

Addressing Unemployment in Nigeria: A Case for Revamping Vocational and Technical Education

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Abstract

Despite the role of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in reducing overall unemployment, Nigeria lacks optimal VTE system that provides adequate training in skills that fit for productive work. Likewise, the existing institutions of learning where VTE is taught do not focus on prospective skills for employment. The consequence of these include increase in non-graduate unemployment and a large pool of graduates that spend more time in the labour market searching for jobs. The concern, therefore, is how Nigeria can revamp its technical and vocational system to accommodate a larger number of the unemployed youth. In view of the foregoing, this policy brief reveals gaps in the current vocational and technical education system and proffers policy options such as development of a national roadmap for vocational and technical training; establishment of national vocational and technical training act; redesigning national vocational and technical training school to accommodate the unschooled and school dropouts; and matching up of firm-based and school-based vocational and technical training programs.

Introduction

In the discourse of inclusive growth, one of the widely held views is that higher level of economic growth might not necessarily reduce poverty and unemployment if a large number of the population is not involved in the growth process. In addressing unemployment and poverty reduction, investment in human capital in terms of high-quality education, skills development, innovation, and knowledge management ensures high economic growth that creates jobs and economic opportunities. In this sense, growth becomes more meaningful if it is accompanied by employment opportunities.

Furthermore, in the domain of economic development, unemployment and poverty are directly connected especially in developing economies. Persistent unemployment has a direct economic cost and leads to poverty, social exclusion, and lower living standards.

Since the year 2000, Nigeria's economic growth has been accompanied by rising unemployment. While Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth increased from 6.7% in 2006 to 9.5% in 2010, the unemployment rate moved from 12.3% to 21.4% in the same period. Prior to the economic recession, unemployment and underemployment rate had already reached a peak of 29%. Between the first and third quarters of 2016, the economy created a net job of 422,133 while 3.7 million people entered the labour market in the same period. Also, in the first three quarters of 2017, over 4 million jobs were lost as unemployment and underemployment rate climbed to 40%. This scenario signals endemic challenge of labour assimilation as manifested in mounting unemployment and poverty rate.

In resolving this challenge of unemployment, Nigeria must come to the realisation of the fact that the private and public sectors cannot meet the demand for jobs in the short to medium term.

This, therefore, raises the need for effective and efficient national skills development system that is able to fill the gap and absorb the larger unemployed and underemployed groups in the country. Apart from the fact that there are limited jobs in the private sector, Nigeria's unemployment challenge has been exacerbated by the lack of adequate skills among citizens, skills mismatch, and a defective education system, among other factors.³

Skills gap among the school leavers and graduates has been a major cause of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Nigeria's education system does not provide adequate training in skills that fit for productive work. The education curricula at both secondary and tertiary institutions do not focus on prospective skills for youth employment, resulting in the misalignment of skills taught in the schools with the demand of the labour market. Higher institutions of learning keep producing graduates annually with 'academic knowledge' which is largely based on the conglomeration of several 'academic theories' across all fields of studies but lack practical, technical, and vocational skills that are requisite for employability. In many Institutions (colleges, polytechnics, universities, vocational centres among others) where Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is provided, issues of lack of proper administration and the use of obsolete equipment and outdated curriculum are prevalent. The consequence of these is having a large pool of graduates that spend more time in the labour market searching for jobs.

In addition, despite the role of vocational learning in reducing overall youth unemployment through informal employment for those who lack the necessary credentials for entry into the formal sectors, Nigeria does not have an efficient vocational

education system that accommodates the majority of school dropouts or those with no formal education. As result of this, many unemployed Nigerians are disinterested in learning a skill and even those with apprenticeship training lack adequate skills to execute tasks efficiently.

The situation is even worse as foreigners from the neighbouring countries continue to take up the jobs in the local economy¹. For instance, the majority of technicians and craftsmen in the construction industry in Nigeria are from neighbouring West African countries².

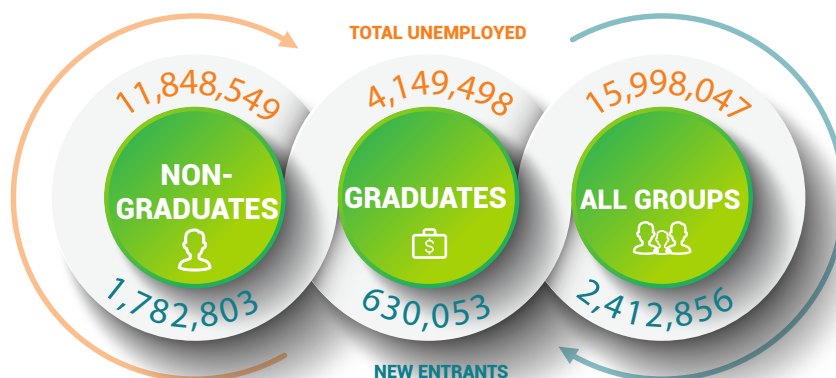
The concern, therefore, is how Nigeria can revamp its technical and vocational system to accommodate a large number of the unemployed youth.

Having established the role of skill development through vocational education and technical training in reducing unemployment, this policy brief reveals gaps in the current vocational and technical education system and proffers recommendations for both policy makers and industry players. The following questions are crucial for this brief:

- What is the role of vocational and technical education in addressing skill gap?
- What reforms are crucial to improve the relevance of vocational and technical education and ensure the majority of the unemployed youths have the necessary skills to contribute productively to the economy?

In addressing these questions, the brief reviews the state and challenges of vocational education and technical training in Nigeria. It also reviews German Vocational Education Training (VET) system as a case study and discusses policy options for revamping Nigeria's vocational and technical education.

TABLE 1: TOTAL UNEMPLOYED BY EDUCATIONAL GROUP, Q3-2017



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and NESG Research Compilation

The State of Vocational and Technical Education in Nigeria

Despite different reforms introduced in the previous years, vocational and technical education is currently suffering from neglect and inadequate human and capital resources that correspond with the needs of the growing youth population. Most of the technical colleges, vocational centres, monotechnic, polytechnics, and universities lack the necessary training facilities to train people in vocational and technical education. To be more concrete, Oryem Origa (2005) identified in his study that “40% of institutions of higher education in Nigeria have laboratory or workshop for technical education programmes while remaining 60% do not have laboratory or workshop space”. Also, curricula of vocational and technical education in large proportion are not in tune with the current innovation and industry need. The quality of academic programs in polytechnic and technical colleges are not closely aligned with the industry needs even the existing ones are not technology-enriched. For example, a survey by Ayonmike (2014) confirms that “obsolete and inadequate instructional materials affect the

existing Technical and Vocational Education and Training curriculum in southern Nigeria technical colleges”.

Furthermore, the current national structure of vocational and technical training does not create an opportunity for the underprivileged and marginalized groups to benefit from vocational education. By way of illustration, one of the entrance requirements into vocational education and technical training in Nigeria is based on the result of Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) which left out the group without school credentials. Therefore, how do we reduce youth unemployment when non-graduates, that is the unschooled and school dropouts, constitute the largest share of unemployed people in Nigeria (see Figure 1). Although there are on-going state-level vocational and technical training programs that accommodate non-graduates (for example, the Lagos State Technical and Vocational Board), there is no existence of a national structure that can accommodate the larger percentage of the non-graduate unemployed.

BOX 1: PAST DEVELOPMENTAL EFFORT OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION



Prior to the first United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) convention on technical and vocational education, Nigeria has been taking several measures to address the nation's needs for vocational and technical education as ways to achieve social and economic development. This was initiated by the establishment of several bodies to control the craft-level technical education through the conduct of examination in a commercial and technical subject. These establishment includes Royal Society of Arts (RSA), the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI), and West Africa Examination Council (WAEC).

Despite the initial reforms, it was noticed that the image of technical education was seen as a programme for academically weak students. In consequence, National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) was established based on the recommendation for scientific and technical manpower and science education by Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) and the need for technical vocation education in the Third National Development Plan, 1975-1980. To further proffer solution to the problem of academically weak students and extends the function of the Board, several accreditations of academic programmes were made in all vocational and technical institutions and the recommendation was made for the establishment of private Polytechnics and Monotechnic in Nigeria. In addition, several efforts have been made by UNESCO to support Nigeria's education authorities both at federal and state levels in revitalizing vocational and technical education to meet the needs of the industries and enhance skill development. In achieving this effort, several cooperation frameworks/projects were established between NBTE and UNESCO, which run through different phases between 2001 and 2012.

Challenges of Vocational and Technical Education in Addressing Unemployment Problem

Lack of industry-aligned curricula

Recognizing the fact that academia and private sector stand as a symbiotic relationship, it is quite unfortunate that teaching and research in Nigeria's institutions are not in tune with the demand of the industries. Nigeria's curricula do not focus on skills prospect for employment. For instance, vocational and technical education curricula are far from the current global industrialization and technology trends. Therefore, failure to incorporate industry need in the Nigerian curriculum exacerbates skills-mismatch problem and will thereby affect the government's long-term effort at reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Lack of political will by the government to develop a national roadmap for VET

Vocational and technical education has been neglected by the government as the priority attention needed is absent. Nigerian government only act if there are strong pressure within and from the

international community. The need to develop employability skills that adapt to the changes in the technological environment is not prioritized by the government. As matter of fact, while countries like Ghana, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland among others have national strategies for vocational and technical training, there is no national roadmap on vocational and technical education in Nigeria.

Limited funding for vocational and technical education

One of the major challenges affecting vocational and technical educational system in Nigeria is inadequate funds to support existing programs. This has led to a shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate educators. Also, there are inadequate laboratories and other relevant facilities in many vocational and technical education institutions. In fact, lack of modern equipment in most vocational and technical institutions has been attributed to the inadequate funding. If this problem persists, the country will keep producing graduates that lack the requisite skills to claim the available jobs.

Misconception of the nature of vocational and technical education

Vocational and technical education is largely perceived as a program for academically weak students, school dropouts, among others. This labour market devaluation of vocational and technical education has led to a huge disinterest in vocational and technical education in Nigeria. In addition, much emphasis is placed on the acquisition of tertiary institution certificate by the Nigerian labour market whereas the non-graduates constitute the largest share of the unemployed in Nigeria as shown in Table 1. In fact, to mention but few, most of the advanced economies like Germany, Austria and Switzerland and likewise some developing economies like India and Brazil place a high premium on skill development through vocational education training across all educational group without discrimination against people with technical and vocational education.

A Case for German VET System and Lessons for Nigeria

Germany's VET system offers a route for a larger share of young adult without eligibility for tertiary education into the labour market.

The system has institutional configuration categorized into three sectors as follows:

- The firm-based training combined with school-based education (called the "Dual system"). In this sector, practical and theoretical knowledge are acquired at the workplace and at vocational schools. The dual system is governed by the Federal Vocational Training Act and training regulations/ordinances enacted by the Joint Committee of the Federal Institute for Vocational Training to ensure broadly defined occupational/industry-specific training curricula. Overall, the aim of this sector is to give opportunities to non-graduates to learn and to move into skilled work.
- The fully qualifying school-based vocational education program. The sector, which is largely organized by each of the 16 German states is mainly for intermediate-level white-collar and dominated by the females.

BOX 2: LESSONS FOR NIGERIA

01

Certification and standardization of on-the-job training processes can increase the transferability of occupation-specific skills between the firms.

02

Social partners (employers and trade unions) are included when establishing institutional linkages between the education system and labour market.

03

Standardized school-based training programs featuring institutionalized firm-based internships are considered as an alternative successful model for German VET system (This system also work in Denmark and Austria).

04

More attentions are given to non-graduates.

Policy Options

Development of a National Roadmap for Vocational and Technical Training

In the face of technological and industrial innovation, national strategy for vocational and technical education further deepens globalization and improves social and economic development. In addition, investing in vocational and technical education enhances the skills of a country's human resource and creates youth employment. Hence, to reduce unemployment and stay in touch with recent innovation, developing a national roadmap for vocation and technical training that addresses the skills and capability challenges across all sectors in Nigeria remains one of the main priorities for youth unemployment reduction. An example of this strategy is the Ghana's five-year strategic plan for Technical and Vocational Education Training.

Establishment of National Vocational and Technical Training Act

In tackling unemployment problem through vocational and technical education training, the establishment of standardized regulations plays an important role in achieving a sustainable and effective system of skills development. Although there is currently a National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) Act but this Act fails to identify some imperatives corresponding to access, equity, quality and relevance of vocational education and technical training. For example, the Act mainly documents the establishment of the board, its fund system and other miscellaneous and supplementary. However, in most countries where national vocational and technical training act exists,⁵ alignment of vocational and technical education with the labour market; provision of skills that are needed for development; development of young people skills for productive work and other critical considerations are central motive for the establishment of federal vocational and technical training act.⁶ Therefore, to promote skills development that reduces youth unemployment, the establishment of federal vocational and technical training act is crucial for Nigeria.

Matching up of Firm-based and School-based Vocational and Technical Training Programs

Closing the skills gaps requires that institutions deepen partnerships with business and industry to strengthen coordination, leverage resources, fund, foster entrepreneurship, and support skills development. Therefore, to develop graduates and non-graduates with industry-need skills, development of requisite skills by active engagement with industry to match education and training with jobs creates a solution to the problem of skills gap and supports the development of young people skills for productive work. A model of this system is the Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, and Austria VET systems where firms are authorized to run high standard training schemes with the structured ordinance by the government to monitor the activities of the training system.

Redesigning National Vocational and Technical Training School to Accommodate the Unschooling and School Dropouts

Low or no education attainment and labour market devaluation of vocational and technical education qualification have contributed to a large-scale emergence of the young population from the labour market. To prevent these problems and its social consequences of unemployment, the establishment of a 3-year standardized national vocational and technical training school where school dropouts and people without degrees could successfully get a competitive qualification to get employed both at formal and informal sectors could play a significant role in reducing youth unemployment. In Germany, where a similar model is run, having some vocational and technical education is a norm even for youth without a school certificate and official eligibility criteria for admission to the program.

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