

Quality of Programmes and Training in Youth Polytechnics: An Assessment of the Challenges Facing Youth Polytechnics in Provision of Quality Education and Training in Kenya

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Abstract

Tertiary education especially in Youth Polytechnics has been identified as the means to provide relevant and adequate technical skills for industrial and economic development consistent with aspirations of Kenya Vision 2030. Youth Polytechnics being accountable to the public as stakeholders need to guarantee that they offer quality training. However, with the diminishing number of students seeking education through Youth Polytechnics, the question of quality is critical and requires urgent attention. The objectives that guided the study were to find out the attitude of stakeholders on quality of programmes offered; Investigate challenges facing Youth Polytechnics in provision of quality education. The study adopted a descriptive research survey design and informed by the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal opportunity and Social Darwinism. The units of analysis were the 31 Youth Polytechnics, 4 were used in the pilot study. Methodology; data was collected through interviews and questionnaires. The findings were that there is shortage of instructors in the Youth Polytechnics and No standardization in academic programmes undertaken across the country. It was concluded that the enrolment was diminishing and quality of training, physical facilities and human resource was wanting.

Keywords

quality programmes, training, enrolment, stakeholders, Youth Polytechnics

1. Introduction

Education is an indispensable tool for the continued existence and growth of any nation. Education is seen as the prime mover and vehicle playing a critical role in the process of nation building. Education accounts for as much as 20% of annual Gross National Product (GNP) of developing countries socio-economic development (World Bank, 1980). Budu-Smith (2005) emphasizes that technical and vocational education is a major agent for industrial development and economic and social progress of any country. Without the skilled technical manpower produced by the polytechnics, technical and vocational institutions for industry, commerce and agriculture, national development would virtually

grind to a standstill.

A few countries like Singapore have managed to realize success in their levels of enrolment although the gap between their academic and technical streams has, in the past suffered similar dilemma. In the 1960's for example Singapore's academic and vocational students ration was 7:1. A study by Tilak (1988) indicated that most countries of South Asia have experienced a general decline, marginal increase or relative stability in enrolments. For instance, in Afghanistan the decline had been from 48% in 1951 to 9.1% in 1981 and in India from 7.3% in 1950 to 0.7% in 1975 (Tilak, 1988).

In third world countries, 1980s saw structural adjustment and cost-sharing measures deeply affecting public provision of education and training. While rate-of-return studies appeared to weaken the case for external support for post-primary countries which vocationalised their formal education systems in the mid-1980s they had to go it alone, without donor aid. Nonetheless, while agency policy became critical of vocationalised education from the mid 1980s, it remained popular for many national governments. In other words, shifts in donor policy had a much greater effect on sub-Saharan Africa, with its relative dependence on external financing, than any other regions (King & Palmer, 2006). In Africa, enrolment in vocational training as a percentage of primary enrolment has been from 0.3% to 0.5% since 1990 (Atchoarem, 2001). There has been a general consensus among education policy makers in Africa that more effort should be directed towards vocational technical education (Musaazi, 2001). It is evident that the importance of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has dawned among policy makers in many countries as reflected in the Various National Development Policy Documents of countries like Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia, Lesotho, and others.

Youth Polytechnics were seen as part of the assertion that community self-help could alleviate the primary school graduate unemployment problem. The Youth Polytechnics were considered less expensive to run than the costs which would be associated with the problems of unemployed youth. At the same time, Youth Polytechnics were closely related to the local needs and the absorption capacities of the rural villages (Republic of Kenya, 1988).

There is a growing sentiment that the public provision of training produces students with skills that are not relevant on the labor market. The proponents of this view often argue that the private training institutes are more flexible, more adaptable and better able to provide trainees with market-relevant skills. While there is limited evidence on the ability of private institutes to deliver better training, preliminary evidence of an on-going randomized vocational training project suggests that providing students with access to the private sector through a voucher program can improve outcomes such as increased student enrollment and retention. Given the preliminary evidence from the on-going vocational training project, it could be constructive for the government to introduce and carefully evaluate a pilot voucher program that allowed individuals to access both public and private vocational training centers (Republic of Kenya, 1988).

The Central Bureau of Statistics Survey (1999) revealed that participation rate for young people aged 15-24 in employment in Kenya was very low. One of the causes of this low participation was

ineffective education and training system that does not equip students with entrepreneurial skills for self-employment and industrial employment. The Youth Polytechnics were intended to provide training linked to production in order to produce a cadre of trained artisans (Mureithi, 2008). The enormous increase in the school enrollments contributed to a large number of children being forced out of the school system each year mainly because of lack of sufficient places and facilities, especially at the primary school level (Indire, 1982; Brownstein, 1972). As well, many graduates were not absorbed into the employment sector, and the general concern at the time was that they had no workable skills (Shiundu, 1986).

It is clear that the increased number of primary school graduates along with a number of drop-outs was a main cause of unemployment of the youth in Kenya. The education system had progressed faster than the labour market. Attempts to alleviate the problems of unemployment among youth, particularly the primary school graduates, were directed toward the establishment of non formal vocational education and training institutions such as youth polytechnics and the national youth service (Sifuna, 1984). These programs were to absorb youth for a few years and give them marketable skills. Technical schools, formal institutions such as secondary (now technical training institutes), industrial secondary schools, and "Harambee" institutes of technology were also introduced to provide vocational and technical skills, but for secondary school graduates. Mureithi (2008) observed that the rate of unemployment of youths aged between 15 and 30 years was estimated to be 67%, 90% of whom are not only unemployed, but also are lacking in entrepreneurial skills that would assist them in engaging in meaningful employment. This called for the enhancement of technical training and education in youth polytechnics.

Technical and vocational education is fundamental to the world of work. For most people, work is the desired outcome of their education and it is through their work that people achieve self-fulfillment. Burge (1991) noted that one of the major issues relating to the world of work where TVET has played a major role in providing solutions is the question of what changes should be made to school curricula at all levels so that young people are more work-oriented and have the basic skills needed for productive work. Omulando and Shiundu (1992) assert that there has been evidence of negative attitudes towards technical and vocational education by a large section of the Kenyan community. It has been claimed that the negative attitude was bred and crystallized with the advent of colonial rule in Africa and the discriminative approach of colonial administration to the education of the African in relation to that of children of the white colonialists. These actions could have influenced negatively the smooth incorporation of technical and vocational programmes into the regular school system of education.

Several countries both developed and developing such as Brazil, Italy, China, Sweden and Japan have given more recognition to technical and vocational education and training through adequate funding (Atchoarena, 2001). In Africa, only a few governments are able to finance technical and vocational educational training at a level that can support quality training. Ethiopia spends only 0.5% of its education and training budget on technical education while Ghana, Mali and Gabon spend 1%, 10%

and 12.7% respectively. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education allocates the technical sector 2% of its budget allocation while the rest is spread to other sectors within the ministry. There are many financing options left before the countries to use in funding educational institutions, which ranges from Cost sharing, Grants, Traditional loans, human capital contract, Income contingent loan, Graduate tax voucher, entitlement individual learning account, education savings account and learning tax credit. (World Bank, 2003).

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive survey research design.

2.1 Research Instruments

The main instruments of data collection for this study were questionnaires and interview schedules.

2.1.1 Questionnaires

Three questionnaires were employed in collecting data and namely Youth Polytechnic Managers Questionnaire (YPMQ), Questionnaire For Heads of Department (QFHD) and Youth Polytechnic Instructor Questionnaire (YPIQ) to establish the attitude of the stakeholders and find out the quality of training in programmes offered.

2.1.2 In-Depth Interview Guide

Three in-depth interviews were conducted namely Student Leaders' In-depth Interview Guide (SLIIG), In-depth Interview for Chairpersons of Parent Trainee Instructors Association (IICPTIA) and In-depth Interview for Ministry Of Youth Affairs and Sports (IIMOYAS) personnel to establish the attitude of the stakeholders and find out the quality of training in programmes offered.

3. Results

3.1 Attitude of Stakeholders on Quality of Programmes Offered in Youth Polytechnics in Terms of Physical Facilities and Human Resource

The respondents to this question were the Youth Polytechnic Managers, Heads of Departments, and Youth Polytechnic Instructors. They were requested to score on a Likert scale their responses on the quality of physical facilities as displayed on Table 1.

Table 1. What is the Attitude of Stakeholders on Quality of Programmes Offered in Youth Polytechnics in Terms of Physical Facilities and Human Resource

Statement	Frequency		
	YPM (Aver score)—n=26	HOD (Aver score)—n=39	YPI (Aver score)—n=81
Teaching facilities in disarray	3.92	3.23	2.93
Physical facilities outdated	3.85	3.92	3.74

Physical facilities not maintained	3.46	3.79	3.87
No play grounds	4.12	3.21	2.76
Short Inadequate tools and	4.08	3.97	3.70
equipment ge of training materials	3.96	3.97	4.09
Inadequate utilities, i.e., water & toilets	2.87	2.59	2.47
Overall Average Score	3.751429	3.525714	3.365714

In general, the Youth Polytechnic Manager's agreed that the quality of physical facilities was wanting as shown by the average overall average of 3.75. Head of Department's agreed that it affected the quality of academic performance with an overall average of 3.5.

This revealed that the polytechnic Instructors' agreed that it affected the quality of programs.

On attitude on human resource and programmes offered, the study found out that: Staff with low qualifications, they are rigid to grow with the changing society, Lack of library for use by students, Physical facilities are in dilapidated conditions, There is shortage of instructors in the YP's and No standardization in academic programmes undertaken across the country

3.2 Challenges Facing Youth Polytechnics in Provision of Quality Education

The respondents to this question the Youth Polytechnic Managers, Heads of Departments and Youth Polytechnic Instructors. These stakeholders were given an open-ended questionnaire to give their responses on the challenges which the Youth Polytechnics face. Table 2 summarizes their responses'.

Table 2. Human Resource Challenges Facing Youth Polytechnics in Kenya as Given by Stakeholders

Challenge	Y.P.MS (n=26)		H.O.DS (n=39)		Y.P.IS (n=76)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Most staff have low qualifications	20	76.92	37	94.87	15	19.74
Low and delayed remuneration for staff	22	84.62	21	53.85	70	92.11
Most instructors are not equipped with modern technology	16	61.54	22	56.41	59	77.63
Staff manning the institutions are inadequate & de-motivated	17	65.38	25	64.10	66	86.84
Inadequate administrative blocks, dilapidated classrooms and/or workshops	19	73.08	33	84.62	6	7.89
Enrolment in the Youth Polytechnics	22	84.62	23	58.97	54	71.05

is alarmingly low.

Most trainees abandon training before completion of course	21	80.77	17	43.59	38	50.00
Under utilization of the capacity of Youth Polytechnics and the non-relevance of some of their training programmes	15	57.69	19	48.72	20	26.32
Shortage of land for expansion	17	65.38	13	33.33	45	59.21

Note: Y.P.MS—Youth Polytechnic Managers, H.O.DS—Heads of Departments, Y.P.IS—Youth.

Source: Responses from the field.

4. Polytechnic Instructors

The study found out that the challenges facing Youth Polytechnics were the following:

- 1) Most staff have got low qualifications;
- 2) Low and delayed remuneration for staff;
- 3) Most instructors are not equipped with modern facilities;
- 4) Staff manning the Youth Polytechnics are inadequate and de-motivated;
- 5) Inadequate administrative blocks and dilapidated classrooms and/or workshops;
- 6) Enrolment in Youth Polytechnics alarmingly low;
- 7) Community's negative attitude towards Youth Polytechnics;
- 8) Underutilization of the capacity of Youth Polytechnics and non-relevance of some of their training;
- 9) Shortage of land for expansion;
- 10) Underfunding from the Government;
- 11) Physical facilities in a dilapidated condition;
- 12) Physical facilities are not maintained and declining enrolments with gender connotations.

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