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Employers' Perceptions of Technical Vocational Education and Training activities in Zimbabwe

Albert Makochekanwa
Professor, University of Zimbabwe
Email: almac772002@yahoo.co.uk

Joburg Mahuyu
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Zimbabwe
Email:jmahuyu@gmail.com

&

Carren Pindiriri
Lecturer, University of Zimbabwe
Email: cpindiriri@sociol.uz.ac.zw

Abstract
The research investigated the perceptions of employers regarding technical and vocational training (TVET) system in Zimbabwe. A total of 57 employers of TVET graduates throughout the country were sampled and information and data were collected from them using a structured questionnaire. The study found that, overall; the employers have high positive perceptions about the quality of TVET training programs in Zimbabwe in a number of dimensions. The major challenge with regards to TVET training was that TVET institutions in Zimbabwe are equipped with obsolete and old equipment which is very much behind machines and equipment used in the industry. Furthermore, the study found that TVET training program emphasizes theory more than hands-on practical skills. Going forward, employers suggested that to close the gap between equipment in stock and the technological frontier, TVET institutions and respective funders should raise money to buy new equipment and ensure continuous upgrading of such equipments.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Technical and Vocational Training, Employers

Introduction

Economic activities and competitiveness of any given country depend on the skills of its workforce. The competencies and skills of the labour force

are in turn a function of the quality of the country's education and training system (Mustapha and Greeman, 2002). In fact Aina (2006) contends that education is unquestionably considered as the bedrock of any meaningful development while Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the cornerstone for any sustainable technological development programme. According to Bappah and Medugu (2013), in the skills training fraternity, TVET is regarded as workforce education predominantly given its traditional role of facilitating the adjustment of the skills and knowledge of any workforce to the changing demands within the society. Thus TVET is deliberately designed to help man improve his skills as it places emphasis on skill development of the individuals in chosen occupations (Olaitan, 1993). TVET's peculiarity is seen in its ability in raising the quality of work and quality of TVET graduates as well as increasing job satisfaction and motivating workers, thus enhancing productivity (Manifred and Jennifer, 2004). In the contemporary world where most countries are emphasising the importance of production of merchandise goods both for domestic consumption and export markets, TVET is expected to produce an educated, skilled and motivated work force to effectively and efficiently produce such goods.

The socio-economic challenges and economic meltdown which experienced Zimbabwe since the turn of the new millennium poses challenges to educational and industrial sectors in the country. This trend has given rise to economic, political and social crises which have threatened the country's political and economic stability for some time. In summary the country's economic activities as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) shrinked by around 54% between 2000 and 2008, with the highest ever recorded hyperinflation rate of 231 million percent recorded in July 2008 and unemployment rate of around 94% recorded for the country by 2008. In such circumstances of economic severity, Giroux (1991) indicates that the rising unemployment, lack of skilled workers, high dropout rates and the changing demographic nature of the workforce have placed the issue of workforce education high on the educational reform agenda of many nations, Zimbabwe included. In support of this line of thinking, Okolocha (2006) observed that the massive rate of unemployment and the changing face of the economic, social, and political and labour market in various countries including Zimbabwe have led to new education reforms and polices with emphasis on TVET geared towards helping the youths and adults to be self-reliant.

Given the seemingly positive benefits from TVET training system, different countries have come up with different framework towards repositioning their TVET programmes for sustainable economic growth and development. Just a snapshot of few countries attests to the various changes they have implemented to ensure TVET catapult them to higher economic development. In the case of France, Michael (2002) indicates that the French National Assembly approved the law on social modernization which contains important measures concerning TVET and the right to employment. The same author further discussed the modernization of training places and strengthening their practical element with emphasis on social and practical skills development. In the case of Germany, Michael (2002) posits that one of the objectives of the country's education reform is to promote the vocational education of gifted young people and to raise the standard of TVET. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (1984) indicates that the country introduced the 8-4-4 educational system with emphasis on TVET which ensured that the graduate students at every level have some scientific and practical knowledge that can be utilised for self-employment, salaried employment or further training. In West Africa, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) shows that Nigeria was by 2013 also among the League of Nations revamping her TVET programmes which was introduced into the 6-3-3-4 educational system in 1982. Given these seemingly positive benefits of TVET to development, the main aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of employers regarding TVET training in Zimbabwe.

Brief history of TVET in Zimbabwe

Historically, an intentionally planned TVET apprenticeship scheme flourished in the Rozvi and Munhumutapa Empire before colonialism centred on trades such as sculpture, basketry, architecture, art and painting, forge-work, iron mongering, pottery, and weaving among other numerous trades and skills. According to the Government of Zimbabwe (MHET, 2010), the curriculum structure followed the patterns of the traditional apprenticeship system, a model which Golby et al (1971) described as the 'Saber Tooth' curriculum. This was an initiation arrangement where skills and competences were 'transmitted', as espoused by Nyerere's (1967) terminology, from one generation to the next, a system that groomed skilled personnel that matched and satisfied the social, political and economic needs of the societies at the time.

The arrival of colonialism in the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the 1890s saw the introduction of a technical and vocational education system which was designed and aligned to suit the racial and economic aspirations of the settler regime. The system found its roots in the Natal crafts training which took place at early years of the 20th century and was organised by the Native Commissioner of Natal, Loram (MHET, 2005). Kegwin and Jowitt transferred this philosophy to Southern Rhodesia in 1923 resulting in the establishment of Tjolotjo and Domboshawa skills centres, primarily training blacks in crafts which included building, carpentry and agriculture (Atkinson, 1972; 1985). The missionaries who came into the country in the 1890's also played a very important role in training Africans in the same trades.

An Education Commission Report (MHET, 2005) triggered transformation in TVET schools' sector. One recommendation out of the commission was introduction of an "ecological curriculum", consequently spurring introduction of F (2) system in secondary education for blacks, starting in 1966 with Msengezi Secondary School. A purely practical curriculum in the education sector was introduced through the reform running parallel to F (1) stream which was academic and more prestigious. Acceptance of the F (2) system by the majority of the people was marred since its objectives were misunderstood especially due to reasons that encompass its racial temperament in that it was being offered to blacks while Asians, Whites and Coloured races were prohibited. It was also regarded as inferior to the F(1) stream as well as technical and vocational systems operating at Salisbury Polytechnic and Bulawayo Technical College for Whites, Asians and Coloureds during that time. It was therefore deemed a dead-end whose graduands might not further their education following four years of secondary education. The structure despised its own graduands who could not train as teachers or nurses and were intended to return to the rural areas where they were supposed to employ acquired skills to develop themselves, an initiative that was unpleasant (MHET, 2005). Thus, even as of 2018 in Zimbabwe TVET is generally considered as a career-path for the less economically and intellectually endowed. This perception is cemented by the fact that the entry requirements in TVET institutions in Zimbabwe are normally lower than those of universities and other academic institutions. Simultaneously, the colonial government provided a parallel TVET system for whites, comprising well-developed technical high schools and post-secondary technical institutions such as Salisbury Polytechnic and

Bulawayo Technical College, which produced highly qualified artisans and technicians based on the City and Guilds system in the United Kingdom.

Soon after independence in 1980, F(2) schools were replaced by Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP) schools whose skills thrust was guided by Nyerere's (1967) philosophy of "Education for Self-Reliance". Despite this policy thrust, the same schools gradually drifted towards the theoretical paradigm, propagating a mismatch between school products and industry needs. This was because the majority of stakeholders, especially parents and guardians, perceived ZIMFEP schools as a replica of F (2) schools of the colonial era. They also perceived theoretical education as epitomising quality education that would open doors for good life.

At lower levels of the education ladder, that is Early Childhood Development (ECD) up to grade 7 and secondary schools (Form 1 to Form 6), further prevarication on TVET policy in this education sub-sector between 2001 and 2004 dogged progress towards fully offering TVET subjects in the secondary schools. Despite the fact that a definite stance to offer at least two technical/vocational subjects in each school was adopted, consistent with the 1999 Nziramasanga Report; over the years, there has not been any significant move towards offering TVET in the schools' sector. It is only from 2016 that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education began making it mandatory for each school to implement its primary or secondary curriculum in line with the Nziramasanga Report.

In the tertiary sector, the 1990 restructuring of TVET established five levels of qualifications: (i) Pre-Vocational Certificate (PVC), (ii) National Foundation Certificate (NFC), (iii) National Certificate (NC), (iv) National Diploma (ND), and (v) Higher National Diploma (HND), aligning them to the theoretical sector and affording learners the opportunity to progress smoothly from one paradigm to the other. The Department of Industrial and Trade Testing has made possible recognition of prior learning through trade testing. Learners without formal academic qualifications, either with experience through on-the-job training, non-formal programmes, including Youth Skills Centres, get trade-tested and have their qualifications registered on the Zimbabwe Qualifications Framework (ZQF). This enables these learners to rise to the skilled worker status.

The policy which resulted in upgrading of technical colleges to polytechnics in 2001 enabled the upgraded colleges to offer TVET degrees from 2004, a trend which has continued to date. With regards to curriculum updates and revisions, the modus operandi used by Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO) in formulating TVET curricula, in close consultation with industry, continues to ensure that courses offered in technical institutions remain relevant to industry and the country's commerce needs.

Despite the importance of TVET in the economic development of any country, various stakeholders still have different perspectives about the programme goals. Bappah and Medugu (2013) contends that international comparison shows that employers in the United States of America (USA) and United Kingdom (UK) believe that the present state of TVET in their respective countries is inadequate to train students effectively for the changing demands of the work place (Brown and Keep, 1999; and Distler, 1992). On the contrary, Fairwealther (1999) shows that Australian employers were reported as being satisfied with their TVET system. The positive and appropriateness of TVET was also observed in Malaysian where according to Mustapha and Greeman (2002) employers and educators expressed satisfaction over the contribution of TVE to the economic development of Malaysia. These evidences were obtained from studies carried out in Europe, America and Asia and not in Zimbabwe. To this end, the research problem of this current study, posed as a question is: what are the perceptions of employers on the role of TVET for sustainable development in Zimbabwe? Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of employers regarding TVET training system in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the study intends to (i) investigate the perceptions of employers regarding the activities of TVET in Zimbabwe, and (ii) find out the perceptions of employers regarding the employability of graduates of TVE programmes.

Literature review

The report by the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) (2014) allude to the fact that despite the expansion of the education and training system at all levels after independence in the public and private sector and non-government organizations (NGO) sectors, one of the major challenges experienced by young people in gaining access to employment is lack of skills. According to the report, 91% of the population that was in the informal sector had no skills. It was found that the current TVET system in the country was

inadequate to meet the skills training and employment needs of the young people. The study further noted that the number of young people currently enrolled in TVET institutions and in apprenticeships was a negligible proportion of the out-of school youth who require skills for employment and industry growth. Other constraining factors that were found included the mismatch between the skills being developed by the training system and what was needed in the labour market, the mismatch between the technology used in institutions of learning and industry and the general economic decline that had affected the labour absorption capacity of industry. The issues that were investigated by the report were relevant to Zimbabwe, however the report did not investigate the perceptions of employers who had TVET graduates in their labour force, a gap which is covered by this current study.

The research on Zimbabwe by Mutambanengwe (2014) investigated the role played by both open and distance learning (ODL), and other institutions as far as reducing unemployment and improving the socioeconomic development of Zimbabwe. To achieve the objective, the author employed a cross-sectional approach which helped to provide a holistic perspective of the nature of technical vocational training taking place in Zimbabwean ODL institutions. The overall finding of the study is that in Zimbabwe, institutions of higher learning are producing graduates every year. Unfortunately, the majority of the graduates are unemployed because of unavailability of jobs on the market and lack of right skills regardless of the fact that the country is rich in raw materials like minerals and land. It follows that because of lack of employment opportunities, university and college graduates were forced to indulge in both legal and illegal activities in order to irk out a living. The worst forms of illegal activities that were noted included: debt bondage, prostitution, pornography, drug trafficking, street vending and other illicit activities, likely to be harmful or hazardous to the health, safety or morals of youths who are not capable of making own decisions and are still depending on parents/guardians. In the midst of these challenges, the study concluded by saying that it is hoped that open and distance learning (ODL), with the right programmes and personnel, can train students to acquire "life skills for self-reliance" so that on completion they become job creators not job seekers. Whilst this reviewed study looked at the impact of higher education institutions on employment and socio-economic development in

Zimbabwe, the contribution of the current study is that it analysis the perspectives of employers on activities of TVET institutions in the country.

Zimbabwe's Library and Information Science (LIS) qualifications are well sought after as evidenced by the number of LIS graduates who continue to secure employment opportunities throughout the region and beyond. The research by Shoko et al (2015) explored the extent to which library and information science programmes could benefit from a Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional qualifications framework in the context of Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) and Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) models. The study found that curriculum standards in the LIS and other disciplines in the country are set and developed assuring quality technical and vocational education and training (TVET) by rendering relevant and responsive curricula, continuous assessment and examinations for sustainable development. Wide consultations from professional bodies, government departments and parastatals have been made to ensure qualitative LIS curriculum development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Whilst the study covered an interesting area, it however did not investigate the perceptions of employers who have TVET graduates in their labour force, a gap which is covered by this current study.

The United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2012) World TVET Database Zimbabwe report provides a snapshot of a number of issues with related to TVET in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the report provides a brief presentation on a plethora of TVET issues in Zimbabwe namely: (i) TVET mission, strategy and legislation, (ii) TVET formal, non-formal and informal systems, (iii) Governance and financing, (iv) TVET teachers and trainers, (v) qualifications and qualifications Frameworks, and (vi) TVET current reforms, major projects and challenges. Despite the importance of the issues covered, the report did not analyse the perceptions of employers who have TVET graduates in their labour force, a gap which is covered by this current study.

The main objective of the study by Adjrah and Quashie (2014) was to investigate implementation of technical and vocational curriculum (abbreviated BTS in French) in Togo so as to identify deficiencies limiting the acquisition of vocational skills. The study sought to answer the following two pertinent questions: (i) are the training devices provided by

private BTS institutions effective in helping students acquire needed vocational skills? And (ii) how do teachers, students, employed BTS graduates and workplace supervisors perceive the effectiveness of BTS curricula to meet job market needs? With regards to employers, eighty percent of them expressed their dissatisfaction regarding implemented BTS curricula compared to the needs of the labour market. A large majority of respondents were unsatisfied (73% and 60% respectively), about the skills acquired by BTS graduates especially labour market expectations, and opportunities for professionals involved in the training process, In summary then, employers believe that students' theoretical knowledge was not well understood and their practical abilities were not up to standard.

In a study which centred on the motor vehicle service and repair industry in Kenya, Ngure's (2013) thesis analysed key stakeholders' perceptions of TVET in the micro and small enterprises (MSE) in the motor vehicle service and repair industry (MVRSI). To achieve the objective of the thesis, data were collected in two cities and four roadside towns. Interviews were held with 19 micro and small enterprises (MSE) employers and 57 of their employees, eight TVET trainers and four senior education officers. Four focus group discussions (FGDs) with final year trainees were held, and observations were made at the MSE and the training institutions. Content analysis was used to analyse data. Major findings obtained indicated that TVET plays a vital role in furnishing its learners with skills that are required in the MVRSI. However, while the training and development (T&D) program had very well crafted training objectives, it was beset by numerous challenges. First, the program had restricted methods of data gathering resulting in a system that had neither been able to compile an industrial skills inventory nor a skills-gap analysis that would inform training providers. Second, most training institutions were located in urban centres. Third, curriculum implementation was generally theoretical, fourth, trainers were found to be inadequately prepared and received low salaries, fifth, training suffered from multiple and uncoordinated management, and sixth, the trainees viewed it as a last training option. In addition, examination results, enrolment and practical tests were identified as the primary methods used for monitoring and evaluation. Informal training providers lacked training implementation, monitoring and evaluation structures. Transfer of skills from training institutions to the workplace was inhibited by insufficient supervisor support, poor working conditions and inadequate tools and equipment.

The study by ASSAHEL Consultants (2013) in Gaza Strip found that low Level of satisfaction among employers appeared towards the quality of TVET graduates. This was attributed to the lack of practical and field experience provided to TVET students as part of their learning. The research also revealed that the employers had a negative attitude towards graduate skills and competences. Furthermore, the study found that there is a preference among employers to hire skilled workers who obtain practical experience from the labour market prior to their recruitment rather than TVET graduates.

Bappah and Medugu's (2013) study on was aimed at finding out the opinions of employers of labour on the roles of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for sustainable development in Nigeria. The sample comprised of 84 indigenous and 72 multinational employers and the research was guided by two research questions. A duly validated 17-item 5 – point like scale questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings revealed among other things that, both indigenous and multi-national employers were not satisfied with the contribution of TVET for sustainable development in Nigeria.

In a study entitled "Labour Market: The Case of Vocational Training in Jordan", a team of independent authors sponsored by UNDP (hereafter UNDP 2014) found the followings: that among businesses that employed TVET-trained individuals, 74% were satisfied with the work or output of TVET-trained employees, and 26% were not satisfied. Satisfied employers reported that they were satisfied with their TVET-trained employees because of the individuals' knowledge level and technical skills (20%), practical work experience (19%), strong work ethic (17%), good interpersonal skills (14%), knowledge and use of new models of machinery and equipment (11%), and good performance under work pressure (9%). Reasons for employer dissatisfaction with TVET-trained individuals related to the workers' poor knowledge and technical skills (24%), poor performance under work pressure (16%), poor leadership skills (15%), poor work ethic (13%), poor knowledge and use of new models of machinery/equipment (11%), poor interpersonal skills (9%), inflexibility and inability to adapt (7%), poor time and priority management (3%), and lack of contribution to strategy and vision to organization (3%). On the other hand, 59% of employers said they were satisfied with the output of skilled workers who had no TVET training. Again, good practical work experience

(21%), a strong work ethic (20%), good interpersonal skills (18%), knowledge level and technical skills (16%), good performance under work pressure (17%), and knowledge and use of new models of machinery or equipment (9%) were the reasons for employer satisfaction.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design, which according to Borg and Gall (1996) involves providing careful descriptions of a phenomenon. The purpose of any descriptive analysis is to generate accurate description of an event, attitude or behaviour. The study was carried out in all parts of Zimbabwe. The choice of the country as a whole was informed by the need to get views from employers of TVET graduates who are scattered throughout the country and across various sectors. Such an approach was seen as the best to use given that study's other intention is to provide evidence based policy advice and recommendation to government as the manager of TVET in Zimbabwe. Data and information collection for this study was conducted between August and November 2017. Before launching the full-scale field survey, a pilot study carried out to determine the appropriateness of the questionnaire and 10 employers across various sectors including tourism, construction, agriculture and metalwork were piloted. After the pilot test, some few adjustments we made before the full survey was conducted with 57 employers.

The sector categories were chosen based on the assumption that the majority of TVET graduates were employed in these industries. The corporate management personnel of these entities or companies constituted the population of the study. The entire population was used as sample for the study because the number is few. In each of the industry three management staff (personnel managers, production/technical managers and supervisors) was requested to complete the survey, for a total sample of 57 employers. These management personnel were assumed to have regular contact with the employees. As such, they were in a unique position to evaluate the employees.

A total of 70 copies of TVET were administered directly to the respondents by the researcher and three assistants. Each copy of the instrument was accompanied with an introductory letter requesting for cooperation. A total of 57 instruments were duly completed and returned. Thus, a return rate of 81% was obtained. Descriptive and inferential statistics ware used

to organize, analysis and interpreter the data. Graphs, pie charts and tables were employed to depict various responses across the research.

A qualitative research methodology was adopted using an interview protocol involving both closed and open-ended questions exploring the employers' perspectives. According to Kendall and Kendall (2002), open-ended questionnaire allows participants the freedom to express their views in their own words and in their own time, in a place of their choosing. With regards to sample size, 70 employers participated in the survey, though responses from 57 were finally used for the analysis. These employers were targeted because they had employed TVET graduates within their organization.

In terms of the procedures, data collection and recording from open-ended questionnaires were done using a paper-based form which lists all the closed and open-ended questions for employers and firms to answer and complete. The principal advantage of this strategy was that it allowed plenty of time for respondents to answer the questions. However, lack of opportunity to observe the physical responses of respondents about the topics and further explanation of the questions are some of the limitations of this approach (Kendall and Kendall, 2002). The completed forms were collected two weeks after distribution. Data pertaining to each question were entered into separate excel spreadsheets. A thematic analytical framework was applied to analyse data in line with the inductive approach. An inductive approach is used in qualitative research to augment understanding of complex data using summary themes or categories from the raw data (Thomas, 2003). The responses from the questions were grouped into three domains to explain the viewpoints of parents concerning TVET. In each domain, there were issues describing the detailed aspects of the TVET sector. According to Ryan (2003), there are twelve techniques used to create themes and sub-themes. In this study, three techniques, namely (1) word repetitions, (2) key words in context, and (3) similarities and differences were applied to determine the common emerging themes in each issue. The next step was to identify sub-themes that link the research findings and the research questions through data analysis. Data was compiled by gathering them in the poles, themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon.

Findings and discussion

The major findings across a number of areas which were investigated are presented in this section and this forms the core of the research. Whilst a number of issues were investigated, the sub-section starts with the perception of the industry (employers) on TVET training in general and TVET graduates in particular.

Perception of quality of TVET

The debate regarding perceptions on TVET training program and TVET graduates by various stakeholders including employers, TVET offering institutions, lecturers, parent, TVET students and potential studies has dominated empirical literature for a long time. Unfortunately, there is no agreed perception as to whether TVET training is the best route for any economic development or not. Literature shows that the perceptions various from country to country and even from sector to sector within a given country.

Table 1 provides a plethora of aspects related to the quality of TVET training program for which the study got responses from the employers with regards to their perceptions. Tabulated information shows that employers highly rated the quality of learning that is offered by TVET colleges and institutions as 89% of respondents rated it into the very high quality (VH) category with 3% rating as a fairly high (FH) quality program. The employers were very clear in refuting the claim that '*Frankly speaking, high quality tertiary education is only offered by universities because these TVET colleges offer sub-standard education'* as close to 80% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Overall, the employers have high positive perceptions about the quality of TVET training programs in Zimbabwe. The study by ASSAHEL Consultants (2013) in Gaza strip in contract found that low Level of satisfaction among employers appeared towards the quality of TVET graduates. This was attributed to the lack of practical and field experience provided to TVET students as part of their learning. In Gaza Strip, it was found that that the employers had a negative attitude towards graduate skills and competences. The same negative perception of TVET was implicitly found in the study by Bappah and Medugu's (2013) when the study concluded that among other things that, both indigenous and multi-national employers were not satisfied with the contribution of TVET for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Table 1: Employers' perception on the quality of TVET

Responses	**VH quality**	**FH quality**	**FL quality**	**VL quality**	**Don't know**
How do you rate the quality of learning that is offered by technical and vocational education training colleges)?	51 [89%]	2 [3%]	5 [8%]	0	0
Responses	**Strongly Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**
Frankly speaking, high quality tertiary education is only offered by universities because these TVET colleges offer sub-standard education.	0	0	2 [4%]	43 [75%]	11 [20%]
Technical and vocational education and training gives access to modern equipment (computers, machines, etc.) which are used during practical sessions/industrial attachments	0	0	0	35[61%]	22 [39%]
Teachers/lecturers and trainers in technical and vocational education and training are well qualified and competent	11 [20%]	46 [80%]	0	0	0
Technical and vocational education and training enables people to continue with university studies afterwards	52 [91%]	5 [9%]	0	0	0
Employers prefer hiring graduates from technical and vocational education and training colleges?	31 [55%]	16 [28%]	10 [17%]	0	0
Technical and vocational education and training emphasizes theory than hands-on practical skills	43 [75%]	40 [17%]	5 [8%]	0	0

Source: Survey

Key: Percentages in parenthesis:

: VH quality = very high quality; FH quality = fairly high quality; FL quality = fairly low quality; VL quality = very low quality.

TVET training institutions in the country are equipped with qualified and competent trainers and lecturers. According to the survey, all respondents (i.e., 100%) agreed to the statement that *'Teachers/lecturers and trainers in technical and vocational education and training are well qualified and*

competent'. This is very welcome feature of the TVET training institutions in Zimbabwe, unlike what happens in some countries. For instance, in the case of Kenya, Ngure (2013) found that TVET trainers were, among others, found to be inadequately prepared. In Zimbabwe, for those that want to proceed to enrol for respective university degrees after graduating with TVET qualification, the architecture of TVET programs in the country is configured in such a way that it is easier for one to proceed to a university. This academic progression along the university ladder was confirmed by all the employers who respondent to the question around this issue

The employability of TVET graduates has been a controversial subject in most countries, especially the developing world. Survey employers where asked respond to the following accession: *Employers prefer hiring graduates from technical and vocational education and training colleges?* From the survey, 83% of respondents agreed to the claim, implying that employers prioritize employing TVET graduates who are considered as having more hands-on training and skills when compared to those with similar qualification but from academic training institutions such as universities.

On the downward side, 75% of respondents indicated that TVET training program emphasizes theory more than hands-on practical skills. This is an unfortunate aspect given that TVET, in most cases, are designed to be different from universities which are more theoretically oriented. Furthermore, TVET programs are expected to inculcate skills relevant for production of goods and services, while universities emphasis the theoretical underpinnings of any field of study.

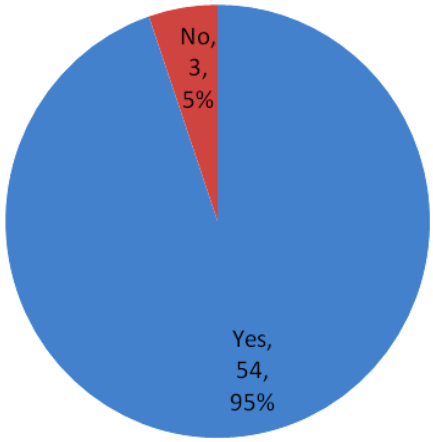
The status of the modern equipment such as computers, machines etc used in the TVET training institutions (laboratories, workshops etc) was also investigated. Tabulated statistics indicates that 61% of surveyed employers disagreed to the claim that technical and vocational education and training gives access to modern equipment (computers, machines) which are used during practical sessions/industrial attachments. In other words, Zimbabwean TVET institutions are equipped with obsolete and old equipment which is very much behind machines and equipment used in the industry. This presents a challenge to students as they will take time and sometimes struggle to use industrial equipment especially in early days of joining the industry.

Link between TVET graduates' qualifications with industry requirements

There has been debate and discussions with regards to the extent to which TVET qualifications currently offered by Zimbabwean institutions match the industry requirements and expectations. Industrial respondents were asked the following question: *In your opinion, are the graduates' qualification directly linked to the job and its requirements? In other words, are the qualifications relevant to the job?* Figure 1 provides a summary of the views and perceptions of the industry. Survey results clearly shows that majority of interviewees representing 95% of the sample confirmed that TVET qualifications are in tandem with what the industry requires. This is a thumb up to the TVET training program in Zimbabwe. Similar findings were also found in Togo when Adjrah and Quashie (2014) concluded that a large majority of employers were unsatisfied (more than 60%) with regards to the skills acquired by TVET graduates especially labour market expectations, and opportunities for professionals involved in the training process.

The finding also reveals that some of the TVET graduates who were once employed by the respondent firms left for various reasons. Figure 2 depicts the major reasons which were provided by 57 firms where TVET graduates once worked. As shown in the figure, majority of firms (39 out 57) indicated that the TVET graduates who were working for them left for better paying jobs with other firms. The fact that they left for other companies is a measure, among others, that the graduates are providing a good workmanship to the industry and as such are mobile.

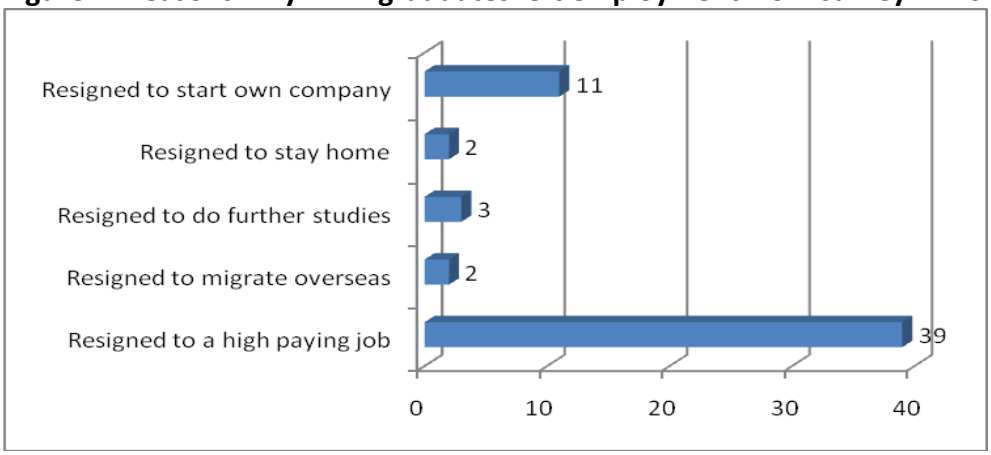
Figure 1: Link between TVET graduates and industry requirements



Source: Survey

The second reason why most graduates left where they we working was that they had decided to venture into their own companies as entrepreneurs. Again, this is a very encouraging direction given that not only will they employ themselves, but that they will also employ other people, thus contributing towards the development of the country by reducing unemployment. Other reasons which were enumerated include going for further studies and going abroad.

Figure 2: Reasons why TVET graduates left employment from survey firms



Source: Survey

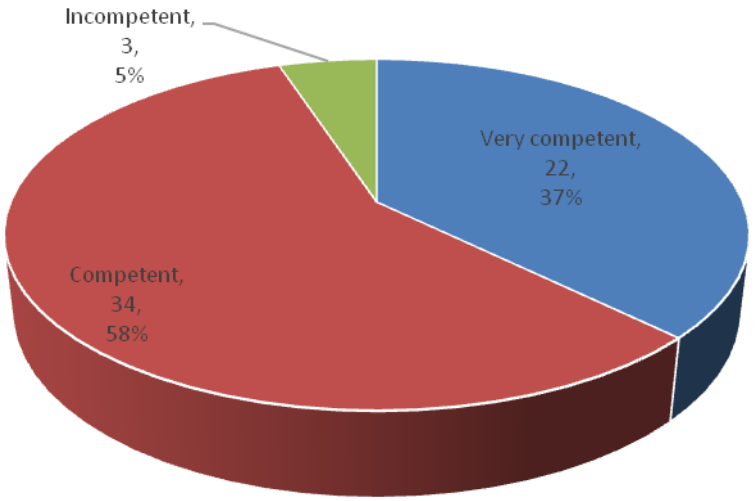
One of the positive attributes of most firms which were interviewed was that they provide training opportunities for the employees, especially TVET graduates among others. For instance, employers were asked the question: *Did your organization/company offer any training opportunities to the graduate and other employees for capacity building?* A total of 52 employers (representing 91% of the sample) answered yes to the question. This attribute shows that most employers have in their human resources planning the element of keeping abreast with development in the various lines of production or services in which they operate in.

Technical competencies of TVET graduate

The technical competencies of TVET graduates once employed were investigated. Figure 3 shows that a total of 34 (representing 59%) surveyed employers said that the graduates were competent while 38% of respondent employers were very much positive about the technical competencies of these graduates as they ranked the graduates as very competent. The overall assessment of TVET graduates from employers'

point of view is that they are competent. The findings of this study are however in contract to what Adjrah and Quashie (2014) found in the case of Togo where employers believed that TVET students' theoretical knowledge was not well understood and their practical abilities were not up to standard.

Figure 3: Technical competencies of TVET graduate



Source: Survey

The TVET graduates were not only competent locally, but also internationally. The employers in the sample group where asked: *Do the current employees have sufficient technical skills to compete on the international labour market?* Out of the 49 who responded to the question, 31 (i.e., 63%) indicated that graduates from Zimbabwean TVET institutions have sufficient technical skills which necessitate them to compete on the international market.

Link between TVET institutions and employers of TVET graduates

The relationship between TVET institutions and employers of TVET graduates that is the consumers of TVET products is vital for any continuous improvement in the training of TVET courses. In most instances, the industry normally come up with new and innovative products, machines and process through their respective research and development (R&D) activities, and these new products should be quickly transmitted to the training institutions for students to be taught such new innovations. One of the most effective ways of transferring such new innovations will be

the existence of constant link between TVET training institutions and the industry. Sampled employers were asked the question: *Do you think there a strong partnership between TVET institutions and the consumers of their products?* A total of 42 respondents (representing 74%) indicated that there was no co-operation between the two sides. This is an unfortunate scenario as this implies the possibility of TVET training institutions lagging behind the new innovations in the respective areas which they train students in.

TVET Private sector engagement

The engagement between TVET training institutions and private is vital for the successfulness of both the training institutions and the industry, with the economy eventually being the ultimate beneficiary. Table 2 provides responses to three questions which employer respondents were asked around this engagement. Majority of respondents totalling 50 (representing 88%) of the sample confirmed existence of communication and coordination between the two sides. To ensure that TVET graduates meet minimum standards of a given company's requirements, 92% of employers said that they normally conduct tests on the capabilities of TVET graduates before they finally employ them. There is room for continuous fruitful engagements as majority of sampled employers (97%) indicated their willingness to finance activities in TVET schools for the sake of promoting TVET training in the country.

Table 2: TVET private sector engagement

Questions/Responses	**Yes**		**No**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Is there any communication and coordination with TVET schools?	50	88	7	12
Do you conduct tests on the capabilities of TVET graduates before starting employing them?	52	92	5	8
Do you have a willingness to finance activities in TVET schools at least partially to promote TVET (either financial or technical support)?	55	97	2	3
	Greater extent		**Lesser extent**	**Partly**

Questions/Responses	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
Evaluate the graduates of TVET schools for professional adequacy? To what extent do you trust in them?	23 [41]		22 [38]	11 [20]
To what extent do you accommodate or provide employment opportunities for graduates of TVET schools in your work?	43 [75]		14[25]	0

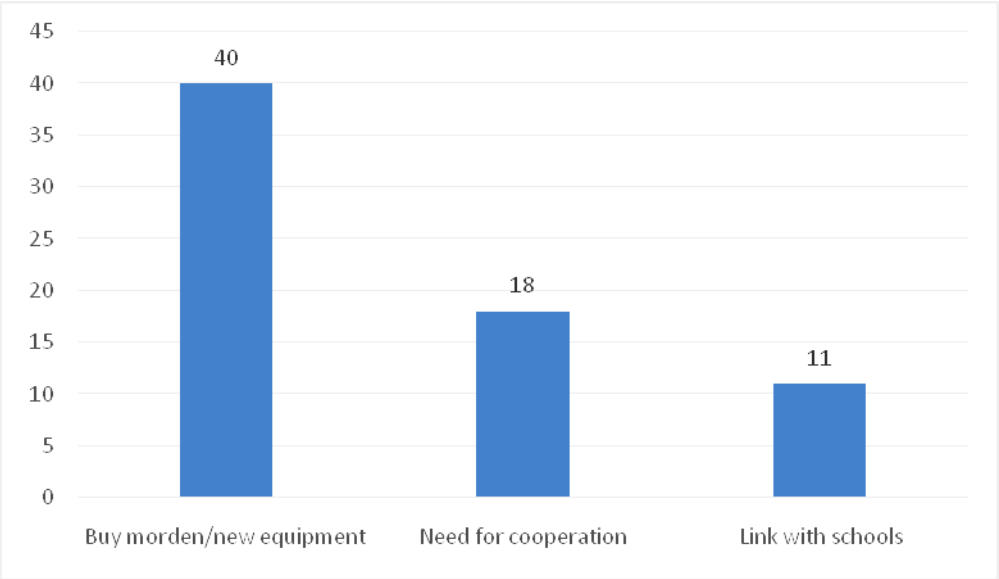
Source: Survey
Key: Percentages in parenthesis

A sizeable number of respondents (constituting 41%) confirmed that TVET graduates have good professional adequacy. A total of 43 sampled employers indicated that they accommodate and provide employment opportunities for graduates of TVET training at their respective firms. This is commendable as this action cements the relationship between TVET institutions and the industry.

Professional work and the development of students' abilities

Development of professional work and the development of students' abilities in TVET institutions require involvement of various stakeholders who should participate in a variety of ways. Respondents were asked the question: *What do you suggest to those who are responsible of TVET schools based on your experience to develop professional work and the development of students' abilities?* Most sampled employers (40 or 71%) enumerated the purchase of modern (new) equipment as one of the ways which should be prioritised when it comes to development of profession work and students' skills. Acquisition of modern/new equipment buttress the pathetic situation discussed below in which employers said that the current existing technologies (i.e., machineries, equipment etc) in TVTE institutions is lagging behind what is being available in the industry. The need for cooperation between TVET training institutions and industry (employers) was also considered as another way of developing professional work and students' abilities.

Figure 4: Ways of developing professional work and students' abilities



Source: Survey

Technology, Machinery and Equipment Section

The superiority of TVET training when compared to university education or other academic education is that the former is oriented toward skills development which requires use of relevant technologies in practical classes. However, the superiority of TVET training over other academic is diminished in instances where the expected technologies in TVET institutions are obsolete, old or in constant breakdown. Sampled employed responded to the question: *Is the infrastructure and equipment used in the TVET training in tandem with the current technology*? All the respondents (i.e., 100%) responded by saying *no* to the question, implying that the infrastructure and equipment used in the TVET training is not in tandem with the current technology available in the industry and on the global market. In other words, students in TVET conduct their studies using old or obsolete infrastructure and equipment but when they go for attachment or employment in industry, they will be using latest and modern technology which they may not be familiar in using them. Thus, the time taken by TVET graduates to operate fully and effectively in their respective job assignment in industry becomes longer that ordinarily expected. The main mechanism which was suggested by sampled employers to close the gap between equipment in stock and the technological frontier was for TVET institutions

and their respective funders to raise money to buy new equipment and ensure continuous upgrading of such equipment.

Practical or theoretical classes?

The debate around the right or optimal ratio between practical and theoretical classes in TVET training remains a controversial issue across many countries. The research asked the question: *Are you satisfied that the TVET classes are conducted with the required practical flavour or they are simply practical classes conducted "theoretically"?* Respondents indicate that the mixture between practical and theory classes varied from 40% (practicals) to 60% (theory), while the reverse is true in some instances. Most respondents were of the view that in general, TVET classes were lopsided towards theory, rather than practical application. This observation is shared with the Kenyan study by Ngure (2013) in which stakeholders indicated that TVET curriculum implementation was generally theoretical. There is no policy in Zimbabwe which makes it mandatory for TVET training institutions to adopt a fixed ratio between practical classes and theoretical classes, but rather institutions have the prerogative of deciding on the mixture for the respective courses they offer.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of employers regarding the activities of TVET in Zimbabwe. The study used a structured questionnaire and interviewed 57 employers who had TVET graduates in their labour force. The study found that, overall; the employers have high positive perceptions about the quality of TVET training programs in Zimbabwe in a number of dimensions. The major challenges with regards to TVET training was that TVET institutions in Zimbabwe are equipped with obsolete and old equipment which is very much behind machines and equipment used in the industry. Furthermore, the study found that TVET training program emphasizes theory more than hands-on practical skills. This is an unfortunate aspect given that TVET, in most cases, are designed to be different from universities which are more theoretically oriented. Going forward, employers suggested that to close the gap between equipment in stock and the technological frontier, TVET institutions and their respective funders (such as government) should raise money to buy new equipment and ensure continuous upgrading of such equipment.

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