

Towards the Sustainability of Industrial Economy: Importance of English Language to Vocational and Technology Education in Nigeria

Oyinlade Morenike Busayo^{1*}, Oso Ibitayo Olamide²

¹Lecturer, Directorate of General Studies, College of Health Sciences and Technology, Ijero Ekiti, Nigeria

²Lecturer, Department of General Studies, Ekiti State Polytechnics, Isan Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract: Technical and vocational education entails the study of technologies and associated sciences alongside general education. It encompasses acquiring practical skills, attitudes, comprehension, and knowledge pertinent to occupations across various economic and social domains. Communication is an integral part of mankind in all endeavours and language is a major tool in the line of communication by which man finds expression for his lofty ideas. The present level of technological advancement and scientific knowledge would have been impossible if man had not been endowed with language. Language plays a sensitive and vital role in education in a multilingual setting such as Nigeria. The global nature of industrial standards and practices often requires knowledge of English, making it essential for students in VTE to be proficient. This paper reviews the Importance of English Language to Vocational and Technology Education in Nigeria. It explores the intersection of language proficiency and vocational/technology education, particularly in Nigeria's industrial economy.

Keywords: English Language, Industrial Economy, Technology, Vocational Education.

1. Introduction

The relationship between society and language is of utmost importance as language plays a pervasive role in various dimensions of societal development. It permeates cultural, social, commercial, and economic realms, influencing how individuals and communities interact and progress. At its core, language serves as a fundamental tool for communication, enabling the expression of desires, thoughts, feelings, and psychological experiences. This unique ability to facilitate nuanced expression and understanding is unparalleled by any other form of communication, making language an indispensable aspect of human existence. Its impact extends beyond mere communication, as it actively contributes to the collective advancement and evolution of the human race. Understanding the role of language is challenging because it is deeply embedded in human behaviour. According to Sapir (1949), it is probable that language exerts influence over nearly every facet of our conscious behaviour. The intersection of language and a speech society demonstrates that these two concepts are inherently linked. This indicates that there exists a

specific, essential relationship between language and the developmental aspects of society. It is impossible to fully address any developmental issue within a society without the use of language. Thus, language serves as a fundamental element in national development and nation-building. Language is a universal phenomenon, prevalent among all of humanity. As humans are at the core of national development, discussions and initiatives related to national development are conducted through language.

In Nigeria, a nation characterized by its rich linguistic diversity, the English language, left as a legacy of British colonial rule, plays a multifaceted role. It not only acts as a vital means of communication among the diverse population, but also serves as the primary linguistic tool through which the nation conveys its perspectives, values, and aspirations to the global community. In essence, English serves as a bridge that connects Nigeria to the rest of the world, allowing the country to participate in international discourse and exchange. Sustainable economic and educational growth are essential for the advancement of a nation. They play a pivotal role in fostering widespread prosperity and contributing to an increase in life expectancy.

Education stands as a cornerstone of development in every sense. Sustainable economic progress eludes any nation that fails to invest significantly in human capital. Education not only enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world but also enhances their quality of life, fostering broad social benefits for individuals and society alike. It amplifies productivity, sparks creativity, and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advancements. Moreover, it plays a pivotal role in driving economic and social progress while fostering improved income distribution. Shehu (1997) asserted that the development of a society hinges on its intellectual, scientific, and technological accomplishments. He further underscored that technology plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth and social progress. Its application is instrumental in transforming the natural resources of a country into goods and services, thereby enhancing the quality of life for the majority of its citizens. Vocational and Technology Education has been

*Corresponding author: morejoy37@gmail.com

globally canvassed as one of the major means of enhancing the sustainable economic growth of a nation. The position of a nation in science, technology, and TVET determines its place in the global economy. Success stories of newly industrialized countries like Korea, China, Malaysia, India, and Singapore show that applying scientific and technological knowledge is vital for sustainable economic development. There is a growing consensus that skilled technicians and technologies are essential for addressing the challenges of a technology-driven economy (Okorafor and Nnajiifo, 2017). Education, in all its various forms and at every level, is an essential tool for addressing nearly all global challenges. It not only serves as an end in itself but also acts as a fundamental instrument for effecting changes in knowledge, values, behaviours, and lifestyles, all of which are crucial for achieving sustainability and stability within and among countries. Education is oriented towards skills acquisition in various fields formally or informally. In all these, the role of effective language and communication skills cannot be underestimated. The English language plays a prominent role in the realm of education in Nigeria. In essence, it is the nation's language of education at all levels. The global nature of industrial standards and practices often requires knowledge of English, making it essential for students in VTE to be proficient. This paper reviews the Importance of English Language to Vocational and Technology Education in Nigeria. It explores the intersection of language proficiency and vocational/technology education, particularly in Nigeria's industrial economy.

This paper aims to review the importance of the English language in Vocational and Technology Education (VTE) in Nigeria and emphasize the need for VTE institutions to prioritize its teaching at all levels. This is important considering the role of the English language in sustaining the economy of a multilingual nation like Nigeria.

2. The English Language and Education in Nigeria

The English language has been established as the national language of Nigeria, reflecting its widespread adoption and usage within the country (Adegbite, 2004). It is noteworthy that English, once introduced by British colonial rulers, has evolved into a lingua franca in Nigeria, serving as a unifying medium of communication among its diverse population. Despite gaining independence, Nigeria continues to embrace English, recognizing its growing significance and pervasive influence across various sectors of society. The profound influence of the English language in Nigeria has placed it as the primary language for governance, commerce, education, mass media, literature, and both domestic and international communication. The official language of Nigeria, as outlined in paragraphs 51 and 91 of the 1988 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is English. The National Assembly conducts its business in English, and the Nigerian constitution (1979, 1989, and 1999) also allows for the use of additional languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba alongside English, provided there is adequate preparation (paragraph 51). While the business of the House of Assembly is also conducted in English, each State Assembly has the authority to add one or more languages in the

state, subject to approval by the House (paragraph 91). This reaffirms that all official government activities, administration, trade and commerce, law and justice, and educational instruction must be conducted in the English language.

The historical trajectory of language policy in Nigerian education can be traced back to the colonial era. In 1927, the British Advisory Committee on native education in Tropical Africa recommended the adoption of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in the early years of primary education (Musa R.J., 2010). This policy has undergone considerable evolution and remains a pertinent issue in Nigeria, a nation characterized by a highly diverse and multilingual population in which approximately 500 indigenous languages are spoken (Blench R., 2002). English served as the medium of instruction until the National Policy on Education advocated for the utilization of indigenous languages in teaching at the foundational level of education. Although the National Policy on Education (NPE) promotes the use of multiple languages in the educational system, the implementation of these provisions has been challenging. Factors such as linguistic barriers, student attitudes, limited access to teaching materials, lack of curriculum resources, parental influence, and teacher quality have all contributed to the difficulties in fully realizing this initiative. In a recent development, the Nigerian government, through its minister of Education, Hon. Adamu Adamu declared that "the government has agreed now that, henceforth, instruction in primary schools, the first six years of learning, will be in the mother tongue." This is a policy approved to make students' mother tongues the primary language of instruction for students in all primary schools. However, this switch will not be immediate drawing from the statement of the minister that "although the policy has taken effect theoretically with the announcement, the government needs "time to develop the material, get the teachers, and so on."

The prevalence of English is particularly evident in the realm of education. English is introduced as a subject from the first year of primary school and continues to be the medium of instruction from the third year of primary school up to the university level. This means that Nigerian children predominantly access cultural and scientific knowledge through the medium of English. As graduates enter professions where English proficiency is a prerequisite, the prominent position of English within the educational system is expected to endure for the foreseeable future. (Bamgbose, 1971). Despite all constitutional provisions, the English language still serves as the predominant medium of instruction in Nigeria's educational system, specifically at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels.

3. Overview of Vocational and Technology Education in Nigeria

The countries of the world are aware of the major contribution of Vocational and Technology Education to national development. This has also long been acknowledged in Nigeria through the government's embrace and introduction of VTE in its education system. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), through the National Policy on Education

(NPE) defined Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as the educational processes involving the study of technologies and related sciences, as well as the acquisition of skills for the economy and social life, alongside general education. The policy emphasises that TVET is an integral part of general education, preparing individuals for specific occupational fields and effective participation in the workforce. Similarly, Sallah (2008) asserted that Technical and Vocational Education is an educational dimension that equips individuals with marketable skills and enables them to contribute to societal development effectively. This implies that skills acquired in various vocation fields immensely contribute to economic growth in a dynamic society, where individuals with vocational expertise engage in productive activities. In the National Policy on Education (2013), the Nigerian government outlined the objectives of introducing VTE as follows:

1. To provide trained manpower in applied science and technology and business, particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical level.
2. To provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development.
3. To give training and impact the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self-reliant economically.

Drawing from the above listed objectives of technical and vocational education, it is evident that the Nigerian government is fully aware of the relevance of VTE to individual and national development in Nigeria. Consequently, there arises a need to transition from the realm of general education to the domain of vocational and technical education to equip individuals with the requisite skills and knowledge (Awajobi, 2006).

4. Categories of V Institutions in Nigeria

The major principal delivery institutions in Nigeria are Secondary Schools, Technical Colleges and Vocational Centers, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and universities. All VTE (TVET) institutions are under the supervision of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE, see Chapter 3). The Table below shows a detailed categorization of VTE (TVET) in the Nigerian Education system:

Table 1

S / N	Type of technology education	Principal manpower role	Principal delivery institution	Academic awards
1.	Pre-vocational education or general vocational education	Semi-skilled manpower for specific job training in apprenticeship or further formal education	Secondary Schools	WAEC / NECO Certificates in combination with other non-vocational subjects
2.	Vocational (job specific) Education	Craftsmen and Master Craftsmen (Low-level manpower)	Technical Colleges and Vocational Centres	NABTEB Certificates: NTC / NBC and ANTC / ANBC
3.	Technical education	Technicians / technologists (Middle-level manpower)	Polytechnics / Monotechnics	ND, HND, Post-HND
4.	Professional education	Professionals (High-level manpower)	Universities	Degree: Bachelors, Masters, Doctorates

Sources: World Bank and FME (1998, p1).

(Extracted from Adepoju, Taiwo & Famade, Olu. (2010). *The application of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis for managing vocational and technical education (VTE) programmes for Educational Research and Reviews. 5. 354-361*)

5. The English Language and Vocational and Technology Education

The English language remains the language of instruction at

all levels of the educational system in Nigeria and the vocational and technology institutions in Nigeria are not exempted. The language remains the sole medium of formal communication in the process of teaching and learning in Nigerian VTE (TVET) institutions. Apart from the statutory engagement of the English language as the medium of expression in the education system of Nigeria, the language is also taught and offered as a general course or enrichment course in VTE (TVET) in Nigeria. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in Nigeria has made it mandatory for vocational education programs in polytechnics and similar technical institutions to include General Studies courses in their curriculum. These courses are intended to help students improve their communication skills, both oral and written and to broaden their understanding of themselves and their surroundings. This will also guide students on how to apply their skills in the context of society and the economy. General Studies courses will make up 10% to 15% of the total contact hours for the program. Regardless of their discipline, all students enrolled in ND/ND D and HND programs are required to complete modules in Use of English, Communication in English, and Citizenship Education. Additional courses may be taken as electives, depending on the professional program and the institution's resources (NBTE, 2022).

In today's global society, the English language holds significant importance as a widespread means of communication. Given its prevalence as a first, second, or official language for millions worldwide, mastering and using English effectively is undeniably crucial in Nigeria. The primary objective of the education system in Nigeria is to foster national unity and facilitate socio-economic development. To accomplish this, having a common language that enables communication and understanding among the ethnically and linguistically diverse population is essential. Given the many languages spoken nationwide, English has been established as the principal language of instruction in all educational establishments. This decision has proven to be instrumental in effectively facilitating the attainment of teaching and learning objectives.

In Vocational and Technology institutions such as polytechnics, Monotechnics, colleges of education, and colleges of health sciences and technology, a credit in English Language at O'level is usually a mandatory requirement for admission, in addition to other relevant subjects. English Language is commonly offered as a General Study Course in these TVET institutions during the first year of the program. In addition to this, the English language is used as a medium of instruction at all levels in the institutions. In light of the significant role that language plays in Nigeria, it has been the subject of debate whether English should remain the medium of instruction in scientific and technical education. While the language undoubtedly holds an important place in the country, some argue that for Nigeria to progress scientifically and technologically, alternative mediums of instruction should be considered for these specific fields. (cf. Nnolim, 2007 cited in Olarenwaju, 2015). Assumably, this has contributed to the reasons the products of TVET have been perceived to be less

proficient in the use of the English language in the labour market. The place of skills acquisition differs from that of communication skills in education but the latter forms an integral part of skills acquisition. Vocational and Technology Education aims to equip students with practical skills necessary for the workforce, especially in industries like manufacturing, technology, and engineering. However, the role of effective communication skills in the prospect of VTE cannot be underestimated. The effectiveness of VTE programs is partly dependent on students' ability to understand and apply technical knowledge, which is frequently delivered in English.

6. Importance of Vocational and Technology Education in the Sustainability of Industrial Economy in Nigeria

Vocational and Technology Education is defined as the acquisition of practical skills and basic scientific knowledge, essential for improving material well-being (Okonkwo, 2008). It equips individuals with practical skills directly applicable to industries such as manufacturing, construction, and services, contributing to enhanced technical knowledge and innovation. This results in a more adaptable workforce capable of meeting the evolving demands of industries.

An industrial economy encompasses an economic system driven mainly by industrial activities, including the production of goods in factories, manufacturing, and infrastructure development. In such an economy, the emphasis transitions from agriculture-based activities to industrial sectors that involve manufacturing, infrastructure development, and technological innovation.

Vocational and Technology education encourages innovation, essential for driving new industrial processes and developing products that meet global standards. Through this form of education, students can quickly adapt to technological advancements, which is key to sustaining the industrial economy of a nation. Technical and Vocational Education is an educational endeavour that equips individuals with valuable skills to effectively contribute to society's development. This implies that acquiring practical skills in various areas or vocations leads to economic growth in a dynamic society, where knowledgeable individuals engage in producing saleable items (SallaH, 2008). Akerejola (2001) puts forward the idea that the long-term economic prospects of the country are intrinsically linked to its ability to adopt comprehensive training strategies aimed at cultivating a proficient workforce with the technical skills necessary for sustainable development. This underscores the critical importance of investing in educational and vocational programs that can equip individuals with the expertise demanded by evolving industries and technological advancements, thereby fostering economic growth and competitiveness on a national scale.

There is no gainsaying in the fact that a Vocational and Technology Education is a means to a thriving industrial economy.

7. Vocational and Technology Education, Industrial Economy Sustainability and English Language in Nigeria: The Meeting Point

The interconnectedness of language, education, and economic development is essential for national advancement. Education significantly contributes to development, and language is pivotal in both the educational and economic dimensions of a country. Regardless of the level of dedication of an individual or a nation, language serves as a crucial tool for achieving progress in the competitive global economy. The widespread global usage and acknowledgement of English as a primary medium for driving progress and development within countries, fostering societal advancement, and encouraging self-reliance is indisputable. It is beyond question that the English language plays a pivotal role in fostering economic growth.

The flexibility and adaptability of the English language, in contrast to the rigidity of Greek and Latin, have significantly contributed to its widespread popularity and continual growth. With a larger number of global speakers than any other language in history, English has emerged as the predominant language for trade, commerce, communication, and technology worldwide. According to John Short et al. (2001), proficiency in English is essential for maintaining competitiveness in global markets. The English language plays a pivotal role in stimulating imagination, creativity, and information, profoundly impacting economic progress. Recognized as a vital communication tool, it empowers societies to develop life skills, foster innovative ideas, create business opportunities, establish industries, and pursue employment, thereby driving economic activities. English is considered crucial for economic development as it contributes to the prosperity of its speakers and the countries that prioritize it. The language has the potential to drive economic transformation within families and nations and is now widely recognized as a fundamental skill worldwide (David Graddol, 2012). The English language continues to be the singular sustainable tool capable of uniting a multilingual nation such as Nigeria towards the sustainability of its economy.

8. Way Forward

The English language continues to be the singular sustainable tool capable of uniting a multilingual nation such as Nigeria. Although the major preoccupation of VTE is to build manpower to sustain the various economic aspects of society, acquiring viable communication skills that can make the products of the institution relevant to their counterparts globally should be prioritised. This can be achieved by ensuring that:

1. the NBTE position on the teaching of English language and communication studies through the ND-HND programme as integrated into the curriculum is fully implemented.
2. Competent teachers in the field of language and communication studies are recruited to teach the students.
3. Organize language workshops centred on the

relevance of communication skills in skills acquisition for both the staff and the student.

4. English language and communication studies are made compulsory courses that must be passed as a requirement for the fulfilment of their degree
5. Relevant and updated teaching and learning materials are made available for both teachers and students to aid the communication skill acquisition
6. The English language and communication studies teacher are introduced to time-to-time training and workshops on Language and communication skills within and outside their institutions

9. Conclusion

The paper critically examines Vocational and Technology education in sustaining Nigeria's industrial economy, emphasizing the central role of the English language in a multilingual society like Nigeria. The study concludes that effective communication skills acquired through the use of English are essential for Vocational and Technology Education Trainees. Proficiency in English improves employability, enabling graduates to contribute more effectively to the economy, facilitate international collaboration, access global markets, and adopt new technologies, all of which are crucial for sustainability.

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