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Contribution of Vocational Training to Graduates' Initiation of Self-Employment Activities in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract: **This research explored the role of vocational training in the Initiation of self-employment activities by graduates in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. Under pragmatic research philosophy, a convergent mixed-methods design was adopted. The Theory of Planned Behaviour informed the study and describes the effects of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on the intentions and behavior of individuals. The researchers concentrated on the role of technical expertise, entrepreneurship education, practical training, and business management expertise gained in vocational training in the initiation of self-employment activities by graduates. It took place in a few vocational training institutions within the Morogoro Municipality in Tanzania. The data were gathered using questionnaires, interviews with vocational trainers, coordinators, observations at the workplace, open-ended questionnaire responses, and analysis of documents of VETA curricula. The research was conducted with a group of 113 people, including 97 vocational graduates, 13 trainers, and 3 coordinators. Quantitative data were analysed with descriptive statistics and qualitative data were analysed using themes. The results indicated that vocational training helped the graduates to start their own business by training them on technical skills to manufacture goods and offering services to customers. Entrepreneurship education facilitated the knowledge of the graduates in setting up their own economic operations, whilst practical training helped them carry out tasks to earn remunerations to customers. Nonetheless, not all graduates had the same application of business management skills. The study concluded that vocational training contributed to graduates' initiation of self-employment through the acquisition of occupational skills, practical experience, and entrepreneurship knowledge. The study recommended strengthening practical business management training to enhance graduates' ability to apply their acquired competencies when establishing and managing their own self-employment activities.**

Keywords: **Vocational training, self-employment, technical skills, entrepreneurship education, business management, vocational graduates.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocational training equips youths with practical skills and occupational knowledge that can be used to earn a living through employment or self-employment. Through training in trades such as tailoring, welding, carpentry, electrical installation and motor vehicle repair, graduates can acquire the skills needed to produce goods and provide services to customers. For those who wish to establish their own businesses, these competencies can provide a starting point for generating income. However, acquiring technical skills does not automatically mean that graduates will initiate self-employment activities. They also need to apply their skills to meet customers' needs, organise their work, manage business resources and make decisions

about their activities. The contribution of vocational training should therefore be examined in relation to how graduates use the knowledge and competencies acquired during training to start their own economic activities

Government have introduced reforms to strengthen vocational education and training and make it more responsive to employment and economic needs. These reforms have increasingly emphasised practical learning occupational competencies and the connection between training and the world of work. For example, India introduced its National Education Policy in 2020, which called for vocational education to be integrated into mainstream education and emphasised practical exposure through activities such as internships. In Kenya the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Act of 2020, which established the Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training to regulate, promote and coordinate skills development. These reforms demonstrate the efforts made by different countries to strengthen vocational training and improve its relevance to learners' future work.

Globally and across Africa, researchers have examined vocational training in relation to self-employment and entrepreneurial preparation. In India, Biaragya (2021) found that formal vocational training was associated with higher earnings among self-employed individuals in rural areas. In Ghana, Padi et al. (2022) examined entrepreneurship education among female students in technical and vocational institutions and found that the course was related to students' intentions to become entrepreneurs, particularly when social support was considered. In Nigeria, Adeniyi et al. (2022) investigated entrepreneurial self-efficacy and readiness among students completing TVET programmes. These studies provide insight into the relationship between vocational education, entrepreneurial preparation and self-employment. Nevertheless, the intentions and willingness of students to become entrepreneurs do not always imply that they already started their own business. Of significance is then the review on how the graduates put the skills and knowledge that they have received during training into practice when starting self-employment activities.

Vocational training in Tanzania has been facilitated by policies and legislations that aim at enhancing skills development. The Vocational Education and Training Act of 1994 had created the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA), which provided the country with an institutional structure to coordinate, regulate and facilitate vocational training. Demand-responsive skills development, such as vocational training, entrepreneurship and employability skills development, was further highlighted in the National Skills Development Strategy of 2016-2022. These programs demonstrate the value attaching to the imparting of skills to be applied by Tanzanians in other sectors of the economy. However, the role that training plays in self-employment is partly based on the application of competencies by graduates after their courses.

Research has been done in Tanzania to investigate various facets of the linkage between vocational training and self-employment. A study that was conducted by Mwakilema (2021) on the vocational and non-vocational graduates in Arusha and Dar es Salaem revealed that among the factors that were significantly linked to self-employment were training in entrepreneurship and access to capital. Raphael and Kipene (2022) investigated the entrepreneurial capabilities of the technical graduates and discovered that technical entrepreneurial skills had a positive and significant correlation with self-employment. Their results underscore the applicability of the skills that graduates gain and utilize and use in seeking their own economic actions. Ramadhani and Suyaan (2025) also investigated the education-to-self employment transition among the TVET graduates in the transportation and leather processing programmes and found that there are problems of funding, marketing and entrepreneurial skills. These studies give valuable evidence on the experience of graduates, though more consideration of the application of certain competencies gained in the vocational training can be useful to clarify the role of training in triggering self-employment activities.

Morogoro Municipality is a pertinent environment in which this issue can be analyzed. In their study, Musuma et al. (2026) explored how technical and vocational education and training can foster youth self-employment in the municipality. Their research took into account the role of practical sessions, field training and entrepreneurship skills in equipping the young people to be self employed. This study offers a valuable starting point to more research especially on how graduates make use of certain competencies gained during training in the beginning of their own activities. Technical skills can assist in producing goods and services and practical training can equip graduates to deliver services to the customers. Knowledge about entrepreneurship and business management skills can also assist them in organising their work and controlling the activities that they set up. Taking a look at these competencies will allow a better insight into the role of vocational training in the initiation of self-employment by graduates.

Even though the issues of vocational training and self-employment in Tanzania, including Morogoro Municipality have been studied before, additional analysis of how graduates implement specific skills gained in the training can give a clearer

picture of this correlation. The present study therefore focused on the contribution of technical skills, practical competencies, entrepreneurship knowledge and business management skills to graduates' initiation of self-employment activities. It drew on information from vocational graduates, trainers and coordinators to examine the contribution of training from different perspectives.

Therefore, this study examined the contribution of vocational training to graduates' initiation of self-employment activities in Morogoro Municipality Tanzania.

Research Objective

(i) To assess the contribution of vocational training to graduates' initiation of self-employment activities in Morogoro Municipality

Research Question

(i) To what extent does vocational training contribute to graduates' initiation of self-employment activities in Morogoro Municipality?

2. THEORETICAL FRAEWORK

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) was used to guide the study. The theory describes the effects of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control on the intention of an individual to perform a specific behaviour. Attitudes are the way people perceive a behaviour, subjective norms are about the impact that people around them have and perceived behavioural control is about their belief in their capability to do specific activity.

This paper applied the theory in studying the role of vocational training in the initiation of self-employment in Morogoro Municipality among graduates. Training equips graduates with technical skills, hands-on training, knowledge on entrepreneurship, and skills in business management, which they can apply in setting up their own activities. As an example, graduates with tailoring, welding, carpentry and motor vehicle mechanics can apply their skills to offer services or manufacture goods to customers. Entrepreneurship training can also assist them to recognize business opportunities, estimate costs, price determination, and how they manage their operations. These skills can make graduates more confident about their skills to commence working independently.

3. METHODOLOGY

It was done in the Morogoro Municipality in Tanzania to investigate the role played by vocational training in initiating graduates into self-employment. The research design was convergent mixed- methods design, where 113 participants took part, including 97 vocational graduates, 13 vocational trainers, and three vocational coordinators in seven vocational training institutions. Graduates gave information on how they applied the skills they learned in the training, trainers and coordinators gave details on how the training equipped the graduates to be self-employed.

Information was gathered by use of questionnaires to graduates, interviews with trainers and coordinators, observations of workplace of graduates, responses to open ended questions in questionnaires and VETA curricula reviews. To ascertain the validity of the research instruments, JUCo Curriculum Department experts and research supervisors reviewed them. The SPSS was used to test the questionnaire reliability with Cronbachs alpha of 0.82. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative data. These were then compared to determine the role of technical skills, entrepreneurship training, practical training and business management skills gained after vocational training in initiating self-employment activities by the graduates.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 VETA Training contribution to Graduates' initiation of Self-Employment Activities

This section discusses the role of VETA training in equipping graduates in preparing them to engage in self-employment in Morogoro Municipality. It also emphasizes on the technical skills, entrepreneurship training, practice training the graduates have had and their ability to manage businesses. The discussion reflects on how the graduates apply these skills and knowledge to initiate activities that bring incomes. The quantitative and qualitative results also indicate some areas where training can be reinforced to assist graduates to prepare to be self-employed.

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4.1.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings were obtained from questionnaires completed by VETA graduates their responses were analysed to establish how they applied the knowledge and skills gained during training to self-employment activities. The analysis covered technical skills, entrepreneurship education, practical training and business management. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarise respondents' answers. The results are presented in tables, with explanations of what the responses reveal about the contribution of VETA training to graduates' efforts to initiate self-employment.

Table 4.1: Vocational Graduates' Responses on Training Offered by VETA for Self-Employment (n=97)

Statement	SA%	A%	U%	D%	SD%	M	Std. D
I use the technical skills Acquired through VETA Training to provide goods or services for income	32.1	55.4	11.6	0.0	0.9	1.8214	0.70025
I have applied the Entrepreneurship Knowledge acquired Through VETA training to establish a self-employment activities	17.9	61.6	11.6	3.6	5.4	2.1696	0.94810
I use practical skills acquired during VETA training to complete tasks for paying customers	25.9	50.0	9.8	4.5	9.8	2.2232	1.17565
The practical skills I received enabled me to perform the vocational tasks required in my self-employment opportunities	15.2	44.1	7.7	26.8	6.3	2.84482	1.16410
I have applied the Business management Skills acquired trough VETA training to manage my self-employment activity	20.5	21.4	27.7	19.6	10.7	2.7857	1.27646

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, M = Mean, Std. D = Standard Deviation
Source: Field Data, 2026

Table 4.1 reveals that 87.5 percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they use technical skills gained in VETA training to offer goods or services to earn income. The result means that the majority of graduates used the acquired skills in training to make money. As an illustration, graduates who have been trained in tailoring, welding, carpentry, and motor vehicle repair can apply their skills to serve the customers and earn income. This implies that technical training contributed to equipping graduates with income-generating activities using their vocational competencies.

Table 4.1 data also indicates that 79.5% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they used entrepreneurship knowledge obtained via VETA training to create self-employment activities. This implies that majority of the respondents applied the knowledge they acquired in the process of training in order to start their own economic operations. Knowledge in entrepreneurship may assist graduates to determine business opportunities, strategize their activities, and decide whether

to apply their vocational skills. Nonetheless, the implementation of this knowledge presupposes that graduates have to leave the four-walled classroom and implement their ideas in practice.

Table 4.1 data show also that 75.9% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they used practical skills they learned during VETA training to perform tasks to paying customers. This observation indicates that a good number of graduates used their training in areas where their labor generated them earnings. Employment with paying customers also provides the graduates with an experience of dealing with assignments and customer expectations. This could aid them in readying themselves to be self-employed, even though they may end up completing paid tasks, but it does not always imply that they have already set up their own businesses.

Table 4.1 data indicate that 59.3 percent of the respondents strongly or agreed that practical skills gained under VETA training helped them to conduct the vocational tasks that they needed in their self-employment activities. This implies that the training enabled graduates to do jobs pertaining to their jobs, however, some of them might have failed to use their skills in real work environment. The discovery casts doubt on whether the work activities that are conducted in the training process are sufficient to equip graduates to meet the demands they face when they work alone. This challenge can be overcome by providing more opportunities to practise tasks under the conditions that are like real work.

The Table 1 of Table 4.1 also indicates that 41.9% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they used the business management skills learned in VETA training to manage their self-employment activities. This implies that not all graduates found it easy to use the knowledge of business management in their operations. The business world is not merely a matter of technical skill; graduates have to be able to handle money, maintain records, plan their activities and make decisions regarding customers and business. The result indicates that VETA training might pay more attention to practical application of the skills of business management to make graduates more prepared to organize the actions they start.

Generally, the results in Table 41 indicate that VETA training led to the initiation of self-employment activities among graduates by providing them with technical skills entrepreneurship knowledge, and practical skills. Nevertheless, these competencies do not necessarily lead to successful business management as the results show. Graduates might be capable of carrying out occupational activities and earn money but still find it hard to structure and coordinate their activities. This implies that VETA must incorporate training to meet the technical demands of vocational service, as well as the business skills needed to initiate and run self-employment operations.

4.1.2 Qualitative Findings

Vocational trainers and a vocational coordinator were interviewed and workplace observation of graduates, open-ended questionnaire answers and examination of VETA curricula provided data on the relationship between vocational training and the entry of graduates into self-employment. The findings focus on three area: technical skills, entrepreneurship education, and practical training

4.1.2.1 Acquisition of Technical Skills and Entry into Self-Employment

Vocational trainers explained the importance of technical skills in the preparation of graduates to begin own activity. With these competencies, graduates are able to create goods or offer services to paying clients. One of the trainers of Institution B stated: *"The practical skills acquired during training can help graduates start their own activities because they can use what they have learned to provide services to customer"* (Vocational Trainer 2, Institution B, May 2026).

This narrative illustrates how the competencies gained in training can assist graduates to start earning revenue in their fields. An example is a graduate in tailoring making clothes to customers, and a graduate in electrical installation providing installation and repair services. Through such work, graduates are able to practice their training. But the capacity to carry out a trade does not, in itself, guarantee that a graduate can begin to work on his own.

One of the trainers of Institution A mentioned the experience of one of the graduates: *"some graduates have the skills to do the work, but starting their own businesses can be difficult when they do not have the tools, capital, or a suitable place to work"* (Vocational Trainer 6, Institution A, May 2026)

The Vocational coordinator raised a similar concern: *"The training equips trainees with practical skills in their respective trades. However, the ability to use these skills for self-employment also depends on whether graduates can access the necessary working tools, start-up capital, and opportunities to reach potential Customers"* (Vocational Coordinator 1, Institution 1, May 2026).

The interviews indicate a disconnect between knowledge acquisition of a trade and an independent activity. Graduates can be aware of how to perform vocational work and do not have equipment, money, or a place to start working. Another challenge is the finding of customers. VETA training contribution is therefore extended to the skills they develop, but the ability to activate self-employment by their skills also requires that they are able to access the resources, and access the customers they will need to apply their training.

4.1.2.2 Contribution of Entrepreneurship Education to Business Initiation

The vocational trainers explained that the education of entrepreneurship is included in the preparation graduates get to begin their own activities. An institution C trainer explained: *"Entrepreneurship education helps trainees understand how they can use the skills they acquire to start their own businesses and earn an income"* (Vocational Trainer 4, Institution C, May 2026).

According to the account given by the trainer, graduates should understand how to convert their vocational skills into income generating activities. As an example, a graduate in tailoring can know how to make clothes, yet they will still need to determine who might want them; and what product to sell. Trainees can be taught entrepreneurship to take these issues into consideration and how to utilize their skills after the training. Nevertheless, it does not always imply that a graduate will be capable of creating an activity by finding a business opportunity.

A 2-institution trainer described business knowledge that graduates must have: *"Trainees need to understand not only their trade but also how to calculate costs, set prices, find customers, and manage the money they earn"* (Vocational Trainer 8, Institution 2, May 2026)

This description reveals why knowledge in business is important in addition to technical expertise. A graduate might be able to produce quality goods or offer a quality service but still fail to make a profit when prices are below costs. On the same note, ineffective income management can expose one to challenges of inability to obtain materials and operate. Locating customers is also important since they require individuals who are willing to pay them when they offer goods or services. These factors render the skills of business management pertinent even at a tender age of self-employment.

The vocational coordinator also stressed the necessity to apply the knowledge acquired in the process of training: "*Entrepreneurship training is intended to prepare trainees to become self-employed, but they also need to apply what they learn when identifying opportunities and planning their businesses"* (Vocational Coordinator 2, Institution B, May 2026).

The opinion expressed by the coordinator to a practical issue: the graduates might be taught about entrepreneurship without applying the knowledge in their own work when they start their own activity. They should evaluate the surrounding opportunities, look at the resources they need, and work out how to get customers. Collectively, these interviews indicate that entrepreneurship education assists graduates to know the business choices they make upon self-employment, and starting self-employment, although the interviews alone are not sufficient to determine how effectively the graduates use the knowledge in their business.

4.1.2.3 Practical Training and the Application of Skills in Self-Employment

Practical training also provides the trainees with a chance to practice the activities of their trades and learn to work on their own. An institution A vocational trainer said: *"Practical sessions help trainees gain experience in performing tasks on their own rather than depending entirely on theoretical explanations"* (Vocational Trainer 10, Institution A, May 2026).

The response of the trainer relates to the importance of practice-based learning. The trainees should get a chance to do a task independently to enable them apply their skills in the outside world. An example is that tailoring trainees should practice in making garments and the welding trainees should practice in metal fabrication. This kind of experience can equip graduates to render services or manufacture products to customers without involving another individual to complete the technical task.

Observations of graduates' workplaces provided further evidence of how these skills were being used. The researcher observed a tailoring workplace established by VETA graduates, where vocational skills were being applied in a business setting. The observation showed that graduates had moved beyond training and were using their skills to provide tailoring services. Establishing a workplace also provided evidence of their efforts to organise their work independently.

A graduate who had completed welding training described a similar experience in an open-ended questionnaire response: *"The welding skills I acquired during training have enabled me to start my own business and provide welding services to customers"* (Graduate 38, Questionnaire Response, May 2026).

The graduate's response connects practical training with the initiation of a specific self-employment activity. The skills acquired during training were being used to provide welding services to paying customers. Alongside the observed tailoring workplace, this account shows that graduates in different trades were applying their vocational competencies in their own activities. However, the evidence relates to particular graduates and does not establish that all VETA graduates make the same transition.

A review of the VETA curriculum at Institution B identified training programmes in tailoring, welding, carpentry, and motor vehicle mechanics. Each trade provides skills that can be used in independent work, including garment production, metal fabrication, furniture making, and vehicle repair. The curriculum establishes that trainees receive preparation in occupations relevant to self-employment, while the observation and graduate's account provide examples of these skills being used after training.

The evidence therefore connects practical training with the work graduates undertake when initiating self-employment. Training provides opportunities to develop occupational skills, and graduates can use those skills to offer services or produce goods for customers. The observed tailoring workplace and the welding graduate's response illustrate this connection, although they do not establish how consistently practical training leads to successful self-employment among all graduates.

4.1.3 Discussion of the Findings

The findings show that VETA training helps graduates develop the skills needed to undertake vocational work independently. The observed tailoring workplace and the welding graduate's experience provide examples of how graduates use their training to offer services to customers. However, starting a self-employment activity involves more than being able to perform a trade. Graduates also need to calculate costs, set prices, manage their earnings, and attract customers. The interviews with vocational trainers and the coordinator revealed that some graduates face difficulties obtaining tools, start-up capital, suitable working premises, and access to customers. These difficulties can prevent graduates from using their skills to start their own activities. The findings therefore show that, although vocational training provides the technical foundation for self-employment, graduates also need business management skills and the resources required to put their training into practice.

These findings are consistent with Melak and Derso (2023), who found that vocational training strengthened graduates' capacity for self-employment through practical and occupational skills. Sharma and Paudel (2023) also found that training contributed more effectively to self-employment when the skills acquired matched local economic opportunities. The present study adds to these findings by showing that technical competence does not necessarily translate into effective business management. Although graduates reported using their skills to provide services and generate income, fewer reported applying the business management skills acquired during training. This finding is also consistent with Ogondiek (2024), who found that some graduates did not initiate self-employment despite possessing practical skills. These studies, together with the present findings, suggest that graduates need more than occupational competence to establish their own activities. They also need to understand how to manage the financial and operational aspects of their work. Greater attention to costing, pricing, financial management, and customer identification during training could help prepare graduates for these responsibilities.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) helps explain the relationship between the skills graduates acquire and their efforts to initiate self-employment, particularly through the concept of perceived behavioural control. This concept concerns how capable individuals believe they are of carrying out a particular behaviour. VETA training can strengthen this perception by giving graduates the skills to perform vocational tasks independently. The tailoring workplace and the welding graduate's account show that some graduates were able to put these skills into practice. However, the findings also reveal that being capable of performing a trade does not necessarily mean being able to establish a business. A graduate may have the necessary technical skills but lack the capital to purchase equipment, a suitable place to work, or access to customers. Such difficulties can limit the graduate's ability to act on their intention to become self-employed. This distinction matters because perceived capability and actual ability to start a business are not always the same. Entrepreneurship education may help graduates make decisions about costs, pricing, and business planning, but applying this knowledge remains important. The findings thus show that perceived behavioural control helps explain graduates' efforts to enter self-employment, while access to essential resources also shapes whether they can turn their skills and intentions into actual business activities.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that VETA training contributed to graduates' efforts to initiate self-employment activities in Morogoro Municipality. Through practical training in their respective trades, graduates acquired skills that enabled them to undertake tasks such as tailoring clothes and providing welding services to customers. These skills gave them a basis for starting their own businesses and earning income from the services they provided. Entrepreneurship education also helped some graduates understand how to establish and manage their activities. The findings show that vocational training was useful in preparing graduates to apply their skills in real work situations and use them to support their livelihoods through self-employment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

VETA institutions should place greater emphasis on linking vocational training with the practical demands of self-employment. Trainers should give trainees more opportunities to practise the tasks they are likely to perform when running their own businesses, including completing customer orders, calculating production costs, setting prices, and managing materials. Entrepreneurship education should also be linked to the specific trades taught so that trainees learn how to apply their technical skills to establish and manage their own activities after graduation. Curriculum developers should work with vocational trainers and experienced entrepreneurs to ensure that training content reflects the actual work graduates undertake in their respective trades. This would help graduates in Morogoro Municipality make better use of the technical and business skills acquired through VETA training when initiating self-employment activities.

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Competing Interests

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Authors' Contributions

Author Kasule, J. designed the study, collected and analysed the data, interpreted the findings, and prepared the first draft of the manuscript. Author Mtana, N. supervised the study, reviewed the manuscript, and provided academic guidance throughout the research process. Author Peter, A. contributed to the review of the manuscript and interpretation of the findings. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance and permission to conduct this study were obtained from Jordan University College (JUCo) and relevant administrative authorities, including the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS), District Administrative Secretary (DAS), and District Executive Director (DED). Informed consent was obtained from all participating Vocational Training Trainers, Institution Coordinators and Vocational Graduates prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. All information collected was used solely for academic purposes.

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