

Title

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TAILORING VOCATIONAL SKILLS ON  
IMPROVING THE LIVELIHOODS OF YOUTH IN MTANDILE COMMUNITY**

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## ABSTRACT

Vocational skills training has become an important strategy for addressing youth unemployment and improving livelihoods in developing countries. This study assessed the effectiveness of tailoring vocational skills in enhancing the livelihoods of youths in Mtandile community, Lilongwe City, Malawi. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from youths aged 18–35 years who had undergone tailoring vocational training using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that tailoring vocational skills contributed positively to youth self-employment, income generation, and improved living standards. Youths acquired skills in sewing, cutting, garment construction, and machine operation, which enabled them to engage in small-scale tailoring businesses. However, the study also identified several challenges affecting the effective utilization of these skills, including lack of start-up capital, inadequate equipment, high costs of tailoring materials, limited market access, and insufficient entrepreneurial skills. The study concludes that tailoring vocational skills play a significant role in enhancing youth livelihoods but require additional support to achieve sustainable outcomes. The study recommends integrating entrepreneurship training, providing start-up capital and equipment, and strengthening support from government and non-governmental organizations to improve the effectiveness of tailoring vocational training programs.

**Keywords:** Vocational Skills Training; Tailoring Skills; Youth Livelihoods; Youth Unemployment; Self-Employment; Income Generation; Malawi

## INTRODUCTION

Vocational training has become an essential strategy for empowering young people in low-income countries. Effectiveness refers to the degree to which an intervention successfully produces the desired results. In this study, effectiveness refers to the ability of tailoring vocational skills to improve the livelihoods of youths in Mtandile community. Vocational training is defined as hands-on education that equips individuals with practical skills required for specific trades or occupations. Tailoring, as a vocational skill, involves cutting, sewing, designing, and garment construction, which provide direct pathways to self-employment. Skills are learned abilities that enable individuals to perform tasks effectively and generate income to support basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. According to the African Youth Charter, youths are individuals aged between 18 and 35 years. This study therefore focuses on youths within this age range in Mtandile community.

## Background of the Study

Youth unemployment is a persistent socio-economic challenge affecting many developing countries, including Malawi. A significant proportion of youths face difficulties accessing formal employment due to limited job opportunities, slow economic growth, and a mismatch between education systems and labour market demands. In Malawi, youths constitute a large percentage of the population, yet many remain unemployed or underemployed, especially in urban and peri-urban areas.

Mtandile community, located in Lilongwe City, is a peri-urban area characterized by high levels of youth unemployment and poverty. Many youths in this community have limited access to higher education and formal employment opportunities,

forcing them to depend on informal economic activities that provide unstable and low incomes. This situation negatively affects their livelihoods, self-esteem, and overall quality of life.

Vocational skills training has been widely recognized as an effective approach to addressing youth unemployment and poverty by equipping young people with practical and marketable skills. Tailoring vocational skills are particularly attractive because they require relatively low start-up capital and can be practiced within local communities. Through tailoring, youths can produce garments such as school uniforms, workwear, and traditional clothing for sale. Despite the implementation of various vocational training programs by the government and other stakeholders, concerns remain regarding their effectiveness in improving youth livelihoods, hence the need for this study.

## Statement of the Problem

Youth unemployment continues to be a major development concern in Malawi, particularly in urban and peri-urban communities such as Mtandile. Although vocational training programs in tailoring have been introduced to equip youths with practical skills, many trained youths remain economically vulnerable. Some are unable to establish successful tailoring businesses, while others operate at very low levels that do not provide sustainable income.

Key challenges include lack of start-up capital, inadequate sewing machines, high costs of tailoring materials, limited access to markets, and insufficient entrepreneurial skills. Gender-related barriers also affect participation and success, particularly among female youths. Despite the availability of tailoring vocational training, there is limited empirical evidence on its effectiveness in improving youth livelihoods in Mtandile community. Without proper assessment, it becomes

difficult for policymakers, training institutions, and development partners to improve vocational programs and address existing gaps.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### Main Objective

To assess the effectiveness of tailoring vocational skills in enhancing the livelihoods of youths in Mtandile community.

### Specific Objectives

- To examine the tailoring vocational skills acquired by youths in Mtandile community.
- To assess the contribution of tailoring vocational skills to youth employment and income generation.
- To identify challenges faced by youths in utilizing tailoring vocational skills to improve their livelihoods.
- To suggest strategies for improving the effectiveness of tailoring vocational training programs.

## Research Questions

- What tailoring vocational skills have youths acquired in Mtandile community?
- How have tailoring vocational skills contributed to youth employment and income generation?
- What challenges do youths face in applying tailoring vocational skills?
- What strategies can improve the effectiveness of tailoring vocational training programs?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment refers to the process of enabling young people to gain the skills, confidence, resources, and opportunities necessary to actively participate in social, economic, and political life. According to the United Nations, youth empowerment involves strengthening the capacities of young people to make informed choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowered youth are more likely to contribute positively to community development and national growth.

In Malawi, youth empowerment has become a critical development priority due to high youth unemployment, poverty, limited access to education, and vulnerability to social challenges such as drug abuse and early marriages. Studies indicate that empowering youth through education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, and mentorship programs significantly improves their livelihoods and social inclusion.

### Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Youth Empowerment

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) play a significant role in youth empowerment, especially in developing countries where government resources are limited. These organizations often provide education support, life skills training, vocational programs, spiritual guidance, and psychosocial support. Research shows that FBOs are trusted within communities and are effective in mobilizing youth participation.

RISE Malawi Ministries, as a faith-based organization, focuses on holistic youth development by combining spiritual growth with socio-economic empowerment. Similar studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that such integrated approaches help youth develop

discipline, leadership skills, moral values, and economic independence.

### Challenges Facing Youth Empowerment Programs

Despite their importance, youth empowerment programs face challenges such as inadequate funding, limited infrastructure, poor monitoring and evaluation systems, and low youth participation. Literature highlights that sustainability of empowerment initiatives remains a major concern, particularly for non-governmental and faith-based organizations operating in rural areas like Madisi, Dowa.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Empowerment Theory

This study is guided by Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes increasing individuals' control over their lives through access to resources, participation, and decision-making. The theory suggests that empowerment occurs when individuals gain skills, confidence, and opportunities that enable them to improve their socio-economic conditions.

In the context of RISE Malawi Ministries, the theory explains how youth empowerment programs such as vocational training, mentorship, and leadership development enhance young people's self-efficacy and community participation.

### Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory also informs this study. The theory argues that investment in education and skills development improves productivity and economic outcomes. By equipping youth with practical skills and knowledge, organizations like RISE Malawi Ministries contribute to long-term

economic empowerment and poverty reduction.

- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus group discussions

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study adopted a case study research design, which allowed an in-depth examination of the effectiveness of RISE Malawi Ministries in youth empowerment within Madisi, Dowa.

### Study Area

The study was conducted in Madisi, Dowa District, an area characterized by high youth population, limited employment opportunities, and reliance on community-based and faith-based organizations for development initiatives.

### Target Population

The target population included:

- Youth beneficiaries of RISE Malawi Ministries
- Program coordinators and staff members
- Community leaders

### Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who were directly involved in or benefiting from youth empowerment programs.

### Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using:

- Questionnaires

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns and insights.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Youth Participation in Empowerment Programs

Findings revealed that a majority of the youth actively participated in vocational training, mentorship, and leadership programs offered by RISE Malawi Ministries. This indicates strong community acceptance and relevance of the programs.

### Skills and Economic Empowerment

The study found that youth who participated in skills-based programs reported improved income-generating abilities, increased self-reliance, and reduced dependence on family support. These findings align with Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes the economic benefits of skills development.

### Social and Moral Development

Participants reported improved discipline, leadership skills, and moral values, largely attributed to the integration of spiritual teachings with empowerment activities. This holistic approach distinguishes RISE Malawi Ministries from purely economic empowerment initiatives.

## Challenges Identified

Despite positive outcomes, challenges such as limited funding, inadequate training materials, and lack of follow-up support were reported. These challenges affected program sustainability and reach.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that RISE Malawi Ministries plays a significant and positive role in youth empowerment in Madisi, Dowa. Through skills training, mentorship, and spiritual guidance, the organization enhances youth socio-economic wellbeing and community participation. However, the effectiveness of the programs is constrained by financial and logistical limitations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increased Funding and Partnerships  
RISE Malawi Ministries should seek partnerships with government agencies and NGOs to enhance financial sustainability.
- Expansion of Skills Training Programs  
The organization should introduce more market-driven vocational skills aligned with local economic needs.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Systems  
Strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess long-term impact.
- Youth Involvement in Decision-Making  
Youth should be actively involved in program planning and implementation to increase ownership and relevance.

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