

**THE TRANSITION FROM CLASSROOMS AND LECTURE
ROOMS TO THE WORKPLACE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE
FROM SELECTED SCHOOLS AND COLLEAGUES IN
ZIMBABWE.**

Angela Maposa*

Chisango FutureFortune**

Abstract

The study sought to establish and strengthen school to work transition. The endeavour to assess how efficient school based instruction and learning prepared students for the world of work (by cultivation of employability skills) was the major motivation for undertaking this study. Questionnaires, structured interviews, document analyses and observation(s) were used to gather data from the selected participants. The sample was a result of convenience sampling, which tried to cover all schools types and colleges. The study found that courses being offered in some colleges were inadequate, irrelevant and in some cases even out of date. The most common element was the promotion of overly specific training and encouragement of a dual structure which segregate vocational and academic education. Recommendations made include regular curricula reviews and inclusion of seriously supervised of internships in the training of college and university students.

Key Words: Transition; Vocational; Technical; Employability

* **Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Education –Zimbabwe Open University**

** **Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Agriculture**

1. Background to the Study

Work is of central importance to everybody's well being. Cooke (1984) says schools that choose to follow a purely academic curriculum when the employment sector is reported to be saturated with white collar job seekers is regarded as ineffective. This observation is directly related to the thrust of this study in the sense that this study sought to unearth the challenges faced by educators and trainers who contribute to the human capital of Zimbabwe.

The major concern for most of educators is the quality of education. Attention is paid to the relevance of the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired from the education system. In spite of the enrolment figures that go up each year, unemployment keeps escalating too. Even those who obtain excellent grades in their public examinations find themselves unemployed. Such tragic experiences are open secrets to school leavers, colleges and university graduates in Zimbabwe. This study was meant to add knowledge that could be used by policy makers and planners. It also intended to suggest ways of reducing frustration that has to be swallowed by school leavers and university graduates. A good system of education is expected to be effective on both the quantitative side (to ensure access to all at various segments of society) and also on the qualitative level (to ensure the country produces the skills needed for rapid social and economic development).

In an era of turbulent economic conditions, there is an emerging demand for all forms of technical and vocational competence. The integration of vocational technical and academic education offers an opportunity to effect change in the Zimbabwean education system. Subsequently there must be smooth transitions from school, college or/and university to the work place. At the time of conducting this study there was no evidence of quality assurance activities by the Ministries concerned. Focus was still on maintaining the study quo in the supervision of lessons, tutorials, files, scheme books, mark schedules and the like.

1.1 Purpose of study

The study was carried out in order to assess the impact of vocational – technical subject on the effectiveness and efficiency (both internal and external) of the Education system. An in-depth examination of current policies and practices relating to the provision and teaching of vocational – technical subjects had to be conducted. It was hoped that the findings of the study would lead to a paradigm shift towards external efficiency of the education system.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To explore the policy change process(es) that led to the provision and teaching of vocational subjects in the secondary schools and colleges.
- To determine the attitudinal problems related to practical subjects in the secondary schools.
- To examine the relationships between what schools do and what goes on in the world of work.
- To justify the need for induction- programmes for the newly employed.
- To suggest mechanisms that the education system and other stakeholders can implement to make vocational technical subjects respond to the socio economic and technological development of the world at large.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study aimed at strengthening the place of vocational technical subjects in the secondary school curriculum. Findings of the study were meant to inform policy makers, curriculum developers programme designers and instructional leaders about the existing barriers to vocational – technical education and the subsequent hitches relating to the dearth of employability skills. If this study did not adequately answers the prevailing questions relating to vocational – technical education at least it provoked other scholars to conduct further investigation and research on the same theme.

1.4 Definition of key terms

Vocationalization

Bacchus (1988:31) says vocationisation means, “... efforts by schools to include in the 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.

Vocational Education

“Vocational” means career”. Vocational education aims at developing the learners’ abilities to cope intelligently with environment and to contribute to the improvement of the conditions in the environment.

Technical education

It relates to maintenance and use of tools. William (2001) defines it as instruction in a skill or product, usually of a mechanical type and or a level between that of the professional scientist or engineer and that of a skilled person.

Curriculum – All planned learning activities and outcomes for which the school is responsible

Transition- The movement from one stage to the next, which entails some degree of change

2. Review of related literature

The local people in the then Rhodesia, had elaborate training and grooming systems. Skills were passed from generation to generation. The training was generally geared towards inculcating positive attitudes towards manual labour. When missionaries came into the country, they provided vocational- technical education by teaching young men to build mission station and teaching others to produce crops and breed livestock on mission farms. Most girls became cooks and general cleaners at mission stations.

During the colonial era, education was one of the cornerstones of the repressive racial policies of white settlers. The recommendation made by the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission of 27 June 1963, did not come to fruition because they were considered to be revolutionary. The 1966 New Plan for African education gave birth to the F2 schools. There was a dual educator system that is a senior secondary school (Forms 1-6) and a junior secondary school (Grades 8-11). The junior secondary school's curriculum was a watered down hybrid of academic and practical subjects such as Metal Work, wood work, building studies and the like. For various reasons, African children did not get employment after completing junior secondary school education. To a certain extent, F2 schools became dumping ground for academic rejects and negative attitudes were compounded by the fact that Europeans, coloureds and Asians did not attend junior secondary schools. Miller (1974) and Zvobgo (1986) concur that the inferiority of F2 schools was master minded by a racial and exploitative political system. The Chronicle (Wednesday, 30 December 1988) showed that the Presidential Commission of Inquiry in Education and Training was opposed the academic nature of Zimbabwe's education system.

There was real substance in the National Association of Secondary Heads (NASH) Conference, theme of 1999: **The Challenge for relevance, 2000: Education for Employment and Development and that of 2001: Vocationalisation**. There are records of concern for linking education with the labour market by making it relevant to potential employers. Employers

require entry level employees to have a range of basic, higher order and affective employability skills. Among the people that have conducted research about employers and the workplace are Beach ,(1982) Back and Barrick (1987), Gregson and Bettis(1991) and Packers(1992).

According to Cotton 1987:2 Research findings can be categorised and understood as follows:

Basic skills	Higher Order Thinking Skills	Affective skills or traits
Oral communication (speaking and listening)	Problem solving	Dependability/ Reliability.
Reading (understanding and complying with instructions)	Learning skills	Positive attitude towards work
Writing, especially for documentation like monthly reports.	Decisions making	Interpersonal skills, interaction and cooperation.
		Self discipline, dignified, dressing as per dress code of organisation Punctuality, responsibility efficiency, effectiveness Integrity Strong sense of duty able to work under minimum supervision.

Source: Adapted from: Cotton (1987)

The study was concerned with how educators accommodated the generic employability skills in their execution of duty.

Specific occupational skills were found to be less crucial for entry level employment that the ability to communicate effectively (which often shows during interview of prospective employees) responsible attitude towards work and the ability to continue to learn.

Natriello (1989:1) says “employers place greatest importance on employees’ attitudes, emphasise basic skills over job specific skills and deem it important for workers to have an understanding of

the work environment. This was akin to findings from studies conducted by young (1986) who says employers require employees to have social skills, positive attitudes about work and basic skills of communication.

Specialised or highly technical skills were often de-emphasised.

School and colleges are not doing enough to cultivate these much needed abilities and this agrees with literature reviewed. Too much emphasis is placed on the academic and “bookish” knowledge.

2.1 What extent are school and colleges placing emphasis on developing employability skills.

Lundy L. L. (1984:23) says , “Industrial education teachers... must not forget that there is a great need for preparing young people in their respective classes with good work habits ... such as honesty, punctuality, regular attendance, productivity and conscientiousness.

Employment and employability are not synonyms. Being employed means having a job. Being employable means posing qualities needed to maintain employment and grow professionally (Bhaerman and Spill, 1988).

What is learnt in school or college is not necessarily related to what young people need to succeed after leaving school?

Research Design and Methodology

This study used in-depth multiple case studies to analyse and describe how the selected schools and colleges used their curriculum to prepare their learners for the world of employment. Grounded theory guided methodology in order for the researcher to fully understand what the learning institutions do or fail to do; how they do it and why they do it. The approach led to accurate description(s) of phenomenon. This study also used grounded theory as a method of inquiry itself (Rudestam and Newton, 2007:42)

Data presentation and Analysis.

In short, challenges to the provision and teaching of vocational technical education included lack of funding (no appropriate infrastructure and no equipment) time constraints in the school system and lack of electrification. But does one feed his/ her children on sand simply because there is no bread study stemmed from the perception that providing and teaching irrelevant education was very harmful to individual and society in general.

Why Education with Production and National Foundation Certification (NFC) Flopped

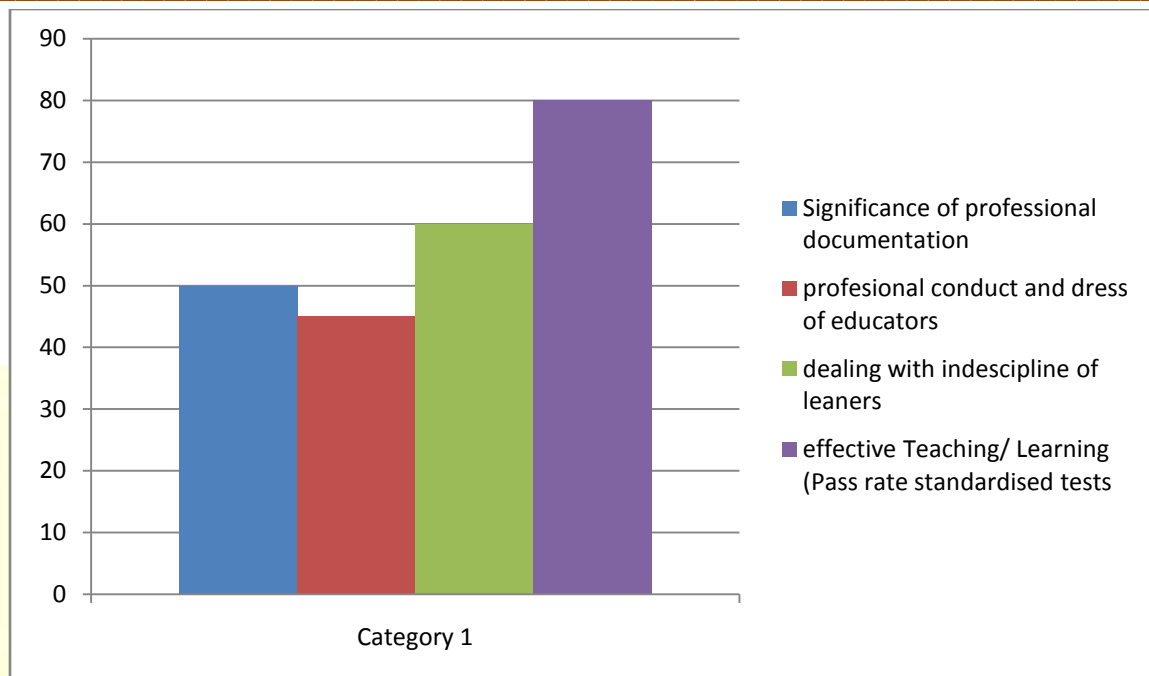
- This study found that policy makers were not attentive to context and feasibility.
- There were no improvements on requisite infrastructure
- Brain washed mentality of people who despised vocational- technical.. subjects
- Economic hardships
- Lack of follow- up

Willingness to introduce NFC courses

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	49	52
No	36	38
Not sure	10	10
Total	N= 95	100

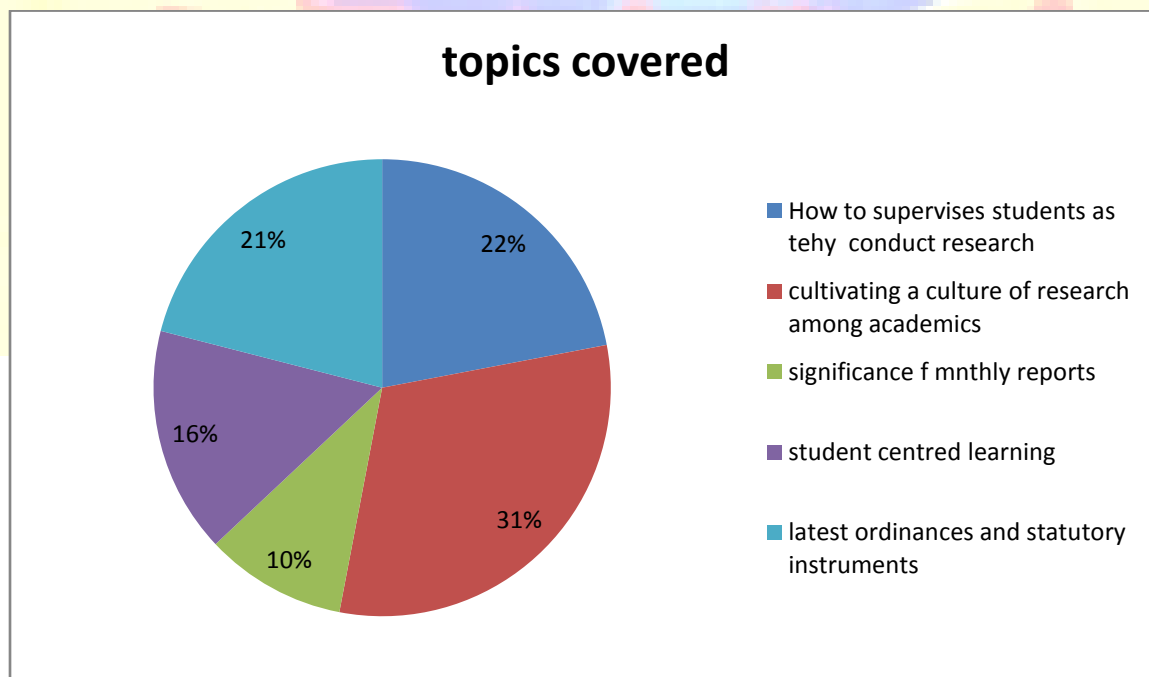
Those who supported the introduction of NFC courses argued that these courses would solve the problem of unemployment by providing entrepreneurial skills which often lead to employment creation. Participants who objected to the introduction of NFC courses said they did not deserved to be tormented by the glaring inadequacies found in most secondary school. They added that NFC courses required a lot of money and could not be afforded by the majority of blacks. After all, most schools profiles revealed that there was no appropriate infrastructure, no equipment and in the double-session schools, there was no time for those subjects. Practicals, which are an integral part of the subjects in question, have to be conducted during double-lessons, which last not less than one hour.

Topics commonly covered in Staff Development workshops in Schools.



The areas of concern/ interest did not embrace anything about the plight of school leaver. Attention ended with internal efficiency and there was no room for external efficiency. It is clear from the Figure above that professionalism of the teacher is prioritised at the expense of preparing the youths for the world of work.

Topics covered in staff development workshops in colleges and universities



There was nothing about what happened to students after graduation. Worse still, not many lectures saw the importance of internship. It seemed to be a relief to lecturers who temporarily pushed the burden to the mentors in various organisations. In some universities internship was a preserve for the Department of Teacher- Development, which saw trainees going out on teaching practices. The hands-on experience gained during attachment did not seem to be fully appreciated. Even the trainees were left to seek and secure places for internship/attachment, showing that training institutions did not feel obliged to go beyond the provision of a letter of introduction. Worse still, the parent- colleges and/or universities sometimes never followed up to assess the nature of organisation in which their student- trainees were.

Reasons for dropping Vocational-Technical subjects

Reasons	Frequency	%
Cannot afford the levies	38	40
Practicals are not as important as Maths, Science and English	27	28
No immediate benefits are derived from Practical subjects	24	25
These are subjects for dull students	6	7
Total	N= 95	100%

The opinion that service is service and that only “higher occupation are worthy, ignores the values of manual work in society and is unconstructive. People have to purge themselves of academic snobbery.

Conclusions

- Secondary school curricula are far from the government's wish to shift from traditional practical subjects to National Foundation Certificate courses.
- Ministry of education, sport and culture is more concerned with policy making than it is, with implementation. Not much has been done on the ground and policies are merely for political expediency.
- Attitudinal barriers still hinder the success of vocational technical education. The best two or three classes per stream are not offered Vocational-technical subjects. Society still renders more respect to certain occupations (e.g. Medical Doctors, lawyers) than others (e.g. Mechanics, builders and cabinet makers).
- With continued economic hardships faced by the country, the study found that there was almost no financial support for vocational – Technical Education.

Recommendations

- Provision of employability skills to be considered as an ethical responsibility. Those educational planners and policy makers have a moral obligation to provide the most complete education and training to enable graduates to fit into competitive, multicultural work environment(s).
- Classroom and colleges and varsities could develop employability skills by replacing key features of real work place settings and assigning student to perform task which are approximate to those performed by employees in those settings.
- Actively involve the labour market (i.e. the potential employers) in determining the requisite skills and knowledge to be included in school and college syllabi. Monolithic planning by Ministry of Education should be minimised if not eradicated.
- Preparedness for the introduction of courses has to be checked against such criteria as: availability of funds, availability of suitably qualified staff, infrastructure, equipment and electricity.
- Implementation pitfalls, already known from past experiences, have to be avoided
- Rejuvenation of career guidance and counselling in schools.
- Narrowing the gap between learning and training.

- Further studies in the promotion of vocational technical education right from the secondary school, high school, college, university into the job markets would add value to the education system of the country. It could be worthwhile to focus on how voc tech education should be fashioned in order to reveal the fullest intellectual and social meaning of work in the socio- economic spectrum.

References

- Auret, D. (1990) A decade of Development Zimbabwe 1980 – 1990. Mambo Press, Gweru
- Bacchus, K (1988) The Political Context of Vocationalisation of Education in The Developing countries. Pergamon Press, Oxford
- Chung, F. and Ngaru, E. (1985) Socialism, Education and development. Zimbabwe Publishing House, Zimbabwe.
- Cotton, K (1995) The Vocation School Fallacy in Development Planning. Oxford University Press New York.
- Mandebvu, O. (1989) Pupils Attitudes Towards Vocational-Technical subjects: An Explanatory study (Dissertation) Linkoping University.
- The Chronicle (1998) December 3 Zimbabwe's Education System is too Academic
- Zvobgo, R. T. (1989) Post- Colonial state and education Refrm. Zimbabwe Publishing House. Harare
- Beach D. P. (1982) A training programme to improve work habits, attitudes and values. Journal of Epsilon Pi Tau 8 (2) p 69-74
- Busse, R (1992) The New Basica. Today's employees want the three "Rs" and So much more" Vocational Education Journal 67(5) pp 24-5
- Gregson, J. A. and Bettis, P.J. (1991) Secondary Trade and Industrial Education work values Instruction: Emancipatory or Indoctrination? Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention, Los Angeles, C.A.
- Lundy, L. L. (1984) Teach more than skills and Knowledge: Industrial Educations, 73 (1) pp 22-23
- Natriello, G. (1989) Whatdo Employees want in Entry Level Workers? An assessment of the Evidence. National Centre for education and Employment Occasion Paper No. 7 Columbia University, New York.