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REMODELING THE VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AS PANACEA TO YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, with far-reaching implications for economic growth, social stability, and human development. Despite various interventions, the gap between the skills acquired through formal education and the demands of the labor market persists. This paper advocates for comprehensive reform in the integration of vocational and technical education (VTE) within Nigerian secondary schools as a fundamental strategy to address youth unemployment. Drawing on empirical evidence and best practices from around the world, this paper examines the current state of VTE in Nigeria, identifies key challenges, and proposes policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of VTE delivery. By aligning VTE programs with industry needs, improving infrastructure and resources, enhancing teacher capacity, fostering industry partnerships, and promoting public awareness, Nigeria can unlock the potential of its youth and foster inclusive economic growth.

Keywords*:* Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Secondary schools, Youth unemployment, Reform, Economic growth.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is a pressing issue in Nigeria, posing significant challenges to economic development, social cohesion, and political stability (Okoro, 2019). Despite the country's abundant human and natural resources, millions of young Nigerians struggle to find gainful employment, leading to widespread poverty, social unrest, and a loss of human capital (Onah & Owo, 2020). The root causes of youth unemployment are complex and multifaceted, including factors such as rapid population growth, inadequate educational opportunities, skills mismatch, weak labor market institutions, and limited access to finance and entrepreneurship support.

Among these factors, the mismatch between the skills acquired through formal education and the demands of the labor market stands out as a critical issue (Okoro, 2019). Nigeria's education system

has traditionally focused on academic qualifications, with little emphasis on practical skills development and technical competencies (Onah & Owo, 2020). As a result, many young people graduate from secondary schools and tertiary institutions ill-prepared for the realities of the modern workplace, lacking the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to succeed in dynamic and competitive industries.

In response to these challenges, there have been growing calls for reform in the integration of vocational and technical education (VTE) within Nigerian secondary schools (World Bank, 2019). VTE offers an alternative pathway for young people to acquire practical skills and hands-on experience in various trades and industries, thereby enhancing their employability, entrepreneurship potential, and social mobility (Okoro, 2019). However, despite its potential benefits, VTE in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, including limited funding, outdated curriculum, inadequate infrastructure, and negative societal perceptions (Onah & Owo, 2020).

This paper seeks to address these challenges by proposing comprehensive reforms to strengthen the integration of VTE in Nigerian secondary schools. Drawing on insights from international experiences and best practices, this paper outlines a set of policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the quality, relevance, and accessibility of VTE programs. By aligning VTE with industry needs, improving infrastructure and resources, enhancing teacher capacity, fostering industry partnerships, and promoting public awareness, Nigeria can harness the transformative power of VTE to address youth unemployment and drive inclusive economic growth.

2. The Importance of Vocational and Technical Education: Vocational and technical education (VTE) plays a crucial role in preparing young people for the world of work, equipping them with the practical skills, technical knowledge, and professional attitudes needed to succeed in various industries and occupations (Okoro, 2019). Unlike traditional academic education, which tends to focus on theoretical concepts and abstract ideas, VTE emphasizes hands-on learning, real-world applications, and experiential training (World Bank, 2019). By providing students with opportunities to engage in practical activities such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, auto mechanics, welding, catering, fashion design, computer programming, and multimedia production, VTE helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace realities.

In addition to technical skills, VTE also fosters the development of essential employability skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and entrepreneurship (Okoro, 2019). These soft skills are highly valued by employers across industries and are essential for career success and upward mobility in today's rapidly changing labor market. Moreover, VTE offers pathways to further education and lifelong learning, enabling individuals to pursue higher qualifications, specialized certifications, and continuous professional development throughout their careers.

From a macroeconomic perspective, investing in VTE can yield significant dividends in terms of economic growth, productivity enhancement, and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2019). A skilled and productive workforce is a key driver of innovation, competitiveness, and

sustainable development, enabling countries to diversify their economies, attract foreign investment, and create high-quality jobs. By equipping young people with the skills and competencies needed to participate in emerging industries such as renewable energy, information technology, healthcare, agriculture, construction, and manufacturing, VTE can help Nigeria capitalize on its demographic dividend and unlock its full potential for economic transformation.

Furthermore, VTE can contribute to social inclusion, equity, and empowerment by providing marginalized groups such as women, rural youth, persons with disabilities, and disadvantaged communities with pathways to economic independence and social mobility (Okoro, 2019). By breaking down barriers to entry and expanding access to quality VTE programs, Nigeria can empower individuals from all backgrounds to pursue their aspirations, fulfill their potential, and contribute to the nation's development agenda.

Overall, VTE is a powerful tool for addressing youth unemployment, promoting inclusive growth, and building resilient societies (World Bank, 2019). By integrating VTE into mainstream education systems and investing in its expansion, modernization, and quality assurance, Nigeria can create pathways to prosperity for its youth and lay the foundation for a more sustainable and equitable future (Onah & Owo, 2020).

3. The State of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria: Despite its potential benefits, vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria faces numerous challenges that hinder its effectiveness and impact. These challenges cut across various dimensions, including policy and regulatory frameworks, curriculum and pedagogy, infrastructure and resources, teacher capacity and professionalism, industry engagement and partnerships, and public awareness and perception (Onah & Owo, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach that involves government action, private sector involvement, civil society engagement, and community participation.

3.1 Policy and Regulatory Frameworks: One of the fundamental challenges facing vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria is the lack of coherent and comprehensive policy and regulatory frameworks to guide its development and implementation (Okoro, 2019). While the Federal Government has introduced various initiatives and programs to promote VTE, including the National Policy on Education, the National Vocational Qualifications Framework, and the National Skills Qualifications Framework, there remains a disconnect between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities (World Bank, 2019). Moreover, the decentralized nature of Nigeria's education system, with responsibilities shared between the federal, state, and local governments, has led to fragmentation, duplication, and inconsistency in VTE policies and programs across different jurisdictions (Onah & Owo, 2020).

To address this challenge, there is a need for the Federal Government to take a more proactive and coordinated approach to VTE policy development and implementation (Okoro, 2019). This may involve establishing a dedicated National VTE Council or Commission to provide strategic oversight and coordination of VTE initiatives, setting clear objectives, targets, and timelines for VTE reform, harmonizing existing policies and

regulations, and fostering collaboration and partnership among relevant stakeholders (World Bank, 2019). Furthermore, there is a need to review and update VTE legislation and regulations to ensure their relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with national development priorities and international best practices (Onah & Owo, 2020).

3.2 Curriculum and Pedagogy: Another challenge facing vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria is the outdated and often irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy used in many VTE programs (Okoro, 2019). While the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and other regulatory bodies have developed curriculum frameworks and competency standards for various VTE disciplines, these frameworks are often based on outdated industry practices and do not adequately reflect current labor market demands, technological advancements, and global trends (World Bank, 2019). As a result, many VTE graduates lack the skills, knowledge, and competencies required to succeed in today's dynamic and competitive industries (Onah & Owo, 2020).

To address this challenge, there is a need to review and revise existing VTE curriculum frameworks to ensure their relevance, currency, and alignment with industry needs and standards (Okoro, 2019). This may involve conducting labor market assessments and skills gap analyses, consulting with industry experts and employers, benchmarking against international best practices, and incorporating feedback from students, teachers, and other stakeholders (World Bank, 2019). Moreover, there is a need to adopt innovative and learner-centered pedagogical approaches that promote active learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and entrepreneurship (Onah & Owo, 2020). By providing students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, develop practical skills through hands-on activities, and work collaboratively with industry partners on authentic projects, VTE programs can enhance the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of teaching and learning (Okoro, 2019).

Furthermore, there is a need to invest in the professional development and capacity-building of VTE teachers and instructors to ensure they have the requisite skills, knowledge, and competencies to deliver high-quality VTE programs (World Bank, 2019). This may involve providing ongoing training and support in pedagogy, curriculum development, assessment and evaluation, technology integration, industry engagement, and career guidance (Onah & Owo, 2020). By empowering VTE teachers to serve as role models, mentors, and facilitators of learning, Nigeria can strengthen the overall quality and impact of VTE provision and enhance its contribution to youth employability and economic development (Okoro, 2019).

3.3 Infrastructure and Resources: A critical challenge facing vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources to support the delivery of high-quality VTE programs (World Bank, 2019). Many VTE schools and workshops suffer from dilapidated facilities, outdated equipment, limited access to technology and internet connectivity, and insufficient instructional materials and supplies (Onah & Owo, 2020). This hampers the ability of VTE institutions to provide students with hands-on training, practical experience, and exposure to modern tools and

techniques, thereby undermining the quality and relevance of VTE provision (Okoro, 2019).

To address this challenge, there is a need for substantial investments in the expansion, modernization, and upgrading of VTE infrastructure and resources across the country (World Bank, 2019). This may involve building new VTE schools and workshops in underserved areas, renovating existing facilities to meet safety and accessibility standards, equipping classrooms and laboratories with state-of-the-art equipment and technology, providing access to digital resources and online learning platforms, and ensuring adequate provision of instructional materials, tools, and consumables (Onah & Owo, 2020). Moreover, there is a need to improve the management and maintenance of VTE infrastructure and resources to ensure their sustainability and longevity. This may involve developing asset management plans, implementing preventive maintenance schedules, establishing partnerships with private sector companies for equipment leasing and maintenance services, and mobilizing community support for infrastructure development and upkeep (World Bank, 2019).

3.4 Teacher Capacity and Professionalism: A key challenge facing vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria is the shortage of qualified and competent teachers and instructors with the requisite skills, knowledge, and experience to deliver high-quality VTE programs (Onah & Owo, 2020). Many VTE schools and programs suffer from inadequate staffing, high teacher turnover, low morale and motivation, and limited opportunities for professional development and career advancement (Okoro, 2019). This undermines the quality and effectiveness of VTE provision and hampers the ability of VTE institutions to prepare students for the demands of the modern workplace (World Bank, 2019).

To address this challenge, there is a need to invest in the recruitment, training, and retention of high-quality VTE teachers and instructors who are passionate, committed, and capable of inspiring and empowering students (Onah & Owo, 2020). This may involve developing comprehensive teacher recruitment and induction programs, offering competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain top talent, providing ongoing training and support in pedagogy, subject-matter knowledge, industry engagement, and technology integration, and creating opportunities for career advancement and leadership development (Okoro, 2019). Moreover, there is a need to strengthen the professionalism and accountability of VTE teachers and instructors through effective performance management systems, professional standards and codes of conduct, and opportunities for peer learning and collaboration (World Bank, 2019). By investing in the capacity and professionalism of VTE teachers and instructors, Nigeria can enhance the quality, relevance, and impact of VTE provision and improve its contribution to youth employability and economic development (Onah & Owo, 2020).

3.5 Industry Engagement and Partnerships: A critical challenge facing vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria is the limited engagement and collaboration between VTE institutions and the private sector. Many VTE programs suffer from a lack of industry input and feedback, inadequate exposure to real-world workplace practices and standards, and limited opportunities for work-based learning, internships, and

apprenticeships (World Bank, 2019). This undermines the relevance and effectiveness of VTE provision and hampers the ability of VTE graduates to transition successfully from education to employment (Onah & Owo, 2020).

To address this challenge, there is a need to strengthen partnerships and collaboration between VTE institutions and the private sector to ensure that VTE programs are aligned with industry needs and standards (Okoro, 2019). This may involve establishing industry advisory boards and steering committees to provide strategic guidance and oversight to VTE programs, developing industry-led curriculum frameworks and occupational standards, facilitating work-based learning opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training, and fostering mutually beneficial relationships between VTE schools and local employers, industry associations, and chambers of commerce (World Bank, 2019). Moreover, there is a need to promote entrepreneurship and innovation within VTE programs to empower students to create their own job opportunities and become agents of change and economic development (Onah & Owo, 2020). By integrating entrepreneurship education into VTE curricula, providing students with access to business incubators, start-up grants, and mentorship programs, and organizing entrepreneurship competitions, trade fairs, and networking events, Nigeria can foster a culture of innovation and enterprise and harness the talents and aspirations of its youth to drive economic growth and social progress.

3.6 Public Awareness and Perception: A final challenge facing vocational and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria is the negative public perceptions and attitudes towards VTE as a pathway for youth development and economic empowerment (World Bank, 2019). Many parents, students, educators, policymakers, and members of the general public view VTE as a second-tier option for students who are unable to excel academically or gain admission to higher education institutions, rather than as a viable and valuable pathway to rewarding and fulfilling careers (Onah & Owo, 2020). This stigma undermines the attractiveness and prestige of VTE programs and discourages talented and ambitious young people from pursuing VTE opportunities (Okoro, 2019).

To address this challenge, there is a need to raise public awareness and change perceptions about the value and importance of VTE as a critical component of the education system and a key driver of economic development and social progress (World Bank, 2019). This may involve launching national campaigns and advocacy initiatives to promote the benefits of VTE, challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, and highlight success stories and best practices (Onah & Owo, 2020). Moreover, there is a need to showcase the achievements and contributions of VTE graduates to the economy and society and celebrate their successes and accomplishments through media coverage, awards ceremonies, and alumni networks (Okoro, 2019). By raising public awareness and changing perceptions about VTE, Nigeria can create a more supportive and enabling environment for VTE provision and empower young people to pursue their passions, realize their potential, and contribute to the nation's development agenda.

4. Policy Recommendations: Based on the analysis presented above, this paper proposes a set of policy recommendations to strengthen the integration of vocational

and technical education (VTE) in Nigerian secondary schools and address the challenges of youth unemployment (World Bank, 2019). These recommendations are organized into five thematic areas: policy and regulatory frameworks, curriculum and pedagogy, infrastructure and resources, teacher capacity and professionalism, and industry engagement and partnerships (Onah & Owo, 2020).

4.1 Policy and Regulatory Frameworks:

1. Develop a National VTE Strategy and Action Plan: The Federal Ministry of Education should work with relevant stakeholders to develop a comprehensive National VTE Strategy and Action Plan that sets out clear objectives, targets, and timelines for the expansion, modernization, and improvement of VTE provision in Nigeria (Okoro, 2019).
2. Strengthen VTE Governance and Coordination: The Federal Government should establish a National VTE Council or Commission to provide strategic oversight and coordination of VTE policy development and implementation in Nigeria (World Bank, 2019).
3. Review and Update VTE Legislation and Regulations: The Federal Government should review and update existing legislation and regulations governing VTE in Nigeria to ensure their relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with national development priorities and international best practices (Onah & Owo, 2020).
4. Establish a National VTE Fund: The Federal Government should establish a dedicated National VTE Fund to provide sustainable financing for the expansion, modernization, and improvement of VTE provision in Nigeria (Okoro, 2019).

4.2 Curriculum and Pedagogy:

1. Review and Revise VTE Curriculum Frameworks: The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should review and revise existing VTE curriculum frameworks to ensure their relevance, currency, and alignment with industry needs and standards (World Bank, 2019).
2. Promote Innovative Pedagogical Approaches: VTE institutions should adopt innovative and learner-centered pedagogical approaches that promote active learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and entrepreneurship (Onah & Owo, 2020).
3. Integrate Academic and Technical Subjects: VTE institutions should promote interdisciplinary collaboration and teamwork among teachers and students to integrate academic and technical subjects and to contextualize learning experiences (Okoro, 2019).

4.3 Infrastructure and Resources:

1. Invest in VTE Infrastructure and Resources: The Federal Government, in collaboration with state and local governments, should invest in the expansion, modernization, and upgrading of VTE infrastructure and resources across Nigeria (World Bank, 2019).
2. Improve Management and Maintenance: VTE institutions should improve the management

and maintenance of infrastructure and resources to ensure their sustainability and longevity (Onah & Owo, 2020).

4.4 Teacher Capacity and Professionalism:

1. Invest in Teacher Recruitment and Training: The Federal Government, in collaboration with state and local governments, should invest in the recruitment, training, and retention of high-quality VTE teachers and instructors (Okoro, 2019).
2. Strengthen Professional Development: VTE institutions should strengthen the professional development and capacity-building of VTE teachers and instructors (World Bank, 2019).
3. Promote Interdisciplinary Collaboration: VTE institutions should promote interdisciplinary collaboration and teamwork among teachers and students (Onah & Owo, 2020).

4.5 Industry Engagement and Partnerships:

1. Strengthen Industry Partnerships: VTE institutions should strengthen partnerships and collaboration with the private sector (Okoro, 2019).
2. Promote Entrepreneurship and Innovation: VTE institutions should promote entrepreneurship and innovation within VTE programs (World Bank, 2019).
3. Leverage Technology and Digital Platforms: VTE institutions should leverage technology and digital platforms to enhance industry engagement and collaboration (Onah & Owo, 2020).

Conclusion

Vocational and technical education (VTE) has the potential to be a powerful tool for addressing youth unemployment, promoting inclusive growth, and building resilient societies in Nigeria (Okoro, 2019). By integrating VTE into mainstream education systems and investing in its expansion, modernization, and quality assurance, Nigeria can create pathways to prosperity for its youth and lay the foundation for a more sustainable and equitable future (World Bank, 2019). However, realizing this potential requires comprehensive reforms that address the key challenges facing VTE provision, including policy and regulatory frameworks, curriculum and pedagogy, infrastructure and resources, teacher capacity and professionalism, and industry engagement and partnerships (Onah & Owo, 2020). By implementing the policy recommendations outlined in this paper, Nigeria can unlock the transformative power of VTE and harness the talents and aspirations of its youth to drive economic development and social progress (Okoro, 2019).

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