PROMOTING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR REDUCING INSECURITY AND CRIME IN NIGERIA

Awe Folasade Feyikemi

Department of Home Economics Education
Federal College of Education Technical Akoka

Abstract
Nigeria continues to experience increasing youth unemployment, poverty, and insecurity despite several government interventions aimed at addressing these challenges. The persistent rise in kidnapping, banditry, cybercrime, armed robbery, and other forms of criminal activities suggests the need for more sustainable and preventive strategies that address the underlying socio-economic factors associated with insecurity. This paper argues that vocational education offers a practical pathway for improving employability, promoting economic empowerment, and reducing conditions that often predispose young people to crime and social unrest. Drawing on Human Capital Theory and Strain Theory, the paper explains how quality vocational education develops technical, entrepreneurial, digital, and transferable skills that improve graduates employability and enhance opportunities for wage employment and self-employment. The paper further proposes the Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM) to explain the relationship between vocational education, employability, economic empowerment, crime reduction, and national security. It also presents the National Employability Security Framework (NESF) as a policy guide for repositioning vocational education through curriculum transformation, industry collaboration, entrepreneurship development, sustainable funding, and effective quality assurance. The paper concludes that vocational education should be recognised not merely as an educational programme but as a strategic investment in human capital development, economic resilience, social stability, and sustainable national development. It recommends stronger government commitment, improved funding, enhanced collaboration with industry, and regular curriculum reforms to ensure that vocational education remains responsive to labour market needs and contributes meaningfully to national security in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Vocational Education; Employability; Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); National Security; Youth Unemployment; Crime Prevention; Nigeria.*

Introduction

Nigeria has continued to face serious socio-economic and security challenges over the years. Rising youth unemployment, poverty, inequality, and increasing criminal activities have remained major obstacles to national development. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), a significant proportion of young Nigerians remain unemployed or underemployed despite various government interventions. This situation has raised concerns among policymakers, educators, and development partners about the need for more sustainable strategies for promoting employment and reducing insecurity.

Several forms of insecurity, including kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, terrorism, cybercrime, cultism, and communal conflicts, have continued to threaten lives, property, and economic activities across the country. The United Nations Development Programme (2023) reports that insecurity has not only affected economic growth but has also discouraged investment, displaced communities, and reduced the quality of life of many Nigerians. Similarly, Ayonmike (2015) argues that persistent unemployment and limited access to productive livelihoods have increased the vulnerability of many young people to anti-social behaviours and criminal activities.

According to Becker (1964), investment in education and skills development enhances human productivity and increases individuals opportunities for employment and income generation. This position remains relevant today because education is widely recognised as one of the most effective instruments for improving people s economic and social well-being. In support of this view, UNESCO (2022) asserts that quality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) equips learners with practical competencies that prepare them for decent work, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning.

Vocational education has therefore become increasingly important in both developed and developing economies. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) emphasizes that vocational education is designed to provide individuals with practical skills, technical knowledge, and appropriate attitudes necessary for employment and self-reliance. Likewise, Okoye and Arimonu (2016) assert that vocational education prepares learners to meet workplace expectations through competency-based training, practical experience, and entrepreneurship development. Consequently, vocational education is now regarded as a strategic tool for addressing graduate unemployment and promoting sustainable economic development.

The growing demand for employability skills has further increased the relevance of vocational education. Unlike in the past when academic qualifications alone were sufficient for securing employment, employers now place greater emphasis on practical competence, communication skills, teamwork, digital literacy, creativity, critical thinking, adaptability, and entrepreneurial ability. The World Economic Forum (2023) reports that these competencies have become essential for workforce competitiveness in the twenty-first century. Similarly, Okoye & Arimonu (2016) argues that vocational education in Nigeria should be restructured to incorporate digital technologies, innovation, and entrepreneurial competencies in order to meet changing labour market demands.

Despite the recognised importance of vocational education, graduate unemployment remains a major concern in Nigeria. The International Labour Organization (2024) notes that many graduates experience difficulty securing employment because the competencies acquired during their education do not always correspond with labour market expectations. In the same vein, Okoye & Arimonu (2016) observes that weak collaboration between educational institutions and industry has contributed to the persistent mismatch between graduates skills and employers needs. This mismatch has reduced graduate employability and limited the contribution of education to national development.

This paper argues that employability represents the missing link between vocational education and national security. While employment generation has received considerable attention in previous studies, less emphasis has been placed on explaining how employability serves as the pathway through which vocational education contributes to crime reduction, social stability, and sustainable national development. Addressing this conceptual gap is important because improving employability expands legitimate economic opportunities, reduces poverty and social exclusion, and weakens some of the conditions that often encourage criminal behaviour.

Drawing on Human Capital Theory and Strain Theory, this paper proposes the Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM) to explain the relationship between vocational education, employability, economic empowerment, crime reduction, and national security. The paper also presents the National Employability Security Framework (NESF) as a policy framework for strengthening vocational education through curriculum transformation, industry collaboration, entrepreneurship education, digital skills integration, sustainable funding, and effective quality assurance.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on two related theories namely; Human Capital Theory and Strain Theory. The two theories complement each other in explaining how vocational education can improve employability and contribute to reducing insecurity and crime in Nigeria. While Human Capital Theory explains how investment in education and skills enhances productivity and employment opportunities, Strain Theory explains how unemployment, poverty, and lack of legitimate opportunities may increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour. Putting these theories together provides a comprehensive explanation of the relationship among vocational education, employability, and national security.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was developed by Becker (1964). The theory assumes that individuals who acquire relevant knowledge and practical skills are more likely to secure employment, earn higher incomes, and contribute meaningfully to economic growth and national development. According to Schultz (1961), investment in human capital increases workers efficiency and enhances national productivity.

One of the major strengths of Human Capital Theory is that it provides a strong justification for investment in education and skills development as a means of improving individual productivity and national economic growth. The theory also explains why governments should continuously invest in vocational education to produce a competent and productive workforce. However, Human Capital Theory has been criticized for assuming that education automatically leads to employment and higher income. In reality, employment opportunities are also influenced by economic conditions, government policies, labour market demand, technological changes, and social inequalities. Therefore, education alone may not guarantee employment if the economy is unable to absorb skilled graduates. Despite this limitation, Human Capital Theory remains highly relevant to the present study because it explains how quality vocational education develops the technical, entrepreneurial, and employability skills required for productive employment and sustainable livelihoods.

Strain Theory

Strain Theory was propounded by Merton (1938) to explain the relationship between social conditions and criminal behaviour. The theory assumes that individuals experience strain when they are unable to achieve socially accepted goals through legitimate means. As frustration and economic hardship increase, some individuals may resort to deviant or criminal behaviour as an alternative means of achieving success. Agnew (1992) expanded the theory by explaining that strain may result from the inability to achieve personal aspirations, the loss of valued opportunities, or exposure to negative social conditions. Consequently, prolonged unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion may increase frustration among young people and expose them to criminal activities.

The major strength of Strain Theory lies in its ability to explain how structural socio-economic challenges contribute to criminal behaviour. The theory shifts attention from blaming individuals to examining the broader economic and social conditions that influence behaviour. Nevertheless, the theory has been criticized because not all unemployed or disadvantaged individuals engage in crime. Personal values, family background, education, religion, peer influence, and effective law enforcement also shape people s responses to economic hardship. Despite these criticisms, Strain Theory is relevant to this study because it provides a useful explanation of how improving employability through vocational education can reduce the socio-economic pressures associated with unemployment, poverty, and insecurity.

The two theories therefore provide the theoretical foundation for the proposed Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM), which explains employability as the critical link between vocational education and national security in Nigeria.

Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM): A Conceptual Framework

The growing challenges of youth unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria have highlighted the need for innovative approaches that integrate education with sustainable livelihood opportunities. Although previous studies have established that vocational education contributes to employment generation and entrepreneurship development, limited attention has been given to explaining how employability serves as the connecting pathway between vocational education and national security. To address this gap, this paper proposes the Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM) as a conceptual framework that illustrates how quality vocational education can contribute to crime reduction and national development through improved employability.

The VESM begins with quality vocational education, which provides learners with practical knowledge, occupational competencies, entrepreneurial skills, digital literacy, and appropriate work attitudes. The second component of the model is the development of employability skills. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), employers increasingly seek graduates who possess technical competence, communication skills, teamwork, creativity, digital literacy, adaptability, leadership ability, and problem-solving skills. Similarly, Okoye & Arimonu (2016) argues that vocational education in Nigeria should deliberately integrate digital technologies and entrepreneurial competencies to improve graduates competitiveness in both local and global labour markets. These competencies improve graduates opportunities for paid employment, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.

As employment opportunities increase, graduates become economically empowered through improved income, financial independence, and productive engagement. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2023), economic empowerment contributes significantly to poverty reduction and social inclusion. Individuals who have sustainable sources of livelihood are less likely to experience the economic frustration associated with prolonged unemployment and social exclusion.

The model further argues that economic empowerment contributes to reduced poverty, youth idleness, and social exclusion, which are among the socio-economic conditions associated with insecurity. Merton (1938) argues that when legitimate opportunities for achieving societal goals are limited, some individuals may resort to criminal behaviour. Consequently, improving employability through vocational education reduces these pressures by expanding legitimate opportunities for productive livelihoods. The final outcome of the model is improved national security and sustainable development. As more young people become productively employed or successfully self-employed, communities experience greater economic stability, reduced crime, increased social cohesion, and improved public safety. Therefore, investment in vocational education should be regarded as a strategic investment in both human capital development and national security.

Table 1: Components of the Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM)

Component	Description	Expected Outcome
Vocational Education	Quality competency -based technical and vocational training	Skilled graduates
Employability Skills	Technical, entrepreneurial, digital and soft skills	Higher employability
Employment & Entrepreneurship	Wage employment and business creation	Increased income
Economic Empowerment	Improved livelihoods and reduced poverty	Social inclusion
Social Stability	Reduced frustration and marginalization	Lower crime
National Security	Peaceful and productive communities	Sustainable development

Table 1 summarizes the core components of the Vocational Employability Model (VESM) and illustrates the sequential relationship among vocational education, employability, employment, economic empowerment, social stability and national security.

An Important feature of the VESM is its continuous feedback mechanism. Improved national security creates a more stable environment for investment, industrial growth, and economic expansion. Increased economic activities generate additional public revenue, enabling governments to invest further in vocational education, innovation, and workforce development. This continuous cycle strengthens employability, promotes inclusive growth, and supports sustainable national development. The VESM therefore provides a comprehensive explanation of how vocational education contributes indirectly to national security by improving employability. Unlike previous conceptual perspectives that emphasize only employment generation, the model identifies employability as the critical pathway linking education, economic empowerment, crime reduction, and national development.

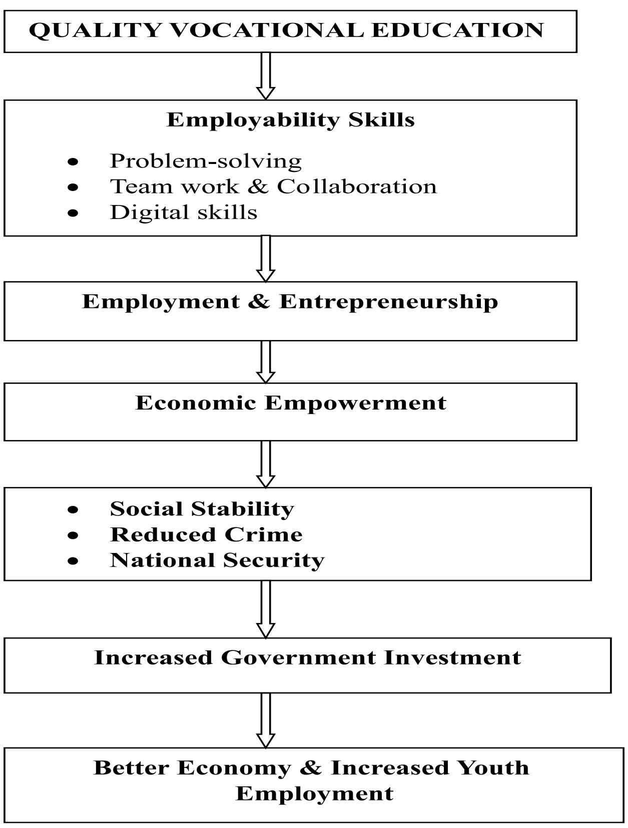


Fig. 1: ***The Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM): A Conceptual Pathway Linking Vocational Education to National Security***

National Employability Security Framework (NESF)

The discussion presented in this paper shows that improving employability through vocational education requires deliberate policy actions and effective collaboration among relevant stakeholders. While vocational education has enormous potential to reduce unemployment and promote economic empowerment, its impact depends largely on the quality of policies, institutional support, and implementation strategies. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), vocational education should be adequately funded and strengthened to produce skilled manpower capable of driving technological advancement and national development. Similarly, UNESCO (2022) asserts that quality TVET systems require strong partnerships among governments, educational institutions, industries, and development partners. Based on these positions, this paper proposes the National Employability Security Framework (NESF) as a policy framework for repositioning vocational education as a strategic instrument for enhancing employability and reducing insecurity in Nigeria.

Table 2: Policy Actions for Implementing the National Employability Security Framework (NESF)

Stakeholder	Key Responsibility	Expected Impact
Government	Increase TVET funding and enact supportive policies	Improved training quality and employability
Educational Institutions	Modernize curricula and strengthen industry collaboration	Labour market relevance
Industry	Offer apprenticeships, internships, and mentorship	Better school-to-work transition
Financial Institutions	Provide start-up financing for vocational graduates	Entrepreneurship and job creation
Development Partners	Support capacity building, innovation, and research	Sustainable TVET reforms

Table 2 outlines the major stakeholders responsible for implementing the National Employability-Security Framework (NESF) and identifies their respective roles in strengthening vocational education and employability.

The first pillar of the framework is curriculum transformation. According to NBTE (2024), vocational education curricula should be reviewed regularly to reflect current labour market needs, technological innovations, entrepreneurship, and digital competencies. Odu (2023) also argues that outdated curricula contribute significantly to the mismatch between graduates competencies and employers expectations. Consequently, curriculum review should be continuous and responsive to emerging workplace realities.

The second pillar focuses on digital and entrepreneurial competencies. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), digital literacy, innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship are among the most important skills required in the twenty-first-century workplace. Ayonmike (2015) asserts that integrating entrepreneurial education into vocational programmes improves graduates capacity for self-employment and enterprise development. Consequently, vocational institutions should deliberately integrate digital technologies, financial literacy, innovation, and business management into teaching and learning.

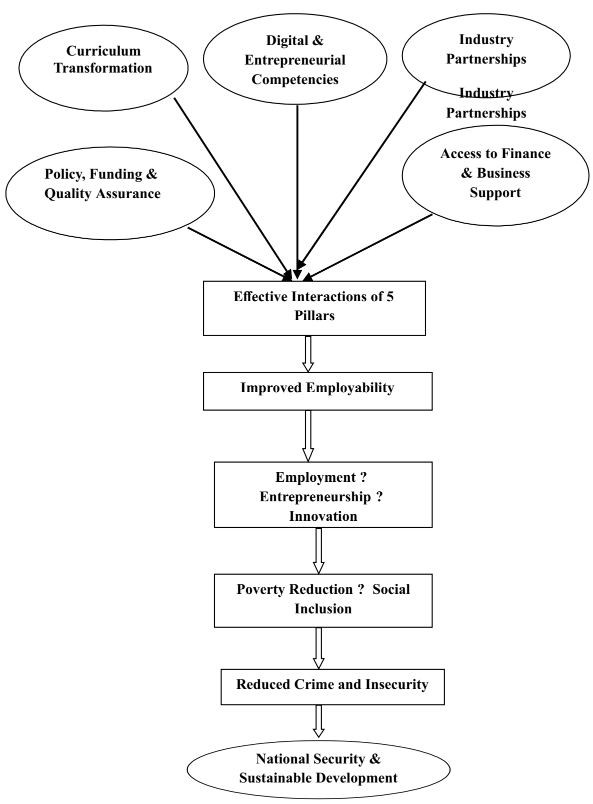
The third pillar is industry partnership and work-based learning. According to Okoye and Arimonu (2016), effective collaboration between educational institutions and industries improves curriculum relevance and enhances students' practical competence. Similarly, ILO (2024) maintains that apprenticeship programmes, industrial attachment, mentorship, and workplace learning improve graduates' transition into employment. Therefore, stronger partnerships between institutions and industries are necessary to enhance graduate employability.

The fourth pillar is access to finance and enterprise support. According to SMEDAN (2023), many young entrepreneurs experience difficulty establishing businesses because of inadequate financial support and limited access to business development services. Likewise, the Bank of Industry (2024) emphasizes that access to affordable credit, innovation grants, business incubation centres, and mentorship programmes enhances the survival and growth of small and medium-scale enterprises. Supporting vocational education graduates with such initiatives will improve self-employment and job creation.

The fifth pillar is policy coordination, sustainable funding, and quality assurance. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), effective vocational education requires adequate funding, qualified instructors, modern training facilities, and continuous quality assurance. UNESCO (2022) also emphasizes that sustained investment in TVET is essential for improving educational quality and workforce competitiveness. Consequently, government, educational institutions, industries, development partners, and professional bodies should work together to ensure effective implementation of vocational education policies.

These five pillars are interrelated and should function as an integrated system. Curriculum transformation strengthens skills acquisition, digital and entrepreneurial competencies improve graduates' adaptability, industry collaboration enhances workplace relevance, enterprise support promotes self-employment, while effective governance and sustainable funding provide the enabling environment for successful implementation. Together, these policy actions improve employability, expand legitimate livelihood opportunities, reduce poverty and social exclusion, and ultimately contribute to reducing crime and strengthening national security in Nigeria.

Fig.2. National Employability Security Framework (NESF)



Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that vocational education remains one of the most effective strategies for improving employability, promoting entrepreneurship, and supporting sustainable national development in Nigeria. Drawing on Human Capital Theory and Strain Theory, the paper established that employability serves as the critical link between vocational education and national security. It argued that quality vocational education equips individuals with the technical, entrepreneurial, digital, and transferable skills required for productive employment and self-employment.

The paper further proposed the Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM) and the National Employability Security Framework (NESF) to explain how vocational education can contribute to economic empowerment, poverty reduction, crime prevention, and improved national security. The central argument is that investment in vocational education should not be viewed only as an educational responsibility but also as a strategic national investment capable of promoting economic resilience, social stability, and sustainable development.

Although vocational education alone cannot eliminate insecurity, strengthening graduate employability can reduce some of the socio-economic conditions that encourage criminal activities. Therefore, sustained investment in quality vocational education, effective policy implementation, and stronger collaboration among government, educational institutions, industries, and development partners remain essential for achieving inclusive growth, sustainable peace, and national development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions presented in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should increase funding for vocational education to provide modern workshops, digital infrastructure, and adequate instructional facilities.
2. Vocational education curricula should be reviewed regularly to incorporate digital literacy, entrepreneurship, innovation, green skills, and other emerging labour market competencies.
3. Educational institutions should

strengthen partnerships with industries to promote industrial attachment, apprenticeship programmes, mentorship, and work-based learning.

4. Entrepreneurship education should be fully integrated into vocational education programmes to encourage graduates to become job creators rather than job seekers.
5. Government and financial institutions should provide vocational education graduates with easier access to start-up capital, business incubation centres, innovation grants, and enterprise development services.
6. Continuous professional development programmes should be organized to enable vocational education teachers acquire emerging technological and pedagogical competencies.
7. Strong quality assurance mechanisms should be established to ensure that vocational education programmes remain relevant to labour market needs and national development priorities.
8. Future empirical studies should validate the proposed Vocational Employability Security Model (VESM) and National Employability Security Framework (NESF) across different educational institutions and regions in Nigeria.

References

Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. Criminology, 30 (1), 47-87. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1992.tb01093

Ayonmike, C.S (2015). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET): Model for addressing skills shortage in Nigerian oil and gas industry. American Journal of educational Research, 3 (1), 62-66

Becker, G. S. (1993). Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2013). National Policy on Education (6th ed.). Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) Press.

International Labour Organization. (2024). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024. International Labour Organization (ILO). https://www.ilo.org

Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. American Sociological Review. 3 (5), 672- 682.

National Board for Technical Education. (2024). National Board for Technical Education Strategic plan 2024-2028. NBTE.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). Nigeria Labour Force Survey. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng

Okoye, K. R. E., & Arimonu, M. O. (2016). Technical and vocational education in Nigeria: Issues and challenges and a way forward. Journal of Education and Practice, 7 (3), 113- 118.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). Skills Outlook 2023 for a resilient, green and digital transition. OECD publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/27452c30-en

Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. The American Economic Review, 51 (1),1- 17

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria. (2023). MSME Survey Report 2023. SMEDAN.

UNESCO. (2022). Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) 2022 2029. UNESCO.

United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Human Development Report 2023/2024: Breaking the gridlock- Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

World Economic Forum. (2023). The Future of Jobs Report 2023. World Economic Forum.