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Original Article

Association Between the Structure of TVET Programs and the Likelihood of Employment Among TVET Graduates in Central Uganda

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Keywords:

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Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is promoted as a pathway into employment, yet the connection between programme structure and actual job outcomes remains uneven. This study examined the association between selected structural features of TVET programmes and the likelihood of employment among graduates in central Uganda. A cross-sectional survey of 365 graduates from Nakawa Vocational Technical College, Lugogo Vocational Technical Institute and Ntinda Vocational Technical Institute (2019–2024) was conducted using a structured questionnaire. The structure of TVET training was measured by whether field jobs matched the training graduates received, the adequacy of job tasks available, where and how the first jobs and activities were obtained, whether they attended industrial training, the primary source of funding, the mode of training, whether full or partial, qualifications obtained, and the field of study. On the other hand, employment likelihood was measured by whether or not a TVET graduate was engaged in an active role that generated some level of income. Data were analysed with chi-square tests of association. The sample was predominantly young (peak age around 22, with most participants aged 18–30), male (68 %), single (80 %), and O-level leavers (64 %). Public institutions dominated, with Nakawa contributing the largest share (34 %). Employment was significantly associated with field–job match ($\chi^2=125.30$, $p<.001$), adequacy of job tasks ($\chi^2=92.74$, $p<.001$), pathway into work ($\chi^2=262.69$, $p<.001$), funding source ($\chi^2=20.66$, $p=.001$), field of study ($\chi^2=26.03$, $p=.001$) and institution attended ($\chi^2=45.86$, $p<.001$). Graduates whose training matched job requirements, who entered work through industrial training or personal networks, who studied high-demand trades (electrical installation, plumbing, hairdressing), and who attended stronger-performing institutions recorded markedly higher employment rates. Mode of training and type of qualification showed no significant link with employment (0.56 (2), p -value = .755; 2.86 (4), p -value = .581). Wages also varied by employment type: those in formal wage employment earned the highest mean income (approximately UGX 800,000), followed by the self-employed (below UGX 600,000), while casual workers and the unemployed reported substantially lower earnings. These results confirm a clear association between the structure of TVET programmes and the likelihood of employment among graduates. Programmes that align training content closely with labour-market

needs and provide structured workplace pathways produce substantially higher employment rates than those that do not. Strengthening industry-linked curriculum review, quality-assured industrial training and institutional accountability is therefore recommended.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the design of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems and graduates' subsequent employment has become a central concern in education and labour-market policy worldwide. As economies confront rapid technological change, demographic pressures, and persistent skills mismatches, the internal structure of TVET programmes, whether modular or linear, school-based or dual, competency-oriented or theory-heavy, shapes the speed and quality of the transition from training to work. Empirical patterns across high-income and emerging economies suggest that programme architecture is not merely an administrative detail but a decisive factor in the likelihood of employment.

In Europe, the dual apprenticeship model, most fully developed in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, continues to illustrate the employment advantages of structured workplace learning combined with school-based instruction (Deissinger & Gonon, 2021). Apprentices spend most of their time in firms under formal training contracts while attending vocational schools on a

part-time or block basis (James Relly & Laczik, 2022). This arrangement produces relatively smooth school-to-work transitions: employment rates among dual-system graduates remain high, youth unemployment stays well below the European average (Van der Velden & Wolbers, 2003), and their training firm retains a substantial share of apprentices upon completion (Trutwin et al., 2026). Comparative analyses confirm that systems with higher vocational specificity and stronger education-employment linkages generally reduce the risk of unemployment and shorten the time to first job (Trutwin et al., 2026), although the magnitude of these effects varies and may involve trade-offs in long-term occupational mobility (Smyth et al., 2001). Across the Atlantic, career and technical education (CTE) programmes in the United States have shown that well-aligned secondary and post-secondary pathways improve both employment and earnings (Holzer, 2021), particularly when courses map closely onto regional labour-market demand (Klein et al., 2023). Graduates of construction, electrical and related trades programmes, for example, frequently secure industry employment within five years of high school, often without further tertiary study, and achieve living-wage

thresholds more readily than peers who follow purely academic tracks (Toppin, 2018). Outcomes remain heterogeneous by field of study, underscoring the importance of programme structure and labour-market signaling. In China, the world's largest TVET system, enrolling more than 30 million students and producing roughly 10 million skilled graduates annually, has undergone successive reforms aimed at closer industry–education integration (Wang, 2023), modern apprenticeships and modular certification (Stewart, 2015; Yan, 2023). Official employment rates for vocational graduates have been reported above 90–95 per cent for extended periods, and secondary vocational education has been shown to generate sizeable wage premiums relative to general secondary education, especially for individuals with lower earnings potential (Schucher, 2014, 2017). Recent policy emphasis on “1+X” certificates and dual-qualified teachers reflects a deliberate attempt to align programme structure with industrial upgrading needs, even as stigma and quality variation persist (Liu, 2023; Torgerson, 1994). Elsewhere in Asia, results are more mixed. In Bangladesh, nationally representative analyses indicate that TVET raises employment probabilities and earnings at lower education levels, particularly for women, yet returns differ sharply by field of study and provider type (Murshed, 2025). Meta-analyses of vocational specificity across countries similarly report an overall positive but modest average effect on youth labour-market integration, with substantial heterogeneity driven by programme design and institutional quality (Blommaert et al., 2020).

Turning to sub-Saharan Africa, the picture remains one of both opportunity and constraint. In South Africa, tracer studies of TVET college completers reveal absorption rates that, while higher than those of less-educated youth, still leave unemployment above 50 per cent in many cohorts; outcomes vary markedly by programme area (engineering versus business studies) and by the strength of workplace exposure (Mncayi, 2016). Ghana has recorded rising enrolments and improving public perceptions, with recent

regional surveys reporting employment rates around 55 per cent among TVET graduates in Ashanti Region, a notable share of whom enter self-employment (Dhakal et al., 2018). Nigeria continues to face lower reported employability figures (commonly cited in the 43–50 per cent range), often linked to weak industry linkages and curriculum–market mismatches (Nwagwu, 2008). Kenya, by contrast, has advanced furthest toward competency-based, modular curricula and stronger employer partnerships (Kogo, 2022); one study of national polytechnic graduates found that the modular versus non-modular structure of programmes significantly predicted employment category after controlling for job-search behaviour, with non-modular pathways associated with lower relative risk of employment (Jahonga, Musera, & Ngala, 2024; Jahonga, Ngala, & Musera, 2024). World Bank reviews of formal TVET in low- and middle-income countries synthesise these patterns: average returns to secondary TVET are frequently small and highly heterogeneous across fields of study and institutions (Chamadia & Mubarik, 2021). In both Kenya and Ghana, earnings premiums relative to general secondary education range from strongly positive to negative depending on the specific trade, reinforcing the conclusion that programme structure and labour-market relevance matter more than enrolment expansion alone (Tripney et al., 2012).

Uganda occupies a particularly instructive position within this regional landscape. Successive policy reforms, the BTVET Strategic Plan (Okware & Ngaka, 2017), the 2019 TVET Policy (Mutebi & Ferej, 2023), and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Act 2025 (Aata et al., 2026), have sought to shift the system from a predominantly knowledge-based, time-bound model toward flexible, competence-based, modular delivery under stronger private-sector guidance. The newly established TVET Council and Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB) institutionalise employer representation and modular assessment, allowing learners to exit with partial qualifications (module certificates) that can be stacked toward

full national certificates or diplomas (Muhwezi et al., 2025; Mutebi & Ferej, 2023).

A 2023 tracer study of National Diploma engineering graduates (building and civil, electrical, mechanical, and water engineering) who completed between 2016 and 2019 found that 63 per cent secured employment within one year of graduation, 20 per cent within the first month, and that 90-95 per cent of employers rated the practical competence of these graduates higher than that of university counterparts (Angela & Kwizera, 2026). Predictors of employment included teaching quality, entrepreneurial skills acquisition, and first-class diploma attainment, while limited industrial mentorship and digital-skill gaps constrained outcomes (Jing et al., 2025). These national figures sit against a broader youth unemployment challenge and a recognised skills paradox: persistent shortages of technicians coexist with underemployment among trained graduates.

The structural features now being introduced- modular packaging, workplace experience learning, recognition of prior learning, and sector skills councils- mirror elements associated with stronger employment outcomes in dual and

competency-based systems elsewhere. Yet empirical evidence on how these design choices translate into differential employment likelihood within the Ugandan context remains limited. This study therefore examines the association between the structure of TVET programmes, particularly modular versus non-modular organisation, the extent of workplace learning, and competency-based assessment, and the likelihood of employment among graduates. Therefore, this study sought to generate context-specific insights that can inform the continued refinement of TVET delivery and contribute to more effective pathways from training to productive work.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional research design. Particularly, a quantitative approach was utilised. This design was selected to allow for the simultaneous assessment of employment status and perceived skill acquisition among graduates at a specific point in time.

Study Area

Figure 1: Map Showing the Study Sites



The study was conducted in the central region of Uganda, a hub of industrial and vocational activity. As seen in Figure 1 below, the selected TVET institutions were Nakawa Vocational Technical College (VTC), Lugogo Vocational Technical Institute (VTI), and Ntinda Vocational Technical Institute (VTI). This area was chosen due to the high concentration of both TVET institutions and potential employers.

Target Population

The target population comprised 7,000 graduates who completed their vocational training from registered Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in Uganda between 2019 and 2024.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this study was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula to ensure the sample is representative of the target population:

$$n = \frac{\chi^2 NP(1 - P)}{e^2(N - 1) + \chi^2 P(1 - P)}$$

Where:

= Required sample size.

= The table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (e.g., 3.841 for 95% confidence).

= The population size.

= The population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 to provide the maximum sample size).

= The degree of accuracy (expressed as a proportion, e.g., 0.05).

Based on this formula, a total sample of 365 respondents was targeted.

Sampling Techniques

A multi-stage sampling technique was utilised. Purposive sampling was first used to select representative TVET institutions. Subsequently, simple random sampling was applied to select individual graduates from institutional alumni databases to ensure every graduate had an equal chance of participation.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were limited to graduates who completed a minimum of a certificate-level course within the last five years, between 2019 and 2024. Exclusion criteria included graduates currently enrolled in further full-time academic programs or those who were unreachable via the provided contact databases.

Data Collection Methods

A quantitative survey method was employed. This approach was chosen to facilitate the collection of standardised data from a large sample, enabling robust statistical comparison between groups.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary tool for data collection was a structured, self-administered questionnaire. The instrument was divided into sections covering demographic profiles and a specialised module using Likert-scale items to measure perceived employability skills.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by academic experts in the fields of technical education, TVET, and skills development. Reliability was established through a pilot study of 10 graduates, with internal consistency measured using Cronbach's Alpha (α), seeking a threshold of ≥ 0.70 .

Data Collection Procedure

Following institutional clearance, the questionnaire was administered via Kobo Toolbox. Participants were provided with an introductory brief on the study, and data collection took place over a period of 2 weeks.

Study Variables

The independent variable for this study was employment status, defined as a binary categorical variable: *employed* (engaged in any income-generating activity, formal or informal) and *unemployed* (actively seeking employment). The dependent variable (outcome) was the level of employability skills acquired, treated as a continuous variable derived from the composite Likert-scale scores.

Statistical Data Analysis

Data were cleaned and analysed in STATA 18.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) summarised the distribution of employment status across categories of each training characteristic. Pearson's chi-square tests of association were used to examine the relationship between each independent variable and employment status. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. The chi-square statistic was calculated as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where O_i is the observed frequency and E_i is the expected frequency under the null hypothesis of no association.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (UCUREC) and registered by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Data were anonymised to ensure the confidentiality and protection of all participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

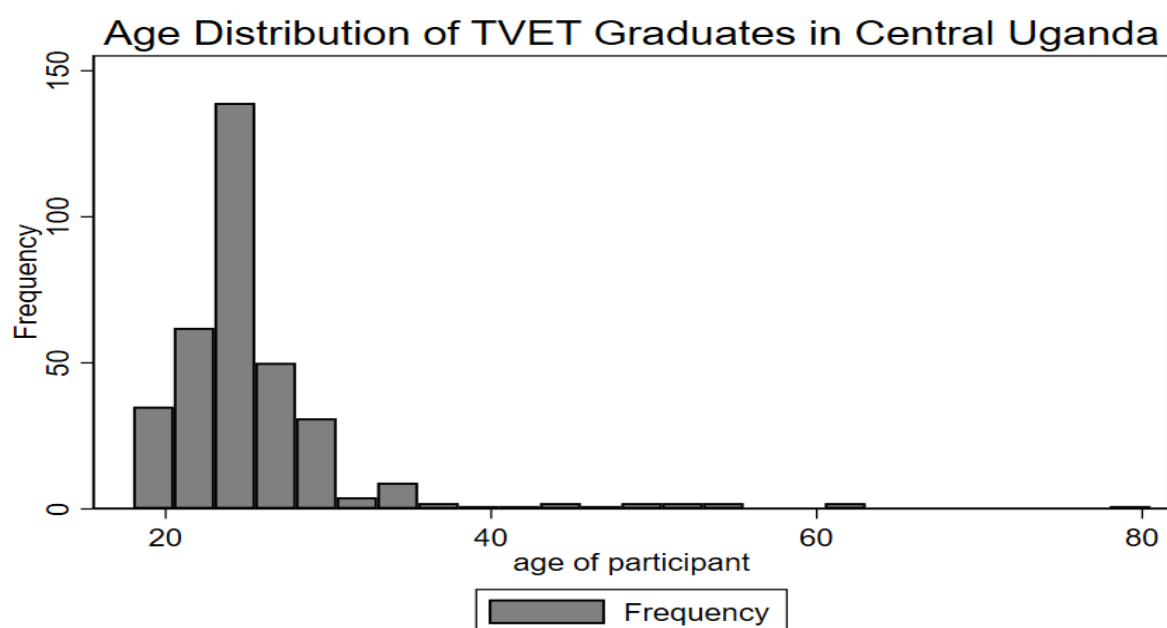
Results

The results in Table 1 reveal that employment among TVET graduates is strongly influenced by the alignment of training with job requirements, adequacy of tasks, pathways to employment, funding sources, field of study, and institutions attended. Graduates whose training fully matched industry needs, who accessed jobs through industrial training or networks, and who studied in high-demand fields or well-performing institutions were significantly more likely to be employed. This underscores the importance of structuring TVET programs to closely reflect labour market demands and to provide clear, supported pathways into employment.

Age of participants

The age distribution of TVET graduates in Central Uganda shows a clear concentration among younger participants, particularly those aged 18-30.

Figure 2: Age Distribution of TVET Graduates in Central Uganda



Primary Field Data from Central Uganda 2026

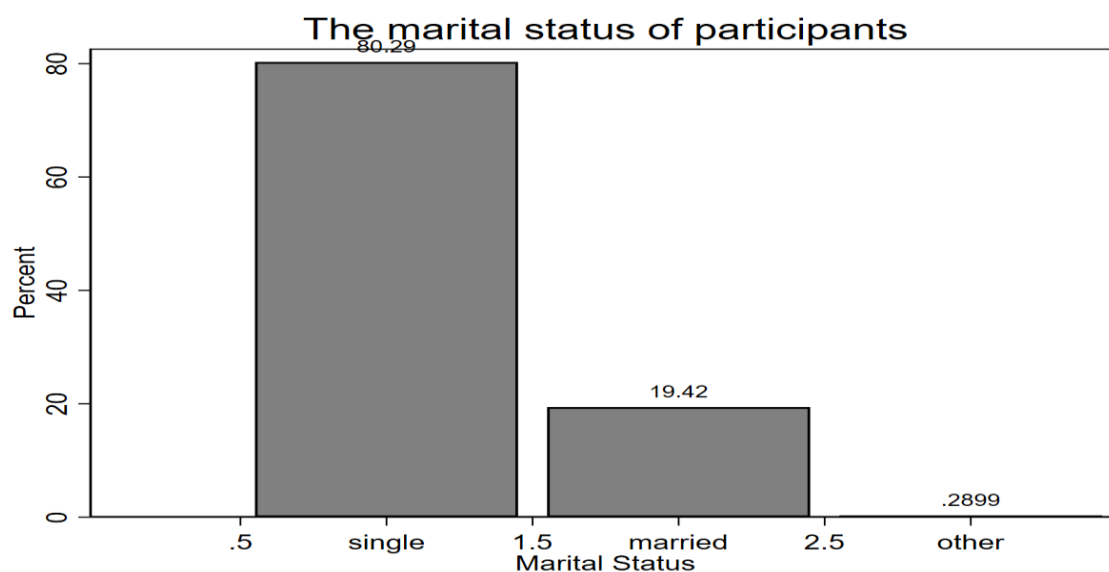
The peak occurs around age 22, where the frequency of graduates is highest, reflecting the typical age at which individuals complete vocational training and enter the workforce. This pattern suggests that TVET programs are most accessible and attractive to school leavers and early career entrants, aligning with the expected transition from secondary education into technical and vocational pathways. Beyond the age of 30, the number of graduates declines sharply, with very few participants over 40. This indicates that

mid-career or older adults are less represented in vocational training, possibly due to existing employment commitments, limited incentives for retraining, or cultural perceptions about age and education.

Participants' Marital Status

The results in Figure 3 below show the dominance of the unmarried participants from the TVET institutions considered.

Figure 3: The Marital Status of Study Participants

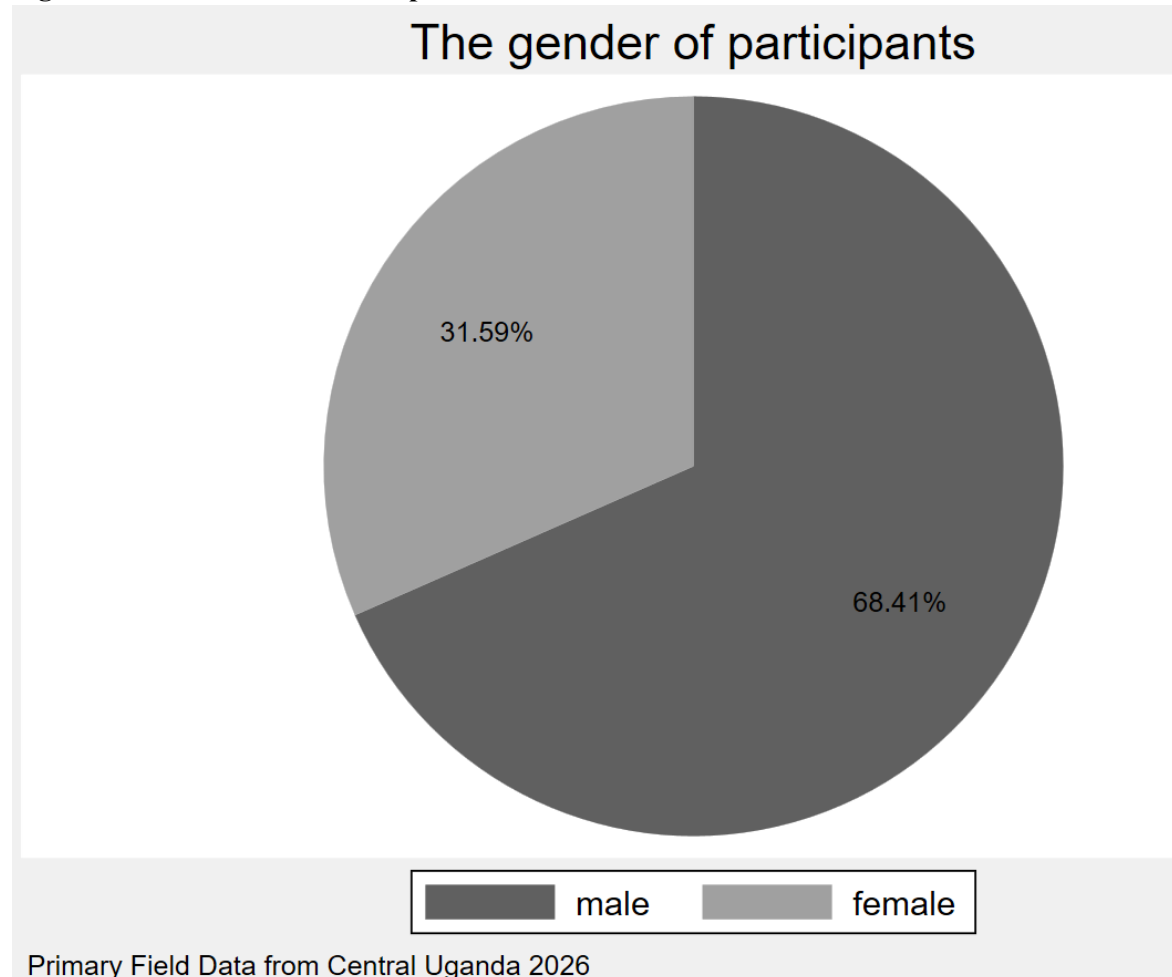


In terms of marital status, the data indicate that 80% of participants are single, 19% are married, and less than 1% are in other categories. This reinforces the finding that TVET programs

primarily attract younger individuals in the early stages of their careers and personal lives.

Gender of TVET Graduates

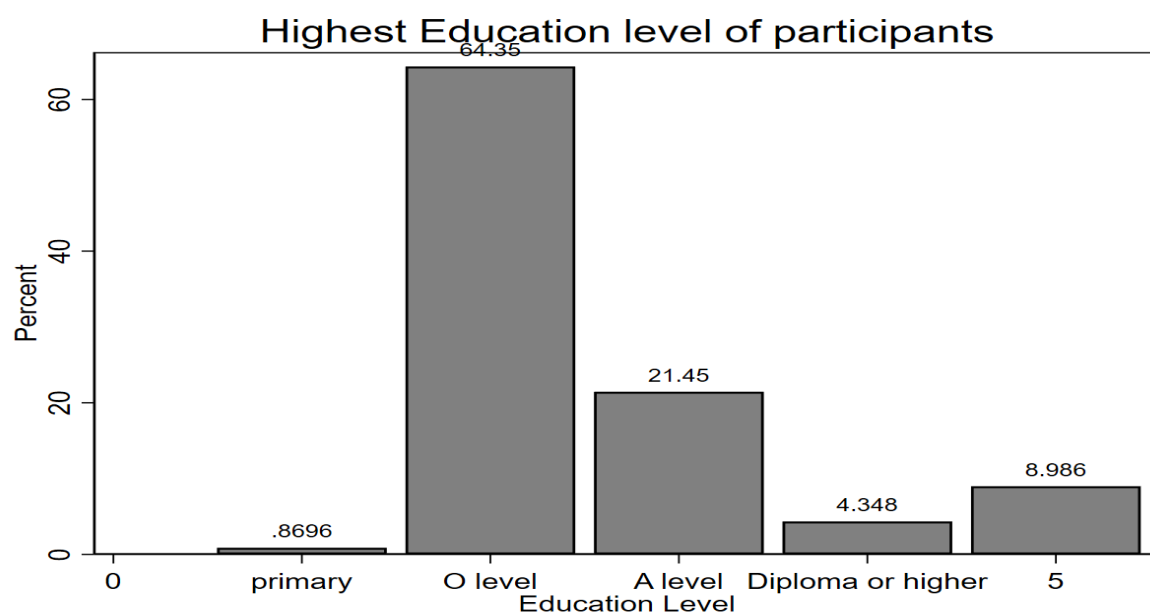
Figure 4: The Gender of Participants



The gender distribution of TVET graduates in Central Uganda shows that the majority are male, accounting for 68% of participants, while females account for 31.59%. This indicates that men are more dominant in vocational and technical training programs in the region, which may reflect cultural, social, or economic factors influencing enrollment patterns. The lower representation of women suggests that despite progress in

educational access, gender disparities remain in technical and vocational education. This imbalance could be linked to perceptions of certain trades being male-oriented, limited encouragement for women to pursue technical fields, or barriers such as family responsibilities and societal expectations.

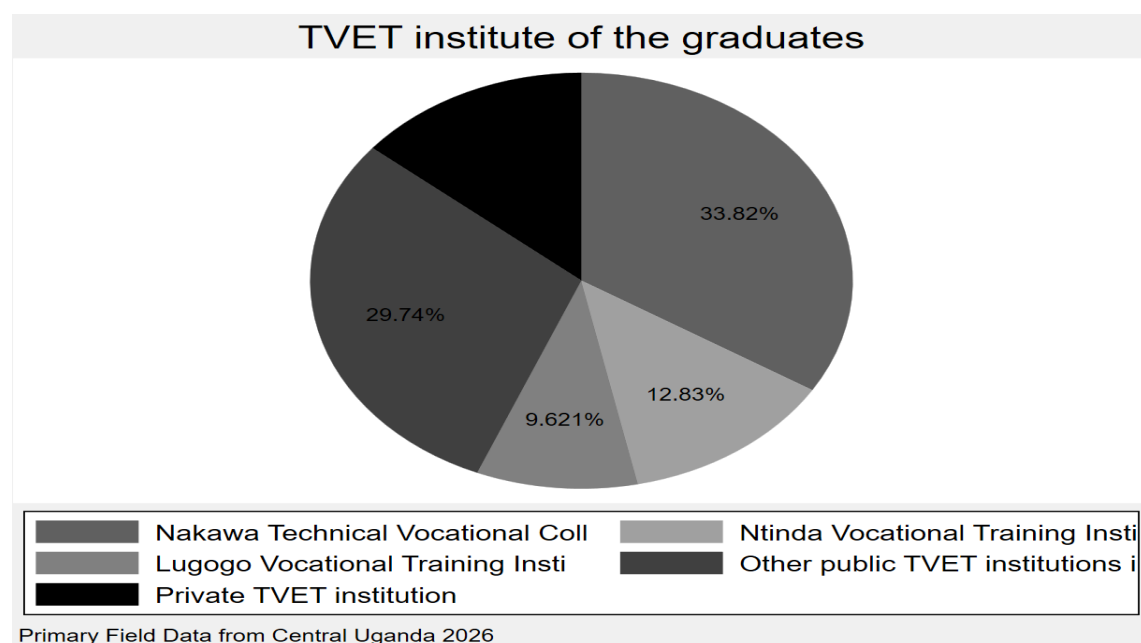
TVET Graduates' Highest Education Level

Figure 5: The Highest Education Level of Participants

The participants' educational backgrounds show that the majority of TVET graduates in Central Uganda have completed O-level education, accounting for 64% of the sample. This indicates that vocational training is most pursued immediately after lower secondary education, making TVET a direct pathway for school leavers who may not pursue further academic studies. Following this, a smaller proportion, 21%, entered

TVET after completing A-level, while only 4% had attained a diploma or higher qualification. The very low percentage of participants with only primary education, at less than one percent, suggests that TVET programs are not typically accessed by those with minimal schooling.

The Distribution of TVET Institutions

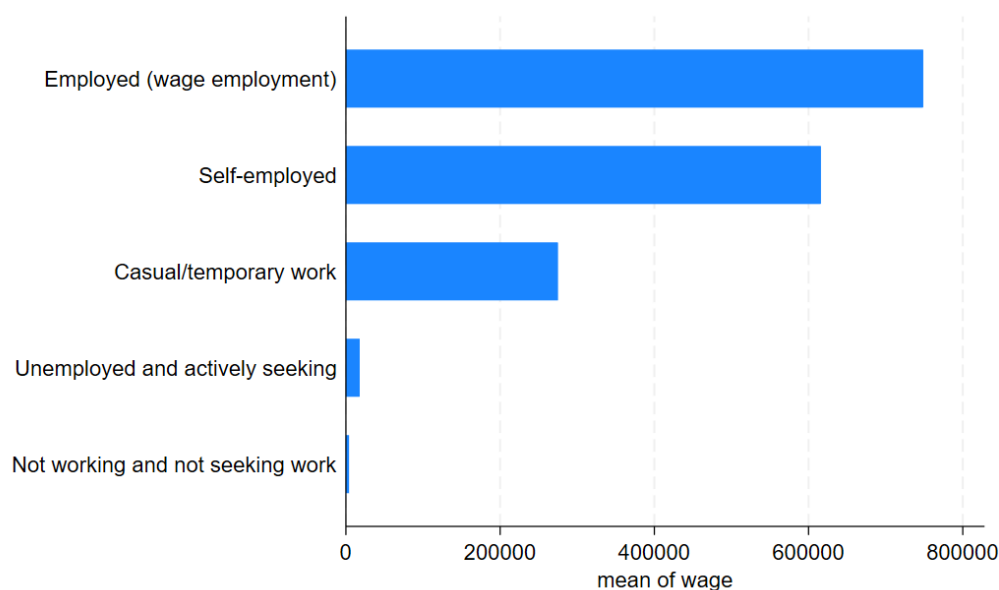
Figure 6: TVET Institutions Surveyed in Central Uganda

Most of the TVET graduates studied at Nakawa Technical Vocational College, which accounts for 33.82% of the total. This makes Nakawa the single largest source of graduates among the institutions considered. When combined with other public TVET institutions, which contribute 29.74%, public training centres clearly dominate the landscape. Ntinda Vocational Training Institute produced 12.83% of the graduates, while

Lugogo Vocational Training Institute contributed 9.62%. Private TVET institutions accounted for about 14%. Altogether, the data shows that the majority of TVET graduates studied in public institutions, with Nakawa standing out as the leading contributor.

Differences in Wages by Employment Status

Figure 7: Bar Chart to Find Out if the Wages of TVET Graduates Differ by Employment Status



Results in Figure 7 show that wages differ across participants' employment statuses. For instance, those in wage employment were reported to earn the highest mean wage, approximately UGX 800,000. Self-employed graduates earned less, with their mean wage falling below UGX 600,000, while those engaged in casual or temporary work earned even less, averaging around UGX 400,000. The unemployed who were actively seeking work reported a mean wage close to UGX 200,000, reflecting minimal or irregular income. Those not working and not seeking employment had the lowest mean wage, essentially negligible compared to the other categories. These results confirm that the type of employment significantly influences the earnings of TVET graduates, with formal wage employment providing the greatest financial

benefit, while casual work and unemployment leave graduates at a clear disadvantage. Previous studies indicate that the type of employment (e.g., temporary or informal) influences wages and can contribute to disparities such as gender pay gaps, indicating that the wage-employment relationship is influenced by contract types and labour market structures (Duman, 2023; McDonald & Solow, 1992).

Association Between Selected Training Characteristics and Employment Status

The Pearson Chi-square test was used to investigate the possible association between selected training characteristics of the TVET graduates and their employment status. The results are as seen below.

Table 1: Association Between Selected Training Characteristics and Employment Status

Variable / Category	Not Employed n (%)	Employed n (%)	Total n	χ^2 (df), p
Field-Job Match				125.30 (3), < .001
Fully match	31 (14.09)	189 (85.91)	220	
Partially match	8 (8.70)	84 (91.30)	92	
Do not match	1 (25.00)	3 (75.00)	4	
Not sure	28 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	28	
Adequacy of Job Tasks				92.74 (3), < .001
Fully adequate	33 (15.79)	176 (84.21)	209	
Partially adequate	12 (11.21)	95 (88.79)	107	
Not adequate	0 (0.00)	2 (100.00)	2	
Not sure	24 (92.31)	2 (7.69)	26	
How Activity Was Obtained				262.69 (5), < .001
Through TVET institution	7 (17.07)	34 (82.93)	41	
Through industrial training	2 (2.41)	81 (97.59)	83	
Through open job application	3 (7.32)	38 (92.68)	41	
Through personal networks	2 (1.85)	106 (98.15)	108	
Through self-employment	1 (5.56)	17 (94.44)	18	
Not currently working	55 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	55	
Industrial Training Attendance				3.09 (1), .079
Yes	68 (20.61)	262 (79.39)	330	
No	0 (0.00)	12 (100.00)	12	
Training Funding Source				20.66 (5), .001
Government-sponsored	9 (19.15)	38 (80.85)	47	
Self-sponsored	1 (2.08)	47 (97.92)	48	
Parent/guardian support	54 (25.84)	155 (74.16)	209	
NGO/donor-supported	4 (11.43)	31 (88.57)	35	
Employer-sponsored	0 (0.00)	4 (100.00)	4	
Other	1 (100.00)	0 (0.00)	1	
Mode of Training				0.56 (2), .755
Full time	48 (21.05)	180 (78.95)	228	
Half time	19 (18.63)	83 (81.37)	102	
Block/modular	2 (14.29)	12 (85.71)	14	
Qualification Obtained				2.86 (4), .581
Modular certificate	51 (20.90)	193 (79.10)	244	
Craft certificate	6 (13.64)	38 (86.36)	44	
Advanced craft certificate	5 (29.41)	12 (70.59)	17	
Diploma	6 (15.79)	32 (84.21)	38	
Other	0 (0.00)	1 (100.00)	1	
Field of Study				26.03 (8), .001
Electrical installation	8 (9.30)	78 (90.70)	86	
Plumbing	2 (6.06)	31 (93.94)	33	
Welding and fabrication	14 (25.45)	41 (74.55)	55	
Automotive mechanics	26 (35.14)	48 (64.86)	74	
Building construction	7 (20.59)	27 (79.41)	34	
ICT/Computer applications	3 (37.50)	5 (62.50)	8	
Tailoring and garment design	5 (23.81)	16 (76.19)	21	
Hairdressing and beauty	0 (0.00)	11 (100.00)	11	
Other	5 (20.83)	19 (79.17)	24	
TVET Institution Attended				45.86 (4), < .001
Nakawa Technical Vocational	45 (38.79)	71 (61.21)	116	
Ntinda Vocational Training	7 (15.91)	37 (84.09)	44	
Lugogo Vocational Training	6 (18.18)	27 (81.82)	33	
Other public TVET institutions	3 (2.94)	99 (97.06)	102	
Private TVET institutions	7 (14.58)	41 (85.42)	48	

Source: Primary Data Collection, 2026

Results in Table 1 show that the structure of TVET programs is strongly associated with the likelihood of employment among graduates. The match between taught skills and job requirements

is particularly significant. Out of the 220 graduates who reported a full match between their training and job tasks, 85.91% (n = 189) were employed, compared to only 14.09% (n = 31) who were not. For those who reported partial alignment, 91.30% (n = 84) were employed, while none of the 28 graduates who were unsure about the match were employed. This confirms that the closer the alignment between training and job requirements, the higher the chances of employment.

Adequacy of job tasks also shows a strong association. Among graduates who considered their training fully adequate, 84.21% (n = 176) were employed, while 15.79% (n = 33) were not. For those who found training partially adequate, 88.79% (n = 95) were employed. In contrast, 92.31% (n = 24) of those unsure about the adequacy were not employed, highlighting the importance of confidence in the relevance of training.

The way employment activity was obtained further illustrates the link between program structure and employment outcomes. Graduates who secured jobs through industrial training had the highest employment rate at 97.59% (n = 81), followed closely by those who relied on personal networks at 98.15% (n = 106). Those who applied openly for jobs also had strong outcomes, with 92.68% (n = 38) employed. In contrast, all 55 graduates who reported not currently working fell into the not employed category, showing the critical role of structured pathways to employment.

Funding sources also influenced employment prospects. Self-sponsored graduates had the highest employment rate at 97.92% (n = 47), followed by NGO/donor-supported graduates at 88.57% (n = 31). Government-sponsored graduates had lower employment outcomes at 80.85% (n = 38), while those supported by parents or guardians had the weakest results, with only 74.16% (n = 155) employed. This suggests that self-investment or external sponsorship may

motivate stronger engagement and better employment outcomes.

The field of study was another important factor. Electrical installation graduates had a high employment rate of 90.70% (n = 78), plumbing at 93.94% (n = 31), and hairdressing at 100% (n = 11). In contrast, automotive mechanics had lower employment outcomes, with only 64.86% (n = 48) employed, and ICT/computer applications had 62.50% (n = 5). This shows that certain trades are more directly linked to employment opportunities than others.

The institution attended also mattered. At Nakawa Technical Vocational College, 61.21% (n = 71) of graduates were employed, while 38.79% (n = 45) were not. Ntinda Vocational Training Institute performed better, with 84.09% (n = 37) employed and only 15.91% (n = 7) not employed. Lugogo Vocational Training Institute recorded 81.82% (n = 27) employed compared to 18.18% (n = 6) not employed. Graduates from other public TVET institutions had the strongest outcomes, with 97.06% (n = 99) employed and only 2.94% (n = 3) not employed. Private TVET institutions also showed high employment rates, with 85.42% (n = 41) employed and 14.58% (n = 7) not employed.

Previous studies indicate that the structure of the TVET training substantially influences the level of training. Modular program structures have been shown to increase employment likelihood compared to non-modular ones, as they may offer more flexible and targeted skill development (Jahonga et al., 2025). However, challenges such as rigid top-down curriculum control, limited private sector involvement, and mismatches between program offerings and current industry standards can hinder employment outcomes for TVET graduates (Generalao et al., 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that how TVET programmes are put together has a real bearing on whether graduates find work. Employment was clearly higher among those whose training lined up

closely with what their jobs actually required, who felt the skills they learned were adequate for the tasks they faced, and who entered work through industrial training or personal contacts. Graduates from fields such as electrical installation, plumbing and hairdressing and beauty, and those who attended stronger-performing institutions, also did markedly better. By contrast, people who were unsure about the relevance of their training, who studied lower-demand trades such as automotive mechanics or ICT, or who came from institutions with weaker records struggled more to secure employment.

The results make it plain that the structure of TVET programmes is closely tied to whether graduates find work. Graduates whose training matched the demands of their jobs, fully or even partially, were employed at rates of 86 to 91 per cent. Those who could not say whether their training fitted the job at all remained unemployed. The same held for how well the skills prepared them for the actual tasks: people who felt the training was fully or partially adequate were employed in large numbers, while almost all of those unsure about its relevance stayed out of work.

How people entered employment mattered just as much. Nearly all who secured jobs through industrial training (98 per cent) or personal networks (98 per cent) were working, and open applications also produced strong results. Structured pathways clearly opened doors that formal qualifications alone did not. Furthermore, the funding source and field of study further shaped outcomes. Self-sponsored graduates recorded the highest employment rate (98 per cent), followed by those supported by NGOs or donors. Parent- or guardian-supported students fared least well. Electrical installation, plumbing and hairdressing produced high employment, while automotive mechanics and ICT lagged. Institution attended also made a difference: some public centres and private providers placed the great majority of their graduates, while others, notably Nakawa, left a much larger share unemployed.

Policy Recommendations

First, training content must stay tightly linked to what employers actually need. Curriculum reviews should be conducted regularly with active input from industry, and programmes that repeatedly show a weak match between skills taught and job requirements should be revised or dropped. Priority should be given to trades that already place graduates well, electrical installation, plumbing and hairdressing, while lower-performing areas such as automotive mechanics and ICT need either substantial redesign or reduced intake until demand improves.

Second, industrial training has to become a properly supervised and assessed part of every programme rather than a loose attachment. Institutions that already place nearly all their trainees through industrial experience should be studied and supported so their approaches can be shared. Clear standards for duration, mentoring and feedback from host firms would help turn workplace exposure into a reliable route into employment.

Third, funding arrangements should be adjusted to encourage greater commitment from learners. Expanding targeted scholarships, employer sponsorships and carefully designed NGO support could reduce over-reliance on parent or guardian funding, which was linked to weaker outcomes. At the same time, performance-based incentives for institutions that consistently place high proportions of graduates could raise overall standards.

Fourth, the wide differences between institutions cannot be ignored. Stronger-performing public centres and private providers should be given resources to expand good practice, while institutions such as Nakawa that leave large numbers of graduates unemployed require focused support, closer monitoring or, where necessary, restructuring.

Fifth, career guidance and placement services inside institutions need strengthening. Because personal networks currently play such a large role in finding work, formal job-placement offices, alumni links and organised employer engagement can help level the field for students who lack strong contacts. Finally, routine tracking of graduate employment by field, institution and pathway should become standard. Publishing these figures openly would allow students, parents and policymakers to make better choices and would keep pressure on institutions to keep their programmes relevant.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not free from limitations. First, the authors recognise the intrinsic inadequacy of basing conclusions entirely on quantitative results, limiting the in-depth understanding of the TVET graduates' factors that could confound their ability to identify employable opportunities. This study was based on self-reported data (purely TVET graduates); this limits validation of responses and opens a wider window for information bias.

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