



EMPOWERING NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH LEADERSHIP CLUBS, LIFE SKILLS AND TVET TRAINING: A PATHWAY TO REDUCING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigeria faces a pressing youth unemployment crisis, with an estimated **40-45% of youth aged 15-34 currently unemployed**. Compounding this, **70-75% of Nigerian youth complete secondary education**, yet only a fraction (15-20%) progress to tertiary institutions, meaning the vast majority directly enter a labour market for which they are inadequately prepared. Secondary schools therefore represent a critical space to equip young people with the skills needed for sustainable livelihoods.

Evidence from LEAP Africa's iLEAD Programme, which has since 2018 reached over 7,000 students and 300 teachers across Lagos, Akwa Ibom, Sokoto States and the FCT, shows that structured interventions combining leadership clubs, life skills, entrepreneurship, and vocational training equip students with resilience, employability, and self-reliance. For example, **78% of students reported improved leadership skills, 76% developed business ideas, and 91% felt better prepared for life after secondary school**. Teachers also reported higher enthusiasm and stronger engagement with learners.

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This policy brief calls on the Federal Ministry of Education to:

- **Legislate the integration of Leadership Clubs** in all secondary schools.
- **Establish partnerships with accredited TVET providers** to modernise trade subjects and deliver practical, market-relevant skills.
- **Create a Directorate for National Leadership & Entrepreneurship for Adolescent Development (N-LEAD)** to coordinate nationwide implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of student leadership, entrepreneurship, and skills programmes.

Taken together, these reforms can transform Nigeria's secondary schools into hubs of opportunity, reducing youth unemployment and unlocking the country's demographic dividend.

Introduction

Nigeria is experiencing one of the highest youth unemployment rates globally, with two in five young people (aged 15–34) unemployed.¹ While 70–75% of Nigerian youth complete secondary education, only 15–20% progress into tertiary institutions, leaving the majority to transition directly into a labour market that is both saturated and unforgiving.² This raises a critical question: ***Is secondary school adequately preparing Nigerian youth for sustainable livelihoods?***

The evidence suggests otherwise. Studies have shown that the trade subjects, introduced into secondary schools in 2011, are poorly implemented, lacking qualified instructors, accredited centres, and relevant linkages to industries.³ Guidance and counselling units, which could have provided psychosocial support and career direction, are non-functional in most schools.⁴ Teachers themselves report low morale, insufficient support, and limited professional development opportunities in equipping students with life skills.^{4,5}

However, promising models exist. Studies from Nigeria and across Africa have demonstrated the transformative potential of embedding leadership development, entrepreneurial

thinking, and vocational skills within the secondary school experience.^{6,7} The iLEAD Programme, implemented in Nigerian secondary schools, provides strong evidence of what works.

Its structured Leadership Clubs improved students' leadership, entrepreneurship, and life skills, while fostering teacher enthusiasm and community engagement. Complementing this with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) delivered by accredited experts can offer practical pathways to employability. Together, **this approach aligns with national and global efforts to promote inclusive economic growth by fostering self-reliance, critical thinking, and adaptability among youth.**

This policy brief draws on findings from the iLEAD Programme and recent national and sub-national evidence to propose concrete policy recommendations aimed at bridging the critical skills gap, empowering youth, and ultimately, securing a brighter, more prosperous future for Nigeria.

Key findings

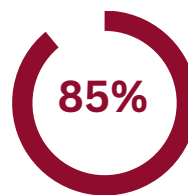
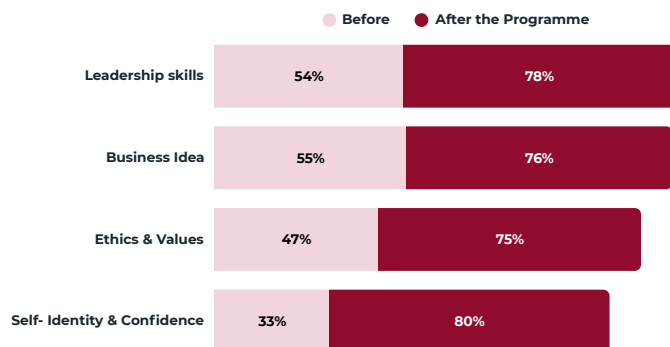
The evidence presented in this brief is primarily drawn from the evaluation⁸ and needs assessment reports⁹ of the recent iLEAD Programme implemented in Sokoto State from 2023 to 2024. Data collection employed a mixed-methods approach. These included questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with key stakeholders such as students, teachers, school administrators, parents, entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, community leaders, and senior officials; including directors and Honourable Commissioners; from the Ministries of Youth and Education. This was further complemented by a review of iLEAD programme data from Lagos, Akwa Ibom, and the FCT, spanning 2018 to 2023. Additional insights were drawn from recent national and sub-national studies on trade subjects, leadership development, and entrepreneurship education within Nigerian secondary schools. Below is a summary of findings:

1 Weak Implementation of Trade Subjects

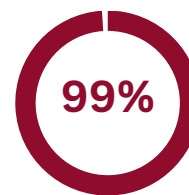
Over 60% of the schools lacked qualified instructors for trade subjects. Where they were offered, students often had limited choice, with little or no practical sessions.

2 Gaps in Guidance & Counselling

About 80% of schools surveyed had no functional guidance and counselling units. At the outset of the programme, many students reported a lack of mentorship on career and life choices. By the end of the intervention, however, 91% of students indicated they felt better prepared for life after secondary school.



Students **take their schoolwork more seriously** since starting the programme



Teachers reported the programme **made them better leaders than they were before**

3 Leadership & Life Skills Development

The programme enhanced students' soft skills. About 78% reported marked improvement in leadership abilities such as teamwork, public speaking, and problem-solving. Furthermore, 72% expressed greater confidence in decision-making and managing peer pressure.

4 Entrepreneurial Mindset & Vocational Skills

The programme cultivated a strong entrepreneurial spirit, with 76% of students developing a business idea by endline, a substantial increase from 55% at baseline. The TVET component equipped students with marketable skills (e.g., fashion design, catering, digital marketing), with some already generating income.

5 Improved Teacher Capacity & Mentorship

Teachers showed greater engagement and mentorship, fostering stronger connections with students and creating a more supportive learning environment. Notably, 91% of students reported feeling more supported by their teachers at endline, up from 79% at baseline.

6 Positive School Environment & Sustainability

The establishment of Leadership Clubs promoted peer-to-peer learning and contributed to sustaining the culture of leadership, collaboration, and innovation within the schools.



1 in 10

For every 10 students receiving vocational training, **at least 1 is already generating income**, demonstrating immediate economic impact and self-sufficiency.



90%

Over 90% of students **feel better prepared for life after secondary school**, a significant leap in career clarity and confidence.



Policy Recommendations

			Low	Medium	High
	Policy Options	Description	Ease of Implementation	Level of Impact	
1	Establish Leadership Clubs in all Secondary Schools	• Institutionalise Leadership Clubs to equip students with leadership, entrepreneurship, and life skills.			
2	Strengthen Curriculum Delivery through TVET Partnerships	• Establish partnerships with accredited TVET providers to modernise and strengthen the implementation of trade subjects, technology & innovation, and entrepreneurship in line with the new secondary school curriculum.			
3	Reinstate Guidance & Counselling through Leadership Clubs	• Use Leadership Clubs as a medium to deliver structured career guidance and psychosocial support in schools.			
4	Teacher Capacity Development	• Train and incentivise teachers to actively facilitate leadership and entrepreneurship learning.			
5	Public-Private Partnerships	• Leverage private sector and NGOs to co-finance and deliver leadership, entrepreneurship and TVET training.			
6	Create a Directorate for National Leadership & Entrepreneurship for Adolescent Development (N-LEAD)	• Led by the Federal Ministry of Education, this directorate will serve as a central platform for implementing policies on student leadership, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills. It will coordinate with state-level offices to drive implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.			

CALL TO ACTION

Nigeria's secondary schools are the crucible where 70% of our youth can be reached before they face the labour market. With millions of young people entering the workforce annually, we cannot afford to send them unprepared. The Federal Ministry of Education should act decisively to:

- **Legislate the integration of Leadership Clubs** in all secondary schools.
- **Establish partnerships with accredited TVET providers** to modernise and strengthen the implementation of trade subjects, technology & innovation, entrepreneurship in line with the new curriculum
- **Create a Directorate for National Leadership & Entrepreneurship for Adolescent Development (N-LEAD)** to coordinate nationwide implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The time is now: investing in these reforms will not only reduce youth unemployment but also strengthen Nigeria's social and economic stability.

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Partners



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Most importantly, we thank the young people who participated in iLEAD. Their resilience and growth remain the true inspiration for this work and the driving force behind our mission to equip Nigerian youth with skills for a brighter future.
