

Trends and Development of Occupational Competency Assessment and Certification in Addis Ababa: Implications for TVET-Industry Partnership

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Abstract: This study aimed to assess the Ethiopian Occupational Competence Assessment and Certification Center (OCACC), considering its mandate to improve the competency level of graduates. A descriptive survey design with a qualitative method was employed. Interview held with leaders and experts of OCACC. Then, interviews were transcribed for analysis, supplemented with field notes and documents. The study investigated occupational standard (OS) perspectives, training standard (TS), and readiness of graduates. The findings showed that a graduate's school-to-work transition (SWT) is constrained by school (supply) and out-of-school (demand) factors. Gaps were observed because of inadequate attention to cooperative training and due to the industry's low awareness and frustration during the CoC assessment. Also, there was a scarcity of experts who developed and validated assessment tools at OCACC. Regarding opportunities, a strategy and participatory system exist. Finally, policy options were forwarded to fill the gap between the existing state and what OCACC strives to be in digitalization, competency development, and TVET-industry partnership.

Key Words: *Competency assessment, occupational standards, training standards, cooperative training, TVET-Industry partnership*

1. Introduction

According to the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) (2007) projection of 2025 estimation (est.), there are about 111.6 million inhabitants, of which nearly half are female, and about 78.8% dwell in rural areas, where agriculture is their mainstay. It is also interesting to note that although nearly half of the Ethiopian population constitutes an active labor force, unemployment is a glaring problem with a rate of 19.1% (2018 est.). Ethiopia has an alphabet that dates to the Axumite period (4th century A.D), but the country remained the "Land of the Thumb Print" with about 51.8% (2017 est.) literacy rate. There is educational expansion in Ethiopia at all levels. However, the system needs to travel long distances to improve quality. Moreover, institutions focus on knowledge with inadequate consideration for value and skill formation. The TVET system is also not strongly linked with small and medium enterprises (SMEs). TVET institutions (public, private, & NGO) expanded to 1403 in 2023, and enrolment increased from 5264 in 1999 to 387,792 in 2018 (Amare 2023). Nevertheless, there is a mismatch between job seekers and employment possibilities.

By way of addressing these challenges, the researcher is interested in conducting trend analysis in one of the priority areas, i.e., Occupational Assessment and Certification at TVET Colleges in Addis Ababa. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program is designed to enable trainees to get paid jobs or create their own jobs (self-employed). Hence, the task of making vocational graduates self-supportive is demanding and should not be left only to training institutions.

A major reform shift was made in the Ethiopian TVET system after the launch of the MoE 2008 TVET strategy, which was supported by the revised Federal TVET Proclamation No. 954/2016 (FDRE, 2016). An outcome-based TVET approach has been practiced in Ethiopia, and more than 400 occupations are prepared by practitioners who represent companies. The TVET strategy stipulated various interventions, including the national qualifications framework for TVET (NTQF); occupational standards; accreditation system; and introduction of a competence-based system for assessment and certification.

The Occupational Assessment and Certification Directive (MoE, 2010c) requires that "the competence requirements in the different qualification levels of the country's vast occupational classifications shall be the basis for the assessment and certification in all industry sectors" (p. 2). The national TVET strategy also envisages that occupational (competence or standards-based) assessment will be conducted internally by TVET institutions and externally by accredited assessors in assessment centers. External assessment will be followed by certification upon passing the assessment. Assessment and certification are independent of

training and regulated by an organ, which is referred to as a Certificate of Competency (CoC) or OCACC (MoE, 2008; FTA, 2014).

In Addis Ababa, there are five branches of the Center of Competencies or OCACCs under the City Administration Competency Assurance Agency. The five CoC branches (eastern, western, central, southern, & northern) conduct trade tests for graduates of TVET institutes by accredited assessors. The occupational competency assessment incorporates knowledge, attitudes, and skills aspects in the form of written or oral questions and practical tests. This occupational competency assessment process has been underway since 2008 (FTA, 2014; MoE, 2010c).

This research, therefore, tries to investigate the problem from the perspective of apprenticeship, assessment and certification policy framework, candidates' participation based on sector and occupations, and countries' experience. The study is expected to add value to the existing literature, practice, research, and policy in both international and local contexts. To this end, the purpose of the research is to assess the status of the Ethiopian Occupational Competence Assessment and Certification Center (OCACC) of Addis Ababa, given its mandate to improve the competency level of TVET graduates and other candidates, thereby providing policy suggestions to enhance the performance of the system. In due course, trends, gaps, and prospects of OCACC were examined. Bearing in mind the above purpose, the research tried to answer the following basic questions:

- What major differences exist in the trend of Occupational Competence Assessment and Certification (OCAC) in terms of candidates' participation based on sector and occupation?
- How is OCACC related to TVET institutions and the industry, including production sectors and service providers?
- What policy gaps and challenges exist regarding the future perspective of the OCAC system?

2. Theoretical Framework

Theories and Concepts of Competency

The term competency is derived from the Latin word 'Competere', which means to be suitable. The concept was developed in Psychology, referring to individuals' ability to respond to demands placed on them by the environment. It is a philosophical view on how we come to understand or know, guided by the pragmatic philosophy of Richard Rorty (1991) and John Dewey's (1916) philosophy associated with cooperative education/training that occurs through practical hands-on experience. The concept of competence has emerged during the second half of the 20th century (Martin, 2007). However, occupational competence assessment in Ethiopia has been introduced since 2008.

Theoretically, according to Mulder (2017), the Outcome-Based or Competence-Based Education and Training (CBET) has been embraced by different theories, and disciplines including learning theories, theories of social constructivism and learner agency (Billett), action theory (Vonken), professional expertise (Evers & Van der Heijden), capabilities (Cairns & Malloch), interpersonal competence and competence acquisition (Argyris), the lack of potential assessment in promotion (Peter & Hull), performance (Gilbert), labor relations (Stokes), education quality improvement (Grant et al.), mathematics (Gelman & Green), cultural sciences (Popov et al.), management theory (Barabach), and competence in language and communication (Chomsky).

As there are different perspectives and approaches towards competency, it is difficult to propose a universally agreed-upon definition of competence. Azimov et al. (2009) describe competence as a combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities formed in learning a specific vocation, as well as the ability to perform any activity based on the acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to Rüschoff (2022), there is no mutual understanding of what constitutes competence. Despite the heterogeneous nature of the approaches, cognitive and performance dimensions of competence are widely used (Rüschoff, 2022).

For instance, Americans encourage behavioral aspects that stress the significance of individual characteristics and behavioral competence to develop better performance. In the UK, a functional approach to competency is practiced. It focuses on functional analysis and the development of occupational standards grounded on a unit of competencies reflecting real-life situations. The French multidimensional views deal with knowledge, functional and behavioral competencies, and the German holistic approach describes competency as the

capacity of a person to act holistically, incorporating not only content or subject knowledge and ability but also core and generic abilities (Stan & Jolanta, 2016; Getachew, 2014).

This study embraces a description by Mulder (2017) that discusses the concept of competence as a balanced perspective of integrated knowledge, attitude, and skills (KAS). This conceptualization is multidisciplinary and is not considered a one-size-fits-all practice and tries to consider the situation of occupational competency in the TVET system. As discussed in the above sections, the conceptualization of the competency approach needs to incorporate knowledge, skills, and attitudes. If training programs incline to one of these competency descriptions, undesired outcomes will be manifested.

The modular or competency-based education and training (CBET), unlike the conventional system, allows the trainee to be trained and certified in any one of the modules (jobs) he/she likes. The following comparison of the basic differences inherent in the two approaches helps to understand the merits of competency-based vocational training programs.

Table 1: Conventional versus Competency-based TVET Program (ICDR, 2000).

No.	Conventional TVET	CBET (Modular) TVET
1	Content-based	Competency-based
2	Time-based	Performance-based
3	Group paced	Individually paced
4	Delayed feedback	Immediate feedback
5	Textbook/Workbook	Modules and media materials
6	Limited field experience	Learning in the field
7	Lecturers, demonstration	Assistance of a resource person
8	General objective	Specific objectives
9	Subjective criteria	Objective criteria
10	Certificates or credentials indicate the successful completion of courses	Certificates or credentials practically demonstrate certain competencies

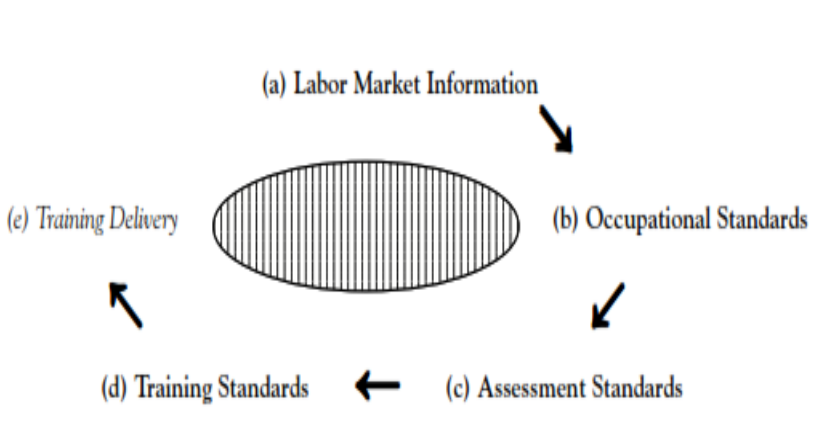
Linking the Occupational Standard (OS) and Training Standard (TS)

Competence is at the core of the VET system, encompassing the ability to use knowledge, skills, and attitudes to perform work activities and to realize expected results. As one of the approaches for preparing a competency-based curriculum, Occupational Standards (OS) and Training Standards (TS) are being developed using various formats to be employed by trainers, trainees, employers, chambers, and other stakeholders.

An “occupation” is a cluster of related jobs that share common occupational tasks of similar complexity and performance across various industrial/service sectors (Stan & Jolanta, 2016). Occupational standards are related to activities performed by a person for a certain occupation, but training standards are developed from the activities in occupational standards, and they include learning outcomes that ensure the requisite attitude, skill, and knowledge by individuals to enable them to perform an agreed task in an occupation (EU, 2011).

Occupational and training standards determine the skills, knowledge, and values required for individuals to perform competently in a workplace. Whereas occupational standards describe what a person does in a given job, training standards define how a person acquires those competencies (OECD, 2024). The conflicting nature of training and employment requirements and the content of OS dictates that the information for OS development should come from employers, training providers, Ministries of Labor and Education, chambers, and other stakeholders. Before undertaking the development of OS, stakeholders need labor market information (LMI) to provide “early warning”, identify priorities for standards development, and scrutinize changing skill demands in occupations, as shown in Figure 1 below (Fretwell, Lewis, & Deij, 2001).

Figure 1: Steps in the Development of Occupational and Training Standards

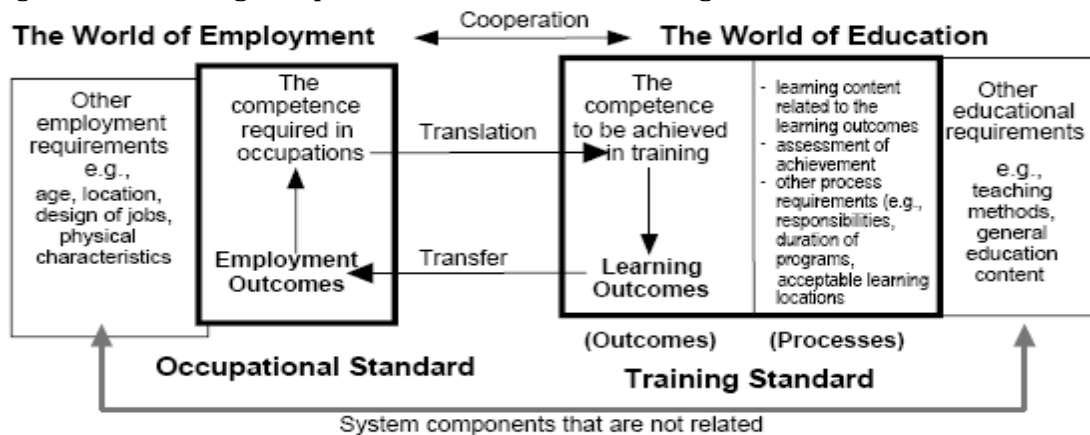


Source: Fretwell, Lewis, and Deij (2001)

According to Fretwell, Lewis, and Deij (2001), curriculum development is on the supply side of the occupational training equation, and at times, there could be a conflict of interest with the demand side, which incorporates occupational standards and assessments.

As illustrated in Figure 2, TS consists of outcomes and processes. Accordingly, the linkage is between TS outcomes and OS or employment outcomes. In a situation where this linkage is direct, employment requirements will determine the learning outcomes. However, the relationship often may have a reciprocal effect, where training outcomes could to a certain extent influence employment outcomes.

Figure 2: Translating Occupational Standards into Training Standards



Source: Mansfield & Schmidt (1999).

Training standards (TSs) need to be linked to occupational standards (OSs) if training is to be relevant to real-life situations. However, such linkages may not be present because training institutions often do not use existing standards. In the logic of *employment*, employers are interested in what people need to do, how they will do it, and how well they do it. They are interested in *outcomes*. In the logic of *education*, education professionals are interested in what people learn, how they will learn it, and how the quality and content of learning will be assessed. Education uses a language of input (syllabus, subject), process (teaching/learning methods), and assessment. TVET institutions, unlike employers, will guard their independence and ability to design training programs. They may consider occupational standards defined by employers as narrow in scope and an invasion of their area of responsibility (Fretwell, Lewis & Deij, 2001).

To this end, there is a need to reconcile supply-side issues (training) and demand-side aspects (employment) through work-based learning (WBL) and apprenticeship schemes. Methodologies for the development of occupational standards range from task-based to competence-based occupational analysis.

Occupational Competency Assessment (OCA)

Occupational standards are the basis for training, assessment, and certification that contribute to the improvement of the quality and relevance of TVET. The assessment consists of theoretical or practical content that will vary as it is compared with another individual (norm-referenced) or it may be based on criteria.

Drawing on diverse sources, MacKenzie and Polvere (2009) elaborated terminologies related to assessment in their TVET glossary. Hence, assessment is defined as “the sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how, skills & competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification,” while an assessor is “a person qualified to carry out assessment” (p. 61).

According to the OCA directive, certification is defined as “a formal process of recognizing that an individual is qualified in terms of the required knowledge, skills, and proper work attitudes based on the occupational standards set by industry” (MoE, 2010c, p.3). Certification refers to who the person is, and what he or she knows and can do, with implications for a quality culture of learning at TVET institutes. Competence is the criterion by which assessment and certification are made.

According to Selamawit (2014), occupational competency assessment is aimed at collecting evidence about candidates’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make judgments about whether an individual is competent or not to the expected workplace standard. The provision of occupational assessment can also serve as the foundation to hire, train, and develop employees. Competence tests are offered for graduates who completed TVET programs and other individuals by way of facilitating the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The occupational competency assessment and certification center is mandated to accredit assessors to conduct trade tests and license TVET institutions or companies as assessment centers for specific occupational qualification levels. It also provides reports and statistics on the results of assessment and, at the same time, maintains and manages the registry/database of workers/candidates assessed and to be certified (OCAAC, 2012).

Based on Cedefop (2015) & Fretwell, Lewis, & Deij (2001), information from assessed candidates or learners, and other stakeholders who participate in assessment can be used to provide:

- feedback to individual learners (e.g., about their competence development process, their strengths and weaknesses, career mobility, lifelong learning, & certification);
- feedback to TVET providers (e.g., regarding design & organization of certification, benchmarking, & other processes such as pedagogical approach, learning sites, etc.);
- feedback to employers (e.g., about hiring, promotion, & planning of internal training);
- feedback at system level (e.g., concerning learning-outcomes-based standards, requirements for trainers & assessors, and stakeholder involvement).

Concerning occupational competency assessment principles, validity, reliability, impartiality, and transparency were considered when developing assessment and certification policies. Moreover, eight key quality certification features were identified: (a) addressing certification in quality assurance mechanisms; (b) providing clear reference points for assessment; (c) provision of information to stakeholders; (d) selection, requirements, and training of assessors; (e) quality of assessment methods and procedures; (f) quality of verification and grading; (g) appeal procedures; (h) documentation, evaluation and monitoring of certification (Cedefop, 2015).

Occupational competency assessment rubrics and metrics are expected to be evidence-based and objective. Otherwise, OCA systems developed haphazardly make school-to-work transition decisions difficult.

Based on the works of Biemans, et al., (2009), challenges to execution of competence-based assessment derive from: a) the fact that practical assessment (as compared to classroom examination) is not only time-consuming

but also requires standardization of observation and preparations of reliable and valid assessment tools; and b) the dilemma of striking the balance between national standards for assessment and local need for flexibility. Studies from Ethiopia on OCA challenges revealed a lack of autonomy for CoC agencies, inadequate feedback for TVET institutions concerning assessment scores, a mismatch between OS and labor market needs, fairness in employing single verifiers, and a lack of internal and external assessors (Ashebir, Solomon, & Getachew, 2026).

Hence, occupational competency being the foundation for assessment and certification, it is vital for quality assurance and strengthening candidates' interest and job fit. In connection with this, occupational competency assessment (OCA) plays a key role in improving ties between TVET colleges and industries/companies.

3. Research Design and Method

Research Approach

This study aimed to investigate practices, gaps, and emerging trends in occupational competency, which is one of the policy debates in vocational training. To address this challenge, a descriptive survey method was used to reveal the existing gaps in the vocational training system of occupational assessment. The research design was qualitative with a mix of quantitative approaches. The quantitative aspect relies on the statistical information from OCACC and the TVET Agency. Qualitative design, including a review of experience, was selected to examine viewpoints and deeper insights on OCA. The approach and materials consulted were chosen depending on policy relevance and appropriateness to the context.

Sources of information and data collection instruments

The data for the study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Firsthand information is obtained through data gathering tools, including interviews. To complement this, the researcher employed secondary sources such as research done in similar areas, documents related to the CoC test at OCAC, relevant books, journal articles, reports, and a review of experiences of countries.

An interview was preferred to get in-depth information on the challenges and opportunities of OCA in the TVET system. Before undertaking the interview, the researcher tried to get the consent of the participants and explained the objectives of the study. The interview was conducted with leaders and experts of OCACC. Regarding qualitative data, individual interviews were transcribed for analysis and supplemented with documentary surveys. For the quantitative data, frequency counts and percentages were used in the Tables.

4. Findings from Current Practices

CoC Test Assessment Results

Table 2: Summary CoC Test Assessment by Year and Competent Trainees (Database of OCACC)

Year	Assessed Trainees	Competent Trainees	Competent Trainees (%)
2008	2113	220	10.41
2009	6589	1715	26.03
2010	23185	4184	18.05
2011	38309	5460	14.25
2012	40661	7751	19.06
2013	40636	17985	44.26
2014	72235	44569	61.70
2015	102553	62557	61.00
2016	114291	64313	56.27
2017	130259	80577	61.86
2018	161192	93916	58.26
2019	179574	95561	53.22
2020	144373	74548	51.64
2021	110295	62390	56.57
2022	170103	103312	60.73

2023	147515	79626	53.98
Total	1483883	798684	53.82

As shown in Table 2, there were some fluctuations and declining trends of assessment results in due course. However, the increasing trend is mostly exhibited. For instance, the number of candidates who were found to be competent on the CoC test has increased from 14.25% in 2011 to 60.73% in 2022 in Addis Ababa City Administration. In the beginning, both the number of assessed candidates and their rate of competency were found to be low. This might be due to awareness problems, a high dropout rate that shows enormous differences between the registered candidates and those assessed in the testing centers, and ill-preparation on the part of vocational training centers and companies. As of 2013, trainees' rate of competency somewhat increased, but in 2020, a decreasing rate was observed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021/22, a slight increase was shown in terms of competency rates.

Table 3: Aggregate Assessment by Sector and Gender (Database of OCACC)

Sector	Female		Male		Grand Total		%
	Assessed	Competent	Assessed	Competent	Assessed	Competent	
Agriculture	268	222	324	287	592	509	85.98
Automotive	286	175	5202	2914	5488	3089	56.29
Business	25673	3064 (11.9%)	13300	2148 (16.2%)	38973	5212	13.8
Business and Finance	13435	6481 (48.2%)	6973	3635 (52.13%)	20408	10116	49.57
Construction	5907	3165	27213	16187	33120	19352	58.43
Culture	438	184	542	352	980	536	54.69
Culture, Sport, & Tourism	3226	2952	1308	1154	4534	4106	90.56
Electricity/Electronics	1029	480	4662	1760	5691	2240	39.4
Electro Technology	3	2	5	5	8	7	87.50
Gender & Development	31	8	56	52	87	60	68.97
Health	32340	10665 (32.9%)	11308	4412 (39)	43648	15077	34.5
Hotel and Tourism	2656	1915 (72.1%)	886	639 (72.1%)	3542	2554	72.11
ICT	6844	1706	6326	2564	13170	4270	32.4
Labor and Social Affairs	65	48	63	43	128	91	71.09
Leather Technology	306	206	445	241	751	447	59.52
Manufacturing	267	134	3247	1373	3514	1507	42.9
Textile and Garment	2079	1161 (55.8%)	839	631 (75.2%)	2918	1792	61.41
Transport Operations	1	1			1	1	100
Grand Total	94854	32569	82699	38397	177553	70966	39.97

As indicated in Table 3, in traditionally female-dominated areas such as Business, Finance, Health, Hotel and Tourism, and Textile and Garment, candidates' competency was found to be similar in most areas to that of their male counterparts. Although male candidates rated slightly higher in some sectors, the gender gap was not high. It might also be surprising to see more male candidates in Gender and Development than females. In general, sectors like Business, Electricity/Electronics, Health, ICT, and Manufacturing were among the less performing areas that need attention. A very low level of participation was observed in the Transport Operations sector (only one female candidate took the test and proved herself to be competent).

Interview Results and Discussions

At a pilot level, OCAC started in September 2008. The number of candidates receiving the service increased from less than 4000 in the beginning to nearly 100,000 in 2015. Such a high level of participation and growing demand for occupational competency assessment or trade tests brought several opportunities and challenges to the OCAC system.

The findings from the interviews of officials and experts at OCACC are summarized as opportunities and challenges. Some of these findings were substantiated by the research work of other professionals and institutions in the area.

For the question or thematic area, *"What new experience (opportunities) came as a result of OCAC? Or what is the difference in the TVET system before and after institutionalizing OCAC?"*, interview participants from OCACC tried to elaborate benefits of introducing CoC test in TVET system concerning the impact on quality, enhancing cooperative training and partnerships, attempts to meet international standard, and accountability and opportunity for self-check, and future directions in the following manner:

Regarding the impact on quality, one of the officials stated:

In the previous TVET system, the focus was on the number of graduates, not on the quality of the training, trainees, and trainers. In the new OCAC scheme, those who are going to be assessed are not only trainees or graduates but also individual employees at small and medium-sized enterprises and TVET trainers. During the commencement of OCAC, the competency level of trainers was 37%. Recently, most trainers have become competent due to continuous assessment and professional development.

Furthermore, one of the experts at OCACC revealed:

In the previous TVET system, there was no skill gap assessment and the way the status of TVET institutes was checked was also weak. In the existing OCAC, OCACC will conduct the assessment to identify skill gaps and inform the results to the concerned candidates and TVET institutes, who send trainees for occupational assessment. Those candidates who do not yet qualify for the level will remain in the TVET institutes and retake the occupational test. Candidates outside of TVET institutes can also take the test several times until they become competent in certain units of competency. Those found to be competent after the test can continue to the next level of training or get a certificate for the level at which they are qualified. If TVET centers cannot qualify 62% of their trainees through the occupational test, they will not be accredited.

In support of the above findings, Habte (2015) mentioned that occupational competency assessment strengthens quality assurance mechanisms by providing guidelines for TVET institutes and companies/employers that set valid and reliable controls in place. Proper implementation of this system warrants that employees and trainees are trained, assessed, proven competent, and confidently discharge their responsibilities.

As to cooperative training initiatives, the official stressed:

Unlike the previous one-time traditional apprentice training that usually takes place towards the end of the training, cooperative training, which is undertaken for each unit of competence, has strengthened the ties between TVET institutes and the industry. The industry gradually started taking ownership by staying away from the previous trend of blame-shifting to TVET colleges/institutions. This joint training scheme enabled the industry and service sector to get a competent workforce. It also had repercussions on the production and service delivered. For TVET institutes, it is a good opportunity to expose their trainees to real-life situations. So, cooperative training became a win-win policy initiative for both TVET institutes and the industry.

Regarding the OCACC's partnership with TVET institutes and the industry, one of the experts explained:

Many sector organizations, TVET institutes, and individual candidates make use of the testing and certification services offered by OCACC. Since it deals with crosscutting and multidisciplinary occupations, it serves diverse groups. OCACC has close relationships with TVET institutes, concerned bureaus or agencies, and industries. Apart from these major stakeholders, the partners of OCACC include small and medium enterprises (SMEs), chambers of commerce, the Ethiopian Employers' Federation, cooperatives, etc.

Concerning attempts to meet international standards, the official stated, *'The dynamic nature of OCAC tools and practices in TVET institutes demands the system to change itself to stay competitive and cope with the international standard. The experience sharing and benchmarking activities will also facilitate the mobility of the labor force and thereby foster interchangeability'*.

In connection with accountability and opportunity for self-check, one of the officials portrayed, *'assessment result not only assists candidates to check their existing level of competency but also necessitates TVET institutes to reexamine their curriculum after identifying the skill gaps. Ultimately, it forces the institutes to possibly adjust or terminate the specific program if it is not mendable'*. According to the other expert, *'contrary to the previous assessment that takes too long until all portions of the TVET program are covered, level-based assessment enables candidates to be self-reliant and see their skill level within a short period of time upon completion of one unit of competency. The one-to-one nature of OCAC also closes the door for plagiarism'*.

On top of this, previous studies confirmed the existence of positive developments in terms of associating assessment with the learning outcomes or workplace requirements (i.e., national competency standards) along with the authenticity, cognitive complexity, directness, consistency, and transparency of assessment

(Atakilt, Worku, & Melesse, 2016). Also, the research by Habte (2015) pointed out that the assessment result or certificate by OCACC helped graduates to be competent in the market, strengthen the capability of assessment centers, differentiate weak and strong performances, and create opportunities for promotion, joining universities, and employability enhancement.

The last issue under opportunities, because of OCAC implementation, was related to policy direction. In this respect, the official at OCACC expounded that *'occupational standard is set by the TVET at the federal level, which is to be used by TVET institutes (to develop a training manual) and OCACC (measurement). Gradually, most of the assessments will be undertaken by the industry'*.

For the question or thematic area, *"What are the challenges in OCACC?"*, the OCAC system in Addis Ababa City Administration is not blameless. As one of the officials indicated, *'Although not like the beginning, there were some sorts of challenges attributed to attitude. Quality-related problems persist when implementing OCAC programs in some occupations. Making use of external assessors from companies or industries is one of the major limitations of the OCAC system'*.

Similarly, one of the experts revealed that *'evaluators' decision, in some cases, lacks consistency. There is also the difficulty of getting assessors or evaluators and incompatibility between the small number of assessors and trainees' demand for assessment. Because of this, assessment results were not issued on time'*. Besides, the same expert expressed, *'scarcity of high-level trainers at OCAC to conduct refresher training, develop assessment tools, and validate the tool forced the organization to rely on foreign expatriates for some occupations'*.

In summary, the challenges observed in OCACC were:

- Awareness problems in some sectors, industries, and even among certain leaders
- The assessment tool lacks contextualization.
- The gap in training resulted in failure and frustration during the CoC assessment.
- Employees and TVET trainees will not be successful without short-term training.
- High staff turnover exhibited.

The above findings on the challenges of OCAC implementation were consistent with studies by FTA and OCACC. As to FTA (2016), the main challenges in occupational assessment and certification were the implementation gap against principles, tools, and standard procedures of occupational competency assessment; preparing and certifying assessors; accrediting assessment centers; and conducting assessments. Regarding competence levels of assessed individuals, reasons for candidates' incompetence were inadequate attention to cooperative training, disparity among training tools and assessment tools, absence of sufficient facilities in the assessment centers, and lack of information for the candidates (OCACC, 2012).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The term competence is a foundation for assessment and certification in vocational training that plays a key role in the school-to-work transition. As components of competence, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, it bridges the world of education (training standard) with the world of employment (occupational standard). In this respect, in-school actors (supply side) need to create synergy with in-company actors (demand side).

Based on the findings, there were fluctuations and declining trends in occupational assessment results in the beginning (since 2008). However, as of 2013, trainees' rate of competency increased, but in 2019, a decreasing rate was observed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of candidates receiving the service increased from less than 3000 (10.41%) in the beginning to 170,000 (60.73%) in 2022. Such an elevated level of participation and growing demand for occupational competency assessment brought several opportunities and challenges to the OCAC system.

Interview participants from OCACC displayed opportunities for CoC or competency test concerning the impact on quality, enhancing cooperative training and partnerships, attempts to meet international standards, accountability, and opportunity for self-check and future directions. Conversely, the challenges observed in

OCACC were awareness problems in some sectors, including industries, and even among certain leaders; scarcity of qualified trainers and assessors; assessment tools lack contextualization; gaps in training resulted in failure and frustration during CoC assessment; and the existence of high staff turnover.

Accordingly, the implementation of OCACC in Addis Ababa is characterized by weak partnerships with industry, the absence of sufficient facilities in the assessment centers, a lack of information for the candidates, and the scarcity of qualified trainers and assessors. Hence, there is a need for a strategic win-win alliance between actors at TVET and the industry. It is also important to support the system with technology and focus on training assessors and company supervisors. with implications for policy and future research in the direction of the demand side.

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