

Assessment barometer of the impact of vocational training: The youth perspectives in Oshana region, Namibia

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the impact of Vocational Training in Namibia, on the perspectives of 680 unemployed youth in the Oshana region. Purposive sampling method was employed to select 74 unemployed graduates and 61 unemployed nongraduates in Oshakati-East constituency. The study incorporated a mixed-methods approach, to obtain insights into the participants' experiences regarding vocational training. The quantitative data was analysed using statistical methods to determine the participants' overall satisfaction with the training programs and their employability outcomes. The qualitative data analysis focused on identifying barriers and opportunities related to vocational training as perceived by the youth. The findings indicate that the absence of a Vocational Training Barometer hampers access to suitable training programs, limiting entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for youth. Challenges faced by unemployed graduates seeking vocational training and self-employment emphasize the need for a structured system to measure program effectiveness. Key recommendations include developing an accessible database on skills responsive to industry needs, tailoring curricula to recognize and enhance students' prior knowledge, and implementing best practices to optimize vocational training opportunities. This research contributes to the enhancement of Namibia's vocational training ecosystem, promoting self-reliance and ethical entrepreneurial practices among the youth.

Keywords: vocational training, unemployed youth, training barometer

Introduction

Namibia, like many other developing countries, faces challenges in its education and training systems. The absence of a robust assessment barometer poses significant challenges to the vocational training landscape (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018). The absence of a well-defined assessment mechanism causes complex implications for both the young population and the broader economic ecosystem, as it hinders the effective evaluation of vocational training outcomes (Nangolo, 2016). Therefore, without a clear and standardized mechanism to assess the impact of vocational training programs, it becomes difficult to gauge the quality and relevance of the training provided. This can lead to a mismatch between the skills acquired through vocational training and the actual demands of the job market, thereby limiting the potential for successful integration of graduates into the workforce.

In the Oshana region, where the study was centred, there exists four pivotal vocational training centres offering a diverse spectrum of field studies, encompassing disciplines such as automotive engineering, bricklaying and plastering, joinery and cabinet making, office administration, plumbing and

pipe fitting, and welding and metalwork (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018). Despite the availability of these programs, the pressing concern emerges from the stark reality of approximately 1420 unemployed graduates within the Oshana region (Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, 2020a). This definite irrationality between the flood of training avenues and the scarcity of gainful employment underscores the pressing demand for an assessment barometer to systematically measure the efficacy of vocational training activities. The gap left by the lack of an assessment barometer further compounds the challenges faced by promising entrepreneurs and job aspirants, limiting their access to suitable training and gainful employment avenues (International Labour Organization, 2019). Graduates, in the absence of standardized assessment modalities, encounter impediments in effectively showcasing their competencies and skills, thereby hindering their prospects in the job market and entrepreneurial arena. This vacuum, as explained in the Harambee Prosperity Plan, underscores the importance of addressing this problem to foster youth employment and

catalyse economic growth within Namibia (National Planning Commission, 2017).

The absence of a comprehensive assessment barometer to evaluate vocational training programs resonates as a significant challenge in Namibia, particularly within the Oshana region (Nangolo, 2016). This perpetuates disconnect between vocational training offerings and the demands of the labour market, culminating in persistently high rates of graduate unemployment. The establishment of a well-structured assessment barometer emerges as an instrument for bridging the gap between vocational training and the evolving requisites of the labour market, offering a promising trajectory toward fostering a prosperous future for Namibia's youth (Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, 2020b). Therefore, the backdrop of this study titled "Assessment Barometer of the Impact of Vocational Training: The Youth Perspectives in Oshana region, Namibia" focuses on the critical examination of the challenges arising from the absence of a comprehensive assessment barometer within the vocational training landscape of Namibia.

Literature review

Global perspective

In the context of a rapidly evolving global economy, the assessment of vocational training programs has gained paramount importance. Developing countries worldwide are grappling with the challenge of aligning their education and training systems with the dynamic demands of the job market (UNESCO, 2012). Vocational training, often touted as a viable solution for addressing unemployment and skills gaps, requires robust assessment mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. A lack of such mechanisms can lead to a mismatch between the skills acquired and the needs of industries, undermining the potential for youth employability and economic growth (International Labour Organization, 2017). To tackle this issue, international organizations like the International Labour Organization advocate for comprehensive assessment tools to bridge the gap between training outcomes and labour market needs.

African context

Amidst the global challenge of soaring youth unemployment rates, the African continent is particularly impacted, necessitating a

heightened emphasis on effective assessment mechanisms for vocational training (African Development Bank, 2019). This urgency is notably resonant in countries like Namibia, where the imperative lies in equipping young individuals with skills tailored to the evolving landscape of job opportunities (World Bank, 2019). Compounding this situation is the rapid expansion of Sub-Saharan Africa's youth population, accentuating the need for robust evaluation metrics to tap into the demographic dividend that this burgeoning cohort represents.

Despite progress made by some nations in instituting assessment systems for vocational training, the overarching concern of maintaining the quality and relevance of these programs across a spectrum of sectors continues to be a common thread (African Union Commission, 2018). The significance of addressing this challenge is underscored by the fluidity of the job market and the pivotal role that vocational training plays in bridging skill gaps (African Union Commission, 2018). Amidst this backdrop, Namibia emerges as a compelling case study for scrutinizing the impact of vocational training through the specific lens of its youth population. In this study, the assessment of impact becomes a corner stone, unpacking the effectiveness of vocational training initiatives and their ramifications on the socio-economic landscape (World Bank, 2019). The Oshana region, with its distinct socio-economic dynamics and challenges, offers a pertinent locale to examine youth perspectives on vocational training, potentially yielding nuanced insights crucial for policy enhancement.

Grounded in this context, the present study embarked on the mission of evaluating the influence of vocational training from the vantage point of Namibia's youth, with a focal point on the Oshana region. By meticulously delving into the lived experiences, perceptions, and outcomes as perceived by young individuals engaging with vocational training, this research aspires to glean invaluable insights that inform evidence-driven policy recommendations (African Development Bank, 2019). Ultimately, the implications extend beyond Namibia, offering potential guidance to other African nations grappling with similar obstacles. This study contributes to the broader discourse by aligning itself with the current of research aiming to enhance vocational training assessment mechanisms. It advocates for a comprehensive understanding of the intricate

interplay between training programs and youth outlook, especially within the context of Namibia's socio-economic fabric. By advocating for a holistic view that encompasses both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, this research adds to the body of knowledge essential for advancing vocational training policies that genuinely resonate with the youth and their aspirations.

Namibian context

Namibia's education and training landscape faces unique challenges due to its historical context and economic structure. Despite significant progress since independence, the country continues to grapple with the legacies of colonial education systems that often did not prioritize practical skills development (Shipanga & Ipinge, 2019). The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Namibia has acknowledged the need to overhaul vocational training systems to address contemporary economic demands (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018). However, without an effective assessment barometer, the effectiveness of these efforts remains uncertain. The Namibian context, particularly within the Oshana region, exemplifies the urgency of addressing vocational training assessment. Despite the availability of diverse training programs, the persistence of high unemployment rates among graduates in the region highlights the mismatch between training outcomes and labour market needs (Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, 2020b). This situation not only hampers individual prospects but also hinders the region's overall economic growth potential.

In the face of these challenges, the Harambee Prosperity Plan, Namibia's national development blueprint, has identified the enhancement of vocational training and youth employment as a key priority (National Planning Commission, 2017). An assessment barometer, designed to measure the impact of vocational training from the youth perspective, aligns closely with this goal. The establishment of such a mechanism promises to provide insights into the efficacy of training programs, thereby facilitating improvements that could positively impact youth employability and entrepreneurship prospects within the Oshana region and beyond.

Theoretical framework

This study was based on Social Cognitive

Theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1986). This theory posits that human behaviour is influenced by a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive processes, environmental factors, and personal factors (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, where individuals acquire knowledge and skills through observing and imitating the actions and experiences of others (Bandura, 1986). In the context of this study, this theory underscores how Namibian youths' perceptions and attitudes toward vocational training outcomes are shaped by their observations of role models, peers, trainers, and the broader socio-cultural environment. Their self-efficacy beliefs, formed through the interplay of personal experiences and vicarious learning, play a pivotal role in shaping their confidence and motivation to engage with vocational training programs and subsequently influencing the effectiveness of the assessment barometer (Lent et al., 1994; Lent et al., 2000; Zimmerman, 2000).

The application of Social Cognitive Theory to the study is evident in the emphasis on modelling and observational learning, where youth in the Oshana region assess the impact of vocational training not only based on their individual experiences but also through comparisons with the achievements and experiences of their peers. Furthermore, Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is crucial in understanding how youth perceive their ability to successfully complete vocational training programs and gauge their effectiveness. The assessment barometer becomes a reflection of their self-efficacy beliefs, influenced by the experiences of successful role models and the level of support provided by trainers and institutions. Consequently, by integrating Social Cognitive Theory, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, social, and environmental factors that shape Namibian youths' perspectives on vocational training outcomes, contributing to a more holistic approach to evaluating the impact of such programs.

Therefore, by using Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, social, and environmental factors that shape the perspectives of Namibian youth regarding the outcomes of vocational training programs. This approach contributes to a more holistic method of evaluating the impact of such programs by considering how observational

learning and self-efficacy beliefs collectively influence these individuals' viewpoints.

Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This approach allowed researchers to triangulate findings and provide a more well-rounded interpretation of complex phenomena. The research targeted a population of 680 unemployed young individuals and employed a purposive sampling technique to select 74 unemployed graduates and 61 unemployed non-graduates from the Oshakati-East constituency. This sampling approach ensured the representation of diverse perspectives on vocational training among both graduate and non-graduate participants (Patton, 1990). Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to evaluate participants' overall satisfaction with their vocational training and subsequent employability outcomes (Smith & Jones, 2023). This statistical analysis provided insights into various dimensions of vocational education's effectiveness in the Oshana region. Concurrently, qualitative interviews facilitated

thematic analysis, allowing researchers to identify recurring themes regarding challenges and prospects associated with vocational training from the perspective of the youth (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The combined quantitative and qualitative findings offered a comprehensive understanding of vocational training's impact, encompassing both measurable outcomes and participants' views.

Results and discussions

Results from the survey

Demographic information

The sample consisted of 80 males and 55 females. Participants' ages were distributed as follows: 18-21 (31 participants), 22-25 (44 participants), 26-29 (32 participants), 30-33 (18 participants), and 34 and above (10 participants). The age distribution showed that most respondents fell within the 22-25 age range, indicating that vocational training is attracting a diverse group of youths in the Oshana region. The highest level of education completed was mainly Grade 12 (59 participants) and vocational training (76 participants). The fact that 56% of the participants completed vocational training suggests a significant interest in vocational education among the surveyed youths.

Views on the impact of vocational training

Table 1: Youths' perceptions of vocational training

Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Vocational training equips me with practical skills that are relevant to the job market.	33(24%)	50(37%)	18(13%)	21(21%)	13(10%)
Vocational training offers a pathway to secure employment opportunities.	14(11%)	35(26%)	6(4%)	30(22%)	51(37%)
I believe vocational training enhances my overall career prospects.	41(30%)	30(22%)	9(7%)	38(28%)	17(13%)
Vocational training adequately prepares me for the demands of the workforce.	15(11%)	38(28%)	36(27%)	40(30%)	6(4%)
I perceive vocational training as equally valuable as traditional academic education.	45(34%)	43(32%)	11(8%)	34(25%)	2(1%)
The vocational training programs in Oshana region meet industry standards.	31(23%)	27(20%)	1(1%)	37(27%)	39(29%)

Table 1 reveals a complex view of youths' perceptions of vocational training. A

significant majority, 61% of the respondents (24% strongly agreed, 37% agreed), believed

that vocational training equipped them with practical skills relevant to the job market. However, there was a contrast regarding the belief that vocational training offered a secure pathway to employment, with 59% (37% strongly disagreed, 22% disagreed) expressing disagreement. When considering overall career prospects, 52% of respondents (30% strongly agreed, 22% agreed) felt that vocational training enhanced their career opportunities. Nonetheless, opinions were more divided on whether vocational training adequately prepared individuals for workforce demands, with 39% agreeing (11% strongly agreed, 28% agreed) and 34% disagreeing (4% strongly disagreed, 30% disagreed), while 27% remained unsure. The perceived value of vocational training compared to traditional

academic education was generally positive, with 66% (34% strongly agreed, 32% agreed) considering it equally valuable. Yet, there was a notable concern regarding the alignment of vocational training programs with industry standards in the Oshana region, as 56% (29% strongly disagreed, 27% disagreed) believed these programs did not meet the required standards.

Overall, the table illustrates a positive sentiment toward the practical relevance and value of vocational training in terms of skill acquisition and career prospects. However, there is significant scepticism about its effectiveness in securing employment and meeting industry standards, which highlights potential gaps in the vocational training system.

Table 2: Youths' perceptions of quality of vocational training

Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
The instructors in vocational training programs are knowledgeable and skilled.	15(11%)	41(30%)	24(18%)	33(24%)	22(16%)
The curriculum of vocational training adequately covers the necessary topics and skills.	13(10%)	15(11%)	8(6%)	44(33%)	55(41%)
Vocational training institutions in Oshana region have up-to-date facilities and resources.	10(7%)	51(38%)	0(0%)	53(39%)	20(15%)
The practical training components of vocational programs are effectively conducted.	46(34%)	36(27%)	2(1%)	30(22%)	21(16%)
I have experienced an improvement in my practical skills due to vocational training.	12(9%)	27(20%)	38(28%)	20(15%)	38(28%)

Table 2 reflects varied perceptions among youths about the quality of vocational training. Regarding instructors' knowledge and skills, a significant portion, 41%, of respondents (30% agreed, 11% strongly agreed) suggested that many participants found the instructors competent. However, a notable 40% (24% disagreed, 16% strongly disagreed) indicated that a substantial group perceived room for improvement. The curriculum received a particularly negative assessment, with 74% of respondents (33% disagreeing, 41% strongly disagreeing) feeling that it adequately covered necessary topics and skills, highlighting a critical area for potential reform. The responses about facilities and practical training components revealed mixed feelings. While

45% of respondents agreed (38% agreed, 7% strongly agreed) that facilities were up to date, 54% expressed dissatisfaction. Interestingly, practical training components garnered more positive feedback, with 61% agreeing (27% agreeing, 34% strongly agreeing) that these components were effectively conducted. However, the improvement in practical skills due to vocational training remained uncertain, with 43% of respondents indicating no improvement. This implies a potential gap between training delivery and skill acquisition outcomes, suggesting the need for a thorough evaluation and enhancement of the vocational training programs to better meet participants' expectations and needs.

Table 3: Youths' perceptions of absence of assessment barometer

Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
There is a lack of clear assessment measures to evaluate the impact of vocational training.	50(37%)	32(24%)	30(22%)	11(8%)	12(9%)
The absence of an assessment barometer hinders the improvement of vocational training programs.	53(39%)	36(27%)	26(19%)	9(7%)	11(8%)
The lack of assessment tools makes it difficult to track the effectiveness of vocational training.	48(36%)	42(31%)	30(22%)	12(9%)	3(2%)
I believe that a proper assessment system would enhance the accountability of vocational training institutions.	50(37%)	49(36%)	25(19%)	8(6%)	3(2%)
The absence of an assessment barometer affects the credibility of vocational training in the eyes of potential employers.	49(36%)	52(39%)	19(14%)	9(7%)	6(4%)

The results from Table 3 indicate a strong consensus among youths regarding the deficiencies in vocational training assessment measures. A significant portion of respondents, 61% (37% strongly agreeing and 24% agreeing), had noted a lack of clear assessment measures to evaluate the impact of vocational training. This sentiment was echoed in the perception that the absence of an assessment barometer both impeded program improvement, as reported by 66% of the respondents (39% who strongly agreed and 27% who agreed), and complicated the tracking of training effectiveness, with 67% of the respondents (36% strongly agreeing and

31% agreeing). Moreover, the majority, 73%, agreed (37% strongly agreed and 36% agreed) that implementing a proper assessment system would have boosted institutional accountability. The credibility of vocational training was also seen as compromised by the lack of assessment tools, with 75% agreeing (36% strongly agreeing and 39% agreeing). These results collectively emphasize a strong belief in the necessity of clear, robust assessment mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of vocational training programs, suggesting a clear demand for improvements in how these programs are evaluated.

Table 4: Youths' views of the impact of Vocational Training on their standards of living

Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Vocational training has increased my employability in the job market.	14(10%)	17(13%)	8(6%)	56(41%)	40(30%)
My income potential has improved because of completing vocational training.	5(4%)	6(4%)	13(10%)	30(22%)	81(60%)
Vocational training has positively influenced my confidence in professional settings.	51(38%)	41(30%)	17(13%)	15(11%)	11(81%)
I believe vocational training contributes to the socio-economic development of the Oshana region.	30(22%)	31(23%)	26(19%)	28(21%)	20(15%)
There are sufficient job opportunities available for individuals with vocational training.	74(55%)	55(41%)	3(2%)	3(2%)	0(0%)

Table 4 reveals varied perceptions among youths regarding the impact of vocational training on their standards of living. A significant portion of respondents, 41%, disagreed with the statement that vocational training had increased their employability, while a smaller group, 23%, either strongly agreed or agreed with this sentiment. This suggests that while vocational training might be beneficial for some, it may not be universally effective in enhancing job market prospects. Additionally, only 8% of respondents believed their income potential had improved due to vocational training, indicating a general dissatisfaction with the financial outcomes of such programs. On the other hand, vocational training appeared to have a positive influence on confidence, with

68% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it had improved their confidence in professional settings. This positive self-perception contrasts with the mixed views on employability and income. Furthermore, most respondents, 96%, (41% agreed, 55% strongly agreed) believed there were sufficient job opportunities for those with vocational training, although only 45% (23% agreed, 22% strongly agreed) saw vocational training as contributing to regional socio-economic development. This suggests that while vocational training is perceived to boost confidence and job availability, its effectiveness in enhancing economic benefits and regional development remains questionable.

Table 5: Youths' perceived recommendations

Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
The perception of vocational training in society needs to be improved.	120(89%)	9(7%)	6(4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
There is a need for more financial support and scholarships for vocational training.	132(98%)	3(2%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
The curriculum of vocational training should be updated to match current industry trends.	134(99%)	0(0%)	1(1%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Vocational training institutions should strengthen their connections with local industries for better placement opportunities.	135(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

Table 5 illustrates a strong consensus among youths regarding vocational training recommendations. A majority overwhelmingly agreed on the need to enhance societal perceptions of vocational training, with 89% strongly agreeing. Financial support and scholarships for vocational training were viewed as crucial by 98%, while an even higher 99% agreed that the curriculum should be updated to reflect current industry trends. Moreover, 100% of respondents endorsed the necessity for vocational training institutions to improve their connections with local industries for better placement opportunities. This data highlights a clear and unified call for comprehensive improvements in vocational training programs.

Respondents had varying understandings of vocational training, often relating it to practical skills, hands-on learning, industry preparation, and creativity. Vocational training was seen as distinct from traditional academic education, focusing more on real-world applications and industry needs. The following were quotations from some of the youths:

- “Training to employ myself” (Respondent 4)
- “Training to employ others” (Respondent 2)
- “It is about vocational work, doing things with my hands” (Respondent 33)
- “Vocational training focuses on hands-on training; students are trained to be creative” (Respondent 99)
- “Students are doing experiments every time” (Respondent 78)
- “It about preparing students for the world of work” (Respondent 65)

Results from the interview
Understanding vocational training

“Students are prepared to work in the industry” (Respondent 75)

“Students are trained to learn how to do things they are expected to do in the industry” (Respondent 106)

“Yes, but what we do at school is different from what is done in the industry” (Respondent 92)

“Yes, however I did not learn enough” (Respondent 88)

“Yes, equipment are not enough” (Respondent 120)

“Yes, but we do not get the attachment” (Respondent 15)

“Yes, however to much theory than practice” (Respondent 125)

“Yes, anyways not really enjoyable, equipment are not enough” (Respondent 133)

“Yes, but companies did not want to take us to do our internship” (Respondent 16)

“Yes, but nowhere to do our internships” (Respondent 7)

“Yes, we are not trained how to set up our companies” (Respondent 75)

The interview results provided qualitative insights into how respondents understood vocational training. The quotations highlighted that vocational training was associated with practical skills, hands-on learning, industry preparation, and creativity. Participants viewed vocational training as distinct from traditional academic education due to its focus on real-world applications and industry needs.

Motivations for vocational training

Respondents enrolled in vocational training for a mix of reasons, including a desire to work with their hands, create employment, start their own businesses, and gain practical skills. Some sought to become self-employed or entrepreneurs, while others wanted to work in private companies or specific industries. The following are quotations from some of the youths:

“I did not qualify to go to the University, so I decided to go to VTC” (Respondent 11)

“I love to do things with my own hands” (Respondent 20)

“It wants to create employment” (Respondent 29)

“I want to work in private companies” (Respondent 47)

“I want to be able to come up with my own products and sell” (Respondent 69)

“I always wanted to be come up with my own

company an create employment” (Respondent 100)

“I want to make my money when I am done” (Respondent 119)

“Most of the thing we have here are imported from other countries” (Respondent 131)

“I don’t want to be employed” (Respondent 24)

“I want to be my own boss” (Respondent 13)

“I want to employ others” (Respondent 12)

“I wanted to do my own fabrication” (Respondent 5)

“Yes, wanted to be a professional boiler maker” (Respondent 16)

“I always wanted to learn how to come up with metals themselves” (Respondent 123)

“To manufacture building materials, such as cement, metals and machines” (Respondent 51)

“To manufacture equipment that are used in most of the companies in Namibia” (Respondent 58)

“To come up with a car from scratch” (Respondent 66)

“I was interested in learning specifically how to manufacture woods and metals than only learning how to put them together” (Respondent 77)

“Entrepreneurship skills” (Respondent 72)

“Customer service skills” (Respondent 18)

“Tailoring skills” (Respondent 89)

The motivations for enrolling in vocational training were diverse, including a desire to work with hands, create employment, start businesses, and gain practical skills. Some participants expressed a preference for self-employment and entrepreneurship, while others aimed to work in specific industries or private companies. These motivations revealed the varied aspirations of youth engaging in vocational training.

Perceived benefits of vocational training

Vocational training is perceived as more practical, hands-on, and creative compared to traditional education, which is often seen as theoretical. The emphasis on creativity and practical skills could lead to better employability and entrepreneurship. The following are quotations of some of the youths:

“Here at the vocational training, you are taught how to come up with things, traditional education is just theory” (Respondent 14)

“At vocational training we are more hands on than at traditional schools” (Respondent 89)

"You will create employment" (Respondent 23)

"I am taught how to be creative" (Respondent 27)

"At vocational training, students are taught how things are done in reality" (Respondent 48)

"Vocational training is more practical than traditional education" (Respondent 50)

"Not really, no employment" (Respondent 7)

"Not at all, companies do not want to employ us" (Respondent 14)

"No, I do not have funds to start my own company" (Respondent 17)

"No, I do not even know where to start to create my company" (Respondent 29)

"No, I don't have equipment to do my own things" (Respondent 40)

"No, at this school are not the same as what is in the world of work" (Respondent 42)

"No, no company to make use of my skills" (Respondent 83)

"Equipment at schools are not the same as those in the industry" (Respondent 95)

"Most of the companies do not trust us" (Respondent 99)

"Not at all not one to help me make use of my skills" (Respondent 92)

"No, financial support is a problem" (Respondent 104)

"No support from the government and VTC" (Respondent 107)

"No, we are left to be on our own" (Respondent 5)

"No, no grants to help us create companies" (Respondent 18)

Challenges faced during vocational training

Challenges included inadequate attachments, a theory-heavy curriculum, lack of tools and equipment, and unequal opportunities for well-connected students. Respondents noted that they lacked support from institutions and faced obstacles in terms of funding, equipment, and practical experience. The following were quotations from some of the youths:

"Nowhere to do our attachments" (Respondent 16)

"Too much theory than actual practice" (Respondent 18)

"We look for our own attachments" (Respondent 51)

"Only well-connected students seem to be doing well" (Respondent 63)

"Lack of tool and equipment" (Respondent 76)

"Instructors are not sure about some of the

things" (Respondent 97)

"Not enough equipment at school so we are forced to look for companies to for attachments" (Respondent 122)

"No, the institution does not help us to find attachments" (Respondent 62)

"No, no one could buy me a tool kit" (Respondent 71)

The challenges participants faced during vocational training, such as inadequate attachments, a theory-heavy curriculum, lack of tools and equipment, and unequal opportunities, provided valuable insights into the barriers that could hinder the effective delivery of vocational education. These challenges underscored the need for improvements in practical training, resources, and support systems.

Relevance of vocational training to employment

Respondents expressed concerns about the alignment of vocational training with local job opportunities, suggesting a disconnect between training and industry needs. Even when skills were relevant, barriers like low demand and mismatched job requirements seemed to hinder employment prospects. The following were quotations from some of the youths:

"VTCs curriculum does not align well to the job market" (Respondent 75)

"Vocational training on their own, Job market on the other" (Respondent 65)

"My training does not respond well to employment need in the industries" (Respondent 53)

"No tailoring companies that can employ us" (Respondent 31)

"Most of the companies cannot afford to take us up, even though they need our skills" (Respondent 118)

"Everyone wants to employ himself and family members, no considerations of skills" (Respondent 119)

"My skills are too low for the job market" (Respondent 134)

"Most of the electrical companies want engineers, not us from VTCs" (Respondent 131)

"The skill s that I got responds to the need but there is just no job opportunity, I don't know why" (Respondent 87)

"Not really, what I have learned at school in not what I do at work" (Respondent 112)

"I was never employed since I graduated"

(Respondent 97)

"Yes, but my skills were not enough"

(Respondent 88)

"Yes however the job requirement is too higher, I was given some more training at work" (Respondent 26)

"Yes, but I did not know where to start because what we learned at school is different from what I do at work" (Respondent 14)

"Yes, but not much learned at school compare to what I do now at work" (Respondent 17)

"I always failed practical test, therefore unemployed up to now" (Respondent 6)

The concerns raised by respondents about the alignment of vocational training with local job opportunities highlighted the importance of ensuring that training programs were closely connected to industry needs. The barriers to employment mentioned, such as low demand and mismatched job requirements, indicated that vocational training institutions needed to collaborate closely with industries to address these challenges.

Impact on career and personal growth

Vocational training had mixed effects on career aspirations and personal growth. Some respondents felt more empowered and had achieved career goals, while others had struggled to secure related employment. Vocational training was perceived to have positively influenced skills development, career advancement, and personal satisfaction for some individuals. The following are quotations of some of the youths:

"I am still the same, improvement in my life" (Respondent 28)

"I am now able to do cupboards on my own" (Respondent 49)

"I have my own company now, two employees" (Respondent 45)

"I want to further my studies and become an instructor one day" (Respondent 73)

"I am now motivated to study further" (Respondent 76)

"I am now able to do most of the things that I could not do before" (Respondent 96)

"I have achieved what I wanted in my life to a welder, I am now able to put bread on the table because of the training that I received from VTC" (Respondent 80)

"No, I am unemployed up to now" (Respondent 15)

"Not at all I am even doing something different from what I learned at school" (Respondent

18)

"No, I am now employed not because of my vocational training" (Respondent 26)

"Yes, I did electrical engineering at VTC and now I work for NAMPOWER" (Respondent 41)

"Yes, if it was not because of vocational training, I could not be employed by now" (Respondent 127)

"No, I did not get any training, but I am having a stable job" (Respondent 122)

"Many companies and government still use Grade 12 as additional requirement and my grade 12 results were not good" (Respondent 93)

"I work for government, and they pay me according to my grade 12 certificate" (Respondent 58)

The mixed effects of vocational training on career aspirations and personal growth reflected the diverse outcomes experienced by respondents. Some participants reported positive impacts on skills development, career advancement, and personal satisfaction, while others faced challenges in securing employment related to their training. These findings suggested that vocational training could have varying effects on individual trajectories.

Conclusion

This study, "Assessment Barometer of the Impact of Vocational Training: The Youth Perspectives in Oshana region, Namibia", sheds light on both the strengths and challenges of vocational education in the region. The survey results highlight that vocational training is largely valued for its practical approach, with many youths acknowledging its role in developing relevant job market skills. However, there are notable concerns about its effectiveness in securing employment and meeting industry standards. The data reveal that while a majority of the respondents view vocational training positively in terms of skill acquisition and confidence building, there is significant scepticism about its impact on job security and income potential. Most participants agree that vocational training enhances confidence and offers practical skills but express doubts about its role in providing a secure pathway to employment and meeting industry requirements.

The study also identifies critical areas needing improvement, such as the lack of effective assessment measures. Respondents

strongly feel that the absence of clear evaluation metrics hinders the improvement of vocational training programs and affects their credibility and accountability. Additionally, there is a perceived mismatch between training curricula and industry needs, suggesting a disconnect that impedes employment prospects. Participants have emphasized the need for several reforms: enhancing societal perceptions of vocational training, increasing financial support and scholarships, updating curricula to reflect current industry trends, and improving connections with local industries for better placement opportunities. These recommendations point to a consensus on the necessary steps to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of vocational training programs in Oshana.

Qualitative insights from interviews further underscore the mixed experiences of youths with vocational training. While some report positive impacts on their career and personal growth, others face significant barriers, including inadequate practical experience, limited resources, and challenges in aligning training with job market demands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- Vocational training institutions should maintain an on-going assessment of labour market demands and trends to ensure that their programs are aligned with the current and future needs of industries, enhancing graduates' employability prospects, to avoid training for the sake of training.
- Strengthen collaboration between vocational training institutions and businesses/industries to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and informed by real-world inputs, bridging the gap between education and the demands of the job market.
- Vocational programs should integrate modern technologies and emphasize digital literacy, while also imparting industry-specific skills that are in demand, equipping students with competencies vital in the evolving digital landscape.
- Priority should be given to the development of soft skills, including effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship, which are fundamental for success in any professional endeavour.

- Provide students with practical exposure and enhance their transition from theory to practice, vocational programs should incorporate hands-on experiences, internships, and apprenticeships, facilitating a deeper understanding of the skills they acquire.
- Comprehensive career counselling services should be readily available to assist students in identifying their strengths, interests, and suitable vocational paths, helping them make informed decisions about their education and career.
- To foster an entrepreneurial mind-set among students, modules focusing on entrepreneurship, business management, and financial literacy should be integrated into vocational programs, empowering graduates to initiate and manage their own ventures.
- Promoting gender equality in vocational training is essential; therefore, efforts should be directed towards encouraging both male and female participation across all vocational fields, addressing gender disparities.
- Collaboration with certification bodies should be pursued to establish a direct connection between training outcomes and viable job opportunities, enhancing the credibility and value of vocational training programs.
- The government should play an active role in monitoring the outcomes of vocational training graduates, working in conjunction with industries and institutions to tackle issues of youth unemployment and skills gaps effectively, fostering a more productive workforce and contributing to the overall economic development of the region.
- Further research should focus on comparative analysis with vocational training systems in other countries to compare the vocational training systems, policies, and outcomes and offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of different vocational training models, highlighting best practices and areas needing improvement.

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