

Influence of Family-Based Characteristics on Trainees' Completion Rate in Vocational Training Centres in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Lack of parental involvement is one of the major factors that leads to higher dropout rates in a school system. This paper focuses on the influence of family-based characteristics on trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Kenya. Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) were previously referred to as Youth Polytechnics (YPs) up to the year 2013 in Kenya when the country adopted the new name through an Act of Parliament. The study was conducted in five selected VTCs in four counties; Kakamega, Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet, and Baringo. The study adopted explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The study instruments employed were questionnaires for trainees and instructors, and interview schedules for VTC Managers and County Directors of Youth Training. The study had a sample size of 228 respondents. Survey data was first collected, then followed by organized interviews with the aim of collecting insightful data for this study. Quantitative data was descriptively analyzed and qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings from this study revealed that family-based characteristics such as changes in family structures, poor parental influence on the choice of courses in VTCs, low status of trainee parents, high poverty levels, parents not monitoring trainees' progress in VTC, inadequate parental guidance and counseling, negative parental attitude towards VTCs, among others influenced trainees to drop out of VTCs. Based on these findings, we recommend that parents should urgently provide a leading role in guiding and counseling their children, continuously monitor their children's progress in VTCs, urgently devise means of earning sufficient income to support their children's education and have positive attitude towards VTCs.

Key words: Family-based characteristics, Trainees' completion rate, Vocational Training Centres, drop out

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) was started as Village Polytechnics (VPs) in 1968 by the National Council of Churches of Kenya. Vocational training prepares learners for specific trades (Chege, 2008). This study focused on the influence of family-based characteristics on trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Kenya. According to Ahmed, Andaleeb, and Arif (2004), economic status is a measure of how poor or rich a person is. The views of these authors tend to link economic status or level of resources to a person's living standard based on income earned, occupational status, living conditions and the education attained. It implies that families that are endowed with adequate resources will increase chances of their children completing an education programme. The findings of Ahmed et al agree with those of Rumberger and Lim (2008), who observed that three aspects of families predict whether students drop out or graduate. The aspects are;

- i. **Family structures.** The study established that students living with both parents have lower drop-out rates and higher graduation rates. Changes in family structure, along with other potentially stressful events (such as a family move, illness, death, marital disruption) increase rates of dropouts
- ii. **Family resources.** The study further established that students in homes with more family resources as measured by parental education, parents' occupational status and family income are less likely to drop out of school
- iii. **Family practices.** A number of parenting practices (social resources or social capital) have shown to reduce odds of dropping out include; having a high aspirations for children, monitoring children's school progress, communicating with the school and knowing the parents of their children's friends. The study further observed that students are likely to drop out if they have a sibling who dropped out.

Muthui and Mugambi (2010) described poverty as the inability of households to meet basic needs which include education and training. In the present study, the family resources will be equated to the ability of households or individuals to meet their basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, education and training. In a separate study, Chimombo (2005) reported that other costs of education such as uniforms, transport and lunch often results in the exclusion of poor children or students from school. Further, Morara and Chemwei (2013) observed that parental negligence, death of parents, instability at home, poverty and large family sizes caused students to drop

out of school. Family income and education of parents are the predictors of school completion for the learners (Lacour & Tissinton, 2011). This means that lack of resources and low level of parents' education can negatively affect school completion levels of learners. Another study by Mandina (2013) observed that poverty, financial constraints and lack of parental interest in children's studies were the major reasons for dropout of school among students. These findings are consistent with a previous study by Sweeten (2004) who established that low economic status of parents was one of the reasons for learners dropping out of school. A study by Okwemba (2014) further revealed that majority (57.4%) of the trainees who were enrolled in Youth Polytechnics (YPs) in Kakamega County were from low socio-economical families. Okwemba's study reveals that generally majority of the trainees who are enrolled in VTCs are from low economic backgrounds. On family structure, Anguiano (2004) revealed that two-parent households were significant in students' decisions to complete high school. The positive association was because students received support from both parents who shared in the responsibilities of their children's educational success.

The reviewed studies have demonstrated how family-based characteristics can affect school completion of learners. Hence, the need for an in-depth study on the influence of family-based characteristics on trainees' completion rate in VTCs.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in five selected VTCs in four counties; Kakamega, Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo. The selected VTCs were Lugala and Mautuma in Kakamega County, and Mugen, Iten and Mogotio in Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo Counties respectively. The study adopted explanatory sequential mixed methods design. In this design a researcher first collect quantitative data followed by qualitative and integrate both data in order to come to the conclusion (Subedi, 2016). An explanatory sequential design according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results. Hence, pragmatism philosophical underpinning was used to guide this study. This philosophy argues that both qualitative and quantitative, are possible, and possibly highly appropriate, within one study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The study instruments employed were questionnaires for trainees and instructors, and interview schedules for VTC Managers and County Directors of Youth Training. The target population for this study was 345. This comprised of 4 County Directors of Youth Training, 5 Managers of Vocational Training Centres, 37 Vocational Training Centre Instructors and 299 VTC trainees (2nd, 3rd, & 4th years). The study employed two sampling approaches. Firstly, non-probability sampling using purposive sampling was used in selecting the County Directors of Youth Training, Vocational Training Centre Managers, the Instructors that teach NVCET Courses, and 3rd year NVCET trainees because of their small number and longer time at VTC. Convenient sampling was used to select 4th year NVCET trainees who were readily available during data collection. This is because the 4th year trainees were out on Industrial Attachment during data collection. It was assumed that these groups that formed part of the target population possessed the required characteristics for this study. Secondly, probability sampling utilizing simple random sampling was used to identify 2nd year trainees taking NVCET courses implemented by each VTC in this study. The study had a sample size of 228 respondents. Survey data was first collected, then followed by organized interviews with the aim of collecting insightful data for this study. Quantitative data was descriptively analyzed and presented using frequency distribution tables. The qualitative data from open-ended responses in the questionnaires and interview schedules was analyzed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to establish family-based characteristics that influenced trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres in Kenya with focus on the National Vocational Certificate of Education and Training (NVCET) curriculum. This curriculum was piloted in 2008 and implemented in 2010 in some selected VTCs in Counties across Kenya. According to Kiplagat, Ferej, and Kafu (2017), Vocational Training Centers in Kenya experienced low trainees' completion rate. The study reported that the highest completion rate at level 1 was 85.63% and at level 2 was 8.73% for the NVCET curriculum. Respondents in this paper highlighted some family-based factors as reasons for low completion levels in Vocational training Centres in Kenya.

The reasons stated by trainees include; lack of fees, family structure issues (death of parents in the course of study, orphans), lack of general parental care, lack of motivation from parents and poor perception of VTCs as for failures. Instructors cited the following as family-based factors that influenced trainees' completion rate; lack of school fees, lack of general parental support and long distance from home for day scholars. The family-based reasons given by the VTC Managers include:

- i. Lack of fees due to low income families
- ii. Negatively affected family structures such as orphaned children and children born out of wedlock
- iii. Lack of basic needs
- iv. Low aspirations of parents for their children
- v. Parents not monitoring their children's progress at school
- vi. Forced interests. Children doing courses forced into and were not interested in.
- vii. Low education of parents, hence cannot set high standards for their children

The County Directors of Youth Training indicated the following as family-based characteristics that influenced trainees' completion rate in VTCs:

- i. Biasness in fee payment. Parents give priority to other institutions in fee payment
- ii. Parental negative attitude towards VTCs
- iii. Lack of/or inadequate family income to support children education
- iv. Low literacy levels of parents, hence cannot set high standards for their children
- v. Low aspirations of parents for their children
- vi. Negatively affected family structures such as broken families and sketchy family structures.

The causes for drop out in the present study closely corroborates those of Joubish and Khurram (2011), in a study that investigated factors influencing drop out in government primary schools in Karachi, Pakistan. The study revealed that socio-economic factors such as poverty, uncaring parents, and child labour, among others were the major factors that caused drop out in government primary schools in Karachi. Further, Okwemba (2014) established that majority of the trainees who were enrolled in VTCs were from low economic backgrounds.

Structure of the trainee's family

The study investigated the type of family structures that the trainees came from. The results as reported by trainees revealed that 75.3% of them lived with their both parents while a total of 24.7% trainees lived in families that had other arrangements other than living with both parents (Table 1). Rumberger and Lim (2008) observed that students living with both parents have lower drop-out rates and higher academic graduation rates, compared to students living in other family arrangements. The authors further observed that changes in family structure, along with other potential stressful events (such as a family move, illness, death, adults entering and leaving the households, and marital disruptions) increase the odds of dropping out of study. Further, many studies have revealed that children who grow up in single-parent families are less likely to complete high school or even attend college than the children who grow up with both parents (Amato, 1987). A study by Anguiano (2004) revealed that two-parent households were significant in students' decisions to complete high school. The positive association was because students received support from both parents who shared in the responsibilities of their children's educational success. Perhaps, based on the findings on the family structure, there may be need to enhance trainee guidance and counseling in VTCs to address some of the issues emanating from the family structures.

Table 1: Structure of the trainee's family

Family Structure	Frequency	Percent
i Living with both parents	137	75.3
ii Living with single parent	30	16.5
iii Living in a family with someone sick	5	2.7
iv Living in a family with marital challenges	3	1.6
v Living in a family with a guardian	7	3.8
Total	182	100.0

Occupations of Trainee's Parents

One of the qualitative items in the trainee's questionnaire sought to establish occupations of trainees' parents. Majority of the respondents stated that their fathers were small scale farmers while others were herdsmen, policemen, drivers and teachers. On the other hand, majority of the respondents indicated that their mothers were small scale farmers while others were teachers, businesswomen, housewives, and herds women. The findings indicate that majority of the parents of trainees were not of higher social status as regarded in Kenyan society, which include doctors, engineers, lecturers, higher leadership positions, among others. The low levels of social status may negatively affect many children from going far in their lives since parents will be unable to set high aspirations for them. Previously, economic status on level of resources has been linked to a person's living

standard based on income earned, occupational status, living conditions and the education attained (Ahmed, Andaleeb, & Arif, 2004). The findings of the current study agree with those of Ngumbao (2012) who found that majority of the trainee's parents dependent on small scale farming, of which fathers were 41.5% and mothers were 45.9%. Okwemba (2014) further revealed that majority (57.4%) of the trainees who were enrolled in YPs in Kakamega County were from low socio-economical families. The present findings further support those of Maronga, Maroria, and Nyikal (2015) in a study in Kisii Central District, Kenya. The study found that majority (66%) of the trainees indicated that their parents/guardians earned income from small scale farming. Therefore, these studies have revealed that majority of the trainees in VTCs are from low income households.

Influence on Trainees' Choice of Courses in VTCs

Majority of the respondents stated that parents were the main source of influence for trainees to choose particular courses in VTCs. The interview sessions organized with VTC managers and County Directors of Youth Training revealed that trainees developed personal interest to choose a course after they had been advised by parents on the course to pursue in VTC. The information obtained from interviews revealed that parents played a major role in influencing their children in choosing courses at different levels of education. However, there were cases of students who choose courses as a result of self-interest and peer influence. Some instructors on the qualitative question in their questionnaire indicated that churches and sponsors or donors were also other sources of influence on course selection. The findings of the current study agree with those of Mgau (1999) and Ngumbao (2012) who revealed that parents were the main source of influence in choosing courses in Institutes of Technology and YPs respectively. In summary, parents were the main source of influence on trainees when choosing courses in VTCs.

Respondents' Views on Family Practices

The study further sought to know the respondents' views on the family practices of trainees in VTC. From Table 2, majority of the parents did not have high educational aspirations for their children and that they did not also monitor their children's progress in VTC and that they were not interested to know the parents of their children's friends as indicated by mean scores of 2.91, 2.76 and 2.41 respectively. The respondents partially agreed that majority of the parents communicated with the VTC as shown by a mean score of 3.44.

Table 2: Instructors' Views on Family Practices

Instructors' views on the Family Practices	N	Mean
i Majority of the parents of the trainees in this VTC have high educational aspirations for their children	34	2.91
ii Majority of the parents of the trainees in this VTC monitor their children's VTC progress	34	2.76
iii Majority of the parents of the trainees in this VTC communicate with the VTC	34	3.44
iv Majority of the parents of the trainees in this VTC are interested to know the parents of their children's friends	34	2.41
N	34	

What was disagreed mainly is that parents of the trainees at the VTCs were not interested to know the parents of their children friends. This is an issue that parents need to address since different families have different belief systems which may influence children positively or negatively. Parents should advise their children on the choice of friends from parents who share similar aspirations for instance in the education of their children. Bempechat (1992) states that parents who are involved in their children education, influence very positive academic outcomes. Similarly, parents play a vital role by encouraging students' feelings of competence and control and positive attitudes towards academics (Grolnick, Friendly, & Bellas, 2009). Grolnick et al. study found that families can have a strong influence on a variety of school outcomes, including the development and maintenance of positive motivation.

Trainee's Main Source of Financial Support in VTC

Majority (76.9%) of the respondents as shown in Table 3 indicated that parents were the main source of financial support (fees and other costs) in VTC while others were supported by the guardians (10%), self (3.8%), relative (3.3%), government (3.3%) and community (2.2%). The findings indicate that parents played a major role in supporting education of their children in VTC. Rumberger and Lim (2008) observed that children

from families with high income are less likely to drop out of school. To further demonstrate the impact of family income on student completion rates, Chapman, Laird, Ifill, and KewalRamani (2011) established that dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about five times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families. To show that parents are the main financial support to trainees, a study by Maronga et al. (2015) revealed that majority (42.8%) of trainees had not joined Secondary school but instead enrolled in YPs due to the inability of their parents/guardians to pay fees for secondary school level. Therefore, parents need to continuously source for funds and equally support their children while in VTCs as those in other sub-sectors of education.

Table 3: Main Source of Financial Support for Trainees in VTC

	Main source of financial support	Frequency	Percent
i	Parents	140	76.9
ii	Guardians	19	10.4
iii	Relative	6	3.3
iv	Community	4	2.2
v	Government	6	3.3
vi	Self	7	3.8
	Total	182	100.0

Highest Level of Education of Trainees' Parents

In order to know the highest level of education of trainees' parents, the trainees were asked to indicate highest levels of education for their fathers and mothers. Majority (36.3%) of the trainees indicated that their fathers had KCSE certificate while 28.0% had KCPE certificate, 7.7% had dropped out of Primary school, 7.1% did not go to school and 6.6% had university education. Others indicated that their fathers had Institute of Technology Education (3.3%), dropped out of Secondary school (2.7%), had TTI education (2.2%), awarded Diploma at TTC (1.6%), had gone through National Polytechnic (1.6%), had TTC P1 (1.1%), KTTC education (1.1%) and 0.5% with YP certificate.

Majority of the trainees (32.4%) indicated that their mothers had secondary education while 31.3% had primary education, 9.9% did not go to school, 6.6% dropped out of primary school, 6.6% dropped out of secondary school and 3.3% had university education. Other mothers had attained National Polytechnic Education (2.2%), KTTC education (1.6%) dropped out of YP (1.1%), had TTC diploma (1.1%), had TTC P1 (1.1%), Institute of Technology education (1.1%), TTI education (1.1%) and 0.5% had YP certificate.

The results in this study reveal that majority of the parents of trainees in VTC had attained at most primary education. The results indicated a cumulative percentage of 42.8% for fathers with up to primary education certificate or none and a cumulative percentage of 47.8% for mothers with up to primary education or none. The results show that a relatively high percentage of the parents of trainees in VTCs are not highly educated, hence may not be able to set high educational and life aspirations for their children. Anguiano (2004) demonstrates how parents with more education effect their children. The author argues that parents with more education served as role models for their children to complete school. This is because such parents have a better understanding of how education systems work. Further, parents with more education often have social support networks within different community systems that could be instrumental in helping their children succeed in education. The findings of Ngumbao (2012) closely agree with those of the present study when it established that majority (21.8%) of the fathers at each level completed Primary school and Secondary school education, while 9.1% had no studies. In Ngumbao's study, majority (25.4%) of the mothers had completed primary education while 16.2% had not gone to school and 14.2% had completed Secondary school education. The observations from the two studies indicate that fathers with KCSE were more as compared to mothers with the same certificate. This scenario may be attributed to family and gender-based roles such as child rearing and domestic chores which engage most women throughout their lifetime.

Respondents' Views on Family Resources

The present study sought views from both the trainees and the instructors on family resources. Studies have shown that students in homes with more family resources as measured by parental education levels, parents' occupational status, and family income are less likely to drop out of school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Further, American Psychological Association (2012) established that a strong link exists between poverty and high

school dropout rates. Other studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between availability of family income or resources and student academic achievement. Lacour and Tissington (2011) argue that poverty significantly affect resources available for students. Due to lack of resources, many students struggle to reach the same academic achievement levels of students not living in poverty. Similarly, when access to resources both within the family and school are limited, students suffer and lag behind in the academic achievement (Barry, 2006).

On family resources, this study established that majority of the trainees in Vocational Training Centres were from poor and less educated families. This confirms earlier findings that trainees drop out of VTC because of lack of school fees, among other challenges. The findings of this study support those findings in a report by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2001) as cited in Blue and Cook (2004) which established that high school students from families within the lowest 20% income range were 6 times as likely as those with families in the top 20% income distribution to drop out of high school.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that family-based characteristics such as changes in family structures, poor parental influence on the choice of courses in VTCs, low status of trainee parents, high poverty levels, and parents not monitoring trainees' progress in VTC negatively influenced trainees' completion levels. Also, low education of parents, low aspirations of parents for their children, biasness in fee payment, inadequate parental guidance and counseling, negative parental attitude towards VTCs, among others influenced trainees to drop out of VTCs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, we recommend that parents should:

- i. Regularly, where possible seek to have stable families,
- ii. Urgently provide a leading role in guiding and counseling their children,
- iii. Continuously monitor their children's progress in VTCs,
- iv. Urgently devise means of earning sufficient income to support their children's education,
- v. Have positive attitude towards VTCs,
- vi. Seek guidance from well informed people when choosing courses for their children, and
- vii. Avoid biasness when paying school fees for their children at different sub-sectors of education

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