Skills Mismatch and Dearth of Vocational Education in the Nigerian Labour Market: A Cog in the Wheels of National Development

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Abstract  Nigeria’s struggles with maximizing her wealth of human and natural resources is well documented. However, while more pronounced obstacles such as corruption, inefficient leadership, civil wars, communal rifts, nepotism, tribalism, political violence, terrorism and bad financial policies have taken the credit; the decay of the educational sector and the subsequent mismatch between the educational outputs and the demands or reality of the Nigerian labour market has caused severe damage to the realization of the Nigerian dream. Generally, technical education and the training of the highly needed technicians suited to emerging jobs within Nigeria has encountered many challenges, and are further impeded by the adoption of archaic and conservative policies unattainable in today’s world; thereby resulting in issues like the disconnection of school curriculum from social needs, corruption in the educational development funds and a worrying indifference on teachers’ part. It is important to note that the Nigerian education policy stipulates technical education as a learning avenue devoted to the development of high-quality technical human resources, with its goal as building a talent pool for the advancement of the country’s economy by means of vocational education. However, these shortcomings due to the massive skill mismatches in the Nigerian labor market have led to a huge economic loophole in the nation’s economy. Particularly, this text believes that the root cause of this skill mismatch seemingly lies in the dearth and neglect of vocational education courses, and the continued lack of attention by the Nigerian government to this issue is undoubtedly one of the main causes of massive unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. These main causes plus the continued ridiculous amount of resources committed to reviving education in Nigeria makes it pertinent to study the end products of our educational institutions. Likewise, the important part of vocational education in Nigeria is missing from the national development strategy. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the problems, challenges and directions of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as an avenue of national development in Nigeria, with regards to its close relations to the Nigerian labor market, while proposing ways to improve TVET teaching according to the needs of the labor market.

Keywords: vocational education and labor market, skill mismatch, skill mismatch measures


1. Introduction

Technical and vocational education is an essential aspect of national development that plays a significant function in the growth and fostering of a country’s economy, by preparing the young people for current and prospective work opportunities. Despite her being blessed with human and numerous mineral resources, Nigeria keeps being tagged as a state lacking gross development. And as noted previously, among the factors contributing to this quagmire is the deterioration in vocational studies and the unproductivity it yields. Vocational education as the study covering skill courses is aimed at improving the level of lower education. Primarily, it focuses on attaining skills needed for specific occupations pertaining to different workplace. Uwaifo points out that technical education is the cultivation of technical talents. [1] He further describes it as the initiator, promoter and implementer of a national technology development, which has made significant contributions in electrical and electronic technology, automotive technology, and construction technology. As such, technical education is a very practical education. Its content and methods are unique and require special attention.

However, although Nigeria has made tremendous contributions to technical and vocational studies, it has still not been given the recognition it warrants. Thus, why it is arguably one of the topmost reasons for the rapid increase in the rising of unemployment rate, skill mismatch, unproductiveness as well as the escalation of
2. History of Vocational Education in Nigeria

The history of vocational studies in Nigeria dates as far back as precolonial times where the practice of vocational educational was carried out mainly in crude form through the practice of hands-on apprentice and shadowing. Agreeing to this, Okolocha and Baba writes that “its roots could be traced to precolonial era when traditional education was in practice. Wards and pupils were subjected to established skilled men such as Blacksmiths, skilled relations, farmers, builders, wrestlers, skilled warriors, masquerades; where they were trained meticulously. Agreeing to this, Akpan et al opines that, Vocational education existed in traditional forms and people had to work for their survival. It was practiced within family circles. Under indigenous system or traditional vocational education, the Nigerian child was taught various skills through weaving, sculpturing, blacksmithing, carving, farming, fishing, cattle rearing, hair plaiting, dress making, bead weaving, leatherwork, pottery, brick making, basket weaving, raffia works, mat weaving and others Nduka, and Fafunwa. The foregoing were forms of vocational education in pre-colonial Nigeria. [5]

Breaking it down, Okolocha and Baba notes that, “The instructional method then was observation and imitation of the master. During the colonial era, the child was trained in the family trade through direct apprenticeship by either the parents or relations.” [6] Interestingly, the advent of colonial masters and the formal education they brought to Nigeria saw the relegation of vocational studies to the background. This was as a result of the priority placed by these pioneers in just making sure that the locals mastered the art of reading and writing. However, it is important to note that there were positive efforts made in that era. Mamman, Chadi, Jirgi, & Mubarak in Okolocha and Baba writes that “the first technical institute established in Nigeria was the Hope Waddell Institute in Calabar in 1885 with the aim of proving education in the rudiments training in the technical trade and teacher’s education.” [7] Similarly, Akpan, Usoro & Iniritan writes that “The Nassarawa School, opened in 1909 in the North, had a technical wing attached to it: leatherwork, carpentry, smithing, weaving and book binding were taught.” [8] It is important to note that corporate bodies such as PZ, UAC and Shell BP also made efforts to incorporate vocational training among their local staff even though there was no plan to issue certificates for such training [7]. Notable incidents surrounding vocational education occurred within 1930 and the period of Nigeria’s independence from the British. As Okolocha & Baba enthused:

The public works, the post and telegraph and railway training school where also established around 1931. Government active participation in the provision of technical education became obvious between 1930 and 1960…Yaba Higher College was officially opened on January 19, 1934 and later became the first vocational and technical institute in 1948 with the motive to train Artisans, crafts men and Technicians, together with teachers of technical education to teach in trade centres, (Aina in Mamman, Chadi, Jirgi & Mubarak, 2013). Thereafter, technical colleges were established by various regional governments various locations in the country, namely: Enugu (1950), Ilorin (1951), Kano (1953), Bukuru (1955), Sapele (1955), Ijebu-Ode (1959), Osogbo, Oyo (1961), Owo (1963), Aha (1964) and Abakaliki (1966). These colleges were not fee paying and they were adequately funded by the government at that time. [7]

In 1987, the then government instituted the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) as a result of the encouragements made at the proceedings of the fourth Commonwealth Education Conference in 1986. The NBTE was charged to lead and organize all the events and movements pertaining vocational education in the country. With the advent and setting-up of the NBTE, as well its subsequent classifications of vocational institutions such as polytechnics, efforts were made to resuscitate and reintegrate vocational studies. However, it has so far been an unprogressive and stagnating campaign, with efforts made at saving vocational studies merely lip service or entirely half-baked. Corruption and the presence of square pegs in round holes have not helped the progress of...
vocational training in Nigeria. From the post-civil war years to this day, lack of proper government policies, inadequate funding, insufficient personnel and other factors have hindered the growth and supposed stance of vocational studies in the development of the contemporary Nigerian society.

3. Vocational Education in Contemporary Nigeria

Currently, there is a clear skill gap in the Nigerian education system leading to a poor output by Nigerian graduates in comparison to their mates in the global market. However, it is important to note that there have been several efforts made to tackle this retrogressive trend in the Nigerian Vocational field. While this summarizes what vocational studies looks like in Nigeria, it is however important to note that understanding the current state of technical and vocational education and training in Nigeria, is a futile exercise without looking at the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). This is because when exploring the issue of skill mismatch in Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that various factors are statistically dependent on the level of government input due to its supervisory role through the NBTE.

Established by the then government in the late stages of the seventies to implement and boost technical studies, the NBTE Council has made several efforts at redeeming vocational studies in Nigeria. One of her efforts was the establishment of the NBTE Centre of Excellence in 2010, as it was faced with the rapid waning of vocational education within Nigeria (and Africa) in the current millennium. The NBTE Centre of Excellence was an initiative brought about to promote capacity-building, innovation and partnership in technical and vocational education, as a way of building on the Nigerian Technology and Vocational Education Revitalization Programme [9]. Commissioned on the 1st of January, 2012, the Centre is among the UNEVOC Centres in the country. [7] Globally, as an institution for the continuous improvement of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), the mission of the TVET in Nigeria and NBTE Centres of Excellence is to promote technical and vocational education through a culture of excellence in capacity-building, innovation and partnerships. To date, the Centre has established contacts with all UNEVOC centres within its competence, including those in French-speaking countries [7].

Table 1. National Education System Certification (Source: National Board For Technical Education (NBTE))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL</th>
<th>INDUSTRY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>NSQ LEVEL 6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HND/DEGREE</td>
<td>NSQ LEVEL 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND/NID/ANTC/ANBC</td>
<td>NSQ LEVEL 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTC/NBC/NSC/TRADE TEST 1</td>
<td>NSQ LEVEL 3</td>
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<td>NSC 2/TRADE TEST 2</td>
<td>NSQ LEVEL 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRE- VOCATIONAL JSS3/NSC 1 &amp; TRADE 3</td>
<td>NSQ LEVEL 1</td>
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KEY
- HND – Higher National Diploma
- ND – National Diploma
- NID – National Innovation Diploma
- ANTC – Advanced National Technical Certificate
- ANDC – Advanced National Business Certificate
- NTC – National Technical Certificate
- NBC – National Business Certificate
- NSC – National Skills Certificate
- NSQ – Nigeria Skills Qualification
Equally, the Centre has also established links with the new UNESCO regional office in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, to launch a green campus project and to conduct a needs assessment survey at certain Nigerian polytechnics for data collection and analysis, in accordance with the concept of global greening (Global Greening Concept) [7]. Towards the end of the last decade in October 2019, the NBTE Centre of Excellence for TVET in collaboration with The Nigerian Institute of Science Laboratory Technology had a five-day training workshop on Usage of Basic Science Laboratory Equipment, and Quality Management System for Science Lecturers, SLT Lecturers, Laboratory Technologists/Scientists and other users of Science Equipment. [10] Notwithstanding these efforts, the journey has however, not been smooth. Nigeria's technical and vocational education training (TVET) has been grounded because of inadequate educational structures and resources. While the effective tackling of this limitation is quite necessary; there is (the lack of) an urgent need to continuously raise more awareness among the government, students, schools, families and other stakeholders about the opportunities and gains of technical and vocational education. This is because for Nigeria to make significant economic progress; skilled, efficient, highly mobile, adaptable and innovative workforce needs to be provided by her education system. As Mike Morrison (2019) notes, “The future of work and the nature of work is changing. Changing at a pace that is unprecedented. In the same way that over the last 20 years has seen massive changes to the work we do, the next 20 will show an even faster rate of change.” [11] So, this gap is as wide as the backwardness of the development Nigeria is and deserves as much attention. However, in her efforts to bridge the skills gap in the education sector, the Nigerian government recently drew up a plan to promote demand-driven teaching as well as provide more technical vocational education and training institutions (see Table 1) so as to ensure that all stakeholders participate fruitfully in the formal and informal sectors.

Although NBTE has made significant contributions to the technical and vocational education in Nigeria, it is equally important to note that vocational studies has still not received the recognition and attention it warrants. Part of the reasons for this is that until now, technical and vocational studies in Nigeria has adhered to traditional teaching methods, which does not support practical approach but rather encourage theoretical methods of indoctrination. This traditional teaching method requires teachers to read from textbooks to students, who will then take notes. To date, this crude method of teaching is one of the main causes of the sharp rise in social unemployment, skills mismatches, poverty rates and escalating crime rate. Unfortunately, the demands of the labour market keeps changing as the world advances. And regrettablly as Morrison wrote, “many employers expect graduates to be “out of the box” ready to fulfil a professional role.” [11]

4. Understanding Skill Mismatch and the Nigerian Labour Market

The Nigerian Labour market has evolved over the years, witnessing several changes both positive and negative ones due to several factors ranging from diversified economy, easy access to internet and data, harsh and convenient government policies, exposure to foreign influence, hard work and perseverance associated with the Nigerian spirit, incapacitated government, large embrace of entrepreneurship, among others. Ironically though, with the rapid boom and diversification of the economy in these present times, the skills mismatch among today’s graduates is getting more pronounced due to the inability of the Nigerian education system to connect properly with the requirements of the labour market and this is mainly due to the inability of the Nigerian education system to establish an up-to-date curriculum and teaching modalities influenced by the demands, challenges and expectations of the labour market and everyday life. Thus, notwithstanding the complexity and the huge growth associated with the Nigerian labour market over the years, several findings depict huge skills mismatch between today’s graduates and demands of nowadays work.

While major statistics highlight an increase in the levels of graduates coming out of Nigerian Universities, there is a huge gap in the quality of graduates produced and what the employers consider ‘employable’. This continued decline in the level of their skill acquisition (cognitive, social, cultural and digital skills) calls for serious concern, and highlights the deterioration of Nigerian Universities as well as an impending stagnation to the Nigerian labour market and the Nigerian economy at large. The huge deterioration in the acquisition of the proper skills needed in today’s work environment by Nigerian graduates is mainly attributed to a weakened School system in Nigeria and their inability to tailor talent and skills development to the personal needs of graduates and employees, especially the Vocational studies touted to be the main route to acquiring such skills.

The weakening of Vocational studies and their impacts are largely felt in Nigeria as this has resulted to and coincided with one main negative trend of the resulting skills mismatch in the Nigerian labour market, thereby leading to several adverse practices such as unemployment and crime; which are harmful to the growth of the economy. It is important to note that while the government has always recognized the importance of vocational studies and occasionally focused on turning around the lots of vocational studies as well as arresting the rate of skills mismatch in Nigeria, various factors have contributed to the pronounced increase in the rate of skills mismatch in the Nigerian labour market and as such, a comprehensive and systematic effort might effectively tackle this ugly trend.

5. Data Extracts of Trends in the Nigerian Vocational School

With some extracts from the NBTE statistical data on the trends in the Nigerian Vocational schools, we can analyze them and see several lapses showing or leading to the rot in the Nigeria vocational schools and the resulting skills mismatch. While there is a general lukewarm attitude towards vocational schools and a huge preference for “Universities” in Nigeria, the first table shows preference for certain vocational institutions above the other ones.
The figure reveals the relative distribution of the aggregate enrolment into NBTE supervised TVET institutions for the 2014/15 academic year. Polytechnics and colleges of technology take up seventy (70) percent of the total—implying that for every ten turned out from NBTE supervised TVET institutions, seven (7) are from polytechnics. Only technical colleges have a proportional share that is up to two (2) digit, at sixteen (16) percent, the remaining proportion is spread across the five other categories. This indicates scanty enrolments into several institutions for technical education with more known technical colleges like polytechnics still commanding higher number of students than the rest.

Gender inequality remains an issue in Nigeria, with females often lagging behind due to several factors. Unfortunately, this is also the case in vocational studies as is seen in the next table.

This difference and the higher number of male pupils enrolled, tells of the male dominance in the dwindling vocational studies in Nigeria. Perhaps, endearing more women to embrace vocational education could help in covering the huge skills mismatch in Nigeria. Equally, this less enthusiasm from the women is equally depicted in the percentage ratio of the women teaching versus the men teaching. This is shown below in Figure 3.
Preference for traditional universities and certain courses are not the only issues holding back vocational education in Nigeria. Preference for certain courses within vocational courses is also an issue, as the other less-liked courses equally have their importance in the development of the nation. The next table highlights this preference for some courses.

As explained earlier, several courses like Health & Related Tech; Art, Design & Related Tech are found lagging behind in the number of pupils enrolling into them. In a nutshell, these are some of the characteristics associated with Nigeria’s current vocational and technical education and training. Unfortunately, these have led to deterioration with not enough employable individuals for the labour market and the development of the country.

### 6. Impacts of Vocational Studies and Skill Mismatch on National Development

The high cost of employing a knowledgeable foreigner, low production inputs due to unskilled labour, resources and time spent on additional training, are most revealed in the impacts of skill mismatch in the labour market, and they in turn negatively affect the Gross Domestic Points (GDP) and the national development of a country. While skill mismatch has thus, proven to be disastrous to the outputs of the labour force of a country; thriving and effective vocational studies is a catalyst to a productive labour force. Obviagele, asserts that “Vocational education if given serious attention will produce graduate
who will be self employed and can produce goods that are of export quality thereby increasing our foreign earnings.”

[13] Also noting the undeniable impacts of vocational studies on national development, Akpan, Usoro & Ibiritan asserts:

Vocational education (formal and non-formal) is the best known veritable tool for training manpower for national growth…There is no socio-economic sector of the nation that is does not benefit from vocational education. For instance, the technical knowledge, technical information and the skills needed for effective assimilation of the modern technological products are acquired through training and re-training in vocational education. [14]

The importance of education in a country cannot be overemphasized. For one, education furnishes individuals with the knowledge necessary to develop the skills required for work and life. Agreeing to this, Okolocha & Baba opines that,

“The development of a nation’s economy is contingent on the quality of skilled human capital in the pool. Vocational and technical education provides student with life skills that will make them to be productive entrepreneurs as it engenders creative and innovative ideas; enlarges the economic pie and increases personal freedom.” [15]

Ovbiagile goes on to posit that

“Vocational education therefore provides an increase in the skill options available to the learner for an effective survival in the economy… If the youths are given the proper training in vocational education, it will create jobs for our teaming youths that are roaming in the street and this will consequently lead to reduction in social vices such as robbery, stealing, prostitution, raping, drug addition etc.” [16]

However, in a situation where the practice of vocational studies is not at the level where it should be, the situation is always the reverse such as what is obtainable in Nigeria. As Gusua in Okolocha & Baba writes, “pre-vocational subjects meant to lunch Nigeria into a respectable industrialized state with abundant pool of lower manpower became a mirage.” [17] This has seen huge resources thrown into reviving or taking vocational studies to where it should be. Besides the huge resources committed (and still being committed) to the resuscitation of vocational studies and arrest of skills mismatch over a lengthy period of time, there are other telling impacts of these two on the development of the Nigerian economy. In a world characterized with constant technological innovations, the responsibility of graduates in being up to date with the needed Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills, is well pronounced in ensuring that Nigeria is not left behind as other countries forge ahead. Equally, most Nigerian employers fail to make their financial targets due to several factors, among which most tellingly, is their failure to find the right graduates for several roles that demand specialized skills; and this huge gap in skills mismatch in the long run, affects the tax generated and relayed into national development. Lastly, skill mismatch often leads to lack of self-confidence on the victim and could potentially lead to crime, drug abuse or even suicide.

7. Reasons for the Mismatch between Vocational Education and Labor Market Demand among Graduates in Nigeria

The clear mismatch between vocational education and the Nigerian labor market’s demands is an apparent cog to the wheels of the development of the Nigerian state. While the early priority of the pioneers of education in Nigeria contributed to this pronounced mismatch in skills; schools, students, and not just the society are important factors in these causes that are as complex as they have grown over the years. The major reasons for the mismatch as this text deciphered are listed below:

● Public perception of Mathematics and Science subjects as being too hard thereby affecting the number of students graduating in technology and engineering.
● Major focus on theoretical manner of teaching that involves dictating to students, instead of the practical form teaching needed for thorough inbreeding of such specialized skills.
● The use of a curriculum modelled after a foreign prototype with no regards for the realities witnessed in the Nigerian scenario.
● Inadequate teachers and facilitators well versed in the practical teaching of those skills. [17]
● Ineffective government policies
● Lack of sufficient funds needed to ensure the availability of practical vocational studies
● High cost of tuition fees demanded for vocational training in most Nigerian institutions

8. Ways to Maximize Vocational Studies and Curb the Impacts of Skill Mismatch on National Development

Although the Vocational studies has witnessed a severe decline in its activities in Nigeria, thereby birthing a huge gap in mismatch of skills in the Nigeria labour market which has affected the development of the country; these severe outcome as well as the limitations and shortfalls hindering vocational studies are not entirely irredeemable. While some efforts being made needs to be increased, more steps are needed to successfully arrest the impacts of skill mismatch in the development of Nigeria. For one, the ingenuity displayed in the events undertaken by NBTE and that of her partnerships are well placed to not only inspire the revival of vocational studies in Nigeria but to also contest the lukewarm perception held about the ‘difficult’ mathematics and science courses indirectly. As Obviagile observes, “economically it is observed that times are shifting to stages of graduates not being employees only but becoming employers in the job market.” [18] As such, increased efforts and additional resources should be committed into encouraging such events and symposia.

As evidently spelt out that the reasons for skill mismatch in Nigeria are complex in nature, an integrated approach to countering the dearth of vocational studies
and its’ resulting skill mismatch is necessary, since the root causes are varied. By enabling access to the resources needed to create a desirable environment for the growth and update of vocational studies, the government can through the NBTE and her extensive nexus of public and private partnerships, enhance unhindered growth and acceptance of vocational studies so as to meet the evolving demands and challenges of the labour market. While this has been the goal of the NBTE, more efforts and resources are needed to ensure that vocational studies are revived and that skills mismatch is a thing of the past in Nigeria. Furthermore, the pronounced importance of the National Vocational Certificate (NVC), an initiative undertaken by the Federal government (through NABTEB) to ensure that graduates churned out from vocational institutions corresponds accordingly with the needs of workplace; needs more than the lip service approach undertaken by past dispensations.

Also required are more research, models and metrics to acquire current happenings, future trends and specific ideas on how to empower Nigerians to enable them to handle current and future challenges in their workplace successfully. Similarly, a well-coordinated, clearly stipulated and sustained, holistic long-term plan developed for the Nigerian terrain and tailored to the demands of the proficiency of both private and public sector’s business case should be embraced by the government. Half-hazard approaches and lip-service approach have contributed immensely to the quagmire of vocational studies in Nigeria, thus, bold and brave decisions from government and corporate leaders, are needed in the nurturing of skilled workers in Nigeria.

Nigerian businesses that have withstood the dynamics and challenges of time, as well as specialized and future skills central to their growth should be inculcated in the text books used in teaching ‘practical’ vocational studies in Nigerian schools. Proven instructors as well as conducive venues are equally as important, since they can be helpful in pulling the attention of young people towards Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills and thus, offset the negative effects of the general disconnection shared towards mathematics and science subjects which indirectly exacerbate the sting of skills mismatch in the long run.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

As this text seeks to ascertain the impacts of rot of the Nigerian vocational studies and the resulting skill mismatch on the development of Nigeria as a nation. Graduates lacking the skills and expertise necessary to meet workplace requirements, can cause a dislodgement between academia and industry, thereby affecting the work output and economic growth of the nation. This is a grave issue halting the development of the country; and calls for immediate attention as it leaves a myriad of negative impacts ranging from economic, security, psychological, behavioural and more on the wellbeing of the Nigerian State. With such an ever evolving and innovative global world, a huge question mark is thus left on the Nigerian current school curriculum, its function and relevance. This study hence suggests that the infusion and inculcation of highly-demanded skills in the school curriculum from primary to tertiary institutions are necessary. The weakened school system and lack of in depth and quality skill-based teaching are two main destructive cases that has motivated the widening gap between today’s work environment, the seemingly outdated school curriculum and the resulting underdevelopment witnessed by the Nigeria State. For a tertiary education to be relevant in the society, it is necessary to move away from traditional teaching methods, research methods, and community service and promote teamwork, volunteerism, innovation and entrepreneurship, because in today’s society, "what can you do" is more important than "what your credentials is." In order to avoid skill mismatches between graduate skilled competencies and job requirements, strong links need to be established between tertiary institutions especially vocational institutions and work units. Women needs to be empowered as well by encouraging to study in vocational institutions. Equally, a stronger and sterner government presence as well as adequate funding is needed to ensure that skill mismatch in the Nigerian labour market is a thing of the past and in so doing, help steady the development of the nation.

References


