

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Placing Greater Emphasis on Vocational Education in Kenya

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Abstract:

Kenya, like other countries in the Sub Sahara Africa (SSA), Technical, Vocational Education, and Training (TVET) is believed to be an obvious remedy to youth employment across the region. As we view TVET in this way, the perception in many if not all the countries across SSA is that TVET is a salvation for the intellectually incapable or those with less or no aspiration for better paying jobs. For the elite and middle class, TVET is in reality not for their children, as it seems almost 'useless'. Interestingly, even with such perceptions, Kenya and other SSA countries have continued to 'embrace' TVET in their education systems but with little investment towards those TVET programmes. In 2018, there was a shift in policy in Kenya with TVET receiving more attention, and as a result attracting a larger budget allocation. The government slashed fees for students in technical and vocational education institutions, and raised public funding in its latest bid to grow the critical skills base needed to achieve the country's economic ambitions. To support this policy, the government agreed to give an annual bursary of US\$300 for every student who joins the technical institutions (University World News, 2018). The students will access the funding through the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), the agency that disburses loans to university students on behalf of the government. This policy comes as a result of the World Bank warning regarding a widening disconnect between labour market skills needs and the graduates of higher education institutions. This paper provides an overview of the state of TVET in Kenya, its challenges and possible recommendations to support the new TVET reforms towards making TVET more attractive for learners in Kenya. The paper argues that the new reforms can only be implemented successfully if key underlying issues affecting TVET in Kenya are addressed.

Keywords: Vocational Educational, Quality Education, Youth, unemployment

Introduction

There is a growing consensus that youth unemployment in less developed countries is a major economic and social problem, especially in SSA (Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti and Takavarasha, 2011). About ten years ago, a World Bank report stated that youth accounted for approximately 60% of the unemployed in the region, and that 72% of adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa lived below the “\$2 a day” poverty line (World Bank 2009). To date, there is still a general decline in the supply of technical and vocational skills, constraining economic prospects in most SSA countries including Kenya. While the country’s development plans have, over the years, consistently stated one major educational objective: producing a properly and effectively trained, disciplined and patriotic youth that can in turn make a positive contribution to the development of the nation (Simiyu, 2009); Kenya as well as countries like Ghana that have concurrently introduced comprehensive vocationalization policies, with the intention to solve youth unemployment have failed (Oketch, 2014). This is largely attributed to the negative attitude towards TVET, which it is claimed was bred and crystallized with the advent of colonial rule in Africa, and the discriminative approach of the colonial administration to the education of the African in relation to that of children of the white colonialists (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is a comprehensive term referring to pragmatically important components of a national training system that entails —those aspects of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills, and attitudes relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO, 1984).

The article is compiled based on the current Kenya’s 8-4-4 education system; where children study for eight years of Basic (primary) education, four years of Secondary education and four years of University education. Table 1 illustrates education expenditure in 2018.

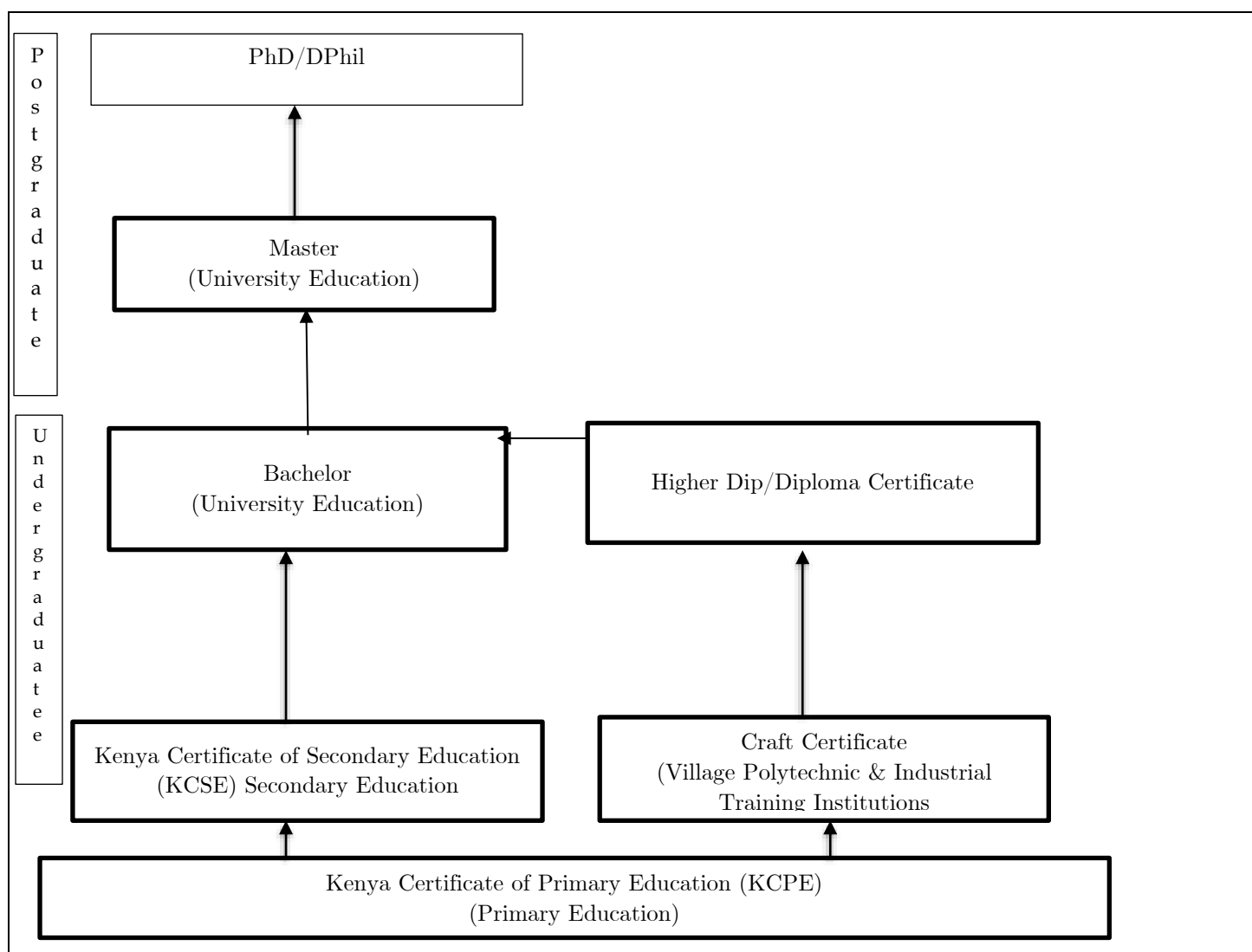


Figure 1: Kenya Education System at a glance

Source: Nuffic (2015, P. 3)

Table 1 : Education Finance in Kenya in 2018

Category	Indicator	Statistics
Expenditure	Government expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure	14.9%
	Expenditure on secondary and postsecondary non-tertiary vocational education as % of total government expenditure	0.6%

(UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018)

A review of Kenya's 8.4.4 System and its TVET character

The 8-4-4 education system of education in Kenya was introduced in 1985 to promote man-power capable of performing blue collar jobs, as compared to the former 7-6-3 system that targeted developing a local workforce to replace the British workforce who largely held white collar jobs in the new, independent Kenya

(Kaviti, 2018). The 8:4:4 system of education was rolled out with a policy that each secondary school must offer at least one technical and vocational subject alongside academic subjects (Republic of Kenya, 1984). These technical and vocational education subjects were listed as: agriculture; woodwork; metalwork; power mechanics; electricity; drawing and design; building construction; home science; business education (accounts, commerce, typing and office practice); art and design; and music.

TVET Trends in Kenya since 1999

The enrolment of regular students in the National Polytechnics increased by 29.35 percent from 9,603 in the year 1999 to 32,718 in 2003. Enrolment in technical training institutes and institutes of technology rose from 23,661 in 1999 to 32,718 in 2003 (MoEST, Education Sector Report, 2005).

In 2010, enrolments grew to 75,547 in 2010 up from 62,439 in 2003 (MoE, Task Force Report, 2012). In 2016, TVET enrolment in Kenya stood at 91,209 males and 74,432 females. In 2018, the number rose to 275,139 total TVET enrolment, 56.2% being males and 43.8% females (Kenyan Economic Survey 2018, p. 238). In 2015, there were 850 Technical Vocational Centres, 123 Technical Vocational Colleges and 11 National polytechnics (UNESCO-UNEVOC report, 2018). The Kenya government plans to have at least 70,000 learners in technical and vocational education institutions in the next five years. There are plans to have at least one vocational and technical institution in each of the 290 constituencies in the next two years (University World News, 2018). This is a good move forward towards Kenya's on-going initiative to increase enrolment in TVET institutions.

Table 2 TVET Institutions by participation level (2015)

Type of institution	Education level	Ministry responsible	Number of Institutions
Technical Vocational Centres	Post-secondary	Ministry of Education / State Department of Vocational& Technical Training	850
Technical Vocational Colleges	Post-secondary	Ministry of Education / State Department of Vocational& Technical Training	123
National Polytechnics	Post-secondary	Ministry of Education / State Department of Vocational& Technical Training	11

(UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018)

Table 3 Enrolments in 2018

Indicator	Statistic	Source (indicate website if possible)
Total Enrolment in TVET institutions	275,139	Kenyan Economic Survey 2018, p. 238 http://t1p.de/jh3w
Percentage of Males	56.2%	
Percentage of Females	43.8%	

UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018)

Career paths for TVET graduates

Since Kenya's Independence in 1963, TVET has experienced both structural and curricular changes that have impacted on its graduates both positively and negatively. It is evident that Kenya as a country values the formal academic education which has failed to provide the much-needed skill training for employment, self-reliance and so on (Simiyu, 2009). Besides, there is a large number of young people that does not meet the requirements for admission to the much coveted university education. Their only hope of advancement is through TVET programmes offered in technical institutes. Some national polytechnics in Kenya offer courses up to first degree level as illustrated below.

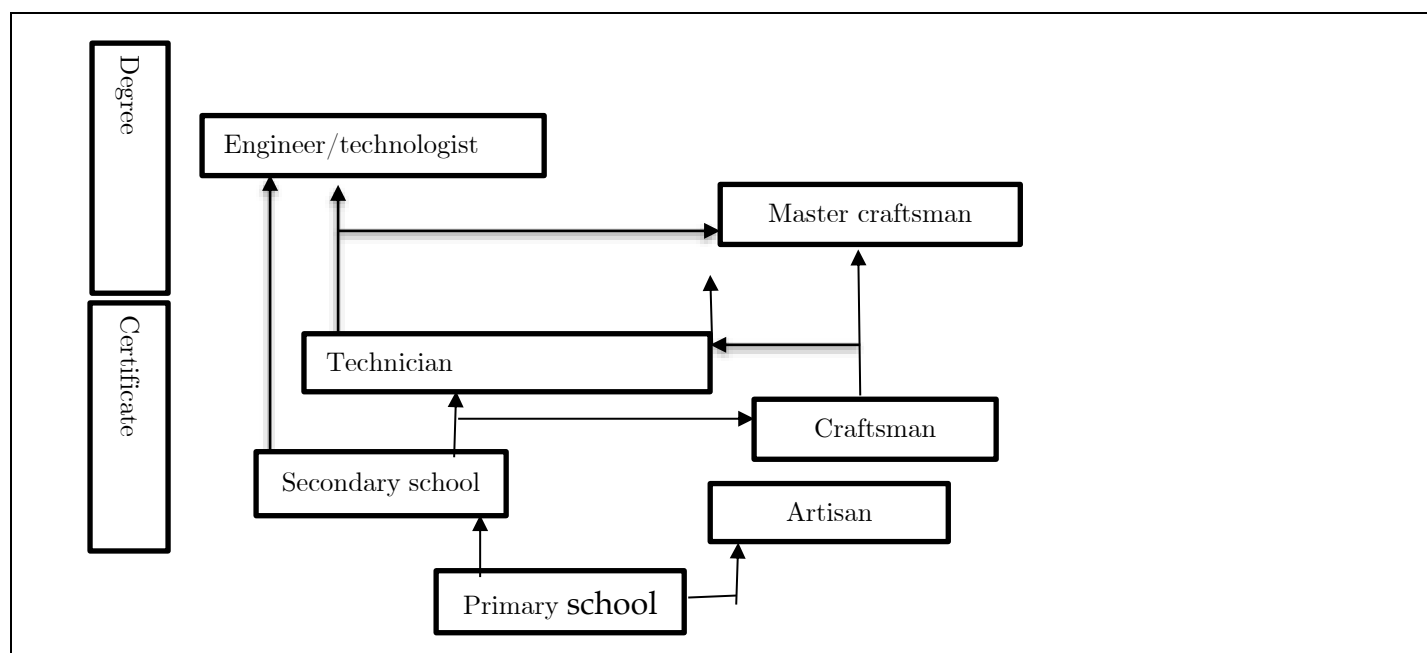


Figure 2 Career paths for TVET graduates
Simiyu (2009)

Kenya is currently expanding her technical sector with a new hope for economic growth. Student enrolments in TVET programmes (all levels) has grown by 32.3% to 363,884 in 2018 (Kenyan Economic Survey, 2019). In fact, funding, which is now over 30% higher than 2017, has been allocated for the recruitment of an

additional 2,000 technical training instructors and capitation grants for students. This will also see the establishment of 15 new technical training institutes and the development of a curriculum development assessment and certification centre (University World News, 2018). This policy shift and the reduction of fees is a good step ahead for Kenya. There are however barriers that the country needs to address if the new TVET policy has to become a reality.

Challenges

a)The Quality of TVET

A wave of research, has shown that massive investment in TVET is not yielding the promises that were initially associated with it, in terms of employment, and meeting the aspirations of the youth (Oketch, 2014). Oketch attributes part of the failure to governments that have failed to provide functional and quality TVET. In 2009, there were four national polytechnics in Kenya (Simiyu, 2009) including the Kenya and Mombasa Polytechnics. Presently, the conversion of polytechnics into universities has simply sent another strong message that TVET is not as valued. While some of these have referred to themselves as technical universities, they have rebranded and taken on a general education outlook rather than promoting high level TVET that is the intention of TVET (Oketch, 2014). Some key reasons would be the inadequate funding to enable TVET institutions train for the market, un-coordinated standards and quality assurance programmes in TVET institutions among others. Besides, admissions to TVET institutions is not based on academic, skills, qualifications and talents but on the applicants' needs, which lowers the quality of the programmes offered (MoE Task Force report, 2012).

b)Perception/attitude

As noted earlier, the first transformation that TVET needs to address is the fact that it recruits from a lesser ability pool of learners (Oketch, 2014; MoE Task Force report, 2012). Many countries including Kenya regard TVET as a second chance for those who have failed to find a place in academic education, which explains its low status in Kenya (Simiyu, 2009). It is believed that TVET is a salvation for the poor performers to enter the world of work, a situation that is further worsened by the low level of wages earned by vocationally trained graduates (Simiyu, 2009). Therefore, for Kenya to elevate the TVET status, she needs to promote both TVET and general education, and the combinations (subjects such as agriculture, metal work) that made it vocational as was the initial intention of the 8-4-4 system.

c)Links between tvet and local industries

It is evident that there is low participation of the industry and the private sector in curriculum design and development, training and assessment of skills (MoE Task Force Report, 2012). There is a mismatch between the skills offered in TVET institutions and actual labour market demand, leaving most graduates unemployed. One of the key reasons is that in most of TVET institutions, curriculum delivery is theory-based as opposed to combining theory and practice. Besides, there are inadequate mechanisms for quality assurance as TVET institutions continue to use technology which is no longer in use in industry (Musyimi, Malechwanzi, & Luo, 2018; MoE Task Force Report, 2012)

d) Conditions of work

Vocational skills in Kenya mostly characterize employment without secure contracts, worker benefits or social protection. These skills largely fall under the informal economy in Kenya, defined as consisting of those economic activities, units, enterprises and workers (both professionals and non-professionals) who engage in commercial activities outside of the realm of the formally established mechanisms (Ronald, 2014). In this regard, they are not regulated or protected by the State. In such unregulated establishments, it is challenging for employees to bargain for better work conditions or representation in trade unions. Besides, skills majorly gained from vocational schools, have easy entry and exit due to fewer labour regulations, less capital investment and limited job security, making TVET less attractive (Kenya Economic Survey, 2019).

Recommendations

a) Education for Sustainable Development in TVET

Incorporating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in TVET curricula as well as re-orienting TVET to sustainable development remain of great importance towards improving the relevance of TVET programmes to the labour market (Dubois et al., 2010). Reports relating to some case studies in SSA, reveal that there is little understanding of the concept of ESD among most of the TVET educators. ESD does encourage changes in knowledge, skills, values and attitude towards a more sustainable and just society for all. However, addressing practical concerns relating to integrating ESD in TVET would be a much valuable idea for TVET programmes.

b) At what level should TVET start?

The extent to which credibility is attributed to national policy on TVET in the school system depends on the type of subjects offered and the status they are given in the curriculum. If they are not introduced early enough or if they are merely optional, then both learners and society at large may not take them very seriously (Kerre, 1995). This has an implication on the level where TVET should start – either at junior secondary or senior secondary, leading to postsecondary training. Presently, TVET begins after primary education. Kenya may consider incorporating technical vocational education at the level of primary schooling. This has come up as an interesting approach to improving education quality and outcomes in South Africa. Care should however be taken on how learners are selected to avoid segregation at an early age. In addition, the government should ensure there is capacity in terms of teacher training and Teaching Support Materials (TSM), to implement this model. If the broad notion of vocation is understood at an early age, this will largely address issues of access, equity, quality, redress etc; and perhaps inclusivity and redress of TVET education.

c) Curriculum

Kenya plans to align her TVET programmes with the Government's goal of industrialisation by the year 2020 and Kenya Vision 2030, with the aim of transforming into a newly-industrialized, middle income country. In this regard,

curriculum becomes a crucial component of any training process as it is what ultimately shapes the outcomes of the desired training programmes (MoE Task Force report, 2012). In terms of the curriculum content, the TVET under the 8-4-4 system comprised core vocational subjects and those that were referred to as industrial subjects. The former included agriculture, accounting, commerce etc., while the latter included building construction, electricity, metal work, etc. In fact, the Kenyan version of TVET as it is known internationally is TIVET (Technical, Industrial, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training). The aim was to instil among the learners' skills for self-reliance in self-employment ventures. The question is, are the programmes in TVET institutions fit for purpose? As it stands currently, the TVET curriculum is inflexible and outdated with unaffordable training materials and textbooks. There is divergence in TVET curricula in various technical and vocational training institutions in Kenya. Fragmented curriculum development, training, assessment and certification of TIVET have made it difficult for prospective employers to determine the comparative value of qualifications from centralized and decentralized systems (MoE Task Force Report, 2012).

What changes therefore are necessary to the curriculum to attract both young people and employers to TVET programmes?

d) May be privatise TVET?

Taking my cue from Oketch (2014), it is advisable that Kenya and other governments delegate TVET to the private sector and probably retain a supervisory and/or financing role. This has worked well in countries like Mali. The simple logic is that private providers offer better prepared, relevant courses with larger TVET penetration than the government. Secondly, since they are commercially-driven they will have greater quality variability and increased government accountability. There will be increased efficiency largely because competition will incentivise innovation and improvement. Though this model may come with decreased regulation and government revenue, private players are likely to invest in more focused TVET institutions.

Conclusion

Vocational education is not inherently flawed. It is equally problematic to argue for its inherent superiority compared to other forms of education. We may not therefore put blame on vocational education or a lack of it for the unemployment problem. There are underlying issues in Kenya and the SSA region that general or vocational education may not resolve until: a) the main causes of unemployment are clearly understood; b) TVET programmes are properly aligned to actual labour market demand. Until these are understood, TVET will not be a solution and vocation education as Wolf (2002) puts it, will remain a good idea for other people's children.

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