

NATIONAL REPORT

Models of Cooperation between Vocational Schools and Entrepreneurs in Kenya

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1. Executive Summary

This report examines the cooperation models currently in place between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and the private sector, assessing their effectiveness in enhancing education, employability, and entrepreneurship. Based on stakeholder survey data, the analysis identifies key strengths, exposes systemic weaknesses, and offers actionable recommendations to improve alignment between training and labor market needs.

While there is a clear effort to connect education with employment, most cooperation models are limited in scale and impact. The most common practices, such as hosting interns and recruiting trainees, are adopted by some institutions, but more comprehensive approaches like dual apprenticeships, scholarships, and financial literacy programs remain largely underutilized. Stakeholders reported that although some training programs strike a balance between theory and practice, many suffer from poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, and minimal industry involvement.

A significant portion of respondents noted that TVET curricula often fail to meet company needs. Suggestions to address this include fostering regular dialogue between schools and businesses, involving professionals in teaching roles, and conducting labor market studies before launching new courses. There is also a clear call for greater investment in training infrastructure, public awareness campaigns to elevate the perception of TVET, and the development of work-study models to enhance real-world learning.

To overcome these challenges, the report recommends scaling up holistic and learner-centered models, upgrading teacher skills, institutionalizing school-industry partnerships, and increasing funding for innovation and equipment. A coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach combining public, private, and policy efforts will be crucial in transforming TVET into a powerful engine for employment, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic growth.

2. Introduction

In recent years, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has gained growing recognition as a cornerstone for addressing youth unemployment and skills mismatch in Kenya. As the country continues to implement its industrialization agenda under Vision 2030 and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), the role of vocational institutions in producing industry-ready graduates has become increasingly critical (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Central to this transformation is the strengthening of cooperation between vocational schools and entrepreneurs, which has been shown to enhance the relevance, quality, and responsiveness of TVET systems to labor market demands (ILO, 2021).

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Partnerships between vocational schools and enterprises foster a more demand-driven approach to training, allowing curricula to reflect real-time industry needs and technological advancements. These collaborations facilitate work-based learning, such as internships, dual training, and apprenticeships, providing students with hands-on experience that boosts their employability. Furthermore, enterprises can contribute to the co-design of curricula, offer industry mentorship, and support skills development in emerging sectors like renewable energy and digital technologies.

In the Kenyan context, such cooperation is vital not only for addressing youth unemployment - currently affecting over 35% of the young labor force (KNBS, 2023) - but also for advancing inclusive and green economic growth. Moreover, building synergies between public TVET institutions and private enterprises can catalyze innovation, support the transition to clean energy, and help break gender barriers that continue to limit girls' participation in technical fields.

This national report explores the current landscape of collaboration between vocational schools and enterprises in Kenya, identifying gaps, best practices, and policy interventions needed to modernize VET institutions. It also aligns with broader continental and global goals, including the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

As part of a broader continental initiative to modernize vocational education and training in Africa, this report also contributes to three key research objectives shared by African partner countries. First, it offers a detailed socio-economic analysis of the existing conditions for cooperation between VET providers and enterprises in Kenya, examining the contextual factors that shape such partnerships. Second, it seeks to identify the structural, economic, and regulatory barriers that hinder effective collaboration between vocational institutions and the private sector. Ultimately, the report seeks to develop context-specific solutions that enhance entrepreneurial engagement in VET programs, with the goal of improving the responsiveness, inclusivity, and impact of vocational training systems across the region.

3. Contextual Analysis

An analysis of the economic, social, and educational context in Kenya is presented in this section.

3.1 Economic Context

Kenya's economy is characterized by a growing services sector, a youthful population, and ongoing efforts toward industrialization. As the country strives to transition into a middle-income economy, the mismatch between labor market demands and the skills possessed by graduates-particularly from TVET institutions-remains a key development challenge.

According to the Kenya Economic Survey (KNBS, 2023), the country has witnessed increased employment in the informal sector, which accounts for over 80% of total employment. This underlines the need for practical, demand-driven skills that can facilitate youth entry into both

formal and informal sectors. Sectors such as construction, energy, manufacturing, and ICT have been identified as key growth areas under Kenya's Vision 2030 and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) 2023–2027, creating a pressing need for vocational and technical skills aligned with these priority industries.

However, the World Bank (2022) notes that many firms report difficulty finding employees with job-ready technical skills, signaling a disconnect between TVET training outcomes and enterprise needs. Limited engagement between training providers and employers exacerbates this gap.

3.2 Social Context

Kenya's population is predominantly young, with 75% under the age of 35 (UNDP, 2021). This demographic dividend presents both an opportunity and a challenge. While there is a vast reservoir of potential labor, youth unemployment remains high (estimated at over 35%) for the 18-35 age group (KNBS, 2022). This problem is most acute for those without practical skills or relevant work experience.

Additionally, there are gender disparities in access to and participation in TVET. Although there has been progress, socio-cultural norms, especially in rural areas, still discourage girls from pursuing technical courses traditionally seen as male-dominated, such as electrical engineering, mechanics, and construction (MoE, 2021). Enhancing the participation of girls and women in TVET, particularly in green and emerging sectors, is essential for inclusive development.

Entrepreneurial development is also rising in Kenya, with Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) employing 14.9 million people as of 2022 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics). However, many MSMEs lack formal engagement with the education system, despite needing skilled labor. Formalizing and incentivizing collaboration between TVETs and MSMEs could help bridge the skill demand-supply divide.

3.3 Educational Context

Kenya's TVET sector has undergone substantial reforms aimed at strengthening quality and relevance. The enactment of the TVET Act of 2013 led to the establishment of three key institutions:

- The Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) for regulation and accreditation;
- The Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC) for competency-based curriculum development;
- The Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) for aligning qualifications frameworks.

These institutions have supported the rollout of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET), which emphasizes practical, industry-relevant training. However, effective implementation of CBET depends heavily on collaboration with enterprises-particularly in curriculum co-design, workplace training, and assessment.

Despite the policy framework, collaboration between TVETs and enterprises remains sporadic. A study by the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2021) found that while employers are willing to engage, they often face constraints such as lack of incentives, weak coordination mechanisms, and unclear institutional roles.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the education sector are growing, but require further institutionalization. For instance, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) has partnered with select TVETs to strengthen dual training models, yet such partnerships are not yet widespread.

Moreover, the Digital Economy Blueprint (Republic of Kenya, 2019) emphasizes the integration of digital skills into vocational training, recognizing the need for youth to participate meaningfully in the global and local digital economy. This requires TVETs to work closely with tech companies and startups, but this area of cooperation remains underdeveloped.

4. Objectives and Scope

This report evaluates the effectiveness of cooperation models between TVET institutions and both public and private sector in Kenya, focusing on how these partnerships support skills development, employability, and entrepreneurship. It assesses commonly adopted models-such as internships, dual training, and staff development-while examining the alignment of training with labor market needs, the adequacy of infrastructure, and the role of industry in curriculum delivery.

Drawing on insights from 10 stakeholders, the report identifies strengths, weaknesses, and key challenges, and proposes practical recommendations to enhance the relevance, sustainability, and impact of TVET-industry collaboration. The models were selected for analysis based on their adoption rates, scalability, and alignment with national employment goals.

5. Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods approach to assess cooperation between TVET institutions and entrepreneurs in Kenya. Primary data was collected through an online questionnaire targeting a purposive sample of entrepreneurs across sectors, focusing on their engagement with TVET, perceived benefits, challenges, and expectations. Respondents could select multiple options and provide open-ended feedback.

In addition, a document review was conducted to analyze relevant national policies, TVET authority reports, and previous studies. This provided context on institutional frameworks and

existing challenges. For data analysis, quantitative responses were summarized using descriptive statistics to highlight trends in model adoption and stakeholder perceptions, while qualitative responses from open-ended questions were thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and deeper insights. Although the sample is not nationally representative, it offers valuable directional insights into the dynamics of TVET-enterprise collaboration in Kenya.

6. Types of Cooperation Models

The table below presents the identified models and the participants responses.

Form of Collaboration	Number of Enterprises (out of 8)
Hosting of interns	7
Recruitment of trainees	5
Ongoing training of company staff	2
Dual apprenticeship	1
Provision of scholarships	1
Personal finance wellness awareness	1

The findings reveal that hosting of interns and recruitment of trainees are the dominant forms of collaboration between enterprises and TVETs. These engagements reflect industry appreciation of TVETs' role in bridging the skills gap. However, the limited uptake of dual apprenticeships, scholarships, and in-service training partnerships suggests untapped potential. Strengthening structured partnerships, raising awareness about the full spectrum of collaborative models, and facilitating policy incentives could broaden and deepen TVET-industry linkages.

The majority of the enterprises (8 out of 10) insinuated that they have partnership agreements that mainly focus on welcoming students for internships in the company. More than half of the enterprises reached out argued that they have not signed any collaboration agreement with any TVET since none have reached out to them.

All the companies reached out agreed that they are willing to sign collaboration agreements with TVETs reasons being; Talent identification, Enhanced company visibility, Access to new knowledge and skills. These priorities suggest that businesses see TVETs not just as training institutions but as strategic partners for recruitment, branding, and innovation.

7. Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses

Several strengths were identified in the current TVET ecosystem, particularly relating to educational content and structure. These include;

- **Balanced Curriculum:** A significant proportion of respondents (4/10) praised the good balance between theoretical and practical training, indicating that when implemented well, the curriculum can provide a strong foundation for both employment and entrepreneurial endeavors.

- **Practical Orientation:** Some respondents (2), viewed the training as too practical, which, although noted as a concern, could also reflect a strength in emphasizing hands-on skills relevant to job markets and enterprise creation.

Despite some strengths, the data also revealed several systemic weaknesses that could hinder the effectiveness of current models in promoting education and entrepreneurship. These include;

- **Inadequate Infrastructure (2 respondents):** A recurring issue was the lack of laboratories and workshops, which directly limits the quality of practical training and undermines the hands-on experience required for technical competence and innovation.
- **Theoretical Imbalance:** Conversely, other respondents (3), perceived the training as too theoretical, suggesting inconsistency in delivery across institutions and a possible disconnect between curriculum design and implementation.
- **Low Uptake of Holistic Models:** Models that incorporate broader development aspects, such as dual apprenticeships, scholarships, and financial wellness-are not widely adopted, signaling missed opportunities for fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and reducing barriers to education access.

8. Identification of Areas for Improvement

The following areas were identified;

i. Misalignment between TVET Curricula and Industry Needs

A significant concern raised by respondents is the limited alignment between TVET training curricula and actual labor market demands. Notably, 4 out of 10 participants stated that TVET curricula are not aligned with companies' needs. This misalignment hinders the employability of graduates and limits the relevance of TVET in supporting entrepreneurship and economic growth.

ii. Low Industry Involvement in Curriculum Co-Development

When asked to rate the importance of co-constructing curricula between TVET and companies, majority of responses clustered around score 3 to 5, indicating a moderate to high recognition of the value of co-designing curricula with industry. However, the presence of lower scores suggests inconsistent stakeholder engagement and possibly skepticism about the feasibility or effectiveness of such collaboration.

iii. Insufficient Market Responsiveness in Course Design

Respondents rated the necessity of carrying out market studies before launching new training courses. These ratings reveal strong support for labor market research, with six respondents rating this measure 4 or 5.

iv. Weak Public Perception of TVET

Changing the negative public perception of technical and vocational training was seen as essential. Importance of raising public awareness of the benefits of TVET, attracted generally high scores (with half of respondents giving a rating of 4 or 5). This reflects a consensus that public awareness campaigns are

critical. However, the recurring low scores point to a need for more unified messaging and stronger advocacy across sectors.

v. Inadequate Practical Training Infrastructure

When asked to rate the need to equip laboratories and workshops for practical training, majority rated this as highly important since lack of well-equipped facilities remains a major barrier to delivering effective, competency-based training. The presence of lower scores may reflect differences in institutional capacity or access among stakeholders, but the overall trend strongly supports infrastructure investment as a top priority.

Summary of Common Challenges

Challenge	Key Issues Identified
Curriculum-Industry Misalignment	Limited engagement with employers, outdated curricula, lack of market intelligence
Inconsistent Industry Collaboration	Sporadic co-construction of curricula, varying willingness among businesses
Negative Perceptions of TVET	Public misperceptions diminish student interest and institutional prestige
Poor Practical Training Infrastructure	Lack of equipped labs/workshops impairs hands-on learning
Low Adoption of Evidence-Based Program Design	Weak integration of labor market data into course planning

9. Recommendations for Improvement

Based on feedback from participants, a number of practical and strategic recommendations emerged to address the key challenges facing TVETS;

- Strengthen practical training through Infrastructure and Internship by equipping laboratories and workshops as well as developing Work-Study Programs
- Enhance teaching capacity and industry engagement by regularly upgrading teachers' skills and enable professionals to teach in TVET
- Foster closer collaboration between TVET and Industry by creating formal School-Industry Partnerships, involve companies in curriculum design and diversify Internships.
- Improve Alignment with Labor Market Needs by conducting regular market studies and strengthening TVET-Company communication.
- Invest in public awareness and funding by raising awareness of TVET Benefits and increasing funding for TVET Programs

10. Conclusion

The findings of this report underscore a strong commitment among stakeholders to bridge the gap between education and employment through targeted models such as internships and recruitment. However, the current application of TVET models remains limited in scope and impact due to structural, pedagogical, and infrastructural constraints. While isolated initiatives show promise, the broader system lacks the coherence and innovation required to fully support learner-centered, entrepreneurship-driven outcomes.

To enhance the effectiveness of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), there is a pressing need for targeted interventions that prioritize: Scalable, holistic training models (e.g., dual apprenticeships, scholarships, and financial literacy programs); Robust public-private partnerships for curriculum development and learner placement; Investment in training infrastructure and capacity building, and a national strategy to elevate the public perception and strategic value of TVET.

Achieving sustainable impact in TVET will require a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that fosters innovation, aligns training with labor market demands, and empowers learners with both technical and entrepreneurial competencies. Now is the time for decisive action to transform TVET into a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and youth empowerment.

11. References

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