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► The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on TVET providers and programmes in Ghana

The Commission for TVET has the mandate to steer the TVET transformation in Ghana and regulate, promote, and administer technical and Vocational Education and Training for transformation and innovation for sustainable development in the country. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, TVET training providers (TP) were confronted with enormous challenges due to school closures and disruption of the academic calendar. The switch to virtual formats was pursued by most TPs but challenged due to high costs of Internet or the limited availability of stable connections.

1. About the Commission for TVET

The Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET) was established by the Education Regulatory Bodies Act (ERBA) 1023 of 2020. The Commission's activities are informed by the five-year strategic plan for TVET transformation which is also derived from the Education Strategic Plan (ESP).

The key goals set out for the Commission in the five-year strategic plan are:

- a. TVET which is accountable and responsive to the sector (governance and management)
- b. Equitable access and promotion of gender mainstreaming
- c. Quality assurance in TVET based on internationally accepted standards
- d. Sustainable source of funding for TVET
- e. Greening TVET for environmental sustainability.

1.1 Mandate

The mandate of CTVET is to regulate, promote, and administer Technical and Vocational Education and Training for transformation and innovation for sustainable development.

1.2 Functions

The Education Regulatory Bodies Act (ERBA) 1023 of 2020 stipulates the functions of the Commission as follows:

- ▶ Formulate national policies for skills development across the broad spectrum of pre-tertiary and tertiary education, formal, informal, and alternative education
- ▶ Coordinate, harmonise and supervise the activities of Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions to meet the requirements of both the formal and informal sectors
- ▶ Develop and implement a national assessment and certification system in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- ▶ Take measures to ensure quality, equitable, and inclusive access in the provision of technical and Vocational Education and Training
- ▶ Develop and maintain a national database on the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector
- ▶ Facilitate research and development in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training system
- ▶ Source for funds to support Technical and Vocational Education and Training activities
- ▶ Facilitate collaboration between training institutions and industry to promote:
 - ▶ Industry-led and demand-driven curriculum development and placement
 - ▶ Workplace experience learning
 - ▶ Recognition of prior learning
- ▶ Promote cooperation with international agencies and development partners
- ▶ Issue reports on the state of skills development in the country
- ▶ Advise the Minister on all matters relating to the management and improvement of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training system
- ▶ Coordinate and promote industry-led occupational standards generation for demand-driven curriculum development and delivery
- ▶ Accredite programmes, institutions, centres, facilitators, assessors, and verifiers at the formal, informal, non-formal, Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions to ensure quality delivery
- ▶ Collaborate with tertiary institutions and relevant agencies to implement competency-based training programmes on the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Framework
- ▶ Perform any other functions that are ancillary to the objects of the Commission

2. COVID-19 in Ghana

COVID-19 is a disease which has affected the whole world. According to the WHO, by 31 December 2019 the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province. A novel coronavirus was eventually identified.

More specifically in Ghana, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on 12 March 2020. On 16 March 2020, the government shut down all schools, including universities (GHANA HEALTH SERVICE 2021).

This resulted in a three-week temporary lockdown of Greater Accra, Kasoa, and Greater Kumasi between 30 March and 20 April 2020. Life started to return to normal after the lockdown, although with strict adherence to the COVID-19 prevention protocols.

All schools (from basic to tertiary) were fully reopened on 15 January 2021. Prior to that final year, students were allowed back in school in 2020 to complete their course work and write their examination. The comprehensive “Guidelines for School Re-opening during COVID-19” were published and distributed to all regional, metropolitan, and district directors of education and heads of all schools (kindergarten to Senior High School). The Commission for TVET (CTVET) also developed comprehensive guidelines for all TVET institutions before reopening.

As of 4 April 2021, Ghana has recorded 90,782 cases of COVID-19 (57 percent male, 42 percent female and one percent other) (GHANA HEALTH SERVICE 2021).

2.1 The impact of COVID-19 on children

In January 2021, UNICEF, Social Policy Research Institute, and National Development Planning Commission published a research on the impact of COVID-19 at the beginning of March 2020 titled “Primary and Secondary Impacts of COVID-19 on Children in Ghana”. Among the key findings of the research and beyond the primary effects of COVID-19 such as death, illness etc., there were mentioned some secondary effects like influence on household incomes, malnutrition, disruption of teaching and learning, etc. (UNICEF 2021).

2.2 Effects on school closures

One of the major secondary effects of COVID-19 is the negative effect on education which resulted in the closure of schools for long periods. As stated, no country was adequately prepared for the pandemic, and as such with the restriction of movement that came about as a result of the disease, it also brought about disruption in learning, schooling, and exam schedules (UNICEF 2021).

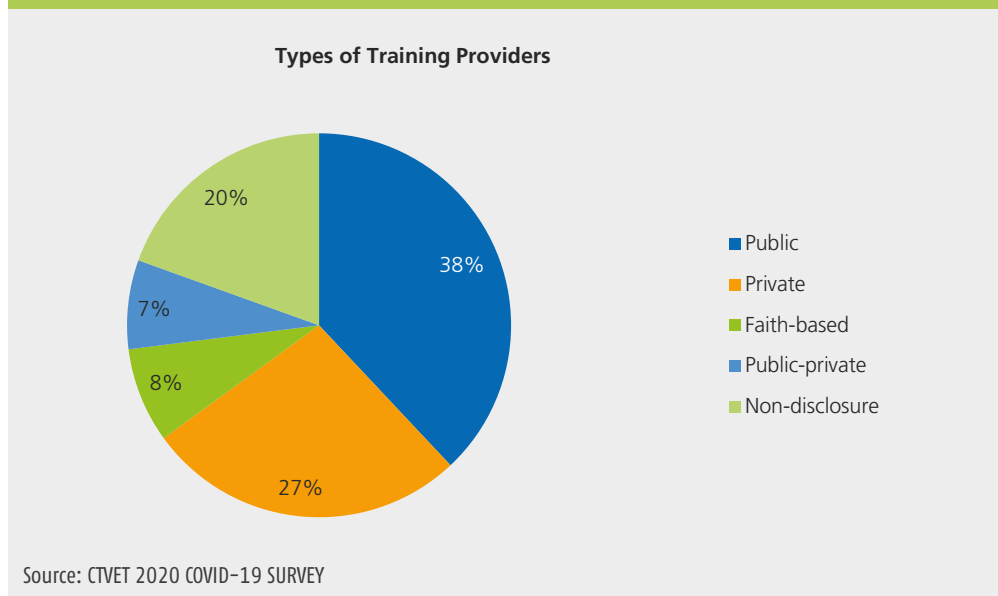
Again, in Ghana, there was a lot of negative impacts on short and long-term learning outcomes (lost or slowed progress in school or early exit from education). There was also the issue of unsuitable learning environment at home (e.g. overcrowding) and no access to distance learning materials (e.g. no access to ICT). Moreover, the study revealed that boys and girls may be vulnerable to gendered traditional roles in households (e.g. increased involve-

ment in child labour for boys and childcare and early marriage for girls) which may occur more frequently in economically vulnerable households. Finally, children in Ghana faced the mental health burden of the loss of access to children's peer networks (UNICEF 2021).

3. The impact of COVID-19 on TVET programmes and providers

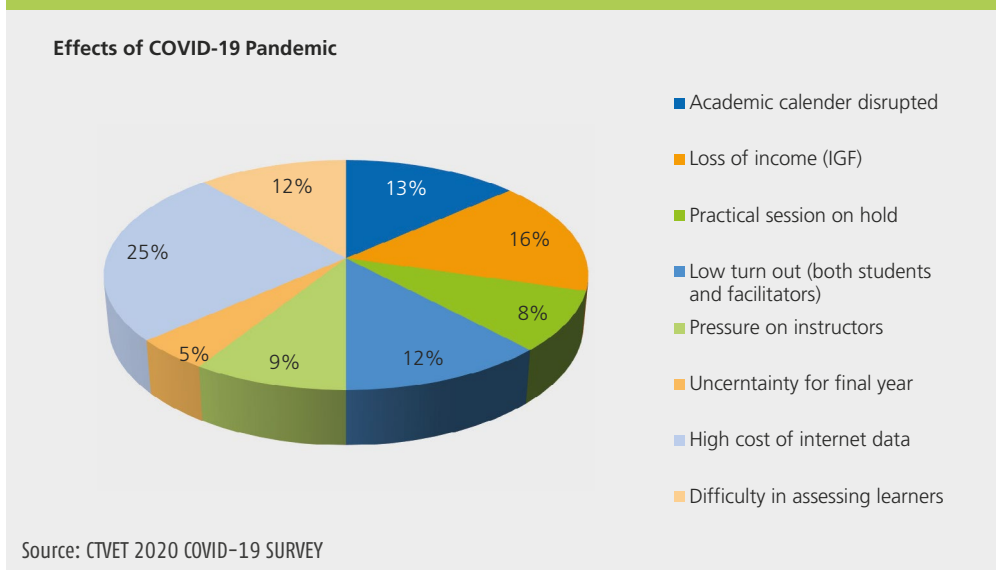
When TVET institutions partially reopened in August 2020, the Commission for TVET conducted a survey of the effect of COVID-19 on TVET programmes and providers to ascertain the level of damage done by the disease. Overall, 200 TVET providers were surveyed. With the majority of the respondents (38 percent) coming from public TVET institutions.

Figure 1: Types of training providers



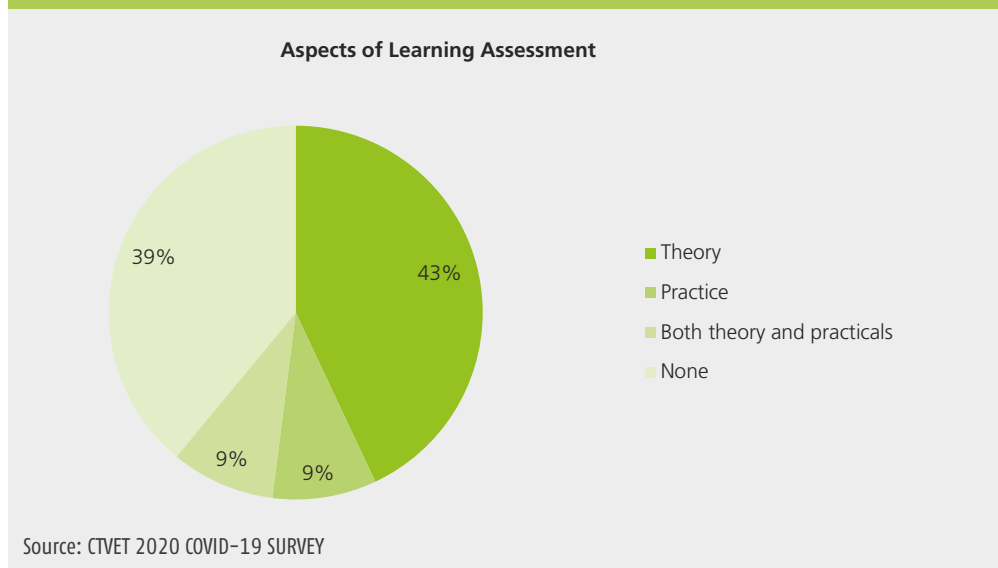
From this study, the major effect of the pandemic on TVET providers and programmes was the high cost of Internet data which made online tutoring difficult to implement in TVET schools (25 percent of respondents). This was followed by disruption in academic calendar which affected teaching and learning (13 percent of respondents). The next significant effect was the difficulty in assessing learners (twelve percent of respondents).

Figure 2: Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic



From the above, it is not, therefore, surprising that out of 200 respondents 164 were either not assessing their learners or assessing them on theoretical aspects of their training. This is significant because Ghana has adopted a harmonized CBT approach to teaching in TVET schools. One of the overriding principles of this approach is the emphasis on practical training as opposed to theoretical training, and as such teaching and assessing learners using theory defeats the CBT concept.

Figure 3: Aspects of learning assessment



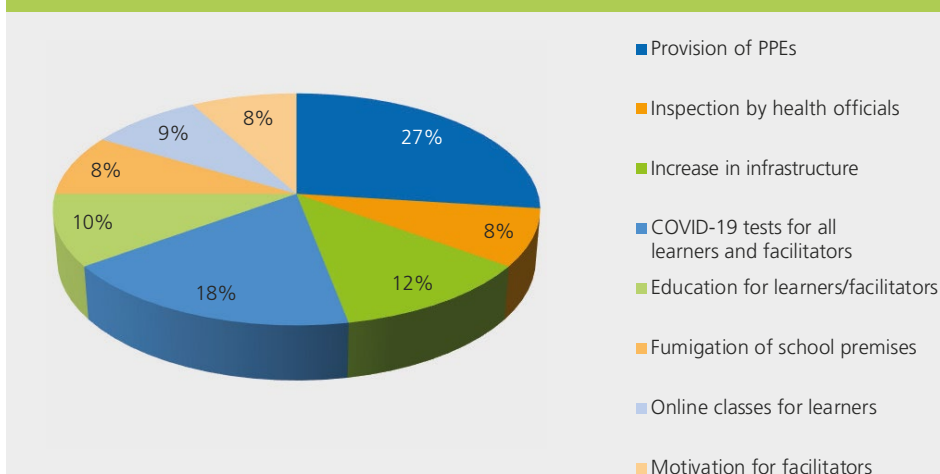
Normal school activities have since resumed, and most of the issues that were raised during the survey has been dealt with as a result. However, schools are to adhere strictly to the COVID-19 protocols.

4. Recommendations and actions taken

Most of the recommendations from the respondents centred around the provision by the government of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE's) to training providers and free periodic COVID-19 tests for all learners and facilitators (27 percent and 18 percent respectively).

In addition to this, the training providers also recommended that health officials inspect their schools and test students from time to time. They also suggested the increase in infrastructure to help in ensuring social and physical distances in classrooms.

Figure 4: Recommendation from TPs



Source: own representation

In this regard, as part of measures for the reopening of schools, the Ministry of Education linked all schools in Ghana to a health facility to help in treating students who may have been in contact with the virus. In addition to this, the Ministry distributed facemasks, hand sanitizers, veronica buckets, and thermometer guns to all schools before reopening.

In cases where some learners developed symptoms of the coronavirus disease, the Ghana Health Service deployed doctors and nurses to the specific institution for all students and staff to be tested, and those who tested positive were isolated and treated.

The Government of Ghana also launched the Ghana CARES Programme (Obaatan pa), which cost GH¢ 100 billion, and TVET providers are encouraged by the Commission for TVET to apply for support under this programme.

On 18 November 2020, the then Senior Minister, Hon Yaw Osafo Maafo, on behalf of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, launched the Ghana COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalization of Enterprise Support initiative in Accra.

The Ghana CARES (Obaatan pa) programme is an unprecedented, bold, and audacious GH¢ 100 billion post-COVID-19 programme intended to stabilize, revitalize, and transform Ghana's economy to create jobs and prosperity for Ghanaians over a three-year period. It is sequenced in two phases: a Stabilization Phase that is running from July till the end of the year (2020); a medium-term Revitalization Phase from 2021 to 2023 (MINISTRY OF FINANCE 2020).

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected, and no country was adequately prepared for it.

The Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education and the Commission for TVET has taken proactive steps to ensure that the impact of the pandemic is minimized in the country.

References

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