

ENHANCING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE: A COMPREHENSIVE TVET STRATEGY

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Abstract: *This paper examines the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in workforce development in Rivers State, Nigeria, a resource-rich region seeking economic development. Recognizing the essential role of human capital in sustainable growth, this paper synthesizes global research on effective workforce strategies, including coaching, certification, and leadership development programs. Through a comprehensive literature review, the paper also evaluated TVET in Rivers State, emphasized successes and challenges such as underfunding, outdated curricula, and inadequate industry engagement. The paper advocates for a robust TVET approach integrating skill development with certification and leadership training to boost employability and productivity in Rivers State. In conclusion, strategic TVET enhancements to align with industry needs and promote socio-economic progress. Furthermore, suggestions among others include longitudinal and experimental studies to confirm the long-term effects of TVET programs.*

INTRODUCTION

Workforce development is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of economic prosperity and social progress, particularly in regions like Rivers State, Nigeria. Scholars have emphasized the pivotal role of human capital in fostering sustainable growth and development (Potter, Ley, Fertman, Eggleston, & Duman, 2003; Olowookere, Olanipekun, Sokhumi, & Aderemi, 2022; Simons, 2013; Akpenyi, Sayer, Nicholson, & Clarke, 2019). In Rivers State, where harnessing human potential is crucial for

unlocking economic opportunities, the significance of workforce development cannot be overstated (Jacobs & Hawley, 2009). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs are integral components of efforts to enhance the skills and capabilities of the workforce, aligning them with the evolving needs of industries and promoting socio-economic advancement (Salleh & Sulaiman, 2020). The Niger Delta region, including Rivers State, is renowned for its abundant natural resources, particularly oil and gas. However, scholars have

underscored the imperative of transitioning from resource dependence to a diversified economy driven by skilled labor and innovation (Francis, Hasan & Zhu, 2016; Howie, 2018). This transition necessitates a strategic focus on workforce development to ensure the availability of competent personnel capable of driving growth in non-oil sectors (Hughes, Shrimpton, Recine & Margetts, 2012). Moreover, scholars have highlighted the broader societal benefits of workforce development, including poverty alleviation, social cohesion, and human development (Hong, Holland, Park, & Kim, 2023; King & Palmer, 2006; Bamberger, Yahie & Matovu, 1996).

Assessing the current landscape of TVET initiatives in Rivers State, scholars have identified both achievements and challenges. Government-led efforts to expand access to vocational training and establish partnerships with industry stakeholders have yielded positive outcomes in terms of skill acquisition and employment generation (Deebom & Taylor, 2020; Gyimah, 2020). However, scholars have also pointed out persistent challenges such as underfunding, outdated curricula, and limited industry engagement, which undermine the effectiveness of TVET programs (Olowookere, Olanipekun, Sokhumi, & Aderemi, 2022; Diop, 2020; Adams, 2019). Moreover, disparities in access to quality education exacerbate socio-economic inequalities, hindering inclusive development and perpetuating poverty traps (Adewusia, Al Hamadb, Adeleke, INwankwod, & Nwokochae, 2020). In light of these scholarly insights, this paper aims to systematically examine and develop a comprehensive TVET

strategy designed to enhance the skills, employability, and productivity of the workforce in Rivers State. It seeks to conceptualize the TVET strategy through certification and accreditation processes, mentorship and coaching programs, and customized training programs (Geib, 2002; Elinson, Frey, Li, Palan, & Horne, 2008; Geale, 1995; Billett, 2006), while also addressing workforce development in terms of employee and leadership development (Hameed & Waheed, 2011; Kirchner, & Akdere, 2014).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The underpinning theory of this paper, rooted in Human Capital Theory developed by economist Gary Becker (2009), asserts that investments in education, training, and skill development drive increased productivity and economic growth (Becker, 2009). From this point of view, workforce development and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are deemed crucial for enhancing human capital, contributing to the accumulation of skills and knowledge valuable in the labor market. This theory provides a foundational understanding of how investments in TVET programs align with the goal of augmenting human capital, thus fostering economic prosperity and societal advancement. In our discourse, Human Capital Theory serves as a guiding framework to analyze the significance of TVET in Rivers State, Nigeria, particularly in transitioning the economy away from reliance on oil and gas towards a diversified, skill-driven paradigm.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is referred to as a dynamic educational paradigm, offering individuals a pathway to acquire practical skills, competencies, and qualifications essential for specific trades, crafts, or professions (Ernest & Ansah, 2013). Grounded in experiential learning principles and hands-on training methodologies (Jabarullah, & Iqbal Hussain, 2019), TVET serves a multifaceted role, driving workforce development, fostering social inclusion, and catalyzing economic growth (McGrath, 2012). Its significance lies in its ability to provide alternative avenues for education and training, catering to diverse socio-economic backgrounds and facilitating skill acquisition and career advancement (Onderi, Ajowi, & Malala, 2014). Its impact reverberates across various dimensions, from addressing the skills gap and reducing unemployment to enhancing productivity, fostering innovation, and supporting overall economic development (Okafor, 2011; Mupimpila, & Narayana, 2009). Aligned with industry demands, TVET tailors training programs to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of driving organizational performance and competitiveness (Metzger, Fujita, Law, Zemsky, Berset, & Iannozzi, 2013). This strategic alignment enables organizations to harness the full potential of their human capital, fostering resilience and driving sustainable growth (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013). In addition, TVET's emphasis on practical skills and hands-on experience empowers individuals to actively participate in the labor market, promoting social

inclusion and economic prosperity (Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2016). Within organizations, TVET assumes a pivotal role in shaping human capital development strategies, nurturing talent pipelines, and enhancing employee retention (Varma & Malik, 2023). Investing in TVET programs, organizations position themselves to adapt to technological advancements, improve operational efficiency, and capitalize on emerging opportunities in dynamic market landscapes (Igberaharha, 2021). Continuous skill development initiatives under TVET enable workforces to innovate, adapt, and thrive amidst evolving industry trends and challenges (Stephen, 2020).

Customized Training Programs (CTPs)

Customized Training Programs (CTPs) within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) framework are tailored to meet the specific skill needs of individuals, industries, or communities (Larson, 2003). These programs, characterized by flexible delivery methods, are crafted based on comprehensive needs assessments, aligning closely with stakeholders' goals (Brown, 2002). CTPs are recognized as strategic interventions addressing unique skill challenges faced by diverse stakeholders (Sarkar, 2022). They ensure training content directly addresses skill gaps, enhancing its relevance and applicability (Hodson, Hooks & Rieble, 1992; Ejiwale, 2019). Focusing on targeted skill development, CTPs optimize resources, minimize efforts on irrelevant training activities, and boost participants' engagement and motivation levels (Hodson, Hooks & Rieble, 1992; Sarkar, 2022). Moreover, tailored training enhances

participants' employability by equipping them with industry-relevant skills (Brown, 2002). CTPs bridge skill gaps, supporting smoother transitions into the workforce and fostering economic development by nurturing a skilled workforce aligned with industry demands (Gaudet et al., 2002; Oviawe, Uwameiye, Uddin, 2017; Dixit & Ravichandran, 2023). Additionally, they promote lifelong learning and yield benefits such as increased productivity, job satisfaction, and improved retention rates (Matsumoto-Royo, Ramírez-Montoya & Conget, 2021; Long, 2011; Hodson, Hooks & Rieble, 1992). Finally, CTPs contribute to economic growth by reducing unemployment, boosting incomes, and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship (Long, 2011; Hodson, Hooks & Rieble, 1992).

Certification and Accreditation Programs

Certification and accreditation programs are essential for establishing benchmarks and criteria that assess the quality of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs and institutions. These programs play a dual role: certification validates individual proficiency in specific skills, and accreditation evaluates the quality of educational institutions and systems based on predefined standards (Bhatta, 2021). According to Patel and Brown (2021), certification and accreditation are pivotal in ensuring the quality and relevance of TVET programs. They provide frameworks for assessing and recognizing competencies that individuals acquire through TVET, thereby enhancing the credibility of these educational pathways (Gu, Gomes, & Brizuela, 2011). Mupimpila and Narayana (2009) emphasize that these programs establish clear standards and

benchmarks that guide curriculum development, instructional methods, and assessment procedures within TVET. This standardization promotes consistency and comparability across different programs and providers, fostering transparency and trust in the qualifications awarded (Mupimpila & Narayana, 2009). These programs are also crucial in promoting the recognition and mobility of TVET graduates in the labor market, both domestically and internationally (Triby, 2009). They assure employers and industry stakeholders that TVET graduates are well-equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to effectively contribute to the workforce (Triby, 2009). Furthermore, certification and accreditation serve as mechanisms for quality assurance and continuous improvement, driving excellence and innovation in TVET provision (Gu, Gomes & Brizuela, 2011). They enhance accountability and transparency within the TVET sector, align TVET programs with industry needs and labor market demands, and bolster the employability and career prospects of TVET graduates (Ogbunaya & Udoudo, 2015; Bhatta, 2021). Additionally, these programs facilitate the transfer of skills and qualifications across sectors and regions, promoting lifelong learning and career progression for TVET graduates (Carneiro, 2011). Lastly, they contribute to socioeconomic development by equipping individuals with the skills and competencies necessary for driving innovation, productivity, and inclusive growth (Comyn, 2018).

Mentorship and Coaching Programs

Mentorship and coaching programs are integral to fostering individual growth and professional

development within organizations or specific professions. Mentorship, as described by Ragins & Kram (2007) and Allen & Eby (2003), involves a seasoned professional providing guidance and support to a less experienced individual, focusing on long-term development across both professional skills and personal growth. This relationship helps the mentee navigate challenges, set goals, and advance in their career. Coaching, on the other hand, is generally more targeted and short-term, concentrating on specific skill improvements or competencies. Coaches work with individuals to identify areas for enhancement, establish objectives, and devise strategies to achieve these goals (Bachkirova et al., 2016; Day et al., 2014). However, mentorship and coaching play crucial roles in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), enhancing skill acquisition, career progression, and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Billett, 2011; Allen et al., 2018). These programs facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge, helping workers excel in their roles and adapt to industry demands. In addition, mentorship and coaching significantly contribute to organizational success by retaining talent, reducing turnover, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement. These factors drive innovation and maintain competitiveness in the industry (Chao et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1990). In TVET programs, these initiatives enhance the quality of instruction and aid educators in continuously developing their pedagogical skills to meet industry standards and trends (Clutterbuck et al., 2018). Through regular feedback and

guidance from mentors, educators refine their teaching methods, contributing more effectively to the holistic development of their students. Robust mentorship and coaching programs thus develop a skilled, confident, and networked workforce capable of driving sustainable growth and innovation. These programs are essential components of the strategic framework within TVET institutions, ensuring these organizations remain at the forefront of vocational education and training (Khakwani, Aslam, Azhar, & Mateen, 2012; Allen & Eby, 2003).

Workforce Development

Workforce development is a strategic imperative aimed at optimizing the capabilities of the workforce to meet both present and future organizational demands. It involves a series of initiatives essential for aligning employees' skills with organizational needs, enhancing productivity, innovation, organizational agility, and competitiveness (Cappelli, 2019; Boudreau & Jesuthasan, 2011). This approach not only boosts individual capabilities but also contributes significantly to organizational resilience and performance (Rao, 2010; Phillips, 2016). Cappelli (2019) explores the critical nature of workforce development initiatives in fostering productivity and driving innovation. Similarly, Boudreau and Jesuthasan (2011) stress its strategic importance in enhancing organizational agility and competitiveness. Nassar, Al-Qimlass, Karacan-Ozdemir, & Tovar (2019) points to the transformative potential of these efforts in closing skill gaps and encouraging a continuous learning culture within organizations. Furthermore, Katz and Muro (2017) underscore the role of workforce

development in promoting economic development and ensuring adaptability to technological advancements and globalization. The development of effective leadership is also a crucial component of workforce development. Bennis (2009) and Kotter (2012) noted the critical role of leadership development in navigating organizational complexity, inspiring others, fostering innovation, and driving strategic execution. Additionally, Rao (2010) emphasizes the importance of employee development programs in enhancing job satisfaction, retention, and career progression. Similarly, Phillips (2016) highlights how employee development is strategically valuable in building a skilled workforce prepared to meet changing market demands and drive organizational performance.

Employee Development

Employee development is a strategic organizational process aimed at enhancing the skills, knowledge, and capabilities of individual employees to promote career growth and organizational effectiveness (Rao, 2010; Phillips, 2016). This process entails a series of structured activities and interventions that are intentionally designed to improve employee competencies and align with both individual and organizational goals. Rao (2010) describes employee development as a deliberate organizational effort to facilitate the learning of job-related competencies, including knowledge, skills, and behaviors. This systematic approach underscores the intent to tailor development initiatives to specific needs. Similarly, Phillips (2016) highlights the crucial role of employee development in driving organizational

performance and adaptability, noting its significance in cultivating a skilled and motivated workforce that is capable of meeting strategic objectives. Further emphasizing the importance of employee development, Cappelli (2019) points out its benefits in enhancing job satisfaction and employee engagement, which are vital for attracting and retaining top talent, improving productivity, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). Additionally, employee development is crucial for succession planning and leadership development, areas that scholars such as Bennis (2009) and Kotter (2012) argue are essential for effective organizational change and performance. Leadership development programs, in particular, not only prepare individuals for future leadership roles but also help build a strong leadership pipeline that supports organizational resilience and sustainability.

Leadership Development

Leadership development is recognized as a crucial strategic process within organizations, essential for enhancing the skills, capabilities, and effectiveness of individuals in leadership roles (Bennis, 2009; Kotter, 2012). Bennis (2009) describes leadership development as a process that expands the capacity of individuals to perform leadership roles and processes effectively. Kotter (2012) further highlights its strategic importance, noting that leadership development is essential for driving organizational change, navigating complexity, driving innovation, and achieving strategic objectives. Leadership development initiatives typically encompass a variety of structured

activities and interventions, such as leadership training programs, executive coaching, mentoring relationships, action learning projects, and succession planning processes (Rao, 2010; Phillips, 2016). These initiatives aim to build leadership competencies, promote personal growth, and enhance organizational resilience. However, investing in the growth and development of leaders not only establishes a robust leadership pipeline and ensures continuity in leadership roles but also drives overall organizational success (Cappelli, 2019). Moreover, leadership development is pivotal in fostering a positive organizational culture, enhancing employee engagement, and retaining talent (Rao, 2010; Phillips, 2016). These aspects are crucial for organizations that aim to adapt and excel in the competitive business environment of today. By cultivating effective leaders who can inspire and empower others, organizations enhance their capacity for innovation, drive transformative change, and achieve sustainable growth.

TVET AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Neupane (2015) investigated the effects of coaching and mentoring on employee performance in the UK hotel industry, along with their impact on overall organizational performance. The study adopts a cross-sectional method, employing deductive reasoning and a quantitative approach. It selects 172 managers and supervisors with coaching or mentoring experience in hotels through convenience sampling. Data is gathered using structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS 20, utilizing techniques such as arithmetic mean,

correlation, and regression. The findings confirm a positive correlation between coaching/mentoring and employee performance, with both factors significantly affecting employee performance. Regression analysis reveals coaching's significant positive effect on overall employee performance ($\beta = 0.466$, $P = 0.007$), as does mentoring ($\beta = 0.457$, $P = 0.008$). There is also a positive and significant correlation between coaching and overall organizational performance ($r = 0.707$). However, while mentoring correlates positively with overall organizational performance ($r = 0.456$), its direct effect is not statistically significant in regression analysis ($\beta = 0.010$, $P = 0.961$). The result suggests that coaching and mentoring are crucial for enhancing employee performance in the UK hotel industry, with coaching appearing to have a stronger impact on both employee performance and overall organizational performance compared to mentoring. However, while mentoring correlates positively with organizational performance, its direct effect may not be as significant as coaching. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, limiting the ability to establish causality, and potential bias introduced by convenience sampling, impacting generalizability. Future research could employ longitudinal designs or experimental approaches to better understand the causal relationships between coaching, mentoring, employee performance, and organizational outcomes.

Krishnan (2023) evaluated the effectiveness of a Certification model within the telecom service industry and its impact on employee productivity and performance. The study sets out two primary

objectives: first, to validate the efficacy of the Certification model, and second, to assess the influence of certifications on employee productivity and performance. To achieve these objectives, a stratified random sampling technique was employed, focusing on graduate engineers recruited between 2009 and 2011. The study analyzed the performance of 52 certified engineers between 2010 and 2012. Data on employee performance was collected from the online Employee Performance Management System (PMS), with validation scores obtained from the LC MIS. Missing data was addressed through a comprehensive analysis, utilizing the SPSS algorithm for imputation. Normality tests revealed non-Gaussian distributions, leading to the use of non-parametric tests for hypothesis testing. Correlation analysis, specifically Spearman's correlation coefficient, was conducted to understand the relationship between organizational learning, employee certification, and on-the-job improvement. Positive correlations were observed, indicating that certification contributes to organizational learning and competency development. Hypothesis testing conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test supported the research hypotheses. The results showed a significant impact of certification on employee performance and productivity, as well as a positive correlation between certification, organizational learning, and competency development.

Muyia and Kacirek (2009) examined the impact of the Emotional Leadership Training Program (ELTP) on participants' Emotional Intelligence (EI) scores. Before and after the training,

participants completed the EQ-i instrument to establish baseline EI levels. The target population comprised ELTP participants at a mid-sized southern university, with 124 enrolling and 112 completing the pretest. Ultimately, 43 individuals completed both pretest and posttest, including 15 women and 28 men. Random sampling was unfeasible due to the sample selection criteria, limiting generalizability to participants completing both pretest and posttest. The Bar-On EQ-i, comprising 133 self-reported statements, measured emotional self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, adaptability, stress management, and general mood. Extensive validation and reliability were demonstrated. SPSS was used for data analysis, including analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and t-tests. While pretest and posttest mean differences were not statistically significant, effect sizes were large. Gender and age differences in posttest scores were not significant after adjusting for covariates. The training had a medium effect on posttest scores.

Flores (2017) studied the strategies utilized by human resource managers in Silicon Valley to enhance employee leadership development programs, guided by transformational leadership theory. The study highlights the challenge faced by business leaders in dedicating sufficient time to developing employee leadership capabilities, leading to suboptimal programs. Through semi structured interviews with three human resource managers and a review of organizational documents, data were collected and analyzed using methodological triangulation. The study emphasizes the significance of CEO involvement for the success

of leadership development programs. Active engagement from top leadership was identified as crucial in fostering a supportive environment for leadership development initiatives. Creating a culture of continuous learning was found to be essential for promoting innovation, engagement, and trust within organizations. An environment that encourages experimentation, feedback, and knowledge sharing contributes to the effectiveness of leadership development efforts. The study underscores the importance of delivering training as a series for optimal results. Rather than isolated events, a sequential approach to training allows for the reinforcement and deepening of leadership skills over time, leading to more significant and sustainable development outcomes. The study suggests that enhancing employee leadership development programs can contribute to positive social change by empowering leaders to address broader societal issues. By equipping leaders with the necessary skills and mindset, such as problem-solving, empathy, and cultural awareness, organizations can play a role in addressing challenges like homelessness, disease, cultural acceptance, and environmental sustainability on both local and global scales.

CONCLUSION

The paper systematically explored the intricate landscape of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) within Rivers State, Nigeria, highlighting its critical role in catalyzing economic diversification away from oil dependency towards a robust, skill-driven economy. The findings reinforce the concept that effective workforce development through TVET is pivotal for fostering economic prosperity,

enhancing social cohesion, and alleviating poverty in the region. Through examining various models and impacts of workforce development from the empirical insights on coaching and mentoring impact on employee performance in the UK hotel industry to the efficacy of certification models in the telecom sector it becomes clear that targeted skill development initiatives are central to advancing employee productivity and organizational performance. Furthermore, the analyses underscore the necessity of adopting a multifaceted TVET strategy in Rivers State that integrates practical training with certification and continuous leadership development, as demonstrated by successful interventions in diverse global contexts. The Emotional Leadership Training Program's focus on Emotional Intelligence and the strategic HR management approaches employed in Silicon Valley serve as exemplars of how tailored programs can significantly uplift workforce capabilities and, by extension, organizational outcomes.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions were made:

Research in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) should focus on longitudinal study designs to track participant progress over several years, implement controlled trials to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions, and foster deeper collaborations between educational institutions and industry stakeholders. These approaches will provide more definitive evidence of TVET's impact on workforce development and offer insights into tailoring programs to meet evolving

industry requirements, ultimately enhancing job market relevance and employment rates.

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