

# **Skills Competition in Ethiopia: Experiences of 3<sup>rd</sup> National Skills Competition Implementations and Lessons for Future Action**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper explores the experiences of skills competition events, focusing on planning, preparation, execution, and post-competition activities. A qualitative approach with phenomenological design was used, with six judges and department heads from ICT, Wood science, and Building technology participating. The study found that organizing skills competition events is crucial for TVET image building and skill cultivation, However, several factors are essential for future success, including arranging necessary equipment, identifying skills to be tested, establishing rules, securing a venue, involving stakeholders, preparing mock competitions, designing evaluation criteria, appointing qualified judges, conducting fair judging, and recognizing and awarding winners.*

**Keywords:** *Skill, Skill competition, Experiences, Lessons*

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## **Introduction**

Skills competition is an ancient activity. One well-known example is the Olympic Games in ancient Greece, which featured a range of athletic contests (Lunt, 2022). These competitions allowed individuals to showcase their physical prowess and skills in disciplines such as wrestling, running, and chariot racing. Another ancient skills competition was the Pythian Games held in Delphi, where musicians, poets, and performers from across Greece would compete in various artistic and cultural endeavours. Ancient China also had skill competitions like the imperial examinations, which assessed knowledge and talent in subjects like literature, history, and philosophy. These competitions not only served as a means of entertainment but also played a significant role in promoting excellence and cultural exchange among different societies. These early skills competitions laid the foundation for the development and evolution of competitive events throughout history, from ancient competitions (Olympic Games), to medieval tournaments (organized by knights and nobles), Renaissance fairs (arts, craftsmanship, and skills of the era), to modernization of skill competitions.

In the modern sense, skills competition refers to organized events where individuals or teams showcase their abilities, expertise, and talents in a specific skill or set of skills (McKay and Stellingwerf, 2021; Pambudi and Harjanto, 2020). It involves a series of tasks or challenges that test participants' proficiency and effectiveness in performing a particular task or achieving a specific goal. This form of competition has played a crucial role in various societies throughout history, serving as a means to showcase and recognize exceptional skills.

Modernization of skills competitions has been driven by advancements in technology and changing societal needs. As industries developed in the 19th

and 20th centuries, skill competitions began to adapt to the changing landscape. The Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid industrialization that took place from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, had a significant impact on the development of current skills competitions (Desmet, Greif, and Parente, 2020). With the rise of mechanization and the expansion of factories, there was a growing need for skilled workers to operate and maintain the new machines. As a result, skills competitions became a way to identify and recognize the most talented individuals in various trades (Hsieh and Rossi-Hansberg, 2023). These competitions provided a platform for workers to showcase their skills and compete against their peers, leading to advancements in techniques and strategies. Also, skills competitions in the Industrial Revolution played a crucial role in driving innovation and raising the standards of craftsmanship, contributing to the overall progress of industries during this transformative era (Hsieh and Rossi-Hansberg, 2023; Desmet, Greif, and Parente, 2020; Stearns, 2020).

Ethiopian TVET training system is competence-based and industry-driven (MoE, 2023). Competence-based training is a good input for skills competition since skills competition will depend on the selected units of competence and training level. However, organizing skills competition events at the national level (Ethio-Skills) is a recent key activity targeting on vocational skills. Ethiopia conducted the first National Skills, Technology, and Action research competition, Exhibition, Symposium, and Expo in June 2019; the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Skills Competition, held from 20- 26 April 2021 in Addis Ababa with the theme “Skilled Citizen for Ethiopian Prosperity.” The main objectives of the skills competition were to enable young people to engage in skills training and

be able to change and counter the wrong perceptions of the community regarding TVET in Ethiopia<sup>6</sup>.

In 2023, Ethiopia kicked off the third round of nationwide skills competition with the slogan ‘Skills for Competitiveness.’ This competition was organized by the Ministry of Labour and Skills and held at the Federal Technical and Vocational Training Institute (FTVTI) from 22-26 May 2023, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The competitors were from vocational skills centres (TVET trainers and TVET trainees) in 18 competition trades or occupation-specific skills.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> National Skills Competition was highly emphasized by senior government officials, including the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E. Abiy Ahmed, who visited the event and officially opened the event with his opening remarks<sup>(7)</sup>:

*Competition will play an integral role in corroborating the talent and competence of young people and creating market linkages. Innovation should be emphasized to enrich Ethiopia and modernize all sectors since all sectors in Ethiopia are rich in inputs but seek innovativeness and skills. Innovative professionals should focus on result-oriented work beat through the challenges they face, and be solutions-oriented to transform Ethiopia. Young people with different skills and abilities who are presenting creative works are appreciated. Let’s be strong; let’s innovate; let’s focus on solutions to overcome challenges.*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-supports-second-national-skills-competition-Ethiopia>

<sup>7</sup> Amharic version available [https://www.facebook.com/MolsFDRE?locale=de\\_DE](https://www.facebook.com/MolsFDRE?locale=de_DE)

The remarks are very sounding and alarming, to coordinate minds, hands, and hearts, and work hard together to eradicate poverty and advance to prosperity. So; skill, skills cultivation, and skills competition are not a simulation for a week event per annum but rather a strategic means to transform the nation economically, politically, socially, technologically, environmentally, and legally to the next level. Similar messages, as a welcoming and opening speech, were also delivered by HE Muferihat Kamil, the Minister of Labour and Skills (MoLS), stressing that <sup>(8)</sup>:

*The skill development sector is a new chapter to confirm economic competitiveness. Institution-wide reforms are underway to produce skilled and productive citizens who contribute the prosperity of the nation and compete in the global economy. Skill development is beyond training (certificate mills). Reorganizing training centers based on local resources and value chains/markets; learning and training by productions; building TVET images via skills competition events; recognizing TVET is the source of growth and development; and getting a membership in World Skills International are key activities [reform] to be implemented.*

The remarks by government officials recognize skill matters. Investing in skills will play a key role in helping countries return to growth and rebuild successful and productive economies (OECD, 2012). And hence, Ethiopia needs skilled people who can adapt to change, think innovatively, and identify new products and processes that will help firms corner new markets. Consequently; skilling, reskilling, and up-skilling should be seen as a strategic issue to be prioritized as a policy, strategy, strategic plan, and research agenda.

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<sup>8</sup> Amharic version available [https://www.facebook.com/MolsFDRE?locale=de\\_DE](https://www.facebook.com/MolsFDRE?locale=de_DE)

And Ethiopia can compete with skills, and one means of testing is organizing national championships of vocational skills contests every two years, bringing together young people, industry, enterprise operators, government, and education and training institutions to promote the benefits of skilled trade professionals. This study, therefore, tried to *explore the experiences of skills competition events, focusing on planning, preparation, execution, and post-competition activities so as to document lessons for future learning.*

### ***Problem statement***

The government of Ethiopia strongly values skill development. And skills competition is parts of the skill development effort with the optimistic belief that competitions are the gold standard of skills excellence. Skills competitions raise the profile and recognition of skilled people, inspire young competitors to think outside the box, help competitors to turn their passion into a profession, and ultimately bring about rapid and inclusive economic growth and development via high-quality skilled talents as one ingredient of national development.

Cognizant of this, the Federal government has organized three skills completion events. On one hand, the organization of skills completion events, partners and stakeholders' involvement, exhibition visitors, and contesters have increased from year to year at the National Skills Competition, Technology, Practical Research Symposium, and Exhibitions, on the other hand, there are rumours and criticisms about skills competition processes (pre-, during, and post-skills competition activities), stakeholders' engagement, and meeting the targets of skills competition, suggesting the presence of knowledge and evidence gap. So, this has to be explored, and documented for future lessons, which may be positive to be strengthened or gaps to be improved.

Hence; this study tried to explore experiences and lessons with particular emphasis on the 3<sup>rd</sup> round national skills competition, guided by the following research, questions:

1. How did skills competition evaluators judge the planning and preparation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> skills competition event?
2. How did skills competition evaluators judge the competencies of competitors (trainers and trainees) who participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> skills competition event?
3. How did 3<sup>rd</sup> skills competition event evaluators judge the execution of competitions and post-competition activities?
4. What lessons from the 3<sup>rd</sup> skills competition event can be drawn for key stakeholders for better and future skills competition event organization?

### ***Significance of the study***

The results of this study have practical values for different stakeholders such as organizers, and training institutions. For Organizers: insights from this research can guide them in improving the competition structure, rules, judging criteria, and overall experience for participants. Research on skills competitions can help organizers attract participants, sponsors, and audiences by highlighting the benefits and opportunities offered by the competition. And for training institutions: research on skills competitions can inform training institutions on effective methods to enhance students' skills, prepare them for competitions, and align their curriculum with industry demands. TVT institutions can build partnerships with industry players through participation in skill competitions, leading to collaborative projects, internships, and potential placements for students.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The primary focus of a skills competition is to assess and recognize individuals who demonstrate exceptional skill levels and to promote excellence within a particular field or industry (Corwith, 2021). These competitions often follow specific rules and guidelines established to ensure fairness, competitiveness, and transparency in evaluating participants' performance and determining the winners. Skills competitions carry forward the glory of labor, the value of skills, and the great spirit of creation (Yonguw, 2018).

From a socioeconomic impact perspective, skill competitions stimulate economic growth by driving innovation and productivity (Surya, Menne, Sabhan, and Suriani, 2021). They create opportunities for businesses and industries to showcase their products and services, attracting investments and expanding their market reach. Skills competitions also contribute to the development of a skilled workforce by promoting training and education in specific industries (Tomizawa, Zhao, and Bassellier, 2020). This leads to increased employment opportunities and a more competent workforce, which ultimately boosts economic development.

From a social perspective, skills competitions promote inclusivity and diversity by providing equal opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds to showcase their talents. They foster a sense of pride and national identity as participants represent their countries on an international stage. Moreover, skills competitions inspire and motivate young people to pursue their passions and develop their skills, influencing the future of various industries. Overall, the economic and social impact of skills competitions is far-reaching, benefiting individuals, industries, and societies at large (Surya, Menne, Sabhan, and Suriani, 2021; Tomizawa, Zhao, and Bassellier, 2020; Pan, Xie, Wang, and Ma, 2022).

Skills competitions occur at the institutional, district (cluster), regional, national, continental, and world levels. Worldwide, from 1950 to 2022, world skills competitions took place for the 46<sup>th</sup> time among World Skills International Member countries and regions<sup>9</sup>. Over 75 the World Skills member countries and regions are working together to help prepare the workforce and talent of today for the jobs of the future. The World Skills competition is the largest skills competition in the world, held once every two years in a World Skills member countries, and until 2023, 22 economically strong countries have hosted this summit. The competition is equivalent to the Olympic Games for skills amongst youth across the world, ending with competition rank results based on the number of achieved medallions (gold, silver, and bronze).

There are over 50 identified skills under six skill categories<sup>10</sup>

*ICT category (5):* Information Network Cabling, IT Network Systems Administration, IT Software Solutions for Business, Print Media Technology, Web Design

*Transportation and Logistics (5):* Aircraft Maintenance, Auto Body Repair, Automobile Technology, Car Painting, Heavy Vehicle Maintenance *Social and Personal Services (7):* Bakery, Beauty Therapy, Cooking, Hairdressing, Health and Social Care, Pâtisserie and Confectionery, Restaurant Service

*Creative Arts and Fashion (6):* Fashion Technology, Floristry, Graphic Design Technology, Jewellery, Visual Merchandising/Window Dressing, 3D Digital Game Art

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<sup>9</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WorldSkills>

<sup>10</sup> [https://nsdaskillscamp.com/trades\\_in\\_worldskills\\_competition](https://nsdaskillscamp.com/trades_in_worldskills_competition)

*Construction and Building Technology (13):* Architectural Stonemasonry, Bricklaying, Cabinetmaking, Carpentry, Concrete Construction Work, Electrical Installations, Joinery, Landscape Gardening, Painting and Decorating, Plastering and Drywall Systems, Plumbing and Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, Wall and Floor Tiling

*Manufacturing and Engineering Technology (15):* CNC Milling, CNC Turning, Construction Metal Work, Electronics, Industrial Control, Industrial Mechanic Millwright, Manufacturing Team Challenge, Mechanical Engineering CAD, Mechatronics, Mobile Robotics, Plastic Die Engineering, Polytechnics and Automation, Prototype Modeling, Welding, and Water Technology

***Theoretical arguments: stakeholder theory***

The theoretical framework of concepts for this study includes stakeholder engagement theory and skills development. The term stakeholder refers to “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 86); stakeholders are those people who have a legitimate claim on an organisation (Hill and Jones, 1992); those who have exact influence over the organisation (Carroll, 1993); a stakeholder should have some form of capital, either financial or human put at risk by an organisation’s activities (Clarkson, 1995). Clarkson (1995) argues that the risk prevails that some stakeholders may be left out as a consequence of not being identified due to the complexity of the process.

Some scholars (such as Clarkson, 1995; Greenwood, 2007; Wheeler & Sillanpaa, 1997) advised organisations to classify their stakeholders into two categories primary and secondary groups. Primary groups are those stakeholders and individuals who are seen as essential to the existence of the organisation and most often are those that have some formal contract with the

organisation, including owners, employees, customers, and suppliers (Ayuso, Rodriguez, and Ricart, 2006; Clarkson, 1995; Podnar and Jancic, 2006). Secondary stakeholders are classified as the group that plays an important role in giving the organisation credibility and acceptance for its activities and include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities, governments, and competition (Ayuso, Rodriguez, & Ricart, (2006; Clarkson, 1995; Podnar & Jancic, 2006).



*Figure 1: Skills competition stakeholders*

The stakeholder theory provides a suitable theoretical framework to identify and prioritise stakeholders. The significance of stakeholders in skill

competitions cannot be undermined, as they play a vital role in the success and smooth functioning of such events (Shaukat, Latif, and Sajjad, 2022). And in the context of skills completions, the main stakeholders are indicated in Figure1. Moreover, the role of some stakeholders in the skill competition event is summarized below.

Competitors play a vital role in skill competitions, as they are the individuals who showcase their abilities, expertise, and talents in their respective fields (Hardy, Hall, Hardy, and France, 2005). They compete against each other to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in the given domain. Competitors must prepare extensively, continuously improve their skills, and stay updated with the latest developments in their industry to excel in the competition. They must adhere to the rules and regulations set by the organizers throughout the competition. Competitors strive to give their best performance, exhibit sportsmanship, and engage in fair play. Their participation not only allows them to test their skills but also provides an opportunity for personal growth, recognition, and networking. Competitors contribute to the success of a skills competition by creating a competitive environment that inspires others to strive for excellence and raises the overall standard of the event.

Organizers play a crucial role in skills competitions. They are responsible for planning, coordinating, and executing all aspects of the event (Kim, Lee, and Park, 2018). This includes selecting the competition format, defining the rules and regulations, and securing appropriate venues. Organizers also handle logistics, such as arranging for equipment, ensuring safety measures, and managing the overall schedule. They recruit qualified judges or evaluators to assess the competitors' skills fairly. Additionally, organizers handle registration processes, communicate with stakeholders, and promote the competition to ensure maximum participation. They provide support and

guidance to competitors throughout the event and address any concerns or issues that may arise. Furthermore, organizers manage the award ceremony, recognizing and celebrating the winners. Their dedication and efficient organization are vital in creating a successful and rewarding experience for all skills competition actors involved.

Sponsors play a pivotal role in skills competitions by providing financial support, resources, and exposure to the event. Sponsors play a significant role in skill competitions by providing financial support, resources, and promotional opportunities that contribute to the success and sustainability of the event. Sponsors can help enhance the competition experience for participants, increase visibility and awareness, and create networking opportunities within the industry (Smith, Johnson, and Brown, 2019). Their financial and non-financial contributions greatly contribute to the growth and sustainability of skill competitions.

Judges play a vital role in skills competitions as they are responsible for evaluating and scoring the participants' performances (Williams, Smith, and Johnson, 2020). Judges for skills competitions are expected to possess a combination of technical expertise, experience, and knowledge in the specific field of the competition. They are typically individuals who have excelled in their respective domains and have a deep understanding of the skills being evaluated. Judges have roles and responsibilities in scoring and evaluation, ensuring fairness and impartiality, providing feedback and guidance, and resolving disputes. Effective communication and critical thinking are crucial qualifications for judges to provide accurate assessments and constructive feedback. Additionally, judges should demonstrate fairness, impartiality, and the ability to make unbiased decisions, ensuring that the competition remains

transparent and credible. Moreover, judges should have a comprehensive grasp of the competition rules, criteria, and scoring systems.

In the course of skills completion, judges may face problems. Judges are challenged by subjectivity in judging, time constraints, balancing competing priorities, biased evaluation criteria, inconsistent scoring methods, a lack of transparency in the judging process, and managing high expectations (Brown, Wilson, and Martinez, 2018). To improve such situations, there has to be code of ethics that serves as a guide to behaviour and decision-making in Skills competitions. A code of ethics may include diversity, excellence, fairness, innovation, integrity, partnership, and transparency. And all stakeholders must be acquainted with and act in accordance with the Code of Ethics. Moreover; setting clear evaluation criteria, training and standardization of judges, effective communication and feedback, utilizing technology for fair judging, and rewarding based on performance are strategies to cope with the problem.

In summary, stakeholders' active involvement, in particular competitors, organizers, government agencies, judges, and sponsors, is vital as they bring different perspectives, resources, and support to ensure the effectiveness and development of skill competition event.

### *Skill Competition phase*

Skill competitions typically involve several phases that outline the structure, process, and evaluation criteria of the event.

*Table: skill competition phases and major activities*

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Major activities</i>
Planning and preparations	defining competition objectives, selecting participants, establishing competition rules and regulations, identifying the skills to be tested, setting the competition format, securing a venue, arranging equipment and resources, creating a schedule, designing evaluation criteria, appointing judges, establishing performance targets, organizing necessary equipment and materials,
Execution of Competitions	setting up competition venue, conducting technical briefings, monitoring and evaluating competitors, ensuring fairness and impartiality, support via transportation and logistics, safety and security measures, technical assistance and expertise, provision of accommodation and meals,
Post-Competition activities	evaluation and feedback, announcing competition results, recognizing achievements, collecting feedback and improvements, resolving disputes, recognition and awards, future planning and collaboration

*Source: Thompson, Rodriguez, and Chen (2019).*

## **Methods of the Study**

### *Design of the Study and Data Collection*

In the Ethiopian context, skills competition is a little-understood practice to be explored with particular emphasis on its planning, execution, and post-competition activities. Researchers explore when they have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they want to examine but have reason to believe it contains elements worth discovering (Stebbins, 2001). As a result, the study followed an exploratory qualitative

approach with particular emphasis on phenomenological research design, which targets gaining insight into the experiences and feelings of a specific audience concerning to the phenomenon under study (Hugh Good, 2023). It seeks to capture the underlying structures and core aspects of these experiences without imposing preconceived theories or interpretations. It is exploratory because it aims to answer a problem that is not clearly defined and understood by questioning as: “What is happening?” “Why is this happening?” “How is this happening? The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of existing practices and to gather insights into the challenges at hand

#### *Sampling and data collection*

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of national and annual skills competitions, 18 occupations, all level III, participated in the skills competition event. Eight department heads, who were available at the time of study initiation, were contacted and accepted the invitation to facilitate data gathering from judges and competitors since they are much closer and have contact addresses. However, only three occupation heads (ICT, furniture making, and building construction) were cooperative and facilitated data collection from judges using an open-ended questionnaire. Hence, data was collected using an open-ended-questionnaires from competition judges, and corresponding department heads communicated via email. Since the research idea was initiated after the closing of the competition event and participants left the hosting institution compound, respondents (judges) were approached via telephone and email, but none of the competitors responded. So, this report was organized based on six judges (two per occupation) and three department heads (one per occupation).

### **Data analysis techniques**

Qualitative design uses open-ended questions to elicit long-form written responses. These questions aim to reveal opinions, experiences, narratives, or accounts (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2009). Thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique, was employed to identify patterns, themes, and concepts within the data. This approach allows researchers to explore the richness and complexity of qualitative data, uncovering meaningful insights and understanding the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Guided by predefined categories (clarity of skill competition objective, planning, execution, competitors and, judges' issues), the data analysis process has passed through three steps:

- Reading and re-reading data to gain a deep understanding.
- Coding the data involves systematically tagging relevant segments with codes that capture the essence of the content.
- Grouping codes into broader themes, which represent patterns or recurring ideas within the data.

Based on such procedures, the following themes were identified, and a possible explanation and interpretation for each theme was done accordingly.

### **Data presentation, analysis, and results**

#### **Pre-competition activities**

With regard to skill competition event organization weakness, judges shared opinions, stating that (J2, J5, J7, and J8):

*As a gap I observed the facilities are not uniform. There is concerted effort among stakeholders. In another case, skills competition has to*

*be led by good planning and organization skills since it is a country level..... government agencies insufficient funding for skills competition, high costs of participation, lack of sponsorship opportunities, inadequate prize money has to be taken seriously as a lesson. Issues of eligibility criteria, competition rules and regulations, prizes and recognition have to be well established before the event.*

The above information depicts the existence of adequate planning and preparation problems. A country-wide competition is successful when preparations by hosting institutions are of good standard with regard to defined skills competition objectives and equivalent resource mobilizations. Selecting eligible participants may require considering age restrictions, skill level requirements, the qualification process establishing competition rules such as time limits, judging criteria, equipment and tools, safety regulations, the selection of the competition venue, the arrangement of facilities and equipment, clearly setting post-competition activities such as cash prizes, trophies, and certificates, career opportunities, coordination with competitors and other stakeholders, promotion, and publicity.

#### *Clarity of skills competition objectives*

Evaluators were asked to state the objectives of the skills competition just to check whether evaluators of the same occupation (department) have similar understanding. Here is the noted evidence regarding skills competition objectives clarity and scope.

An evaluator from wood science (J2):

*To create a better professional, support early-stage problem-solving innovations to deliver results, to know the level of experts, to have an*

*exchange of experience, in order to have a better view of different areas of work, to encourage innovations that are useful for the country and to make them be used.*

An evaluator from Building construction (J4):

*In skill, computational thinking helps students break down complex problems, recognize patterns, figure out how the different parts work together, and to create good work environment. And to appreciate, in courage creating, skill, developing work opportunity and experience sharing in national.*

Another evaluator from ICT department (J6)

*I do not really remember the exact objectives of the skills competitions, which are presented by the organizers. However, the following objectives are commonly observed in skill competitions: promote technical and vocational education, recognize and reward excellence, encourage skill development, facilitate industry engagement, foster innovation and creativity, enhance national competitiveness, inspire career aspirations and recruitment, raise public awareness, drive policy and education reforms.*

Concerning skills competitions purpose, there seems difference among respondents. Possibly, occupational orientations might have affected their response. In other words, there seems to be inadequate common understanding among stakeholders is crucial. In developing countries, the overall objective of skills competitions includes: promoting skills training among young people, changing societal attitudes, inspiring innovation, creating market connections, and contributing to the country's development and prosperity. Competition

also help learners develop essential skills critical to success in today's world. These skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, time management, and teamwork, all of which are essential in both academic and professional environments. Skills competitions provide opportunities for young individuals to compete and demonstrate their competencies in particular vocational skills using task-based and industry-relevant scenarios.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> round skill competition objective meeting*

With regard to 3<sup>rd</sup> round skills competition goal achievement, judges were asked to reflect on what they observed, and they shared what they perceived it to be.

*Yes. While I say this it also starts and ends in the given period without any problem. In another case, skill competition is a stage where you expect to see a new skill, knowledge and attitude the result of this brings a new technology, 100% copied technology and value added technology and competitive product for the world market. But according to this idea I didn't saw a very challenging technology, so in our country, still the maturity of skill started its journey but very long distance is left. So i can't say the 3rd skill competition met its objectives. (J8) indent the qualitative data*

*Yes, in overall judgment skill competition has inspired them to dream bigger and make bolder personal goals. It's also opened a lot of doors and created exciting professional opportunities as well as making them organized. Moreover, skill competition also helps learners to develop essential skills that are critical to success in today's construction industry. These skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, time management, and teamwork,*

*all of which are essential in both academic and professional environments ...  
.... (J4)*

Observations from judges seem mixed. To make skills competitions successful, hosting institutions or organizers have to do preparatory phase activities in relation to competitors' fitness and roles, as well as logistical arrangements. This may include identifying competitors' skills, educating them on how to compete via mock competition, doing competition readiness activities, fine-tuning skills and techniques, and doing refreshment training and skill development activities such as technical training, physical conditioning, mental preparation, teamwork, and collaboration.

### ***Skill competitors' readiness and competence***

Regarding skills competition participants, the following observations explain the situation:

*..... While you observe some of trainers and trainees' skills, knowledge and attitudes they bring on the competition stages are not matured and it needs more maintenance even at college levels. They think as a fashion but for me, this unplanned and unorganized cutting and joining materials in a short period of time are not success without analyzing and keeping the standard as well as without knowing our end users is wastage. The concerned body must think on these details. The blueprint/ package must prepare on time and materials needed for competitions must purchase. To fix this problem, before the competition date, the candidates who came from different regions and colleges may practices from two to three days on the equipment's they will took a competition. (Judge, J8)*

Another observation about competitors from J1 and J2 is presented below:

*Proper assembly should perform by the contestee they should pre-assemble the pieces and check if it is perfectly fit or make adjustment and after they will assemble it with glue, fix with dowel pins and use clamp for holding The contestee should show how they prepare wood surface preparation, sanding or smoothing of wood and use of spray gun in finishing (J1).*

*The contest has a time limit; they will be allowed only to finish it in 12 hrs that make it 1 day and half. The contestee should finish it on time or else they will be behind and the assessor's in-charge will not let them to continue (J2).*

By their nature, skills competitions demand participants' physical, psychological, and logistical readiness. Participants should start by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the competition they are preparing for. This involves researching various aspects, such as the competition format, rules, and requirements. Lack of proper orientation, intense pressure to perform the task, limited resources and equipment availability, time constraints, fear of failure and performance anxiety, dealing with high levels of stress, gossip about past experiences with respect to biased evaluation criteria, inconsistent scoring methods, and lack of transparency in the judging process may lead to disappointment. And these have to be managed proactively by the skill competition organizing committee.

On the other hand, competitors must prepare extensively, continuously improve their skills, and stay updated with the latest developments in their industry to excel in the competition. They must adhere to the rules and regulations set by the organizers throughout the competition. Competitors strive to give their best performance, exhibit sportsmanship, and engage in fair

play. Their participation not only allows them to test their skills but also provides an opportunity for personal growth, recognition, and networking.

*Technical and non – technical skill gaps*

An evaluator from building construction (Tiling):

*.....They are two kinds of skills hard skill and soft skill. In my point of view, they are good on soft skill but when we come to hard skill there is a gap of updated technology, lack of machine operation system, lack of technical exercise and poor on safety rules. To be honest on our trainers there is a big lack of hard skill (more work to be done on Trainers hard skill). To generalize it I participate in all of skill competition from first to third us evaluator there is change on key performance from the first and second skill competition. Some competitors do not to know about the objective of the skill competition and attention to the project that they have to done, and some competitors using different hand tools for the appropriate works and interpreting project drawings.*

Assessors from wood science (furniture making):

*Contesters should need to improve their reading and interpreting, working drawing, should know how to priorities and manage their times, should operate machine and observe safety. Participants must need to practice cutting wood joinery, its squareness, neatness and preciseness. Participants must also concern in preparing surface for finishing. Time management, shallow understanding of the project; missing some production steps, selection of good material, joint making especially dovetail joint was less than expected.*

Judges from ICT department

*Some contestants showed a lack of attention to detail, resulting in minor errors during hardware assembly or network configuration. There was a gap in non-technical skills such as paying attention to detail and using time appropriately. But Trainers were better than trainees in non-technical skills such as understanding the questions, communication skills, applying problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and task management. There were instances where minor errors or oversights were noticed in their database designs or documentation. Additionally, time management skills could be enhanced, as some contestants struggled to complete tasks within the allocated time frame.*

The descriptions quoted above indicate that there are some technical and non-technical skill gaps. Lack of mock skill competition, inadequate understanding of the competition objectives they are preparing for and formats of skill completion may lead to such shortcomings. Researching and creating awareness on the competition format is a crucial step before participating in any skill competition. Participants need to familiarize themselves with the objectives, expectations, structure, timeline, and procedures of the competition. This includes understanding the number of rounds, the scoring system, and any specific tasks or challenges they will face. By doing so, participants can strategize their approach and effectively allocate time and resources for each stage of the competition. On the other hand, the skill competition organizing committee should do pre-competition activities.

### **Discussion of Results**

National and international skills competitions are seen as positive and strong learning pathways for students by TVET providers, policy makers and

industry operators. In the WorldSkills network, positive learning outcomes are continuously reported by students, and their mentors (teachers, trainers and parents). Moreover; skill competition activities are adding value by serving as a hub for further professional development of teachers and trainers; providing teachers and trainers with extra pedagogical and didactic skills and new teaching and learning strategies; and contributing in the development of curricula and the creation of education.

In the 47<sup>th</sup> edition of World skills competition, held from 10 to 15 September 2024, in Lyon city, France, Ethiopia was fully accepted to be the 88<sup>th</sup> member of world skills organization and for the first time three young Ethiopians participated in skills competition (CNC machining, furniture making and networking skills category).

This is historical and a good beginning for the government, education institutions and youth in general because skills competitions (SC) are a strong resource in the overall development of education and VET, the development of skills excellence and the professional and personal shaping of students.

Before participating in the world skills competition, Ethiopia kicked off the third round of nationwide skills competition with the slogan ‘Skills for Competitiveness.’ This competition was organized by the Ministry of Labour and Skills and held at the Federal Technical and Vocational Training Institute (FTVTI) from 22-26 May 2023, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The competitors were from vocational skills centers (TVET trainers and TVET trainees) in 18 competition trades or occupation-specific skills.

After the event is over, an attempt was made to explore skills competition activities by collecting data from judges and involved department representatives. Analyzed data depicted that skills competition event was

implemented with pre, during and after phases having its own strengths and limitations.

#### Pre – skill competition

Ethiopia had the experience to organize national skills competition in the last two consecutive rounds. And it is improving its event organization. In every skills competition, activities demand a lot of extra time, efforts and (extra) funding. However; pre skill competition activities of third round seems not well organized by making necessary preparations and coordination of stakeholders. For instance, preparing necessary documents, standards and code of ethics is not yet put in place during the third round. Failing to plan about resources, facilities, infrastructures adequately is planning to unlearn. Skills competition activities should not see as a special addition as stand-alone events. As a result, organizers and participants should be concerned about the extra time needed for preparation, training and participation of testers. So, the host/organizing committee should develop requirements of different official documents including the constitution, the standing orders, the code of ethics and competition rules. So, a functional office with defined roles and expected outcomes and standards has to be institutionalized and the office has to execute responsibilities adequately and progressively.

#### Actual competition

Successfulness/unsuccessfulness of skill competition is the consequence of preparation phase (pre–skill competition careful planning). Good planning or scheduling leads to good execution. But during execution phase, participants and venue readiness, accessing optimal competition facilities and infrastructure were not as expected from the host. So, the skill competition organizing committee must execute jobs before actual competition commences including housing testers early the schedule; confirm

accessibility of a suitable workshop area and equipment for each skill competition in accordance with the skill's technical description and infrastructure list.

Moreover; one of the advantages of skill completion is TVET image building. However; the host responsible for organizing the Competition was poor in public relations and event publicity before and during the Competition. So, media arrangement has to be one key activity of the event to broadcast from event preparation to completion.

Post - competition

The opening ceremony of third national skill competition was colorfully launched in the presence of federal, and regional senior government officials, education institutions, contesters, judges, and other invited partners and industry operators. However; in the course of event progress, because of inadequacy of structured and defined procedures, complains from contesters and judges were observed. Some of the sources of complain were work shop arrangements, psychological and physical preparation of contesters, time allotment, evaluation criteria and scoring methods, award of certificates and incentives on time.

So the organizing committee should learn and abide by the core values of skills competition which includes diversity, excellence, fairness, innovation, integrity, partnership, and transparency. And they should coordinate all the accredited persons (facilitators, judges, and contesters, partners) to be fully engaged from start to end by aligning themselves with the highest levels of integrity, honesty, and fairness.

### **Conclusions**

Modern skills and workforce development systems need to provide skills that meet changing employer demands and local job market needs. Skills

competition enhances this interaction and skills' development. Competitions in which VET-students can show their vocational and personal skills are a perfect platform to expose and benchmark learning outcomes, providing nations and colleges to improve their standards. In this perspective, skills competition activities in VET directly contribute to the strengths and opportunities of national economies. Acquiring skills and achieving skills excellence is determined not just through delivering an adequate and developing skill-set, but it needs also the resilience, agility and creative mind-set that are vital for driving higher performance at work and the capability to meet rapid changes in technology and disruptive innovations.

Cognizant of this, Ethiopia is experimenting skill competition as a value additive activity by implementing national skills competitions every two year. No doubt, Skills competitions encourage both the young and adults to consider VET as a viable, attractive option. They are also an important tool for developing and benchmarking VET. Participating in skills competitions is an excellent way to develop the expertise of the personnel of the education organizers, offer students individual learning paths and develop the operational activities of the entire organization. Skill competitions can also transform learning outcomes, supporting innovations in teaching and assessment practices across the curriculum. By embedding competition activity into core teaching and learning activities, vocational education and training providers can ensure their apprentices, students and staff to raise standards, improve outcomes and enhance engagement. With this understanding and background, local and national skill competition organizers should institutionalize and built well skills competition constitution by clearly depicting roles and responsibilities of stakeholders before, during and after skill competition event.

## **Possible Lessons**

Skills competitions offer numerous benefits for participants, organizations, and society as a whole. By participating in these competitions, individuals have the opportunity to enhance their skills, gain recognition, and expand their professional network. At the same time, organizations can identify talented individuals, promote excellence within their industries, and improve overall performance. Additionally, skills competitions contribute to economic growth, inspire future generations, and enhance national competitiveness. Convicted of this, the government of Ethiopia has installed skills competition platforms, despite some attention to improvements. Learning from the past and planning for the future is very advisable, considering the following points:

### *Institutionalizing skills competitions and upscaling offices*

The Ethio-skills competition event, involving TVET trainers, trainees, and some private enterprise operators in 2023, has showed that skills competitions are organized by committees, whose roles are mainly scheduling, communicating with regional states, assigning judges, ranking contesters for possible award prizing, and acknowledgements. Such a short-term project may not achieve the ultimate purpose of skills competition sustainably. Instead, the skill and technology competition office may be accountable to MoLS or TVTI with clear duties and responsibilities, including planning and preparation, mobilizing resources, promoting exemplary skills and technologies to the next level, preparing competition guidelines and rules, organizing competition events in regions, etc.

## **Competition Readiness**

Skills competitions often involve rigorous preparation and training to achieve success. In this regard, the skills competition committee or hosting institution should execute pre-competition activities such as finalizing logistics and equipment, mock competitions and simulations, performance evaluation and feedback, fine-tuning skills and techniques, setting coping strategies for participants' time management challenges (prioritization, multitasking, meeting deadlines), and emotional challenges (handling pressure, dealing with failure, managing stress).

*Include industries in the skill competition event.*

In the skills competition events, competitors are from TVET institutions (trainers and trainees) and some enterprise operators. It seems good in the future to invite medium and large scale industries to compete in the competition event since the competition event does not only provide employers with valuable information about their employees' competence but also creates opportunities to share experiences and partnerships.

*Standardizing competition tools and evaluation procedures*

Skills competitions are organized with the optimistic belief that they provide employers, colleges, and independent training providers with a proven method of achieving real results for young people of all abilities. Hence, skills and technology selection tools, equipment, materials, people, space and time, competition venues, and evaluators' competence, and validity of evaluation criteria should be up to standard and should be developed through key stakeholders' involvement.

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*Develop a sense of ownership among key stakeholders.*

Skills competitions have become an increasingly popular platform for individuals to showcase their abilities and talents. However, several challenges and issues have been identified that hinder the success and fairness of these competitions. One key problem is the lack of communication between stakeholders, including organizers, participants, and judges. Insufficient and ineffective communication channels can lead to misunderstandings, confusion, and frustration among all involved parties. Another significant issue is the unfair judging criteria employed in skills competitions. When the criteria for evaluation are subjective, biased, or inconsistent, it undermines the credibility and transparency of the competition, affecting participants' motivation and trust. Additionally, limited opportunities for participation pose a challenge, as many aspiring individuals may not have access to these competitions due to geographical barriers, a lack of awareness, or restrictive entry requirements. Hence, the involvement and sense of ownership of key stakeholders such as the media, judges, competitors, partners and sponsors, hosting institutions, and government agencies in skills competitions have to be strengthened.

*Documenting events*

The ultimate purpose of skills competitions is to benefit competitors, which may include a drive for excellence, innovation, promotion and collaboration. To ensure such desirable qualities, practicing strategies to outperform competitors, such as identifying competitor strengths and weaknesses, developing unique skills and techniques, analysing competitor performance, and archiving and publicizing events for further reference, seems viable.

*Limitations of the study*

This report is organized using an open-ended questionnaire from three occupations (furniture making, database administration, and tiling/masonry) judges and department members on a voluntary basis. The study lacks information including competitors' opinions, other occupation judges, department members, and members of the skills competition committee. Hence, further and more in-depth study is needed by involving key stakeholders and multiple data sources, such as event observation and interviews.

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