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Nexus between Soft Skills and Technical Vocational Education and Training Graduate Employability

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ABSTRACT

Soft skills are increasingly seen as being crucial for the modern workforce due to the rapid and pervasive digitalisation that has transformed the nature of employment. To work with new technologies and stay up with the rapid changes in technology, graduates require employability skills. Despite the growing demand there remains a shortage of employability skills, organisations frequently struggle to identify qualified candidates for digital jobs because workforces frequently lack the skills necessary to manage digital change. Soft skills became more important as the pace of world of work moved online. Meanwhile, the role of TVET in job creation cannot be over emphasised in the changing world. Thus, the study examined how soft skills can enhance TVET graduates' employability. Study participants included 351 students from Botswana TVET schools. To better understand how soft skills relate to TVET graduates' employability, we used STATA software to establish the correlation between the two variables. The result indicated that soft skills promote TVET graduates' employability. Hence, all TVET administrators should keep up-to-date with this present model so that they can design policies that promote employability for TVET graduates.

1. Introduction

Unemployment has become a major concern in today's global economic environment. This widespread problem, however, is influenced by various factors in Botswana. Since unemployment is a naturally occurring phenomenon, it causes problems for individuals when it lasts for an extended length of time. Addressing this issue would need extensive investigation (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017). Botswana is one of the developing countries with educated labour force and graduates from TVET (Chitema, 2021).

The First National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education (NPVET) in 1997 states that, one of TVET's specific roles is to provide graduates with job-related skills that are closely linked with graduate employability (Republic of Botswana, 1997). Graduate employability is frequently linked to a student's future career as they endure individual shift in terms of personal social position in the community and family. Most TVET graduates assume that academic success will make it simpler for employers to hire them. Botswana's job market has changed due to the rapid adoption of new

technologies and the variety of demands that employers now require in line with current globalisation (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017). This has caused a number of problems and has indirectly hampered the country's relatively poor economic performance.

Botswana TVET forms part of upper secondary and post-secondary education. There are two TVET programme types: brigades and technical colleges. In general, students who have completed ten (10) years of basic education begin an artisan programme (brigade) whereas those who have completed senior secondary education enroll in a technical programme (technical college) (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012). As per the UNESCO Strategy 2022-2029, TVET has a purpose of vocational education which is to provide both skilled and unskilled individuals with the practical skills necessary to execute specialised tasks in a work setting for jobs needed in business and industry (UNESCO, 2022). NPVET, which was published in 1997, declares that one of TVET's special objectives is to equip graduates with work-relevant skills that are directly connected to graduate employability (Republic of Botswana, 1997b). There are further advantages for the small, micro, and medium enterprise (SMME) sector, where TVET graduates can work for themselves and establish their own businesses using their abilities (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017).

The main goal for TVET graduates to succeed in their organisation is to demonstrate the worth of employable skills (Behle, 2020). In the twenty-first century, employability skills may be defined as a set of transferable core skill groupings that reflect the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes necessary in the job (Al Asefer & Zainal Abidin, 2021). Employability skills is critical to their professional progress at all levels of work (Li & Sun, 2019). As a result, Azmi, et al. (2018) opined that TVET graduates with employability skills can adapt to different sorts of employment and multi-task. The graduates' skills aid in the smooth and flawless completion of the task. This improves the abilities of employees in the organisation to complete various tasks that are easily assigned (Nugraha et al., 2020). Employers want graduates with the necessary skill sets to fill existing employment positions. The present emphasis is on soft skills. Soft skills are usually technical in nature and easy to evaluate in a short period of time. Employee skill sets requirements are shifting as organisations face a changing competitive environment. Despite increased labour market demand, companies appear to be having trouble filling various positions due to the argument that the majority of graduates are unemployed and lack soft skills (Okolie & Asfa, 2017). Rudhumbu (2021) argued that students need to develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the labour market if the TVET curriculum is to be appropriately delivered.

TVET graduates searching for work face high unemployment rates, prolonged unemployed periods, and declining job quality globally. Botswana TVET graduates struggle to get employment, mostly because they lack soft skills. Annually, TVET colleges are required to produce graduates who have obtained the necessary qualifications to enter the many fields of work. Employers place a high value on having the essential soft skills, to the point that some organisations prioritize soft skills when hiring new staff. Developing a set of useful talents is one of the fundamental human capital management tenets, in which educational institutions invest a range of resources (Oluwalola & Awodiji, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the level of the soft skills among Botswana TVET graduates needed to succeed in the workplace and furthermore to examine the relationship between the soft skills and Botswana TVET graduate employability.

Studies have indicated the importance of soft skills for employability of TVET graduates. Soft skill have been found to be of importance in course of TVET training to promote employability of graduate (Hartanto et al., 2017). Chaka's (2020) study found that communication, creativity, and problem solving are necessary soft skills for employability in the job market. The findings of Pheko & Molefhe (2017) suggested that employability skills are crucial. However, it is unclear whether TVET graduates in developing countries like Botswana possessed these skills. According to Legg-Jack (2014), employers look for graduates with soft skills such as self-reliance, communication, problem-solving, mathematical literacy, analytical skills, technical drawing, and interpersonal skills. In the study of Succi & Canovi (2020), it was found that employers ranked highly skills like being professionally ethical, adapting to change, being creative and innovative, customer/user orientation, and working well in a team. Succi & Canovi (2020) found that developing soft skills is crucial to enhancing graduate employability.

2. Employability Theory

Being employable can be a result of many factors, which makes it difficult to identify the theory (UKEssays, 2018). Yorke and Knight (2004) described employability as the result of learning, achieving, and understanding the personal skills that are necessary to be successful in employment. There are three ways to define employability: the first is immediate employment, which states that most graduates seek immediate employment to gain work experience and settle their student debts before seeking more permanent employment, which will prepare them for a graduate-level position. It also focuses on graduates' readiness to cope with the job market without requiring additional training. Therefore, this study is underpinned on the assumption by Yorke and Knight (2004) that learning, achieving and understanding of skills set require for employment after graduation by the TVET students. Hence, soft skills have been examined in the study as set of skills that will prepare TVET graduates for employment for their perceptions.

3. Graduate Employability and Soft Skills

Several researchers have varied definitions of what employability is. Employability is a notion that has been debated extensively. Employability was a subject that Baker and Henson (2010) covered in great length. They contend that employable skills have been specifically covered in core curriculum in the form of regular classes or stand-alone courses; in other words, they have been included as a "lock" to school curricula. However, according to McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), employability is a far more complicated phenomena that includes individual circumstances, individual qualities, and external influences that might all have an impact on access to jobs. As further research was conducted, Kruss (2004) stated that graduates should be prepared not just for work but also for employability. It appeared that the emphasis was shifting from employment to employability (Harvey, 2005).

Studies indicates that specialised vocational skills are no longer sufficient for graduates to satisfy labor market expectations in the twenty-first century workplace (Dean & East, 2019). Employers are now looking for graduates with distinctive talents and traits known as employability skills (ES) (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017) which are seen as a critical issue in the national, regional, and global labor markets. In this paper, the word "employability" refers to the skills and competencies that TVET graduates need to possess in order to increase both their prospects to function in a job and the economic and social development of the country.

In the same vein, Griffin and Annulis (2013) investigated the skills necessary for graduates to work in the manufacturing business. Employers served as research participants. Throughout the research the participants showed an emphasis on a few skills. Writing, group interaction, reading, calculating, computer skills, calculating, leadership, self-development, technical skills and employability were all covered. As per the findings, the three most significant skills required by employers are employability, group interaction, and self-development. Accordingly, graduates must have a variety of ES and abilities when they join the workforce. Communication skills, problem-solving abilities, decision-making abilities, and teamwork are among the essential ES for graduates to possess. As part of employability skills is resilience, agility and adaptability required in the labour market today. The argument is that graduates can enhance their employability by developing career adaptability and resilience (Glavin, et al., 2017). Changes in the world affect people's career adaptability, employability, and career resilience (Maree, 2017; Rossier, et al., 2017). Thus, TVET graduates are to be prepared with ability to adapt and resilient to be employable in the dynamic work of life. An innovative approach to problems and the ability to come up with creative solutions to gain a competitive edge are critical skills for the 4IR job. The ability to think outside the box to produce ideas that are not conventional (Pardo-Garcia & Barac, 2020).

Every TVET graduate is expected to have employability skills. The requirement for soft skills is crucial for preparing TVET graduates for the job market (Nugraha et al., 2019). The goal of soft skills application is to give graduates the chance to acquire the necessary employability skills, job maintenance abilities, and work efficiency (Fahimirad et al., 2019). Due to rapid technological advancement, increased globalisation, and fierce competition, every applicant and employee must possess strong employability skills. Employers are looking for TVET graduates with the necessary technical capabilities as well as essential soft skills. According to Nugraha et al. (2019), employability

skills are crucial for TVET graduates. The market views social skills, communication skills, technology and information skills, managerial abilities, creativity and innovation, problem solving, and critical thinking as the most coveted graduate traits (Fahimirad et al., 2019). This shows that TVET graduates must still have a social nature and interpersonal skills in addition to having educational credentials in their respective disciplines. However, the industry in which they work will allow them to continue to refine their technical skills (Li & Sun, 2019).

It is impossible to develop a single, globally applicable definition or list of employability skills (Nugraha et al., 2020). However, numerous researchers Kay and Greenhill (2011) and Patacsil & Tablatin, (2017), have investigated the traits, features, abilities, and knowledge that comprise employability, including both general and especially for graduates, and have determined a set of competencies that should be considered core employability skills. According to Lowden et al. (2011) employers expect graduates to have technical and disciplinary competencies from their degrees, as well as the ability to exhibit a range of wider skills and qualities, typically referred to as employability skills.

Employers place an emphasis on graduates' writing skills, mathematical skills, problem-solving skills, and attitudes (Kay and Greenhill, 2011), whereas, (Lowden et al., 2011) identify teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, and managerial abilities as important in this regard. Communication, problem-solving, leadership, decision-making, emotional intelligence, social ethics abilities, and the capacity to deal with individuals from varied backgrounds were highlighted as significant employability skills by (Nair et al., 2009).

Also, Martin et al. (2008) identified 14 different employability skills based on a comprehensive investigation. They assessed these talents by order of priority and relevance, as well by what employers regarded as 'deal-breakers'. These skills were communication, literacy, numeracy, enthusiasm/commitment, teamwork, timekeeping, problem-solving business awareness, entrepreneurial, vocational job-specific, and advanced vocational job-specific, business awareness, enterprising, vocational job specific, and advanced vocational job specific. However, several studies showed that the employability skills mostly wanted by employers are problem solving, effective communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills (Billing, 2003; Schmidt, 1999).

Soft skills have been defined differently by various researchers as the current world job employability set of skills. Soft skills are "personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labour market, in school, and in many other domains," (Heckman and Kautz, 2012, p. 451). They are "a blend of attitudes, comprehensions, qualities, and practises" (Yorke, 2006, p. 4). They are referred to as "wicked competencies" (Knight and Page, 2007) because they are difficult to define since they may take on different shapes in various circumstances and grow over the course of a lifetime (Ciappei & Cinque, 2014). In this paper, soft skills are abilities that supplement a TVET graduate hard skills. People with soft skills are more adaptable and have better attitudes, which enables them to successfully navigate the problems they face in both their professional and personal lives. In this case, "soft skills" refer to a broad variety of social and interpersonal attributes and competencies that are applicable across all fields and sectors of the economy (Hurrell, 2016; Deloitte Access Economics, 2017). Soft skills, according to Tsaoussi (2020), may be broadly applicable across any job and can be learned as a continuous journey. TVET graduates may develop soft skills in their brigades and technical colleges, but they will constantly meet different settings that will not only put their soft skills to work but will also sharpen them.

Several studies discussed communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills among the soft skills considered as crucial in the workplace (Dean & East, 2019; Lavender, 2019). Soft skills are essential for graduate success in the workplace. The consequences of making the wrong judgement about a candidate's knowledge and skills can be costly to a company (Dean & East, 2019) because of the effects on corporate goals such as employee behaviours, security, efficiency, participation, and withdrawal.

According to Audu et al. (2013), leadership skills appear to be in high demand as they have a good impact on employment. As technology evolves, there is a growing tendency of bringing leadership qualities into the workplace (Audu et al., 2013). The use of leadership skills results in changes that have an impact on the workplace. As a result, people with leadership skills are in high

demand in today's job market because they grasp the value of human behaviour and can solve problems.

Personal skills, in particular, are skills that can be used to collaborate with others (Misra, 2018). Graduates need communication skills because every job involves initiative, flexibility, and the capacity to accept a variety of assignments (Nugraha et al., 2020). These abilities enable graduates to recognise opportunities for success since they have a positive impact on how a person works. Some scholars have emphasized the significance of interpersonal skills in the workplace (Mayombe, 2021; Paolini, 2020). Paolini (2020), for example, stated that interpersonal skills are required for the job market and that new graduates should be given the chance to strengthen these abilities in order to become effective academic and professional employees. Misra (2018) further emphasised the importance of interpersonal skills in the workplace from the standpoint of the global market. She mentioned that firms and employers are seeking for applicants that have a high academic background as well as those who have outstanding interpersonal skills. It is because companies require workers to deal with consumers from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Interpersonal skills are a requirement for graduates and should be taught (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

Furthermore, Chaka (2020) expanded on the crucial link between problem solving skill and employability 4.0. He researched necessary soft skills for 4IR and discovered that they were critical for graduates who would work in the sector during the 4IR. Additionally, Majid et al. (2020) emphasize the need of problem-solving skills (PSS) for the 4IR. Problem-solving abilities were seen as one of the best attributes for employability. In addition to problem-solving abilities, they identified analytical thinking as a key talent for a future graduate who is equipped for employment (Chaka, 2020). In Wise et al. (2005), self-awareness of TVET graduates is positively associated with employment prospects.

TVET graduates need digital skills to operate alongside new technologies and future-proof their professions as technology becomes more integrated in workplaces through greater digitisation of supply chains and procedures (Nugraha et al., 2020). These skills cover a wide range and can be divided into several categories, such as data and knowledge literacy, computation, and management; digital communications and collaboration; media content creation; information and communications technology (ICT) security; and use of hardware and ICT tools for problem solving and critical thinking. Nugraha et al. (2020) further emphasized that digital skills may be used at a basic level (e.g., turning on devices, opening emails, scrolling down a page, using word processing software) or at a higher level (e.g., developing and integrating emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), implementing and running cloud-based infrastructure, creating online media content).

The ability to think critically is an essential skill for modern life, and it can be cultivated through education, mainly in the humanities, social sciences, and classical studies. As a result, critical thinking involves analyzing facts to make judgments (Glaser 2017; Loseby, 2019).

4. Method

Considering the nature of the study, post-positivism appeared to be the most appropriate paradigm to use. The purpose of this study is to determine the nexus between TVET graduates' employability and soft skills. Postpositivism is regarded as a research philosophy based on the premise that "truth and reality are free and independent of the viewer and observer" (Aliyu et al., 2014, p. 34). Even though positivism has its weaknesses, it is considered relevant to this study since it enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by using empirical testing and techniques such as sampling, questionnaires, validity, and reliability that can be applied to a large sample (Mialhe et al., 2018). Accordingly, this study adopted a correlational design.

Botswana has ten districts. However, only five districts with TVET schools were purposively included in the study. All 2829 final-year students in Technical Colleges and Brigade schools of the selected five Botswana districts serve as target population for the study. The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane's statistical formula.

$$\frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \quad (1)$$

Where n = sample size, N = Population under study, e = margin error. Thus, the sample size of 2829 population 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level (Floyd & Fowler, 2014). Therefore, the calculated 351 is the minimum sample size for generalising the study findings. Since the whole population cannot be examined, only a representative sample must be picked (Acharya et al., 2013). This study used probability sampling, enabling the researcher to generalise sample results to the target population (Acharya et al., 2013). Hence, the study employed a stratified sampling technique to select 351 respondents, see Table 1.

Table 1. Population and Sample Size

| S/N | Schools Name | Population | Sample Size |
|-----|---|------------|-------------|
| 1 | Francistown Technical College (North East District) | 1500 | 185 |
| 2 | Jwaneng Technical College (South East District) | 162 | 20 |
| 3 | Gaborone Technical college (South East District) | 700 | 87 |
| 4 | Palapye Technical college (Central District) | 94 | 12 |
| 5 | Tutume Brigade (Central District) | 123 | 15 |
| 6 | Kgatleng Brigade (Kgatleng District) | 85 | 11 |
| 7 | Mahalapye Brigade (Central District) | 63 | 8 |
| 8 | Lobatse Brigade (South-East District) | 102 | 13 |
| | Total | 2829 | 351 |

4.1. Population and Sample Size

This study used a questionnaire titled "Soft Skills and TVET Graduate Employability Questionnaire" (SSTGRQ) adapted from Fahimirad et al., (2019), and Saari & Rashid, (2013) to elicit information from the sampled respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three sections, A, B, and C. Section A was based on the demographic data of the respondent, such as gender, programme of study, TVET type, duration of programme, and age. Section B comprised 26 items graduates' employability whereas section C focused on Soft Skills with 37 items generated from existing empirical studies. The response to the items was based on 4-Point Likert Rating Scale. The rating scale is given as 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5= always.

Validity is the degree to which results obtained from the data analysis represent the study's variables (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). Thus, the instrument was given to experts in the field of educational management, TVET education, psychology, guardians and counseling, industrial psychology, research test and evaluation. They assisted in validating the questionnaires designed for this research. They assessed the face and content validity of the instruments by ensuring that irrelevant and ambiguous items were eliminated. Hence, their suggestions were taken accordingly.

In research instruments, reliability is the degree to which repeated trials yield consistent results (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate reliability using the STATA 12.0 software. According to the reliability test results, graduate employability is 0.83 and soft skills are 0.89. Thus, both variables have a reliable scale. Scales with values above 0.70 at a significant level of 0.05 were considered acceptable (Pallant, 2011).

Research and ethics committee approval was received from the Johannesburg University with the number: Sem 1-2022-028. In order to obtain permission, the researcher described the research aim, showed the research instrument, and demonstrated the objectives of the research to the gatekeepers of the selected TVET schools. Likewise, participants were educated about the research's importance and risks. Participants were therefore given consent forms to sign. With the assistance of tutors, researchers administered the instruments to respondents. Respondents immediately returned the completed questionnaires.

Data analysis was done based on research hypotheses using STATA 12.0 software. The data analysis started with data entering/coding into a spreadsheet and editing and inspecting data to make provisions for missing data and outliers. Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage were used to analyse the participants' profile. Inferential statistic of Pearson correlation was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. One of the assumptions underlining the use of Pearson correlation states that the approach must be used "when you want to explore the strength of the

relationship between two continuous variables” (Pallant, 2011, p. 102). Therefore, variables such as soft skills (independent) is a continuous. The dependent variable (graduate employability), which is continuous variables.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

| Characteristic | <i>n</i> | % |
|--|----------|-------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 183 | 56.0 |
| Female | 144 | 44.0 |
| Total | 327 | 100.0 |
| Technical and Vocational Education Training | | |
| Technical College | 138 | 42.2 |
| Brigade | 189 | 57.8 |
| Total | 327 | 100.0 |
| Duration of Study | | |
| One year | 197 | 60.2 |
| Two Year | 117 | 35.8 |
| Three Year | 13 | 4.0 |
| Total | | |
| Age | | |
| 30 years and Below | 196 | 60.0 |
| 31-40yrs | 101 | 30.9 |
| 41-50yrs | 20 | 6.1 |
| 51yrs and Above | 10 | 3.0 |
| Total | 327 | 100.0 |

As shown in Table 2, 56.0% of the study participants were male and 44.0% were female. 57.8% in brigade and 42.2% were in technical college. In relation to participants’ duration of study, 60.2% had spent only one year, 35.8% had spent two years while 4.0% had three years. The majority (60.0%) of the participants were of age 30 years and below, 30.9% were 31-40 years of age, 6.1% were 41-50 years whereas 3.0% were of 51 years and above.

5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for the Study Variables

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for the Study Variables

| Variable | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-----------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1 Employability | 351 | 3.83 | 0.45 | - | | | | | | | |
| 2 ICS | 351 | 3.83 | 0.56 | 0.45* | - | | | | | | |
| 3 SAS | 351 | 4.40 | 0.58 | 0.08 | 0.32* | - | | | | | |
| 4 LES | 351 | 3.57 | 0.53 | 0.42* | 0.50* | 0.11* | - | | | | |
| 5 COM | 351 | 2.83 | 0.67 | 0.25* | 0.24* | -0.21* | 0.23* | - | | | |
| 6 CTS | 351 | 2.83 | 0.94 | 0.35* | 0.38* | -0.05 | 0.47* | 0.66* | - | | |
| 7 PSS | 351 | 3.20 | 0.79 | 0.26* | 0.18* | -0.14* | 0.30* | 0.75* | 0.70* | - | |
| 8 Soft Skills | 351 | 3.44 | 0.45 | 0.45* | 0.61* | 0.19* | 0.63* | 0.74* | 0.87* | 0.78* | - |

Soft Skills: Innovative and Creativity Skills (ICS), Self-Awareness and Adaptability to Change Skills (SAS), Leadership Skills (LES), Communication Skills (COM), Critical Thinking Skills (CTS), Problem-Solving Skills (PSS) *p<.05.

The result in Table 3 showed a strong positive correlation between graduate employability and soft skills, $r(351) = .45, p < .05$. There was also a strong correlation between graduate employability and innovative and creativity skills (ICS), $r(351) = .45, p < .05$, moderate correlation between graduate employability and leadership skills (LES), $r(351) = .42, p < .05$; and critical thinking skills (CTS), $r(351) = .38, p < .05$, and a weak but significant correlation between graduate employability and communication skills (COM), $r(351) = .24, p < .05$ and problem-solving skills (PSS), $r(351) = .26, p < .05$. However, no significant correlation was found between graduate employability and self-awareness and adaptability to change skills (SAS), $r(351) = .08, p > .05$.

The study examined the perceived relationship that exists between soft skills and TVET graduates' employability. The goal was to establish how soft skills can enhance TVET students' employability skills after graduation. To this end, the result revealed that soft skills and their elements have a strong relationship with TVET graduate employability as perceived by the final year TVET students. This implies that the better these soft skills students possessed, the better their employability chance after graduation to meet current 4IR job demands. Thus, the availability of these soft skills in the course of training will promote their employability significantly. The findings corroborated the study by Ibrahim, et al. (2017) who found a significant relationship between employees' acquisition of soft skills and their performance at work. In addition, Oluwalola and Awodiji's study (2021) found that soft skills would positively promote teachers' careers. Thus, the higher the soft skills of TVET graduates, the better their employability chances. According to Ibrahim et al. (2017), the acquisition of soft skills significantly predicts performance. Legg-Jack (2014) found that employers expect TVET graduates to be self-sufficient, communicative, problem-solving, mathematically literate, and analytical. Hartanto et al. (2017) argue that TVET graduates will be expected to have soft skills in their fields of expertise to meet the demands of the workplace. According to Succi & Canovi (2020), graduate employability can be enhanced by developing soft skills.

Among all the factors that were used to measure soft skills, only self-awareness and adaptability to change was found not significantly correlate to TVET graduate employability. The result might have been informed by TVET students' level of understanding of emotional intelligence as a future fit skill. On the contrary, Wise et al. (2005), TVET graduates' self-awareness is significantly correlated with their employment status. In Jameson et al. (2016) study, employers rated emotional self-awareness as not critical to graduate employability. Kumar and Sharma, (2019) observed that self-awareness as a soft skill will promote graduate employability. The instability in the position among scholars could be informed by factors such as research approaches used, the individual factor, and studies areas. It is argued that career adaptability and resilience can be developed as skills and abilities by graduates to enhance their employability (Glavin, et al., 2017; Rossier, et al., 2017).

In addition, problem-solving as a factor of soft skills was found to promote TVET graduates' employability. It means that TVET graduates with problem-solving skill are likely to be employable. Thus, since the scale was self-assessment, it indicates that students are aware of necessity for problem-solving skill for them to be employable at graduation. The finding was corroborated with Chaka (2020), that employability 4.0 is closely linked to problem-solving skills. Additionally, TVET graduates who are innovative and creative are likely to be employable. Edziwa and Blignant (2022) found that most graduates noted that innovativeness is a skill they expect to be employable.

Furthermore, leadership skills were found to be directly related to TVET graduates' employability. It implies that TVET students understand the importance of acquiring leadership skills for employment opportunities. The result is in accordance with Halik et al. (2012) study, which demonstrated the relevance of having leadership skills in promoting graduates' employment when they enter the workplace. Though, a weak but significant relationship was perceived to exist between communication skills and TVET graduates' employability. It means that TVET students are abreast of significant importance of communication skills in their employability. Thus, communication skills such as knowing how to use the technologies platforms like zoom, emails, google meet, MS Teams, and WhatsApp to express ideas clearly, establish online contacts to collaborate, start a conversation with other professionals via the internet, and transmit ideas, information and opinions clearly and convincingly, both verbally and in writing, while listening are essential for TVET graduates

employability in the digital world. It could be summarised that soft skills will significantly promote employability of TVET graduates.

5.3. Implications for Theory and Management Practice

This study investigated the nexus between the studied variables soft skills and TVET graduates employability in Botswana. The study focused was on how TVET students perceived that acquisition of soft skills will enhance their employability after graduation. Consequently, the investigation was underpinned by the employability theory which is based on acquisition, learning and understanding of relevant skills that will promote TVET graduate employment immediately after completion of their training (Yorke & Knight, 2004). Human resources managers seem to agree that acquisition of relevant skills is crucial to promoting the employability of graduates (Becker, 1993). Generally, human capital literature focuses on employees' knowledge, skills, competencies, and innovative abilities.

As the information and communication revolution unfolds, and a global labour market and the global socioeconomic transformation of the era of change take place, knowledge and skills are becoming increasingly critical to economic growth (World Bank, 2002; Ukwuaba, 2015). As a result, adding soft skills to TVET graduates' practical skills will improve their employability. Findings indicated that soft skill elements such as communication, leadership, critical thinking, and problem-solving, among others, are critical factors in TVET graduates' employability. In the world of work, soft skills play a crucial role in determining the employability of TVET graduates (Succi & Canovi, 2020). TVET students who possess these skills can have a great deal of relevance in the competitive world of work after graduation. Hence, the findings of this study confirm the theoretical justification of employability theory. In this work, we contribute to the literature on how soft skills help prepare TVET graduates for immediate employment after graduation. It is recommended that governments, professional organisations, and managers of TVET programs arrange appropriate training on the soft skills that are the focus of this study. This will allow not only TVET graduates to be prepared, but also tutors to contribute to TVET institutions' educational goals. Hence, all TVET administrators should keep up-to-date with this present model so that they can design policies that promote employability for TVET graduates. Finally, future studies should include mediating factors as well as predictors and criteria, including factors such as gender, leadership style, school type, and school factors.

This study is limited based on the following factors. The sample size used is not large enough to accommodate for generalisation of the result across Botswana. The scale used is self-assessed scale. Many of the students were not willing to participate in the study while some are not on ground due to induction programme for their out of classroom programmes or attachment. Also, other schools could not be reached because of distance and logistics. On the methodology, qualitative research approach could be used to have in-depth students understanding of these skills for employability. TVET tutors and employers of graduates can be engaged for inclusive understanding of relationship between soft skills and graduates employability.

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