



ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH EMPLOYERS' ENGAGEMENT IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING IN TANZANIAN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract:

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) fundamentally is a pillar for improving employability among graduates. Nonetheless, evidence concerning engagement of employers in WIL in institutions under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Tanzania is minimally established. The research closed the gap that existed in the by examining engagement of employers in WIL among institutions in Tanzania under TVET. A mixed method comprising quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews was adopted. Based on students' enrolment status and graduate outputs, four institutions under TVET were chosen purposively. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression were adopted for quantitative data analysis while thematic analysis was adopted for analyzing qualitative data. The results disclose that levels of employers' engagement, motivation and skills development at $p < 0.05$ were significant and positive in predicting employability of graduates. The research presents conclusion that engagement of employers in WIL programmes boost TVET employability of graduates. Formalizing and sustaining partnerships between institutions under TVET, policymakers, and employers through development of curricula, students' review, funding, and training placements were recommended for strengthening quality of WIL and employability of graduates.

Keywords:

Employer Engagement, Employability, Technical and Vocational Education

1. Introduction

Globally, the demand for graduates with the required competencies from TVET institutions has increased progressively in current years (Bitegera & Bisanda, 2022; Gyimah, 2020). Institutions under TVET play an essential function in augmenting employability of graduates in both local and international labour markets. With reference to the Tanzania Vision 2050 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2025) and the Tanzanian Third Five-Year Development Plan (2021/2026) (MoFP, 2021), institutions under TVET are responsible in developing a high-skilled labour force that matches with the existing market requirement (Mashenene et al, 2024; NACTE, 2020; Andreoni, 2018). Thus, coherence between industries and TVET programmes is necessary in designing and equipping graduates with relevant skills that minimize rates of unemployment (MoFP, 2021). This situation is so since the said integration between industries and programmees under TVET is crucial, as it provides learners with important real-world experiences from work that foster their practical skills and employability (Ritter et al., 2018). Likewise, institutions under TVET are expected to fuel national economic development by producing graduates who are highly skilled and with significant contribution towards sustainability of social and economic growth across diverse sectors (Charles et al., 2023; Mabunda & Frick, 2020). This connotes that, to attain country's economic development sustainability

depends on availability of workforce who are well trained and possess appropriate skills required to accomplish a specific task.

In the present knowledge economic era, several employers opt to hire graduates with a balanced combination of transferable and cognitive skills (Kamuzora, 2024; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). Notwithstanding this demand for labour with relevant skills, employers frequently voiced a concern about TVET graduates' productivity and employability and productivity (Adely et al., 2021; Chamorro-premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019; Leyaro & Joseph, 2019). For instance, Okolie et al. (2019) and O'Higgins and Pinedo (2018) indicated that many graduates from TVET institutions lack essential employability skills required for successful workforce transition, raising questions about the quality and relevance of TVET curricula and practices in general. Additionally, earlier studies had emphasized a substantial gap between the skills acquired through traditional training approaches and those emanating from employers in several developing countries (e.g., Teng et al., 2019; Ritter et al., 2018). This misalliance emphasizes the pressing need for structural reforms and improve training programmes to guarantee graduates under TVET institutes attain required skills that enable gainful employment opportunities after graduation (Diop, 2020; Terblanche, 2017). For institutions under TVET to achieve this mission of aligning education with industry requirements and to improve graduates' employability training through the WIL framework from which employers' participation was essential (Mesuwini & Mokoena, 2023).

Research present that while strategies for employability may fill a variety of educational approaches and stages, there is robust relationship between employability and WIL (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2021; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Associated with other pedagogical classroom methods, WIL holds the fact that skills development is efficiently fitted with the curricula through both work-based and on-campus experiences related to learning (Jackson & Dean, 2023; Ferns & Lilly, 2016). This is executed through functional employer participation, which is critical for the fruitful implementation of the WIL (Jackson & Meek, 2020; Ritter et al., 2018). Such engagements are crucial for granting learners with essential real-world work experiences that encourage practical skills which consequently fuel employability (Ritter et al., 2018). As a result of the push to integrate work and learning, substantial changes have been made to make sure that critical competencies and skills are implanted within the workplace. These experiences and skills include those directly integrated into institutional curricula (Jackson & Meek, 2020; Jackson et al., 2019) and are further enhanced by work-oriented curricular activities such as WIL or volunteer work (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; Nguyen, 2020). At this juncture, WIL serves as a crucial link between the training students receive in TVET programs and the practical work experience they are expected to acquire in the workplace.

Since 1967, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) has been introduced in Tanzania through the education for self-reliance philosophy, exposing students to real productive work relevant to their society (Mkude, Cooksey & Band Leavy, 2003). Since then, the approach has been part and parcel of education policies, particularly in TVET. The key goal of WIL was to enhance industry-student engagement by providing students with valuable opportunities to gain practical experience and apply the classroom-based skills and knowledge to real-world situations (Jackson et al., 2022; Vaaland & Govender, 2018). Therefore, WIL performs as a trustworthy method and fundamental element of TVET training programmes. As a system of experiential learning, WIL improves TVET curricula by allowing students to relate formal knowledge in industry settings (Jackson & Dean, 2023). Regularly, this demands them to develop strong initiatives, adaptability, and problem-solving skills to thrive in different perspectives. This calls for a strengthened partnership between institutions under TVET, students, and potential employers to promote deep skill development.

Regardless of the initiatives by the institutions under TVET in integrating WIL to enjoy the fundamental benefits, systemic obstacles continue to exist that impede employability of graduates (Jackson et al., 2017). The evidence indicates that notwithstanding TVET's extensive initiatives and adoption of a work-integrated learning approach, still the problem under discussion continue to prevail (Putra, Basharia, Komaro & Hamdani, 2021; Tamrat, 2019; Rowe & Wilson, 2017), studies show most Tanzanian graduates still lack essential employability skills required in the labor market (Kessy, 2020; Ndyali, 2016). Several TVET graduates encounter troubles in proving required work-readiness skills and experience, hindering opportunities for their employability. This results into employers' unwillingness to hire graduates with underprepared skills, compelling increased unemployment for youths (MoEST, 2021). Such encounters raise alarms in the literature concerning the linkage between training and employability (MoEST, 2021; Amani, 2017; Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016; Vaaland & Ishengoma, 2016). These studies emphasize a gap in employers' engagement within TVET WIL programmes, where training has continued being content-focused instead

of competency-based. This emphasizes the need to investigate how employers' engagement in WIL influences employability of graduates.

Following the persistent encounters of skills gaps and graduates' employability, the current research investigates how institutions under TVET fuel engagement of employers in WIL through strategies such as on- and off-campus placements, industry-based projects, and initiatives for practical training. This shapes on the worldwide harmony that WIL enhances work readiness (Lingwanda, 2023; Marijani et al., 2023; Teng et al., 2019). Nonetheless, inadequate empirical proof under existence on engagement of employers in WIL programmes to boost graduates' employability through well-developed knowledge, skills, and capabilities before graduation. Thus, the current research intends to fill the existing gap by researching the function of engaging employers in WIL on improving graduates' employability from institutions under TVET in Tanzania and the impediments they experience during implementation. The research is framed under the following research questions: To what extent do institutions under TVET involve employers in implementation of WIL? What is the influence and predictive impact of engaging employers in WIL on employability of graduates? What limitations do institutions under TVET and employers face in implementing WIL? By responding to these research questions, the study intends to improve education-industry linkages and boost partnerships between institutions under TVET and employers to train graduates for labour market requirements.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Theory

WIL theory, grounded in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, speculates that education attains its greatest potential through the intentional integration of theoretical classroom training with real workplace experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). This method regards learning as a cyclic procedure of real experience, deep observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, outstandingly appropriate to TVET. In TVET frameworks, WIL converts the workplace from a peripheral site into a core training environment, where students connect professional groups, reveal on their roles, and develop professional uniqueness (Sunnemark, 2023). An introductory supposition of WIL theory is that learning begins from two unified environments: the academic institution, which promotes theoretical insight, and the workplace, which presents situated and practical socialization (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This duality enriches outcomes by exposing TVET students to real-world challenges, bridging practical knowledge from placements with theoretical knowledge from studies (Billett, 2009). Conversely, the theory alerts that benefits depend on placement quality; superficial or unstructured experiences can weaken learning, impairing issues like skill gaps (Smith & Smith, 2017). In the Tanzania's TVET framework, WIL focuses on serious gaps in employability amid inadequate industry engagement. For example, just 28 percent of graduates from TVET present strong workplace experience, per the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA, 2022). The theory advocates improving institution-industry alliances, structured supervision, and curricular configuration to nurture technical competencies, professionalism, and adaptableness (Mesuwini, 2023). Notwithstanding its strengths, in Tanzanian framework, WIL must cope with local encounters like community awareness, power imbalances in placements, financial constrain and social-cultural barriers to reflection, demanding specific-contextual adaptations for sustainable results. Thus, by promoting realistic, supervised practice, WIL equips graduates from Tanzanian TVET for dynamic national, regional, and global labour force, matching with competency-based curricula objectives.

2.1.2 Situated Learning Theory

Situated Learning Theory (SLT) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) postulates that learning advances through effective involvement in communities of practice, where trainees learn by connecting with and being mentored by underwent practitioners in authentic work settings (Pennbrant & Svensson, 2018). Learners gain knowledge, skills, and professional behaviours through observation, simulation, and social collaboration, advancing from peripheral participants to full practitioners (Smith et al., 2016; Billett, 1996). SLT presents learning beyond cognitive practices to involve social, cultural, and environmental scope, highlighting that active learning depends on dipping in actual communities and collaborations with skilled mentors (Catalano, 2015; Fischer et al., 2007).

Institutions under TVET in Tanzanian situations, SLT's focuses on social involvement and genuine peripheral involvement offers a valuable lens for understanding how learners advance practical skills and professional identities through workplace engagement. SLT outlines that learning is rooted within social and cultural perspectives, modelled

by workplace norms, resource limitations, and community expectations. Nonetheless, active implementation for instance in Tanzanian institutions under TVET demands supportive communities of practice, meaningful mentorship, and strong and close supervision during WIL placements and practices (Billett, 1996). Consequently, integrating SLT into the TVET framework in Tanzania therefore encourages closer alliance between institutions and employers to fostering social and practical learning, improving students' competence and labour force willingness and employability at large.

2.2 Conceptualizing Work Integrated Learning

WIL is progressively credited as fundamental in TVET for advancing graduates who are prepared for the complications of the modern labour force. At its focal point, it connects the gap between theoretical academic learning and practical workplace application, promoting graduates who are both knowledgeable and skilled in real-world perspectives (Jackson et al., 2017). Though there is no collectively agreed-upon definition, WIL is usually intellectualized as an umbrella term for educational programmes proposed to integrate classroom theory with realistic work experiences (Matsoso & Benedict, 2020; Berndtsson et al., 2020). This assimilation is widely conceded to improve professional competence, improve learners' experience to workplace norms, and developing the skills essential for accomplishment post-graduation (Ferns et al., 2024; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2014). Institutions under TVET adopt varied models of WIL including clinical rotations, internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education, field attachments, and simulations (Nguyen, 2020; Atkinson, 2016). These methodologies submerge learners in professional practice environments for aeras extending from weeks to months, nurturing sustained engagement with employers and permitting them to interpret theoretical knowledge into practical competencies (Ferns et al., 2016). The value of such occurrences is comprehensive: they present a forum for employers to evaluate potential hires, validate learners' career selections, and significantly boost employability of graduates' potentials (Friedman & Roodin, 2013). Simulations counterpart these workplace experiences by offering structured opportunities for learners to investigate workplace circumstances and make decisions reflective of real-world encounters, thus strengthening behavioural and cognitive skills essential for workplace achievement (Atkinson, 2016).

WIL connects educational outcomes with needs from labour market, promoting graduates' competences and employability. Empirically, engagement in WIL boosts learners' self-efficacy, motivation, practical skills, and professional identity which are essential predictors of workforce willingness (Dembo & Seli, 2020; Purdie et al., 2013; Drysdale & McBeath, 2012). Employers demonstrate a noticeable preference for graduates who hold a blended combination of technical and soft skills including communication, adaptability, and problem-solving—competencies that WIL programmes foster effectively (; Kamuzora, 2024; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). In addition to skills development, WIL is viewed as cost-effective, allowing employers to integrate motivated learners into productive activities, helping mitigate workforce shortages, and enabling the shift from education to employment (Suleman, 2021; Jackson, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is essential to contextualize the influence of WIL within wider socio-economic and labour market situations. Though WIL boosts job willingness and employability, it does not provide assurance for employment outcomes, which are dependent on external drivers such as policy and economic conditions (Jackson & Collings, 2025). Consequently, WIL should be considered as an integral component of holistic strategies designed to boost integration of graduates' labor market and long-term career development. Generally, WIL stands as a strategic foundation within curricula under TVET, efficiently integrating theory and practice to prepare graduates who fit for employment in future. Understanding its full potential requires overcoming barriers through better allocation of resources, upgraded partnerships within the industry, and reforms of tailor-made curricula to growing labour force requirements. Such initiatives are imperative to instill graduates with the competences desirable for sustainability of employment and to meet national development goals.

It acknowledges that learners develop essential professional skills, intensify their understanding, and augment their willingness for the workplace when absorbed in the proper industry settings (Ferns et al., 2025). Contrasting from traditional internships or unstructured experiences from work, WIL is defined by deliberate design, with explicitly defined learning outcomes and close engagement between educational institutions and employers to ensure workplace experiences complement and strengthen academic curricula (Billett, 2009). This vigilant structuring facilitates the often-cited gap in institutions under TVET institutions between theory and practice by fostering competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional attitudes essential for career success.

Focusing on the institutions under TVET in Tanzania, WIL is extremely applicable, as the sector prioritizes creating work-ready graduates associated with labor market requirements. Employer participation is vital to warrant valuable workplace experiences and curricula that remain responsive to growing industry needs.

2.3 Employer Engagement in WIL

Engagement of employers in WIL is an introductory to delivering sound workplace learning experiences that boost employability for graduates. Effective participation of employers warrants that WIL placements are thoroughly connected with the existing industry requirements, nurturing the development of competencies and job-relevant skills (Ferns, Russell, & Kay, 2016). Employers offer realistic work environments in which learners interpret theoretical knowledge into practical skills. This participation enables a two-way exchange: learners acquire meaningful understandings and hands-on based experience, whereas employers receive benefits from early exposure to potential recruits with sharpened skills to suit their workforce demands (PhillipsKPA, 2014). Besides, involved employers frequently report growing organizational innovation and productivity as learners initiate novel perspectives. Thus, engagement of employers is a pivotal pillar in making sure that the appropriateness and quality of WIL programmes, notably in TVET where pragmatic acquisition of skills is essential.

Successful strategies for promoting engagement of employers focus on building strong, mutually beneficial relationships. Institutions in education must institute well defined channels of communication, grant administrative support, and recognize contributions of employers to incentivize engagement (Oosthuizen, 2022). Establishment of formal models concerning partnerships like advisory boards and joint curricula development committees enables continuous engagement between institutions under TVET and stakeholders from the industry, warranting appropriateness of curricula and reactive adaptation to changing labour market requirements. Motivations including tax breaks, certifications, or public recognition can additionally encourage engagement of employers in WIL dependably. Notably, a synchronized framework including academic supervisors, program administrators, workplace mentors, and learners reinforces the partnerships to become sustainable and effective (Martin & Hughes, 2009). Such frameworks warrant that roles of employers outspread outside mere placement provision to functioning engagement in mentorship and assessment.

Employers' perceptions and motivations suggestively shape their engagements in WIL. Common motivators comprise of the prospect to shape forthcoming labour force skills, lessen risk of recruitment by subjecting potential employees to various tests during placements, and accomplish commitments on corporate social responsibility (Atkinson et al., 2019). Additionally, employers appreciate the WIL's role in promotion innovation through learners' participation. Nevertheless, engagement can be hindered by challenges including unawareness about benefits of WIL, insufficient institutional support and perceived administrative burdens (Ferns et al., 2016). Addressing the listed challenges through rationalized processes, better education about WIL's reciprocal advantages, and strengthened institutional mechanisms can improve employers' readiness to work in partnership. Within the framework guiding TVET, where employers' partnership directly influences the creation of job-ready graduates, understanding and fostering employer roles—from placement hosts to active contributors in curriculum design—is critical for the success and sustainability of WIL initiatives.

2.4 Employability through Engagement of Employers in WIL

WIL at present has been recognized as a substantial pedagogical approach, has been progressively merged into higher education and training institutions' curricula (Lingwanda, 2023; McRae & Johnston, 2016) with the focus to improve students' learning, skills development and graduates' employability (Ferns et al., 2019). The aim of WIL is to facilitate blended learning activities and assessments practice by engaging trainees in meaningful industry or community involvement through different forms such as field attachments, placements, practicums and internships and campus-based activities (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). When integrated into TVET curriculum practices, these forms of WIL activities provide a platform for collaboration between employers and training institutions in preparing competent and skilled graduates who demonstrate the competencies demanded by industry (Oosthuizen, Spencer & Chigano, 2022).

To facilitate the shift in Tanzanian TVET educational paradigms from a model that relies solely on institutional-based formal learning to one that emphasizes outcome-based and comprehensive approaches, it is essential for training institutions and industries to work together in equipping graduates with essential skills for the

workforce (Ferns et al., 2019). As long as learning encompasses intellectual, practical, and personal career success and life satisfaction (Clark et al., 2018; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021), it should be integrated and unified to ensure that it is meaningful, relevant and lifelong in the context of working learner within the new learning economy (Clark et al., 2019). This highlights a combination of learning and work because TVET institutions should not solely depend on their expertise and resources to achieve the expected learning package outcomes (Ferns et al., 2019).

In this regard, TVET institutions in Tanzania should collaborate with employers and industry partners to achieve this goal. While this partnership is important, TVET institutions have long been using the aforementioned forms of WIL. This indicates that the TVET curriculum should incorporate both educational and practical work experiences by engaging students in practical-based learning. However, the primary challenge persists particularly that relating to how to foster viable partnerships between educational institutions and industry placements (Mayombe, 2022). In this context, the effectiveness of WIL programs depends on placing trainees in industries or institutions where they can practice and demonstrate their competencies (Scholtz, 2020). In response, TVET institutions must implement competence-based training programs to enhance students' mastery of general and soft skills, thereby increasing graduate employability. (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2018; NACTE, 2020). The industry plays a vibrant part as a partner in nurturing learners' trustworthy learning experiences through practicums, internships, or project-based learning (Chand & Deshmukh, 2019). Additionally, industry offers educational institutions with meaningful feedback concerning the alignment of graduates' competencies with labour market requirements.

Furthermore, Vaaland and Ishengoma (2016) indicate the significance of partnerships among industries, companies, and higher education in nurturing graduates' competencies that can support them participate in the complex and competitive nature of contemporary work environments. Eventually, WIL boosts learners to develop cultural capital and recognize the values, conduct, and relevant behaviours required for their future career growth (Miller & Gonzalez, 2016). This groundwork supports learners adopt unconventional ideas that augment problem-solving and adaptability (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022). Besides, earlier research has established that engagement of the industry in WIL is essential since, as future employers, they require work-ready or employable graduates (Teng et al., 2019; Ferns et al., 2016). These researchers underline the importance of engagement of the industry through WIL, remarking that employers progressively require graduates who not only prove academic competence but also hold the practical skills and eagerness for workforce.

In accordance with Hart Research Associates (2018), employers allocate a great value on applied learning activities like work experience and internships when hiring graduate workforce. This is a awakening call for employers to team up with academia institutions, as up-to-date employers demand graduates who hold a blend of skills, comprising of academic, technical and soft skills to face the complexities of the labour market (Mutalemwa et al., 2020). Similarly, Mgaiwa (2021) in line with Ishengoma and Vaaland (2016) in Tanzania established that university-industry linkages and learners internships are improved strategies for cultivating employability of graduates. The participation of organizations with educational institutions has a positive stimulus on both the industry and the learners involved in practical training. Consequently, TVET programs designed with WIL signify as a strategic approach in empowering graduates with vibrant skills and competences required for their employment.

2.5 Challenges of Employer Engagement and WIL Integration

The role of the Industry in WIL is crucial, and, thus, engagement of employers with TVET WIL practices is indispensable to establish what is needed to fuel their contribution and engagement WIL. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this significance of employers' engagement in WIL, numerous encounters hinder fruitful involvement, mostly within the TVET scene. These impediments comprise of inadequate knowledge and tangible motivation for employers about the benefits resulting from WIL programmes. For instance, Ferns, Russell and Kay (2016) established that several employers perceive coordination of WIL as a supplementary administrative workload burden without defined instant returns. This state disheartens sustained employers' participation in WIL practices.

Resource-interrelated impediments—comprising of inadequate time, financial assistance and human resources to coordinate, supervise and mentor learners—continue to fuel employers' unwillingness to participate in WIL, mostly focusing on small and medium enterprises (Patrick et al., 2014; PhillipsKPA, 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Patrick et al., 2009). Precisely, this empirical evidence dependably categorizes allied costs, insufficient resources and institutional support, inadequate staff ability in mentoring and supervising learners, complex partnership arrangements with educational institutions, and limited access to well defined and accessible information about WIL programmes as

major obstacles to employers' participation in WIL. These recurring encounters demonstrate negative effect to the quality of WIL experiences by confounding expectation management, coordination, resourcing and communication, thus discouraging engagement of sustained partner over time. Subsequently, several institutions under TVET fight to evidently communicate the shared benefits of WIL, leaving employers and the wider community inadequately informed and to a lesser extent probable to oblige (Oosthuizen, 2022). Remarkably, current research suggests for the provision of clear, accessible, and targeted information about WIL, which may be more effective in promoting employer participation than efforts focused solely on removing barriers (PhillipsKPA, 2014). Consequently, literature is driven by the dual desire to tackle enduring limitations while improving enabling resources to support sustainability to engage employers in WIL.

Other limitations occur during coordination and monitoring of WIL placement practices. This is due to insufficiency of well-defined policies and frameworks under TVET which caused the double standards in the management of the WIL programmes in TVET institutions, destabilizing the quality and usefulness of placements (Mesuwini, 2023). In several countries like Tanzania, various institutions under TVET function without enthusiastic employees answerable to coordination of WIL, resulting in limited communication with teaching staff, learners and employers. This has become a stumbling block which hampers the forecast of placements, supervision allocation and the monitoring of learners' progress and results. Similarly, gaps resulting from limitations of lecturers' exposure to the industry lessen their capability to help learners and employers during the time of placements (Oosthuizen, 2022). Without robust structures for institutional support, WIL integration risks become fragmented, weakening the potential for effective and measurable student learning and satisfaction of employers. Moreover, misalignment between curricula under TVET and real workplace requirements is also among the major barriers in engagement of employers and WIL at large.

Literature in different context highlighted that most of TVET curricula are often theoretical and lacking context septicity thus not fully reflecting the dynamic skills and technological practices used in different industries (Wolf, 2016). These has led to a mismatch between student competencies and the current employer expectations (Davids & Waghid, 2019). This critical gap can result in wrong placements that inadequately develop required skills or exposing students to current industry standards. Moreover, the quality and the supervision of WIL experiences have also become a concern. This has caused an unsatisfactory mentorship in workplace and alarming oversight that directly can result to uncondusive learning experiences, where learners are under-utilized or allocated basic tasks which may be unconnected to the field of their study or professional careers (Mesuwini, 2023). Thus, for the success of TVET in Tanzania, warranting curricula alignment and supervision quality is indispensable in amplifying the WIL benefits and preparing learners for the shifts into the workplace.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design, Study Area and Sampling Procedures

The research opted a multiple-case study research design with a parallel mixed-methods to survey engagement of employers WIL and its underlying influences on employability of graduates from institutions under TVET in Dodoma, Tanzania. Triangulation and integration of quantitative and qualitative data resulted in robustness of data and insights about the relationship between employers and TVET, boosting trustworthiness. Four institutions under TVET were purposefully chosen; two Vocational Education and Training (VET) and two Technical Education and Training (TET) were considered as case studies and units of analysis. This aided literal replication (similar outcomes) or theoretical replication (contrasting outcomes) in relation to WIL approaches. Respondents totaled 162: 108 employers (convenience-sampled from those active in WIL programs) and 54 academic staff (lecturers, principals, program coordinators purposively selected for their direct WIL coordination roles). This sample size ensured saturation in qualitative data and adequate power for quantitative comparisons.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

As a mixed-methods study, quantitative data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire with Likert-scale, closed, and open-ended items, adapted and modified from previous studies on WIL and the employability of graduates, such as the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (Radloff, 2010) and the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA, 2014). As a mixed-methods study, quantitative data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire with Likert-scale, closed, and open-ended items, adapted and modified from

previous studies on WIL and the employability of graduates, such as the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (Radloff, 2010) and the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (AWPA, 2014). The tool captured the level of employer engagement in WIL activities, their motivation for engagement, and skills developed through their involvement and perceived challenges diminishing their engagement in the WIL program. It also captured information about TVET academic staff perceived challenges impeding employer engagement in WIL programs. The questionnaire was piloted and adapted for use in the Tanzanian TVET context, facilitating the assessment of the validity and reliability of the instruments. Piloted questionnaire yielded strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86\text{--}0.89$ across subscales). The construct, face, and content validity were determined to ensure valid of the tool for measuring the intended constructs in the Tanzanian context. In other hand, qualitative data were collected through face-to-face interviews to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding WIL implementation. With 11 participants; two principals, four WIL coordinators, and five employers were selected purposively for diverse WIL involvement, until thematic saturation.

3.3. Data analysis

Quantitative data coding and processing was performed with the help of IBM's SPSS software version 23. Both descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted on the quantitative data collected through questionnaires. For the purpose of describing engagement levels and perceptions, descriptive analysis was used, and results were presented in terms of mean, frequency, standard deviation, and percentage. Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to examine the relationship and predictive effect of employer engagement (engagement in WIL activities, motivation to engage, and skills development) on graduate employability. Qualitative data, its category, stepwise thematic analysis was undertaken in the identification, analysis, and presentation of themes according to Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021). It involved organization and description of data in accordance with the research questions aimed at highlighting major results. Diverse themes were established and clustered on the basis of their setting and interpreted according to the relevant theories and literature with the aim of complementing the results emanated from quantitative data analysis. This unified design permitted a full understanding patterns of employers' engagement and their inferences for improving WIL usefulness and outcomes for graduates. Results from thematic analysis were organized into relevant themes and integrated into the study as quotations to complement the quantitative results. Before the regression analysis, the model assumptions were tested, which implied that the data fitted well with regression analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Characteristics and Study Variables

Table 1 present descriptive statistics analysis of the respondents and the variables of the study. Demographic characteristics of respondents analyzed includes sex, age, education level, working experience and type of the organization. The study variables analyzed include level of employer engagement, motivation for engagement, graduates' employability and skills development.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of demographic characteristics and study variables

Demographic statistics			Variables statistics				
Employers	TVET ac staff		Variables of the study				
	Category	f	Category	f	Variables	M	SD
Gender	Male	76 (71%)	Male	39 (72%)	Engagement	3.88	0.713
	Female	32 (29%)	Female	15(28%)	Employability	4.2	0.491
Average Age	42		Av. age	32	Motivation	3.72	0.69
Average Experience	7.6 yrs.		Ev. exp	5.6	Skills	4.2	0.53

Results present a significant pattern observed in the demographic data with regard to gender, education level, and age. Of the 108 employers' respondents, the majority (71%) were male, compared to 29% female, reflecting the existing gender imbalance in Tanzanian workplaces where men are more hired compared to female. This corroborates finding by Temu and Ng'atigwa, (2024) who found similar results. Once more, out of 54 respondents from academic staff from institutions under TVET, 72% were male, while 28% were female, suggesting that male dominated in institutions under TVET. The results are congruent to (Opoku, 2024) who presented gender disproportions within TVET education sector. This unbalanced gender disparities illustration recommends that male representation may seriously impact the formulation and delivery of WIL programmes. Averagely, the age of employers and academic staff were found to be 42 and 32 years respectively, implying a workforce of relatively energetic youth, with high potential to develop working experience. Further, employers demonstrated eight years of professional experience in the sector, while six years on average were remarkable for academic staff, revealing substantial expertise in the management of WIL engagement, though in some cases employers and academic staff experience could be defined as moderate. Concerning variables in the study, 3.88 was computed as an overall mean score (SD = 0.71) for engaging employers in WIL. This advocates a fairly high engagement level among respondents. Respectively, overall mean scores for employability and skills development were rated higher (M= 4.2, SD = 0.49; 4.2, SD= .53). This recommends that the perceptions of respondents on WIL are highly rated with a belief that WIL improves employability of graduates and skills development to meet the real-world work environment. Further, the results show that the level of respondents' engagement was moderate with a mean score of M=3.88 and standard deviation SD=0.713 and engagement motivation in WIL with (M=3.72, 0.69). The results suggest relatively favouring perceptions on engagement of employers, employability and skills development. Understanding the status of demographic characteristics is vital since they help in shaping stakeholders' viewpoints and potentially impact the usefulness and inclusivity of WIL efforts and eventually affect outcomes for the employability of graduates.

4.2. Employers' Motivation for WIL Engagement

Table 2 illustrates the results concerning motivation for engaging employers in WIL. Understanding indicators of an employer's motivation to engage in WIL is crucial because employer motivation both shapes the scope and sustainability of WIL partnerships and determines the quality of learning experiences offered to students.

Table 2: Employers Motivation for WIL Engagement

Description	Mean	S D
Improved corporate image	4.03	0.901
To maintain the standing of the profession	3.9	1.215
Opportunity to trial students before hiring.	3.82	1.084
Future access to work-ready graduates	3.66	1.095
Corporate responsibility	3.63	1.047
We receive funding from universities for participation	3	1.028
Alleviating skills shortages for my industry	2.83	0.991
WIL is mandated in our profession/industry	2.7	1.389
Refreshing the work environment through new energy and ideas	2.24	1.348
Overall mean score	3.72	0.691

The employer's motivation to engage in will was highly associated with their intention to improve corporate image (Mean = 4.03, SD=0.901), closely followed by the need to maintain professional standing (Mean = 3.90, SD=1.215) and the opportunity to trial potential hires (Mean = 3.82, SD=1.084). The future access to work-ready graduates (Mean = 3.66, DS=1.095) and fulfilling corporate social responsibility (Mean = 3.63, SD=1.047) factors also were given highly value by employers. On other hands, indicators such as refreshing the workplace with new ideas (Mean = 2.24, SD=1.348), financial incentives from universities (Mean = 3.00, SD=1.028), addressing skills shortages

(Mean = 2.83, SD=0.991), and compliance with mandated WIL participation (Mean = 2.70, SD=1.389) were found to be less influential motivators. The overall mean score was found to be moderate (M=3.72, SD= .69) indicate that employers have a motivation to engage in WIL. From these results it appears that employers are motivated to engaged in hands-on roles that directly impact student development. These findings are in collaboration with Mabungela and Mtiki's (2024) and Dannenberg et al. (2025) that pointed out employer engagement in WILL is more operational rather than strategic collaboration. In a similar vein, the study findings align with studies that found factors such as reputation enhancement and talent acquisition reflect employers' motivation in enforcing WIL for workforce development and organizational branding (Jackson et al., 2017; Jackson, 2025).

Further, the results are in alignment with those of Jackson et al. (2017) which established that employers argued that students' work placements are meaningfully useful for the respective industry. Meaning that, lowering stress on compulsory involvement and innovation at workplace advocates intrinsic and voluntary benefits, instead of compliance or expected innovation, which essentially drives engagement of employers. Subsequently, strengthening wide-ranging partnerships that expand roles of employers beyond mentorship to comprise of strategic planning and funding could improve sustainability and appropriateness of WIL to the requirements of the industry, hence improved preparation of graduates and fostering mutually beneficial collaborations (Aničić & Divjak, 2022; Jackson et al., 2017). During the interview sessions, employers expressed their motivation of WIL. This is demonstrated by the following response from an employer, who had this to confess:

“During field practice we got a chance to meet graduates before their actual work. This led the organization to higher right people”

As illustrated in this quote, WIL placements provide employers with the opportunity to assess potential recruits in real work environments. This helps them identify and hire qualified graduates who are skilled and experienced in real world of work.

4.2. Extent of Employers' Engagement in WIL Activities

Table 3 presents the extent of employer's engagement in seven different areas of WIL practices.

Table 3: Employers' Engagement in WIL activities in TVET institutions

Variable Description	Mean	SD
Provision of feedback on the performance of students during their WIL	3.67	1.606
Participation in student orientation related to WIL experiences	3.5	0.962
Selection of students for Work Integrated Learning opportunities	3.17	1.872
Participation in institution planning for the WIL experiences.	2.84	1.216
Curriculum development meetings related to WIL at TVET institution	2.62	1.439
Participate in funding TVET institution WIL program	2.5	1.391
Collaborate with institutions to seeks out opportunities for WIL placements	2.19	1.377
Overall mean score	3.88	0.713

The result shows that employer engagement was found to be moderate in three aspects: providing feedback on student performance during WIL (mean = 3.67), student orientation activities (mean = 3.50), and selection of students for WIL opportunities (M = 3.17, SD = 1.872). Results further indicate that employers show moderate involvement in curriculum development meetings (mean = 2.62) but take a more active role in selecting students for WIL placements (mean = 3.17). Findings show that the role of employers in students' mentorship and preparation for the workplace is an important landmark in maintaining their continuity and supporting them to become equipped for repetitive work. Nevertheless, involvement in WIL planning institutionally (mean = 2.84), financing WIL programmes (mean = 2.50), and collaborative efforts in identification of placement opportunities (mean = 2.19)

were found to score lower rates. This recommends that under-engagement in strategic and resource-based roles is critical that needs to be prioritized for sustainability of WIL. Further, engagement of employers in WIL was rated moderate with a mean score ($M=3.88$, $SD=.713$), representing that engagement of employers was moderately rated in the WIL programmes.

The results are in congruence with those of Jackson et al. (2022) and Jackson et al. (2017) which presented that feedback from employers is essential for the improvement of learners' workplace willingness and skills development. The engagement of employers is lowly integrated in strategic and collaborative activities including stakeholders' meeting during curricula development process, planning institutionally for WIL experiences and looking for opportunities for WIL placements, which are likely to hamper the alignment of the industry requirements and academic curricula in Tanzania. This impediment has been extensively discussed in the literature under the WIL that underscores the necessity for greater partnerships in industry-education (Dannenberg et al., 2025; Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024). Moreover, fairly small number of employers' engagement in funding WIL programmes additionally revealed in this research hints to the potential constraints related to financial and other resources distressing their participation. This can influence the quality and sustainability of the initiatives under WIL as testified in Mayombe (2024). The modest mean score for choice of learners for WIL shows that employers contribute to candidates' selection, hitherto there is a chance for strengthening the influence of employers to ensure the selection is aligned with definite competencies in selected workplace. This concurs with Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) which established that improved participation of employers in staffing processes has the possibility of improving placement achievement rates and promote a tensor skill match between learners and employers' requirement.

Generally, the results express an active but irregular employer engagement pattern in WIL-associated activities under TVET. Boosting the WIL benefits needs intensifying roles of employers beyond students' supervision and feedback to incorporate strategic partnership in curricula development, financing and placement sourcing. Intensifying such alliances can better fill the observed skills gap, boost employability of graduates and support institutional responsiveness to the growing industry trends (Dannenberg et al., 2025; Jackson, 2016). As one of the interviewees presented:

"Prior curricula development, it is obligatory to engage employers to establish needs form the industry. During WIL, employers serve as our eyes; they report confidentially on learners' progress and performance."

The quote stresses a shared and trust-based partnership between institutions under TVET and employers, whereby employers help in judging student trainees under WIL throughout. Subsequently, this stipulates a path for feedback on usefulness of the training curricula, the circumstance that can be adopted to boost it and warranting training reflect up-to-date labour requirements and that learner progress is suitably observed.

4.3 The Impact of Employer Engagement on Graduate Employability

The research investigated the effect of engaging employers in WIL on employability of graduates under TVET. To accomplish this, the analysis regarding correlation and multiple linear regression were adopted to measure the effect and analytical influence of patterns of employers' engagement under WIL, involving motivation for engaging employers, the degree of engaging employers in numerous WIL actions and development of skills at the moment of implementing WIL as independent variables while the outcomes concerning employability of graduates as dependent variable.

Correlational Analysis for Determining the Relationship of Employer's Engagements and Graduate Employability

The analysis concerning Pearson correlation was carried out to study the association between engagement of employers under WIL and employability of graduates. The analytical process included correlating responses regarding employers' involvement level in numerous activities under WIL, their engagement motivation and the students' development skills during engagement of employers under WIL. Table 4 summarizes results emanated from data analysis.

Table 4: Employability of graduates and engagement of Employers Correlation

		Engagement	Motivation	Skills	Employability
Employability	Pearson r	.685**	.214**	.949**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.026	0.000	

*. 2-tailed significant correlation at 0.05 level

The findings exposed those engaging employers under WIL are powerfully positively correlated to the employability of graduates ($r=0.685$, $p<0.05$), signifying that graduates benefit meaningfully when employers enthusiastically include themselves in their experiences related to work-based learning environment. The motivation for employers to engage in WIL similarly indicated a positive with a moderate correlation regarding employability ($r=0.214$, $p<0.05$), signifying that readiness of employers play a supportive function in improving outcomes of graduates. Most notably, the skills acquired by learners through engaging employers verified an outstandingly strong correlation with employability of graduates ($r=0.949$, $p<0.05$) emphasizing that the practical skills obtained through these placements are vital drivers for successful employment post-graduation.

Multiple Linear Regression Findings on the Effect of Motivation, Skills and Engagement on Graduates' Employability

Hierarchical multiple linear regression was adopted to forecast the effect of motivation, skills, engagement on employability of graduates. Table 5 illustrates correlational findings for multiple linear regression.

Tables 5: Regression Models Predicting Motivation, Skills and Engagement on Employability

	Variable	B	t	sig.
Model1	(Constant)		14.259	0.000
	Motivation	0.152	2.251	0.026
Model statistics	F (1,108) =5.066, p<.0260	R² =0.046	$\Delta R^2=0.046$, p<.026	
Model 2	(Constant)		8.504	0.000
	motivation	0.082	1.628	0.106
	Engagement	0.460	9.411	0.000
Model statistics	F(2,108) =48.910, p<.000	R² =0.482	$\Delta R^2=0.437$, p<.000	
Model 3	(Constant)		3.379	0.001
	Motivation	0.024	1.059	0.292
	Engagement	0.159	2.444	0.015
	Skills	0.870	21.036	0.000
Model statistics	F (3, 108) =317.207, p=.000	R² =0.901	$\Delta R^2=0.419$, p=.000	

Three hierarchical multiple linear regression models were applied to evaluate the predictors of employability for graduates. For the first model, motivation for engaging employers were entered, presenting 4.6% of the variance in employability of graduates [F (1,108) =5.066, $p<.026$, $R^2 =0.046$, $\Delta R^2=0.046$, $p<.026$]. Another model, which involved engagement, significantly upgraded the model, describing 48.2% of the variance [F (2,108) =48.910, $p<.000$, $R^2 =0.482$, $\Delta R^2= 0.437$, $p<.000$]. This model presented a substantial 43.7% rise in R-square from the first model. The third model, integrating motivation, engagement, and skills development, additionally enhanced the

model, illustrating 90.1% of the variance [$F(3, 108) = 317.207, p = .000, R^2 = 0.901, \Delta R^2 = 0.419, p = .000$]. This model indicated a significant 41.9% rise in R-square from the second model. The high F-ratios crosswise all models show a robust framework for measuring motivation, engagement and skills development on the employability of graduates.

To measure contributions of all predictors in the final model, unstandardized beta coefficients (B) were studied. Two variables, skills development ($B = .870, p < .000$) and employers' engagement ($B = .159, p < .015$) were predicted to have significant influence on employability of graduates ($p < .05$). Contrary, motivation ($B = .024, p = .292$) was determined to be not significant in influencing employability of graduates. These results show that though skills development and employers' engagement significantly influence employability of graduates, motivation variable on the other hand statistically does not have a significant influence. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that insufficient statistical significance does not automatically conclude the possibility that these variables may influence employability by chance or through mechanisms not captured in the present analytical process. Consequently, such variables cannot be completely abandoned, as their potential effect, whether through unmeasured processes or factors contextually, may nonetheless embrace importance for conceptualizing employability of graduates.

These results underpin the recognized view in the literature that engagement of employers is crucial to bridge the gap between requirements from labour market and preparation for academic guidelines. Engagement of employers offers dependable prospects for learners to relate theoretical knowledge in real-world situations, which significantly increases employability by training graduates with appropriate competencies required at workplace (O'Regan, 2023; Ferns & Lilly, 2015). The vigorous relationship between skills development and employability is associated with prior studies documenting that acquisition of both soft and technical skills is the major mechanism through which WIL improves career preparedness and competitiveness (Mabungela, 2024; Rowe, 2017). This stresses that graduates' achievement depends mostly on meaningful, skill-focused employer participation programmes under WIL.

These versatile benefits strengthen the WIL's role to bridge knowledge from academia and workplace requirements, as extensively upheld in recent research (Jackson, 2025; Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024). Likewise, exposure to real-world and opportunities for networking during WIL promote confidence of graduates and increase outcomes for job placement (McIlveen et al., 2011). Interviewees voiced how engagement of employers leads in improved students' monitoring and mentorship: one of employers commented, "We are very cognizant of the learners during their field practical and seriously mentor them in a professional manner," while the second employer presented, "HR invited our students to serve as part-timers after their graduation." These voices emphasize the tangible, enduring benefits that employers' contribution brings to programmes under WIL and graduates' achievement. I frequently receive calls from several institutions (where our learners participated in WIL programmes) that require learners who have completed their studies... they are learners who can perform a well-done job.

Engagement of employers in WIL provides an important role in preparation for a wide range of skills necessary for employability, efficiently linking together theoretical knowledge and practical oriented gaps. Learners acquire both technical competencies and indispensable transferable skills—including teamwork, communication, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability and time management—through real-world work experiences, augmenting their willingness for employment and career advance (Areskoug Josefsson, 2024; Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024; Jackson, 2015). This skills development affiliates with the Kolb's experiential learning theory, stressing the step of concrete experience, highlighting the value of learners learning by doing in real workplace situations (Kolb, 1984). This was achieved through involvement between mentors from the industry and training institutions to emphasize practical-based approach in academia. Vigorous engagement of employers through mentorship, feedback, and curricula participation warrants that WIL experiences remain applicable to industry requirements, which is essential for cultivating graduates with work-ready minds (Jackson et al., 2017). Correspondingly, results portray situated learning theory, where learning is expected to happen through involvement in communities of practice (Catalano, 2015; Edmonds-Cady & Sosulski, 2012). This means entrenching learners in trustworthy work environments can help employers gain not just technical skills but also culture, norms and expectations at workplace (Benbow & Hora, 2018).

As employability advances beyond technical proficiency to comprise of networking, professional distinctiveness and personal traits including resilience and self-confidence, it mostly understood as a multi-dimensional construct covering general, discipline-specific, and personal skills crucial for achievement across varied work situations (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Yorke, 2005). Generally, WIL permits learners to develop these integrated competencies, meaningfully improving their prospects of respectful employment. Likewise,

motivation of employers, though less noticeable, remains imperative as employers with high level of motivation tend to devote additional efforts into mentoring and offering high quality learning environments that have positive influence on learners' skills development and confidence (David, 2022). This advocates that nurturing employer's eagerness and commitment should be a strategic emphasis for institutions targeting maximization of WIL's benefits. Generally, the results point out that real WIL dictates not only vigorous participation of employers but also devotion to the quality of participation and the drivers for the motivation behind it to warrant graduates acquire the skills required by employers, hence improving their prospects for employability.

4.4 Challenges Diminishing Employers' Engagement in WIL Activities

The research assessed challenges weakening engagement of employers in activities on WIL under TVET institutions through carrying out analysis of perceptions from both teaching staff and employers. The wide-ranging results, as illustrated in Table 5, expose a wide range of challenges covering learner readiness, communication, organizational capacity, resource limitations and administrative obstacles.

Participants presented various substantial challenges upsetting their involvement in WIL. Financial and budgetary limitations were perceived as the slightest substantial challenge (Mean = 1.20, SD = 0.41). Though, things like negative perception before experiences in WIL programme (Mean = 3.35, SD = 1.37), ambiguity regarding whom to contact concerning WIL (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.41) and shortage of students under TVET in their geographical location (Mean = 3.78, SD = 0.48) scored a more noticeable challenge. Other challenges with moderate scores comprised of learners' inadequate skills (Mean = 2.37, SD = 1.20), insufficient institutional resources (Mean = 2.39, SD = 1.21), and size of organizations (Mean = 2.21, SD = 1.47). Encounters like inadequate information about WIL opportunities and shortage of space to host learners were also assessed but with fairly lower mean scores with 1.80 and 1.61 correspondingly.

From the viewpoint of TVET teaching staff, systemic and institutional encounters were established as more noteworthy. High mean scores were reported for administrative and bureaucratic hurdles (Mean = 4.29, SD = 0.75), lack of communication between institutions and industries (Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.61), and insufficient industry partnerships and collaboration (Mean = 4.22, SD = 0.78). Funding shortages (Mean = 4.16, SD = 0.86) and difficulties securing suitable WIL placements aligned with students' fields of study (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.76) were also highlighted as critical. Additionally, ineffective preparation of students for WIL (Mean = 4.06, SD = 0.82), employers' reluctance to accept students (Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.84), and low student enthusiasm toward WIL participation (Mean = 3.41, SD = 1.07) further illustrate the challenges faced by institutions

Table 5. Employers' and TVET Academic Staff's Views of Challenges Diminishing Employers' Engagement in WIL Activities

Challenge (Employers)	Mean	SD	Challenge (TVET Staff)	Mean	SD
I don't know who to contact about WIL	3.8	0.4	Organizations administrative or bureaucratic hurdles	4.29	0.74
Lack of TVET students in my area	3.78	0.48	Lack of communication between our institution and industries	4.23	0.6
Negative prior experiences	3.35	1.36	The lack of sufficient industry partnerships	4.22	0.77
Insufficient resources within my organization	2.39	1.21	Lack of funds	4.16	0.85
Students with insufficient skills	2.37	1.2	Difficulties in finding suitable WIL placements	4.12	0.75
My organization is small.	2.21	1.47	Ineffective preparation of students for WIL programme	4.06	0.81
Limited information	1.8	0.98	Employers' reluctance in	4	0.84

about WIL opportunities			accepting students for WIL		
A lack of space to accommodate a student	1.61	0.8	Students' escarpment for WIL	3.41	1.06
Monetary cost/budget constraints	1.2	0.4			

The findings reveal that one significant barrier discussed by participants related to engagement to WIL was communication problems, such as not knowing who to contact and the limited availability of students, as major barriers to their engagement in WIL activities. Contrary, teaching staff underscore greater institutional and administrative encounters. Their high-rate scores suggest a quick requirement to improve partnership between institutions, streamline bureaucratic procedures, solicit satisfactory funding, and boost the preparation of learners for workplace readiness. Apprehensions about their negative historical experiences and hesitancy to receive learners highlight the crucial importance of tackling incongruities and warranting that learners are furnished with the appropriate skills and attitudes successful mastery of real work situations.

The identified observations favour former research which presents the requirement for strengthened communication and engagements between institutions under TVET and industry (Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024; Oosthuizen et al., 2022). The significance of learners' enthusiasm also supports results by Jackson (2025), whereas institutional financial limitation aligns with facts revealed by Dannenberg et al. (2025). The high mean score for inadequate contact information advocates unproductive relationship between institutions under TVET and employers, which affiliates with earlier research stressing the prerequisite for efficient channels of communication and selected coordinators to foster improved involvement (Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024; Oosthuizen et al., 2022). Negative preceding experiences may connote historical mismanagement or divergences between learners' skills and workplace requirements, emphasizing research encouraging enhanced preparation of learners and well-defined expectation management to improve satisfaction of employers (Jackson, 2025). Additionally, shortage of students under TVET in employers' geographical locations makes a complex situation regarding the challenges related to accessibility and placement. Limitations emanating from organizational resources and perceptions of students' skill gaps amplifies extensive concerns in WIL literature in relation to the alignment between requirements from the industry and training institutions (Dannenberg et al., 2025). Generally, these results underline the significance of refining communication, strengthening students' willingness, and improving institutional support to lessen challenges and intensify engagement of employers in WIL programmes for improved TVET results.

These complex challenges highlight the relationship of institutional, industrial, and learner-associated drivers that weaken the effectiveness of WIL under TVET. Administrative bottlenecks and imperfect communication channels echo results in the broader literature, stressing the requirement for strengthened coordination and involvement between institutions under TVET and stakeholders within the industry (Dannenberg et al., 2025; Mabungela & Mtiki, 2024; Oosthuizen et al., 2022). These scholars speculate that the struggle in sourcing sufficient placements and the shortage of financing mirror common struggles where programmes under TVET experience shortfall to meet requirement for quality experiential learning opportunities (see Edmonds-Cady & Sosulski, 2012). Besides, learners' willingness remains a great concern; limited preparation lessens the value of the WIL experience for both learners and employers (Jackson, 2025). Employers also present frustration when placements involve students mismatched to organizational culture or work expectations, with comments highlighting issues of low motivation, poor attitude, or excessive need for supervision, which strain resources and productivity.

During the interview, one of the interviewees commented:

When learners are not well suited to the institution, they can distress productivity and become a drain in terms of financial and time resources. The only disadvantage is when you hire a learner that doesn't have the matching values or is not the right fit for the institution, for example the learner that takes plenty of sick leave, lazy or impolite to customers and entails serious management attention. Occasionally you can get categorically unsatisfactory placements, where it is a burden on the business to manage the interns for the whole placement.

The interviewee's narration shows that while WIL can be jointly valuable, its recognition depends severely on the fitness of learner placement inside the institution. When learners are incompatible in various aspects including attitudes, skills, values, professionalism and experience can result in counterproductive. To better comprehend this encounter, employers may interpret these placements as a drain instead of being beneficial, as unenthusiastic or unwell aligned learners. These types of encounters can diminish productivity, necessitate extreme supervision, and even damage the reputation of the organization or relationships with clients. To sum up, overcoming the challenges of engaging employers in WIL necessitates well-defined channels of communication, improved student training, minimized bureaucracy, and dependable funding. Addressing these identifies issues will support WIL programmes offer meaningful learning experiences and build stronger linkages between industry and industry.

5. Conclusions and Implications of the study

5.1. Conclusion

This research investigated the role of engaging employers in WIL and its influence in improving TVET graduates' employability in Tanzania. The results show that involvement of employers in WIL practices, with relatively higher engagement in operational activities such as student selection and the provision of feedback, but limited participation in strategic domains including curriculum development and financial support. Employer involvement was largely driven by practical considerations, such as opportunities for mentoring, exposure to real-world work environments, skills development, access to potential talent, and reputational benefits. Importantly, the study established that employer engagement in WIL significantly influences TVET graduates' employability, with the level of employer involvement and skills development emerging as significant predictors, while motivation for engagement showed a weak and non-significant effect. These findings highlight the central role of the depth and quality of employer engagement particularly in skills development in shaping graduate employability outcomes. However, communication challenges were identified as a major barrier to effective employer participation. Consequently, to fully realize the potential of WIL in bridging skills gaps and preparing graduates for the labor market, TVET institutions should strengthen employer partnerships beyond routine supervision to encompass strategic collaboration, effective communication mechanisms, and shared resource mobilization.

5.2. Implication for theory and practice

5.2.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to understanding critical role of employer engagement in WIL on enhancing the employability of TVET graduates in the context of Tanzanian by empirically validating the influence of employer's engagement indicators such as level of engagement, motivation and skills development. The findings support the Work-Integrated learning (WIL) and Situated Learning Theory (SLT) as a robust framework for analyzing graduates' development of employability in contexts of TVET. By highlighting the relative importance of employer's engagement, the study extends existing theories on WIL experience adoption and implementation. Thereby confirming that learning develops through active participation in communities of practice, where novices learn by engaging with and being mentored by experienced practitioners in authentic work setting. Therefore, findings reinforce experiential and situated learning theories, emphasizing that vital skills are best acquired through hands-on workplace experiences rather than depending on only traditional classrooms. This study underscores the importance of engaging employers in WIL practice to provide students with practical exposure and develops cognitive and soft skills that increase employability and productivity.

5.2.2. Practical implications and recommendations

The findings of this study offer several important practical implications for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and policymakers seeking to strengthen employer engagement in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) practices. Strengthening such engagement is critical for enabling TVET institutions to fulfil their mandate of producing workforce-ready graduates.

First, TVET institutions should actively foster meaningful employer engagement in WIL through well-structured and transparent communication channels. Clear mechanisms for information sharing and collaboration can enhance employers' awareness of the purpose, benefits, and expectations of WIL, thereby promoting their commitment and sustained support. Improving logistical arrangements is equally essential. This includes investing in adequate

infrastructure, facilitating access to modern machinery and technologies, and addressing geographical constraints to ensure the availability of suitable and accessible student placements (Mesuwini, 2023). Such measures can reduce barriers that often discourage employer participation in WIL initiatives.

Second, TVET institutions should prioritize WIL-focused capacity-building initiatives aimed at both institutional staff and employers. Targeted training and sensitization programs can enhance employers' understanding of their roles in WIL and strengthen their willingness to engage in supervision, mentoring, and assessment of students. Institutions should also institutionalize regular platforms for dialogue between TVET providers and industry partners to support continuous interaction and trust-building. Furthermore, administrative support structures should be strengthened by formally involving employers in key WIL processes, including curriculum design, student placement, assessment, and resource mobilization. Establishing robust monitoring and coordination systems can further ensure consistent and meaningful employer involvement across all stages of WIL implementation.

Third, policymakers have a critical role in creating an enabling environment for effective WIL implementation. Policy frameworks should clearly mandate and guide employer engagement in the TVET curriculum process in order to bridge the persistent gap between industry requirements and training provision, ultimately enhancing graduates' employability. Addressing systemic challenges such as regulatory constraints, fragmented governance structures, and the absence of standardized WIL policies across institutions is essential for improving the administration and sustainability of WIL programs. In addition, policymakers should promote comprehensive and collaborative strategies that bring together institutional leaders, employers, and students, while also providing incentives for employer investment and participation in decision-making processes. Such policy support can create conditions under which WIL initiatives can thrive and realize their transformative potential within the TVET sector.

Finally, this study highlights several avenues for future research. Further studies could explore models of co-designed curricula between TVET institutions and industry partners, conduct longitudinal investigations into the outcomes of sustained employer–institution collaboration, or undertake comparative analyses of WIL practices across different industrial sectors. These research directions would deepen understanding of effective employer engagement strategies and contribute to the continuous improvement of WIL in TVET systems.

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