



Link Up Leigh Park Project: Interventions for
16-24-year-olds who are not in education, employment or
training (NEET) - A review of existing evidence

Report produced by the University of Portsmouth Link Up Leigh Park Research
Team

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Introduction

Approximately 770,000 young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK are currently not in education, employment, or training (NEET; Office for National Statistics, 2023). NEET rates peaked in the UK in 2011, reaching 16.9% (ONS, 2023), but declined to a record low of 9.5% in 2021 before rising again. Since 2004, the proportion of 15-to-19-year-old NEETs has consistently been above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (OECD, 2023). Extended periods of being NEET are linked to negative outcomes, including long-term poor physical and mental health (Feng et al., 2018) and an increased likelihood of future unemployment (Crawford et al., 2011).

The term 'NEET' originated in the UK in the 1990s, initially categorising 16-to-17-year-olds not involved in education, training, or employment (Upton, 2010). This terminology emerged as school-to-work transitions became more challenging for many young people (Bynner et al., 2019). The European Commission Employment Committee (ECEC) defined NEET as 15-to-24-year-olds who are "neither employed, nor in any education or training" (Mascherini, 2018), explicitly including both unemployed and inactive NEETs. Unemployed NEETs are actively seeking employment, while inactive NEETs have not engaged in job-seeking behaviours recently (Maguire, 2015).

Sub-classifications of NEETs are important as different groups face unique challenges in seeking education, training, and employment (Zuccotti & O'Reilly, 2019). These classifications can include factors such as employment-seeking intentions, gender, ethnicity, and household structure (Furlong, 2006). Understanding these diverse needs enables targeted interventions, optimises resource allocation, and informs effective policies to support reintegration into education or employment.

Key risk factors for becoming NEET include low academic attainment and low socioeconomic status (SES), which significantly restrict access to quality education and employment, and are associated with various negative outcomes. Low academic attainment is linked to issues such as poor overall wellbeing and mental health, which further decrease participation in education and work (Sadler et al., 2015). SES, reflecting factors such as parental income, education, and occupation (Cirino et al., 2002), is also correlated with diminished cognitive and socioemotional development, as well as increased physical and mental health issues (Hackman & Farah, 2009). Addressing wellbeing is crucial for NEET interventions, as it influences positive outcomes like better health and increased academic success (Bücker et al., 2018).

The objective of this review was to examine evidence-based interventions for NEETs that could be integrated into the LULP project and/or implemented by Local Authorities. Our review methodology differs from traditional approaches because we recognised that a comprehensive systematic review of NEETs had already been conducted by Apunyo et al

(2022)., which encompassed the exact topics we aimed to explore, along with additional relevant insights. Consequently, we opted to utilise the Youth Futures Foundation Evidence and Gap Map developed by Campbell Systematic Reviews (Apunyo et al., 2022) for several reasons. Firstly, given the extensive prior work in this area, conducting a completely new systematic review would be inefficient and potentially redundant. The Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) provides a robust and up-to-date synthesis of the existing literature, offering a solid foundation for our current study. We utilised the studies identified in EGM, filtering out those that we determined local authorities could not realistically implement due to financial constraints or because the interventions targeted populations outside of our demographic focus. Additionally, we utilised the rigorous quality assessment conducted by Apunyo et al., ensuring that the studies included in our review met high standards of methodological rigour. This approach not only streamlined the review process but also enhanced the relevance and applicability of our findings for local authorities seeking effective interventions for NEETs.

By using this extensive evidence base and adopting a systematic approach to its analysis, we aim to identify the most promising interventions for addressing the NEET challenge. This will enable the development of evidence-based strategies that can effectively support young people in transitioning into education, employment, or training, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes for NEET youth and broader societal benefits.

Method

The following sections outline the methods employed by Apunyo et al. (2022) to enhance the clarity and understanding of the overall research approach.

Literature Search Strategy

Apunyo et al. (2022) employed a comprehensive, standardised search strategy across over 20 databases and institutional websites. The search focused on English-language documents, reflecting the predominance of studies published in English and avoiding potential translation issues. The strategy incorporated filters for population demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, study designs, interventions, and outcomes, with an emphasis on impact evaluation designs to assess the effectiveness of youth employment interventions.

The search encompassed both peer-reviewed articles from scholarly databases and other literature, including evaluation reports and working papers from institutional websites. All identified studies underwent title and abstract screening, followed by full-text review. This process included unpublished studies and those with mid-term outcomes. Prior to its final execution on January 29, 2020, the search strategy was pre-tested and peer-reviewed by

two information science specialists. In order to ensure contemporary relevance, as noted by Mawn et al. (2017), the publication period was limited to 2000-2019. The selected studies were then uploaded into EPPI Reviewer 4 software for screening and coding, facilitating a systematic and thorough analysis of the collected data.

Eligibility Criteria

The following criteria, established by Apunyo et al. (2022) with reference to Saran and White (2018), were used to determine which studies would be included in or excluded from the original review. These criteria, based on the PICOS framework (Population, Intervention, Comparator, Outcomes, and Study Design), ensure that the selected studies are relevant, focused, and provide valuable insights into youth employment interventions.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria define the specific characteristics that studies must possess to be considered for the review. These criteria are designed to ensure that the selected studies align closely with the research objectives and provide meaningful data for analysis. Studies meeting all of the following criteria were included in the review:

Population: Youth or young women and men aged 15-35 years from all countries. This age range captures the core youth demographic across various cultural and socioeconomic contexts, allowing for a comprehensive global perspective on youth employment issues. For studies with mixed populations, youth had to make up over 51% of participants.

Interventions: Economic, education and skills, entrepreneurship, employment, welfare, strengthening training and education systems, enhancing labour market conditions, transforming financial sector markets. This broad range of interventions covers the main areas that impact youth employment, from direct skills training to systemic changes in education and labour markets.

Comparison: Studies with active or passive alternate interventions. Including studies with comparisons allows for the assessment of the relative effectiveness of different intervention approaches, including both active interventions and passive controls.

Outcomes: Economic, education and skills, entrepreneurship, employment, welfare. These outcome categories encompass the primary areas where youth employment interventions aim to make an impact, providing a comprehensive view of intervention effectiveness. This includes economic results, educational achievements, skills development, entrepreneurship, employment rates, and overall welfare improvements.

Study Types: Impact evaluations and systematic reviews of youth employment interventions. These study types provide the most rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of interventions, allowing for informed policy and programme decisions.

Publication Period: Studies published between January 2000 and December 2019. This time frame ensures the relevance of the included studies while providing a substantial period for analysis.

Publication Status: Both published and unpublished studies. In order to address potential publication bias, unpublished studies were included to offer a more complete overview of the available evidence.

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria outline specific characteristics that disqualified a study from being included in the original review. These criteria help to maintain the focus and quality of the review by filtering out studies that do not align with the research objectives or do not meet the required standards of evidence. Studies meeting any of the following criteria were excluded from the original review:

Studies focused exclusively on individuals under 15 or over 35 years old - This criterion ensures that the review remains focused on the target youth demographic, excluding studies that primarily address children or older adults.

Studies not related to training, education, labour market, or financial sector interventions for youth - This criterion helps maintain the review's focus on relevant interventions that directly impact youth employment.

Studies that did not report relevant outcomes - In order to be included, studies must provide data on outcomes related to economic status, education and skills, entrepreneurship, employment, or welfare, ensuring that the review can assess intervention effectiveness.

Opinion pieces, non-empirical studies, or studies lacking a clear evaluation component - This criterion ensures that the review includes only evidence-based, empirical research with clear evaluation methodologies, maintaining the rigour and reliability of the findings.

Additional Considerations

To ensure a thorough synthesis of evidence for stakeholders in youth employment research, the following additional considerations were applied:

- **Multiple reports from a single study:** These were included separately if they had different eligible designs or distinct outcomes.
- **Overlapping information:** When multiple reports provided overlapping information, the one with the most detail was preferred.

This approach to eligibility criteria and study selection ensured a comprehensive and rigorous Evidence Gap Map (EGM) that provides valuable insights for researchers and policymakers in the field of youth employment interventions.

Additional Exclusion Criteria for the LULP Review

As mentioned previously, the current review utilised the work undertaken by Apunyo et al (2022) as documented above. However, as we wanted to only review studies which could be realistically implemented by local authorities we chose to exclude some of the studies from our review. For example, many studies focused on broader economic policies, such as minimum wage impacts or employment tax incentives, rather than targeted interventions for NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). While these studies provide valuable insights into labour market dynamics, they do not offer practical, actionable strategies that local authorities can adopt. This review aims to identify evidence-based interventions specifically designed to assist NEETs in their transition to education and employment, ensuring that the findings are relevant and applicable for local stakeholders. In addition, some studies were excluded because they concentrated on specific demographics that did not align with our NEET population. For instance, interventions specifically targeting youth with disabilities, war-affected youth, or particular racial or ethnic groups may address needs that differ significantly from those of the broader NEET population. Including such studies would not produce relevant insights for local authorities aiming to effectively support NEETs.

Selection Process for the LULP Review

The review process began with the download of 399 studies identified by Apunyo et al. (2022). After the title and abstract screening, 102 studies were excluded based on predefined eligibility criteria, which assessed their relevance to the research focus and intervention type. Following this initial screening, full-text screening was conducted on 297 potentially relevant studies. During this stage, each study was carefully reviewed in its entirety to evaluate its alignment with our objectives, including the specific target population and the applicability of the intervention for local authorities. Subsequently, these studies were assessed for quality, employing established quality assessment tools to ensure that only those meeting high and medium quality standards were included. This rigorous evaluation process resulted in the final selection of 87 studies for further analysis, allowing us to concentrate on robust evidence that could effectively inform practical interventions for NEETs.

Data Extraction

A standardised data extraction form was jointly developed by two researchers (AP and JU) to capture key information from each study. Both researchers were involved in extracting data, focusing on study characteristics, intervention details, and key findings. They cross-checked a sample of each other's extracted data to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Analysis

The analysis involved the following steps:

Descriptive Analysis: A quantitative summary of the included studies, calculating frequencies and percentages for categorical variables.

Synthesis of Findings: A narrative synthesis approach to integrate and summarise findings under identified themes.

Identification of Gaps and Research Directions: Highlighting areas where evidence was lacking or inconclusive, and noting suggestions for future research directions.

These aspects of the review followed the guidelines set forth by the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) to ensure a transparent and thorough reporting process.

Results

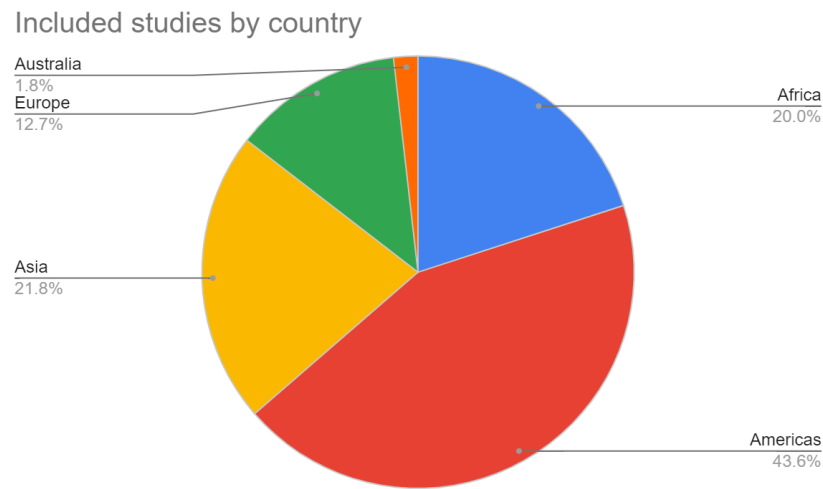
Study Selection and Characteristics

This scoping review included a total of 87 studies that met the predefined inclusion criteria. The studies included a wide range of methodologies, with randomised controlled trials (RCTs) making up the majority (n=45). Other included methodologies comprised quasi-experimental evaluations (n=6), field experiments (n=5), non-experimental evaluations (n=3), and diverse additional methodologies (n=28). This broad methodological diversity ensures a comprehensive understanding of youth employment interventions across various contexts (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Geographical and Temporal Distribution

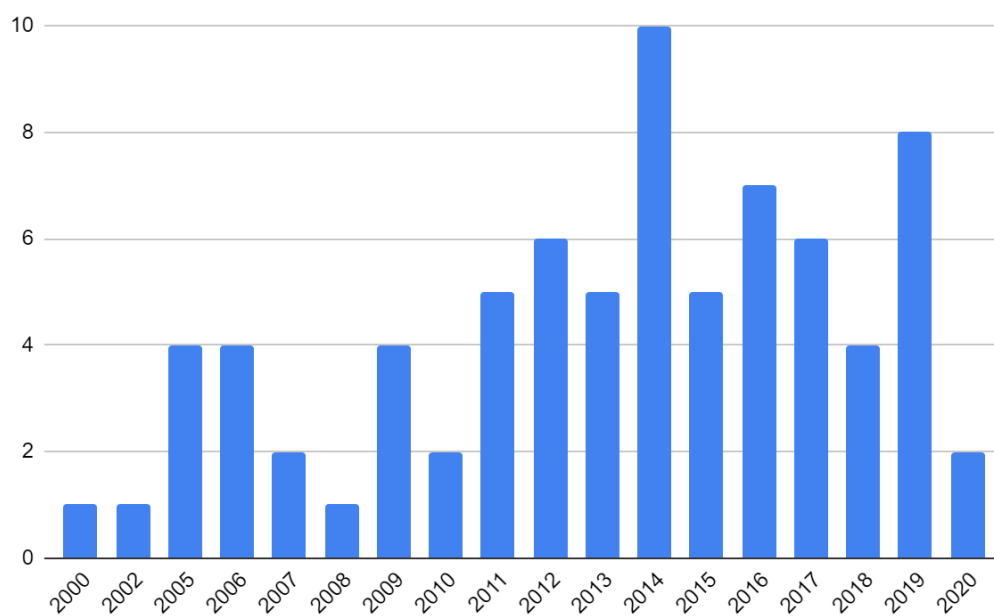
The included studies spanned multiple continents, with notable concentrations in Africa (e.g., Uganda, n=6), the Americas (e.g., US, n=7; Argentina, n=4), and Asia (e.g., Jordan, n=5) as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Included Studies by Country



The temporal distribution of studies showed a concentration in recent years, with 11 studies published in 2019 and 26 studies published between 2014 and 2017 (Figure 2). This recent focus suggests an increasing interest in youth employment interventions over the past decade (Levac et al., 2010).

Figure 2 - Temporal Distribution of Studies



Sample Sizes and Target Populations

Sample sizes varied considerably across studies, ranging from large-scale interventions with over 10,000 participants (e.g., Chong et al., 2006; Behaghel et al., 2014) to smaller-scale studies with fewer than 1,000 participants (e.g., Groh et al., 2016; Schaeffer et al., 2014). The target populations were diverse, including young job seekers from low-income backgrounds, at-risk youth, marginalised groups, and young entrepreneurs. This diversity in target populations may impact the generalizability of findings across different contexts and demographics (Tricco et al., 2018).

Intervention Types

The interventions identified in this review can be categorised into several groups. This wide range of intervention types reflects the multifaceted approach to addressing youth employment challenges (Kluve et al., 2019). The following list includes various intervention programs designed to enhance employment outcomes, skills development, and entrepreneurship among youth and individuals seeking job opportunities. These interventions originate from a diverse range of studies and programs that focus on different aspects of employability, such as vocational training, job matching assistance, financial support, entrepreneurship training, internships, and counselling services. By grouping these interventions, we gain a clearer understanding of the strategies employed to address unemployment and underemployment in various contexts.

1. Vocational Training and Skills Development

This group encompasses programmes primarily focused on equipping individuals with practical skills necessary for employment. These interventions include vocational training courses that teach specific trades (e.g., electronics, tailoring) and enhance employability through soft skills development. Many programs also integrate internships to provide hands-on experience, bridging the gap between training and the workplace. The aim is to create a skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of various industries, particularly for younger individuals entering the job market.

2. Job Matching and Job Search Assistance

Also known as Job Placement, these interventions aim to connect job seekers with potential employers and facilitate their job search process. These include job fairs, intensive job counselling, and programmes designed to provide labour market information. The goal is to improve the chances of finding suitable employment by offering tools and resources that aid individuals in navigating the job market effectively. Such programs often emphasise networking opportunities and skill matching to promote successful employment outcomes.

3. Financial Assistance and Grants

Financial support is crucial for individuals looking to enter the workforce or start their own businesses. Therefore, these are interventions that provide cash transfers, grants, or subsidies specifically aimed at reducing barriers to employment. For instance, some programmes offer grants for vocational training tools or start-up money for small enterprises. By alleviating financial constraints, these programmes encourage skill acquisition and entrepreneurship, making it easier for individuals to invest in their careers.

4. Entrepreneurship and Business Training

This category focuses on fostering entrepreneurial skills and business acumen among individuals, particularly women and underserved populations. Programmes provide training in business management, financial literacy, and support for developing business plans. The idea is to empower individuals to create their own businesses, enhancing economic self-sufficiency and supporting local economies. This entrepreneurial focus is especially relevant in areas where traditional employment opportunities may be limited.

5. Internships and On-the-Job Training

Internships and on-the-job training are vital components of many intervention programmes, providing practical experience that is highly valued by employers. Programmes typically include a combination of classroom instruction and real-world experiences, allowing participants to apply their learning in a workplace environment. This hands-on approach helps individuals develop confidence and skills while improving their employability upon completion of the programme.

6. Counselling and Coaching

These interventions offer personalised support to individuals as they navigate their career paths. Coaching may include job search training, counselling sessions, and workshops designed to enhance skills such as resume writing, interview preparation, and self-efficacy in job searching. The emphasis is on providing guidance and support to help individuals overcome barriers to employment and develop effective job search strategies, thereby increasing their chances of securing suitable employment.

Comparators and Outcome Measures

The studies utilised various comparison groups, including control groups not invited to participate in interventions, eligible non-participants, and geographically matched controls. Primary outcome measures focused on employment status, earnings, and job quality, while secondary outcomes encompassed personal development, skills acquisition, and social

impact. The variety of comparators and outcome measures used across studies may influence the interpretation and comparability of findings (Higgins et al., 2019).

Discussion

In this discussion section, we interpret and synthesise the findings from the scoping review regarding interventions for NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). A summary of findings is included to highlight the key themes and trends identified during the review process. We have provided an overview of these findings and discuss their implications in the context of youth employability and engagement. Additionally, we have outlined the practical implications of the results, offering insights that inform policy and practice aimed at effectively supporting NEETs while suggesting potential pathways for future research. By identifying gaps in the existing body of knowledge, this discussion will emphasise areas that warrant further investigation, guiding future studies in this critical field. Finally, we will acknowledge the limitations of our review process, adding transparency and rigour to our findings. Ultimately, this section aims to reflect on the significance of the results and pave the way for continued exploration and advancement in interventions for NEETs.

Summary of Findings

Various types of interventions were evaluated, each with its own set of outcomes. For example, cash grants and subsidies programmes showed mixed results. In Uganda, while cash grants initially boosted self-employment, these effects tended to diminish over time (Blattman et al., 2019). Job training programmes, particularly those combining vocational and skills training with internships or on-the-job training, generally showed positive short-term impacts on employment and earnings (Attanasio et al., 2011). Apprenticeship programmes, such as the one implemented in Brazil, demonstrated promising results, increasing the likelihood of participants securing permanent jobs and experiencing lower turnover rates (Corseuil et al., 2019).

Several factors were identified as influential in determining the outcomes of these interventions. The quality of training emerged as a crucial factor, with higher quality courses associated with better labour market outcomes. In Peru, participants in high-quality courses exhibited significantly higher earnings compared to those in lower quality programmes (Chong & Galdo, 2006). Programme duration also played a role, with longer participation often leading to better outcomes. For example, in Germany, participants who remained in a programme for 6-12 months showed more positive employment effects (Ehlert, 2012). The economic context in which these interventions were implemented also proved to be a significant factor, highlighting the importance of designing context-specific programmes that take into account local economic conditions and labour market dynamics (Cueto & Mato, 2009).

The effectiveness of interventions targeting youth employment and skills development varied widely across different programmes and contexts. While many interventions demonstrated significant short-term positive impacts on employment rates, earnings, and skill acquisition, the sustainability of these outcomes remains a concern. For instance, the Youth Opportunities Programme in Uganda led to a notable 38% increase in earnings among participants, showcasing the potential for targeted interventions to uplift economically disadvantaged youths (Blattman et al., 2014). However, a common challenge observed across multiple studies was the tendency for these initial positive impacts to diminish over time, raising important questions about the long-term viability of such programmes and their ability to foster sustainable improvements in youth employability.

The PROJOVEN programme in Peru exemplified this trend, demonstrating initial positive effects on monthly wages that gradually decreased over the long term (Chong & Galdo, 2006). Similar findings are reported in the research by Alzúa et al. (2014) on a youth training programme in Argentina, which observed a decline in effectiveness after the initial implementation phase. Specifically, they found that while there were sizable short-term gains in formal employment (approximately an 8 percentage point increase) and earnings (up to 50% higher than the control group), these effects dissipated in the longer term. This aligns with the pattern observed in the PROJOVEN programme, indicating a broader trend across various contexts where youth employment programmes experience a decline in effectiveness after initial success. This pattern underscores the necessity for interventions to incorporate long-term support mechanisms that can help participants maintain and build upon their initial gains. Supporting this notion, Alzúa et al. (2016) conducted a long-term evaluation of a youth training programme in Argentina and found that ongoing assistance was crucial to maintaining employment outcomes for youth. The authors emphasised that while their programme showed initial success, the long-term impacts on employment and earnings were less clear without continued support. Alzúa et al. (2014) further suggested a need for longer follow-up and additional support to assist participants in sustaining their achievements. Without ongoing assistance—such as mentorship or further training opportunities—young people may struggle to leverage the skills they have acquired, leading to regression in employment outcomes.

Furthermore, research by Chong and Galdo (2006) supports the idea that adaptations tailored to specific local conditions are essential for enhancing programme effectiveness. They found that the quality of training courses significantly influenced labour market outcomes, with participants in high-quality courses exhibiting significantly higher earnings compared to those in lower-quality programmes. This highlights the importance of adapting training programmes to local needs and ensuring high-quality implementation. Additionally, they noted that programme duration played a role in effectiveness, with longer participation often leading to better outcomes. Their research emphasises the importance of designing context-specific programmes that take into account local economic conditions and labour

market dynamics, reinforcing the need for tailored adaptations in youth employment interventions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers and practitioners aiming to develop more resilient and effective interventions that can support youth in achieving sustained economic success. Thus, a holistic approach that balances immediate skill development with long-term support may be key to breaking the cycle of temporary gains in youth employment.

Gender disparities in intervention outcomes were frequently reported across various studies, highlighting the significant impact of gender on the effectiveness of youth employment initiatives. Multiple studies have shown that the impact of interventions differs markedly based on gender, indicating the need for a nuanced understanding of how these programmes affect young men and women differently. An example comes from the Dominican Republic, where women benefited considerably from vocational training programmes, experiencing higher rates of employment and income growth. In contrast, men paradoxically faced negative impacts in terms of short-term employment, with some men showing reduced engagement in the labour market following participation in these programmes (Acevedo et al., 2017).

This gender disparity can be attributed to several factors, including the types of skills taught in vocational programmes and the differing labour market conditions experienced by men and women. Ibararán et al. (2019) found significant long-term impacts on the formality of employment, particularly among men, and indicated that these impacts were sustained and growing over time in the Dominican Republic. In a study conducted in Nepal, Ahmed et al. (2014) observed that the training programme was more effective for women compared to men. The study showed improved employment outcomes and income for women. This difference in outcomes highlights potential issues in skill transfer effectiveness across genders. Groh et al. (2016) studied the effects of soft skills training on female youth employment in Jordan. They found that while the training did not significantly improve employment outcomes for participants compared to the control group, it did increase participants' optimism regarding their future employment prospects. This highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that considers both tangible skills and psychological factors in employment interventions.

These findings underscore the importance of considering gender-specific needs and barriers when designing and implementing youth employment interventions. Tailoring programmes to address the unique challenges faced by young women—such as childcare responsibilities or societal expectations—can enhance their effectiveness. Similarly, it's crucial to engage young men in programmes that resonate with their interests and the realities of the job market. The integration of gender-sensitive approaches in the development and execution of interventions not only promotes equity but also maximises overall programme effectiveness. Incorporating gender-specific strategies can involve targeted mentorship, flexible training

hours, and inclusive outreach efforts that address societal norms. It is imperative for policymakers and practitioners to recognise these gender dynamics to ensure that youth employment initiatives are equitable and impactful for all participants.

In summary, the findings of the review indicate that various interventions aimed at addressing the NEET issue can produce significantly different outcomes depending on their design, quality, and context. Cash grants and subsidies have shown mixed results, with initial positive impacts diminishing over time, while job training programmes that integrate vocational skills with internships yield more favourable short-term employment outcomes. The quality of training and programme duration are essential factors influencing success, with higher quality courses and longer participation correlating with better labour market results. Importantly, the review reveals that sustainable improvements in youth employability require ongoing support and long-term engagement, as initial gains often wane without adequate follow-up. Additionally, gender disparities in programme effectiveness highlight the need for interventions tailored to the specific challenges faced by young men and women. Overall, the review emphasises the necessity of comprehensive, high-quality, and context-specific interventions that prioritise both immediate skills development and sustained support to foster lasting economic success for NEET youth.

Implications for Practice

One of the crucial implications for practice is the necessity of tailored and comprehensive interventions in training programmes. The variation in outcomes among different demographic groups indicates that a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate. For example, research by Acevedo et al. (2017) in the Dominican Republic highlighted that women gained significant benefits from vocational training, while men faced negative impacts regarding short-term employment opportunities. This disparity emphasises the need for gender-specific interventions that target the unique challenges and advantages experienced by various groups. By designing programmes that consider these differences, practitioners can create more effective training initiatives that not only enhance participation but also improve outcomes for all individuals. Such tailored strategies may include personalised support services, curriculum adjustments, and the provision of resources that specifically cater to the needs of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. This approach not only enhances equity in access to benefits but also maximises the overall effectiveness of vocational training programmes.

The research by Chong and Galdo (2006) in Peru emphasises that the quality of training programmes is crucial for improving participants' earnings. This indicates that increasing access to training alone is not enough; it is essential to also enhance the quality and relevance of the training offered. High-quality training programmes typically include well-designed curricula, experienced instructors, and practical experiences that align with industry needs. Such improvements ensure that participants not only gain essential

knowledge but also develop skills that are directly applicable in the job market. In essence, prioritising the quality of training can lead to better economic outcomes for individuals, making it important for practitioners to focus on both access and effectiveness in vocational training initiatives.

The findings emphasise the significance of long-term support mechanisms in training programmes. Research, including that by Alzúa et al. (2016), has shown that while participants may experience initial positive outcomes, these effects can fade over time. This suggests that practitioners should not only focus on the immediate benefits of training but also consider the importance of ongoing support. Implementing long-term follow-up services—such as mentorship, additional training, or career counselling—can help participants sustain their initial gains and continue to develop their skills. By providing continuous support, programmes can foster resilience and adaptability in participants, enabling them to navigate changing job markets and advance in their careers over time. This approach ultimately enhances the effectiveness of training initiatives and contributes to sustained economic improvement for individuals.

Implications for Policy

From a policy perspective, the findings of the review highlight the necessity for a more nuanced and integrated approach to youth employment interventions. Evidence suggests that programmes combining multiple elements—such as vocational training, life skills education, and internships—are more successful in enhancing youth employability. For example, Attanasio et al. (2011) demonstrated that such comprehensive models effectively prepare young individuals for the workforce by equipping them with both technical skills and essential soft skills. This indicates that policymakers should prioritise holistic approaches that address various aspects of youth employability simultaneously. By integrating different programme components, stakeholders can create a supportive ecosystem that not only focuses on job-specific training but also fosters personal development, builds resilience, and enhances real-world experience through internships or apprenticeships. Implementing such multifaceted strategies can lead to better employment outcomes for youth, ultimately contributing to economic growth and reducing overall unemployment rates. A coordinated approach also encourages collaboration among educational institutions, employers, and community organisations, ensuring that initiatives are aligned with the needs of both the job market and young individuals.

The observed gender disparities in programme outcomes, as highlighted in studies like Bandiera et al. (2015), emphasise the need for gender-sensitive policies in youth employment interventions. These disparities can lead to different levels of access, participation, and effectiveness of programmes for men and women. Policymakers should examine how interventions may impact genders differently and consider specific barriers that each group faces. For example, women might experience cultural or societal obstacles

that limit their engagement in certain programmes, while men might deal with distinct expectations in the workforce. By designing policies that take these differences into account, stakeholders can create more inclusive and effective employment programmes. Tailored support services, mentorship, and flexible training options can help ensure both men and women benefit equally from interventions. Addressing these disparities not only enhances programme effectiveness but also supports broader goals of gender equality in the labour market.

Moreover, findings underscore the importance of the economic context in shaping programme outcomes, as highlighted by Cueto and Mato (2009). This suggests that policies governing youth employment and training initiatives should be flexible and adaptable to the unique economic conditions of different regions. In order to achieve effective outcomes, it may be necessary to develop region-specific strategies that take into account local labour market demands, economic challenges, and available resources. This approach allows for tailored solutions that resonate with the specific needs of communities and enhances the relevance of programmes for participants. Additionally, allowing for local customisation of national programmes can enable adaptations that reflect the distinct circumstances of a region, ensuring that interventions are not only relevant but also effective in achieving desired goals. By being responsive to local economic conditions, policymakers can enhance the effectiveness of training programmes, ultimately leading to improved employment outcomes and economic resilience within communities.

Strengths and Limitations of the Review Process

Strengths

This review presents several notable strengths that enhance its validity and relevance within the field of youth employment interventions. One major strength is its comprehensive scope, which encompasses a diverse range of studies from various geographical contexts, including both developed and developing countries. This broad representation enables a nuanced understanding of youth employment interventions across different economic and social settings, thereby increasing the generalizability of the findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Moreover, the review's inclusion of multiple types of interventions—such as cash transfers, vocational training, apprenticeship programmes, and entrepreneurship support—provides a multifaceted perspective on addressing youth unemployment and underemployment. The examination of both quantitative and qualitative outcomes adds depth, revealing insights not just into employment rates and earnings but also into softer outcomes like skill development and empowerment (Levac et al., 2010). Additionally, the review adheres to a rigorous methodological approach, following established guidelines for scoping reviews. The systematic search strategy and clearly defined inclusion criteria enhance reproducibility and minimise bias in study selection (Peters et al., 2015).

Limitations

Despite these strengths, the review acknowledges several limitations. A prominent concern is the potential for publication bias; studies with positive or significant results are often more likely to be published, leading to an overestimation of the effectiveness of certain interventions (Tricco et al., 2016). Furthermore, the heterogeneity of included studies in terms of methodological quality poses a challenge. While efforts were made to evaluate study quality, the diversity of interventions and contexts complicates the application of a uniform assessment tool, potentially impacting the reliability of synthesised findings (Pham et al., 2014). The predominance of short-term outcome measures in many studies is another limitation. The lack of long-term follow-up data restricts understanding of the sustained impacts of interventions (Blattman et al., 2019). Language bias is also an issue, as only studies published in English were included, which may have excluded relevant research from non-English speaking countries where youth unemployment is prevalent (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Lastly, resource constraints meant that some relevant databases and grey literature sources may not have been searched, risking the omission of pertinent studies and interventions (Levac et al., 2010).

Evidence for Future Research

The review identified several critical gaps that warrant further investigation and refinement of employment and training programmes. A significant issue is the observed lack of sustained impacts from various interventions, with initial benefits often diminishing over time (Abebe, 2018; Blattman, 2019; Ehlert, 2012). For instance, vocational training programmes frequently yield temporary improvements in employment rates, raising questions about their long-term efficacy and the need for ongoing support (Alzúa, 2016; Groh, 2012). Additionally, there is a notable deficiency in addressing the specific needs of various demographic groups within the labour market, such as high-skilled job seekers, young men, and women (Abebe, 2019; Acevedo, 2017; Ahmed, 2014). Many current programmes often fail to adequately assess job quality and its relationship to employment outcomes, prioritising earnings over important factors like job satisfaction (Blanco, 2019; Godlonton, 2016). Overall, this evidence underscores the urgent need for comprehensive evaluations that not only measure immediate outcomes but also delve into long-term impacts, demographic considerations, and job quality. Addressing these gaps is essential for fostering more effective and sustainable employment solutions tailored to the diverse needs of youth populations.

Based on the insights and suggestions from the included studies in this review, several themes for future research can be identified:

Long-term Effects of Training and Employment Interventions: Numerous studies emphasise exploring the long-term impacts of various training programmes and interventions on employment outcomes. This includes examining how different populations respond to job-search assistance, vocational training, and self-employment support (e.g., Abebe, 2018; Attanasio, 2011; Blattman, 2019).

Gender Dynamics and Differentiated Impacts: Understanding the mechanisms behind different outcomes for men and women in training and employment programmes is crucial, as well as how gender affects participation and success (e.g., Acevedo, 2017; Ahmed, 2014; Alzúa, 2016).

Programme Sustainability and Scalability: Research into the sustainability of training outcomes and the ability to scale successful programmes across various contexts is advocated. This includes assessing factors that influence participant engagement and success (e.g., Alfonsi, 2020; Blattman, 2014).

Mechanisms of Effectiveness: Investigating the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the success of employment interventions is critical, including the role of soft skills, social networks, and other individual characteristics (e.g., Groh, 2016; Godlonton, 2016).

Job Matching and Market Integration: There is a need to explore better job matching mechanisms, the effectiveness of job fairs, and how to facilitate smoother transitions into stable employment for various demographic groups (e.g., Alzúa, 2019; Beam, 2016; Chakravorty, 2019).

Impact of Economic Context: Future research should investigate how varying economic conditions and local labour market dynamics influence the effectiveness of training and employment programmes (e.g., Cueto, 2009; Ibarraran, 2015; Carneiro, 2014).

Support for Underrepresented Groups: Many studies call for a focus on interventions aimed at underrepresented populations, including women and marginalised demographics, and how these programmes can be tailored to better address their specific challenges (e.g., Mulas, 2018; Valdivia, 2014; Cadena, 2012).

Overall, pursuing research in these areas is likely to yield valuable insights that can enhance training programmes, improve employment outcomes, and ensure equitable access to resources across different population groups.

Conclusion

This review, conducted as part of the Link Up Leigh Park Project, has made a meaningful contribution to understanding the complex issue of youth disconnection from education, employment, or training (NEET). By synthesising existing evidence-based interventions, the review offers valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by young people in this demographic and the tailored strategies that can effectively address their needs.

One of the significant contributions of the review is its identification of diverse intervention types that have been successful in improving outcomes for NEET youth. It highlights the importance of multifaceted approaches, incorporating elements such as vocational training, job matching assistance, financial support, and mentorship. This comprehensive perspective underscores that a one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate; rather, interventions must be tailored to reflect the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and challenges faced by young people.

Additionally, the review emphasises the critical role of long-term support in ensuring the sustainability of positive outcomes. By demonstrating that interventions providing ongoing mentorship and resources yield more durable benefits, the review calls attention to the necessity of continuity in support structures. This finding is particularly relevant for policy formulation and programme design, as it advocates for an investment in youth well-being that extends beyond initial training phases.

The review also addresses the significance of gender dynamics in employment interventions, providing evidence that outcomes can vary significantly based on gender. By bringing this factor to light, the review highlights the need for gender-sensitive approaches when implementing youth employment programmes. This insight is crucial for ensuring that interventions are equitable and effective for all participants.

Furthermore, the review serves as a roadmap for policymakers and practitioners, informing decision-making processes with evidence-based recommendations for effective interventions. It calls for future research to bridge existing gaps, particularly concerning the long-term impacts of interventions and their adaptability to varying economic contexts.

In summary, the review has contributed significantly to the field of youth employment and NEET interventions by providing a thorough analysis of effective strategies, advocating for tailored and long-term support, and emphasising the importance of considering demographic factors in programme design. These insights will guide future initiatives aimed at improving the prospects of NEET youth, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and resilient workforce.

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