From vocational aspiration to institutional embodiment: School-level impediments and framework recommendations for Adventist secondary schools in Zimbabwe

Dennis Munaiwa[1]*
Norman Kachamba [2]

[1]*nkachamba@ru.edu.zm

[1,2]Rusangu University, Zambia

https://doi.org/10.51867/asarev.3.1.14

ABSTRACT

Vocational education is increasingly recognized as essential for preparing learners with practical, entrepreneurial, and life-oriented competencies. In Zimbabwe, competence-based curriculum reforms and international TVET policy frameworks emphasize skills development, employability, and inclusive participation. Within Seventh-day Adventist education, vocational education is also consistent with the holistic formation of the head, heart, and hand. Despite receiving philosophical and policy support, Adventist secondary schools implement vocational education unevenly. Guided by institutional theory, this study examined school-level impediments constraining vocational education implementation in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference and developed a framework for strengthening practice. The study adopted a sequential mixed-methods design. Six schools were purposively selected for qualitative exploration through interviews and focus group discussions, followed by a cross-sectional survey of 485 respondents comprising 382 students, 79 teachers, and 24 administrators drawn from ten schools. A purposive expert panel of ten members participated in a four-round Delphi validation process, and a limited pilot was conducted in two schools over one school term. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, while quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, and comparative gap analysis. Findings revealed seven interrelated impediments: attitudinal hierarchy, inadequate resources and infrastructure, timetable and curriculum overload, teacher capacity gaps, regulatory and certification barriers, weak career guidance, and gender stereotyping. The study found a substantial aspiration–implementation gap: stakeholders valued vocational education strongly, but institutional conditions for meaningful delivery were weak. The article recommends an implementation framework anchored in leadership mandate, teacher development, infrastructure mobilizations, timetable integration, attitude transformation, partnerships, certification, entrepreneurship, and monitoring. It concludes that vocational education must move from symbolic endorsement to institutional embodiment if Adventist secondary schools are to deliver holistic, equitable, and practically relevant education.

Keywords: Adventist Education, Aspiration–Implementation Gap, Holistic Education Holistic Education, Implementation Framework, Institutional Embodiment, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Vocational Education, Zimbabwe

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has become central to debates on the relevance and quality of secondary schooling. Across many education systems, schooling continues to be judged largely by examination performance, academic progression, and university admission. However, the social and economic realities facing young people after school are broader than linear academic pathways. Work may be formal or informal, salaried or self-generated, technical or entrepreneurial, rural or urban, digitally mediated or locally improvised. For this reason, secondary education is increasingly expected to develop learners who are not only able to know and remember, but also to make, repair, produce, design, adapt, solve problems, and serve their communities.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is internationally understood as education, training, and skills development related to occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods (United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). UNESCO's TVET strategy for 2022–2029 places skills development at the Centre of empowerment, decent work, and transitions toward more inclusive, digital, and green economies (UNESCO, 2022). This international orientation is relevant to Zimbabwe, where curriculum reforms have sought to strengthen competence-based learning, life skills, practical subjects, entrepreneurship, and preparation for productive participation in society (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education [MoPSE], 2015, 2021). These policy ambitions suggest that secondary schooling should not be limited to academic reproduction; it should also prepare learners for meaningful work, innovation, and community transformation.

The need for vocational education becomes sharper in a faith-based school system whose philosophy affirms the formation of the whole person. Within the Seventh-day Adventist educational tradition, education is framed around the integrated development of the intellectual, spiritual, moral, physical, and practical dimensions of the learner. The commonly invoked ideal of developing the head, heart, and hand implies that the hand should not be

treated as inferior to the head. Productive work can cultivate discipline, creativity, stewardship, responsibility, service, dignity, and self-reliance (White, 1903). Vocational education should therefore not be interpreted merely as an economic instrument or a fallback for learners perceived as academically weak. It is also an educational, moral, and philosophical concern.

A persistent contradiction is nevertheless evident. Practical subjects may be formally listed on timetables, policy documents may affirm competence-based learning, and school leaders may express support for skills development. Yet workshops may remain under-equipped, practical lessons may be compressed, teachers may lack sufficient specialist support, learners may receive limited career guidance, and vocational pathways may continue to be associated with lower academic prestige. This contradiction is not simply the absence of vocational education. It is partial presence without full institutionalization. Vocational education exists, but it is not always embodied in school routines, budgets, timetables, pedagogies, assessment practices, certification pathways, partnerships, and cultural narratives.

Previous research in African contexts has shown that vocationalised secondary education is frequently constrained by limited infrastructure, inadequate funding, weak teacher preparation, low stakeholder confidence, and social stigma (Association for the Development of Education in Africa [ADEA], 2023; Puyate, 2008; Tshabalala & Ncube, 2014). These challenges are not merely technical; they reflect institutional priorities and inherited beliefs about the relative value of academic and practical learning. Institutional theory suggests that organizations often adopt formal structures that reflect external expectations, but daily practice may remain loosely coupled from official policy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). This helps explain why schools may affirm vocational education in principle while failing to organize the enabling conditions needed for sustained implementation.

The problem addressed in this article is the gap between vocational aspiration and institutional embodiment in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference. The article examines the school-level impediments that constrain implementation and translates those impediments into a framework recommendation. The argument developed is that vocational education cannot be strengthened through isolated interventions alone. It requires an implementation architecture that aligns philosophy, policy, leadership, resources, teacher capacity, learner guidance, certification, partnerships, stakeholder meaning, and accountability.

1.1 Research Objectives

i. To determine stakeholder perceptions of the value and implementation status of vocational education in Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference.
ii. To establish the school-level impediments that constrain the implementation of vocational education in the selected schools.
iii. To examine how the identified impediments influence the institutional delivery of vocational education.
iv. To develop and validate a framework model for strengthening vocational education implementation in Adventist secondary schools.

1.2 Research Questions

i. How do students, teachers, and administrators perceive the value and current implementation of vocational education?
ii. What school-level factors impede the effective implementation of vocational education?
iii. How do institutional, material, professional, regulatory, informational, and cultural factors influence vocational education delivery?
iv. What framework can guide Adventist secondary schools in moving vocational education from aspiration to institutional embodiment?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Institutional Theory as the Guiding Theory

This study was guided principally by Institutional Theory. Institutional Theory explains how organizations are shaped by rules, norms, values, cultural expectations, and legitimating structures in their environment (Scott, 2014). In education, schools often adopt policies, curriculum labels, and formal structures in response to governmental, professional, religious, and community expectations. However, policy adoption does not automatically lead to meaningful practice. Meyer and Rowan (1977) describe this as a form of loose coupling, where formal structures may exist symbolically while daily routines continue unchanged. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) similarly argue that organizations may conform to external expectations for legitimacy, even when internal capacity remains weak.

Institutional Theory is relevant to this study because vocational education in Adventist secondary schools is philosophically affirmed, nationally endorsed, and widely valued, yet it remains unevenly enacted. The theory helps explain why schools may formally offer practical subjects while failing to provide adequate workshops, time, teacher support, certification pathways, or positive cultural narratives. In this article, institutional embodiment refers to the degree to which vocational education is built into the everyday life of the school through leadership mandates, budgets, timetables, teaching practices, learner guidance, partnerships, assessment systems, and monitoring.

Institutional Theory also supports the interpretation of impediments as interrelated rather than isolated. Attitudes, resources, teacher capacity, certification, guidance, and gender norms are institutional forces that shape how vocational education is understood and delivered. Therefore, implementation should be viewed not only as a curriculum issue but also as a governance, culture, resource, and accountability issue.

2.1.2 Supporting Behavioral and Capacity Perspectives

The Theory of Planned Behavior provides an additional lens for understanding stakeholder participation in vocational education. Ajzen (1991) argues that behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this study, students' and parents' willingness to support vocational subjects may be influenced by whether practical learning is perceived as valuable, whether respected stakeholders approve of it, and whether learners believe that resources, teachers, time, and certification pathways are available. Negative attitudes toward practical subjects may therefore reduce participation even when vocational education is formally present.

Self-efficacy theory also informs the interpretation of teacher and learner capacity. Bandura (1977) explains that people are more likely to act effectively when they believe they possess the capability to succeed. In vocational education, teacher self-efficacy may be weakened by inadequate tools, insufficient training, and limited assessment support. Learner self-efficacy may also decline when workshops are poorly equipped, gender stereotypes discourage participation, or career pathways are unclear. These behavioral and capacity perspectives complement Institutional Theory by showing how organizational conditions influence individual motivation and action.

2.2 Conceptual and Policy Orientation of Vocational Education

Vocational education is often justified through employability, productivity, entrepreneurship, and national development. These justifications are important, particularly in contexts marked by youth unemployment, underemployment, and informal livelihoods. Human capital theory argues that education and training can improve the productive capacity of individuals and societies (Becker, 1993). However, vocational education should not be reduced to a narrow labor-market instrument. Billett (2011) argues that vocational learning also involves identity formation, participation, practice, and the development of capacities needed for meaningful work and social contribution.

In Zimbabwe, the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education 2015–2022 emphasized competence-based learning, practical skills, problem solving, learner-centered pedagogy, and preparation for life and work (MoPSE, 2015). The Education Sector Strategic Plan 2021–2025 continued to emphasize quality, relevance, curriculum implementation, learner support, and improved education management (MoPSE, 2021). These national priorities converge with Adventist educational philosophy, which views education as the balanced development of the whole person (White, 1903). The convergence between public policy and faith-based philosophy creates a strong justification for strengthening vocational education in Adventist secondary schools.

Nevertheless, convergence at the level of ideals does not guarantee coherence at the level of practice. Implementation requires resources, capable teachers, institutional leadership, curriculum time, assessment systems, stakeholder confidence, and policy clarity. The literature on competence-based curriculum implementation in African contexts indicates that reforms often struggle when teachers are not sufficiently prepared, materials are inadequate, and assessment systems remain misaligned with practical learning (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). This suggests that vocational education reform must be studied through both policy and school-level implementation lenses.

2.3 Empirical Review

This empirical review is organized according to the four objectives of the study. The purpose is to show how previous empirical studies inform the investigation of stakeholder perceptions, school-level impediments, the institutional influence of those impediments, and the development of a framework for strengthening vocational education in Adventist secondary schools.

2.3.1 Empirical Studies on Stakeholder Perceptions and Implementation Status of Vocational Education

The first objective of the study was to determine stakeholder perceptions of the value and implementation status of vocational education in Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference. Empirical literature shows that stakeholder perceptions are central to the success or failure of vocational education because learners, parents, teachers, and administrators influence subject choice, resource allocation, motivation, and institutional commitment.

Puyate (2008), in a study on the implementation of vocational education in private secondary schools in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, found that the success of vocational programmes was affected by student attitudes, teacher motivation, availability of facilities, and government support. The study revealed that although vocational subjects were formally recognized, weak facilities and low motivation reduced their attractiveness to learners. This evidence is relevant to the present study because it shows that positive policy statements are insufficient when learners and teachers experience vocational education as poorly supported in practice.

Tshabalala and Ncube (2014), in their study of rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe, similarly found that the implementation of technical and vocational education was constrained by inadequate resources, limited funding, and weak stakeholder support. Their findings suggest that stakeholder perceptions are not formed in isolation; they are shaped by the visible quality of implementation. Where workshops are poorly equipped, teachers are unsupported, and vocational subjects appear marginal, learners and parents may interpret practical subjects as inferior to academic subjects.

These studies support the present study's focus on the gap between stakeholder valuation and actual implementation. Within Adventist education, this issue is especially important because vocational education is consistent with the holistic development of the head, heart, and hand. However, if stakeholders value vocational education in principle while schools fail to provide adequate practical conditions, the result is an aspiration–implementation gap. Therefore, empirical evidence justifies examining not only whether stakeholders value vocational education, but also whether they perceive it as meaningfully implemented.

2.3.2 Empirical Studies on School-Level Impediments to Vocational Education Implementation

The second objective was to establish the school-level impediments that constrain the implementation of vocational education in the selected schools. Empirical studies across African contexts consistently identify inadequate resources, weak infrastructure, shortage of trained teachers, insufficient funding, curriculum overload, and negative attitudes as major barriers to vocational education.

ADEA (2023) reported that the vocationalisation of secondary education in Africa is frequently constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited equipment, insufficient qualified vocational teachers, and weak implementation systems. The report shows that vocational education requires more than curriculum inclusion; it requires workshops, tools, consumables, safety equipment, trained teachers, and sustainable funding. This evidence directly supports the present study's attention to resource and infrastructure deficits in Adventist secondary schools.

Puyate (2008) also identified inadequate workshop equipment, lack of teaching materials, and weak administrative support as constraints to effective vocational education. These findings are relevant because practical education cannot be delivered effectively through theory alone. When schools lack tools, materials, and functioning workshops, vocational education becomes abstract and loses its practical value.

In Zimbabwe, Tshabalala and Ncube (2014) found that rural secondary schools struggled to implement TVET policy because of financial limitations, inadequate equipment, teacher shortages, and lack of community support. Their findings are important for the present study because they show that school-level impediments are both material and social. A school may have vocational subjects on paper, but implementation remains weak when the institution lacks resources, committed leadership, and stakeholder confidence.

Empirical evidence therefore supports the need to investigate impediments at the school level rather than treating vocational education failure as a purely national policy problem. In Adventist secondary schools, impediments such as limited workshops, fragmented timetables, teacher-capacity gaps, weak career guidance, certification barriers, and gender stereotyping must be examined as institutional conditions that shape implementation.

2.3.3 Empirical Studies on How Impediments Influence Institutional Delivery of Vocational Education

The third objective was to examine how the identified impediments influence the institutional delivery of vocational education. Existing empirical studies show that impediments do not operate separately. Instead, they interact to weaken school routines, learner participation, teacher confidence, assessment quality, and stakeholder trust.

Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019), in their analysis of competency-based curriculum implementation in Zambia, observed that curriculum reforms often face challenges when teachers are not adequately prepared, teaching materials are insufficient, and assessment practices remain misaligned with practical learning. Although their study focused on Zambia, the findings are relevant to Zimbabwean secondary schools because both contexts involve attempts to shift from content-heavy schooling toward competence-based learning. Their work shows that reform failure often occurs at the implementation level, where teachers and schools lack the capacity to translate policy into classroom practice.

ADEA (2023) similarly emphasized that vocationalisation requires coherent systems linking policy, teacher preparation, infrastructure, financing, assessment, and labor-market relevance. This suggests that school-level delivery is weakened when one or more of these elements is absent. For example, teacher training alone may not improve implementation if workshops remain under-equipped. Similarly, resource provision may not improve learner outcomes if timetables do not protect practical learning time.

Tshabalala and Ncube (2014) found that inadequate resources and limited stakeholder support reduced the effectiveness of vocational education in rural Zimbabwean schools. Their findings imply that weak delivery can reinforce negative perceptions. When learners experience vocational subjects as poorly resourced or marginal, they may conclude that such subjects are less valuable. This creates a cycle in which poor implementation produces low confidence, and low confidence further weakens participation and investment.

The present study therefore builds on empirical literature by examining impediments as an interrelated institutional architecture. Attitudinal hierarchy, inadequate resources, timetable overload, teacher-capacity gaps, certification barriers, weak guidance, and gender stereotyping are not isolated problems. Together, they shape whether vocational education becomes a meaningful part of school life or remains a symbolic curriculum requirement.

2.3.4 Empirical Studies on Frameworks for Strengthening Vocational Education Implementation

The fourth objective was to develop and validate a framework model for strengthening vocational education implementation in Adventist secondary schools. Empirical literature suggests that effective vocational education requires integrated interventions rather than isolated solutions.

UNESCO (2015) emphasized the importance of quality assurance, teacher preparation, recognition of skills, and links between training and occupational fields. UNESCO (2022) further positioned TVET as central to empowerment, decent work, inclusion, and transitions to changing economies. These international orientations support the need for a framework that links school-based vocational learning with teacher development, certification, entrepreneurship, equity, and community relevance.

ADEA (2023) found that vocationalisation in African secondary education requires investment in infrastructure, teacher preparation, financing, policy coherence, and stronger links with industry and communities. This supports the present study's framework components, including leadership mandate, teacher professional development, infrastructure mobilizations, timetabling, stakeholder attitude transformation, partnerships, certification, entrepreneurship, and monitoring.

Empirical evidence also supports the need for career guidance and gender inclusion. Where learners lack accurate information on vocational pathways, they may rely on stereotypes or view practical subjects as inferior. Similarly, gendered assumptions about practical subjects restrict learner choice and reduce equity. UNESCO's (2022) emphasis on inclusive TVET strengthens the argument that vocational education frameworks must address gender participation, guidance, and equitable access.

The empirical literature therefore supports the development of a whole-school framework. Such a framework should not treat vocational education merely as a subject area, but as an institutional system requiring leadership, resources, teacher capacity, learner guidance, certification, partnerships, cultural transformation, and monitoring. This directly informs the framework proposed in the present study.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a sequential mixed-methods design. Mixed-methods research is appropriate when a study requires both depth of contextual understanding and breadth of measurement across stakeholder groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The design moved through four linked phases. First, a qualitative exploration was conducted to understand how vocational education was experienced in selected school contexts. Second, a quantitative survey was administered to measure stakeholder perceptions and implementation conditions across a wider sample. Third, expert validation was conducted through a Delphi process. Fourth, a limited pilot implementation was conducted to test the feasibility of the framework components.

This design was suitable because the study aimed not only to identify challenges but also to develop a practical framework. Qualitative data helped identify lived impediments and stakeholder meanings. Quantitative data helped compare perceptions across students, teachers, and administrators. The Delphi process strengthened expert judgement on feasibility and priority. The pilot phase provided early evidence on whether framework components could be activated within actual school conditions.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference. The schools operate within Zimbabwe's national curriculum and examination environment while also reflecting Adventist educational philosophy. The study area was selected because Adventist schools formally affirm holistic education, making them an appropriate context for examining the relationship between vocational aspiration and institutional practice. The selected schools represented varying institutional conditions, including differences in location, enrolment size, resource availability, and practical subject provision.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised students, teachers, and administrators in Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference. Students were included because they are the primary beneficiaries of vocational education and are directly affected by attitudes, resources, guidance, and subject-choice structures. Teachers were included because they implement curriculum, manage practical learning, and experience professional support or constraints. Administrators were included because they influence budgets, timetables, staffing, partnerships, and school-level implementation priorities.

3.4 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The study used a multistage sampling approach. Schools were first purposively selected because the study required institutions offering or expected to support vocational and practical subjects. Six schools participated in the qualitative phase, while ten schools participated in the quantitative survey phase. Within the selected schools, respondents were grouped by stakeholder category: students, teachers, and administrators. Students and teachers were sampled to ensure representation across participating schools and practical subject contexts, while administrators were purposively included because of their leadership and policy-implementation roles.

The quantitative sample consisted of 485 respondents: 382 students, 79 teachers, and 24 administrators. The qualitative phase involved interviews and focus group discussions in six schools. The Delphi phase involved ten purposively selected experts with knowledge of vocational education, school leadership, curriculum implementation, teacher development, or Adventist education. The pilot phase was conducted in two schools over one school term to examine feasibility under contrasting institutional conditions.

Table 1

Sample composition and methodological contribution

Study phase	Scope	Sampling approach	Analytical contribution
Qualitative exploration	Six schools	Purposive school and participant selection	Identified lived impediments, stakeholder meanings, and contextual explanations
Quantitative survey	485 respondents: 382 students, 79 teachers, 24 administrators across ten schools	Multistage sampling by school and stakeholder category	Measured perceptions of value, adequacy, support, guidance, and implementation conditions
Expert validation	Ten experts over four Delphi rounds	Purposive expert selection	Prioritized high-impact and feasible framework components; final agreement reached 91%
Pilot implementation	Two schools over one school term	Purposive selection of contrasting schools	Tested feasibility of selected framework components in real school settings

Table 1 shows that the study used a sequential mixed-methods structure in which each phase made a distinct contribution to the development of the findings and framework. The qualitative phase provided contextual insight into how vocational education was experienced in six schools, while the quantitative phase measured the extent of stakeholder perceptions and implementation conditions across a wider sample of 485 respondents. The Delphi phase strengthened the validity of the proposed framework through expert consensus, and the pilot phase tested the feasibility of selected framework components in two schools. The table therefore demonstrates that the study did not rely on a single source of evidence, but integrated qualitative, quantitative, expert, and pilot data to address the research objectives.

3.5 Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Four main data collection procedures were used. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected administrators and teachers to explore leadership support, resource conditions, teacher preparation, certification issues, and school-level implementation practices. Second, focus group discussions were conducted with students and teachers to examine learner experiences, attitudes toward vocational subjects, career guidance, gender expectations, and perceived barriers. Third, a structured questionnaire was administered to students, teachers, and administrators. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items on the perceived importance of vocational education, adequacy of resources, teacher support, timetable allocation, career guidance, stakeholder attitudes, gender perceptions, and implementation effectiveness. Fourth, a Delphi instrument was used over four rounds to obtain expert judgement on the proposed framework components.

The pilot implementation involved selected activities from the framework, including leadership sensitization, stakeholder awareness, timetable attention, resource auditing, and preliminary partnership identification. Feedback from the pilot was used to refine the implementation roadmap.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following systematic coding procedures. Initial codes were generated from interview and focus group transcripts, then grouped into categories reflecting recurring impediments and institutional patterns. Thematic analysis was appropriate because it enabled the identification, interpretation, and organization of patterns across stakeholder accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and comparative analysis across stakeholder groups. Selected indicators were used to calculate the gap between perceived importance and perceived delivery adequacy. Delphi responses were analyzed using percentage agreement and expert consensus patterns. The final round achieved 91% agreement on the recommended framework components.

Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings occurred during interpretation. Qualitative themes explained why certain quantitative patterns appeared, while survey findings helped assess how widely identified issues were perceived across stakeholder groups. This integration strengthened the validity of the conclusions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were observed throughout the study. Permission to conduct the study was obtained through relevant school and administrative channels. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their role, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Because students were included, age-appropriate assent and appropriate school-based consent procedures were followed. Confidentiality was maintained by avoiding the use of names of individual participants and by presenting findings in aggregate form. Data were used only for academic purposes. The pilot activities were conducted in a manner that did not disrupt normal teaching and learning.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Stakeholder Perceptions of the Value and Status of Vocational Education

The findings showed that students, teachers, and administrators generally valued vocational education. Stakeholders recognized that practical learning could support employability, entrepreneurship, self-reliance, creativity, and community service. This finding aligns with UNESCO's (2022) view that TVET contributes to empowerment, productive employment, and just transitions. It also reflects the Adventist philosophy of holistic education, where intellectual development should be integrated with moral, spiritual, and practical formation (White, 1903).

However, the study also found that positive valuation did not automatically translate into strong implementation. Across stakeholder groups, vocational education was appreciated as an ideal but perceived as weakly supported in daily school practice. This produced what the study identifies as an aspiration–implementation gap. The concept explains a situation where stakeholders believe in the importance of vocational education, yet the school system does not sufficiently provide the conditions needed to make it effective.

This finding is consistent with Institutional Theory. Schools may adopt valued policy language and philosophical commitments while daily routines remain loosely coupled from those commitments (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). In the present study, Adventist schools affirmed holistic education, but practical formation was not always equally visible in budgets, timetables, workshops, teacher development, or certification arrangements.

4.1.2 School-Level Impediments Constraining Vocational Education Implementation

Seven interrelated impediments were identified: attitudinal hierarchy, resource and infrastructure deficit, timetable and curriculum overload, teacher capacity gaps, regulatory and certification barriers, weak career guidance, and gender stereotyping.

Attitudinal Hierarchy: The first impediment was an attitudinal hierarchy in which academic subjects were often accorded higher symbolic value than vocational subjects. Although stakeholders valued skills development in principle, practical subjects were still vulnerable to being viewed as lower-status options. This perception can discourage learner participation, reduce parental enthusiasm, and weaken institutional investment.

This finding supports Ajzen's (1991) argument that attitudes and subjective norms influence behavior. If students perceive those respected adults view vocational subjects as inferior, their willingness to participate may decline. It also aligns with earlier empirical findings showing that negative stakeholder perceptions constrain vocational education implementation (Puyate, 2008; Tshabalala & Ncube, 2014). In Adventist education, this hierarchy is philosophically problematic because it contradicts the dignity of work and the head–heart–hand ideal.

Resource and Infrastructure Deficit: The second impediment was inadequate resources and infrastructure. Practical education requires workshops, tools, consumables, safety equipment, gardens, kitchens, storage spaces, power supply, maintenance systems, and procurement routines. Survey evidence showed low adequacy ratings,

including a student resource adequacy mean of 2.24 and an administrator budget adequacy mean of 2.46 on five-point scales. These results suggest that the material basis of vocational education was perceived as insufficient.

This finding is consistent with ADEA (2023), which identifies inadequate infrastructure and limited vocational teacher supply as constraints to vocationalising secondary education in Africa. It also confirms Puyate's (2008) finding that inadequate workshop equipment and teaching materials weaken implementation. Where resources are insufficient, practical subjects may become theory-heavy, reducing the authenticity of vocational learning.

Timetabling and Curriculum Overload: The third impediment was limited or fragmented time for practical learning. Practical competence requires demonstration, guided practice, production, correction, and reflection. These processes are difficult to achieve when vocational lessons are compressed or displaced by examinable academic subjects. The timetable therefore becomes an institutional indicator of value. A school may state that vocational education matters, but if practical time is not protected, implementation remains symbolic.

This finding reflects the broader problem of curriculum reform implementation. Competence-based curriculum requires sufficient time for applied learning, yet schools may continue to organize learning around traditional academic priorities (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2019). In the present study, curriculum overload reduced the space needed for meaningful vocational practice.

Teacher Capacity and Professional Support Gaps: The fourth impediment was uneven teacher capacity and support. Vocational teachers require technical competence, pedagogical skill, workshop management, safety awareness, assessment literacy, and entrepreneurship orientation. The study found that teacher support and professional development were not consistently adequate. This weakened implementation and placed a heavy burden on teachers.

This finding aligns with UNESCO (2015), which emphasizes the role of teachers and quality assurance in TVET systems. It also supports ADEA's (2023) conclusion that many African countries need comprehensive vocational teacher training and development systems. From a self-efficacy perspective, inadequate training and resources may reduce teachers' confidence in delivering practical lessons effectively (Bandura, 1977).

Regulatory and Certification Barriers: The fifth impediment was uncertainty around regulatory and certification pathways. Meaningful vocational education requires credible recognition of learner competence. If certification routes are unclear or difficult to access, schools may hesitate to invest, and parents may doubt the value of vocational subjects. Certification strengthens legitimacy because it makes skills visible, portable, and useful for further education or work.

This finding is consistent with UNESCO's (2022) emphasis on TVET pathways that support empowerment, decent work, and lifelong learning. It also reflects Institutional Theory: certification provides institutional legitimacy by connecting school-based vocational learning to recognized external standards (Scott, 2014).

Weak Career Guidance: The sixth impediment was inadequate career information and guidance. Learners reported limited guidance on how vocational subjects connect to entrepreneurship, technical colleges, apprenticeships, self-employment, community development, and emerging sectors. Without guidance, learners may rely on peer opinions, stereotypes, or outdated assumptions.

Career guidance is not a peripheral service. It is a mechanism for translating interest into informed participation. It also helps correct social meanings that portray vocational education as a second-class pathway. This finding aligns with competence-based curriculum principles, which require learning to connect with life, work, and learner development (MoPSE, 2015).

Gender Stereotyping: The seventh impediment was gender stereotyping. Practical subjects were affected by assumptions about what girls and boys should study, make, repair, cook, cultivate, or design. Such assumptions restrict educational justice because they limit choice before learner ability is fully discovered. Gender stereotyping also narrows the pool of skilled young people available for community and national development. This finding aligns with UNESCO's (2022) inclusion agenda for TVET and just transitions. In faith-based education, gendered restriction is inconsistent with the principle that every learner should be supported to develop God-given capacities for service and productive participation.

Table 2

Impediment architecture and strategic interpretation

Impediment	Evidence signal	Strategic meaning
Attitudinal hierarchy	Vocational and academic subjects were not always accorded equal symbolic value	The dignity of practical work must be re-narrated through school culture, parental engagement, and public recognition
Resource and infrastructure deficit	Student resource adequacy mean = 2.24; administrator budget adequacy mean = 2.46	Practical education is weakened when the material basis of instruction is insufficient
Timetabling and curriculum	Practical time was reported as limited, fragmented, or vulnerable	Time allocation should be treated as an implementation priority, not a residual scheduling matter

overload	to displacement	
Teacher capacity and support gaps	Teacher support and professional development were uneven	Implementation depends on technical, pedagogical, assessment, and safety capacity
Regulatory and certification barriers	Recognition pathways were not sufficiently visible or easy to access	Credible certification is needed for legitimacy and stakeholder confidence
Weak career guidance	Students reported inadequate information on vocational pathways	Guidance is required to convert interest into informed participation
Gender stereotyping	Subject choice was affected by gendered assumptions	Equitable access requires dismantling gender-coded vocational expectations

Table 2 shows that vocational education implementation was constrained by both material and non-material factors. Resource and infrastructure deficits affected the practical delivery of vocational subjects, while attitudinal hierarchy weakened the symbolic value attached to practical learning. Timetable overload reduced opportunities for mastery, and teacher-capacity gaps limited the quality of instruction. Certification barriers and weak career guidance reduced learner confidence in vocational pathways, while gender stereotyping restricted equitable participation. These findings directly address the second objective of the study by identifying the school-level impediments that constrain vocational education implementation. They also show that the impediments are interconnected rather than isolated.

4.1.3 Influence of Impediments on Vocational Education Delivery

The findings show that the impediments did not operate independently. They formed an interlocking architecture that weakened vocational education implementation. Attitudinal hierarchy reduced stakeholder confidence and investment. Resource shortages weakened practical delivery. Weak delivery reinforced the perception that vocational subjects were inferior. Timetable marginalization limited mastery. Teacher support gaps weakened pedagogy. Certification uncertainty reduced legitimacy. Weak guidance left stereotypes unchallenged. Gender assumptions narrowed participation.

This interdependence explains why single interventions are unlikely to be sufficient. A school may acquire tools, but without trained teachers and protected time, the tools will not transform learning. A school may train teachers, but without materials, assessment support, and certification pathways, implementation will remain fragile. A school may conduct motivational talks, but without visible learner pathways and practical resources, attitudes may not change. Institutional Theory therefore provides an appropriate explanation: vocational education implementation depends on the alignment of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements (Scott, 2014).

The study also found disparities of 60.5 to 75.0 percentage points between importance ratings and delivery adequacy or support indicators across stakeholder groups. These disparities confirm that the central problem was not lack of aspiration but weak institutional embodiment. Stakeholders valued vocational education, but schools lacked consistent structures for delivery. This finding supports the argument that implementation requires conversion of ideals into systems: budget lines, timetables, workshops, teacher development, certification arrangements, partnerships, and monitoring.

4.1.4 Framework Model for Strengthening Vocational Education Implementation

Based on the findings and Delphi validation, the study recommends an eight-component framework for strengthening vocational education implementation. The framework treats vocational education as an institutional ecosystem rather than a single subject issue. *Policy and Leadership Mandate:* Vocational education should be made an explicit institutional priority. The Zimbabwe East Union Conference should issue a clear system-level directive requiring schools to integrate vocational education into strategic plans, budgets, timetables, staff development, and monitoring. School-level vocational committees should be established to coordinate implementation. Leadership is critical because school priorities are revealed through what is funded, protected, supervised, and celebrated.

Teacher Professional Development: Teachers should receive sustained professional development in technical skills, practical pedagogy, competency-based assessment, workshop safety, inclusive teaching, curriculum interpretation, and entrepreneurship integration. Partnerships with technical colleges, experienced artisans, industry experts, and peer learning communities should be formalized. Teacher development should be treated as an enabling condition, not an optional activity. *Infrastructure and Resource Mobilization:* Schools should adopt a tiered resource model. Schools with limited resources may begin with starter toolkits, shared facilities, community-based production sites, gardens, small enterprise projects, and phased refurbishment. Better-resourced schools may develop specialized workshops and demonstration units. This tiered model prevents resource scarcity from becoming an excuse for institutional paralysis while recognizing real differences in school capacity.

Timetabling and Curriculum Integration: Vocational subjects should be allocated protected practical blocks rather than fragmented periods. Curriculum integration should link theory, practice, entrepreneurship, production, and assessment. Practical time should be treated as a strategic implementation requirement. Without protected time, learners may receive exposure but not mastery. *Stakeholder Attitude Transformation:* Schools should deliberately re-narrate vocational education as a valued expression of competence, service, stewardship, creativity, and livelihood preparation. Parent seminars, student career weeks, alumni testimonies, vocational exhibitions, assembly presentations, and church-based messages on the dignity of work can help change perceptions. Attitude transformation is necessary because implementation is shaped by meaning as well as resources.

Industry and Community Partnerships: Schools should establish partnerships with local artisans, farms, workshops, businesses, construction firms, technology providers, health institutions, alumni, and technical colleges. Partnerships can provide mentorship, exposure, materials, demonstration sites, and work-based learning opportunities. These partnerships should be formalized through registers, memoranda, supervision protocols, and safeguarding procedures. *Student Entrepreneurship and Certification:* Vocational learning should be connected to visible outcomes. Learner projects should be linked to enterprise fairs, portfolios, micro-production units, exhibitions, and credible certification pathways. Schools should pursue relevant registration and assessment arrangements where possible. Certification strengthens legitimacy, while entrepreneurship strengthens relevance.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback: Implementation should be measured through clear indicators. These may include practical hours delivered, teacher training completed, tool availability, budget allocation, learner participation by gender, certification enrolment, project output, partnership activity, and learner satisfaction. Monitoring prevents vocational education from returning to symbolic status after initial enthusiasm.

Table 3

Framework Model Mapped to Impediments

Framework Component	**Primary Impediment Addressed**	**Recommended Institutional Action**
FC1: Policy and leadership mandate	Fragmented leadership commitment	Issue a system directive, establish school vocational committees, and create budget lines and accountability indicators
FC2: Teacher professional development	Teacher capacity gaps	Provide technical, pedagogical, safety, assessment, and entrepreneurship training through structured partnerships
FC3 : Infrastructure and ressource mobilisation	Resource and infrastructure deficit	Apply a tiered resource model: starter kits, refurbishment, shared facilities, and phased capital investment
FC4: Timetabling and curriculum integration	Timetable marginalization	Protect double or block practical periods and integrate projects, theory, production, and assessment
FC5: Stakeholder attitude transformation	Attitudinal hierarchy and stigma	Use parent seminars, exhibitions, alumni role models, assemblies, and church messaging to re-narrate vocational education
FC6: Industry and community partnerships	Institutional isolation and limited exposure	Create registers of artisans, farms, businesses, alumni, and technical institutions for mentorship and work-based learning
FC7: Student entrepreneurship and certification	Weak pathways and limited recognition	Link practical learning with enterprise projects, portfolios, career fairs, and credible certification routes
FC8: Monitoring, evaluation, and feedback	Weak continuity and accountability	Track practical hours, learner participation, gender equity, teacher training, resources, partnerships, and certification outcomes

Table 3 presents the proposed framework as a direct response to the impediments identified in the study. Each framework component corresponds to a specific implementation weakness. For example, leadership mandate responds to fragmented institutional commitment, teacher professional development addresses capacity gaps, and infrastructure mobilizations responds to resource shortages. Similarly, protected practical time addresses timetable marginalization, while stakeholder attitude transformation responds to the low symbolic status sometimes attached to vocational subjects. The table therefore links the findings to the fourth objective of the study by showing how the proposed framework was derived from the empirical evidence.

Table 4

Recommended implementation roadmap

Implementation Horizon	Priority Actions	Indicators of Progress
First school term	Activate FC1 and FC5 through policy communication, vocational committees, leadership commitment, and stakeholder sensitization	Committee established; school statement issued; first parent/student engagement conducted
First academic year	Undertake infrastructure audit, restructure timetables, begin teacher development, identify starter pathways, and create partnership registers	Audit completed; practical blocks protected; teacher training plan active; partner list approved
Second academic year	Pursue certification arrangements, deepen partnerships, organize vocational exhibitions, and formalize learner project portfolios	Certification pathway initiated; memoranda signed; exhibitions held; student portfolios assessed
Third year and beyond	Institutionalize monitoring, scale infrastructure investment, review gender participation, and track learner outcomes	Annual implementation report produced; budget line sustained; participation and certification data reviewed

Table 4 translates the framework into a phased implementation plan. The first school term focuses on leadership communication, vocational committees, and stakeholder sensitization because these actions are within immediate institutional control. The first academic year prioritizes audits, timetabling, teacher development, and partnership identification to establish the minimum conditions for implementation. The second academic year focuses on certification, exhibitions, and learner portfolios, while the third year and beyond emphasizes monitoring, infrastructure scaling, gender participation review, and learner outcome tracking. This phased structure is important because it recognizes that vocational education reform cannot be achieved through one-time intervention. It requires progressive institutionalization over several school cycles.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study examined school-level impediments to vocational education implementation in Adventist secondary schools under the Zimbabwe East Union Conference. It found that vocational education is philosophically affirmed, nationally endorsed, and valued by stakeholders, yet its delivery remains constrained by weak institutional embodiment. Seven interrelated impediments were identified: attitudinal hierarchy, inadequate resources and infrastructure, timetable and curriculum overload, teacher capacity gaps, regulatory and certification barriers, weak career guidance, and gender stereotyping.

The findings show that the main challenge is not simply lack of appreciation for vocational education. Rather, the challenge is the failure to translate appreciation into school-level systems, routines, resources, and accountability. This produced a substantial aspiration–implementation gap. Vocational education is admired, but it is not yet sufficiently embedded in leadership priorities, budgets, timetables, teacher development, learner guidance, certification pathways, partnerships, and monitoring systems.

The article concludes that strengthening vocational education requires a whole-school and system-level framework. In Adventist education, this is more than a technical adjustment. It is a matter of philosophical integrity. If education is truly holistic, learners must be supported to think clearly, serve responsibly, work productively, solve problems creatively, and value the dignity of labor. Vocational education should therefore be repositioned as a central expression of holistic education rather than a marginal or second-class pathway.

5.2 Recommendations

First, the Zimbabwe East Union Conference should issue a formal policy and leadership mandate requiring all Adventist secondary schools to integrate vocational education into annual plans, budgets, timetables, and monitoring reports. This will reduce uneven implementation and strengthen accountability. Second, schools should establish vocational education committees responsible for coordinating implementation, resource mobilizations, timetable protection, partnerships, exhibitions, and learner support. Third, sustained teacher professional development should be provided. Training should cover technical skills, practical pedagogy, competency-based assessment, workshop safety, inclusive participation, entrepreneurship, and certification requirements.

Fourth, schools should adopt a phased infrastructure and resource mobilizations plan. Each school should begin with an audit of existing resources and develop a realistic pathway from starter kits and shared facilities toward

specialized workshops where feasible. Fifth, practical learning time should be protected through double or block periods. Vocational education cannot produce mastery if practical periods are fragmented or repeatedly sacrificed to other school activities. Sixth, schools should strengthen career guidance by providing learners with accurate information on vocational pathways, technical colleges, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships, self-employment, certification, and community-based opportunities.

Seventh, stakeholder attitude transformation should be institutionalized through parent seminars, student career weeks, alumni role models, vocational exhibitions, and church-based messages on the dignity of work. Eighth, schools should actively address gender stereotyping by ensuring equal access to all vocational subjects, using inclusive language, presenting diverse role models, and tracking participation by gender. Ninth, industry and community partnerships should be formalized. Local artisans, farms, businesses, alumni, technical institutions, and community organizations can support mentorship, materials, exposure, and authentic learning sites. Tenth, monitoring and evaluation should be implemented annually. Indicators should include budget allocation, practical hours delivered, teacher training, resource availability, learner participation, gender equity, partnership activity, certification enrolment, project outputs, and learner satisfaction.

Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The authors acknowledge that artificial intelligence-assisted tools were used only for language editing, grammar improvement, formatting refinement, and general clarity enhancement during manuscript preparation. The tools were not used to generate research data, fabricate findings, conduct data analysis, create references, or replace the authors' scholarly judgement. All content, interpretations, findings, conclusions, and references were reviewed, verified, and approved by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity, originality, and accuracy of the manuscript.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

Association for the Development of Education in Africa. (2023). *Study report on the preparedness for the vocationalisation of secondary education in Africa*. ADEA.

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50*(2), 179–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Billett, S. (2011). *Vocational education: Purposes, traditions and prospects*. Springer.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review, 48*(2), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101

Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology, 83*(2), 340–363. https://doi.org/10.1086/226550

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. (2015). *Curriculum framework for primary and secondary education 2015–2022*. Government of Zimbabwe.

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. (2021). *Education sector strategic plan 2021–2025*. Government of Zimbabwe.

Mulenga, I. M., & Kabombwe, Y. M. (2019). Understanding a competency-based curriculum and education: The Zambian perspective. *Journal of Lexicography and Terminology, 3*(1), 106–134.

Puyate, S. T. (2008). Constraints to the effective implementation of vocational education program in private secondary schools in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 9*(1), 59–71.

Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2010). *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Tshabalala, T., & Ncube, A. C. (2014). Teachers' perceptions on challenges faced by rural secondary schools in the implementation of the technical and vocational education and training policy in Nkayi district. *International Research Journal of Teacher Education, 1*(2), 10–15.

UNESCO. (2015). *Recommendation concerning technical and vocational education and training (TVET)*. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2022). *Transforming technical and vocational education and training for successful and just transitions: UNESCO strategy 2022–2029*. UNESCO.

White, E. G. (1903). *Education*. Pacific Press.