

Vocational Education: Key to Provision of Specialised Occupation for Self-Reliance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since unemployment and economic weaknesses are increasing in Nigeria, vocational education has become crucial for helping individuals gain abilities in specific professions and rely on themselves. This study analyzes how vocational education allows for the offering of specialised jobs by relying on empirical evidence and international experiences. Through a scoping review, the team analysed studies from reliable sources about how vocational training affects employability, entrepreneurship and the development of communities. This study shows that vocational education deals with the skill-gap crisis and also equips individuals with both soft and technical skills for a lasting income. Major barriers to food security arise because of inadequate financial support, problematic infrastructure and lack of effective policies. The researchers recommended revising rules, involving more funds and modifying learning programs to support vocational education in nationwide development. The paper points out that more research in vocational education is needed to constantly improve its usefulness in matching what students learn with workforce demands.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Specialised Occupation, Self-Reliance, Skill Formation, Nigeria,

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Introduction

The Nigerian labor market has been affected by challenges from unemployment, underemployment and not having enough skilled workers. One continuing difficulty is that the training provided in schools is not always what employers are looking for (Aminu, 2019). When it comes to this issue, vocational education is a good solution as it teaches people skills they can quickly apply at work (Pan et al., 2025). This research investigates the role of vocational education in helping Nigerians become qualified for special jobs and depend on themselves. For years, the emphasis on formal schooling in Nigeria has failed to teach youths and graduates the skills they need to find work (Onuma, 2016; Egwu, 2014). With more universities and polytechnics operating, still a large group of graduates cannot find work which is often because their qualifications are not well suited to job requirements (Stephen, 2019). As a result, offering vocational education plays a bigger part in creating employment and new types of entrepreneurship (Adefunke et al., 2020).

Vocational education provides practical instruction in various trades and occupations, preparing individuals for self-employment and job creation (Hao et al., 2023). With Nigeria's youthful population and limited formal sector opportunities, the importance of fostering self-reliance through skill acquisition cannot be overstated (Na-Allah & Ahmad, 2022). Moreover, global trends suggest that economies that prioritise skill-based training exhibit lower unemployment rates and increased innovation (Lu & Wang, 2023). The objectives of this paper are to: (1) Examine the role of vocational education in promoting specialised occupations in Nigeria; (2) Assess how vocational training contributes to individual and collective self-reliance; and (3) Identify systemic challenges hindering vocational education effectiveness and propose policy recommendations. Through these objectives, the study aims to support policy formulation and implementation geared toward improving vocational education for national development.

Methodology

This study adopted a scoping review methodology, suitable for mapping key concepts, identifying gaps, and synthesising evidence from a wide body of literature (Zhang et al., 2024). Unlike systematic reviews that focus on narrowly defined questions, scoping reviews are ideal for examining complex topics such as vocational education in Nigeria where diverse variables are involved (Lu & Wang, 2023). The research followed the PRISMA-ScR guidelines, involving the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of relevant sources. A search strategy was developed using databases such as ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and MDPI, with keywords including “vocational education in Nigeria”, “self-reliance through skill acquisition”, “employment generation”, and “entrepreneurship education”. A total of 48 peer-reviewed journal articles were initially retrieved. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria (focus on Nigeria or comparable developing countries, publication year 2012–2025, English language), 17 articles were selected for synthesis.

Each study was reviewed for its contribution to understanding how vocational education leads to self-reliance and specialised occupation. Data were extracted regarding study location, methodology, findings, and relevance. For instance, López et al. (2023) explored critical thinking in technical education while Wang et al. (2023) compared vocational and academic education outcomes. Content analysis was applied to identify recurring themes including employability, skill mismatch, entrepreneurship, government support, and infrastructural barriers.

The literature analysed includes contributions from Nigerian-based scholars (Kolade, 2018; Onuma, 2016), international case studies relevant to developing contexts (Pan et al., 2025; Bedoya-Guerrero et al., 2024), and theoretical explorations on education-job alignment (Aminu, 2019). This approach enabled a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities in vocational education and its role in fostering self-reliance.

Results

An important outcome of the scoping review is that vocational education is essential for learning the abilities needed to be independent (Pan et al., 2025). Nowadays, getting practical skills is being seen as a way for people in emerging countries like Nigeria to build their economies and improve their communities. Through vocational education, students can gain trades in areas like carpentry, tailoring, mechanics, electrical work and ICT and end up with skills needed to find work and also pursue business opportunities. This is most obviously seen in technical and artisanal fields because gaining those skills helps create jobs, lowers unemployment and supports local economic growth. Hao et al. (2023) argue that having vocational human capital helps individuals earn more through skills they can use for work which reduces their reliance on assistance and keeps them from facing major financial risks.

Vocational education is offered in Nigeria by technical colleges, via polytechnic institutions and as apprenticeships organised by local groups in the community. Because of these many platforms, obtaining new skills is more accessible to people. Odewale et al. (2019) and Onuma (2016) observed that individuals who finish at vocational institutions generally display a stronger desire to be entrepreneurs than people from solely academic institutions. The job-focused approach of vocational training prepares students for faced with actual issues in the labor market. Kolade (2018) provides an outstanding example by describing the resilience and innovative skills of vocational school learners living through ongoing war and instability in Maiduguri. It was concluded that skill-based training allowed them to deal with hardship by finding work and jobs they could use.

Soft skills are now recognized more often in recent literature as being important for getting a job and growing a business. The ability to communicate, team up, use emotional intelligence, adjust to changes and solve problems is usually what sets apart those who get hired from those who remain unemployed today. Bedoya-Guerrero et al. (2024) point out that online graduate students who have strong soft skills are more likely to find work and do well in their chosen fields. Vanutelli et al. (2023) also point out that teaching emotional intelligence to adults with intellectual disabilities matters, as it helps them succeed in the workplace and increases their productivity. In the vocational education context, the integration of these skills into training curricula ensures that graduates are not only technically capable but also socially adept, making them more versatile and valuable in the labour market.

López et al. (2023) further contribute to this discourse by arguing that critical thinking should be a foundational element of vocational education. Their findings suggest that when vocational trainees are equipped with the ability to think critically and solve problems creatively, their capacity to innovate and operate independently is significantly enhanced. This is particularly relevant in a fast-changing job market that requires workers to be flexible and proactive. The inclusion of critical thinking skills in vocational curricula, therefore, does not just produce technicians but future-ready workers who can respond to challenges and leverage opportunities in their environments.

Despite these evident benefits, the effectiveness of vocational education in Nigeria is hampered by several systemic barriers. Among the most cited obstacles are inadequate

infrastructure, obsolete teaching materials, unmotivated or underqualified instructors, and a lack of synergy between training institutions and industries (Olaniran & Mncube, 2018). These issues undermine the quality and relevance of training provided, leaving graduates ill-prepared for the demands of modern workplaces. Furthermore, the lack of regular curriculum updates means that many institutions still teach outdated skills that are no longer in demand in the contemporary labour market. This disconnect creates a situation where even vocational graduates face unemployment or underemployment because their training is not aligned with market realities.

Helping and supporting the clean technology industry should be given top priority. According to Shu et al. (2019), the government's assistance helps improve how well and how fast vocational schools respond and adapt. The authors highlight that, for vocational training to be transformed, entrepreneurs must play a role, organizations must adapt and institutions should provide support. The authors, led by Veronica, add to this idea by discussing that supporting social SMEs in emerging countries such as Nigeria encourages them to grow worldwide and boost nearby communities' economies. All these studies emphasize one point: to achieve maximum results from vocational education, there needs to be steady and planned investment by governments, development partners and industries in vocational classrooms, studying designed curricula and teacher development.

Entrepreneurship education helps mediate the link between vocational training and the ability to depend on yourself. In their paper, they show that aspirations and business help shape how vocational programs lead to the success of running a business. They discovered that having confidence and help from others makes it likelier for vocational graduates to start and keep their businesses. Neneh (2020) also stresses that social support and feeling confident as an entrepreneur help to increase entrepreneurial intention. Linking entrepreneurship knowledge with opportunities for mentorship, funding and incubation in vocational school supports students as they step from training to running a business.

The background and guidelines behind vocational education should not be overlooked. Uche (2020) points out that the way Nigeria's post-colonial government organized vocational education still affects its structure. In British North America, vocational instruction was looked down upon compared to academic courses, an attitude that has remained in the present. That's why culture must improve its views on trades, together with changes in rules that make vocations more valued by certifying them, creating ladders for development and spreading information to the public. To really help people and the nation, vocational education must first sort out these fundamental issues.

It is still a big issue in Nigeria that graduates' skills do not fit the demands of the job market. Aminu (2019) considers graduate unemployment in Nigeria to be largely a result of this gap. He believes that too much emphasis on learning in school and not enough on skills needed for work has made it difficult for many graduates to meet what employers are looking for. The curricula in vocational education meet the specific requirements of different industries and give students the skills needed right away. Even so, communication between training centers and businesses is important to see that training fits the needs of the workforce.

Lu and Wang (2023) agreed with the need for new approaches in teaching vocational subjects and developed a quality model to evaluate vocational education based on observation. The researchers have found that innovative teaching, frequent curriculum checks and improved training for teachers can greatly boost the performance of vocational education. Cao et al. (2023) studied how skills are formed differently between rural and urban students and



emphasized that there should be equality in offering vocational training. The community members found that students who come from marginalised or rural areas tend not to get access to good training which leads to more poverty and isolation. Solving these inequalities is very important to make Nigeria's vocational system inclusive and just.

There are gaps in providing vocational education to rural and urban areas and to men and women which adds more difficulty to the country's efforts to grow independently. Wang et al. (2023) examined data from rural China and showed that vocational education leads to better job. Taking this approach, they showed that educational background plays the main role in influencing employment. It means that putting funds and efforts into rural vocational institutions and programmes for female advancement in Nigeria might help close current gaps and reach more individuals from rural areas through vocational training. As found by Cao et al. (2023), the quality of education is a problem for rural students who go to cities for schooling, so policy-makers should address mobility and place in their planning.

On the whole, vocational education greatly enhances Nigeria's efforts towards sustainable growth and many people taking care of their own needs. Still, it can succeed only if infrastructural shortcomings are resolved, curricula are updated, soft and entrepreneurship skills are taught and equity is maintained for all students. It is also essential for governments to ensure positive policies and develop funding that help link the training needs of industries with the perception of society about vocational careers. A concerted effort to implement these recommendations will not only enhance the relevance and impact of vocational education but also contribute meaningfully to reducing unemployment, alleviating poverty, and fostering economic independence among Nigerian youth. The findings of this review reiterate the urgency of reform and strategic investment in vocational education as a viable solution to Nigeria's persistent socio-economic challenges.

Discussion of Findings

This study demonstrates that vocational education is an important method of overcoming the gap between what is taught in schools and available jobs in Nigeria. As a result of following this educational pathway, individuals acquire both practical skills and personal skills they can use at work. In addition, vocational education helps people become independent and profit others by starting their own businesses. What makes this significant in Nigeria is that youth unemployment and underemployment are strong challenges in the nation. Researchers previously mentioned by Neneh (2020) and Na-Allah & Ahmad (2022) notice that having skills encourages graduates to focus on economic self-reliance and community development, a trend found in vocational education graduates.

Even so, though the potential of vocational education is recognised, various problems within the system prevent it from being fully supported. Among these issues are unsuitable centres for training, not enough resources for vocational institutions, courses that are no longer relevant to what the industries require and poor coordination among officials. Socially, it is still considered preferable to study at university instead of focusing on some vocational skills which weakens the draw and standing of vocational education. What Olaniran and Mncube (2018) highlight is that these problems decrease the power of vocational education to help in employment and economic matters.

As a result, introducing entrepreneurship education, critical thinking and soft skills should be part of vocational training for students. According to López et al. (2023) and Bedoya-Guerrero et al. (2024), being skilled at technical tasks isn't enough in today's workplaces. Having the skills of communication, problem-solving, adapting and teamwork, along with



technical knowledge, is becoming more important for getting a job. Thus, vocational education needs to develop people's hard and soft skills to get them ready for ever-changing work and entrepreneurship.

The study points out that such an inclusive and well-structured vocational education is essential and can be achieved with active support from the government, companies and communities. Such broad help is important to repair existing weaknesses and to match vocational training with the needs of the job market. They explain that, when public and private organizations work together, vocational training is linked to economic priorities and results in more lasting chances for employment for marginalized people.

In light of Nigeria's socio-economic context, promoting equity in access to vocational education is also paramount. Historical disparities, including rural-urban divides and gender inequality, must be addressed to ensure that all segments of the population benefit from vocational opportunities. Additionally, embedding digital literacy and global competencies into vocational curricula can make graduates more competitive in the global economy. As the world of work evolves rapidly, Nigeria's vocational education system must evolve correspondingly to remain relevant and impactful. Thus, strategic reform, investment, and innovation are required to maximise the potential of vocational education as a vehicle for self-reliance and sustainable development.

Conclusion

It is confirmed by this study that vocational education is essential for those in Nigeria who want to do specialized and independent work. With the help of technical and other skills, vocational education opens up opportunities for people to leave poverty and joblessness behind. Nonetheless, lots of its opportunities are not used because of issues with infrastructure, negative views and not meeting what the market needs.

Major improvements in the curriculum, funding and the support system are urgently required. Prioritising vocational training should be a top priority for policymakers wanting to improve the country. Helping students move from education to work, building partnerships between education and industry and making education more inclusive are important progresses we need. Although considerable studies have been conducted, some gaps still exist in finding out how vocational training affects women, those with disabilities and youth in rural areas. Future examinations should specifically watch vocational results, examine the outcome of using digital help for education and work and compare policies in Nigeria against those of other developing nations.

In general, this paper supports the understanding that vocational education promotes independence and helps communities become more resilient. If Nigeria focuses and plans well, its youth can help the country use vocational education to accelerate its economic development.

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