

# School Stakeholders' Perception Towards the Implementation of the Academic and Vocational Career Pathways in Secondary Schools in Kafue District, Zambia

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**Abstract-** The aim of this study was to determine the perception of stakeholders towards the academic and vocational learning pathways in selected secondary schools in Kafue district. Mixed methods approach was used where semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires were used as data collection techniques. Findings revealed that the school stakeholders in most of the secondary schools perceived the academic learning pathway with negativity and, therefore, advised learners not to take it on account of none availability of infrastructure / facilities and and qualified teaching staff to effectively guide learners for quality achievement. It also became apparent that learners' choice of learning pathways depended on the availability infrastructure, physical facilities / equipment, trained personnel and motivation to enhance decision making. The study recommended that government needs to provide necessary infrastructure, skilled human resource and physical facilities in order to actualise the blue prints for the revision of the curriculum along with capacity-building among career teachers for effective career choice guidance to learners. There is also need for educational planers to fully avail information to the stakeholders who are learners, teachers, parents and administrators on career path ways for stakeholders' informed decisions and choices.

**Index Terms-** Academic & Vocational, Career path ways, Implementation, Perception, Stakeholders

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a general belief that the secondary school years are crucial for teenagers to become prepared for transition from school to work life (Amoah, Kwofie & Kwofie, 2015; Ombaba, Keraro, Sindabi & Asiengo, 2014). Secondary school years present the switch from the supportively privileged life of the primary school to the freedom and responsibility of either tertiary education or employment (Ajufo, 2013). Career guidance is widely accepted as a powerful and effective method of bridging the gap between education and the world of work (Ibrahim, Wambiya, Olaka & Raburu, 2014). Students will come through

secondary schools with knowledge of their preferences and interests because of their interactions with many stakeholders in their environment. Career guidance packages are, therefore, intended to help students understand their own abilities to their fullest potential (Ombaba *et al.*, 2014). The process of making a choice is complex and unique for each individual depending on cognitive factors and social structures of the individual's environment (Braza & Guillo, 2015). A career choice is a resolution that most people make in their lives which should be considered carefully (Eyo, 2011). Consequently, the aim of career guidance is to permit a person to explore life's options (Lazarus & Chinwe, 2011).

The education system in Zambia has undergone some changes which have roots in the pre-colonial era in terms of career path reforms. The provision of education in Zambia is guided by the democratic principles of liberalization, decentralization, equality, equity, partnership and accountability. The principles of liberalization and decentralization entail that many individuals and organizations are involved in the provision and management of education. Therefore, the need to develop a standard curriculum regulatory framework was necessary (MOE, 2013).

According to the *Education Act of 2011*, the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education was the custodian of quality education provision and ensures that all providers adhere to the policy and regulations on curriculum. Therefore, all learning institutions should have the Zambian education curriculum framework (ZECF) and other important curriculum-related documents and syllabuses. These documents shall function as key daily guides and tools to ensure the provision of quality education. In order to keep the curriculum up to date, Zambia education curriculum framework (ZECF) is reviewed every ten (10) years in response to change drivers that include political, economic, social, technological, ecological and legal factors. However, curriculum support materials such as syllabuses and books are reviewed after every five (5) years in order to keep them up to date.

The rate of technological advances and new labour market needs have accordingly changed the way skills training should be done. Governments are thus strategically responding to these needs and bridging technological skills at different levels of human resource development. New technology and changing manufacturing processes have an effect on productivity and on the demand for workers with higher-level skills, enterprising and innovative traits with broader workplace competencies that can command higher returns (MOE, 2013). In fact, MOE, (2011) confirms that, appropriate and relevant skills training should have an assortment of different skills that are applicable to a variety of jobs. The method of training also matters a lot. The training method should incorporate both best practices and nurture and develop vocational and technical skills for learners to be able to use a combination of their intellect and hands to add value to their lives and resources around them.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Skills training and development supported by appropriate Career pathways and curriculum are pertinent factors for an economy to have human resource that are efficient and effective in any Job. Appropriate curriculum and learning pathways help equip individuals with essential competences and skills necessary to operate a particular Job successfully (MESVTEE, 2013). Therefore, the training methods should incorporate both best practices and nurture and develop vocational and technical skills for learners to be able to use a combination of their intellect and hands to add value to their lives and resources around them (Ida and Keith, 2014). However, this has not been the case in Zambia for some time now due to the limitations of the curriculum which enabled individuals acquire only the labour market needed skills (Kelly, 1991). It is from this background that the government developed a new curriculum with an emphasis on career pathways where learners choose either academic or vocational pathway depending on their abilities.

Despite the government's efforts to have the new revised curriculum be implemented fully and equitably, most schools are shunning away from taking on certain career pathways. Some schools are taking on career paths which are deemed easy to administer, less costly and where they have enough trained personnel to teach. Furthermore, some parents /guardians and certain teachers discourage learners to take on certain career pathways despite performing very well at junior school level citing such as being difficult and challenging. These stakeholders such as learners, teachers and school administrators seem to perceive certain career pathways as costly, not relevant to the job market, difficult to be undertaken and may not be applicable in the Zambian context despite the government's effort to fund its implementation. There is no well documented evidence-based research as to the perception of school stakeholders towards the academic and vocational learning pathways, which was the researcher's motivation and therefore the pre-occupation of this study.

### 1.2. Study Objectives

- (i) To establish the perceptions of school stakeholders towards academic and vocational pathways.
- (ii) To ascertain school environmental factors determinant to the effective implementation of the academic and vocational career pathways.

- (iii) To determine the availability of skilled human resources in schools to equitably teach the two career path ways.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.3. Background to Curriculum Development in Zambia

In the year 2000, Zambia through the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) embarked on the school curriculum review starting with the Lower and Middle Basic Education (Grades 1 – 7). The purpose of the review was to link the school curriculum to teacher education. Specifically, the review that commenced in 2000 was meant to re-define the desired learner, the teacher-educator or instructor and the teaching and learning outcomes so as to make education relevant and responsive to the individual and society (CDC, 2000) as a whole.

The government through the Curriculum Development Center came up with the curriculum framework of 2013 which gave proper guidance on the career pathways. The document brings in aspects of two learning pathways called *academic* and *vocational career pathways*. The career pathways are meant to prepare learners not only for the white collar job but also equips them with skills that are life sustaining. In fact, MOE, (2011) confirms that government should introduce practical work at secondary school level as part of grading towards grade twelve (12) finals, say forty (40%) percent practical and sixty (60%) percent theory. This will equip the children with skills and sense of responsibility at an early age. The skills being advocated for in the new revised curriculum may be good but are the teachers fully trained to handle the new skills being introduced in the new curriculum? What about the learners, are they allowed to choose career pathways according to their abilities? In fact, literature reveals that where teachers and other educators are fully trained in skills being proposed in the new curriculum, the implementation process becomes easy and everyone feels part of the system being proposed (MOE, 2013).

In most developing countries in the world, formal employment has failed to grow at the same rate as informal employment resulting in significant levels of unemployment and underdevelopment (Amoah et al, 2015). For example, in Ghana, technical and vocational education is at the center of the country's policies to help solve employment problems and to reduce poverty (Ibrahim et al, 2014). The government recognized that the country's training system was not producing employable graduates with the right skills (MOE, 2013). Hence, its investment in the technical skills to equip individuals and be able to work on their own once they passed through secondary education. All these were enshrined in the curriculum that separated the academic path from the vocational learning pathway.

### 1.1. Perception of Stakeholders towards Vocational Education

Among the key challenges facing TVET in most African countries include; the need to improve the perceptions of vocational education and training; to improve the training of instructors or educators; to develop links between vocational and general education which currently often operate in parallel, and between formal and non- formal training programs (Bosch & Charest, 2008).

## 1.2. Physical Facilities, Materials and Infrastructure

Literature reveals that it is critical to note that suitable equipment / facilities and infrastructure should be put in place to support the implementation of any curriculum. Infrastructure includes; well-furnished classroom blocks, equipped laboratories such sciences laboratories and computer laboratories. Teaching and learning materials should be adequate to enable teacher and learners effectively use them. In fact, it should be noted that any curriculum being implemented has its own infrastructure requirements. It may require building new addition classroom blocks, new laboratories, or rehabilitation of the existing infrastructure. For instance, there are schools where infrastructure is being shared by students. In such cases, new infrastructure should be put in place to curb such scenarios. This would enable the exposure of the students to practical experiences, acquisition of relevant skills, scientific attitudes without any hindrance (Danmole, 2011)

It should be the government program to ensure the production and provision of textual and other instructional materials should be a priority for quality delivery of the curriculum. Simple science and computer apparatus and equipment should be part of the package in the provision of government towards the curriculum to be implemented. Besides, teachers and students require exposure and practical experience with standard and modern apparatus and equipment. Adequate facilities such as classrooms, halls, libraries, laboratories and playing fields are key priorities for the successful curriculum implementation. Schools need adequate classroom accommodation to alleviate overcrowding. The problem of overcrowding makes learners to share the few stocks of furniture and teaching and learning materials available in the school. In such cases teacher effectiveness is hampered and it becomes impossible for the teacher to render individual pupil attention because of the large number of pupils in class (Kelly, 1999).

## 1.1. Skilled Human Resource

Skilled human resources in curriculum implementation are cardinal. Lack of the skilled personnel would hinder the effective implementation of the curriculum in any country. In the education sector, it would mean that all the stakeholders should possess the required and necessary skills to accelerate the process. Teachers should be competent with the new skills and methods being promoted in the new curriculum. The managers should also understand fully the contents of the curriculum in order for them to explain to their subordinates. For instance, one of the subjects being incorporated in the new curriculum is information and communication technologies (ICTs) which require specialized competencies. It is therefore important to note that teachers should possess these competencies in order to effectively teach the subject to the learners. Computer literacy and ability to access the internet to match student's sources of information and modern ways of collecting information are desirable (MOE, 2013).

The training and retraining of teachers is necessary for them to enact reformed based curriculum such as that of the program. The capacity building process should be systematic and continuous through workshops, seminars, enlightenment programs on the reform, orientation courses and other useful educational activities. This is because teachers themselves like pupils and students require support to be effective in the delivery

of the curriculum. Further, curriculum material such as teachers' guides, handbooks and manuals should be designed to improve teacher quality as one potential vehicle towards supporting them (Danmole, 2011)

The implementation of the new education curriculum and subsequent achievement was scheduled for 2015 in accordance with MGDs. Therefore, stakeholders in education were tasked to ensure that there was effective implementation of the curriculum. However, considering the special position in the school system, the school heads and managers and inspectors were expected to play key roles in providing good leadership and motivation for success of the new curriculum (Danmole, 2011)

In South Africa for example, authorities seem to be always changing the curriculum and this has affected the implementation process (Pitsoe, 2013). However, according to Piaget, educators work well where there is certainty and stability in the curriculum and the education system. Consistence change in the curriculum affects the teacher performance in terms of methods and approaches. For instance, a situation where one method is introduced today before the evaluation, another method is introduced to replace the former. In such a situation, teachers tend to be confused as to what exactly needs to be done.

The other scenario is in Indonesia where the government took a careful step by implementing the concepts of the school based curriculum in order to deal with the main education problems such as the demand for teachers in schools to be skilled and trained (Mwamwenda, 2013). Amongst many of the steps taken were that, authorities empowered schools to arrange, improve or develop and evaluate their curriculum by considering social, cultural, financial, and local potential as well as society needs, results and other aspects that affect the education process in the school or in the area where the curriculum was being applied.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to establish the perception of the stakeholders towards the implementation of academic and vocational pathways in selected secondary schools of Kafue district. To this end, this study adopted a triangulation in order to curb biasness but enhance credibility, validity, reliability, integrity and generalizability of findings (Kerrigan, 2014; Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). Specifically, a descriptive multi case study design was used. It involved obtaining of rich descriptive data about the participants' understanding of human behaviour contextually on how the current status of a phenomena describe 'what exists' with respect to variables or condition in a situation (Merriam, 2009).

The research was conducted in four (4) randomly selected secondary schools in Kafue district out of nine (9) secondary schools where academic and vocational career pathways are being implemented. Purposive sampling was then used to select learners and teachers from the pupil's registers and staff registers respectively from each participating school. Twenty teachers were purposively picked and stratified sampling method was used to pick one hundred and sixty grade 12 pupils. The probability sampling technique was used under which the random sampling technique was used to come up with the actual sample size. The

data were collected through questionnaires and focus group discussion interviews.

These data collection techniques allowed for triangulation, ensured validity and credibility of the study (Flick, 2014). Focus group interviews were held over two distinct sessions of about 90 minutes each. The interview instrument provided the researcher with an added advantage of getting a huge amount of in-depth data much faster and efficiently than the use of the method of questionnaires and observations (Greeff, 2011). Check and Schutt (2012) are in agreement that the response rate of interview instrument compared with other methods such as the questionnaires is generally higher. An audio tape, pen and paper were used as tools to record the conversations during the interviews. The self-administered and self-contained structured questionnaire was designed by the researcher and was used to collect relevant standardized data from all subjects in the sample. The reasons for using questionnaires in this study in addition to interviews was that these two instruments had different and possibly complementary strengths and weaknesses. *The questionnaire was used in this study to collect data from secondary school students regarding perceptions they have on the implementation of academic and vocational pathways in secondary schools.* This is in line with Yin (2009) who maintains that questionnaires aim to attain answers either on the facts related to the participants or their opinions regarding the subject under investigation. Furthermore, Rosssnow (2005) stipulates that types of data generated by a questionnaire include facts, opinions, activities, level knowledge, expectations, attitudes and perceptions. In view of the nature of the research design, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was used to analyze the data which were collected. Frequency counts, means, standard deviation and simple percentages were employed for the analysis of data. Ethically, all data which was obtained and information presented by the respondents were subjected to uncompromising confidentiality (Morris, 2006). Permission to conduct this study was obtained from Lusaka Province Education Office (LPEO). Once permission was granted, the school managers of the selected schools were contacted by mobile phone,

which was followed by an officially written request in order to explain to them the nature of the study. Meetings in advance were held with participants concerning this present study. Expectations were explained and clarified. The participants were given sample questions which were reflected in the interview guide. The participants were reminded that their participation was purely on a voluntary basis. Times and places of interviewing were agreed upon. The principle of anonymity was also considered and upheld. This was effected through the use of pseudonyms or code names in place of the respondents' actual names in this present study (Babbie, 2007). Merriam (2009) emphasises that ethical challenges are likely to arise during data collection and publication of findings. This view underscores the researcher-participant relationship which according to Marshall and Rossman (2011) is built around the interpersonal peculiarities of the researcher, often understood in terms of how the researcher keeps good relations, builds trust, respects norms of reciprocity and considers ethical issues. In this way, respondents were made to be aware that their involvement in this current study was valued and their participation was voluntary. In other words, they had the freedom to withdraw should they feel uncomfortable in the process of this research.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data have been discussed jointly in order to facilitate triangulation of the study findings. Data analysis has yielded the following general themes: students' choice of learning pathway, supportive infrastructure and availability of qualified human resource. Each of these themes and their subsequent categories separately discussed below.

##### 1.1. Perception of stakeholders towards academic and vocational learning pathways

##### 1.1.1. Most Learners do not Like Taking the Academic Path way (Natural Sciences)

**Table 1: Most pupils do not like taking natural sciences pathway**

|                            | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Neither agree nor disagree | 30        | 16.7    | 16.7          | 16.7               |
| Agree                      | 92        | 51.1    | 51.1          | 67.8               |
| Strongly Agree             | 56        | 31.1    | 31.1          | 98.9               |
| 999                        | 2         | 1.1     | 1.1           | 100.0              |
| <b>Total</b>               | 180       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Source:** Researcher’s Field Data (2019)

**Table 1** above shows that the majority respondents i.e. 148 did not like the academic pathway. Corroborative qualitative data revealed that most pupils feared to fail if they took such a pathway due to its perceived difficulty. It was clear that this mythology was cobwebbed in teachers’ and administrators’ inability to demystify it through effective guidance and counselling services along with effective teaching/learning programmes.

**Table 2** below shows the pupils’ perception on the extent to which they are allowed to make choice of their own desired career path ways.

**Table 2: Pupils are free to choose learning pathways of their choice**

|                                | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Valid</b> Strongly disagree | 60        | 33.3    | 33.3          | 33.3               |
| Disagree                       | 60        | 33.3    | 33.3          | 66.7               |
| Neither nor disagree           | 5         | 2.8     | 2.8           | 69.4               |
| Agree                          | 47        | 26.1    | 26.1          | 95.6               |
| strongly agree                 | 1         | .6      | .6            | 96.1               |
| 999                            | 7         | 3.9     | 3.9           | 100.0              |
| <b>Total</b>                   | 180       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Source:** Field data (2019)

As depicted in **Table 2** above, the majority of the participants, n=120 (66.7%) disagreed with the notion that students were free to choose learning pathways while the minority n=60 (33.3%) agreed with the statement. The above findings suggest that most of the participants’ perception on students’ choice on learning pathways was in doubt. Similar results were obtained on this variable from the qualitative data obtained from the participants through focus group discussions. The majority of participants indicated that perceptions among stake holders were negative regarding the learning pathways that government has provided for the students. A remark that stood out from the responses was:

*The current curriculum develops skills alongside academics even though vocational pathways are expensive in terms of equipment which renders the whole process untenable much more needs to be done.*

It was further revealed that learners perceive academic and vocational learning pathways in terms of available infrastructure in schools. The majority of the participants indicated that they chose certain learning pathways based on the availability of infrastructure which was lacking in most schools.

Notwithstanding the above findings, Hyland and Winch, (2007) stress that the vocational route is considered inferior to the academic one, attracting disproportionately high number of low income students who may be excluded from general or academic education and often come for areas of multiple disadvantage. However, in support of the above findings, Orji (2010) point out that the relative attractiveness of vocational education and training may stem from historically lower levels of esteem for manual workers as compared to those who could afford to engage with theoretical ideas and knowledge. This view is reinforced by the fact that the study also revealed that parents and guardians discouraged learners from taking on certain learning pathways especially the natural sciences under the academic learning pathways in fear of failure.

### 1.1. Supportive Infrastructure and Facilities

**Table 3. Lack of suitable infrastructure / facilities discourages learners from taking either vocational or academic path ways.**

|                            | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly disagree          | 2         | 1.1     | 1.1           | 1.1                |
| Disagree                   | 2         | 1.1     | 1.1           | 2.2                |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 13        | 7.2     | 7.2           | 9.4                |
| Agree                      | 98        | 54.4    | 54.4          | 63.9               |
| Strongly Agree             | 63        | 35.0    | 35.0          | 98.9               |
| 999                        | 2         | 1.1     | 1.1           | 100.0              |
| <b>Total</b>               | 180       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

According to **Table 3** above, this study revealed that the majority, n=160 (89.4%) of the participants “agreed” that lack of suitable infrastructure was one of the factors influencing learners from choosing either vocational or academic pathways and only n=4 (2.2%) participants “disagreed” with the statement while n=13 (7.2%) remained neutral.

The implications of the above findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data are that participants were in agreement that lack of suitable infrastructure discourages learners from taking either vocational or academic learning. In support of the scenario above, Kelly (1999) states that, “adequate facilities such as classrooms, halls, libraries, laboratories and playing fields are key priorities for the successful curriculum implementation.” The majority of participants revealed that schools needed adequate classroom accommodation to alleviate overcrowding which in the end makes learners to share the few stocks of furniture and teaching and learning materials available in the school. In this regard one participant had this to say:

*“In our school, natural sciences have been made optional where the learners are supposed to take up pure sciences due to lack of equipment necessary to support the teaching and learning of pure sciences. This is however against the recommendations as outlined in the revised curriculum where every secondary school is encouraged to take natural science pathways as compulsory.”*

The above view is supported by Mwanakatwe (2014) who observes that the absence of teaching and learning resources such as desks and other educational materials and requirements impact negatively on curriculum development and implementation. However, if the infrastructure is in place at the point of curriculum implementation, then the process would be smooth and stakeholders would be more than willing to effectively support the process. Therefore, it can be concluded that most learners in secondary schools in Kafue district fear to take up academic and vocational career pathways due to inadequacies in the facilities and equipment’s that support the teaching and learning of both the academic and vocational learning pathways.

### 1.1. Adequacy of Qualified Teachers

**Table 4: Inadequate Qualified Teachers Discourage Learners from Choosing certain career pathways**

|                            | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Strongly Disagree          | 33        | 18.3    | 23.9          | 23.9               |
| Disagree                   | 32        | 17.8    | 17.8          | 81.1               |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 26        | 14.4    | 14.4          | 63.3               |
| Agree                      | 45        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 48.9               |
| Strongly Agree             | 43        | 23.9    | 23.9          | 23.9               |
| 999                        | 1         | 6       | 6             | 100                |
| Total                      | 180       | 100     | 100           |                    |

Source: Field Data (2019)

**Table 3** above shows that n=45 (25.0%) and n=43 (23.9%) of the participants “agreed” and “strongly agreed” respectively to the statement while n=33 (18.3%) and n=32 (17.8%) of the participants “strongly disagreed” and “disagreed.” Further, the table shows that n=26 (14.4%) were none committal to the statement. The study findings from both qualitative and quantitative data, generally point to the fact that participants agree that most students are afraid of taking up academic or vocational learning pathway due to inadequate qualified teachers in certain specific subjects. This study suggests that teacher recruitment is one of the determining factors in the implementation of the two pathways in secondary schools.

Findings from the interviews with the teachers showed that most of them were of the view that lack of adequately qualified staff affects the implementation of the academic and vocational pathways. One participant had the following remark:

*“Capacity building in terms of CPDs at both school and national levels should be strengthened so that teachers are updated and upgraded.....what I mean is that this process should be systematic and continuous through workshops, seminars, enlightenment programs on the reform, orientation courses and other useful educational activities. From my point of view, very*

*few teachers from my school have had a chance to attend this training.”*

Consistent with the above views, Ronfeldt (2013) argues that the progression of curriculum implementation and professional development also increase the number of qualified teachers. Teachers constitute the human resource required for the facilitation of the objectives of any curriculum and its implementation. Since what teachers do in classrooms and laboratories are largely independent of what they know.

From the above exposition, it emerged that in spite of being aware that introduction of the two pathway in the school curriculum would entail engaging qualified personnel, the majority of the participants pointed out that schools are still using underqualified staff. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that there is a lack of basic understanding of how implementation of the revised curriculum can be done as far as the distribution of qualified staff is concerned. Capacity building of teachers is imperative for the implementation of the new curriculum.

### V. CONCLUSION

The research has discovered that the perceptions of the stakeholders towards the academic and vocational learning

pathways are good despite the fact that the choice to take on certain learning pathways by learners are based on the availability of suitable infrastructure, qualified staff and teaching/learning materials. Therefore, schools without proper equipment and infrastructure tend to have very few learners taking on critical subjects which fall under the academic learning pathway. Furthermore, many of the participants in the research came out that the two learning pathways which are the core of the revised new curriculum were received with mixed feelings as most of the stakeholders had very little information regarding the subject combinations in each learning pathways. This ultimately has an implication on the availability of qualified teaching staff that are supposed to handle such subjects along with teaching/learning materials. Learners are not allowed to choose learning pathways of their choice but instead the guidance and careers department allocate classes for them without considering the learner's abilities and potential.

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