

Leadership, Collaboration, and Employability: A Comprehensive Review of Zambia's Vocational Training Paradigm

Tobias Alubi¹, Samuel Baba Adongo², Jennifer Mabena³, Othata Nkhii⁴,
Eusmay Akesithi Nleya⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Subject Matter Expert, Kazian School of Management

Abstract:

This study examines the intersection of leadership styles, stakeholder collaboration, and graduate employability within Zambia's vocational training (TVET) paradigm, utilizing a qualitative, descriptive design grounded in secondary data analysis. Drawing from peer-reviewed studies, World Bank and ILO reports, TEVETA bulletins, and institutional data spanning 2010–2024, the study reveals that transformational and hybrid leadership models within TVET institutions correlate with a 17–21% improvement in retention and graduation rates compared to transactional approaches, enhancing institutional responsiveness and curriculum adaptability. Gender disparities persist, with female graduates experiencing a 12% lower employment rate within six months post-graduation, reflecting structural biases in sectoral placement. Public-private partnerships, exemplified by the NORTEC–First Quantum Minerals collaboration, demonstrate that structured stakeholder engagement increases employer satisfaction with graduates from 45% under traditional curricula to 75% under competency-based models. However, a significant skills mismatch persists, with 68% of employers reporting difficulties in recruiting adequately skilled graduates, exacerbated by underfunding, with TVET receiving only 1.2% of Zambia's education budget despite rising youth unemployment. The study recommends adopting transformational leadership, formalizing industry advisory boards, expanding competency-based education, and increasing funding allocations to TVET as strategies to bridge the skills gap. These interventions align with Zambia's Vision 2030 and the Seventh National Development Plan, ensuring TVET graduates meet labor market demands while advancing inclusive socio-economic development. The findings provide policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders with actionable insights for reforming Zambia's TVET landscape to enhance graduate employability and institutional resilience.

Keywords: Leadership styles, TVET, graduate employability, stakeholder collaboration, skills mismatch, Zambia, transformational leadership,

1. Introduction

Zambia, like many sub-Saharan African countries, faces the dual challenge of high youth unemployment and a persistent mismatch between the skills imparted by its education system and the demands of the labor market. According to the Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats, 2023), youth unemployment stood at approximately 17.4% in 2022, with over 70% of young people engaged in informal and precarious

employment (World Bank, 2022). To address this, the Zambian government has prioritized Technical Education, Vocational, and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) as a strategic tool for national development and poverty reduction (Ministry of Higher Education, 2021). Leadership within vocational training institutions, collaboration among stakeholders, and alignment of training programs with market needs have emerged as critical drivers for the success of this initiative (Chishimba & Muleya, 2021). Research suggests that effective leadership can influence instructor motivation, curriculum delivery, and student engagement, all of which directly affect employability outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Moreover, partnerships between government, private industry, and training institutions have shown promise in bridging the skills gap, especially in sectors like mining and construction where skills shortages are acute (ILO, 2021).

2. Literature Review

Banda et al. (2022) examined the employability of TVET graduates in Zambia by surveying 500 graduates and 100 employers in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces. Their study highlighted that over 68% of employers found graduates lacking practical competencies, attributing this gap to outdated curricula, insufficient industrial exposure, and a lack of soft skills training. The authors argued that despite the expansion of TVET institutions, quality and relevance remain major concerns. They emphasized the need for stronger industry-academic linkages and more workplace-based learning to bridge the skills gap. The study concluded that without significant curriculum reform and stronger leadership within institutions, the national goal of reducing youth unemployment will remain unattainable. The findings align with other regional studies indicating that weak employer engagement is a key reason for persistent skills mismatches in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mwale and Phiri (2021) investigated the influence of leadership styles on the performance of public TVET colleges in Zambia. Using a mixed-methods approach, they collected data from 10 colleges, including interviews with 50 administrators and surveys from 300 instructors. Their results revealed that transformational leadership significantly improved staff motivation, fostered innovative teaching methods, and increased student engagement. Colleges with leaders who practiced participative decision-making recorded 21% higher student retention rates than those with rigid, transactional styles. However, they found that many principals still operated under hierarchical models due to bureaucratic oversight from the Ministry of Higher Education. Mwale and Phiri recommended adopting a hybrid leadership style that balances transformational principles with clear accountability structures to boost institutional adaptability and graduate employability. Their work underscores the importance of leadership training for TVET managers in Zambia's educational reform agenda.

Kabwe (2021) focused on leadership practices and curriculum responsiveness in Zambia's vocational colleges. By analyzing administrative reports, conducting focus groups with instructors, and interviewing policymakers, Kabwe identified gaps in the alignment between training programs and industry expectations. He found that colleges led by principals who engaged directly with industry partners regularly updated their syllabi, resulting in higher graduate employability. For example, in institutions applying blended leadership, employer satisfaction with graduates increased by 15% compared to colleges without industry input. Kabwe argued that sustainable curriculum reform requires both strong internal leadership and structured collaboration with employers and regulatory bodies like TEVETA. He recommended policy incentives to encourage public-private partnerships and regular labor market surveys to inform course offerings. Kabwe's findings contribute to the debate on how leadership styles interact

with institutional partnerships to close the skills gap.

Chisanga (2021) explored the influence of leadership practices on the effectiveness of Zambia's TVET institutions by surveying 250 instructors and 600 students across five provinces. The study found that while transformational leadership promoted innovation and responsiveness in curriculum delivery, its adoption remained limited due to institutional resistance and lack of leadership training for college administrators. Colleges with transformational leadership practices recorded a 25% improvement in instructor motivation and a 19% increase in student participation in skills competitions and industry projects. However, Chisanga highlighted that even in colleges with motivated instructors, outdated curricula and insufficient industry linkages continued to hinder graduate employability. The study recommended leadership development programs focusing on change management for principals and heads of departments in TVET institutions to foster adaptive leadership practices necessary for aligning training with Zambia's labor market demands .

Ngoma (2020) examined how bureaucratic structures in Zambia's public technical colleges limit the effectiveness of leadership practices and institutional adaptability. Using qualitative interviews with 30 principals and senior administrators across eight technical colleges, Ngoma found that a predominantly transactional leadership style, driven by strict policy adherence and hierarchical structures, restricted flexibility in curriculum updates and industry collaborations. The study noted that while transactional practices ensured compliance with TEVETA standards, they often stifled instructor creativity and reduced opportunities for responsive curriculum adjustments. For instance, over 65% of instructors reported delays in incorporating new technologies or industry-relevant modules due to lengthy approval processes within college management and ministry oversight. Ngoma recommended policy reforms to decentralize certain decision-making processes, allowing principals to engage proactively with industry partners and local labor market stakeholders to address the persistent skills mismatch affecting graduate employability.

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) conducted a regional analysis focusing on youth employment and skills mismatch in sub-Saharan Africa, including Zambia, using national labor force surveys and employer interviews. The report revealed that approximately 70% of Zambian youth faced challenges securing employment due to a mismatch between their skills and market demands. Employers reported that graduates lacked practical experience, digital literacy, and soft skills essential for current industry needs. The ILO noted that while Zambia's TVET system had expanded access, it struggled to ensure quality and relevance, exacerbated by underfunding and insufficient industry participation in curriculum design. The report emphasized the need for competency-based training models, industry-driven apprenticeships, and public-private partnerships to align training with labor market realities, thereby enhancing employability and reducing underemployment among graduates in Zambia .

The World Bank (2023) in its *Zambia Economic Update* analyzed employment trends and skills challenges using ZamStats labor force data and employer surveys. It found that youth unemployment was 17.4%, while underemployment affected nearly 45% of youth, with the informal sector absorbing the majority of young workers. The report highlighted that employers across mining, construction, and ICT sectors reported a skills gap exceeding 60% in critical technical areas, limiting productivity and industrial growth. The World Bank emphasized the importance of aligning TVET curricula with industry needs and incorporating soft skills and digital competencies into vocational training to improve graduate employability. It also recommended stronger leadership within TVET institutions and greater collaboration with the private sector to enhance training quality and responsiveness to Zambia's economic diversification goals, underlining the need for ongoing policy and funding reforms.

3. OBJECTIVES

Despite Zambia's strategic prioritization of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) under frameworks like the *Seventh National Development Plan* and the *TVET Policy 2020–2030*, youth unemployment and underemployment remain high, with approximately 17.4% of youth unemployed and over 45% underemployed (World Bank, 2023). Studies (Banda et al., 2022; ILO, 2021) have highlighted persistent skills mismatches between TVET graduates and labor market needs, with over 68% of employers reporting difficulties in finding suitably skilled candidates in technical fields. Institutional leadership practices in many TVET colleges are dominated by hierarchical, transactional models, which restrict adaptability and limit the incorporation of industry-relevant practices into curricula (Ngoma, 2020; Mwale & Phiri, 2021). Additionally, insufficient stakeholder collaboration and limited private sector involvement in curriculum design hinder the responsiveness of TVET to changing market demands (Kabwe, 2021; Chisanga, 2021). These systemic challenges lead to low employability among graduates, exacerbating youth unemployment and impeding Zambia's efforts to diversify its economy and achieve inclusive growth. In response to the identified challenges, this research is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze the impact of leadership styles within Zambia's TVET institutions on graduate employability outcomes.
2. To evaluate the role of stakeholder collaboration, including public-private partnerships, in aligning TVET curricula with labor market demands in Zambia.
3. To examine the extent of the skills mismatch between TVET graduates and industry requirements in Zambia.
4. To propose evidence-based recommendations to improve leadership practices, enhance stakeholder collaboration, and reduce skills mismatches within Zambia's TVET system to enhance graduate employability.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design grounded in secondary data analysis to systematically examine the interrelationship between leadership styles, stakeholder collaboration, and employability outcomes within Zambia's vocational training paradigm. This approach enables an organized synthesis of existing scholarly literature, government reports, and policy documents to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector in Zambia while aligning findings with the broader goals of enhancing youth employability and supporting economic development (Creswell, 2014). Data for this study were sourced exclusively from a robust range of materials, including peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2024, and comprehensive reports by reputable international organizations such as the World Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), and UNESCO, focusing on issues of skills mismatch, youth employment trends, and vocational education system performance within Zambia. Additionally, policy documents issued by the Ministry of Higher Education Zambia and TEVETA provided crucial contextual frameworks on leadership practices, curriculum reforms, and implementation challenges in the TVET system, while reports from industry associations such as the Zambia Federation of Employers and the Zambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry offered valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of employers regarding graduate skills and institutional collaboration. The collection process involved systematic searches across academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR,

Scopus, and ResearchGate, alongside official government websites and repositories of development agencies, to ensure the comprehensiveness of the review. Search terms used included “vocational training Zambia,” “leadership in TVET,” “graduate employability Zambia,” “skills mismatch Zambia,” and “stakeholder collaboration TVET,” allowing for the identification of literature most relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were strictly defined, focusing on documents published in English within the stated period that directly addressed issues within Zambia’s TVET system, leadership practices, stakeholder collaboration, and youth employability, while studies outside these thematic areas or lacking verifiable Zambia-specific context were excluded to maintain relevance and validity. Given that this study exclusively utilizes secondary data without employing any statistical tools, content analysis was adopted as the primary analysis technique, allowing the researcher to extract, categorize, and interpret recurring themes such as the effects of transformational and transactional leadership on institutional performance, the role of public-private partnerships in improving training relevance, the extent of skills mismatches affecting graduate employability, and the impact of policy frameworks on TVET delivery. Through thematic organization, the findings were aligned with the research objectives and problem statement to facilitate clear interpretation and discussion in the subsequent analysis chapter, ensuring systematic presentation of insights for policymakers and educators. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the research process; although no primary data collection was undertaken, academic integrity was maintained through proper citation and acknowledgment of all referenced materials to avoid intellectual property violations and to ensure transparency for future researchers seeking to replicate or build upon this study. This methodology ensures that the research remains grounded in verifiable data while providing a practical, evidence-based foundation for improving Zambia’s vocational training ecosystem and addressing youth unemployment challenges.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive thematic synthesis of secondary data, structured around the study’s objectives: (1) the impact of leadership styles within Zambia’s TVET institutions, (2) stakeholder collaboration and public-private partnerships, (3) skills mismatch and employability challenges, and (4) integrated recommendations for enhancing Zambia’s vocational training ecosystem. The findings align with literature systematically collected from 2010–2024 and policy reports, providing evidence-backed insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners.

5.1 Impact of Leadership Styles within TVET Institutions on Employability

Leadership in TVET institutions significantly affects curriculum responsiveness, instructor motivation, and the employability of graduates. Mwale and Phiri (2021) found that TVET colleges practicing transformational leadership recorded 21% higher graduation rates and 17% higher student retention rates compared to colleges led by transactional leadership models. Chisanga (2021) also reported that transformational leaders foster innovation in curriculum delivery, encouraging instructor-led projects and industry-aligned skills competitions.

Table 5.1: Comparative Impact of Leadership Styles in TVET Institutions in Zambia

Leadership Style	Impact on Retention	Impact on Graduation Rate	Instructor Motivation	Curriculum Adaptability
Transformational	+17%	+21%	High (collaborative culture)	High (industry-responsive)

Transactional	Baseline	Baseline	Moderate (task-focused)	Low (rigid structure)
Hybrid (Blended)	+12%	+15%	High (balanced approach)	Moderate to High

(Data Source: Mwale & Phiri, 2021; Chisanga, 2021)

However, Ngoma (2020) highlighted that bureaucratic constraints within government-managed institutions often limit the adoption of transformational leadership, with over 65% of instructors reporting delays in curriculum updates due to hierarchical approval processes. This reduces agility in aligning training programs with evolving labor market demands, contributing to skill mismatches.

5.2 Stakeholder Collaboration and Public-Private Partnerships

Collaboration between industry stakeholders and TVET institutions is critical for aligning training outcomes with Zambia's labor market needs. According to ILO (2021), Zambia's TVET sector faces weak industry participation, with only 28% of TVET institutions having structured partnerships with private sector employers. However, notable examples of successful collaboration exist, such as the partnership between First Quantum Minerals and Northern Technical College (NORTEC), where industry-funded programs have aligned curricula with sector-specific technical skills, leading to 80% of graduates being absorbed into employment within six months (NORTEC Annual Report, 2022).

Table 5.2: Public-Private Partnerships in Zambia's TVET Sector (Data Source: NORTEC Annual Report, 2022; ILO, 2021)

Institution/Partner	Nature of Collaboration	Outcome
NORTEC & First Quantum Minerals	Industry-funded programs, curriculum input	80% graduate employment within 6 months
TEVETA & Zambia Federation of Employers	Skills development consultations	Limited national adoption
Kitwe Vocational Training Centre & ZESCO	Apprenticeship programs	Moderate employment absorption

Stakeholder collaboration not only enhances curriculum relevance but also facilitates workplace-based learning and apprenticeships, providing practical exposure that increases employability prospects (World Bank, 2023).

5.3 Skills Mismatch and Employability Challenges

Zambia faces a significant skills mismatch crisis, where TVET graduates often lack the technical and soft skills required by employers. According to the World Bank (2023), 68% of employers in Zambia report difficulty finding appropriately skilled labor, while 70% of TVET graduates indicate that their training did not match the requirements of the industries they aspire to join. ILO (2021) found that in sectors like construction, mining, and ICT, skills shortages are most acute, with technical skills gaps reported by 63% of employers in these industries. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving were also identified as critical gaps among graduates.

Table 5.3: Skills Mismatch Indicators in Zambia’s TVET Sector

Indicator	Statistic
Employers reporting difficulty finding skilled labor	68% (World Bank, 2023)
TVET graduates reporting skills mismatch	70% (ILO, 2021)
Skills gap in technical sectors (mining, ICT, construction)	63% (ILO, 2021)
Soft skills gap among graduates	Reported by 54% of employers (ILO, 2021)

This persistent mismatch affects employability, leading many youth to remain underemployed or in informal employment despite having formal vocational qualifications (ZamStats, 2023).

5.4 Integrative Insights

The findings demonstrate that leadership, collaboration, and curriculum alignment are deeply interconnected in influencing employability outcomes within Zambia’s TVET sector:

- Transformational and hybrid leadership models enhance institutional responsiveness, motivate instructors, and encourage curriculum innovation, directly improving graduate readiness for the labor market (Mwale & Phiri, 2021; Kabwe, 2021).
- Public-private partnerships contribute to curriculum alignment and practical skill development, providing pathways for workplace-based learning and smoother transitions into employment (ILO, 2021; NORTEC, 2022).
- Persistent skills mismatches highlight the inadequacies of current training models, emphasizing the need for ongoing labor market analysis and industry involvement in curriculum design (World Bank, 2023).

Table 5.4: Integrated Thematic Synthesis

Theme	Findings	Source
Leadership Styles	Transformational leadership enhances retention and curriculum innovation	Mwale & Phiri, 2021; Chisanga, 2021
Stakeholder Collaboration	Effective partnerships improve employment outcomes	NORTEC, 2022; ILO, 2021
Skills Mismatch	High mismatch levels hinder employability	World Bank, 2023; ILO, 2021

These findings confirm that improving leadership within TVET institutions, expanding stakeholder collaboration, and aligning curricula with market demands are essential for addressing youth unemployment and ensuring that Zambia’s vocational training system contributes effectively to economic development and industrial growth.

5.5 Leadership and Institutional Capacity in Zambia’s TVET

Beyond quantitative graduation and retention data, leadership significantly shapes institutional capacity in resource management, instructor training, and curriculum renewal. Banda et al. (2022) observed that institutions with proactive, transformational leaders tend to secure 20–30% more external funding from donors and industry partners due to increased trust and transparent governance, which translates into improved workshop facilities, instructor upskilling, and learning materials provision. Furthermore, Kabwe

(2021) highlighted that leadership that actively involves staff in decision-making fosters a culture of accountability and innovation, enabling instructors to adopt competency-based education models that better align with labor market demands. Conversely, institutions with rigid hierarchical leadership underperform in maintaining workshop equipment, leading to outdated training that contributes to the skills mismatch.

Table 5.5: Institutional Capacity Indicators under Different Leadership Models

Indicator	Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership
External funding mobilization	+20–30% (Banda et al., 2022)	Minimal
Instructor participation	High (collaborative)	Low (directive)
Curriculum update frequency	Frequent (aligned to market)	Infrequent (bureaucratic)
Facility maintenance	Regular	Irregular

5.6 Gender Dimensions within Employability Outcomes

Gender disparities within Zambia’s TVET outcomes are evident across enrollment, retention, and employability. According to the World Bank (2023), while female enrollment in TVET increased from 33% in 2015 to 41% in 2022, employability outcomes remain skewed, with female graduates experiencing a 12% lower employment rate within six months post-graduation compared to male counterparts, primarily due to cultural biases in sectors like engineering, mining, and construction. The ILO (2021) further identified that women are more likely to be trained in traditionally feminized sectors (e.g., hospitality, tailoring) where informal employment and lower wages are prevalent, limiting their upward mobility despite qualifications. Institutions with gender-sensitive leadership initiatives, such as dedicated female mentorship programs and targeted industrial placements, report marginally better female employability outcomes.

Table 5.6: Gender-Based TVET and Employability Data in Zambia

Indicator	Male Graduates	Female Graduates
Average employment within 6 months	58% (World Bank, 2023)	46% (World Bank, 2023)
Average wage post-employment	ZMW 4,200/month	ZMW 3,100/month
Sectors of employment	Mining, construction, ICT	Hospitality, tailoring

These findings emphasize the need for leadership and policy frameworks that promote gender mainstreaming within TVET, encouraging female participation in high-demand sectors and ensuring equitable industrial attachments.

5.7 Curriculum Relevance and Labour Market Alignment

The skills mismatch in Zambia’s TVET is compounded by curricula that are outdated and insufficiently aligned with market shifts. The Zambia Federation of Employers (2023) reports that over 60% of employers find that TVET graduates lack proficiency in modern technologies, such as automation, ICT applications in manufacturing, and green energy systems, limiting immediate employability. TEVETA’s Annual Report (2023) acknowledges the slow adoption of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) models across institutions, despite policy frameworks encouraging such shifts. Institutions engaging directly with industry stakeholders for curriculum co-design, as seen in NORTEC’s mining

machinery and electrical programs, demonstrate higher graduate employability, with employer satisfaction ratings rising from 45% in 2018 to 75% in 2023. These findings indicate that leadership willing to innovate curricula and engage with the private sector is critical for bridging the employability gap.

Table 5.7: Curriculum Relevance vs. Graduate Employability (Data Source: TEVETA, 2023; Zambia Federation of Employers, 2023)

Curriculum Approach	Employer Satisfaction with Graduates
Traditional theory-heavy curriculum	40–50%
Competency-Based/Industry-aligned	70–80%

5.8 Policy Consistency and Funding Challenges

Policy inconsistencies and underfunding remain systemic barriers within Zambia’s TVET sector. The World Bank (2023) reports that public TVET institutions operate on constrained budgets, with only 1.2% of the education sector budget allocated to TVET, despite a growing youth population. The lack of consistent policy implementation leads to disparities in quality and access across regions. ILO (2021) highlights that while the Zambia TVET Policy 2020–2030 outlines progressive goals, including industry linkages, digital literacy integration, and gender mainstreaming, actual implementation is hampered by bureaucratic delays and fragmented institutional accountability. Institutions that actively seek partnerships to supplement funding, such as through Constituency Development Funds (CDF) and donor projects, demonstrate marginally better training quality.

Table 5.8: TVET Funding and Policy Implementation Challenges

Factor	Status
TVET share of education budget	1.2% (World Bank, 2023)
Policy implementation consistency	Low (ILO, 2021)
Regional quality disparities	High
Funding reliance on CDF/Donors	Increasing trend

Addressing these funding and policy alignment gaps requires leadership that can advocate for TVET at the national policy level while efficiently managing local resources for maximum impact.

5.9 Evidence-Based Recommendations to Improve Leadership, Collaboration, and Reduce Skills Mismatches in Zambia’s TVET System

Building on the findings across leadership practices, stakeholder collaboration, and the persistent skills mismatch in Zambia’s vocational training landscape, this section proposes evidence-based, actionable recommendations to enhance graduate employability in alignment with Zambia’s Seventh National Development Plan and Vision 2030 goals.

1. Strengthening Leadership Practices in TVET

Evidence from Mwale and Phiri (2021) and Kabwe (2021) demonstrates that transformational and hybrid leadership practices in TVET institutions significantly enhance retention rates, foster innovation in curriculum delivery, and strengthen external partnerships critical for graduate employability outcomes. To institutionalize these benefits, it is recommended that TVET institutional heads and senior instructors undergo targeted capacity-building workshops on transformational and blended leadership frameworks in collaboration with TEVETA and supporting donor agencies, equipping leaders with the skills to drive

change and responsiveness within their institutions. Establishing performance-based leadership evaluations focused on promoting collaboration, instructor motivation, and curriculum responsiveness, rather than emphasizing purely administrative compliance, will further embed quality in leadership practices. Additionally, to address gender disparities in employment outcomes, there is a need to encourage gender-responsive leadership initiatives by promoting women into leadership roles within TVET institutions, aligning with World Bank (2023) findings that indicate a 12% employment gap between male and female TVET graduates. These measures collectively will create a leadership culture that is adaptive, inclusive, and aligned with Zambia's goal of creating a skilled, employable workforce.

2. Enhancing Stakeholder Collaboration and Public-Private Partnerships

Data from ILO (2021) and the NORTEC Annual Report (2022) affirm that structured public-private partnerships significantly improve curriculum alignment with industry needs and enhance graduate employability outcomes within Zambia's TVET system. To build on these successes, it is recommended that each TVET institution formalize industry advisory boards composed of employers, industry associations, alumni, and key stakeholders to co-design curriculum structures and ensure continuous relevance to market demands. Expanding workplace-based learning models is also essential; this can be achieved by incentivizing private sector participation in internships, apprenticeships, and industrial attachments through targeted tax incentives and supportive policies that encourage employers to collaborate with TVET institutions. Furthermore, leveraging digital platforms to facilitate regular dialogue between industries and training institutions will enable agile curriculum updates and training practices responsive to rapid market shifts, addressing the 68% employer dissatisfaction rate with graduate skills highlighted in World Bank (2023) reports. By fostering systematic collaboration, these strategies will align training outputs with labor market needs and ensure that TVET graduates are equipped with practical, relevant skills.

3. Reducing Skills Mismatches to Enhance Employability

With 70% of TVET graduates in Zambia reporting experiencing skills mismatches upon entering the workforce (ILO, 2021), targeted interventions are essential to bridge the persistent gap between training outputs and labor market requirements. One critical measure involves accelerating the implementation of Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) models across TVET institutions, ensuring a balanced focus on both technical and soft skills, including teamwork, problem-solving, and digital literacy, which are increasingly demanded by employers. Institutionalizing graduate tracer studies and employer feedback surveys will enable TVET institutions to systematically identify specific skill gaps, informing annual curriculum reviews to align with evolving industry requirements effectively. Additionally, investing in modern training equipment and simulation tools through public-private co-financing initiatives will ensure that practical skills training within TVET institutions mirrors current technological standards, particularly in Zambia's priority sectors such as mining, ICT, and renewable energy. Collectively, these measures will significantly reduce skills mismatches and enhance the employability of TVET graduates, aligning their competencies with the current and future needs of the Zambian economy.

4. Policy and Institutional Frameworks for Sustainability

Persistent underfunding, with TVET receiving only 1.2% of Zambia's education budget (World Bank, 2023), coupled with inconsistent policy implementation, remains a barrier to achieving sustainable improvements within the country's TVET system. To address these challenges, it is critical to advocate for increased budgetary allocations for TVET under the national education framework, supported by evidence that demonstrates improved employability outcomes and institutional performance when TVET

systems are adequately funded. Aligning institutional plans and programs within TVET institutions with Zambia's National Skills Development Plan will ensure consistency and coherence across the sector while retaining the flexibility to adapt to local industry needs and regional economic contexts. Additionally, establishing regional centers of excellence within TVET institutions that specialize in high-demand sectors will not only advance skill development in critical areas but also serve as hubs for instructor training and curriculum innovation, driving quality improvements across the system. These policy and institutional reforms will build resilience within Zambia's TVET landscape, ensuring the system's ability to sustainably produce a workforce aligned with the country's economic growth objectives.

Table 5.9: Summary of Evidence-Based Recommendations

Focus Area	Recommendations
Leadership	1. Leadership training (transformational/hybrid) 2. Performance-based evaluations 3. Gender-responsive leadership
Stakeholder Collaboration	4. Industry advisory boards 5. Expand workplace learning 6. Digital collaboration platforms
Skills Mismatch Reduction	7. CBET implementation 8. Tracer studies & feedback loops 9. Equipment modernization
Policy & Institutional Frameworks	10. Increased TVET funding 11. Alignment with National Skills Development Plan 12. Regional centers of excellence

6. Conclusion

This study comprehensively examined the interplay between leadership styles, stakeholder collaboration, and graduate employability within Zambia's vocational training (TVET) paradigm using a qualitative, descriptive analysis of secondary data. Firstly, it was established that leadership practices within TVET institutions significantly influence graduate employability outcomes. Transformational and hybrid leadership models were found to improve institutional responsiveness, enhance instructor motivation, and facilitate curriculum innovation, directly impacting retention and graduation rates (Mwale & Phiri, 2021). In contrast, transactional leadership, while ensuring structured compliance, often limits adaptability, thereby constraining the institutions' responsiveness to evolving labor market demands. Secondly, stakeholder collaboration, particularly public-private partnerships (PPPs), was identified as critical in aligning TVET curricula with industry needs. Successful models, such as the NORTEC–First Quantum Minerals partnership, demonstrated that structured collaboration results in higher employability rates and improved curriculum relevance, supporting Zambia's efforts to align training with the Seventh National Development Plan and Vision 2030 targets. Thirdly, the persistent skills mismatch between TVET graduates and employer needs was highlighted, with over 68% of employers reporting difficulty in finding adequately skilled workers (World Bank, 2023; ILO, 2021). This mismatch was linked to outdated curricula, insufficient practical training, and limited integration of soft skills and emerging technologies within TVET programs.

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