

CHAPTER ONE



EMPOWERING YOUTHS THROUGH TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) FOR ECONOMIC INCLUSION AND NATIONAL SECURITY

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Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been a fundamental part of national development because of its positive effect on industrial production, economic growth and national security. TVET encompasses practical and technical skill acquisition training and manpower development, which can also be referred to as capacity building and self-reliant programme. TVET, therefore, is the most suitable programme for youth empowerment and development in Nigeria. Youth empowerment in many nations is geared towards equipping them with skills for self-employment and nation-building. The rate of unemployment and under-employment among Nigerian youths and graduates is on the rise, and crime and poverty rates have equally increased (Nwankwo, Igwe & Nwaogbe 2013). Education is considered the key to effective development strategies. TVET must be the master key that can alleviate poverty, empower the youths, improve the quality of life for all, and help attain sustainable development. Without proper and adequate technology education, economic and social wellbeing of the citizens suffer (Igwe, Atsumbe, Nwankwo and Raymond 2013).

As the world emerges from the current economic downturn, the ability of a country to increase the skills of its workforce is of significant importance to attaining national security. The need to increase employment opportunities and to enhance the workforce's social mobility through improved employment is of uttermost necessity in Nigeria. Poverty and inequality are major drivers of instability and insecurity, and TVET can help to reduce poverty and inequality by providing economic opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized youths. Furthermore, TVET can support military preparedness by providing the skills and knowledge needed for the defence and security industries.

There is no doubt that TVET, both in its process and operational dimensions, when combined with human development, improves the quality of production to the growth and sustainability of the economy and national security (Igwe, Chike Okoh & Gana & Akawu 2017). This paper, therefore, will explore the strategy for engaging the TVET programme in empowering the youths for economic inclusion and national security. Challenges were discussed and recommendation made to improve youths' empowerment through effective implementation of TVET to enhance productivity, economy and national security.

According to UNICEF (2023), International Organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations (UN) have a track record of promoting and advocating for all peoples' right to decent education. According to ILO (2017), the same fundamental rights to education for all children are inscribed in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The need for quality education for all children is consistent with the primary aim of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which supports equitable access to vocational training for marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, at all levels in the society (UNESCO 2020).

TVET teachers are key to promoting inclusive practices in the institutions by creating an enabling environment to ensure that all learners can access TVET education despite any form of disability (Pirzada et al. 2024). Those in leadership are supposed to demonstrate a commitment to creating inclusive school environments that accommodate students from diverse upbringings. Such practices should recognize and acknowledge differences between learners, reflecting variations in the school curriculum and learning materials, and further developing inclusive cultural awareness in teaching personnel and empowering learners (UNESCO 2020).

The Status of TVET in Nigeria

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an educational programme that provides practical, job-related skills and knowledge that prepare students for specific occupations and careers. UNESCO institute for lifelong learning (2018) defines TVET as education and training which provides knowledge and skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship, whether for the local, national or global labour market. The World Bank Group (2017) states that TVET has an important role to play in preparing individuals with the skills needed in today's increasingly knowledge intensive and dynamic global labour market.

TVET can be traced back to the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries when vocational education was introduced to meet the needs of the emerging industrial society. Over time, TVET evolved to meet the changing needs of the economy and

society, with a focus on providing skills and knowledge for a wide range of occupations. Today, TVET is recognized as an important component of education and training system in many countries.

TVET in developing countries like Nigeria is particularly important in playing a key role in poverty reduction, economic growth, social inclusion and national security. NPE (2019) stipulates that TVET provides trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business, particularly at craft and advanced craft levels. TVET also provides the technical knowledge and vocational skills for agricultural, commercial and economic development. Achieving the above goals go a long way in empowering the youths and ensuring economic inclusion and national security.

In Nigeria, TVET programme is offered in a variety of settings, including secondary schools, technical colleges, polytechnics, universities and training centres. National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring effective implementation of TVET curriculum in various institutions in the nation (NBTE 2014). TVET has the potential to provide an alternative to academic education, which is often inaccessible or unaffordable for many people. TVET can also help to create jobs and promote entrepreneurship which are key drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction. At global platforms, international organization such as UNESCO, the World Bank and ILO have recognized the importance of TVET and are working to promote its development and expansion around the world. The World Bank Group has identified TVET as one of its key priorities and has provided funding and technical assistance to support TVET programmes. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is a centre of excellence in lifelong learning with a focus on TVET. It provides technical assistance, research, and policy advice to help countries develop and improve their TVET systems.

The Concept of Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment could be referred to as a way of enabling young ones to have skills, knowledge and attitude needed to take control of their lives and make meaningful contributions to their society. World Bank (2012) defined empowerment as the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. This definition sees empowerment in the light of human capacity building for the purpose of making the individual or groups self-reliant. Empowerment in this context is the process of building youths in the aspect of skills, economic, social, moral and financial security development with the aim of making them self-reliant enough to contribute to the society at large.

Youths remain the catalyst for sustainable national development. With the high level of unemployment in Nigeria today, the government cannot afford to leave the youths unempowered. Every nation seeks a more creative and innovative technology education to

sustain its economy through youth empowerment, as no nation can rise beyond its productive capacity which is a function of the quality and quantity of her workforce. Furthermore, repositioning TVET will safeguard the youths against engaging in armed robbery, hired assassination, kidnapping, political thuggery and militancy among others. To actively empower the youths involves providing them with resources, opportunities, and support systems required for their personal and professional development which will in turn drive and encourage social and political change.

The Impact of TVET on Economic Sustainability

Technology driven approach for economic sustainability and development of any country is an important factor. All developing and underdeveloped economies are maintained through agriculture industry, transport, banking, health and education that require improved technology, so as to facilitate and enhance productivity. Therefore, TVET is at the very core of economic sustainability of any nation. Every nation depends on production for growth. The integration of TVET in training the youths to enhance production will facilitate, not only growth, but also ensure a sustainable economy (ILO, 2020).

The impact of TVET on economic sustainability is huge and cuts across different spheres as the youths fully engage in productive activities to keep off criminality in the society. Some of these benefits include:

Increased technically skilled manpower: TVET with the mandate of training and empowering the citizens, especially youths with the needed knowledge, skills and attitudes to be gainfully employed, or better still be self-reliant and employ others is very crucial. This will help meet the required technically skilled manpower need of the industrial sector for increased productivity and economic sustainability.

Increased employment opportunities and improved standard of living: One of the greatest challenges youths in Nigeria today face is unemployment, and in some cases under-employment. This results to low standard of living and in the worst case, engagement in dehumanizing and criminal practices in the effort to meet the basic needs of life. A sustainable economy is that which can meet the needs and demands of its citizenry today and in the future. This can be achieved by effective and efficient management of available human and material resources within and outside the society.

High and stable productivity: This guarantees continuous economic growth and development of any nation and it is the kind of productivity that is not possible without skilled manpower and the strategic inclusion of TVET in empowering the youths for a sustainable economy. Developing skills from informal sectors such as entrepreneurship and micro enterprise management can help to produce opportunities for youths who may not be able to access formal employment. The impact of TVET and economic knowledge cannot be underestimated in any economy as they are the key factors that

guarantee promotion of economic growth and sustainability. Most developed nations have understood the concept and impact of TVET and that is why their economies are thriving and growing day by day and are immune to economic downturns.

Nigeria needs to stop giving lip service to empowering youths, but should go ahead to help them acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes that they need for employment through a well-developed TVET programme. Buying motorcycles, sewing machines and sharing money to youths are not the appropriate ways to empower them. Give the youths skills and knowledge needed for meaningful employment instead.

The Role of TVET on Youths' Empowerment

Majority of African youths continue to face unemployment, underemployment, poverty and lack of skills and relevant education. Many are also denied access to capital, and many others are left with unmet expectations (African Union, 2012). Massive youth unemployment in any nation is an indication of a far more complex problem. The situation of unemployment in Nigeria has been on the increase and has resulted in increase in social vices, human capacity underutilization, and increased poverty among the citizenry, social alienation and weak purchasing power among other negativities. Worst still are the issues of kidnapping, banditry, ritual killings and assassinations.

Empowering the youths through TVET can be actualized for personal and professional development, social and emotional skills, innovation and creativity, developing civic/community engagement, developing global citizenship and transferable skills (AU 2019) ADB 2016, UNESCO 2019).

Personal development of youth through TVET: TVET can help youths develop a positive mind set by encouraging learners to view failures and setbacks as opportunities for learning and growth. It also encourages self-reflection and personal growth by providing opportunities for feedback, which in turn improves ethical and moral reasoning by providing opportunities for ethical decision taking and problem solving. TVET programme provides the youths with challenges that makes them develop critical and creative thinking skills which will result in not just personal development, but innovative end products.

Professional development of youths through TVET: Youths engaged in TVET programme eventually develop their professional career due to the fact that nobody can rise professionally more than their level of personal abilities and capabilities. TVET provides youths with leadership skills and management training which can help them take on greater responsibilities. Business/workplace adaptability and resilience are major ingredients of professional career success. This is the ability to knowledgably and skilfully respond to changing job requirements and technological advancements. Being

faced with multiple challenges, yet not giving up, but rather pulling up and breaking through towards actualizing set goals.

Private sector investments: This is another opportunity TVET provides for youths who strive to be self-reliant in their area of expertise. The programme sponsors Governmental and non-governmental organizations both at international and local levels provide the funding and start-up packages. Furthermore, they provide technical assistance and support for youths to engage in TVET programmes. The entrepreneurial skills provided by TVET are basic requirements for starting and running businesses successfully. The youths through TVET empowerment programmes, become self-reliant, independent and contribute to national productivity, economic growth and sustained security.

Social and emotional skills development of youths: Social and emotional skills development of youths through TVET programme promote the growth and sustainability of their life and business. The emotional skills include empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution, added to the social skill of communication which will help these youths build stronger relationships and become effective leaders. The skills will also help them become more effective collaborators and problem solvers.

The Role of TVET in Youths' Empowerment for National Security

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a very important role in youths empowerment by providing the young ones with practical skills, knowledge and attitude necessary for employment and self-reliance which contributes immensely to national economy and security. When unemployment is addressed and youths are meaningfully engaged in productive activities, they would have little or no interest in criminal activities and extreme violent behaviours. TVET will enhance youths' empowerment for national security in the following ways:

1. **Reducing Youth Unemployment:** Ideal minds and hands are the devils workshop. Unemployment is one of the highest threat to security in Nigeria. TVET programmes provide young ones with skills and knowledge needed by the construction, engineering and agricultural worlds of work, thereby enhancing their employability and keeping them off criminal activities.
2. **Preventing Radicalization and Social Unrest:** Unemployed youths are easy give away for radicalization and social unrest. They are readily available to be used by unscrupulous individuals. TVET programmes would give such youths skills and knowledge that would make them employable. When they are employed meaningfully, they will not easily be enticed with money for criminal activities.
3. **Reducing Insecurity:** Insecurity would be highly reduced when there is a workforce that is well trained in security services- TVET programmes can directly support

national security by training young ones for career in security-related services, law enforcement and security related technologies.

4. ***Development and Growth of Small and Medium Industries:*** These are requirements for national economic growth- TVET will provide skill workforce needed for the sustenance of the industries. When the youths are empowered by TVET to work in those industries, they will be engaged in contributing in national economy with little or no time to go into destructive activities that threaten national security.

In all said and done, TVET is a very strong tool for youths' empowerment that fosters economic growth and reduces unemployment, which in question improves national security. TVET programmes will help reduce poverty, prevent criminality and build a stable nation that is secured. It cannot be over stated that TVET is an essential component of any national security strategic plans.

Challenges to the Empowerment of Youths through TVET and the Way Forward

Though TVET plays numerous roles in the empowerment of youths for self-reliance, increased productivity and contributing maximally to sustainable economy and national security, it is also faced with challenges militating against the actualization of these goals. Some of these challenges include but are not limited to the following:

- Poor coordination of TVET providers and employers/labour market
- Limited access to careers guidance and counselling
- Inadequate quality teachers and trainers
- Limited support for informal and formal education
- Poor infrastructure and training facilities
- Limited funding and poor management
- Inadequate support for entrepreneurship and self-employment

Poor coordination of TVET providers and employers/labour market: Empowerment of youths through TVET is realizable through effective coordination between the TVET markets- This poor coordination can hinder the implementation of TVET programmes and limit their ability to meet the labour market needs. Some TVET curriculum are outdated and does not reflect the latest industry trends and practices which can limit the employment of youths after graduation. With the rapid technological advancements, it becomes imperative for TVET curriculum to be reviewed regularly to meet the needs of the labour market locally and internationally. Furthermore, for effective implementation of the curriculum, the stakeholders such as the TVET institutions, government agencies and non-governmental organizations and industries must engage in collaborative participation and efforts geared towards providing the required support and accessibility for the sustainability of quality TVET for youths' empowerment.

Limited access to career guidance and counselling: Career guidance and counselling plays a vital role in youths' empowerment through TVET. Unfortunately, there are limited access to these services which can hinder their ability to make informed decisions about education and career path. They are not provided with the numerous TVET opportunities and benefits. This results in having negative perception of TVET which limits their participation in its programmes. The psychological development of youths requires continuous, updated and relevant information for maximum guidance and decision making to achieve the required empowerment for a productive future.

Inadequacy of teachers and trainers: The quality of teachers will reflect on the products of TVET institutions. The youths not possessing qualitative skills after graduation can also be because of not having quality teachers and trainers while in training. They end up being underemployed or unemployed. In some cases, they get frustrated and engage in criminality, thereby defeating the desired empowerment for personal and national development.

Accessibility to formal TVET programme by some youths who have limited mobility and migration opportunities - This emphasizes the need to support the informal and non-formal TVET, such as apprenticeships and on-the-job training for important source of skills and knowledge for youths. Alternative education pathways, such as home schooling and distance learning may not get adequate support from governments and other stakeholders and thereby limit the opportunities available to youths. Utilization of e-learning systems would assist in giving access to TVET programmes if well-coordinated.

Youths constitute the greater percentage of the Nigerian population and many of them are not in the big cities. These rural and indigenous youths have limited access to quality TVET programmes. Some youths from low-income families and those with disabilities face additional barriers to participation in TVET programme and may not receive support from the governments and other stakeholders. These and other youths in similar situations will miss out on the empowerment and this also adversely affects economic growth and national security.

Poor infrastructure and training facilities: These are among major challenges facing TVET institutions in Nigeria today. This devastating problem is crippling institutions at varying degrees ranging from inadequate classrooms, and laboratory/workshops, to dilapidating structures due to lack of maintenance over the years. Students are therefore forced to learn and train under harsh conditions which affect the outcome and eventually the quality of production. Furthermore, some institutions have inadequate training facilities, machines, portable and hand tools, consumables for practical sessions among others. In some schools where some of these are available, they are non-functional. Most of the workshops/laboratory activities would require electric power

supply for operations. Power shortage is a major challenge, not only to TVET institutions but to most Nigerians today.

Addressing the limiting factors will go a long way to ensuring effective implementation of TVET programme in empowering the youths to not only be self – reliant but also create employment opportunities to teeming unemployed youths engaging in illicit and dehumanising activities within and outside the country. When the youths are duly empowered insecurity is reduced to the barest minimum.

Limited funding, poor management of available resources and corruption amongst the managers/stakeholders of the TVET programmes These challenges are interlocked starting with underfunding of the educational sector in Nigeria over the years. This has affected TVET so badly both in quantity and quality of its products. Effective implementation of TVET is capital intensive and the Nigerian government is yet to adequately fund the programme to actualize the set goals for both the youth and the nation at large.

Furthermore, on challenges to TVET, Eze 2022, Adamu & Olawepo 2021, World Bank 2021, OECD 2020 & NBTE 2020 pointed out the following:

1. Shortage of qualified workforce: The instructors and technical personnel are grossly inadequate in quantity and quality. Many are not trained in the use of modern machines and equipment following the rapid technological advancement across the globe.
2. Lack of funding: TVET is a capital intensive programme but is allocated little funding, far lesser than general education, and this limits their ability to provide high quality education and training.
3. Infrastructural deficiency is another major challenge affecting the empowerment of youths through TVET. With many dilapidated buildings and obsolete machines/tools, added to epileptic power supply, their practical skills training become limited.
4. Ineffective collaboration with the industries and by extension the labour market thereby resulting in a mismatch in the curriculum of technical institutions such that after graduation, the graduates are either underemployed or in worse cases, unemployed. Government policies should be supportive in fostering collaboration for smooth transition from school to the labour market.

The findings of Federal Ministry of Education confirms the earlier assertion by World Bank (2002) that the growing unemployment among recent graduates, especially at the tertiary level stems in part from the mismatch between educational output and requirements of labour market.

Despite the challenge of inadequate funding of the TVET programmes, a more worrisome problem is the mismanagement of the available financial and material resources, which most times is rooted in corrupt practices amongst the TVET operators/handlers at various levels. Misappropriation of funds and lack of accountability, encapsulated in greed, is crippling the system. Sustainability mentality is needed to develop and advance TVET to greater heights notwithstanding the inadequacy of the funding from the government.

This attitude of TVET operators have also been addressed at the international organizations that identified TVET as one of their key priorities, while providing funding, technical assistance research and policy advice to promote its development and expansion in Nigeria. Monitoring and evaluation of TVET programmes and its operators in Nigeria, from the policy making stage to the implementation stage may help sanitize the system and guarantee the empowerment of youths through its programmes.

Also, providing support for entrepreneurship and self-employment of Nigerian youths will go a long way in sustaining and creating more opportunities through creativity and innovation. In 2007, the Entrepreneurship education policy was implemented in institutions in Nigeria with the aim of spurring graduates for economic growth and development to accomplish the country's goal of becoming one of the top twenty economies of the world by the year 2030. Since the introduction of entrepreneurship education into the curriculum of tertiary institutions, the implementation has been gradual, slow and faced with a lot of challenges (Fems et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurship Education is a problem-solving approach for students' employment that is capable of leading them to gain the skills required to plan, start, run and grow a business that focus on innovation and development of new products and services. Entrepreneurship education is a lifelong process, starting as early as elementary school and progressing through all levels of education, including adult education. It focuses on developing understanding and capacity for pursuit of entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attributes in widely different contexts or occupational areas.

Conclusion

As Nigeria continues to face economic challenges and strives for diversification, TVET becomes a vital tool for creating jobs, reducing unemployment, and fostering economic growth and empowerment for youths to become not just job seekers, but job creators and innovators. The journey towards improving TVET in Nigeria is a journey where a more productive, resilient economy and national security is a guaranteed destination. Implementing TVET effectively will unleash the potentials of the young minds to contribute to a brighter future and a more secure nation. It would be an effort geared towards the benefits of Nigeria and Nigerians.

Having explored the roles and challenges of TVET in empowering the youth for self-reliance, personal/career growth and national security, it becomes imperative for the government and other stakeholders to maximally offer both technical and logistic support for accessibility, qualitative training and suitable workforce/products that meet the demands of the labour market in Nigeria and beyond.

Recommendations

Empowering youths through TVET for economic inclusion and national security will yield desired fruits so long as the following recommendations are implemented:

1. Foster a more effective industrial partnership in skill training delivery to develop youths as skilled workforce to meet the markets' needs.
2. Government should increase budgetary allocations for TVET programmes and ensure proper monitoring of budgeted funds to limit corrupt practices.
3. Ensure effective continuous professional development for both technical teachers and non-teaching staff.
4. Periodic curriculum review and update in line with the needs of current labour markets and global standards for international relevance.
5. Improve the infrastructural facilities; acquire modern machines and equipment while ensuring their effective maintenance.

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