

**LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT IN POST-CONFLICT PEACE BUILDING NORTH EASTERN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the role of Technology and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in empowering youth as a critical component in post-conflict peace-building in North Eastern Nigeria. Following prolonged conflict and insurgency, the region faces severe challenges, particularly youth unemployment, social disintegration, and a skills gap. The article reports the theoretical part and key concepts surrounding TVET's potential to equip youth with employable skills, promote entrepreneurship, and contribute to economic recovery and peace building. By critically evaluating various models and existing TVET practices, the study highlights the importance of integrating TVET into peace-building strategies to reduce poverty, foster economic self-reliance, and prevent further instability in the region. Furthermore, the article explores the potential benefits, limitations, and areas for further research, with an emphasis on the intersection of education, peace, and development. The study concludes with recommendations for stakeholders, including policymakers and educators, to leverage TVET in addressing the socio-economic challenges facing youth in conflict-affected regions.

Keywords: TVET, post-conflict peace building, youth empowerment, North Eastern Nigeria, Economic recovery, Education

INTRODUCTION

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) defines Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as "education which is mainly designed to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, know-how and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation, trade or group of occupations or trades" (UNESCO, 2007). TVET emerges as a crucial strategy for youth empowerment and addressing unemployment in Nigeria (Salisu, 2020), particularly in the conflict-affected North-East region (Aminu et al., 2024). TVET equips youth with practical skills for employment and entrepreneurship, tackling the alarming unemployment rates and associated social issues (Maigida et al., 2013). The integration of entrepreneurial skills in TVET is emphasized as a key approach to enhance youth employability and self-reliance (Chijioke et al., 2017; Ogunbote et al., 2023; Ikutal, 2021; Salisu, 2020). Specific skills identified as essential include vocational skills in horticulture, engineering, and construction, as well as business, financial management, and communication skills (Chinedu & Olabiyi, 2015). Global partnerships in TVET are highlighted as a means to curb youth unemployment and restiveness in North-East Nigeria, with job creation and skill development through TVET identified as critical factors in addressing community unrest (Wombo, 2023). These interventions are crucial for enhancing national security and achieving sustainable development goals in the region.

This article provides a conceptual insight of TVET's role as a catalyst for youth empowerment and peace building. By synthesizing relevant literature on TVET, post-conflict recovery, and youth development, this study highlights how TVET can be effectively integrated into post-conflict

reconstruction strategies to foster economic development, reduce poverty, and promote peace. TVET is seen as crucial for economic development, poverty reduction, and peace-building in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2007). It can empower girls and women, contributing to gender equality and peaceful change in local communities (Arrey-Ndip, 2023; Hilal, 2012). TVET integrates human resource development (HRD) and national human resource development (NHRD) outcomes, addressing workforce, economic, and social development issues (Alagaraja et al., 2014). A systematic review of TVET interventions in low- and middle-income countries found small, positive, and significant effects on overall paid employment, formal employment, and monthly earnings (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013). Further research is necessary to strengthen the understanding of TVET's impact on youth empowerment and peace building in post-conflict setting.

2. Theoretical Framework: TVET in Post-Conflict Peace-Building

In regions recovering from conflict, young people often face the dual challenge of rebuilding their lives while navigating limited economic opportunities. In post-conflict settings such as North-Eastern Nigeria, where communities have been ravaged by insurgency and violence, there is an urgent need for strategic interventions aimed at rebuilding the social and economic fabric of society (Gbadeyanet al., 2024; Salaudeen & Dauda, 2019). Youth, who are often among the most affected by conflicts, face immense challenges including unemployment, lack of education, and social marginalization (Muhammad et al., 2022). In this context, leveraging TVET emerges as a key approach for empowering youth and fostering economic recovery, which in turn contributes to sustainable peace-building efforts. TVET serves as a strategic tool to address these challenges by equipping youth with market-relevant skills, reducing unemployment, and preventing the recurrence of violence by providing alternatives to conflict-driven livelihoods.

The theoretical framework for understanding how TVET can be harnessed for youth empowerment in post-conflict settings is informed by several key theories:

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory suggests that investments in education and training improve individual productivity and lead to economic development (Schultz, 1961). TVET equips youth with practical skills that directly translate into employability, income generation, and economic stability, which are critical in conflict-affected areas like North-Eastern Nigeria. These investments in human capital help to rebuild a skilled workforce essential for post-conflict reconstruction, while also reducing poverty and dependence on humanitarian aid (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013).

Peace-Building Theory

Peace-Building Theory emphasizes the creation of structures and systems that promote sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict, such as socio-economic inequalities (Galtung, 1996). By integrating technology and vocational training, youth in conflict zones can develop marketable skills that increase employment opportunities and reduce the likelihood of engaging in conflict-related activities. TVET's role in providing economic alternatives for youth is a critical component of long-term peace-building (Arrey-Ndip, 2023).

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory focuses on enabling individuals to gain control over their lives by enhancing their capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). In the context of North-Eastern Nigeria, technology-enhanced TVET

provides youth with both technical skills and the confidence to rebuild their communities. Empowerment through education fosters agency, self-reliance, and resilience, which are essential for post-conflict recovery (Muhammad et al., 2022).

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory explores the value of social networks and the importance of trust, cooperation, and community engagement for achieving collective goals (van Bakel & Horak, 2024). In post-conflict societies, rebuilding social capital is crucial, as conflict often erodes trust and social cohesion. TVET programs that integrate collaborative learning and community-based projects can help rebuild social capital by fostering positive relationships among youth, promoting teamwork, and enhancing social integration (Maigida et al., 2013).

Economic Recovery Theory

Economic Recovery Theory explains the processes through which economies rebound from conflict, with a focus on job creation, infrastructure rebuilding, and economic stabilization (Chang & Rose, 2012). TVET, particularly when enhanced by technology, is instrumental in economic recovery, as it equips youth with the skills needed to contribute to rebuilding critical infrastructure, reviving local industries, and participating in entrepreneurial ventures (Ogunbote et al., 2023). By creating a skilled workforce, TVET contributes directly to local economic growth and broader national recovery efforts in the North-East Nigeria.

Youth Empowerment through TVET and Technology

In post-conflict North-Eastern Nigeria, the empowerment of youth through TVET and technology involves addressing several key challenges: unemployment, lack of education, and limited access to opportunities. According to the World Bank, youth unemployment in the region has been exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency and Covid-19, which has destroyed livelihoods, displaced populations, and undermined the local economy (Jenq et al., 2021). TVET offers a way to reverse these trends by equipping youth with market-relevant skills, including those in agriculture, construction, and emerging digital technologies (UNESCO, 2007).

Technology-Enhanced Learning

The integration of technology into TVET programs significantly enhances the quality and relevance of vocational training. Online learning platforms, mobile applications, and digital tools provide access to training materials, enabling youth in remote or conflict-affected areas to acquire skills that are critical for economic recovery (Pandey & Tiwari, 2014; Salisu, 2020; Tabbron & Yang, 1997). Technology also facilitates entrepreneurship by giving youth access to digital marketing, financial management tools, and e-commerce platforms, allowing them to start and scale their businesses (Yasak & Alias, 2015).

Skills Development for Economic Recovery

TVET programs tailored to the needs of post-conflict reconstruction are vital for economic recovery. Skills in sectors such as construction, agriculture, renewable energy, and information technology (IT) are particularly relevant for rebuilding physical infrastructure and revitalizing local industries (Allais, 2012; Tukundane et al., 2015). The focus on digital skills is especially important in today's globalized economy, as it enables youth to participate in both local and international markets. In North-Eastern Nigeria, these skills can be applied to agricultural development, small-scale manufacturing, and other sectors critical for local economic resilience (Aminu et al., 2024; Chinedu & Olabiyi, 2015).

Fostering Entrepreneurship and Self-Reliance

In addition to employability, TVET fosters entrepreneurship by providing youth with the skills and knowledge needed to create their own businesses (Salisu, 2020). Entrepreneurship is particularly important in post-conflict settings where formal employment opportunities may be limited. TVET programs can teach financial literacy, business management, and innovation, enabling youth to establish small enterprises that contribute to local economic recovery (Alagaraja et al., 2014; Yasak & Alias, 2015).

Leveraging technology and vocational education for youth empowerment in post-conflict peace building is a strategic approach to addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by young people in North-Eastern Nigeria. By equipping youth with the skills necessary for employment and entrepreneurship, TVET plays a central role in economic recovery and sustainable peace. Through the application of Human Capital Theory, Peace-Building Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Social Capital Theory, this framework illustrates how TVET and technology can transform the lives of youth, reduce the risk of conflict recurrence, and contribute to long-term stability in post-conflict regions.

TVET and Youth Empowerment: Conceptual Structure

TVET provides individuals with the practical skills necessary for employment and entrepreneurship, contributing directly to their economic self-sufficiency and broader societal development (Chijioke et al., 2017; Ikutal, 2021). The empowerment of youth through TVET is multidimensional, involving economic, social, and psychological components (Bubaet al., 2022). This section explores the conceptual foundations of TVET as a vehicle for youth empowerment, focusing on its role in promoting economic independence and fostering social cohesion.

TVET as a Vehicle for Economic Empowerment

TVET serves as a powerful mechanism for economic empowerment by equipping individuals with market-relevant skills that increase their employability and entrepreneurial potential. In contexts where traditional education may not provide sufficient pathways to employment, TVET offers an alternative approach that is directly linked to the demands of the labor market. This is particularly important in post-conflict regions, where economic structures have been disrupted and unemployment rates are often high (Bubaetal, 2022). By focusing on practical skills, TVET helps youth acquire competencies in fields such as agriculture, construction, and information technology—sectors that are critical to economic recovery and growth in developing countries (Ikutal, 2021).

Economic empowerment through TVET also involves fostering entrepreneurship. In many post-conflict settings, formal employment opportunities maybe limited, and the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) becomes essential for economic stability. TVET programs that incorporate business management, financial literacy, and innovation training empower youth to start their own businesses, thus contributing to job creation and economic revitalization (UNESCO, 2007). By building entrepreneurial skills, TVET fosters self-reliance and reduces dependency on external aid, helping to lay the foundation for sustainable economic development (Salisu, 2020).

Furthermore, the economic empowerment provided by TVET is essential for breaking cycles of poverty, particularly in regions like North-Eastern Nigeria, where decades of conflict have weakened economic systems and deprived young people of meaningful opportunities for work (Aminu et al., 2024). By equipping youth with the skills they need to secure stable income, TVET can transform lives, reduce poverty, and drive economic recovery.

TVET and Social Cohesion

Beyond economic empowerment, TVET can play a critical role in fostering social cohesion and community resilience. Beyond its economic benefits, TVET also plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion in post-conflict societies (Bhari et al., 2021). Social cohesion refers to the bonds that bring individuals and groups together, fostering trust, cooperation, and mutual support within a community (Khan et al., 2023). In post-conflict settings, where social fabric has often been torn apart by violence, rebuilding trust and fostering cooperation is essential for long-term peace and stability. TVET can contribute to this process by creating inclusive environments where youth from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and regions can come together to learn and collaborate (Galtung, 1996).

TVET promotes social cohesion by providing equal access to education and training for marginalized and disadvantaged youth, including those who may have been excluded from formal education systems due to conflict or displacement (Bhari et al., 2021). This inclusion fosters a sense of belonging and reduces the social and economic inequalities that often fuel tensions and conflict (Khan et al., 2023). When youth from diverse backgrounds work together in vocational training settings, they build relationships based on mutual respect and shared goals, which helps to mend divisions created by conflict.

Moreover, TVET programs that emphasize teamwork, collaboration, and problem-solving help to strengthen social capital—the networks of relationships that facilitate collective action (Chijioke et al., 2017). By encouraging youth to engage in group projects, apprenticeships, and community-based initiatives, TVET helps to rebuild social ties and fosters a culture of cooperation. In the context of post-conflict recovery, these efforts contribute to the healing of societal wounds and the prevention of future conflict by reducing tensions and fostering positive intergroup relations (Buba et al., 2022).

TVET also promotes social cohesion by providing youth with the skills and opportunities to participate actively in the rebuilding of their communities. By training young people in trades such as construction, healthcare, and renewable energy, TVET enables them to contribute directly to the reconstruction of infrastructure, the provision of essential services, and the development of local industries (Alagaraja et al., 2014). This active participation not only fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility but also enhances the social cohesion necessary for long-term peace and stability.

TVET is a multifaceted tool for youth empowerment, contributing to both economic empowerment and social cohesion. By providing market-relevant skills, TVET enables young people to secure employment or start their own businesses, thus fostering economic independence and reducing poverty. Simultaneously, TVET plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion by fostering inclusion, rebuilding trust, and encouraging collaboration among youth from diverse backgrounds. In post-conflict settings such as North-Eastern Nigeria, the dual role of TVET in economic empowerment and social cohesion is critical for sustainable peace-building and long-term recovery.

Challenges and Barriers to Implementing TVET in North Eastern Nigeria

Implementing TVET in North-Eastern Nigeria, a region significantly affected by insurgency, conflict, and socio-economic instability, is crucial for youth empowerment and economic recovery. However, various challenges hinder the successful implementation of TVET programs in this

region. These challenges include insufficient infrastructure, limited resources, and societal attitudes that stigmatize vocational education. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring that TVET fulfills its potential as a transformative tool for development in post-conflict contexts.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

One of the most significant challenges to implementing TVET in North-Eastern Nigeria is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources. Decades of conflict, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency, have devastated the region's educational facilities, leaving many schools and training centers destroyed or in disrepair (Gbadeyan et al., 2024; Kelvin-Iloafu et al., 2019). This destruction has severely limited the availability of physical spaces where vocational training can take place. Additionally, the absence of basic resources, such as electricity, internet access, and learning materials, further constrains the ability of training centers to operate effectively (Gbadeyan et al., 2024; Salaudeen & Dauda, 2019; Wombo, 2023).

The lack of specialized equipment and tools needed for vocational training is also a major challenge. TVET programs often require access to industry-standard machinery, tools, and materials to provide practical, hands-on experience. In fields such as construction, carpentry, or automotive repair, the absence of proper equipment limits the quality of instruction and the ability of students to gain market-relevant skills. Furthermore, many training centers in North-Eastern Nigeria rely on outdated technologies and teaching methods, which hinder the ability to provide training that meets the needs of modern industries (UNESCO, 2022).

Additionally, financial constraints exacerbate the infrastructure challenges. Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to implement TVET programs in the region often face limited budgets, which restrict their ability to build and maintain adequate facilities or provide the necessary training materials. The cost of providing vocational training is particularly high in rural and conflict-affected areas where the logistics of transporting materials and ensuring the safety of both students and instructors present significant obstacles (Khan et al., 2023). Without sufficient funding, TVET programs may struggle to scale up and reach the most vulnerable populations, limiting their overall impact on youth empowerment and economic recovery.

Social Stigmatization of Vocational Education

Another major barrier to the successful implementation of TVET in North-Eastern Nigeria is the social stigmatization of vocational education (Muhammad et al., 2022). Despite the practical benefits of TVET in providing marketable skills and enhancing employability, vocational education is often viewed as inferior to traditional academic pathways (Gbadeyan et al., 2024). Many parents and students perceive vocational education as a "last resort" for those who are unable to succeed in formal academic settings. This stigma is deeply rooted in societal attitudes that prioritize university degrees and white-collar jobs over manual or technical work, even though the latter may offer better employment opportunities in the local economy.

In North-Eastern Nigeria, where cultural norms and expectations often emphasize academic success as a marker of social status, vocational education is frequently dismissed as a less prestigious option. As a result, many youth and their families may be reluctant to enroll in TVET programs, even when these programs offer viable pathways to employment and income generation. This reluctance is further compounded by the perception that vocational education is primarily for marginalized or disadvantaged individuals, reinforcing its image as a secondary option.

The social stigmatization of TVET also affects funding and policy support for vocational education. Governments and donors may prioritize academic education over TVET, allocating

more resources to traditional schools and universities, while neglecting vocational training centers (UNESCO, 2022). This imbalance in resource allocation not only undermines the quality of TVET programs but also perpetuates the perception that vocational education is less valuable. As a result, vocational training programs often suffer from under-enrollment, further limiting their potential to contribute to youth empowerment and economic recovery in the region.

Moreover, addressing the social stigma associated with vocational education requires a comprehensive effort to change public perceptions and promote the value of technical and vocational skills. Public awareness campaigns, community engagement, and efforts to showcase the success of TVET graduates in securing stable employment and entrepreneurship opportunities are essential for shifting societal attitudes. In regions like North-Eastern Nigeria, where traditional norms may be deeply ingrained, overcoming the stigma surrounding vocational education is a critical step toward ensuring that TVET is seen as a viable and respected pathway for youth.

The successful implementation of TVET in North-Eastern Nigeria faces significant challenges, particularly the lack of infrastructure and the pervasive social stigmatization of vocational education. Inadequate resources and outdated training facilities hinder the ability of TVET programs to provide high-quality, practical instruction. Simultaneously, societal attitudes that view vocational education as inferior to academic pathways limit enrollment and support for these programs. Addressing these challenges requires not only increased investment in infrastructure and resources but also a concerted effort to shift public perceptions and promote the value of TVET as a key driver of youth empowerment and economic recovery.

The Way Forward: Integrating TVET into Post-Conflict Strategies

Integrating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) into post-conflict strategies is critical for fostering long-term peace and development in regions like North-Eastern Nigeria. Post-conflict recovery often involves rebuilding infrastructure, restoring economic stability, and addressing social grievances, all of which can be facilitated through a robust TVET system. By equipping youth with practical skills, TVET provides a pathway for individuals to become economically self-reliant and active contributors to the reconstruction of their communities. Moreover, TVET programs play a vital role in addressing the root causes of conflict, such as unemployment and social exclusion, by promoting economic empowerment and social cohesion. This section explores the necessary steps to effectively integrate TVET into post-conflict recovery, focusing on policy recommendations and community engagement.

Policy Recommendations for Enhancing TVET

To maximize the impact of TVET in post-conflict settings, comprehensive policy reforms are needed. These policies must address the specific challenges faced in regions like North-Eastern Nigeria ensuring that TVET programs are adequately resourced, aligned with labor market needs, and accessible to all.

Firstly, governments should prioritize funding for TVET infrastructure and resource development. As noted earlier, inadequate facilities and outdated equipment hinder the effectiveness of TVET programs. Policymakers must allocate sufficient budgets to rebuild and equip vocational training centers with modern tools, technology, and materials that align with industry standards. Additionally, collaboration with international organizations and donor agencies can provide financial and technical support to address resource shortages in conflict-affected areas (UNESCO, 2022).

Secondly, policymakers should focus on curriculum development and industry partnerships to ensure that TVET programs are relevant to the local economy and future labor market demands. TVET curriculums should be tailored to meet the specific skills needed in sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, construction, and information technology, which are key for economic recovery in post-conflict regions. Establishing partnerships with local businesses and industries will also help create employment opportunities for TVET graduates and ensure that the training provided aligns with the skills required by employers (Bubaetal., 2022; Pandey & Tiwari, 2014).

Thirdly, to increase the appeal of vocational education and combat its social stigmatization, governments should implement public policies that promote the value of TVET as an equal alternative to academic education. One strategy could involve offering scholarships, apprenticeships, and career development programs specifically for TVET students, thereby demonstrating that vocational education can lead to successful and lucrative careers (Salaudeen & Dauda, 2019). Policy frameworks should also prioritize the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, and individuals affected by conflict, ensuring that TVET is accessible to all.

Community Engagement and Public Awareness

Beyond policy reforms, successful integration of TVET into post-conflict strategies requires active community engagement and efforts to raise public awareness about the benefits of vocational education. TVET programs must be designed with community input to ensure that they meet the specific needs and cultural contexts of the local population. Engaging community leaders, local governments, and civil society organizations in the planning and implementation of TVET programs is essential for building trust and ensuring community ownership of these initiatives (Gbadeyan et al., 2024).

Public awareness campaigns are critical for changing negative perceptions about TVET and overcoming the stigma associated with vocational education. These campaigns should highlight the success stories of TVET graduates who have become skilled professionals or successful entrepreneurs, demonstrating the potential of vocational training to provide economic mobility and improve livelihoods. Additionally, governments and NGOs should leverage media platforms—such as radio, social media, and community forums—to educate the public about the role of TVET in economic recovery and peacebuilding.

Community engagement also involves fostering collaboration between vocational training centers, local businesses, and industry leaders to create practical, demand-driven training opportunities (Tajudeen, 2023). By engaging communities in the development and delivery of TVET programs, the programs become more responsive to local needs and better positioned to contribute to post-conflict recovery.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the potential of TVET to serve as a catalyst for youth empowerment and peace building in post-conflict North Eastern Nigeria. By providing young people with practical skills, TVET can help them become economically self-reliant and contribute to the rebuilding of their communities. However, for TVET to realize its full potential, significant challenges must be addressed, including inadequate infrastructure, social stigmatization, and the need for a market-driven curriculum.

In conclusion, TVET is a crucial tool for empowering youth and fostering economic recovery in post-conflict settings like North-Eastern Nigeria. However, the successful implementation of TVET faces significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, resource shortages, and social stigmatization. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive policy reforms that prioritize funding for TVET programs, curriculum alignment with labor market demands, and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Equally important is community engagement and public awareness efforts to shift societal attitudes towards vocational education and ensure that TVET programs are responsive to local needs.

The integration of TVET into post-conflict strategies can lead to sustainable development by providing youth with the skills needed to rebuild their communities, secure employment, and foster social cohesion. Through targeted policy interventions, collaboration with stakeholders, and ongoing community engagement, TVET has the potential to transform the lives of young people and contribute to long-term peace and stability in post-conflict regions.

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