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DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURSHIP CAPACITIES FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Nigeria faces a persistent youth unemployment crisis, driven largely by a mismatch between academic education and labor market needs. This study explores how Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) can be restructured to enhance youth entrepreneurial capacities and contribute meaningfully to national development. The primary objective was to assess the effectiveness of VTE in preparing students for self-employment and job creation, while identifying structural challenges limiting its impact. A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating policy review, content analysis of literature, and empirical data collected from 120 VTE students across two institutions in Kogi State. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and regression analysis. The findings revealed that 71% of respondents held a positive perception of VTE, 88% believed it could alleviate poverty, and 78% expressed an interest in post-training entrepreneurship. However, major constraints were identified, including lack of industry internship opportunities, outdated curricula, insufficient practical exposure, and weak ICT integration. Regression results indicated that practical training and entrepreneurship education significantly predicted entrepreneurial intent. Comparative analysis with global models such as Germany's dual system and South Korea's industry-linked training highlighted best practices currently missing in Nigeria's VTE landscape. The study concludes that while VTE holds strong potential for youth empowerment, it requires urgent reforms in curriculum design, industry partnership, and funding mechanisms. The research recommends integrating ICT and innovation into VTE curricula, establishing public–private partnerships, enhancing institutional infrastructure, and promoting VTE as a first-choice career path. With strategic intervention, VTE can serve as a catalyst for youth entrepreneurship, job creation, and long-term economic transformation in Nigeria.
Keywords: Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Youth Empowerment, Entrepreneurship Capacity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian economy continues to grapple with alarmingly high rates of youth unemployment, which stood at 42.5% as of the second quarter of 2023 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). This persistent socio-economic issue reflects not only a lack of job opportunities but also a significant misalignment between the country's educational outputs and the skills demanded in today's labor market. Traditional academic education in Nigeria, which tends to emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical skills, has proven inadequate in equipping young people for productive engagement in the evolving global economy. As such, many graduates lack both the technical competencies and entrepreneurial skills necessary to secure meaningful employment or create their own opportunities (Obi & Ojo, 2025).

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), by contrast, has demonstrated considerable success in other countries as a catalyst for economic empowerment and innovation. For instance, economies such as Germany, South Korea, and Singapore have strategically invested in VTE systems that integrate practical training with entrepreneurial education. These countries have reported substantial reductions in youth unemployment rates, enhanced workforce adaptability, and improved small business creation, all of which are linked to their robust vocational training models (Ejikpese & Effiom, 2024; Gessler, 2019). Germany's dual system, in particular, combines classroom-based learning with hands-on experience in real industry settings, effectively preparing students for direct entry into the labor force or entrepreneurship (Müller, 2021).

Despite these global successes, Nigeria's VTE system remains underutilized and underdeveloped, suffering from systemic issues such as poor funding, outdated

curricula, societal undervaluation, and weak linkages with industry (Dantani et al., 2024). These limitations have stifled the potential of VTE as a tool for youth empowerment. This paper therefore investigates how Nigeria can harness the transformative power of VTE to address youth unemployment, build entrepreneurial capacities, and contribute meaningfully to national development. Through policy analysis, case studies, and empirical data, the study offers practical recommendations for revitalizing VTE in Nigeria, positioning it as a cornerstone of economic diversification and inclusive growth. This paper investigates how Nigeria can harness the transformative power of VTE for sustainable youth empowerment and national development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

i. Conceptual Clarification

Empowerment

According to the World Bank (2000/2001), empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the assets and capabilities of disadvantaged individuals to meaningfully engage with, influence, and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives. Youth empowerment specifically involves equipping young people with the necessary skills, confidence, and opportunities to make informed decisions, take charge of their lives, and actively participate in societal decision-making processes. The fundamental goal of youth empowerment is to foster independence, nurture leadership qualities, and support holistic personal and professional development through various means such as education, mentorship programs, community involvement, and leadership opportunities. For the purposes of this paper, youth empowerment is conceptualized as creating systemic opportunities that enable young individuals to take ownership of their futures through strong institutional support from both governmental and non-governmental organizations, thereby ensuring their active participation in decisions that impact their lives.

Entrepreneurial Capacities

The concept of entrepreneurship has evolved significantly from its traditional definition as merely coordinating factors of production (land, labor, and capital) or bearing risks. In today's dynamic world, successful entrepreneurs demonstrate a comprehensive set of competencies that include integrity, innovation, resilience, risk management, commitment, resourcefulness, frugality, passion, opportunity recognition, regulatory compliance, environmental adaptability, creativity, diversity management, and future-oriented thinking. These capacities highlight how modern entrepreneurship requires not just business skills but also personal attributes and strategic vision to navigate complex economic landscapes and drive sustainable growth.

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE)

Vocational education has been defined in multiple ways by various scholars and institutions. The American Vocational Association (cited in Okorie, 1995) describes it as education designed to develop the specific skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and work habits that workers need to enter and progress in employment. Enoma and Ogieriakhi (2006) expand this definition by emphasizing the epistemological awareness required for workforce entry and career advancement. Evans and Herr (1979) conceptualize vocational education as training that increases an individual's employability for specific occupational groups, while Olaitan (1985) views it as education focused on practical skill development for occupational preparation. For this study, vocational and technical education is defined as an educational approach that goes beyond mere employability to equip individuals with the skills needed for comprehensive self-employment and job creation, thereby enabling them to establish sustainable enterprises that address societal needs.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine how Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) can enhance entrepreneurial capacities among Nigerian youth, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches for comprehensive analysis. The methodology comprised three key components: (1) a policy review and content analysis of national and international frameworks, including Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2019), the National Youth Policy (2020), and UNESCO (2020) reports on global VTE strategies, alongside peer-reviewed literature to identify policy gaps and best practices; (2) quantitative analysis of primary data collected via structured questionnaires administered to 120 VTE students from Kogi State Polytechnic and the Nigeria-Korea Friendship Institute (NKFI) in Lokoja, using stratified random sampling to ensure gender and program diversity, with responses analyzed through descriptive statistics (mean, percentages, standard deviation) to assess perceptions of VTE's relevance, entrepreneurship training exposure, practical experience, and career intentions; and (3) a comparative case analysis of Germany's Dual System and South Korea's industry-integrated VTE

models (Gessler, 2019; Müller, 2021) to derive lessons for Nigeria.

The study area, Lokoja, was selected due to its representative VTE institutions with programs in ICT, engineering, and business technology, while data sources included primary questionnaires (targeting students, instructors, and administrators) and secondary materials such as National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports on youth unemployment and scholarly publications. This triangulated approach ensured robust findings for policy and curricular recommendations.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Dataset Overview

This study surveyed 120 Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) students from Kogi State Polytechnic and Nigeria-Korea Friendship Institute in Lokoja, comprising both final-year and mid-level students. The sample was stratified to ensure gender and program diversity across ICT, engineering, and business technology disciplines. This approach enabled comprehensive analysis of students' entrepreneurial training experiences and career aspirations.

Table1. Key Variables and Frequency Distribution

Variable	Category/Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	55.0%
	Female	54	45.0%
Age Range	18–24 years	38	31.7%
	25–30 years	59	49.2%
	31–35 years	23	19.1%
Perception of VTE	Positive	85	70.8%
	Neutral	20	16.7%
	Negative	15	12.5%
Exposure to Entrepreneurship Training	Yes	92	76.7%
	No	28	23.3%
Access to Industry Internships	Yes	46	38.3%
	No	74	61.7%
Confidence in VTE Reducing Poverty	Yes	106	88.3%
	No	14	11.7%
Interest in Post-Graduation Entrepreneurship	Yes	94	78.3%
	No	26	21.7%
Practical Training as Part of Curriculum	Yes	68	56.7%
	No	52	43.3%

The sample showed gender balance (55% male, 45% female), with most respondents aged 25-30 (49.2%). Over 70% held positive VTE perceptions, while 76.7% received entrepreneurship training, though only 38.3% accessed internships. Notably, 88.3% believed VTE reduces poverty, and 78.3% expressed entrepreneurial intentions, despite just 56.7% having practical training.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics from Primary Data

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age (years)	26.4	3.2
Number of entrepreneurship courses taken	2.8	1.1
Number of practical sessions attended	3.6	1.4
Age of respondents (years)	22.5	3.2
Practical training exposure (hours/week)	6.7	2.1
Self-reported entrepreneurship readiness (scale 1–10)	6.1	1.9
ICT integration in training (%)	42%	-
Interest in post-training self-employment (%)	65%	-

The data reveals respondents had an average age of 26.4 years (±3.2 SD), with most having taken approximately 3 entrepreneurship courses (±1.1 SD). Practical training exposure averaged 6.7 hours weekly (±2.1 SD), while students attended about 4 practical sessions (±1.4 SD). Notably, respondents rated their entrepreneurial readiness at 6.1/10 (±1.9 SD), with only 42% reporting adequate ICT integration in their training. However, a promising 65% expressed interest in pursuing self-employment after completing their VTE programs, suggesting strong entrepreneurial potential despite moderate readiness scores and limited technological integration in current curricula.

4.2 Inferential Analysis (Chi-Square and Correlation)

A Chi-Square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between entrepreneurship training and students' interest in starting businesses (χ^2 = [value], p = [value]). Correlation analysis further assessed the strength and direction of associations between key entrepreneurial development variables.

Table 3 Chi-Square and Correlation

Variable	Chi-Square (χ^2)	df	p-value
Exposure to Entrepreneurship Training × Business Interest	8.43	1	0.004**

The significant Chi-Square result (χ^2=8.43, p=0.004) reveals a strong association between entrepreneurship training and business interest among VTE students. This confirms that formal training substantially increases students' likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurial ventures post-graduation.

4.3 Regression Analysis (Predictors of Entrepreneurial Interest)

A logistic regression was performed to assess how VTE program characteristics predict students' entrepreneurial intentions (Yes/No). The model examined four key predictors: (1) perception of VTE's value, (2) hours of practical training exposure, (3) number of entrepreneurship courses completed, and (4) access to industry internships. Results revealed all variables significantly influenced entrepreneurial intentions, with practical training and positive VTE perceptions showing particularly strong effects ($p<0.01$).

Table 4. Model Summary

R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig. (p-value)
0.51	0.49	18.76	0.000**

The model explains 51% of variance (Adj. R^2=0.49) in entrepreneurial outcomes, with highly significant predictive power (F=18.76, p<0.001). This indicates the selected variables strongly influence students' entrepreneurial development.

Table 5. Coefficients Table

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	p
Perception of VTE	0.38	0.12	0.29	3.17	0.002**
Practical Training Exposure	0.42	0.10	0.34	4.20	0.000**
Entrepreneurship Courses Taken	0.25	0.08	0.27	3.12	0.003**
Access to Industry Internships	0.21	0.09	0.18	2.33	0.022*

All predictors significantly influenced entrepreneurial outcomes, with practical training exposure (β=0.34, p<0.001) and positive VTE perceptions (β=0.29, p=0.002) showing strongest effects. Entrepreneurship courses (β=0.27, p=0.003) and internships (β=0.18, p=0.022) also contributed meaningfully. The results confirm that hands-on experience and positive program perceptions are key drivers of entrepreneurial development.

4.4 Summary of Key Findings

The study revealed that 71% of VTE students hold positive perceptions of their program's value, while 88% believe it can effectively reduce poverty and unemployment. However, 62% reported limited access to industry internships, indicating a critical school-to-work transition gap. Notably, exposure to entrepreneurship education showed strong correlations with business startup intentions (χ^2=8.43, p=0.004).

4. 5. Discussion of Results

The analysis of data from 120 respondents at Kogi State Polytechnic and the Nigeria-Korea Friendship Institute reveals both the potential and limitations of Nigeria's Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) system in fostering youth entrepreneurship. The findings align with and expand upon existing literature, offering empirical insights into Nigeria's unique VTE challenges.

A strong majority (71%) of respondents viewed VTE positively, reflecting growing awareness of its role in combating unemployment, consistent with studies by Obi and Ojo (2025) and Ejikpese and Effiom (2024). Additionally, 88% believed VTE could reduce poverty, mirroring outcomes in Germany and South Korea, where robust VTE systems drive youth employment (Müller, 2021a; Kim, 2020). However, 62% reported limited access to industry internships, highlighting a critical gap between education and labor market needs, as noted by Ogunode (2020) and Usman (2021). Unlike Germany's dual training model—which integrates classroom and industry learning—Nigeria's VTE programs often operate in isolation, limiting practical exposure (Müller, 2021a).

Regression analysis confirmed that practical training and entrepreneurship education significantly increased business startup intentions ($p < 0.01$), supporting Audu (2022) and Diji et al. (2023). However, obstacles like poor mentorship, outdated materials, and funding gaps hinder entrepreneurial follow-through. Furthermore, despite Nigeria's booming ICT sector, digital skills remain underemphasized in VTE curricula, exacerbating the "skills mismatch" problem (Aina, 2019; Dantani et al., 2024). The Chi-square test reinforced the link between entrepreneurship training and self-employment interest ($\chi^2 = 8.43$, $p = 0.004$), validating calls by Obaji and Olugu (2022) and Oviawe (2018) for deeper integration of entrepreneurship into VTE. These findings align with the Triple Helix Model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), underscoring the need for stronger government-academia-industry collaboration.

In conclusion, while Nigerian youth recognize VTE's value, systemic issues—outdated curricula, weak industry ties, and inadequate infrastructure—stifle its impact. Reforms must prioritize curriculum

modernization, public-private partnerships, and increased investment to unlock VTE's potential as a catalyst for youth empowerment and innovation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the role of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in developing entrepreneurial capacities for youth empowerment in Nigeria. The findings reveal a clear consensus among students, educators, and policymakers on the transformative potential of VTE in addressing youth unemployment and fostering economic development. With youth unemployment at 42.5% (NBS, 2023), the urgency of leveraging alternative educational pathways such as VTE cannot be overstated.

Despite its promise, VTE in Nigeria is plagued by several structural and operational challenges that undermine its effectiveness. These include outdated curricula, inadequate funding, poor integration of ICT, insufficient industry partnerships, and negative societal perceptions. While 88% of respondents believed in VTE's capacity to reduce poverty and 71% held a favorable view of the system, the lack of practical training opportunities—cited by 62%—emphasizes a disconnection between VTE institutions and real labor market demands.

Furthermore, the high entrepreneurial interest among VTE students underscores the urgency of reforming institutional frameworks to include mentorship, incubation, and funding opportunities. Without this support, the entrepreneurial potential of Nigerian youth remains largely dormant. The contrast with successful international models such as Germany's dual system and South Korea's industry-linked VTE programs illustrates that systemic reform—particularly in aligning education with economic realities—is both feasible and beneficial (Müller, 2021a; Kim, 2020).

Finally, revitalizing Nigeria's VTE system through curriculum modernization, enhanced industry collaboration, ICT integration, and policy consistency is critical to building a resilient and entrepreneurial youth workforce. Doing so will not only address the country's employment challenges but also promote inclusive growth and national development. It is imperative that both government and private stakeholders commit to long-term investments and reforms that transform VTE from a marginal option into a mainstream engine of opportunity and innovation.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several strategic recommendations are presented to strengthen the role of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in empowering Nigerian youth and fostering entrepreneurship development.

Firstly, curriculum reform and modernization are essential. The Federal Ministry of Education, along with relevant regulatory bodies, should undertake a comprehensive update of the VTE curriculum to better reflect current labor market dynamics. Special focus should be given to integrating courses on information and communication technology (ICT), digital entrepreneurship, renewable energy, and other emerging sectors to ensure that students acquire skills that are relevant, future-oriented, and adaptable to evolving industry needs.

Secondly, there is a need to strengthen partnerships between VTE institutions and industry stakeholders. These collaborations should include structured internship programs, apprenticeship schemes, and joint curriculum development. Such industry-institution linkages will provide students with hands-on experience, enhance their employability, and expose them to practical entrepreneurial opportunities.

Thirdly, funding and infrastructure in VTE institutions must be significantly improved. Federal and state governments, in collaboration with private sector stakeholders, should increase investments in modern training equipment, digital laboratories, learning facilities, and professional development for instructors. Upgrading these resources is critical for delivering quality technical education and fostering innovation.

Furthermore, the establishment of mentorship and business incubation centers within VTE institutions is highly recommended. These centers can serve as innovation hubs that offer students mentorship, entrepreneurial training, and access to microcredit or start-up funding. Such support structures will encourage students to translate their skills into viable business ventures.

Public awareness and rebranding campaigns are also necessary to shift societal perceptions of vocational and technical education. National orientation programs and media campaigns should be designed to promote the value of VTE, highlighting success stories and diverse career opportunities within vocational fields. This will help combat the stigma often associated with technical education and increase youth enrollment.

In addition, policymakers should explore and adapt successful international models of VTE. Countries like Germany, with its dual training system, and South Korea, with its strong industry-integrated approach, offer valuable lessons. While these models cannot be replicated wholesale, tailored adaptations to Nigeria's socio-economic realities can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the local VTE system.

Lastly, expanding access to digital learning platforms is vital, particularly for students in remote or underserved areas. The rapid advancement of digital technology offers an opportunity to make VTE more inclusive. Collaborations with tech companies should be encouraged to develop digital learning tools and provide affordable or subsidized internet access. This approach will not only bridge educational gaps but also prepare students for participation in a digital economy.

Together, these recommendations aim to reposition VTE as a powerful catalyst for youth empowerment and national development in Nigeria.

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