



Universiteit Utrecht



EDUKANS

The Further Alignment of Life Skills Training at TVET's in Amhara region

*A qualitative study of trainees', graduates' and employers' perceptions, outcome expectations
and perceived outcomes of life skills training at TVET's in Amhara Region – Ethiopia*

'Don't give us fish, teach us how to fish'

*Master Youth, Education & Society
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Abstract

27% of the Ethiopian youth who live in rural areas are unemployed. The high youth unemployment rate can be explained by the lack of life- and hard skills youth need to access the labour market (Oviawe, Uwameiye, & Uddin, 2017). Edukans developed a Life Skills training (LST) for TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) trainees who follow a short-term training. The purpose of this research was to gain more insight in the perceptions, outcome expectations and perceived outcomes of the users. In total 10 graduates, 5 trainees and 3 employers were interviewed in Dessie, Ethiopia. The interviews were analysed by the qualitative method of Baarda, De Goede, & Teunissen (2013). The results indicate that all respondents agreed that the training duration is too short. Trainees and graduates consider LST as instructive and think it is important for their future perspective. For the further alignment of the training, it is recommended to extend the training duration, start with LST from elementary level and to include two topics: Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) for females only and entrepreneurship to stimulate self-employment in Ethiopia.

Keywords: youth unemployment, life skills training, Edukans, Ethiopia

Samenvatting

27% van de jongeren die op het platteland in Ethiopië wonen is werkloos. Het hoge werkloosheidspercentage kan verklaard worden door het gebrek aan leef- en technische vaardigheden die nodig zijn op de arbeidsmarkt (Oviawe, Uwameiye, & Uddin, 2017). Edukans heeft een levensvaardigheden training ontwikkeld voor studenten die een korte training op de TVET volgen om de vaardigheden te leren die zij nodig hebben op de arbeidsmarkt. Het doel van dit onderzoek was om meer inzicht te verkrijgen in de percepties, uitkomstverwachtingen en waargenomen uitkomsten van de gebruikers. In totaal zijn 10 afgestudeerden, 5 studenten en 3 werkgevers geïnterviewd in Dessie, Ethiopië. De interviews zijn geanalyseerd aan de hand van de kwalitatieve methode van Baarda, De Goede, & Teunissen (2013). De resultaten laten zien dat alle respondenten het met elkaar eens zijn dat de trainingsduur te kort is. De studenten en afgestudeerden beschouwen de training als leerzaam en vinden dat het belangrijk is voor hun toekomstperspectief. Voor de verdere doorontwikkeling van de training is het aanbevolen om de trainingsduur te verlengen, LST aan te bieden op basisscholen en om twee onderwerpen toe te voegen: seksuele gezondheid voor vrouwen en ondernemerschap om zelfstandig ondernemerschap te stimuleren.

Sleutelwoorden: jeugdwerkloosheid, levensvaardigheden training, Edukans, Ethiopia

The further alignment of life skills training in the Amhara region

Youth unemployment is a major issue worldwide. In this context, youth are (unemployed) individuals aged between 15-24 years (Kuhn, Milasi, & Yoon, 2018). In 2018, 13% of the youth worldwide were unemployed. In Ethiopia more than 27% of the youth who live in rural areas are unemployed. This is four times more when compared to Ethiopian adults (Bayrak & Tatli, 2018). The youth unemployment rate in urban areas in Ethiopia is lower: 20% (Wossen & Ayele, 2018).

As a consequence of the high youth unemployment rate, Ethiopia faces another problem: the migration outflow. Due to the lack of suitable job opportunities in rural and urban areas, high- and low educated Ethiopians consider migration to other countries. There are job opportunities in Ethiopia, however, Ethiopians who are low-educated and unemployed do not have the hard skills – the technical expertise and knowledge someone needs for a job – that are required to work at nearby companies (Robles, 2012). This can be a reason why Ethiopian youth migrate to urban areas or other countries (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2013).

Many NGO's and government initiatives funded by the EU are trying to combat the high unemployment rate in Ethiopia with the overall objective to reduce irregular migration in the Amhara region. Research done by Oviawe, Uwameiye & Uddin (2017) showed that the high youth unemployment rate can be explained by the lack of soft (also called life skills) and hard skills that youth need to access the labour market. One of the initiatives is to increase the number of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) facilities in Ethiopia. TVET facilitates skills development for the socio-economic- and technical development, and equips the trainees with skills, knowledge and attitudes for employment in a particular profession (Oviawe et al., 2017). It is believed that TVET's will increase job opportunities, improve living conditions and empower individuals (Kingombe, 2012).

However, research done by the Edukans Foundation (2016) showed a gap between vocational education and employment. This gap between the lack of life- and hard skills of the youth and the specific skills that are required to access the labour market and retain employment, often complicates their chances on the labour market (Bhurtel, 2015). Even though life skills are official included in the Ethiopian curriculum for education (ECFE), it is often seen as a lacking part since little attention is given to the implementation of the life skills in the lessons (Ministry of Education Ethiopia, 2009; ASP ETHIOPIA'S, 2010). Life skills development should be extended in order to combat the high youth unemployment rate in Ethiopia (Hagos Baraki & Van Kemenade, 2013). Life skills can be defined as: *“The combination of skills (what one has), knowledge (what one knows), and attitudes (what one*

believes and values) that constitute a set of competencies (what one can do) that enable youth to adapt to, function and thrive in society. It will help individuals to translate the knowledge, skills and attitudes into specific behaviours to cope with, navigate, or transform life's challenges'' (Kwauk, Braga, & Kim, 2018, p.1).

One specific strategy that is implemented by the NGO Edukans to combat unemployment and to improve the chances of youth on the labour market, is the provision of Life Skills training (LST) in TVET's. LST involves self-reflection, increases the trainees' self-awareness and stimulates responsible decision making. Other crucial personal skills such as emotion-, stress-, and conflict management as well as interpersonal relationship skills are covered in the training (Van Heerden, 2005). Life skills have been identified as a crucial aspect for successful matching of students to the job market (Bhurtel, 2015; Hagos Baraki et al., 2013). However, due to little research that is done, it is uncertain whether LST is well aligned with the needs of the target group. Research has been conducted about the effectiveness of LST (Brandt & Klein, 2016; Kirk & Winthrop, 2007; Singla et al., 2019), but not about the perceptions of trainees, graduates and employers towards the importance of LST.

Research focus

This research is carried out at Edukans, an organisation committed to improve education in developing countries (Edukans Foundation, 2016). The purpose of this research is to align LST further based on the needs of the target groups. This will be done by looking at the perceptions of trainees, graduates and employers towards the importance and usefulness of life skills and by looking at the outcome expectations of trainees and perceived outcomes of the graduates and employers of LST. The respondents will also be asked what could be improved about LST.

In total four research questions are formulated in this research:

- 1) What are the *trainees', graduates' and employers' perceptions of importance* towards life skills?
- 2) What are the *trainees' outcome expectations* of LST and what are their recommendations to further develop LST?
- 3) What are the *graduates' perceived outcomes* of LST and what are their recommendations to further develop LST?
- 4) What are the *employers' perceived outcomes* of LST and what are their recommendations to further develop LST?

The reason why the above-mentioned target groups will be involved in this research is because LST involve these target groups: trainees and graduates because they are attending or did attend LST. Employers are involved because they can explain what requirements and life skills are needed in order to be a good employee. It is expected that the perception of importance, outcome expectations and perceived outcomes of the target groups do correspond with each other.

The first research question will focus on the perceptions of importance of trainees, graduates and employers towards life skills. It is important to know how they define life skills and what their perception about the importance and usefulness of life skills is, in order to see whether the training is well aligned with the needs and expectations of the target groups. Several aspects of the ASE-model will be used to find out what the perceptions of importance of the graduates and trainees are towards life skills. This Dutch model assumes that intention and subsequent behaviour are determined by cognitive variables. The ASE-model was chosen because it explains the emergence of human behaviour, explains future behaviour and predicts motivational change (Mudde & De Vries, 1998). This is essential when looking at the perceptions of importance, outcome expectations and perceived outcomes of LST of the respondents. Further explanation of how this model is integrated within this research is written in the theoretical framework. Environmental factors and skills are also included in the ASE-model.

The second research question is about the outcome expectations of trainees who are still doing LST. Topics that will be discussed in the interviews will be LST and their future perspectives. These topics will also be discussed in the interviews with the graduates (research question 3) and the employers (research question 4), where the focus lies on the perceived outcomes, since they already have completed LST or deal with graduates. This research will not focus on the cultural sensitivity of LST because it is assumed this training is culturally sensitive since it is designed in collaboration with the partner organisation in Ethiopia (Edukans Foundation, 2016).

Perceptions of trainees, graduates and employers towards importance of life skills

The World Health Organization (WHO) (1999) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recognize the importance of life skills. The WHO Department of Mental Health developed five basic areas of life skills that are relevant for all cultures: (1) decision-making and problem-solving; (2) creative thinking and critical thinking; (3) communication and interpersonal skills; (4) self-awareness and empathy and (5) coping with emotions and

stress (World Health Organization, 1999). The above-mentioned topics are also used in the LST developed by Edukans (see Appendix for overview life skills lessons).

The first research question will focus on trainees', graduates' and employers' perceptions of importance towards LST. In order to understand and operationalise *perceptions*, the ASE-model will be used (Mudde & de Vries, 1998). The following determinants will be used: (1) attitude towards and knowledge about life skills; (2) perceived social influence and (3) perceived self-efficacy. Employers will only be included in the first determinant. These determinants together lead to intention and eventually to behaviour. Within this research, behaviour means the perceived or expected outcomes of LST of the employers, graduates and trainees. Skills (lack of) and environmental factors also have influence on the perceived or expected outcomes (Mudde & De Vries, 1998; Van Es, Nagelkerke, Colland, Scholten, & Bouter, 2001).

Attitude and knowledge. To be able to measure the attitude of trainees, graduates and employers, attitude will be divided into the following measurable characteristics: (1) description of life skills; (2) (fore)knowledge about life skills and (3) attitude towards importance and usefulness of life skills (Lechner, Kremers, & Meertens, 2010). It is expected that the respondents do have some knowledge about life skills because life skills are included in the ECFE. (ASP ETHIOPIA's, 2010; Ministry of Education Ethiopia, 2009). A second expectation is that the respondents have a positive attitude towards the importance and usefulness of life skills since LST is expanded to more regions, which would not be the case if Ethiopian students would not be positive about life skills (Edukans Foundation, 2016). It is also expected that trainees and students feel more confident since research done by Yadav & Iqbal (2009) showed that life skills training has impact on a individuals' self-esteem and self-confidence.

Perceived social influence. The concept of perceived social influence can be described by the direct or indirect influences that other people can have on individual behaviour. Normative beliefs, social support, social pressure and modelling are aspects of the above mentioned direct and indirect influences (Brug & Van Assema, 2016). In this research perceived social influence is based on: (1) social norms within the community; (2) social support/ pressure; (3) modelling and (4) gender roles. Since the youth unemployment rate in Ethiopia is high, it is expected that youth who are unemployed feel pressure to get employed and will migrate to search for work (Wossen & Ayele, 2018). This pressure may have a negative influence on their self-esteem (Buffel, Missinne, & Bracke, 2017). Nevertheless, it is also possible that youth do not feel the pressure to get employed, since their friends are

unemployed too, which in turn could demotivate them to get employed (Buffel et al., 2017). It is expected that trainees and graduates do recommend friends to take LST and that trainees and graduates do not think that males and females have equal chances on the labour market since Albanesi & Şahin (2018) claim there are gender differences on the labour market worldwide.

Perceived self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy can be described as the innate capability someone believes to possess (Brug & Van Assema, 2016; Van Es et al., 2001). Within this research the measurable characteristics are: (1) the expectations and beliefs of their own competence; (2) skills and (3) confidence. It is expected that trainees and graduates do not feel competent and confident enough to find and to retain a job before LST due to lack of (soft) skills (Oviawe et al., 2017). When trainees and graduates acquire the knowledge, develop life skills and change their attitude about work ethics by attending LST, it is expected that they feel more competent and confident in their job hunting (Bhurtel, 2015).

Environmental factors and skills

Research done by Bernard (1991) showed that community can be a protective factor for individuals' success. It is expected that a close community will be accommodating with the youth in the battle against youth unemployment by taking care of the youth and try to use their social network to get young people to work. An expected barrier will be the addiction to Khat, a plant that grows in East-Africa which has a similar boosting effect as amphetamine. Research done by Lifson et al. (2017) showed that 75% of the 242 respondents reported lifetime Khat use. 54% of the respondents started to use Khat before the age of 19 years. The Khat addiction might be a factor that influences the youth unemployment rate since many Khat addicts are not employed (Lifson et al., 2017). Due to the lack of (soft) skills it is possible that trainees and graduates are not confident enough to find and to retain a job (Oviawe et al., 2017). This might influence the perceived or expected outcomes.

Outcome expectations of trainees of LST

The second research question focuses on the *outcome expectations* of trainees, who are still following LST. Trainees will be asked about: (1) how they have experienced LST so far; (2) what they expect the outcomes will be; (3) whether they expect LST will help to get employed; (4) what themes they find most interesting; (5) their future perspective and (6) improvements of LST. An expectation is that trainees expect to get more knowledge about life skills and insight in their personal qualities since Robles (2012) claims these skills belong to the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. It is also expected that they think LST

will improve their life since LST is proven effectively (Brandt & Klein, 2016; Hagos Baraki & Van Kemenade, 2013).

Perceived outcomes of graduates of LST

Research question 3 focuses on the *perceived outcomes* of graduates. Graduates will be asked about: (1) how they experienced LST; (2) the outcomes of the training; (3) what grade they would give LST; (4) whether the training helped them to get employed; (5) what themes they find most interesting; (6) their future perspective and (7) improvements of LST. It is expected that at least half of the graduates who will be interviewed are employed. Research showed that LST on TVET's is effective (Brandt & Klein, 2016; Singla et al., 2019), but little research has been conducted about the impact of LST in TVET's on employability (Mohammed, 2017). Hopefully this research will give more insight about the impact of life skills on employability in Ethiopia.

Perceived outcomes of employers of LST

Research question 4 focuses on the *perceived outcomes* of employers. Employers were asked about: (1) whether they see a difference between those who took LST and those who did not; (2) whether they would recommend students to take this training and (3) improvements of LST. It is expected that employers do see differences in those who took LST and those who did not. It is expected that employees who did take LST are more punctual and are eager to work, because these aspects are included in the perception of employers about necessary skills, knowledge and characteristics which help graduates to be employable (Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011).

Recommendations

In research question 2, 3 and 4, trainees, graduates and employers will be asked what can be improved about LST. It is expected that the respondents think the duration of LST is too short, since most life skills programs last 4-6 years (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009). Based on this expectation it is also expected that they think it is better to start with LST in an earlier stage (e.g. elementary school). The last expectation is that employers want to make LST accessible for all employees within the company (Lowden et al., 2011).

Method

Type of research

This research has a qualitative approach. It is a systematic research into social phenomena in natural settings of the participants (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, & Varpio, 2015). These social phenomena include opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs and preferences of the participants (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016). In

order to help understand these social phenomena, interviews will be analysed by using the qualitative method of Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen (2013), and data will be observed (Boeije, 2010). This research can be considered as a field orientation since observations of the life skills lessons took place. To get a better understanding of the content of the interviews and to gain more background information, two managers have been interviewed. The interviews were held with the TVET manager in Dessie and with the Program Manager in Addis Abeba. These interviews were not analysed but used for background information and for better understanding of the context of this research.

Respondents

Most data was collected at the TVET Hope Enterprise. The trainees are following LST during the short-term training. A total of 10 graduates and 5 trainees who were following or did follow a short-term training on the TVET Hope Enterprises in Dessie were interviewed. This research used a purposive sample. The only prerequisite is that they were attending or did attend LST developed by Edukans. In total 3 employers were interviewed: two employers in Dessie and one in Kombolcha. While Dessie has many small-scale business, more large-scale factories are set in Kombolcha. Henceforth, employers in both scale-settings were interviewed to broaden knowledge about experiences in both settings. Since the research only contains 18 respondents, this research is not (statistically) generalizable for all the Ethiopians who are unemployed or are thinking about migration. Nonetheless, the results of this research can contribute to further developing LST to improve the quality of LST. This is the principle of substantive generalization (Boeije, 2016).

Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were held. Different topic lists, based on the ASE-model, were developed for each type of respondent to see whether their answers differ from each other or whether they correspond with each other. Examples of questions are: ‘What do you think about LST?’ (attitude); ‘Did you know what life skills were before LST?’ (knowledge); ‘Would you recommend your friends to take this training?’ (perceived social influence); ‘Is the occupation you want to do achievable in your eyes?’ (perceived self-efficacy); ‘Does LST change your future perspective? Why (not)? What else is needed?’ (environment); ‘What did you expect of LST? (outcome expectations); ‘What did you learn from LST?’ (perceived outcomes) and ‘What could be improved to make LST better?’ (recommendations). To contribute to the internal validity, a clear introduction was given at the beginning of the interview and the intention of the interview was shared with the respondents too.

Procedure

Data was collected in a period of three weeks. First, the semi-structured interviews with trainees were held and secondly observations for field orientation took place. A translator was needed since the researcher does not speak Amharic, the local language. Before the interviews were executed the respondents gave verbal permission to use their answers for research purpose only and to record the interview by using the app Voice Recorder. The same applied for the observations: trainees were asked for their permission for the researcher to be present in the classroom during LST (Faden & Beauchamp, 1986). The duration of the interviews was on average 20 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, so the answers are verifiable. This will increase the reliability of this research (Baarda et al., 2013). The different conversation techniques that have been applied, contributed to the internal validity. The different techniques that were used were: summarise answers given by respondents, paraphrase and ask for further explanation (Baarda et al., 2013).

Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded by the qualitative method of Baarda et al. (2013). Inductive coding techniques were used, and the statements of respondents were systematic compared. This eventually led to the development of core labels, who will be described in the results. To guarantee the internal validity within this research, the formulated labels will stay as close as possible to the original words used by the respondents (Baarda, 2014; Evers, 2015). Codes has been placed behind each label, in order to control the analysis and to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents. This contributes to the validity and reliability of the data (Baar & Wubbels, 2013).

Results

This section describes the main findings for each research question. The core labels that were emerged from the qualitative analysis are in italic and citations of the respondents stand between quotation marks. Different abbreviations will be used to indicate the target groups: [EM] is employers (N = 3), [GR] is graduates (N = 10) and [TR] are the trainees (N = 5). Despite the small number of interviews, the number of respondents is sometimes mentioned to show the prevalence of the mentioned aspects.

Perceptions of trainees, graduates and employers towards importance of life skills

The determinants used to operationalise perceptions were: (1) attitude towards and knowledge about life skills; (2) perceived social influence and (3) perceived self-efficacy.

Attitude and knowledge. Trainees and graduates defined life skills as a tool to *identify their strengths and weaknesses, that life skills are about interaction and*

communication with others. Life skills are about discipline and how to guide yourself in the right track. It will help to avoid stress and to solve problems. 'Life skill is important use for me. I make my life stable. I avoid stress and also to improve my life in a better way. That is a life skill.' [GR 1] and: *'Life skill training is useful for me because I identified the weakness of myself and know what is my strengths.'* [GR 7] All trainees and graduates *did not have knowledge about life skills* before they attended this training. Both trainees and graduates think *life skills are important*: *'Life skills are important because it helps how to change ourselves into independent.'* [GR 8] Employers define life skills as *long-lasting* and they feel *life skills are very important, especially for females*:

'Many workers are female in this factory. It is more important for them to have life skills training. Because they have feelings. How to protect themselves for life. [EM 3] According to employers, *LST is important and useful in combatting youth migration, it helps to overcome challenges and creates good communication.* Trainees, graduates and employers agree that life skills are important, that it helps in combatting challenges and that it improves communication in general. What differs in the description of life skills is that life skills are, according to employers, especially important for females.

Perceived social influence. Most graduates and trainees would *recommend their friends to take LST* to improve communication skills, to improve self-confidence, to kick-off Khat and to change their (work) attitudes. *'Most of them are not doing work because of that addiction.* [GR 1] and: *'Some of them are addicted, no self-confidence. Because of this there are many friends I would recommend this training.'* [GR 4] Most respondents are *sharing knowledge with others* with the aim to change their friends' ideas and attitudes. According to the respondents is *sharing life experiences* an instructive manner to learn from each other: *'Because when you share experience in life, I know more. When my friends experience things.'* [TR 4] The core labels about the sex-related job opportunities were inconsistent. Some of the respondents said that *males and females do have same job-opportunity*. Other respondents contradicted this by saying that there is *more job-opportunity for females*, or *more job-opportunity for males*. Some graduates *migrated to Arabic countries to work* in the household. One respondents shared their story: *'I migrated to Kuwait to work in households. I send back the money to my family. I worked for four years here. [...] I came back to Ethiopia because it was not comfortable to stay in Kuwait.'* [GR 4]

Perceived self-efficacy. The core labels were *life skills will make me feel hopeful for future* and *it will help me to get a job because I can explain myself to employers*. The respondents said they feel more hopeful for the future now with the prospect of having

knowledge about life skills: ‘Most of the people in outside, if they did not complete their grade, they are hopeless. But now I trained and will get some knowledge about life skills training about hopefulness for the future.’ [TR 1] Trainees suspect that life skills will help to get employed because they can explain themselves better to employers about their qualities, hard- and soft skills and previous working experience.

Outcome expectations of trainees of LST

Trainees consider *LST as important and useful*. They did expect to learn about ‘*Who am I*’, *self-confidence, decision-making, how to avoid stress, how to avoid problems, how to communicate with others and to gain more knowledge for the future*: ‘For the future I expect from this training how to communicate with my friends and family and society. Even in the companies. How to communicate. How to share ideas. I expect this.’ [TR 4] Trainees have been asked if they think *LST might increase the chance of employability*: ‘LST, it is important. How to communicate with the company owners or the interviewer. So, this is important to get a job.’ [TR 4] Some respondents said they expect that *LST will change and improve their lives*, and that it *will help them in preventing themselves of migration and addiction*. The most interesting themes in general were *gender equality, goals and visions and how to identify yourself*: ‘About vision. About who am I. This is also an interesting part. How to identify myself.’ [TR 1] Some trainees want to *work for a company*, and some want to *be self-employed* so they can *create more job opportunities for others*: ‘After three or two years I want to be self-employed. [...] and to create job opportunity for others. This is my future plan.’ [TR 1] The motives of trainees who want to work for companies are to *get more experience and to save money* for the future. Most of trainees also want to *create their own family* in ten years’ time. Trainees felt the duration of LST was too short: ‘I want to longer the time. The duration. Four hours per week instead of two.’ [TR 2] One trainee felt it was difficult to share what about LST could be improved, since he only participated in one life skills lesson.

Perceived outcomes of graduates of LST

Graduates shared that they feel *LST is instructive, it changed their attitude and made responsible decisions* after they took LST:

‘After the training I expected that also, to improve that attitude, after the training I also makes it strong thinking about others. [...] I changed the attitudes, in working areas or within communication or in life environment, my families.’ [GR 1]

They *developed their vision, made more income and prevented themselves from addiction*:

‘Avoiding from unwanted places. Unwanted places mean it is not important for my life. From addiction like that. [...] Because of this I am confident about the future.’ [GR 1] Another

outcome was that *LST helps to live life in the good way and help to pass challenges in life*: ‘There is a challenge in life. But how to pass that challenge I learn from life skill training.’ [GR 2] Graduates also shared LST taught them *how to communicate and how to help each other*. Graduates claim that they did develop *self-confidence and a better self-esteem* after they completed LST. One girl was dependent on crutches to move herself from place to place.

‘Before the life skill training, I was disabled. But now after life skill training, I have a self confidence in the normal persons. Things are similar [...] ‘I have a problem with my legs but now I feel confident.’[...] It is not an obstacle to do anything. Because of life skill trainings.’

Graduates shared how their life was before they took LST. Some of them were *doing the household, take care of children or worked in daily labour*. They described in their own words that they had *no visions about future, no self-confidence and were not able to communicate with others*. Graduates have been asked to give LST a grade. Nine graduates gave LST a 10, only one gave the training a 5: ‘Because of the duration (too short). Because of the time. Much more knowledge. Because of that I give it a 5.’ [GR 5] A graduate explained why he thinks LST is worth a 10: ‘Because it is important for me. Because for my life. I listed why I think it is important. To avoid stress, to change attitude, positive thinking and about information. Because of that, I give a ten.’ [GR 1] The graduates are convinced that LST will help to get a job because they learned *how to explain their skills and attitudes towards employers*. The interviews took place three months after their graduation. At that moment, 8 out of 10 graduates were unemployed:

‘But much more of the sewing companies are found in Kombolcha. 30 km from Dessie. Small enterprise. But huge companies are found in Kombolcha. Because of that I am unemployed now. I don’t want to go to there. In Kombolcha there is much more job opportunity.’

One graduate works in the work field according to his short-term training, the other graduate works as a cleaner. The *most interesting themes*, according to the graduates, were *communication, self-confidence and gender equality*. Most interesting themes in finding a job were *avoiding stress, communication and bargaining, selling and explaining yourself to employers*. Four graduates wanted to be *self-employed* in the future: ‘I want to make my income by my own, self-employment within business.’ [GR 7] The other six want to work for a company. They want to increase income and find a job related to the short-term training they completed. The graduates also want to *create their own family in the future and support*

and improve themselves, their family and their children. Some said that they want to improve their communication in the future, their self-confidence and they want to change themselves. The difference between the outcome expectations of trainees and the perceived outcomes of graduates is that graduates say LST changed their attitude and that they have developed self-confidence and a better self-esteem. Trainees did not mention these two outcomes as expectations.

Perceived outcomes of employers of LST

Employers can see a clear difference between those who followed LST and those who did not. *Those who took LST have good motivation, are self-confident, hopeful, punctual, vibrant, assertive and seen as a role model. The employability of those who took LST will be high because they have good working culture and employers are more interested in employing them.* According to employers, the *attitude of the young generation and the working culture of the Ethiopians* is the cause for the high youth unemployment rate in Ethiopia. Besides that, gender equality plays a role too. *Ethiopian females are not free to discuss about things like sexuality.* The biggest difference between the perceived outcomes of graduates and employers is the topic about Ethiopian females in relation to sexuality and the attitude-problem of the young generation. This was not mentioned by the perceived outcomes of graduates.

Recommendations

In research question 2,3 and 4 the respondents were asked what can be improved about the training. These results will be combined and described in this section.

Extend training duration and start LST at elementary school. According to trainees and graduates LST is too short. They recommend doubling the number of hours of training in order to get more knowledge: ‘Duration is not enough. It is very short. [...] ‘If I get more knowledge, more detailed knowledge, I will be able to share it with my friends.’ [GR 3] Only two graduates felt the duration was enough as it is now. Another recommendation was to start with LST from grade 1 (elementary school).

Entrepreneurship and SRH must be included in LST. The employers recommend including entrepreneurship as a topic:

‘In the life skill training the concept of entrepreneurship must be included [...] they will be creative to start their own business.’ [EM 2]

Behavioural aspects should be emphasized more and SRH (Sexual Reproductive Health) for woman should be included in LST:

LST must be accessible for all employees. Two employers said that all company workers should attend LST. Based on this, they recommend developing LST for employees.

Don't give us fish, but teach us how fish. Finally, *Ethiopia needs knowledge and mindset from the West:*

'We need not only aid from the Westerns, we need a knowledge transfer from the Western people. [...] Knowledge about Life skills training, entrepreneurship knowledge. So, we don't only need the grade, but the mindset.' [...] 'Don't give us a fish but teach us how to fish.' [EM 3]

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to align the training further based on the needs of the target groups. This was done by gaining more insight in the perceptions of trainees, graduates and employers towards the importance and usefulness of life skills and by looking at the outcome expectations of trainees and perceived outcomes of the graduates and employers of LST.

Perceptions of trainees, graduates and employers towards importance of life skills

The research question was: what are the *trainees' and graduates' and employers' perceptions of importance* towards life skills?

Attitude and knowledge. It was expected that the respondents did have knowledge about life skills, since life skills are included in the curriculum. This was not the case. An alternative explanation for this is that the ECFE had to deal with some criticism: the syllabuses would contain too much to be taught in the available time, the content of some subjects would be too difficult for the grades and the content would not be sufficiently relevant to the lives and needs of students (Ministry of Education Ethiopia, 2009). The results do not support this expectation since all trainees and graduates said they did not know what life skills were until they attended LST. A possible explanation is that the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia added life skills to the curriculum of kindergarten - grade 12 after the graduates completed grade 12. Documents about the curriculum of Ethiopia were found from the year 2009 and 2010, when graduates already completed high school.

The second expectation was that trainees, graduates and employers had a positive attitude towards the importance and usefulness of life skills and that trainees would develop self-confidence and graduates would have developed self-confidence. The results are in line with the expectations: most trainees, graduates and employers agreed that life skills are important in life. Kar (2011) recognized in his research the importance of life skills in adult life too. According to Yadav & Iqbal (2009) life skills training has impact on a individuals'

self-esteem and self-confidence. This is in line with the results. There were no remarkable differences between answers given by trainees or graduates.

Perceived social influence. The first expectation was that youth would feel pressure to get employed and will migrate to search for work. As shown in the results, some respondents did migrate to search for work. Research showed that this pressure may have a negative influence on their self-esteem (Buffel et al., 2017), but this research has been unable to demonstrate that. There was a speculation that youth would not feel pressure to get employed because friends of them are unemployed too, which in turn could demotivate them to get employed (Buffel et al., 2017). It is assumed that this is the case within this research too, because the respondents did not give a specific answer to this. They said due to political issues, addiction and migration they and their friends are unemployed.

The respondents did recommend their friends to follow LST, which is in line with the earlier-mentioned expectation. Trainees and graduates think it can help their friends to change their attitudes. Concerning equal chances for males and females on the labour market, the answers were inconsistent. Graduates felt there was a difference between sexes, something the trainees did not mention. Research done by Denu, Tekeste, & Van Der Deijl (2005) showed that females face higher level of unemployment compared to males. According to Albanesi & Şahin (2018), gender differences in the labour market can be explained by the skill composition.

Perceived self-efficacy. It was expected that trainees and students would feel more hopeful about their future perspective. Trainees and graduates said they would be more hopeful for the future because they have life- and hard skills that will help them get employed. This is in line with research done by Oviawe et al. (2017) who claim that trainees and graduates do not feel competent enough to find and to retain a job due to lack of (soft) skills. They were also convinced that life skills will help them to get employed. Based on this data it is assumed the trainees and graduates feel more competent and confident in their job hunting (Bhurtel, 2015). No remarkable differences between trainees and graduates the given answers.

Outcome expectations of trainees of LST

Trainees were asked about their outcome expectations of LST. It was expected that trainees expect to get more knowledge about life skills and that they would learn more about their personal qualities (Robles, 2012). The results confirm these expectations. The second expectation has also been confirmed by the results. Trainees did expect that LST will change or improve their life. This expectation was literally a core label that was emerged from the

analysis. It will improve life because it will help in preventing from migration and addiction and it will help to get employed. Research done by Botvin, & Kantor (2000) showed that life skills training is helpful in preventing from addiction too.

Perceived outcomes of graduates of LST

The research question that was formulated was: what are the *graduates' perceived outcomes* of LST and what are their recommendations to further develop LST? Graduates told that LST has changed their life and that they adjusted their attitude. They were remarkable positive about their future perspective with knowledge they gained in LST. Graduates were more confident and were convinced it will help them to get employed and to make their life stable.

The second expectation was that at least half of the graduates who were interviewed, were employed. This expectation is not achieved since only two graduates were employed at the moment the interviews took place. Poor economic performance might be an explanation for the unemployed graduates. This is a major problem for developing countries in particular. When the economic growth is low, the economic activity and investments are low too. This results in that overall job creation entails low (Kellow, Ayele, & Yusuf, 2010). Another possible explanation for this could be the mindset the Ethiopian youth have. Research showed that the majority of the youth have the mindset of a job-seeker instead of a job-creator. When the Ethiopian youth would have gained more knowledge about entrepreneurship during LST, it is more likely they would have started their own business after graduation and thus are employed (Ayalew & Zeleke, 2018).

Perceived outcomes LST of employers

The final research question focused on the perceived outcomes of employers. It was expected that employers do see differences in those who took LST and those who did not. The results confirm these expectations: employers claimed they could see differences in employers who took LST and those who did not. The difference they witnessed were punctually, motivation, tolerance and conflict resolution mechanisms. The employees who did follow LST had also good work ethics, were assertive and motivated to work. This is in line with research done by Lowden et al. (2011) where they describe the perceptions of employers about necessary skills, knowledge and characteristics which help graduates to be employed.

Environmental factors

It was expected that community of the respondents would be accommodating with the youth in the battle against youth unemployment. This research has been unable to demonstrate

that since community support and involvement was not the focus during the interviews. This might be an implication for further research.

The addiction to Khat was expected to be a barrier (Lifson et al., 2017). This turned out to be the case: many respondents told the researcher about their friends being addicted to Khat and use this as a reason for them to not be employed. As mentioned earlier, Botvin & Kantor (2000) showed that life skills training is helpful in preventing from addiction too. Due to the lack of (soft) skills trainees and graduates did not feel competent and confident enough (Oviawe et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Trainees, graduates and employers felt LST is useful and important in life. They did not have knowledge about life skills before they attended LST. They would recommend their friends to take LST too because they think LST is instructive. In addition, they think males and females do have equal chances on the labour market. They are more hopeful for their future due to their life skills and they think it will help them to get employed. Trainees expected to gain more knowledge about life skills for the future and they expected that LST will change and improve their lives, and that it will help them in preventing themselves of addiction and migration. The perceived outcomes of graduates were that they changed their attitude and made responsible decisions. LST helped them to live life in the good way and to help pass challenges. They developed self-confidence and a better self-esteem after completing LST. Eight out of ten graduates were unemployed at the moment the interviews took place. For the future they want to create their own family and support their family and children. Employers claimed they can see a clear difference between those who did follow LST and those who did not. They can see differences in motivation, self-confidence, punctuality, assertiveness and being vibrant.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be considered when interpreting the research results. First, there is a possibility that the trainees and graduates gave socially desirable answers in the interview. The first five interviews were translated by the dean of the TVET, so to reduce this possibility, another translator was asked to translate. Other manners that were used to reduce the possibility of socially desirable answers were conducting the interviews in a room where respondents felt comfortable (in a classroom setting) and by assuring the respondents that the answers they would give are handled with respect and that their answers will be used for research purpose only (Boeije, 2010). The researcher also introduced herself before every interview where she told the respondents the purpose of her research and that she was not

judgmental. For future research it is recommended to ask an unprejudiced translator to translate to reduce the chance of socially desirable answers (Ghazala, 2002). Another recommendation for future research is to do a longitudinal research instead of cross-sectional research to discover certain development or change (Boeije, 2016).

This research can be distinguished from performed research since this research was qualitative of nature instead of quantitative. Most research that has been conducted is quantitative of nature. This research focused on the perception of the target groups towards LST, which is different from conducted research too, where the emphasis was placed on the effectiveness of LST only. This may be helpful to gain insight in how the respondents experienced the training and what they think could be improved about LST.

Implications

The purpose of this research was to align LST further based of the needs and recommendations of the target groups. This purpose has been achieved since the respondents gave a clear view about how they experienced LST and gave recommendations to further align LST. These implications can be applied to partner organisations and life skills interventions in general. The recommendations that were mentioned are:

Include entrepreneurship in LST. Employers recommended to include entrepreneurship in LST. According Kellow et al. (2010) most people in Ethiopia are motivated to start their own company, but they lack capacity to sustain or cope with the related challenges. Many trainees and graduates shared they want to be self-employed in the future so including this topic will meet their needs. The government should create policies that supports entrepreneurship to stimulate graduates to become young entrepreneurs (Mason & Brown, 2013).

SRH for females only must be included in LST. Employers recommended to include this topic in LST. Due to the fact that Ethiopian youth are affected with the burden of sexual and reproductive health issues, communication about sexuality is very important (Yesus & Fantahun, 2010). Research done by Melaku, Berhane, Kinsman & Reda (2014) showed that discuss sexual reproductive health issues with family and peers does have a positive effect on contraceptive awareness of students. Therefore, it is important to enlarge the SRH knowledge of students (Yesus & Fantahun, 2010).

Extend training duration. Trainees and graduates recommended to extend the training duration. At this moment, LST does exists out of 14 lessons (for overview of life skill lessons see Appendix). Trainees and graduates recommended to double the duration of the

training because they feel the amount of knowledge is being transferred in a short period of time.

Start LST at elementary school. Graduates and employers recommended to start with LST at elementary school. Children will learn more quickly than adults do due to their brain plasticity (Johnston, 2009). Because of this, it is better to expose children at a younger age to life skills. It is recommended to perform a life skills lesson once a week within the current curriculum that is adapted to the age category.

Sharing knowledge and life experiences. This recommendation is devised by the researcher herself. The respondents told in the interviews they considered sharing life experiences with each other is valuable. They gave examples about how their perspective on migration changed when a returnee shared his migration story with the students. Research done by Delle Fave & Bassi (2009) showed that sharing life experiences is an effective manner to make students, who think about migration, reconsider their motives to migrate. Because of this it is recommended to invite a returnee in the training to share his migration story.

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Appendix

Overview lessons of Life Skills Training

Title Lesson	Life skill	Knowledge	Goal
1 Who Am I?	Self - awareness	Students know the difference between technical skills and life skills	I know who I am and what my motivation is to be here
2 Communication	Relationship skills		I know how to communicate effectively, using listening skills and body language
3 My emotions and me	Self-awareness	Students understand the influence of emotions on behaviour and actions	I can recognize my own emotions
4 Managing emotions	Self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students understand the influence of emotions on behaviour and actions Students know strategies to cope with stress 	I know how to handle different emotions
5 Giving and receiving feedback	Social awareness	Students know that different contexts require different communication styles	I know how to give and receive feedback
6 Problem solvers	Responsible decision making		I know how to come up with strategies to solve conflicts
7 Team work	Relationship skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students understand the benefits of effective teamwork for the employee and the employer Students identify characteristics of effective teams 	I know how to be a good member of a team
8 Gender roles	Social awareness & self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students understand the difference between biological sex and gender 	I know what gender roles are and how they influence power relations

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students understand how culturally prescribed gender roles influences our role and opportunities as individuals • Students understand that culturally defined gender roles can be questioned and changed. 	
9 Sexual and gender based violence	Social awareness & self management	Students understand the meaning of 'unwanted sexual acts'	I know what 'unwanted sexual acts' are and how to say 'NO!' to them
10 Pregnancy for girls and boys	Social awareness & self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students know at least three signs of pregnancy • Students know that one-time sex can lead to pregnancy • Students know the menstruation cycle • Students know which contraceptives are available, and that condoms provide double protection: against pregnancy/ AND against HIV and STD'S 	I know more about pregnancy and I am aware of the steps I can take if I/someone get(s) pregnant.
11 Making decisions	Responsible decision making		I know how to make decisions, based on responsible thinking
12 Networking	Relationship skills	Students know how and where to look for a job in an organised manner	I know how to do networking
13 Job interview	Relationship skills & self-I	Students understand self-esteem, attitude, self-confidence and how they relate to job success.	I am well-prepared to do a job interview
14 Evaluation of the module	Responsible decision making		I know the importance of life skills and I know which life skill I want to use