

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-59421

Title: AMBITIONS, ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN SUPPORT OF BENIN\ 'S EMERGENCE BY 2030.

Rating

Recommendation: Accept after Major Revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		√		
Techn. Quality			√	
Clarity		√		
Significance		√		

Reviewer's ID: JPR- 212

Detailed Reviewer's Report

1. Summary of the Manuscript

The manuscript examines the transformation of Benin's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system within the framework of the National Strategy for TVET (SN-EFTP 2019–2030). The study employs a mixed-methods approach combining documentary analysis, 63 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) on coded ordinal data. The EFA identifies three structural dimensions: (1) institutional governance and coordination; (2) operational financing and quality of provision; and (3) socio-cultural perceptions and private sector involvement, accounting for 90.7% of total variance. The study identifies four actor typologies and proposes five strategic recommendations for 2026–2030. The authors conclude by calling for a national longitudinal TVET database.

2. Originality and Contribution

Strengths:

The study addresses a pertinent and under-researched topic: the systemic determinants of TVET performance in a West African context.

The mixed-methods design, particularly the integration of EFA with qualitative interview data, offers an innovative methodological contribution to TVET policy analysis.

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The actor typology (institutional strategists, operational practitioners, economic partners, socio-cultural advocates) provides a novel analytical framework for understanding stakeholder dynamics in TVET reform.

The comparative perspective with Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo (Table 6) adds valuable regional context.

Weaknesses:

The EFA component, while innovative, raises significant concerns regarding methodological rigor (detailed below).

The originality of the three-factor structure is debatable, as governance, financing, and socio-cultural factors are well-established dimensions in TVET literature (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

3. Technical Quality and Methodological Concerns

3.1 Sample Size and EFA Validity (Major Concern)

The authors acknowledge that the sample size ($n = 63$) falls below the recommended threshold for EFA ($n \geq 200$). While they cite MacCallum et al. (1999) and Costello & Osborne (2005) to justify EFA with small samples, this justification is insufficient for the following reasons:

Communalities: The authors report communalities ($h^2 \geq 0.72$), which partially mitigates the sample size concern. However, the ratio of variables to factors (10 variables, 3 factors) with $n = 63$ yields a subject-to-variable ratio of 6.3:1, which is below the commonly accepted minimum of 10:1 (Hair et al., 2019).

Generalizability: The authors correctly note that results should be considered "analytical trends" rather than generalizable conclusions. However, the manuscript would benefit from a sensitivity analysis (e.g., bootstrap resampling) to assess factor stability.

Recommendation: The authors should either (a) remove the EFA component and present the qualitative findings as the primary contribution, or (b) substantially strengthen the methodological justification with additional robustness checks.

3.2 Data Coding and Ordinal Scores

The coding of interview responses into ordinal scores (1–5) on seven dimensions is a reasonable approach, but the manuscript lacks detail on:

Inter-coder reliability (was coding performed independently by multiple researchers? What was the Cohen's kappa?).

The specific criteria used to assign ordinal scores (e.g., what distinguishes a score of 3 from a score of 4 on "governance"?).

Recommendation: Provide a coding manual or rubric in an appendix, and report inter-coder reliability statistics.

3.3 Factor Extraction and Rotation

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The use of Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1) is acceptable but has known limitations. The authors should report the scree plot and parallel analysis to corroborate the three-factor solution.

The Varimax rotation assumes orthogonal factors. Given that governance, financing, and socio-cultural factors are likely correlated, an oblique rotation (e.g., Promax or Direct Oblimin) may be more appropriate. The authors should justify their choice of orthogonal rotation.

3.4 Variance Explained

The reported cumulative variance of 90.7% is unusually high for social science research. While this may be attributable to the small sample size and high communalities, it warrants caution. The authors should discuss whether this reflects substantive dimensionality or methodological artifacts (e.g., common method variance, small sample bias).

3.5 Qualitative Component

The qualitative component is robust, with 63 interviews across 12 departments and theoretical saturation achieved at the 55th interview. However, the manuscript would benefit from:

A more detailed description of the interview guide (e.g., sample questions).

A clearer articulation of the thematic analysis process (e.g., Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework).

Reporting of negative or disconfirming cases.

4. Clarity and Presentation

Strengths:

The manuscript is generally well-structured, with clear sections for introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, and recommendations.

The tables (Tables 1–6) and figures (Graphs 1–2) are informative and well-designed.

The actor typology is clearly presented and visually supported by the factor plane (Graph 2).

Weaknesses:

The manuscript contains several typographical and formatting errors (e.g., "l'Enseignement et la Formation Techniques Professionnels" should be "l'Enseignement et la Formation Techniques et Professionnels"; "e" after "EFTP" on page 2; "décrte" on page 6).

The references are not consistently formatted. Some entries include DOIs, others do not. The reference list mixes APA style with inconsistent punctuation.

The English abstract is well-written, but the manuscript body is in French. Given that the journal is an international journal, the authors should consider translating the entire manuscript into English or providing a bilingual version.

The graphical abstract (Graph 1) is visually cluttered, with overlapping labels. Consider simplifying or providing a higher-resolution version.

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5. Significance and Policy Relevance

Strengths:

The study has clear policy relevance, particularly for Benin's SN-EFTP 2019–2030 and the broader West African context.

The five strategic recommendations (R1–R5) are specific, actionable, and time-bound (2026–2030), with designated responsible actors and indicators.

The call for a national longitudinal TVET database is well-founded and addresses a critical gap in policy evaluation capacity.

Weaknesses:

The recommendations, while specific, are not prioritized or costed. Which recommendation should be implemented first? What are the estimated resource requirements?

The comparative analysis (Table 6) is informative but lacks depth. The authors should discuss why Benin lags behind Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire in certain indicators and what lessons can be drawn.

The discussion of "Benin's emergence by 2030" is somewhat disconnected from the empirical findings. The manuscript would benefit from a clearer articulation of how TVET reform contributes to broader national development goals (e.g., SDG 4, SDG 8).

6. Ethical and Transparency Considerations

The manuscript does not report ethics approval. Was the study approved by an institutional review board? How was informed consent obtained from the 63 interview participants?

The authors should include a statement on data availability (e.g., are the interview transcripts available upon request?).

The authors declare no conflicts of interest, but this should be explicitly stated.

7. Specific Comments and Suggestions

Title: Consider revising to reflect the mixed-methods nature of the study, e.g., "Determinants of TVET Performance in Benin: A Mixed-Methods Analysis in Support of the SN-EFTP 2019–2030."

Abstract: The abstract is comprehensive but exceeds 250 words. Condense to 200–250 words.

Introduction: The research question is clear, but the theoretical framework (human capital theory) is underdeveloped. Consider integrating institutional theory or systems theory to better capture the multi-level dynamics.

Literature Review: The review is somewhat dated. Incorporate more recent studies (2022–2025) on TVET reform in Africa.

Methods: Provide a flow diagram of the mixed-methods design (e.g., sequential explanatory, convergent parallel).

Results: Report confidence intervals for the variance explained by each factor.

Discussion: The discussion of Pritchett (2001) is relevant but could be deepened. How do the findings challenge or extend Pritchett's critique?

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References: Ensure all references are cited in the text and vice versa. Several references (e.g., Bourdieu, 1992; ILO, 2019) appear in the reference list but are not cited in the text.

Language: The manuscript would benefit from professional English editing if the journal requires English publication.

8. Final Recommendation

Major Revision

The manuscript addresses a timely and policy-relevant topic and offers valuable empirical insights into Benin's TVET reform. However, the methodological rigor of the EFA component requires substantial strengthening, and the manuscript would benefit from clearer reporting of ethical procedures, data coding, and robustness checks. The authors should also consider whether the EFA adds sufficient value beyond the qualitative findings or whether the study would be stronger as a purely qualitative investigation.