JOURNAL OF INCLUSIVE & INNOVATIVE PRACTICES (JOIIP)
ONLINE ISSN: 3005-9976

Decolonisation of misguided mental frameworks on the relevance of vocational-technical education to African society

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ABSTRACT

The Zimbabwean society harbours misguided mental frameworks with regard to the teaching of vocational-technical curriculum in schools. The need to decolonise such thinking is imperative. Hence, the study is on the relevance of a decolonised curriculum that addresses unemployment needs in the Zimbabwean context. It focuses on secondary schools in Masvingo Province. This is a qualitative case study informed by the interpretivist paradigm. Purposive sampling was done to get information-rich cases. The study employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to generate data. Data were analysed and presented thematically. It emerged, from the study, that schools are just consolidating foreign academic traditions. Therefore, in contrast to the demands of actual development, education continues to be unreformed, inadequate, disparaging, denigrating, and demeaning. It is essential that all students receive technical-vocational education to foster their mental growth and socialisation. Decolonised epistemologies are key to success for Africa.

Key words: vocational education; technical education; decolonisation; misguided epistemology

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing emphasis on providing secondary school students in vocational-technical education with real-life experiences (Rintala & Nokelainen, 2020). Before independence in most African countries, including Zimbabwe, education was subject to strict controls under colonial rule, with governments setting limits on its scope and reach. Africans were to be given an education, but not equal to that of the colonisers. While providing for the semi-skilled labour necessary for industrial development, African education was also intended to maintain the existing racial distinctions between Blacks and Whites and to prepare Black manpower for customary prescribed roles. The history of colonised peoples all over the world, including Zimbabweans, was shaped through "cultural technologies of dominance" (Terreblanche, 2014:88) that continue into the present day. Decolonisation of the resultant inferiority complex mindsets and such murdered minds can bring transformation in school curricula geared towards providing students with self-employment skills.

The missing gap in the curricula for the subjects offered can be filled by promoting decolonial education in relation to vocational-technical skills so as to transform the mindsets of students to meet self-employment skills (Musonda et al., 2023). Decolonisation, therefore, speaks to historical antecedents that engulfed the minds of African societies and made them think that there is supremacy in the academic curriculum (Race et al., 2022), yet attention is not given to crucial issues.

Zimbabwe has gone through various forms of curriculum change from the period before independence, going into post-independence. The watered-down curriculum which was named F2 that was offered to Africans before independence had inferiority connotations (Ndebele, 2014). The F2 system was introduced for Blacks under the 1966 Education Plan (Zvobgo, 1996). The plan introduced a new junior secondary school (F2) whose emphasis was on practical or vocational subjects, in addition to the F1 school curriculum which offered academic subjects intended mainly for the settler population. This was a deliberate ploy to restrict the numbers of Africans pursuing the academic curriculum. Colonisation was established in the belief that superior races have the privilege to civilise the less fortunate, so-called inferior races. The British proclaimed that if they really wished to do good in Africa, they must teach her savage

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sons and daughters that Whites wereare their superiors. After independence, there was a curriculum review which then shunned the vocational-technical education. This was despite that technical-vocational education and training is a crucial element that harnesses the power and functionality of the individual in any society.

The Nziramasanga Commission of inquiry of 1999 sparked a national debate when it recommended the need for vocational-technical subjects to address the high level of unemployment in Zimbabwe. It is argued that technical-vocational education can help equip current and future workforce with the skills they need for productive jobs and entrepreneurship, but in practice most countries struggle to deliver on the promise of skills development (UNESCO, 2023). This clearly points to struggles countries face in trying to alleviate poverty-stricken communities through the vocational-technical curriculum, but in vain. Africa is not the poorest nor the worst in terms of its thinking capacity to alleviate poverty through effective implementation of technical-vocational curriculum. Africa carries with it misguided mental frameworks in terms of the relevance of vocational-technical education and training, which need to be decolonised. Africa looks down upon vocational-technical education and considers it peripheral in the curriculum. This is well expressed by Murray-Carlin, who advances the argument that,

> What we are practising, day in and day out, … is the subversion of the African mind; the breaking down of mental tissues; their reconstruction in the Western mode; their reordering of thoughts; feelings, beliefs, habits, responses, of every aspect of the mind and personality. This is what we are doing and cannot avoid doing- this is the core of our activity" (Murray Carlin in Stanley, 1960:11)).

In the quotation, the impact of colonialism and Westernisation on the African psyche is being clearly pronounced. African-centred knowledge is missing. The African minds are troubled because the curriculum Africans follow does not speak to their needs. In the eyes of Plato, vocational-technical education is critical for those who would be the guardians of society. It prepares individuals for careers in skilled trades, offers practical skills, and helps them contribute to society in meaningful ways. Conversely, it is argued that the provision of education without technical skills has disappointed many who hoped education would be levelling and

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promoting individual skills (Marginson et al., 2023).

In Zimbabwe, vocational-technical education gained currency when some secondary schools offered the subjects designed by the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO) (Mhlanga et al., 2021). While the technical-vocational curriculum is considered by many as the silver bullet for solving the problem of joblessness among the youth, African society views it with mixed feelings. , in the paradox of imitation argues that:

> African societies are not the closest to the Western culture but have been experiencing the most rapid pace of westernisation… African educational institutions continue to be mechanisms for westernisation. African institutions are caught up between rebellion against the West and the imitation of the West (Mazrui, 1980:2).

This clearly points to cultural imperialism, where the African identity is in crisis. The imposition of a Western curriculum erodes the identity of the African, whose curriculum lacks practical relevance. Imitation of Western curricula does not work to decolonise African minds at all.

Atayo (2000:46) describes vocational and technical education as 'socially useful work' which also aims to help students develop critical awareness about their education and society. Advocating the importance of technical and vocational education, Atayo (2000:47) declares:

> The acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge is rudimental for the survival of any potential society. If one does away with all other education, a country can survive with technical and vocational education.

The citation highlights the importance of vocational-technical education in equipping individuals with skills necessary for societal survival. The need to promote self-sufficiency is being pronounced, particularly through providing individuals with basic scientific knowledge through the vocational-technical curriculum.

The need to transform the curriculum to suit Zimbabwe's needs has been reiterated by several scholars. Shizha (2013) advances the argument that postcolonial Africa needs to transform through educational deconstruction and reconstruction of the curriculum in the form of Education with Production (EWP). In the same vein, the then Minister of Education in 1985 argued that,

> The curriculum in our education system should be seen and considered as a vehicle towards the

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> establishment of a socialist society. It should have a marked emphasis on scientific and technological content to promote productivity in which society can benefit. This kind of curriculum would be achieved through the philosophy of Education with Production (Maravanyika, 1990:18).

Officially opening one of the EWP pilot schools, Banana commented that, the days are past when any student possessing an 'O' level certificate could walk out of the classroom and get a job. Today, those leaving Form Four must be prepared to create their own jobs. They must be given the technical skills as well as financial management training to set up their own cooperatives and industries (Banana, in ZLMFEP, 1984). These arguments speak to the need to decolonise the curriculum and reconstruct the misguided mental frameworks within Zimbabweans so that they consider vocational-technical as the panacea to development and employment.

It is argued, in educational theory and practice, that the relevance of any curriculum is based on the extent to which it meets the needs of the individual learner, the national economy, society at large, and the future challenges of the country (Secretary's Circular No. 3 of 2002). The vocational curriculum was in the past considered as the curriculum for underdogs, and it was a watered-down curriculum. It was used by the Whites as a tool to widen the gap between the Black Africans and the White community. Whites wanted to avoid competition with Blacks on the job market. Fanon writes that "the juxtaposition of the black and white 'races' has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex" (2008: xvi). His book, *Black skin, white masks*, "is meant to liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation" (Fanon 2008:14). In other words, Fanon believes that it is necessary for the Black person to overcome colonialism through providing a curriculum that is Afrocentric.

Shisha and Karivo (2011) argue that the philosophy behind colonial education was that of exclusion. Racial discrimination was evident in terms of provision and quality of education.

> Elitist, highly selective, economically wasteful, geared to the needs of the small modern sector of the economy which is incapable of providing enough jobs for the country's growing population. It is neither relevant to the employment

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> needs of the majority nor to the complete eradication of illiteracy (Shizha & Karivo, as cited in Riddell, 1986:80).

Prioritising the needs of a small elite through following a Western curriculum is a serious sign of elitism. It leads to a disjuncture and limited job opportunities by the products of that education system. Such a mental framework must be challenged and replaced with more contextual, inclusive and relevant forms of curriculum.

Illiteracy is regarded as the root cause of all the evils as well as inequality in society. The Blacks were treated as slaves and denied quality and relevant education. The Whites wanted to use the educated African as labourers, clerks and assistants, but soon became aware that Africans could grow into dangerous competitors. Colonial administrators ensured that Africans became labourers for the growing colonial economy by offering them minimal practical education in agriculture, building, carpentry and domestic science (Chimbi & Jita, 2023). They decided that the African must not be given too much scope in terms of curriculum content and even to carry out useful work. He/She certainly must be given the minimum remuneration and the most restricted opportunities. Giving the African academic education was considered as good as granting him political influence.

The Whites thought that to educate a person is to raise not only his/her knowledge and skills, but also his/her hopes and ambitions, claims for full citizenship and the sense of his/her own personal dignity and identity. The curriculum was watered down for the African child to reduce competition of whatever form with Whites, and the solution was to give the African child the vocational curriculum which would give only basic literacy and numeracy skills. The purpose of African education was to train Natives to live under tribal conditions as well as to enable them to work in European-controlled industries (Chimbi & Jita, 2023).

Soon after independence, the Zimbabwean government introduced the concept of Education with Production (EWP) under the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of praxis. In its plan to address skilled manpower challenges, the Republic of Zimbabwe planned that:

> … The secondary school curriculum will be broadened to include a wide range of technical and vocational subjects which are oriented towards the manpower requirements of the production system (Republic of Zimbabwe, 1988:57).

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These views underscore the thinking behind the persistent attempts to vocationalise school curricula not only in Zimbabwe but in other post-colonial developing countries. Vocational education is considered as an effective way to develop work-related skills that can be developed further when pupils leave school. However, it is important to note that not all plans are put into action.

This move did not help the situation of stigmatisation either. The Zimbabwean education system inherited colonial curricula that were disengaged from the life worlds of African learners. The problem in Zimbabwe today is that the system of education, while purporting to be liberative, has remained largely conservative, segregatory and oppressive because of its colonial background (Bhurekeni, 2020). This has resulted in a disjuncture and disconnect between the education system and the needs of the Zimbabwean society. Inequalities still exist in the current education system. However, these are now rooted in the class structure of society and the unequal distribution of resources to the various regions (Blanden et al., 2022; Zvobgo, 1997). Zimbabwean society looked at this with negative connotations because of history. Zimbabweans shunned this kind of curriculum. To that end, the Zimbabwean education system continued with a kind of one eye system, where the academic curriculum was 'the curriculum'. This disadvantaged students whose talent is not academic but vocational. To that end, a high rate of unemployment has become the order of the day. The critical question remains whether the provision of vocational education is the answer to the high rate of unemployment in the Zimbabwean context.

Statement of the problem

While educational debates on the decolonisation of the curriculum have gained agenda status in Zimbabwe (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2024), little is known about the success and progress of vocational-technical education in schools. This leaves a critical gap in our understanding of the accomplishment of the decolonisation agenda. Zimbabwean society still feels that vocational education in schools is exploitative and to the advantage of the elite, to such an extent that people in the lower echelons of society are still colonised. The efficacy of vocationalising secondary education is being continuously challenged by academics, while some see it as the panacea to resolving the growing unemployment problem. The controversy remains because some people say, "old

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soldiers never die" (Foster, 1987:137) and feel that vocational education is very relevant. Others think that such a curriculum is for the poor who remain entangled in the vicious cycle of poverty, with the rich leaving such a curriculum, and go to private schools and abroad to get the education of their choice. On the other hand, some parents consider the provision of the academic curriculum alone as a serious mistake. They think that quality education is all about being an academic. It is noted, with concern that the concentration on mental and the theoretical exercises at the expense of manual and practical experience has failed to prepare most students for jobs, family, or citizenship responsibilities. Youth unemployment has in the recent years become one single major problem across the world (Mbon et al., 2023). The persistence of the high rate of unemployment in Zimbabwe necessitates an urgent search for a clear explanation on the relevance of the vocational-technical curriculum. Is it the answer, anyway? Zimbabwean society should have a voice on the need for a vocational-technical curriculum in schools (Anthonie, 2019).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is the vocational education curriculum relevant to the Zimbabwean society?
2. Is the vocational-technical curriculum reducing unemployment in Zimbabwe?
3. How effective is the vocational-technical curriculum in meeting the needs of students and society?
4. How do colonial legacies shape vocational-technical education in Zimbabwe?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This study is premised on two conceptual frameworks, which are vocational-technical education and decolonisation.

Vocational-technical education

Vocational-technical education has key elements, which include human capital development through investing in students, skills and knowledge, contributing to local economic growth; alignment with community needs, and preparing students for ongoing learning (lifelong learning). These elements are reflected in the quotations below.

> Vocational education includes instruction and training in a wide variety of fields, including agriculture, business, office jobs, health-

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> related occupations, home economics, trade and industrial education, technical education and education in various skills and crafts related to construction and mechanics (Encyclopedia of American Education, 2007:1188).

It is more to do with the hands-on approach to education. The idea behind is not to become a slave to manual work, but to learn to attain a high level of self-reliance. Vocational education is defined as,

> …efforts by schools to include in their curriculum, those 'practical' subjects which are likely to generate among the students, some basic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that might prepare them to think of becoming skilled workers or to enter other manual occupations (Bacchus, 1988:31).

Vocational-technical education, therefore, refers to an approach that focuses on providing students with practical skills in specific trades. The primary goal is to equip students with the skills and knowledge required for entry into self-employment.

Decolonisation

Decolonisation is an "umbrella term for diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined process of colonisation and racialisation to enact transformation and redress…and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being and relating that these processes seek to eradicate" (Stein & Andreotti, 2016:370). Decolonisation of the curriculum is a process whereby educational institutions that are dominated by foreign educational practices, as well as Eurocentric epistemologies in their existence, are dismantled to accommodate the disadvantaged and the once colonised groups (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2023a). This means making an overhaul shift or changing the content of the curriculum and the mindsets of the people to meet the contextual needs of the Zimbabwean society, thereby unearthing their full human potential. Decolnisation is based on three claims. Of critical importance to this study is the claim that knowledge relevance and contextualisation are the ideas that that the curriculum ought to make connections with the pieces of knowledge of people, their contextual life circumstances, indigenous knowledge systems, languages and ways of knowing (Cross & Govender, 2021). Within the context of this study, decolonisation provides a lens into whether the Zimbabwean society is still entrenched in the colonial mentality which shunned vocational-technical curriculum in schools.

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Theoretical framework: Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was propounded by educational economists whose interest was in the seeming relationship between education and economic development. Its concepts can be traced back to classical economists like Adam Smith (1776), who likened expenditure on educating an individual to investment in a machine or other forms of physical capital (Wuttaphan, 2017). The argument advanced is that a more educated, better trained person can supply a larger amount of useful productive effort than one with less education and training (McConnell et al., 2009:85). Human capital is defined as "productive wealth embodied in labour, skills and knowledge" (OECD, 2001, cited in Tan, 2014:2) and it refers to any stock of knowledge or the innate/acquired characteristics a person has that contributes to his or her economic productivity (Garibaldi, 2006, cited in Tan, 2014:2). Central to the Human Capital Theory is the notion that people invest in themselves through education and training to enhance their future earning\ prospects, which is the reason why this theory suits the current study.

The Human Capital Theory postulates that individuals' knowledge, skills, and experience are vital assets that contribute to economic growth and development. Investing in these assets results in higher productivity, better employment prospects, and increased earnings. The implications of this theory are that investing in relevant education and training yields a skilled workforce, which in turn leads to economic development. This theory helps to illuminate the concerns of the current study and how they can be addressed. Vocational-technical education is linked to the human capital theory because it provides individuals with specific skills and training that directly impact their employability and productivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocational-technical education is not an 'alternative' curriculum because critics argue that this contributes towards the crisis facing developing countries and undermines TVETs' ability to expand the economies and lift citizens out of poverty (Ngcaweni, 2017). Gumede (2017) observes the centrality of vocational education to industrialisation and development, asserting that education based on an industrialisation path should be the new emphasis of the debate over decolonising education in Africa. To that end, society should remove the invisible fences that fail them to break away from colonised thinking

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so that the future of the current generation is not doomed.

Scholars like John Dewey suggested broader conceptions of vocational education. Dewey (1920) criticised the provision of vocational education for purposes limited to the immediate requirements of industry pointing out that:

> …there is a danger that vocational education would be interpreted in theory and practice as trade education, as a means of securing technical efficiency in specialised future pursuits. Education would then become an instrument of perpetuating the unchanged existing industrial order of society; instead of operating as a means of transformation (Dewey, 1920:372).

A study carried out in developing countries by Psacharopoulos (1991) concluded that the main reason why vocationalisation of secondary education failed to meet its intended goals was:

> Because students forced into the technical-vocational stream would never choose, let alone accept, to enter a manual occupation. Education is being seen by all families…as a way into a modern job in the city. When the general education stream is closed for the sake of stopping the one-way street from the secondary to university…the inherent dynamics of behavioural choice by students and their parents is ignored (Psacharopoulos, 1991:194).

The World Bank, which was the main funding body of education in Zimbabwe, refuted the provision of vocational education and had this to say:

> Bank lending should strengthen the quality of, and access to, academic secondary education, rather than prevocational courses. ...For secondary education, given a poor record of performance, the diversification of curricula by adding vocational courses should be avoided (World Bank, 1991:68).

The Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry (1999) recommended vocational and technical education from primary school level up to tertiary level as a strategy that would mitigate unemployment. It is now almost two decades before any fruits of the recommendations are enjoyed by the school leavers. This is in line with the philosopher Aristotle, who advances the argument that students of today have a democratic right to experience a framework of respectful practical wisdom that infuses practical and theory together in all phenomena (Aristotle, as cited in Hooley & Moran, 2011). Aristotle

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further argues that schools must teach practical wisdom to its students for intellectual excellence (Aristotle, as cited in Hardarson, 2019). In the same vein, Mutumbuka (1986:11) argues:

> There is need to change the Zimbabwean curriculum so that learners are geared towards improving their productive levels through the application of higher levels of technology than were previously available. The problem is getting worse than before. There are many unemployed graduates who are loafers of the streets. This is because today, the general contours of modern educational systems are being more decisively shaped by the relentless appetite for more academic forms of education which might not lead to self-employment.

This is in line with John Dewey, who strongly supported experiental learning, as it offers students a hands-on, collaborative learning experience, which helps them to fully learn new skills and knowledge (Sikandar, 2015).

Zimbabwean society needs to be conscious of coloniality. Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and in so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, we breathe coloniality all the time and every day (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Africa needs not ignore the effects of unconscious dynamics of oppression and how they sustain coloniality.

Okocha (2009) conducted a study in Nigeria on societal attitudes towards vocational-technical education. The study found out that although parents recognise the employment value inherent in vocational education, they are still prepared to accept the superiority of social prestigious and white-collar professions over technical related occupations. These are the misguided mental frameworks that need to be transformed to suit the current global trends.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative case study design informed by the interpretivist paradigm was chosen for the current study. The analysis followed the principles of content analysis. The case study focused on secondary schools in Masvingo Province. The population for the study comprised secondary school teachers where vocational-technical subjects are taught. Purposive sampling was done to get information-rich cases that were willing to

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talk (Patton, 2002:463). The study employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to generate data. Thematic analysis was employed as a method of data presentation and analysis because it can be applied to studying people's experiences in that it aims to identify, analyse and report patterns, that is, themes, within data (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Terry et al., 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The next section unpacks the generated data and presents the themed findings.

Imparting generalisable skills, transition skills and problem-solving skills

It emerged, from the participants, that a vocational-technical curriculum imparts generalised skills, transition skills and problem-solving skills. These should be the natural state of students from any education system.

P5: *The central value of vocational-technical education is that it provides students with generalised skills, transition skills as well as problem solving skills. With such kind of knowledge, the student will never get stuck in terms of what to do after completing an educational cycle.*

P1: *We have a lot of students who are just roaming the streets, some turning into thieving, drug and substance abuse and drug addicts. They cannot sew a button onto their shirts or repair a lose screw on the door.*

P6: *The curriculum must be relevant to make such products of a system useful to themselves and to society.*

Literature points to the fact that vocational-technical education combines scientific-technological and applied aspects of education and focuses on the requirements and competencies of a particular profession. It aims to educate and train individuals for self-employment, employment in industry, trade and service sectors and to provide basic education to students so that they function effectively in society (Gungo, 2020). Commenting on Zimbabwe's vocational-technical education curriculum, Munowenyu (1999:53) notes: "The present curriculum in Zimbabwe is failing…to help make school leavers become better skilled, educated and confident problem-solvers. The solution is to introduce meaningful basic vocational-technical education in schools." Although the point was raised many years ago, the debate goes into the twenty-first century where the Zimbabwean government is still changing its curriculum in a bid to meet the current unemployment needs. The Competency-Based Curriculum was replaced by the Heritage-Based Curriculum. The question that remains is whether all this solves the

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unemployment problem which is troubling the youth in Zimbabwe.

Provision of fitness for purpose

Participants were of the view that vocational-technical education provides students with fitness for purpose. The participants opined that:

P1: *Vocational-technical education curriculum, if well structured, provides fitness for purpose to our students who lack daily living skills.*

P2: *We need people who have fitness for purpose. An all-rounder human being must be able to produce food for oneself and the family, going into the fields, garden, producing extra food for sale and the like.*

P3: *One must be able to engage in income generating projects to make life sustainable rather than waiting for handouts from other people or from the government. This becomes the basis for self-reliance in life.*

There is great concern for students to be fit for purpose, particularly for self-reliance and sustainable development. It is argued that:

> The school leavers have no experience, no adequate practical skills. What they have is academic education, which has imbued them with high aspirations for white-collar jobs. What they need to improve their chances of self-employment are opportunities for work experience on the labour market (Kanyenze, as cited in Raftopoulos, 2003:7).

In line with the above citation, it is argued that colonial legacy has shaped the curriculum in Zimbabwe. The British imperial rule, which imposed Western values and knowledge systems that undermined indigenous cultures and philosophies, is affecting the smooth acceptance of the vocational-technical curriculum (Bhurekeni, 2020). The curriculum, thus, has limited relevance despite the struggles to meet the local needs and context.

A nation at the risk/Precarious state of the nation

Concerns about removing the nation from its precarious state were raised during the interviews. Participants reiterated that students who lack vocational-technical skills place the nation at risk of underdevelopment.

P8: *Gone are the days when the academic route was considered as the only way to drive a nation to high levels of employment and development. That was a one-eyed system of education.*

P2: *A nation whose secondary school products lack vocational-technical education is at risk of high level of unemployment.*

P4: *This kind of curriculum provides students with life skills that are needed for life to go on. Such a curriculum broadens the skills of*

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life-long learning to students. It helps them continuously learn.

Learning never reaches a terminal point. As long as one remains alive and healthy, learning can go on and should continuously go on because new skills to survive and develop oneself and the nation are always needed. The perception that vocational and technical education is suited for the less-intellectually-gifted members of society is still entertained by some segments of society including some professionals (UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 2021). While the so called 'smart' students pursue the perceived superior academic pathways of education, investment in vocational-technical education is less valued despite the current global shortages and high youth unemployment (Wang, 2022).

Preparation for the world of work

Participants felt that vocational-technical education prepares students for self-employment and for the world of work.

P7: *Parents expect schools to provide skills and strategies their children will need to survive and prosper with ever increasing life demands and changes as they enter the world of work.*

P10: *Vocational-technical education fully prepares students for self-employment and for the world of work, and this is key in providing relevant experiences needed by the job market.*

Vocational-technical education plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with practical skills essential for the workforce, making it a vital education for national economic prosperity (Mufanechiya et al., 2024). Skills and knowledge acquired equip individuals to be self-reliant as well as employers of labour rather than job seekers, thereby reducing the rate of unemployment and solving the problem of poverty (Mbon et al., 2023).

Opens opportunities for persons with disabilities

Vocational-technical education broadens horizons for various people. This theme came from participants who had taught such subjects to some students who are differently abled. They had this to say:

P9: *You find that there is nobody considered as useless and helpless with knowledge of vocational -technical education.*

A literature review study on vocational-technical education revealed that it removes barriers of marginalisation from differently abled persons. It also opens opportunities for persons with disabilities realise their potential (Septiana et al., 2024).

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the dominant western-centric approach may not be relevant to the Zimbabwean society, and a more contextualised approach is needed. The colonial education system that was designed to keep Africans subservient, has limiting access to quality education. The current vocational-technical system in Zimbabwe reflects colonial biases, failing to address local needs and challenges and thus fail to solve the problem of unemployment. The issue of reforming the minds of the Zimbabwean society towards effectively implementing the vocational-technical curriculum remains an unfinished agenda. The study also concludes that vocational-technical education has value if well offered in schools. School curricula in post-colonial Zimbabwe have remained irrelevant to Zimbabwean people's demands. The curriculum for schools should seriously consider offering vocational-technical subjects that develop students' knowledge and skills and equip them with self-reliance skills. There is need to incorporate indigenous knowledge and practices into the curricula to promote relevance and preserve African cultural identity and self-sufficiency. The study strongly recommends the involvement of local stakeholders in curriculum development to ensure vocational-technical education is relevant and effective.

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