

REPOSITIONING TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: AN AGENDA FOR RENEWED HOPE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) is a significant conduit for empowering the youth with skills capable of improving self-reliance and societal development. However, a gap exists in its effective operation, particularly in Nigeria. This paper outlines the need for repositioning TVET to better equip Nigerian youths for engendering prospects and entrepreneurship. The focus is on restructuring TVET's instructional and operational frameworks in line with the modern industry demands and international best practices. Furthermore, the article suggests reviewing the National Policy on Education (NPE) to accommodate the rising need for practical skills, entrepreneurship, and innovations. The paper also proffers strategies of revamping TVET into a more efficient system. These strategies include: career guidance and counselling, enhancing skill development, encouraging entrepreneurship, technical teacher education development among others. Emphasis is also laid on the importance of forming mutually beneficial partnerships between TVET institutions, industries and relevant stakeholders. The paper proffered recommendations to the repositioning of TVET for empowering youths with entrepreneurship skills and thereby reducing unemployment. It was concluded that repositioning TVET for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria requires concerted effort from various stakeholders. It is therefore, imperative for policymakers and educators to prioritize the modernization and revitalization of TVET with a future-oriented approach to achieve the renewed hope agenda of the current administration.

Keywords: *Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), youth empowerment, entrepreneurship*

INTRODUCTION

Repositioning TVET for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship is apt considering the current situation our country, Nigeria, is passing through. This is because it will help in addressing the challenges of unemployment, poverty, and insecurity that affect many young people in the country. According to Abayomi and Adedayo (2020), TVET stands for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. It focuses on providing students with practical skills and knowledge for a specific trade or vocation. Similarly, Ogunsola (2017) posited that TVET can have many benefits for individuals, society, and the economy, such as increasing employability, productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Repositioning technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria is crucial for the country's economic development, and for the well-being of its young population (Okwelle and Deebom, 2017). In Nigeria, and in many other countries of the world, there is a growing recognition of the importance of TVET in addressing youth unemployment and fostering economic development. By repositioning TVET, policymakers and educators aim to create an environment that empowers young people to become job creators, innovators, and contributors to the country's economy.

TVET plays a vital role in equipping young people with the skills needed for employment and entrepreneurship, as well as fostering a culture of innovation and self-reliance. Several relevant citations were highlighted to support the need for repositioning TVET for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper discusses the strategies for enhancing youth

employability and entrepreneurial skills in TVET which include guidance and counselling, enhancement of skill development, encouragement of entrepreneurship practice, public private practice, apprenticeship and internship among others. The paper also presents the benefits of TVET for youth empowerment, need for reforms in TVET in some key areas, challenges and recommendations.

TVET Institutions in Nigeria

According to a report by the African Union Development Agency (2012), Nigeria has 366 approved institutions that offer TVET programmes across the nation, including polytechnics, colleges of agriculture, colleges of health sciences, innovation enterprise institutions, vocational enterprise institutions, and technical colleges. These institutions cater for about 338,721 students as of 2014. The government has also developed and implemented policies and frameworks to improve the quality and relevance of TVET, such as the National Policy on Education, the NBTE Enabling Act, the Ministerial Strategic Plan, and the Nigerian Skills Qualification Framework.

TVET for Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship: An Agenda for Renewed Hope

In the over eight years of Nigeria's political governance, Nigerians have felt a lot of heat across different spheres of Nigerian life- economy, politics, security, and perhaps health. Many Nigerians appeared to be despairing, seemingly losing hope in the country they call their own. Unemployment figures skyrocketed to 4.1% as at 2023 in the first quarter according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2023). Inflation assumed an alarming proportion. Then naira, as at October 2023, is exchanging for over N740:00 to dollar. Aside from the economic woe that had befallen the nation, the security situation in Nigeria has been terrible. Cases of banditry, abductions, women and child abuse are recorded on daily basis. Then in May 29, 2023 came a successful transfer of power to another democratically elected government. The big question is, in the past five months, have the hope and aspirations of Nigerians been rekindled? However, in the face of despair and despondency, Nigerians' hope can be renewed. Nigerians can believe in Nigeria once again. This can be done through functional Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This type of education has the tendency of empowering the youth by providing them with entrepreneurship opportunities.

Strategies for Enhancing Youth Employability and Entrepreneurial Skills in TVET

1. Career Guidance and Counselling (G and C)

To take a career for functional living requires guidance and counselling. Young men and women can be influenced through G and C to shun indolence, political thuggery, which is mostly fueled by the political class for their own personal benefits, truancy and waywardness and take on useful careers. A career in TVET and entrepreneurship has the tendency to functionally engage the youth and not just take them off the streets, but assist them to contribute meaningfully to societal development as well. To achieve this, however, G and C will play a useful role. Guidance counsellors must see this as a crucial challenge that they would need to respond to so as to be successful.

2. Enhancing Skills Development

TVET programmes, especially at the polytechnic level, need to focus more on developing practical skills, the technical know-how and competencies that are needed in the labour market. In addition, in this age of digitization, digital skills are needed not only for national development but for global competitiveness as well. That means that the curriculum of tertiary education in Nigeria must be structured in such a way as to capture these vital aspects of TVET. According to Ogunsola (2017), aligning TVET curriculum with industry needs and providing hands-on training can enhance the employability of Nigerian youths.

3. Encouraging Entrepreneurship

TVET programmes should not only prepare youth for employment but also foster an entrepreneurial mindset. Adesoji and Adebayo (2019) highlight the significance of integrating entrepreneurship education within TVET to nurture self-employment opportunities among the youth. In addition to preparing the youth for employment, TVET should also foster an entrepreneurial mindset. In order to foster entrepreneurial mindset, students will need to be provided with the necessary business and entrepreneurial skills which can eventually pave way for their entrepreneurial success.

4. Public-Private Partnerships

Collaboration between the government, private sector, and TVET institutions is crucial for repositioning TVET in Nigeria. A study by Ossai (2018) suggests that public-private partnerships can enhance the quality of TVET programmes, promote industry relevance, and facilitate youth entrepreneurship. Through partnerships, TVET programmes can receive necessary support and resources from the private sector which will offer students opportunities for practical training.

5. Technical Teacher Education Development for Enhancing TVET

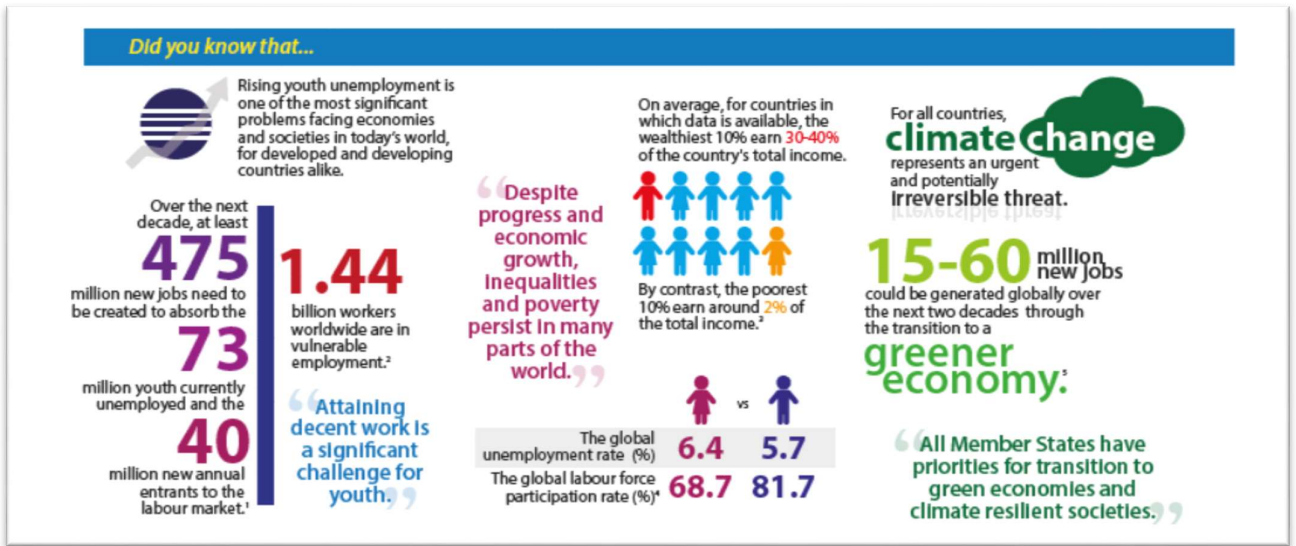
One vital aspect of this conference bothers on technical teacher development. There is no way TVET will thrive in the face of poor technical teacher educational development. For the youth population to be equipped with functional skills and knowledge for self-employment and self-reliance, teacher quality must be given a high premium. In this wise, technical teacher education must be given the full attention it deserves. Budgetary allocation to this sub-sector must, therefore, be raised considerably. The current government appropriation to the whole education sector which stands at 1.79 trillion (representing 8.2% of the 2023 budget) is unacceptable (Ojo, 2023). Again, government's continuous singing of the song: "First priority education, second priority education, and third priority education" without any concrete and tangible steps is unacceptable. Governments at all three tiers must be seen to live up to their words. It is high time government worked towards the recommended international education appropriation of 15-20% (Adedigba, 2017). Politicizing education, and TVET in particular, is unacceptable. Government needs to demonstrate full dedication to education, especially TVET which is capable of leading youths out of unemployment by providing opportunities for them to undertake entrepreneurship at various levels.

6. Strengthening Infrastructure

Investments in infrastructure and facilities are indispensable to modernizing TVET institutions in Nigeria. In this wise, Umar (2019) emphasizes the need for improved infrastructure to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of TVET programmes. Consequently, stakeholders in education, and TVET in particular, will be required to provide adequate workshops and laboratories, as well as equipment necessary for effective skills development.

7. Expanding Apprenticeships and Internships

TVET institutions should collaborate with industry stakeholders to provide apprenticeship and internship opportunities for students. Research by Ayadu and Akintayo (2019) indicates that practical exposure through apprenticeships can enhance the skills of TVET students and facilitate entrepreneurship development. This practical exposure allows students to further develop their skills and gain real-world experience.



UNESCO Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) 2016-2021

Benefits of TVET for youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

TVET has many benefits for individuals, society, and the economy. Some of the benefits of TVET are as follows:

1. TVET helps to fill the skills gap in the job market. The skills and knowledge provided to students by TVET are essential to industry and the wider society.
2. Skills and knowledge provided by TVET lead to a wide range of career opportunities in various sectors, such as health, information technology, computer and engineering. These careers can offer job satisfaction, personal growth, and social recognition for TVET graduates.
3. TVET facilitates lifelong learning and career development by enabling students to acquire transferable skills and competencies that can help them adapt to changing work environments and technologies. TVET also provides opportunities for further education and training, such as apprenticeships, internships, or higher education programmes. These can help TVET graduates to enhance their qualifications, update their skills, and advance their careers.
4. TVET plays a vital role in supporting economic growth and development, at both the individual and community levels. By equipping students with relevant skills and knowledge, TVET can help to increase productivity, innovation, and competitiveness in various sectors and industries. TVET also helps to promote entrepreneurship, by fostering creativity, problem-solving, and self-reliance among TVET graduates. These can lead to the creation of new businesses, jobs, and income sources.

Need for Reforms in TVET

To reposition TVET, the following vital reforms must be undertaken:

Curriculum Development: The curriculum needs to be redesigned to reflect the demands of the modern economy and emphasize the acquisition of practical and technical skills. This includes incorporating entrepreneurship and innovation training, as well as adaptability to emerging technologies and industries.

Infrastructure Upgrades: Investment in modern and well-equipped training facilities and workshops is necessary to ensure that students have access to hands-on learning experiences and practical skills development.

Teacher Training: Teachers and instructors play a crucial role in the delivery of quality TVET programmes. Providing ongoing professional development and training opportunities for teachers will help enhance their pedagogical skills and up-to-date knowledge of industry trends and technological advancements.

Industry Partnerships: Collaboration between TVET institutions and industries is essential for aligning training programmes with workplace needs. Establishing partnerships with companies and organizations can lead to internships, apprenticeships, and job placement opportunities for students, ensuring their skills are relevant and in demand.

Entrepreneurship Development: Introducing entrepreneurship education and support systems within TVET programmes helps foster an entrepreneurial mindset and equips students with the tools needed to start and manage their own businesses.

By implementing these reforms, Nigeria can harness the potential of TVET to empower its youth, reduce unemployment, and drive economic growth. Repositioning TVET for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort involving government, educational institutions, curriculum experts, industries, and other relevant stakeholders.

Challenges of TVET for Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

TVET in Nigeria faces many challenges. These challenges include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, inadequate curriculum, low enrolment, low status, lack of coordination, and lack of industry linkages. These factors affect the quality and relevance of TVET, and prevent it from meeting the needs, aspirations, and expectations of its graduates and employers. Therefore, there is the need to reposition TVET in Nigeria, by improving on its inputs, policies, programme and practices.

Rising youth unemployment is one of the most significant challenges facing economies and societies in today's world, developed and developing countries alike. When the right atmosphere is provided, TVET can equip the youth with the skills required to access the world of work, particularly for self-employment and self-reliance, thereby reducing access barriers. This is evident in work-based learning which ensures that skills gained are recognized and certified. TVET can also improve responsiveness to changing skill-demands by companies and communities, increase productivity and increase wage levels as well. TVET can also offer skills development opportunities for low-skilled people who are under-employed or unemployed, out-of school youth and individuals not in education, employment and training (NEETs).

These are some of the major challenges that need to be addressed in order to improve TVET in Nigeria:

1. Low societal recognition and status of TVET, which leads to low enrolment and shortage of skilled workforce.
2. Obsolete and inadequate instructional facilities and equipment which affect the quality and relevance of TVET.
3. Poor funding and management of TVET programmes which limit the resources and opportunities for TVET providers and students.
4. Poor staffing and teacher training which result in lack of qualified and competent TVET teachers.
5. Poor linkages with industry and labour market which reduce the responsiveness and employability of TVET graduates.
6. Poor curriculum and teaching methods which do not reflect the current and future skills needs and standards of TVET.

7. Poor assessment and quality assurance which do not measure and ensure the effectiveness and impact of TVET.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequently, the following recommendations are hereby proffered in the light of the challenges discussed above:

1. Increasing the funding and allocation of resources for TVET programmes, facilities, equipment, and teachers. This can be done by mobilizing both public and private sources of finance, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the management of funds.
2. Improving the quality and standards of TVET by establishing a national qualification framework, a quality assurance system, a competency-based curriculum, and a teacher training programme, that are aligned with the national development goals and global best practices.
3. Enhancing the access and equity of TVET by expanding the opportunities for TVET at different levels and modes of delivery, promoting gender equality and social inclusion, and providing financial support and guidance to students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. Strengthening the relevance and responsiveness of TVET by fostering linkages with industry sectors and labour markets, and identifying current and future skills need, integrating entrepreneurship education and skills development, and supporting innovation and digitization.
5. Monitoring and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of TVET by collecting and analyzing data on TVET indicators, conducting tracer studies on TVET graduates, and disseminating good practices and lessons learned.

CONCLUSION

Repositioning TVET for youth empowerment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria requires concerted effort from various stakeholders. By focusing on skills development, entrepreneurship education, public-private partnerships, technical teacher development, infrastructure improvement, and expanding apprenticeship opportunities, TVET can contribute to reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic growth in Nigeria. It is imperative for policymakers and educators to prioritize the modernization and revitalization of TVET with a future-oriented approach to achieve the renewed hope agenda of the current administration.

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