

Why Trainees Drop Out of Vocational Training Centres in Kenya: Focus on Community-Based Factors

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Abstract

High dropout rates in many Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Kenya is a major issue of concern. This study was conducted to establish community-based factors that influenced dropout rates in VTCs in Kenya with focus on National Vocational Certificate of Education and Training (NVCET) curriculum. The study was conducted in four counties in Kenya, namely: Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, Nandi and Kakamega. Data was collected from five VTCs which had implemented the NVCET curriculum and were also Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) centres. This study utilized explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Survey data was collected first from 37 purposively selected instructors, 170 simple randomly selected second year, 9 purposively selected third year, and 3 conveniently selected 4th year trainees. Interviews were organized with the four County Directors of Youth Training and five Vocational Training Centres Managers who were purposively selected to participate in the study since they were deemed to possess valuable information for this study due to their respective positions. Document analysis was also used to enrich data collection. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative responses were thematically analyzed. The findings of this study revealed that there were few role models in the surrounding community, minimal moral and material support from the surrounding community and negative perception of the VTCs by the community. There were also cases of interference from the surrounding community on development projects. The study recommends the following; the community and the VTCs should do a follow-up of the trainees already completed VTCs and build a pool of role models, community sensitization on the need to support trainees morally and materially should be enhanced and introduction of psycho-social support programs to handle cases such as those of the orphaned children, among others.

Key Words: Community-based factors, Dropout rates, Vocational Training Centres, NVCET Curriculum

Introduction

Drop out is often a process rather than the result of one single event, and, therefore, has more than one proximate cause (Hunt, 2008). Understanding the reasons for students dropping out of an education system is the solution to addressing this educational issue. According to Maton and Moore (2010), the problem of not completing school should be the concern of every member of society since it has negative consequences at both the individual and social levels. The present study focused on the dropout rates in Vocational Training Centres which offer vocational training in Kenya. These centres were formerly referred to as Youth Polytechnics (YPs) upto 2013 when Kenyan government enacted Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Act, 2013.

Court (1976) observes that academic achievement or completion is a criterion for advancement in any educational system and it is measured by its ability to enable a person gain access to higher levels of learning or training. The author further observes that this desire may not be true with many of TVET institutions globally, since most of them do not offer opportunities for progress to higher levels of training.

According to Maclean and Wilson (2012), over 50 million students worldwide were enrolled in TVET institutions in 2012. In Europe and East Asia, TVET enrolment accounted for 50% and 30% respectively. In Africa and South America, their share was less than 20% and in North America and West Asia, less than 10% and 4% respectively. The findings demonstrate uneven variations in TVET enrolment. Looking at the Kenyan case, RoK (2015) data total enrolment in TVET programmes increased from 33,835 in 2012/2013 to 54,991 in 2014/2015 and 100,862 in 2015/2016. This increase was attributed to the addition of new training institutions in the Country.

Besides increase in TVET institutions and enrolments, there has been a small percentage of students transiting from Primary school to Vocational Training Centres. Atchoarena and Delluc (2001) observe that the negative effects towards TVET institutions in Africa have continued to affect negatively enrolment rates. The authors further observe there has been a perception that TVET is a reserve for those who failed to pursue general education.

With annual increase in TVET enrolments in Kenya, it is also important to note that school completion of the same students enrolled, with focus on VTC trainees may not be guaranteed especially with a development country like Kenya. According to UNESCO-UNEVOC (2012), TVET dropout rates remain high in a number of developing countries.

The government of Kenya created a Ministry of Youth Affairs in 2005 to focus on youth development (MOYA, 2006). The development focused on the revival of Youth Polytechnics countrywide to enable those who drop out of school, for various reasons to acquire appropriate skills to earn a decent livelihood (Presidential Press Service, 2007). The rehabilitation was done on infrastructure, provision of tools and equipment, introduction of the new (NVCET) curriculum a year later (2008) and its implementation in 2010, provision of Subsidized Youth Polytechnic Tuition (SYPT) fees and employment of instructors.

Though with government development support, VTCs have continued to experience non-completion of programmes by its trainees. In a study by Onditi (2015), trainees dropped out of Youth Polytechnics (YPs) due to pregnancy caused by the instructors and the peer trainees, low qualification of instructors, poor attitude of trainees towards vocational education and training and poverty. Other reasons were trainees' inability to cope with the training demands due to their low entry behaviour, lack of training facilities, poor teaching methodology and outdated curriculum. An earlier study by Ronoh, Mutai, Koech, and Kitainge (2014) reported that trainers in YPs were not enterprising and lacked innovative skills, making their classes dull and smaller due to drop out. According to a preliminary study conducted by the researcher in Elgeyo Marakwet County in one of the Youth Polytechnic that has implemented the NVCET curriculum, the findings in Table 1 indicate a reduction in the trainee completion rates.

Table 1: Percentage of trainees who completed the NVCET course in level 1

Course		Year	Number of Enrolled students enrolled	No of students who did exam	% of students who did exam
Food processing	Technology	2012	21	10 in 2013	47.6
Food processing	Technology	2013	21	16 in 2014	76.2

Source: Field data, 2015

In the above study, the management of the VTC pointed out the following as factors causing reduction in the number of trainees completing the course;

- i Trainee-based factors (pregnancy, indiscipline)
- ii Institution-based factors (insufficient counseling)
- iii Family-based factors (fee payment problems)

The reasons mentioned in the above studies may be true but it was necessary that an in-depth study be conducted to establish the causes of dropout in VTCs with focus on community-based factors.

Turning to the focus of this study, the surrounding community may have a great influence on the institutions of learning. Syomwene (2013) reported that majority of the communities in Kenya were of middle income. This level of income becomes a hindrance in a situation where an educational programme requires support from the surrounding community. According to Rumberger and Lim (2008), communities play a crucial role in adolescent development along with families, schools and peers. Living in an affluent environment or community is beneficial to the school success. The study suggested that affluent or well to do neighborhoods provided more access to community resources and positive role models. Simiyu and Sambu (2014) reported that the community played a key role in provision of Technical and Vocational Education and Training facilities and equipment in primary schools in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya. These two

studies reveal a very critical role performed by the communities surrounding a learning institution.

On the other hand, communities can also affect negatively a learning institution. Kinyanjui (2007) reports that a negative attitude towards vocational education does not only exist among the community members, but also manifested among instructors and learners as they felt inadequate academically. In an earlier study, Ngerechi (2005) cited in Kamau and Ngumbu (2013) argues that for Kenya to cater for the changing technological systems and economic development, a change of attitude by the government and other stakeholders towards vocational education must be addressed. He further suggests that TVET system should provide good quality vocational education and training comparable to general academic education to avoid suspicion on the quality by the society and raise the public appeal.

For the realization of a sustained development in the education sector in Kenya, it is important that the government monitors keenly how learners complete each level of education, including VTCs and how they transit to the next level or exit to the world of work. Hence, this study was designed and conducted to investigate the community-based factors influencing dropout in VTCs in Kenya.

Methodology

Explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was adopted in this study. This study was designed and conducted in four counties, namely; Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet, Nandi and Kakamega. Data was collected from Mogotio VTC in Baringo, Iten VTC in Elgeyo Marakwet, Mugen VTC in Nandi and Mautuma and Lugala in Kakamega. These sites were selected because they were the first VTCs to implement the NVCET curriculum in the year 2010 and were assumed to possess the required information for this study. The target population was 345 comprising of 4 County Directors of Youth Training, 5 Managers of Vocational Training Centres, 37 instructors and 299 trainees. Questionnaires were first administered to 37 purposively selected instructors, 170 simple randomly selected second year trainees, 9 purposively selected third year trainees and 3 conveniently selected fourth year trainees. Interview sessions were organized with the 4 County Directors of Youth Training and 5 Managers of Vocational Training Centres who were purposively selected to participate in the study due to their leadership positions. Therefore, this study had a total sample of 228 respondents. Document analysis was also used to enrich data collection. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the qualitative data from the organized interviews and open-ended items in the questionnaires were thematically analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The objective of this study was to establish the community-based factors that influenced trainee dropout rates in VTCs in Kenya. The study sought views from instructors and trainees on the influence of the surrounding community on trainee dropout rates. The analysis of relevant items in Table 2 indicate that the trainees agreed that there were trainee role models from the

surrounding community, the presence of role models from the community could positively improve the completion rates of trainees, and that the surrounding community gave both moral and material support to the Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) as shown respectively by mean scores of 3.88, 3.75 and 3.41. The trainees further agreed that the presence of a supportive community can increase the completion rates of the trainees, the community with negative attitude lowers the completion rates of VTC trainees, and that some members of the surrounding community interfered with projects in the VTC as shown respectively by the mean scores of 3.64, 3.19 and 3.03. The respondents disagreed (mean=2.53) that the surrounding community was very negative about the VTC. As revealed by the trainees that some of the members of the surrounding community interfered with projects in VTCs, Semejju (2004) suggests that community involvement would create a better understanding of the socio-economic benefits of the Youth Polytechnics, which are currently referred to as Vocational Training Centres to the development of the catchment area. The author argued that community involvement promotes a sense of ownership and increases accountability to avoid misuse of resources. Therefore, there is need for VTCs to continuously engage the surrounding community in their various activities so as to change the current negative perception towards them.

Table 2: Trainees' views on the influence of community-based factors on trainee dropout rates

Trainees' views on the influence of community-based factors		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
i	There are trainee role models from the surrounding community	182	3.88	1.114
ii	The presence of role models from the community can positively improve the completion rates of trainees	182	3.75	1.190
iii	The surrounding community gives both moral and material support to the VTC	182	3.41	1.309
iv	The presence of a supportive community can increase the completion rates of the trainees	182	3.64	1.203
v	The surrounding community is very negative about the VTC	182	2.53	1.260
vi	Community with negative attitude lowers the completion rates of VTC trainees	182	3.19	1.337
vii	Some members of the surrounding community interfere with projects in this VTC	182	3.03	1.475
N		182		

Table 3 shows that the instructors agreed that there were trainee role models from the surrounding community, the presence of role models from the community can positively

improve the completion rates of trainees, and that the surrounding community gave both moral and material support to the VTC as shown respectively by mean scores of 3.91, 4.21 and 3.03. The instructors also agreed that the presence of a supportive community can increase the completion rates of the trainees, the community with negative attitude lowers the completion rates of VTC trainees, and that some members of the surrounding community interfered with projects in the VTC as shown respectively by the mean scores of 4.15, 4.00 and 3.09. The instructors disagreed (mean=2.59) that the surrounding community was very negative about the VTCs. According to Kamau and Ngumbu (2013), active community involvement in the management and curriculum issues in Youth Polytechnics would increase a sense of ownership and understanding of vocational training programmes. Hence, community involvement with an aim of avoiding conflicts is critical in nurturing well developed VTCs that are acceptable and able to address the needs of the society.

Table 3: Instructors' views on the influence of community-based factors on trainee dropout rates

Instructors' views on the influence of community-based factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
i There are trainee role models from the surrounding community	34	3.91	.793
ii The presence of role models from the community can positively improve the completion rates of trainees	34	4.21	.592
iii The surrounding community gives both moral and material support to the VTC	34	3.03	1.141
iv The presence of a supportive community can increase the completion rates of the trainees	34	4.15	.657
v The surrounding community is very negative about the VTC	34	2.59	1.104
vi Community with negative attitude lowers the completion rates of VTC trainees	34	4.00	1.073
vii Some members of the surrounding community interfere with projects in this VTC	34	3.09	1.190
N	34		

The trainees and instructors responded similarly in Tables 2 and 3. Though they agreed that there were role models from the surrounding community, the qualitative responses from the instructors and County Directors revealed that there were few role models. It was further observed that there was lack of encouragement from those who had completed courses at VTC due to their personal engagements. The instructors said that the availability of role models could motivate many trainees to complete their courses, which eventually yield high trainee completion rates. The study further established that the community's support morally and materially was very minimal, which could have been attributed to poor perception of the VTCs. The managers

stated that there was high level of discouragement from those in the informal sector, commonly referred to as *Jua Kali* arguing that people can earn money without training. Hence, some trainees occasionally drop out of VTCs and venture into the informal sector. It was further revealed by the County Directors that some of the members of the community took their children to other sectors of education, hence depriving VTCs the needed resources in terms of financial support through payment of school fees. The instructors also revealed that members of the community did not put much emphasize on mobilizing financial support for needy children in VTCs. On the other hand, the trainees emphasized the need for a morally and materially supportive community. All these concerns imply that there was minimal or no support from the community and perhaps that is why the instructors stressed the need to sensitize the community on the benefits of VTCs. To highlight the need for a surrounding community that is supportive, South, Baumer, and Lutz (2003) argued that students in low socio-economic neighborhoods are more likely to drop out of school than students in more affluent neighborhoods. Affluent or well-to-do neighborhoods provide more access to community resources and positive role models. In a study done in Primary schools in Eldoret Municipality by Simiyu and Sambu (2014), it was observed that the community played a key role in provision of Technical and Vocational Education and Training facilities and equipment.

Though the quantitative responses from both trainees and instructors indicated that there were no negative perceptions from the community, the qualitative responses gave more insightful information into the issues affecting VTCs negatively. The Managers and the County Directors reported that there was still negative attitude from the surrounding community towards VTCs. For instance, some members of the community perceived VTCs as second class education institutions meant for failures, leaders encouraging all failures to join VTCs, negative statements by some Primary school teachers who said, “If you fail, you will go to VTCs”, among others. All these responses indicate that there was still negative attitude towards Vocational Training Centres in Kenya. Ngerechi (2005) cited in Kamau and Ngumbu (2013) argued that for Kenya to cater for the changing technological systems and economic, a change of attitude by the government and other stake-holders towards vocational education and training must be addressed. Perhaps there is need for regular sensitization on the benefits of the VTCs to the youths and the community at large so as to change their poor image. The interference of the development projects as reported by the respondents in the VTCs has to be addressed amicably through involvement of all the stake-holders; government, community and Boards of Management.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study established that there are a number of community-based factors that influenced dropout rates in Vocational Training Centres. This study concludes that lack of adequate role models, minimal moral and material support, negative perception of VTCs and interference on the development projects influenced trainees to drop out of Vocational Training Centres in Kenya.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i The Ministry of Education and the community leadership should urgently sensitize parents or families and the communities on the need to support their children's education in VTC. Strategies to rebrand VTCs should be initiated and implemented immediately so as to create a positive public perception. This will make parents and communities value education of their children equally in VTCs and other levels of education.
- ii Community leadership should urgently initiate community out-reach programs such as voluntary services in the VTCs. This will enhance both moral and material support to VTCs.
- iii The surrounding communities and the Vocational Training Centres should continuously do a follow-up of the trainees who have already completed courses in VTCs and build a pool of role models who will create positive influence to continuing trainees. They should also introduce psycho-social support programs to handle cases such as those of orphaned children.

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