



Applying experiential learning theory in non-school-based technical and vocational education and training for unemployed youths in South Africa

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is one of the major challenges facing Sub-Saharan African countries today. Although young people may hold general certificates of education (equivalent to Grade 12), they lack employable or marketable skills enabling them to be integrated into the labour market. In this paper, I examine the application of experiential learning theory (ELT) in non-school-based technical and vocational training for unemployed youths as a learning approach to develop job-related skills and competencies for the real world of the workplace. I used a qualitative research design to meet the research objectives and conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 10 trainees out of 512 to get their views on training delivery and learning approaches for skills acquisition. To complement the interview data, I also conducted field observations at the training centres, in the workshops, and at companies hosting trainees for workplace training. My findings revealed that the facilitators used classroom-based and field-based experiential learning approaches to help the trainees gain job-related skills and competencies required in the labour market. I conclude that applying ELT in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes helped young trainees gain the job-related skills and competencies required in the labour market. As practical implications for society, I provide new insights into applying ELT to improve the effectiveness of non-school-based TVET programmes for disadvantaged and unemployed youths. My findings will motivate other trainers and training managers to apply ELT in designing and implementing non-school-based TVET programmes.

Keywords: non-school-based training, vocational training, experiential learning, disadvantaged youths, South Africa

Introduction

Youth unemployment is one of the major challenges facing Sub-Saharan African countries today. Although some young socio-economically disadvantaged young people may have

completed secondary school with general certificates of education (equivalent to Grade 12), they lack job-related skills that enable them to become wage employed or start micro-enterprises in the informal sector. To solve the problem, I perceive technical vocational education and training (TVET) to be a significant step towards human capital development, waged- and self-employment for economic development (United Nations, 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). Furthermore, evidence from studies shows that TVET programmes empower disadvantaged young people with marketable skills and competencies that allow them to become involved in economic activities (Kersh & Huegler, 2019; Lantu et al., 2022; Papier, 2016; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). To reach these outcomes, TVET programmes with experiential learning approaches that focus on hands-on training should be implemented.

To ensure that TVET programmes enable unemployed young people to acquire the relevant marketable skills to ensure a future in the labour market, learning should happen in real-life and interactive environments. For this reason, experiential learning is a significant component of TVET programmes for unemployed youths. In this paper, I examine the application of experiential learning theory (ELT) in non-school-based technical and vocational training as a learning approach to develop job-related skills and competencies for the real world of the workplace.

Background of the study

In many countries, TVET has the role of equipping young people (specifically those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged) with employable skills to succeed in the labour market. Kersh and Huegler (2019) noted that the TVET system has been used as a strategy to help youths who remain unemployed because they lack the skills to become integrated into the labour market. In its recent 2010 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) on disadvantaged youth, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also emphasised the importance of TVET in contributing to solving the problem of disadvantaged youths. Disadvantaged or marginalised groups are made up of those who do not have equal access to available resources because of socio-economic inequalities including poverty, ethnicity, gender, livelihood, and geographical location. The GMR suggested that TVET “can play an important role in strengthening the transition from school to the world of work, in offering second chances and in combating marginalisation” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2010, p. 90). The consequence of marginalisation in this case is that young people who cannot make the school-to-work transition often face long-term unemployment that results in absolute poverty.

Acquiring marketable skills can reduce youth unemployment and alleviate poverty. Sub-Saharan African countries face challenges of youth unemployment because of economic factors and the lack of job-related experiential learning skills that enable individuals to become involved in economic activities at a low level (Eicker et al., 2016). For the TVET programmes to play a significant role in skills development, their delivery requires teaching

and learning approaches that develop job-related skills and competencies for the real world of the workplace. If job opportunities in the trainees' communities exist, appropriate teaching and learning approaches will help them to acquire employable skills that will lead to success in the labour market (Lantu et al., 2022; Papier, 2016). To provide young people with job-related skills, TVET courses should focus on hands-on training informed by appropriate teaching and learning theory.

In South Africa, the provision of non-school-based TVET for unemployed youths is relevant because some disadvantaged young people and school dropouts do not have access to formal TVET colleges given their financial constraints. Yet, there is a need for them to acquire job-related skills to foster their integration into the labour market. Data from Statistics South Africa (2021) on the provincial labour market reveal that the unemployment rate among youth (15–34 years) is 55% compared to 21,5% among adults (35–64 years). The youth unemployment rate in the province is 48,7% (Stats SA, 2021). Most disadvantaged youths are not in employment or training because they face financial challenges linked to enrolling at tertiary education institutions to build their skills. To empower them with marketable skills, the local governments provide non-school-based TVET programmes consisting of short-course curricula that enable them to obtain jobs at entry level. The vocational skills training programmes are formal and accredited by the Sectoral Education and Training Authority.

Teaching and learning approaches in TVET programmes lay a good foundation for the utilisation of skills in the labour market. Extensive studies on unemployed and disadvantaged youths focused on the implementation of the TVET curriculum in colleges (Rudhumbu, 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010), the effectiveness of school-based TVET programmes in helping youths acquire skills (Eicker et al., 2016; Lantu et al., 2022; Lolwana, 2016). In this paper, I add to existing knowledge on the contribution of ELT to non-school-based TVET programmes by examining the effects of delivering non-school-based TVET through ELT to help youth gain job-related skills at the benchmarked level.

This work is part of a research project on non-school-based TVET for unemployed and disadvantaged youths in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. The training courses are practice-oriented in the form of experiential learning to contribute to the acquisition of skills related to employability, work experience, and work readiness, hence enhancing their chance to compete with other job seekers in the labour market. Depending on the training course and training centre, experiential learning has been offered either at the training centres (workshops) or partner companies (in-service training, micro-placement). The research participants were unemployed and disadvantaged young people who enrolled in non-school-based TVET programmes provided by the eThekweni Municipality in KZN. It is important to note that in this paper I am confined to examining the application of ELT in non-school-based TVET as a learning approach to develop skills and competencies for the real world of the workplace; I do not look at the employment outcomes.

Problem statement and study objectives

My concern is with the effectiveness of non-school-based TVET programmes in empowering disadvantaged and unemployed youths with job-related skills and competencies for real-world work. Previous studies reported the lack of learning through concrete experience or learning-by-doing to help trainees gain experience (Abdullah et al., 2019; Lolwana, 2016). Other studies have pointed out the lack of training equipment at the training centres for carrying out practical activities in the process of learning (Bratti et al., 2022; Da Costa, 2016; Drewery et al., 2020). Therefore, I examine the application of ELT in non-school-based TVET as a learning approach to develop job-related skills and competencies for the real world of the workplace. The objectives of the paper are to examine:

- the application of ELT approaches during classroom-based learning to empower trainees with relevant skills;
- the application of ELT approaches during field-based learning to help trainees practice skills in the world of work; and
- the perceptions of trainees about the acquisition of job-related skills and competencies for future employment.

Experiential learning is usually applied in TVET because it connects knowledge to its application in daily life. The rationale of the study is that integrating non-school-based TVET with experiential learning provides trainees with an opportunity to combine theory and practice in a real-world work environment and enhances work-related capabilities. I envisage providing new insights into the implementation of TVET programmes by applying experiential learning theory for desirable outcomes in terms of job-related skills and competencies for the labour market. This will equip trainers and centre managers with the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to infuse ELT into the curriculum design and facilitating process. There is a need to help young trainees go through the four steps of ELT while ensuring the availability of human and material resources.

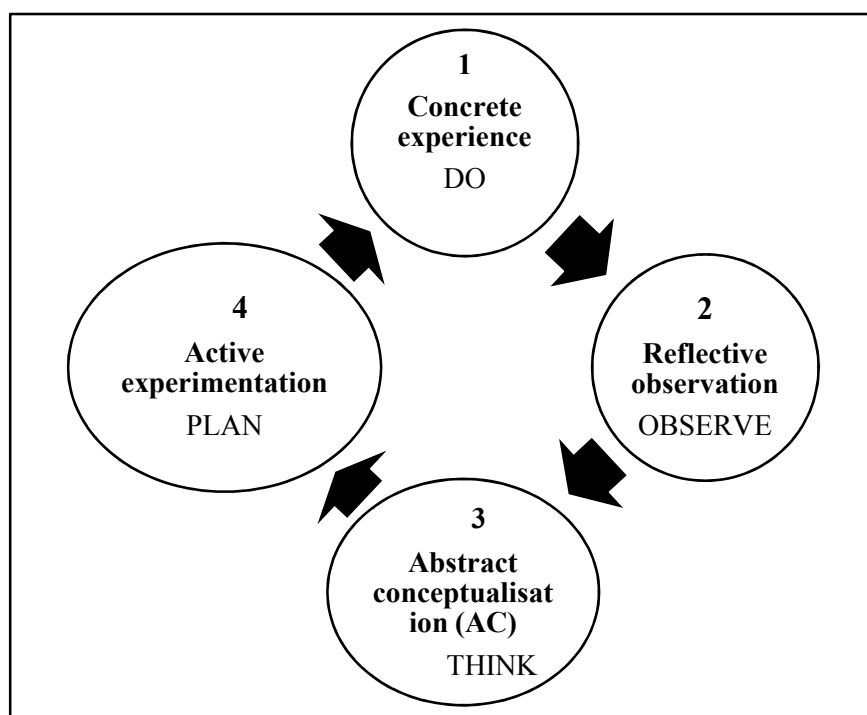
Theoretical framework and literature review

As the title indicates, in this paper, I use experiential learning theory, a term coined by Kolb in 1984. In experiential learning, learners acquire knowledge and skills by being directly and actively involved in experience. According to Kolb (1984, p. 41), experiential learning is a learning method that consists of “learning by doing, experiencing and reflecting.” It is important to mention the difference between experiential education and experiential learning. Experiential education is the philosophical procedure that guides the development of structural and functional learning experiences in a learning environment (Roberts, 2012). Experiential learning denotes the specific techniques or mechanisms that a learner (student or trainee) can utilise to acquire knowledge and ability, hence meeting learning goals. Keeton and Tate (1978, p. 2) pointed out that learning is experiential when “. . . the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied . . . it involves a direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about it.” Kolb (1984, p. 41) perceived learning as “the process in which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming

experience.” Thus, experiential learning consists of a group of learning strategies that seek to empower students to become actively involved in practical activities through doing.

As indicated above, for the learners to acquire skills, the learning process must be in the form of learning-by-doing or hands-on learning. During the process of experiential learning, learners bring individual learning needs, objectives, and experiences to their learning environment. To this end, Kolb (1984) developed four stages of the experiential learning cycle.

Figure 1
Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984)



1. **Concrete experience (CE):** During this stage, learners are directly engaged in authentic situations or tangible matters. They are motivated to participate in active learning under the guidance of a facilitator or mentor (Herod, 2012; Kolb, 1984). This stage consists of pursuing new knowledge and skills in real-life activities to gain concrete experience.
2. **Reflective observation (RO):** Learners reflect carefully on the experience to develop new skills or new ways of thinking (Kolb, 1984). The process entails noticing what has happened and relating this to past experiences and conceptual understandings.
3. **Abstract conceptualisation (AC):** The activity is for the learners to conceptualise a theory from what they have observed during the experience. At this stage, learners link the experience to theory or concepts learned from textbooks or in the classroom (Kolb et al., 1999).
4. **Active experimentation (AE):** During this stage, learners apply the new knowledge and skills in real-life work environments and new workplace conditions (Kolb, 1984; Kolb et al., 1999). They will test new ideas, thus improving skills through a new experience. In other words, this stage stresses the practical application of the experience to the reality of

the work environment (Villarroel et al., 2020) or, put differently, the application of experiential learning approaches in classroom-based learning.

Applying experiential learning approaches during classroom-based learning motivates and facilitates students to participate actively in learning activities leading to the attainment of their learning objectives and needs. It is important to mention some experiential learning approaches that teachers can use in the classrooms or at schools, including training centres. These are case-based learning, role-playing, game-based learning, cooperative learning, small-group work, simulations, presentations, and types of workshop practicums (Huang and Jiang, 2020; Perini et al., 2018). Teachers select an approach to classroom-based learning based on the lesson objectives and outcomes. Villarroel et al. (2020) pointed out that classroom-based (school-based) experiential learning is not passive, but rather active and practical and results in fostering the students' understanding of the content of lessons and applying it in the real-work environment.

In the classroom (school-based), experiential learning requires personal input, initiative, and self-direction of students in the learning process. In practice, project-based, case-based learning, role-playing, game-based learning, cooperative learning, small-group work, and other types of experiential learning become experiential when elements of reflection, support, and transfer are added to the basic experience, transforming a simple activity into a learning opportunity (Butler et al., 2019). Pamungkas et al. (2020) reported in their study that there were positive outcomes of classroom-based experiential learning because students could learn more actively by directly practising activities that were relevant to the theory being taught.

However, there are challenges in implementing classroom-based (school-based) experiential learning in vocational training programmes. In the study conducted in Indonesia, Pamungkas et al. (2019), noted that the application of experiential learning in vocational education and training, especially in technical subjects is not easy because of its broad scope and complexity. This study found that the implementation of experiential learning was hampered by three components that constitute its main challenges, namely inadequate learning and equipment space, the lack of experience in teachers and instructors and failing to pay attention to additional experiences, and poor class management. Furthermore, learning to apply experiential learning to vocational education and training programmes requires a lot of time (Pamungkas et al., 2020).

The application of experiential learning approaches in field-based learning

In the context of non-school-based TVET programmes for disadvantaged youths, field-based learning helps trainees practise skills learnt in classrooms and understand the world-work environment. In this connection, Sam and Van der Sijde (2014) supported the idea that field-based learning enhances trainees' abilities and competencies that employers need in the industry. This argument implies that field-based learning can increase the employability of the trainees. Examples of field-based learning are fieldwork, practicums, project-based learning, workplace learning, situated learning, place-based learning, on-the-job training, internships, and service learning (O'Shea, 2014). Therefore, applying experiential learning

approaches in field-based learning contributes to non-school-based TVET programmes in terms of helping trainees to gain job-related skills for their future world of work.

Nevertheless, previous studies note some challenges that training centres face in the application of experiential learning approaches in field-based learning. The common challenge is the lack of linkage with external stakeholders such as local businesses and institutions to facilitate workplace-based learning in a real-world of work (Lolwana, 2016; Rudhumbu, 2021). A similar study conducted by the United Nations (2020) and Bratti et al. (2022) both mentioned an inadequate supply of training equipment (workshops, instructional tools, and machines) and no or few links with local businesses as two major challenges that impede the application of ELT in TVET programmes for youths. As a result, the majority of TVET colleges could not use relevant field-based learning approaches such as practicums, workplace learning, place-based learning, and on-the-job training.

Research methodology

I used a qualitative research approach to meet the research objectives. Following Lavery (2016), the qualitative research approach allowed me to see the reality of the application of ELT in non-school-based TVET from the understanding of the young trainees. The justification for using a qualitative research design is the nature of the theoretical framework, which is ELT, and the research objectives that require the analysis of the research participants' views and perceptions. In the context of a qualitative research approach, the type of research design was multiple-case studies. Twenty-four (24) training centres were selected to create cases.

The recruitment of 24 training centres or training providers involved using a list provided by eThekweni Municipal Academy which contained the names of companies, local businesses, and institutions that had signed a memorandum of understanding as partners in vocational skill training and that are also accredited by the Sectoral Education Authority. To ensure that the training centres met the research purpose and research objectives, I selected centres that use school-based (in classrooms and/or workshops) and field-based (workplace-based) experiential learning to enable the trainees to acquire relevant skills needed in the labour market and to further their employment prospects. The director (as gatekeeper) requested the training centre managers to support me in the data collection process.

Participants and sampling method

In this paper, I report on the qualitative approach. In the original research project, the participants consisted of 512 young trainees from 24 training centres who graduated from non-school-based TVET programmes for unemployed youths in KwaZulu-Natal. However, the qualitative study entailed 10 participants out of 512 young trainees who completed survey questionnaires for one-on-one interviews. For the qualitative component, the research participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. In other words, I selected only "participants who [were] relevant to the topic, [were] best positioned to provide the needed

information for the study and [were] willing to share it with [me]" (Kumar, 2011, p. 207). The 10 participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- be currently employed whether in the informal public or private sector;
- be selected according to the type of vocational skills training on one side and type of post-training occupation or employer on other; and
- be selected according to gender, areas (CBD, township), and the nature of the training centre (public or private).

Data collection and analysis

It is significant to mention that the theoretical framework, literature review, and research objectives helped me to develop the data collection instruments. First, to obtain reliable data on the application of ELT in TVET centres, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 10 trainees to get their views on training delivery, learning approaches, and skills acquisition. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them with the permission of the participants (see Creswell, 2014; Laverty, 2016). Second, to complement interview data, I also conducted field observations at the training centres, in the workshops, and in host companies where trainees were placed for job training. I observed the practical activities in which trainees were involved.

The analysis of the data from interviews and site observations followed the principles of thematic analysis. The codes and themes allowed me to understand the raw data by putting names onto descriptions and interpretations (see Fouché & Bartley, 2011). The data collected through semi-structured interviews with trainees and field observations was organised and linked by making connections between the analysed data to provide information that helped me reach the research objectives.

Findings

Biographic profile of the trainees

As mentioned in the introduction, the non-school-based TVET programmes targeted disadvantaged and unemployed young people who completed grade 12 and who had no marketable skills. They could not gain admission to universities or TVET colleges because of low marks on their Grade 12 certificates and this meant that no government funding was available. The findings from the interviews suggest that their unemployment status was their main motivation to acquire relevant skills to compete with other job seekers in the labour market. They were trained in construction, plastering, carpentry, welding, boilermaking, motor mechanics, firefighting, upholstery, end-user computer skills (ICT), small medium and micro-enterprises, lifeguard skills, and Early Childhood Development.

Experiential learning approaches during classroom-based learning at the training centres

In this sub-section, I examine the application of ELT during classroom-based or workshop learning to help the trainees gain relevant skills and knowledge for the world of work. It is important to mention that data from interviews was supplemented by classroom-based and workshop observations. The first trainee (D04) reported his learning experience from the training centre by saying,

Theory in the classroom was good and according to our expectations because the learning tasks focused on activities like those happening in the companies. Depending on the lesson of the day, trainers could group us for different types of learning activities. Yes, I remember, some of the activities were role-playing, case-based learning, presentations, small-group work, and other activities in class or outside. Our training centre has a workshop equipped with learning materials for simulations. All these learning activities helped us understand the content of the lessons in the textbook.

A second trainee (M23) reported his learning experience thus:

Regarding the way we were trained, I can say that our training sessions happened more in the workshops than in the classrooms. I can say that we spent many hours practically learning things in groups. We gained more knowledge and skills through practical activities either in classrooms or outside. Our trainers were using different activities to practice technical skills like people who are in a real-work environment.

A third trainee who studied ICT (IT 203) explained her learning experience by saying,

The training centre was well equipped with computers which had software programmes used to capture information about patients at hospitals or clinics. Our training was much more practical and orientated to IT activities at a health clinic. The group assignments consisted of doing activities such as presentations, role-playing, problem-solving, small-group work, and simulation, and trainers used to provide us with examples of patient information to work on.

A fourth trainee (L402) who studied lifeguard skills explained the training delivery approaches of her training centre as follows:

Learning activities depended on the types of lifeguard skills to acquire and save a drowning person. Sometimes we used to learn through games in which trainers helped us practise skills with hands-on activities. We were also given life-saving cases from a real-life experience in which a group of three or four students must solve a problem. We developed skills through reflection and discussing complex, real-life scenarios. Case-based activities in the classroom prepared us for real-world experience in the lifeguard job.

The analysis of these four observations on the training centres reveals that trainers used diverse types of experiential learning to facilitate skills acquisition in the non-school-based TVET centres. The types of experiential learning approaches mostly used were role-playing,

game-based learning, and case-based learning. Data from classroom-based and workshop observations also revealed that trainees learned through simulations, presentations, small-group work, and workshop practicums. The findings suggest that a selection of experiential learning approaches during classroom-based learning depended on the type of skills training programme and learning outcomes of a lesson. The findings from the interview extracts further suggest that by using these experiential learning approaches, the trainers helped young trainees to go through the stages of concrete experience (CE) and reflective observation (RO) of ELT where the learning process was active. As a result, classroom-based experiential learning helped trainees gain an understanding of the lessons through activities in the form of a practice-based experience.

Experiential learning approaches during field-based learning

In the context of non-school-based TVET programmes for disadvantaged youths, field-based learning was very important for two reasons. First, the programmes were delivered in the form of short course training to help trainees acquire job-related skills for immediate employment after graduation. Second, they lacked social connection with prospective employers because of their socio-economic situation. Thus, field-based learning could help them gain industry experience and connect with prospective employers.

During one-on-one interviews, trainees were asked to explain how they practised skills in the workshops or in the world of work. Another question concerned how the practice of technical skills during training at their training centres prepared them for the world of work in their current employment. The first participant reported,

To acquire practical skills in the work environment, we went through physical fitness exercises to save lives on Durban beaches. They used to give us adequate lifesaving equipment to facilitate the learning process and apply practical training. The practicums occurred in the real work environment where I am currently employed.

A second trainee (BOI.3) who studies boiler making explained his learning experience by saying,

Our training centre works in partnership with companies using the same skills in the city of Durban. After our recruitment as trainees, we were placed in each partner company for work-based training. These companies provided the workplace and mentorship to us.

A third trainee (BOI 14) further explained the learning experience from her centre by explaining,

Our training centre is both training providers and employers using the company for workplace learning and micro-placement. Our training happened in the real-work environment where it was possible to become full employees after graduating.

A fourth trainee said,

We are recruited as interns during our training programme by signing a contract with the municipality and other companies for two years. This is why we could receive stipends as temporary employees. After the programme, some employers considered our internship as two years of work experience in the industry.

Though the trainees benefited from classroom-based experiential learning, the analysis of the above extracts reveals that field-based experiential learning expanded their knowledge and skills in their respective training courses. Findings from observations conducted in the companies and institutions where trainees were placed confirmed that the field-based learning entailed practicums in companies or work environments, on-the-job training, micro-placement, and internships. The findings from the transcripts and site observations I conducted suggest that the trainees had abundant opportunity to go through the stages of ELT which are concrete experience (CE) and reflective observation (RO) where the learning process was made active by involving tangible matters. Their practical learning allowed them to reach the stage of abstract conceptualisation (AC) where they could connect the experience to the theory or concepts learned in the classrooms.

The acquisition of job-related skills and competencies for future employment

I also sought to examine the perceptions of trainees about the acquisition of job-related skills and competencies to be used in the labour market. The trainees were asked to explain how the combination of classroom-based and field-based learning approaches prepared them for their future employment. A trainee (S04) reported,

Yes, I am confident with the skills I have acquired from my training course. The way I see it, our skills training programmes are run as work-based training to help us obtain jobs immediately after graduating. I can work for a company, or small business or become self-employed without supervision.

A second participant (L403) explained,

Yes, the skills training course at my vocational training centre prepared me for this job. The course consisted of capturing patient data in hospitals or health clinics using ICT. The skills and tasks that I perform here are similar to those we used to do during our training programme.

A third trainee (M153), who studied auto mechanical, said,

I acquired the necessary skills to become employed in this auto mechanic workshop. I utilise all the technical skills I acquired during the training programme. It was a good training course because of its practical component. I did an interview and was selected for the job.

The analysis of the three transcripts shows that types of experiential learning used by the non-school-based TVET centres facilitated the acquisition of marketable skills. This may be because of the practice-oriented approach to the training. The interview extracts highlight that the use of experiential learning at school and at the workplace helped trainees to acquire relevant skills needed in the labour market. Without generalising, the findings suggest that many trainees acquired skills and abilities required in the labour market. The inference is that there was a link between skills supply and skills demand in the industries and/or the workplace.

Although the employment outcomes are not the focus of this paper, the findings revealed that the application of ELT in non-school-based TVET to develop job-related skills and competencies and the mechanisms utilised to assist a graduate with finding employment were effective. This is because the wage employment rate after graduating was 65.4%; trainees became employed toward the end of their training or immediately after graduating. The short courses provided in the form of non-school-based TVET had lasting benefits for the trainees. The findings further revealed that the facilitators (trainers and company-based mentors) were already familiar with experiential learning before using it.

Discussion of findings

The application of any type of experiential learning approach in classrooms or workshops at the centre helped trainees gain an understanding of the lessons through activities in the form of a practice-based experience. The experiential learning approaches mostly used were role-playing, game-based learning, case-based learning, simulations, presentations, small-group work, and workshop practicums. These findings concur with those reported in the study conducted by Pamungkas, et al. (2020) in which classroom-based experiential learning yielded positive outcomes because the trainees could learn more actively by transforming theory into practice. In support of Gustavsson and Thunqvist's (2019) argument, the present findings suggest that these practice-oriented methods of learning in classrooms or workshops helped the trainees acquire relevant skills and abilities for the labour market.

By using any type of classroom-based experiential learning, the trainees could go through the four stages of ELT, hence gaining practical skills. However, Green et al. (2017) and Perini et al. (2018) have cast doubt on the effectiveness of classroom-based practice to experiential learning. They argue that classroom-based experiential learning may not always help students understand the content of skills and apply them in the work environment because of its passive nature. Nevertheless, the present findings attest that motivating and engaging trainees in the classrooms helped them to understand the content of lessons and increased their practical knowledge and skills.

Trainees gained exposure to the real-work environment in the companies or institutions in which they were placed for workplace training. The field-based experiential learning in companies or work environments consisted of on-the-job training, micro-placement, and internships. Previous studies on the topic also revealed that these types of experiential learning approaches helped young trainees to familiarise themselves with their future jobs

that were linked to their training course studied (Abdullah et al., 2019; Sam & Van der Sijde, 2014). In the context of the present study, the inference from the findings is that workplace-based learning developed the skills and abilities of the trainees to perform tasks in their future employment. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that the acquisition of skills and competencies was facilitated by mentorship in the host companies. Through the mentorship process, the trainees could learn through the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) from concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), and abstract conceptualisation (AC) to active experimentation (AE).

The linkage and partnerships between the training centres and the host companies facilitated the application of experiential learning approaches in the form of on-the-job training, micro-placement, and internships. This finding differs from those reported in previous studies that the common challenge hindering the application of ELT in TVET was the lack of linkage with external stakeholders, local businesses, and institutions to facilitate workplace-based learning in a real-world of work (Lolwana, 2016; Rudhumbu, 2021). As a result, the majority of TVET colleges could not use relevant field-based learning approaches such as practicums, workplace learning, place-based learning, and on-the-job training (Bratti et al., 2022; United Nations, 2020). In my study, the linkage not only facilitated the application of ELT but also enabled trainees to acquire job-related skills and a smooth school-to-work transition.

The classroom-based and field-based (workplace-based) experiential learning enabled the trainees to acquire the relevant skills needed in the labour market and their employment prospects. The trainees perceived that both types of experiential learning helped them to develop skills and competencies to perform similar tasks in their future employment. The findings concur with the view of Gustavsson and Thunqvist (2019) that practice-oriented methods of delivering TVET programmes (whether at training centres or workplaces) empower the trainees to gain the job-related skills and abilities required in the labour market. The partnerships between the training centres and external stakeholders (industries, local businesses, and employers) helped overcome the challenges of the limitations or lack of experience of trainers, and the lack of opportunities for practical learning by doing and workplace opportunities. This is because the partner companies provided trainees with mentors for work-based learning.

Conclusions

In this paper, I examine the application of ELT in non-school-based technical and vocational training as a learning approach to develop job-related skills and competencies for the real world of the workplace. The evidence from the findings reveals that the types of classroom-based learning were simulations, small-group work, and workshop practicums. The field-based learning consisted of internships, on-the-job training, and micro-placement in the host companies. In receiving both types of experiential learning in non-school-based TVET programmes, the trainees perceived that they gained job-related skills for their future world of work.

Based on the findings, I conclude that applying ELT in TVET programmes helped young trainees gain job-related (real-world) skills and the competencies required in the labour market. Thus, the non-school-based TVET programmes were effective in empowering disadvantaged and unemployed youths with job-related skills and competencies for real-world work. As practical implications for society, I provide new insights into applying ELT to improve the effectiveness of TVET programmes for disadvantaged and unemployed youths. I hope that my findings will motivate other trainers and training managers to apply ELT in designing and implementing non-school-based TVET programmes.

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