



# Exploring the Zimbabwean Technical and Vocational Education Journey: Challenges and Prospects

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## ABSTRACT

The study explored the challenges that militate against the successful implementation of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Zimbabwe. The study gave an informed focus on biases and perceptions associated with the academic curriculum. In addressing these challenges, it becomes possible to create an environment where TVET education is valued and considered a viable pathway for individuals, and national economic and social development. Using critical discourse analysis, the study examined the perceptions of instructors and students about TVET education and identified historical factors that continue to contribute to the devaluation of TVET. The study findings revealed that the historical undervaluing of TVET subjects in comparison with academic subjects was borrowed from the colonial bottleneck education system that favoured university education over technical skills and persists today. The study underscored the need for a paradigm shift to TVET skills if economic development is to be realised in Zimbabwe. This study recommends the need to re-evaluate the status of TVET education given its contribution to the job market. This study understands the historical roots of biases against TVET and provides insights for the reconstruction of an effective TVET system in Zimbabwe that contributes toward ongoing discourses on the importance of technical skills for national development. The study recommends the need to reshape public perceptions around TVET which requires a concerted effort and long-term commitment to changing societal attitudes toward technical-vocational education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with practical skills essential for the workforce, making it a vital education for national economic prosperity. Despite its importance, the institutionalisation of TVET faces significant challenges, particularly in countries of the Global South like Zimbabwe. These challenges are multifaceted and include outdated perceptions of TVET, lack of resources and infrastructure, inadequate funding, limited industry partnerships, and a skills gap between what is taught and what the labour market demands.<sup>1</sup> To overcome

<sup>1</sup> S. P. Dube, "An Investigation of the Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Initiative in the Zimbabwean Education System," *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education (IJCDSE)* 9, no. 1 (2018): 3329–34.

these obstacles, there is a pressing need to reform TVET education in Zimbabwe to align it with the needs of the modern economy. The existing literature highlights the importance of TVET in contributing to economic development but lacks a comprehensive analysis of the specific challenges faced in the Zimbabwean context. In addressing this gap, the study aims to provide a critical historical examination of the barriers that hinder the effective implementation of TVET in Zimbabwe and propose feasible solutions to improve its impact on the workforce and national economy. The primary objective of this study is to critically discuss the challenges facing TVET in Zimbabwe and present recommendations for re-configuring TVET education to make it more attractive and responsive to the demands of the postmodern economy. By identifying key issues and proposing practical solutions, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing discourses on the importance of technical and vocational training in driving economic growth and meeting the evolving needs of individuals and the labour market.

In the subsequent sections, the study delves into the historical antecedents that have shaped current TVET perceptions, and specific challenges encountered in the institutionalisation of TVET in Zimbabwe, including resource constraints, funding issues, limited industry partnerships, and skills mismatches. The discussion further focuses on strategies for re-configuring TVET education, such as curriculum updates, quality improvement initiatives, industry collaborations, and image enhancement efforts. These are the key areas in which the study aims to offer valuable insights to revitalise TVET in Zimbabwe for improved economic performance and the sustainable production of a skilled workforce.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Tracing the Zimbabwean Vocational Education System Attitudes

The historical evolution of TVET in Zimbabwe reflects broader trends and challenges observed in most African countries, characterised by a shift from traditional knowledge-based systems to the influence of Western education models during colonisation.<sup>2</sup> This transition underscores the complexities and obstacles faced by TVET education in Zimbabwe and across the continent, including issues such as the racial vocational-academic divide, limited resources, and limited opportunities for progress.

In Zimbabwe, the traditional TVET system was rooted in a heritage-based epistemology, where the initiation of young adults into adulthood involved practical training and integration into the traditional labour market.<sup>3</sup> The traditional TVET model in Zimbabwe also encompassed apprenticeship practices, where young people were mentored by experienced community members to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for their roles in society.<sup>4</sup> In addition, according to the author, these competencies were essential for sustenance in the traditional economic set-up, with apprentices producing tools for agricultural, hunting, and warfare purposes, reflecting the functional aspect of informal TVET in traditional African societies. Moreover, the traditional apprenticeship system in Zimbabwe emphasised continuous learning and skill development, with a focus on imparting relevant knowledge, values, and attitudes such as honesty, hard work, and productivity.<sup>5</sup> This approach highlights the importance of skills acquisition and value-oriented education in African traditional TVET curricula, aimed at benefiting both individuals and society at large.

The historical trajectory of TVET in Zimbabwe illuminates the intricate interplay between traditional knowledge systems, Western influences, and the practical skills development necessary for societal and economic progress.<sup>6</sup> Recognising the rich heritage of TVET education in Africa and integrating traditional practices with modern approaches, can revitalise the Zimbabwean TVET sector to address current challenges, industrialise the economy and create much-needed employment, particularly for the youths.

<sup>2</sup> Leona Mandiudza, Winnet Chindedza, and Jeriphanos Makaye, "Vocationalization of Secondary Schools: Implementation Reality or Fallacy?," *European Journal of Sustainable Development* 2, no. 1 (2013): 123.

<sup>3</sup> Dama Mosweunyane, "The African Educational Evolution: From Traditional Training to Formal Education," *Higher Education Studies* 3, no. 4 (July 18, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v3n4p50>.

<sup>4</sup> A. Achl, "African Indigenous Education," 2021, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357950398>.

<sup>5</sup> Achl, "African Indigenous Education."

<sup>6</sup> B. Haßler, et al., "Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review of the Research Landscape." VET Repository, Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, Bonn, Germany. Creative- Commons-Lizenz CC BY 4.0. DOI 10.5281/zenodo.4288831.

## The Influence of Western Epistemologies on Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The TVET journey in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the 20th century when arts and crafts training was introduced by the colonial regime of Cecil John Rhodes, initially intended for Africans considered to be intellectually weak.<sup>7</sup> This philosophy was further implemented in Rhodesia by Kegwin and Jowitt in the 1920s, leading to the establishment of skills centres at Tjolotjo and Domboshava focusing on arts and crafts training in building, carpentry, and agricultural skills.<sup>8</sup>

The colonial education policies and TVET development were in line with the colonial education system in most former British colonies, where missionaries were responsible for providing education to the African population, while the colonial government oversaw the education of white groups. Mandiudza et al., point out that various education Commissions such as Frank Tate (1929), Fox (1935), Kerr (1952), and Judges (1962) played pivotal roles in monitoring and recommending the inclusion of TVET subjects in the school curricula, although implementation by the colonial government was partial.<sup>9</sup> The recommendations resulted in the establishment of the vocational F2 system in 1966 which marked a significant advancement in technical and vocational education for the black population in Zimbabwe. However, scholars such as Mavhunga and Kanyongo noted that the F2 system was organised in a way that maintained an elementary level to prevent competition with the Europeans, primarily catering for less academically inclined black learners, school dropouts, and individuals deemed disadvantaged.<sup>10</sup> This racially motivated segregation system, while providing some practical components, remained inferior to the academic-focused F1 system primarily accessible to whites and academically gifted black students.

However, the F2 system had its fair share of challenges. Despite its intentions to provide technical skills and training, graduates of the F2 system faced limited opportunities for further education and development compared to F1 graduates who could pursue university education.<sup>11</sup> Katsande maintains that the systemic divide between F1 and F2 students created barriers for technical and vocational graduates to access higher education and training opportunities, contributing to a persistent disparity in educational pathways.<sup>12</sup> Despite gaining independence in 1980, and other numerous efforts to reform it, the TVET colonial legacy still haunts the Zimbabwean nation to the present day.

Under colonial rule, Main points out that TVET in Zimbabwe adopted a Western approach emphasising pragmatism and experiential learning in real-life contexts, aligning with the philosophy of educators like Dewey who advocated practical and hands-on education.<sup>13</sup> The influence of Western knowledge systems during colonialism led to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge in African countries, including Zimbabwe, where Eurocentric epistemological models were imposed, disrupting the continuity of indigenous value systems in education.<sup>14</sup> According to Zegeye and Vambe and Mapara, post-independence efforts have been made in Zimbabwe to reconstruct indigenous knowledge systems through educational studies that acknowledge the importance of incorporating indigenous perspectives in every aspect of education.<sup>15</sup>

The imposition of Eurocentric models by colonial powers resulted in the loss of African cultural and historical heritages and identities, prompting the need to reintroduce indigenous knowledge systems into African education and retrace the traditional values of TVET. The Unhu/Ubuntu philosophy,

<sup>7</sup> C. M. Nherera, "Vocationalisation of Secondary Education in Zimbabwe: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation" (London Institute of Education., 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (2005). "Report on the technical and vocational education and training policy review framework." [unevoc.unesco.org/fileadmin/user-upload/docs](http://unevoc.unesco.org/fileadmin/user-upload/docs)

<sup>9</sup> Mandiudza, Chindedza, and Makaye, "Vocationalization of Secondary Schools: Implementation Reality or Fallacy?"

<sup>10</sup> Pharoah Joseph Mavhunga, "Vocationalisation Of The Secondary School Curriculum As An Instrument For Human Resources Development: Zimbabwean Experiences, Challenges, And The Way Forward," 2002; Gibbs Y Kanyongo, "Zimbabwe's Public Education System Reforms: Successes and Challenges," *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 65–74.

<sup>11</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (2005). "Report on the technical and vocational education and training policy review framework."

<sup>12</sup> Tapiwa Emmanuel Katsande, "Vocational Education and Training in Rural Zimbabwe: Attitudes and Opinions of Students, Teachers and Education Inspectors: The Case of Murewa District," *Journal of Education and Vocational Research* 7, no. 3 (2016): 12–29.

<sup>13</sup> P. Main, "John Dewey's Theory: How Have John Dewey's Theories of Learning Shaped Educational Reform and Classroom Practice?," 2023, <https://structural-learning.com/post/john-deweys-theory>.

<sup>14</sup> Mosweunyane, "The African Educational Evolution: From Traditional Training to Formal Education."

<sup>15</sup> Abebe Zegeye and Maurice Vambe, "African Indigenous Knowledge Systems," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 2006, 329–58; Jacob Mapara, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Zimbabwe: Juxtaposing Postcolonial Theory.," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009).

emphasizing communalism over Western individualism, has been instrumental in reshaping educational structures and curriculum in TVET programmes, bringing African perspectives to the forefront.<sup>16</sup> The revival of African holistic education, rooted in indigenous knowledge systems, has instilled pride and self-perception in the hands-on professions, challenging the dominance of Western educational models in African educational systems. The re-evaluation of African indigenous knowledge in TVET programmes aims to reclaim and integrate elements that promote cultural heritage and pride while discarding those that do not align with African values.<sup>17</sup>

It is essential that African educational systems, including TVET, acknowledge the fusion of African and European value systems. Embracing both traditions and integrating them into postmodern African educational systems, is a balance that can be struck between honouring African principles and adapting to modern educational demands. This approach is more sustainable and allows for the revitalisation of TVET programmes within the framework of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) while recognising the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and values into educational practices.

To address these historical shortcomings and the present challenges of TVET education in Zimbabwe, there is a need to reconfigure the system using an eclectic approach that enhances its relevance, attractiveness and effectiveness while aligning with the evolving needs and potential of learners in contemporary Zimbabwe. The critical analysis of the historical development and challenges of TVET in Zimbabwe highlights the importance of reforming the system to better serve the diverse educational needs of the population and bridge existing disparities in access to further education and training opportunities.

### **Technical-vocational education case studies in selected Southern African countries**

The perceptions and status of TVET in the Southern African context reflect the broader challenges encountered by TVET systems in many countries throughout the Global South.<sup>18</sup> Literature from these countries on TVET programmes is often viewed as a second-tier option, reserved for individuals who are considered less academically inclined or who face behavioural and learning challenges within the traditional academic environment, leading to a stigma and devaluation of TVET that hinders its development and attractiveness. Historical antecedents have perpetuated negative perceptions around vocational education, impacting its image and standing within the education system.<sup>19</sup> This section reviews TVET perceptions from a few selected Southern African countries and how they compare with the Zimbabwean context.

In Zambia, Sakamba raises three critical issues negatively affecting the successful implementation of TVET.<sup>20</sup> Firstly, there is social stigma and negative cultural attitudes toward TVET. In Zambia, TVET is often viewed as a last resort for students who have not succeeded in traditional academic pathways, reinforcing the perception that vocational education is a path to failure. This societal attitude toward TVET as a less prestigious option has discouraged interest and investment in vocational education by students, parents, and governments alike. Secondly, TVET has faced infrastructure and curriculum challenges. Generally, inadequate funding, limited curriculum links with universities, poor infrastructure, and weak TVET institutions-industry connections have further marginalised vocational education in a developing country like Zambia. These challenges hinder the quality, relevance, and career progression opportunities for TVET graduates, perpetuating the cycle of undervaluation and under-investment in vocational training programmes. Lastly, Sakamba raises concerns about monitoring and evaluation in TVET.<sup>21</sup> The absence of clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for TVET programmes in Zambia

<sup>16</sup> Mosweunyane, "The African Educational Evolution: From Traditional Training to Formal Education."

<sup>17</sup> Mosweunyane, "The African Educational Evolution: From Traditional Training to Formal Education."

<sup>18</sup> E. Hanford, "The Troubled History of Vocational Education," 2014, <http://www.apmreports.org/episode/2014/09/09/the-troubled-history-of-vocational-education>.

<sup>19</sup> A. Adams, E. Intsiful, H. Zagoon-Sayeed, A. Essuman, "Examining public perception on Technical and Vocational Education and Training enrolment in Ghana." *International Journal of Training Research*, 22(2), (2024); 147-164. DOI: 10.1080/14480220.2023.2222943

<sup>20</sup> Rodrick Sakamba, "Factors Affecting Sustainable and Quality Technical Vocational Training (TVT) Projects in Zambia," *South American Journal of Management*, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Sakamba, "Factors Affecting Sustainable and Quality Technical Vocational Training (TVT) Projects in Zambia."

raises critical interest in the certification and competencies acquired by TVET students. The lack of robust assessment practices and quality assurance measures undermines the credibility and effectiveness of vocational education in preparing students for the world of work.

These persistent challenges and negative perceptions surrounding TVET in Zambia underscore the urgent need for systemic reforms, increased investment, and enhanced recognition of vocational education as an important vehicle for skills and career advancement.

The South African TVET context reflects a similar pattern as in Zambia. The enrolment figures within the South African three-stream model, which includes academic, technical-vocational, and technical-occupational pathways, often show students opting for university education where more promising career prospects are perceived.<sup>22</sup> Mphatsoe highlights that the lack of clear and accessible information about TVET colleges may contribute to the skewed preference among school leavers for university enrolment over TVET institutions, resulting in an inverted pyramid representation where a smaller number of learners consider TVET as a viable educational pathway.<sup>23</sup> The prevailing perception of TVET as a less preferred educational pathway in South Africa reflects wider societal attitudes toward technical and vocational training, with students often perceiving university education as offering more promising career opportunities.<sup>24</sup> This perception influences enrolment patterns and contributes to the under-utilisation of TVET institutions. Mphatsoe further says that the lack of transparency in information on TVET colleges in South Africa contributes to the limited awareness and understanding of the opportunities and benefits offered by vocational education.<sup>25</sup> This opacity surrounding TVET options discourages potential students from considering enrolling at these institutions as they do not see a future in TVET education.

The Tanzanian experience mirrors that of other African countries in the Global South, where TVET programmes have the potential to improve the acquisition of essential life skills needed to meet the evolving demands of industry, the economy, and individual development. Despite this potential, there has been a lack of sufficient government attention, interest and investment in the TVET sector, leading to limited opportunities for students to advance to higher levels of education from TVET colleges.<sup>26</sup> The challenges faced by Tanzanian students from TVET colleges in progressing to the next level of education highlight general barriers that hinder the upward mobility and career advancement of TVET graduates. The lack of clear pathways for further education and training restricts the opportunities available to individuals who have completed vocational programmes.

In addressing these negative perceptions in Tanzania, information gaps, and lack of government support, TVET education's value and effectiveness may be promoted as a viable and essential alternative education system in the countries in the Global South. To address the challenges facing vocational education and improve its reputation and efficacy, concerted efforts are required from all stakeholders in the TVET value chain.

With reference to Lesotho, Ts'eane emphasises the critical role of TVET education in national economic discussions, particularly in addressing contemporary societal issues such as youth unemployment.<sup>27</sup> To improve the status and effectiveness of TVET, it is essential to reshape public perceptions and narratives about vocational education, underscoring its relevance to the evolving needs of industries and the economy. According to Mbizvo and Ts'eane this entails:

- Advocacy to enhance public perception and awareness: Efforts to change public perceptions and narratives surrounding TVET, highlighting its importance in addressing real-world challenges and contributing to economic development.
- Funding mechanisms and resources: Enhancing funding mechanisms for TVET programmes to ensure adequate resources for curriculum development, infrastructure upgrades, and quality assurance measures.

<sup>22</sup> S. Mphatsoe, "A Different Approach: Technical-Vocational Education and Training," 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Mphatsoe, "A Different Approach: Technical-Vocational Education and Training."

<sup>24</sup> Mphatsoe, "A Different Approach: Technical-Vocational Education and Training."

<sup>25</sup> Mphatsoe, "A Different Approach: Technical-Vocational Education and Training."

<sup>26</sup> World TVET Database, "World TVET Database Tanzania," 2016, . [unevoc.unesco.org/wtdb/worldtvetdatabase-tza-en.pdf](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/wtdb/worldtvetdatabase-tza-en.pdf).

<http://www.unevoc.unesco.org>.

<sup>27</sup> M.N. Ts'eane, "An Investigation into the Relevance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training Curriculum in Lesotho Secondary Schools" (Durban University of Technology, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.51415/10321/3316>.

- Curriculum development and industry partnerships: Strengthening curriculum development processes to ensure relevance to industry needs, and fostering strong partnerships between training providers and industries to enhance the employability of TVET graduates.
- Infrastructure upgrades and quality assurance: Improving infrastructure facilities for TVET institutions and establishing robust quality assurance and certification systems to enhance the credibility and effectiveness of vocational education.<sup>28</sup>

These challenges in Lesotho impede the transition of learners into meaningful employment opportunities, create their employment and limit their prospects for success in work spaces, echoing similar conclusions observed in Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa TVET programmes. These key areas need a rethink through coordinated efforts and strategic interventions; then countries like Lesotho can enhance the standing and impact of vocational education, thereby equipping individuals with the necessary skills and competencies to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving employment market and even become successful entrepreneurs.

Generally, from most African contexts and the cases cited, integrating TVET into broader national economic and development strategies is essential for realising its potential in addressing real national challenges, reducing youth unemployment, and fostering job creation.<sup>29</sup> This shift in perspective is crucial in overcoming the enduring stigma attached to technical and vocational education in countries like Zimbabwe and across Africa, where TVET faces reputational challenges. The need to address these critical issues and reshape the perception of TVET has become louder than ever before, and countries like Zimbabwe can emulate some success stories from other contexts and build a resilient skilled workforce, drive economic development, create employment, and effectively respond to societal needs in the face of global challenges.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

The study targeted instructors and students in TVET colleges affected by challenges and opportunities in the TVET journey. Masvingo was purposively and conveniently chosen because of the presence of two TVET colleges, Masvingo Polytechnical and Mushagashi. Qualitative methods were used to collect data through open-ended interviews and focus group discussions.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Two samples consisted of instructors for open-ended interviews and students for focus groups. Researchers purposively selected TVET instructors who are actively teaching in colleges, retired or fully working as industrialists in different fields. Five instructors were sampled from engineering (1), building and construction (1), horticulture and agricultural studies (1), hairdressing and beauty therapy (1), and information and communication technology (ICT) (1). Instructors' responses are recorded as TVET 1-5. Fourteen students for focus groups were selected from Engineering (electrical, mechanical, and civil) (1), Building and construction (1), Metalwork (1), Carpentry and joinery (1), Horticulture and agricultural studies (1), Textiles and clothing (1), Hairdressing and beauty therapy (1), Information and communication technology (ICT) (1), Business studies (1), Accounting (1), Hotel and catering (1), Art and design (1), Media studies (1), Travel and tourism (1). The sample constituted nineteen (19) participants, eleven (11) of whom were female and eight (8) were male. FGDs are recorded as FGD1 and FGD2.

### **Data Collection**

Five instructors (three men and two women) who were purposively selected were interviewed as field experts to provide insights on the uptake of programmes due to biases as well as lack of infrastructure development and availability of resources. These interviews helped to determine the challenges and prospects of TVET training in Zimbabwe.

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<sup>28</sup> Washington T Mbizvo, "Financing Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Lesotho and Uganda," n.d.; Ts'eane, "An Investigation into the Relevance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training Curriculum in Lesotho Secondary Schools."

<sup>29</sup> Hanford, "The Troubled History of Vocational Education."

### **Focus Group Discussions**

Two (2) focus group discussions with a total of five (5) male students and nine (9) female students FGD1 (2 males and 5 females) and FGD2 (3 males and 4 females) were conducted. All participants were above the age of consent. All participants were chosen based on availability, willingness and representativeness of either gender or fields of study. Focus groups helped to determine the reasons for students' choice of TVET training or their refusal to take it up.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

Qualitative data was captured through interview notes and was transcribed, translated and typed. Atlas.ti 8 software was used to analyse the data using thematic approaches.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers used informed consent for participants who were free to participate or not, without coercion, deception or inducement. The privacy and confidentiality of all eligible participants were ensured and emphasised using anonymity on collected data (without name and contact details). Participants were fully informed of the study purpose and objectives, participant expectations, risks and benefits involved, and that participation was voluntary. Any person could withdraw at any moment without any negative repercussions if they felt uncomfortable.

## **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

### **Vocationalisation of the Zimbabwean TVET**

Participants responded to the historical developments and current responses on student choices to pursue academic or TVET subjects. The lecturers supported the promotion of TVET saying, "Stakeholders need to raise the awareness of the importance and value of TVET education to provide practical skills and pathways for self-employment along the National Development Strategy One (NDS1) in Zimbabwe" (TVET3). This can be done if "The TVET curriculum skills are aligned with industry needs and emerging job markets" (TVET1). Another lecturer stated, "We need to showcase diverse opportunities and career pathways for TVET graduates after dismantling colonial perceptions and stereotypes of this system" (TVET5). This can be done if "Colleges establish a link with, and strengthen partnerships with industry, to give learners firsthand experience and exposure to the real world of work thereby enhancing the practical relevance of their training" (TVET2). Interviewees made statements about their awareness of biases for student gifting and post-independence initiatives; difficulties faced by schools after independence; and policies that forced students to take up at least one TVET subject at school.

Also, the FGDs responded by saying, "TVET education is often seen as a second-class option compared to academic subjects, but we need to see their equal wait and that they are not for the academically challenged" (FGD2). The other group also stated, "We lack awareness of the value of TVET subjects on the job market, hence we need to destigmatise their value on the economy" (FGD1). Focus groups thus urged stakeholders "to find ways to support both kinds of learners" (FGD1) through improved "allocation of resources on TVET subjects to par them with academic subjects" (FGD2), hence "address stigma" (FGD1), and "create relevance of TVET in the job market for those who want to advance their careers in that direction" (FGD2). Interviewees highlighted the need to comprehensively integrate TVET and academic subjects to benefit all students and the nation.

The participants were aware of the historical context of TVET in Zimbabwe and the new narrative of vocationalisation in Zimbabwe's development trajectory. Vocationalisation was captured in the 2015-2022 curriculum framework in keeping with the recommendations of the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission and underscores the complexities inherent in reforming TVET programmes. The report recommended that students take at least one TVET subject at school, but "integration and the development of a synergy between academic and TVET subjects were lacking to effectively implement TVET subjects in schools" (TVET4). The transition from post-independence school-based TVET (also known as F2), was marked by the establishment of a unitary education system to redress the colonial

imbalances by adopting the philosophy of Education with Production (EWP) that reflected the evolving landscape of TVET in Zimbabwe.<sup>30</sup> The EWP philosophy became a revival of the neglected F2 thinking of the colonial era, as well as the revival of Nyerere's Ujamaa concept of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) entertained by the liberation struggle camps.<sup>31</sup> Despite the government's efforts and initiatives with the Zimbabwe National Craft Certificate (ZNCC) given to ZJC candidates, and the Zimbabwe National Foundation Certificate (ZNFC) for 'O' Level candidates was manned by the arm of the Ministry of Education and Culture called the Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP) meant to superintend over the success of the EWP.

The programme was intended to increase access, relevance, equity, and equality in education for all, but became marginalised and stereotyped in view of academic subjects, using colonially inherited perceptions, especially Cambridge qualifications.<sup>32</sup> That is why Mashingaidze in the 1990s reported that the wholesale approach to vocationalisation should consider schools' readiness and capacity in terms of manpower and infrastructure demands.<sup>33</sup> Capacitated schools did not have challenges in offering TVET subjects, regulated and assessed by the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO). According to education ministries, the Secretary Circular Number 2 of 2001 reinforced by Secretary Circular Number 14 of 2004 TVET was made compulsory following the Nziramasanga Commission report of 1999, unfortunately with poor registration in TVET subjects.<sup>34</sup> Interviewees further discussed the apprenticeship model and the on-the-job training in TVET education. The Nziramasanga Commission was questioned for its implementation without investment in infrastructure, skills and resources because schools needed tools, materials, and equipment as well as professionally developed teachers for TVET subjects. Questions were also asked about the role of the ministries in helping schools and colleges collaborate with industry and business, to ensure that TVET is aligned with individual needs and those of the labour market.

Interviewees further expressed their awareness of why TVET was embraced in the post-2013 constitutional referendum saying "ZANU-PF haphazardly embraced TVET in 2015 because of youth unemployment and its waning popularity" (TVET3). ZANU-PF's survival strategy, following previous poor policies like the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (1990-1996), which led to the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CIET) recommended TVET subjects into the curriculum but the government had no political will at the moment.<sup>35</sup> Thus "TVET was a fire-fighting instrument for ZANU-PF's political decline in the third millennium" (TVET2). Without changing the curriculum philosophy and providing the necessary infrastructure, skills and resources, "TVET remained stereotyped and relegated to afternoon sessions, while academic subjects were done in the mornings" (TVET1). Scholars also feel that TVET has not been allocated mainstream importance in many schools, save for polytechnics and apprenticeship programmes and for this reason believe:

*The present curriculum in Zimbabwe [academic] is failing, to a large extent to help make school leavers become better skilled, educated and confident problem-solvers. The solution is to introduce a comprehensive, compulsory and meaningful technical and vocational education in schools.*<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Kanyongo, "Zimbabwe's Public Education System Reforms: Successes and Challenges."

<sup>31</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (2005). "Report on the technical and vocational education and training policy review framework."

<sup>32</sup> Brian Raftopoulos and Rory Pilosof, "Education in the First Two Decades of Independence," *Fending for Ourselves: Youth in Zimbabwe, 1980-2020*, 2021, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Mavhunga, "Vocationalisation Of The Secondary School Curriculum As An Instrument For Human Resources Development: Zimbabwean Experiences, Challenges, And The Way Forward."

<sup>34</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (2005). "Report on the technical and vocational education and training policy review framework."

<sup>35</sup> Raftopoulos and Pilosof, "Education in the First Two Decades of Independence"; Mavhunga, "Vocationalisation Of The Secondary School Curriculum As An Instrument For Human Resources Development: Zimbabwean Experiences, Challenges, And The Way Forward."

<sup>36</sup> Mavhunga, "Vocationalisation Of The Secondary School Curriculum As An Instrument For Human Resources Development: Zimbabwean Experiences, Challenges, And The Way Forward."



In the 2015-2022 Curriculum Framework, the Government of Zimbabwe introduced a Continuous Assessment Learning Activity (CALA) or competence-based approach to assess learners.<sup>37</sup> This became aligned with the National Development Strategy One (NDS1) to drive industrial recovery and development through TVET.<sup>38</sup> CALA, as part of TVET, eliminated the use of examinations to assess learners. With CALA they experimented with solving problems in real-life situations.<sup>39</sup> The focus groups stated, “CALA was meant to contribute toward innovation and industrialisation in solving Zimbabwe’s socio-economic problems” (FGD2). Another focus group also stated, “CALA was a new nest of ideas from elementary to tertiary levels, that would enable learners at any level to produce tangible goods and services that speak to societal needs” (FGD1). Interviewees emphasised the need for continued dialogue and strategic planning to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of TVET education in addressing key societal issues such as youth unemployment and skills development. However, “the haste implementation of TVET to salvage ZANU-PF’s waning fortunes” (TVET3) was also condemned by scholars as education fathers paid lip service to its implementation.<sup>40</sup> Interviewees also mentioned that “ZANU-PF was affected by the poor performance of industries during the hyper-inflationary period, which affected its funding of TVET programme in the 2015-2022 era” (TVET4). Colonialism has also been blamed for undermining the meaningful implementation of TVET in schools.<sup>41</sup> This calls on stakeholders to provide frameworks to improve negative perceptions.

In all, participants indicated that TVET has failed because of its history in Zimbabwe, poor ministerial collaboration with other stakeholders, ineffective monitoring and evaluation, inadequate financial and human resources, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a mismatch in the Zimbabwean examination system and the CALA approach among others. This has led to the unsuccessful implementation of TVET in schools during the 2015-2022 curriculum era. As will be recommended, school administrators, managers and stakeholders need to channel adequate resources for teacher training, infrastructure development and provision of tools and equipment by aligning school subjects with industrial needs.

## DISCUSSION

### The Zimbabwean technical and vocational education trajectory

#### Historical development of TVET in Zimbabwe

TVET in Zimbabwe began during the colonial era when institutions for whites were separated from those for blacks for instance Salisbury (Harare) Polytechnic (1926) and Bulawayo Technical College (1927) were meant to address the skills gaps within the white community.<sup>42</sup> Blacks had St. Peters Kubatana (1963), in Highfields run by Roman Catholic missionaries. This changed in 1980 when Zimbabwe embraced scientific socialism. It prioritised the expansion of the education system with a specific focus on TVET. In 1984, the Manpower Planning and Development Act (MPDA) was established, which led to the creation of the Zimbabwe Manpower Development Fund (ZIMDEF). ZIMDEF was financed through 1% of the salary bill of the employees. It contributed to the establishment of numerous TVET centres of private and public nature.<sup>43</sup> Notable industrial training centres include the Danhiko project in Harare for the disabled and disadvantaged; Masasa (Industrial) Training Bureau (MTB) in Harare, Mupfure Self-Help College (MSHC) in Chegutu, School of Hospitality and Tourism (SHT) in Bulawayo, and Westgate Industrial Training College (WITC). In terms of polytechnics, seven were established,

<sup>37</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2015). “Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015-2022.” Zim Curriculum Framework 4 PSE11 2015-22\_FINAL26-04-16\_Layout 1 (zimsake.co.zw)

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Firomumwe, “The Paradoxical Power of Continuous Assessment Learning Activity Nexus Industrial Development in the Context of Zimbabwean Education System 5.0,” *Journal of Economics Education and Entrepreneurship* 3, no. 1 (2022): 37–48.

<sup>39</sup> Mataka Tawanda Wallace, Matee Lihotetso Gloria, and Hokonya Wellington Munetsi, “Continuous Assessment Learning Activity: An Overdue Progressive Assessment Approach Compromisingly Implemented,” *International Journal of All Research Writings* 4, no. 1 (2022): 57–68; Firomumwe, “The Paradoxical Power of Continuous Assessment Learning Activity Nexus Industrial Development in the Context of Zimbabwean Education System 5.0.”

<sup>40</sup> Wallace, Gloria, and Munetsi, “Continuous Assessment Learning Activity: An Overdue Progressive Assessment Approach Compromisingly Implemented.”

<sup>41</sup> Mavhunga, “Vocationalisation Of The Secondary School Curriculum As An Instrument For Human Resources Development: Zimbabwean Experiences, Challenges, And The Way Forward.”

<sup>42</sup> UNESCO, “Education Sector: TVET Policy Review Zimbabwe,” 2018, Unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000 366321.

<sup>43</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (2005). “Report on the technical and vocational education and training policy review framework.”

Harare, Kwekwe, Bulawayo, Mutare, Gweru, Masvingo and Kushinga Phikelela.<sup>44</sup> This provides scholars with valuable insights into the history and development of TVET in Zimbabwe, beginning with colonial, then first republic and second republic initiatives to address skills gaps and promote technical skills development within the country.

### **TVET policy and implementation in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe introduced the Short Term Emergency Recovery Programme (STERP) policy that emphasised greater cooperation between public TVET programmes, industrial practices and income-generating projects to address economic and social challenges.<sup>45</sup> TVET colleges are largely overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MHEISTD) and the then Ministry of Youth, Sports Arts and Recreation (MYSAR). Other line ministries also provide training programmes and qualifications in their own domains of competence, such as agriculture, mining, and health.<sup>46</sup>

### **Challenges in technical and vocational education uptake in Zimbabwe**

The effective provision of TVET to contribute to national economic development has been fraught with multiple challenges. It has been affected by lack of coordination, illegal operation and lack of regulation. The fractured nature of TVET provision in Zimbabwe, among others, has led to a lack of commitment on the part of students, parents and other stakeholders. This highlights the gaps that need to be filled to improve quality and effectiveness as regulation, monitoring and coordination are improved. However, TVET is believed to unlock national and economic development.<sup>47</sup> The albatross lies in the lack of political will to support a clear road map for the full vocationalisation of the curriculum compared to the heavy emphasis on academic subjects (through funding and celebration). This has seen ZIMDEF funds dedicated to the development of human resources for the industry and commerce in the country for schools being looted and abused by stakeholders. Corruption has benefitted a few people without developing the skills required by the government initiative through ZIMDEF.<sup>48</sup> Other problems is poor funding to establish new infrastructure, equipment, and human resources from the ministry have also militated against the effectiveness and efficiency of TVET.<sup>49</sup> In this way, schools have heavily relied on academic subjects that depend on examinations such as English, Mathematics, Science, and indigenous languages as TVET subjects cannot be taught in their schools, leading to the undermining of TVET training across the nation.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, there are vocations such as nursing that exclude subjects like woodwork, metalwork, and building from their requirements.<sup>51</sup> This imbalance in attention and resources between academic and TVET subjects has contributed to the slow and restricted growth of TVET establishments in Zimbabwean schools.

Furthermore, TVET subjects were allocated to students with low aptitudes for academic achievements or intellectually ungifted aspirants in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa, hence low academic status. Even academics believe that TVET occupies a low status on the scale of academic subjects in Zimbabwe.<sup>52</sup> This stigma has led TVET aspirants to be people with low entry qualifications (school dropouts or weak students) even today. Low uptake, as emphasised early on, has been caused by the exclusion of TVET subjects in nurse training, among others.

<sup>44</sup> UNESCO, "Education Sector: TVET Policy Review Zimbabwe."

<sup>45</sup> K. Sammy, "Vocationalising education: Unpacking TVET college lecturers' instructional practices." (2021)15. doi: 10.4018/978-1-2607-1-1ch002

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO, "Education Sector: TVET Policy Review Zimbabwe."

<sup>47</sup> Erisher Woyo, "Challenges Facing Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions in Producing Competent Graduates in Zimbabwe," *Open Journal of Education* 1, no. 7 (2013): 182, <https://doi.org/10.12966/oje.11.03.2013>.

<sup>48</sup> UNESCO, "Education Sector: TVET Policy Review Zimbabwe."

<sup>49</sup> Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (2005). "Report on the technical and vocational education and training policy review framework."

<sup>50</sup> A Makochekanwa and J. Mahuyu, "TVET Offering Institutions' Perceptions on TVET Education: The Case of Zimbabwe." *The African Review*, 48(1), 168-195. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1821889X-12340036>

<sup>51</sup> N. Tshili, "Govt Tightens Nursing School Requirements," *Zimbabwe Situation*, October 18, 2018, [www.zimbabwesituation.com](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com).

<sup>52</sup> Mandiudza, Chindedza, and Makaye, "Vocationalization of Secondary Schools: Implementation Reality or Fallacy?"; Nherera, "Vocationalisation of Secondary Education in Zimbabwe: A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation"; Mavhunga, "Vocationalisation Of The Secondary School Curriculum As An Instrument For Human Resources Development: Zimbabwean Experiences, Challenges, And The Way Forward."

TVET in Zimbabwe has also been affected by fragmented funding mechanisms that depend on student (tuition) fees to develop programmes.<sup>53</sup> TVET requires a separate budget from the central government to develop an effective, efficient, competitive and flexible market-driven educational system.<sup>54</sup> Limited financial support has prevented TVET from getting the attention it deserves in human resource development discourses in most African countries and Zimbabwe is no exception.<sup>55</sup> The marginalisation of TVET in the allocation of resources in education budgets has compromised the growth of opportunities to produce graduates with competencies in TVET subjects. Thus, it can be argued that the Ministries of Education have treated TVET subjects as a subset of their budgetary allocation.<sup>56</sup> Without adequate funding, and depending on student fees, the TVET provision in Zimbabwe remains pitiable, until the government becomes committed to supporting it.

### Successes in technical and vocational education in Zimbabwe

The discussion has highlighted the positive contribution of TVET skills development in the labour market and the global workforce. Zimbabwe has immensely contributed to the development of TVET skills despite the continued loss of human capital through brain drain due to the poor performance of the economy in the country and the HIV pandemic. The collapse of Zimbabwean industries during the economic meltdown of 2000-2008 led to an increase in unemployment, which forced the government to shift toward TVET programmes for the provision of both soft and hard skills needed for occupational success. This has led to an increase in migration to the vibrant informal sector and seen some positive attitudes toward TVET programmes.

Further, TVET implements formative competency assessments where student outcomes, involvement, independence and self-assessment are implemented. This has enhanced the reputation and recognition of TVET in Zimbabwe. TVET's outcome-based assessment emphasises practical and relevant skills that are more attractive and beneficial for individuals and the nation. This has led many people to migrate from academic to TVET subjects to acquire soft and hard skills they can use in occupational and survival circumstances.<sup>57</sup> This underscores the importance of investing in, and promoting TVET, to equip individuals with practical and marketable skills.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve and enhance the reputation of TVET in Zimbabwe, the programmes need better coordination and collaboration to secure funding resources, improved regulation and monitoring to ensure quality and standards, and continued investment in curricula review and infrastructure to meet the country's economic, social and human capital needs. To do this, stakeholders, especially government, educational institutions, industry partners, and international organizations, must prioritise and invest in TVET programmes, develop comprehensive TVET strategies, address negative attitudes toward TVET, and establish sustainable TVET funding mechanisms. This collaborative effort can unlock the full potential of TVET for national development and economic growth in Zimbabwe. The following recommendations may improve the status and reputation of TVET education in Zimbabwe:

- Need to upgrade infrastructure and resources in schools and other educational institutions to support the implementation of the TVET curriculum through the provision of tools and techniques such as laboratories, workshops, and technology that enhance student learning and hands-on experiences.
- A dynamic and responsive programme is possible through reviews and updates that incorporate technologies and skills to equip graduates with relevant and marketable soft and hard skills.

<sup>53</sup> Makochekanwa and Mahuyu, "TVET Offering Institutions' Perceptions on TVET Education: The Case of Zimbabwe."

<sup>54</sup> Jerald Hondonga and Sylvia Manto Ramaligela, "Comparing Financing Models for Vocational Education and Training in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe," in *Socio-Economic Perspectives on Vocational Skill Development: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (IGI Global, 2020), 56–79.

<sup>55</sup> Nathaniel Gyimah, "Assessment of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) on the Development of the World's Economy: Perspective of Africa, Asia and Europe," *Asia and Europe* (February 19, 2020), 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Hondonga and Ramaligela, "Comparing Financing Models for Vocational Education and Training in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe."

<sup>57</sup> Davison M Mupinga, Michael F Burnett, and Donna H Redmann, "Examining the Purpose of Technical Education in Zimbabwe's High Schools.," *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 75–83.

- Need to establish robust quality assurance mechanisms for the credibility of TVET education through accreditation systems, for example, reliable certification recognised by industry, and external quality audits of institutions to meet required standards.
- Need to reform public mindsets and stereotypes toward narratives on the value and benefits of TVET among learners, parents, and the wider society through expos and exhibitions.
- Need for improved coordination and collaboration to align TVET programmes with the future needs of industry and commerce as institutions and employers engage in regular consultations, advisory boards, and internship/apprenticeship programmes, work placements, and guest lectures by captains of industry to bridge the gap between academia and industry.
- Need for effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and quality of the TVET curriculum. It requires all stakeholders, that is, educators, industry experts, and policymakers to collaborate in monitoring and evaluating TVET.
- Need for adequate financial and human resources from government and institutions through public-private partnerships/sponsorship to support and improve the relevance and quality of TVET education.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has underscored the critical role TVET plays in equipping individuals with practical skills and knowledge, despite the challenges with its institutionalisation in Zimbabwe. Although Zimbabwe has made a lot of progress in developing TVET programmes for its workforce, problems related to human capital empowerment and economic development persist. Challenges, such as outdated perceptions, inadequate resources and infrastructure, inadequate funding, limited industry partnerships, and a mismatch between taught skills and labour market demands, continue to haunt the quality and effectiveness of the programmes. This can be overcome by improving coordination, regulation, and investment in TVET, to package TVET in a way that makes it attractive and effective in meeting the demands of the postmodern economy. Reconfiguring TVET to be more appealing and responsive to the needs of learners and the labour market by aligning it to industry demands and ensuring that practical skills are directly applicable to the workplace can generate greater demand and a significant contribution to national economic development. If implemented well, TVET can produce a skilled workforce that meets the requirements of various industries and sectors, contributing to national economic growth and prosperity. The importance of government collaboration with educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and society, has been recognised to harness the potential of TVET in Zimbabwe. In all, strategic reforms and partnerships are needed to promote value in practical skills and improve the quality and relevance of TVET in Zimbabwe.

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