

Is Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) a Silver Bullet for Youth Unemployment in Uganda? A Critical Political Economy Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment is one of the most enduring socio-economic problems in Uganda, even though there have been continuous policy reforms and increased investment in education and skills training. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has generally been encouraged as a solution to this issue on the basis that practical skills lead to better employability, higher productivity, and greater chances of self-employment. The present article critically looks into whether TVET can genuinely be seen as a "silver bullet" for youth unemployment in Uganda. Using Human Capital Theory, Political Economy Theory, and Labour Market Segmentation Theory, the paper states that although TVET does improve individual capabilities, technical competence, and entrepreneurial potential, its impact on employment is limited by structural factors in the Ugandan economy. These factors are limited industrialisation, weak labour demand, a high level of informality, insufficient financing, and weaknesses within the TVET system itself. The research makes use of a qualitative, desk-top method which is guided by a critical political economy approach and involves looking at policy documents, reports from institutions, and empirical literature. The results indicate that TVET helps in the acquisition of skills and could enhance work readiness, but it on its own cannot produce enough employment in an economy that has limited capacity to absorb labour. The article states that TVET is necessary but not sufficient on its own as a means of tackling youth unemployment. If sustainable reductions in youth unemployment are to take place in Uganda, an integrated policy strategy must connect TVET with industrialisation, enterprise development, and access to finance, as well as labour market reform and wider economic transformation. Instead of viewing skills development as a separate initiative, policymakers should incorporate TVET into a broader employment creation strategy that takes account of both the supply and demand sides of the labour market.

Keywords: TVET, youth unemployment, Uganda, political economy, employability, skills development, labour market

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is still, one of those most urgent socio economic troubles Uganda is facing in the 21st century. Even with steady economic growth and various policy upgrades, the country keeps meeting this kind of paradox, where the population is getting younger and larger, but job spaces stay few. As the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2024) notes, Uganda's population is now above 45 million, and more than 70% is under the age of 30. That age mix is a double edged thing: it can open the door to a demographic dividend, but also it stacks a lot of pressure right onto the labour market.

Some current labour market signs show how deep this problem really goes. For example, over 40% of youth are counted as NEET, meaning not in employment, education, or training. That figure suggests a serious level of withdrawal from both the education path and the labour market itself (UBOS, 2024). Meanwhile a good number of working youth are stuck in informal, low output, and unstable arrangements. So the issue is not only about people being jobless, it also touches underemployment and unsatisfactory job quality, basically more than one layer at the same time.

Every year, roughly 700,000 younger people move into the labour force, but the economy makes way fewer proper jobs. That gap keeps unemployment hanging around, and it hits educated youth quite hard. What we see here is more than a simple mismatch, it's like there is a deeper disconnect between what schooling produces and what work actually requires. Because of that, TVET has been promoted a lot, almost like a strategic fix to get young people ready with hands on, job relevant capabilities. People frame it as a way to handle the skills mismatch, and also to encourage self employment. But saying TVET by itself can just solve youth unemployment is, honestly, too simple for a problem that is structural and quite complicated.

TVET can improve the supply side, in the sense that it strengthens skills, but it doesn't really touch demand side issues, like job creation staying limited, or industrialisation being weak. So even when training looks good on paper, many trained people end up unemployed, or stuck in work that doesn't fully use their potential, or underemployed. This paper claims that youth unemployment in Uganda is fundamentally structural. In other words, TVET matters; it's needed, yes, but it is not enough, and whether it works depends on wider economic realities and institutional arrangements.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Uganda is facing a significant challenge with youth unemployment, and this issue is closely tied to the country's demographic makeup and its economic development path. With one of the youngest populations in the world, Uganda sees hundreds of thousands of young people entering the job market each year, a number that far surpasses what the economy can realistically provide in terms of stable jobs (Uganda Bureau of Statistics [UBOS], 2023). This demographic pressure has ramped up the competition for the few formal positions available, leaving many young people to settle for informal, low-paying, and often unstable jobs. Even though there has been a consistent push towards improving education, the journey from school to the workforce is still fraught with challenges, highlighting some deep-rooted inefficiencies in the labor market.

In light of this challenge, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has emerged as a key strategic response. The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, has made TVET reforms a top priority, aiming to cultivate a skilled workforce that meets the needs of the labor market (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2022). These reforms focus on competency-based training, fostering industry partnerships, and enhancing practical skills development. However, despite the expansion of TVET and improved access to skills training, there are still concerns about how effectively this translates into sustainable job opportunities for graduates.

Looking at the bigger picture, Uganda's labor market faces structural challenges that hinder the success of skills-based initiatives. The economy is largely informal, with limited industrial growth and a weak capacity for value-added production (World Bank, 2024). Consequently, even when young people gain technical skills from TVET institutions, the demand in the labor market often falls short of being able to absorb them. This structural mismatch underscores the disconnect between the supply of education and the demand in the economy, prompting us to question the belief that simply developing skills can effectively tackle unemployment.

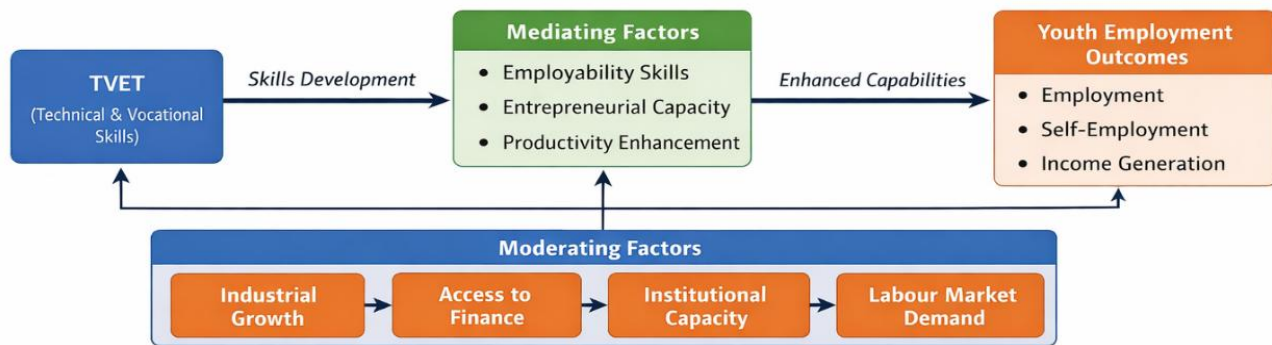
In Uganda, the landscape of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is still heavily influenced by various institutional and systemic challenges. These hurdles include insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, limited connections with industries, and the ongoing stigma that views vocational education as a "second-choice" option (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). Additionally, many TVET graduates face significant obstacles in accessing startup capital and essential resources for self-employment. As a result, the effectiveness of TVET is increasingly seen as linked to broader economic changes, rather than being a standalone solution for job creation.

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework places Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) at the heart of youth employment outcomes in Uganda. TVET is viewed as a well-structured system for skill development aimed at boosting technical abilities, practical knowledge, and readiness for the workplace among young individuals. The World Bank (2024) notes that skills development systems in Sub-Saharan Africa are progressively shifting towards competency-based training to better align with labor market needs. Within this

framework, TVET is anticipated to enhance employability, foster entrepreneurial skills, and increase productivity among youth, ultimately improving their prospects for both employment and self-employment.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – TVET and Youth Employment in Uganda



Source: Adapted from ACET, 2021; World Bank, 2020.

The connection between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and youth employment isn't straightforward; it's influenced by several important factors that enhance capabilities. These factors include employability skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and productivity improvements. Research shows that just having technical training doesn't automatically lead to a job unless it's paired with soft skills, the ability to innovate, and support systems for developing businesses (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2023) also points out that in Africa, a young person's employability increasingly relies on a mix of technical, digital, and entrepreneurial skills, rather than just technical know-how. In this context, these mediating factors act as bridges that help convert TVET training into real job opportunities.

However, how effective TVET is can be greatly influenced by the structural and institutional conditions of the economy. These influencing factors include the growth of industries, access to financing, the capacity of institutions, and the demand in the labor market. Recent findings indicate that even the best-designed TVET systems can struggle to create job opportunities in environments where industrial growth is slow and the private sector can't absorb new talent (World Bank, 2024). In Uganda, for instance, the economy is still largely informal and based on agriculture, which limits the demand for skilled workers and weakens the link between TVET and employment. Additionally, access to financing plays a crucial role in whether TVET graduates can turn their skills into new businesses, while the capacity of institutions affects the quality, relevance, and credibility of the training they receive.

Overall, the conceptual framework offers a nuanced view of youth employment dynamics, moving away from the simplistic idea that skills alone guarantee jobs. Instead, it places Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) within a wider political economy context, where the results are influenced by the interplay between individual abilities and the broader economic landscape. As highlighted by UNDP (2023), effective strategies for sustainable youth employment need to blend skills development with structural changes, including industrial policies, financing for enterprises, and reforms in the labor market. This framework emphasizes that while TVET is essential, it's not enough on its own for youth employment; its success hinges on the robustness of supporting capabilities and the surrounding structural conditions.

Theoretical Framework

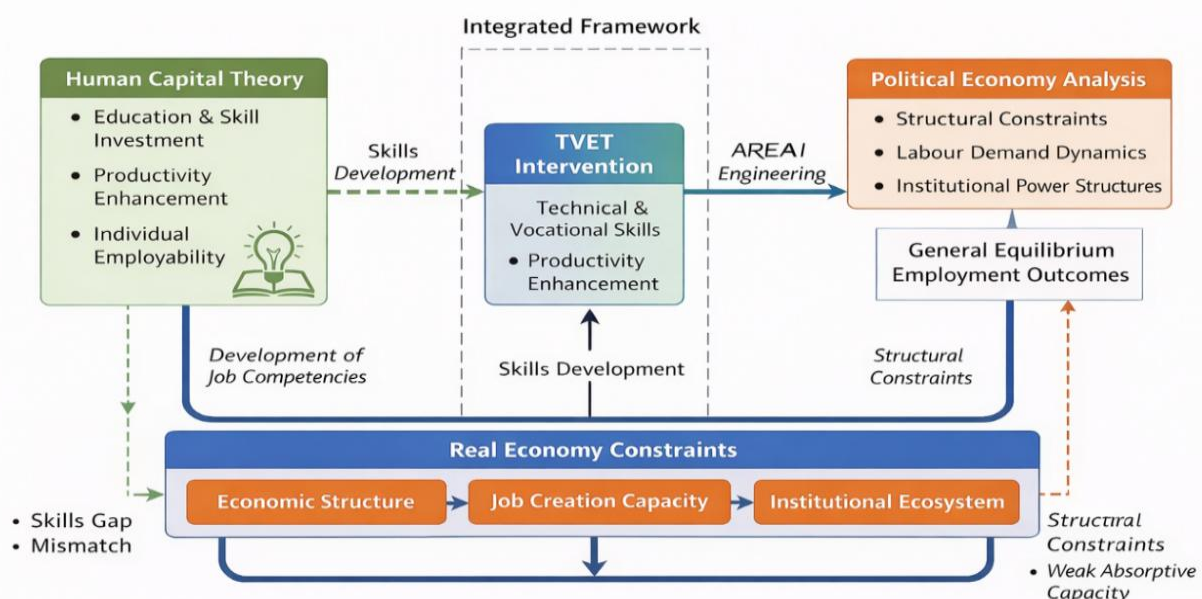
This study is anchored in Human Capital Theory, which was first proposed by Becker (1993). This theory suggests that investing in education and training boosts individual productivity, employability, and earning potential. Within this context, TVET is seen as a direct investment in practical skills that enhance a worker's competitiveness in the job market. Modern interpretations of this theory continue to highlight the importance of skill acquisition as a key driver of economic growth and personal success in the labor market, especially in developing countries where skill shortages are still a major issue (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023).

However, relying solely on Human Capital Theory doesn't fully explain the ongoing issue of youth unemployment in places like Uganda. While TVET does enhance individual skill sets, it operates under the assumption that there's a labor market ready to absorb these skilled workers. This gap is addressed by Political Economy Theory, which focuses on how structural factors—like industrial growth, institutional strength, and power dynamics—affect employment outcomes. From this viewpoint, unemployment isn't just about lacking skills; it's also a sign of fragile productive structures.

Building on this critique, the theory of labour market segmentation sheds light on why TVET graduates might still face unemployment or underemployment. It suggests that labour markets are split into formal “primary” sectors, which offer stable and well-paying jobs, and informal “secondary” sectors, where low wages and job insecurity are the norm. In Uganda, the prevalence of the informal economy means that even skilled TVET graduates often find themselves in low-productivity jobs, which limits the benefits they can expect from their training (ILO, 2024; Fields, 2019). This structural divide challenges the straightforward idea that acquiring skills will automatically lead to formal employment.

By weaving together these theoretical insights, this study views TVET as a crucial, yet insufficient, part of the solution to youth unemployment. While Human Capital Theory emphasizes the promise of skills development, Political Economy and Labour Market Segmentation theories point out the structural barriers that influence outcomes. The interplay of these theories indicates that effectively reducing youth unemployment will require not just investment in TVET, but also a focused effort on economic transformation, industrial growth, and strengthening institutions to create a real demand for skilled workers (World Bank, 2023; AfDB, 2024).

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework – Analyzing TVET and Youth Employment in Uganda



Source: Adapted from Becker, 1993; Fine, 2001; World Bank, 2020

Philosophical Underpinning

The philosophical foundation of this study is anchored in pragmatism and critical realism, which together offer a well-rounded perspective on the connection between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and youth employment. Pragmatism focuses on finding practical solutions to real-world challenges, which aligns perfectly with TVET's emphasis on hands-on skills and relevance in the workplace. From this viewpoint, education holds value as long as it enhances individuals' ability to contribute productively to society. In the context of Uganda, this perspective resonates with policy expectations that TVET should directly boost employability and self-sufficiency among young people (UNESCO, 2023).

On the flip side, critical realism pushes back against a purely observational approach by asserting that social phenomena are influenced by deeper structures and mechanisms that might not be immediately apparent. When applied to youth unemployment, this viewpoint suggests that even if individuals gain relevant skills through TVET, they may still face structural barriers—like weak industrialization, insufficient investment, and segmented labor markets—that hinder those skills from leading to actual jobs (Bhaskar, 2016; World Bank, 2024). This philosophical approach is particularly insightful in understanding why simply expanding TVET hasn't solved unemployment issues in many developing countries.

Additionally, the study incorporates capability theory, especially the insights of Amartya Sen, which argue that development should be evaluated based on what people can truly do and become. In this light, TVET enhances the capabilities of young individuals by broadening their skill sets and career options. However, expanding capabilities doesn't automatically lead to tangible outcomes, like actual employment, unless it's backed by supportive economic and institutional conditions—such as access to credit, markets, and effective governance structures (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2023).

At last, the integration of these philosophical viewpoints highlights a key argument of this article: while Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is essential, it alone won't solve the issue of youth unemployment. Pragmatism affirms its practical benefits, critical realism reveals the structural barriers at play, and capability theory emphasizes the need for supportive conditions. Together, these perspectives advocate for a shift in policy—moving away from seeing TVET as a standalone solution and instead placing it within a larger framework that includes industrial development, labor market reforms, and inclusive economic transformation (ILO, 2024; African Development Bank, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we dive into the literature surrounding Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and its connection to youth unemployment, focusing on perspectives from around the globe, Africa, and specifically Uganda. We'll explore how TVET has been defined, the theories that explain its link to employment, and the evidence that shows how effective it is in tackling youth unemployment. Additionally, we'll highlight some significant gaps in the existing literature, particularly the common tendency to view unemployment mainly as a skills issue rather than a broader structural economic problem (World Bank, 2019; ILO, 2020).

On a global scale, TVET has emerged as a key policy response to the challenges of unemployment, underemployment, and the growing need for skilled workers in our rapidly evolving job markets (UNESCO, 2023). In developing areas, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, TVET is frequently championed as a way to boost employability, encourage self-employment, and enhance national productivity (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018; McGrath et al., 2020). However, researchers warn that the effectiveness of TVET hinges not just on the quality of the training provided but also on the broader economic landscape, which includes factors like industrialization, investment levels, labor demand, and the capacity of institutions (Filmer & Fox, 2014; World Bank, 2020). On the flip side, Political Economy Theory questions this straightforward relationship by highlighting the structural constraints present in economies. Scholars like Fine (2001) and Sender (2019) argue that labor market outcomes are influenced not just by skills but also by structural elements such as industrial capacity, labor demand, institutional strength, and the dynamics of power within the economy. This viewpoint implies that even individuals with top-notch training might find themselves unemployed if the economy isn't

equipped to absorb the workforce. The combination of these theories offers a well-rounded analytical framework for understanding the outcomes of TVET.

In Uganda, youth unemployment continues to be a significant hurdle for development, even with the growth of education and training opportunities. A key issue highlighted in various studies is whether Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can truly provide young people with the skills they need for the job market, or if its effectiveness is hampered by deeper economic challenges, a lack of capacity to absorb new workers, and limited job creation in the formal sector (MGLSD, 2021; World Bank, 2020). This chapter takes a closer look at whether TVET can genuinely be a viable solution to youth unemployment, or if broader political and economic factors are holding it back.

Understanding TVET

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) encompasses educational and training programs aimed at equipping learners with the practical, technical, and occupational skills necessary for employment, self-employment, and entrepreneurship (UNESCO, 2023). Unlike traditional academic education, TVET focuses on applied learning, hands-on experience, and competency-based training that readies individuals for specific trades and professions (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). It includes a variety of training pathways—formal, non-formal, and informal—spanning numerous sectors such as agriculture, construction, manufacturing, hospitality, automotive repair, information technology, and services (ILO, 2020).

TVET is increasingly seen as a vital tool for driving economic and social development because it directly addresses the needs of the labor market and helps bridge the gap between what education provides and what employers expect (McGrath et al., 2020). In many developing nations, where unemployment and informal work are common, TVET offers a practical route for young people to acquire skills that make them employable, whether through traditional jobs or self-employment (Filmer & Fox, 2014). It also plays a key role in boosting productivity by creating a workforce equipped with the technical skills needed in today's and tomorrow's industries (World Bank, 2019).

The idea of TVET has grown beyond just preparing individuals for specific jobs; it now encompasses broader objectives like fostering entrepreneurship, promoting lifelong learning, encouraging innovation, and enhancing adaptability in ever-changing job markets (UNESCO, 2023). This shift is especially crucial in economies where formal job opportunities are scarce, pushing youth to depend more on self-employment or informal sector work to make a living (ILO, 2020). Consequently, TVET is often viewed not just as an educational initiative but also as a strategy for labor market engagement and overall development.

In Uganda, TVET is anticipated to aid young people in transitioning from school to the workforce by equipping them with practical skills that align with sectors likely to offer employment. However, research indicates that the success of TVET hinges on factors like the relevance of the curriculum, the quality of training, the availability of equipment, the competence of instructors, and robust connections between training institutions and industry (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). When these elements are lacking, TVET may struggle to deliver the desired employment results.

Theoretical Foundations

This study is anchored in two key theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory and Political Economy Theory. Together, these theories offer valuable insights into how Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can shape youth employment and highlight the reasons why its effects might be hindered by larger structural factors.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, closely linked to Becker (1993), posits that investing in education, training, and skill development boosts individual productivity, which in turn enhances their earnings and job prospects. From this angle, education is not just a societal benefit; it's also a smart economic investment that enriches workers' knowledge, skills, and overall efficiency in the job market (Becker, 1993). TVET is particularly significant

here, as it equips individuals with practical skills that enhance their employability and encourage active participation in the economy.

The theory indicates that those who gain technical and vocational skills are in a stronger position to find jobs, adapt to evolving labor market needs, and even pursue self-employment opportunities (Mincer, 1974; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). In this light, TVET plays a crucial role in reducing unemployment by elevating the quality of the labor force and making workers more appealing to employers. It also empowers individuals to earn income through entrepreneurship, especially in informal and small-scale business environments where technical skills are particularly valuable (ILO, 2020).

Nonetheless, critics of Human Capital Theory point out that simply having skills doesn't guarantee job placement, especially in situations where there's a lack of labor demand and limited job openings (Fine, 1998; World Bank, 2019). This critique is particularly relevant to our study, as it implies that while TVET can enhance individual capabilities, its impact on youth unemployment may be restricted by the structural characteristics of the economy.

Political Economy Theory offers a more comprehensive view by placing unemployment within the context of the structures, institutions, and power dynamics that influence economic opportunities. Unlike Human Capital Theory, which mainly zeroes in on the supply of labor and skills, Political Economy Theory shines a light on the demand side of the labor market. It considers how state policies, industrial growth, capital accumulation, and institutional frameworks play a crucial role in shaping employment outcomes (Chang, 2002; Mkandawire, 2015).

From this political economy lens, youth unemployment isn't just about a mismatch between skills and available jobs. It points to deeper structural issues like low levels of industrialization, sluggish private sector growth, insufficient public investment, poor infrastructure, and policies that don't create enough decent work opportunities (Fine, 1998; World Bank, 2020). While Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can enhance employability, it can't single-handedly generate jobs in an economy where labor demand is lacking.

This theory is especially pertinent for developing nations like Uganda, where the economy is marked by a significant informal sector, limited capacity for industrial absorption, and a high influx of young people into the labor force (MGLSD, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Political Economy Theory thus sheds light on why many TVET graduates still face unemployment or underemployment, even after gaining relevant skills. It also underscores the importance of complementary policies, such as fostering industrial development, supporting enterprises, investing in infrastructure, and reforming labor markets.

When we look at the relevance of this study, these two theories really come together to create a solid framework for understanding how TVET relates to youth unemployment. Human Capital Theory sheds light on how TVET can boost an individual's employability, while Political Economy Theory highlights the ways in which the larger economic landscape can restrict its effectiveness on overall unemployment rates. By blending these viewpoints, we can achieve a more nuanced analysis of TVET, viewing it not just as a strategy for skill development but also as a policy intervention that functions within broader structural limitations.

Global Perspectives on TVET and Youth Employment

Around the world, TVET has become a popular strategy for enhancing youth employment outcomes. In developed countries like Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, robust dual-training systems connect vocational education directly with industry, leading to impressive employment rates among graduates (OECD, 2022). However, global evidence also shows that the success of TVET is heavily influenced by the economic structure. In areas where industrialization is strong and labor demand is high, TVET plays a significant role in boosting employment. On the other hand, in economies with weaker industrial foundations, the effect of TVET on formal employment tends to be limited. The World Bank (2020) stresses that for skills development to lead to meaningful reductions in unemployment, it must be paired with effective job creation policies.

TVET in Africa

Youth unemployment continues to be a pressing issue across Africa, even with the notable growth of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2021), many countries on the continent are grappling with a persistent skills mismatch, largely due to weak connections between training institutions and the industries that need skilled workers. The challenges facing African TVET systems are numerous, including insufficient funding, outdated curricula, poor infrastructure, and limited involvement from the private sector. Consequently, many graduates find it tough to secure formal employment, often ending up in the informal sector or remaining jobless. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) emphasizes that a large portion of employment in Africa is informal, which hampers TVET's ability to convert skills into stable, wage-paying jobs.

TVET in Uganda

In Uganda, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has taken center stage in national policy initiatives like Vision 2040 and the National Development Plan III. The government is making strides by investing in the growth of vocational institutions and promoting competency-based education to tackle youth unemployment. However, despite these initiatives, high rates of unemployment and underemployment persist among the youth. As reported by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2023), a considerable number of young people are either jobless or stuck in low-paying informal jobs. Research from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2022) reveals that while TVET institutions are on the rise, they still face hurdles such as limited funding, inadequate equipment, and a lack of alignment with the needs of the labor market. Additionally, Uganda's narrow industrial base limits the ability to absorb skilled labor effectively.

Empirical Review

The empirical research surrounding Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and its impact on youth employment reveals a variety of outcomes. Many studies indicate that TVET enhances employability by providing young individuals with practical, job-specific skills that are essential for self-employment, informal work, and traditional jobs (UNDP, 2022; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). In numerous settings, TVET graduates are known to take part in small-scale income-generating activities like carpentry, tailoring, mechanics, plumbing, hairdressing, and agriculture, allowing them to make a living even when formal job opportunities are limited (UNDP, 2022). These insights bolster the idea that TVET can be a vital route into the labor market, especially in economies where informal employment is prevalent (McGrath et al., 2020).

Moreover, empirical evidence highlights that the success of TVET is heavily dependent on the quality and relevance of the training provided. Research shows that when curricula are tailored to meet labor market needs and institutions foster strong connections with employers, graduates are more likely to find jobs or start successful self-employment ventures (ILO, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). On the flip side, when training facilities lack resources, instructors are not kept up-to-date, and industrial partnerships are weak, the job prospects for TVET graduates often fall short (Atchoarena & Delluc, 2001; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). This indicates that TVET is more effective in boosting employability when it aligns with the demands of industry and the local economy.

However, several studies warn against assuming that TVET alone can significantly lower unemployment rates. The World Bank (2020) points out that youth unemployment is not merely a matter of lacking skills; it is also influenced by structural issues within the economy, such as sluggish industrial growth, insufficient investment, and a lack of job creation. In such environments, even graduates with solid training may struggle to find suitable employment.

Research Gaps

Even with the increasing amount of research on TVET and youth employment, there are still some significant gaps that need to be addressed. To start, a lot of the current literature tends to focus too heavily on skills development as the main fix for youth unemployment, while not giving enough attention to the demand-side issues in the job market. Many studies operate under the assumption that simply enhancing technical skills will

lead to jobs, but the reality is that unemployment is also influenced by larger economic factors like low industrial capacity, weak private-sector growth, and a lack of investment in sectors that create jobs (World Bank, 2019; ILO, 2020). This highlights a gap in our understanding of how effective TVET can be in generating employment in environments where job creation is fundamentally limited.

Additionally, the existing literature often views TVET as a purely technical matter, overlooking its role within a broader political and economic framework. There are few studies that take a political economy approach to explore how government policy decisions, industrial frameworks, fiscal priorities, and power dynamics within institutions affect the results of TVET programs (McGrath et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). This is especially relevant in Uganda, where youth unemployment cannot be fully grasped without looking at how education policies, labor market structures, and the overall economy interact.

Lastly, there's a noticeable lack of empirical research that specifically looks into how structural factors influence the relationship between TVET and employment outcomes in Uganda. While many studies highlight the advantages of vocational training, fewer delve into why graduates still struggle with unemployment or underemployment, even after gaining relevant skills. This gap points to the need for a more detailed analysis that goes beyond just providing training and considers the economic landscape that TVET graduates are stepping into (Filmer & Fox, 2014; World Bank, 2020).

This study aims to fill those gaps by taking a political economy approach that places TVET within the larger framework of economic structure, labor demand, and institutional capacity. In doing so, it hopes to offer a deeper understanding of why TVET can enhance individual employability yet still struggle to make a significant impact on national youth unemployment rates.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review reveals that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is widely acknowledged as a vital tool for fostering practical skills, boosting productivity, and enhancing the employability of young individuals (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018; ILO, 2020). Moreover, TVET is increasingly seen as a pathway to self-employment and entrepreneurship, especially in areas where formal job opportunities are scarce (McGrath et al., 2020). By providing learners with specific occupational skills, TVET can facilitate smoother transitions from school to the workforce, particularly when the training aligns with the needs of the labor market (Oketch, 2007; UNESCO, 2021).

On the flip side, the literature also points out that the impact of TVET on youth employment is hindered by broader structural and institutional challenges. In many developing countries, youth unemployment remains stubbornly high due to factors like limited industrial growth, weak private sector development, low investment in labor-intensive industries, and a lack of demand for skilled workers (Fox & Kaul, 2018; Filmer & Fox, 2014). Consequently, even graduates who have received quality TVET may find it difficult to secure decent employment when the economy can't accommodate them. This indicates that unemployment isn't just a matter of skills; it's also a demand-side and structural economic issue (World Bank, 2019).

Additionally, research highlights ongoing institutional shortcomings that undermine the effectiveness of TVET systems. These include insufficient funding, outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, weak connections with industry, a low status associated with vocational education, and poor labor market information systems (Atchoarena & Delluc, 2001; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). When collaboration between training institutions and employers is lacking, graduates often end up with skills that don't align with the job market, which diminishes the employment benefits of TVET and restricts its potential contribution to national development (McGrath et al., 2020).

Overall, there's a strong consensus in the literature that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a crucial role in building skills and enhancing employability. However, it can't tackle the issue of youth unemployment all on its own. Its success hinges on additional policies that foster industrial growth, support businesses, encourage entrepreneurship, and strengthen institutions (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2019). To achieve sustainable employment outcomes for young people, we need a holistic approach that weaves together skills development with broader economic changes and proactive labor market strategies.

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