

Chapter 13

Examining Assessment Tools and Procedures for Work–Based Learning in Pandemic Times

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the continuity to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) training activities and assessment thereby affecting and/or threatening the completions dates for many learners. Several institutions must revisit their assessment methods and tools for work-based learning during such pandemics. This study investigated the innovative assessment methods adopted by private TVET institutions to assess work-based learning during the pandemic. A quantitative research design was used to gather data using online questionnaires. Online questionnaires were used to effect social distancing and getting instant feedback. Purposive sampling was used to select research participants amongst TVET lecturers and attachment coordinators in private TVET colleges. Descriptive statistics were used to present research results using quantitative analysis and descriptions for clarifications. Findings indicated that assessment of practical skills virtually remains a challenge, and most of the institutions kept on using their old ways of assessing.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The advent of COVID-19 caused massive disruptions of continuity to TVET training and assessment activities thereby affecting and/or threatening the completion dates for many learners (International Labour Organisation, [ILO], 2021). Several TVET programmes such as apprenticeships and traineeships involve a combination of both classroom and work-based training, or wholly on-the-job learning coupled with formative and summative assessments. Alternance of training venues can take place on varying durations which can be on weekly, monthly, or yearly basis (European Commission [EC], 2013). Whilst most theory lessons delivery and their assessments have gone online, practical competences must be carried out in the workplace and assessed on the job. Even though the pandemic has created several opportunities to adopt new pedagogical methodologies based on digital technologies and interactions online, its impact on development and assessment of hands-on practical skills virtually remains a challenge (ILO–UNESCO–World Bank, 2021). Hence, this study investigated and examined assessment tools and procedures adopted for work-based learning assessment by institutions in Botswana during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To comply with COVID-19 protocols, training institutions have been challenged to revisit their assessment tools and procedures of work-based learning during such pandemics (World Bank, 2020). ILO–UNESCO–World Bank (2021) joint survey findings indicated that 75% of respondents reported that there was cancellation or postponement of examinations and other assessments due to the pandemic. The negative impacts of the pandemic on the school closures and work-based training cancellations and postponements on outcomes for learners was greater in low-income countries. Moreover, in these countries, the online delivery of TVET courses is further hampered by the lack of digital skills among teachers and students (Hondonga, Chinengundu & Maphosa, 2021). On the other hand, some critics of teaching TVET courses online argue that, even where simulators are available, distance and online learning does not easily incorporate the development of practical skills, and many institutions in developing countries cannot afford simulator technology (ILO-UNESCO-World Bank, 2021:12; Hartel, 2017). The overwhelming advantages and need to expose Vocational Education and Training (VET) learners to the real work environment have been met with another challenge on how to assess work-based trainees. This has been further affected by restrictions introduced to limit the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in the workplaces.

Prior to the pandemic, institutional assessors were physically following-up learners in the workplaces for work-based learning assessment and/or collecting evidence of assessment from trainee mentors and supervisors in the workplaces. Therefore, in an era when most of the communication and transfer of information must be paperless, TVET institutions need to come up with innovative ways of conducting work-based assessments to meet training schedules. Hence, this study examined assessment tools and procedures for work-based learning implemented by TVET institutions in Botswana during the pandemic times.

Although training institutions were closed and several lessons have now gone online, including that of TVET courses, the debate is on whether it is possible to teach and assess practical hands-on courses online (Hartel, 2017). Contentious and fundamental questions raised by academics and industrialists are: How can TVET learners acquire practical skills in a virtual workshop? How can learners' competencies be assessed and merged with other theory assessments to make a full award? However, proponents of blended learning such as Bates (2015); Hartel (2017); Cleveland-Innes & Wilton (2018) and Gannon (2020) argue that the future of TVET teaching must embrace online teaching and assessment methods

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