



ENABLERS OF STUDENT'S SATISFACTION WITH WORK PLACEMENT LEARNING TOWARDS SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION: A CASE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to determine the factors that may promote TVET students' satisfaction with WPL.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study utilised a qualitative design, employing interviews and focus groups to gather information from 23 final-year undergraduate TVET students who had completed a six-month WPL program. The goal was to understand the factors contributing to student's satisfaction with the overall work placement program and how it can enhance confidence for a seamless school-to-work transition upon graduation. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes related to factors influencing students' satisfaction with WPL in preparation for the transition to the workforce.

Research Limitation: The study's qualitative, open-ended surveys provide valuable insights; unfortunately, there are no quantitative indicators to determine general trends.

Findings: The thematic analysis revealed four main themes based on the research questions: positive WPL experiences, institutional support, acquisition of new skills for the future, and a favourable work environment.

Practical Implication: These findings have practical implications for universities and WPL host establishments. The results suggest that higher education institutions and industries should improve students' satisfaction with WPL to help them recognise their competencies before entering the workforce.

Social Implication: The practical experience gained through the WPL program can provide students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, opportunities to improve their socio-economic status.

Originality/Value: This paper provides a comprehensive examination of WPL satisfaction with the school-to-work transition, offering insights for industries, WPL providers, educational institutions, and students seeking work placements.

Keywords: *Satisfaction. student. TVET. work placement learning. work transition*



INTRODUCTION

Globally, the primary goal of TVET is to equip learners with the necessary skills for successful employment in a specific occupation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; UNESCO & ILO, 2002). In Nigeria, TVET programs play a vital role in training individuals with technical and vocational skills to help them transition from school to either paid employment or self-employment in their chosen fields (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Orji, 2015, 2021; Orji & Ogbuanya, 2018, 2022). However, learning models combining industry and higher education are becoming increasingly important today due to the rising unemployment rate among new graduates (Chukwuedo et al., 2024; Afolabi & Medu, 2023). To lessen unemployment rates and close the knowledge gap between TVET theory and practice, the Federal Government of Nigeria implemented its mandatory 6-month work placement learning (WPL) program. WPL has become a standard component of the Nigerian higher education system, particularly in the TVET field. Students in TVET departments can participate in WPL as part of their curriculum.

Work placement learning, also known as students industrial work experience scheme (Industrial Training Funds, 2013), internship (Adeosun et al., 2022; Arthur et al., 2022; Molino et al., 2020) or work-integrated learning (Chukwuedo et al., 2024) offers students a unique privilege- the opportunity to connect their academic knowledge with real industrial situations. WPL is a planned work experience program in which higher education institutions collaborate with industries or firms to provide students with a better understanding of day-to-day operations and exposure to practical work environments not typically found in the classroom. Generally, WPL programs aim to integrate classroom learning with real-world experiences, allowing students to learn by doing. This is achieved through direct engagement, immersive learning events, and the development of meaning by learners.

Beyond its primary goals, research shows that work placement learning (WPL) improves perceived employability (Otache & Edopkolor, 2022), greatly enhances engagement with practical skills (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022) and cultivates concrete learning behaviours (Brewer et al., 2022; Chukwuedo et al., 2023). Additionally, WPL has been demonstrated to enhance job preparedness (Kapareliotis et al., 2019), foster entrepreneurial behaviours (Eisenstein & Raz, 2021; Lantu et al., 2022), and facilitate career advancement (Hill et al., 2022). Evidence has also revealed that factors contributing to student satisfaction vary among disciplines. For example, Hussien and La Lopa (2018) identified key factors influencing student satisfaction with WPL among hospitality students. Meanwhile, Gupta et al. (2010) examined elements contributing to student satisfaction with internship experiences in marketing. Similarly, To and Lung (2020) investigated factors affecting internship satisfaction among Chinese students. While the quantitative nature of these studies has provided reliable results and a balanced picture of what factors may contribute to WPL



students' satisfaction, it has left us with little insight into how WPL participants perceive their own experiences. This lack of insight may explain why many of the problems encountered during WPL remain unsolved (Adeosun et al., 2022; Edet, 2020; Ejiofor et al., 2015; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Lee & Chao, 2013; Oladimeji et al., 2017).

In designing this study, we considered that understanding TVET students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences with WPL using a qualitative model would confirm existing findings and provide insight into how TVET students perceive the impact of the WPL experience on their future careers. Therefore, this study aims to enhance the understanding of WPL among TVET students by pinpointing the factors linked to increased student satisfaction with the WPL experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Work Placement Learning in TVET

Work placement learning (WPL) has become vital to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. WPL is globally acknowledged as a way to bridge the gap between theoretical education and practical application, enhancing students' employability and preparing them for the workforce (Otache & Edopkolor, 2022; Kapareliotis et al., 2019). The compulsory six-month WPL program in Nigeria aims to tackle youth unemployment by equipping TVET students with hands-on skills and experiences to complement their classroom learning (Chukwuedo et al., 2024).

Combining theoretical knowledge and practical experience is fundamental to effective TVET education. Studies show that WPL significantly improves students' readiness for future careers, fosters entrepreneurial thinking, and facilitates a smooth transition from education to the workplace (Eisenstein & Raz, 2021; Lantu et al., 2022). However, the success of these programs depends on several factors, such as institutional support, workplace dynamics, and the development of transferable skills (Hill et al., 2022).

Determinants of Student Satisfaction in WPL

Student satisfaction in WPL programs has been a key area of research, with various factors identified as contributors to positive outcomes. For instance, Hussien and La Lopa (2018) examined hospitality students' internship experiences, highlighting crucial factors of mentorship, a supportive workplace environment, and diverse tasks. Similarly, To and Lung (2020) explored how meaningful tasks and alignment with career goals influence satisfaction among Chinese students.



In Nigeria, Adeosun et al. (2022) and Oladimeji et al. (2017) emphasised the role of robust institutional support in promoting student satisfaction. This support includes pre-placement training, adequate supervision, and mechanisms for resolving conflicts during internships. Brewer et al. (2022) further noted that students who received constructive feedback and mentorship during their placements reported higher satisfaction and a stronger sense of employability.

The Role of Skill Acquisition and Employability

Skill acquisition during WPL is a significant factor in determining student satisfaction, as it directly affects their perceived employability. Chukwuedo and Ementa (2022) found that students engaged in hands-on, skill-based activities reported more positive placement experiences. Similarly, Kapareliotis et al. (2019) showed that internships offering exposure to industry-specific tools and practices greatly enhanced job readiness. Additionally, transferable skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving play a key role in WPL satisfaction. These skills make students more adaptable in professional settings and boost their confidence for entrepreneurial endeavours (Otache & Edopkolor, 2022). In Nigeria, entrepreneurial training during placements has inspired innovation and built career resilience (Eisenstein & Raz, 2021).

While quantitative research has provided valuable insights into WPL satisfaction, there is a lack of qualitative studies exploring students' personal experiences. For example, although studies by Gupta et al. (2010) and Lee and Chao (2013) offer solid statistical analyses, they fail to delve into the subjective perspectives of WPL participants. Adeosun et al. (2022) argued that without qualitative data, issues such as mismatched placements and insufficient supervision remain unresolved, limiting the effectiveness of these programs. Moreover, much of the current research focuses on specific fields, such as marketing and hospitality, leaving gaps in understanding the experiences of TVET students more broadly. To address these limitations, a qualitative approach is increasingly seen as essential for designing better strategies (Edet, 2020; Ejiofor et al., 2015). Thus, we considered that understanding TVET students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences with WPL using a qualitative model would confirm existing findings and provide insight into how TVET students perceive the impact of the WPL experience on their future careers.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Participant Selection

Using a qualitative methodology, this study investigates the experiences of fourth-year undergraduate TVET students who have participated in Work Placement Learning (WPL) in Nigerian enterprises. Guided by the WPL satisfaction model from Gupta et al. (2010) and Jean et al. (2012), the research focuses on factors such as individual attributes, institutional support, job characteristics, organisational climate, contextual influences, positive internship experiences,



conducive work environments, enhanced job prospects, skill acquisition, workplace comfort, and communication skills. A qualitative case study approach was selected to allow participants to openly share their perspectives, foster meaningful engagement, and provide a deeper understanding of student satisfaction with WPL as a pathway for school-to-work transition (Lizon et al., 2023; Samsudin et al., 2024).

Through a purposeful sample strategy, students from two specific public Nigerian universities were meticulously contacted. The participants were deliberately chosen among those who had completed Work Placement Learning (WPL) at medium or large-sized companies/industries with a proven track record of accepting students for over ten years. This stringent selection process was crucial as it ensured that the students could offer insightful perspectives on how instructional methods of WPL task delivery enhanced their learning experiences. At the same time, instructors could provide valuable information on these methods.

The study's goals were thoroughly explained to the participants, who were reassured that there would be no rewards for their participation (Orji et al., 2021). As a result, 23 fourth-year TVET undergraduate students (12 females and 11 males, ages 20 to 25) who had finished a six-month Work Placement Learning (WPL) program that was required for graduation from their universities fulfilled the inclusion requirements and voluntarily took part in the study (see figures 1 & 2). The students came from various backgrounds, such as technical education, home economics, computer science, and agriculture.

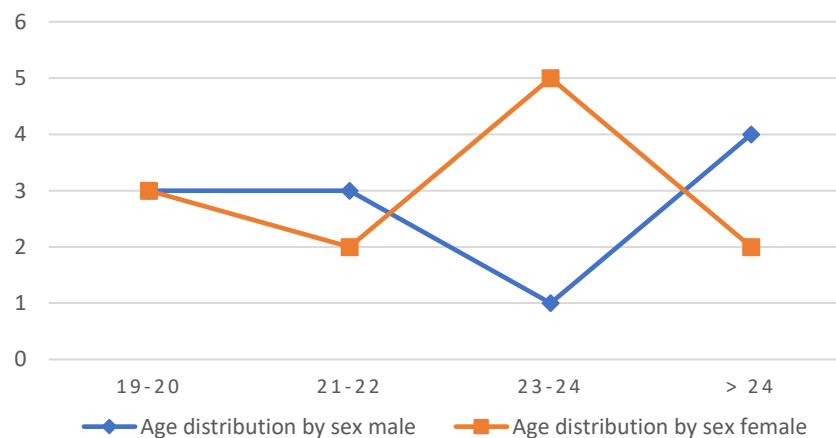


Figure 1: Characteristics of TVET students interviewed

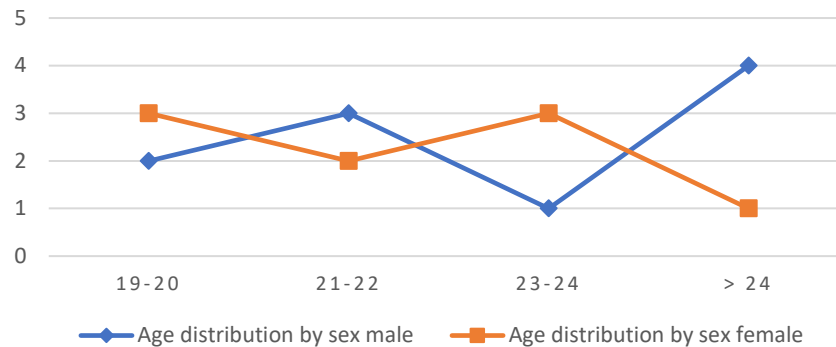


Figure 2: Characteristics of TVET students that participated in focused group discussion

Ethical Compliance

Our investigation was conducted following the highest ethical standards. All necessary permissions from the universities were diligently obtained, and participants provided informed consent. Before consenting to participate, participants received a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives. To protect their privacy, they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, with personal information such as age, gender, and the type of company/industry where WPL was conducted collected solely for eligibility verification. All data was securely maintained and devoid of personal identification markers. Additionally, participants were assured that their responses would only be used for academic purposes and that they would receive feedback on the study findings to preserve the study's integrity. The researchers consistently stressed respecting and preserving participants' dignity and rights.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study's data were gathered in two stages. Initially, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, who shared valuable insights into the factors influencing their satisfaction with the WPL experience. Participants discussed various aspects, such as overall WPL experiences, job characteristics and prospects, comfort level within the work environment, and newly acquired skills that enhance their satisfaction, shedding light on the transition from school to employment. These interviews, held face-to-face at convenient times during school hours, started with an introduction to the study, followed by questions like “How old are you?”, “What is your course of study?” “Where did you complete your WPL, and for how long?”, “Do personal factors and institutional support contribute to your positive WPL experiences?”, “Do you believe the WPL work environment will impact your career progress after graduation?”, “How confident are you in



finding employment post-graduation, and why?”, and “How will the skills gained during WPL position you for the future?” Each interview lasted between 40 to 60 minutes.

The second data collection phase involved focus group discussions, fostering a collaborative space where participants further explored their initial responses. This team-based approach supported data triangulation from the face-to-face interviews. The focus group discussions, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, ensured that participants considered the most impactful factors contributing to their satisfaction with WPL, guided by the WPL satisfaction model proposed by Gupta et al. (2010) and Jean et al. (2012), as well as two research questions. All data were gathered within two months, with participant consent for audio recordings on electronic devices.

Data analysis centred on the WPL satisfaction models and research questions to uncover factors contributing to TVET students' overall satisfaction with WPL. Recorded data were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was conducted according to Braun & Clarke's (2006) guidelines. Researchers immersed themselves in the data, developed initial codes, identified and reviewed themes across responses, and produced the final report. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a unique identifier to analyse and present results. The analysis revealed four key factors affecting student satisfaction with WPL: institutional support, positive student attitudes, future-oriented skill acquisition, and a supportive work environment.

RESULTS

From on the thematic investigation, the analysis yielded four pivotal themes based on the research questions (see Table 1):

- **Theme 1: Positive WPL Experience.** This theme explains how the WPL participants' satisfaction stemmed from their realistic and positive prospects before entering and after the program.
- **Theme 2: Institutional Support.** This theme addresses the strong support from the university and WPL supervisors that played a significant role in the positive experience with the WPL programme.
- **Theme 3: New Skills for the Future.** This theme concerns how the skills acquired during WPL closely align with future skill needs and how these new skills help to define future career interests and prospects of the participants.
- **Theme 4: Favourable Work Environment.** This theme explains how working at a professional level during WPL provides a realistic preview of the future work environment. It helps to establish the working collaboration with individuals from diverse professional backgrounds.

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Table 1. Schematic representation of main themes and subthemes.

1. What roles did individual and environmental factors play in shaping your future career?	
2. How has your work engagement and acquisition of new skills impacted you?	
Theme	Positive WPL Experience
Subthemes	1.1. <i>Positive attitude</i> 1.2. <i>Confidence to succeed (Trust in one's abilities)</i> 1.3. <i>Strong commitment</i>
Theme	Institutional Support
Subthemes	1.1 <i>University and WPL supervisors support</i> 1.2 <i>Mentorship and Guidance</i> 1.3 <i>Collaborative partnership and industry linkages</i>
Theme	New Skills for the Future
Subthemes	1.1. <i>Digital literacy</i> 1.2. <i>Problem-solving and critical thinking</i> 1.3. <i>Communication and collaboration skills</i> 1.4. <i>Cultivation of adaptability and resilience</i>
Theme	Favourable Work Environment
Subthemes	1.1. <i>Motivation and Engagement</i> 1.2. <i>Learning by doing</i> 1.3. <i>Making decisions about my career</i>

Theme 1: Students Positive WPL Experience.

Reflecting on the earlier discussion on the WPL satisfaction models, the study findings provided clear evidence of the necessity for students' conduct before and during the WPL programme. The participants pointed out that with a positive attitude, trust in one's ability, unwavering dedication and a blend of competent knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired during WPL, students will perform better and gain a sense of satisfaction in their WPL. Notably, some participants highlighted the importance of students' optimism in enhancing satisfaction with their overall WPL experiences:

With high optimism, self-motivation, and resourcefulness, we approach our work placement as a valuable learning experience, treating it like a real job and seizing opportunities for growth beyond the confines of traditional lecture halls (US B2).

Another participant clarified that:

We take our training time seriously and learn as much as possible from our trainers. We view challenges as learning opportunities, strive to perform beyond expectations, and build relationships with the people we interact with (US A5).



During the interview, many students demonstrated their positive feelings about the WPL program as a valuable bridge between their studies and future careers. For instance, one participant demonstrated his enthusiasm about the new experiences:

I was eager to challenge myself and step outside of my comfort zone. The WPL program offered the perfect platform for personal and professional growth. The chance to work in a professional environment was thrilling. I was excited to learn and meet new people (US 6B).

Another participant also voiced:

I believed that the WPL program would provide me with a strong foundation for my future career. It was an investment in myself that I was eager to make (US A12).

Theme 2: Institutional Support.

All the participants maintained that the robust support provided by their institutions was a key success factor to the success they experienced during the WPL. Many mentorships and guidance were pivotal in providing the needed collaborative partnership that helped to create a supportive and enriching learning environment:

Our supervisors were always available to provide guidance, feedback, and encouragement, which helped us navigate challenges and achieve our goals. Additionally, the WPL office was instrumental in coordinating placements, organizing training sessions, and facilitating communication between students and supervisors (US A4).

My supervisor's expertise and support were invaluable. Their mentorship played a pivotal role in my personal and professional growth. I had Based on the kind of guidance to practical assistance I received, I felt well-equipped to excel in my WPL and future career (US A8).

Several participants emphasize the role of WPL in providing a robust collaborative partnership and industry linkages. For example, one of the participants is skeptical of how the partnership between the university and the host organisation created a supportive and enriching learning environment while the industry connections can facilitate a smooth transition from academia to the professional world:

Our university supervisors play a crucial role in fostering relationships between students and the university and between students and host companies/firms. It is important to note that institutional supervisors are readily available to students for consultations and emergencies during their work placement (US A1, A6, and B4).

Theme 3: New Skills for the Future.



In general, WPL allows learners to experience various skills and activities while performing specific tasks in the WPL environment. These different jobs and tasks significantly help participants acquire new skills and knowledge for the future. (Hussien & La Lopa, 2018). Several participants emphasised the importance of the skills they acquired and how they prepared them for their future career pursuits. For example, one participant expressed how his ability to install solar panels in houses, offices, and business environments has aligned adequately with his future career goals:

"The skills I have acquired during my Work Placement Learning (WPL) program prepared me for the jobs of the future and align very well with my future workforce needs" (US A10).

Other participants also emphasised the importance of employability skills that they believe are highly required for gaining employment and boosting their confidence in finding a job upon graduation:

My time in the WPL program has made me better at dealing with change and challenges. I have learned to be flexible and bounce back from setbacks (US B4).

I have become really good at using technology because of my WPL experience. This is a significant advantage in today's world (US B4, A3, B7).

I have gotten much better at figuring things out and thinking deeply about problems. This helps me come up with creative solutions (US A6, B1).

I can communicate and work with others really well now. My WPL experience helped me improve these skills a lot (US A13).

Theme 4: Favourable Work Environment.

WPL provides students with a taste of the real world by allowing them to gain experience in the field while also establishing professional connections and practical skills (Collins, 2002). In the interview data, we observed that students in this study believed that a favorable work environment is crucial for worker satisfaction and productivity. They believe that factors such as good communication and positive relationships with colleagues, which promote motivation and engagement and opportunities to learn by observation, are key to enhancing students' satisfaction with their overall WPL experiences, aiding in proper decision-making about one's future career. One student's viewpoint stood out to affirm this claim:

I personally experienced a positive work situation that boosted my motivation, engagement, and overall job satisfaction during WPL. In general, employers should aim to create a work environment that fosters success and well-being for all students during WPL (US B10).

I have a better understanding of my responsibilities at work now. Regardless of the task at hand, I always prioritise the intrinsic benefits above the extrinsic ones.....and I am



confident in my ability to apply both my academic background and the professional abilities valued by employers (US A7).

Moreover, WPL affords students the chance to develop novel proficiencies and gain practical experiences beyond what they would typically receive in a traditional classroom environment. With strong institutional backing, the six-month Work Placement program would provide a safe and supportive environment for students who are looking to find successful professional role models to learn from when they enter the workforce.

Some participants emphasise how working with professionals from different backgrounds help them to learn how things work in the real job world:

Working on a real-world project enabled me to gain insight into the workings of the actual job market. It was like a practice run for my future career. I learned how to work with others and solve problems together. I am confident in implementing the knowledge I have acquired and identifying solutions to issues (US B9).

I worked with people from all sorts of backgrounds. This experience taught me how to understand and work well with people who are different from me, which is important for any job (US B8).

The work environment at WPL facilitated my creative thinking and generated novel concepts. It resembled preparing for a profession that necessitates always discovering novel approaches to accomplish tasks. The majority of the assignments aided me in determining my desired career path. I acquired knowledge about several professions and identified my areas of expertise (US B5).

Discussion

Several studies To & Lung, (2020);Hussien & La Lopa, (2018); Gupta et al. (2010) have utilised quantitative measures to identify factors that could improve student satisfaction with work placement learning experiences across various disciplines. However, these studies have provided limited insight into how work placement learning (WPL) program participants perceive their own experiences from a qualitative standpoint. This lack of qualitative perspective may explain why challenges faced during WPL have not been effectively addressed. This study aimed to bridge this knowledge gap.

Using a qualitative methodology that included focus groups and semi-structured interviews, this study looked into the variables influencing TVET students' satisfaction with their work placement (WPL) experiences. The aim was to understand how these experiences influence a seamless



transition from school to work. Building upon the WPL satisfaction model proposed by Gupta et al. (2010) and Jean et al. (2012), two research questions were formulated from the literature to guide the thematic analysis. Through in-depth interviews and collaborative discussions, participants provided valuable insights into their WPL experiences, highlighting the roles of institutional support, skill acquisition, work environment, and personal attitudes in shaping their satisfaction.

The analysis revealed that participants consistently underscored the importance of a positive attitude, self-belief, commitment, and applying diverse skills and competencies developed during WPL as crucial contributors to their satisfaction. This finding aligns with previous studies that connect attributes like academic readiness, a positive outlook, and proactive engagement with internship satisfaction (Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Gupta et al., 2010; Arif, 2007). For many students, a constructive attitude towards WPL enabled them to leverage the learning opportunities provided, actively engage in work tasks, and build self-confidence as they prepared for the job market.

Moreover, participants identified strong institutional support, alongside mentorship and guidance from faculty and supervisors, as essential elements of a successful WPL experience. This support enhanced students' training and facilitated their connections with industry professionals, fostering collaborative learning and practical insights. These findings align with previous research indicating that interns with robust university support report higher training quality and satisfaction (Fagan & Wise, 2007; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; Klee, 2011). Consistent with Lam & Ching (2007) and Rose et al. (2014), participants in this study pointed to mentorship as instrumental in helping them navigate challenges and maximise their learning experiences during WPL.

Another significant finding was the role of WPL in equipping students with new skills that contribute to their future employability. Participants reported that exposure to real-world job tasks was instrumental in developing skills relevant to their careers, thereby increasing their satisfaction with the WPL experience. This supports Gupta et al.'s (2010) conclusions that students' satisfaction with WPL is strongly related to the practical skills they gain. Emphasising skill development when promoting WPL to students can enhance their preparedness for future employment. This insight is consistent with the findings of D'abate et al. (2009), Lord et al. (2011), and Wubuli (2009), who highlighted the importance of job characteristics in determining internship satisfaction.



The study also underscored the importance of a favourable work environment in fostering student satisfaction. Participants reported that an encouraging and supportive workplace promoted motivation, enhanced their engagement, and provided learning opportunities through observation and interaction with professionals. This environment helped students make informed decisions about their future career paths. Consistent with prior studies (D'abate et al., 2009; Gupta et al., 2010; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018), these findings suggest that a favourable organisational climate is a strong predictor of internship satisfaction, as it enables students to apply their skills effectively, boosts their confidence, and provides a foundation for future career growth.

From a practical perspective, the study provides valuable implications for universities and industry partners looking to improve the impact of WPL programs. Enhancing mentorship opportunities, strengthening collaboration between academic institutions and industries, and creating supportive workplace environments are essential to enriching student experience. These efforts not only bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application but also equip students with the skills and confidence they need to thrive in the job market, ultimately helping to reduce graduate unemployment.

Socially, the findings offer critical insights into addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria. By equipping students with practical, adaptable, and transferable skills, WPL programs help them build resilience and adapt to the demands of dynamic industries. Supportive work environments also empower students to develop confidence and professionalism, contributing to a more skilled and employable workforce. This aligns with broader societal goals of promoting sustainable economic growth and reducing inequalities in access to meaningful employment opportunities. What sets this study apart is its qualitative approach, which delves into students' lived experiences participating in WPL programs. Unlike previous studies that relied on quantitative data, this research provides rich, detailed insights into the personal, institutional, and environmental factors shaping student satisfaction with WPL. By focusing on how students perceive their experiences, the study bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of WPL's role in career preparation.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the key factors that enhance student satisfaction with work placement learning (WPL), focusing on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Nigeria. It highlights the vital role WPL plays in ensuring a smooth transition from education to employment. The findings emphasise the importance of a positive WPL experience, strong



institutional support, targeted skill development, and a supportive work environment. Together, these elements boost student satisfaction and prepare them to face professional challenges after graduation. Additionally, this research significantly contributes to the existing literature by identifying practical strategies to improve WPL programs. It offers a clear framework for enhancing student satisfaction while addressing the broader issue of graduate employability. The findings highlight the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and industry partners to create more effective and impactful WPL programs that benefit students and society.

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