

# Strategies to Enhance Employability of TVET Graduates in Ethiopia: Evidence from Literature and Documents

Zewdu Teshome Woldesemayat (Corresponding Author)  
PhD Candidate, Ethiopian Civil Service University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
E-mail: zedtes@gmail.com

Dr. Birhane Sime Geressu  
Associate Professor of Public Policy and Leadership  
Ethiopian Civil Service University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## Abstract

The growing number of unemployed graduates in Ethiopia has made TVET institutions to focus on employability enhancement strategies. The purpose of this paper was to examine the policies and laws addressing employability and also to identify strategies in place to enhance employability of TVET graduates in Ethiopia. A qualitative approach was employed. The study used secondary data sources involving, reviews of documents and relevant literature in an attempt to answer the research questions. The information were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the issue of graduate employability has been integrated in national policies and strategies, and international laws though limited implementation of these policies in enhancing employability of graduates in Ethiopia. Finally, the study concluded that TVET institutions should work mainly on the identified strategies as they might have positive contributions to producing competent graduates as well as insuring employability.

**Keywords:** Employability, Graduates, TVET Institution, Ethiopia

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## 1. Introduction

One of the main focuses of higher education institutions (HEIs) is to prepare graduates for any form of employment. To be specific, HEIs are expected to produce quality and employable graduates who are ready either for employment in the labour market or for self-employment through establishment of a company or being organized in cooperatives. “Employability” has become controversial and widely debatable word (Harvey, 2001). However, the Knight & Yorke’s definition of the term has been acknowledged by many literature. They described graduate employability as “a set of achievements- skills, understanding and personal attributes – that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Knight & Yorke, 2003). This definition refers to the ability of a graduate to work in a job and be able to move between jobs, and thus remaining employable throughout his/her life. According to McGunagle & Zizka (2020), graduate employability has long been a dominant debate in the discourse of higher education for the reason that HEIs are mainly aimed at generating entrepreneurs and workplace ready graduates. Graduate employability is also of a major area of interest within the fields of higher education (Iyer, 2021; Rowe and Zegwaard, 2017; Hinchliffe, 2006; Cole, Rubin, Feild and Giles, 2007; De Grip, Van Loo and Sanders, 2004).

The issue of employability had never been an agenda of higher education across the globe for centuries (Taye, 2013). However, globalization, increased competition, accelerated technological change, massification of higher education and evolution of the knowledge-based economy have made the issue to receive a considerable critical attention. Alternatively, enhancing employability has become main concern of HEIs, employers, and other stakeholders due to the growing graduate unemployment and underemployment (Romgens et al, 2020; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Clarke, 2018; Small et al., 2018; Suleman, 2018; Flanagan, 2018; Sin & Amaral, 2017). However, the problem of graduate unemployment has still become worldwide (ILO, 2010; Tan and French-Arnold, 2012); and in particular it is claimed that the low level of graduate competencies and the poor quality of graduates that does not meet employers’ expectations are responsible for the growing trends of graduate unemployment (Perera, Babatunde, Pearson & Ekundayo, 2017; Hanapi, Nordin & Che-Rus, 2014; Aris, Baharum, Sanusi, Abdul-Rahman & Lee, 2013; Egulu, 2004; Johnson and Burden, 2003; Kivinen and Silvennoinen, 2002; Morley, 2001; De la Harpe, Radloff, and Wyber, 2000). It is therefore of primary concern to address the enhancement of graduates employability.

A number of policies and legal frameworks are enacted to integrate the issue of employability enhancement. Alternatively, various policies and laws at international and national levels are there to address the issue of employment and employability. Internationally, the legal frameworks include UN declarations, ILO constitution, ILO conventions and declarations recognize the issue of employability. In Ethiopia, different policies and laws at

federal and regional levels have been used to support employment and employability. The issue of employment and employability have been integrated in laws such as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution, the National Employment Policy and Strategy (NEPS), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy and Strategy, Industrial Development Strategy (IDS), and TVET Proclamation. Ethiopia is a youthful nation with 56% of its population is a working population of age range 15-64. According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2017) data, nearly 50% of the total population of the country, that is, 51,595,198 of students were enrolled at different levels of education in 2017. The data show that the number of graduates reached 290,813 in 2017, of which 31,097, 141,700, and 18,016 are graduates of TVET, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels respectively.

Currently, Ethiopia is experiencing unemployment challenges. According to the CSA survey (1995-2017), the rate of urban unemployment in Ethiopia increased to 19% in 2018 (CSA, 2018). According to the 2010 Ministry of Education report, only 20-23 percent of the TVET graduates from various institutions have got employment opportunities in 2010, and this has been a consistent indication for the problem is a nationwide. For TVET to hit its target, ideally, all its graduates should be employed and contribute to the economy (MoSHE, 2020; MoE, 2010). Even though employability has become main concern of higher education, graduate employability has been less researched in the context of TVET system. Besides, no previous studies has given sufficient considerations to the contribution of policies and laws in addressing graduate employability in TVET system. Hence, this particular study is conducted to assess the extent to which policies and laws are addressing employability in Ethiopia. The study also identifies the strategies used to enhance employability of TVET graduates. Based on the aforementioned information, the following basic questions are addressed in the paper.

1. What are the important provisions of international and national legal frameworks that support employment and employability in Ethiopia?
2. What strategies are suggested to enhance the employability of TVET graduates?

## 2. Method

The purpose of this study was to assess the policies and laws addressing employability and also to identify strategies in place to enhance employability of TVET graduates in Ethiopia. The study employed secondary data as main source of data. To this effect, reviews of documents and relevant literature have been conducted to answer the two research questions that guide the study. To see whether international and Ethiopian policies and laws are addressing the issue of employability, the study analyzed the articles and contents related to employment and employability. The study also reviewed policies and relevant literatures to identify major strategies that are meant to enhance employability of TVET graduates. The study used country policies, international legal documents and relevant journals as sources of data. The information were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis.

## 3. Theoretical Framework of Graduate employability

The concept of employability first appeared in Britain in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The concept has developed and extended with the increasing number of higher education graduates and the diversification of career forms in the labour market. Employability has been defined in many ways, and this makes the term subject to interpretation. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) defines employability as a combination of attributes, skills, and knowledge that all graduates or ready-to-work participants should have to demonstrate their capability in the labour market and bring benefits to themselves, organizations, and society (CBI/Nation Union of Students, 2011). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) points out that besides knowledge and skills, employability also includes teamwork ability, ability to handle non-routine procedures, ability to communicate and solve problems, and even transferability (Pont, 2001). *The Employability Skills Framework* of the Australian Government defines employability as the ability of individuals to achieve employment, career development, and potential realization, which includes communication skills, problem-solving skills, initiative and entrepreneurial skills, planning and organization skills, self-management skills, and scientific and technological skills (McLean et al., 2012). Employability is a term employers often use it as a measurement on graduates' marketability (Rahmat et al., 2012). Graduate employability can be defined as the compilation of a series of skills and abilities that a graduate can obtain to achieve a desirable job and succeed in his/her career (Tomlinson, 2012; Chen, 2017). Such skills and abilities enable the graduate to meet the desired requirements of employers and adapt to changes in the labour market.

Employability is not merely getting a job. According to Knight & Yorke (2003), employability is a set of achievement—skills, understandings and personal attributes—that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. It is a set of competences, skills, knowledge, attitudes, that graduates must possess to maintain and secure employment, and to ensure that they keep on being effective in the real workplace. Likewise, employability has been defined as having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal

attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Pool and Sewell, 2007). Harvey (2001) defined employability as the ability of graduates to get a satisfying job. Employability refers to a new graduate possessing a set of skills and/or competences that enable him or her to compete and secure employment, whether in formal employment, self-employment or any career (Harvey, 2003). For Nielsen (1999), employability holds an expression of how well individuals' competences and skills meet the requirements of the labour market. According to Fugate et al. (2004), being employable is expressed by how well individuals fit into the labour market based on, for instance their human and social skills.

The broader definition of employability is the one that is offered by De Grip et al. (2004), which embraces both the supply and demand side constructs:

*Employability refers to the capacity and willingness of workers to remain attractive for the labour market (supply factors), by reacting to and anticipating changes in task and work environment (demand factors), facilitate by the human resource development instruments available to them (institutions) (p. 216).*

Employability has been primarily an issue of concern in several fields of the economy, but in this context the emphasis is on students and graduates in TVET system. The definition of employability ranges from simple to inclusive measures, as stated by Hillage and Pollard (1998):

*In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment (p. 2).*

According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), employability represents the employability assets (knowledge, skills and attitudes) individuals possess, the way they use those assets and present them to the employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. This definition highlights the full range of skills that affect the ability of individuals to secure and maintain employment. Several literatures have suggested different definitions for graduate employability, and its attributes that are supposed essential for graduates. However, there is no agreement as to which attributes are most important in conceptualizing graduate employability (Tomlinson, 2012; Tran, 2015). HEIs including TVET are called upon to provide graduates with the right skills and attributes for employment. This is a challenge facing most education institutions in their endeavors to develop graduates who are able to actively participate in the labour market and economy (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). However, literature, policies, and practices have continued to put greater emphasis on enhancing trainees' technical skills and attributes for employment (Walker & Fongwa, 2017; Archer & Chetty, 2013; Andrews & Higson, 2008). The main responsibility of HEIs and TVET colleges is to produce graduates with technical skills and employability attributes that enable them secure employment and enhance employability. These skills include among others, diversity awareness, interpersonal skills, self-management, digital literacy, communication skills, critical thinking, and teamwork (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011). Pheko and Molefhe (2017) have also identified 14 skills including literacy, communication, commitment, numeracy, punctuality, personal presentation, teamwork skills, general information technology, customer service, problem solving, vocational job specific skills, advanced vocational jobspecific skills, business awareness, and enterprising skills. They also argue that providing graduates with the right skills and competences that meet the demands of employers and the contemporary world of work is a vital role of HEIs and training colleges (Pheko and Molefhe 2017). Thus, this paper argues that HEIs and, in particular TVET colleges should not confine themselves to training graduates for employment only, they should also develop trainees in the right way of enhancing the employability knowledge, skills and attitude that enable them to have choices in their jobs and career, and to have significant contribution in the socio-economic development.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Legal Framework of Graduate Employability

#### 4.1.1. International Legal Frameworks

The international laws support employment and employability. Laws such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Labour Organization Conventions are discussed here under.

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stipulates the following relating to employment: "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" (UN, 1948). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in its article 6, proclaims the right to work. The exercise of the right to work in all its forms and at all levels requires two essential elements: (1) States parties must have specialized services to assist and support individuals in order to enable them to identify and find available employment; and (2) The labour market must be open to everyone under the jurisdiction of States parties. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also provide the issue of employability, and are meant to realize the goal of decent work for all women and men by 2030. Goal number eight of the Sustainable Development Goals promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth through full and productive employment and decent work for all.

In the preamble of the ILO Constitution, the prevention of unemployment is provided as one improvement area to be recognized by every nation. The principal goal of ILO is to contribute to the promotion of full, productive, and freely chosen employment opportunities for all who are able to work. International Labour Organization Convention No. 122 concerning Employment Policy (1964) also speaks of “full, productive and freely chosen employment”, linking the obligation of States parties to create the conditions for full employment with the obligation to ensure the absence of forced labour. Work as specified in article 6 of the Covenant must be decent work, that is, work that respects the fundamental rights of the human person as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety and remuneration. Thus, the international legal instruments are providing provisions that support employability.

#### **4.1.2. The Legal Framework of Ethiopia**

The FDRE constitution, adopted in 1995, in its Article 41 and 42, recognizes Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Right of Labour respectively. In relation to employment, Article 41(7) of the same announces "the state shall undertake all measures necessary to increase opportunities for citizens to find gainful employment" (FDRE, 1995). This indicates that the FDRE constitution has given due emphasis to enhancement of employability and also, in particular, to labour rights by declaring it in a separate article. In addition, the Constitution recognizes that these provisions are interpreted in conformity with the international laws adopted by Ethiopia, and other global instruments related to employability. In this regard, Article 9(4) of the Constitution proclaims that “all international agreements ratified by the country are integral part of the law of the land”. The above provisions of the FDRE constitution show that the issue of employment and employability are constitutionally supported, and laws addressing the issue are being translated into action in compatible with the international conventions ratified by the country.

The National Employment Policy and Strategy (NEPS) is another policy planned at national level to guide and support issues related to employment and employability. The National Employment Policy and Strategy (NEPS) of Ethiopia is designed to effectively coordinate the employment creation efforts at different sectors (FDRE, 2016, 2009). The policy document reveals that a considerable number of employment opportunities have been created as a result of increased investment in the private sector, and public investments particularly in sectors of infrastructure, urban development, and housing construction (FDRE, 2016). However, the issue of unemployment has still remained a key agenda of the government.

Unemployment has become the issue of employability. According to the British Council (2014), increased educated youth in Sub-Saharan Africa has made employment challenging, since economies are not experiencing similar developments; and also they are not able to meet the demands of the labour market. Being one of the Sub-Saharan African countries, Ethiopia is suffering from youth unemployment, which would adversely affect the overall growth and development of Ethiopia (Agmassie & Reda, 2022). According to USAID (2017), more than two thirds of the Ethiopian population are below the age of 30, and around 27% of young people have no work. The main reason for the country’s unemployment is the mismatch between the rapidly growing labour force and growth rate of productive employment and income generation opportunities of the economy (FDRE, 2016). In view of the above facts, the revised national employment policy and strategy of Ethiopia has boldly specified the promotion of productive, decent and equitable employment opportunities for all its citizens who are willing and able to work (Ibid).

Ethiopia is known for its abundant labour force, and thus appropriate employment policy is definitely of great importance in coordinating the growing working force in an effective and productive manner. The country is also putting itself into vigorous action to make sure that graduates are equipped with the required competencies (knowledge, skill, and attitude) that the economy demands. As a result, a considerable number of jobs have been created; however, unemployment still becomes painful in the country. The revised employment policy and strategy (2016) called for improvements in areas of poor policy implementations and has given greater focus on the growth of employment-intensive sectors to enhance employability, particularly of the youth, and thereby reduce unemployment. The Ethiopian Industrial Development Strategy (IDS) also promotes labour-intensive focused industrialization to generate sufficient jobs for the highly growing labour force, since the economy is not generating the required job opportunities for the inexpensive skilled and semi-skilled labour, including graduates of the TVET institutions (Desta, 2021).

The Ethiopian TVET Policy and Strategy (2020) is a policy developed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in response to the current needs of the sector. It is the revision of the 2008 TVET strategy. The revision has been made in reaction to solve the challenges of the existed TVET system. The identified challenges and problems are mostly related to employability. These are: (1) The quality of the TVET system does not respond to labor market demands due to: Lack of adequate quality assurance system, Inadequate and outdated equipment, TVET trainers’ lack of industry experience, and Poor training infrastructure; (2) Lack of value attributed to TVET and poor perception which resulted in low enrolment in TVET; (3) Parents and young people still view TVET as a second option, or as education meant for school dropouts and trainees who cannot join higher education; (3) Lack of sustainable and innovative TVET financing system; (4)

Limited acceptance of TVET qualifications across other education streams; and (5) Graduates tend to lack foundation skills in such areas as reading, writing, mathematics, computing, communication, teamwork, problem solving, customer relations, and foreign languages.

The new TVET Policy and Strategy discloses the reasons that initiate the revision of the existed policy and strategy. The rapid expansion of TVET contributing significantly to the country's economy; the existed policy lacks fitness with the current education and labour market; the need to align the new policy with the education roadmap and prosperity plan, and through way to realize the national and sectorial ten years development plans are major reasons among others (MoSHE, 2020). The policy document notes that the mere expansion of TVET does not solve the problems of unemployment and low productivity of the economy, and hence there is a growing awareness that TVET must respond to the competence needs of the labour market (Ibid).

One of the main objectives of TVET is to assure and enhance the employability of trainees through the acquisition of employability skills related to the demands of the labour market (African Union, 2007). Similarly, the Ethiopian TVET Policy and Strategy is aimed at enhancing graduates' employability through development of their entrepreneurship and employability competences (MoSHE, 2020). The role of TVET institutions should not only be limited to producing trainees with specific areas of specialization but also more importantly, to developing a system to enhance their employability. As such, the Ethiopian TVET policy and strategy has set the goal of no unemployed TVET graduates (Ibid).

Actually, TVET has the responsibility of putting graduates at the very position for employment by improving trainees' entrepreneurship and employability skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are most demanding in the ever-changing labour market. TVET programs have to be linked to the labour market, since the ultimate goal of these programs is employment creation. The achievement of Ethiopia's national "Prosperity Plan" requires that citizens be equipped with the necessary skills to find employment in emerging industries and sectors (MoE, 2021). The Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP VI, 2020/21-2024/25), under Programme-3 Component-5 states 'Preparing students for the job market through a career and technical education programme.' The objective of Component-5 is to develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes for employability and entrepreneurship (MoE, 2021). On top of this, the curriculum review that will be undertaken throughout the life time of the ESDP VI is to enable the youth to develop the skills required for productive employment. Educational reform also focuses on equipping learners with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, i.e., the skills and values needed to become responsible citizens in a learning society and remain employable throughout life in a knowledge economy (Ibid). This is an indication that the ESDP VI has integrated the issue of employability in its programmes and components.

The current Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Proclamation prevail the sector to independent and significant sector for the country's development. According to the TVET Proclamation No. 954/2016, the general objective of TVET is to create a competent, motivated, employable, adaptable and innovative workforce through which the country's socio-economic development shall be enhanced. In the preamble of the proclamation, it has been noted that developing a competent, motivated, employable, adaptable and innovative human resource through the provision of demand driven TVET is vital for ensuring sustainable economic competitiveness. The proclamation is incorporating the agenda of employability into responsibility of the TVET system. The overarching objective of the new TVET policy and strategy is also to provide demand driven, high quality, relevant technical and vocational education and training to all citizens to create competent, motivated, employable, adaptable and innovative work force which can contribute to the prosperity of the country. To this effect, six core policy issues along with relevant strategies to achieve the policies are identified. The newly revised TVET policy and strategy has the mission of producing productive, self-reliant, competent and innovative workforce with employable skills to meet labor market demand in terms of both quality and quantity in order to contribute to the prosperity of Ethiopia. Hence, the current TVET policy and strategy has given due emphasis to the enhancement of employability by producing competent and employable trainees/graduates with the required entrepreneurship and employability competences.

## **4.2. Strategies To Enhance Graduate Employability**

### **4.2.1. Collaboration/ Partnership Between TVET and Industry**

Recently, several authors have been complaining about the inability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to prepare work-ready graduates (Australian Workplace Productivity Agency (AWPA), 2014) and suggesting that partnerships between industry and HEIs are of paramount importance. In Ethiopia, TVET-Industry linkage is recognized as of main strategy to strengthen the system of training and technology transfer (MoSHE, 2020). TVET institutions collaborate with industry not only to improve the training system but also to solve the problem of competence gap and ultimately enhance the employability of graduates. Hence, the link between TVET and industry is vital for skill development, employment generation, and technology transfer. Partnership between TVET and industry provides graduates with the required training that equips them with competences often needed by employers and makes them employment ready (Ma'dan et al., 2020; Collins, 2001). One of the

mission of TVET is “producing productive, self-reliant, competent and innovative workforce with employability skills to meet labor market demand in terms of both quality and quantity” (MoSHE, 2020). For this, collaboration and partnership with industry is imperative for ensuring that graduates’ competences are enhanced and aligned with the need of the industry through the provision of quality training, and also for enhancing graduate employability since industries are primary consumers of TVET graduates.

#### **4.2.2. Review of TVET Curriculum**

It is apparent that TVET curriculum is designed in a manner as to meet the needs of students, industry, employers and the labour market. Curriculum review should also be directed toward enabling the youth to develop the skills required for productive employment (MoE, 2021). The TVET strategy introduces occupational standards and outcome-based curriculum to ensure quality and relevance (MoE, 2008). It is apparent that in an outcome-based TVET system, the labour market demand is identified and occupational standards (OS) are developed by industry and then based on the OS, the curriculum is developed. In Ethiopia, however, TVET curriculum is often prepared by academics with little or no understanding of industry requirements or local needs (Singh & Tolessa, 2019). More importantly, TVET curriculum in Ethiopia is not a direct reflection of its occupational standard and its mapping is not in the right position to address the country’s labour market demand and training needs (Woyessa & Arko-Achemfuor, 2021). The TVET curriculum should be a true reflection of the occupational standards (OS). Occupational standard as indicated in the TVET policy and strategy is a standard defined by experts from the world of work indicating the skills, knowledge, and attitude that a trainee/graduate shall possess to productively perform in the world of work. In many cases, the occupational standard needs to be emanated from the need of the labour market. The occupational standards reflect the competence requirements of the world of work of each programs, though its practice was not demand-driven, and without the needs and full involvement of the industry (MoSHE, 2020).

As indicated in the Curriculum Development Manual, TVET curricula need to align with and reflect the specific context of occupational standard (MoSHE, 2020; MoE, 2012). According to Zhao & Raune (2014), TVET systems are usually facing challenge of producing sufficient number of graduates with the right skills demanded by the labour market. Similarly, TVET colleges in Ethiopia have been performing below expectations in developing demand-based curriculum and implementing competence-based training, and as a result, nearly 50 percent of TVET graduates have not been employed (Geressu, 2017). According to Fallows and Steven (2000), HEIs should enhance graduate employability through inclusion of generic competences into their curricula, since the existing knowledge of academic subjects alone would not essentially make graduates be qualified and competent in the current knowledge-driven economy and fast-changing labour market conditions.

One of the policy goals of the Ethiopian TVET policy and strategy is to develop an outcome-based quality TVET curriculum that would enable to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes set in the occupational standards (MoSHE, 2020). To this end, a number of strategies are provided. Among these, incorporating generic competencies such as English Language, Mathematics, Physical Education, Civic and Ethical Education etc. into the curriculum to enhance trainees’ mental, physical, emotional, technical and communication skills; and designing the TVET curriculum in a manner that would lead to the development of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. With this, TVET colleges would be able to instill sufficient skills through their curriculum design and reviews that would reflect the occupational standards comprising the competence requirements of the world of work. In doing so, it would be possible that TVET curriculum contributes significantly to graduate employability enhancement.

#### **4.2.3. Cooperative Training**

Cooperative training is a model of training by the cooperation of enterprises/industries and TVET institutions whereby trainees spend much of their time in the enterprises/industries to acquire industrial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences of the industrial environment and the remaining time in TVET institutions to acquire basic skills and theoretical concepts (MoSHE, 2020). According to MoE (2010), cooperative training refers to the cooperation between two parties, TVET institutions and enterprises/industries, whereby the former equips trainees with the basic competencies of general and occupation specific concepts and knowledge whereas the latter provides practical training so that trainees will ultimately acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude in a desired occupation. In a cooperative training, the enterprise/industry is expected to provide training workshops, machinery, equipment, consumable materials and well-equipped trainers for the delivery of training (MoE, 2010). This will improve the quality of the current Ethiopian TVET system. Hence, cooperative training describes a partnership model between TVET institutions and industry with the aim of delivering quality training jointly. With this, the practice-theory ratio of 70:30 is translated into effect in the TVET provision.

It is believed that the trainees undergone through cooperative training shall be competent during the occupational assessment because they experienced the real competencies required in the occupational standard that reflects the needs of labour market (MoE, 2010). After all, trainees would acquire practical and workplace experiences since 70% of the formal TVET trainings are delivered in the industry. This will enable the prospective graduates to polish their skills, develop proper work habits and self-confidence so that they can be employed or self-employed after completing their training. And this will ultimately enhance their employability.

#### **4.2.4. Strengthening Quality Assurance System**

Quality is a multidimensional concept which is difficult to define; however, the UNESCO's definition of the term seems important. Quality is a multi-dimensional concept which should embrace all functions, and activities; teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to community, and academic environment (UNESCO, 2010). Quality assurance (QA) can be viewed as performance measures designed by the authorities for assessing the performance of educational institutions with a view to ensuring that the learning outcomes meet the needs of the society (Onyesom and Ashibogwu, 2013; Igborgbor, 2012). QA can also be conceptualized as established procedures, processes and standard systems that support and ensure effective delivery of educational services (Kontio, 2012). Similarly, quality assurance (QA) is a critical examination of the objectives, attitudes, procedures and institutional control systems with a view to ensuring that set standards and quality are maintained (Fadokun, 2005). The essence of QA is to enhance the effectiveness of education system towards achieving set standards (Onyesom and Ashibogwu, 2013). With specific application to TVET, a quality assurance is imperative in the learning environment (school setting) to provide policy-makers with deeper understanding of vocational education, its functions, set goals and key characteristics (ETF, 2012).

Within the policy circles, QA represents a potent “tool which enables policy makers to determine national educational needs, to assess new approaches to resolving issues, and to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and strategies” (Asian Development Bank, 1996). QA has its own indicators. According to Ehindero (2004), quality assurance indicators include: (i) the learners' behavioural characteristics, attributes and demographic factors, (ii) the teacher's professional competencies/pedagogic skills, (iii) the teaching processes, curriculum and learning environment, (iv) the outcomes of education. UNESCO (2002) also identified five key components of quality assurance indicators. These are: (i) What learners gain; (ii) Quality Learning Environments; (iii) Quality Content; (iv) Processes that support Quality; and (v) Outcomes from the learning environment. An effective QA should focus on critical elements such as participation, quality, relevance and funding of TVET (King, 2011). The Ethiopian TVET policy and strategy identified that inadequate quality assurance system in the country is one of the main reasons responsible for the inability of the TVET system to meet labor market demands (MoSHE, 2020). Similarly, according to Gebremeskel (2019), the quality of the training process was weak to equip TVET students with the required competences, which means the efforts of quality assurance were not effective enough to meet the needs of trainees and labor market. Thus, there needs a robust quality assurance system to ensure relevance and quality of training provision.

Strengthening quality assurance system in TVET is thus considered as vital to ensure quality which is directly related to relevance of training and its contribution to development, where quality has presently gained more emphasis than quantity in the education and training system. For TVET to stimulate employability and national development, there is a need to establish quality assurance systems which entails quality assessment, improvement and monitoring, and periodic self-assessments resulting in continuous improvement of TVET quality.

#### **4.2.5. Aligning the TVET System with National Development Plans**

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has to play its role in promoting sustainable development, since it is considered as main supplier of skilled workforce for development. According to Marope et al. (2015), TVET has been viewed as main driving force for a country's national development. Investing in TVET is mostly viewed as investing in national socio-economic development. Because TVET can play the leading role by creating skilled workforce that support the socio-economic development of a country. TVET is producing graduates for regional, national and also global labour markets; and this affects the manner TVET system is planned and implemented. For this, TVET curriculum, teaching learning processes, learning contents, and policies and practices should be aligned with the national development plans. It is undeniable that TVET contributes significantly to a country's socio-economic development. Also, TVET has politically been acknowledged as an important sector with the potential to produce competent graduates who are able to contribute to a country's economic development (Mishra, 2007). In Ethiopia, there is a pressing desire to align the TVET strategy with the country's prosperity plan including the national and sectorial ten years development plans. The TVET policy and strategy is developed as means to enhance alignment of planning and implementation between federal and regional TVET to ensure joint planning and collaboration. Successful implementation of the TVET policy and strategy is possible through alignment with the development plans at all levels.

#### **4.2.6. Conducting A Tracer Study**

Tracer study is a survey that attempts to trace the job search as well as the employment of previous students of an educational institution (Latif & Bahroom, 2010). Tracer study evaluates the graduates' livelihood after they completed their training and join the labor market (Herrmann et al, 2010). Tracer studies are widespread in higher education but also often employed in the TVET (Heidemann, 2010). It enables to obtain valuable information regarding the education and training provided by a particular TVET college and evaluates graduates'

current and future career and employment opportunities. The purpose of a tracer study is to assess whether TVET graduates, are able to get any form of productive employment or not. One of the ultimate objectives of skills training is improving employability among students or graduates. To this effect, TVET institutions should provide competence-based trainings that matches with the present skills demand of the labour market and the skills that are expected to be important in the future. With a country like Ethiopia suffering from weak labour market data and institutions, tracer studies are playing important roles in providing timely and relevant data on the effectiveness of training interventions and how well they are matching with the labour market demands.

The TVET policy and strategy of Ethiopia recognizes the tracer study as one strategy to assess the outcome and impact of TVET graduates (MoSHE, 2020). A tracer study is vital to TVET institutions, since it provides valuable information regarding the employability of graduates and the relevance of training that enable them to accommodate changes in the demands of potential employers through constant review of their training program, curricula, and methods to strengthen and enhance employability of their graduates (Herrmann et al, 2010). Essentially, TVET conduct employability tracer studies to see whether the provided skills produce employable graduates who are able to fit in the formal ways of employment or create their own jobs and sustain employment (Schomburg, 2003).

## 5. Conclusion

Graduate employment and employability have recently been issues of both national and global concern because of the ever rising number of unemployed graduates (Aida et al., 2015). This qualitative study explores the extent to which policies and laws are integrating the issue of employability in Ethiopia. It also identifies strategies that enhance employability of TVET graduates. The study found that employability has been integrated in national policies and laws and international laws. However, the implementation of these policies, strategies and laws in enhancing employability of graduates is low in Ethiopia (Shimekit & Oumer, 2021). The study also attempted to identify some major strategies that could enhance employability of TVET graduates. These include partnership/collaboration between TVET and industry, review of curriculum, cooperative training, strengthening quality assurance system, aligning TVET system with national development plans and conducting tracer studies. A collaboration between TVET and industry is important, particularly in Ethiopia where TVET programs are not in a position to satisfy the needs of employers/industries/end users as well as the labour market (MoSHE, 2020). Matching education and training in line with employer's demand is one success factor to enhance graduates' employability (Aida et al., 2015). More importantly, developing sustainable partnerships with industries will assist in increasing opportunities for workplace-based training for TVET students. This process will ensure the relevance of the programmes offered at the TVET colleges which would enhance graduates' employability. Hence, it is suggested that a proactive partnership between the industries and the TVET institutions should be strengthened to improve networkings between academia and industries to create a better understanding of each other's needs and to identify how they can be met through the industry programs.

Partnership is also important not only to enhance graduates employability competences but also to develop skills that are considered important in the future. With collaboration, TVET colleges should maintain development of employability competences in their students and help them become competent in applying such competences even before their graduation and entry to a workplace. As long as TVET institutions create more interaction and collaboration with the industry, they will have more access to industrial attachment for apprentices since the industry is meant to provide them with training materials and equipment. The industry is also encouraged to take relevant interventions to continuously enhance the graduates' acquired competences which are needed to stay and progress on their career. This makes the TVET curricula to be notably relevant to labour market demands. This ultimately improve the job readiness as well as employability of TVET graduates.

Curriculum development need to go with the pace at which technology is developing. However, it is evident that the Ethiopian TVET curriculum is said to be outdated and not adequately responding to the needs of trainees and the labour market as well. Additionally, the occupational standards indicating the competences that a trainee should possess to perform well in the world of work are not reflected in the TVET curriculum. Hence, labour market demands and training needs should properly be considered when the curriculum is developed. The curriculum needs to be revised or updated in a regular basis, and the process of updating curriculum need to be inclusive of all relevant stakeholders including employers, and the TVET. In doing so, TVET will be able to play its significant role of preparing work-ready and employable graduates that meet the needs of the country's economy as well as the labour market demands.

TVET is designed to be delivered largely through cooperative training. This requires collaboration with industry or enterprises that are expected to offer practical training through the provision of industrial knowledge, practical skills and work attitudes. An effective cooperative training has the purpose of increasing the quality of training and improving the relevance of TVET to the needs of the labour market, thereby enhancing employability of graduates. However, the weak collaborative work culture among TVET colleges and industries has dented the implementation of cooperative training (Geda, 2016). TVET need to expand participation in



work-based training to promote successful transitions from school to work and improve the quality of skills development. It is therefore imperative for TVET institutions to strengthen and maintain links with industries and partners for the delivery of cooperative training, and thereby increasing the employability of TVET graduates.

Concerning the TVET quality, it has been found that despite the efforts made by the government to ensure quality of the training process, the training delivery was not strong enough to equip students with the required knowledge, skills and attitude, and by implication, the quality assurance system was not able to meet the needs of trainees and labor market. Strengthening quality assurance system in TVET is therefore considered as vital to ensure quality which is directly related to relevance of training and its contribution to development, where quality has presently gained more emphasis than quantity in the education and training system. For TVET to stimulate employability and national development, there is a need to establish robust quality assurance systems which entails quality assessment, improvement and monitoring, and periodic self-assessments resulting in continuous improvement of TVET quality. TVET need to systematically collect and use information on current and expected future skills demands to provide timely information to relevant stakeholders on the content and type of education and training required. Specifically, TVET institutions need to engage in conducting tracer studies of their graduates so as to check the effectiveness of their training delivery and the relevance of their curricula to the labour market.

Alignment of TVET system with country's national development plan is vital since TVET is aimed at supporting government strategies to reduce poverty and unemployment and to achieve socio-economic development through promotion of competence-based education and training that meets the competence requirement of industry, job creation in sectors, and establishment of TVET networks to assist trainees to respond to the labour market demands. TVET colleges need to offer programmes based on the occupations of high demand and scarce skills in the economy as well as in the labour market. Generally, TVET is on the supply side of the country's economy whereas the labour market is on the demand side. Hence, for TVET to insure employability, it has no choice except to produce competent graduates with the competences needed by the labour market.

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