

Effective Leadership of TVET Institutions: An Exploration of the Perspectives of TVET Leaders

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Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is increasingly being recognized as an agent of social and economic development. It equips youth and adults for work. Across the globe, TVET is challenged by issues such as inferior laboratories and equipment, lack of industry collaboration, and poor leadership. It is important that for TVET to achieve social and economic goals there has to be effective leadership of TVET programmes and institutions. This study seeks to determine the perspectives and characteristics of TVET leaders among selected TVET institutions in Jamaica. It was conducted using the explanatory sequential mixed methods design which features both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The study revealed perspectives of TVET leaders on effective leadership and the characteristics of effective TVET leaders; concluding by recommending that TVET leaders receive professional development to understand the key features of effective TVET programmes in order to lead effectively.

Keywords: social and economic goals, TVET leadership, leadership

Introduction

Globally and nationally, TVET is increasingly being recognized as an agent of social and economic development (Ekhalia et al., 2021; Fien & Wilson, 2005; Marope et al., 2015; Maclean, 2005; Mu'azu, 2021). This idea is underscored by entities such as the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation International Centre for Technical Vocational Education and Training (UNESCO-UNEVOC), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) (Solomon-Wallder & Barrett, 2023). TVET's social and economic impact is

evident in that it develops a skilled workforce, aims to fight unemployment, aids in productivity, and increases earnings (Aedo & Walker, 2012; Kana & Letaba, 2024; Oketch, 2007; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024).

The perspective of TVET, as posited by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the National Center for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (2020) will be used in this paper. It describes TVET as involving education, training, and skills development, which can take place in a variety of institutions at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Continuing education and a strong work-based component are also included.

Many countries have recognized the important role of TVET and its contribution to economic and social development (Kana & Letaba, 2024; Okoye & Arimonu, 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, TVET has contributed to skills and youth development and helps with school to work transition and preparation for the 4th industrial revolution (Oketch, 2007; Oketch & Lolwana, 2017; Kana & Letaba, 2024). Although the integral role of TVET is recognized in African countries such as Nigeria; inadequate funding, inadequate facilities, curriculum that has little relationship to the workplace, and a value system that emphasizes university education remain challenges (Okoye & Arimonu, 2016). This value system is a challenge because it emphasizes and gives University education status as opposed to TVET, which is generally perceived as for students who have not excelled academically and focuses on hands on practical training and not theoretical training. In addressing these gaps, Oketch and Lolwana (2017) call for the integration of TVET in the education system in sub-Saharan Africa and for TVET in the Global South to be driven by the local culture, thus facilitating inclusion and equity (Matu, 2022).

According to Tripney et al. (2013), TVET in regions such as Latin America, East Asia, South Asia, and the Caribbean impacts youth employment and outcomes. As a result, he argues for investment in TVET in developing countries. In countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, TVET has been given priority. In Indonesia, many secondary schools have been converted to TVET schools in response to the needs of the labour market (Paryono, 2011).

The Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) is the implementation arm of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that is the coordinating mechanism for TVET in the Caribbean. Its mandate is to promote the development of national training agencies or apex bodies (national and regional bodies that provide policy and strategic direction, standards setting and quality assurance for TVET) with

responsibility for TVET across the region and the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ), which is the regional certification system (CARICOM, 2014).

Various initiatives are taking place in the Caribbean to transform TVET, including the expansion of the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications, the integration of the competency-based education and training (CBET) approach, and financial support by international agencies such as the International Development Bank (IDB) (CANA, 2019; CARICOM, 2014). TVET in Latin America and the Caribbean must be responsive to issues such as climate change and it has been recommended that greening be integrated into the TVET curriculum (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2013). Greening refers to processes and practices that are environmentally friendly, making decisions and adopting a lifestyle that is ecologically responsible and which will lead to protection of the environment and sustainability of natural resources for current and future generations (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2017).

Graham (2023) has also called for increased TVET research in the Caribbean and greater collaboration with researchers and policymakers.

The Jamaican TVET System

The TVET system in Jamaica is situated within the Education Act of 1965; the Human Employment and Resource Training/National Service Training Agency (HEART/NSTA) Trust amended Act of 2019; the Apprenticeship Act of 1959; the National Youth Policy Act of 2006; the Council of Community Colleges Act of 2001 (amended in 2021); and the University of Technology Act of 1999 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2014); UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012). In Jamaica, TVET seeks to provide skills for employability, to develop lifelong learning, and to foster community building and social responsibility (MoE, 2014).

Jamaica's TVET policy sets out key areas that are critical to successful TVET implementation. These include access and equity, governance, quality, financing, curriculum development, certification, and research (MoE, 2014). TVET

in Jamaica is offered formally, non-formally, and through informal systems (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012). Informal and non-formal TVET takes place outside the formal education system. However, informal TVET is typically unstructured, based on practical experiences and does not usually result in certification. Non-formal TVET is more planned and structured, and may lead to certification.

According to Morris and Powell (2013), for TVET to be transformed in Jamaica investment in human capital is required, along with funds for state-of-the-art equipment, the marketing and promotion of TVET nationally, and the professional development of TVET teachers. Rowe Amonde (2024) further extends this by saying that schools in the formal education system in Jamaica (such as technical high schools) struggle with the negative perception of TVET among teachers and parents and a lack of updated labs and equipment. Another key area for transformation is the removal of the perception that TVET is for students who are not doing well academically (Hutton & McCulloch, 2024). Other factors that plague TVET in Jamaica are administrative and leadership issues that affect the integration of TVET into the formal school system (Solomon-Wallder & Barrett, 2023). The administrative and leadership issues include lack of buy in from school leaders, inefficient planning and administration and lack of desired competencies of school leaders. In order to address these challenges and advance TVET in Jamaica, there needs to be increased focus on strengthening leadership in TVET (Morris & Powell, 2013; Rowe Amonde, 2024; Solomon-Wallder & Barrett, 2023). This can be done through the effective implementation of the TVET policy and capacity building training for TVET leaders and managers.

Morris (2024) recognizes that progress has been made in offering tertiary level TVET programmes in Jamaica, as it helps in the development of higher-level skills. In 2022, the government of Jamaica recommended the strengthening of TVET in the secondary school system. This was a key recommendation from the Jamaica Education Transformation Commission report (Jamaica Information Service [JIS], 2023).

Background of the Study

The HEART/NSTA Trust

The mission of the HEART Trust, National Service and Training Agency is to advance TVET in Jamaica. Its mission is driven by its Act, which was developed in 1982 and revised in 2019. The activities of the HEART/NSTA Trust are financed through the HEART Trust Fund.

As a training agency, it seeks to:

1. Promote the education of persons not involved in the formal education system;
2. Monitor aspects of technical and vocational education and training; and,
3. Establish an effective system that aligns workforce to industry and national development needs through the provision of education, training, character development, national service, and work experience for trainees (HEART Act, 2019).

Specifically, the Act speaks to financing for TVET; development of training guidelines; approving and certifying courses; maintaining high standards in technical and vocational education and training; partnerships in matters relating to TVET; promoting access to TVET; instituting a system of assessment; and granting certificates and awards (HEART Act, 2019).

The HEART/NSTA Trust executes its mandate through the development of occupational standards; collection and analysis of data on labour market demand and supply; development and dissemination of instructional resources; delivery of accredited training programmes; assessment of programmes; and collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information to mainstream TVET in the formal education system (HEART Act, 2019; MoE, 2014). These are key areas in TVET that have implications for effective leadership.

The Trust offers programmes based on the key skill areas as outlined in Jamaica's Vision 2030 plan, and these are developed in alignment with the National Qualifications Framework of Jamaica (NQF-J). The programmes are concentrated in

the following sectors: agriculture, manufacturing, global services, logistics, tourism, renewable energy, construction, creative industries, and information and communications technology. Programmes are offered through institutions, community-training interventions, and special projects (HEART/NSTA Trust, 2023).

The HEART/NSTA Trust owns 26 institutions and partners with communities to support 80 community-based training interventions (JIS, 2024). Since 2022, it has increased access through regionalization of the institutions by creating workforce colleges and TVET clusters (HEART/NSTA Trust, 2022). The 26 institutions are divided into 6 regions, ranging from Regions 1-6. Each institution has a manager and is further divided into clusters comprising 2-3 institutions, each headed by a Director Principal (HEART/NSTA, n.d.).

For 2025-2029, there are 3 key strategic priorities detailed in the HEART/NSTA strategic plan: enhancing the quality of training and certification; strengthening the reach and participation of the TVET ecosystem; and increasing services to youth at risk (HEART/NSTA Trust, 2023).

In 2019, legislation made for the legal provision of the merger of the functions of the HEART Trust NTA, the National Youth Service, the Jamaica Foundation for Lifelong Learning, and the Apprenticeship Board. The merger sought to rationalize programmes and systems to better meet education and training needs (JIS, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to explore the perspectives and characteristics of TVET leaders in Jamaica's HEART/NSTA Trust. It also examined the TVET leadership competencies valued by policymakers and leaders associated with these institutions.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. [Quantitative] What are the institutional leaders' perception of effective TVET leadership?

2. [Qualitative] What are the perceived leadership characteristics of TVET leaders?
3. [Qualitative] How do leaders and policymakers of the national training agency define effective TVET leadership?

Delimitations of the Study

The study focused on the views of the top level TVET leaders in HEART institutions. Therefore, the perspectives of middle-level leaders and those who do not lead institutions were intentionally not captured.

Limitations of the Study

There is limited research on TVET in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Not all TVET leaders in the institutions participated in the survey.

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to knowledge about TVET in Jamaica and can be extended to other TVET leaders in the region with similar characteristics. The findings can contribute to informing policy and practice in recruiting, training, and upskilling TVET leaders in HEART who are characteristically similar to those who participated in this study.

Literature Review

Effective TVET Leadership

Educational leadership is a combination of behaviours, actions, strategies executed, and decisions taken in an educational setting (Argyropoulou & Lintzerakou, 2025). It should be shared, thus producing inclusivity and empowerment (Carvalho and Veiga, 2024; Simmons & Yawson, 2022). TVET leadership is leadership that recognizes the role of TVET in leading social and economic transformation and leads based on this belief (Ferdinand-James et al., 2024; Haughey, 2015; Marope et al., 2015). It is leadership that is driven by disruptions in society (such as the rise of artificial intelligence, the demand for new and emerging skills and climate change) and addresses social inequality

resulting in inclusiveness, quality, and relevance in education that will ultimately equip youth and adults with skills for employment and entrepreneurship — preparing individuals to meet the changing world of work (ILO 2020, UNESCO–UNEVOC, 2023).

Because of the increasing emphasis on TVET as an agent of social and economic development and environmental sustainability (Marope et al., 2015), it has become necessary to focus on what makes for effective TVET leadership and for quality institutions. The role of leadership in TVET has become increasingly important because of the significance and importance of TVET in advancing economies (Gewe, 2016, as cited in Kraak & Paterson 2016; Kedir & Geleta, 2017). Strong and effective leadership in TVET is seen as necessary for increasing the autonomy of an institution, responding to the needs of industries, and increasing accountability and responsibility (Brennan, 2014).

According to the UNESCO–UNEVOC (2015) recommendations for quality TVET, there are key pillars that define an effective TVET system. One of these is the capacity building of TVET staff such as trainers, managers, and administrators. This focus points to the importance of leadership and the recognition that effective leadership is necessary for quality TVET. Recognizing this, UNESCO–UNEVOC ran its first ongoing leadership training institute for TVET senior leaders and mid-level managers in 2016. In articulating the objective of this institute, UNESCO–UNEVOC (2023) stated that the programme sought to update participants' understanding of the latest developments in the TVET sector and to equip them with tools and skills for effective leadership, including strategic knowledge, thematic knowledge, and the leadership and management skills to drive change.

As part of advocating for quality in TVET, the Jamaican TVET policy speaks to the need for capacity building that will equip TVET administrators to manage and implement programmes that meet the needs of firms and the local and global workforce (MoE, 2014). To strengthen effective TVET leadership, it is important to invest in the training and upgrading

of TVET leaders (Nikisi et al., 2025; Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023).

There are some key areas that constitute effective leadership in TVET. These include decentralizing authority; establishing semi-autonomous boards; industry engagement; responding to community needs; innovation; and building collaborative relationships (Brennan, 2014; Haughey, 2015). These are in alignment with the general areas of leadership such as collaboration, communication, and being an agent of change (Simmons & Taylor, 2019; Symbaluk et al., 2024).

As a necessary aspect of strengthening TVET leadership in Jamaica, Solomon-Wallder and Barrett (2023) have argued for the integration of TVET in the Jamaican secondary school system in order to increase access and give more students opportunities to pursue TVET subjects. Additionally, TVET writers have advocated for strong governance and leadership as key to the building of effective TVET institutions (Abdullahi & Othman, 2021; Maclean, 2005; Plane, 2009).

Characteristics of TVET Leaders

Influencing others towards a shared goal or vision is a key characteristic of leadership. This means that the TVET leader should be able to define a vision that equips individuals for work and life and have individuals coalesce around that vision (Mumford, 2010). Kedir and Geleta (2017) list some essential characteristics of the TVET leader. These include inspiring a shared vision; empowering others to act; involvement in decision making through collaboration; experimentation; taking risks; modelling values; and recognizing and rewarding job performance.

Building collaborative relationships is important to being an effective TVET leader and this collaborative ethos should extend to industry and those who are involved in the management of institutions (Ghirmai & Fessehatsion, 2023; Tadde et al., 2021; Nikisi et al., 2025). Additionally, it is important that TVET leaders be innovative by challenging systems and processes — thereby arriving at new processes, new products, and new services (Haughey, 2015).

TVET leaders must be responsive to global changes such as the onset of the 4th industrial revolution (Haughey, 2015; Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023; Spoettl & Loose, 2015), with its focus on digitization and digitalization. These should therefore be introduced in TVET programmes to facilitate technology-enabled learning, thus creating more resilient institutions and skill systems across the globe (COL, 2025; UNESCO, 2023).

TVET leaders should also aim to be student-centered, and attending to the needs of students as major stakeholders while preparing them for an international workforce (Whatley et al., 2023; Tadle et al., 2021; Joo, 2018). According to Joo (2018) leadership enhances school outcomes indirectly via the provision of overall direction (enhanced teacher competencies, relevant programs, and school-industry linkages).

Importantly, the TVET leader should be able to cope with changes, as the current job market is fast evolving. Recognizing the changing job landscape, Spoettl & Loose (2015) maintain that it is necessary to provide career education that will equip students with skills for the workplace.

Therefore, for TVET to achieve the ambitious goal of being an economic initiative, a social initiative, and an environmental initiative, focus needs to be placed on training and upskilling TVET leaders to build these very important characteristics.

Perception of TVET Leaders on Leadership

TVET leaders have emphasized the need to recognize its role in national development and to use this knowledge as a driving force in the design of the TVET curriculum (Albashiry et al., 2015; Mu'azu, 2021; Sauffie, 2015). The TVET leader should have a vision for change and possess key strategic knowledge and competencies such as the ability to assess sustainability goals and the implications for TVET. The TVET leader should possess management and leadership skills and develop strategies for executing key thematic TVET areas (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023). CARICOM (2014) has highlighted the need to upgrade TVET

leaders to lead skills-training programmes. In collaboration with the CARICOM for Employment (C-EFE) programme, a leadership programme was developed and delivered to 16 institutions across the Caribbean in 2016 (Nova Scotia Community College International [NSCC], 2025). The programme aimed to build the capacity of local TVET institutions to offer new TVET programmes and strengthen existing programmes in the areas of gender sensitivity, environmental relevance and responsiveness to labour market intelligence. CANTA, the implementation arm of CARICOM for technical vocational education and training, recognizes the importance of TVET leadership in articulating the goals for TVET in the region. These include the provision of standards-driven competency-based education and training, assessment, and certification. CANTA also describes its remit as guiding the implementation of quality assurance principles towards the continuous improvement of TVET, and improving the image and status of TVET in the region (CARICOM, 2014). These are key pillars of TVET that require effective leadership in order for them to be realized.

The HEART/NSTA Trust, in recognizing its role as the leading provider of technical and vocational education in Jamaica, describes its mission as providing vocational training that equips workers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to attain higher levels of productivity. Furthermore, this can be done by forging local and international partnerships, introducing new programmes, and collaborating with various stakeholders (HEART, 2023).

In driving change, the TVET leader should be innovative and should transform institutions (Kedir & Geleta, 2017). According to the ILO (2020), which promotes TVET as a key aspect of its mission, the TVET leader should develop partnerships with key stakeholders to execute reforms and should be guided by a monitoring and evaluation framework. Additionally, the TVET leader should look for opportunities to promote lifelong learning opportunities and flexible pathways through the digitization of TVET and skills systems (ILO, 2020).

In summary, effective TVET leadership is recognized as an important component of quality institution-building worldwide. The review of the literature does reveal gaps, including limited studies on TVET leadership in Jamaica few studies researching the voices of TVET institutional leaders and their perspectives on what makes for effective TVET leadership.

Methodology

Research Design

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design was chosen for this study. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), in a mixed methods design, quantitative and qualitative approaches are used in a single study. As shown in Figure 1, the quantitative data were collected and analysed before the qualitative data and the results were then interpreted together. This design provided explanation of the quantitative research results using the qualitative evidence. They were integrated to develop a comprehensive picture of the results (Taghizadeh et al., 2015). The results from the survey were integrated with the focus group results and the document analysis. This design was used because combining both approaches strengthens the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

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Population and Sample

At the time of this study, there were 39 TVET leaders drawn from across 26 TVET training institutions in Jamaica. No sampling was done, since all 39 leaders were invited to participate in the study and all completed the survey. Nine TVET leaders participated in the focus group interview. The participants for the focus group were selected based on their responses to the survey question at the end of the survey that asked if they were willing to participate in a focus group discussion. Nine participants indicated their willingness to participate in the focus group discussions. These were TVET leaders in charge of clusters of institutions or individual institutions with proven records of providing technical vocational education and training (TVET) since the early 1980s (HEART, 2023).

Data Collection

Three data collection methods were used in the study: survey, focus group interview, and document review.

Quantitative Phase

The survey of 22 questions was created and developed by the researcher using Survey Monkey. The survey was sent to an expert professor who has written and published extensively in leadership. He examined it to ensure that it captures elements related to leadership. Minor changes were made to questions based on feedback. Based on the results from the survey, the researcher decided to explore key aspects in the focus group discussion in order to interrogate and get a deeper understanding of the issues coming out of the quantitative phase.

The questions had a 3-point Likert-type response format of disagree, neutral, and agree. These questions were designed for the participants to select the characteristics of TVET leaders. However, 1 open-ended question was used to identify any additional characteristics that were not captured in the Likert-type questions. The response rate was 56% (22/39). The survey

sought to ascertain respondents' perception of the characteristics that make for an effective TVET leader.

The survey questions were reviewed for both content and construct validity by a senior academic researcher who has written extensively on leadership. Minor changes were made based on the feedback given..

Qualitative Phase

These are the focus group interview questions were as follows:

1. What does effective TVET leadership mean for you?
2. Describe the important characteristics of a TVET leader.
3. What kind of leadership would make your institution a successful one?
4. How important is leadership to effective TVET training and delivery?

The quantitative phase informed the qualitative phase. The participants for the focus group interview were chosen from the survey based on their indication that they were willing to participate in the focus group discussions. The questions for the focus group interview were developed by the researcher. They came out of responses from the survey. The participants were told the purpose of the focus group interviews, they were told that pseudonyms would be used in reporting the findings and each was given an opportunity to respond to the same questions.

The 1-hour focus group interview was used in Phase 2 to allow 9 volunteer leaders to express their views about TVET leadership. It is acknowledged that these volunteers could come with biases and they may not be representative of the general population (Brassey, et al 2025) The focus group was conducted online using Microsoft Teams and recorded with their permission.

The focus group interview was chosen because it provided an opportunity for the participants to respond to similar questions and to express their attitudes, opinions, and preferences while gaining deeper insight into the issues being discussed (Tümen Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021).

All participants were given an opportunity to respond to the questions (Patten, 2013).

A document review was also conducted. Each participant's job description was reviewed and the qualities and characteristics identified as important by those in the governance and leadership of the corresponding TVET institutions recorded. This was a secondary source of information that provided ready answers to questions asked in the survey and the focus group, and contributed to the triangulation of survey and focus group responses.

Integration Phase

While reporting the findings of each research question, the quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated in this phase. The explanatory sequential design of mixed methods research was used. Quantitative and qualitative data were integrated and interpreted (Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2017)

Data Analysis

Quantitative Phase

The survey data for research question 1 were analysed by Survey Monkey. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to present the findings.

Qualitative Phase

The focus group interviews were transcribed and then analysed manually. This involved reading through the data and transcript for preliminary themes and subthemes; creating a list of codes based on research questions; aligning the data with themes and sub-themes and organising them into categories; and then interpreting the data and presenting them as a coherent narrative (Isangula et al., 2024). The transcripts were coded on three separate occasions to reduce ambiguity and to ensure that they were correctly interpreted. The categories that emerged were collated and carefully dissected into themes based on the various characteristics of effective leadership provided by the respondents. The researcher also looked for patterns within the

categories and the dimensions of these patterns. From these emerged the key characteristics of effective TVET leadership. Similarly, themes were also identified from the focus group and document reviews of the job descriptions provided.

Ethical Considerations

An email was sent to each TVET leader asking him or her to complete the survey. It was stated in the email the purpose of the survey which was to inform research on TVET leadership. Additionally it was also said that in discussing the findings it would not be attributed directly to him/ her and pseudonyms would be used. From the survey responses nine participants volunteered to participate in the focus group.

The survey questions ended by asking participants if they were willing and available to participate in a focus group session and they voluntarily agreed. They were told that their responses were confidential, and that confidentiality would be maintained by the use of pseudonyms in the presentation of the findings.

The participants were given the right to withdraw or not participate in the study. Participants were not told that they would benefit from or be compensated by participating in the study. They were told that their perspectives would help to inform leadership in TVET.

Researcher's Positionality

As a TVET senior leader, I have recognized the need for transformative leadership in this field. My work experience has led me to focus on research in effective TVET leadership, shaped by my worldview as a leader, my philosophy of TVET leadership, and how I interpret the data. The researcher mitigated against bias from her positionality by reflecting on her biases and beliefs regarding TVET leadership and questioning and challenging these to ensure they were not influencing the research.

Findings and Discussion

Respondents' Characteristics

The survey was sent out to 39 leaders across a network of 22 institutions. Of these, 15 led 1 TVET institution, while the others led a cluster of institutions. There were 15 females and 7 males who participated in the survey. More than 90% of the TVET leaders surveyed had more than 5 years' experience in leading institutions. Of the total number of TVET leaders surveyed, 90% had advanced through the institution to become leaders, while the others were external recruits.

Research Question 1: What are the institutional leaders' perception of effective TVET leadership?

The leaders shared various perspectives on effective TVET leadership including aligning TVET with social and economic priorities; strategic planning and implementation; establishing industry partnerships to drive the strategic direction of the institutions; leading people; strengthening the digital transformation of TVET by implementing programmes and systems at the institutional level; and promoting access and inclusion.

Alignment with Social and Economic Priorities

The TVET leaders were of the view that it was important to determine the national, social, and economic priorities that drive TVET, then use this information to decide what programmes should be offered at their institutions. All the TVET leaders stated that they understood the social and economic priorities driving programmes at their institutions. According to Kevin, "TVET Leadership is competence-based and we should be able to network with stakeholders to have the competencies of the trainees aligned with what is required in the labour market." The priorities of the labour market are economic in nature and help to inform strategic priorities set by government and non-government institutions under the

direction of their Management Boards where these exist. TVET programmes are therefore driven by the priorities of the government. For these institutions, therefore, it means that effective leadership of TVET institutions ensures that national, social, and economic priorities are aligned with their programmes.

The view of TVET as having an economic agenda is in line with the focus of TVET as detailed by Marope et al. (2015) and Oketch (2007) who describes TVET as having an economic agenda, an environmental agenda and a social agenda. This is also supported by Aedo and Walker (2012) and Kana and Letaba (2024) who argue that TVET develops a skilled workforce and increases productivity. The UNESCO–UNEVOC medium term strategy (2024) further supports this, referring to TVET's role in equipping youth and adults with skills for employment and entrepreneurship. The Jamaican National TVET Policy, (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2014) also underscores the important role TVET plays in contributing to social development by fostering social responsibility.

Although 100% of the TVET leaders surveyed viewed alignment with programmes and social and economic priorities as important to effective leadership of TVET institutions, only 77% said that they understood the key building blocks of a TVET system. This could be an indication that orientation and training are needed for these leaders in terms of what makes for an effective TVET system. The need to train and upgrade TVET leaders has been recognized by UNESCO–UNEVOC (2016) and Solomon-Wallder and Barrett (2023) as important to effective TVET leadership.

By developing an understanding of what makes for effective TVET leadership, there could be greater success in the design and implementation of TVET programmes and greater recognition of the social, economic, and individual benefits that result from pursuing these programmes, thus enabling the leaders to become better advocates for TVET despite its negative perception (Brennan, 2014; Thompson, 2012). It is felt that TVET is for students who have not excelled academically and it is more hands

on learning rather than academic or theoretical. A thorough understanding of the philosophy and goals of TVET would equip the leaders to have the necessary information to advocate for TVET as a vehicle for providing fulfilling employment.

Strategic Planning and Implementation

Alignment with social and economic priorities is important in the strategic planning and implementation activities of TVET leadership. More than 90% of the leaders surveyed indicated that this was important. Patrice described effective strategic implementation as leadership which is “understanding people, providing support and guidance, monitoring, delegating, empowering, evaluating, and effectively managing resources to meet the goals and objectives set out to be achieved.”

Establishing Industry Partnerships

Industry partnerships were established by 91% of the TVET leaders surveyed. The need for industry partnerships as an important aspect of strategic TVET leadership is underscored by Eric who said, “The training delivery should be at a standard where our training should be aligned and meet the expectations of the industry. Once there is change within the industry then the institution should keep abreast as well to remain relevant.” Eric's quote implies that strong collaboration is needed with the industry in the design, delivery, assessment and evaluation of TVET programmes. The number of participants who established partnerships with local stakeholders in order to strengthen links with the community and offer relevant TVET programmes was 86%.

Leading People

According to Melia, leadership in TVET involves guiding persons and influencing them to work towards accomplishing shared goals or targets. It is providing them with the resources required, identifying the tasks to be completed and distributing them accordingly. This helps the team to understand what needs to be achieved within a given timeframe. Ray extends Melia's

notion of leadership, adding that as someone who needs to empower, engage, motivate and build the capacity of individuals to achieve objectives, the leader's focus is ultimately on transforming persons. The survey results indicated that 100% of the respondents provided opportunities and encouraged team members to develop their leadership capabilities. These collaborative people skills are important for the leadership and governance of quality TVET institutions (Brennan, 2014; Haughey, 2015) and for educational leadership (Argyropoulou & Lintzerakou, 2025; Carvalho and Viega, 2024; Simmons & Yawson et al., 2022).

Strengthening Digital Transformation of Institutions

The total number of respondents who said that systems for digital transformation needed to be strengthened was 64%. Given the shift to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital transformation of leading TVET institutions and programmes is seen as a key priority. According to Joan the skill training environment should consider online modalities when delivering programmes. Kevin gave another perspective to digital transformation by speaking to the important role institutions play in developing information technology competencies among learners that will impact national development. Among these institutions the COVID-19 pandemic caused massive disruptions in training, and this led to disruptions in the modality used to deliver training. While many of these institutions transitioned training to the online modality, it appeared to have been interim measure in response to the crisis. Leadership is therefore required to make this measure an institutionalized feature of TVET teaching and learning, requiring deliberate efforts at the level of policy. This is in alignment with institutions such as the Commonwealth of Learning (2025) and UNESCO (2023) who advocate for digitization and digitalization as important aspects of quality TVET.

Promoting Access and Inclusion

The total number of participants who said that programmes at their institutions promote access and inclusion was 77%, suggesting that this is an area in which TVET leadership could be improved. Recognizing this gap, Kevin said that structures should be in place to accommodate individuals coming in at different levels and teaching should be adjusted to provide them with additional time if needed. According to UNESCO and NCVER (2020), a key goal of TVET that is advanced by many international organisations and economies is ensuring that it allows for an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable economy and society. This means that structures should be established to provide access to various groups such as those in rural areas; those with special needs; engage youth at risk and address gender disparity.

Research Question 2: What are the perceived leadership characteristics of TVET leaders?

More than 90% of the TVET leaders surveyed emphasized key characteristics that should be part of the profile of the ideal TVET leader. These characteristics are:

- Possessing the knowledge and awareness of key government priorities and the social and economic factors driving TVET;
- Having the ability to share the vision for TVET by articulating clearly what will make TVET institutions successful and articulating a vision for change;
- Building external collaborations with various stakeholders and establishing industry partnerships;
- Fostering collaborations among team members;
- Having a desire for continuous improvement by using assessment outcomes to improve student performance;

- Creating opportunities for the professional development of staff and managing performance; and
- Providing opportunities for the team to grow as leaders.

The findings are similar to key characteristics of TVET leaders as outlined by various authors. According to Mumford (2010) the TVET leader should be able to articulate a vision that speaks to the economic focus of TVET. This vision should also be shared (Kedir & Geleta, 2017). Others have argued that the TVET leader should build collaborative relationships with various stakeholders (Ghirmai & Fessehatsion, 2023; Keder and Gelatia, 2017; Plummer, 2023)

In addition, while there was agreement on the important characteristics of TVET leaders, areas for improvement were also noted, including the ability to establish partnerships to move the strategic direction of the institutions forward; implementing strategies to strengthen access and inclusion of diverse target groups; and implementing programmes and systems to strengthen the digital transformation of TVET. The digital transformation of TVET is a key priority and is advocated for by organisations such as UNESCO (2023) and the Commonwealth of Learning (2025).

Research Question 3: How do leaders and policymakers of the national training agency define effective TVET leadership?

Based on the job descriptions of the senior TVET leaders at these institutions, their roles extend to strategic planning, human resource development, programme monitoring, and management. These leaders were expected to execute roles such as:

1. determining the strategic direction of the institution in alignment with labour market trends and training priorities of the wider organization;
2. directing and maintaining a database of existing and past trainees;

3. undertaking financial planning through budget preparation;
4. providing oversight for operational systems and standards, strategic planning, and human resource development; and
5. programme monitoring and management.

The strategic planning roles were further broken down into key areas such as developing plans to facilitate the rebranding and transformation of the institution; coordinating the implementation of access to training and assessment services; directing and designing the implementation of strategies to achieve increased cost effectiveness; and achieving key certification and employment rates. The competencies for the development of human resources were monitoring and evaluating the performance of direct reports; conducting performance appraisals; and recommending actions to improve performance. Of equal importance was the need to provide leadership through delegation, communication, training, mentoring, and coaching. These roles and functions outlined in the job descriptions are aligned to what UNESCO-UNEVOC (2016) refers to as strategic competencies, described by CANTA (2025) as important functions of TVET leaders.

The responses from the survey were in alignment with the competencies emphasized in the job descriptions. Strategic planning was a key competence in the job description and the respondents in the survey agreed that in the execution of their jobs, this was given priority. However, the job descriptions did not explicitly require them to have knowledge relating to a TVET environment or to the key features of effective TVET. This was borne out in the survey responses where respondents stated that their knowledge of the TVET environment could be strengthened.

In executing their roles, it is expected that the TVET leader will monitor and evaluate the performance of those they supervise. The survey respondents stated that they were heavily involved in this and agreed that they implemented strategies for the performance management of staff. Their job descriptions further extend this by stating that guidance needs to be provided

through training, mentoring, and coaching. The survey responses did not speak explicitly to mentoring and coaching as strategies used to advance professional development; but based on the survey, the respondents indicated that time was allocated for staff to engage in professional development and that opportunities were provided for them to develop leadership skills.

Similar themes common to the job descriptions and responses from the survey were: providing exposure for trainees to work study programmes; ensuring that programme offerings were relevant to industry needs; and meeting the strategic objectives of the wider entity that provides oversight (the National Service and Training Agency).

There is increased emphasis on ensuring that programmes are responsive to the needs of employers, and this was addressed in various ways in the job descriptions. There were frequent references to national labour market trends, relevant industry needs, satisfying market demands, and meeting the requirements of employers. From this information it can be concluded that the employers are important stakeholders in a TVET institution, and their needs drive the programmes in an institution. This is supported by the ILO (2020) which emphasizes the need for partnerships and stakeholder engagement in the delivery of TVET programmes.

A key duty detailed in the job descriptions is that leaders should coordinate the expansion of access to training. This was one of the areas that the TVET leaders agreed should be strengthened. The survey responses indicated that this was an area that needed improvement.

Conclusion

The findings from the study underscore the importance of implementing structures and programmes that will nurture effective TVET leadership. These structures include training, upgrading, coaching, and mentorship for TVET leaders. The leadership programme to be

implemented should include technical knowledge about what makes for effective TVET systems and quality TVET programmes and be included as an important aspect of the training and upgrading of TVET leaders. There needs to be increased emphasis on how leaders can strengthen access and inclusion in their institutions and improve digitization of TVET programmes.

In the recruitment of TVET leaders, knowledge and experience of a TVET system and an appreciation of what makes for quality TVET programmes, should be critical requirements.

There also needs to be further research on how specific characteristics of the TVET leader impact effective TVET leadership and the key features of a TVET system based on the Jamaican context.

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