

# STRENGTHENING WORK-BASED LEARNING TO BRIDGE THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION: ADDRESSING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN KENYA'S CENTRAL REGION TVETS

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## Abstract

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a critical link between classroom learning and labor market readiness within Kenya's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. Despite a robust policy foundation through the TVET Act (2013) and the Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) framework, implementation challenges persist, especially in Kenya's Central Region. Only 25% of employers engage in WBL, with rural areas such as Nyandarua and Laikipia recording placement rates below 15%. The study used a mixed-methods approach—combining institutional data from Mukurwe-ini Technical Training Institute, interviews with employers and TVET administrators, and a review of global models from Germany, Switzerland, India, and South Korea. Findings revealed fragmented governance among regulatory bodies, high employer supervision costs, rural disparities, and gender-based dropout rates of up to 65%. The paper recommends establishing a National WBL Agency, developing regional placement hubs, offering employer tax incentives, and deploying mobile certification units. These interventions aim to raise placement rates to 80%, enhance inclusivity, and align Kenya's WBL with Vision 2030 and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda.

**Keywords:** Work-Based Learning, TVET, Employer Engagement, Central Kenya, Skills Development

## 1.0 Introduction

Work-Based Learning (WBL) provides the practical bridge between theoretical training and real work environments. It strengthens employability, productivity, and innovation—key components of Kenya's Vision 2030 industrialization goal. However, in the Central Region, WBL implementation faces multiple barriers. Industries remain reluctant to participate due to limited incentives and unclear policy support, while rural counties such as Nyandarua and Laikipia suffer from limited industrial presence. Additionally, the overlapping roles of TVETA, NITA, and TVET-CDACC have created administrative inefficiencies that delay certification and discourage participation.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This study is guided by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and the Social Partnership Model. Human Capital Theory explains that employers invest in WBL when they perceive measurable returns, such as improved productivity or reduced recruitment costs. The Social Partnership Model underscores that successful WBL systems—like those in Switzerland and Germany—are founded on collaboration among training institutions, employers, and government agencies. However, Kenya's fragmented structure limits such partnerships. Global benchmarks show that countries like Germany, Rwanda, and India have successfully implemented centralized agencies and digital platforms that Kenya can adapt to its regional needs.

### 3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design integrating both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were drawn from Mukurweini Technical Training Institute (TTI), TVET Authority reports (2020–2024), and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 stakeholders, including TVET administrators, employers, and officials from NITA and TVETA. Institutional placement records revealed disparities such as 12% rural placements compared to 61% in urban areas. Data were coded thematically using NVivo, and descriptive statistics were computed in Excel.

### 4.0 Findings

The findings highlight notable policy progress and persistent challenges. The TVET Act (2013) institutionalized industrial attachment, and the CBET framework improved flexibility and certification. However, overlapping mandates among TVETA, NITA, and TVET-CDACC cause certification delays averaging 5.2 months. Only 25% of firms in the Central Region participate in WBL, with 68% citing high costs as deterrents. Rural counties record placement rates as low as 12%, while female dropout rates reach 65%. Over 80% of informal artisans remain uncertified, limiting their labor mobility.

### 5.0 Discussion

The study found that the effectiveness of WBL in Kenya's Central Region depends heavily on governance alignment and employer incentives. Fragmented institutional arrangements undermine accountability, while limited engagement from employers weakens the linkage between training and labor market needs. Kenya can make progress by centralizing governance under a National WBL Agency and establishing regional WBL hubs in counties with limited industries. Employer tax credits, stipends for low-income trainees, and mobile certification units would enhance inclusivity and gender equity.

### 6.0 Recommendations

1. Establish a National WBL Agency to harmonize the roles of TVETA, NITA, and TVET-CDACC.
2. Develop Regional WBL Hubs in Nyeri, Kirinyaga, and Nyandarua counties.
3. Introduce employer tax credits and subsidize supervision costs.
4. Deploy mobile RPL units to certify informal workers.
5. Provide stipends and childcare support for women.
6. Develop a digital WBL platform to coordinate placements nationally.

### 7.0 Conclusion

Kenya's WBL system holds immense potential to transform youth employability and industrial competitiveness, but progress is hindered by fragmented governance and weak employer participation. The Central Region exemplifies both challenges and opportunities. Sustainable progress will require centralized coordination, employer-driven incentives, and inclusive region-based strategies aligned to Vision 2030 and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda.

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