

Work-Integrated Learning for Employability Skills Development: Current Practices and Prospects in Tanzania Business Training Institutions

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajasss.v5ispecialissue.7>

Abstract

The study examined the current practices and prospects of work-integrated learning in Tanzania business training institutions. Specifically, it: explored the perceived benefits and constraints associated with work-integrated learning in Tanzania business training institutions; and evaluated the influence of work-integrated learning programmes on employability skills development. The study adopted a pragmatism paradigm and a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 145 second-year bachelor's degree students in procurement and accountancy programmes, sampled using a convenient sampling technique. Inferential and descriptive analysis techniques were used for data analysis and presentation. The multiple regression model was used for hypothesis testing. The study found that the Tanzania Institute and Accountancy and College of Business Education employ field practice as a means for enhancing the employability skills of their students. Moreover, the approach is beneficial to students, institutions and employers despite personal, policy and institutional constraints. Whereas field placement was seen to have a positive and significant influence on the employability skills of students, other forms like sandwiches, internships and entrepreneurship programmes were not yet formalized in these institutions' curricula. Therefore, the study recommends curriculum review, institutional setup and policy enforcement to strengthen field placement and incorporate sandwich, internship and entrepreneurship programmes towards employability skills development. Further study may develop a measuring scale for employability skills among finalist students in business training institutions.

Keywords: *Work-integrated learning, employability skills, higher learning students, sustainable development*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The global labour market requires graduates from training institutions, with employability skills to address social, economic and political impediments against economic growth and sustainable development (United Nations, 2016;

Ali & Jalal, 2018; World Bank, 2021). This need is based on the truth that business training institutions are the engine of workforce development through innovation and creativity systems which, when aligned with industrial skills, boost production, employment creation and income generation (OECD, 2011). In this sense, therefore, business training institutions embarked on employability skills development for their students congruent to the labour market needs (Govender & Wait, 2017).

The skills include but are not limited to problem-solving, technological use, critical thinking, communication, teamwork and collaboration, resource management, entrepreneurship, applied academics as well as creativity and innovation skills (Florida Chamber Foundation, 2019; ILO, 2021). Categorically, those skills based on: professional skills, methodological skills, interpersonal skills, personal skills, and analytical and digital skills not only enable an individual to get a job but also retain it, get a promotion and develop his career paths (Bano & Vasantha, 2019). While some of the skills are observable like teamwork, communication and digital use, the rest are not easily unobservable (Suleman, 2016). Therefore, tertiary and higher business training institutions, expose their students to the working environment through different work-integrated learning to enhance the employability skills required in the labour market (Maina, Guardia & Fernandez-Fener, 2021).

Work-integrated learning is a learning approach that encompasses theories learnt in classes and their industrial applicability through different forms namely: Placements, simulations, Industrial projects, internships, sandwiches, entrepreneurship, fieldwork and cooperatives (Rowe, 2017). The approach is not simply working and learning but entails a systematic curriculum designed, pedagogical practices and assessment methods which engage students to practice what they have learnt theoretically in the real world of work (Atkinson, 2016).

The approach prepares higher education students for the world of work through different experts in the fields who have real experience in the jobs to develop employability skills (Reddan, 2016). The approach is essential for achieving sustainable development goal 8: *promotion of sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all* (United Nations, 2016).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-integrated learning can be traced as far back as the 1890s when employers in Europe complained about, the increasing mismatch between the required skills in the labour market and the possessed skills among graduates from different learning institutions (Bowen & Drysdale, 2017). The study in Australia indicated

that the increase of globalization tendencies in the World which was triggered by advancements in technology has made jobs in the labour market more unpredictable hence a need for school-industrial partnership to update education programmes to the pace of the labour market (Torii, 2018). Therefore, Australia adopted a work-integrated learning approach to impart hands-on skills to students for their professional career paths (Jeong & McMillan, 2015). The approach intended to enhance problem-solving skills, workforce readiness, practitioners' skills, networking, time management, job application and effective working habits through internships, visiting workplaces, meeting employers and field placements (Gill, 2018). In Sweden, the approach, benefits students, employers and the training institution as well depending on the level of integration. To students, it builds confidence, and while employers get an extra workforce with skills and innovations, the institution reflects the job market needs for policy, curriculum and pedagogical intervention (Bernhardsson, Gellerstedt & Winman, 2017).

In the case of South Africa, work-integrated learning was introduced in the higher education system to bridge the skills gap between what is taught in universities and what is required by employers in the labour market in the 4th industrial revolution (Okeke-Uzodike & Anwana, 2020). The approach brings the world of work to the learning place to enhance essential and relevant skills practical (Govender & Wait, 2017; Atkinson, 2016; Bowen & Drysdale, 2017). Even though work-integrated learning, enables students to perform diligently 88% of the assigned work in the labour market, the approach is constrained by a shortage of students' placement chances, the mismatch between employers' interests and universities' intended skills (Okeke-Uzodike & Anwana, 2020). Other impediments include persistent low completion rates in apprenticeships due to a shortage of resources, the demand of employers in the labour market for more hands-on skills from graduates and the pressure from different education stakeholders about the relevance of education in higher learning institutions (Vaughan,2012). The approach is neglected by different practitioners, as it increases the workload on the management, staff, employers and students (Govender & Wait, 2017).

In Tanzania, work-integrated learning was introduced in 1967, through education for self-reliance philosophy, exposing students to real productive works relevant to their society (Mkude, Cooksey & Band Levely, 2003). Since then, the approach has been part and parcel of education policies for the same (MoEC, 1995; MoEVT, 2014). Despite the wide adoption of a work-integrated learning approach (Samadi, 2013; Sachs, Rowe & Wilson, 2017; Tamrat, 2019; Putra, Basharia, Komaro & Hamdani, 2021), there is empirical evidence that most

Tanzanian graduates lack essential employability skills required in the labour market (Ndyali, 2016; Kessy, 2020). Such a situation contributes to the high rate of unemployment which leaves a large number of graduates jobless hence raising literature concerns on how business training institutions integrate learning and work towards employability skills (Amani, 2017; Petracco & Sanchez-Reaza and Shachiyeva, Kizu & Kahyarara, 2014; World Bank, 2021; MoEST, 2021).

The study is based on employability theory by Yorke and Knight (2002) which holds that employability is the outcome of one's learning, achievements and understanding of essential skills (Knight & Yorke, 2002). The theory suggests that employability skills are developed throughout learning. Therefore, the need for this paper to examine the current practices and prospects of work-integrated learning in Tanzania business training institutions. Specifically, the study was guided by three specific objectives: exploring the perceived benefits and constraints against work-integrated learning in Tanzania business training institutions; and evaluating the influence of work-integrated learning programmes on employability skills development.

Based on the employability theory and reviewed literature and study objectives, four alternative hypotheses were tested: H₁ sandwich predicts employability skills development among business students; H₂ internship predicts employability skills development among business students; H₃ entrepreneurship predicts employability skills development among business students and H₄ field placement predicts employability skills development among business students. The hypothesis based on the prominent forms of work-integrated learning in literature, is expected to enhance the employability skills of students in tertiary business training institutions (Santiago, 2009; Samadi, 2013; Reddan, 2016; Rowe, 2017; Bowen & Drysdale, 2017; Govender & Wait, 2017; Krishna, 2020).

3.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a pragmatism paradigm, sequential explanatory mixed methods design where follow-up interviews were conducted for validation of the quantitative data (Creswell & Plan Clak, 2018). A total of 160 Semi-structured questionnaires were distributed to second bachelor's degree students from the Tanzania Institute of Accountancy and College of Business Education. The filled returned questionnaires were 145. (90.6%). Then five follow-up interviews were conducted with students during their work-integrated learning programme, at GPSA, TANESCO, TRA, PEPSI and CRDB. The choice of C.B.E and T.I.A was instigated by the similarities of the academic programmes hence their students could be found in similar departments during work-integrated learning schedules. The sampling techniques were convenient for procurement and accountancy

second-year students. The preference of second-year students is based on the fact that; it is the academic year when students are exposed to the real world of work. Inferential and descriptive analysis techniques were used for quantitative and qualitative data analysis and presentation respectively (Manamba, 2020). The quantitative data were coded and subjected to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to generate frequency and percentage. The qualitative data were organized into similar themes and presented in verbatim quotes and thematic paraphrases. The multiple regression model was used for hypothesis testing.

Model specification:

$$ES = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SP + \beta_2 IP + \beta_3 EP + \beta_4 FP + \epsilon$$

Whereby:

ES= Employability skills

SP= Sandwich programme

IP= Internship Programme

EP= Entrepreneurship Programme

FP= Field Placement

$\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = Coefficients of variables used in the study

ϵ = Error term.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The multiple regression model results

The results of the multiple regression model used in this study were statistically significant and fit for the study as the F-statistic value was 28.242 and the probability of F-statistic was significant at a 5% level. R-squared was 68% and adjusted R-squared was 69.1% implying that 69.1% of the independent variables explained the changes in the dependent variable and only 30.9% of the remaining variables were not used in this study. The reliability of the instruments was Cronbach alpha 7, which is acceptable. The results of the hypotheses testing are presented below:

4.2 The multicollinearity test results

The multicollinearity test was conducted to evaluate the relationship among explanatory variables. Data presented in Table 1, indicates that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each explanatory variable is less than ten, and tolerance (1/VIF) is greater than 0.1. In principle, when the VIF is less than 10 and tolerance is greater than 0.1, the independent variables employed by the study are said to be free from multicollinearity and tolerable (Shrestha, 2020; Bager, Roman, Algelith & Mohammed, 2017).

Table 1: Multicollinearity table

Variables	VIF	1/VIF
Sandwich Programme	7.693	.130
Internship Programme	1.082	.924
Entrepreneurship	1.687	.593
Field Placement	1.040	.961
Mean (VIF, 1/VIF)	2.8755	0.3478

Table 2: Regression analysis results

Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig	Decision
Constant	-.092	-.267	.790	
Sandwich	.163	1.386	.168	Rejected
Internship	.003	.058	.954	Rejected
Entrepreneurship	.056	1.397	.165	Rejected
Field Placement	.939	14.485	.000	Accepted
Diagnostic Tests				
R-Squared	68%			
Adjusted	69.1%			
R-squared				
F-statistics	28.242			
Prob(F-statistics)	0.0000			
Reliability Test				
Cronbach's Alpha	.664			

Thus, the multiple regression model of this study is; $ES = 0.163SP + 0.003IP + 0.056EP + 0.939FP + \epsilon$

4.3 The influence of work-integrated learning on employability skills development

The objective sought to assess the influence of work-integrated learning on employability skills development among students. Four hypotheses were formulated. The results of hypothesis testing were:

4.3.1 Sandwich programme and employability skills

The study hypothesized that sandwich programme positively and significantly predicts employability skills among students in business training institutions. Results reveal that sandwich programmes positively but insignificantly predicted employability skills among students in business training institutions with a coefficient and p-value of ($\beta = 0.163, p < .168$), hence the alternative hypothesis H_1 is rejected. Such results deviate from previous studies conducted in Vietnam which revealed that sandwich programmes impact significantly employability skills development among students due to the exposure to the job before the accomplishment of their studies (Santiago, 2009). It deviates as well from the study conducted in Nigeria about institutional variables and students'

employability skills development in public Universities in Cross River and Akwa Ibom states, which established a significant contribution of sandwich programmes among students (Sule et al, 2020). Based on these observations, the findings imply that business training institutions in Tanzania have not yet utilized the potential of sandwich programmes as an engine for employability skills development due to personal, institutional or policy factors, therefore a need for an intervention for changes.

4.3.2 Internship and employability skills

The study hypothesized that internship programme positively and significantly predicts employability skills among students in business training institutions. Results reveal that internship programmes had a positive but insignificant predicted employability skills development among students in business training institutions with a coefficient and P-value of ($\beta = 0.003$, $p < .954$), hence, the alternative hypothesis H_2 is rejected. These results differ from the findings of previous studies which established the positive and significant influence of internship programmes on the development of employability skills among students in health sciences (Reddan, 2016 Atkinson, 2016). This means that internships are not well utilized by business training institutions in Tanzania, compared to their counterpart health science training institutions. Therefore, a call for intervention measures for improvement.

4.3.3 Entrepreneurship and employability skills

The study intended to test if entrepreneurship programme positively and significantly predicts employability skills among students in business training institutions. Results reveal that entrepreneurship programmes had a positive but insignificant predicted employability skills among students in business training institutions, with a coefficient and P-value of ($\beta = 0.056$, $p < .165$), hence the alternative hypothesis H_3 is rejected. These results differ from the findings of previous studies which established the positive and significant influence of entrepreneurship programmes on the development of employability skills to students in different countries (Govender & Wait, 2017; Krishna, 2020). This means that although business training institutions in Tanzania are meant to incubate entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship has not been effectively exploited as a tool for developing employability skills among students when in tertiary institutions. That means, there is a need for intervention strategies to expose students to entrepreneurship activities towards employability skills.

4.3.4 Field placement and employability skills

The study hypothesized that field placement positively and significantly predicts employability skills among students in business training institutions. Results reveal that field placement exerts positive and significant predicted employability

skills among students in business training institutions with a coefficient and P-value of ($\beta = 0.939$, $p < .000$), therefore the alternative hypothesis H_4 is accepted. The significance and positive influence of field placement on employability skills created a need for a follow-up interview with students during their field placement sessions. Students were asked how field practices influenced their employability skills. Their responses were:

I learnt customer care theoretically in class, but at CRDB, I had to attend to the satisfaction of the customers. Therefore, I know what customer care entails (Bachelor of Accountant Student, CRDB Bank, October 2023).

Field placement has enabled me to develop the ability to use the new procurement system 'NeST', as at GPSA, I had to use it practically not just define it as it was in class (Procurement student from GPSA, October 2023).

With TRA, I have developed dressing code skills, financial statement and bank reconciliation techniques which I could not do on Campus (Accountancy student from TRA, October 2023).

I knew about warehousing but at TANESCO, I have learnt how to use electronic warehousing in which one can access the status of materials in any warehouse of TANESCO from any point (Procurement student from TANESCO, October 2023).

Balancing orders with the available stock is the key task which I was performing daily to attend to orders effectively and efficiently. Such skills could not have been developed without my presence at Pepsi (A Procurement student from PEPSI, October 2023).

Students' voices concerning their field placement suggest that, work-integrated learning bridges skill gaps between what is taught and what is required in the labour market. That means, there is a need for strengthening and widening opportunities for students' exposure to the labour market to develop hands-on skills. This result concurs with the findings from the study conducted at the University of Brawijaya-Indonesia which revealed that field placement enhances the employability skills of undergraduate students such as critical thinking, creativity as well as leadership skills (Tippa & Mane, 2018; University of Brawijaya, 2022). Therefore, business training institutions in Tanzania should capitalize on field placement for their students through effective selection, monitoring and supervision of areas for field placement, to enhance the development of relevant employability skills.

4.4 The benefits of work-integrated learning in Tanzania business training institutions

The objective intended to explore Students' perceptions of the benefits of work-integrated learning. Their responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Benefits of work-integrated learning in Tanzania Business Training Institutions

Perceived benefits	Frequency	Percentage
Develops time management skills	139	96
Improves students' responsibility and accountability	99	68
Prepares students for future jobs	110	76
Offers part-time jobs for students	76	52
Provides hands-on skills to students	87	60
Provides extra workforce to employers	128	88
Builds college-employers relationship	87	60
Enhances relevant curriculum development	128	88

Source: Field Data (August, 2023).

The students' responses revealed that integrating learning with work is beneficial to students, training institutions as well as employers. The results are in line with other studies about the perceived benefits of the approach. However, the two findings about part-time jobs for students and relevant curriculum development are new findings contrary to the previous studies (Samadi, 2013; Sachs, Rowe & Wilson, 2017; Putra, Bashaina, Komaro & Hmdani, 2021). This implies that the benefits of work-integrated learning have not yet been exhausted by different scholars, which means, there are still other benefits which are not yet known. There is a need to adopt the approach for the sake of its numerous benefits.

4.5 Constraints against work-integrated learning in Tanzania Business Training Institution

The objective intended to explore Students' perception of the constraints against work-integrated learning. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Constraints against work-integrated learning

Constraints	Frequency	Percentage
Difficult to get field placement opportunities	128	88
The desire for payment among students	116	80
Lack of integrated curriculum to support the programme	122	84
Lack of online learning systems in tertiary institutions	104	72
Limited funds in tertiary institutions to enhance the approach	116	80
Lack of employers' interest in supporting the programme	110	76
Limited employment firms for work-integrating learning	93	64
Lack of business parks owned by tertiary institutions	87	60

Source: Field Data (August, 2023)

The findings about constraints impending work-integrated learning indicate that the constraints are institutional, personal and policy issues. These findings support the studies conducted by different scholars and institutions (Council of Higher Education, 2011; Ali & Jamal, 2018; World Bank, 2021). The presence of different constraints means the complexity of the approach hence a need for collaborative strategies among different stakeholders including employers, tertiary institutions, policy makers and internal agencies dealing with education. The new constraints which were not suggested in previous studies include a lack of business parks owned by tertiary institutions and a lack of online systems to support work-integrated learning. These new constraints are manageable if tertiary institutions are determined to enhance employability skills among their graduates because they are within their institutional capacity.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that the Tanzania Institute and Accountancy and College of Business Education employ field practice as a means for work-integrated learning to enhance the employability skills of their students before they graduate and join the labour market. Moreover, the approach is beneficial to students, institutions and employers despite personal, policy and institutional challenges. Whereas field placement was seen to have a positive and significant influence on the employability skills of students, other forms like sandwich, internships and entrepreneurship programmes were not yet formalized in these institutions' curriculum. Therefore, the study recommends curriculum review, institutional setup and policy enforcement to strengthen field placement and incorporate sandwich, internship and entrepreneurship programmes towards employability skills development. Further study may develop a measuring scale for employability skills among finalist students in business training institutions. Also, a developmental study may be conducted on the use of business parks for employability skills development in business training institutions.

6.0 IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The study has revealed the less utilized forms of work-integrated learning in tertiary institutions, this observation may serve as a base for curriculum review and policy enforcement by tertiary institutions, the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACTVET) as a regulator and the Ministry of Education to promote the development of employability skills among tertiary institutions students through effective and intensive work-integrated learning programme. The paper may serve as feedback for competency-based education policy to stakeholders for policy review towards work-integrated learning to enhance employability skills. If this happens, the beneficiaries may include the graduates who will secure decent jobs, employers

for improving productivity and training institutions for graduating employable students.

7.0 LIMITATION AND AREA FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study respondents were students from accountancy and procurement programmes from T.I.A and CBE only. Students from other business programmes such as marketing and business administration and students from other institutions like the Institute of Financial Management (IFM) and Institute of Rural Development Planning (IRDP) were not involved. This limitation could not affect the results, because tertiary training institutions follow similar work-integrated learning programmes as guided by the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACTVET).

8.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With heartfelt gratitude to Professor William Amos Pallangyo, the Chief Executive Officer of Tanzania Institute of Accountancy (T.I.A), we the authors of this paper, acknowledge the financial, moral and managerial support which enabled us to prepare and present this paper in the Tanzania Institute of Accountancy second international conference in Zanzibar-2023.

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