

Vocational Education, Public Policy and National Development in Nigeria: The Journey to Sustainable Development

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Received 29 July 2025; revised 12 August 2025; accepted 01 September 2025

Abstract

No country can develop to its full potential if the ‘white collar jobs’ are the prime focus by the government. It is a normal trend across the world for a child through conventional educational system (CE). However, the secret of the moment of most developed countries growth is the facts that the vocational educations (VE) are given a conventional outlook. Government policies in the developed countries place high value on vocational education certificate just like other conventional certificates. What is the level of mixture of the vocational (VE) and conventional education (CE) needed for national development in Developing countries? Using the System theory, the study explains how government policy can help VE to aid CE so as to ensure national development. Qualitative methods are used to collect data and descriptive methods used for data analysis. This study provides the typology of levels of VE and CE mixed for national and sustainable development attainment.

Keywords: Development, Policies, Sustainable development, System theory, Vocational education,

1. Introduction

No country can develop to its full potential if the preference for the ‘white collar jobs’ are on the high side by the employers of labour and as well the main policy focus of the government. The white-collar jobs are the functionalities of the conventional education (CE) system. It is a normal trend across the world for a child to be trained from primary school, through secondary and cumulate it in tertiary institutions. This is the trend that has sustained economies of the world to a large extent. Some jobs are specifically tailored for the conventional education such as banking sector, administrative jobs, secretariat jobs, insurance sector, medical sciences among others in the cooperate jobs sector.

However, the secret of the moment of most developed countries’ economy is the facts of the relevance and utility of ‘blue collar jobs’ also called vocational educations (VE). They are the backbone for the ‘white collar jobs’. They are the workshops that fabricate life and operational structure for the conventional education’s white-collar jobs. The quality, volatility and sanctity (QVS) of vocational education is directly proportional to the extent of growth in the economy. The quality of vocational education is the finesse of the type of outputs it is producing be it world standard or national or local standards (Ajeniweni, Bamgbowu and Obasi, 2024; Okwuchukwu, and Okpara, 2025). The volatility of vocational education is the extent of what they can do, the depth of their expertise in dealing with input for a proper output. The sanctity of vocational education and skills is the process, manner and how they are doing things and relevance to the society.

Vocational educations mainly provide the practical laboratory for the execution of the theoretical facts learnt in the books to become practical economic truth for the national development. It transforms the theoretical knowhow to the practical knowhow. It bridges the gap between imaginary theories to practical and achievable outcomes. The extent of its quality, volatility and sanctity practice is equivalent to the strength of national development. These quality, volatility and sanctity (QVS) can be attained through relevant government policies.

Government policies in the developed countries do not segregate vocational education certificate holders from conventional education certificate holders. The total take home pay that some vocational education certificate holders receive is mostly equivalent to some other conventional white collar jobs (Aluko and Aluko, 2021; Okwuchukwu, and Okpara, 2025). The availability of jobs for the vocational education certificate holders is always surplus and sufficient to allow them to contribute their invaluable roles to the national development. Government policies in good climes also provide enabling environments for them to thrive without acrimony. They embrace both conventional and vocational education as a complementary package that provide national growth and sustainable development.

Developing countries all over the world are expected to follow the policy trend of merging the vocational education with the conventional education. If it is working in the developed countries, it workability in the developing country is a matter of relevant government policy and political will to formalize the informality in the vocational education sector in the country. Government policy on the quality, volatility and sanctity (QVS) of the vocational education must be well crafted. The jobs and market space discrimination must also be outlawed by relevant policies and institutional structure for implementations.

This study opined that before every student progresses into the senior secondary school education, he or she must be enrolled in a vocational school where they will learn a particular skill. This will be certified at the junior level and further at the senior level before the terminal senior secondary education. Further training will be encouraged for the advance certificate at the post-secondary level of certification. This will reduce the discrimination and inferiority complex surrounding the vocational educational sector. Therefore, what is the level of mixture of the vocational (VE) and conventional education (CE) needed for national development?

Previous studies emphasizes mostly on either vocational education or conventional education as a panacea for national development (Okwuchukwu, and Okpara, 2025; Ugwaka, 2025; Okpara, and Ekeh, 2025). A few studies laid little emphasis on the mix of VE and CE (Ahmadu, and Orisaremi, 2025; Sani, Muhammad, Dutsin-Amare and Muhammad, 2025; A'ih, Ene, Oluchi, and Ozavisa, 2025). This is a gap and there is an urgent need for a comprehensive study that provides a good mix between the VE and CE. This study provides the typology of levels of vocational education and conventional education mix that is needed and that can be mixed for national and sustainable development to be attained. System theory professed by von Battalanfy and domesticated by David Easton is utilized to explain how government policy can serve as a viable input to help vocational education through a strong institutional means in conjunction with conventional education outputs so as to ensure national development.

2. Literature Review

This section generally entails the conceptual clarification of some important variables in the study such as vocational education and conventional education. It also explains the empirical and theoretical analysis of the concepts.

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

This section specifically entails the conceptual clarification of some important variables in the study such as vocational education and conventional education.

2.1.1 Vocational Education

Vocational education in the perspective of the Africa Development Bank (AfDB) in conjunction with the UNESCO and the International Labor Organization (ILO), (2022) is the aspects of the educational process that involve the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupants in various sectors of economic and social life, in addition to general education. It is also the study of technologies and related sciences outside the formal educational settings so as to equip people with technical skills to solve basic problems, improve economic livelihood of people and prepare them for the labour market. (AfDB, 2022). In addition to technical knowledge and aptitude, vocational education emphasis is also on acquiring softer skills in negotiation, communication and teamwork. Vocational education in recent times is acquired in public and private educational establishments, or other forms of formal or informal instruction aimed at granting all segments of the society access to life-long learning resources and entrepreneurship.

It can also be described as a job an individual does different from the white collar jobs because of a strong feeling that it brings fulfillment to ones purpose of life. It can also be seen as a job you do by way of rendering service or help to others different from the conventional white collar jobs. It is a vocation that is those work activities in which one is specially gifted. It is a purpose driven commitment that is intrinsically rewarding to the person and they perform them with feelings of satisfaction, high level of autonomy, importance and relevance (Abdurrashid, 2019). Vocational training therefore is the training that equips a person with the skills you need to do a particular job. It can be described as any skill training ‘usually roadside’ where the basic scientific knowledge behind the said skills are ignored or not emphasized but the mechanics and outcome are of paramount importance.

2.1.2 Conventional Education

Conventional Education in the same vein is the educational design and process of acquiring knowledge, skills, aptitudes, and attitudes necessary for effective living (Ukachi and Ejika, 2018; Jiboku, Jiboku, and Babasanya, 2021). It prepares people or personnel for one or a chain of occupations, trader or jobs. Vocational education is a major part of the global education systems relevant in various countries around the world; it has high level of informal enrolment and a large proportion of learners at various levels of education (OECD, 2023). It often play the needed role in ensuring that both young people and adults have the essential skills needed by various aspects of the societies and labour markets today and also for the future (OECD, 2023). At the same time, vocational education is a proven way of equipping people with the utility skills needed to be responsive to change. It is a skill that is strategically located at the intersection between the conventional education system and the labour market, VE is well placed to respond to the complex skill needed as a result of dynamic societal needs.

3. Theoretical framework

This section entails the use of a grounded theory (system theory) to empirically analysis the linkage, between the variables of the study such as vocational education and conventional education to public policy and national development. It scientifically justifies that systematic linkage of policy inputs and its corresponding output and feedbacks on national development.

3.1 System theory

An analytical foundation for describing and explaining an organization in general is provided by systems theory. According to von Bertalanffy (1956), a system is a complex of interdependent parts. In order to identify general principles that apply to all systems, von Bertalanffy encourages systems thinking across all fields. In contrast to the analytical, mechanical paradigm that defines classical science, it presents the concept of systems as a new scientific paradigm. Rapoport (1966, 1968) defined a system as a collection of related entities bound together by history and behavior. In contrast to Rapoport, Easton (1966) suggested a

broad definition of political systems. Easton described a system as any set of variables regardless of the degree, of interrelationship among them that interact for a mutual outcome.

An arrangement or combination of items or components that create a complex or unified whole is called a system. Chaotic is the opposite of methodical. According to Johnson, Kast, and Rosenzweig (1964), a chaotic environment is one in which everything is dependent upon everything else. Nonetheless, a system's fundamental elements are its inputs, transformation process, external variable, and outputs. Inputs: The external environment can provide a variety of inputs, such as people, capital, managerial expertise, and technical skills. The different claimants—groups of individuals putting claims on the company—such as workers, customers, suppliers, investors, and the federal, state, and local governments are also included.

Process of transformation: In an organizational system, inputs are efficiently and effectively converted into outputs. There are various ways to look at this. Management functions including marketing, finance, production, and personnel can be the focus. External variable: One element of the systems model is the external variable. The conversion of inputs into outputs is significantly influenced by the external environment. Organizations are compelled to react to the external world, even though they have little or no control over it.

The outputs: Inputs are protected and used by the management functions, which convert them into outputs while taking external factors into account. The company produces a variety of outputs. Products, services, profitability, contentment, and the integration of the objectives of different claimants to the company are typically among the numerous things they include. Lastly, giving the system new life notably, some of the outputs in the systems model of the policy-making process turn back into inputs. Employee happiness and newly acquired knowledge or skills appear to be significant human inputs. In a similar vein, if the results are not worth it, policies are reinstated.

The figure I show the system analysis of input environment in terms of demands and support into the political system and the outputs in terms of the decisions and policy made on the political system. The feedback mechanism from the policy environment is mostly used to crosscheck the extent of effectiveness of the inputs. Vocation educational policy need is an example of input in the political system which have to be integrated and processed out as part and component of a comprehensive education policy for the country and at the same time, the output environment (which include the recipient of the education policy) will give the input environment (which include the policy actors) the necessary feedbacks of the effect of implementing the education policy.

A good input such as the vocational education policy needs will lead to a good output after the processing mechanisms had critically consider the workability and importance of the policy. At the processing stage many policies are lay to rest while others are drastically transformed and yet others retain their mandates of the original intensions. The feedback stage gives the policy actors the correct reflections on the policy whether the community appreciates the policy's effect or it needed to be changed.

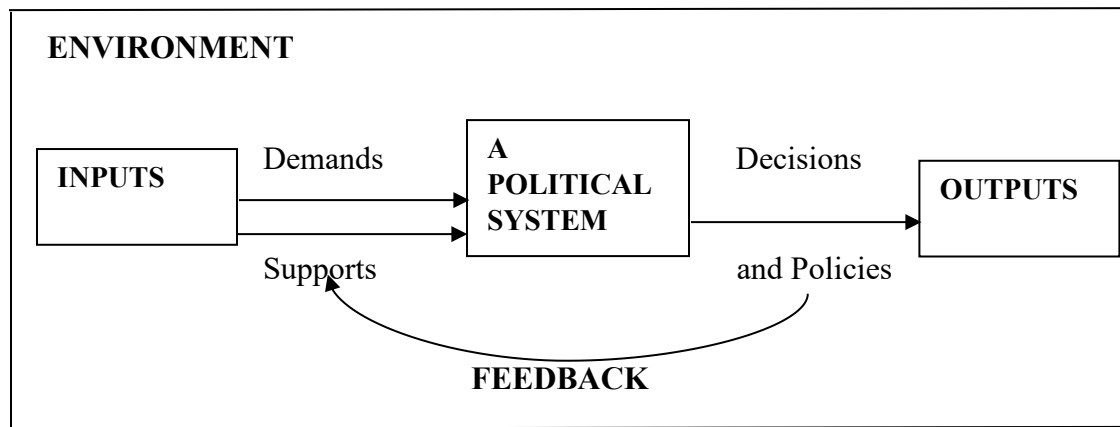


Fig. I: System theory analysis

4. Methodology

The study employed a systematic content review research design. This approach was employed taken into consideration the theme, and the corresponding variables such as the dependent, and the independent variables in the study. These make inference to government policy on vocational education and national development in Nigeria. Secondary sources of data which include journal papers from Scopus, Science direct and Google scholar database among others spanning a period of 2011 to 2025 were used.

Qualitative content analysis (documentary analysis) was subsequently used which include several stages such as selecting relevant texts, familiarization, coding was done manually. Themes were generated and identified within the coding framework which include; Development, Policies, System theory, Vocational education, Sustainable development.

Also, the same process of content analysis and coding were employed to analyze vocational education and conventional education, government policies on vocational and conventional education dichotomy in Nigeria, typology of mixture of vocational education and conventional education mix, these include; Minimum or Low mix typology (M-LM typology), Medium or Average mix typology (M-AM typology) and Maximum or High mix typology (M-HM typology). Consequently, the themes identified were interpreted in the contest of the study aided by a deductive approach, specifically, conceptual analysis. The findings were compared to the reviewed literature where inferences or conclusions of the study were drawn.

1. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study. The documentary analysis was use to present findings thematically. The following themes were used; Government Policies on Vocational and Conventional Education Dichotomy in Nigeria and Typology of mixture of Vocational Education to Conventional Education Mix (VE:CE) which include; Minimum or Low mix typology (M-LM typology), Medium or Average mix typology (M-AM typology) and Maximum or High mix typology (M-HM typology).

5.1 Government Policies on Vocational and Conventional Education Dichotomy in Nigeria

During the colonial era in Nigeria, vocational education was not accorded a worthwhile recognition by the colonial school system. Education was literary as in most former British colonies. For almost a hundred years in Nigeria, educated people were those who read classics. There was no programme for vocational skills training in the formal education curriculum until 1909 when some form of vocational education programmes were opened in the country. The Nassarawa School, opened in 1909 in the North, had a

technical wing attached to it, to teach: leatherwork, carpentry, blacksmith, weaving and book binding (Akpan, Usoro, and Ibiritan, 2013; Bello and Muhammad, 2021).

In 1925, memorandum on education policy in British Tropical Africa was issued and Nigerian governments took active part in the provision of technical education and opened trade centres and technical institutions. A novel example is the Yaba Higher College was an instance of a technical education institution established in 1934. In 1952 there were three technical institutions located at Yaba, Enugu and Kaduna and seven trade centres and eighteen handicraft centres across the country. In 1953 the first Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was opened in Zaria, Enugu and Ibadan (Fafunwa, 1995). They were unfortunately short lived.

Ashby Commission Report in 1960 saw the opening of Universities in Nigeria while the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the East offered the first organized Vocational – Technical Education (VTE) programme to be seen in West Africa (Fafunwa, 1995). The Commission report recommended the introduction of technical streams in the secondary schools and three levels of technical education in the country namely: 1. Pre-vocational and Pre-technical levels of training for secondary schools; 2. Craftsman training for technical colleges, trade centres and vocational schools; 3. Technical training for Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology (Fafunwa, 1995; Akpan, Usoro, and Ibiritan, 2013).

In 1977 the Federal Government of Nigeria issued the first National Policy on Education, it favoured vocational education. Subsequent policies especially the 1999, 2004, 2023 educational policies have favoured the development of vocational education in the country and it seeks to achieve technological development and provide solutions to the prevailing economic problems (Bello and Muhammad, 2021; Ime, Udoudo, Ekong, and Udom, 2025). To empower vocational education in the pursuit of the above goals and monitor its efforts in achieving quality learning, the government has set up agents of quality assurance to do the job. These agents are the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), and the National Universities Commission (NUC). Each agent has provided minimum standards for use by the training institutions.

In post 2005 educational policies, the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), was mandated to re-structure the curriculum with the following objectives in view: Develop interest in science and technology; Acquire basic knowledge and skills in science and technology and vocational education. Basic technology as pre-vocational education subject at the upper basic level is designed to accomplish the parts for vocational education (Adetola, 2021; Akounjom, Babatunde, and Aiguoarueghian, 2024). In 2025, several state governments in Nigeria had open vocational training center to cater for all classes of people in the society and satisfy the job need of the society. However, the perspective of a few people on vocational education when compared to the conventional education is a negative trend therefore slowing down the trend of flow of vocational education acceptability.

5.2 Typology of mixture of Vocational Education to Conventional Education Mix (VE:CE)

There exist a level of dichotomy between the conventional education and the vocational education (Akounjom, Babatunde, and Aiguoarueghian, 2024). This has affected the level of acceptability, sentiment, ridicule and casual-mindedness attached to the vocational skills unlike the conventional educations. What level of mix is needed to blend the conventional education with the vocation education in other to attain maximum acceptability, reduce dichotomy, eradicate favoritism and nepotism in the operationalization of the two sets of educations?

This paper propounded three sets of mix typology for vocational education and conventional education. The agenda is to attain maximum national development and reduce the level of social stigma on the vocational skills. These include;

- i. Minimum or Low mix typology (M-LM typology)
- ii. Medium or Average mix typology (M-AM typology)

- iii. Maximum or High mix typology (M-HM typology)

5.2.1 Minimum or Low mix typology (M-LM typology)

The minimum or low mix typology (M-LM typology) is the level of VE-CE mix policy or strategy that only permits the vocational education to operate at the primary level of importance. The vocational education and skills are seen as not necessary for national development but mainly as a complimentary tool to reduce poverty and joblessness among low class people in the society. Therefore, many of the valuable skills needed are learnt by people with poor or no formal education. People with conventional education deficiency are encouraged to 'learn a trade' or a vocation so as to survive the hardship of the nation. The M-LM is the economic survival mix for people with deficiency with conventional education. They are often regarded as drop-out of school category.

Their involvement in the vocational education and skill acquisition is to solely bridge their personal socioeconomic gap and reduce the level of crime in the society due to idle hand. They do not have any prospect for national development. This level of mix that is primary education or school dropout scenario slows down national development and prolongs the time to attain Sustainable development.

About forty eight per cent (48%) of Nigeria's vocational education to conventional education mix, socioeconomic and political landscape is located in this axis of mix. The longer the time the country remain in this level, the slower the national development and the possibility of attaining sustainable development may remain blurred. The more the number of people in this category, the uncertain and slower the rate of national development will be. This partly explains why it is taking a longer period for many countries to attain rapid development.

5.2.2 Medium or Average mix typology (M-AM typology),

The Medium or Average mix typology (M-AM typology) is the level of VE-CE mix policy or strategy that only permits the vocational education to operate at the secondary level of importance. The vocational education and skills are seen as partly necessary for national development and not just a complimentary tool to reduce poverty and joblessness among low class people in the society. Middle income earners and workers are part of this M-AM typology secondary mix. Therefore, many of the valuable skills needed are learnt by people with post primary educational level. They have formal education but not to the tertiary level. People in this M-AM typology mix do not have major conventional education deficiency; the rate of poverty, joblessness and lack of white collar job search syndrome compel them to pick up a vocation skill so as to survive the hardship of the nation and contribute meaningfully to the development of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

The M-AM mix is the economic survival mix for people without deficiency with conventional education. They are often regarded as societal constraint categories. Their involvement in the vocational education and skill acquisition is to primarily bridge their personal socioeconomic gap and reduce the level of crime in the society due to idle hand and secondarily provide job opportunities for others due to their level of business expansion and creativity.

This level of mix, that is post primary education scenario propels national development and hastens the time to attain sustainable development. About thirty four per cent (34%) of Nigeria's vocational education to conventional education mix, socioeconomic and political landscape is located in this axis of mix. The longer the time the country remain in this level, the slower the national development and the possibility of attaining sustainable development may remain uncertain. The more the number of people in this category, the faster the rate of national development will be. This partly explains why it is taking a shorter period for the country to rapid development.

5.2.3 Maximum or High Mix typology (M-HM typology)

The Maximum or High mix typology (M-HM typology) is the level of VE-CE mix policy or strategy that only permits the vocational education to operate at the post-secondary level of importance. The vocational education and skills are seen as highly essential for national development and not just a complimentary tool to reduce poverty and joblessness among low class people in the society. Middle and high income earners and professional workers are part of this M-HM typology post-secondary mix. Therefore, many of the valuable skills needed are learnt by people with post-secondary educational level. They have formal education up to the tertiary level.

People in this M-HM typology mix do not have any conventional education deficiency. They are not affected by the rate of poverty, joblessness and lack of white collar job search syndrome to compel them to pick up a vocation skill. They are not in a race to survive the hardship of the nation. They are enthusiastic in picking up a vocational skill of their interest and passion so as to solve the perceived social economic gap and problem in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Therefore, the M-HM mix is the economic diversification mix for people without deficiency with conventional education. They are often regarded as societal explorer categories. Their involvement in the vocational education and skill acquisition is to primarily satisfy their curiosity and creativity, create a niche for their personal socioeconomic needs and reduce the level of crime in the society due to other people's idle hand. Secondly they provide job opportunities for others due to their level of business expansion and creativity.

This level of mix, that is, post-secondary education scenario, propels national development and hastens the time to attain sustainable development. About twenty eight per cent (28%) of Nigeria's vocational education to conventional education mix and socioeconomic and political landscape is located in this axis of mix. The more the number of people in a country in this level, the faster the national development and the possibility of attaining sustainable development may become a reality. This partly explains why it takes a short period for some country to attain rapid development.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In Nigeria, vocational education is usually offered as the senior secondary schools or technical colleges and includes general education, practical skills and a few theories required by the chosen occupation. Over the times, many of the people plying the trade via vocational skills are more from the primary school educational level and drop out levels. This has cast scare on the vocational education as a space for the backward, downtrodden, poor and the wretched of the earth category of people in the society. Therefore, the sector that commands rapid technological and industrial development of any country becomes moribund and underestimated in most developing countries.

The government policies in Nigeria on vocational education in conjunction with the conventional education are not at par to warrant national development and sustainable development. More emphasis is laid on the conventional education that often leads to the white collar jobs. The white collar jobs had come highly competitive and mostly politically motivated to obtain. However, the vacuum in the job creation potential in the vocational education is unfathomable yet laying fallow and less harnessed.

Therefore, for development to be attained in the country, government or public policy must favour the development of vocational education. Enabling business environment must be created to encourage private investors. These environments include; tax free periods, electricity, good road and other infrastructures. More of post-secondary vocational education participants must be encouraged by the government so as to

ensure the professionalization of the vocational education. This implies that when people of high education and qualifications in other fields of study diversify into vocational educations and skill acquisition, the stigma and shamefacedness look on such vocations will be reduced.

Therefore, the government should implement a policy that will ensure all graduate (post-secondary) certificate holders to acquire a vocational certification before proceeding for the compulsory national service year. Therefore, such vocational education and training should be inculcated in the conventional educational curriculum which a student will pass through side by side before graduation. Such graduates should be empowered to set up a company providing services to the community, filling a gap and creating jobs for others. This strategy will ensure national development is quickly attained and sustainable development is steadily maintained.

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