

WHY CHILDREN SHOULD **CONSIDER** TVET OPPORTUNITIES AFTER PLE

By John Masaba

Dr Morris Odoch Odrua is a living testament to the benefits of joining the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system early, challenging the long-held misconception that TVET is a pathway for academic failures or a last resort for learners who perform poorly.

Despite attaining good results at primary level, Dr Odoch says he deliberately chose technical education and never sat in a secondary school classroom. Today, he is a celebrated civil and structural engineer, holding a PhD alongside several master's degrees, undergraduate degrees and professional certificates.

Dr Odoch was among the experts involved in the construction of the iconic Nile Bridge in Jinja. He began his TVET journey immediately after P7 and says he has no regrets about the decision.

Odoch's story reflects a broader trend: more PLE leavers are choosing TVET over the traditional rush to Senior One, than before.



Students undergoing technical training operating a solar-powered system. Experts say such pathways are shorter and more focused, enabling learners to master many skills

CLEAR PATHWAYS

Loy Abaine Muhwezi, the commissioner for TVET operations and management, noted that reforms have opened clear pathways for learners from Primary Seven (P7) up to Uganda Technical or Community Polytechnic Certificate (UCPC) programmes, and even further to PhD level.

"That means a Ugandan can choose any option, either TVET or secondary school," she said. Muhwezi emphasised that technical institutions should prioritise new PLE leavers, allowing them to pursue careers as artisans, technicians, agriculturalists, fashion designers and even journalists.

She highlighted the return on investment in TVET, saying: "If I take my child now to a TVET institution, in one year, if the person has done even one module and passed it well, this person can contribute to his or her school as they proceed. The time is gone when people were waving academic papers.

FIRST LADY'S CALL

During the release of the 2025 PLE results at State House Nakasero, the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, urged PLE leavers to consider TVET as a viable pathway to economic empowerment.

"In 2025, with the enactment of the TVET Act, the TVET system regulated by the TVET Council was formally established to exist alongside the general education system in Uganda. This TVET system is also a pathway that learners who complete Primary Seven can pursue," she said.

According to the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB), programmes available to PLE leavers include electrical installation, bricklaying, plumbing, pipe fitting, leatherwork, shoemaking and garment design.

As of January 2026, 58 institutions across the country were offering government-sponsored skills development programmes. In addition, about 100 private institutions nationwide are now capable of admitting learners directly from P7. These learners enrol in a three-year programme, after which they are awarded the Uganda Community Polytechnic Certificate, which is now considered equivalent to completing O'level in Uganda.

Employers are now interested in someone who can do something."

'MORE THAN GRADES'

Jalia Nassaza, the acting executive secretary for

development at the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB), stressed that entry into TVET is based on interest and passion, not grades.

"We are not admitting failures. We admit people who have the interest to take up the programme, whether you have a first grade or a second grade," she said when contacted for comment.

She added that flexible training in TVET allows learners to pursue full qualifications or select specific skill packages depending on their goals.

UVTAB spokesperson Narasi Anyijuka Kambaho said the number of learners that are branching to TVET after P7 has been growing. He said somebody who went to secondary school but did not complete S4 can take advantage of sponsorship opportunities by the Government and get admitted. He said

even those who may have failed to get good grades like Kato can enroll under the modular arrangement and progress to the desired level of education, including up to PhD.

"One can come and do a module in carpentry and qualify and when they complete the required modules, they can enroll for the National Certificate and other higher qualifications," Kambaho said, adding that TVET now provides wide opportunities for progression. This is under the vision of ensuring that all Ugandans possess employable skills.

"The Government is certifying mechanics who can't read and write and beauty salon operators under the TVET Act. There are those who say we take failures. No, we provide diverse options where one can enroll under modular or the formal TVET arrangement."

He highlighted the benefits of early TVET enrolment, noting that with the current reforms, the Government focuses on applied knowledge and practical skills.

"We can specialise from the early stages, informed by labour market needs," he said, noting the Government's commitment under NDP4 and Vision 2040 to build a skilled workforce for sectors such as oil and gas,

manufacturing, tourism, and ICT.

Kambaho explained that vocational pathways are shorter and more focused than traditional secondary school routes. "In vocational, if a student joins, it will take three years to graduate with a certificate. By the time an S6 student finishes, a vocational student could already be pursuing a diploma," he said.

"Many who have gone through this path are now celebrated technicians in Uganda," he added, emphasising that early hands-on skills give students a competitive advantage.

Kambaho also noted that the TVET system allows broad progression opportunities, whether through formal or informal pathways.

"Progression under the informal arrangements can reach the highest levels," highlighting the flexibility of the system to accommodate diverse learners.

Kambaho says many people who have taken the shorter route of branching right from primary school and are doing well.

"Some UNRA engineers who participated in supervising the building of the Nile Bridge took up vocational studies after P7," he said.

Dr Odoch argues that the conventional academic pathway — from nursery through primary, secondary, and university — can take up to 25 years before one secures decent employment. In contrast, he notes that learners in technical education can be employable by the age of 16.

"Even when challenges arise, it is easier for a technically trained person to sponsor themselves or benefit from the many government scholarships available in technical institutions, which are often more accessible than those in secondary schools," he said.



Loy Abaine Muhwezi, the commissioner for TVET operations and management in the education ministry