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The influence of the socio-demographic factors on curriculum discrepancy for vocational skills training in folk development colleges in Tanzania

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Abstract. This study investigated the influence of the socio-demographic factors on the discrepancy in vocational skills (VSs) curricula in folk development colleges (FDCs) in Tanzania. Utilising a mixed-methods research approach and correlational design, data were collected from 468 participants, including 384 students, 21 tutors, 58 FDC graduates and two (2) industry officials and were analysed by chi-square test and multivariate binary logistic regression. The results reveal significant associations between the socio-demographic characteristics and curriculum discrepancies. The results also indicate a lack of media exposure and absence of prior knowledge about vocational programmes that exacerbated the gap in skills attainment. Moreover, the results reveal that most students were young males from rural backgrounds, reflecting broader socio-economic challenges. The results further suggest that electrical installations, plumbing, and pipe-fitting had higher student participation than tailoring, although the statistical significance remained marginal. However, the results indicate no significant associations between age, gender, or place of residence and the discrepancies in VSs. The key argument in this study is that there is a need for targeted interventions that enhance media access and prior knowledge to better align VSs training with labour market demands. By addressing the identified gaps, VSs training institutions can improve educational outcomes and better meet the needs of diverse learner populations.

Keywords: folk development colleges, socio-demographic factors, curriculum discrepancy, vocational skills training

1. Introduction

The vocational skills curriculum (VSC) is a crucial framework for imparting knowledge necessary to improve living standards globally [8, 32]. Vocational skills equip individuals with practical competencies applicable in various fields, enabling them to secure employment or launch their businesses [32]. VSC fosters increased self-employment rates and contributes to the socio-economic development within communities [8, 10, 32]. Vocational skill education (VSE) is viewed as a strategic approach to economic advancement on both personal and national levels, as it provides citizens with the skills and competencies required for meaningful participation in the workforce [21]. Institutions such as folk development colleges (FDCs) are pivotal in preparing youth for active participation in self-improvement, thus contributing to broader national socio-economic growth [20, 24].

FDCs are essential grassroots institutions that foster basic education and vocational skills among adults, particularly within marginalised communities, to alleviate poverty and enhance societal well-being [21]. Unlike traditional education systems that may exclude individuals without higher education qualifications, FDCs provide an accessible and pragmatic learning environment tailored to the unique needs of young adults

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who may have missed conventional schooling opportunities [33]. Through a focus on practical, hands-on training, FDCs impart vital technical skills and provide the socio-economic knowledge necessary for individual empowerment and self-employment [21]. This community-centred approach helps bridge the skills gap, fostering local economic development and enhancing the employability of graduates [38]. By promoting a culture of lifelong learning, FDCs encourage participants to engage actively in their development and the broader economic landscape, leading to more resilient and prosperous communities [20, 21, 24].

FDCs is well researched at global level and in Tanzania [2, 3, 13, 15, 18, 21–23, 27, 30]. However, previous studies have been conducted in foreign countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and Germany. Those studies conducted in Tanzania mostly focused on factors for employability skills, challenges, prospects and impacts, agricultural education and youth farms [15, 21–23, 27, 30]. While existing literature has documented the contributions of FDCs to community development and individual empowerment, less attention has been paid to understanding how variables such as age, gender, prior education, and socio-economic status affect students' experiences and outcomes in vocational training programmes. This study investigated the influence of socio-demographic factors on curriculum discrepancy in vocational skills (VSs) training in FDCs, which has not been well documented and studied in the Tanzanian context. The key research question was: *To what extent do demographic factors influence the curriculum discrepancy in VS training in FDCs?*

2. Background

2.1. What is VS and curriculum?

Giving definitions of the terms is always problematic, as individuals have different perspectives. VSs, as defined by Nanjwan and Plang [29], are practical competencies that enable individuals to become proficient in specific trades or professions. To Cappelli [6, p. 98], VSs refer to "a wide range of abilities that facilitate the acquisition, performance, and mastery of job-related tasks". VSs effectively apply knowledge and expertise in various career fields, including trades such as artisans, carpenters, masons, electricians, and other crafts [17]. In this study, VSs can mean individual practical competencies that enable him or her to perform or master job-related activities and can lead to self-employment. Curriculum, on the other hand, is defined by Mulenga [26, p. 5] as "what is taught in school. In other words, a curriculum is a set of subjects". According to Nti [31, p. 1], in its narrow meaning, curriculum is "a course, especially, a specified fixed course of study, as in a school, or college, as one leading to a degree". In this study, curriculum can mean what is taught in schools or colleges.

2.2. The concept of FDCs

The National Education Act of 1978 [34, p. 5] defined FDC as an "adult education centre at or in which training is provided in a specific field of learning for the purposes of particular developmental requirements of a District or any Part of it, or a group of Districts". FDCs play a significant role in imparting comprehensive life skills and practical competencies to individuals, aligning their education with the broader goals of personal growth and societal advancement. In this study, FDC can be termed as the colleges that serve as pillars of vocational education, offering accessible training opportunities and empowering local communities through skills development and economic empowerment.

2.3. Vocational skills in Tanzania

FDCs in Tanzania work in consideration of various educational policies and guidelines in providing VSs, such as the Technical Education and Training Policy in Tanzania of 1996 [12, 39]. FDCs enhance vocational skills training for artisans/craftsmen, technicians, and technologists and promote self-employment through entrepreneurship education development by promoting indigenous and endogenous technologies to cover different occupations practised in both rural and urban communities. FDCs facilitate the link of skills with employment opportunities as decent work is critical, and skills need to be an integral part of economic growth and employment [39]. FDCs also focus not only on young people who have completed their formal college but also on adult workers, college dropouts, workers in the informal economy, and disadvantaged groups [19, 36, 41].

FDCs in Tanzania offer folk education (FE) and vocational education (VE) that equip trainees with knowledge and skills for self-employment, self-reliance, and the ability to solve immediate problems in the communities [27]. The main skill areas provided are related to agriculture, carpentry, masonry, mechanics, tailoring, cookery, animal husbandry, electrical installation, and other related fields [11]. In 2021, in Tanzania, 5,783 artisans were trained by FDCs in collaboration with other stakeholders [4, 40]. The government of Tanzania has also completed the rehabilitation of 54 FDCs countrywide, spread across various regions on the mainland of Tanzania. In 2020/2021, FDCs provided training for 31,039 participants, among them 4,913 had a long course training programme, 26,126 had short courses, and 13,347 were involved in an outreach course programme in collaboration with other government and private institutions [40].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach and design

The study used a mixed-methods research approach with a cross-sectional design to gather qualitative and quantitative data. A mixed-methods research design helps in offsetting the weaknesses of a single approach. A cross-sectional research design enables the collection of data at the same time. This research design allows data collection from a diverse sample representing different groups or segments of the population simultaneously, providing a snapshot of the present state of variables of interest, as argued by Cooper and Schindler [7]. The mixed-methods research approach is time-consuming; sometimes, it is challenging to balance the data from quantitative and qualitative sources. It was important, therefore, to ensure that both data were presented.

3.2. Location of the study

The study was conducted in the Mara Region in Tanzania. The region was selected because the Mara region had more than three (3) FDCs, such as Musoma FDC, Kisangwa FDC and Tarime FDC. The colleges offer a wide range of programmes, namely masonry and bricklaying, plumbing and pipe-fittings, electrical installation, agriculture, driving, tailoring, carpentry and joinery, computer, and motor vehicle mechanics. It was expected that individuals in these colleges could give important information regarding VSs and how demographic factors can influence the curriculum discrepancy in VS training in FDCs and how gained skills could help them to be absorbed in major economic activities, namely crop farming, livestock keeping, fishing, mining, construction, tourism, and crop border trading and for self-employment purposes.

3.3. Sampling and sample size

The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the FDC graduates (snowballing), chief industrial officials, and principals. A simple random technique was employed to select the students from FDCs. The study involved 465 participants, of whom three (3) were FDC principals, 21 FDC tutors, 58 FDC graduates, 384 students, and two (2) chief industrial/mining officials. The participants' distribution by gender is as indicated in table 1.

Table 1
Study participants by gender.

Participants	Sex		Total
	Males	Females	
Principals	2	1	3
Industrial/mining officials	2	0	2
Tutors	17	4	21
FDC graduates	36	22	58
Students	261	123	384
Total	**318**	**150**	**468**

3.4. Data collection methods

This study used questionnaires, interviews and documentary review as data collection methods.

3.4.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to collect the data from students, both the graduates from FDCs and those in the visited institutions. Questionnaires help yield huge amounts of data within a short time as they are distributed to different individuals simultaneously. Individuals involved in the questionnaires can give their responses based on their understanding. Questionnaires, however, tend to give a low return rate if mailed or sent through the postal office. To avoid this challenge, it was necessary to ensure they were administered in person.

3.4.2. Interviews

Interviews were also employed to collect the data from tutors, principals and industrial officials. Interviews provide clarification and flexibility if the question is poorly understood or the interviewee goes astray. This method is acknowledged to help gain a deeper understanding of the issue under investigation as it involves the experiences of the study participants' viewpoints. Interviews, however, are considered time-consuming, a most criticised aspect of this data collection method. It was important to ensure that questions were rephrased where possible and to maintain the issues under discussion to save time.

3.4.3. Documentary review

Documentary review was among the methods of data collection in this study. Documentary review gives the contextual information and helps ground the study. This study reviewed documents such as VS guidelines, guidelines for FDCs, college teaching timetables, schemes of work, VSC, attendance books for tutors, and laboratories/workshops. Documentary reviews face challenges that are sometimes old, sometimes specific to different localities, and have different purposes. It was important, therefore, to ensure that they were scrutinised to serve the study's purpose.

While some documents were old, those with helpful information for this study were still considered. The surveyed documents and their respective information collected are as indicated in table 2.

Table 2
Documents reviewed and information collected.

Documents	Information collected
Journal articles	Background information
Books	Research methods
Attendance sheets	Tutors' attendance
VS and FDC guidelines	Contextual information
Teaching timetable	Information on commitment for tutors
Schemes of work	Information on what is taught follow the syllabus for VSC
Empirical studies	Evidence of what takes place in other countries

3.5. Data analysis and ethical concerns

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, which presented the frequency and percentage to describe numerous socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants. Then, the chi-square test was used to examine the association between demographic characteristics and curriculum discrepancy. It was important to request research permission and ethical clearance letters from the university, and they were routed to the respective offices' Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) and District Administrative Secretary (DAS). Participants in this study consented before they were involved. Anonymity was also necessary to keep the confidentiality of the participants' information. It was also important to ensure that plagiarism of ideas was avoided by providing the sources of information and listing the references.

4. Results

The results presented here include socio-demographic information, a programme of study, prior knowledge of the field, and the number of field practicals attended by students. They also show the association between socio-demographic characteristics and the discrepancy in the VS curriculum.

4.1. Socio-demographic of study participants

The results indicated that about 63 per cent were males and 38 per cent were females. Among these, about 78 were aged 18-24 years and only about three (3%) were above 30 years (table 3).

Table 3
Socio-demographic characteristics of FDC students (n = 384) [14].

Students	Sex		Age of respondents		
	Males	Females	18-24	25-29	30+
	240	144	299	73	12
%	62.5	37.5	77.86	19.01	3.13

Similarly, during the interview session with one of the FDC principals, it was commented that students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to lack access to VS programmes, and he had this to say:

> In my experience, there is often a strong association between students' socio-demographic characteristics and the curriculum discrepancy in VSs.

> For example, students from low socio-economic backgrounds may have access to VS programmes with fewer resources, outdated equipment, and lower-quality instruction. This is a challenge for them to fully develop the technical competencies outlined in the curriculum. (FDC principal 1, on 6th March 2024)

Another FDC principal also explained the same during the interview that students' socio-economic factors resulted in the gap in the VS curriculum, and he had this to say:

> Students' socio-demographic factors often influence the gap between the VSs curriculum they are meant to learn and what they actually achieve. For instance, those from low socio-economic backgrounds typically join VS programmes with limited resources, outdated tools, and subpar instructions, hindering their ability to master the intended technical skills. (FDC principal 2, on 18th March 2014)

These results suggested that most of the students were at a tender age, thus VSs were an urgent need for them, given that the country faces an unemployment problem. Similarly, gender issues did not play a significant role, with females showing no substantial difference in outcomes compared to males. This overall discrepancy sheds light on the complex interplay between various contextual factors and the quality of VE delivery in the FDCs. Yet, students from low socio-economic backgrounds faced challenges of a lack of resources to master the intended skills.

4.2. Programme of study and prior knowledge on the field

The results indicated that more than 38 per cent of students were studying plumbing and pipe-fitting, followed by electrical installations for about 24 per cent (table 4). The results also indicated that about 61 per cent of students had no prior knowledge of the field of study, and only 39 per cent had experience in the field.

Table 4
Programmes of study and prior knowledge on the field [14].

	Number of students	%
Programme of the study		
Electrical installations	94	24.48
Tailoring	67	17.45
Motor vehicles mechanics	77	20.05
Plumbing and pipe-fitting	146	38.02
Prior knowledge to programme		
Yes	151	39.32
No	233	60.68

The results also indicated that prior knowledge of the VSs programme (AOR = 0.337, $p = 0.021$), significantly mitigated the discrepancies by reinforcing the notion that foundational awareness and understanding are essential for successful skills acquisition (table 5). Students with prior knowledge of the VSs programme had a lower probability of experiencing a discrepancy between the intended and the attained VSs curriculum, compared to those without it (AOR = 0.337, $p = 0.021$, 95%CI: 1.105; 1.209). Notably, prior knowledge of the programme significantly affected the outcomes, with those lacking prior knowledge being less likely to attain the intended skills (AOR = 0.337,

Table 5
The association between the socio-demographic characteristics and the VSs curriculum discrepancy.

Variable	**Response**	**COR (95% CI)**	***p***	**AOR (95% CI)**	*p*
Age of the respondents	18-24	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	25-29	1.009 (0.596, 1.709)	0.971	0.967 (0.556, 1.681)	0.906
	>30	1.159 (0.359, 3.738)	0.805	1.002 (0.305, 3.2902)	0.996
Sex of the respondents	Male	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Female	0.994 (0.649, 1.520)	0.978	1.003 (0.661, 1.595)	0.904
Program of the study	Electrical installation	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Tailoring	0.469 (0.240, 0.916)	0.127	0.765 (0.119, 0.843)	0.105
	Motor vehicles mechanics	0.843 (0.459, 1.549)	0.583	0.524 (0.332, 1.402)	0.125
	Plumbing and pipe-fitting	0.675 (0.398, 1.145)	0.146	0204 (0.119, 1.009)	0.132
Place of residence	Rural	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Urban	1.257 (0.536, 2.946)	0.598	1.193 (0.327, 1.212)	0.86
Exposure to media	Yes	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	No	1.146 (0.759, 1.731)	0.515	1.172 (2.112, 4.821)	**0.030**
Prior knowledge of the program	Yes	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	No	1.250 (0.817, 1.911)	0.302	0.337 (1.105, 1.209)	**0.021**
Previous highest level of education	Primary	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
	Secondary	0.927 (1.323, 2.661)	0.172	0.623 (1.232, 2.004)	0.101

$p = 0.021$), suggesting that initial awareness and understanding of VSs training significantly influenced the skills acquisition. However, while previous education levels did not exhibit a strong association, the trend indicated that secondary education may not adequately prepare students for VSs training, and thus, there is a need for enhanced educational pathways that align closely with VSs requirements. During the interview, one of the tutors commented on the challenges that affect the implementation of VSs, and he stated:

> From my experience, keeping pace with rapidly evolving industry needs and technologies is one of the key factors that affect the implementation of the VSs curriculum. Many occupations are undergoing constant changes driven by advancements in science and technology, as well as other innovations. VS programmes are updated to ensure that students learn the most relevant and in-demand skills, which can match what is taught in the classroom and the realities of the modern workplace. (Tutor 1, on 13th March 2024)

Another tutor also commented during the interview on the importance of the study programme to keep pace with the labour market, and she stated:

> We need programmes that meet the labour market demands. As a country, we face an unemployment problem. FDCs need to have programmes that will provide VSs to students to help them employ themselves. We need programmes that attract self-employment if we really need to solve this socio-economic problem in our society. (Tutor 6, on 19th March 2024)

The results revealed that students participated more in electrical installations, plumbing, and pipe-fitting than in tailoring, although the statistical significance remained marginal. These results indicated the necessity of having these programmes to ensure that students receive the VSs required for self-employment, especially in this era of massive unemployment challenges.

4.3. Place of residence and media exposure of students

The results indicated that 94 per cent of students came from rural settings and only six (6) per cent came from urban settings (table 6). Media exposure appeared to be relatively balanced, where about 53 per cent had exposure to it, and 47 per cent did not have exposure. The results also indicated that those without media access showed increased odds (AOR = 1.172, p = 0.030), experiencing a discrepancy, and thus suggesting that media plays a critical role in shaping vocational knowledge and skills (table 5). Specifically, students who lacked media exposure were more likely to experience discrepancies in their VSs training outcomes (AOR = 1.172, p = 0.030), compared to those with exposure, suggesting that access to information plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding and preparedness for VSs.

Table 6
Place of residence and media exposure of respondents [14].

Place of residence	No.	%	Exposure to media	No.	%
Rural	204	94.01	Yes	204	53.13
Urban	180	5.99	No	180	46.88

However, during the interview, one of the tutors stated that the expertise and training of instructors played a significant role towards effective VS acquisition among students, and he commented:

> The effectiveness of skills-based teaching varies significantly due to several factors. The expertise and training of instructors are crucial, as well-trained educators with practical experience can engage students more effectively. Access to modern resources and facilities enhances hands-on practices, which are vital for mastery of skills. The teaching and learning methods we use also affect the students' outcomes, such as the use of interactive and student-centred approaches, which tend to be more effective than traditional lecture-based methods. (Tutor 2, on 13th March 2024)

Geographic location also showed a variation between urban and rural students: 1.257 (0.536, 2.946) with p = 0.598 for urban and 1.193 (0.327, 1.212) with p = 0.86 for rural, where urban students demonstrated markedly different outcomes and took an advantage of VSs than their rural counterparts (table 5). These results suggested a potential gap in information dissemination or awareness about VS training opportunities. The results suggested that access to media influenced the students' educational choices and awareness of VS programmes available. However, the instructors' expertise also seems to play a crucial role in preparing competent individuals.

4.4. Number of field practicals attended by students

The results indicated that about 57 per cent of students have attended practical training twice, followed by those who attended only once, for about 32 per cent of students (table 7).

During the interview, one of the industrial officials also commented that the preparation of students in FDCs, based on the labour market and feedback from students

Table 7
Number of field practicals attended by students [14].

Number of field practicals attended	Number of students	%
1	124	32.29
2	219	57.03
3	41	10.68

and industry officials, is important to ensure that students fit within the dynamic world and said:

> I think the curriculum content at FDC addresses various aspects of the labour market, but there are areas that could be further developed. While some parts of the programme align well with industry demands, there may be opportunities to enhance certain skills or topics that are increasingly relevant in today's jobs. It is also worth noting that feedback from students and industry representatives could help continuously refine the curriculum to meet the needs of both students and employers. Overall, I see potential for growth and improvement in this area. (Industrial official 4, on 19th March 2024)

Similarly, one of the FDC principals also commented during the interview that students from the marginalised groups face institutional barriers that affect their success in VS acquisition and stated:

> Students from marginalised ethnic groups may face institutional barriers such as a language that hinders their ability to succeed in VS programmes, even when the curriculum is well-designed and structured. (FDC principal 1, on 6th March 2024)

These results indicated that while students attended field practicals, only a few attended three-field practicals. However, the results indicated that FDCs need to prepare students based on industrial needs and the labour market. This signifies a need for more practical work for the FDCs to prepare individuals with desired competencies, and thus, feedback from students, industries, and other employers remains important.

4.5. The association between the socio-demographic characteristics and the VSs curriculum discrepancy

The results highlighted an association between socio-demographic characteristics and the gap in the VSs curriculum. Age did not appear to significantly impact this discrepancy, as both the 25-29 and over 30 groups showed confidence intervals that include 1 and $p > 0.05$, indicating no strong evidence of association (table 5).

A bivariate and multivariate binary logistic regression analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics and the curriculum discrepancy in VSs in FDCs. The results indicated that a p-value was less than 0.05, the standard threshold for statistical significance. Several socio-demographic characteristics were also significantly associated with the curriculum discrepancy in the VSs. This signifies the quality of the VSs offered in FDCs.

The analysis further indicated that students with prior knowledge of the VSs programme had a lower probability of experiencing a discrepancy in the VSs curriculum,

compared to those without prior knowledge (AOR = 0.337, p = 0.021, 95%CI: 1.105; 1.209).

The results suggested that media exposure and prior knowledge of the programme may play a crucial role in mitigating the discrepancy in the VSs curriculum in the FDCs. This can also add value to the efficiency and effectiveness of the VSs provided to FDCs.

5. Discussion of results

The results indicated that socio-demographic factors influence curriculum discrepancies in FDCs and significantly affect VE outcomes. The results also indicated that the age distribution was predominantly youthful between 18 and 24. These results indicated a demographic segment that could benefit from educational innovations tailored to younger learners' preferences, as highlighted in the study by Anindo [3] in Kenya. Akinpelu [2] in Africa found the same results: a significant portion of participants (94%) resided in rural areas. Thus, Akinpelu [2] emphasised the need for the VSs training for the rural population for income generation. The results also echo the cross-sectional descriptive study by Nade and Malamsha [28] in Tanzania on the influence of agri-entrepreneurship courses on youth farm entrepreneurial intention, which focused on evidence from FDCs. This suggests that targeted educational initiatives in these rural areas could enhance access to VSs training, preventing discrepancies in the VSs curriculum. Given the rampant unemployment problem in many countries in this era, VSs appear to help curb this problem.

The results again revealed a gender imbalance, where males dominated in VSs and just a few were females. According to Becker [5] study in the USA, there is a need to reinforce females with regard to the battle related to stereotypes in occupational choices. These results align with those of Baxter, Novy-Marx and D'Angelo [4] study in Sub-Saharan Africa, which argued that educational institutions must create pathways for all genders and disadvantaged youth. The results also revealed a low level of prior knowledge with no previous exposure to the VS programmes, which raises concerns about the importance of outreach and recruitment strategies. As a result, many students lacked prior knowledge about the necessary skills required in the industry, motivation, and priority concentration on the skills required for personal competence and the acquisition of skills that respond to the needs of the labour market.

These results underscored the essential role of information dissemination in VE, as it has been emphasised by Cappelli [6] study in the USA. These results again align with those of Nade and Malamsha [28], who found in Tanzania that students' prior knowledge and confidence significantly reduced the discrepancies in VSs training outcomes, suggesting that educational institutions should prioritise enhancing students' preparatory experiences before enrolment. This discrepancy highlights the need for VSs training programmes to consider the broader socio-economic context of the students, as these factors can significantly affect educational attainment and skills development.

In addition, the results indicated that media exposure appeared to have a relative balance between gender, indicating that students had access to technology and information that could shape their educational choices. These results align with the notion that broader socio-economic contexts influence learning trajectories as argued by Nanjwan and Plang [29] in their study in Nigeria. However, these results contradict the study by Mtebe, Fulgence and Gallagher [25] in Tanzania, who found that lack of exposure to media with regard to career paths within the industries was one of the reasons for the discrepancy in VSs curriculum for students.

Overall, the comprehensive socio-demographic factors not only shed light on the

underlying causes of curriculum discrepancies but also suggested that a multifaceted approach, considering gender, age, residence, and prior knowledge, was needed to formulate effective educational policies and targeted interventions. These results support what Ahmadi and Lukman [1] found in their study in Nigeria that implementing educational reforms required an understanding of the complexities of the socio-demographic landscape to address the needs and challenges within the VE.

The results further suggested that media exposure and prior knowledge of VSs programmes played a critical role in shaping students' educational experiences. Specifically, students who lacked media exposure exhibited a higher likelihood of experiencing significant discrepancies in their VS training outcomes. These results support what was found by Rohit [37] in India that media platforms such as online tutorials, video simulations, and social media forums provided VSs to learners dynamically and helped them develop and acquire practical skills aligned with industrial needs. This highlights the importance of access to information in enhancing students' understanding of the skills required in the chosen fields. Furthermore, prior knowledge was a significant predictor of success, indicating that foundational awareness is essential for effectively acquiring the desired skills.

In contrast, the study found no significant associations between age, gender, or place of residence and the discrepancies in VSs, which diverges from the study by Kamwela [16] in Tanzania and that of El Refae, Kaba and Eletter [9] in the United Arab Emirates, who found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds often faced barriers such as limited resources and lower-quality of instructions, which hindered their ability to meet curriculum expectations.

6. Conclusion and implications

In this study, we investigated the influence of the socio-demographic factors on the discrepancy in the VS curriculum in FDCs in Tanzania. The results indicated a significant association between socio-demographic characteristics and curriculum discrepancies. The results also indicated a lack of students' media exposure and prior knowledge about vocational programmes that exacerbated the gap in VSs attainment. The results again revealed that most students were young males from rural backgrounds with relatively broader socio-economic challenges. The results revealed further that electrical installations, plumbing, and pipe-fitting had a relatively higher participation rate among students than tailoring, although the statistical significance remained marginal. The results again provided valuable insights into the influences of the socio-demographic information on the discrepancy in the VSs curriculum offered in FDCs.

Moreover, the study identified a lack of significant association between age, gender, and place of residence with curriculum discrepancies. This divergence points to the complexity of the educational landscape, where socio-economic contexts may exert a more substantial impact than individual demographic characteristics. The results underscore the need for targeted interventions that address the specific needs of diverse learner populations, particularly in rural areas with limited access to resources. By enhancing media access and improving prior knowledge among students, FDCs can align their curricula more closely with the realities of the labour market economy, ultimately bridging the gap between intended and attained VSs. Such initiatives may not only enhance the quality and relevance of VE but also contribute to the long-term employability of graduates in an increasingly competitive labour market.

Educational institutions should develop comprehensive outreach programmes utilising various media channels, such as social media, local radio, and community workshops, to disseminate information about VSs training options, necessary skills,

and career pathways. FDCs need to establish preparatory courses or orientation sessions before programme enrollment, aiming at equipping students with foundational knowledge and skills relevant to their fields of choice. These initiatives can help bridge the information gap, increase students' awareness, foster a sense of preparedness, and thus improve educational outcomes. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the unique socio-economic contexts of students, particularly those from rural areas, to ensure that resources and support systems are in place to facilitate their learning experiences. By adopting these strategies, FDCs may be effective and relevant in their VSs training programmes, ultimately leading to better preparation of students for successful careers in the labour market system.

7. Limitations

This study did not assess the curricula materials in the VSs and did not focus on the students' performance in VS programmes. Other studies can be conducted in that area to gain more insights about VE provided in FCs.

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