

The Deteriorating Status of Vocational Studies in Nigerian Universities; an Impediment to the Nation's Future

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Abstract Nigeria and the course of her future make an interesting topic especially with being the most populous black nation on earth as well as a regional power in Africa. Despite these and her being endowed with abundant natural and human resources, Nigeria has always been tagged by several scholars and analysts as a state with an uncertain future due to her inability to maximize her numerous resources, utilize opportunities as well as the inability to halt the impending threats of internal violence, terrorism, and militancy; coupled with her failure to tackle new security threats and challenges properly plus her inability to actualize some of her goals and visions due to corruption, tribalism among others. In all these projections, the field of education has a gigantic role to play in putting the future of the country on the right path but has been found wanting with the standard of education in Nigeria declining seriously, especially the much-needed vocational studies. Asides providing the tutelage essential to the growth of the pupil's personality; the importance of the universities in providing the necessary skills for advanced and futuristic jobs as well as undertaking research works to expand the volume of intellectual understanding of current and projected issues in the country and their application to such issues, cannot be undermined with regards to the country's future. This text thus seeks to address the deteriorating status of vocational studies in Nigerian Universities as an impediment to the future of the country.

Keywords: vocational education, universities, Nigeria, decline, perception and future

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1. Introduction

Countries often engage in long-term and short-term plans in order to achieve an intended target in the future, knowing that what the future holds is always very important to the survival of that state hence why prospecting the future is very important to the policymakers in a nation. Often time, a lot of factors contribute overtime to the healthiness or destruction of a country with time, and analysts, as well as policymakers, are often vocal in deciphering these factors and how they could be positively maximized so as to enhance the future of each state. Intended to prepare individuals for a specialized job or vocation, vocational education has often been rightly interlinked with a country's efficiency and competitiveness, [1] hence why it has huge implications on the future of a country. Sound vocational studies often translate to more skilled workers, and as a result, brings additional outputs from businesses in a country which is why developed and underdeveloped countries are trying to restructure and update their vocational education system so as to be able to provide the skilled workers imbibed

with the up-to-date knowledge needed to contribute to the growth of their economy. Nigeria is not an exemption, despite the minimal attention given to vocational studies, its labour market across the country has over the years witnessed a rapid development where we have seen more local business adopt a global model where the focus is on developing and competing internationally. This has led to a fierce competition among businesses to remain on top, resulting to a heightened need for skilled and high-quality employees required to operate in varied specialized jobs, which will, in turn, enhance the output of the Nigerian labour market; and in so doing, secure not just the development of the country today, but her future as well. While vocational studies are traditionally not associated with universities, the need for workers with the needed expertise has seen several Nigerian universities adopting the tutoring of vocational studies in their institutions although, this trend hasn't been discussed much by scholars and analysts. Notwithstanding, education especially vocational studies have been on the decline in Nigeria and its dwindling status despite its undeniable importance, has seen a poor attitude towards the practice of vocational studies in Nigerian universities. Unfortunately, this can be adduced to have a direct impact

on the development of the country as well as her future, negatively. To address how this is possible, it is important to look at an overview of vocational studies in Nigeria. In the subchapter below, this will be done, while the course of the subsequent subchapters will all be aiming to address the poor status of vocational studies in Nigerian Universities as well as the hitches it brings to the future of the country.

2. History of Vocational Education in Nigerian Universities

Although the history of vocational studies in Nigeria is said to have originated in a crude method of apprenticeship form [2,3] before the colonial times. It metamorphosed into its current form, before the Nigerian Independence when the Federal government established several technical and vocational institutions such as the Hope Waddell Training Institute (1895), Yaba Higher College (1934), as well as the three technical institutions located at Yaba, Enugu, and Kaduna and the seven trade centers and eighteen handicraft centers spread across the country [2,3]. However, the history of vocational education in Nigerian Universities started after the independence when the first universities in the country were established in the Western, Northern, and Eastern regions of the country. Historically, the University

of Nigeria, Nsukka in the Eastern part of Nigeria became the first university to offer the first organized Vocational – Technical Education (VTE) program to be seen in West Africa [2,3].

This initial practice of vocational studies led to a gradual embrace of vocational and technical studies by other existing universities and by some of the universities that were established in the country after the civil war. Years later, during the 80s and the 90s, some State Administrators built universities of science and technology such as the Old Anambra State University of Science and Technology [4]. However, as the educational system went under a rut during the military regime, due to the neglect by the leaders as well as the monstrous corruption gradually affecting every part of the system then, the educational system, as well as the universities, plummeted steadily, affecting drastically, the practice of vocational education in Nigerian Universities. Notwithstanding, several universities and their governing bodies made efforts that saw the tutoring of selected vocational and technical courses such as Estate Survey, Secretarial studies, etc. Even though Polytechnics and Technical Colleges still led as breeding grounds for vocational and technical studies, several universities maintained this course. By the late 90s as well as the beginning of the 21st century, a good number of the universities joined the trend with several of them now offering vocational and technical courses.

Table 1.

TYPE OF VOCATIONAL COURSE OFFERED	OFFERING UNIVERSITIES
Available as Automobile Technology Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bauchi State University • Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University
Available as Construction Technology Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modibbo Adama University of Technology
Available as Electronics Technology Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ebonyi State University • Modibbo Adama University of Technology
Available as Mechanical Technology Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enugu State University of Science and Technology • Nnamdi Azikiwe University • Modibbo Adama University of Technology • Niger Delta University
Available as Technical Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adekunle Ajasin University • Delta State University • Bayero University • University of Benin • Cross River University of Science and Technology • University of Uyo • Nnamdi Azikiwe University • River State University of Science and Technology • Modibbo Adama University of Technology • Tai Solarin University of Education • Ekiti State University • University of Jos • Niger Delta University
Available as Vocational and Technical Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niger Delta University • Ambrose Alli University • Benue State University • Enugu State University of Science and Technology • Ekiti State University • Osun State University • Ebonyi State University
Available as Woodwork Technology Education in:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University

Source: University Compass [7]

Currently, vocational education is being offered in several Nigerian universities such as Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi; Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, and the University of Uyo; University [5]. Akpan et al assert that Ahmadu Bello University, University of Port Harcourt, University of Uyo, Benue State University...are offering organized vocational-technical education to the Nigerian youth [6]. In the same vein, vocational and technical courses are being offered at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma; Benue State University, Makurdi; Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu and Osun State University, Osogbo [5]. In Table 1, using the current brochure of courses and higher institutions of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the board handling entrance examination into higher institutions in Nigeria; University Compass gives a more detailed background of Nigerian Universities who have delved into vocational education and the nature of vocational courses they offer.

3. Overview of Vocational Studies in Present-day Nigerian Universities

The universities in Nigeria have unfortunately been affected by the general decay in the Nigerian educational system, despite being regulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC), an arm of government established in 1962 to monitor both Federal, State, and Private universities within Nigeria [8]. Unfortunately, the expectations on Nigerian universities to deliver quality graduates for the advancement of the country like all universities across the world and participate in research works to expand the volume of intellectual understanding of current and projected issues in the country as well as their application to issues facing the country; has been riddled severally with employers losing faith in graduates. This has hugely undermined the future of the country. Even the influx of private universities that tended to supplement the decadence in public institutions has come under severe criticisms of failing to halt the flop as well as being highly expensive with students expected to pay huge tuition fees and other high fees. While the NUC is expected to grant approval for all academic programmes run in Nigerian universities as well as grant approval for the establishment of all higher educational institutions offering degree programmes in Nigerian universities, and ensure quality assurance of all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities, coupled with being a channel for all external support to the Nigerian universities [8]; the quality of the standard of education has terribly gone down, including the vocational courses adopted in some Nigerian universities.

Currently, there is a huge decline of vocational studies in Nigerian universities. This rut is hugely visible especially in the perception held towards Vocational Studies by most Nigerian Universities Students. It is important to note that tackling this decline is almost impossible without improving the students' understanding of Vocational Studies; as without bettering this perception, it is extremely difficult to effectively maximize the impacts of vocational studies in Nigerian Universities,

even when the other causes have been taken care of. The students are the forebearers of Vocational Studies as well as the future of the country. Thus, this text will in the next subchapter, examine the current perception of vocational studies by students of Nigerian universities, with a view to offering workable solutions.

4. Current Perception of Vocational Studies by Nigerian Universities Students

Replying to an undisclosed self-delivered questionnaire, 300 undergraduates of an equal number of males and females from three selected Nigerian universities namely Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and Ekiti State University, Ekiti; responded to questions asked about details of their sex, age, course, department, preferred job after school, if they know about vocational studies, what they think about vocational studies, and if and how vocational studies can be improved. The choice for these universities is due to their being located in different parts of the country: the north, south, and west respectively; as well as the fact that these universities all offered certain vocational courses.

As they were expected to fill immediately, the students returned all the 300 questionnaires shared to them. 92% of the respondents indicated their knowledge of vocational studies. 90% didn't think of vocational education as a necessary venture for an easy or steady career. 19% believed vocational education could be improved and shared ideas on how this could be attainable, with a majority of them (13% out of 19%) believing that the bulk of the load lies with the government.

Consequently, despite the fact that vocational studies consisting of "practice-based and on-the-job learning company orientations do not only shape professional aptitudes but also social and personal abilities necessary for individual growth," [9] the research conducted by this study among three hundred students of selected three Nigerian universities discovered that there is a poor disposition towards vocational studies and that, currently, there is a strong yearning for well-paid white-collar jobs among undergraduates despite the lack of the vocational studies needed to bring about this, even as the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) asserts that "acquiring new skills and competences can extend professional opportunities at micro level" [10].

5. Reasons for the Poor Perception of Vocational Studies held by Today's University Undergraduates in Nigeria

The dreadful perception that Nigerian undergraduates and graduates hold towards vocational studies stems from both administrative and educational issues as well as the societal factor that has persistently occurred for decades and these issues has over the years gradually ingrained in undergraduates, an appalling perception towards vocational studies. Examining the administrative issues, it

is inevitable that due to the neglect of the educational system especially vocational studies by past governments since the late 70s, vocational education and training (VET) has been steadily on the decline. Everyone, from the street urchins on the street to the politicians running the affairs at the capital, Abuja; were conscious of this decline in the standard of education in Nigeria. Unfortunately, everyone was more focused on getting contracts, government slots, and more money at the expense of the urgent need to provide a suitable learning environment and the facilities as well as the right tutors to reignite the passion for education, especially vocational studies. Indeed, doing those things neglected would secure the future of the country. Rather, the inconclusive government programs which were in most cases haphazardly organized; the lip service paid to sound initiatives and reforms that could have lifted the Nigerian vocational studies as well as the major one: inadequate funding; really hampered the practice of vocational studies in Nigeria and its ability to be modernized as well as maximizing its capabilities to effectively impact on the pupils and subsequently maintain the interest of all, especially the youths on vocational studies.

The issues crippling vocational studies and leading to the lamentable perception and disapproval of vocational studies by Nigerian Undergraduates and graduates are not just administration based only. Educationally, a lot of issues have snowballed to lead to the bedeviling of vocational education and these are problems witnessed by the students daily in their place of learning; from a scarcity of teachers with the appropriate experience to the shortage of the necessary educational books, materials, tools, and equipment suitable to the Nigerian terrain and futuristic in the global sense. More so, other issues grounding vocational studies that undergraduates equally witness in their various schools are scantily-equipped laboratories, non-existing correlation of classroom exercises with the realities encountered in real life, and the use of theory-based teaching with insufficient practical tutorials as well as being taught with an outdated curriculum.

From close scrutiny of the students, this text is of the view that the perception of vocational education by Nigerian undergraduates is also influenced by the rising truancy and massive yearning for the easy life and life on the fast lane. These two issues developed out of the mass decadence in morality due to corruption, the mass admiration for the rich irrespective of the source of wealth, an abundance of plenty wanna-be musicians in Nigeria and the thriving of advanced fee fraud as well as the popularity of reality shows like *Big Brother Naija* where winners are rewarded with millions of naira and cars unlike in schools where best graduating students are rewarded with just 10,000 naira [11]. Furthermore, besides the preference for white-collar and office-based jobs, one of the banes of vocational studies in Nigeria is the general conception held about it as a course for the average, poor and incapacitated people [12,13] due to it being perceived as a course that will end up producing 'ordinary roadside workers' and their likes. Subsequently, pressure from parents and peers comes in as the rich hardly allow their wards to study them and even the middle-class citizens

shy away from them, concentrating on courses considered 'more professional' as a way of making that leap into the highest class in the society. Hence, much ado is placed on courses like Medicine, Economics, Law, and Banking that are traditionally regarded as prestigious professions by parents who normally compel their wards to choose them. This limited understanding of vocational studies serves as one of the major factors that have clouded the minds of university undergraduates. Consequently, burdened with these mental excesses as well as the little or no result to show from enrolling for vocational studies due to its decline; university undergraduates are drawn to and more focused on those 'prestigious courses' that command respect and can inflate their pockets fast, even if it means working with inadequate experience; hence the lamentable perception they hold about vocational studies and their scanty enrolment into vocational courses.

6. Supposed Impacts of Universities Graduates and Undergraduates Grounded in Effective Vocational Studies on the Future of the Country

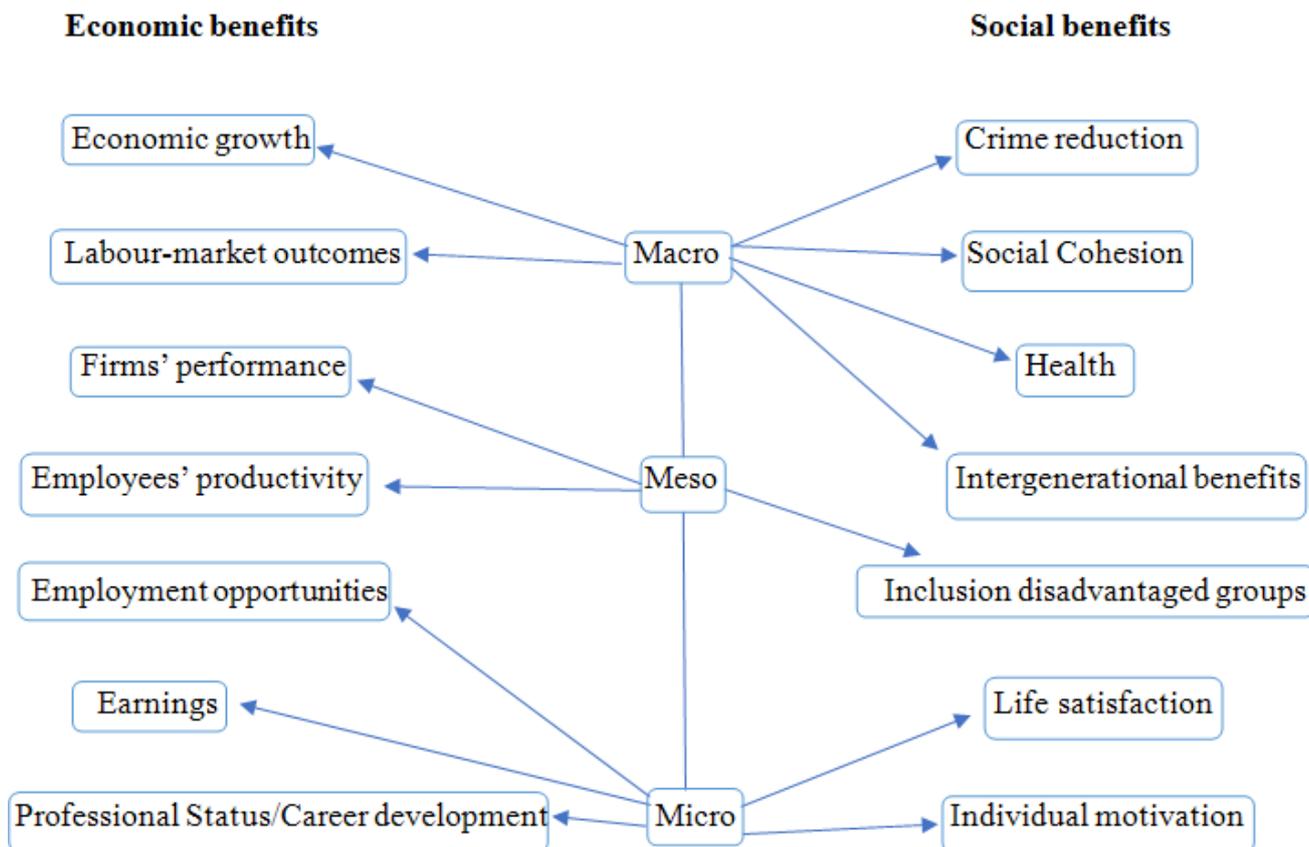
Bearing in mind that "the major thrust of technical and vocational education (TVE) worldwide is to address issues of youth unemployment, poverty, and international competitiveness in skills development towards current and projected opportunities and challenges," [14] this text will from the two tables below, describe how university students imbued with the expertise of vocational studies can impact on the future of Nigeria.

While [Table 2](#) outlines the economic and social benefits of vocational studies to the individual and the country at large, the third table below tries to explain these points a bit.

Looking at these tables and their points, it is clear that vocational education brings massive short-term and long-term economic gains to the country where it is effectively practiced. While it is clear that vocational studies reduce unemployment and bring improvement to workers; this impact remains one of the basics for national development and economic boom. Also, "for those already engaged in economic activity, acquiring new abilities could be an insurance against unemployment and also favours potential productivity and professional mobility." [17] By improving these employment records, vocational studies provide security of a job and ensure economic stability as well as periodic elevation of job status, which in turn derives economic benefits for employers and thereby stimulates economic growth.

Furthermore, by instilling the needed knowledge and skills, vocational studies bring about technological progress as well as improved productivity in the labour force that translates to the economy of a country and a well-secured future for her. Built towards impacting highly developed knowledge and expertise needed for current and futuristic jobs; an effective vocational education indirectly saves the country from losses this ignorance could cost in the future, which could certainly be more at the time, the boomerang occurs.

Table 2.



Source: CEDEFOP [15]

Table 3.

<p>The economic dimension</p> <p><i>Macro level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic returns on VET: research on the evaluation of public and private investment in VET in terms of profitability and economic growth; • labour-market outcomes of VET: reduction of unemployment and inequality resulting from more people attaining a VET qualification. <p><i>Meso level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performance of enterprises: costs and benefits of training in terms of profitability and innovativeness; • employee productivity: individual abilities and capacity to contribute to profit after VET. <p><i>Micro level:</i></p> <p>The benefit of IVET and CVET on individuals: earnings, finding a job, reduction of skill mismatch, integration into the labour market with satisfactory wage, further career development opportunities and professional status.</p> <p>The social dimension</p> <p><i>Macro level:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effects of VET across generations within families and how family impacts on skills development; • relationship between VET and health: how education and VET can support the health of a nation; • social cohesion: multidimensional concept measured by, for example, tolerance, trust, formal and informal networking (social and relation capital), low grade of social polarisation, etc.; • how education and VET can reduce delinquent and criminal acts in a society. <p><i>Meso level:</i></p> <p>Inclusion of disadvantaged or marginalised groups through education and VET.</p> <p><i>Micro level:</i></p> <p>Personal well-being: quality of life for individuals and effects on personal development, attitudes and motivation.</p>

Source: CEDEFOP [16].

Asides the economic impact, vocational studies equally have a transformative impact, as by teaching people the necessary skills needed to make their lives and that of other people better, it serves as a platform that helps to steer people towards a productive and beneficial lifestyle. The research journal from The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) asserts that "Practice-based and on-the-job learning company orientations do not only shape professional aptitudes but also social and personal abilities necessary for individual growth." [9] Hence people equipped with knowledge from vocational studies tend to have a better lifestyle than their counterparts and are more productive in their jobs and have a superior career outlook. Similarly, when imbued with the knowledge from vocational education, it can translate to higher incomes which will, in turn, transform the pupil's class and life materially. Thus, vocational education also impacts the economy through added consumption and spending as is always the case when there is an increase in salary or wage.

Vocational education isn't just an important and dependable factor for economic development but brings about social and cultural impacts. It plays a huge role in bettering the economic situation of rural and sub-urban areas. Also, investments put into getting the right knowledge and expertise for a particular job often guarantees mastery of that job that is not only likely to bring much more profit but also bring about improved self-esteem and self-fulfillment, more especially to the less-privileged and downtrodden that indulge in it. It also affects the security as vocational studies reduce unemployment which breeds crime and instability, two issues that are very harmful to the economy as well as the future of a country since these negative impacts drastically affect the lives and infrastructure in a country.

7. Workable Solutions for Improved Perception and Acceptance of Vocational Studies by Undergraduates in Nigerian universities

Subconsciously, Nigerian-trained graduates have had their mindsets geared towards a negative perception of vocational studies due to certain reasons that emanate from previous experiences. The findings from previous researches as well as the research conducted by this text suggest that this perception is coming from a combination of factors. Factors such as societal misconception of vocational education, negligence from government and policymakers, lack of funding, shortage of study materials and well-trained teachers, pressure from parents and peers; as well as truancy, distaste for hard work and a massive desire for life on the fast lane. All these coerce them into unpremeditatedly developing a high indifference towards vocational studies.

From the findings stated above, there is a link between study materials, domestic background/backing, self-confidence and passion for education, societal myths, as well as how the student feels; thus there ought to be a collective effort from all, the society, family, and the student as well. However, knowing the dire need for the restoration

of vocational studies in Nigerian universities, the government needs to be at the forefront of these revolutionary steps, especially with regards to backing with the needed funds, provisions, tools, materials, and improved power supply as well as formulation of effective policies and reforms aimed at total reinvigoration of vocational education within universities and all over the country. While the Nigerian universities offering vocational education should be commended, the big question is: how deep and practical-wise are the teachings of those courses and how has the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) fared in handling vocational education in the universities? Point blank, the vocational education curriculum in universities must be thoroughly reviewed. There should be an efficient system put in place to ensure constant monitoring of the practice of vocational studies in Nigerian universities and efforts should be made to ensure that vocational and technical education in universities is tailored to be further relevant to the current and future needs of the labour market and society in general.

An effective vocational study is of immense benefit to all the stakeholders, including the entire nation, from the government, community, family, schools, parents, to the student. Hence the society, especially the media and the parents should play a substantial role in moulding student attitudes and mindsets towards vocational studies. It is the stance of this text that for vocational studies to thrive in Nigeria, there are steps that needs to be taken. Corruption needs to be tackled head-on by scrutinizing the source of any sudden wealth acquired by citizens while the police and the law enforcement agencies need to be empowered with the right gadgets, data, and tools [18] to be able to effectively halt the practice of advanced fee fraud in Nigeria. This will help in curbing the art of truancy destroying Nigerian youths and undergraduates. Parents should also avoid choosing careers for their children or forcing them to adopt their preferred courses.

Equally, there is a need to fish out and adopt passionate and active teachers with the maximum experience in vocational studies and training that will serve as effective participants in the resuscitation and development of vocational studies in Nigerian universities. These teachers need to be adequately and promptly paid also, alongside rewarding hard work and outstanding students in the best way possible [18]. Equally, all the stakeholders should strive to see that vocational and technical education are tutored in a conducive atmosphere in the universities and with updated and colourful texts. Simply put, the discipline must be attractive through qualitative investments into it. On their part, undergraduates should discard truancy, adopt diligence as well as hard work, and strive not to be discouraged by previous dreadful experiences they had about vocational education and training. This can be further encouraged through orientations and seminars.

8. Conclusion

The attempt by this text to address the dwindling status of vocational studies in Nigerian Universities with regard to how it affects the future of the West African country. In the course of it, it equally ventured into unraveling the

current reality of the poor perception displayed towards vocational studies by most Nigerian undergraduates as well as the reasons behind their depleted enrolment into vocational education courses and poor perception they have of it. Furthermore, it examined the supposed impacts of university graduates and undergraduates grounded in effective vocational studies on the future of the country before suggesting practical solutions through which those issues facing vocational studies in Nigerian universities could be fixed in order to put the future of the country on the right path and ensure the needed socio-economic advancement. While the impacts of vocational studies are difficult to evaluate or predict with regards to the future of the country; there are costs to the Nigerian economy, related to her future that are associated with the staleness of vocational studies in Nigeria. Molagun bemoans the negligence towards vocational studies in Nigeria as she asserts that the “Historical records on the development of vocational and technical education revealed that the trend of lukewarmness towards vocational education has continued for a long time.” [13] Reviving it is important as Ekpenyong (2008) in Igbinedion & Ojeaga (2012) asserts that “nations after nations have progressively reviewed their systems of education with a view to bringing about speedy national development as a country’s level of socio-economic development is generally linked to the type of educational philosophy and system in operation.” [19] Really, several types of research have been conducted on vocational studies in Nigeria and they are in unison that the resuscitation of vocational studies will go a long way in salvaging the development as well as the future of Nigeria; as the economic effects of an effective vocational education are undoubtedly beneficial. Throughout the world, the popularity of vocational studies is on the increase as ever before and this attention is deserving as its impacts on society are vast and well known.

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