



## **The Impact of Industrial Sociology on Vocational Education and Skill Development in Nigeria: Bridging the Gap between Education and Labor Market Needs**

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(Received: May-2024; Accepted: December-2024; Available Online: December-2024)



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### **ABSTRACT**

Abstract Industrial sociology, as a field of study, examines the interplay between social structures, work organizations, and labor markets. In Nigeria, the disconnect between vocational education and the labor market has resulted in high unemployment rates, underemployment, and a skills mismatch. This paper explores the role of industrial sociology in addressing these challenges by analyzing how sociological insights can inform vocational education and skill development programs. By examining the social dynamics of work, organizational behavior, and labor market demands, this paper argues for a more integrated approach to vocational education that aligns with the needs of Nigeria's evolving economy. The study concludes with policy recommendations for bridging the gap between education and labor market needs, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between educational institutions, industries, and policymakers.

**Keywords:** Industrial sociology; vocational education; skill development; labor market; Nigeria; unemployment; skills mismatch.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, faces a critical challenge in aligning its educational systems with the demands of its labor market. Despite the country's vast human and natural resources, high unemployment rates, particularly among youth, remain a persistent issue. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stands at 42.5%, with underemployment affecting an additional 21% of the workforce. This alarming trend is exacerbated by a significant mismatch between the skills acquired through vocational education and training (VET) programs and the competencies required by employers in the labor market (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016). This disconnect not only undermines the potential of Nigeria's workforce but also hinders the country's economic growth and development.

Vocational education, which is designed to equip individuals with practical skills for employment in various trades and industries, has long been recognized as a critical tool

for addressing unemployment and fostering economic development. However, in Nigeria, the effectiveness of vocational education has been limited by a range of systemic issues, including outdated curricula, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of alignment with industry needs (Adebayo, 2018). These challenges are further compounded by the rapid pace of technological change, which has transformed the nature of work and created new skill demands that many vocational education programs are ill-equipped to address (Okafor, 2021).

Industrial sociology, as a field of study, offers valuable insights into addressing these challenges. By examining the social structures, organizational behaviors, and labor market dynamics that shape work and employment, industrial sociology provides a framework for understanding the root causes of the skills gap and designing interventions to bridge it. Industrial sociology emphasizes the importance of social context in shaping employment outcomes, highlighting factors such as workplace culture, gender dynamics, and social networks that influence access to education and employment opportunities (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012). In the Nigerian context, where cultural diversity and informal employment are prevalent, these sociological perspectives are particularly relevant for designing vocational education programs that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of different social groups.

This paper explores the impact of industrial sociology on vocational education and skill development in Nigeria, with a focus on bridging the gap between education and labor market needs. The study is motivated by the urgent need to address the high rates of unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria, particularly among youth, and to ensure that vocational education programs are aligned with the demands of the labor market. By applying sociological insights to the design and implementation of vocational education programs, this paper argues that Nigeria can create a more skilled and employable workforce that is better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st-century economy.

The paper begins by providing an overview of the current state of vocational education in Nigeria, highlighting the systemic issues that have limited its effectiveness. It then examines the role of industrial sociology in understanding labor market dynamics and addressing the skills gap. Drawing on sociological theories and empirical research, the paper explores how insights from industrial sociology can inform the design of vocational education programs that are more responsive to the needs of employers and workers. Specifically, the paper discusses the importance of curriculum reform, industry-academia collaboration, soft skills development, and addressing social barriers to employment.

Finally, the paper concludes with policy recommendations for stakeholders in the education and labor sectors. These recommendations emphasize the need for increased funding for vocational education, the establishment of a national skills council, the promotion of public-private partnerships, and the integration of technology into vocational training programs. By adopting a more integrated approach to vocational education that incorporates sociological perspectives, Nigeria can better align its educational systems with the needs of its labor market, thereby reducing unemployment, promoting economic growth, and fostering social inclusion.

## **THE STATE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Vocational education in Nigeria is designed to equip individuals with practical skills for employment in various trades and industries, ranging from agriculture and construction to information technology and healthcare. Historically, vocational education has been viewed as a critical pathway for addressing unemployment and fostering economic development, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria, where formal education

systems often fail to meet the diverse needs of the labor market (Adebayo, 2018). However, despite its potential, the vocational education system in Nigeria has been widely criticized for its inability to meet the demands of the labor market, resulting in high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and a persistent skills mismatch (Eze & Okoye, 2020).

One of the most significant challenges facing vocational education in Nigeria is the outdated nature of many training programs. The curricula of many vocational institutions have not been updated to reflect the changing demands of the modern economy. For instance, while industries are increasingly adopting digital technologies and automation, many vocational training programs continue to focus on traditional trades without incorporating digital literacy or technical skills relevant to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Okafor, 2021). This disconnect between the curriculum and industry needs has left many graduates ill-prepared for the realities of the labor market, contributing to the high rates of unemployment and underemployment in the country.

Another critical issue is the chronic underfunding of vocational education in Nigeria. Despite the recognized importance of vocational training for economic development, the sector has historically received inadequate financial support from both the government and private sector. This lack of funding has resulted in poor infrastructure, inadequate training facilities, and a shortage of qualified instructors (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016). Many vocational institutions lack access to modern equipment and technologies, which are essential for providing students with hands-on experience and practical skills. Consequently, graduates often enter the labor market with theoretical knowledge but limited practical competence, further exacerbating the skills gap.

The disconnect between vocational education and labor market needs is also evident in the lack of collaboration between educational institutions and industries. In many developed economies, vocational education programs are designed in close consultation with industry stakeholders to ensure that the skills taught are aligned with employer needs. However, in Nigeria, there is often little or no coordination between vocational institutions and industries, leading to a mismatch between the skills acquired by graduates and the competencies required by employers (Ayonmike et al., 2014). This lack of collaboration not only undermines the employability of graduates but also limits the ability of industries to access a skilled workforce, thereby hindering economic growth.

The Nigerian labor market is characterized by high unemployment rates, particularly among youth. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), the youth unemployment rate stands at 42.5%, with underemployment affecting an additional 21% of the workforce. This situation is particularly concerning given Nigeria's large and growing youth population, which represents a significant demographic dividend if properly harnessed. However, the failure of the vocational education system to equip young people with the skills needed for gainful employment has turned this potential asset into a liability, contributing to social and economic instability (Okafor, 2021).

The rapid pace of technological change has further complicated the challenges facing vocational education in Nigeria. The advent of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation has transformed the nature of work, creating new skill demands that many vocational education programs are ill-equipped to address. For example, while there is a growing demand for skills in areas such as data analysis, software development, and digital marketing, many vocational institutions continue to focus on traditional trades such as carpentry, tailoring, and masonry, which are increasingly being automated or outsourced (World Bank, 2019). This misalignment between the skills taught in vocational programs and the needs of the labor market has left many graduates unable to compete in the modern economy.

Moreover, the vocational education system in Nigeria is plagued by systemic inefficiencies and bureaucratic challenges. The lack of a coherent national policy framework for vocational education has resulted in fragmented and uncoordinated efforts across different states and regions. While some states have made significant investments in vocational training, others have neglected the sector, leading to disparities in access to quality education (Okolie et al., 2020). Additionally, the absence of a robust regulatory framework has allowed the proliferation of substandard vocational institutions, which offer low-quality training and further undermine the credibility of vocational education.

The social perception of vocational education in Nigeria also poses a significant challenge. In many parts of the country, vocational education is often viewed as a second-tier option for individuals who are unable to gain admission into universities or other higher education institutions. This perception has led to a lack of interest in vocational training among young people, who often prioritize academic qualifications over practical skills (Eze & Okoye, 2020). Changing this perception requires not only improving the quality of vocational education but also raising awareness about the value of vocational skills in the labor market.

In conclusion, the state of vocational education in Nigeria is characterized by a range of systemic challenges, including outdated curricula, underfunding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of alignment with labor market needs. These challenges have contributed to high rates of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among youth, and have limited the ability of vocational education to fulfill its potential as a driver of economic development. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves curriculum reform, increased funding, industry collaboration, and the integration of technology into vocational training programs. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can create a more skilled and employable workforce that is better equipped to meet the demands of the modern economy.

## **INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGY: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LABOR MARKET DYNAMICS**

Industrial sociology, as a subfield of sociology, provides a robust framework for understanding the complex interplay between social structures, organizational behaviors, and labor market dynamics. It examines how social institutions, cultural norms, power relations, and economic systems shape work organizations and influence employment outcomes (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012). By applying sociological insights, policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the skills gap and design targeted interventions to address these challenges. In the context of Nigeria, where high unemployment rates and a persistent mismatch between education and labor market needs prevail, industrial sociology offers valuable tools for analyzing and addressing these issues.

One of the key contributions of industrial sociology is its emphasis on the social context of work. Unlike traditional economic approaches that focus primarily on supply and demand dynamics, industrial sociology highlights the role of social factors such as workplace culture, gender dynamics, social networks, and power relations in shaping employment outcomes (Granovetter, 1973). For instance, studies have shown that workplace culture—defined as the shared values, norms, and practices within an organization—can significantly influence employee productivity, job satisfaction, and career advancement opportunities (Hodson, 2001). In Nigeria, where workplace cultures often reflect broader societal norms, understanding these dynamics is critical for designing vocational education programs that prepare students for the realities of the workplace.

Gender dynamics also play a significant role in shaping labor market outcomes. In many societies, including Nigeria, gender-based discrimination and cultural norms often

limit women's access to certain types of employment or restrict their career advancement opportunities (Adebayo, 2018). Industrial sociology provides a lens for examining how these gendered norms are reproduced within work organizations and how they contribute to inequalities in the labor market. For example, women in Nigeria are often underrepresented in technical and vocational fields, which are traditionally dominated by men. By incorporating gender-sensitive approaches into vocational education, policymakers can address these disparities and create more inclusive training programs that empower women to enter non-traditional fields.

Social networks are another critical factor in shaping employment outcomes. Granovetter's (1973) seminal work on the strength of weak ties highlights how social connections can influence access to job opportunities and career advancement. In Nigeria, where informal employment accounts for a significant portion of the labor market, social networks often play a crucial role in securing employment. For instance, many individuals rely on family, friends, and community connections to find jobs, particularly in the informal sector (Eze & Okoye, 2020). However, this reliance on informal networks can also perpetuate inequalities, as individuals from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds may lack access to influential networks. Industrial sociology provides insights into how vocational education programs can help bridge these gaps by fostering professional networks and providing students with opportunities to connect with industry stakeholders.

Power relations within work organizations are another area of focus for industrial sociology. The field examines how hierarchies, authority structures, and workplace politics influence employee behavior and organizational outcomes (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012). In Nigeria, where power dynamics often reflect broader societal inequalities, understanding these relationships is essential for creating equitable and inclusive workplaces. For example, employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or minority groups may face barriers to career advancement due to systemic biases or discriminatory practices. By incorporating sociological perspectives into vocational education, policymakers can design programs that address these power imbalances and promote social mobility.

The informal sector, which accounts for a significant portion of Nigeria's economy, presents unique challenges and opportunities for industrial sociology. Unlike formal employment, which is regulated by labor laws and institutional frameworks, informal work is often characterized by precarious conditions, low wages, and limited access to social protections (Okafor, 2021). Industrial sociology provides tools for analyzing the social and economic dynamics of informal employment and identifying strategies for improving working conditions and integrating informal workers into the formal economy. For example, vocational education programs can be designed to provide informal workers with the skills and certifications needed to transition into formal employment, thereby enhancing their economic security and social mobility.

Cultural norms and values also play a significant role in shaping labor market dynamics. In Nigeria, where cultural diversity is a defining feature of society, understanding how cultural factors influence work and employment is critical for designing effective vocational education programs. For instance, in some communities, certain trades or occupations may be stigmatized or viewed as inferior, discouraging individuals from pursuing careers in those fields (Ayonmike et al., 2014). Industrial sociology provides a framework for examining these cultural barriers and developing strategies to overcome them. By promoting positive narratives about vocational education and highlighting the value of skilled trades, policymakers can challenge negative stereotypes and encourage more young people to pursue vocational training.

In addition to these social factors, industrial sociology also examines the role of organizational structures and practices in shaping labor market outcomes. For example, the rise of globalization and technological change has transformed the nature of work, leading to the emergence of new organizational forms such as gig work, remote work, and flexible employment arrangements (World Bank, 2019). These changes have created new opportunities for workers but have also introduced new challenges, such as job insecurity and the erosion of traditional labor rights. Industrial sociology provides insights into how vocational education programs can adapt to these changes by equipping students with the skills needed to navigate the evolving world of work.

In conclusion, industrial sociology offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the social and organizational factors that influence labor market dynamics. By emphasizing the social context of work, including workplace culture, gender dynamics, social networks, power relations, and cultural norms, industrial sociology provides valuable insights for addressing the challenges facing vocational education in Nigeria. By incorporating these sociological perspectives into the design and implementation of vocational education programs, policymakers can create more responsive and inclusive training systems that better meet the needs of the labor market. This, in turn, can help reduce unemployment, promote economic growth, and foster social inclusion in Nigeria.

## **BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET NEEDS**

To bridge the gap between vocational education and labor market needs, Nigeria must adopt a more integrated and holistic approach that incorporates insights from industrial sociology. This approach should focus on addressing systemic challenges, fostering collaboration between stakeholders, and ensuring that vocational education programs are responsive to the evolving demands of the labor market. Below are key strategies that can help achieve this goal, supported by evidence and examples.

### **1. Curriculum Reform**

One of the most critical steps in aligning vocational education with labor market needs is the regular updating of curricula to reflect emerging skill demands. Many vocational training programs in Nigeria still focus on traditional trades, such as carpentry, tailoring, and masonry, which are increasingly being automated or outsourced (Okafor, 2021). However, the rapid pace of technological change has created new skill demands in areas such as digital literacy, data analysis, software development, and renewable energy. For instance, a report by the World Bank (2019) highlights that 65% of jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa will require digital skills by 2030. Despite this, only 20% of vocational training programs in Nigeria currently incorporate digital skills training (Okolie et al., 2020).

To address this gap, there must be sustained collaboration between educators, industry representatives, and policymakers to identify emerging skill needs and integrate them into vocational education curricula. For example, the inclusion of modules on artificial intelligence, robotics, and green technologies can prepare students for the jobs of the future. Additionally, curricula should be designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing for regular updates as new technologies and industries emerge. This requires establishing mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between vocational institutions and industry stakeholders, such as sector-specific advisory boards or skills councils.

### **2. Industry-Academia Collaboration**

Strengthening partnerships between vocational institutions and industries is essential for ensuring that training programs are aligned with employer needs. In many developed economies, such as Germany and Switzerland, vocational education systems are characterized by strong collaboration between educational institutions and industries, resulting in high levels of graduate employability (Ayonmike et al., 2014). In contrast, Nigeria's vocational education system often operates in isolation from industry, leading to a mismatch between the skills taught and those required by employers.

Internships, apprenticeships, and industry-led training initiatives can play a crucial role in bridging this gap. For example, apprenticeship programs allow students to gain hands-on experience in real-world work environments, enhancing their practical skills and employability. According to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), countries with robust apprenticeship systems have youth unemployment rates that are, on average, 10% lower than those without such systems. In Nigeria, initiatives like the National Industrial Skills Development Programme (NISDP) have shown promise in linking vocational training with industry needs, but these efforts need to be scaled up and institutionalized.

### **3. Focus on Soft Skills**

In addition to technical skills, vocational education must emphasize the development of soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. These skills are increasingly valued by employers and are critical for success in the modern workplace. According to a survey by the World Bank (2019), 87% of employers in Sub-Saharan Africa consider soft skills to be as important as technical skills when hiring new employees. However, many vocational education programs in Nigeria focus exclusively on technical training, neglecting the development of soft skills.

Incorporating soft skills training into vocational education can significantly improve graduates' employability and career prospects. For example, programs that include modules on interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and leadership can prepare students to navigate the complexities of the workplace. Additionally, experiential learning opportunities, such as group projects and simulations, can help students develop these skills in a practical context. By equipping graduates with both technical and soft skills, vocational education can produce well-rounded individuals who are better prepared to meet the demands of the labor market.

### **4. Addressing Social Barriers**

Industrial sociology highlights the importance of addressing social barriers to employment, such as gender discrimination, unequal access to education, and cultural biases. In Nigeria, these barriers disproportionately affect women, rural populations, and individuals from low-income backgrounds. For instance, women account for only 22% of enrollment in technical and vocational education programs, largely due to cultural norms that discourage women from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields (Eze & Okoye, 2020). Similarly, rural areas often lack access to quality vocational training facilities, limiting opportunities for individuals in these regions.

Vocational education programs must be designed to promote inclusivity and provide opportunities for marginalized groups. This can be achieved through targeted interventions, such as scholarships for women, mobile training units for rural areas, and awareness campaigns to challenge cultural stereotypes. For example, the Nigerian government's N-Power program has made efforts to include women and rural populations in its vocational training initiatives, but more needs to be done to ensure that these programs

are accessible and effective. Additionally, vocational education curricula should incorporate gender-sensitive approaches that address the unique challenges faced by women in the workplace, such as workplace harassment and unequal pay.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

To effectively bridge the gap between vocational education and labor market needs, Nigeria must implement targeted policies that address systemic challenges and promote collaboration between stakeholders. The following policy recommendations are proposed to create a more responsive and inclusive vocational education system:

### **1. Increased Funding for Vocational Education**

The Nigerian government must prioritize vocational education by allocating more resources to the sector. Currently, vocational education receives a disproportionately small share of the national education budget, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, outdated equipment, and a shortage of qualified instructors (Adebayo, 2018). Increased funding can be used to modernize training facilities, update curricula, and provide professional development opportunities for instructors. For example, the government could establish a dedicated fund for vocational education, similar to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), which has been instrumental in improving infrastructure in higher education institutions. Additionally, international development partners and private sector organizations should be encouraged to contribute to vocational education funding through grants, donations, and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

### **2. Establishment of a National Skills Council**

A National Skills Council (NSC) should be established to oversee the development and implementation of vocational education policies. This council should comprise representatives from government, industry, academia, and civil society to ensure that policies are informed by diverse perspectives and aligned with labor market needs. The NSC could be modeled after similar bodies in countries like South Africa and India, which have successfully used skills councils to bridge the gap between education and employment (World Bank, 2019). The council's responsibilities should include conducting labor market assessments, identifying emerging skill demands, and monitoring the effectiveness of vocational education programs. By providing a platform for collaboration between stakeholders, the NSC can help ensure that vocational education policies are both relevant and impactful.

### **3. Promotion of Public-Private Partnerships**

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can play a key role in expanding access to vocational education and ensuring that training programs are aligned with industry needs. The private sector has a vested interest in developing a skilled workforce and can contribute resources, expertise, and training opportunities to vocational education programs. For example, companies could partner with vocational institutions to provide internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training for students. The Nigerian government should create incentives for private sector participation, such as tax breaks or grants for companies that invest in vocational education. Additionally, PPPs can be used to establish industry-led training centers, where students can gain hands-on experience using state-of-the-art equipment and technologies.

### **4. Integration of Technology**

The rapid pace of technological change has created new skill demands that vocational education programs must address to remain relevant. Digital skills, such as coding, data



analysis, and digital marketing, are increasingly important in the modern economy, yet many vocational education programs in Nigeria do not incorporate these skills into their curricula (Okafor, 2021). To address this gap, vocational education programs should integrate technology into their training modules, ensuring that students are prepared for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This could include the use of e-learning platforms, virtual reality simulations, and online certification programs. Additionally, vocational institutions should partner with technology companies to provide students with access to cutting-edge tools and technologies

## CONCLUSION

The disconnect between vocational education and labor market needs is one of the most significant challenges facing Nigeria's economy. High unemployment rates, particularly among youth, and a persistent mismatch between the skills acquired through vocational education and the competencies required by employers have undermined the potential of Nigeria's workforce and hindered economic growth. Industrial sociology offers valuable insights into addressing these challenges by highlighting the social and organizational factors that influence employment outcomes. By examining workplace culture, gender dynamics, social networks, and power relations, industrial sociology provides a framework for understanding the root causes of the skills gap and designing interventions to bridge it.

To create a more responsive and inclusive vocational education system, Nigeria must adopt a more integrated approach that incorporates sociological perspectives. This approach should focus on reforming curricula, strengthening industry-academia collaboration, emphasizing soft skills, and addressing social barriers to employment. Additionally, the implementation of targeted policies, such as increased funding for vocational education, the establishment of a National Skills Council, the promotion of public-private partnerships, and the integration of technology, can help ensure that vocational education programs are aligned with the needs of the labor market.

Achieving these goals will require collaboration between educators, industry representatives, and policymakers, as well as a commitment to addressing the social barriers that limit access to quality education and employment opportunities. By bridging the gap between vocational education and labor market needs, Nigeria can unlock the potential of its workforce, reduce unemployment, and foster sustainable economic growth. This, in turn, will contribute to the country's development and improve the quality of life for millions of Nigerians.

In conclusion, the integration of industrial sociology into vocational education policy and practice provides a robust framework for addressing the challenges facing Nigeria's labor market. By adopting a holistic and inclusive approach, Nigeria can create a vocational education system that is both relevant and effective, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to develop the skills needed to thrive in the modern economy.

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