



Research Article

Teachers' perceptions on challenges faced by rural secondary schools in the implementation of the technical and vocational education and training policy in Nkayi district

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The paper analysed the teachers' perceptions on challenges faced by rural secondary schools in the implementation of the technical and vocational education and training policy in Nkayi District in Zimbabwe. This study sought to investigate the challenges confronting teachers of rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe using the quantitative methodology. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population comprised all secondary school teachers in Nkayi District. The sample consisted of 120 teachers of which 68 were female and 52 were male. The data were gathered through a questionnaire. The study revealed that most teachers had a positive attitude towards the TVET programme. It also revealed that schools faced many challenges as they tried to implement TVET. The study recommends that there should be more allocation of financial, material and human resources towards TVET in secondary schools.

Key Words: Technical education, Vocational Education, Technical Vocational and Education Training (TVET), Secondary schools, Implementation, District, Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO)

INTRODUCTION

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has emerged as one of the most effective human resource development strategies that African countries need to embrace in order to train and modernise their technical workforce for rapid industrialisation and national development (Afeti, 2014). In almost all countries in Africa, large numbers of graduates coming out of the formal school system are unemployed, although opportunities for skilled workers do exist in the economy (Baiyin, 2004). This situation has brought into sharp focus the mismatch between what schools offer and labour market skill demands (Savage, 2009). Another reason that is often cited for the incidence of high

unemployment among graduates is the absence of entrepreneurial training in the school curriculum (Afeti, 2014). In Zimbabwe, technical and vocational education and training gained currency when some secondary schools offered technical and vocational subjects designed by the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO).

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HEXCO curricula are designed in close consultation with industry and all National Foundation Certificates (NFC) courses offered in secondary schools therefore, were characterised by their relevance to industry and commerce (Zendera, 2013). Furthermore, to strengthen the teaching and learning of technical and vocational education in schools, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has adopted and is implementing a two-pathway education structure. The two-pathway structure, which is technically and vocationally-biased is meant for post-Basic Education (Form 2) to cater for students of different abilities (Policy Circular Number 77 of 2006). All secondary schools in Zimbabwe, therefore, are mandated by this policy pronouncement to teach technical and vocational subjects to all their pupils. It is on account of this information that this study set out to investigate challenges that schools encounter as they attempt to implement this policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technical and Vocational Education and Training is about work and training for work (Raymond, 2007). Immaculate (2006) in his opinion said that technical and vocational education are work experiences meant to be imparted to an individual systematically in order to get him or her adequately equipped for good employment in a recognised occupation. According to Brickmen (2006), TVET includes numerous occupational areas such as agriculture, various trades, health services and technical training. On the other hand, Nwogu and Nwanoruo (2011) perceive TVET as an educational training which has been designed technically and systematically to accommodate both the trainer and the trainee in order to enable most importantly, the trainee acquire the basic knowledge, skills, abilities, understanding and attitudes needed for one's efficient performance in his/her chosen occupational carrier for self-reliance and national development.

According to Mpfu (2012) the 2001 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO) and the 2002 International Labour Organisations (ILO) General Conference on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) involves those aspects of the educational process in addition to general education, the study of technologies and knowledge related to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Foster, 2007). Societal and economic development depends on the strength of TVET provision through the education system as it provides access to skills and entry routes into the labour markets (Nyerere, 2009). Savage (2009) states that TVET includes technical education which essentially refers to

theoretical vocational preparation of students for jobs involving applied science and modern technology. It emphasises the understanding of basic principles of science and mathematics and their practical application rather than the actual attainment of proficiency in manual skills as is the case with vocational education (Savage, 2009). Vocational education and training on the other hand, prepare learners for jobs that are based on manual and practical activities, traditionally non-theoretical and totally related to specific trades, occupations, or vocation (Pillay, 2005).

The technical and vocational education implementation as an education strategy requires substantial financial commitments and dedicated key stakeholders' support and commitment (Bennel, 2009). Investing in a strong, public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector must be crucial in knowledge-based societies in developed as well as developing countries (Baiyin, 2004). The UNESCO (2001) revised recommendations on TVET, assert that, given the immense scientific, technological and socio-economic development, either in progress or envisaged, which characterise the present era, particularly globalisation and the revolution in Information Communication Technology, TVET should be given central role in the educational process in all countries as it enriches a person for life and it provides the competencies which are necessary in modern states (Savage, 2009).

According to Fuller (2006), not only can TVET support the socio-economic welfare of individuals, but it can also increase their international competitiveness. Currently, as Gatawa (1999) argues, technological changes are taking place at an extremely fast pace in a fast globalising world. The gap in knowledge and ownership of advanced technologies between developing and developed countries has always been large, with developing countries often adopting technologies and solutions innovated elsewhere and lacking the capacity and resources to adapt most of the technologies to the local context (Bennel, 2009). Transfer of knowledge therefore through TVET coupled with creative skills and career guidance, can raise the innovative capacity of developing countries allowing them to innovate quality technological solutions for their own context and for export and keep up with the developed world (Zendera, 2013).

There are many challenges that schools trying to implement TVET face particularly in developing countries. For example, as Immaculate (2006) postulates, technical and vocational education has been considered as a career path for the less academically endowed, and this

perception has been fuelled by the low academic requirements for admissions into TVET programmes and the limited prospects for further education and professional development. As Zendera (2013) observes, what worsens this perception is that governments create the impression that the primary objective of vocational education programme is to keep drop outs; that is, students who are unable to move up the educational ladder, not because of poor grades, but because of lack of places at the higher level from the basic and secondary school systems off the streets, rather than projecting the project as an effective strategy to train skilled workers for the employment market and for sustainable livelihoods.

The other challenge with TVET programmes is that they are competing with academic subjects. Academic education is found by most students and parents to provide a route to better jobs and incomes than other forms of education (Pillay, 2005). With this in mind, students were likely to have a negative attitude towards TVET. As Gichira (2002) posits, aspects such as high probability of getting employment after following a certain course of education like TVET, results in students developing positive attitudes towards the learning content.

Fuller (2006) notes that inadequate technical experts meant to drive TVET systems is another challenge militating against effective TVET provision. There is general lack of professional teachers, education managers and policy makers with adequate expertise and insight in the formulation and implementation of vocational education and training programmes (Gichira, 2002). The TVET staff in many countries lacked the technical capacity to develop national qualifications, courses, competency-based curricula and training packages as well as quality assurance and accreditation standards in TVET (Zendera, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Numerous attempts to vocationalise the secondary school education system before and after independence in Zimbabwe have been made without much success. This study seeks to examine the extent to which secondary schools are implementing the new TVET policy in Zimbabwe.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to establish teachers' perceptions on challenges that their schools faced during the implementation of the technical and vocational education

and training programme in order to come up with practical suggestions to improve the situation.

Research Questions

1. What are the teachers' views toward technical and vocational education and training?
2. What are the challenges faced by schools in implementing the TVET programmes.
3. How can schools be assisted to better implement the TVET programmes?

Significance of the Study

The study's importance is premised on the assumption that if TVET programmes' implementation challenges are established, this would enable all stakeholders to put their heads together to come up with strategies to improve the situation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the quantitative research paradigm and made use of a descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell (2009) the descriptive survey design looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data. As Chawawa (2012) observes, the questionnaire increases reliability because of its greater impersonality. However, as Bell (2011) posits, its major weakness is that it may invite people to lie and answer questions vaguely. This was mitigated through the use of pilot testing of the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 120 teachers of which 68 were female and 52 were male. Simple random sampling was used to select the respondents.

There is no any descriptive information about the instrument(s) used for this study as well as the psychometric properties

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions and one open-ended question. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaires to the schools under study. The same method was used to collect the completed questionnaires in order to maximise on the rate of return of the instrument. Data produced from the questionnaire produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential

implications from them derived and recorded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to explore teachers' perceptions on challenges faced by rural secondary schools in the implementation of the technical and vocational education and training policy in Zimbabwe. This section is presented in two parts, namely, results and discussion.

Presentation of Data

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by sex (N=120)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	52	43
Female	68	57
Total	120	100

Table 1 above shows that there were more female respondents than male ones. The datum was considered statistically significant to the extent that it confirmed that most schools in Zimbabwe had more female teachers than male ones.

Table 2. Composition of respondents by age (N=120)

Age in Years	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	2	2
20 – 29	10	8
30 – 39	50	42
40 – 49	54	45
50 and above	4	3
Total	120	100

The information on Table 2 above reveals that the majority of the respondents are within the 30 – 49 age range (87%). Those below 30 years constituted 10% of the respondents and the 50 and above age range were a mere 3% of the sample.

Table 3. Composition of respondents by areas of specialisation

Area of Specialisation	Frequency	Percentage
Arts	94	79
Sciences	18	15
Practicals	4	3
Technical	4	3
Total	120	100

Table 3 above shows that the majority of teachers in the sample (79%) specialized to teach Arts subjects, 15% specialized to teach sciences and those who specialised to teach practical and technical subjects were 3% apiece.

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Table 4. Composition of respondents by TVET subjects taught (N=120)

Subject	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	10	8
Woodwork	15	12
Metalwork	5	4
Food and nutrition	10	8
Fashion and Fabrics	7	7
Technical graphics	5	4
Building	4	3
Computer studies	15	13
Accounts	10	8
Physical education	12	10
Art and craft	7	7
N/A	20	16
Total	120	100

The information on Table 4 above shows that the majority of respondents (84%) teach one practical or technical subject or the other and yet the majority of them do not hold qualifications to teach these areas as depicted in table 3 above. Only 16% of the respondents indicated that they did not teach practical subjects.

Table 5. Challenges faced by teachers in TVET implementation (N=120)

Rank	Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lack of expertise	24	20
2	Lack of equipment	22	18
3	Shortage of textbooks	20	16
4	Shortage of specialist rooms	15	13
5	Inadequate time	13	11
6	Lack of industrial attachment	10	8
7	Inadequate funding	8	7
8	Students' negative attitudes	6	5
9	Lack of parental support	2	2
Totals		120	100

The information on table 5 above shows the major challenges faced by teachers ranked according to the highest to the lowest frequencies. The picture reveals that many respondents (20%) were challenged by lack of expertise to teach TVET curricula, followed by lack of equipment (18%), shortage of basic books (16%), shortage of specialist rooms (13%), lack of industrial attachment, for pupils (8%), inadequate funding (8%), students negative attitudes (5%) as well as lack of parental support (2%).

The questionnaire had one open-ended question which wanted to find out from the respondents what they felt could be done to improve the implementation of TVET

programmes in their schools. The most common responses included the following: -

- Technical and vocational education and training subjects should be made compulsory for all pupils.
- There should be career guidance for pupils so that they appreciate the value of these subjects.
- Schools should engage other stakeholders particularly industry for attachment of pupils.
- Schools within zones and clusters should collaborate to assist each other on these subjects.
- Schools should be electrified and also have generators on stand by since most of these subjects require electricity.
- Colleges and universities should train more TVET teachers.
- Provide incentives for TVET teachers to attract them to teach in the rural areas.

Discussion

The findings reveal that the majority of teachers in the study were female. This information was considered statistically significant to the extent that it confirmed that most schools in Zimbabwe had more female teachers than male ones. The implications of this finding are that boys may be disadvantaged if most female teachers specialised in those practical and technical areas viewed by students (boys) as courses for girls. Such stereotypes are common in schools where you find very few boys doing areas like needlework, cookery or fashion and fabrics, because the boys, through socialisation view them as feminine subjects. This is corroborated by observations by Bennel (2009) who discovered that the socialisation of most African boys discouraged them from doing those subjects that their culture preserved for the girls.

The study revealed that the majority of respondents specialised in Arts subjects. Very few teachers under study had specialised in practical and technical subjects. This corroborates information by Zendera (2013) who states that one factor militating against effective implementation of TVET provision in schools is general lack of professional specialist teachers. The nature of technical and vocational subjects is such that those teachers who teach them should have undergone rigorous training to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to impart to pupils and not just the theoretical aspects of the areas.

Data from the study also reveal that the majority of teachers were assigned to teach one practical subject or the other. This inspite of the fact that the majority of the

teachers were not qualified to teach these subject areas. The effects of this information are that, first of all, pupils receive inadequate information from these ill equipped teachers; secondly; the teachers are forced by authorities to teach these areas because under normal circumstances no teacher would opt to teach in an area where they are fully aware of their lack of capacity. This then breeds a lot of conflict and animosity between teachers and heads of schools. As Raymond (2007) argued, where teachers are compelled to teach there is always bound to be passive resistance through teaching the basics at the expense of core material on the subject thereby disadvantaging the learners.

The study revealed that schools experience a multiplicity of challenges during the implementation of TVET programmes. These challenges among others, included lack of expertise amongst the teachers, lack of equipment to properly teach the subjects, shortage of specialist rooms for the practical teaching of these subjects, inadequate time due to shortage of qualified teachers since the subjects are taught by teachers who teach in other areas, failure by schools to find industrial attachment for their pupils, lack of funding as well as lack of support from parents. The above challenges render the whole implementation process of the TVET programmes an impossible mission. This finding tallies with observations by Bennel (2009) who postulates that technical and vocational education implementation as an education strategy requires substantial financial commitments and dedicated key stakeholders' support and commitment.

Data from the study also revealed that most students and parents had negative attitudes towards the technical and vocational subjects. Where students were expected to choose subject areas (for example at Form Three level) with a combination of academic and practical subjects, the majority opted for the academic areas in spite of the advice from teachers. Where they were coerced to take these subjects, in most cases, they would not register them for the Ordinary Level Examinations as parents would be said to have discouraged them from registering for them. This is corroborated by observations by Pillay (2005) who states that, the other challenge with TVET programmes are that they are competing with academic subjects. Academic education is found by most students and parents to provide a route to better jobs and incomes than other forms of education. With this in mind, students were likely to have a negative attitude towards TVET. As Gichira (2002) argues aspects such as high probability of getting employment after following a certain course of education results in students developing positive attitudes towards the learning content.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the background of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions: -

- Both theoretical and empirical data in this study converge on the fact that most Zimbabwean secondary schools are struggling to implement the technical and vocational education and training policy.
- The majority of teachers assigned to teach practical and technical subjects were not in possession of the required qualifications to effectively implement the policy.
- There is lack of equipment in the schools to properly teach pupils the full aspects of TVET in the schools.
- Schools do not have specialist rooms for the practical activities for the TVET programmes.
- Most schools find it difficult to secure places for industrial attachment for their pupils.
- Schools lack the financial resources to adequately implement TVET programmes.
- Most students and parents had negative attitudes towards the technical and vocational subjects.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations.

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should provide appropriate and adequate material resources like equipment, consumables and textbooks, to ensure effective implementation of TVET in schools.
- The corporate sector should be engaged and requested to adopt certain disadvantaged schools so as to support their TVET programmes.
- Universities like the Zimbabwe Open University should be contracted to publish modules to provide TVET study materials using their state of the art printing machines at lower costs.
- There should be TVET district based education officers to guide heads and teachers on the implementation of TVET programmes.
- In order to develop business operational skills among the pupils, and enhance chances of self-employment, entrepreneurship courses should be an integral part of TVET courses.
- Schools should have fully functional guidance and counselling departments or units to guide pupils on various career paths including opportunities availed by TVET courses.

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