



An Assessment of Communication Skill Attributes for Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) Graduates Required by Employers in Tanzania

¹Naisujaki Sephania Lyimo & ²Jafari Mwanza
¹ Department of Applied Sciences and Social Studies
² Mechanical Department
Arusha Technical College, Tanzania
Email: naiviebe@gmail.com

Abstract: *The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic necessitated for innovation in every aspect of human endeavours including the educational aspect. This study aimed at discovering attributes of communication skills for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates considered important in the labour market by employers/industries in the era of COVID-19 Pandemic. The study employed survey method using questionnaire as a tool for data collection. A total of 150 employers out of 300 were randomly selected from different industries from regions of Tanzania. The regions involved were Dar es salaam, Dodoma, Mwanza, Arusha and Mbeya to respond to the questionnaires. Data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. This study established that employers require graduates who have ability to build a team and work in a team, ask for an apology when feeling guilty, write clearly, concise and correct manner, prepare and deliver an oral presentation, conduct meetings and minute writing, negotiate with the clients/customers and express ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively in writing and in speech. This calls for curriculum developers in TVET institutions to include these important abilities required by a graduate before entering the job market.*

Keywords: *Communication skills, Attributes, TVET Graduates, Employers*

How to cite this work (APA):

Lyimo, N. S. & Mwanza, J. (2023). An assessment of communication skill attributes for technical and vocational education Training (TVET) graduates required by employers in Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 7(1), 133 – 138.

1. Introduction

1.1 Concept of communication

Communication is the process of transmitting information and meaning from one individual or organization to another by means of mutually understandable symbols. Communication involves the exchange of ideas, opinions and information with a specific objective (Iksan et al., 2012). The central objective of any communication is the

transmission of meaning. For successful communication both the receiver and the sender must understand the message without any confusion. There must be an agreement between the sender and receiver of the information communicated. In transferring an idea, the use of symbols like (words, signs, pictures, sound) which stands for that idea must be understood by an individual or group intended for the message/idea.

Communication skills is among the employability skills needed by employers, especially in the COVID 19 era. It is one of the generic skills required for a TVET graduate to be successful at the labour market. Communication skill is

crucial for a successful career and gives a significant contribution to the success of the organization (Wahyuni et al., 2018).

Employers require an employee/graduate not only have technical skills (mastery of the core subjects) but also require communication skills to improve productivity of the company. The graduate needs to be prepared with various skills to ensure they meet the demands of the employers/labour market. Hanafi (2014) affirms that communication skills are needed by graduates since every job requires initiative, flexibility and ones' ability to accept different tasks. Being able to communicate is a basic life skill that proves beneficial to all human beings. For graduates, communication skill is one of the most important life skills to be mastered before getting into the job market. Most employers complain of TVET graduates missing important communication skills attributes which should help to increase productivity in an organization. Effective communication skills can help make better impressions on others, and enable individuals to engage in clear conversations, in both oral and written form. This study aimed to discover attributes of communication skills for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates considered important in the labour market by employers/industries in the era of COVID-19 Pandemic.

2. Related Literature

2.1 Importance of Communication Skills

Communication skills are important tool used to influence, change people's attitude, minds and motivate to maintain good relation among each other. It is a central for success of activities in an organization. Success of an organization/company's activities is highly accelerated by effective communication skills among members in an organization/company. Communication skills are very important especially when graduates are in the process of seeking for a job. The new graduate would be tested on communication skills abilities during the job interviews (Iksan et al., 2012)

Sonnenschein & Ferguson, (2020) contributed that, effective communication skills help to build a good interpersonal relationship. It strengthens a mutual sense of commitment, without effective communication skills information cannot be collected, processed, or exchanged, words and data would remain isolated facts. He emphasizes that the most important foundation skill for anyone in the

new world of work and in the COVID 19 era is the ability to communicate and being able to express your ideas effectively. Ability to work well in teams, to manage subordinates and relationships with seniors, customers and colleagues, depend on an effective communication skill.

Hamidi and Barati, (2011) mentioned that Communication skill is the main input for planning, leading, organizing, and controlling the resources and processes of any organization in order to achieve the main goals. In educational organizations, communication skill is one of the most important aspects in improving the teaching profession.

Most employers are insisting that, TVET institutions should develop student's communication skills since only disciplinary knowledge is not enough for successful career (Sonnenschein, & Ferguson, 2020). While there is much debate on what type of skills required, the need for effective communication skills is inevitable for a graduate to enter labour market (Jackson, 2016). Scholars Stowe et al., (2012) highlighted that employers emphasizes written, verbal and interpersonal skills as among important communication skills required. While Heron, (2019) reported that, oral communication, that means the ability to make presentation to diverse range of audiences are very important for any graduate to master. Likewise, Robles, (2012) maintains that communication is an important interpersonal skill.

Communication is one of the most important employability skills that any employer requires to make their products more competitive in the market. Employers consider effective communication skills as an important tool to improve productivity in an industry/company. Wahyuni et al., (2018) acknowledged that preparing the graduates with skills that meet the industry requirements is still a challenge that must be dealt with by the Technical Vocational Education and Training institutions. Communication skills are essential for graduates to venture into a job market where most employers emphasize communication skills in the selection of new employees (Amiruddin et al., 2015). Graduates produced by TVET often fail to meet the needs of the employers which sometimes may result into unemployment.

TVET Graduates' communication skills have been an issue of concern by employers. Apart from excellent academic performances in technical skills, employers expect graduates to have good communication skills attributes for workplace communication. Graduates' inability to meet these expectations have been found to be one of the reasons not getting employed or to self-employed.

Employers require a graduate who has ability to communicate clearly and share thoughts, feelings and ideas with other people. Moore and Morten, (2017) affirm that a student from higher education need to be prepared well so that they can be ready for work, but it is important that he/she is able to read, write, speak and listen well in order to communicate properly. Bharathi, (2016) acknowledged that Communication skills are recognized as important elements in education of the modern generation. Personality development remains incomplete if the communication skills are ignored.

Communication skills are needed by graduates because every job requires initiative, flexibility, and one's ability to accept different tasks (Hanafi, 2014). These skills allow someone to be able to read the opportunity to succeed because it has a good effect on how a person works (Kazilan, Hamzah, & Bakar, 2009; Sisodia & Agarwal, 2017).

Effective communication is vital in this era of globalization and COVID 19. It is a combination of effective listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Effective communication enables one to establish and maintain both personal and professional relations successfully (Barathi, 2016). The study confirms the fact that a graduate with solid knowledge of communication skills will be able to develop self-confidence and increase the individuals' employment opportunities. It is a known fact that a common job requirement is to have good oral communication skills in addition to the technical knowledge (Barathi, 2016). This study, therefore, investigated the communication skills attributes for TVET graduates required by employers to enter job market.

3. Methodology

Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) described research methodology as a component which includes the proposed research design, population and sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and measurement of variables. This section explains research design, population and sampling procedures and validity and reliability of the research instrument.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed quantitative research approach using descriptive survey design. Kothari, (2007) defined research design as the overall strategy that one may choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical manner. He also points that research design constitutes the blueprint or the roadmap for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data as to obtain answers to research questions. Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) added that the major purpose of descriptive research is description of state of affairs at present. He further defined as a design which is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual or a group of people. Descriptive survey design was adopted because it describes the actual situations of the communication skills attribute required by employers for a graduate to enter job market.

3.2 Population and sampling procedures

A total of one hundred and fifty (150) out of 300 employers were randomly selected from five regions of Tanzania to respond to the questionnaire. The regions involved were Dar es salaam, Dodoma, Mwanza, Arusha and Mbeya. The regions were selected because of the high concentration of industries which absorb most of the TVET graduates. A total of 107 respondents, which is (71.3%), returned the filled questionnaires.

3.3 Validity and reliability

To ensure acceptable validity and reliability of the instrument prior to data collection, the instruments were given to experts for scrutiny and go through them and gave necessary recommendations for improvement. To establish acceptable reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted to industries/employers which were not part of the sample. Cronbach's Alpha (α) was used to measure internal consistency strength. Reliability test yielded 0.931 Cronbach's Alpha for eleven (11) items of communication skills attributes which means the questionnaire was highly reliable. The cu-toff point of acceptable reliability was 0.7, the questionnaire was considered reliable for data collection as seen in table 1

Table 1: Reliability Analysis Results

Communication skills attributes items	Cronbach's Alpha
Ability to use visual aids in oral and written presentation	.954
Ability to express ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively in writing and in speech	.921
Ability to prepare and deliver an oral presentation of the offered services to the clients or other people	.924
Ability to answer questions in front of audiences	.923
Ability to build positive public relations	.922
Ability to speak fluently and correctly	.924
Ability to ask for an apology when feeling guilty	.922
Ability to negotiate with the clients/customers	.923
Ability to write clearly, concise and correct manner	.918
Ability to conduct meetings and minute writing for different occasions	.918
Ability to build team and team work	.924

3.4 Data analysis

Statistics in terms of frequency and percentage was employed to analyze and present data from the questionnaire. The open-ended questions in the questionnaire were analyzed to come up with proper interpretation of results.

4. Results and Discussion

Employers were asked to rate communication skill attributes for TVET graduate required to enter job market by indicating very important, important, quite important, less important and not important.

Table 2: Responses for communication skills attributes required by employers for a graduate to enter job market

Communication Skill Attributes	Very important		Important		Quite important		Less important		Not important	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Ability to use visual aids in oral and written presentation	51	47.7	33	30.8	20	18.7	3	2.8	00	00
Ability to express ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively in writing and in speech	74	69.2	27	25.2	6	5.6	00	00	00	00
Ability to prepare and deliver an oral presentation of the offered services to the clients or other people	79	73.8	20	18.7	8	7.5	00	00	00	00
Ability to ask for an apology when feeling guilty	83	77.6	19	17.8	5	4.7	00	00	00	00
Ability to negotiate with the clients/customers	78	72.9	24	22.4	5	4.7	00	00	00	00
Ability to write clearly, concise and correct manner	82	76.6	18	16.8	7	6.5	00	00	00	00
Ability to conduct meetings and minute writing for different occasions	78	72.9	23	21.5	6	5.6	00	00	00	00
Ability to build team and team work	86	80.4	17	15.9	4	3.7	00	00	00	00

Findings in table 2 indicate that 86 (80.4%) rated ability to build team and team work skills as very important 83 (77.6%) rated ability to ask for an apology when feeling guilty as very important while 82 (76.6%) rated ability to write clearly, concise and correct manner as very important too. Likewise 79 (73.8%) rated ability to prepare and deliver an oral presentation of the offered services as very important, 78 (72.9%) rated ability to conduct meetings and minute writing for different occasions, and ability to negotiate with the clients/customers skills as very important, also 74 (69.2%) rated ability to express ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively in writing and in speech are very important, 51 (47.7%) rated ability to use visual aids in oral and written presentation as very important skills. The study found that seven (07) communication skill attributes were rated as very important aspects for any graduate from TVET to acquire before entering the job market. These attributes are 1. ability to build team and teamwork 2. ability to ask for an apology when feeling guilty 3. ability to write clearly, concise and correct manner 4. ability to prepare and deliver an oral presentation of the offered services 5. ability to conduct meetings and minute writing for different occasions, and ability to negotiate with the clients/customers 6. ability to express ideas, thoughts and feelings effectively in writing and in speech 7. ability to use visual aids in oral and written presentation. This finding concurs with Wayahuni et al, (2018) who also found ten (10) communication skills attributes with the highest important level required to enter the workplace. These are Build teamwork to achieve common objectives; Create a harmonious relationship through mutual communication; Make the team to interact and synergize; Provide the support and improve self-confidence; Build optimism and spirit of the team at work; Utilize the information system to exchange information; Motivate individual or group to achieve the expected objectives; Resolve conflicts through negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy process; Build the trust from others; Build the relationship with people from different backgrounds.

These results indicate that there were the same need related communication skills to enter the workforce. These findings imply that employers are lacking these skills from graduates and this calls for curriculum developers to ensure include these communication skills attributes into TVET curriculum.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The present study concludes that important communication skill abilities required by employers for TVET graduates

includes and not limited to ability to build team and work in a team, ability to ask for an apology when feeling guilty, ability to write clearly, concise and correct manner, ability to prepare and deliver an oral presentation of the offered services in an organization to improve productivity, ability to conduct meetings and minute writing for different occasions and a graduate with an ability to negotiate with the clients/customers within and outside the organization.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made from the stud:

1. TVET institutions should put emphasis on developing graduates with key competencies and skills that will help them to get employed or employ themselves. Hence, in the era of COVID-19, communication skills have become essential aspect of ensuring graduates are empowered and able to self-employ or get employment. Mastering of communication skills enables the graduate to be competitive at the job market.
2. Curriculum developers should include in the TVET curriculum all the communication skills attributes as required by employers. This indicates that there is a gap between what employers need and what is being taught in the TVET institutions do not match with their demands.
3. Curriculum implementers in TVET institutions to employ pedagogical methods which allow learners to dominate the learning sessions and come up with creativity and innovations that can help improve communication skill's development.

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