

# Involvement of Institutional Managers in Addressing TVET Graduate-Employability Skills Gaps

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## **Abstract**

TVET institutional managers are key to achievement of Kenya government's aspiration of industrialization by the year 2030, christened Vision 2030. This is aimed at through focused investment of resources in technology learning under the supervision of TVET managers. The government's keen interest in TVET is displayed through enhanced financial support by way of ever increasing national budget for TVET sector whereby the number of TVET institutions have shot by 450% since 2013 to-date. This is evident through allowing increased learner enrolment which has shot by over 600% since 2013, training and employment of TVET tutors and in-servicing TVET management, and formation of TVETA (Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority) for quality assurance. The value of TVET institutional managers in the input-output cycle cannot be realized without effective TVET-industry linkage and collaboration which would minimize graduate-employability skills gaps. The government is actively engaged in public sensitization and, in calling out to investors, both internal and external, besides supporting research activities in the match towards towards vision 2030. However, TVET educational players, coordinated by TVET institutional managers, whose process destination is industry have inadequate contact with industry yet industry are the primary consumers of TVET outputs. Today, industry values and prefers much TVET training to take place within the workplace for seamless absorption of TVET graduates. It would also foster feedback from an enhanced TVET-industry knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing experience. Instead, in TVET curriculum implementation skilling for employment is conducted with a short stint at industry, dubbed industrial attachment. This has resulted in skills mis-match attributed to non-market responsive training. Adequate involvement of TVET institutional managers through collaboration between TVET and industry with periodically reviewed feedback would lead to provision of relevant practical skills. This would be through effective implementation of Competence Based Education and Training (CBET) Curriculum geared towards industrialization. It is in this respect that this paper explores the value of involvement of institutional managers in addressing TVET graduate-employability skills gaps.

**Key Words:** TVET; TVETA; TVET- industry linkage; CBET; Employability skills gaps

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## **I. Introduction**

TVET refers to the aspects of the educational process which, in addition to general education, involves the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO, 2002). In this regard, TVET institutional managers facilitate curriculum implementation with the aim of equipping trainees with not only vocational and technical skills, but also with other broad-range of knowledge and abilities necessary for effectiveness at work place and life. To ground this, May 1961 Addis Ababa Conference of African States on Human Resource Development and Training in May 1961 recommended that Africa's priority should be accorded to ensuring that an adequate proportion of the population receives the kind of skills required for economic development, UNESCO (1961) as a way of matching human resource training to economic development of nations. This was based on the fact that economic growth would require an expanded reservoir of 'polyvalent' human resource with relevant technical skills and abilities acquired through the technical curricula of the formal school system through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Expanded programmes of technical education are mandatory if urgent need for qualified specialists to run the existing and projected economic institutions are to be met, UNESCO (1961). In this regard, those entrusted with the management of TVET institutions ought to be 'polyvalent' to fit changing industry demands.

As a follow-up, Kenyan government recommended the establishment of Technical Training Institutes (T.T.Is) from former Technical Secondary Schools as tertiary institutions for teaching of practical skills to facilitate direct employment, self-employment and employment in the informal sector (Republic of Kenya,

1981). As reported in Republic of Kenya (2010) technical institutions should have close linkages with the world of work to solicit support of industry in the enhancement of practical training that is market -driven. It is therefore imperative for TVET institutional managers to have to develop a common understanding of skills training gaps to feed the industry appropriately. Such inter-linkage can foster activities inclusive of donations of equipment and tools, staff exchange programs ,and placement of trainees and staff on work experience attachment. However, in spite of the emphasis placed on vitality of technical education by conferences and commissions, an International Labour Organization (ILO) Report of 1992 still observed that young people graduating from technical institutions in Kenya lacked employable skills (UNESCO, 2002, Kerre, 1992), hence employability gaps. Today's revised TVET curriculum, CBET, offers hands on skills training that is relevant for the labour market by competitive workforce ( KNA, 2021). This observation by Kerre (1992) calls for a systematic involvement of TVET institutional managers in establishing a rapport between TVET and industry for identification of graduate employability skills gaps.

In Kenya, the current TVET reforms as reported in Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 (Republic of Kenya, 2012) are aimed at achieving an industrialized nation by the year 2030. According to Wakiaga (2019) the government decided to address the misconceptions about training for blue collar jobs by investing heavily in TVET through Vision 2030 focused funding. In this regard, it is noted that Finland which is a global stellar example of TVET ranks fifth worldwide in Most Innovative Economies (MIEs) as rated by Bloomberg's 2017 Innovation Index. To this end, government has increased funding, is publicizing TVET institutions to enhance enrolment, has offered bursaries and loans to enrolled students, and is consistently training tutors, and institutional managers as supervised and coordinated by TVETA (Republic of Kenya, 2012). As reported in The Star (12/4/19), the government had allowed doubled population of 78,000 for university intake to 171,500 for TVET institutions in the year 2019 followed with increased funding for institutional and training projects besides bursaries and loans for students, and training schedules for tutors and managers. This has resulted in an increase of 450% in the number of TVET institutions, and student enrolment of 600% from 2013 the year 2021(KNA, 2021). However, national policy and efforts, only, cannot make Kenya realize its industrialization dream, hence the importance of focusing on whether the activities in the individual TVET institutions are geared towards the commitment to Vision 2030 (Dawo & Owuor, 2020). It is important to note is the fact that CBET system is based on industry and business demand-led model approved and industry validated occupational standards(KNA,2021).The key players in this initiative are TVET institutional managers.

#### **MANAGEMENT FACTORS UNDERLYING TVET-INDUSTRY SKILLS MIS-MATCH BY TVET TRAINEES**

According to World Bank(1991) and UNECSO (2012), the reputation of TVET institutions is dependent on their ability to produce qualified young people who will be immediately operational in the work place, the industry. To achieve this, TVET is expected to play three key functions towards national sustainable development:

- i) To provide viable training opportunities and career advancement avenues for the ever increasing school leaver population
- ii) To provide skilled manpower that is needed at varied levels of the economy that underlie self-reliance/ self-employment to fill the unemployment gaps.
- iii) To enhance industrialization process necessary for national goal achievement and national vision realization.

However, literature indicates that TVET has still been left to the periphery and its significance has not actually been embraced or even nearly realized (Mureithi, 2008; Indoshi ,2010; Abebe,2012) . Without change, the goals of TVET in Kenya being to develop an effectively coordinated and harmonized system that is capable of producing quality skilled human resource, with the right attitude and values as required for growth and prosperity of the various sectors of the economy (Mureithi, 2008) may never be achieved.

As analyzed here-in, a study on challenges facing technical training in Kenya by Sang, Muthaa and Mbugua,( 2012) had the following major findings:

- i) As regards relevance of training curriculum, according to trainers, the relevance T.T.I taught skills to the employment market skills in industries and business organizations in Kenya. Respondents (29.2%) and (27.1%) indicated that the courses offered by the T.T.Is were relevant and irrelevant to the market skill needs respectively, while 16.7% held no opinion on the relevance of courses offered, whereas 14.6% and 12.5% felt that the courses offered were very relevant and very irrelevant respectively. The data reveals that about 40% of respondents indicated that the courses were either irrelevant or very irrelevant to the market skill needs in industries and business organization. This observation made from the trainers in T.T.Is means that T.T.Is are engaged in training activities they doubt to serve the consumers.

ii) In matters relating to facility availability, majority of the H.O.D respondents (83.3%) indicated that training facilities were not adequate compared to only 16.7% of respondents who indicated that the physical facilities were adequate. This implies that the H.O.Ds felt that T.T.Is operated with inadequate training facilities. The graduates' opinion was also sought in reference to the adequacy of the physical facilities. Majority of the graduate respondents (63.1%) indicated that the training facilities in T.T.Is were inadequate while 36.9% indicated that the facilities were adequate. This implies that majority of the T.T.I graduates felt that they were trained using inadequate training facilities.

iii) As concerns adequacy of trainers, majority of the respondents (72.9%) indicated that the trainers were not adequate while (27.1%) of the respondents indicated that the trainers were adequate to implement the training duties in the department. The shortage of trainers therefore emerged as one of the challenges facing T.T.Is in Kenya. The study sought information on the academic qualifications of T.T.I trainers. Most of the trainers (32.1%) are either diploma holders or first-degree holders in each case. About 22.2% and 13.6% of the trainers were said to have higher diploma and masters respectively. The study established that majority of the trainers were either diploma holders or first degree graduates. This is despite the fact that most T.T.I graduates eventually left the institutions with a diploma qualification. It is therefore clear that the T.T.Is are poorly staffed. This is despite several conferences and government documents and task forces highlighting the value of teaching and training staff as a critical component of an educational process (Republic of Kenya, 2010) hence the need to focus on their availability and qualification.

In a study on factors that determine students and teachers attitudes towards Art and Design curriculum in Kenya (Indoshi, 2010), out of the technical teachers interviewed on the study conducted by Indoshi (2010), only 38% had acquired industrial work experience of only six months or less, 26% had work experience of between 12-36 months and 16% had work experience of over 36 months. This was generally the scenario reported about technical training programmes in Trinidad and Tobago's post-secondary education system. Werum(2003). This study conducted revealed that 67% of the TVET trainers were more comfortable teaching theory than practical lessons or aspects of the TVET curriculum. In addition, Abebe (2012), argued that lack of motivation among teachers to teach in TVET that was low rated negatively affected trainer input towards curriculum implementation. This could be associated with employment skills gap realized in industry whose bedrock is technical skills gained through hands-on experience. This against government intention that emphasizes adequate staffing for effective training (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

According to Aduda (2003) the trainer should possess higher qualification than the trainee sought level of achievement, the highest being a diploma for TVET institutions, in order to effectively execute the training duties. In this regard, in Kenyan, research showed that 37% of the TVET teachers in Kenya possessed Diploma and 33% possessed degree, about 20% held a certificate and 10% had master's degree as their highest qualification. In Nigeria, a study investigating professional adequacy of TVET instructors found that only 65.83% were qualified (Olataye, 2011). A worse scenario was revealed in Zambia whereby UNESCO (2012) showed that, with increase in enrolment, private TVET institutions faced a more critical shortage of qualified trainers. Out of the 159 teaching staff survey, only 36% had a teaching certificate.

### **STRATEGIES FOR MINIMIZING GRADUATE-EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS GAPS**

It is imperative for TVET institutional managers to engage industry as significant players in TVET. In order to convince and engage employers and enterprises (industry) to be significant players in TVET in different emerging economies. The following strategies are suggested by Wahba(2011):

- i) Systematic professional development of TVET Trainers / Instructors / Teachers, Assessors and Verifiers. This would enhance trainer input skills and eventually enhance the output and training outcomes necessary for active industry workplace.
- ii) A TVET system should keep pace with technological advancements in industry and use technology appropriates in technical education and training for workplace relevance.
- iii) Encouraging Continuing TVET and Lifelong Learning. This is premised on the fact that industry is evolving and TVET ought to respond to remain relevant.
- iv) Delivering a TVET Demand Approach to avoid producing industry obsolete skills.
- v) Develop and manage a robust evidence based Competency Assurance Management System CAMS with a view to set a traditional criteria for management of quality assurance of the TVET System (Quality Based TVET). This demands benchmarking with the best practices worldwide.
- vi) Change the mindset of parents, the community and stakeholders about vocational education being second choice to academic education through community sensitization and mobilization.

In addition, according to Singh and Tolessa (2019), to realize the inherent immense benefits of TVET, emerging economies with a myriad of sectorial weaknesses ought to adopt the following:

- i) Ensure that TVET is more market driven (Demand driven TVET)
- ii) Control and assure the quality of TVET (Quality Based TVET)

- iii) Establish more TVET Institutions (Vocational Institutes, Vocational Training Centers, Technical Industrial Schools) with a view to provide technical and vocational education and training to meet the needs of the community
- iv) Establish different decentralized Enterprise Training Provider Partnerships for different sectors of industry
- v) Set clear national TVET strategies and policies
- vi) Increase funding towards TVET. This should be directed towards research and development, acquisition of appropriate and up-to-date equipment and tools and general maintenance and management of TVET institution
- vii) More attention or equal attention should be offered to the TVET sector as that offered to the General and Higher Education
- viii) Encourage industrial organizations to participate in the formulation of the curricula, provide On-the-Job Training programmes and certify the competencies offered
- ix) Governments should encourage industrial organizations to participate in TVET in general by creating incentives for companies, reimbursing training costs, subsidizing apprenticeship wages and for those companies who earn huge profits, by allowing for tax claiming.

The afore-mentioned strategies tend to be trainee-focused, not concentrating on TVET institutional managers who are key drivers to addressing the factors underlying their graduate employability skills gaps. TVET institutional managers, some of whom, as currently deployed, do not have a technical training background, can directly contribute to bridge this skills gap by:

- i. Invite stakeholders in industry to highlight noted areas of graduate training gaps to be included by trainers for enhanced out-put ( attitude, knowledge and skills).
- ii. Individual institutions to carry research on areas to be included in training in response to industry-skills-demand.
- iii. Institutional managers to endeavor to keep pace with upcoming technological innovations by availing them for their trainees, as and when they emerge.
- iv. Institutional managers can foster soft skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, teamwork, problem solving and analytical capacity which are necessary for survival in an industrial setting.
- v. Institutional managers, being the lead trainers, should inculcate professionalism in the various areas of training.
- vi. Institutional managers should plan for learners to attend industrial visits and participate in related technical events, if and when organized.
- vii. To appreciate, the magnitude of their job, they should themselves endeavor to learn and understand the requirements of TVET learners, particularly for those from non-technical orientation.

## II. Conclusion

With enhanced involvement of TVET institutional managers through TVET-industry linkage and collaboration, there would be improved networking between the academia and industry to create a better understanding of each other's needs and to identify how these can be met through their partnership. To realize this, the roles of TVET institutional managers should expand beyond simply supervising CBET curriculum implementation to focusing on making a vibrant and relevant techno—academic experience for learners. This should include consultancy with resource mobilization, marketing and public relations with project management skills. They should also provide feedback for curriculum review towards achieving TVET output with minimized graduate employability skills gaps for Vision 2030.

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