Sumerianz Journal of Education, Linguistics and Literature, 2025, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 1-10
ISSN(e): 2617-1201, ISSN(p): 2617-1732
Website: https://www.sumerianz.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47752/sjell.8.1.1.10

Original Article Open Access

Implementation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bo City: Challenges and Prospects

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Article History

Received: 18 January, 2025

Revised: 13 March, 2025

Accepted: 04, April, 2025

Published: 22 April, 2025

How to Cite

Ben A. Sei, Saidu Challay(PhD) (2025). Implementation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bo City: Challenges and Prospects umerianz Journal of Education, Linguistics and Literature 8(1)1-10.

Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is that aspect of education that is intended to expose learners to the acquisition of skills that equip them for the job market at the middle-man power level. The main focus of TVET is to enable learners acquire practical skills, related to occupations in various sectors of the economy.

The study examined how TVET is implemented by Technical and Vocational Institutions in Bo city in a bid to account for the prospects and challenges these institutions face while implementing TVET programmes. The study is a descriptive survey of some selected Technical and Vocational institutions in Bo City. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in data collection. Questionnaires were administered to sixty-five (65) instructors from five (5) Technical and Vocational institutions in Bo city. These included Sierra Leone Opportunities Industrialisation Centre (SLOIC), Government Technical Institute, (GTI) Craftshire Technical Institute (CTI), Creative Crafts Education Centre (CCEC) and Southern Agro-Industrial Development Associates Centre (SAIDAC).

Some of the findings were that the Technical and Vocational Institutions in Bo city operate with inadequate number of academic and supporting staff, poor ICT facilities, insufficient supply of electricity and water supply. It was also found out that resources provided by government were grossly inadequate for the operation of Technical and Vocational Institutions, thus posing serious operational challenges.

Keywords: Technical and vocational education and training; Skill-based; Industrial; Competency.

1. Introduction

Education is generally considered as a process of transmitting knowledge, skills and attitude in order to transform and enhance a person to become useful in society. It also involves the transmission of cultural heritage and values from one generation to the next (Ahmed, 2015)**.** It endeavors to draw out the best in a young person's mind. Thus, learning is an indicator of the perfection that has already existed in mankind (Jawara *et al.*, 2019).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is that aspect of education in which the learner is exposed to the acquisition of discernable skills that could be easily transformed into economic benefits (Akerele, 2007). The United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2002), views TVET as a comprehensive term which encompasses the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge related to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life of people.

It is often said that investment in Technical Education can help foster economic growth, enhance productivity, contribute to national and social development, and reduce social inequality (World Bank, 1998). Thus, the level of a country's education is one the key indicators of its level of development (UNESCO-UIS/OECD, 2005). Technical

and Vocational Education and Training is catalyst to development of every nation as it targets the youthful population of country who constitute a greater percentage of the workforce of most developing and underdeveloped countries. The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Sierra Leone in 1996 was aimed at addressing the massive dropout rate of students who could not enter the mainstream academic programmes. In view of this, Government created Technical and Vocational Institutions across the country to cater for this category of learners. The implementation of the TVET has however been confronted with series of challenges which has affected the effectiveness of these programmes. According to Mohammed (2005) in Ayonmike (2013), one of the problems of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in many countries including Sierra Leone is the lack of motivated teachers, and the reason for this lack of motivation could easily be traced to the low esteem of the teachers. Moreover, lack of funds greatly affects the implementation of technical education.

2. Statement of the Problem

Since the inception of the 6-3-3-4 educational system in Sierra Leone, there has been a proliferation of vocational institutions, most of which are run either privately or by government. The number of such institutions have grown even faster than ever since the end of the war. The aim of these vocational institutions is to provide training for school leavers in artisan and middle level manpower development. However, this sector has been ignored since the introduction of the grammar school type of education by colonial masters. Despite the progress made by most African countries including Sierra Leone to provide skills training for the youths through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), provisions are fraught with challenges. In most African countries, there is an inherent bias in the form of low prestige towards technical and vocational courses, and it is generally associated with low educational attainment. For example, most youths are oriented to prefer academically based professions to TVET competency or skilled- based professions. Meanwhile, there is a real demand for both lower and middle level skilled (manpower) workers in many industries, which are not being met. This presupposes that one of the greatest gaps in human resource development is in vocational education and technical skills training. Technical and vocational training centers also suffer from under funding, obsolete and inadequate training equipment and tools; there is also a consistent decline in the quality of training offered as most instructors do not have the requisite industrial and practical experience. The challenge therefore is how TVET training can produce graduates with skills that can respond to the needs of a highly competitive and dynamic global market and industry. As with many technical and vocational institutions world-wide, Sierra Leone technical and vocational institutions may be confronted with challenges that influence the rather lagging development of technical and vocational education and training. Although the post war development aspirations were to develop and strengthen this sector, there seem to be a lukewarm attitude by students who still prefer the Grammar school type of education over technical and vocational education and training.

3. Literature Review

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is aimed at preparing learners for jobs that are based on skills or artisanal in nature. Traditionally, such skills have been linked with non- academic training and are entirely related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. It is sometimes referred to as technical education, as the learner directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques or technology.

A country's technical and vocational training system is a decisive factor determining the competitive strength and level of development of its economy. The education and training system is largely determined by the country's socio-cultural, economic, demographic and technological development. The development of a skilled labour force makes an important contribution to national development as it develops the application of science and technology for transformation of materials into goods and services. A skilled workforce is therefore the secret to economic growth and national development.

The provision of technical and vocational education is fraught with challenges ranging from availability of equipment, low funding, lack of access to electricity and internet connectivity, low morale of instructors etc. Kirchberger (2008) maintains that by 2008, TVET in European countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany was in crisis and in the process of major restructuring. Even a country like Germany, which has always been considered as the best example of TVET that is closely aligned to the needs of the industry, has been called into question Kirchberger (2008). Spain has also had challenges such as an increase in the number of TVET graduates working under unfavorable conditions and having only interim contracts or part time work (Kirchberger, 2008; Lopez-Fogues, 2014). Lopez-Fogues (2014), observe that another challenge in Spain involves women being restricted to healthcare, beauty and management courses, which often leads to decreased labour market participation. In Spain, women comprise more than 85 percent of students studying community services, textiles and health, while auto-mechanics, information and technology, and electronics have an average of 2.1 percent of women students (Lopez-Fogues, 2014). This is also the case in England, where Atkins and Flint (2011) findings revealed a

concentration of female learners in care work and male dominance in science and engineering courses. In addition, Kirchberger (2008), notes how conditions are even more difficult for women graduates, who tend to receive lower salaries than their male counterparts. Ochieng (2024), also highlights a key challenge in the TVET agenda in Kenya, where the political class has warmed received the idea TVET, but many other issues around key stakeholders, trainees and training materials still need to be addressed.

In sub- Saharan Africa, this form of education has a reputation of being associated with low-achieving learners and women, who constitute the majority of TVET students in countries, such as Ghana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Senegal (UNESCO, 2014). Kirchberger (2008), summarized the TVET situation in Africa as uncoordinated, unregulated, very fragmented, and characterized by low-quality training, obsolete teaching material and equipment, as well as gender, geographical and economic inequalities. The UNESCO (2016), Report argues that TVET in Africa is haunted by a lack of training of the workforce, a poor link between training and the labour market demands, insufficient funding, the inability of training to foster self-employment, and a general unavailability of career guidance. Jones (1999) puts forward possible ways of addressing the low social status of TVET, which has always been a challenge in Africa, by enhancing career guidance and counselling, as well as providing better employment prospects. As TVET in Africa has always been viewed as inferior to tertiary education, progression to higher education through this route is unavailable in most cases, which results in failed aspirations on the part of those who want to go in this direction (Jones, 1999). Across Africa, TVET is seen as being key in addressing unemployment and skills development, especially for women and youths. It is against this background that the African Union in 2015 formed the TVET Expert Working Group for the African continent with the sub-title 'To foster youth employment.' There have been significant shifts and reforms in the sector in an effort to overcome the challenge of unemployment that is faced by many countries in Africa. TVET is being reformed for the development of skills needed for economic growth, and the sector has been recognized for the potential role that it can play in poverty alleviation (AU, 2014). However, an AU (2014) argues that TVET has failed to achieve the main objective, which is to reduce unemployment. According to the report, proposed policies have not been implemented adequately to address the challenges faced by TVET in most African countries. (Lolwara, 2016), also analysed TVET in most Sub-Saharan African countries and noted that responsiveness to the needs of the labour market, poor infrastructure, and low inputs are the main challenges faced by TVET institutions. After an examination of the research approaches adopted in three West African countries, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Ivory Coast, it was apparent that 'economics (macro and micro-economics)' is the most preferred approach in researching the TVET sector (Azoh and Carton, 2012). This is, however, at the expense of other approaches, such as qualitative analysis, especially in gathering the views of those who are directly involved in TVET. This goes against (McGrath, 2011) view that learners' perspectives should be privileged in TVET research, since they are the heart of the system. Just like in most African countries, research in West Africa has mainly been done by research agencies and consultants with little contribution from local academics and an absence of examination of students' experiences (Azoh and Carton, 2012). Findings from studies conducted in selected African countries have shown that many countries are making efforts to revamp the TVET sector to make it better managed and coordinated (Afeti and Adubra, 2012). Studies in Africa have mainly been quantitative and conducted for the purpose of making policy recommendations. An example is the AU (2014) survey, conducted in a number of countries to gather comprehensive information about the provision of TVET in Africa. The findings also revealed a lower representation of women in Science and Mathematics studies but a higher representation in Business and Ccommercial courses. Findings from surveys like the one conducted by UNESCO-UIS/OECD (2005) in Africa with regard to policy changes, led to recommendations for the development of a competitive workforce in light of the incompatibility between skills and the world of work in the African countries (Afeti and Adubra, 2012). The desire to promote TVET as a vehicle for poverty reduction, employment, general economic development and regional integration has been the underlying driver for the generation of studies and literature (Afeti and Adubra, 2012; Oketch, 2007). Furthermore, findings from the studies conducted by institutions, such as UNESCO and the African Union identified several challenges that affect the TVET sector in Africa, including the poor perception of the sector, inadequate funding and poor management. In Nigeria, TVET is also associated with under-achievers, which has contributed to a negative perception of the sector (Kehinde and Adewuyi, 2015). Furthermore, the authors argue that it is strongly believed that TVET is not academically oriented and so should best be taken by those with a mental or physical disability. As in many African countries, the Nigerian sector does not have enough funding to purchase teaching/learning materials and equipment for courses. Moreover, capital investment is required for machinery, laboratories and workshops, which are currently absent, or outdated (Ogbuanya and Izuoba, 2015). Ogbuanya and Izuoba (2015) argue that, in Nigeria, the present state of the TVET sector is an indication that the country is not recognizing its significance and neglecting to give it the support that it deserves. Okeye (2013), adds that the major challenge with TVET is that the institutions are not imparting employability skills. This has resulted in the country importing labour, such as engineers, although there are unemployed TVET graduates. There is a mismatch between skills development and the needs of the market (Okeye,

2013; Pamdoff, 2013). In Ghana, TVET offers the chance for skills training for a large percentage of the population (Kirchberger, 2008). However, the TVET sector in Ghana faces challenges, including poor infrastructure, inadequate training institutions, outdated syllabus and inadequate funding (Boateng, 2012). Boateng (2012) observes that the Ministry of Education spends one percent of the national budget on the sector, which is far from the needed financial injection. Negative perceptions also continue to haunt the sector, as TVET is also believed to be for less academically talented people. Anamuah-Mensah (2004), conducted a small-scale study in Ghana and noted that from 87 respondents, none of them wanted to send their children to a TVET college mainly because of societal perceptions of the sector. Though TVET is thought of as a vehicle for improved craftsmanship and enhancing useful citizenship (Boateng, 2012), there is a need to foster positive perceptions and improve its image in Ghana. For TVET to be effective in contributing to improve learning outcomes there needs to be adequate funding for the sector.

4. Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate how Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programmes are implemented in Bo city focusing on the prospects and challenges**.**

The specific objectives include the following:

- Assess the contribution of Technical and Vocational Institutions in the Implementation of TVET programmes in Bo city.
- Assess the resources (human, finance and materials) available in Technical and Vocational Institutions for the implementation of TVET programmes in Bo city.
- Identify the challenges/problems Technical and Vocational Institutions face in the implementation of TVET programmes in Bo city.

4.1. Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions:

- How does Technical and Vocational Institutions implement TVET programmes in Bo City?
- What are the available resources for the implementation of TVET programmes in Bo City?
- What challenges do Technical and Vocational Institutions face in implementing TVET programmes in Bo City?

5. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design, wherein data were obtained from key participants who were mainly instructors in the selected technical and vocational institutions. A total of sixty-five (65) instructors from five (5) TVET institutions were selected as sample for this study. The choice of respondents was based on Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) view regarding descriptive research which is aimed at collecting data and reporting such data in the way things are. Descriptive survey research designs are used in preliminary and exploratory studies to allow researchers to gather information, summarize, present and interpret data for the purpose of clarification (Orodho and K., 2002). Gall and Borg (1989) noted that descriptive survey research is intended to produce statistical information about aspects of education that interest policy makers and educators.

6. Results

This section presents the results obtained from the survey starting with the demographic characteristics of the respondents. 65 respondents were purposively selected from four Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions in Bo City. There was a 100% return rate as the respondents were easily accessible which made it easy to retrieve the questionnaires from them. The table below presents the demographic characteristics of the informants:

Table-1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristics	Frequency n=65	Proportion of respondents %
Age: n (%)		
21 – 30	6	9.2
31 – 40	21	32.3
41 – 50	28	43.1
51 – 60	7	10.8
61 & above	3	4.6
Gender: n (%)		
Male	43	66.2
Female	22	33.8
Highest Qualification: n (%)		
Certificate	10	15.3
Diploma	12	18.5
Bachelor Degree	29	44.6
Master Degree	14	21.5
Teaching Experience: n (%)		
1 – 5 years	3	4.6
6 – 10 years	20	30.8
11 – 15 years	35	53.8
16 years & above	7	10.8

Source: Field Data (2023)

The table above presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of the 65 respondents selected for this study, the majority of them, i.e., 28 (43.1%) were within the age bracket of 41 – 50, while 21 (32.3%) of them were within the age group of 31 – 40. This shows that majority of the respondents were within the active age group. The sex composition of the respondents was 43 (66.2%) male and 22 (33.8%) female, which shows that more male respondents participated in this study. The highest qualification of the respondents was bachelor degree, 29 (44.6%), although not all of them had professional teaching degrees. Quite an appreciable number of them had master degrees, although their master degrees were not in technical and vocational education. With regards their teaching experience, 20 (30.8%) and 35 (53.8%) of the respondents had taught for a period 6 -10 years and 11 – 15 years respectively. This indicates that the respondents had a long experience in the teaching field.

6.1 Responses from Respondents

As stated earlier, the study targeted 65 respondents from 6 TVET institutions in Bo City, and their responses to the questions they were asked are presented in the table that follows.

Table-2. Responses from respondents

Variable	Score	Respondents (n) =65 (%)
TVET institutions receive adequate funding from Government n (%)		
Agree	1	7 (10.8)
Disagree	2	55 (84.6)
Unsure	3	3 (4.6)
There is a timely payment of Government subsidy n (%)		
Agree	1	7 (10.8)
Disagree	2	53 (81.5)
Unsure	3	5 (7.7)
Instructors are paid on time		
Agree	1	55 (84.6)
Disagree	2	9 (13.8)
Unsure	3	1 (1.5)
Instructors in TVET institutions are well paid n (%)		
Agree	1	7 (10.8)
Disagree	2	56 (86.1)
Unsure	3	2 (3.1)
Infrastructural facilities are adequate in the TVET institutions n (%)		
Agree	1	10 (15.3)

Disagree	2	53 (81.5)
Unsure	3	2 (3.1)
Internet connectivity is always available in the TVET institutions n (%)	1	4 (6.2)
Agree	2	61(93.8)
Disagree	3	0 (0)
Unsure		
The TVET curriculum is harmonized and standardized n (%)		
Agree	1	20 (30.8)
Disagree	2	12 (18.4)
Unsure	3	33 (50.8)
Do administrative challenges exist in TVET education? n (%)		
Yes, there are administrative challenges	1	65 (100)
No, there are no administrative challenges	2	0 (0)
There is a poor perception of TVET by learners and parents n (%)		
Agree	1	58 (89.2)
Disagree	2	5 (7.7)
Unsure	3	2 (3.1)
There is lack of qualified instructors for TVET n (%)		
Agree	1	15 (23.1)
Disagree	2	49 (75.4)
Unsure	3	1 (1.5)
There is gross deficiency of educational facilities in TVET institutions n (%)	1	27 (41.5)
Agree	2	30 (46.1)
Disagree	3	8 (12.3)
Unsure		
There is poor implementation strategy for TVET programmes n (%)		
Agree	1	37 (56.9)
Disagree	2	24 (36.9)
Unsure	3	4 (6.1)
How can we change learners' perception towards TVET? N (%)		
Through public awareness raising	1	35 (53.8)
Government should prioritise or put more emphasis on TVET	2	22 (33.8)
TVET institutions should promote more public private partnerships	3	8 (12.3)
Why do you think there is no proper funding for the TVET education sector? n (%)	1	42 (64.6)
Lack of Government commitment	2	23 (35.3)
No public private partnership		
There are adequate tools and equipment in the TVET institutions n (%)	1	21(32.3)
Agree	2	38 (58.5)
Disagree	3	6 (9.2)
Unsure		
Training in TVET institutions has helped to remove many youths from the street n (%)	1	51 (78.5)
Agree	2	9 (13.8)
Disagree	3	5 (7.7)
Unsure		
Graduates from TVET institutions can be easily employed or be self-employed n (%)	1	55 (84.6)
Agree	2	8 (12.3)
Disagree	3	2 (3.1)
Unsure		

Source: Field Data (2023)

7. Discussion

From the results in this study, it is clear that TVET institutions do not get the required funding from government for their operations. 55 (84.6%) of the respondents disagreed that they receive adequate funding from government. It is therefore evident that although government is aware of the contribution of TVET institutions in the development of the middle manpower, yet the required resources have not been provided for these institutions to effectively function in the country. Most of the TVET institutions lack the required equipment suitable for industrial training. This makes the graduates from these institutions less suitable for employment in industries. The equipment they are exposed to during their training are less sophisticated than the ones used by industries. There is the possibility of retraining the graduates of these institutions in the use of industrial equipment.

Furthermore, it was revealed that although government pays subvention to TVET institutions, this subvention is usually not paid on time. This creates a lot of administrative challenges for the institutions. It was also revealed in the focus group discussions that not TVET institutions benefit from the payment of subventions. In some cases, government only pays the salaries of instructors in these TVET institutions. Although majority of the instructors (55 (84.6%)) agreed that they are paid on time, they however disagreed that they are well paid; 56 (86.1%) of the respondents disagreed that they are well paid.

The respondents were asked about the state of infrastructure facilities, internet connectivity and harmonization of the TVET curriculum. 53 (81.5%) of the respondents disagreed that there is adequate infrastructure for the TVET institutions. Majority of the classrooms were overcrowded, and the buildings lacked proper electricity and water facilities. In terms of internet connectivity, 61 (93.8%) of the respondents disagreed that the TVET institutions have internet connectivity. Majority of the instructors and students accessed the internet by purchasing megabytes for their smart phones which is very expensive. The few who agreed that they have access to internet connectivity were the ones who connect to the Router around the administrative building. Majority of the respondents were not sure whether the TVET curriculum was harmonized and standardized across all the TVET institutions. Probing further through focus group discussions, the respondents revealed that they are not very sure about the curriculum of the other institutions. Also, the institutions were running different programmes and there was the possibility therefore for each institution to have its own curriculum. Additionally, the respondents have not received any training in curriculum alignment and harmonization, where they will have the opportunity to learn about curricula of other TVET institutions.

Regarding the perception of learners towards TVET education, it was revealed that despite government's effort to streamline technical and vocational education, learners still have a poor perception about TVET. This is partly due to the fact that more importance is placed on the acquisition of university degrees for the acquisition of white-collar jobs. This is further exacerbated by the lack of degree programmes in the newly established technical universities. There still seems to be more emphasis on degrees in humanities, social sciences and disciplines related to medicine. In order to change this poor perception, respondents suggested that there is need for more public awareness-raising amount school going children about the importance and relevance of technical and vocational education. Furthermore, they suggested that government should prioritise technical and vocational education by providing incentives such as bursaries or grants to students who opt for TVET programmes. Government should also provide more funding to TVET institutions in order to capacitate them by providing the required equipment that will enable these institutions to more effectively carry out the training of students in these institutions.

7.1 Prospects of TVET

TVET can be planned with the aim of contributing to occupational competence through the effective training in acquisition of appropriate skills and knowledge for the development and application of indigenous or local technology. The beneficiaries of these institutions must also be assured of the basic occupational skills necessary for individuals, the community, as well as the nation in order to promote national development. This can enhance the development of learner confidence and the chance to develop the potential of learners through appropriate programmes that will lead to self-employment, thus leading to socioeconomic wellbeing of citizens. This will also lead to growth and expansion of the economy through the development of the private sector. Ensuring that vocational training institutions are well equipped with the basic tools and gadget will enhance the acquisition of skills and knowledge in preparation for the workforce. Developing inclusive programs in which learners will attain the proper skills that lead to the social and economic development of the nation is very key for the development of the nation.

With the establishment of the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, there is potential for technical and vocational education to be prioritised. Currently, a directorate has been created in the ministry to supervise technical and vocational education training. With the establishment of this directorate, every district headquarter town has been provided with a Government Technical Institute. There is also a regulatory body, the National Council for Technical, Vocational and other Awards (NCTVA). This body is responsible for the accreditation of all technical

and vocational institutions in the country. It is also responsible for the certification of students in TVET institutions. Thus, NCTVA is working closely with the directorate of TVET for harmonisation of the curriculum as all TVET institutions are expected to sit a common end of programme examination. Government has also absorbed the staff of most of the TVET institutions in the Government Payroll.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study looked at some of the challenges that TVET institutions face in providing technical education for learners. Over the years, educationists have opined that providing technical education to the youthful population will lead to job creation and reduce the high level of dropout rate among the youth. This is part of what led to the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education; wherein pupils who could not meet the pass mark at the Basic Education Certificate Examination can proceed to the technical option to develop their skills in technical education.

It was however revealed in this study that most of these technical institutions do not have the required support in terms of provision of tools and equipment, adequately trained personnel in technical and vocational education, infrastructure and financial resources. This has put a considerable pressure on these institutions in day-to-day operations.

Although technical and vocational education is seen as a way of increasing employment, a greater number of the youth population still show preference in going in for purely academic disciplines instead of pursuing technical vocational education. This is further supported by some parents who would not prefer their children to go in for middle manpower training.

In terms of policy implementation, there seem to be a huge between policy and implementation. At the onset of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, there were schools designated to offer purely technical and vocational subjects. However, because of the lack of equipment in those schools, most of them went back to the old system of teaching subjects that were not technical/vocational in nature. Instead of preparing pupils for the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) examination, almost all the pupils are now prepared for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Another shortcoming in the policy also has to do with the fact that there has been no opportunity for pupils to continue with degree programmes in technical and vocational education. It is possible that in the near future, pupils will have such options with the establishment of technical universities in the country.

Based on the above, the following are recommended:

- Technical and Vocational Institutions should be provided with the requisite materials and equipment to ensure that learners have hands-on experience that will better equip them for the job market or make them become better entrepreneurs.
- Adequate water and electricity facilities should be provided for the Technical and Vocational Institutions in order to ensure the smooth running of these institutions. It will be difficult to teach courses like metal work, computer science when there is lack of electricity.
- Government with the collaboration of the private sector should establish construction firms in order to absorb the graduates of the Technical Vocational Institutions to practice the vocational skills they have acquired.
- Adequate funding should be provided for the management of Technical Vocational Institutions in Bo city and the country at large.
- Technical Vocational Institutions should improve on their infrastructure and classroom facilities to enable them enroll more students as the demand for their training programmes is increasing.
- The curriculum of TVET should be harmonized and a national qualification framework developed for technical education.

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