



Empowering the Future: Vocational Guidance Programmes and Interventions as Catalysts for Youth Employability and Economic Development

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Abstract

Unemployment, especially among youth, continues to be a major socio-economic challenge globally, with devastating effects on economic growth, social stability, and poverty levels. This paper critically examines the role of vocational guidance programmes and interventions in addressing unemployment and enhancing economic development. Drawing from extensive secondary sources, it highlights how career counselling and vocational education frameworks bridge the skills gap by preparing individuals for employability and entrepreneurship. The paper explored the integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) into broader employment strategies and demonstrates its effectiveness in fostering career readiness, entrepreneurial mindsets, and sustainable economic growth. Theoretical models, such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides insights into the relationship between vocational training, self-efficacy, and economic outcomes. Recommendations focus on curriculum reforms, public-private partnerships, increased funding, and the use of digital technologies to strengthen career services. This paper offered practical insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders committed to reducing unemployment and promoting inclusive growth.

Keywords: Vocational Guidance, Technical Education, Employability, Career Counselling, Economic Growth

1. Introduction

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has reached alarming levels, with rates exceeding 33%, posing serious economic and social challenges (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The mismatch between educational training and labour market demands has left many graduates unprepared for employment, exacerbating poverty and inequality (Ajufo, 2013). Nigeria's education system largely emphasises theoretical knowledge while neglecting practical skills, leaving youths ill-equipped for the workforce or entrepreneurial ventures (Akintoye, 2021).

Vocational guidance programmes and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) offer viable solutions by providing career counselling and skill-based training to address this gap (Okoye & Okwelle, 2020). These interventions empower young people by enhancing career decision-making, self-efficacy, and adaptability, enabling them to navigate the labour market effectively (Falco & Summers, 2019). TVET further prepares individuals with practical skills tailored to industry needs, fostering employability and entrepreneurship (Jemini Gashi et al., 2023).

Despite their potentials, vocational programmes in Nigeria face challenges such as insufficient funding,

outdated curricula, poor industry collaboration, and limited accessibility, particularly in rural areas (Mgbonu, Youngman, & Popoola, 2020). Addressing these deficiencies requires reforms, increased investment, and partnerships between the government and private sector (Akinsola, 2021). Digital platforms can also expand access to career counselling and training, bridging gaps in underserved areas (Jäckel-Visser et al., 2021).

This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of vocational guidance and TVET, drawing on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Human Capital Theory, and Career Construction Theory (Falco & Summers, 2019; Akello & Extension, 2024). It advocates for scalable interventions to equip Nigerian youth with employable skills and entrepreneurial capabilities, thereby reducing unemployment and promoting sustainable economic development

2. Theoretical Framework

To understand the role of vocational guidance programmes and interventions in addressing unemployment and fostering economic growth in Nigeria, it is essential to apply relevant theoretical perspectives. This paper employs Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Human Capital Theory, and Career Construction Theory as frameworks for analysing the issues and solutions within the Nigerian context.

2.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by

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Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), highlights how self-efficacy, goal-setting, and outcome expectations influence career decisions and behaviours (Falco & Summers, 2019). SCCT proposes that an individual's belief in their ability to achieve career goals (self-efficacy) and expectations about the outcomes of their efforts significantly impact career choices and persistence.

In Nigeria, where economic instability and limited job opportunities exacerbate unemployment, SCCT is particularly relevant. Many youths struggle with low confidence due to prolonged joblessness and limited exposure to career possibilities. Vocational guidance programmes address this issue by fostering self-efficacy through career assessments, mentorship, and goal-setting workshops (Jemini Gashi et al., 2023). By enhancing belief in their abilities, young people can overcome barriers, develop resilience, and pursue vocational pathways that match their aspirations and skills. For example, training initiatives in Nigeria's informal sectors, such as fashion design and agriculture, demonstrate how confidence-building and practical skills training can enable youths to transition into employment or entrepreneurship (Damba, 2024). Such interventions illustrate the importance of SCCT in guiding individuals to make informed career decisions and persist in the face of challenges.

3. Vocational Guidance and Employability in Nigeria and Role of Career Counselling

Vocational guidance has long been recognised as a critical component of workforce development. In Nigeria, where youth unemployment is linked to skill mismatches, career counselling programmes can play a transformative role in bridging gaps between education and employment (Mgbonu, Youngman, & Popoola, 2020).

Effective career counselling provides students with tools to assess their strengths, interests, and market opportunities. It helps them align their career goals with industries that demand specific skills, such as construction, healthcare, and ICT (Falco & Summers, 2019). In Nigeria, however, career counselling services are often unavailable or poorly implemented, particularly in rural areas (Agbo et al., 2024). Programmes that integrate personality tests, vocational training assessments, and mentorship schemes have shown promising results in improving employability and self-efficacy (Jemini Gashi et al., 2023). By offering structured guidance, these interventions help youths identify viable career paths and build confidence to pursue them.

Addressing gender inequalities and inclusion vocational guidance also addresses gender disparities by promoting inclusive career opportunities. In Nigeria, cultural norms often discourage women from pursuing careers in technical fields (Ajufo, 2013). Programmes focused on gender equality can encourage women to explore trades such as engineering and

carpentry, which are traditionally male-dominated. For example, vocational centres that target female entrepreneurs have enabled many women to establish businesses in tailoring, catering, and beauty therapy, demonstrating the potential of gender-sensitive interventions (Kareem et al., 2024).

4. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a Driver of Economic Growth: Linking TVET to Employment Opportunities

TVET systems focus on equipping individuals with practical skills needed to thrive in industries. Unlike traditional academic systems, TVET emphasises hands-on training, enabling participants to develop competencies that meet labour market demands (Okoye & Okwelle, 2020).

TVET provides a direct pathway to employment, particularly for youths who may not pursue higher education. In Nigeria, sectors such as agriculture, construction, and renewable energy present opportunities for skilled workers (Damba, 2024). However, outdated equipment and lack of industry partnerships limit the effectiveness of many TVET institutions (Akinsola, 2021). Addressing these issues requires modernising facilities, improving instructor training, and forging stronger collaborations with employers to ensure relevance.

5. Promoting Entrepreneurship

Beyond preparing individuals for jobs, TVET fosters entrepreneurship by teaching business management, innovation, and financial literacy (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). With rising youth unemployment, Nigeria must shift focus from job-seeking to job-creation strategies. Programmes such as Start-Up Nigeria and the Youth Entrepreneurship Support (YES) scheme have already shown success in equipping participants with entrepreneurial skills (Kareem et al., 2024).

6. Global Perspectives and Local Adaptation: Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Implementation

International models, such as Germany's dual apprenticeship system, demonstrate the benefits of integrating classroom learning with workplace training. Nigeria can adapt these frameworks to develop local industries and improve employment outcomes (Okoye & Okwelle, 2020). Despite its potential, TVET in Nigeria faces several challenges:

- I. Funding Deficiencies – Many training centres lack resources to upgrade equipment or hire qualified instructors (Akinsola, 2021).
- II. Outdated Curricula – Programmes often fail to align with industry needs, making graduates less competitive (Mgbonu et al. 2020).
- III. Limited Industry Collaboration – Weak links with industries hinder job placements and

apprenticeships (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023).

- IV. Accessibility Barriers – Rural communities lack adequate training centres and career guidance services (Agbo et al., 2024).

7. Policy Recommendations

- I. Curriculum Modernisation and Reform- A fundamental step towards improving vocational guidance and TVET programmes in Nigeria is curriculum modernisation. The current curricula in many vocational institutions are outdated and disconnected from the realities of the modern labour market (Mgbonu, Youngman, & Popoola, 2020). This results in a lack of employable skills among graduates, perpetuating unemployment.
- II. Modernising curricula involves aligning training programmes with technological advancements and global industry standards (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). For example, sectors like renewable energy, ICT, and agriculture are emerging as growth areas in Nigeria. Incorporating modules on coding, robotics, and sustainable farming techniques can create a workforce equipped for the future.
- III. Collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, and industry stakeholders is crucial to ensure that curricula are responsive to evolving labour market needs (Akinsola, 2021). Models such as Germany's dual apprenticeship system, which integrates theoretical learning with hands-on workplace experience, can be adapted to the Nigerian context (Okoye & Okwelle, 2020). Furthermore, flexible curricula that support continuous learning should be adopted. This will help individuals update their skills throughout their careers, addressing Career Construction Theory's emphasis on adaptability (Jäckel-Visser et al., 2021). Such reforms can create a workforce capable of responding to the demands of a dynamic economy.

8 Strengthening Industry Partnerships and Workplace Apprenticeships

Building public-private partnerships is essential for bridging the gap between vocational training institutions and industry needs. Employers can provide valuable insights into skill requirements, ensuring that training programmes are relevant and effective (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023).

Establishing apprenticeship programmes, where trainees receive hands-on experience in real-world settings, is vital for improving employability (Okoye & Okwelle, 2020). Apprenticeships not only provide practical skills but also build connections between students and potential employers, facilitating smoother transitions into the workforce. For instance, Industries

in Nigeria's oil and gas sector have partnered with TVET centres to offer tailored training programmes. These partnerships have significantly improved job placements among TVET graduates (Damba, 2024). Expanding similar initiatives to other sectors, including ICT, agriculture, and construction, could enhance workforce readiness and reduce unemployment rates.

8.1 Private Sector Investments

Encouraging private-sector investments in vocational training infrastructure is also key. Private companies can sponsor training centres, provide equipment, and fund scholarships for disadvantaged youths (Akinsola, 2021). Such partnerships benefit industries by ensuring a steady supply of skilled workers while contributing to national development.

8.2 Expanding Access through Digital Platforms

Digital transformation presents an opportunity to scale up vocational guidance and TVET programmes. With Nigeria's increasing internet penetration, online career counselling platforms and virtual training modules can extend the reach of vocational education, especially in rural areas (Jäckel-Visser et al., 2021).

8.3 Online Career Counselling Services

Digital platforms can offer virtual career assessments, mentorship, and job-matching services, addressing accessibility barriers (Jemini Gashi et al., 2023). Students can explore career options, receive training, and connect with employers without geographical limitations. Platforms such as Jobberman Nigeria already connect job seekers with employers. Integrating such platforms with TVET programmes can streamline skill development and job placement processes.

8.4 E-Learning Tools and Virtual Classrooms

E-learning platforms can deliver courses on technical skills and entrepreneurship, providing interactive content and simulations to enhance learning outcomes (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). These tools align with SCCT's focus on self-efficacy by allowing learners to track their progress and build confidence (Falco & Summers, 2019).

8.5 Mobile Training Programmes

For rural areas with limited internet access, mobile-based training modules can deliver career guidance through SMS or radio programmes. These approaches have proven effective in other African countries and could be scaled to fit Nigeria's needs (Otwine et al., 2022).

8.6 Ensuring Inclusivity and Gender Equity

Gender disparities persist in Nigeria's vocational and technical education systems, with women often excluded from male-dominated industries (Ajufu, 2013). Policies aimed at improving gender inclusivity can help bridge this gap by encouraging female participation in trades such as engineering, ICT, and construction.

8.7 Women-Centred Programmes

Creating women-focused vocational centres and offering scholarships to female students can boost enrolment in non-traditional fields (Kareem et al., 2024). Programmes such as Women in Technical Education (WITED) have already demonstrated success in Nigeria. Expanding such initiatives can promote gender equity and economic empowerment.

8.8 Support for Marginalised Groups

Vocational programmes must also target marginalised communities, including persons with disabilities and those in rural areas (Agbo et al., 2024). Specialised training modules and adaptive technologies can ensure equal access to vocational education, reducing inequalities.

8.9 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Policy Accountability

To ensure the success of vocational guidance and TVET programmes, a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework is required. This includes setting clear performance indicators, tracking employment outcomes, and collecting feedback from trainees and employers (Agbo et al., 2024).

8.10 Performance Metrics

Metrics should evaluate programme outcomes, such as:

- i. Employment rates among graduates.
- ii. Income growth and economic self-sufficiency.
- iii. Entrepreneurial success stories and business sustainability.

9. Policy Accountability

Government agencies, such as the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), should collaborate with independent evaluators to assess the impact of vocational policies and propose improvements (Okoye & Okwelle, 2020).

- I. **Enhancing Funding Models:** Inadequate funding is a recurring challenge for TVET in Nigeria. Sustainable financing models are necessary to support infrastructure upgrades, curriculum reforms, and faculty development (Akinsola, 2021).
- II. **Public Sector Funding:** Increased budgetary allocations to education and vocational training can revitalise TVET centres and enable large-scale implementation of guidance programmes (Akello & Extension, 2024).
- III. **Private Sector and Donor Support:** Public-private partnerships can attract donor funding to supplement government efforts. International organisations, such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), have supported similar initiatives globally, offering templates for Nigeria to replicate.
- IV. **Promoting Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment:** Nigeria's unemployment crisis

cannot be solved by formal employment alone. Emphasis should be placed on entrepreneurship training to encourage self-employment (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). Programmes that teach financial literacy, business planning, and marketing skills can transform job seekers into job creators. Success stories from initiatives like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Skill Acquisition Programme highlight the potential of entrepreneurship-driven interventions (Kareem et al., 2024).

10. Conclusion

Vocational guidance programmes and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) offer practical solutions to Nigeria's unemployment crisis by equipping youths with market-relevant skills and promoting entrepreneurship. Through theoretical frameworks such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), Human Capital Theory, and Career Construction Theory, this paper has demonstrated the importance of career counselling, skill development, and adaptability in addressing labour market challenges.

Modernising curricula, strengthening industry partnerships, integrating digital platforms, and promoting inclusivity are critical to improving the effectiveness of these programmes. Furthermore, sustainable funding and robust monitoring frameworks can ensure long-term success.

Investing in vocational education not only empowers individuals but also drives economic growth and reduces poverty. Nigeria must prioritise these reforms to create a workforce prepared for modern demands and technological advancements. Future research should explore scalable interventions to expand access and improve the sustainability of vocational guidance programmes nationwide.

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