

A Positional Paper on Driving the Future of TVET in Nigeria: The Imperative of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

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Abstract

The future of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Nigeria is closely tied to the promotion of gender equality and social inclusion. By addressing the challenges facing TVET and implementing targeted solutions, Nigeria can foster a skilled workforce that contributes to the nation's economic growth and development. To improve their socioeconomic standing, people from diverse backgrounds, including those with limited access to formal education, can utilize alternative avenues provided by TVET to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. By providing practical, hands-on training, TVET can empower girls and women to pursue careers in various industries, thereby promoting gender equality in the workforce and addressing the gender gap in education. By encouraging men and women to pursue careers in non-traditional fields, TVET helps break down gender stereotypes and foster an inclusive workforce. TVET equips learners with entrepreneurial skills, enabling marginalized groups and women to become self-employed and promote economic independence, contributing to social inclusion. Raising awareness about gender equality and social inclusion through targeted campaigns, workshops, and events held at TVET institutions can help address issues such as gender stereotypes, workplace harassment, and equal opportunities. Collaborating with local organizations and community leaders can help TVET institutions identify the unique needs of various communities, fostering community engagement and a more inclusive environment. In conclusion, driving the future of TVET in Nigeria requires a focus on gender equality and social inclusion. By addressing the challenges facing the sector and implementing targeted solutions, Nigeria can create a skilled workforce that contributes to economic growth and development while promoting fairness and equality for all.

Background to the Study

Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has long been recognized as a key component of Human Resource Development (HRD) and a vital tool for socio-economic development (UNESCO 2018). More recently, the TVET sector has been identified for its potential to advance the SDGs on the African continent, as well as to achieve Agenda 2063. Indeed, it is seen as crucial to achieving these goals (African Development Bank, 2021). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is designed to provide a population with knowledge and skills that will allow them to secure and retain their jobs successfully. TVET is seen as a mixture of formal, informal, and non-formal learning that provides youths with the knowledge and skills they require for employment. According to the United Nations Organisation for Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), TVET is considered a value-added portion of a general education that integrates technology, sciences, practical skills, attitudes, understanding, and information relating to employment in different economic and social sectors. TVET organizations are big 'workplace suppliers' that will be in the workforce and will be at the forefront of dealing directly with sustainable issues (Paryono, 2017).

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is education and training that offers knowledge and skills for employment. UNESCO (2006) defines TVET as an educational process characterised, in addition to general education, by the study of technology and related sciences, practical skills acquisition, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge relevant to occupations in various economic sectors and social life. Technical and vocational education is an educational process that involves, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge relevant to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016). Over the years, TVET has received recognition worldwide as a major driving force in both socio-economic growth and development in technology. For instance, during the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) third International Congress on TVET in Shanghai, China in 2012, the representatives present concluded that transforming TVET should be a top priority in the need to build greener societies and tackle global unemployment. Emphasis was placed on updating and developing mechanisms and tools to identify current and future skills needed, to ensure the relevance of TVET programmes to rapidly changing labour markets, economies, and societies (Bukit, 2012).

The concept of social exclusion is used in very different ways, as will be discussed in the following section. For some, it is synonymous with poverty. Others emphasis inadequate social participation, lack of social integration, and lack of power. While related to poverty, social exclusion is a quite distinct concept that is also linked to the important notion of social capital. Social capital can be defined as the networks of social relations that are characterized by norms of trust and reciprocity that facilitate cooperative behaviour (Stone, 2001) and build a cohesive society (Winter, 2000). Social disadvantage has been linked in a recent Australian study to lower levels of social trust and higher levels of crime (Cameron, 2005).

Despite the international campaigns for gender equality and equity in higher education, studies conducted in several countries continue to show that women are underrepresented in TVET institutions as students, staff, and managers. The participation of women in TVET education as students is uneven across national, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries in both developed and developing countries. UNESCO (2003:81) concluded that, although there are variations between and within different regions, there is a pattern whereby female participation in higher education tends to diminish as one move from secondary to higher education, especially in science and technology-oriented technical programs. Gender disparities are also apparent in fields or subjects of study with women (UNESCO 2003). Morley and Lugg (2009) observe that since academic identity is often constructed and enacted via disciplinary choice and location, gendering of disciplinary choices in TVET serves to track students into different types of occupations and social hierarchies, hence contributing to gender inequalities in society.

TVET has been hailed as “the answer to the skills shortage and skills mismatch in Africa” and “the missing link for the training and integration of youth in the labour market”. TVET no doubt holds tremendous potential for increasing employment, economic development, and ultimately economic empowerment for young Africans in particular. In particular, we draw attention to the ways that gender disparities generate obstacles and conditions in the TVET sector that, given their close connection to the workplace, directly affect women's ability to enter and remain in the labour force, as well as their long-term economic security and empowerment. According to the literature, TVET institutions may tend to reproduce patriarchal dynamics rather than transform them if gender-responsive reforms based on an understanding of how “gender regimes” function and persist are not implemented. Despite this, TVET has the potential to help the African continent achieve its development goals.

Objectives of TVET

The objective of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is to provide individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies required for employment and entrepreneurship in various industries. TVET aims to equip learners with practical, hands-on expertise, enabling them to contribute effectively to the economy and society, while also fostering personal growth and development. The main goals of TVET include:

1. Enhancing employability: TVET programs help students acquire the skills needed to enter the workforce or advance in their chosen careers.
2. Promoting entrepreneurship: TVET encourages learners to develop the skills and confidence to start their businesses or become self-employed.
3. Bridging the skills gap: TVET addresses the growing demand for skilled workers in various industries, helping to fill the gap between the supply of labor and the demand for specialized skills.
4. Boosting economic growth: By providing a skilled workforce, TVET contributes to the overall economic development of a country, as well as the competitiveness of its industries.

5. Encouraging lifelong learning: TVET emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and skill development throughout one's life, promoting adaptability and resilience in the face of changing job markets and technological advancements.
6. Fostering social inclusion and gender equality: TVET offers opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those who may have faced barriers to education, to gain valuable skills and improve their socio-economic status.
7. Strengthening national development: By equipping citizens with relevant skills, TVET contributes to the overall development of a nation, addressing issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality.

Review of the Literature

When thinking about what TVET is all about, it is worthwhile to first take a look around the room where we sit. From the seat on which people are sitting to the laptop they are holding, to the projector screen, to the building, and other things, are all partly or completely the product of TVET. No wonder Thompson (2012) said that TVET, if properly understood, is not a career but the application of skills to support life. TVET refers to those aspects of educational processes involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, as well as the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understandings, and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (FRN, 2004). TEVT is meant to impart knowledge and skills for increased efficiency in the world of work, sustainable livelihoods, personal empowerment, and socio-economic development, which enhances proper adjustment in knowledge economies and rapidly changing work environments. Thus, TVET is an all-embedded comprehensive education and training program, involving lifelong learning, responsible citizenship, and the promotion of environmentally sound development and social transformation. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo stated that TVET, with its relevant practical training component, holds the key to Nigeria becoming technologically relevant and internationally competitive in the world market. He continued that TVET is also the most effective means of empowering the citizenry to stimulate sustainable national development, enhance employment, improve the quality of life, reduce poverty, limit the incidence of social vices due to joblessness, and promote a culture of peace, freedom, and democracy (Federal Ministry of Education-FME, 2000).

Definitions of TVET by UNESCO

Given the long history of UNESCO's global involvement in the development of TVET, reviewing her definitions may reveal the global conceptions of TVET that have shaped the global development of TVET. UNESCO-UNEVOC TVETipedia (2017) defines TVET as “education concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work”; a definition that restricts itself to the role of TVET in transitioning learners from school to work. The encyclopaedia however notes that many terms have been used in the past to refer to TVET. These include Apprenticeship Training, Occupational Education (OE), Technical Education (TE), Vocational Education (VE), Technical and Vocational

Education (TVE), Vocational Education and Training (VET), Professional and Vocational Education (PVE), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Workplace Education (WE) and Workforce Education (WE) among others. The use of the terms is more common in some regions than in others. Maclean & Lai (2011) make similar observations. For example, the US government opted to use the term Career and Technical Education (CTE) in favour of VET in 2006 (Cedefop, 2020).

Benefits of TVET

New research suggests that TVET is on the whole beneficial to learners. In a systematic review of the literature, (Tripney & Hombrados (2013) found small positive and significant impacts on paid employment, formal employment, and monthly earnings from various forms of vocational education in low-income and middle-income countries. Self-employment and number of hours worked per week were however not significantly improved. Earlier, Hoeckel (2008) reviewed the literature on the benefits of vocational education in the OECD and found that vocational education provides multiple benefits for individuals and society. In the short term, individuals received improved employment chances and earning levels, while employers received higher productivity. The society received saved expenses. In the long term, individual employees became more flexible and had higher chances of lifelong learning. Employers experienced lower staff turnovers and the society received net gains due to increased tax income and externalities from improved productivity.

Status of Equality and Inclusion in Nigeria

According to the National Gender and Equality Commission (2016), Equality in education implies securing education as a right for all learners and supporting the learners to exploit their full potential and aspirations, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. It also involves implementing and institutionalizing interventions and arrangements towards achieving the set goals. Inclusion in education refers to the extent to which education service delivery responds to the diversity of needs and learners, according to the UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI). Specifically, UNGEI defines 'inclusion' to entail “providing all learners at all levels, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age-appropriate classrooms in their neighborhoods, to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society.

Inclusion also means increasing access to and participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from and within education. This process may involve changes in education content, approaches, structures, interventions, and strategies. At the centre of inclusion is the human right (UNGEI 2010). Equality in education implies securing education as a right for all learners and supporting the learners to exploit their full potential and aspirations, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. It also involves implementing and institutionalizing interventions and arrangements towards achieving the set goals. All levels of education have multiple outcomes, such as cognitive achievement (what do the pupils know/achieve), affective

achievement (attitudes such as whether the pupils like going to school or like subjects such as science, reading, or mathematics), and behavioral values (such as civic responsibility and good moral values such as respect and social work). Other aspects of focus were gender dimensions, including access to all levels of schooling, and whether it is boys or girls who perform better. Gender dimensions also focused on education management (education managers and management boards) and teaching (teachers), among others. The aspects of inclusion and equality discussed above form the fundamental principles of the Education for All (EFA) commitment of 1990, and SDG No. 4 on quality education.

Challenges of Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) in Nigeria

Like many other aspects of the Nigerian educational system, TVE is beset by many surmountable challenges. These challenges have rendered it ineffective, inaccessible to the majority, and unproductive. Nwosu and Micah (2017) provide the following as the challenges of TVET in Nigeria:

- i. **Reluctance in Policies and Recommendations Implementation:** Sadly, many of these policies are merely on paper and receive little to no attention, even though there are numerous policies in place to propel TVE's progressive development at all levels and make it the envy of all. Numerous individuals have contended that inadequate implementation of educational policy is a challenge facing both TVE and the Nigerian educational system as a whole.
- ii. **Public Negative Perception:** Of all the challenges facing TVET, negative public perception is responsible for low patronage among Nigerian students. Social sciences, arts, and general sciences are taking. From the secondary level, parent abhor seeing their children attend technical schools/colleges and at the tertiary level majority prefer law, accounting, business administration, medicine, and so on to technology education, creative arts, home management, hospitality, agriculture, and related sciences. With a chunk of students gaining admission into these other preferred courses, TVET, unfortunately, is at the bottom of the food chain.
- iii. **Man-power Deficiency:** One of the nagging challenges of TVE in Nigeria is the endemic shortage of manpower in these few available Technical Institutions or colleges. Out of the few available teachers or lecturers, many lacks the requisite qualification, training, skill, or capacity to appropriately inculcate practical and theoretical knowledge. Apart from that, many workshops/laboratories do not have technologists or laboratory attendants to oversee practical activities.
- iv. **Institutional and Infrastructural Inadequacy:** Despite all that is said about the importance of TVE as an important machinery in the process of national development, there is a general shortage across the board in the number of institutions that offer courses in TVE. From secondary level to tertiary level.
- v. **Budgetary and Subvention Deficit:** Another challenge that has plagued all TVE institutions, both at the federal and state levels, is the challenge of funding. TVE is an expensive venture but with outstandingly matchless economic developmental benefits. With the issue of underfunding and inappropriate or poor subvention,

many of these institutions rely heavily on theoretical instructional methodology, and rote learning is the order of the day.

Driving the future of the TVET in Nigeria

To drive the future of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) through the lens of the blue economy, we must focus on the following key areas:

1. **Developing relevant and specialized skills:** The blue economy, which encompasses marine resources and activities, requires a skilled workforce with expertise in areas such as fisheries management, aquaculture, maritime transportation, and ocean energy. TVET institutions should collaborate with industry stakeholders to design and update curricula that cater to these emerging sectors.
2. **Encouraging innovation and research:** Investing in research and development will help TVET institutions stay up-to-date with the latest advancements in the blue economy. This can be achieved by fostering partnerships between academic institutions, research organizations, and industry players to work on cutting-edge projects and technologies.
3. **Promoting entrepreneurship and job creation:** TVET programs should encourage students to become entrepreneurs by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to start their own businesses in the blue economy. This will not only create job opportunities but also stimulate economic growth in the sector.
4. **Addressing gender disparities and social exclusion:** The blue economy offers numerous opportunities for women, yet they are often underrepresented in these sectors. TVET institutions must work towards promoting gender equality by designing inclusive programs and creating a supportive environment for female students.
5. **Enhancing workforce mobility:** As the blue economy expands globally, there will be a need for skilled workers to move between countries and regions. TVET institutions can play a vital role in preparing students for this mobility by incorporating international perspectives and standards into their curricula and fostering international partnerships.
6. **Emphasizing sustainability:** The blue economy relies on the responsible use of marine resources, and TVET programs should instill sustainable practices in their students. This includes teaching about environmental conservation, resource management, and the importance of minimizing the negative impacts of human activities on marine ecosystems.
7. **Strengthening links with industry:** TVET institutions should collaborate closely with industry stakeholders to ensure that their programs align with the needs of the blue economy. This can be achieved through internships, apprenticeships, and other forms of work-integrated learning that provide students with practical experience and industry exposure.

Challenges of TVET

UNESCO launches new strategy for TVET 2022-2029 at international conference

UNESCO is actively engaged in shaping the future development of TVET. On 25 and 26 October, 2020, at the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET in Bonn, Germany, UNESCO is hosting a hybrid international conference and the launch of its new strategy for TVET for the period 2022-2029. The strategy takes into consideration the present and future priorities of individuals, economies, and societies. Its title, “Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training for successful and just transition”, further captures UNESCO's expectation that TVET is critical for promoting a path to recovery and resilience building in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, and for accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 8 and other related SDGs over the next eight years. The Strategy is aligned with the global process for the transformation of education and its Summit, convened by the UN Secretary-General in September 2022, which provided the political capital we need to change the course, generating national commitments from 130 countries.

The new strategy is focused on three main lines of action:

1. **Develop skills for all individuals to learn, work and live:** To support flexible lifelong learning pathways, the key focus is on inclusion and targeted measures and technical assistance to mitigate the impact of technology and climate change on gender equality, marginalized communities, and those dependent on informal economies and subsistence agriculture.
2. **Develop skills for inclusive and sustainable economies:** To support job growth, private sector participation and effective skills anticipation, the key focus is on the transition towards a digital and green economy, STEM and 21st century skills, innovation, and strong governance and investment.
3. **Develop skills for inclusive and peaceful societies:** To supporting rights-based education for sustainable development, the key focus is on global and participatory citizenship education and TVET for social integration and cohesion.

These priorities seek to inspire a renewed ambition for TVET in Member States in a way that responds to their needs and ever-changing labour markets, economies, and societies. As such, it was developed in alignment with UNESCO's 2021 Futures of Education report, calling for a new social contract to repair injustices, solve the skills deficits affecting labour market, and further learning and career progression for both youth and adults.

Influence of TVET on Social Inclusion and Gender Equality

Inclusive TVET involves taking into cognizance the unemployed, dropouts, physically challenged, marginalized groups, rural dwellers, and retirees, and equipping them with the necessary skills needed for wealth creation. The focus is centered on the provision of requisite skills to all interested persons without discrimination. Empirical facts have shown that the provision of skills through TVET brings additional benefits to people and thus enhances their employability status. For instance, Edokpolor and Owenubi

(2017) conducted research and found that TVET can equip people with skills for job creation and sustainable development of the economy. According to Oladejo (2021), TVET has great prospects for tackling poverty, enhancing employability through skill acquisition, and boosting sustainable development. The role of inclusive TVET in equipping individuals with the requisite skills that could enable them to effectively participate in social, economic, and technological innovation processes cannot be neglected. Inclusive Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been observed as one of the ways to achieve participation and inclusion of most Nigerians in legal and meaningful profit-oriented activities to earn their living, eradicate poverty, reduce social vices, and combat insecurity. Igniting avenues for creating jobs, and generating and sustaining wealth in the nation through inclusive TVET could lead many people out of poverty and thereby reduce social vices and insecurity in Nigeria. It therefore becomes imperative to discuss feasible options for implementing inclusive TVET to reduce or eliminate insecurity in Nigeria.

The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 defined an inclusive society as “a society for all, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play (United Nations, 1995). Such an inclusive society is equipped with mechanisms that accommodate diversity and facilitate/enable people's active participation in their political, economic, and social lives. As such, it overrides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures equal opportunities for all to achieve full potential in life, regardless of origin. Such a society fosters, at the same time, emanates from the well-being of each individual, mutual trust, a sense of belonging, and interconnectedness.

The goal of social integration is to create “a more stable, safe and just society for all”, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society must be based on the principles of embracing, not coercing or forcing, diversity and using participatory processes that involve all stakeholders in the decision-making that affects their lives.

Social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities, that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizens' participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Social cohesion is a related concept that parallels that of social integration in many respects. A socially cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition, and legitimacy. Such societies are not necessarily demographically homogeneous. Rather, by respecting diversity, they harness the potential residing in their societal diversity (in terms of ideas, opinions, skills, etc.). Therefore, they are less prone to slip into destructive patterns of tension and conflict when different interests collide.

SDG 5: Empowering women and girls to take control of their bodies and lives is crucial for solving our biggest social and environmental crises. Gender inequality is one of the main drivers of high fertility rates. Not a single country has yet achieved full equality, and the worst gender-based injustices and crimes continue to be widespread. According to the UN, ending gender-based violence, harmful practices (including child marriage and FGM), preventable maternal deaths, and unmet family planning needs is affordable and within reach, but it still suffers from a severe funding shortage. In the meantime, the number of women and girls subjected to harmful practices is increasing due to slow progress and population growth.

“The proportion of women and girls subjected to FGM is decreasing overall, but the number of women and girls subjected to it is growing because of population growth. That number could grow from 4.1 million in 2020 to 4.6 million in the year by 2030, since the cohort of girls in many high-prevalence countries is growing.”



Figure 1.

Conclusion

In conclusion, TVET plays a vital role in promoting social inclusion and gender equality within the context of the Blue Economy. By providing equal opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds and genders, TVET programs contribute to a more equitable distribution of benefits and responsibilities in ocean-related industries. This fosters a more inclusive and sustainable growth of the Blue Economy, ensuring that the advantages of ocean resource development are shared among all members of society.

Furthermore, TVET institutions often prioritize gender-responsive education and training, which helps to break down traditional gender barriers in the workforce. This can lead to increased participation of women in ocean-related professions, thereby enhancing their economic opportunities and empowering them to contribute to the sustainable management of marine resources.

Way Forward

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a significant role in promoting social inclusion and gender equality by providing equal opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds and fostering an environment that values and supports the participation of both genders. Here are some ways TVET contributes to social inclusion and gender equality:

1. **Skills Development for Underprivileged Groups:** TVET offers a platform for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those with limited access to formal education, to acquire relevant skills and knowledge. This enables them to secure decent employment opportunities and improve their socio-economic status.
2. **Addressing Gender Inequality in Education:** TVET can help bridge the gender gap in education by offering alternative pathways for girls and women who may not have had equal access to traditional academic education. By providing practical, hands-on training, TVET can empower girls and women to pursue careers in various industries, thereby promoting gender equality in the workforce.
3. **Encouraging Non-traditional Occupations:** TVET can break down gender stereotypes by promoting the participation of both men and women in non-traditional occupations. For instance, women can be encouraged to pursue careers in fields such as construction, engineering, and automotive repair, while men can be encouraged to explore opportunities in healthcare, childcare, and teaching.
4. **Developing Entrepreneurial Skills:** TVET equips learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to become self-employed, which can be particularly beneficial for marginalized groups and women who may face barriers to employment. By promoting entrepreneurship, TVET fosters economic independence and contributes to social inclusion.
5. **Creating Awareness and Promoting Equality:** TVET institutions can play a role in raising awareness about gender equality and social inclusion through targeted campaigns, workshops, and events that address issues such as gender stereotypes, workplace harassment, and equal opportunities.
6. **Strengthening Community Engagement:** TVET can contribute to social inclusion by fostering community engagement and collaboration. By working with local organizations and community leaders, TVET institutions can identify the unique needs of various.
7. **Industry Collaboration:** Strengthening partnerships between TVET institutions and industry players can help ensure that training programs are aligned with the

needs of the labor market. This can be achieved through the establishment of industry advisory boards, internships, and apprenticeships. Collaboration with industry can also facilitate the provision of modern equipment and resources for TVET institutions.

8. Government Support and Policy Implementation: The Nigerian government should prioritize TVET by allocating sufficient funding and implementing policies that support the sector. This includes providing incentives for private sector investment in TVET, as well as developing a comprehensive national TVET policy that addresses the challenges facing the sector.

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