various industries and sectors. By offering practical training in fields such as healthcare, construction, information technology, and manufacturing, vocational education enhances the employability of individuals, addressing the skills gap prevalent in many economies. As a result, individuals who have undergone vocational training are better positioned to secure gainful employment, thereby reducing unemployment rates and contributing to a more productive workforce.

**Meeting Industry Demands:** In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements and evolving industry requirements, vocational and technical education ensures that the workforce remains relevant and adaptable. By aligning curricula with the needs of industries, vocational institutions can produce graduates who possess the latest skills and knowledge, subsequently bolstering the competitiveness of businesses and driving economic growth. Moreover, these institutions often collaborate with industry partners to develop programs that directly address the demands of the labor market, thereby fostering a symbiotic relationship between education and industry.

**Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Vocational and technical education nurtures a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation by empowering individuals to pursue their own ventures and contribute to economic diversification. By fostering creativity, problem-solving abilities, and practical skills, vocational education instills an entrepreneurial mindset in individuals, enabling them to establish small businesses, startups, and innovative enterprises. As these ventures grow and thrive, they contribute to job creation, economic resilience, and the cultivation of a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

**Global Competitiveness:** Countries that prioritize vocational and technical education are better positioned to enhance their global competitiveness. By investing in the development of a skilled workforce, nations can attract foreign direct investment, stimulate technological advancements, and bolster their comparative advantage in various industries. Furthermore, a well-trained workforce contributes to the overall productivity and efficiency of the economy, positioning the country as a favorable destination for business and trade.

### **The Impact of Vocational and Technical Education on Economic Recovery: Case Studies**

Vocational and technical education plays a crucial role in economic recovery by equipping individuals with the skills and expertise needed to drive growth and innovation in various industries. Several countries and regions have demonstrated the significant impact of vocational and technical education on their economic recovery through successful case studies. By analyzing these cases, we can gain valuable insights into the ways in which such educational programs contribute to economic revitalization.

**Germany: The Dual Education System:** Germany is renowned for its dual education system, which combines classroom learning with on-the-job training, particularly in the manufacturing and engineering sectors. This approach has been instrumental in addressing the country's skills gap and nurturing a highly skilled workforce. As a result, Germany has maintained its status as a global leader in manufacturing and technology, contributing significantly to its economic recovery and sustained growth.

**Singapore: Skills Future Initiative:** Singapore's Skills Future initiative focuses on empowering individuals to develop skills relevant to the evolving job market, thereby enhancing the nation's economic development. By encouraging lifelong learning and skills mastery, the program has enabled Singapore to adapt to technological advancements and industry demands, ultimately boosting its economic competitiveness on the global stage.

**United States: Community College Workforce Training Programs:**

In the United States, community colleges have played a pivotal role in economic recovery through their workforce training programs. These initiatives offer vocational and technical education tailored to the needs of local industries, providing individuals with the expertise required for high-demand occupations. By aligning educational offerings with labor market demands, these programs have contributed to the revitalization of regional economies across the country.

**United Arab Emirates: Emirati Vocational Qualifications**

**Framework:** The United Arab Emirates has made significant strides in economic diversification and development through its Emirati Vocational Qualifications Framework. By emphasizing vocational and technical education, the framework has facilitated the transition towards a knowledge-based economy, reducing reliance on oil revenues and fostering sustainable growth in non-oil sectors such as tourism, healthcare, and renewable energy.

These case studies underscore the crucial role of vocational and technical education in driving economic recovery and prosperity. By equipping individuals with practical skills and industry-relevant knowledge, such educational programs not only address unemployment and underemployment but also fuel innovation, entrepreneurship, and overall economic development. Furthermore, they promote social mobility and inclusivity by providing diverse pathways to sustainable employment and career advancement.

Vocational preparation is becoming more and more important as technological advancements bring people closer together. According to Jean (2003), there is substantial evidence that people with higher qualifications and skill levels are less likely to be unemployed, and macroeconomic viewpoints demonstrate that these workers also tend to perform better overall and have a positive effect on social capital. According to Lyons, Randhawa, and Paulson (1999) in Olaitan (2015), "muddling things in education industry" will no longer be effective in the age of global cartels. VTE was historically viewed by Nigerians prior to the current administration as an educational curriculum intended for low-level, low-brilliant, less privileged, or second-class persons (Eze & Okorafor, 2012). Daniel (2001) asserted that the focus of the main educational changes has been on vocationalization. This explains why several nations have developed unique frameworks for repositioning their VTE initiatives. Michael (2002) described some of the initiatives taken by member states of the European Union to restructure and reposition VTE in their respective nations. Michael (2002) stated that the law on social modernization, which includes significant provisions pertaining to vocational education and the right

to employment, was approved by the French National Assembly. The "craft high school" initiative was formally introduced by the French Minister of Vocational Education. Its goal is to strengthen the connections between various vocationally focused education courses, especially the technological and vocational ones.

The following are ways that vocational and technical education can serve as catalyst for socio-economic development in a distressed economy.

- i. Vocational and technical education contributes to the reduction of individuals pursuing white collar jobs and helps address the issues of unemployment. By acquiring work skills in a variety of vocations, including electrical, plumbing, automotive, vulcanizing, computer engineering, agriculture, and cloth weaving, among others, training youths and adults in vocational and technical trades empowers them to be self-reliant and self-employable and ensures adequate money circulation in the economy.
- ii. It produces skilled and trustworthy workers who can make use of the wealth of natural and human resources a nation has to offer for economic and industrial growth and development, vocational and technical education serves as a driving force behind people's desire to work for their country.
- iii. VTE contributes to the quickening of economic growth. The growth of the person or individual came before the development of the society or country. In order to meet people's everyday requirements in all spheres of life endeavors, there must fundamentally be constant economic growth. The nation's 2030 vision—which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—cannot be achieved unless vocational and technical education, among other things, is used to empower young people throughout the country.
- iv. Trained indigenous craftsmen, technologists, and fabricators must use vocational and technical education to create and construct the necessary machinery and equipment to address the growing socio-economic and developmental issues facing Nigeria. It is past time for Nigeria, the giant of Africa, to stop importing hardware and start producing or manufacturing it instead.
- v. Since there is a close connection between agricultural and vocational and technical education, agriculture itself is a vocation. Nigerian youth who receive sufficient farming

- training will be equipped to become "intelligent users of our natural resources" (Morebise, 2022).
- vi. Vocational and technical education is also necessary to stop the Nigeria's historic youth emigration, which would cause a brain drain and waste of human resources, to other continents, particularly Canada, America, and Europe.
  - vii. Rather than hiring foreigners to undertake tasks that locals could and should perform, employment and job opportunities should be developed where Nigerian youngsters with technical and vocational training might make use of their skills.
  - viii. Nigeria as a nation is capable of ranking high in manpower development leading to sustainability of economic production within her borders through efficient vocational and technical education and training.
  - ix. The industrial and agro-processing industries in agriculture and other informal sectors could experience a much-needed boom thanks to investments in VET.
  - x. To add value to primary products and natural resources in the agriculture sector, VTE has the capacity to train and absorb a sizable workforce, sparking an industrial revolution in Nigeria.
  - xi. Skilled labor from VTE might also be used to make farm equipment and machines, to improving agriculture.

## Conclusion

Vocational and technical education plays a vital role in driving socio-economic development, especially in a struggling economy. By providing practical skills and training, it equips individuals to meet the demands of the workforce and contribute to the growth of industries. This type of education also addresses unemployment by creating a workforce with relevant skills. Additionally, it fosters entrepreneurship and innovation, leading to economic empowerment and overall development. In distressed economies, investing in vocational and technical education can bring about positive change and pave the way for sustainable progress.

Vocational and technical education serves as a cornerstone of economic development by equipping individuals with practical skills, meeting industry demands, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing global competitiveness. As economies continue to evolve in response to technological and market changes, the significance of vocational education in shaping a skilled and adaptable workforce cannot be overstated. By recognizing the pivotal role of vocational and technical

education, societies can foster sustainable economic development and prosperity for generations to come.

Vocational and technical education serves as a linchpin for driving socio-economic development in a distressed economy. Its capacity to address unemployment, foster entrepreneurship, and enhance economic resilience makes it an indispensable component of any comprehensive strategy for economic revitalization. As such, policymakers and stakeholders must recognize the pivotal role of vocational and technical education in navigating economic challenges and prioritize its integration into broader economic development agenda. By doing so, they can lay the groundwork for a more inclusive, innovative, and resilient economy that thrives even in the face of adversity.

### **Recommendations**

For vocational and technical education to serve as catalyst for socio-economic development in a distressed economy like what is obtainable in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. To sustain and grow vocational and technical education and training in Nigeria, the government should cooperate with the private sector. The government should, in particular, promote private sector investments in technical and vocational education and training.
2. Organizations at the federal, state, and local levels should have a distinct goal and vision for technical and vocational education, and, the goal should be pursued with vigor.
3. Making important policy choices involving vocational and technical education, the government, notably the Ministry of Education, should consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including educators, members of the business and industry community, parents, students, academicians, and other professionals.
4. It is imperative that the school curriculum prioritize a well-rounded approach by including employability, technical, and general skills into vocational programs. Vocational curricula should also be adaptable and sensitive to the demands of the country both now and in the future.
5. To maintain employer and private sector commitment to education, training, and human resource development, policy makers should introduce legislation linked to new reform efforts such school/business collaborations, school-to-work activities, technological preparedness, and workforce development.

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