

# BOOSTING THE SOCIAL DEMAND FOR VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Vocational and Technical Education is a panacea to national development; unfortunately, this reality is not exactly so in Nigeria. The undue emphasis on general or liberal education at the expense of vocational and technical education (VTE) has over the years created some form of apathy which tends to reduce the social demands for VTE programmes, with its attendant effects on enrolment patterns. This paper examined the concept of Social demand for Vocational and Technical Education and highlighted the fundamental principles as well as the present state of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Some strategies that could help boost the overall social demand for vocational education such as promoting incentives for VTE students, policy that allow VTE students partake in the proceeds of their projects, enlarging employment opportunities, staff training and retraining, adequate supply of electricity and other relevant equipment provision of occupational guidance and counselling services were discussed. Apart from the fore-going, it was suggested that government at all levels should intensify public awareness of the role of VTE to national development and economic wellbeing of individuals in order to attract more people especially school leavers and students to undertake training in VTE.*

**Keywords:** *Manpower, National Development, Social Demand, Technical Education, Vocational Education.*

## **Introduction**

The hitherto popular view by classical economists in the infant years of economic history, pioneered by Adam Smith that natural resources constitute the basis of the wealth of a nation has overtaken by contemporary events. The organized efforts towards discovery, exploitation of the inert resources and their renewal reveals the crucial role of the human element (human capital) identified by Harbison (1973) as being the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations.

Secondly, the development of this human capital through formal general or liberal education at the expense of vocational and technical education has over the years reduced the popularity and the social demand for vocational and technical education in our schools and colleges. This, no doubt, has had serious negative consequences on the; national economy due to the dearth of well trained and vocationally competent manpower.

This paper therefore addresses the need and strategies for boosting the social demand for vocational-and technical education (VTE) in Nigeria in order to ensure the much desired great and dynamic economy.

### **Concept of Vocational and Technical Education**

Literature is replete with the definition of VTE. Okoro (2024), citing the American Vocational Association defines Vocational Education as:

*Education designed to develop skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits and appreciation encompassing knowledge and information needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis. It contributes towards the development of good citizens by developing their physical, social, civil, cultural and economic competence.*

On the other hand, Osagie (1998) citing the UNESCO (1978) defined Vocational and Technical Education as a comprehensive term referring to the educational process which involves, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Omokri (2018) aptly observes that in both definitions, practical skills for application to life situations are emphasized, leading to various occupations or professions. However, for the purpose of this paper, vocational and technical education involves those subjects as listed for the pre-vocational (JSS) classes, senior secondary school and the technical colleges. For junior secondary schools, they are: Agricultural Science, Home Economics, Fine Art, Business Education and Introductory Technology. At the senior secondary school, they are the same as for the JSS, but subdivided and treated in more details as:

Agricultural Science (same as for the JSS); Home Economics as Clothing and Textiles, Foods and Nutrition and Home Management, Fine Art as Visual Art; Business Education as Commerce, Book-keeping and Accounts, Shorthand and Type-Writing; Introductory Technology as Applied Electricity, Auto Mechanics, Building Construction, Electronics, Metal Work, Technical Drawing and Wood works (WAFC 1998-2000 REGULATION & SYFEABUSES). The subjects for technical colleges consist of those for senior secondary schools, subdivided and treated in details in addition to others such as Refrigeration Air-Conditioning, Vehicle Body Building, etcetera.

### **Principles of Vocational Education**

Charles A. Prosser in the 1940s developed what he considered the sixteen most important theorems or principles of vocational education. These principles have had a substantial influence on the administration of vocational education, especially in the United State of America. The principles developed by Prosser are still as useful today as they were when they were first developed. They specify minimum standards below which effective vocational education cannot be offered. Some of the theories or principles of vocational education, according to Okoro (2018), are:

1. Vocational education will be efficient in proportion as the environment in which the learner is trained is replica of the environment in which he must subsequently work.
2. Effective vocational training can only be given where the training jobs are carried out in the same way, with same operations, the same tools and the same machines as in the occupation itself,
3. Vocational education will be effective in proportion as it trains the individual directly and specifically in the thinking, and the manipulative habits required in the occupation itself.
4. Effective vocational education for any profession, calling, trade, occupation or job can only be given to the selected group of individuals who need it, want it and are able to profit by it.
5. Vocational education will be effective in proportion, as the instructor has had successful experience in the application of skills and knowledge to the operations and processes he undertakes to teach.

6. The only reliable source of content for specific training in an occupation is in the experience of masters of the occupation.
7. The administration of vocational education will be efficient in proportion as it is elastic and fluid rather than standardized.
8. While every reasonable effort should be made to reduce pre-capital cost, there is a minimum below which effective vocational education cannot be given, if the course does permit of this minimum of per-capital cost, vocational education should not be attempted.

### **The State of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria**

It is pertinent to note that government has duly recognized VTE at least on paper by deploring the general public attitude which regards technical education as somewhat inferior to other types of education (FRN, 2014). This statement appears to be the summation of the fate befalling VTE, particularly technical education in the country. Some of the various area of deficiencies include: Staffing, working space/materials and equipment, finance, students' enrolment rate, curriculum content.

#### **Staffing**

This is the most critical factor in VTE and also the most lamented, as Okoro (2024) say, that "Teachers" conditions have for too long been a taboo issue" which no one wants to address. This perhaps accounts for why Aghenta (2020) has observed that 60% of qualified teachers leave the teaching profession in Nigeria before they are 12 months old. Osagie (2000) and Ugonabo (2021) decried the acute shortage of Vocational and Technical Education teachers, a situation which Aworanti (2019) attributes to a high attrition rate, of teachers arising from attraction to better paid jobs in the industrial sector and mercantile houses. Citing Aina (2016) and NERDC (2017), Aworanti maintains that Nigeria does not have organized system of development of technical teachers. In a statement credited to Aminu (1986), "it could as well be that the country had no technical teachers at all", pointing out that of the 102, 083 teachers needed then only 5,593 were available (less than 6%). If Vocational and Technical Education thrives in skills, it could thus be correctly said that there are no teachers to impart the skills.

#### **Working Space, Materials and Equipment**

Aworanti (2010) highlights the inadequacy of workshops, laboratories and equipment some of which are absolute and in a state of disrepair. He said that it is unfortunate the majority of teachers in technical colleges do not even know how to use some of the equipment installed. This is a result of the unplanned "transfer of technology which led to indiscriminate importation of machines and equipment". In the words of Nwadiani (2025) "with no money left for capital projects, education as a whole in Nigeria remains undeveloped, hence the growing mismatch between education and economy".

Training without adequate-facilities and personnel in an economy in dire need of skills is an exercise in futility which would only render the products of such training economically unuseful, promoting unemployment and compounding sociological problems. This perhaps explains the negative attitude of the learners and the public to VTE. A re-orientation of the entire system is necessary, requiring the establishment of functional laboratories and workshops, stocked with relevant materials and equipment. These should be related to the occupational needs and those of the various communities where such schools are located.

#### **Lack of Adequate Finance**

The attendant decline in the value of the naira has weakened the financial resources allocation to the education sector, with resultant rise in the cost of education, school systems are

only concerned with the payment of staff emoluments (Enaigbe, 2019). The inability or unwillingness of government to provide fund and provision of necessary equipment and production of the vital teaching personnel has made this type of education uninteresting thereby losing public confidence and support.

### **Student Enrolment Rate**

Making secondary technical education parallel to senior secondary school was to make students transit from the JSS to technical colleges without loss of time. Moreover, the emphasis on students on technology and particularly adaptable productive technology requires that a sizeable number of students enroll into technical colleges from junior secondary school. However, low transition into technical colleges of about 3% of JSS products amounting to slightly above 10,000 pupils nationwide threatens the continued existence of technical schools (Aworanti, 2000). The spirit of relegation of technical education in preference for Secondary schools still persists with 97% transiting into senior secondary schools. The lack of skills in secondary education sustains the high quest for university degrees, hence the high level of unsatisfied demand for admission. The apathy against technical education is so strong that the words of Aworanti (2019), “over 500,000 youths that desire admission into tertiary institutions cannot find places and instead of making a fresh start at technical colleges, they remain jobless, social misfits and constitute a public nuisance”.

### **Concept of Social Demand for Vocational Technical Education**

Social demand simply refers to the individual private demand. According to Nwadiani (2025), social demand for education is the total number of individuals' demand for education process over time. This demand is indicated by the social, political and economic situation of the time. Coombs (1985) is of the view that the social demand for education at time exceeds felt learning needs, as when young people compete for entry into the university not primarily to satisfy their yearning to learn but to obtain a diploma that has special prestige and market value. This kind of situation is what Dove (1976) calls "the diploma disease".

From the above, it is observed that social demand for education (VTE) has a direct impact on total enrolment of students for VTE courses with the resultant effect on the graduation or completion rate of qualified VTE trainees needed for a great and dynamic economy. Therefore, boosting the demand for VTE would engender national development.

### **Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education**

Vocational and technical education has not received sufficient attention, not even between 1951 to 1966, which witnessed unprecedented explosion in the number of schools and in students' population. The little emphasis given to vocational and technical education by some missionaries during the early days of their work in Nigeria was not followed-up.

In the 1950 there were few technical/vocational institutions in Nigeria and 29 secondary institutions by 1960, with a total enrolment of 22,588 students. In 1962, Nigeria had 5 fully-equipped technical colleges with 6,000 students only. Enrolment increased to 10,000 students and by 1968, had reached 12,000. In the area of post-secondary technical education, Nigeria in 1973 had eight of such institutions enrolling 8,856 students in polytechnics and colleges of technology. Enrolment rose from 1,939 in 1975 to 35,777 between 1977/1980 (Kwanasie, 1989).

The recent enrolment into Federal and State technical colleges vis-a-vis that of senior secondary schools does not show any significant improvement. The comprehensive educational analysis carried out by the FGN, the UNICEF, the UNESCO and the UNDP in 2020 as reported by the UNICEF (2021) shows that in 2020/2021 session, a total of 43,714 students got enrolled into technical schools in Nigeria, while a total of 579,000 students got into senior

secondary schools in the same academic session. In 2021/2022 session, only 41,520 students went into technical schools against a total number of 645,000, Students into technical schools rose to 42,310 students while that of secondary schools. Similarly, in 2022/2023, the total enrolment into technical schools rose to 42,310 students while that secondary schools shot up to 657,000 students. The enrolment of students into technical schools dropped to 42,372 in 2023/2024 session and that of secondary schools went up to 678,000 in the same academic year. The 'story was the same in 2024/2025 session where only 43,354 students were admitted into technical schools in Nigeria.

The phenomenon of low admission rate: is only restricted to science and technical schools. To date, the total enrolment of secondary school is far more than that of science and technical schools. Even at the tertiary level, the student population in liberal arts out number that of science, engineering and technology,

## **Strategies for Boosting Social Demand for Vocational and Technical Education**

### **1. Promoting Incentives to Vocational and Technical Education Students**

According to Nwadiani (2023), promoting dis-incentives to education is one of the ways of reducing the social demand for education. Conversely, social demand for vocational education could be enhanced by promoting incentives to participants or part time basis while on school, higher pay to VTE graduates, scholarship in and outside the country have the potential of positively affecting the overall social demand for VTE programmes.

### **2. Provision of Adequate Occupation Guidance and Counseling Services**

A lot of students opt for general education course in preference to vocational education courses due to their misconceptions and negative image built around the VTE courses. With adequate occupational guidance and counseling regarding choices of careers, the social demand would improve; with attendant positive effect on enrolment.

### **3. Community Education**

This strategy is based on the premise that proper public enlightenment of parents and students on the role of vocational and technical education in nation building increase students acceptance choice of VTE. Such methods as public lectures, seminars, television and radio programmes, debates, etcetera could be organized to foster the enlightenment of the general public.

### **4. Training and Retraining of Instructors and Teachers**

Okoro (2019) observes that 70% of vocational and technical education students opine that they would abandon their courses of study for lack of trained and skilled instructors and teachers. This finding corroborates the general opinion that students are attracted to courses where they are sure the teachers could deliver the goods.

### **5. Having a Share in Their Projects**

Generally, students are motivated for hard work in a particular area if they know of their potential benefit. Olatunji (2022) opines that students' participation in vocational and technical education courses increases if allowed to partake in the proceeds of their projects. For example, Agricultural Science students could be given a share of the eggs or crops they produced rather than allowing the school authority have them all. These tokens of benefits could attract some more students into choosing courses in vocational and technical education.

### **6. Ensuring the Steady Supply of Electricity**

One of the major problems of vocational and technical education in Nigeria is the unsteady supply of electricity in carrying out assignments or for teaching special courses in the laboratory, or workshop. This unsteady supply causes a lot of frustration to students and teachers. One of the effects of this situation is delayed completion of work and inadequate acquisition of skills, thereby producing half-baked graduates who later become misfits in the world of work. This ugly outcome has the capability of discouraging potential students.

Therefore, increased and steady supply of electricity boosts the social demand.

### **7. Less on Paper Qualification**

Vocational and technical education is a practical skill acquisition oriented type theorization. The undue emphasis on paper qualification without the corresponding skill frustrates the interest of a vast majority of students who need, want or could profit from it. Therefore, the federal government and all employers of labour should shift their emphasis from paper qualification to competency based vocational education.

### **8. Enlarging Employment Opportunities**

The possibility of gaining employment shortly after graduation from vocational technical training programmes could increase the social demand for VTE course. This point is important when viewed against the background of students who cannot set up their own business. In fact, most graduates need to work in order to save enough money to start off their vocation. But if the prospect of securing gainful jobs is bleak, students are likely to develop cold feet towards VTE. This factor however depends on the government of the day and the impact of organized private sector who have the financial muscle to employ fresh graduates.

### **9. Provision of Micro Credit Schemes for VTE Graduates**

The poverty level of most students in Nigeria; and their inability to raise funds for meaningful money generating projects makes the introduction the micro- credit programme necessary. If the scheme is properly backed up with relevant legislation and adequately funded and monitored, students are most likely to be attracted to opt for VTE courses.

### **Suggestions**

In the light of the fore-going, it is hereby subjected that

- 1) Public awareness of the role of vocational and technical education in economic development should be reinvigorated;
- 2) Vocational guidance and counseling should be intensified to acquaint students on right choices of vocational courses to embrace;
- 3) Adequate training and retraining programmes should be organized for instructors, and teachers in vocational and technical education;
- 4) There should be an arrangement whereby students partake in the proceeds of their projects;
- 5) Exceptionally good students could be sponsored for higher studies within or outside the country;
- 6) Tangible or non-tangible incentives should be given to students such as scholarships, bursary, etc.; and
- 7) Micro credit schemes where soft loans could be given for students' projects should be introduced.

### **Conclusion**

Vocational and technical education is a veritable tool for fostering the development of national economics the world over. Therefore, for Nigeria to achieve a great and dynamic economy, vocational and technical education should be given its pride of place. The much anticipated great and dynamic economy as, entrenched in the national goals of the country can also be attained if adequate skilled manpower in quality and quantity is produced.

The possibility of producing the required manpower is predicated on the availability of people who are willing to embrace vocational and technical education. This would be feasible if necessary machinery is put in place to ensure the interest of individuals and parents towards demanding vocational and technical education as a course that could make them relevant in the world of work and ensure national development.

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