

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: THE VOICE OF AGRICULTURAL TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ATVET) STUDENTS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The graduate employability has seen most governments, institutions of higher learning and industries engaging each other, as industries feel universities and colleges are churning out graduates that are not work ready. This has led to many strands to the discourse of graduate employability. One strand of the discourse is whether the higher education institutions should produce work-ready graduates. Another strand of the discourse is on how these institutions can make their graduates work ready, if it is an expectation that the graduates should be work ready. There is also another strand of the discourse on what constitutes graduate employability, that is, what skills make graduates work ready. This article looks at the latter from the perspectives of Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) students in Zimbabwe. The article reports on part of a major study that was conducted on student internship and employability. Data was collected through focus group discussions with final year students from three agricultural colleges, that were selected using an eclectic sampling strategy which incorporated both typical case and maximal variation. The study showed that students view soft skills, namely entrepreneurship, financial literacy, innovativeness, ethics, problem-solving, honesty and some technical skills as essential to them.

Keywords: employability, TVET, ATVET, generic skills, technical skills, graduate attributes

INTRODUCTION

This article is premised on the findings of a bigger study that was conducted in Zimbabwe. Among the research questions in the study, was a question that required to establish what students felt were the ideal attributes an Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) student should acquire to foster employability after graduation. Literature

is awash with graduate employability skills albeit being complex and contested, but they seem to be based on what employers and institutions have prescribed for the students (Nugraha et al. 2020; Osmani et al. 2019; Zegwaard, Campbell, and Pretti 2017; Rowe and Zegwaard 2017; Bridgstock 2017; Oliver 2015; Ismail and Mohammed 2015, Hillage and Pollard 1998; Rust and Froud 2011; Lowden et al. 2011; Caballero and Walker 2010). This article brings in the voice of a rather neglected critical stakeholder in curriculum development, the consumer of the curriculum, the student. The student is the recipient of the employability development agenda and discourse but rarely involved in the development of the agenda itself (Lisá, Hannelová, and Newman 2019; Tymon 2013). The voice of the student is found largely missing in most employability literature (Leggett, Kinear, and Boyce 2004).

Recent developments, in higher education the world over, has seen a strong emphasis placed on making graduates ready for work (Moore and Morton 2015). Colleges and universities are persistently urged to ensure that they produce employable graduates. This is, however, despite the fact that there is a philosophical question of whether they should (Tymon 2013). Institutions are, therefore, under pressure to take on-board employability in their establishments. This entails the institutions improving their outputs and market responsiveness by producing relevant graduates. In Zimbabwe, for an example, questions have been posed as to how relevant institutions of higher learning are, in producing graduates that meet industry requirements (Report on Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education: Consultative meeting on Industrial Attachment for university students, February 2012).

Institutions of higher education in countries such as Australia and Indonesia, put serious attention on training methodologies that embrace real work experiences as a way of preparing college and university graduates for the world of work (Campbell and Zegwaard 2011; Paryono 2014). In Zimbabwe, most institutions of higher learning are embracing industrial attachment (IA) as instrumental in equipping students with the required employability skills, which make the graduates functional in the work environment.

Employability has become, and is likely to continue to be, a major issue for a variety of stakeholders in higher education (Bennet 2018; Holmes 2013). Despite debate about whether institutions of higher learning can and should develop employability skills in students, most of the institutions the world over include the development of employability skills within their curricula. On the other hand, employers have continued to say that graduates are not ready for the world of work and lack some of the basic skills needed for successful employment. What really are these skills? Do students view the plethora of skills produced by academics and workplace personnel as valuable to them?

Student engagement in curriculum development at higher education level is fast becoming

ubiquitous. The general feel is that students should participate fully in their learning environments and engage in the processes of enhancement and change. This ensures that the curricula and pedagogy are kept relevant not only for the employer but also to the student since they (curricula and pedagogy) will be need based and market based. However, agricultural education and training in sub-Saharan Africa is said to be “slow to adapt to new patterns of demand” and “lacks proper mechanisms for identifying emerging needs as well as for reforming curricula” (Cletzer et al. 2016, 80).

LOCATING ATVET IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF TVET IN ZIMBABWE

ATVET is a sector among a plethora of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes offered in Zimbabwe. In general, TVET in Zimbabwe is under the administration of a wide range of providers (UNESCO 2018). TVET is viewed as a skills-oriented education that has prospects of stimulating employability and national development. The providers of TVET include Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Science and Technology Development (MHTESTD), Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, Ministry of Lands, Agriculture. It should, however, be noted that the MHTESTD is ordinarily considered the custodian of all education and training post-secondary school level. TVET under the auspices of this ministry culminates in students acquiring diploma or certificates that are endorsed by the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO). In general, there is no a one-size fit all TVET system in the world. The systems differ according to the socio-economic context of a particular country/nation (Mutitu, Odongo, and Kihu 2018).

ATVET has been aptly defined as that agricultural education that “... involves the study of the technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in agriculture ...” (Kirui and Kozička 2018, 4). This brings to the fore that ATVET can be offered at school level (primary and secondary) and tertiary (colleges and universities). It has, however been historically focused on the production systems/technologies (production skills) and was directed to producers (Jones 2013; Johanson and Saint 2007). The question of what skills generally lies on the level, at educational level, ATVET is being taught. Just like TVET, ATVET has been widely placed within the formal and informal education systems but there is scholarly agreement that the formal one has been more dominant. The context of this article, however, views ATVET from the formal education system, specifically tertiary education level.

Tertiary ATVET institutions, in Zimbabwe, offer National Diploma in Agriculture, supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture which has its own Directorate of Agriculture Education and Farmer Training. The Ministry supervises the colleges whilst the quality

assurance is done by universities. The colleges are thus affiliated/accredited to universities for certification. Although the universities are institutions in the MHTESTD, the role of the ministry in ATVET institutions is vague and undefined (UNESCO 2018).

The three-year diploma programmes offered by ATVET institutions comprise two years residential studies and one year of supervised industrial attachment. The infusion of industrial attachment is deemed as a measure to enhance students' employability skills. The students are on campus in the first and third years whilst attachment is in the second year.

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY VERSUS GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

For the sake of lucidity, we would like to first clarify our understanding and definitions of employment and employability. This article would like to affirm that employment and employability, although conflated, are different. In brief, employment is the state of being on a job. There is, however, another view that a person running his/her own enterprises is also employed (self-employment) (Oliver 2015). Such people not only employ themselves but also employ others thereby contributing towards a country's level of employment. Employability is the capability/suitability of being employed/ ability to secure a job upon completing a study. The article addresses the former, hence does not look at the employment status/level of ATVET graduates in Zimbabwe. The article focuses on what students from selected Agriculture colleges in Zimbabwe viewed as worthwhile skills that would render them functional and productive in the field of agriculture. This is motivated by the fact that in a number of African countries, the public sector used to be the major employer of ATVET graduates. However, due to structural adjustment programmes most public sectors no longer have the capacity to employ new civil servants in line ministries (Vandenbosch 2006).

GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS.

There is no agreed definition of graduate employability. We would like to say that the definitions of employability have continued to evolve. Early authorities, in employability, defined it from the point of view of students' ability to access employment (Hillard and Pollard 1998; Yorke 2010) while others define it from the perspective of skills, as a "set of skills essential for one to get employment" (Artess, Forbes, and Ripmeester 2011; Rust and Froud 2011; Lowden et al. 2011; Caballero and Walker 2010). From Hillage and Pollard's (1998) standpoint employability has to do with the capability of getting and keeping fulfilling work. In more recent years, employability has been broadened not to only encompass technical skills and attributes that make graduates work-ready but includes non-technical areas that include professional identity, personal attributes and networking (Zegwaard et al. 2017; Rowe and

Zegwaard 2017; Bridgstock 2017). Oliver (2015, 59) coins it as the ability to:

“... discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make (students/graduates) more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.”

What can be deduced from the afore highlighted conceptualizations is that; graduate employability focuses on an individual’s potential to acquire desired employment through developing appropriate human capital. This entails the graduate acquiring the requisite attributes that make him/her employable, emphasising the need for lifelong learning. From this perspective employability skills in TVET, can be expressed as those skills that are needed by TVET graduates to get employment, maintain it and perform well at a given workplace.

One commonly cited definition of employability is that it refers to a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations (Yorke 2006 as cited by Jollands 2015). Where a definition of individual employability of a graduate alludes to graduate attributes; it implies that individuals have, and are able to demonstrate, them in order to obtain jobs.

Employability skills in TVET can be put into three main categories/divisions: core, generic and personal attributes. There is, however, a generic versus core skills debate in terms of their significance to employability (Morrison 2014). At the end of it all there is general consensus that a TVET graduate with a rich core skills base and a strong application of generic skills is highly employable. The core skills pertain to subject specific skills which have been cited as “technical skills, hard skills, core competencies” (Pegg et al. 2012; Ismail and Mohammed 2015). These skills are necessary to performance at work and hence tend to be specific to certain occupations or fields (Bridgstock 2009). While these skills are essential for the job to be done, emphasis on them tends to be productivist in approach which may be a dead end on its own. The end result is production of “economic citizens in place of public good citizens” (Mtawa, Fongwa, and Wilson-Strydom 2019). Such graduates may be relevant in a given situation but become redundant should circumstances change. For this reason, focussing on the technical skills only is viewed as nonprogressive. This does not mean that they are not important. In ATVET these would include, but not limited to, production skills in a wide range of enterprises.

Generic skills have been articulated as “soft skills, enabling skills, transferable skills, essential skills, work skills”. They are non-technical but very essential for graduate employability (Haron et al. 2019; Tran 2012). The 21st century employer prefers graduates who

are equipped with these skills so that they can carry out tasks given in order to enhance an organisation's/company's productivity and competitiveness. Generic skills have generally been rated the most important asset by employers when selecting personnel to fill in vacancies in companies. They are considered as the most important asset by employers in choosing candidates to fill in the vacancy in their company (Mohd Makhbul et al. 2015). This is because they equip one to organise, adapt, and strategically apply any specific skill in a new circumstance or situation (Singh and Gera 2015). The soft skills include among many; teamwork, creativity, innovation and business skills. Harris and Berwyn (2018) suggest that vocational educational systems should focus more on teaching the generic skills. They advocate for the VET systems to also shift towards assessing and recording these skills than the trend in most systems where emphasis is on task-oriented technical skills.

Personal attributes have been branded as “traits, personal qualities, and generic green” in literature. Personal attributes, as Tymon (2013, 845) posits “... cross into differential psychology literature on personality traits and other individual differences ...”. These attributes have more to do with the inner self of the student/graduate. The personal attributes can be viewed as attitudes and abilities that enable one to contribute to and manage own work, collaborate with others especially in high performance work teams (Curtis and McKenzie 2001). The most cited attributes include, among others; adaptability, self-regulation, self-improvement, work ethic, self-confidence and willingness to learn. With the increasingly rapidly technological world it has become apparent that graduates should “learn how to learn”. However, the issue of whether these attributes can be developed is highly contentious. Some scholars believe personal attributes are innate (Kearns, 2001) while others say they are learnable (ACCI/BCA 2002). It appears scholars have not been able to designate conclusively what constitute personal attributes hence the discord in the discourse. However, we subscribe to the views by Haron et al. (2019) that the attributes can be cultivated/nurtured in students through pedagogies that promote students' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be viewed as the belief and ability of an individual to organise and conduct an action to completion (Bandura 1995). It, therefore, affects one's actions and ability to think and act. According to Bandura, three sources of sources of self-efficacy exist and these can be the basis for the pedagogies of tertiary education. The sources include mastery experiences, indirect experiences through social models and social influences. By sending students on attachment, at a real workplace environment, institutions avail them with mastery experiences as they get familiar with real workplace settings. As students interact with individuals within a community of practice (workplace) they pick social models around which they mould their inner selves. Self-efficacy culminates into self-authorship among graduates which is the footing of all other personal attributes. Higher

education can indeed switch on the self-efficacy mode among students by employing appropriate pedagogy that embraces the work environment. As Harris and Berwyn (2018) put it, today's employers prioritise personality, drive and passion and most have expressed that they can address any technical skills shortfalls, post recruitment.

In this article employability is construed to mean a set of achievements, i.e., skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and perform successfully in the chosen occupation. Among the employability assets are skills, professional knowledge (what one knows) and attitudes (the way one uses one's knowledge). By one calling herself/himself a graduate in a certain area, the graduate will be making a claim that he/she has the employability assets required by employers and should be able to showcase these to anyone who may so require to confirm the claim. We therefore see it prudent to end this brief, on graduate employability, with Holmes (2013, 550) exposition:

“... graduate employability can be considered as the always temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with those who are gatekeepers to those opportunities, particularly those who make selection decisions. In presenting themselves to the prospective employer, as a prospective employee, the individual is presenting their claim on being a graduate ‘worthy’ of such employment.”

METHODOLOGY

As pointed earlier on, in this article, this work is part of a bigger study in which the researchers were tracking the Industrial Attachment programme in Zimbabwe, therefore the methodology was informed by the bigger study. The bigger study involved three colleges from which a group of students, returning from IA, were selected. Student participants were drawn from three sampled Agricultural Colleges (ATVET institutions).

The researchers used an eclectic sampling strategy, in their selection of institutions. The sampling strategy employed both the typical and maximal variations techniques. Typical case entails one focusing on cases that represent or exhibit the phenomenon under investigation (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2011). The criterion for typicality was the number of years an institution had been involved in Agriculture Education. The longest serving institutions were selected, as the researchers assumed these had a history to fall on. Maximal variation incorporates diversity of the phenomenon in its entirety. In Zimbabwe ATVET institutions can be put into three categories, based on their affiliations for accreditation of Diploma Certificates. Sampling was such that all the three categories of the institutions were represented. The institutions were first precisely grouped according to their affiliations and then one longest serving member in each was selected to provide participants in focus group discussions (FGD).

Critical case sampling was employed in the selection of student participants at institution level. As Patton (2015, 276) posits a critical case sampling involves selecting a small number of important cases to "... yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge". Third-year students were deemed the ideal category, from which participants were to be selected. These were final year students who were returning from attachment hence were presumed to be information rich, as they had a feel of the workplace. Ten returning student participants were randomly selected among the third-year students only, at each college. Randomization had to be employed due to the overwhelming numbers of students who wanted to participate in the study. The researchers chose a figure of ten (10) participants per focus group per institution, as informed by Moser and Korstjens (2018) and Nyumba et al. (2018). These argue that ten is considered large enough a number to gain a variety of perspectives but small enough not to become disorderly. Big numbers, as high as twelve members are difficult to manage and can easily disintegrate to two, hence are discouraged. On average, the final year student enrolment stood at 35.

Data was collected through ten-member focus group discussions (FGD) with the returning students. Before the commencement of any proceedings, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their freedom to participate. The participants were also informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study whenever they felt like. With the consent of the participants, proceedings from the FGDs were audiotaped using a dictaphone.

A thematic analysis was done informed by Nyumba et al. (2018), Creswell (2003), and Merriam (2009) who are of the view that the process comprises data management, coding and integration.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The article regularly refers to an instrument from which an excerpt was taken. Reference instruments, to that effect, carry subscript letters (a, b or c). The subscript indicates the college from which a given view is attributed. A digit attached to FGD signifies the student number in the group. For example, *FGD_a-5* implies the item is attributed to what emerged from the focus group discussion at College A and the statement is attributed to student number 5.

As alluded to in the introduction, students were asked to indicate those skills which they felt would make an ATVET graduate employable. Generally, discussions in groups were very lively with some students even reflecting what transpired when they were out on attachment. The students dwelt on issues to do with entrepreneurship, innovativeness, financial literacy, technical skills (hands-on person), ethics, honesty, problem solving. Progressive authorities believe that TVET programmes should respond to current and future skills requirements needs

largely of a nation and to some extent the global village. The skills highlighted by the students tend to also reflect the same impression. Most of the skills highlighted by the students appeared to be driven by their nation's economic woes and the high level of employment in the country.

Entrepreneurial skills

There was general consensus, among students from the FGDs, that ATVET graduates should possess entrepreneurial skills. During the discussions, quite a number of terms were thrown around to exemplify entrepreneurship, e.g., *job creator (FGD_b)*, *self-starter (FGD_a)* and *business minded (FGD_c)*. As one student put it,

“During my training I expect to be taught and mentored on how to run my own agricultural enterprises. That is why I chose to be at college and also why I chose a particular organisation for my attachment, in the first place. I need to be a self-starter.” (FGD_a-4).

Another student argued,

“... some people say they want to be managers but for one to be to that he/she should have an entrepreneurial flavour.” (FGD_c-2).

Entrepreneurship has not been cited strongly, in literature, as an essential employability. The request by the ATVET students, to be acquainted with entrepreneurial skills, however, brings a critical component in alleviating youth unemployment. As cited earlier in this article, the public sector which used to employ ATVET graduates in Zimbabwe has frozen new employment, leading to high unemployment of the ATVET graduates. What this entails is that ATVET graduates now need other skills that can make them earn a living in the absence of no jobs from the number one employer. This probably explains why they cited “entrepreneurship” as an essential skill as they see it as an option to counter unemployment. This probably is calling for a curriculum review in the sector to address the concerns. This in line with Blignaut's (2020) view of addressing a national problem. Blignaut (2020) advocates for a curriculum transformation that enables South Africa to overcome some of its social ills through education. In his argument, Blignaut puts emphasis on moulding a new generation, of South Africans, that shun racism, indecency and inhumane tendencies through the education system. In the same token, the students appeared to be expressing a solution to the problem ATVET graduates are facing after completing their training.

Innovativeness

Most students highlighted the need for innovativeness as a critical skill expected of an ATVET

graduate should develop on attachment.

“Climate change is here to stay, and agriculture will no longer be the same. An ATVET ... should be able to come up with innovative means of mitigating climate change. I, therefore, expect the place of attachment to give me room to put my ideas to practice.” (FGD_a-9).

“My attachment was predominantly what I would call ‘knowledge transfer’. It lacked innovation. I was not given room to try-out things or experiment. Ideally a training in our area needs one to be innovative. In my case, it appeared they wanted me to operate like a technically efficient robot.” (FGD_c-3).

“Self-authorship is achieved by someone who is willing to learn, come up with innovative solutions and not afraid of criticism.” (FGD_a-1).

Another student chipped in, citing the Education 5.0 model of education championed by Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.

“Our parent ministry is calling us to innovate so as to industrialize, so if my experiences at college and attachment place do not make me achieve that, then *ndakaenderei kuattachment kwacho?* (Translated – then why did I go for attachment?)” (FGD_a-3).

The student was referring to an education thrust that was introduced by her parent ministry in which universities and colleges were challenged to produce graduates who should proffer solutions to the country and their societies. According to the Education 5.0 philosophy, the functions of higher education institutions were raised to five, i.e., besides teaching, research and community service, the institutions should embrace innovation and industrialization. The two new functions call for post-secondary education programmes to produce goods and services that are saleable and/or patentable. During the time of this study, the notion of innovation was abuzz.

Some participants brought in the idea of problem-solving attached to innovativeness. One participant put it,

“The world of agriculture education always calls for one to think outside the box. One should understand the problem, be it at a farm, and find solutions. My stay at college and place of attachment should create an environment that allows me to be a problem-solver.” (FGD_a-6).

“Farmers out there need solutions from us the educated youths. I want to be out there addressing farmers’ needs. My education should empower me with such a critical skill.” (FGD_c-8).

Technical proficiency/Hard skills

Students at one college suggested that they would consider technical skills as very essential.

“I know there are certain jobs in life that require academic intelligence, but I am sorry if one is to be a sound graduate of Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training, one should at all cost demonstrate what I would term practical intelligence. There is no place for bookish material at all, one just has to have the technical ability, that technical knowhow (There is a loud applause soon after that contribution).” (FGD_b-3).

“Hands-on skills in raising and managing almost all classes of livestock in farms. How will I operate as an expert be it at a farm or educating children in schools, should I decide to join the teaching profession?” (FGD_b-7).

“Have an appreciation of agronomy so that I can handle a wide range of crops be it here in Zimbabwe, the region and globally. I am not saying I should know production technologies of all crops, no. I want agronomic knowledge that I can apply on my own.” (FGD_b-4).

“Horticulture is serious business, any graduate who purports to have passed through an ATVET programme should demonstrate not only knowledge in the field but should be able to perform practically on the ground.” (FGD_b-9).

This response was a bit unique, as it emerged from one college. A closer look at the college shows that is the oldest among the participant institutions. It is also one of the colleges that are regularly listed, in job advertisements, as potential sources of graduates needed for employment in the area of agriculture. The loud applause by students after student 3’s contributions points to the value students at this college put on technical skills. These students’ views appear inclined towards agricultural productivity.

Financial literacy

Students from across the three colleges felt that financial literacy should be a skill imparted to all ATVET graduates during their training.

“Agriculture is business. I feel a highly employable ATVET graduate should have the capability to draw budgets and balance farm accounts.” (FGD_c-2).

“Sound decision making is a requirement in agriculture. Now for one to do that, there is need for some comparative analysis, in terms of financial gains. Otherwise, will end up making expensive decisions.” When the student was asked to clarify, she indicated, “... an expensive decision is one where someone opts for a less profitable endeavour when the resources available can sustain a more profitable one.” (FGD_a-10).

“I had a difficult time, at my place of attachment, when the farm owner wanted to invest his profits from the 2018 season back into agriculture (FGD_a-9). The farm manager and myself did not know what to advise the farmer to invest in. I think we need some schooling in terms of managing *mari iyi* (this money).” (FGD_b-1).

A closer analysis of these students’ views suggests that financial literacy could be linked to entrepreneurship. The students appeared to be eyeing self-employment hence the need to be financially literate. In an era where youth unemployment is an issue across most third world

countries, this skill can come handy as graduates can use it build their own business empires. In our view this does not only apply to ATVET but most TVET programmes.

Honesty/Trustworthy

The students highlighted the need for graduates to be honest beings. Their argument was premised on the fact that for most agricultural settings, the person appointed to be in-charge is normally entrusted with almost everything by the owner.

“Most bosses do not reside in farm settings. They rely on me and therefore give me all the resources for use. This cannot be down to someone who shows a dubious character.” (FGD_a-7). This is followed by an ovation: “Yeeeees yeeeees!”

“When I was on attachment my boss was very open with me. She said she was more comfortable with me because of my uprightness. We should show employers we are worthy to be entrusted with resources be it financial or material resources.” (FGD_b-8).

Ethical understanding

There was much discussion on ethics. The students highlighted that colleges should produce graduates who are conscious and put human health first in whatever agricultural production activity. There was consensus that agricultural produce should be safe for consumers so there is need to inculcate an ethical culture among students, during their training.

“The health of all nations is in the hands of farmers. One should just do his/her farming job properly without risking the lives of consumers of our products.” (FGD_c-8).

“I say no shortcuts to farming.” (FGD_b-5).

“I have been on attachment and I wasn’t impressed by the way some people do their business. The harvest intervals of pesticides are not being followed at all.” (FGD_c-10).

“In livestock production, I witnessed people using antibiotics meant for humans to treat livestock diseases. An employable graduate should exhibit some conscience, for the sake of human health and the environment.” (FGD_c-2).

DISCUSSION

It would appear that the ATVET students perceived employability skills differently from what literature largely posits. Literature views employability skills from the neo liberal model perspective which puts emphasis on skills that employers want from students. On the contrary, participant students in our study appeared to be focussing on self-employment. For them, skills that would make them worthwhile entrepreneurs were more plausible than most of the documented skills sets outlined by most scholars in the employability discourse (Zegwaard et al. 2017; Rowe and Zegwaard 2017; Bridgstock 2017; Ismail and Mohammed 2015; Pegg et al.

2012; Tymon 2013; Bridgestock 2009; Yorke, 2006). It would appear that the difference is brought about by the industry-led approach (neo liberal model) that Higdon (2016) laments takes precedence in most governments policies. Students are prepared for the labour market hence they “... are encouraged to collect these skills, as if deposits in a bank” (Higdon 2016, 177) and get rewarded depending on how much the student acquired. We concur with Higdon that higher education systems seem to be failing to take students and graduate views on board to inform higher education curricula. A closer look at the high level of unemployment in Africa could be linked to the gap between the expectations of students and that of industry enunciated through governments and higher education institutions. Higher education systems in Africa, in our view, should endeavour to produce graduates that have the capacity to create employment and this is what the participant students also echoed. The findings presented above have clear implications for curriculum development in higher education wherein future policy, in higher education, needs the student voice. There is need to take students as collaborative partners when determining the curricula for higher education institutions. Without such a transformation of the curriculum, especially in the ATVET/TVET field, higher education will continue producing disgruntled graduates who continue to add up on the numbers of unemployed youths instead of graduates who create employment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA (HEIS)

The dominant international discourse of employability appears to be masking youths’ view of employability in developing countries. Youths in Africa and the developing world have to grapple with “unemployment” in their respective countries, hence to them an education system that nurtures an entrepreneurial consciousness is more productive than a system that prepares them to move around in search of jobs. This implies that the curriculum in higher education systems in the continent should be guided by the needs of these youths, as they are future of Africa. Curricular in HEIs should equip students with essentials skills that enable them to utilise the rather massive untapped resources in their respective countries. The curriculum should also reflect the developmental needs of a country.

In our view Africa, as developing continent, should have a development agenda that should inform curricular in HEIs. We are not against “Internationalization/Globalization” but are of the view that the African agenda should be the cornerstone of curricular in HEIs. There maybe need for a curriculum transformation that speaks to the need of Africa.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored a less chartered area in the employability discourse. The student has often been highlighted as the beneficiary of the higher education system, but the same student is not a key participant in what the curricula should provide. The findings have shown that the absence of a student's voice from the employability agenda for higher education has created discord between what institutions want to inculcate in students and what students want for their advancement in life.

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