

IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS TECHNICAL/VOCATIONAL SKILLS ON YOUTH ENROLLMENT FOR SKILLS TRAINING: A CASE OF YOUTH POLYTECHNICS IN GATUNDU-KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Development of a countries economy greatly depends on human resource that is well equipped with the appropriate skills and training that can manage and steer growth of industries. Technical Vocational Education (TVET) has over the years been identified as efficient training strategy that can empower societies with the right skills thus enabling growth of informal and formal industries especially in developing countries. However in Kenya, the type of technical/vocational education offered before independence created a negative attitude where few students opt for technical/vocational education. This crippled creativity, innovation and acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, which is vital to the development of technologies that would lead to rural industrialization. Youth polytechnics have been identified as major centers for youth development and training, yet receive very low enrolment. Conversely there is a large number of idle and untrained youth in rural areas. This study investigated the influence of community attitudes towards Technical/Vocational Education on students' enrolment for training in the youth polytechnics in Gatundu district in Central Kenya. This paper singles out community attitudes as a key factor leading to low enrolment. The population of the study included community members from Gatundu district. Purposive, sampling techniques were used to select the study sample. An interview schedule was the instrument used for data collection. Content analysis was applied on the qualitative data collected. The findings indicated that negative community attitudes and poor image on youth polytechnics emerged as a major factor that highly influenced enrolment levels. These findings are likely to stimulate action on the restructuring the management of youth polytechnics to raise public appeal. This will position youth polytechnics as institutions that focus on addressing community needs and employment creation.

Key words: Technical/vocational education, youth, community attitudes, enrollment, skills training, youth polytechnics

1.0 Introduction

According to Government of Kenya (GoK) Skills Gap Analysis Report (2012) and Youth policy paper Republic of Kenya (RoK 2007), seventy five percent (75%) of the population in Kenya are youth, and only 39% of this population are absorbed in the job market leaving the rest unemployed. Majority of the youth are found in the rural areas and due to the scarce resources they migrate to towns to compete for the scarce job opportunities. They end up in the slums where they are vulnerable to recruitment into gangs and militia groups to eke out for a living. Upon realizing this, the Government of Kenya, is in the process of restructuring technical / vocational education with emphasis on the crucial role of youth polytechnics (RoK 2007). This training will harness the creativity and innovativeness of the youth through relevant education and skills training programmes. Ultimately, it will prepare the country in focusing on realization of the millennium development goals and Kenya Vision 2030. The youth polytechnics (YPS) have been initiated not only to solve the problem of unemployment but also to offer an alternative path way for attainment of skills under the technical, industrial and vocational education and training programme.

Geert, (2008) defines Technical, Industrial, Vocational, Entrepreneurship Training (TIVET) programme as a form of education which mainly leads participants into the acquisition of practical skills know-how and attitude necessary for employment in a particular occupation, group of occupations or self employment. Its main role of providing skills that improve productivity, raise income levels and improve access to employability has been widely recognized. Bonn resolution (UNDP, 2004) emphasize the importance of TIVET as a 'master key' for alleviating poverty, promotion of peace and environmental conservation to improve quality of human life and promote sustainable development in Africa.

According to Nyerere (2009) TIVET institutions in Kenya comprise of technical training institutions (TTIs), demonstration centers, Youth Polytechnics (YPs), Institutes of technology (ITs) and National youth service skills development centers. These institutions were established to offer TIVET education programmes. Kenya's political violence in December 2007 exposed the threat of a large population of unskilled and unemployed youth amidst growing poverty. To address some of the underlying problems the government made an initiative of reviving the youth polytechnics in the country.

There are over 700 youth polytechnics in Kenya but only 639 are registered with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and sports as vocational training centers. Out of this number, 134 are private while 505 are government owned. The courses offered in the youth polytechnics include: Fashion & garment making technology, building technology, hair and beauty, carpentry and joinery, welding technology, electrical installation and wiring, information technology, agri-business and entrepreneurship. Nyerere, (2009) points out that, out of a youth population of 75%, a total of 61% are unemployed, lack employable skills majority and live in the rural areas and urban slums.

1.1 Community Attitude towards Technical/Vocational Skills

Negative attitude towards vocational education dates back to the colonial history of Kenya. Academic education was perceived as having a higher social status than vocational education, and even attracted higher wages in white collar jobs, creating a sense of secondary worker for those in technical fields (Bogonko, 1992). Republic of Kenya report, (RoK, 1999) points out that the vocational education introduced in Kenya before independence helped its graduates to perform subordinate tasks while foreigners supervised them. This created a negative attitude and as a result few students opt for vocational education especially in rural areas. This, therefore, would cripple creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial skills, which are vital to the development of technologies that lead to industrialization.

According to Kinyanjui (2007), a negative attitude towards vocational education is not only among the community members, but also manifested among teachers/instructors and learners as they feel inadequate academically. This acts against effective mentorship from the teachers. The lack of business mentors or positive role models within the rural set up whom the youth can look upon with admiration, reinforces this perception. Having been used to a curriculum that is too academic and theoretical, the youth have developed a culture of dislike for practical based courses. This may have militated against the concept of self employment and rural industrialization propagated by vocational training through youth polytechnics. The optional nature of technical subjects in secondary education tends to create the impression that the none-technical subjects are more important. This attitude is strengthened by the recurrent budget allocations reduction by the Government to TIVETs and the recent developments where technical institutions and National polytechnics are being transformed into universities to offer non technical subjects (Muindi, 2011). The fact that technical/vocational education is not well established in the public Universities reinforces the attitude as observed by Mahinda and Mcleanard (2004).

Ngerechi (2005) argues that for Kenya to cater for the changing technological systems and economic development, a change of attitude towards vocational education must be addressed. The author further suggests that TIVET education system should not create inequalities in the education system. Instead it should provide good quality vocational education and training comparable to general academic education to avoid suspicion on quality by the society and raise the public appeal. GoK, skills gap analysis report, (2011) observes that the buildings and other teaching learning resources in public youth polytechnics are in poor condition compared to other public learning institutions. This could also create an impression that the youth polytechnics are of less importance as training institutions. Tilak (2006) observed that vocational education is an equity measure with a rural bias; it allows the rural community to acquire skills, develop talents and creativity. It serves the needs of the relatively poor by providing employment opportunities within the rural set up. However, contrary to the foregoing argument, the low enrolment seems to suggest otherwise.

In 1985 Kenya introduced a new education system where students would take 8 years in primary school, four years in secondary school and four at the university, hence the term 8-4-4 education system. The system was introduced to inculcate knowledge, skills and attitudes, which would change their perceptions and prepare the youth for the

world of work (Obura 1996). However, technical education at primary school does not exist at present, while at secondary school level few students opt for technical subjects due to negative attitude and the cost burden (ROK, 2006). The community was also supposed to contribute towards the cost of offering technical subjects, which meant more financial burden on the parents.

This strategy was meant to help the society to understand vocational training better (ROK, 1991). Technical/Vocational education has not recovered from the tainted image as it is still seen as low quality education. Semejju (2004) suggests that community involvement would create a better understanding of the socio-economic benefits of the youth polytechnics to the development of the catchment area. Community involvement promotes a sense of ownership and increases accountability to avoid misuse of resources. The community may also be involved in curriculum design and implementation to ensure that courses offered are appropriate to the available opportunities and socio-economic development activities in the area (ILO, 2001). The programmes in the youth polytechnics, lack public appeal and stature due to negative publicity and poor image arising from the physical structures and the traditional nature of the courses offered. For them to take their rightful place in the community, youth polytechnic courses need to be more responsive to the development activities of the areas as well as the technology in place. This may be in terms of participating in social economic activities and projects that address the immediate needs of the society. This approach may lead to increased community acceptance (UNDP, 2005), and an increase in enrolment.

According to Shiundu and Omulandu (1992), the youth polytechnics were intended to provide socio-economic development to the rural community through: Introducing the youth to certain ethics to prepare them for the world of work; Equipping of the youth with skills and attitudes that would lead to their involvement in income generating activities; use of the skills acquired to engage in sustainable livelihood, to uplift their standard of living and that of their communities by creating employment for self and others thus stemming rural-urban migration. This mandate has not been achieved since independence.

Community attitudes towards youth polytechnics are not an issue of concern in Kenya alone. Tilak (2006), highlights factors that work against TIVET in Asian countries, as socio-cultural attitudes towards vocational education and a negative attitude towards vocational oriented jobs, which reduces the demand for vocational education. It is further argued that vocational education is perceived as a preserve of the poor and the educationally backward sections of the community, low achievers and drop outs that are not eligible for admission into higher education. Consequently, it only attracts the racial minorities and women. This perpetuates inequalities in the education system which is a common phenomenon in many developing countries. Gill and Fluitman, (2000) argue that mechanisms for resource allocation in developing countries do not favour vocational education, as it is more expensive to sustain than general education. They further argue that most of the developing countries do not allow the provision of sufficient resources for vocational education due to budgetary constraints. As a result, the returns from the system are very poor. This trend also tends to promote negative attitude towards TIVET education.

According to RoK (2008), the Government acknowledges the role that the youth polytechnics could play in imparting the youth with the necessary skills for rural development and self-employment. The Government of Kenya gaps analysis on youth training report points out that, investing in youth polytechnic training means investing in national security as this reduces idleness giving the youth an alternative productive involvement rather than engage in dysfunctional behavior.

The focus of this study was on Gatundu district which had twelve (12) youth polytechnics out of which eight (8) were public and four privately owned. The total enrolment in these polytechnics at the time of this study was 581, yet there is a large population of youth out of school. Training acquired from youth polytechnics would empower the youth with skills to start business ventures in the area. This would in return provide jobs to the youth, enhance security, as well as provide some of the unavailable services to the community. This would make the youth polytechnics more beneficial and change the community perception on vocational skills.

2.0 Purpose and Objective of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine community attitudes towards technical/vocational skills and its influence on youth enrolment for training in youth polytechnics in Gatundu district.

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To establish the community attitude towards technical/vocational skills?
2. To establish the perceived benefits of youth polytechnics to the community
3. To assess the community's attitudes towards the courses offered

2.1 Research Methodology

This study employed descriptive survey design. The population for the study included members of the community in the areas where the polytechnics are located. Seven (7) public youth polytechnics were purposively selected and used as sampling frames for community members who participated in the study. Snowball sampling technique was used to select 50 respondents from the community for an in-depth interview. An interview schedule was used to collect data. The main area of focus was community attitudes towards vocational skills; attitudes towards courses offered, and perceived socio-economic benefits from the training. Experts in educational research validated the instruments. The instrument was piloted on 5 community members in the neighbouring Kiambu district.

To achieve the objective the responses were captured at three levels as follows:

- i. The community general attitude towards technical & vocational skills.
- ii. The perceived benefits of polytechnics to the community.
- iii. The community attitude towards the courses offered by the polytechnics.

3.0 Results

Table 1: Community general attitude towards youth polytechnics

Statements	N=50	Yes	No	Neutral
		Negative	Positive	
Dumping ground for school dropouts		6	-	-
A place for students to mature		7	-	-
A place for people with intellectual disabilities		12	-	-
Institute to accommodate the poor		5	-	-
Rural institutions of vocational training		-	14	6
Total		30 (60%)	14 (28%)	6 (12%)

Source: Field data

Table 1 shows community responses as to whether they thought the youth polytechnics in their areas were effective training institutions. All the respondents (100%) confirmed being aware of the existence of youth polytechnics. Probing further on the role of these institutions as sources of youth training in skills, (12%) felt that the polytechnics were good for training people with intellectual disabilities. These responses were rated as negative, positive or neutral. Those whose responses were 'yes' to the statements were rated as negative, while those whose responses were 'no' were rated positive.

Table 2: Perceived benefits of youth polytechnics to the community

Responses	N=50	F No	% Yes
Offers training to the community youth		30	14
Reduces crime		13	26
Occupies the youth (reduces idleness)		7	60
Total		50	100

Source: Field data

Table 2 shows the responses on the perceived benefits of the polytechnics to the community. All the respondents (100%) perceived the polytechnics as beneficial to the community, but each had their own perceived benefits. Majority (60%) felt that polytechnics kept the youth engaged, 26% felt that they reduced crime in the area, while only 14% felt that they were offering some useful training to the youth.

Table 3: Community's attitudes toward the courses offered

Statements	N=50	f	%
Assist those in need/ the poor		30	60
Good for non-performers		12	24
Good for school dropouts		8	16
Total		50	100

Source: Field data

The study was also interested in finding out what the community thought of the courses offered by the youth polytechnics. Table 3 shows a summary of the responses on community attitudes towards the courses offered. The results showed that 60% of the respondents felt that the youth polytechnic courses were only good for those who could not afford to train in other institutions. Further, 24% and 16% respectively felt that the courses were good for non academic performers and school drop-outs.

4.0 Discussion

From the results on Table 1, Negative attitude implied that the respondents had perceptions that were not supportive of the youth polytechnics, while the positive were supportive of the youth polytechnics. This large percentage (60%) with negative perceptions implies that though the polytechnics are located within the community, they did not view them as credible institutions for skills training. Surprisingly, the respondents are parents and members of the community and the negativity may imply that they may not encourage their children to enroll in these institutions. This may have resulted due to the failure to communicate or advocate the institutions mandate to the community to make them active stake holders on matters pertaining to the institutions as is the case of public primary and secondary schools. The courses offered did not relate to the local activities either through provision of goods and services. This divorces them from the community resulting to misconceptions. The government for a long time has not given priority to polytechnics in budgetary allocations, leading to a state of negligence of both equipment and physical facilities. This perception is also supported by Kinyanjui, (2007) who observed that the institutions lacked public appeal and that the courses were too traditional to attract the youth.

The results in table 2 indicate that the community did not perceive youth polytechnics as important training institutions. This may also suggest that those who enrolled their children only did so as the last resort especially they charge low fees hence affordable. For the institutions to gain acceptance in the community, they must be seen to contribute positively in terms of enhancing the quality of the lives of the community members. The old program which started in 1966 then referred to as 'village' polytechnics, was mandated to train the rural youth with knowledge skills and attitude leading to self employment. This would raise the living standards of the

community and initiate rural industrialization (Kings, 2005). This study observed that this objective has not been accomplished, due to community attitudes' towards the polytechnics which affect enrolment and security of workshops and equipment in these institutions.

Youth unemployment fosters dysfunctional behaviour, high levels of crime and violence, substance abuse and violence. Unemployment also results into socio- psychological problems as it blocks their passage to adulthood due to prolonged dependency, inability to join a career and capacity for productivity. It also alienates the youth from the society and the democratic process, which may result to social unrest. The post election violence experienced in 2007 is a clear indication of the danger posed by unemployed youth. Technical/vocational training would provide the youth with skills for productivity in self employment, the youth would then be able to take advantage of the established revolving youth fund to create jobs for themselves and others.

This could be done through having programmes with skills that directly relate to solving prevailing problems in the catchment area and the job market. Since Gatundu districts' main economic activity is small scale farming, short causes in farming and value addition as well as using the polytechnics as centers for community forums or activities that support the socio- economic life of the community would help to change the negative attitudes. A majority of respondents associated the courses offered with specific classes or categories of people in the society, for example; non academic performers, dropouts and the poor. These are perceptions likely to work against the trainees self concept.

The study also found out that only 14% of the respondents viewed the polytechnics as beneficial as training institutions, but the skills offered could not be applied in the area as most shopping centers lacked electricity and the roads net work was poor. This fact limited the number of youth enrolling for skills training as there are no businesses relating to the offered courses except garment making and public service vehicles driving. Twenty six percent 26 % viewed them as beneficial in reducing crime and idleness by offering the youth an alternative engagement and enhancing security in the community. The majority felt that the institutions could play a more meaningful role in empowering the youth if the skills provided were different or more advanced than what was offered by informal sector which a majority of the youth preferred. The results implied that the respondents supported the existence of these institutions. However, the institutions did not meet their expectations and this reinforced the negative attitude. GoK, (2011) observed that the Government has increased its financial and management support to youth polytechnics as they are critical in youth development. Public image of the institutions must be improved for them to be recognized as effective training institutions for the rural youth.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of this study it is concluded that community attitude towards the youth polytechnics' training was negative and that technical/vocational education is perceived as a preserve for the poor and non academic performers in the society. The courses offered only lead to blue collar jobs; as a result the community did not perceive them as of any economic benefit. This may have resulted in the slow development and ineffectiveness of these institutions. It is also concluded that the youth polytechnics have not achieved their mandate of training the rural youth with employable skills. The government through its development blue print (Vision 2030) emphasizes on youth polytechnics as a pillar in youth development, resulting to the commendable support the government is giving these institutions currently. The community is a main stakeholder in the polytechnics and ownership should be encouraged for them to be good ambassadors.

By providing technical/vocational training that matches the technological developments in place, the polytechnics would attract more students and reduce suspicion on the part of the community. Positive community attitude towards vocational education must be created if Kenya will achieve its rural development goal as envisaged in vision 2030. Active community involvement in the management and curriculum issues in the youth polytechnics would create a sense of ownership and understanding of vocational training programmes.

6.2 Recommendations

- (i) The government can improve the institutions by mainstreaming them to the Ministry of higher education science and education instead of the Ministry of youth affairs and sports, so that they are included in the education system policy planning and resources allocation as this will improve the public image.
- (ii) Involvement of the youth polytechnics in activities such as construction of cattle dips, churches and caring for the environment in the rural areas would increase public awareness. This would enhance positive attitudes among the community and in return increase the level of enrolment and productivity.
- (iii) Use the youth polytechnics for short courses to farmers and community groups tailored to address problems of the everyday activities as this will increase their usefulness and public image.
- (iv) Provide Jua kali shades in the shopping centers where the graduate can start small industries using the revolving youth funds availed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and sports.
- (v) Match the skills training with the job market and the development needs in the catchment area this will make the graduates competitive not only in Kenya but in the region.

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