


Technical Vocational Education and Training in Uganda: Career guidance and practices

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Background: Effective career guidance is critical in Technical Vocational Education and Training in Uganda (TVET). The current career guidance practice is weighed down by lack of; funds, trained personnel, and policy. Since many studies explore career practices in secondary schools, examining the specific approaches in TVET as an entity is new.

Objective: This study investigated the established career guidance practices for TVET in Uganda and it also aimed to determine the definition and goal of career guidance in TVET, including the related activities, impacts, and challenges.

Method: A qualitative study using open-ended questions and interviews was employed. The questions were hosted on Google Forms. The questionnaire link was shared on the participant's WhatsApp group by a contact person. Seventeen participants responded plus interviewees (3). The data was transcribed and synthesized in Microsoft Word with a three-column table to identify emerging patterns and themes.

Results: The findings reveal that career guidance is very vital in TVET as much as it is in secondary schools, and it needs funding, trained personnel, policy, and planning. In addition, a model for institutions to follow in implementation of career guidance is relevant to streamline the service to all students. As well as a categorical service that caters for each student's ability, talent, interests, and growth.

Conclusion: The non-uniformity in career guidance implementation can be solved by creating a model that can be followed by all institutions. Looking into the major setbacks such as poor funding, few trained personnel, and no policy framework is paramount.

Contribution: The current situation, engagements and potential of career guidance in Technical Vocational Education and Training in Uganda was explored in this article.

Keywords: career guidance; school to work transition; technical vocational education and training; labour market; Uganda; career guidance activities; career guidance definitions; information.

Introduction

Skilling Ugandan people continues to be a buzz word, and vocational education is currently a national priority. This research expounds on the career guidance and practices in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Uganda. According to UNESCO (2001), the relevance of career guidance to TVET has been somewhat given attention but remains under-explored. For example, about 62% of the secondary schools in Uganda have career guidance offices and officers (Kabunga, 2020; Otwine et al., 2018), whereas the data about career guidance in TVET institutions are combined within the other tertiary institutions and are barely itemised. Nevertheless, as the enrolment in TVET in Uganda keeps growing and the human development approach is being encouraged in TVET through global initiatives (Kim, 2021), setting up working structures that offer and follow-up career guidance services is essential.

Human development approaches ensure that in addition to knowledge and hard skills there is support provided through counselling for the acquisition of life skills. Secondary schools in Uganda have individual methods of implementing career guidance, and the government does not follow-up on establishing their effectiveness (Nsubuga & Kronholz, 2018) much less in TVET institutions. The presence of operational structures for systematic implementation of career

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guidance in TVET in Uganda are quite uncertain. Therefore, this study expounded on the current endeavours and perceptions by the TVET institutions towards availing career guidance and information and equipping TVET students with confidence regarding labour market relevance, inclusion and independence for a smooth school-to-work transition.

Literature review

Definition of career guidance

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2004), defines:

[C]areer guidance as services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training, and occupational choices and to manage their careers. (p. 19)

The Republic of Uganda Career Guidance Handbook (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2011) also defines career guidance as comprehensive efforts undertaken to help students access information about the available opportunities for education and making career choices and decisions regarding training institutions and courses alongside corresponding career developmental options and job prospects after completion. The OECD definition is accepted globally and is used by the World Bank; furthermore, it uses the word 'individual' to refer to all people, whereas the Ugandan career handbook definition specifies 'students' because career guidance services are currently concentrated in formal education. This is the reason why most of the literature about career guidance in Uganda is in formal education settings. Career guidance can be provided on an individual or a group basis, face to face or online, such as using helplines and other services (OECD, 2004). Choosing how to administer career guidance depends on the availability of resources and skills and differs by country. Career guidance provides a lens to understanding the country, as it spotlights the education and training and economic systems and the relationship between the two (Watts, 1999). Developed and developing countries have distinct patterns of career guidance administration. For example, in developing countries, such as Uganda, these systems are in early stages of development. However, it might be possible to identify system priorities through their daily practices including choice of field of education, training and work, which are deemed important for the economy (Watts, 1999).

Rationale of career guidance in Technical Vocational Education and Training

The impact of career guidance on individuals, especially students, cannot be underestimated. For example, it helps individuals discover themselves, focus on crucial skill sets and reduce skills mismatches between supply and demand, allowing for the reintegration of marginalised and at-risk groups into education (Sultana, 2004). In addition, it minimises gender-related disparities in TVET (Peace, 2017). Moreover, it is crucial in school-to-work transitions and

throughout the study process to provide accurate labour market information that is constantly changing (Kintu et al., 2019). This information is used to align the study content, allowing young people to evolve into potent, visionary, motivated, persuaded and desirable human resources that the country can depend on for productivity. Therefore, this study is crucial because it highlights the criticality of establishing and enhancing career guidance structures not only in secondary education but also in TVET.

Functional career guidance systems could help students in three holistic ways: lifelong learning goals, labour market outcomes and social equity and social inclusion goals (Figure 1).

For over 20 years, countries in Europe have deemed these three specific areas to be vital components of career guidance (Sultana, 2004). They are evidence of how career guidance contributes to public policy goals. Lifelong Learning (LLL) goals refer to continual consolidation, extension and renewal of knowledge and skills; labour market outcomes refer to all labour market issues, improving the outcomes and efficiency and supporting economic development goals and social equity and social inclusion goals cover issues relating to ensuring that no one is left behind (Dandara, 2014).

To ensure LLL, European countries, such as Germany, Estonia and Italy, employ career guidance to reduce failure, repetition and dropout rates (Watts & Sultana, 2004). This intervention falls under the global trends fostered by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and Vocational Education (2014), which indicates that young people in TVET need support to make informed choices, reducing the dropout rates during training. Technical Vocational Education and Training students qualify for employment; therefore, dropping out is a significant cost to the individual, sponsors and society at large.

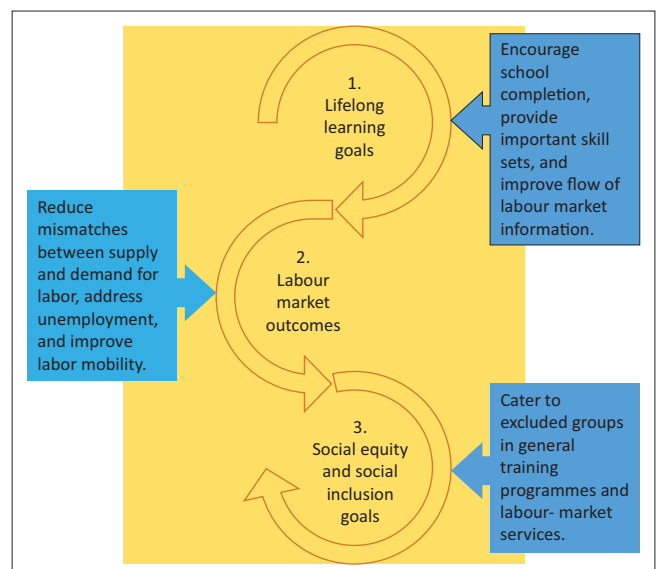


FIGURE 1: Holistic ways through which career guidance is vital.

In Uganda, TVET is open to the general public interested in skills. Thus, LLL may benefit a range of individuals across the age groups. Moreover, career guidance can advocate for shortened graduation periods, expose all to individualised and diversified learning opportunities and promote in-depth learning through experiential learning (Sultana, 2004).

Economists and policymakers have long recognised the potential of career guidance to improve labour market efficiency (Dandara, 2014; Ginzberg, 1971; Sultana, 2004; Van Esbroeck et al., 2005; Watts, 2008). Through initiating a journey of self-discovery (Mimura, 2016), career guidance helps people understand their strengths, interests and qualifications to search for fulfilling jobs where they can perform their best (OECD, 2004). Career information helps people understand the long- and short-term outcomes of certain career choices (OECD, 2004), get acquainted with changing job patterns and deal with the uncertain future (Sultana, 2004). Furthermore, it helps improve other work-related factors, such as salaries, working conditions and promotions (Bereményi, 2022). As the push and pull factors arise from the labour market reforms and transformation of education systems and training in developing countries such as Uganda (Kabunga, 2020), the vitality of career guidance cannot be underestimated.

Gaps in career guidance in Uganda

In Uganda, the pressure on TVET graduates during transition from school to work is evident. According to Kabunga (2020), after graduation students get shocked by their changing roles. Moreover, poor self-confidence resulting from lack of career information, counselling and professional guidance remains unresolved and requires urgent attention to help students with educational and professional choices. For post-graduate students, looking for 'any job' is demeaning to their years of training. Rampant underemployment, redundant labour and struggle with workplace expectations suggest that career guidance enhancement is long overdue. With career guidance, TVET graduates could obtain relevant information and become equipped with the inherent capacity, innovation and confidence to assume a better future. A misperceived career choice that leads to wastage of individual efforts and resources and subsequent frustration is worse (Kabunga, 2020). The school-to-work transition hustle presents an urgent justification for the need of career guidance in TVET.

The urgent need for career guidance in the Ugandan context is also justified by the fact that the country constitutes the world's second youngest population, with approximately 78% younger than 35 years (World Atlas, 2023). Moreover, 55% of the population is younger than 18 years, and the overall unemployment rate is approximately 9.4% as of 2013 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Educating, guiding and proper preparation of these young people can greatly have an impact on the nation through human resource development. Withal, the Sustainable Development Goal 4

(SDG 4) states, 'Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escape poverty', particularly the need to 'increase the number of people with relevant skills particularly technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship' (United Nations, n.d.). Uganda is one of the poorest nations in the world (Samuel & Oates, 2006); therefore, for it to make strides economically, education coupled with career guidance is vital.

Uganda ran the Business Technical Vocational Education and Training Strategic Plan 2011/2012–2020, Vision 2040 (from 2007) and subsequently, the TVET policy of 2019. These national initiatives for in-country development were primarily for human resources revitalisation. They were even validated in the SDGs and created a strong back-up for TVET. However, in Uganda, skills mismatch challenges (Hawley, 2006) and school-to-work transition pressure remains rampant (Kabunga, 2020). Therefore, institutional capacity is important to focus on grassroots activities such as career guidance in TVET institutions to support young people within their process to develop relevant skills for the world of work.

State of career guidance in Uganda

In 2008, a department of guidance and counselling was established at the MoES to disseminate programmes that guide students in their careers and psycho-social concerns (Otwine et al., 2018). These efforts were intended to provide personal, social, psychological, educational, career, vocational and spiritual guidance. This initiative showed slight developments towards building career guidance structures in Uganda. Career offices were established, and some teacher and student trainings were administered (Otwine et al., 2018). Approximately 4704 secondary schools and tertiary institutions were registered; 20% of them had career guidance structures (Otwine et al., 2018). Of approximately 260 TVET institutions, 38 (15%) provided career guidance structures. Of 61 505 teachers country-wide, 714 trained as career teachers.

Funding was secured from the School Management Committees, Parents Teachers Associations and Boards of Governors; technical support was provided by the MoES by availing information, training, providing training manuals, coordinating programmes and monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, some established school activities include career days, career weeks, talking compounds with messages on personal values, talks during new student orientation and class meetings. Although this department fostered promising initiatives, only a few schools offered career guidance services – predominantly government schools – and many activities remain suitable only for secondary schools, not TVET institutions. Additionally, the percentage of career officers trained in TVET institutions country-wide is negligible (1%). Moreover, while career guidance is an additional benefit in secondary schools, it is a dire necessity in TVET institutions.

Career guidance services are critical in TVET for creating awareness of courses and professions that profit the country long-term (Okiror & Otabong, 2015). Considering the 9.4% unemployment rate in Uganda (as of 2013), young people should be directed to priority sectors that will sustain the economy for a long time (Vandenbosch et al., 2002). Recently, the work environment for TVET graduates has experienced tremendous changes, creating pressure in the school-to-work transition. In some countries, such as the United States or Japan, career services have been established for over 100 years, whereas no such concrete services exist in Uganda to date (Nsubuga & Kronholz, 2018). In order to establish some of the services in TVET institutions, there is need to investigate from the TVET practitioners the distinct patterns of career guidance in TVET as an entity, given its (TVET) unique characteristics.

The following research questions were posed:

1. What is the current definition and goal of carrying out career guidance in TVET?
2. How is career guidance being practiced in Uganda's TVET institutions?
3. What is the impact of career guidance on TVET students?
4. What are the major setbacks in implementing career guidance in TVET?
5. What are the strategies for improving career guidance in TVET?

Research methods and design

This research was explorative. It is commonly applied in the fields of education, administration, health, social work and counselling (Merrian & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were found through a key contact person with access to the WhatsApp group to which the targeted participants belonged.

Structured interview and structured questionnaire data-collection methods were used. The interview guide and questionnaire consisted of nine and 17 open ended questions, respectively. A team of experts validated the questionnaire (see Supplementary File 1). This involved ascertaining that the questions effectively captured the topic and could be easily understood. Some questions were refined to avoid biased answers, and some important questions that were previously omitted were added. Additionally, the questionnaire structure was adjusted to remove any leading, confusing or double-barrelled questions. Duplicate questions were deleted, some terms were changed to better suited ones, a preamble was added and the question order was changed for chronological flow. The expert team comprised one professor and three PhD students – all professionals in [programme masked for blind review] at [location masked for blind review]. The team corresponded via Zoom and email.

Study population and sampling strategy

Seventeen of 78 principals answered a structured open-ended questionnaire using a Google form. To obtain

detail and clarification, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Three participants (W, Y and Z) were interviewed. The interviewees were selected by convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method that was used based on the criteria that participants were willing to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). Interviewee W is a principal who actively promoted career guidance in his institution. He held some training courses on Zoom and invited the author to one of them. Interviewee Y is an officer in charge of industrial training in one of the TVET institutions in the country. Interviewee Z is a principal of a TVET institute who, after answering the online questionnaire, reached out to the researcher to express his gratitude, stating, 'Career guidance is what we need in our institute'. Of the 17 participants (see Table 1), 16 were men and one was a woman. The participants were from different parts of the country (Figure 2).

Data collection

Data were collected through questionnaire and interview methods from public TVET institutions' principals, who provided information on career guidance in their institutes. The structured open-ended questionnaire was hosted on Google Forms. The questions prompted participants to provide information about career guidance in their own institutions about, for example, the perceptions, goals, activities, adequacy and challenges of career guidance. The link was shared on the principals' WhatsApp group by a contact person (one of the principals).

Although the information reached all group members, the response rate was approximately 22% because of issues of willingness and internet connectivity. Cohen et al. (2016) recommended that a qualitative researcher retains the disposition to apply culturally sensitive ways of collecting data. Therefore, multiple reminders were considered bothersome to the contact person and principals. However, the number of the people who answered the questionnaire (17), coupled with the interviews (3), were considered substantive because a small sample size is appropriate for an in-depth analysis as a fundamental factor in qualitative research (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Participants could answer the questions by themselves or delegate a key person in the institution to respond on their behalf. That is why the results consisted of different designations from respondents: principal (6), acting principal

TABLE 1: List of participants.

No. of technical vocational education and training institutions	Designation
17 institutions	Principal (6)
[Western region (4),	Acting principal (2)
Eastern region (3),	Deputy principal (1)
Central region (7), and	Head instructor (2)
Northern region (3)]	Head of department (2)
	Technical teacher (1)
	Supervisor (2)
	Director of studies (1)

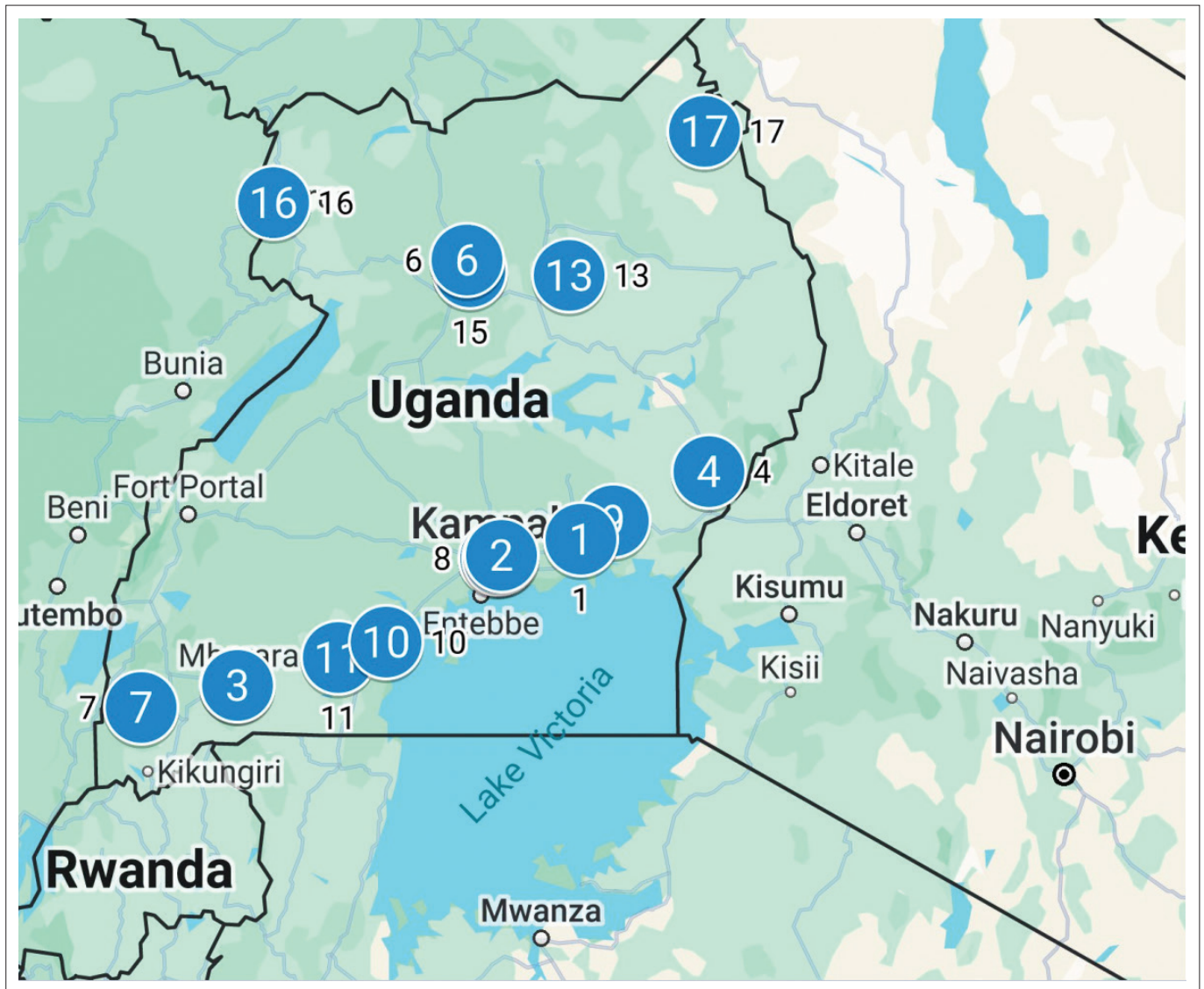


FIGURE 2: Location of participating institutions.

(2), deputy principal (1), head instructor (2), head of department (2), technical teacher (1), supervisor (2) and director of studies (1) (see Table 1).

Data analysis

The data analysis focused on the participants' construct of the concept of career guidance in TVET. The data also centred on participants' experiences described as activities they do or watch being done to foster career guidance in the institutions. This research used qualitative data from the interviews and questionnaires, merged and then encoded under corresponding sub-headings with clear linkage to the study questions and rationale. Data triangulation was employed for the two data sets from interviews and questionnaire to ensure validity and data saturation (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). Data were organised into various stages on a Microsoft Word table. The first column was the research question, the second column the corresponding questionnaire and/or interview question number and the third column the emerging themes from the data.

The next phase involved data synthesis, theorising, contextualisation and creating meaning, followed by filtering (Morse, 1994). The analysis was presented in a three-column table (see Table 2) in Microsoft Word. Finally, the author made inquiries with the participants to discuss the emerging interpretations within the research cycle for validation to establish the credibility of findings before the final analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from Hiroshima University (HR-ES-000970).

Results

Concept, purpose and definition of career guidance

The research found out that the concept of career guidance is considered not to be straightforward because most institutions embed career guidance content in school

TABLE 2: Data analysis.

Research questions, (R.Q)	Questionnaire questions, (Q)/Interview questions, (I.Q)	Themes
R.Q 1. What is the current definition and goal of carrying out career guidance in TVET?	Q (5 and 16) I.Q (1 and 2)	-concept, purpose and definition of career guidance.
R.Q 2. How is career guidance being practiced in Uganda's TVET institutions?	Q (6,7,8 and 9) I.Q (4)	-institutional level implementation.
R.Q 3. What is the impact of career on TVET students?	Q (10,11,12,13 a and b) I.Q (5 and 6)	-impact of career guidance
R.Q 4. What are the major setbacks of implementing career guidance in TVET?	Q (4) I.Q (7 and 8)	- The need of a categorised career service -system challenges
R.Q 5. What are the strategies for improving career guidance in TVET?	Q (15 and 17) I.Q (9)	-how improve career guidance

TVET, Technical Vocational Education and Training.

activities such as fresher's orientation, parades and small talks in between lessons. Moreover, interviewee Y thought that students need more career sessions and professional career advisors who are capable of not only providing career info but also psychological help as well. Interviewee W felt that the government's initiative to create awareness about TVET is making young people aware of opportunities of TVET especially in the oil sector but is killing their innovativeness on the other hand because students tend to only focus on what is available. Hence, it is subsequently creating many skilled but unemployed people.

When asked about the definition of career guidance, the participants coined it around the different endeavours to provide job-related knowledge, how to upgrade, remain focused throughout the school period and how to have a positive attitude for success in their career. In summary, the participants mentioned that the aims of career guidance are to create awareness among students about the importance of their type of education (TVET) and allow for an individual to exploit their potential, self-discovery, acquire skills necessary for the world of work, make proper and informed choices, as well as to encourage them to live in harmony with other persons surrounding them, respect all those in authority and emphasise good behaviour and discipline. The point-by-point list of the aims of career guidance is as presented in Table 3.

Career guidance activities and institutional level of implementation

To understand how career guidance is practiced in Uganda's TVET institutions, this study examined activities and institutional level implementation. Many institutions carry out career talks, alumni motivation, peer interaction, key stakeholders from academia and the world of work, assemblies, orientations, seminars and industrial training. Some departments engage associations such as the plumbing association to interact with students. These previously mentioned activities were written down in the questionnaire; however, from the interviews only talks from people in the world of work and taking advantage of school events such as assemblies were mentioned.

TABLE 3: Implementor's aims of career guidance.

Implementer's aims of career guidance.
Prepare students for vertical and horizontal mobility in their career growth.
Create awareness of the type of education TVET is and allow an individual to exploit their potential.
Enable every trainable person to identify their talent that can earn them a living through engaging in productive activities.
Ensure that each student receives appropriate skills needed and is competent for the world of work.
Encourage students to have a positive attitude and hope for survival, continuity, and success in their career.
Encourage students to have a positive attitude and hope for survival, continuity, and success in their career.
Encourage students to have a positive attitude and hope for survival, continuity, and success in their career.
Prepare students to make informed choices about further education and employment opportunities.
Enhance candidates' career opportunities.
Bring enlightenment and confidence building among students.
Guide students toward their dreams.

TVET, Technical Vocational Education and Training.

Impact of career guidance

Data on the how career guidance impacts students were collected based on the implementer's point of view. It was categorised by the researcher in three ways, attitude, self-discovery and school to work transitions.

Attitude

The research found out that career guidance enhances understanding to build competences (skills, knowledge and attitude) especially required in the world of work. The participants acknowledged that students enrol into TVET sometimes as parents' choice and therefore in order to feel comfortable in their pursuit, they need guidance, counselling, mentorship and leadership trainings. 'TVET is still considered by many as a path for the destitute', a participant said. Interviewee Z believes that the current career information is scanty; hence has no effect and that to have an impact, it should be continuous and consistent. However, interviewee Y said, 'the attitude changes once they realise their ability especially when they visit the industries and realise, they can do something'.

Self-discovery

As mentioned earlier, participants coined out the discovery of hidden talents and abilities. For example, some career activities such as industrial visits expose students to hands on trainings that when students try out, they realise they can do it. The 'I can do it' attitude is almost everything a student needs to pursue a successful career. A participant who belonged to the woodworking department cited that students can be heard saying, I can make a door, bed or ceiling and this clearly motivates students.

School to work transitions

The results from this research revealed that only 7.7% (one person) of the participants strongly believe that the current practice of career guidance adequately prepares students for a smooth school to work transition. The rest (38.5) agree while the others (53.8%) disagree. This is probably why some participants acknowledge no existence of a transition plan;

however, personal connections among teachers, students and companies help. In addition, the award of certifications for every profiled skill gives students confidence to approach the world of work. This is directly influenced by the new curriculum and is a great contribution to students' future career according to the participants. However, interviewee Z thinks that it does not help rather students need prior exposure to industries because most of the profiled skills are school related and yet work requires unique information. In fact, he continued to say that most are unemployed because of the mismatch.

Setback in implementing career guidance in Technical Vocational Education and Training

The setbacks in career guidance were obtained by asking participants the challenges they face during implementation of career guidance. The research summarised the setbacks in two categories: need of a categorised career service and system challenges.

The need of a categorised career service

The research revealed that in TVET, girls have special consideration by the government for entry, regardless, the TVET trades still pose challenges for them. In this case, these girls need categorised information to suit their situation. Yet the career guidance given is general and not considerate about different categories of students.

System challenges

These were quite a number including lack of budget allocation, few resourceful personnel, lack of legal framework such as policies and strategies, inadequate motivation for the trained persons, no training of career officers and the part time career officers who cannot understand the students' issue within a limited time.

How to improve career guidance

The research, from the participants' point of view, listed the different ways that career guidance can be improved in TVET. The interventions were categorised into long-term (policy), midterm (funding career guidance activities) and short-term (training of career officers, scheduling regular career days, categorised career services and establishing career offices in institutions).

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to document the current practices and perceptions by the TVET institutions towards availing career guidance and information. The results revealed that the implementers are focused on individuals of schooling age for career growth, awareness of TVET, talent development, skills for work, confidence and to help them pursue individual dreams. Although there are a lot of aspects that require improvement, most participants acknowledged the vitality of career guidance and the need to build a good system in TVET as an entity. The available

career handbooks by the Ministry of Education (MoES, 2011, 2015) have two major emphases: career guidance as a precursor to subject choice and career guidance as a promoter for training skill sets desired in the labour market. The research showed that students in TVET benefit more from the latter that includes endeavours that help them refine their skill sets in preparation for the world of work. According to the National Planning Authority (2013), the Vision 2040 prioritises human resource development in hands on skills that are currently globally competitive. It also supports endeavours to reduce the skills mismatch in the country of which career guidance is primary. Students in TVET courses still lack sufficient knowledge of the type of education they are pursuing, thus career guidance practices are very important to create this awareness. This is because historically, TVET in Uganda has been marginalised and perceived to offer inferior skills for life as opposed to general education (Kim, 2021). This is why people still carry an information gap, hence the dire need for career guidance in TVET.

To understand how career guidance is practiced in Uganda's TVET institutions, this study examined institutional level implementation. It was found that many institutions take advantage of school events to provide some information. There are limited or no career programs in institutions. A thesis by Otwine et al. (2018) provided a general view of career guidance in the country with historical information. This thesis had very little to no information about TVET but showed that the current activities are concentrated in secondary schools. As mentioned previously, TVET students need not only talks but experiences in the field as well.

Nsubuga and Kronholz (2018) consider some of the current activities as merely 'talks'. When the event is finished, the focus changes to something else until the next event. It is a challenge for TVET students to consolidate the information and put it to proper use. Therefore, this requires streamlining career guidance into a process that allows students to gradually achieve a tangible outcome. When this process is streamlined, it entails holistic career guidance that provides an authentic experience characterised by not only the provision of career information, talent training and matching but also concern for an individual's values, needs, interests, self-development, growth and decision-making abilities (Watts, 2013). In the developed world such as Japan they have been designing and trying out different career-guidance models including one that emphasised the teacher guidance function (Watanabe-Muraoka et al., 2001). It is therefore high time Uganda also focuses on establishing a maiden model for TVET schools.

About the impact of career guidance on TVET students, the research revealed that career guidance helps students to own their own education, especially when they get to discover their hidden talents and also after realising where the TVET education is taking them. It was also found that there is a subsequent related positive effect towards attitude, self-discovery and school to work transitions.

In practice, measuring attitude requires examining social and contextual factors (Carrasco & Lucas, 2015). Examining social and contextual factors is a practice done to explore people's perceptions and measure how people respond to interventions. For example, during the research, a tracer study was cited. In TVET, tracer studies follow up on alumni to ascertain their wellbeing after school and measure the impact of some previous interventions (INTRAC, 2017). The participants revealed that students testified of the positive impact of career activities that helped them in school and even after school in the world of work.

Self-discovery is a key component in career guidance. It is the process of gathering information through various sources to expand understanding and insight regarding oneself (Mimura, 2016). The 20th and the 21st century models of career guidance uphold self-discovery as a key component of career guidance. Mimura (2016) held that it is vital for students to know themselves in the same way they look at themselves in the mirror. They should be close to and in touch with their inherent talents and abilities. However, this research found that this component needs enhancement and that the students need to be empowered. Students should be empowered before they leave the formal training for the labour market. Also, as additional life challenges occur within the labour market, people (students) should know themselves to be able to overcome challenges (Mimura 2016). Ideally, career guidance should have a model or step-by-step process (Van Esbroeck et al., 2005) that students go through that could smoothly lead them to the intended purpose, of self-discovery, instead of relying on haphazard events.

In addition, the results show that in Uganda's career guidance in TVET, care for special groups was reported missing in career guidance in Uganda's TVET. Participants revealed that TVET courses can be especially tedious for some groups of people, such as girls. In addition, the admission system accepts students from various backgrounds, with different realities and varying abilities (MOES, 2023). Therefore, each student's category must be carefully catered for to achieve satisfactory results.

Last but not least, in practice, career guidance is underdeveloped in Uganda because of several challenges. The research found several system challenges ranging from lack of budget, to no career policy, to lack of trained personnel. The labour market and the nature of work are changing (Kintu et al., 2019), increasing the vitality of career guidance. These challenges therefore pose significant implications for individuals and the overall workforce. The lack of skilled career officers and confusion between psychological counsellors and career professionals hinder the provision of accurate and specialised guidance. Moreover, the absence of categorical career guidance and poor infrastructure further restricts access to comprehensive services. These challenges limit individuals' ability to make informed career decisions, potentially leading to mismatched skills and opportunities. It is crucial for Uganda to prioritise addressing these challenges,

allocating resources and establishing clear policies and frameworks to build a robust and effective career guidance system that supports individuals in navigating the evolving labour market landscape (ILO, 2021).

Conclusions, recommendations and limitations

Career guidance and its potential are widely known among TVET institutional principals and other TVET personnel in Uganda. Generally, even those who do not practice career guidance acknowledge its vitality. Career guidance activities practiced in the institutions included weekly assemblies, orientation weeks, talks from alumni experts, industrial visits, inter-departmental exhibitions and career seminars.

Each institute implemented career guidance following its own scope and method, making it difficult to measure impact and gaps. Therefore, a consistent plan (model) would facilitate effective and fair career guidance. This plan must reflect the uniqueness of TVET as a form of training and be easily adoptable at an institutional level. The plan should include career activities, career consultation, time allocation, career officers with their required skills, implementation style and assessment and evaluation.

Moreover, because of the nature of TVET admissions, categorical or specialised career guidance cannot be ignored. Students require personalised tailor-made information or training and follow-up. Although the ad-hoc method is cheap, it cannot create lasting effects for students.

The current methods, activities and engagement of career guidance in TVET in Uganda ensure provision of general information that students easily treat as counsel but cannot process as concrete life guidelines for concrete careers. The manner of dissemination of this information does not allow students to attach their personal interest, goals or perspectives to it. It remains mere 'talk' from adults. Therefore, career guidance for Uganda's TVET requires authenticity that incorporates concern for people's ideas, needs, interests, self-development, growth and ability to make decisions independently.

Further studies should investigate how a consistent implementation plan of career guidance services can be developed for Uganda's TVET. The limitation of this study is that it could not ascertain where the planning of the career guidance services initiative should best start (i.e. top [MoES] or bottom [institutions]). The contents of career guidance and mode of implementation that would offer students an authentic experience considering available resources were also unclear. Furthermore, as different institutions have different levels of career guidance implementation, proper career guidance services in TVET may require a systems overhaul. Future studies should examine implementation methods.

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Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

D.B. is the sole author of this research article.

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Data availability

The data are available on the link below. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1eJVwVGSgHKBauHD06DPUN2hVMYMYXrNWHz7rdBeTMwQ/edit?usp=sharing>. This data set should only be accessed by an authorised person and the purpose should be for the sake of this research.

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