

Integration of Employability Skills and Soft Skills into Technical and Vocational Education and Training Curricula: Panacea for Sustainability and Industrial Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria faces a persistent challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment, despite the proliferation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions designed to equip students with job-ready skills that largely focus on developing technical competencies. There is growing evidence that many graduates still lack the employability attributes. However, the current TVET curricula in Nigeria appear inadequately structured to integrate these non-technical skills systematically.. There is a lack of cohesive policy frameworks, curricular content, teacher preparedness, and assessment strategies geared toward the development of soft skills. The study, therefore, investigated the implementation of Employability Skills into TVET programs as a means of fostering national sustainability and development. This study adopted a survey method and descriptive research design. The population of the students are TVET students and Lecturers and the stratified and purposive sampling method was employed to select 71 participants. A self-designed questionnaire consisting of 15 items was used to gather information from the respondents. The mean rating of 3.57 indicated a high level of implementation of soft skills into TVET curriculum and training. The mean rating of 3.50 indicated that employability skills influenced TVET graduates job readiness and productivity. This study also revealed the major challenges of integrating soft and employability skills into TVET curricula such as a lack of

teaching aids, large classes, poor access to simulation labs, collaborative spaces, ICT tools for modern communication training, students undervaluing soft skills and the absence of an institutional strategy to improve soft skills outcomes. It can be concluded that the implementation of employability skills and soft skills into TVET Curricula and training might improve the sustainability and industrial development in Nigeria. It was recommended that employers can co-develop training activities that match workplace realities during the instructional process

Key words: Employability Skills, Curriculum, TVET, Job readiness

Introduction

In the contemporary global economy, the demand for a highly skilled workforce transcends technical competencies. Employers increasingly seek individuals who not only possess job-specific skills but also demonstrate soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. This can only be achieved through education, which is the systematic process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Education aim to develop an individual's intellectual and moral capacities to contribute meaningfully to society. Education can be delivered through formal, non-formal, and informal modes that foster critical thinking and lifelong learning. Education refers to the broad-based curriculum that provides foundational knowledge and skills necessary for personal development, citizenship, and life-long learning. It includes subjects like language, mathematics, sciences, social studies, and humanities. It fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. It involves providing the cognitive and communication foundation that supports the acquisition of vocational skills for industrial growth.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) refers to skill-based education and training that prepares individuals for specific trades, crafts, and careers at various levels. It emphasises practical work-oriented instruction focus on employability and hands-on skills. It's offered in technical colleges, polytechnics, and vocational centres. It also promotes national development through skilled manpower. TVET is focused on skill acquisition and technical knowledge that prepares individuals for specific trades or careers. Modern TVET integrates general education to produce well-rounded graduates. The integration of both is essential for the holistic development of learners and the nation's growth. These competencies form the intellectual

framework needed for understanding and performing tasks in vocational fields. (Bruner, 1960). It also enhances employability, soft skills, such as communication and teamwork, which are critical for employment and workplace success. (ILO, 2021).

TVET is an important arm of the educational system designed to equip learners with practical skills, technical knowledge, and attitudes necessary for employment and self-reliance (Okoro, 1999). Traditionally, TVET has focused on developing technical proficiencies in various trades. However, this narrow focus has often left graduates ill-prepared to meet the dynamic needs of modern workplaces, where soft skills are as critical as hard skills (Oviawe, 2017). There is a need to integrate curriculum into TVET for the sustainability of the trade and the development of the nation at large. The term "curriculum" originates from the Latin word "*currere*", which means "*to run a course*". In education, it refers to the planned and structured learning experiences provided to students in schools or training institutions.

"A curriculum is a set of subjects taught in a school, or the content of a particular course." Pg 5 Olaitan, (1996) states that

"In TVET, the curriculum also includes practical skills and competencies needed for employment. "The curriculum in TVET is an organised set of experiences designed to develop competencies in a specific occupational area."

UNESCO-IBE (2013) describe the components of a curriculum include: Learning objectives, Content or subject matter, Teaching methods, learning experiences and Assessment methods

A curriculum in TVET is a structured framework that outlines the knowledge, technical skills, and competencies required for a specific occupation or trade. Key features of a curriculum are to integrate theoretical and practical components, reflect industry standards and labour market needs. Curriculum design is the process of planning and organising the content, learning experiences, and instructional strategies within an educational program to achieve specific outcomes. When designing Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) curricula, it is essential to balance skill training with general education to ensure that learners are competent in both trade-specific and life-related domains. This blend enhances learner flexibility, societal relevance, and productivity.

Curriculum development refers to the systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs to improve teaching and learning. It includes needs assessment, setting objectives, content selection, and evaluation. Phases in curriculum development include: Planning, Development, Implementation, Evaluation and revision. Curriculum innovation involves introducing new ideas, practices, or content into the curriculum to improve relevance, effectiveness, and engagement in response to societal and technological changes. Curriculum integration refers to the blending of subjects or learning experiences to form a cohesive learning experience. In TVET, it connects theoretical knowledge with practical skills and general education with vocational content. The different types of Curriculum integration include: Horizontal integration (across subjects), Vertical integration (across levels) and cross-disciplinary integration. Curriculum alignment refers to the systematic process of ensuring that the learning objectives, instructional content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies are all directly linked to industry standards, occupational competencies, and labour market demands. The goal is to prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for employment and career advancement in specific trades or technical fields. Curriculum must clearly define what students are expected to know and be able to do. Objectives should be measurable, achievable, and job-relevant. Curriculum should reflect current technologies, tools, practices, and certifications required by employers. Involvement of industry stakeholders such as advisory boards helps ensure relevance. Teaching methods such as hands-on training, simulations and apprenticeships must support skill acquisition relevant to workplace tasks. If the curriculum is aligned, it will improve employability, because teachers can focus on relevant skills and knowledge, reducing learning gaps, for the alignment to take place, employability skill and soft skill need to be integrated to the curriculum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training, this will prevent struggle to keep pace with evolving technology and industry requirements, it will also boost synergy between educational institutions and industries, in order meet up with labour market needs.

According to Feraco *et al.* (2022), soft skills are adaptable personality traits that control our cognition, behaviour, and emotions, and help us accomplish our goals. Soft skills are crucial to the labour market's outcomes because they increase people's chances of finding work, achieving success at work, and producing innovative outputs. Moreover, this category of skills is defined as personal qualities that improve an individual's ability to communicate effectively and perform

their job duties. These traits can be described as a unique combination of behaviours, dispositions, skills, and abilities that enable individuals to overcome personal and professional challenges. Soft skills are a wide-ranging set of competencies that greatly influence an employee's communication proficiency (Tankovic' et al., 2021). Soft skills encompass a combination of personality traits and social abilities that significantly impact an individual's ability to work effectively and interact with others. Developing and enhancing these skills can lead to improved employability and career advancement. Moreover, soft skills are vital for achieving holistic personal development and increasing the potential for labour market integration. Therefore, candidates must possess these competencies to be considered for any position (Volkov et al., 2022). Soft skills, which include interpersonal abilities, emotional intelligence, leadership, communication, and critical thinking, complement technical expertise and significantly enhance employability (Robles, 2012).

Employability skills refer to a set of core competencies, behaviours, and personal attributes that enhance an individual's ability to gain and maintain employment, contribute meaningfully in the workplace, and progress in their career. These skills, often described as "soft skills" or "transferable skills," include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, time management, adaptability, and digital literacy (Yorke, 2006; Succi & Canovi, 2020). While technical skills are job-specific, employability skills are universally applicable across various occupational contexts, making them essential for career success and organisational productivity. Employability skills, on the other hand, refer to the transferable skills that help individuals secure and retain employment, adapt to work environments, and transition between jobs (Yorke, 2006). The integration of these skills into TVET curricula aligns education with labour market requirements and fosters the development of a competent workforce capable of driving national development. Several empirical studies affirm the importance of employability skills in VTE. For instance, Nwadiani and Ofoegbu (2019) noted that many VTE graduates in Nigeria face challenges in securing employment not because of a lack of technical know-how, but due to deficits in essential soft skills demanded by employers. Similarly, Hanapi et al., (2018) posited that feedback from industries shows that lack soft skills and hands-on experience, both of which are essential for job performance. Okolie et al. (2020) advocated for a comprehensive reform of VTE curricula to align with 21st-century skills, suggesting a close. The integration of employability skills in VTE can take several forms, including curriculum

redesign, project-based learning, industry partnerships, entrepreneurship education, and the incorporation of work-based learning experiences such as internships and apprenticeships (National Skills Development Strategy III, South Africa, 2011).

Effective teaching and assessment strategies are also required to embed these skills in instructional delivery, moving beyond rote learning to experiential and reflective learning approaches. Employability skills are increasingly indispensable in vocational and technical education. Their integration into the VTE curriculum is not only a response to labour market demands but a critical strategy for enhancing graduates' versatility, entrepreneurial capacities, and overall contribution to national development. To ensure graduates have employable skills the curriculum should be reviewed in response to industry needs and feedback (Ogbuanya & Efuwape, 2018). Addressing existing implementation gaps requires collaborative efforts between governments, training institutions, industries, and communities.

Nigeria's national development goals, as encapsulated in the National Development Plan (2021–2025), emphasis human capital development as a pillar for sustainable economic transformation. A robust TVET curriculum that integrates soft and employability skills can produce graduates who are not only technically proficient but also innovative, adaptable, and ready for global competitiveness such a curriculum fosters entrepreneurship, reduces youth unemployment, and enhances productivity, thereby contributing to economic growth and social stability (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021). Awodiji & Magogodi, (2023) assert that soft skills promote TVET graduates' employability. Hashim (2024) students in this TVET institution had good soft skills and a moderate level of readiness to thrive in the industrial revolution. The results of the study prove that the student's level of readiness to face industrial revolution are influenced by the acquisition of soft skills, as having soft skills would affect the students' enthusiasm to be ready for industrial revolution adoption.

Moreover, the integration of these skills is consistent with global educational frameworks such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which emphasis inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes lifelong learning and employability. By embedding soft skills and employability skills into vocational training, countries can empower their youth with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities

of the 21st-century workplace and contribute meaningfully to society. Despite the benefits of introducing employability and soft skills into the curricula. There are still some obstacles towards the implementation. Bakar (2017) note that outdated curricula and insufficient funding are affecting the integration of soft and employability skills into TVET curricula.

In Nigeria and other developing nations, this shift underscores the need to integrate soft skills and employability competencies into the TVET curriculum to foster national growth and development. In light of the above, this study seeks to explore the integration of soft and employability skills into the TVET curriculum as a strategic solution a panacea to Nigeria's challenges of youth unemployment, underemployment, and slow economic development. The study will provide evidence-based insights that can inform curriculum reform, policy development, and effective instructional strategies in the TVET system.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria faces a persistent challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment, despite the proliferation of TVET institutions designed to equip students with job-ready skills. While these programs largely focus on developing technical competencies, there is growing evidence that many graduates lack the soft skills and employability attributes required to thrive in the modern labour market. These include communication, teamwork, critical thinking, adaptability, and emotional intelligence skills that are essential not only for personal career success but also for sustainable national development. In a rapidly changing global economy driven by innovation, automation, and knowledge-based industries, the demand for a workforce that possesses both technical know-how and soft, transferable skills has become more pressing than ever. Employers consistently report that technical proficiency alone is insufficient; graduates must also demonstrate reliability, problem-solving capacity, and interpersonal skills to remain competitive and productive.

However, the current TVET curricula in Nigeria appear inadequately structured to integrate these non-technical skills systematically. There is a lack of cohesive policy frameworks, curricular content, teacher preparedness, and assessment strategies geared toward soft skill development. Consequently, the gap between training outcomes and labour market expectations continues to widen, undermining the nation's efforts toward sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, and inclusive development. Therefore, the core problem this study seeks to address is the

insufficient integration of soft and employability skills into the Nigerian Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula. The study will explore the extent of integration, identify existing gaps, and propose strategies for embedding these vital competencies into TVET programs as a means of fostering national sustainability and development.

Objectives of the study

- (i) To examine the extent to which soft skills are integrated into the TVET Training and curricula in Nigeria
- (ii) To identify the challenges of implementing employability skills into TVET curricula
- (iii) To determine the influence of employability skills integration on the job readiness of TVET graduates..

Research Questions

- (i) To what extent is the integration of soft skills into TVET training and curricula in Nigeria?
- (ii) What are the challenges of implementing employability skills in TVET programs?
- (iii) How does the integration of employability skills in TVET influence the job readiness of the graduates?

Methodology

This study adopted a survey method and descriptive research design. Surveys can gather quantitative data regarding students' and lectures' perceptions and experiences with TVET curricula implementation using descriptive statistical analysis. There are eight Technical colleges in Ogun State. The total population of students and lecturers for this study are 846 and 61 respectively. The multistage sampling method was employed in this study. The first stage was random sampling of four Technical colleges. The second stage is the stratified sampling method to select the strata from each schools. The third stage was the use of purposive sampling method to select participants for the studies. A total number of 71 participants responded to the

questionnaire as follows: Tech three students 50, Instructors 21. A self-designed questionnaire consisting of 15 items was used to gather information from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part 1 was used to elicit information on perceived implementation of soft skills into the TVET training and curricula in Nigeria and the influence of integration employability skills in curriculum on the job readiness of the TVET graduates was assigned a four point likert Scale response of strongly agreed (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), with corresponding numerical values 4, 3, 2 and 1. Part II of the questionnaire was open ended questionnaire for respondents to describe the challenges of integrating soft and employability skills in TVET programs. Face validation of the questionnaire was carried out by three experts. Cronbach alpha reliability method was adopted to determine the internal consistency of the items. A reliability coefficient value of 0.73 was obtained.

Results

Table 1: Integration of soft skills into TVET Curriculum and Training

Items	Response (%)				Mean	S.D
	SA	A	D	SD		
Soft skills are introduced into the TVET curriculum to promote students' oral communication	81.7	18.3	-	-	3.82	0.39
Soft skills integration in the TVET curriculum enhances students' written communication	49.3	50.7	-	-	3.49	0.50
Implementation of digital communication in TVET training promotes students digital communication	70.4	28.2	1.4	-	3.44	0.60
The implementation of the TVET curriculum enhances student's problem solving skills.	97.2	-	-	2.8	3.92	0.28
Soft skills in TVET curriculum encourages students collaboration among themselves	47.9	49.8	1.4	1.4	3.42	0.50
The implementation of TVET training improves team work among students	91.5	8.5	-	-	3.42	0.50
The implementation of TVET curriculum improve team work among students	42.3	57.7	-	-	3.58	0.58
TVET training inculcate the ability of student adapting to different situations	6.20	33.8	4.2	-	3.58	0.50
Soft skills introduced into the TVET curriculum increases students ability to think critically	47.9	52.1	-	-	3.48	0.50
TVET training inculcates morals and discipline in the students	54.9	45.1	-	-	3.55	0.50
Mean Rating = 3.57 (S.D = .49) High						

From table 1, the overall mean rating of 3.57 indicates a high level of implementation of soft skills into TVET curriculum and training since the mean is above the threshold of 2.50, these perceptions are more aligned with the TVET instructors. The highest-rated statements on the implementation of the TVET curriculum enhances student's problem solving skills with mean of 3.92, soft skills are introduced into the TVET curriculum to promotes students oral communication with mean of 3.82, the implementation of TVET curriculum improve team work among students and TVET training inculcates the ability of student adapt to different situations with mean of 3.58, TVET training inculcates morals and discipline in the students with mean 3.55, soft skills integration in the TVET curriculum enhances students written communication with mean of 3.49, soft skills introduced into the TVET curriculum increases students ability to think critically with mean of 3.48, implementation of digital communication in TVET training promotes students digital communication with mean of 3.44 and implementation of TVET training improves team work among students with mean of 3.42 are relatively high. The standard deviations (ranging from 0.28 to 0.60) indicate variability in the responses. This means the degree of integrating soft skills into TVET curricula is high. The findings of this study are in accordance with Feraco *et al.* (2022), soft skills are adaptable personality traits that control our cognition, behaviour, and emotions, and help us accomplish our goals. It also conforms with Tankovic *et al.*, (2021) that soft skills are a wide-ranging set of competencies that greatly influence an employee's communication proficiency. It is also in alignment with Robles (2012) that soft skills are skills such as interpersonal abilities, emotional intelligence, leadership, communication, and critical thinking, complement technical expertise and significantly enhance employability. Probably because the skill is an essential part of TVET, which graduates exhibit at the labour market to increase their chances of securing a job and accomplishing their roles and responsibilities.

Table 2: Mean rating of the influence of employability skills in TVET on graduate job readiness

Items	Response (%)				Mean	S.D
	SA	A	D	SD		
TVET graduates exhibiting leadership skill enhances their job performance	42.2	46.7	-	11.1	3.20	0.92

TVET graduates' technical skills are essential for effective job delivery	77.8	20.0	-	2.2	3.73	0.58
TVET Graduates ability to communicate clearly affects their job productivity	68.9	26.7	-	4.4	3.60	0.72
TVET graduates possess the teamwork spirit that influences their productivity	48.9	42.2	4.4	4.4	3.36	0.77
TVET graduates ability to meet deadlines improves their job performance	64.4	33.3	2.2	-	3.62	0.54

Mean Rating = 3.50 (S.D = .71) High

Table 2 shows the overall mean rating of 3.50, indicating that employability skills influence TVET graduates' job readiness and productivity since the mean is above the threshold of 2.50. These perceptions are more aligned with the factors influencing TVET graduates' productivity. The highest-rated statements on TVET graduates' technical skills are essential for effective job delivery with a mean of 3.73. TVET graduates' ability to meet deadlines improves their job performance with a mean of 3.62. TVET graduates' ability to communicate clearly affects their job productivity with a mean of 3.60.

Also, TVET graduates possess the teamwork spirit that influences their productivity with a mean of 3.36. TVET graduates exhibiting leadership skill enhances their job performance with a mean of 3.20 are relatively high. The standard deviations (ranging from 0.92 to 0.54) indicate variability in the responses, with the respondents accepting the statements as a key factor influencing TVET on graduate job readiness and productivity. This means the key factors influencing TVET graduates' job readiness and productivity include exhibiting leadership skill enhances their job performance, technical skills are essential for effective job delivery, Graduates ability to communicate clearly affects their job productivity, possessing the teamwork spirit that influences their productivity and graduates' ability to meet deadlines improves their job performance. The findings of this study align with Awodiji and Magogodi, (2023) that soft skills promote TVET graduates' employability. It also corresponds with Hashim (2024) that the student's level of readiness to face the industrial revolution is influenced by the acquisition of soft skills. Probably because the acquisition of soft skills might influence students' enthusiasm and be ready to meet the demand of industries

Table 3: Challenges affecting the integration of soft and employability skills into TVET curricula

Challenges	Frequency	Percent	Rank	Remark
Lack of teaching aids designed for soft skill development in vocational contexts	7	33.3	1.0	1 st
Large class hinders soft skills implementation	5	23.8	2.0	2 nd
Students undervaluing soft skills when compared to technical skills	3	14.3	3.0	3 rd
Inability of TVET instructors to have opportunities to learn modern pedagogies	2	9.5	4.0	4 th
Lack of mentorship programs	1	4.8	5.0	5 th
	1	4.8	5.0	5 th
Limited opportunities for TVET students to practice soft skills on their Job	1	4.8	5.0	5 th
Lack of assessment to align training based on industry needs	1	4.8	5.0	5 th

Table 3 shows the ranking of challenges affecting the integration of soft and employability skills into TVET curricula from the lecturers' perspective. It reveals that the highest proportion of the respondents 33.3 % cite the lack of teaching aids designed for soft skill development in vocational contexts, rank 1st. Also followed by 23.8 % cite large class hinders soft skills implementation rank 2nd, the proportion of 14.3 % cite students undervaluing soft skills when compared to technical skills, ranking 3rd, 9.5 % cite inability of TVET instructors to have opportunities to learn modern pedagogies rank 4th. Additionally, the least proportion, 4.8 %, cites a lack of mentorship programs, insufficient feedback from industry on the specific soft skills needed in the workplace, limited opportunities for TVET students to practice soft skills on the job, and a lack of assessment to align training with industry needs, which rank 6th. This means the major challenges of integrating soft and employability skills into TVET curricula includes lack of teaching aids designed for soft skill development in a vocational context, large class hinders soft skills implementation, students undervaluing soft skills when compared to technical skills and the inability of TVET instructors

to have opportunities to learn modern pedagogies. The findings of this study are in accordance with Bakar (2017) that outdated curricula and insufficient funding are affecting the integration of soft and employability skills into TVET curricula. Probably because the major hindrance of the integration of employability skills and soft skills in the curriculum is not peculiar to TVET alone, but a general issue in the implementation of innovative courses in the curriculum in the Nigerian context.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the implementation of employability skills and soft skills into TVET Curricula and training might improve the sustainability and industrial development in Nigeria,

Recommendations

- (a) During the instructional process and training, lecturers should endeavour to use realistic work scenarios that are related to industrial experience to explain some concepts.
- (b) To address one of the challenges of integrating soft skills and employability skills, employers can co-develop training activities that align with workplace realities. Training programs should incorporate workshops that emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork.
- (c) Review the TVET curriculum regularly by collecting employer feedback on TVET graduates after post-graduation to refine the curriculum and also measure job readiness. This will enable the curriculum to be relevant and meet the demands of the labour market.
- (d) The Government can initiate policies and provide funds that can support TVET institutions to improve their infrastructure, resources, and industry partnerships. This might assist to close the skills gap between employability skills and the knowledge acquired from school

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