



Bridging the Skills Gap: TVET's Role in Solving Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

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Abstract

Youth unemployment remains a pressing global issue, particularly in developing economies. Despite increasing levels of formal education, many young people struggle to find employment due to a persistent mismatch between the skills they possess and the needs of the labor market. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems are uniquely positioned to bridge this skills gap by equipping youth with demand-driven, practical, and industry-relevant competencies. This paper examined the role of TVET in addressing youth unemployment, highlights the challenges facing TVET systems, and provides recommendations for enhancing their impact on employability.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is a critical global issue that continues to undermine social stability, economic growth, and individual well-being, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Despite notable progress in expanding access to formal education, millions of young people remain unemployed or underemployed, often due to a significant mismatch between their acquired qualifications and the skills demanded by employers.

According to recent estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 73 million youth were unemployed globally in 2023, with young people being nearly three times as likely as adults to be jobless (ILO, 2023). Furthermore, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that youth unemployment in Nigeria alone has reached 35.1% in 2023, with over 40 million youths aged 15–35 years either unemployed or



underemployed (NBS, 2023). These alarming figures underscore the urgent need to re-evaluate the effectiveness of current education and training systems in preparing youth for the labor market.

A growing body of literature attributes the persistence of youth unemployment not solely to economic cycles or labor market saturation, but increasingly to a structural “skills gap” (OECD, 2020; McGrath, 2012). This skills gap in Nigeria is compounded by rapid technological changes and the growth of new industries such as ICT and renewable energy, sectors where technical competencies are paramount. Moreover, many Nigerian youths enter the labor market lacking competencies in digital literacy, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship (Adebowale & Adewale, 2021).

Globally, skills gap arises when graduates of education systems lack the technical, digital, and socio-emotional skills required in today’s workplaces. Traditional academic curricula often emphasize theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical competencies, resulting in a workforce that is inadequately equipped to meet the dynamic needs of modern industries. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has emerged as a vital mechanism to address these challenges. TVET systems offer competency-based, practice-oriented training that is directly aligned with labor market requirements. Through strong engagement with employers, TVET institutions are uniquely positioned to facilitate more effective school-to-work transitions, particularly for young people entering the workforce for the first time (Rauner & Maclean, 2008; Afeti & Adubra, 2012). TVET also provides pathways to self-employment and entrepreneurship, which are critical in economies characterized by limited formal job opportunities.



Therefore, this article examines the role of TVET in bridging the skills gap and mitigating youth unemployment in Nigeria by analyzing current challenges and successes in Nigerian TVET policy and practice, comparing international models where relevant. It explores how modern, demand-responsive TVET programs can address labor market needs, evaluates international best practices, and identifies policy and institutional challenges that hinder effectiveness. The article concludes with practical recommendations for enhancing the relevance, inclusivity, and scalability of TVET systems within national development agendas.

Understanding the Skills Gap in Nigeria

The “skills gap” refers to the disconnect between the qualifications and competencies of job seekers and the specific skills employers need (OECD, 2020). Many Nigerian graduates possess qualifications but lack hands-on skills demanded by employers, especially in technical and digital fields (Adewale & Obaji, 2022). The Nigerian labor market is characterized by a large informal sector and limited formal job opportunities, making entrepreneurial and technical skills critical for youth employment (World Bank, 2021).

The mismatch is further aggravated by an education system that emphasizes theoretical knowledge over applied skills, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of alignment between curricula and industry needs (UNESCO, 2022). Additionally, the Fourth Industrial Revolution has further widened this gap by increasing demand for digital, technical, and soft skills that are often missing from general curricula (World Economic Forum, 2020).

TVET as a Bridge to Employment in Nigeria



TVET plays a critical role in aligning education with the labor market. Its core strengths include:

Industry-Relevant Curriculum

TVET programs are typically developed in collaboration with industry partners, ensuring that training reflects current labor market needs (Afeti and Adubra 2012). Competency-based training allows learners to acquire skills that are immediately applicable in the workplace. Recent efforts by the Nigerian government aim to integrate industry needs into TVET curricula through partnerships with key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and ICT (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeships

Hands-on training through internships, apprenticeships, and simulations enables students to gain real-world experience, increasing their employability upon graduation (Rauner & Maclean, 2008). Apprenticeship schemes, a traditional component of Nigerian informal education, are being formalized and expanded to improve youth competencies and job readiness (ILO, 2019).

Pathways for Informal Sector Employment

In many developing countries, the informal sector is a major source of employment. TVET can offer flexible, modular training that equips youth with entrepreneurial skills to succeed in informal or self-employment settings (Adams 2011).

1. Nigeria in the Context of Global Best Practices

While Nigeria faces unique challenges, lessons can be learned from successful TVET models globally:



1. Germany's dual system illustrates the value of combining classroom education with extensive on-the-job training, leading to low youth unemployment rates (Euler 2013).
2. Singapore's emphasis on continuous skills upgrading and strong government-industry collaboration serves as a benchmark for TVET modernization (Tan & Cheah 2009).
3. Rwanda's integration of TVET into national development strategies shows how focused policy can drive relevance and access (Rwanda Ministry of Education 2020).

Nigeria is adapting elements of these models while tailoring them to local realities, especially through partnerships with private sector and donor agencies.

Challenges Facing TVET Systems

Despite its potential, TVET faces several systemic challenges:

1. Perception and Status: TVET is often seen as a second-choice option, leading to low enrollment and limited public support (Oketch 2007).
2. Resource Constraints: Many institutions lack modern equipment, trained staff, and funding to deliver high-quality programs (UNESCO-UNEVOC 2022).
3. Weak Industry Linkages: In some regions, poor collaboration between training institutions and employers undermines relevance (Walters & Isaacs, 2020).
4. Governance and Quality Assurance Issues: Fragmented governance and lack of consistent standards hinder TVET effectiveness (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Policy Recommendations for Nigeria



To enhance the effectiveness of TVET in addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria, the following strategies are recommended:

1. **Strengthen Industry Partnerships:** Encourage co-design of curricula and expand apprenticeship programs.
2. **Invest in Infrastructure and Staff Development:** Upgrade facilities and enhance trainer qualifications to ensure quality.
3. **Promote TVET as a First-Choice Pathway:** Launch national campaigns to improve perceptions and inform youth about career opportunities.
4. **Integrate Entrepreneurship and Digital Skills:** Equip youth with 21st-century competencies to thrive in dynamic labor markets.
5. **Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Use labor market data to continuously improve training relevance and outcomes.

Conclusion

TVET offers a critical opportunity for Nigeria to bridge its youth skills gap and reduce unemployment. However, achieving this potential requires addressing systemic challenges through coordinated policy reforms, investment, and stakeholder engagement. By learning from global best practices and adapting them to local contexts, Nigeria can develop a responsive, high-quality TVET system that equips its youth with the skills needed for sustainable economic growth and social development.



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