



Effectiveness of the 7Ps of Marketing on Student Enrolment in Zimbabwean Polytechnics.

A Case Study of Bulawayo Polytechnic

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Abstract.

Worldwide, many organisations whether in the private or public sector, including polytechnics have adopted the 7Ps for marketing. The effectiveness of these 7Ps in boosting student enrolment remains uncertain as there remains a gap in understanding how polytechnics effectively apply them. The study aims to explore the application of the 7Ps within polytechnics and assessing both barriers and challenges encountered in their implementation. The paper focused on the identification the barriers and challenges potential students face on enrolment, evaluating the effectiveness of the 7Ps and their impact on student enrolment, and exploring prospective students' preferences and needs in TVET, focusing on factors influencing their enrolment decisions. A descriptive research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods was used on a population of 355 Bulawayo Polytechnic staff members with a target population of 230 lecturers and 5 managers from which a sample size of 28 staff members was selected using the stratified random sampling technique and purposive sampling respectively. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews, administered on staff members. The findings revealed long course durations, high tuition fees, additional costs, lack of TVET program information, and 5'0' levels as barriers and challenges to student enrolment, and ineffective application of the 7Ps. The potential students' preferences were modern training technological/equipment, scholarships and flexible fees payment plans, digital marketing, testimonials from successful alumni students, streamlined admission processes, and tangibles. Based on these findings, the study recommended community engagement and partnerships with industry as a source for external assessors and inputs for curriculum reviews. Offering potential students without 5 '0' levels a chance for TVET, a 6 months training duration for cosmetology courses, 3 year training duration for engineering courses at national certificate level with more practical lessons, and 3 coursework items per module was emphasized.

Key words: 7Ps, TVET, Student Enrolment

Introduction

7Ps of marketing is defined as a framework that helps organizations effectively market their products or services. It expands on the traditional 4 Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) by adding three more elements: People, Process, and Physical evidence. These Ps are integral to organizational strategy in today's competitive environment and every organization is using them to enhance their market presence and customer

satisfaction which leads to business growth and success. The Companies like Apple continuously innovate their product lines, releasing updates and new features to maintain market leadership (Smith, 2023). These makes strategies for organisations to be customer-centric and focus on areas which gives them a competitive advantage.

Globally, the education sector is undergoing rapid changes, driven by technological advancements and increasing competition among institutions. The 7Ps are pivotal in shaping how educational institutions attract and retain students as reflected by key global trends which include:

- Digital transformation, institutions are increasingly utilizing online platforms for marketing, enhancing their reach and engagement with prospective students (Bennett & Ali, 2020).
- Personalized marketing, tailoring marketing strategies to meet individual student needs has become crucial for attracting diverse student populations (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).
- Global Competition, with the rise of online education and international student mobility, institutions must adopt competitive marketing strategies to remain relevant (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

In relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, number 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN, 2015) will see institutions improving their student enrolments through the use of one of the 7Ps. This calls for TVET institutions to promote their training programs and tailor them to suit the needs of every citizen. This is also supported by goal number 8, to promote sustained, inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (UN, 2015). In order to boost student enrolment and achieve goals above, there is pressing need for polytechnics to enhance marketing strategies to attract more students to polytechnics (Mavhunga, 2022).

Studies in China revealed that in the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, polytechnic institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of effective marketing strategies to attract students (Ratiu and Avram, 2013). The 7Ps provide a comprehensive framework that can help these institutions navigate the competitive realm of tertiary education. As polytechnics offer specialized courses aimed at equipping students with practical skills for the job market, understanding how to position these programs effectively is crucial for enhancing visibility and appeal.

In Africa, higher education is seen as a key driver for economic growth and development. Many countries are prioritizing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to address skills shortages and create employment. This is supported by the following key trends:

- Focus on Skills Development, governments are emphasizing the importance of polytechnic education to enhance employability and meet labor market demands (African Union, 2016).
- Public-Private Partnerships, collaborations between educational institutions and the private sector are becoming essential for curriculum relevance and resource mobilization (Mokgatlhe, 2021).
- Access and Equity, initiatives are underway to improve access to education through scholarships and alternative learning pathways (UNESCO, 2021).

Despite the potential of the 7Ps framework, many polytechnics in Kenya face significant challenges in its implementation (Camilleri, 2020) like outdated curricula, high tuition costs, and inadequate facilities can impede their ability to attract prospective students. The above key trends resonates with one of the African Union (AU) Development Goals, Promoting education as a tool for economic growth and stability (African Union, 2016). This supports the effective use the 7Ps of marketing in polytechnics to boost student enrolment despite their good infrastructures, government support and qualified and experienced staff. The study emphasizes the need for the effective use of the 7Ps of marketing to enhance student enrolment and address the challenges faced by polytechnics, which is crucial for the achievement of the African Union development goals of 2016.

In Zimbabwe, the government has recognized the critical role of polytechnic education (TVET) in its development strategies. This is supported by the following key policies which were implemented:

- National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), aims at economic recovery through skills development and enhancing educational quality (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020).
- National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2), focuses on increasing access to education and aligning it with industry needs (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021).

- Vision 2030, seeks to transform Zimbabwe into an upper-middle-income economy, emphasizing the importance of education in achieving this goal (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020).). ‘Leaving no one and no place behind mantra’ calls for polytechnics to equip Zimbabweans in the remote areas with TVET skills with community development thus contributing to an upper- middle class economy.

In order for Zimbabwe to achieve the above targets, it is the mandate of polytechnics to impart skills to every Zimbabwean through quality education and collaborations with industry hence the need for effective use of the 7Ps of marketing to boost student enrolments for every trade.

Polytechnics (TVET institutions) in Zimbabwe face significant challenges in attracting students for courses such as carpentry and joinery (CJ) and beauty therapy (BT), hairdressing (HD), fashion, clothing and textiles (FCT), applied art and design (AAD), vehicle body building (VBB), motor vehicle body refurbishment (MVBR), wood machining (WM), automotive precision machining (APM), foundry, brick and block laying (BBL), painting and decoration (PD), commercial design (CD), music, textile design (TD) and leather and allied manufacturing (LAM) (Chikozvo and Mavhunga 2021) underscores the pressing need for a reevaluation of marketing strategies to better align with student expectations and market demands. This is also supported by a 35% decline in enrolment observed in 2020 despite the implementation of the 7Ps of marketing (Bishau and Samkange, 2020).). This situation raises questions about how polytechnics can effectively utilize these marketing strategies to enhance student enrolment.

Bulawayo Polytechnic serves as a pertinent case study to analyze the effectiveness of the 7Ps of marketing in enhancing student enrolment. By examining its current marketing strategies and alignment with national policies and global trends, this research aims to provide insights into how polytechnics can better position themselves in a competitive educational landscape.

This study aims to explore the application of the 7Ps of marketing within polytechnic institutions in Zimbabwe, assessing both the barriers and challenges encountered in their implementation in Zimbabwe. By investigating how these marketing principles can be effectively leveraged, the research seeks to provide actionable insights and practical recommendations for enhancing student enrolment. Ultimately, the goal is to empower polytechnics to refine their marketing approaches, ensuring they can meet the evolving needs of students in a competitive educational landscape..

Objectives

- To identify barriers potential students face when considering enrolment in technical and vocational education programs at polytechnics.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the 7Ps of marketing in Zimbabwean polytechnics and their impact on student enrolment.
- To explore prospective students' preferences and needs in technical and vocational education, focusing on factors influencing their enrolment decisions.

Materials and Methods

Researchers employed the mixed method which combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing for a richer understanding of the research problem (Fassinger and Morrow, 2013).. Qualitative methods refers to a research technique that focuses on quantifying relationships, behaviours, and phenomena using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques (Creswell & Creswell 2020). It is a method characterized by the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns, test hypothesis, and make predictions. This is what influenced the researcher in order to objectively explore the application of the 7Ps of marketing within polytechnic institutions in Zimbabwe. While qualitative method refers to a research technique that focuses on understanding phenomena through collection and analysis of non-numerical data like words, images, or objects (Denzin & Lincoln 2021). This method provides insights into people's experiences, perceptions, and social contexts, with emphasis on depth over breadth. The researcher was also influenced in order to assess the barriers and challenges encountered in their implementation in Zimbabwe. By combining these approaches, researchers managed to enhance the validity of the findings.

A descriptive research design was used by the researcher in order to gather comprehensive information on how the 7Ps of marketing influence student enrolment in Zimbabwean polytechnics. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, the researcher managed to yield rich insights that can inform future marketing strategies for polytechnics in Zimbabwe.

Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires are effective research tools that ensure data consistency and reliability. They enable efficient collection from large, diverse samples at low cost, maintain respondent anonymity for honest answers, and can be customized with various question types to capture diverse insights. Interviews are crucial in research as they provide in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. They allow for flexible questioning, fostering rich dialogue. This qualitative data enhances understanding of complex issues, offering nuanced information that quantitative methods may overlook (Cresswell, 2018).

The population for the research was 355 members of staff from the four departments (training, administration, support, and principal's office) at Bulawayo Polytechnic. The target population for the study was 230 lecturers from these ten training divisions/departments at Bulawayo Polytechnic. A sample of 23 (10% of the target population) respondents for the questionnaire (lecturing staff) and 5 participants (interviewees) comprising of principal, vice principal, dean of students, public relations officer, and examinations coordinator at Bulawayo Polytechnic for the interviewees.

The researcher used both probability (quantitative) and non-probability (qualitative) sampling techniques for the research. For quantitative data, the researcher used stratified random sampling and purposive sampling for qualitative data. Stratified random sampling is a sampling method that involves dividing a population into distinct subgroups called strata that share similar characteristics (Babbie 2016). This technique ensured that each training division/department formed a stratum. While purposive sampling also called judgmental or non-probability sampling defined as a technique where researchers select participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question (Flick 2018). The principal, vice principal, public relations officer, dean of students, and examinations coordinator considered for interviews. To improve research validity, the researcher clearly defined and operationalised all concepts and variables for credible findings. Questionnaire data from all the 23 households was analyzed quantitatively for all quantifiable data under research. Thematic descriptions were used for qualitative data. This data was first coded and fed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22 and Excel spread sheets. The descriptive statistics which included frequencies and percentages was used and presented in tables, graphs and thematic descriptions.

Results

Table 1: Student Enrolments by course per division/department for 2023 – 2025 (post COVID era and period under semesters/modular system)

DIVISION/DEPARTMENT	COURSE	YEAR 2023	YEAR 2024	YEAR 2025
Applied Art and Design Department	FCT	4	12	4
	AAD	7	12	5
	CD	8	7	9
	TD	0	0	0
	Music	0	0	0

	Leather and Allied Manufacturing	0	0	0
Automotive Department	APM	15	4	4
	MVBR	12	8	16
Construction Department	BBL	20	17	15
	CJ	22	19	16
	PD	0	0	0
	WM	0	0	0
Cosmetology	HD	3	1	1
	BT	3	5	11
Mechanical	VBB	9	5	2
	Foundry	7	5	2

Figure 1: Graphical presentation of student enrolment by course per division/department for the period 2023 – 2025

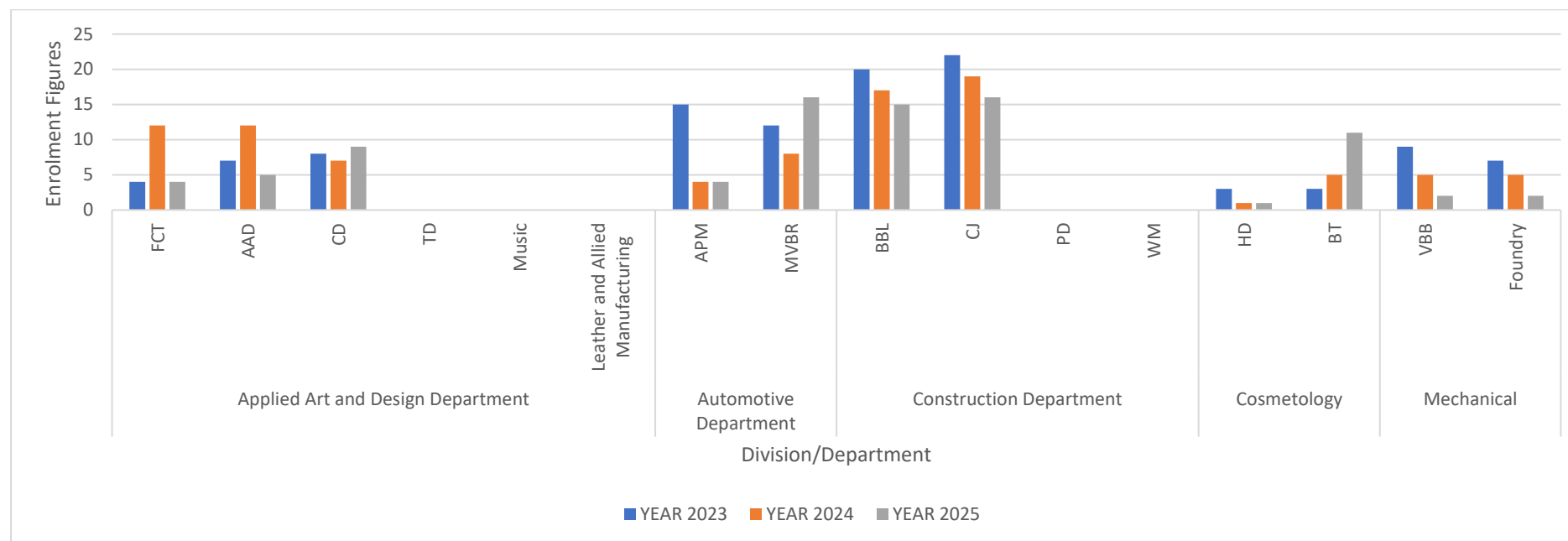


Table 2: Respondents' comments on the effectiveness of the 7Ps of Marketing on Student Enrolment at Bulawayo Polytechnic.

DIVISION/ DEPARTMENT	MARKETING ELEMENT	COMMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE

Applied Art & Design	P - Product	Offers FCT, AAD, CD, TD, Music and LAD courses with a training duration of 1 year for national certificate and 2 years for national diploma. Low enrolment due to cheap imports from China and second hand clothes sold at Flea markets and boutiques and short courses offered by private institutions. Music and leather courses have failed to attract students for the past 10 years.	10	43.4%
Automotive		MVBR content no longer in line with the industry requirements. The industry is now using technology to refurbish the accident damaged vehicles parts or replace with a new panel. For APM course, the industry is now replacing damaged or worn out parts with new ones rather than machining parts except for the few old cars. The new technology has made the courses irrelevant, hence the need to align the courses with the industry needs. Training duration reduced from 3 to 2 years.	2	8.7%
Construction		WM, PD, BBL, and CJ are being affected by the 5 '0' Levels including Mathematics, Science and English entry requirements. This has created a negative attitude towards the course since they consider them as hands on courses which must consider all the potential students who can read and write despite the 5 '0' level subjects. Offers a general national diploma in construction technology WM & PD courses have failed to attract students for more than 10 years. WM is considered by industry as manufacturing course and not construction. Training duration was reduced from 3 to 2 years.	6	26.1%
Cosmetology		HD and BT have a long duration which is not preferred by customers over City and Guilds whose 6 months. Also module components like perm for hair dressing are no longer preferred by clients but plaiting and wigs.	2	8.6%

Mechanical		VBB and Foundry were affected by low operations at National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) hence low demand. Training duration was reduced from 3 to 2 years	3	13%
All		46% of the respondents highlighted that enrolment figures for the courses under construction, mechanical, automotive, and cosmetology are being boosted by apprenticeship programme from both the private sector and government (RASM). While 10.7% mentioned that industry engagement through external assessors can be the gateway to tapping the industry needs and technology advancements for curriculum reviews. These external assessors through their assessment reports can recommend on the modern training equipment to be procured (correct specifications) and areas to be included in the module contents. These assessors can enable the establishment of partnerships which can result in accessing their workshops equipped with advanced training equipment.		
	P-Price	The fees charged are competitive and affordable compared to what is being charged by the privately owned institutions. But prohibitive to low income earners and the rural based students due additional costs to the tuition fees in terms of transport, accommodation, and food.		
	P-Place	Located is easily accessible by both pedestrians and motorists since it's linked by foot paths and tarred roads, 2kms from the city Centre. But prohibitive to the rural and marginalized groups because of the additional costs to the tuition fees in terms of transport, accommodation, and food.		
	P-Promotion	Through advertising in the Chronicle and Sunday News in October and June for the January and August intakes. On digital marketing, social media (especially WhatsApp), website, and electronic billboards are being used. Also career		

		guidance and open days by invitations from primary and secondary schools for image building and promoting the courses to potential students. These promotional strategies mostly reach urban based potential students leaving out the rural and marginalized groups.		
	P-People	Both qualified, 8(28.6%) with national certificate + class 1, 3(10.7% with national diplomas, 4(14.3%) with higher national diplomas, 8(28.6%) with degrees, and 5(17.9%) with master's degrees and experienced staff members with more than 10 years. Staff selection is done by the trade specialists from the respective divisions/departments with guidance from human resources department and head office.		
	P-Process	Fees payment through bank branches throughout the country, enrolment through physical interviews, and modes of study (full time/block/part time) of study are convenient for the potential students. Fees clearance system for results and certificate collection.		
	P-Physical Evidence	Campus facilities (training workshops/labs/lecture rooms/equipment (outdated)/tools), infrastructure (hostels/dining hall/classrooms), cleanliness and maintenance (grounds and cleaning personnel/maintenance team), signage (all the main roads leading into Bulawayo), and navigation for easy identification.		

Table 3: Managers’ responses on barriers faced by potential students on enrolment

From the 5 (17.9%) administration staff members interviewed responded as shown in the table below:

RESPONSE	DESCRIPTION
Financial barriers	high tuition fees for those coming from low-income backgrounds/rural areas, additional costs (for materials like laptops, stationery, regalia, AutoCAD fees for engineering courses, transport, and food and accommodation.
Awareness & Information gaps	On programs offered, admission requirements, career opportunities associated with TVET programs, and enrolment times
Perception of TVET & Polytechnics	Perceive TVET programs as inferior (societal stigma) to university education and gender stereotypes discouraging certain groups especially to take up some engineering courses like brick and block laying
Academic Preparedness	Emphasis on 5 ‘0’ levels as entry requirements creates a barrier to the ones who do not meet the academic requirements needed.
Lack of Facilities	Polytechnics have inadequate facilities such as laboratories and workshops and limited access to technology to do online training.
Limited online marketing	Polytechnics are depending on invitations by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for career counseling and guidance, no initiatives by these institutions. Current promotional strategies used do not reach out to every potential students especially the rural, marginalized areas like Siyabhuwa area in Binga, Matabeleland North Province

5. Discussion of Findings

Student enrolments trends for period 2023 – 2025

The results shows that Applied Art & Design had a total enrolment of 68, Automotive with 59, Construction with 109, Cosmetology with 25, and Mechanical with 30. These figures shows low enrolments which is supported by both managers and lecturers’ responses in tables 2 and 3 above.

Barriers faced by potential students when considering enrolment in polytechnics

The 5 (17,9%) of administration staff members interviewed mentioned a number of barriers faced by potential students which included high tuition fees for those coming from low-income backgrounds/rural areas, lack of information on programs offered, admission requirements, career opportunities associated with TVET programs, and enrolment times making it difficult for them to be enrolled in polytechnics, negative perception of TVET programs as inferior to university education, and gender stereotypes discouraging certain groups especially to take up some engineering courses like brick and block laying/cosmetology. The emphasis by polytechnics to consider those with 5 '0' levels as entry requirements creates a barrier to the ones who do not meet the academic requirements needed, (Moyo 2023). Polytechnics have inadequate facilities such as laboratories and workshops and limited access to technology to do online training using simulations and robots, limiting the number of students to be enrolled per intake, (Chikoko 2023). Economic stability, high unemployment rates, and lack of scholarships or financial aid programs are some of the barriers and challenges mentioned by respondents which makes potential students hesitant to invest in TVET programs that may not guarantee employment after graduation, (Ndlovu 2023)

Effective application of the 7Ps of marketing and their impact on student enrolment in Zimbabwean polytechnics 28 (100%) respondents indicated that polytechnics are using 7Ps of marketing to attract the students for TVET programs to a less extend since they are government institutions who needs approval first before a decision is implemented. The government controls the TVET programs offered, module content, fees to be charged, promotional media to be used (for Bulawayo polytechnic, it's the Chronicle, Sunday News, ZBC, Website), and procedures for maintaining facilities (Ministry of Local Government and Public Works gives approval) and acquiring equipment and vehicles (government authority is require prior to purchasing). These institutions do not have a marketing department but only public relations officer, a section of marketing with one person who doubles up with lecturing making it difficult effectively apply the 7Ps of marketing on student enrolment. The respondents also mentioned that TVET curriculum lacks alignment with industry needs and technological advancement, specialized courses per institution (same courses are being offered), scholarships, rural physical access, digital presence, contacts with graduates so that they can be used as brand ambassadors, streamlined admissions, and orientation programs, (Gadzirai 2023). This shores that polytechnics do not effectively apply the 7Ps of marketing to attract potential students and boost enrolment.

Prospective student preferences and needs in TVET programs

40% of the respondents interviewed (public relations officer and the dean of students) and indicated that prospective students prefer TVET programs that align with industry demands and technological advancements, qualified and experienced lecturing staff, affordable tuition fees, scholarships, flexible

payment plans, easily reachable locations, modern facilities and equipment, effective marketing strategies like social media and community outreach, highlights on alumni achievements and their recommendations (success stories) to motivate them to enroll, guidance and counseling as support services, streamlined admission processes, consistent student feedback from the institution, welcoming and professional campus atmosphere, and tangibles like brochures/active websites/promotional videos to easily identify and associate with the institution. These findings were also supported by 23 lecturing staff when they completed the questionnaires, they indicated that shorter training periods for cosmetology courses, introduction of a national diploma per each trade under construction than to generalise, tailor the programs to accommodate those who can read and write (with less than 5 '0'levels). and By understanding these preferences and needs of the prospective students is vital to improve enrolment, rates, the polytechnics will become customer centric whereby their offerings become market driven, (Chikoko & Mupinga 2022) and (Gumbo 2021). By being a customer centric, polytechnics' enrolment is boosted and the 7Ps of marketing will be effective because every P as a marketing element will be tailored to meet the potential students' preferences and needs.

Areas for polytechnics to improve marketing strategies and enhance student enrolment. 46.4% of the respondents mentioned reverting back the training period for the national certificate in engineering course from 2 years to 3 years to give more time for practical lessons and cover all module contents in detail. The students will have a year after attachment to give feedback to lecturers on training gaps and current technologies in the industry. 17.9% of the respondents highlighted the need to acquire modern training equipment and to consistently review the curriculum. While 7.14% mentioned the need to shorten the long training durations for cosmetology courses with high demand in the shipping industry. Polytechnic are need to align their programs with current industry needs, charge affordable tuition fees to accommodate average income (making TVET education accessible to many families), being accessible to rural students, use of online marketing and having a marketing department, staff having exposure to new technology, streamlining enrolment processes, maintaining facilities, and community engagement and partnering with industry, (African Development Bank 2023).

6. Conclusion

Results of this study indicated that while Zimbabwean polytechnics are applying the 7Ps of marketing to boost student enrolment, significant improvements are needed in order to be effective. These improvements should focus on aligning TVET programs with industry demands and technological advancements, introducing scholarships and flexible fees payment plans, acquiring modern facilities and equipment, adopting digital marketing so that they are digitally present, share success stories from their alumni students, offering streamlined admission processes, and develop tangibles like brochures/active websites/promotional for easy identification. Community engagement and partnerships with industry are key strategies which polytechnics can adopt in order to effectively apply the 7Ps of marketing to boost enrolment especially for courses with low enrolments

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