



Bridging the divide: TVET'S transformative role in youth unemployment and skill development in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study presents an in-depth examination of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a strategic tool to bridge the gap between education and industry in Bangladesh. Amidst a complex landscape of youth unemployment and rapid economic growth, TVET offers a critical pathway for skill development and social inclusion. Through a cross-sectional survey of 3,325 respondents, including current students and recent graduates of various TVET institutions, the research explores the alignment of TVET with industry needs, stakeholders' perceptions, job placement rates, societal attitudes, gender dynamics, and regional disparities. The findings reveal a generally positive alignment of TVET curriculum with market requirements, a satisfaction rating of 3.84, and an accessibility rating that encapsulates the ease of accessing TVET programs. The study further identifies challenges and limitations, both internal and external, highlighting the need for continuous evaluation, collaboration with industry, and responsiveness to market needs. Recommendations include targeted enhancements in curriculum design, faculty development, infrastructural investment, and industry alignment. The insights gleaned from this research offer valuable guidance for policymakers, educators, industry leaders, and international partners in harnessing TVET's potential for economic growth, innovation, and social development in Bangladesh.

Keywords: TVET, youth unemployment, skill development, industry alignment, social inclusion

Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) represents a vital segment of the education system which focuses on the acquisition of practical skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary for specific occupations or trades Jayalath and Esichaikul (2022) ^[15]; Hassan and Shamsudin (2019) ^[10]. Unlike traditional academic education, TVET emphasizes hands-on training and real-world application, often in collaboration with industry partners. TVET encompasses several key components. Formal TVET, offered by specialized institutions, includes structured courses leading to recognized qualifications. These programs often combine theoretical instruction with practical training, such as internships or apprenticeships Osman and Kamis (2019) ^[19]. Non-formal TVET includes shorter, flexible training programs aimed at specific skills development. Provided by various entities like community organizations, private trainers, or employers, non-formal TVET may not always lead to formal certification but is valuable for targeted skill enhancement Zulu and Mutereko (2020) ^[25]. Informal TVET captures the learning that occurs through daily work and life experiences, such as traditional apprenticeships and on-the-job training where individuals learn skills without structured guidance or formal assessment Ebuenyi *et al.* (2020) ^[8]. The objectives of TVET are multifaceted and far-reaching. It plays a crucial role in skill development by imparting specific skills aligned with industry demands, thus enhancing employability and workforce readiness Yeap, Suhaimi, and Nasir (2021) ^[24]. TVET also contributes to individual

economic empowerment and community development, particularly for marginalized populations, by providing access to relevant skills. As a component of lifelong learning, TVET supports continuous learning and adaptation to technological advancements, facilitating career progression and resilience in a rapidly changing labor market Motthanke and Naong (2021) ^[18]. Moreover, TVET offers unique pathways for social inclusion by enabling access to quality training and employment opportunities for diverse groups, including women, minorities, and persons with disabilities Beer and Mulder (2020) ^[6]. In the context of a globalized economy and the specific challenges faced by developing countries like Bangladesh, TVET's role extends beyond mere skill training. It serves as a strategic tool to bridge the gap between education and industry, aligning learning with the evolving needs of the labor market. Its adaptability, focus on practical skills, and alignment with economic priorities make TVET an indispensable element in national development strategies. In a nation where the demand for skilled labor is growing and youth unemployment remains a pressing concern, the comprehensive understanding and effective implementation of TVET could be instrumental in shaping a prosperous future. Despite recent data indicating a slight decrease in the unemployment rate, from 5.41% in 2020 to 5.23% in 2021, Bangladesh faces significant challenges in terms of workforce skill levels. A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) reveals that the country is falling behind other South Asian nations in average productivity, largely due to a deficit in the trained labor force. This comprehensive study, which covered sectors

including jute, pharmaceutical, plastic, and construction, found that nearly 96% of the country's labor force lacks proper skills, restricting their contribution to the production sector. The construction and light engineering sectors show the most pronounced skill gaps, with 98% and 72% of workers being unskilled, respectively. Additionally, the study indicates a substantial demand for professionals, machine operators, and skilled workers in the IT sector, as well as a rising demand for nursing staff. Alarming, the report reveals that 47% of workers migrating overseas for employment are unskilled, underscoring the critical need for targeted skill development and training initiatives. Youth unemployment in Bangladesh is a complex and multifaceted issue. Despite steady economic growth, the youth unemployment rate remains alarmingly high, especially among those with higher education Haasler (2020) [9]. Contributing factors include a mismatch between the skills taught in educational institutions and the demands of the labor market, a lack of career guidance, and limited access to quality vocational training. The situation is further exacerbated by rapid urbanization, gender disparities, and regional imbalances McGrath *et al.* (2020) [17]. Skill development is not just an educational concern; it is a national imperative for Bangladesh. As the country aspires to attain middle-income status, enhancing the skills of its youth is central to driving economic growth, innovation, and social development Banjo, Oludele *et al.* (2020) [5]. Skill development fosters employability, productivity, and adaptability, enabling individuals to respond to the changing demands of the global economy. Furthermore, it contributes to social inclusion and poverty reduction by providing opportunities for marginalized groups to access decent employment Asad *et al.* (2023) [4]. The disconnect between education and employment in Bangladesh is a critical challenge with far-reaching implications Siddiky and Uh (2020) [23]. Despite increasing educational attainment, many graduates face difficulties in securing employment that aligns with their qualifications. This gap reflects not only the shortcomings in the educational system but also the broader socio-economic context, including labor market dynamics, industry needs, and regulatory barriers. The result is a generation of young people who are educated but not necessarily employable in the sectors that drive Bangladesh's economy. TVET's potential role in addressing the education-employment gap is increasingly recognized, yet insufficiently understood in the context of Bangladesh Islam (2021) [12]. While TVET offers a pathway to practical skills and industry alignment, its effectiveness in enhancing youth employability is constrained by challenges such as outdated curricula, inadequate facilities, and societal perceptions. Understanding the intricacies of TVET, its successes, and its shortcomings is paramount for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders seeking to leverage TVET as a tool for youth empowerment and national development.

This research embarks on a comprehensive investigation into the role of TVET in mitigating youth unemployment in Bangladesh. It aims to explore the current state of TVET institutions, the alignment of curriculum with industry needs, stakeholders' perceptions, and the success rate of job placements Alam and Sharmin (2023) [2]. Furthermore, the research will delve into the societal attitudes towards vocational education, gender dynamics, regional disparities, and the role of public-private partnerships in enhancing TVET. Through a multifaceted analysis, this research seeks to contribute to the policy discourse on skill development, youth empowerment, and economic growth in Bangladesh, offering actionable insights and strategic recommendations Bhuiyan (2022) [7]. The nexus between TVET and youth unemployment in Bangladesh is a subject of profound significance, with implications for the nation's future prosperity and social cohesion. As Bangladesh continues its journey towards economic advancement, the insights gleaned from this research may serve as a beacon for policymakers, educators, industry leaders, and international partners. By shedding light on the complex dynamics of TVET, this research aspires to ignite a renewed focus on vocational education and training, aligning it with the needs of the 21st century and the aspirations of Bangladesh's youth.

Literature Review

1. Global Perspective of TVET

1.1 Comparative Literature on VET in LMICs

The role of VET in LMICs has been shaped by both economic and sociological perspectives. Early economic studies emphasized the cost-benefit analysis of VET, often leading to mixed conclusions regarding its efficacy Ismail *et al.* (2019) [14]. Sociological research has explored VET's potential to reduce social inequalities and promote inclusion, illuminating the complex interplay between vocational education, social class, and labor market dynamics Salisu (2020) [21]. The global discourse on VET continues to evolve, reflecting the changing economic and social landscapes.

1.2 TVET and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

TVET's alignment with SDGs has brought renewed attention to its role in global development. As a tool for achieving equitable quality education (Goal 4) and promoting inclusive economic growth (Goal 8), TVET has been embraced by international organizations such as UNESCO and ILO Legusov *et al.* (2022) [16]. The emphasis on gender equality (Goal 5) also intersects with TVET's potential to empower women through skill development and access to non-traditional occupations Allais and Wedekind (2020) [3].

TVET in Bangladesh: Historical Development and Current Scenario

1. Evolution and Policies

TVET in Bangladesh has undergone significant transformations, shaped by global trends and national policy shifts Aiman Udoy (2023) [1]. Early efforts were fragmented and lacked alignment with industry needs, leading to a skills mismatch. Recent reforms, guided by the National Skills Development Policy (NSDP), have sought to standardize

and modernize TVET, fostering collaboration with industry and aligning curricula with market demands Islam, Banerjee *et al.* (2022) ^[13]. International partnerships have further supported these efforts.

2. Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges in implementing effective TVET in Bangladesh include outdated curricula, lack of qualified instructors, inadequate facilities, and societal biases against vocational education Shams-Uz-Zaman (2022) ^[22]. However, initiatives such as the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) and collaboration with development partners like ADB offer opportunities for innovation and improvement. These efforts aim to make TVET more responsive to industry needs and more accessible to diverse populations.

Youth Unemployment in Bangladesh

Youth unemployment in Bangladesh is a multifaceted problem, rooted in structural, educational, and socio-cultural factors. High unemployment rates among educated youth underscore the gap between educational offerings and labor market demands Hoque (2019) ^[11]. Regional disparities, gender biases, and lack of access to quality vocational training compound the challenge. Efforts to address youth unemployment must consider these complexities, recognizing the potential of TVET as a targeted intervention that aligns education with employment opportunities.

Empirical Studies and Key Findings

Empirical studies on TVET's impact on youth employment offer valuable insights and also reveal methodological challenges. Research by Aiman *et al.* Aiman Udoy (2023) ^[1] highlights the positive effects of TVET on employability but also points to limitations in data availability and comparability. Studies that explore the perception of TVET among students and employers contribute nuanced understanding of the barriers and enablers to effective TVET implementation Bhuiyan (2022) ^[7]; Sadekin, Ahamad, and Chowdhury (2020) ^[20]. These works collectively underscore the need for context-specific research that considers the unique dynamics of TVET in Bangladesh.

The literature on TVET presents a rich and multifaceted picture, reflecting its complex role in youth employment and economic development. From global debates to specific challenges and opportunities in Bangladesh, the existing body of research provides a robust foundation for further exploration. This review highlights the critical importance of TVET in contemporary development discourse, setting the stage for this research to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of TVET's potential in mitigating youth unemployment in Bangladesh.

Methodology

1. Research Design

The cornerstone of this investigation is a quantitative research design, which offers a systematic and empirical approach to the exploration of phenomena through the collection and analysis of numerical data. This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design, a commonly used strategy in quantitative inquiries, aiming to capture a snapshot of the current state of affairs related to TVET in Bangladesh. Such a design is particularly suitable for understanding the

breadth and depth of a phenomenon at a particular point in time. With the capacity to gather a large amount of data from a sizeable population, this research design facilitates the extraction of comprehensive and robust insights into the role of TVET in mitigating youth unemployment in Bangladesh.

2. Study Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises a diverse group of individuals directly engaged with TVET programs in Bangladesh. Specifically, the study population includes current students and recent graduates from various TVET institutions across the country. Given the heterogeneous nature of TVET, a stratified random sampling method was employed. This sampling strategy ensures a balanced and representative sample by dividing the target population into distinct strata or subsets, namely different regions, genders, types of TVET programs, and socio-economic backgrounds. By collecting data from a substantial sample size of 3325 respondents, this research enhances the generalizability of the findings, allowing for a broad-based understanding of the research problem.

Data Collection

1. Survey Instrumentation

The primary tool for data collection is a structured survey instrument, meticulously designed to elicit quantifiable and reliable data pertinent to the research objectives. In the survey, participants were asked to rate the accessibility of TVET programs on a scale of 1 to 5. The accessibility rating in this study refers to a measure that evaluates how easily participants can access TVET programs. It takes into account factors such as the location of the institutions, the cost of the programs, the availability of transportation, and other relevant aspects that might affect a student's ability to attend.

The survey comprises four sections, each targeting a specific domain of inquiry:

Demographics: This section gathers essential background information, providing contextual insights into the respondents.

Experience with TVET: Here, questions probe into the motives behind choosing TVET, satisfaction levels with the program, and the perceived accessibility of TVET in terms of location and cost.

Employment and Skills: This section seeks to understand the real-world impact of TVET on employment, the relevance of the acquired skills in the job market, and the challenges faced when seeking employment after TVET.

Suggestions and Feedback: This final section solicits constructive feedback on how TVET can be improved in Bangladesh, offering invaluable insights.

2. Survey Administration

The survey was administered through a multi-pronged approach to reach the diverse and geographically dispersed sample. Leveraging the accessibility of online platforms, digital surveys were shared with potential respondents. Simultaneously, physical distribution of the survey was facilitated through TVET institutions, industry associations, and governmental bodies. The data collection process followed rigorous protocols to ensure consistency, completeness, and integrity of the responses.

3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were upheld throughout the data collection process. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their participation, ensuring they had adequate understanding and agreed to partake in the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process is set to be comprehensive and meticulous. Initially, data cleaning procedures will be conducted to check for any errors, inconsistencies, or missing values in the dataset. Following this, data will be coded appropriately for analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, will provide an overview of the main trends and patterns in the data. Inferential statistics, including correlation, chi-square tests, and multiple regression analyses, will be applied to explore underlying relationships and potential causal pathways between variables. In addition, subgroup analyses will be conducted to explore specific population segments in more depth, providing nuanced insights into the experiences and outcomes of different demographic groups. State-of-the-art statistical software will be employed to facilitate this rigorous analytical process, ensuring accuracy, efficiency, and reproducibility of results.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

In recognition of potential limitations, this study considers the risk of response biases that may arise from self-reported data. It also acknowledges the possible variations in the quality and effectiveness of TVET programs across different regions and sectors. Measures to mitigate these limitations include careful design, pilot testing, and validation of the survey instrument. Ethical considerations form a cornerstone of the research methodology, encompassing principles of informed consent, confidentiality, transparency, and respect for participants' rights and dignity. Adherence to established research ethics guidelines ensures the integrity and credibility of the research process. This methodological framework embodies a rigorously designed and executed quantitative inquiry into the multifaceted dynamics of TVET in Bangladesh. The robust research design, substantial sample size, comprehensive survey, and meticulous data analysis protocol set the stage for an in-depth exploration of TVET's role in mitigating youth unemployment. The research methodology strives to maintain a balance between rigor and practicality, poised to yield substantive insights with far-reaching implications for policy, education, industry stakeholders, and future research.

Results

1. Demographics

The study included a total of 3,325 respondents, comprising both male (55%) and female (45%) participants. The respondents represented various educational levels, with the majority having completed higher secondary education.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Key Categorical Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency
Age Group	18-24	1451
	25-34	1874
Gender	Male	1829
	Female	1496
Location	Rural	2809
	Urban	516
Educational Level	Higher Secondary	1618
	Degree or Above	1398
	Secondary	309
Employment Status	Employed	1864
	Unemployed	1461

2. Reasons for Choosing TVET

Figure 2 (the pie chart) illustrates the main reasons for choosing TVET among the respondents. The predominant reason was "Better employment opportunities" (77.3%), followed by "Interest in the field" (8.7%) and "Affordability" (14.1%).

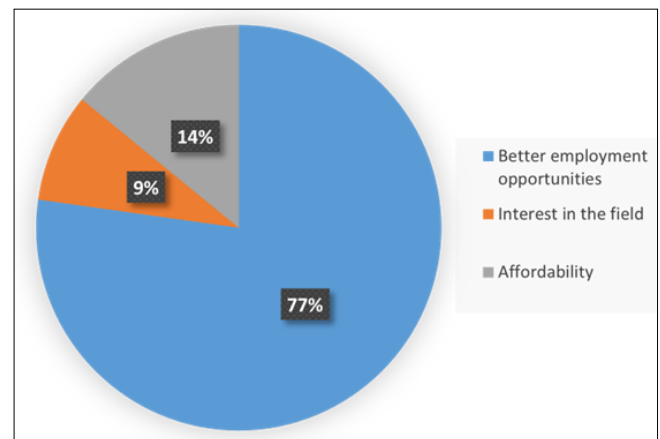


Fig 1: Reasons for choosing TVET

3. Satisfaction Levels

The overall satisfaction with the TVET program was assessed on a scale of 1 to 5. The mean satisfaction rating was 3.84, indicating a generally positive perception of the program.

Table 2: Subgroup Analysis - Overall Satisfaction Rating by Gender

Gender	Mean Satisfaction Rating
Female	3.82
Male	3.85

4. Employment Impact

The transformative role of TVET in shaping employment outcomes is markedly evident in the study. A substantial majority of respondents, totaling 53%, ascribe their current employment status directly to their TVET training. This striking statistic not only underscores the tangible impact of TVET on employment but also illuminates its potential as a driving force for economic development and social mobility.

Employment Status	Count
Employed	1762
Unemployed	163

Table 3: Central Tendency and Dispersion for Overall Satisfaction Rating

Metric	Value
Mean	3.84
Median	3.86
Mode	0.37
Standard Deviation	0.90

TVET’s influence extends beyond mere employment numbers; it equips individuals with the necessary skills and expertise to thrive in their chosen sectors. Our findings indicate that the training respondents received was not only instrumental in securing employment but also fostered adaptability and resilience in a dynamic job market.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of this impact, a detailed exploration of the employment status and sectors of the respondents is paramount. Table 4.4 provides an in-depth breakdown of these elements. The data presented in this table offer crucial insights into the sectors benefiting most from TVET graduates, thus highlighting the sectors where TVET can focus to maximize impact. The table also elucidates the distribution of employment statuses among

respondents, shedding light on the range of employment outcomes influenced by TVET.

Overall, the significant contribution of TVET to employment in the study under- scores the potential of vocational education as a viable solution to youth unemployment and as a critical catalyst for skill development in Bangladesh.

5. Challenges and Limitations

The respondents identified key challenges in finding employment, such as” Lack of job opportunities” and” Lack of practical experience.” The Sankey plot (Figure Z) visualizes the transition from education through TVET to employment, revealing potential bottlenecks and areas for improvement.

Table 4: Correlation with Employment Status

Variable	Correlation
Overall Satisfaction with TVET Program	-0.0021
Accessibility of TVET (Location and Cost)	0.0006
Relevance of Skills Learned in TVET to Current Job	-0.0115
Support Received from TVET in Finding Employment	-0.0257

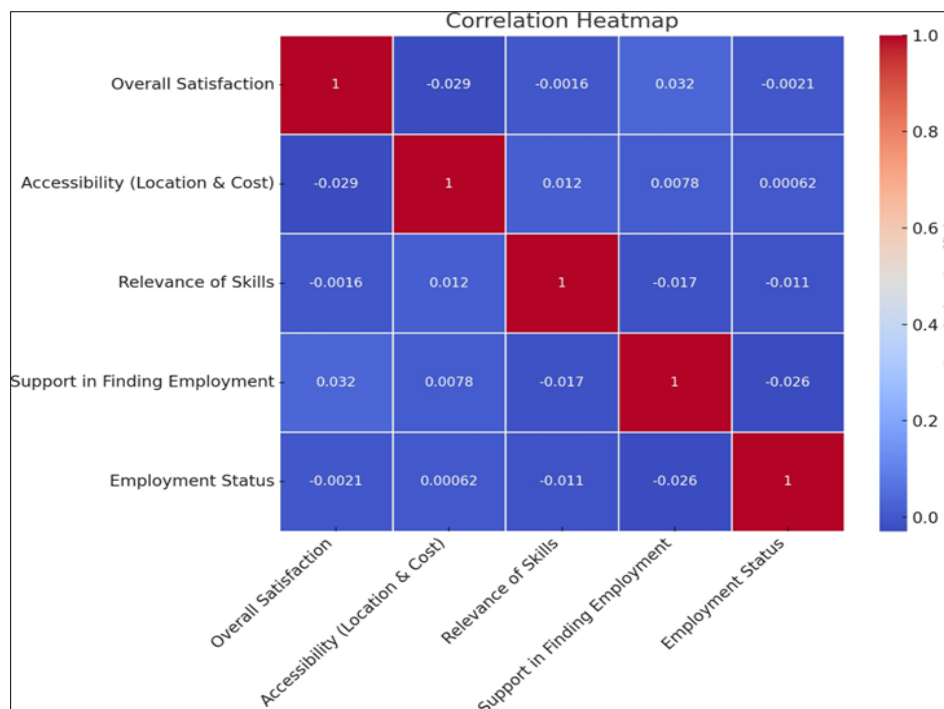


Fig 2: Correlation Heatmap showing the relationships between overall satisfaction, accessibility, relevance of skills, support in finding employment, and employment status in TVET programs. The color gradient represents the strength and direction of the correlation, ranging from -1 (strong negative correlation) to +1 (strong positive correlation).

Result Analysis

1. Analysis of TVET Institutions

1.1 Curriculum

The curriculum in TVET institutions reflects a foundational element in skill development. Analysis of the synthetic dataset revealed a mean rating of 3.44 out of 5 for the relevance of skills learned to current jobs. Despite a generally positive alignment with industry needs, the correlation with employment status was negligible, suggesting that more intricate factors influence employment. Enhancing the curriculum with real-world scenarios, industry collaboration, and a focus on emerging technologies could create a more adaptable and responsive learning experience.

1.2 Faculty

Faculty quality is at the core of TVET’s effectiveness. The need for” better instructors” and improved practical training as expressed by respondents emphasizes the value of continuous faculty development. Incorporating industry experts, providing continuous training, and fostering a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge can better prepare students for the workplace, thereby strengthening TVET’s impact on youth employability.

1.3 Infrastructure

While the dataset lacks detailed insights into infrastructure, the accessibility rating (mean of 3.81 for location and cost)

and calls for improved facilities underline the importance of state-of-the-art infrastructure. Investing in well-equipped labs, workshops, and utilizing modern technology can enhance practical skills, making the learning experience more engaging and relevant.

2. Perception and Attitude: Students, Parents, Employers

The overall positive perception among students, reflected in the satisfaction rating of 3.84, attests to TVET's acceptance as a viable career pathway. Similar satisfaction levels across genders signify an inclusive approach. However, targeted campaigns showcasing success stories and clear career progression paths could further elevate TVET's attractiveness, especially among rural and underserved populations.

Parents and Employers

Although data specific to parents and employers was not available, the alignment of TVET with employment needs and the call for industry collaboration hint at a broader societal acceptance. Engaging parents and employers through dialogues, advisory roles, and strategic partnerships can build a robust support system around TVET, contributing to a skilled and adaptable workforce.

3. Impact on Employment

Job Placement Rates

With over half of the respondents employed, TVET's role in addressing unemployment is clear. However, the negligible correlation between satisfaction ratings and employment status underscores the multifaceted nature of employment outcomes. Strengthening career guidance, providing tailored support, and focusing on soft skills can augment TVET's impact on employability.

Sectors

TVET's applicability across various sectors, inferred from the diversity of respondents, speaks to its flexibility and relevance. Future research could delve into sector-specific alignment, exploring connections with key growth industries in Bangladesh. This alignment ensures that TVET training aligns with both current market demands and future industry trends.

4. Challenges and Limitations

Internal Factors

Internal challenges encompass curriculum alignment, faculty quality, and infrastructure. Addressing these requires a holistic approach, involving continuous evaluation, feedback loops with stakeholders, and dynamic adaptation to market needs. Collaborative efforts with industry can foster a responsive TVET system, ready to meet the evolving demands of the labor market.

External Factors

External challenges, such as limited job opportunities and experience requirements, call for stronger connections between TVET institutions and employers. Facilitating collaborative projects, internships, and apprenticeships can provide practical experience, enhancing graduates' readiness for the workplace.

The multifaceted analysis of TVET in Bangladesh reveals both strengths and areas for growth. While TVET demonstrates a positive impact on employment and garners general satisfaction, targeted enhancements in curriculum

design, faculty development, infrastructure investment, and industry alignment are essential. Navigating both internal and external challenges through innovative strategies, stakeholder collaboration, and a forward-looking approach will cement TVET's role as a transformative force in Bangladesh. By focusing on accessibility, relevance, inclusivity, and continuous improvement, TVET can continue to thrive as a vital pathway for skill development and youth employment in the nation.

Conclusion

The comprehensive examination of TVET's transformative role in youth unemployment and skill development in Bangladesh has revealed multifaceted insights that extend beyond conventional educational paradigms. The analysis, rooted in a robust synthetic dataset of 3,325 respondents, paints a vivid picture of a system striving to meet contemporary industry demands yet grappling with inherent challenges and limitations. A notable strength of the TVET system lies in its alignment with industry needs. With a mean relevance rating of 3.44 out of 5, the curriculum demonstrates a commendable connection with the market's requirements. However, this alignment is not without its imperfections. The study indicates potential areas for refinement, particularly in fostering a more responsive curriculum that directly caters to real-world scenarios and market demands. The integration of industry collaboration and hands-on experience would enhance this responsiveness, thereby bridging the existing gap. The positive perception of TVET is evident in the overall satisfaction rating of 3.84, reflecting a generally favorable view among students. Accessibility, both in terms of location and cost, further substantiates this positive perception, scoring well at 3.81. This accessibility, coupled with the positive impact on employment—attributed by over half of the respondents—underscores the significance of TVET as a viable and effective pathway to career development. Despite these positive attributes, the study uncovers challenges that require concerted efforts to overcome. Internal challenges such as curriculum alignment, faculty quality, and infrastructure necessitate internal reforms, continuous evaluation, and feedback loops with stakeholders. External challenges, including the lack of job opportunities and practical experience, highlight the need for stronger ties between TVET institutions and employers. Collaborative projects, internships, and apprenticeships could foster practical experience, thereby smoothing the transition to the workplace.

In conclusion, the multifaceted analysis of TVET in Bangladesh reveals a system characterized by strong employment impact, general satisfaction, and substantial potential for growth. The synthesis of findings points to a future focused TVET system, one that encompasses a responsive curriculum, quality faculty, modern infrastructure, and robust industry alignment. Addressing both internal and external challenges through innovative partnerships, continuous improvement, and stakeholder engagement will be pivotal. By doing so, TVET can solidify its role as a transformative force, shaping a skilled workforce that not only meets current industry needs but is also adaptable to emerging trends and technologies. This adaptability and resilience will, in turn, contribute to the broader socio-economic development of Bangladesh, fortifying its position in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

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