

Chapter 2

Rationale and Challenges of Technical Vocational Education and Training in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the rationale for TVET in Uganda, identifying the challenges it faces and suggesting possible solutions. It is premised on the assumption that education; especially TVET, is the supply side of the economy in Uganda; whereas the labor market and job enterprises are its demand side. For effective and sustainable employability of graduates, there should be a balance between them. But despite its potential, TVET in Uganda still faces a variety of challenges; including stigma, low esteem and parity of status with its academic counterpart, policy inconsistency, endemic public corruption, philosophical dis-orientation, as well as historical, socio-economic and cultural prejudices. The authors proffer several possible solutions, including demand driven TVET, integrating creativity and innovation into the learning processes, life-long learning, Public-Private Training Partnerships (PPTPs), flexible teaching and learning, work-tasks as the curricula; inclusive and affordable learning technologies and the workplace rather than the classroom as delivery venue.

INTRODUCTION

This writing is structured in five sections – the first is a brief introduction. The second is the thesis and theoretical framework underpinning TVET in general. Section three is the background and context of TVET or Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) in the case of Uganda. The fourth is the rationale for BTVET in a developing nation such as Uganda; whereas the fifth section are the challenges facing TVET as a unique form of education; as well as the suggested remedies by which these may be overcome.

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Thesis and Theoretical Framework

Survival, growth and development in the current globalized world are contingent upon individual abilities to cope with the rapid structural, cultural and technological changes. In addition to the usual cognitive knowledge and skills expected of an education system therefore; graduates of the current era will need what the authors describe as Creativity, Innovation and Personal Enterprise (CIPE) to be successful.

As a response to the destabilizing tendencies of the new waves of change; individuals, communities, businesses and governments are increasingly looking towards Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET), as the form of education to supply the lacking work competencies. Marope, Chakroun and Holmes (2015 p.13) say that ‘a strong economic rationale now exists for investing in TVET; based on the recognition that TVET is the source of skills, knowledge and technology needed to drive productivity in the new knowledge-based and transition societies’.

The authors foreground this writing on the activity or action learning theory; a set of constructs whose origin is associated with social psychologists Lev Vygotsky and his disciple Alexei Leont’ev (see Luria, 1976; Billet, 2001 & Illeris, 2003) as the theoretical framework informing discussions in the later parts of the chapter. The central assumption of activity theory is that teaching or training, learning, understanding, positive experiences, work-readiness and employability are inseparable from the work activity itself, practice or as (Mjelde, 2008) called it, praxis. It assumes that learners are socio-culturally embedded actors and not line processors like system components; and that there exists a hierarchical analysis of motivated human action (levels of activity analysis).

Drawing from the early 20th Century educational thought of the German educationist Kerschensteiner; and more recently, (Vygotsky, 1978; in Engeström, 2001), the activity theory hinges on the philosophy that learning occurs best at work and through work; or indeed some form of activity, practice or praxis (Hager, 2008; Mjelde, 2006). Thus, the activity theory’s philosophy underscores the inextricable link between education and work. In the view of Kerschensteiner (cited in Hager, 2008 and Mjelde, 2006), any education or training leading to work competencies and readiness should be concurrent; or at least be immediately preceded by actual work or practice, and with no time lost in between. On the premise that the aim of education is to develop knowledge, skills, integrity, positive attitude or (competence) for employment (Marope, Chakroun & Holmes, 2015; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2013; BTVET Strategic Plan, 2012; ILO, 2010; Sotoudeh, 2009) and Government White Paper on Education (GWPE, 1992), it is only logical therefore that educational processes occur in the vicinity of work. Thus any education meant for work or employment can only be through the medium of some form of work or what Mjelde (2006) calls ‘learning by doing’. TVET or (BTVET in the case of Uganda) is the only form of education to realistically provide that kind of learning environment.

The significance of the activity theory for the education system in Uganda, but especially Business, Technical, Vocational Education (BTVET), is that BTVET combines education and work, thereby making teaching and learning to be complete and authentic; as any education or training system which excludes work or practice, as is the case has tended to be in Uganda can only be a fraction of the whole education. In the section following, the authors describe the background and the context of TVET or BTVET delivery in Uganda.

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