Curriculum Evaluation of the Textile and Fashion Design Department of Cameroon Opportunities Industrialization Center (COIC), Buea

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Abstract

Purpose: Although technical and vocational education is a viable solution to unemployment and other socio-economic challenges, there is a dearth of empirical data on the perceptions of various stakeholders. To close this gap, the study proposes a case study evaluation of the program of the Textile and Fashion Design (TFD) department in Cameroon Opportunities Industrialization Center (COIC).

Materials and Methods: Tyler's rationale was used as the evaluation framework. The in-depth exploration proceeded in three phases. The first phase was a desk review of relevant documents. The second phase comprised of in-depth interviews with four main groups of respondents: 2 administrators, 3 trainers, 9 trainees, and 6 alumni. For each group of the respondents, an interview guide was used for data collection. The final phase was classroom observation using an observation guide. The data collected was submitted to content analysis, and then reported using both thematic and narrative techniques following the evaluation framework.

Findings: The findings show that the TFD department is achieving its overall objective notwithstanding the challenges at the level of the entrepreneurship aspects of the objective. The program is also implemented in ways that enhance the achievement of the objectives, but the gaps in specialization, duration, and resources indicate the need for policy reviews. The assessment policy was found to be consistent with the objectives, and the stakeholder generally perceive the program in a positive light despite the challenges raised.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Recommendations were made to close the identified gaps in the program implementation. For one thing, more needs to be done in digital visibility and sensitization. The challenges faced by the alumni indicate that more needs to be done in achieving the entrepreneurial aspect of the objective. Finally, if the "no entry requirement" policy is maintained, there might be need to consider specialization to increase quality and relevance of the program.

Keywords: *Textile, Fashion Design (TFD) Department, Technical, Vocational Education, Curriculum Evaluation, Tyler's Rationale*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The steady rise in unemployment among graduates has resulted in many educational discussions on relevance and quality of formal education. Even the calls to curricula professionalization do not seem to have yielded the desired results. The proliferation of educational institutions seems to simply result in the proliferation of certificates and degrees that do not enable the graduates decisively face the challenge of work and life. The need for alternatives is increasingly urgent. There is need for alternatives that focus more on skill building and entrepreneurship rather than simply accumulating degrees and diplomas.

Vocational training seems to be a viable alternative in this light, but it is not new (Kraak, 1991; Psacharopoulos, 1987). Che (2007) explains that in Cameroon, "a technical or vocational educational focus has not historically been a priority in formal, colonial schooling structures" (p. 334). However, the changing times and socioeconomic dynamics have made vocational training a viable alternative, guaranteeing the "acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge rudimental for the survival of any potential society" (Atayo, 2000, p. 47).

Technical and vocational education is gaining currency as a viable option in the fight against unemployment and other socio-economic challenges. In fact, enrolment in technical and vocational secondary schools in Cameroon is commendably high (Che, 2007). Yet, as Che (2007) continues to explain, there is little to no current empirical data which re-examines perceptions of vocational and technical education in Cameroon by various interested parties, including educators, parents, students, policymakers, and employers to see whether a shift has occurred in perceptions and if so, why a shift may have occurred. (p. 336)

This is precisely the problem that this study sets out to address. This lack of empirical data creates a gap in knowledge because it is not evident yet how and to what extent these technical and vocational training institutions are achieving their curricular objectives as well as their relevance to society at large. Yet such information is critical in guiding and energizing its quality and relevance as a viable option in the fight against unemployment and the other socio-economic challenges plaguing the society. Therefore, the current work is a micro level curriculum evaluation of the program of the Textile and Fashion Design (TFD) department in Cameroon Opportunities Industrialization Center (COIC).

After thus stating the problem and objective of this paper, it might prove instructive to provide some context for the evaluation. To that end, it might be good to provide a succinct background to the case study as culled from their website and other documents from the organization. Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) was first created in America by an American Named Rev. Dr. Leone Sullivan. The main idea he had behind the creation of the center was to impart marketable skills into the black community in America who were not being offered white collar jobs. The idea was to provide these disadvantaged youths with the skills needed to get entry-level jobs. He gradually spread this idea over seventeen African countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Liberia and beyond. In 1987, through Mr. Kome Anasthasius, a Cameroonian who studied in Sierra Leone, OIC was brought to Cameroon. Since it fell in line with the government's idea to eradicate poverty, they signed a protocol agreement with the officials and that led to the establishment of the institution. Some of the areas they operate in are Building and Construction; Hotel Catering and Management; Motor Mechanics; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); and Textile and Fashion Design.

In terms of administrative structure and governance, COIC is controlled by a Board Director who is the employer. A team of managers headed by the Program Director runs Management. They have a staff strength of over 90 workers including both the institutional staff and the staff of the income generating units like the Hotel and driving school. Income is equally generated at the level of the training unit, from the trainees' products and handwork. At the end of a two-year course, trainees are placed on a three-month internship program and then issued a well-recognized diploma.

The specific interest of this micro level curriculum evaluation is the department of Textile and Fashion Design (TFD). This department was started in the month of March 2010 through the visionary idea of the board chairman, Barrister Sam Ekontang Elad. He had a burning desire to see that young people learn employability skills in TFD for self-reliance and create wealth for themselves. As a result, he contacted Mr. Ngwa Marcus Suh, an industrial design specialist in TFD who a board member is also. Together they designed a project for the training of young people in TFD. The unit took off in March 2010 with 4 female trainees. However, in 2014 the unit graduated a total number of 16 trainees and till date has graduated over 300 trainees some of whom are already employed in fashion houses like the Cameroon Development Cooperation. This TFD department is the case study of this curriculum evaluation. This paper report details the reason, background, framework, methodology, findings (evaluation proper), recommendations and conclusion.

Evaluation Framework

The curriculum theory of Ralph Tyler, also known as his 'linear objectives' model or the Tyler's rationale (Tyler, 1950), is one of the systematic and scientific curriculum theories/models (Ibeh, 2021). It is one of the most popular process-oriented curriculum theories because it focuses on providing "guidelines on an effective curriculum development process" (Syomwene, 2020, p. 334), describing and explaining the curriculum as a process. The objectives and process-orientation of Tyler's curriculum theory make it an apt theoretical framework for a study intending to evaluate whether a curriculum is developed and implemented in a way that enables the achievement of its objectives.

As such, we used the Tyler's rationale – that is his curriculum theory – as our evaluation framework because, as Posner (2004) explains the "Tyler rationale is particularly well suited to help the curriculum analyst tease a curriculum apart into its component parts…to understand the "anatomy of a curriculum"" (p. 18). Tyler's rationale is a goal attainment model that is the basis of most of the common models in curriculum design, development, and evaluation. It is also called the objectives-centered model and it is comprised of four main parts building from four fundamental questions (Tyler, 1950, pp. 1-2):

   i.   What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
  ii.   What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
 iii.   How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
 iv.   How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

The Tyler Model begins by defining the objectives of the learning experience – the educational purposes that the learning context should seek (Tyler, 1950). These objectives must have relevance to the field of study and to the overall curriculum (Keating, 2006). Tyler's model obtains the

curriculum objectives from three sources: 1) the student, 2) the society, and 3) the subject matter. When defining the objectives of a learning experience Tyler gives emphasis on the input of students, the community, and the subject content. Tyler believes that curriculum objectives that do not address the needs and interests of students, the community and the subject matter will not be the best curriculum.

The second part of the Tyler's model involves the identification of learning activities that will allow students to meet the defined objectives. Tyler explains that the learning experiences are "the interaction between the learner and the external conditions in the environment to which he can react" (Tyler, 1950, p. 63). This requires selection of content that is useful and meaningful to the learners (Meek, 1993). The third part involves the organization of the learning experiences with a view to attaining the defined objectives. Posner (2004) explains that this part involves a wide array of complex and pertinent considerations. For one thing, it must consider macro (course to form programs) and micro (units from courses) levels of organization. It must also consider the vertical (sequencing of content) and horizontal (integration of content taught concurrently or scope). This level also makes considerations on content structure, whether the configuration is discrete, linear, incremental, continual, or spiral.

The last part involves evaluating and assessing the learning experiences. The goal here is to determine whether the learning objectives have been attained by means of the learning experiences. This involves both the assessment within the curriculum and assessment of the curriculum. The curriculum focuses on the validity and reliability of the various evaluation and assessment operated during the implementation of the curriculum: the diagnostic, formative and summative assessments. This also involves evaluating the curriculum from without, paying attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and making a value judgement about its appropriateness.

In a way Tyler is a strong supporter of the student-centered approach to learning. Overall, Tyler's model is designed to measure the degree to which pre-defined objectives and goals have been attained. In addition, the model focuses primarily on the product rather than the process for achieving the goals and objectives of the curriculum. Therefore, Tyler's model is also product focused. It evaluates the degree to which the pre-defined goals and objectives have been attained. Using the Tyler rationale as the theoretical basis of the evaluation, we built the following evaluation synopsis framework:

Table 1: Evaluation Synopsis Framework

Part	Criteria
Planning	Type and Rationale of Institution
	Nature and Appropriateness/Relevance of Objectives
	Perspective of Vocational Training and Pertinence
Implementation	Relevance of Programs towards Meeting the Objectives
	Appropriateness of Program Structure towards Enhancing Efficacy of the Learning Experiences
	Appropriateness of Organization towards Enhancing Efficacy of the Learning Experiences
	Resources: Human and Material
Evaluation	Assessment policy: Reliability and Appropriateness
	Alumni's Voice

Note. Evaluation Synopsis Framework. Adapted from Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction by Tyler (1950).

This evaluation synopsis framework will constitute the framework used for the evaluation of the TFD department. It might prove instructive to turn to the methodology of the evaluation.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This case study evaluation of the Textile and Fashion Design (TFD) department in OIC Buea, employed a qualitative approach. The choice of a case study evaluation following the qualitative approach was because the evaluation had as objective an in-depth exploration to determine whether the TFD department of OIC Buea is meeting her objectives, consistent with the evaluation framework adopted for the study. The data was collected in three main phases. The first phase was a desk review of documents from or relevant to the department including: the official website of COIC, Buea; program documents in the department; and internship reports for the final year students of the department. An observation checklist was used at this point. This was mainly done to giver a general overview of the department as well as guide both the target and development of the tools for the next phases of the data collection.

The second phase included in-depth interviews (IDIs). In this phase, four main groups of respondents were interviewed: administrators, trainers, trainees, and alumni. A total of 19 IDIs were caried out as follows: 2 administrators, 3 out of the 4 trainers in the department, 9 trainees, and 6 alumni of the department. The administrators were chosen by means of purposive sampling, to ensure that they would be able to provide key insights on the program. The original intention was to interview all the 4 trainers in the department, but one was unavoidably unavailable. The 9 trainees interviewed were chosen by means of random sampling. 3 of the 6 alumni interviewed were chosen by random sampling but the other 3 were the outcome of snowballing. These IDIs were done to secure a deep insight into the perspectives and opinions of some of the key stakeholders of the department. For each group, an interview guide containing both unstructured and semi-structured questions was used as the instrument for data collection. The final phase of the data collection was classroom observation. The goal of the classroom observation was primarily to capture how the training was carried out (with a focus on the methods used, and the

demeanors of the trainers and trainees) and the available resources for use during the workshops. A self-developed classroom observation guide was used at this point.

Some ethical considerations were made in view of the evaluation. An authorization to carryout the data collection was obtained from the Vice Dean in Charge of Research and Cooperation. This authorization was presented to the Training Manager at COIC, Buea who then helped facilitate the entire process. Regarding informed consent, all the participants were at least 19 years of age. This ensured that they were both legally and ethically capable of informed consent. Before each interview, the respondent was reminded of the objective of the interview within the context of the evaluation. They were also assured of the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of their responses and opinions. Triangulation of data sources helped ensure validity and reliability. Face and content validity of the interview guides and observation checklists were ensured by three peers who reviewed them. The collected data was submitted to content analysis, and then reported using thematic and narrative analyses. The themes followed the chosen evaluation framework. Outstanding quotes from the respondents were used to enhance the narrative of the evaluation.

3.0 FINDINGS

Planning

At this point, the focus is on the type and rationale of the institution, the nature and relevance of the objectives, a sort of needs assessment that the objectives serve, the departmental objectives, and entry requirements and intake.

Objectives

COIC falls under technical and vocational training. As such, her TFD department, just like all her other departments, falls under technical and vocational training. This can also be seen from the departmental objectives as stated by the administrators and trainers within the department. One of the administrators had this to say in this regard:

The overall objective of the department is to train our students in marketable skills and entrepreneurship in textile and fashion design so that by the time they finish they should be able to set up their own workshops and not be job seekers.

This clearly shows a few things. Firstly, the department is into vocational training in textile and fashion design. Secondly, the objective has a twofold target: marketable skills and entrepreneurship in textile and fashion design. This means that by the end of the program the students should have acquired practical and entrepreneurial skills to be able to engage their own practice in textile and fashion design or get employment in another's business. Thirdly, this objective aligns with what Che (2007) identifies as the overall goals of technical education in Cameroon: "providing a trained workforce for various employment sectors, to increase understanding of technology, and to prepare people who might be able to solve the environment problems Cameroon is facing" (p. 334). This is also why Atayo (2000, p. 46), says technical and vocational training is "socially useful work."

This also suggests a contextual posture towards two main curriculum ideologies – social efficiency and social reconstruction – in the sense that each ideology serves in the accomplishment of a particular aspect of their twofold objective (Schiro, 2008). By targeting their learners' acquisition

of marketable skills, their curriculum tends towards social efficiency – "training youth to function as future mature contributing members of the society" (Schiro, 2008, p. 4). By also targeting entrepreneurship they are trying to solve unemployment problem of the society. This makes their curriculum tend towards social reconstruction – "conscious of the problems of our society and the injustices done to its members, such as those originating from racial, gender, social, and economic inequalities" (Schiro, 2008, p. 6) ideologies. This also makes their curriculum very relevant to their social context.

Unemployment is a real challenge. In fact, Che (2007) explains that just like "many other sub-Saharan African nations, Cameroon is facing the problem of a glut of educated graduates who are unable to find viable employment in the formal or modern economic sector" (p. 336). Evidently, reliance on the government for jobs cannot solve this problem. This is a fact that keeps coming out clearly in the various addresses of President Paul Biya, and it came out again during his speech on the 58th youth day celebrations in Cameroon. Clearly, vocational training offers a viable alternative solution to this problem. As such, several teachers in Che's (2007) study "shared their views of avenues of employment in Cameroon, and many voiced access to TVE as a means of weaning graduates from an over-reliance on government employment" (p. 337). The part of the TFD departmental objective that states that the trainees "should be able to set up their own workshops and not be job seekers," aligns with this need to do away with youths' over-reliance on the government for employment. This further demonstrates the relevance of the objective of the TFD department.

It is critically important that the trainees themselves be a primary consideration in the needs assessment that leads to these objectives. To determine whether this objective aligns with their personal and professional needs they were asked about their reason for choosing COIC. Their responses were very instructive. Some highlighted their interest in handwork and creativity. Others highlighted the specificity of COIC. Nevertheless, all apparently seem to both understand and find a place in the overall objective of the department. One of the students interviewed had this to say.

I chose OIC because it is an institution. They have trained teachers, and the teachers have the patience to teach you what you need to know. They don't care to know your entry qualification or knowledge. They teach you from the basics and treat everybody the same.

This opinion spoke to the demeanor of the teachers and their character of patience, which is laudable. It also raises the issue of entry qualification. This had an interesting peculiarity in COIC. But before delving into that, yet another student said: *"I love fashion designing. I love sewing. I love material dresses. That is why I chose OIC."* As a follow-up question, this student was asked why she didn't just go to any tailoring workshop out there rather COIC. In response, she added that *"I did not go to a tailoring workshop because out there they do patch work not industrial sewing."* A teacher had noteworthy insights on this issue. When asked whether it is better for someone to learn sewing in the TFD department of COIC or simply go to a tailoring workshop, this is what she had to say:

In a workshop, you should be careful. It is preferable to come here. I have also been in a workshop. In workshops, I take myself as an example, when I went there, most often they don't have times for them. They don't give the opportunity to practice. It is more about observing and if you are not smart, you might not learn anything. Sometimes the trainers there [in the workshops] are very

busy with their own activities and clients. Some are even secretive and do not want to train their competition.

This differentiation between a regular tailoring workshop and COIC's TFD department, further highlights the structure, reliability, quality, and peculiarity of the training afforded by the TFD department as opposed to a regular tailoring workshop. This also serves as an evaluation of the TFD department as opposed to tailoring workshops. A student who also had experience with a tailoring workshop was also asked to give her opinion on this. This was her response.

It is better. I have been in a workshop before. In the workshop it is different. They try to give you the knowledge very fast. It is not that neat, and they do not make you understand very well. At times you do things because they have told you to do it not that you understand what you are doing very well. But here they break everything down. They take you from the basics no matter your qualification. Here you also learn how to handle a workshop but, in the workshop, you do not learn how to handle the workshop.

Clearly, they indicated a preference of TFD in COIC not for arbitrary reasons, but because of the value addition in their offering. This comparison with tailoring workshops rather than other vocational training centers at this point is because unlike other centers, they have a peculiar entry requirement that brings them closer to informal workshops than other centers. On that note it makes sense to turn now towards their entry requirements in detail.

Entry Requirements

When asked about the entry requirements into the department, an administrator had this to say: "*At the level of the intake, our lowest qualification is FSLC. We have first school leavers, we have degree holders, we have o/levels and advance levels.*" She listed the admission requirements as follows (which is also as listed on their website):

 i. Handwritten application specifying trade chosen
 ii. Photocopy of Birth Certificate,
 iii. Photocopy of National I.D.,
 iv. Photocopy of First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) or Highest Qualification,
 v. 2 passport size photographs,
 vi. Medical certificates.

This seems to suggest that the main interest is that the prospective trainee be able to read and write. The respondents were clear that anybody can get into the program irrespective of level of education. When asked how they felt about this situation which most of them referred to as "no real entry requirement", a teacher had this to say:

To me it is okay and even good. Because there are people out there worried and scared to express themselves. But if you come to an environment where everybody is equal. Today I was having a class and one trainee said she chose OIC because everybody is the same, no matter their qualification. In their class there are people with first school, people with O/Level and people with A/Level. But when you go there until they point them out you will not know who is who; and it makes them comfortable. It is also giving opportunity for those unable to train themselves in other schools, to have somewhere where they can train themselves, and also become better tomorrow.

Such positive reaction to this policy is not peculiar to the teachers. Even the students felt like it was a great unifier. However, the students had divided opinions on how this "no real entry requirement" situation affected the learning process itself. One student said *"It is the same for all of us. Here we deal with skills, handwork, and creativity. So your certificates do not matter. Some people might not go to school but have the creative mindset and like to explore."* Another student felt slightly differently about this. She said *"I think those with first school might have a challenge understanding the theory which will make them to be slow in learning. They might deal mostly when the see tools but understanding the theory might be a challenge for them."* This concern was shared by a teacher. However, a respondent whose entry qualification was FSLC, had this to say.

When I noticed that some of my classmates were Advanced level holders and I only had FSLC, I really felt like I might not be able to cope with the training. But as we went on, the teachers really took their time to teach us and be patient with us and make sure that we practice well and also learn well. Now I can even sew better than some of those who came with their Advance Levels and other certificates. Everybody is the same. The teachers do not discriminate. They teach all of us the same and it helps us to learn very well whether we went to school or not.

This sense that she wasn't discriminated upon because she didn't have an A/Level Certificate or some other certificate like her classmates, her confidence, and the mastery of the desired skills is a testament that the "no real entry requirement" situation is no bulwark to the achievement of the learning objectives. This is also due to the trainees' resolve and motivation to use the opportunity the department offered to make something out of their lives. Nevertheless, it is also majorly due to the way in which the program is implemented: how the learning experiences are selected and organized.

Implementation

Consistent with the chosen evaluation framework, this section covers two of the four parts of Tyler's Model: selection and organization of the learning experiences. The interest here is to examine the relevance of the programs towards achieving the objectives, the appropriateness of the program structure towards enhancing the efficacy of the learning experiences, the appropriateness of organization towards enhancing the efficacy of the learning experiences, and the resources. It is important to note here that the objective of the learning experiences in the TFD department is to train in view of developing marketable skills and entrepreneurship disposition of the trainees in TFD. In the words of one of the administrators interviewed, *"The various programs are tailored towards achieving the objectives enumerated above."*

Structure

Regarding the overall structure of the program, one of the administrators interviewed explained as follows:

At the level of the intake, our lowest qualification is FSLC. We have first school leavers, we have degree holders, we have o/levels and advanced levels. And when they come, we just join. They are all one. They have an orientation class, which is Feeder for 3 months. From there they are sent to vocation, and we received them now into class C, irrespective of their level. At the orientation level they tell them about the institution and what the departments are about. After that they study French, English, Marketing and other basics in Business and Entrepreneurship. This happens for

a period of 3 months still during the orientation in Feeder. After this they go to their various departments.

After reiterating the "no real entry requirement" situation, she moves one to explain that after the students are admitted, they undergo a 3-month period of orientation. During this time, the trainees learn about the institution, the departments, and study courses like French, English, Marketing, as well as basics in Business and Entrepreneurship. This part of their program is intended to help achieve the entrepreneurial aspect of their objective. This orientation involves all the trainees in all the various departments. It is after the orientation period that the trainees are sent to their various departments to begin their actual vocational training. Still in line with achieving the entrepreneurial aspect of the objective, a trainer indicated as follows:

Yes, we train them to be able to work for someone or open their own workshops. They also have entrepreneurial skills training. After their training here, they go out for a 3-month internship to those already owning workshops out. There their focus is not to go and learn how to sew again but to see how the business runs.

At the departmental level, the program is structured proceed in a somewhat spiral manner from Class C through Class B to Class A. An administrator explained as follows: *"You must begin from class C. when they come in from class C, class C is more of the orientation class. More theory, they brief you more on the department, so you get familiar with the department. As you move to class B more practical and class A mostly practical."* This suggests that the program is structured to be both incremental and spiral. Class C runs for 3 months. Class B runs for 7 months. Class A runs for 5 months. After class A, the trainees go for a 3-month internship. After the internship, they produce the internship report. As such, the program covers a total of 2 years – 18 months.

When asked whether this duration was sufficient to achieve the desired objectives, a trainer had this to say.

In this department we do interior and exterior decoration, we do fashion designing, and we do textile designing. If they make it such that the trainee can specialize in a program from the beginning to the end, I'm sure it will be better. Instead of doing everything for those 2 years. That is where the challenge is. But now that they are doing everything it might make sense to set 2 and half years for designing because it is more designing. Décor can be one and a half or two and textile can take one year because with textile once you get the base you can continue your own.

In her opinion, the duration of the program is not sufficient, especially because the trainees are not allowed to specialize in focus area. They are expected to do everything the department offers. When asked why this was the case, a trainer answered that it gives the trainees a better platform on which to build their eventual professional practice. Still in line with stating the inadequacy of the duration of the program, a trainee had this to say.

For someone starting from the bases, 2 years is not enough. 2 years as training can only be enough if maybe you come to OIC and are specialized in just sewing; and you don't have to do other things like the décor and the other things we have to do here. Since we have to do everything, the duration could be about 3 to 3.5 years.

This adds to the notion that specialization might be a more effective way to go for the students unless the department plans on increasing the number of years for the training. But increasing the

number of years would also mean additional costs both to the department and the trainees. This might not be the best approach to take. It seems the best option might be to resort to specialization.

At the same time, another trainee feels that the training duration is sufficient. She said *"2 years are enough for someone who knows what they want. It is all about focusing and knowing that your teachers cannot teach you everything. There are things you have to learn on your own."* This is also another interesting perspective considering that the idea is to enable the student to take charge of their learning, hence the indirect teaching approach. Nevertheless, there was a strong recommendation for specialization. One trainee put it like this:

In my opinion they can make this trade to be a specialized something. If you are leaving out there and coming to OIC to do fashion designing it should be designing, that's sewing. If you are coming to do décor it should be décor. If you are coming for textile technology, it should be textile technology; not combining all and doing at once. At the end of the day, you might even get nothing.

Clearly, it makes sense to consider specialization, if we go by the opinion of the trainers and trainees, at the very least. The risk of inadequate practice for a skill building endeavor like this could really mar the achievement of the set objectives. This is an issue that requires proper consideration at the level of the administration.

Program

The department has three main areas of focus: interior and exterior decoration, fashion design, textile designing. This is divided into 6 subjects as follows: Fashion Drawing, Technology of Equipment, sewing, and pattern drafting, and decoration. All the students are expected to do all the areas and courses during their stay in the TFD department. The program is organized to run as modules. Some modules are completed in one week. But others cover multiple lessons, each of which is covered in a week. This makes it difficult to tell the modules apart from the lessons, but it seems to work for them. Each week's module or lesson – as the case maybe – is split into both theoretical sessions and practical sessions. For each lesson/module the sessions of theory are assigned 3 hours a week while the practical sessions are assigned 7 hours a week. This shows that the program is more of practical (70%) and that makes sense for a few reasons. Firstly, it is consistent with best practice in technical and vocational training (Kraak, 1991; Ziderman, 1997). Secondly, this focus on practice is consistent with the requirements of skill building. As the popular saying goes, "practice makes perfect." Finally, this also explains why the "no entry requirement situation" is not a deterrent to achieving their objectives. With sufficient practice, anyone can pick up the required skills, irrespective of their qualifications or previous knowledge.

Class C runs for 3 months covering 12 weeks and 12 corresponding modules/lessons. In the same way, Class B runs for 7 months corresponding to 28 weeks/modules. Class A runs for 5 months corresponding to 20 weeks/modules. The table below presents the weeks, modules, and learning outcomes for the modules for Pattern and Sewing for Class A, as an example of the general structure of the modules in the department.

Table 2: Modules for Pattern and Sewing (Class A)

Week	Module	Learning Outcome
1	Drafting and stitching of complex design (blouses)	By the end of these lessons, trainees should be able to draft, transform and stitch any complex design
2	Drafting and stitching of complex design (jackets)	
3-4	Drafting and stitching of complex design (female dresses with different collars)	
5-6	Drafting and stitching of complex design (dresses with complex sleeves)	
7	Drafting and stitching of complex design (dresses with inner pockets)	
8	Drafting and stitching of complex design (dresses with patch pockets)	
9	Production of fashion accessories using local fabrics (hats)	By the end of these lessons, trainees should be able to produce fashion dressing accessories using local materials
10-12	Production of fashion accessories using local fabrics (bags and clutches)	
13-14	Production of fashion accessories using local fabrics (jewelries)	
15	Drafting and stitching of male outfits (shirts)	By the end of these lessons, trainees should be able to trace and stitch male outfits
16-20	Drafting and stitching of male outfits (trousers)	

Note. Modules of Pattern and Sewing for Class A. Content adapted from the departmental program as received from the HOD.

The learning outcomes as shown on this table are conventionally well stated. The constant use of simple actionable words like draft, stitch, produce, and trace, reveal a few important things. Firstly, the lesson outcome/objectives are SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound. This also means that determining skill acquisition and mastery is very easy. Little wonder why most of the respondents believed given the nature of the training, entry qualification or entry knowledge was neither a condition for nor a barrier to the desired skill acquisition. From classroom observation, it was noticed that the adopted teaching approach was indirect teaching with a constructive mixture of both independent and group work. This gave the trainees a very active role in their training. The time allocation between theory and practice also makes this feasible. However, this is heavily reliant on resources. Hence, the next consideration.

Resources

Here the target was to consider both the material and human resources. To enable the evaluation of the material resources, a checklist of required tools was developed to guide the classroom observation and complemented by interviews with the administration. The table below shows this checklist of tools relevant to TFD.

Table 3: Checklist of Tools

TOOL	REMARK
Measuring and Marking tools	
Meter rule/yardstick	Measuring and marking the fabric are standard parts of sewing. They are essential to sewing.
Tape measures	
Dressmakers' carbon	
Tailors chalk	
Tracing wheel	
Hem markers	
Seam/sewing gauge	
French curves	
Cutting Tools	
Cutting shears	These help in cutting out patterns and fabrics once they have been laid out. They aid in the production of the various pattern pieces of a particular design.
Pinking shears	
Paper cutting scissors	
Cutting tables	
Rotary cutter	
Sewing Tools	
Sewing materials	These are essential to textile and fashion design. Unlike some other tools, these ones cannot be lacking.
Thread	
Sewing needles	
Dressmakers' pins	
Hand sewing machines	
Electric sewing machines	
Thimble for sewing	
Treadle machine	
Embroidery machine	
Serger (neatening) machine	
Pressing Tools	
Pressing iron	These are important in straitening wrinkled fabric before cutting, ironing seams when made, and pressing the finished clothing to ensure it has a professional touch.
Press cloth	
Ironing board	
Clothes brush	
Pressing mitt	
Pounding block	
Seam roll	
Sleeve board	
Reference Materials and other Facilities	
Reference books and textbooks	These cannot be underrated. They help in the provision of structure and syllabus for the program. They help in the standardization of the instruction. They help maintain quality. A properly organized dedicated classroom is very important in enhancing the students' learning experience.
Fashion magazines	
Catalogues	
Commercial patterns	
Chalk/marker board	
Chairs	
Brown paper	
Classrooms	
Full length mirror	
Clothing laboratory	
Dress form	

Note. A checklist of tools. Content adapted from "Available teaching and learning resources for the implantation of clothing and textiles curriculum in Senior High Schools in Ghana" by Quarcoo, Komla & Senayah (2022).

The tools were extrapolated from the context of a Highschool. It is easy to presume that their learning objectives would be different, likewise their teaching methods, evaluation, and

progression requirements. However, this is not entirely the case. Quarcoo, Komla & Senayah (2022) explain that "Clothing and Textiles as an area of Home Economics under TVET is a skill-oriented subject taught at the Senior High School level of education in Ghana with the aim of training students to acquire knowledge and skills in clothing production and management" (p. 3678). As such, the difference in entry requirement, wider context, or even progression requirements don't belie the fact that both institutions target skill acquisition and so are heavily dependent on resources to facilitate the training. Based on this checklist, the tools in the TFD department were examined through both observation and interviews with the administrators. The findings are captured on the table below.

Table 4: Tools Available in the TFD Department in COIC

TOOL	QUANTITY
Manual Sewing Machines (Butterfly and Singer)	8
Electric Sewing Machines (Semi-Industrial)	3
Zigzag Machine	1
Industrial Sewing Machine	4
Pressing Iron	2
Tailor's Arms	5
Wooden Ruler (100cm)	7
Tables (Large Immovable)	3
Smaller Tables	18
Classrooms	2
Chalk Board	2

Note. Tools available in the TFD department in COIC. Developed from classroom observation and interviews in the department, by the researcher.

Here again we have the chance to identify some of the peculiarities of the TFD department. in the first place, this is not bad at all. It is impressive. One teacher interviewed noted in this regard:

We don't have enough equipment but compared to other training centers I have seen OIC is trying. In some places you see the machines standing there but they are not in use. They are bad but they just display them like that. But all our machines are operational, and we try to program and manage the few we have.

Vocational training, just like general education, is facing the challenge of inadequate resources (Atayo, 2000). However, TFD is making commendable efforts in combating this challenge, yet the challenge remains. One of the administrators put it like this:

Of course, the resources are always scare. The equipment there we need more. The number of students totally outweighs the number of equipment. We need more machines to meet up with the high intake of students. We also need space. The classrooms are not there. Benches are not there. The chairs are not enough.

This shows that there are still many gaps to be filled especially as intake keeps increasing. One might wonder if part of the issue is that the office charged with intake doesn't take sufficient cognizance of the available resources before determining the number to admit into the department. But then again there are other competing considerations and priorities like financial constraints

that make this a convoluted issue. Nevertheless, just like this administrator, the trainees also approached the resources issue from the point of view of material resources. One trainee had this to say.

I don't think the resources are enough. We need more machines. The machines are limited. We need machines like zigzag machines. We just have 1 zigzag machine. Meanwhile students have to learn how to zigzag as well. Our teachers find it very difficult to allow every student to practice on it because they might destroy the machine since it is just one. If it was about 2 or 3, they would leave one for students and the others for the teachers. The machine I am using now is my personal machine because machines are limited. Another challenge we have is that of buying working tools. We are the ones to buy the materials we use for practice, but students have challenges buying these materials. The staff decided that we should buy our materials for practice because they discovered that students are more serious when they are using their own materials. It is also helpful to buy because after OIC you can still use it.

This highlights the fact that the lack of sufficient resources takes a negative toll on practice. This trainee has got a private machine but not all can afford such. In fact, even the policy that the trainees buy their practice material themselves is challenging for many of the trainees – most of whom are from struggling backgrounds. Many of the respondents affirmed this challenge, indicating that it slows down the training process. Some of these resource gaps have been indicated to the administration and they have committed to doing something about it considering the available resources.

Next was the issue of human resources. The respondents were unanimous that the number of available trainers was inadequate. One trainee noted that *"We don't have enough teachers but those there are trying. We have 4 teachers, but I think we need about 7 or 8 teachers."* One of the administrators interviewed explained that they have 1 permanent staff, one voluntary staff and 2 part-timers. This is a very low trainer to trainee ratio. Considering the current enrolment of 54 trainees in the department (31 trainees in Class C, 5 in Class B and 18 in Class A), this gives a trainer-to-trainee ratio of about 13 trainees to 1 trainer. The fact that 2 of the four trainers are also part-timers makes this even more intricate. The administration is aware of this and is trying to do something about it. They have been trying to do more recruitment, but it is usually very challenging to get the right fit for the jobs. One of the teachers tried to shed some light on this issue.

They have the trainers. Our difficulty is, especially for the fashion where I am specialized, it is difficult to have us to train them. For example, they have hunted for someone to assist me, but they found no one. People come and they go. They don't want to sit. Most of us don't agree to come for their own reasons. I was trained in a school; a technical school where I did this field. What we did in school was industrial sewing. It is difficult to practice this in our society because the one in our society is bespoke sewing. So, after school, I merged the two by doing a 6-month apprenticeship to learn bespoke sewing. Even those trained in tailoring shops have a challenge to impart knowledge in a formal situation like this. But for me I am lucky because I went to a teacher's training.

This shows that one reason why it is difficult to have Trainers is because, in the context of sewing, most tailors available are bespoke tailors but the schools usually prefer industrial sewing and many of these tailors can't make the switch in skills to train the trainees accordingly. Secondly, some of

these tailors have challenges in transmission of the skills to the trainees, and yet this is a critical skill or lack thereof in this context.

It is important to note that among the trainers, most are former trainees and practitioners in their areas of specialty. One is a technical school graduate and practicing fashion designer with relevant experience and teacher training. Even the trainer who is a PhD holder, is also a practitioner in his area with enviable years of experience. This means that the staff are well prepared for the tasks they are required to perform in the department. This goes to show that the challenges faced are not in trainers' competences.

Many initiatives have been taken to close these resource gaps. One administrator explained as follows:

We need support from the community to coverup these gaps. We need financial support. We need assistance from people of goodwill. We need donors. Last three years we had people who came and saw what we were doing in the department and were impressed. They donated some machines to us. And during graduations we always plead that parents and well-wishers should come with prizes and most of these prizes are things that can help the trainees graduating.

Donations from the community have helped close some of these gaps for both the institution and the graduates. Another administrator highlighted the input from partnerships in this regard.

Before the crisis there used to be expats from all over the world to come and assist the school. With the sociopolitical crisis, people managing projects in areas like Mundemba have taken vulnerable children from those areas – students whom because of the war have dropped out of school – and sponsored them in the various departments in OIC. Even the department of Textile and Fashion Design has graduated some of these children. This partnership is still ongoing backed by MOUs. We have about four of such organizations sponsoring these vulnerable children in OIC. At the end of the training, they buy the children sewing machines and other gadgets to help them set up their own practice. This happens in all the other departments, not only Textile and Fashion Design.

All these go a long way to assuage the challenges raised. But they are neither enough nor are they the only efforts in that regard. Within COIC itself, there are dispositions to help. As one administrator explains,

There is an office in the organization called "Resource Mobilization". The officer in charge of that has the responsibility to canvass for support and also write projects and request for people to support the institution in terms of donations and writing projects for funding. That department is very strong and has done a lot in that regard.

The responsibilities of this office form part of the effort to mobilize support for the institution. This same administrator recommended that the department engage in exhibitions and sensitization to get more people aware of what they do. He thinks that there are two main selling points which are inadequately ventilated and utilized: one is the fact that COIC is one of the cheapest vocational training centers in Cameroon; the other is that COIC has the highest number of areas (8 departments) in which trainees can be trained. If these are properly exploited, they will enhance the resource mobilization efforts and so help close the gaps in resources.

From foregoing, it seems that the implementation (selection and organization of the learning experiences) – despite the challenges faced – is tailored towards achieving the stated departmental objectives. It now behooves us to turn our attention towards the evaluation phase of this work.

Evaluation

At this juncture, the goal was to examine the assessment policy, consider its reliability and appropriateness, as well as listen to the alumni as a testament of what the department has produced. This comprises of two evaluations within the program (the assessment policy) and an evaluation of the program.

Assessment Policy

As aforementioned, every module/lesson is planned for 10 hours: 3 hours for theory and 7 hours for practice. This shows their policy of 30% theory and 70% practical work. This is also reflected in their assessment of the trainees. In July, during the summative evaluations for the year, the assessment is done as follows: 30% for theory/written part; and 70% for practical sessions on handwork. According to one of the administrators, *"The practical sessions always start at least 1 week before the written sessions because the practical sessions can go on for 2 weeks or maybe more."* This is what determines progression to the next class or graduation: if they fail, they repeat. Before this summative assessment, there are formative assessments from time to time, depending on the trainers. These usually constitute working sessions within which the trainees complete some given tasks that show their mastery of specific skills.

The marks of the two sessions of the summative examinations are collated and put on 100. Since all subjects are weighted as 5 coefficients, the average is calculated and recorded on 20. Failure consists of having an average below 10, and when that is the case, the trainee is asked to repeat the class. However, during the Disposition Council meeting, the HODs could decide to allow the progression of a candidate with 9 averages based on certain considerations, especially if the candidate is really good at practical work in general or some specific skills.

This assessment policy seems appropriate and reliable in testing for skills acquisition and mastery. As such, it works in determining whether the learning outcomes as well as the departmental objectives have been achieved. But as evidence of their commitment to quality, there is also a policy in place to ensure that the trainers are also doing their best to achieve the objectives. One of the administrators explained the process as follows:

First of all, you bring your qualifications. They go through your qualifications. From there you are given a voluntary staff position, even though you are paid. You stay in this position for 2 years after which you are assessed to see if you are qualified to be a permanent staff of the department. But it doesn't end there. At the end of every year there is a performance evaluation for both the staff and administrator.

This process ensures that the trainers and administrators keep putting in their best in ensuring the departmental objectives are achieved. This rigor is part of the reason why the program yields so much fruit and satisfaction.

Evaluation of the Program

The aforementioned rigor is part of the reason why the trainees are generally very satisfied with the program. This was highlighted in the reasons why they prefer studying in COIC rather than

simply going to a tailoring workshop that purportedly offers the same skills. One of the trainees gave her general impression as follows:

My general impression so far is that it is really nice. It is good. I am able to do what I could not do when I came here. I could not sew. It did not have idea of some designs and how to dye fabric. But now I am able to do that. Unfortunately, 2 years is not enough. It should have been about 3 years. This additional year should be for more practice.

This shows that the department is transforming the students and helping them develop the marketable skills they seek. Yet it also shows that there is a need for more time for practical sessions. She recommended an extra year for that, but it seems that if the challenge with the resources is assuaged then there might be no need for that.

One of the teachers had a similar impression which also covered vocational education in general.

I see the transformation in the students and the prospects of acquiring and using the skills they are learning. I also look at what these practical skills are doing in my life now. It is all amazing. If I knew my life would be like this, I would not have gone to school. I would have abandoned school and followed business. By now I would have been a very big entrepreneur today. This is because some of us have suffered a lot to put food on the table.

This sentiment that somehow schooling is opposed to flourishing or at least survival, while entrepreneurship is the way to go, is heightened by the alarming unemployment of graduates. It is important to look towards skill building rather than just acquisition of certificates. Her sentiments re-echo the claim that "if one does away with all other education, a country can survive with technical and vocational education" (Atayo, 2000, p. 47). It now seems fitting to turn to the alumni and see how the products of the program are doing.

Alumni Perspectives

Among the alumni interviewed, the certificate they had at the time of admission into the program ranged from FSLC, GCE O/Level, to GCE A/Level. 40% of them were employed. The remaining 60% were self-employed. Of these self-employed alumni, 30% had their own workshop while the remaining 30% were working from home. There was nothing to suggest that the employment status or nature of employment related to or a function of the entry qualification.

When they were asked about the challenges they face now after the training at the TFD training in COIC, they had instructive responses. Some pointed to entrepreneurial challenges, and others indicated finances. One of them said that she is *"unable to draft, cut, and sew a suit because there was no teacher at OIC for that."* This adds to the request for more teachers and the challenge faced with getting the teachers in their required number and specialty. Another indicated that she *"didn't know how to interact with clients and marketing strategies. 3 months internship is too short for proper training."* This suggests that more needs to be done at the level of the entrepreneurial aspect of the objective. This might be part of the reason why one said another indicated *"lack of finance to open my shop, and how to deal with clients"* as her own challenges. More needs to be done in marketing, financial management, and sourcing of funding. These will prepare the trainees to avoid or at least circumnavigate the challenges that these alumni are raising.

When asked about the length of the program, most of the alumni thought – like most of the other respondents – that it was not enough. One of these said *"to me it was short because not everyone*

is smart enough to acquire such skills in 2 years' time. But on the other hand, I was on the safe side because I was a smart trainee." For sure, all trainees cannot master the skills at the same pace. Some would be smarter and so master faster than others; but this is not necessarily related to their qualification. Nevertheless, it might have something to do with their previous knowledge and/or experiences. This is why one of the alumni said, *"2 years was too long. 1 year of training is enough especially for someone who already had some knowledge."* This opinion goes to the peculiar extreme of saying that the training is too long. Yet it raises the issue that some previous knowledge can make skill acquisition quicker. It should be noted that this previous knowledge is not necessarily formal education or some certificate. Worth remembering is the fact that some trainees came to COIC after some experience as apprentices in tailoring workshops; and this provides significant previous knowledge.

Based on these challenges that they faced, they made some recommendations. There was a recommendation that more be done on marketing including *"how to choose accessories for good patterns and customer service like how to interact with clients, how to learn their choices and how to sell yourself to attract clients."* Branding, customer service and personal selling are marketing dispositions that significantly help entrepreneurs succeed. Others talked about the need for more training *"on fabric sourcing and the type of fabrics best according to designs,"* others also mentioned a need to learn "*how to setup your own business*." In the area of resources, some mentioned the *"need for more equipment like curvy rulers, Crockett, and size charts."* Some of these have already been earmarked for purchase based on feedback from the staff. Finally, there was also the talk of a *"need for an additional year for the trainees to acquire more skills."* The need to extend the program was already raised by the other respondents but it wasn't raised as a need for acquisition of more skills specifically. It was more about more practice, alongside other resource-based considerations.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

It could be concluded that the TFD department in COIC Buea is achieving its objective of training students in marketable skills and entrepreneurship in TFD. Yet the evaluation of this department revealed challenges, especially in implementation that require more decisive intervention on the part of the administration. The recommendations proffered could go a long way in mitigating these challenges.

Recommendation

Based on the data collected, the analyses carried out and the findings, the following recommendations seem relevant.

i.   The Digital visibility of the TFD department and COIC is very low. Clearly communicating the great work, they do to the widest possible audience through social media handles and their website, is a good place to start. The fact that their website still seems under construction till now is not good for their branding. More sensitization is required. This will also help assuage their resource challenge and make their resource mobilization campaign more effective.

ii.   More needs to be done in entrepreneurial skills. Evidently, much is already being done in enabling the students to acquire the relevant TFD skills; and that is amazing. However, the challenges the alumni are facing alongside some recommendations from the other respondents shows that the trainees are still lacking in relevant marketing skills like branding, sales, and customer service. This will be of significant benefit to the trainees.

iii.   Still on the curriculum, some review needs to be done. The issues raised around duration and the need for specialization need to be considered. At the very least, the administration needs to consider either reviewing the duration or getting the trainees to specialize to increase their chances of mastery given the resource gaps.

iv.   The "no real entry requirement" policy is a very good policy. However, for it to be effective, there is a need for adequate resources and time. The challenges raised – inadequate material resources, inadequate practice time, and few trainers – could very much work to the disadvantage the trainees, particularly the average or slow trainees. This is especially so since insufficient diagnostic assessment is done from the beginning to determine the strengths of each trainee so that their individual learning needs could be prioritized.

v.   There is a need for more teachers in the domain of TFD. Some of these could come from their alumni, after additional training and experience as is the case with some currently recruited. However, other teacher training institutions should consider this domain too.

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