

# Addressing Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: The Role of TVET and Strategies for Empowerment

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**Abstract:** This article explores the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training TVET in addressing high youth unemployment in Nigeria. It identifies factors contributing to unemployment and proposes solutions, including promoting skill development, enhancing entrepreneurship opportunities, integrating local content into TVET curricula, and increasing funding for TVET institutions. The article underscores the need for a robust partnership between TVET institutions, industries, and local communities to foster youth empowerment and job creation.

**Keywords:** TVET, Youth Unemployment, Skill Development, Entrepreneurship, Local Content, Institutional Connect, Funding, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

High youth unemployment is a challenge that affects individuals and economies negatively. Matching the supply (graduates) and demand (labour market) of skills can increase the employability of the workforce and reduce skills shortages. In developing countries, skills matching are complex tasks given the peculiar socio - economic conditions, weak institutions, capacities and governance systems (European Training Foundation / European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training / International Labour Office, 2016).

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has reached a very alarming level. Nigeria has one of the worst youth unemployment rates in sub - Saharan Africa. Unemployment Rate in Nigeria increased to 33.30 percent, youth unemployment is currently 42.50 percent, under employment is 22.80 percent while, youth under employment is 21.00 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria, 2023). The implication of this is that about three in five Nigerian youths are jobless including young graduates. Nigeria has one of the worst youth unemployment rates in sub - Saharan Africa estimated at 37.7 per cent (African Economic Outlook, 2012). The last 5 in the ranking are African countries; out of the bottom 20 countries in the ranking, 17 are African countries (African Economic Outlook, 2020). The objective of this study is to identify some of the causes of unemployment and proffer solutions to these factors.

## 2. Some Causes of Unemployment and Accompanying Solutions

### 2.1 Credentialism

Credentialism refers to the overemphasis on formal educational qualifications and credentials as the sole determinant of employability, often disregarding practical skills and experience. Eradicate the perception of certificate acquisition as a meal ticket. This requires a joint effort from the TVET trainers, parents, students and the government.

In Nigeria, there is a deep - rooted belief that possessing higher educational degrees or certifications guarantees employment. Consequently, the pursuit of degrees, such as national diploma, higher national diploma, bachelor's or master's, has become highly competitive, leading to an oversupply of qualified graduates in certain fields. However, the job market fails to absorb this influx adequately, resulting in a mismatch between available jobs and the qualifications possessed by job seekers.

#### 2.1.1 Negative Impact of Credentialism on Youth Unemployment

*Limited Opportunities:* Credentialism reinforces the notion that only specific educational qualifications hold value in the labor market. This perception leads to a scarcity of opportunities for young people who lack the desired credentials but possess alternative skills and competencies. As a result, many young Nigerians face underemployment or unemployment despite having valuable talents.

*Skills - Experience Gap:* Credentialism places undue emphasis on academic achievements rather than practical skills and experience. This imbalance often leaves fresh graduates ill - prepared to meet the demands of the job market. Employers seek candidates with hands - on expertise, which is frequently lacking among recent graduates. Consequently, job seekers find themselves caught in a vicious cycle, as they require experience to secure employment, but opportunities to gain experience are limited.

*Unproductive Emphasis on Paper Qualifications:* Relying solely on formal qualifications during the hiring process ignores the holistic evaluation of an individual's potential. Many talented young Nigerians are excluded from employment opportunities because their skills, aptitude, and creativity are undervalued in comparison to those with superior academic qualifications. This narrow - minded approach stifles innovation and limits the overall development of the workforce.

#### 2.1.2 Addressing the Issue of Credentialism

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*Promoting Skill Development:* Encouraging vocational training and skill development programs would help bridge the gap between education and employability. These initiatives should focus on equipping young Nigerians with practical skills that align with the needs of industries and the labor market. A good example is the NBTE National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) program.

*Raising Employer Awareness:* Employers need to recognize the value of diverse skill sets and experiences beyond formal qualifications. By actively seeking candidates with relevant skills and competencies, employers can contribute to reducing youth unemployment while improving the overall quality of the workforce.

*Enhancing Entrepreneurship Opportunities:* Creating an environment that supports and fosters entrepreneurship can offer alternative avenues for young Nigerians to pursue self-employment and create job opportunities for others. Initiatives such as startup incubators, access to funding, and business development support can empower young entrepreneurs and mitigate the adverse effects of credentialism.

## 2.2 Identity Crisis and Lack of Confidence

Most Nigerian youths suffer from identity crisis. Some want to be what they are not. They are quick to forget their background and history. Unfortunately, history is no longer taught in some schools. The youths must be confident in themselves, their background, history, and country. Confidence will give birth to love that will metamorphose into opportunities to make youths better. Confidence in this great country Nigeria will make youths committed to the course of this nation. In the long run, jobs will be created, and wealth will increase. Love arouses confidence!!! Confidence gives birth to opportunities!!! Opportunities gives birth to innovations!!!

### 2.2.1 The Impact of Lack of Confidence

*Limited Job Search Efforts:* When young Nigerians lack confidence, they may feel discouraged from actively seeking employment opportunities. The fear of rejection or a belief that they are not qualified enough can prevent them from exploring potential job openings. Consequently, many youths remain unemployed, missing out on valuable chances to utilize their skills and contribute to the workforce.

*Underemployment:* Even when young Nigerians manage to secure jobs, a lack of confidence often leads to settling for positions that do not align with their qualifications and aspirations. They may underestimate their abilities and accept roles that offer limited growth prospects, leading to underemployment. This compromises their potential and inhibits overall professional development.

*Missed Entrepreneurial Opportunities:* Confidence is vital for entrepreneurial success. Without self-assurance, many talented Nigerian youths may hesitate to take risks, start their ventures, or pursue innovative ideas. The fear of failure or self-doubt can stifle creativity and prevent the creation of new businesses and job opportunities.

## 2.3 Low Input of Local Content

A new wave of change in TVET ecosystem for curriculum delivery with an excellent drive to create patriotic thinkers, entrepreneurs, and politicians must begin in earnest. The energy should be geared into utilizing local and natural resources for desired products and services. TVET trainers should begin to identify local problems for adaptation into the curriculum. Let us distinguish our needs from the borrowed curriculum because we do not have the same challenges as the Europeans. Our students' receptiveness also differs because of differences in history, background, environment, exposure, needs and some other salient factors.

### 2.3.1 The Significance of Local Content

*Relevant Skills Acquisition:* Nigeria possesses a rich cultural heritage and diverse economic sectors, such as agriculture, oil and gas, manufacturing, and the creative industries. By integrating local content into TVET curricula, we ensure that young Nigerians gain practical skills and knowledge tailored to the specific sectors and industries that drive our economy. This approach bridges the gap between education and employment, equipping youth with the competencies required to contribute meaningfully to the workforce.

*Entrepreneurship and Job Creation:* Local content in TVET programs nurtures entrepreneurial spirit among young Nigerians. It encourages them to identify opportunities within their communities and develop innovative solutions that address local challenges. By focusing on local needs, TVET institutions can empower students to create their ventures, which, in turn, generates job opportunities and reduces dependency on formal employment.

*Cultural Preservation and National Identity:* Integrating local content into TVET curricula also helps preserve Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and promotes a sense of national identity. By incorporating traditional knowledge, indigenous practices, and local customs, TVET institutions can instill pride and a deeper connection to Nigerian culture within young learners. This not only strengthens social cohesion but also encourages the exploration of traditional industries and crafts that have significant economic potential.

### 2.3.2 Strategies for Incorporating Local Content

*Collaboration with Industries and Local Communities:* TVET institutions should establish partnerships with local industries, businesses, and community organizations. These collaborations can provide insights into the specific skills and knowledge required by the job market. Additionally, involving local experts and practitioners as guest lecturers or mentors can enhance the practical relevance of the curriculum.

*Contextualized Case Studies and Projects:* By incorporating case studies and projects that reflect real-life local scenarios, TVET institutions can engage students and enhance their problem-solving abilities. This approach encourages critical thinking and creativity while addressing local challenges. Students can apply their skills to develop solutions that have a direct impact on their communities.

**Experiential Learning and Internships:** Practical experience is crucial for bridging the gap between theory and practice. TVET institutions should emphasize experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and industry attachments. These experiences expose students to the realities of the local job market, enabling them to acquire practical skills, network with industry professionals, and enhance their employability.

**Curriculum Review and Continuous Improvement:** TVET institutions must regularly review their curricula to ensure they remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of local industries. Engaging stakeholders, including employers, industry associations, and alumni, in the curriculum review process can provide valuable insights and ensure that TVET programs align with market demands.

## 2.4 Student - Student - Staff - Partnership

The TVET ecosystem must begin a new model for partnership. The Student - Student - Staff - Partnership (SSSP) model will create jobs for youths and enrich TVET trainers. Right from the lecture halls, TVET trainers must begin to identify the strength and weaknesses of their undergraduates. Based on these two factors, and basic needs of starting a Small Medium Enterprise (SME), trainers should encourage their undergraduates to partner on production of goods and/or services. These types of partnership could cut across departments or even institutions within and outside our borders.

### 2.4.1 The Advantages of Student - Trainer Partnerships for SME Creation

**Skill Development and Knowledge Transfer:** TVET trainers possess practical expertise and experience that can greatly benefit undergraduate students aspiring to become entrepreneurs. Through partnerships, trainers can share their knowledge, impart entrepreneurial skills, and guide students in developing viable business ideas. This knowledge transfer equips students with the necessary skills and insights to navigate the challenges of starting and managing SMEs effectively.

**Mentorship and Support:** Trainers serve as mentors and guides, offering valuable advice and support to undergraduate students embarking on their entrepreneurial journey. By providing mentorship, trainers can help students refine their business plans, identify potential pitfalls, and navigate the complexities of starting a business. This support instills confidence in students and increases their chances of entrepreneurial success.

**Access to Industry Networks:** TVET trainers often have extensive industry networks and connections. Through partnerships, trainers can provide students with access to these networks, facilitating potential collaborations, partnerships, and opportunities for business growth. Leveraging these connections enhances the visibility of student - led SMEs and opens doors to potential customers, investors, and industry resources.

**Practical Application of Knowledge:** Undergraduate students often possess theoretical knowledge gained from their

academic studies. Partnering with TVET trainers enables them to apply this knowledge in practical settings. Trainers can guide students in translating their theoretical understanding into tangible business strategies, product development, market analysis, and effective implementation. This practical application enhances students' entrepreneurial acumen and increases the likelihood of SME success.

## 2.5 Institutional Connect

Institutions, Faculties and Departments should deliberately set out to refer ALUMNI to one another. As TVET trainers who have mentored so many graduates, graduates - graduates mentorship should be another area to take advantage of in job creation. Trainers should refer ALUMNI to one another with specific directives on areas for support. This effort could reduce the number of unemployed youths.

In addition, some institutions such as National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP), Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS), Importers and Exporters etc will provide support to some of our intending manufacturers or service providers. The TVET trainers need to take up these responsibilities in the form of reaching out on behalf of the students or coordinating submissions and in some cases provide logistics.

### 2.5.1 New programs to promote institutional connect

TVET institutions should organize *networking events, business plan competitions, or entrepreneurship forums* where undergraduate students can interact with industry professionals, gain insights, and forge valuable connections. These engagements facilitate knowledge sharing and increase the visibility of student - led SMEs.

The Polytechnics should establish *entrepreneurship support programs or incubators* within TVET institutions that offer continued guidance, resources, and mentoring for students interested in SME creation. Trainers can play a pivotal role in these initiatives, providing ongoing support, access to facilities, and nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship.

## 2.6 Mini Industries

The end results of research outputs and services in TVET ecosystems which you find in most offices today either on shelves or the floor will do very well in the markets. There is need to emphasize commercialization during lectures and especially at the time of project writing in our Polytechnics. This will promote creation of industries. In a way, the standard of living for all TVET trainers will also be positively impacted.

## 2.7 Gown to Town Symbiotic Relationship

TVET institutions must track their graduates, check out their performance, identify with them and search out their challenges. This is the only way to improve TVET services in specific terms and deliver promptly to meet with the needs of the industries both locally and internationally. A robust ALUMNI database will reduce youth unemployment

and enhance sustainability of processes. In addition, institutional connect and mentorship are two variables that will be directly positively influenced.

Here are some ways in which tracking ALUMNI records can contribute to reducing unemployment:

*Assessing Graduate Outcomes:* By tracking the employment status and career paths of Polytechnic graduates, institutions can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their programs. This data can help identify areas of improvement, align curricula with industry needs, and ensure that graduates possess the skills and qualifications required by the job market. The information gathered can inform future decision - making and enable the Polytechnic to produce graduates with higher employability rates.

*Strengthening Industry Collaboration:* Tracking the records of Polytechnic products allows for the identification of successful graduates who have established their careers or started their businesses. Establishing partnerships between these successful alumni and the Polytechnic can foster industry collaboration, mentorship opportunities, and potential employment avenues. Industry professionals can provide guidance, internships, and job placement opportunities for current students, creating a direct link between education and employment.

*Enhancing Curriculum Relevance:* By analyzing the employment outcomes of Polytechnic graduates, institutions can assess the relevance of their curricula to the demands of the job market. Tracking records can identify areas where graduates face challenges in securing employment or areas with high demand but low graduate representation. This information can guide curriculum development, ensuring that programs align with industry needs and equip students with the skills required for current job market demands.

*Alumni Networking and Support:* Tracking records of Polytechnic products helps in building a strong alumni network. Alumni can serve as mentors, providing guidance, industry insights, and job opportunities to current students. Alumni associations can facilitate networking events, career fairs, and workshops, allowing students to connect with successful graduates who can provide valuable support and advice. This network enhances students' chances of finding employment or starting their own ventures through the guidance and connections offered by alumni.

*Program Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:* Tracking the records of Polytechnic products enables institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs in terms of graduate employment outcomes. The data collected can help identify strengths and weaknesses, allowing for continuous improvement of curricula, teaching methodologies, and support services. By monitoring the success of their graduates, Polytechnics can adapt and innovate to meet the changing demands of the job market and ensure the employability of their students.

*Government Policy and Funding:* Tracking employment outcomes can provide evidence to support government policies and funding decisions. Data on the employment

rates of Polytechnic graduates can inform policymakers about the effectiveness of TVET programs and guide funding allocations. Governments can prioritize investments in fields that demonstrate high employment rates, ensuring that resources are directed towards sectors with significant job creation potential.

## 2.8 Increased Funding of TVET institutions

To fully realize the employment potential in science, technology, and innovation, it is crucial to fund the TVET ecosystem that supports entrepreneurship and innovation. Increased funding for TVET institutions is a crucial step towards reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. By enhancing program quality, expanding access, fostering industry partnerships, supporting entrepreneurship, and strengthening career guidance, TVET institutions can equip young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the job market. Investing in these institutions is an investment in the future of the nation, as it unlocks opportunities for youth, stimulates economic growth, and contributes to the overall development of the country.

In particular, investing in research and development (R&D) is crucial for technological advancement and economic growth. By increasing funding for R&D activities, we can drive innovation across sectors and encourage collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Establishing research institutes and promoting public - private partnerships can pave the way for groundbreaking discoveries and the development of locally relevant technologies.

### 2.8.1 Benefits of Increased Funding of TVET institutions

*Enhancing Program Quality:* Increased funding for TVET institutions enables them to enhance the quality of their programs. It allows for the recruitment of highly qualified instructors, the provision of up - to - date equipment and technology, and the creation of conducive learning environments. High - quality programs equip students with relevant and marketable skills, making them more employable. By investing in curriculum development, instructional resources, and modern facilities, TVET institutions can produce graduates who are well - prepared to meet the demands of the job market.

*Expanding Access to TVET:* Insufficient funding often restricts the capacity of TVET institutions to accommodate a larger number of students. By increasing financial support, these institutions can expand their capacity, allowing more young people to access vocational education and training. This expanded access reduces the barriers to entry for youth, particularly those from marginalized communities, and provides them with opportunities for skill development and sustainable livelihoods. Increasing enrollment in TVET programs increases the pool of skilled workers and decreases the unemployment rate among young people.

*Strengthening Industry Partnerships:* Increased funding enables TVET institutions to establish and strengthen partnerships with industries. By investing in resources for industry engagement, such as establishing apprenticeship programs, organizing industry visits, and fostering

collaboration with employers, TVET institutions can align their programs with industry needs. This alignment ensures that students acquire the skills and knowledge that are in demand, enhancing their employability prospects. Furthermore, close collaborations with industry enable TVET institutions to anticipate emerging job trends and adapt their programs accordingly, reducing the skills gap and addressing unemployment challenges effectively.

*Providing Support for Entrepreneurship:* Increased funding allows TVET institutions to provide support and resources for entrepreneurship development. This includes the establishment of business incubation centers, entrepreneurship training programs, and access to start-up capital for aspiring entrepreneurs. By nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset and providing the necessary support, TVET institutions empower young people to create their own businesses, thereby reducing unemployment. Entrepreneurship-focused initiatives foster innovation, job creation, and economic growth, contributing to the overall development of the country.

*Strengthening Career Guidance and Counselling:* Increased funding enables TVET institutions to invest in comprehensive career guidance and counselling services. These services help students make informed decisions about their education and career paths, aligning their skills and interests with available job opportunities. Effective career guidance equips students with the knowledge to explore various career options, identify their strengths, and make informed choices that lead to sustainable employment. Well-funded TVET institutions can provide specialized career counselling, internships, and job placement support, ensuring a smoother transition from education to the workforce.

## 2.9 The place of God

We must shun all forms of religion bias and tribalism to empower our youths. No segregation, we are one! Nigerians must cultivate a different mindset, one that acknowledges the importance of faith, hard work, and a partnership with God in achieving success. While it is true that God provides for us, it is essential to cultivate a mindset that recognizes the partnership between faith and action. By aligning our actions with God's principles, taking personal responsibility, seeking His guidance, and embracing the power of work and perseverance, we position ourselves for success. Remember, God's blessings are not a substitute for our efforts, but rather a confirmation of His faithfulness as we work in harmony with His plan.

*Faith as the Foundation:* Having faith is essential in our journey towards success. Believing in God's goodness, provision, and guidance enables us to step out of our comfort zones, take risks, and pursue our dreams. However, faith should not be misconstrued as a passive approach that absolves us of responsibility. Instead, it should ignite a sense of purpose and drive us to take action, knowing that God will be with us every step of the way.

*Aligning with God's Principles:* God has provided us with principles and wisdom in various aspects of life, including

work, relationships, and stewardship. By aligning our actions with these principles, we position ourselves for success. For instance, embracing diligence, integrity, and perseverance in our work not only honors God but also increases our chances of achieving our goals. Recognizing that God values our efforts and the responsible use of our talents encourages us to work diligently and with excellence.

*Taking Personal Responsibility:* While it is essential to trust in God's provision, it is equally important to take personal responsibility for our own lives. We must recognize that God has given us talents, skills, and opportunities, which we are called to utilize to the best of our abilities. This means setting goals, acquiring knowledge, honing our skills, and working diligently towards our aspirations. By actively participating in our own journey, we become co-creators with God, unlocking our potential and maximizing the blessings He has bestowed upon us.

*Seeking God's Guidance:* In our pursuit of success, we should continually seek God's guidance through prayer, reflection, and studying His Word. God is the ultimate source of wisdom and direction, and involving Him in our decision-making processes ensures that our actions align with His purpose for our lives. Seeking His guidance also provides us with clarity, peace, and the ability to make informed choices that contribute to our personal and professional growth.

*Embracing the Power of Work and Perseverance:* God's blessings are often manifested through our willingness to work hard, persevere through challenges, and maintain a positive attitude. Recognizing that success is a result of both God's grace and our diligent efforts empowers us to overcome obstacles, develop resilience, and seize opportunities. Hard work, combined with faith, opens doors and positions us for divine favor and breakthroughs.

## 3. Recommendations and Conclusion

To bring about improvement in the economy and youth empowerment, all TVET institutions will have to dwell more on individual's potential, patriotism, confidence, hardwork, collaboration with industries and local communities, contextualized case studies and projects, experiential learning and internships, curriculum review and continuous improvement, skill development and knowledge transfer, mentorship and support, access to industry networks, practical application of knowledge, networking events, business plan competitions, or entrepreneurship forums, entrepreneurship support programs or incubators, mini industries/commercialization of research outputs and alumni networking and support. TVET institutions have a duty to restore the black man's dignity and use that as a catalyst to create a respectable policy in the world.

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