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Challenges Affecting the Effective Implementation of Vocational Education Program in Youth Polytechnics in Kenya

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to identify the challenges affecting the effective implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. The research work was limited to four randomly selected Kenya Youth Polytechnics and addressed the following research questions: What students' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?; What facilities factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?; What teachers' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?; and, what government/parental factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics? The main instrument for data collection was a questionnaire administered to 10% of the target population of teachers (N=50) and students (N=450) in the study area. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including the sample mean and grand population mean. The findings revealed a dearth of professional and qualified teachers for the teaching of vocational subjects; inadequate infrastructure and equipment in schools; insufficient instructional materials and books in schools; and that the polytechnics were generally poorly financed. Two key recommendations were that adequate infrastructure should be provided in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics so that they are properly equipped for functional teaching and learning, and that an 'enlightenment' campaign should be carried out in the society to emphasize the importance of vocational education.

Key words: Vocational Education, Youth Polytechnics

INTRODUCTION

Adesina, (1982) comments that education at all level is a delicate issue, which serves as a

way forward to every society especially in a developing nation. Advanced countries have improved their standard of living by

education, which is considered to stimulate economic and technological development; thus, education can be regarded as an investment that yields dividends in terms of overall development of a country.

Education in any form, traditional or formal, shapes the destiny of society. Today, education is considered the critical soft-ware for development. According to John (1973), Education can be defined as an integral part of social, political, economic and cultural processes. Its social purposes can be classified into education that enhances: survival strategies that enable women and men to survive the harsh conditions in which they live. Such provision may include literacy, primary health care, and some home craft skills; education and training for the formal and informal sectors of the economy; cultural and political education which aims at empowerment of women and men to participate actively in society through the networks of community organizations, political parties and trade unions.

Since gaining independence in the year 1963, Kenya has strived to provide equal education opportunities to all citizens regardless of race, sex or creed. The concept of youth polytechnics was developed and

popularized. Village (youth) polytechnics were established to equip primary school leavers with skills for self-employment or employment. During this time, youth polytechnics were initiated and owned by the communities with the support of the National Council of Churches of Kenya and later other churches. This was a strategy to ensure that school leavers had access to technical, entrepreneurial and business skills which would lead them into income generating activities, to improve the standards of the communities in which they lived, and to stem rural-urban migration (Ngware et al, 1999).

In 1972, the government recognized the important role that Youth Polytechnics were playing in imparting skills and decided to support this community initiative through grants. With the advent of the 8-4-4 system of education in the late 1980's, another technical educational programme was formulated. Youth Polytechnics were placed as the first rung in the technical skills development ladder. Theoretically, a student trained in a youth polytechnic could sufficiently develop his/her skills to an undergraduate degree level (Ndegwa, 1991). Since the publication of NCKK report (1966) of "After school, what?", the Kenya Government, voluntary organizations, the

churches and other development partners have been deeply concerned with the problem of youth unemployment in Kenya; it seems to continue increasing given higher population growth rates, slow pace of economic expansion, and the shrinking formal employment sector (Ministry of Youth Affairs; Kenya 2006).

Currently there are about seven hundred (700) Youth Polytechnics spread across the country that offer a wide range of skills leading to Government practical Trade Test Examinations. Some offer artisan certificate courses which are certified by the Ministry of labour (Ministry of Youth Affairs; Kenya 2006).

Over the years, Youth Polytechnics have suffered from a poor public image leading to a decline in the number of young people enrolled in them. In addition, many Youth Polytechnics lost their focus and started offering varied courses that were supply driven rather than market demand driven. The courses they offered were limited to traditional skills and they lacked entrepreneurial focus. This led to a mismatch between the skills the Youth Polytechnics offered and skills required in the labour market (Kerre, 1998).

For Kenya to stand out technologically there is the need for the effective implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. In spite of the importance of vocational education to the development of both individuals and the society at large, there is no much emphasis placed on the effective implementation of vocational education programs in Kenya. The frequent occurrence of low students' participation in vocational education courses has been a great concern to all-well-meaning individuals, institutions and industries. It is in the light of the above, that the present study was carried out to ascertain if there are factors responsible for the non-effective implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to identify the challenges affecting the effective implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. The first specific objective was to identify the students' factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

The second objective was to determine the facilities factors affecting the non-

implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

The third objective was to identify the instructors' factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

The fourth objective was to determine the government/parental factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

Research Questions

To address the above objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What students' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?
2. What facilities factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?
3. What instructors' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?
4. What government/parental factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

While carrying out the study, the researcher employed the survey design. Survey design is capable of collecting background information and hard-to-find data and the researcher had the opportunity to motivate and influence respondents' responses. Sproul (1995; 30) recommends the survey technique for research where attitudes, ideas, comments and public opinion on a problem or issue are studied. The population of the study consisted of 450 students studying vocational/technical courses, and 50 Instructors teaching vocational/technical courses in four randomly selected Youth Polytechnics in Koibatek, Baringo North and Baringo districts in Kenya.

A total of forty (45) students and five (5) teachers were chosen randomly for this study, and the sample size out of the total target population of students offering vocation/technical courses and teachers teaching technical/vocational courses in four randomly selected Youth Polytechnics located in the study area, representing 10% of the population. The method of sampling adopted was a systematic random sampling process under a pilot test re-test method, and

this gave an average value of 0.96 reliability correlation coefficient, which was considered adequate for the study. A structured questionnaire for the study, consisting of a five-point rating scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and an open ended question to collect the general views of the respondents about vocational education was employed in the data collection.

RESULTS

The result of this study is presented in line with the research questions raised and the hypotheses formulated

Research Question 1

What students' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?

This objective sought to establish the students' factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth polytechnics. Student's awareness of the importance of vocational education programs variable was operationalized. Student's awareness was deemed relevant to the study. The respective frequency and percentage was calculated and the results indicate the following: that students are not aware of the importance of vocational education programs with a grand

mean of (40%); students in Youth Polytechnics feel that vocational education is meant for technical colleges (44.4%); students are always afraid of practical work (8.9%); and that students are afraid of vocational education due to fear of doing a statistics subject (6.7%). The implication of this was that students were not aware of the importance of vocational education in Youth Polytechnics, and that they felt that vocation education was meant for technical colleges only.

Table 1 Students' factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Youth Polytechnics

Students awareness	Frequency	(%)
Youth Polytechnics Students are not aware of the importance of vocational /technical education	18	40
Students in Youth Polytechnics feel that vocational education is meant for technical colleges	20	44.4
Youth Polytechnics Students are always scared of practical work	4	8.9
Youth Polytechnics students are afraid of vocational education due to fear of doing a statistics course	3	6.7
Total	45	100

Research Question 2

What students' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?

The study sought to establish the facilities factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. The purpose was to determine whether the challenges emanated from the lack of insufficient resources for training. Three key types of resources were identified as material, human and financial.

Results presented in Table 2 indicate the following: there was lack of adequate textbooks in the library (20%); materials for teaching and learning were not readily available (31.1%); workshop equipment was inadequate (40%). Teaching aids were not always used in class (8.9%). The implication of this was that, textbooks should be provided in the library, teaching and learning materials should be made readily available, teaching aids should be used in class, and that adequate workshop equipment should be provided in Youth Polytechnics.

Table 2 Facilities factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Youth Polytechnics

Workshop, materials and textbook factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
There are inadequate textbooks in the library	9	20
Materials for teaching and learning were not readily available	14	31.1
Teaching aids are not always used in class	18	40
There are inadequate workshop equipment	4	8.9
Total	45	100

Research Question 3

What instructors' factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?

The human resources consist mainly of trainers (instructors, training officers and managers) which are essential in the dissemination of knowledge and skills. Availability of competent trainers was an important aspect when students decide to join Youth Polytechnics. The variable competent instructors were correlated with the aim of the trainees joining the institutions. It was established that the aim

of the trainees was to acquire practical skills for self-employment.

Results presented in Table 3 indicated the following: a lack of professional and experienced instructors (20%); instructors are not provided with enough allowances (37.8%); motivation of instructors by government is high (17.8%), and there is a cordial relationship between instructors and students (24.4%). All of these are seen as exerting some effect on the implementation of vocational education programs in private secondary schools. The implication of this is that instructors should be professionals and experienced in the instruction of vocational subjects, instructors should be provided with enough allowances, instructors should be motivated to teach, and there should be cordial relationship between instructors and students.

Table 3 Instructors' factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Youth Polytechnics

Teachers' factors	Frequency	%
Lack of professional and experienced instructors	9	20
Instructors are not provided with enough allowances	17	37.8
Motivation of instructors by government is high	8	17.8
There is a cordial relationship between instructors and students	11	24.4
Total	45	100

Research Question 4

What government/parental factors affect the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics?

This objective sought to establish the government/parental' factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. Government/parental' factors was deemed relevant to the study. The respective frequency and percentage was calculated and the results tabulated as shown in the table 4. Results from Table 4 indicate the following: a lack of cooperation from parents (24.4%), a lack of government appreciation for vocational education (26.7%), parents are unable to afford books

for courses offered (20%), and vocational education programs lack support from government (28.9%).

Table 4 Government and Parental Factors affecting the non-implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics

Government and Parental Factors	Frequency	%
Lack of cooperation from parents	11	24.4
Lack of government appreciation for vocational education	12	26.7
Parents are unable to afford books for courses offered	9	20
Vocational education programs lack support from government	13	28.9
Total	45	100

Research findings

This section reports the findings concerning the objectives and answers to the research questions. From the results obtained in the tables of analysis of the data the following research findings are presented:

Student attitude was partly responsible for the non-implementation of vocational

education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

The entry behavior was another impediment to effective implementation of vocational education program as there was no minimum entry requirements explicitly set out to admit quality students thus compromising the quality of graduates and their performance in trade test examinations.

Methods of Instruction were wanting in most cases as majority of the instructors had not undergone training on pedagogy.

A lack of adequate training facilities was one factor affecting the implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

Teacher attitude affected the implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

Poor government and parental attitude were factors inhibiting the implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics.

The government had not come up with concrete policies to manage vocational education and the management of this sector

was haphazard as it relied on policies set out by the ministry of education, social services labour, youth affairs among others.

The curriculum being used in youth polytechnics was outdated as it had last reviewed just after the independence of Kenya. However the government had started the review process of the curriculum though the process had not been completed.

DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of data in Table 1 suggests that many student attitudes or factors affected the non- representation of vocational education programs in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. Thus, for the vocational programs to be fully implemented, students as stakeholders have to be made aware of such programs and their importance; they must become interested in practical skills-oriented lectures, and cognitive skills at the same time. If the students are to become employable on graduation, they must appreciate hands on learning.

The finding of the study showed that effective vocational training cannot take place in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics without the adequate provision of learning facilities. Instructional facilities needed include; textbooks, classrooms, workshops, library,

tools, equipment and so on. These findings are in agreement with (Puyate, 2004) who asserted that no vocational program can be complete without adequate facilities. Consequently, for skills training to be implemented effectively, enough training facilities have to be provided.

The finding of the study shows that instructors, who are the major operators of educational systems or programs, are expected to effect and impart the needed knowledge to the trainees. This can only be effective if instructor's welfare is made a priority to make them comfortable to work. They needed adequate remuneration, incentives, allowances, promotion and so on. This finding are confirmed by Olaitan (2007), who reports that if government places much importance on vocational education programs in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics, then there was need for teachers to be provided with adequate remuneration, incentives, allowances and promotion because the teachers are the major players in the implementation of any education program.

The finding of the study showed that the government's attitude towards vocational education programs in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics was a key factor in the

effective implementation of programs. The process of provision and implementation of any national education program lies on the shoulders of the government. The Kenya government was rich in policy papers on education in general, and vocational education in particular, but had no clear plan for effective implementation of the policies papers. Thus, for the vocational education programs in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics to be implemented effectively, the government needed to assume full responsibility in their implementation process.

CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to identify the challenges affecting the effective implementation of vocational education program in Kenyan Youth Polytechnics. From the findings of the study, the researcher arrived at the following conclusions:

From the findings of the study the researcher concluded that, planning of adequate and suitable vocational/technical educational programs should not be for the sake of formality, but should be implemented effectively. Those courses which are practically-oriented should be accorded appropriate recognition, which they deserved in the realm of educational

activities to make them marketable and to attract students and funding..

The bedrock of technological advancement in any country lies in the effective implementation of educational policies. Therefore, government should emphasize technology-transfer through its educational policies. Students in particular, should be enlightened on the importance and advantages of science and technology-related subjects, as well as vocational/technical courses as a way of reducing the present high unemployment prevailing in the country.

Youth polytechnics training should not be treated as a marginal element of either educational or industrial policy. In a context of globalization, it is a core element of strategies for both competitiveness and poverty eradication. This importance should be reflected in the profile given to training in national policies and in the locus of responsibility for training in governmental structures.

From the research study done, it came out clearly that the 'Jua Kali' sector (Informal sector) was absorbing most students who would have been enrolled in the vocational education training institutions hence

lowering the enrolment levels in vocational education institutions. This was because the equipment, machinery and tools used in this sector were modern and the training provided the interns with favourably good practical skills. However the mode of training did not enable the trainees acquire certificates and theoretical knowledge on the skills they learnt, hence could not progress with their education to higher levels.

This research highlighted some of the issues encountered in the implementation of vocational/technical education programs in Youth Polytechnics in Kenya. The researcher provided the following recommendations stated below with the intention of facilitating the effective implementation of vocational/technical education programs in Youth Polytechnics in Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the present study:

A component on attitude change of students should be incorporated in the curriculum to prepare them psychologically for greater achievements in their education as a foundation to encourage them to progress their studies up to the University level.

Students in Youth Polytechnics should be made aware that vocational education is not meant for technical colleges only but could propel their education up to the University level.

Adequate enlightenment campaigns should be carried out in society generally about the importance of technical and vocational education.

Adequate infrastructure should be provided in youth polytechnics, and they should also be properly equipped for teaching and learning.

Instructional materials for the teaching of technical and vocational-related subjects should be provided.

Libraries should be built in youth polytechnics, and also be well equipped with books and other reference materials.

Instructors should be well remunerated, be paid on time and they should be given fringe benefits, and other incentives due to them, to boost their morale.

The Youth Polytechnics need to seek alternative sources of funding their operations, relying on the government and

parents was not sustainable, neither was it adequate.

The government should speed up the process of policy formulation to manage vocational education in the country.

Youth polytechnics training policies needed to be clearer about their role in preparation of their students for self-employment.

Professional and experienced Instructors should be employed to teach vocational/technical subjects.

Regular training and re-training programs in form of seminars, conferences, in-service training programs, short courses and workshops, should be organized at regular intervals to simulate instructors' interest in vocational/technical subjects.

The Vocational education curriculum review process should be hastened to enable the sector produce competent graduates who can compete favourably in the ever changing technological world.

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