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Amos Agbojo

amos.agbojo@fuoye.edu.ng

Federal University Oye Ekiti

Olayemi Abiodun-Oyebanji

University of Ibadan

Jacob Opele

Federal University Oye Ekiti

Ndubuisi Ugwu

Federal University Oye Ekiti

Hammed Adeyanju

Tai Solarin University of Education

Research Article

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Posted Date: November 25th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11379565/v1

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

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Amos Agbojo (corresponding author)
Department of Educational Management & Business Studies
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
amos.agbojo@fuoye.edu.ng

Olayemi Abiodun-Oyebanji
Department of Educational Management
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
olayemi.oyebanji@yahoo.com

Jacob Opele
Department of Library and Information Science
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
jacob.opele@fuoye.edu.ng

Ndubuisi Ugwu
Department of Health Education
Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
ndubuisi.ugwu@fuoye.edu.ng

Hammed Adeyanju
Department of Educational Management, College of Specialised and Professional Education, Tai Solarin Federal University of Education, Ijagun, Nigeria
adeyanjuhi@tasued.edu.ng

Abstract

This research provides a comprehensive evaluation of community-level rehabilitation programmes for many youths who have to spend their daytime doing street trading, housework, agriculture or other income-generating activities instead of going to school and later joining the technical and vocational schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. The research was carried out using targeted interviews for 16 participants in four selected communities in Ogun State, Nigeria. The target participants are a community leader, one religious leader, an out-of-school youth and one returnee-student, purposively sampled in each of the selected community, mapping out the best practices and strategies used for the outreach, mentorship, and the after-school programmes. A descriptive phenomenological qualitative approach was adopted, while 'Strategies for Educational Equitable Access Interview Guide' (SEEAIG), consisted of two themes: rehabilitation challenges and alternative pathways; perceived roles of community and religious leaders served as instrument for

data collection. Data were analysed thematically through content analysis. Rehabilitation goes beyond the recovery of cognitive and academic skills as it also includes the development of psychosocial resilience and inclusivity through training centres. The results highlight the importance of recognising and restoring the physical, emotional and communication skills of the youths who have become alienated from the system of education. The implementation of rehabilitation programmes like bridge classes, moral support, faith-based initiatives, and vocational training has led to an increase in the number of students returning to school and staying in education for the long term. The article advocates for government investment in integrated community hubs and ongoing training for local facilitators, governed by youth-focused ethical frameworks. Stakeholders should address community and faith-based leadership reform, alignment of rehabilitation activities with national policy standards, and support robust monitoring to ensure the sustainability of gains embedded in technical and vocational education.

Keywords: Rehabilitation strategies, Religious leaders, Community leaders, Out-of-school youths, Faith-based advocacy

Introduction

Technical and vocational education (TVE) programmes aim to equip its recipients with indispensable knowledge, skills and attitudes for meaningful participation in work and life. The TVE entails the development of the capabilities that impact the effective psycho-motor and cognitive domains of youth in readiness for transition into local and national labour markets and satisfy their intrinsic and extrinsic desires, values, work and aspirations (Okun and Abiola, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). Nations like the USA, Japan, Germany and China have attained significant heights in the areas of industrialisation due to regular investment in technical and vocational education and training of its human resources (Shefiu and Ayika, 2019). It is clearly stipulated in the National Policy on Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2014) that the curriculum for TVE must be categorised into foundational and trade modules. The five components of each trade's curriculum are general education, workshop practices, industrial training/production work, entrepreneurship training and theory or corresponding courses. The TVE trades programmes consist of: Automobile, Building and Wood Work, Business, Computer, Electrical/Electronic, Hospitality, Mechanical, Printing (Creative Arts/Design), Textile, Agriculture trades (Yisa et al.

2022). Despite the availability of all the aforementioned industrial-driven training programmes and huge investments in TVE, many Nigerian youths could not access this functional education, while those who started dropped out before completion of the training programmes (UNICEF, 2024).

Africa accounts for a substantial share of the world's out-of-school youths (OoSY), particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite significant hard work by governments, international organisations, and development partners to expand access to TVE, millions of African youths persist excluded from schooling due to economic, social, cultural, and political factors (Ogunode et al., 2022). UNESCO reports that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of educational exclusion globally, with many youths never entering school or dropping out before completing primary education (United Nations Youths' Fund (UNICEF), 2024). In the same vein, Nigeria has constantly logged one of the highest numbers of OoSY internationally. It is disheartening to note that one in every five OoSY in the world is Nigerian, making the country a major contributor to the global education crisis (UNICEF, 2024). According to UNICEF, over ten million Nigerian youths of basic education age remain excluded from the formal education system.

Scholars have identified several factors contributing to the prevalence of OoSY across Africa. Poverty remains the leading factor, as many families cannot manage to pay for the cost of schooling materials such as uniforms, textbooks, transportation, and examination fees. In many rural communities, youths are engaged in farming, fishing, herding, and other income-generating activities to support household survival. Gender discrimination also limits educational opportunities for girls to access TVE, who habitually face premature marriage, teenage pregnancy, and cultural boundaries on schooling (Oyekan et al. 2023; Reuters, 2024). Nigeria has multidimensional and interconnected causes of OoSY. Many youths are duty-bound to engage in street hawking, domestic labour, farming, and other monetary activities as a substitute of attending school. Research has identified poor educational funding, corruption, weak implementation of TVE policies, insecurity, high fertility rates, and inadequate political commitment as major contributors to the problem (Reuters, 2024).

Although Ogun State is commonly viewed as one of the educationally advanced states in Southwestern Nigeria, the issue of OoSY from TVE remains a major concern. This is premised on the recent UNICEF report that approximately 43.3% of youths in Ogun State are out of school, a

situation that has caused concern among education policymakers and development partners (UNICEF, 2024). UNICEF Southwest Nigeria Advocacy reported that poverty and economic hardship continue to affect many households, limiting parents' ability to provide educational support for their youths in Ogun State. Family instability, orphanhood, parental neglect, insufficient TVE training materials and inadequate monitoring of school-age youths also contributed to educational exclusion (Findeisen et al., 2022 and Yisa et al., 2022). Educational exclusion will not only increase the likelihood of poverty, unemployment, social vices, and child exploitation but also reduce economic productivity in Ogun State. It also undermines the state's efforts toward achieving quality TVE, social development, and sustainable economic growth (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022). From the foregoing, there is therefore an urgent need for a study that will not only address the issue of OoSY but also proffer pragmatic measures to expand TVE access in Ogun State, a gap which this enquiry filled. This article therefore explored community-based rehabilitation strategies for OoSY.

Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) strategies refer to locally driven interventions designed to identify, support, rehabilitate, and reintegrate OoSY into TVE systems. These strategies emphasise community participation, shared responsibility, and the utilisation of local resources to address the multifaceted causes of educational exclusion (Bashir et al. 2020). Communities possess valuable knowledge about local educational challenges and are often better positioned to identify youths who have dropped out or have never enrolled in TVE programmes. The creation of local education systems through various groups such as committees, parent-teacher associations, village development groups, and religious organisations can enable the communities to access resources for and push the cause of more students attending schools. These groups also can track pupils' attendance, detect youths in danger of dropping out, and set up support systems that make TVE students continue their education.

One major rehabilitation tool that the researchers found useful is organising community information and sensitisation drives. Many youths have not returned to schools for TVE education because they adhered to culture, gender discrimination, early marriage, child labour, or misconceptions about the value of education. Community leaders, religious leaders, and local influencers can play significant roles in changing societal attitudes toward education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025). Through public meetings, radio programmes, community dialogues,

and advocacy campaigns, stakeholders can educate parents and guardians on the long-term benefits of TVE and the negative consequences of educational deprivation.

Theoretical and empirical framework

This study is anchored in Rogers Everett's Diffusion of Innovation (DoI) Theory (1962), which focuses on understanding how, why, and how quickly innovative ideas and technologies spread in a social system. It may take a long time for new technologies to be fully adopted and employed, and sometimes these efforts encounter strong opposition from certain segments of the community in which they are intended to be spread. The whole DoI theory consists of four main parts, namely innovation, communication system, time and social system.

Innovation encompasses all collections of goods and services, new or old, that, when used, provide the user with an unparalleled level of utilisation. Innovation, as used in this research work, embraces the practice by the government to adopt the use of religious and community leaders' communication systems to reach out to the OoSY and enhance their access to TVE. In addition, it equally involves creating levels of awareness or knowledge, persuasion, making a decision on adoption, implementation and confirmation of utilisation of innovations (rehabilitation strategies). Another component of dispersion which serves as a conduit for users to exchange information with one another is the tags communication system. It is a method that manages information flow between users. Rogers separated communication systems into mass media and interpersonal channels. The DoI increases the speed and quality of the communication mechanism. Rogers argues that the interpersonal channel is more important for the dissemination of new innovations or technology. It is against this background that this article posits that most of the innovation in the TVE training facilities and skills acquisition will be diffused through interpersonal channels to the OoSY hosting communities. The adopter classification and use rate are really recorded by the time component of the innovation dissemination process. In addition, it records the duration of an innovation from the moment of creation until it ceases to be original. It also measures how quickly the rehabilitation strategies invention spreads across society and is used by various users (OoSY from TVE).

Rogers (2003) classified society's members into five categories based on their level of inventiveness. These groups consist of knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and

confirmation. Adoption of DoI Theory by TVE administrators, for instance, will prompt community leaders, parents and OoSY to take necessary actions toward utilisation of government TVE accessibility initiatives. This is because they will be well informed about the expected positive outcomes of what they do. The execution of the reformation and rehabilitation process will be improved by using the four components of diffusion research (innovation, communication system, time, and social system). While the innovation gives room for reformation of TVE activities, communication and social systems help in the rehabilitation of the OoSY. The time element then helps in the assessment of the effective management of the strategies to increase equal accessibility to qualitative education.

Economic support interventions also constitute a vital aspect of CBR. Poverty remains one of the leading causes of school dropout and non-enrollment. Communities can create scholarship programmes, education assistance funds, feeding programmes for their young, and material aid activities in order to lessen the burden on low-income families. Providing uniforms, textbooks, stationery, transportation, and education expenses can lead to TVE training involvement among disadvantaged youth increasing dramatically (Nwoke et al. 2024). Funds from local community saving groups and philanthropy will also be useful in maintaining these interventions. One more strategy which is also efficient is setting up different or non-conventional TVE training opportunities. OoSY who had been out of school for years may be too late to go back into their age-appropriate grades, so they may have problems being able to return (Garba, 2025). The community TVE centres, bridge schools, non-formal educational programmes and accelerated learning schemes offer youths the basic literacy, math, and life skills which are so critical for their success in formal TVE School afterwards. These types of educational support programmes help the students' transition into formal schooling while also giving them the time to catch up on their learning deficiencies (Alkali, 2023).

Counselling and psycho-social service provision can also help to make the rehabilitation of OoSY more successful. For example, many Out-of-School Youths go through situations such as being in a state of distress, trauma, neglect, having been abused, displacement, experiencing feelings of being worthless, etc. Community counsellors, social workers, teachers, and other trained volunteers might have these young people emotionally supported, helping them overcome their personal problems (Aniche et al. 2023). Psychological counselling can significantly raise

student motivation, help them to be more independent and self-assured, etc, and make them be positive towards TVE training. If the parents cause the students' absenteeism through domestic problems, family counselling is very relevant. Similarly, the level of engagement among parents of OoSY is also critical in this kind of rehabilitation approach. Parents or caregivers are the ones mainly responsible for the youths' participation in school (Alkali, 2023).

Gaining support from the different sectors of society will help communities and schools implement their TVE rehabilitation activities effectively (Agbojo et al. 2026 and Keijzer et al., 2022). Community-based rehabilitation needs support from teachers, local authorities, NGOs, CBOs, religious bodies, and various development partners such as UNICEF Nigeria (2024), who all have the potential to contribute to an integrated approach that meets the educational/socio/mental health and/or economic needs of OoSY. These types of collaborations are good support for the development of comprehensive TVE reintegration programmes that can operate sustainably.

Bashir et al. (2020) say that the community-driven systems for ensuring the safety and care of children can also have a major role in the success of OoSY rehabilitation. Nigerian experienced terrorism, banditry, armed conflicts and displacement in recent time have further worsened educational exclusion because schools are often destroyed, pupils and teachers kidnapped, displaced, and youths involuntarily flee their communities (The PUNCH, 2026); hence, the need for proposed supportive conditions. Child labour, child trafficking, abuse, insecurity and exploitative situations often keep a child from going to school. Local watchdog organisations such as community policing, child protection committees, etc., and child advocacy groups working locally can identify and respond quickly to threats to educational participation. Communities should create environments for young person where they can feel safe and be protected.

Technical and vocational education combined with life skills training are supplementary measures that enable older out-of-school youth (OoSY), especially older adolescents not easily integrated back into school (NMEC, 2023). Consequently, community-based vocational training centres can impart learners with hands-on skills and trades like tailoring, carpentry, farming, technology, and business. Therefore, community-based vocational training centres could equip learners with practical skills and trades such as tailoring, carpentry, agriculture, information technology, and entrepreneurship. These programmes enhance employability, economic independence, and social inclusion while creating pathways for lifelong learning. Salvà-Mut et al.

(2020) remark that higher employment in the manufacturing sector tends to manifest lower TVE dropout rates and enhanced students' enrolment.

Ahmadu and Orisaremi (2025) found that a properly structured and sufficiently reinforced TVE could significantly tackle Nigeria's environmental, economic and social challenges. Community volunteers, education committees, and local leaders can track youths' attendance, academic progress, and well-being after reintegration. Regular monitoring helps identify emerging challenges and enables timely interventions that prevent relapse into school dropout. Continuous support and mentorship increase the likelihood of successful educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2023). Despite huge resources invested to enhance TVE accessibility and literacy advocacy in Nigerian states, along with various initiatives and programmes, OoSYiOS statistics (43.3 per cent) persisted. This study therefore explored how community-based rehabilitation strategies could be harnessed to fill the identified lacuna in TVE.

Objectives

The purpose of this research is to diminish the rate of OoSY in Ogun State (OoSYiOS), Nigeria, through community-based rehabilitation strategies. The explicit objectives of this study are to:

i. identify barriers hindering OoSY equitable access to TVE in rural and urban communities in Ogun State,
ii. examine the rural and urban out-of-school youths' experiences of accessing TVE in Ogun State,
iii. identify practicable community-based rehabilitation strategies for reducing OoSY's statistics in Ogun State,
iv. describe out-of-school youths and other stakeholders' perception on the effectiveness of the community-based rehabilitation strategies to support equitable access to TVE,
v. describe returnee-students and other stakeholders' perception on the effectiveness of the community-based rehabilitation strategies to support equitable access to TVE, and
vi. assess the roles of community and religious leaders in rehabilitating vulnerable youths to TVE centres in Ogun State.

Research questions

The following five research questions were raised and answered:

1. What barriers influence OoSY equitable access to TVE action in rural and urban communities in Ogun State?
2. How do rural and urban out-of-school youths describe their experiences of accessing TVE?
3. What practicable community-based rehabilitation strategies for reducing OoSY's statistics in Ogun State?
4. How do out-of-school youths and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of these community-based rehabilitation strategies in improving equitable access to TVE?
5. How do returnee-students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of these community-based rehabilitation strategies in improving equitable access to TVE?
6. How do community and religious leaders describe their roles in rehabilitating vulnerable youths and enhancing equitable access to TVE in Ogun State?

Methodology

Participants

A total of 16 participants in four selected communities (two rural and two urban) in Ogun State, South-West Nigeria (two rural and two urban) participated in the study. The target participants are OoSY and active students from TVE, religious and community leaders in Ogun State, Nigeria. The community leader, one religious leader, an out-of-school youth and one returnee-student were interviewed in each of the selected communities.

Procedure

This research adopted a descriptive phenomenological qualitative approach. The design was selected because the study sought to understand how participants experienced and interpreted educational exclusion, equitable access barriers, re-entry difficulties and their perception on the effectiveness of the community-based rehabilitation strategies to support equitable access. The multi-stage sampling protocol, comprising purposive and Snowball sampling methods, was used to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used to identify information-rich participants with direct experience of educational exclusion or recognised responsibility within the

community. Snowball referral was used, where necessary and appropriate, to identify additional eligible participants through trusted community dwellers. The sample was selected based on relevance and information richness rather than statistical representation. Eligibility criteria for out-of-school youths and returnees including age range (below 10 and18 years), period of educational exclusion/re-entry (between 1 and 5 years) and residency in the selected community. For local authorities, the duration of community/religious service used for eligibility is from five years and above. The rationale for selecting religious and community leaders is based on the fact that they are very close to the vulnerable youths and active students, and therefore will assist in identifying and locating them.

Instrumentation

The participants responded to semi-structured in-depth interviews titled 'Strategies for Educational Equitable Access Interview Guide' (SEEAIG) organised around educational barriers, re-entry difficulties and effectiveness of the perceived reforms, community-based support mechanisms. Sixteen interviews were conducted, one with each participant. Interviews were audio-recorded only where permission was obtained, transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary. The structure of SEEAIG consisted of two themes: Rehabilitation Challenges and Alternative Pathways; Perceived Roles of Community and Religious Leaders, with 16 items/statements exploring and assessing community-based rehabilitation strategies for promoting equity in access to technical and vocational education.

Data analysis

Themes and sub-themes were mapped out for the study; hence, the data were analysed thematically through content analysis. A participant-by-theme matrix was used to scrutinize convergence and divergence. The analysis distinguished participants' descriptions from the researcher's interpretations. Interpretive claims are therefore presented primarily in the Discussion rather than embedded in the reporting of raw findings.

Results

This part presents the results of the data obtained from OoSY, returnee-students, religious and community leaders in tables, and analysed in line with the research questions generated in the study.

304 **Table 1: Rehabilitation barriers**

Theme	Categories/Sub-themes	Frequency of mention	Illustrative evidence
Rehabilitation challenges and alternative pathways	**Barriers to re-entry**	16	"Vulnerable youths expressed shame of repeating classes."
	Age	13	"Some youths' age mismatch with classmates,"
	Stigma	14	"Youths describe early marriage hinders re-entry."
	Structural and household drivers	16	"Parents do not have the financial power."
	Chronic poverty	16	"Some families prefer children to learn a trade."
	Lack of funds	15	"Youths are being sent home for non-payment of fees."
	Learning materials	16	"Children eventually stayed away permanently after repeatedly being sent home for lack of learning materials."
	Willingness to return to TVE	15	"Youths are more than willing to go to school"
	Strong expression of willingness	16	"Many youths would seize the opportunity if supportive conditions exist."
	Rehabilitation centres and alternative pathways	16	"Participants support educational and vocational rehabilitation centres at local level."
	Proximity, trust, and moral authority	15	"Community and religious leaders can influence OoSY more effectively than mass/social media."

Table 1 shows the summary of theme 1 and sub-themes as well as the collective responses obtained from the respondents with their frequency counts. While all the respondents (16) expressed support for 15 out of the 16 statements under the five sub-themes, 13 respondents believed in age barrier and 14 participants viewed early marriage as a stigma. It therefore contains logical answers to research questions 1 to 4 as follows:

1. What barriers influence OoSY equitable access to TVE in rural and urban communities in Ogun State?

Theme 1. Rehabilitation challenges and alternative pathways

Sub-theme 1.1 Barriers to re-entry: shame, age, and stigma

The vulnerable respondents anticipate barriers such as shame of repeating classes, age mismatch with classmates, and early marriage, especially for older youth. This leads to proposals for changing schools, relocating to new environments, or channeling youth through separate rehabilitation centres to reduce stigma. For instant,

> ***OSY2:*** *"I could still remember vividly then in JSS 2 that my father pleaded with me to repeat the class that I failed but I insisted that I cannot be in the same class with my younger sister".*

2. How do rural and urban out-of-school youths describe their experiences of accessing TVE?

Sub-theme 1.2. Structural and household drivers of out-of-school youths' status

Across both groups, chronic poverty emerges as the most frequently cited driver of non-enrolment and dropout. Participants consistently describe parents who "do not have the financial power" to buy books, uniforms and learning materials or to meet admission and levies, despite nominal free education. Among out-of-school youths, the issue of the inability to pay is viewed from their own, day-to-day perspective: they tell stories of how they were sent home multiple times simply for not having paid fees or bought the required school supplies, and eventually, they did not go to school at all. Poverty remains the leading factor, as many families cannot manage to pay for the cost of schooling materials such as uniforms, textbooks, transportation, and examination fees.

OSY1: "*My parents did not have funds to buy books, school uniform and learning materials for me and that was why I could not go to school".* ***RS2: "****Because my mum could not fund my education after the demise of my dad, I have to stop schooling and engaged in hard labour in the farm which requires drinking of alcohols during raining season until my pastor encouraged me to go back to school from my little savings".*

This implies that many youths are duty-bound to engage in street hawking, domestic labour, farming, and other monetary activities as a substitute for attending school and to support household survival.

Sub-theme 1.3 Strong expressed willingness to return to TVE

Both the rural and urban OoSY repeatedly state they are willing or "more than willing" to return to technical and vocational training college, driven by shame, regret, and comparison with progressing siblings. Community and religious leaders agree that many youths would seize the opportunity if supportive conditions existed. This contradicts any assumption that out-of-school youths are uniformly disinterested in TVE.

OSY2: *Yes, I am more than willing to go back to school. This is because I am not pleased with my current situation. All my younger ones have gone far with their education".* ***RS4:*** *Yes. I had the willing to come back to school because I was not happy with the condition, I find myself. I felt unfulfilled and sometimes being aggressive against my younger ones who are doing well academically".*

3. What practicable community-based rehabilitation strategies for reducing OoSY's statistics in Ogun State?

Sub-theme 1.4 Rehabilitation centres and alternative pathways

All groups strongly support educational and vocational rehabilitation centres at ward, local government, or educational zone levels, with incentives. These centres are seen as ways to: provide remedial classes and skills training; avoid the embarrassment of re-entering former schools; leverage proximity to maintain attendance and transform dropouts into useful citizens. This suggests that a dual pathway such as academic catch-up and vocational skills may be necessary to accommodate diverse ages and interests. This result could be due to the fact that rapid urbanisation,

migration, and the growth of informal settlements have also created barriers to educational access, particularly among vulnerable populations.

> ***OSY4:*** *"Yes, I will go back to school if there is a remedial class for me to cover the lost grand".* ***RS3:*** *It was easy for me to return back to school because my parents relocated from rural to urban area two years ago. There was no technical college in our village".* ***RL2:*** *"Provision of educational rehabilitation centers at local government and ward levels with incentives for the affected children will keep them till the end of their programmes".* ***CL4:*** *"Provision of vocational training centers at local government level with incentives will make the dropout children to change their mind because of the proximity and keep them in school till the end. The concerned students might be reformed and be useful to themselves and the community".*

4. How do out-of-school youths and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of these community-based rehabilitation strategies in improving equitable access to TVE?

Sub-theme 1.5 Proximity, trust, and moral authority

All four groups strongly believe that community leaders and religious leaders can influence OoSY more effectively than mass/social media. Reasons given include: physical proximity and daily contact; ability to invite parents and youths for direct dialogue; capacity to organise town-hall meetings and sensitisation; moral and spiritual authority as "fathers" or custodians of community values. The out-of-school youth themselves express higher confidence in local leaders than in government or media promises. The result implies that most of the innovation in the TVE training facilities and skills acquisition should be diffused through interpersonal channels to the OoSY hosting communities as proposed by the DoI theory.

> ***OSY1:*** *"Yes, If the government involve our community leader in solving the problem of out of school children, any parent and child who refuses to cooperate may be sanction in the community".* ***RS1:*** *"Yes, I have confidence and belief in my religious leaders than the government".* ***CL4:*** *"Both the pastors and imams have been preaching and praying for the out of school children in their various churches and mosques. Since they know them, they can help in inviting and motivating them to go back to school as their spiritual fathers. They will also help to follow them up".* ***RL3:*** *"The community leaders will identify and invite the concerned children and their parents for dialogue. They both live in the same community, therefore, follow-up and feedback on their educational progress can easily be obtained".*

5. How do returnee-students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of these community-based rehabilitation strategies in improving equitable access to TVE?

Sub-theme 1.6 Perceive the effectiveness of these community-based rehabilitation strategies

All the four returnee-students remark that local leaders have the potentials to inspire OoSY more than conventional methods (mass/social media). Their position is based on physical nearness and daily contact; ability to invite parents and youths for direct dialogue; capacity to organise town-hall meetings and sensitisation. The returnee-students express gratitude to their community leaders for the played in contacting and informing them of the TVE admission opportunities, used their good offices to influence government officers in charge of TVE and politicians to reabsorb them back to school, after more than two years of hopelessness. The result implies that respondents strongly believe in efficient communication, advocacy and follow-up roles of local leaders in diffusing innovations in the TVE as proposed by the DoI theory.

> ***RS3:*** *"I am a direct beneficiary of the sacrifices of my Kabiyesi (King) to ensure that no youth suffers educational exclusion in his community. He invited my dad and mum, insisted that I must go back to school, obtained application form for me and supported my transportation at resumption".*

Table 2: Community-based rehabilitation strategies

Theme	Categories/Sub-themes	Frequency of mention	Illustrative evidence
Perceived roles of community and religious leaders	**Roles of community leaders**	16	"Report parents who refuse to cooperate with government initiatives."
	Monitoring	15	"Setting up monitoring teams."
	Sanctions	14	"Applying community-level sanctions to erring parents and youths."
	Roles of religious leaders	16	"Religious leaders highlight their ongoing efforts."
	Faith-based advocacy	16	"Preaching about education."
	Prayers	16	"Praying for youths."

	Counselling	16	"Counselling families."
	Scriptural framework	16	"Using scriptures to emphasise the value of knowledge."

Table 2 indicates the summary of theme 2 and sub-themes alongside the responses from the participants as well as their frequency counts. While all the interviewees (16) responded in support of six out of the eight items under the two sub-themes, 15 respondents believe in the introduction of monitoring sanctions and 14 participants suggest the application of sanctions to erring parents and youths. It therefore presents a logical answer to research question 5 below:

6. How do community and religious leaders describe their roles in rehabilitating vulnerable youths and enhancing equitable access to TVE in Ogun State?

Theme 2: Perceived roles of community and religious leaders

Sub-theme 2.1 Roles of community leaders: monitoring, sanctions, and accountability

Community leaders envisage setting up monitoring teams and even applying community-level sanctions to "erring parents and youths" who refuse to cooperate with government initiatives. This indicates that local governance structures could be mobilised to enforce schooling norms, provided safeguards are in place to protect youths' rights and avoid abusive sanctions. Counselling services can enhance youths' motivation, improve their self-confidence, and foster positive attitudes toward learning in TVE. Family counselling may also be necessary to address domestic issues that contribute to school absenteeism or dropout.

> ***CL1:*** *"Community leaders will identify and invite the concerned children and their parents for dialogue. They both live in the same community, therefore, follow-up and feedback on their educational progress can easily be obtained".*

Sub-theme 2.2 Roles of religious leaders: faith-based advocacy and scriptural framing

Religious leaders state their constant work involving preaching about education, praying for youths, advising families with counselling, and quoting scriptures to underline the worthiness of knowledge. Based upon their experience of great trust, they advise that government programmes for out-of-school youths are done in cooperation with religious institutions. This faith-based

collaboration can serve as part of a community-rooted initiative. The study indicates that such community interventions can offer parenting education, literacy courses, and economic empowerment that help families become capable of supporting their children's education. When parents become aware that knowledge acquisition through education is of great importance and have sufficient funds, they are more able and willing to encourage their children to join and continue education; in that case, it can be technical or vocational education.

> ***RL2:*** *The religious leaders will preach the significance of knowledge and education with the support of the scriptures in the local language for better understanding. They will also advocate and counsel the out of school children to uphold government educational programmes.*

Discussion of findings

Expressed drivers of out-of-school youths and alternative routes

The findings reveal that poverty, the direct costs of schooling, and opportunity costs are major drivers of out-of-school youths (OoSY). Expenses associated with uniforms, textbooks, admission levies, transportation, and other learning materials constrain educational participation among economically disadvantaged households. The reported admission levy for technical and vocational education (TVE) further suggests a discrepancy between the policy ideal of free education and its practical accessibility. These findings align with Nwoke et al. (2024), Oyekan et al. (2023), and Reuters (2024), who highlight poverty, inadequate learning resources, and the involvement of young people in income-generating activities as barriers to educational participation. Household responsibilities, including farming, hawking, domestic labour, and other informal work, further compel some youths to prioritise family survival over schooling.

The findings also indicate that repeated exclusion from school due to inadequate learning materials can result in permanent withdrawal. This underscores the need for targeted financial assistance and the provision of essential educational resources to prevent avoidable dropout. The inadequacy of some technical workshop facilities, tools, and instructional resources reported by Yisa et al. (2022) further highlights the importance of ensuring that TVE institutions are adequately equipped to support effective skills acquisition.

Beyond financial constraints, stigma and age-related concerns impede educational re-entry. Some youths fear ridicule for repeating classes, returning to former schools, or learning alongside younger students, while early marriage presents additional challenges for girls. Participants therefore favoured alternative schools, age-appropriate learning environments, and flexible educational arrangements. This finding supports NMEC (2023), which emphasises the potential of lifelong learning and skills-based programmes to provide alternative pathways for young people unable to return to conventional schooling. From the perspective of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory, the success of such alternatives depends partly on their acceptance, accessibility, and integration within the communities they are intended to serve.

Expressed willingness to attend rehabilitation and remedial centres

A major finding is the expressed willingness of many OoSY to resume education or vocational training. Their reported dissatisfaction with their current circumstances and regret over leaving school suggest that disengagement does not necessarily reflect a lack of interest in learning. Rather, limited access to affordable, flexible, and socially acceptable educational opportunities appears to be a significant constraint. This finding highlights the importance of sustained guidance, monitoring, and support, consistent with UNESCO (2023), in facilitating educational reintegration and preventing subsequent dropout.

Participants across the stakeholder groups supported establishing educational and vocational rehabilitation centres at ward, local government, or educational-zone levels. They envisaged centres that provide remedial instruction, preparation for re-entry or certification, vocational training, subsistence support, and learning environments that minimise stigma. These preferences indicate the need for community-based models that accommodate learners' different ages, circumstances, and educational needs. The finding is consistent with Bashir et al. (2020), who emphasise the contribution of community-based child-protection mechanisms to rehabilitation initiatives.

The findings further suggest that educational exclusion has implications beyond individual learning, potentially reinforcing poverty, unemployment, exploitation, and reduced economic productivity. Consequently, community-based rehabilitation should integrate educational support with vocational skills development and appropriate social assistance. The strong support expressed

by youths, religious leaders, and traditional rulers also underscores the perceived relevance of TVE to human-capital development and local economic advancement. In line with Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory, successful implementation requires community acceptance, stakeholder participation, and effective dissemination of information about available educational alternatives. Extending TVE policies and rehabilitation services to grassroots communities may therefore improve access and reduce educational vulnerability.

Local leadership and its reformative roles

The findings identify community and religious leaders as influential actors in addressing educational exclusion. Participants perceived these leaders as more effective than mass and social media in reaching OoSY because of their physical proximity, shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds, established relationships, and capacity for direct engagement with families. Their moral authority and familiarity with local circumstances may facilitate identification, mobilisation, counselling, and follow-up. These findings support Alkali (2023), who highlights the influence of parents and caregivers on young people's educational participation, and reinforce the importance of sustained monitoring and mentorship in rehabilitation programmes.

Community leaders proposed monitoring mechanisms and community-level accountability measures to encourage school attendance. Although such structures may strengthen local responsibility for education, enforcement measures should remain lawful, proportionate, and protective of young people's rights. The findings also emphasise the need for psychosocial counselling, family engagement, and parental empowerment. Given the emotional and social difficulties some OoSY experience, trained counsellors, teachers, social workers, and community volunteers could provide appropriate support to rebuild confidence and encourage sustained participation in TVE. Family counselling may also help address household-related factors contributing to absenteeism and dropout.

Religious leaders reported using sermons, prayer, and family counselling to promote education. Their established relationships with community members provide a potential foundation for integrating educational advocacy into existing religious and moral practices. The findings suggest that government programmes may achieve greater community acceptance when implemented through trusted religious and traditional institutions. This interpretation aligns with

Nwoke et al. (2024) on the potential contribution of community-based funding groups and local philanthropists to educational interventions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate the importance of collaboration among government agencies, schools, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, religious institutions, and development partners. Coordinated partnerships can mobilise resources, strengthen accountability, and address the interconnected educational, social, and economic barriers confronting OoSY. Community-based leadership should therefore complement, rather than replace, formal government responsibility for accessible and adequately resourced education and vocational training.

Conclusion

The recent research concludes that stigma associated with repeating classes, age disparities, and early marriage constitute significant barriers to educational reintegration among out-of-school youths (OoSY). Nevertheless, their expressed willingness to resume TVE highlights the potential of accessible, community-based rehabilitation centres supported by appropriate incentives. Community advocacy, monitoring, accountability, and culturally and religiously informed engagement also emerged as promising strategies for facilitating educational reintegration.

Accordingly, the study recommends that government collaborate with community and religious leaders to strengthen educational advocacy and expand access to functional TVE programmes. Given these leaders' proximity, trust, and moral influence, they should be actively involved in identifying, mobilising, and supporting OoSY. Furthermore, TVE stakeholders should prioritise establishing educational and vocational rehabilitation centres at ward, local government, and educational-zone levels, providing flexible learning opportunities, vocational training, and appropriate incentives to promote equitable access and sustained participation.

Policy implications for TVE stakeholders

The findings on community-based rehabilitation strategies for promoting equity in access to technical and vocational education (TVE) among rural and urban out-of-school youths in Ogun State have the following policy implications:

i. Establishment of community-based educational and vocational rehabilitation centres. The Ogun State Government should establish accessible rehabilitation centres at ward, local government, and educational-zone levels. These centres should provide remedial education, vocational skills training, flexible learning pathways, and opportunities for reintegration into formal education.

ii. Review of education-related fees and financial barriers. The government should review admission fees, levies, examination charges, and other associated costs that prevent disadvantaged youths from accessing TVE. Financial assistance, scholarships, free learning materials, and transportation support should be provided to economically vulnerable learners.

iii. Introduction of flexible and alternative learning pathways. TVE policies should accommodate over-age learners, youths who have missed several years of schooling, and those unable to participate in conventional full-time programmes. Flexible timetables, accelerated learning, remedial classes, and competency-based vocational training should be introduced to facilitate their educational reintegration.

iv. Integration of psychosocial support and anti-stigma measures. Education authorities should develop policies that address shame, low self-esteem, age differences, and the fear of returning to former schools. Counselling, peer mentoring, family support, and non-discriminatory admission practices should be institutionalised to create a welcoming learning environment for returning youths.

v. Institutionalisation of community-based monitoring and follow-up. Local governments should establish community education committees to monitor enrolment, attendance, retention, and programme completion. Such committees should collaborate with schools, TVE institutions, parents, and social welfare agencies to identify emerging difficulties and provide timely support to vulnerable learners.

vi. Protection of learners' rights in community enforcement mechanisms. Although the findings indicate support for community-level accountability and sanctions, policies should prioritise counselling, dialogue, parental engagement, and social support rather than punitive measures. Any enforcement mechanism must protect young people's rights, prevent abuse, and avoid further marginalisation of economically disadvantaged families.

Abbreviations

CBOs	Community-based organizations
CBR	Community-based rehabilitation
FRN	Federal Republic of Nigeria
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NMEC	National commission for mass literacy, adult and non-formal education
OoSY	Out-of-school youth
RS	Returnee-students
CL	Community leaders
RL	Religious leaders
OoSYiOS	Out-of-school youth in Ogun State
TVE	Technical and vocational education

Author contributions

All the authors collaboratively designed the study, while AA, JO and OA collected the data. AA, NU and HA worked together on the data analysis and drafted the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

The authors declare no external funding received for this research.

Data availability

The data used during this enquiry are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethics approval

The authors declare that all procedures involving human participants were conducted in strict accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional framework and the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments. Because this enquiry was retrospective and non-interventional, and all participant data were fully anonymized, the Federal University Oye-Ekiti Research Ethics Committee waived formal approval from an autonomous ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, or waived by the institutional authority because the data were analysed anonymously. The authors therefore confirm that this enquiry was performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations.

Consent to participate

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. For participants under 16 years of age, informed consent was obtained from their parent or legal guardian.

Consent to publish

Informed consent to publish was obtained from all individual participants (and their parents or legal guardians in the case of minors under 16 years) for whom identifiable personal data or images are included in this manuscript.

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