

Short Courses as Pathways to Enhancing Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in Training and Education: A Case Study of Thika Technical Training Institute

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Abstract

The study set out to assess the impact of new flexible short courses introduced in Thika Technical Training Institute by the Flexible Skills Development (FSD) which are tailored to meet the needs of the local labour market. The guiding philosophy responds to the reality of an ever expanding informal sector and shrinking wage employment opportunities, large numbers of youth who are locked out of the formal skills training system and the limited as well as expensive training opportunities. This demonstrates the need for a system that establishes inclusion of those traditionally locked out of the system, equity through a diversity of courses and a flexible approach. In this regard, therefore, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) FSD is designed to strengthen capacity in technical and vocational training institutions to adopt flexible delivery approaches and reach more learners. This is in line with the third goal of UNESCO Education For All (EFA) enunciated as; Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through objectives, equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs. The study utilized exploratory studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection instruments entailed questionnaires, interview schedule, observation schedule and content analysis. The study found out that short courses have among others lead to attitudinal change, boosted the self-confidence of target group, inculcated basic skills and competences, created employment opportunities and boosted earnings.

Key words: *FSD, TVET programs, flexible short courses, EFA, attitudinal change*

Background to the Study

Inclusion and diversity are aspects that are increasingly receiving attention from players in TVET like UNESCO and COL. It is the contention of this paper that short courses approach is one of the strategies towards this end since they open doors to many who are excluded by formal training programmes. Inclusion refers to efforts to cater for those excluded from educational opportunities due to social economic reasons. Inclusiveness is now the main vehicle that provides for access and participation of all in educational opportunities. One of the opportunities of inclusion available for TVET is by creating diversity and flexibility in the provision of courses and pedagogy.

When an institution opens up for short courses tailored to the needs of the immediate local market, it is not only enhancing the principle of inclusion by bringing on board those traditionally not factored in by the system, but also opening up a diversity not available to the clientele hitherto.

Towards tackling social inequities and exclusion, TVET needs to promote the skills of all

learners, irrespective of gender, class, ethnicity, age or other social characteristics. While TVET has a strong role in empowering excluded individuals and groups, both economically and socially, skills are one aspect in promoting social inclusion. (UNESCO, 2013). Close collaboration between TVET institutions and the local labor market is important in order to align the curricula with skills needs of the labor market.

According to the Flexible Skills Development in Africa, (2012) INVEST Africa, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) working in partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA) there are three realities and characteristics of African TVET that the institutions and by extension educational researchers must respond to in our time: Expanding informal sector and shrinking wage employment opportunities; Huge numbers of poorly educated, frustrated and unemployed youth who are locked out of the formal skills training system and; Unequal training opportunities fostered by inequities based on geographical location, gender and socio-economic factors.

The African Context

The reality of the African context is that the informal sector today absorbs most of those unable to find wage employment. In an average African country approximately 85 percent of total employment is engaged in the informal economy and it is they that need to be factored in TVET education to upgrade their skills and in turn, improve productivity.

Thika Technical Training Institute (Thika TTI) is one of the ten TVET institutions in Africa that are working with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) team to enhance the introduction of flexible approaches to TVET education. Working in partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa, Flexible Skills Development (FSD) was established in 2010. One of this involves the development of new flexible courses which meet the needs of the local labor market. In Thika TTI there are short courses strategically selected to suit the local market. They include: Basic Financial Skills, Homecare and Nutrition, Public Relations and Customer Care and Biogas Production Technology. Presently the following are also on offer: Poultry Keeping, Green House Framing, Fish Farming and Rabbit Keeping.

Introduction of short courses in the technical institutions are focused towards youth development. The technical skills and are tailored towards helping the trainees transition to employment- whether self or otherwise.

Youth skills development, poverty and unemployment are prominent global concerns. Pressure to expand post-basic education in countries with low to moderate enrollment and concerns of high youth unemployment have encouraged the development of a “skills for jobs” education reform discourse. The discourse argues that post-basic education focus on skills development with the hypothesis that such a focus will help reduce youth unemployment.

One of the key recommendations of the Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training dubbed ‘Transforming TVET: Building skills for work and life’ held in Shanghai , People’s Republic of China from 14th to 16th May 2012

recommended that countries should take innovative measures to provide quality and inclusive

TVET, especially to the disadvantaged groups including learners with disability, marginalized and rural populations, migrants and those in situations affected by conflict and disaster.

UNESCO has focused on the issue of inclusion and diversity in TVET as a vehicle for promoting development and poverty reduction. A case in point that has been used to inform the thesis of this study is the situation in Asia. In an effort to explore transversal skills in education and training in the Asia-Pacific, UNESCO Bangkok is currently conducting a regional study focusing on TVET. The study involves researchers from six countries in the region (Indonesia, Thailand, Viet Nam, Republic of Korea, Brunei, and Malaysia) and focuses on teaching and assessment of these skills. The fact is that despite growing global enrollment in tertiary education, youth unemployment remains a concern across the region. In 2012, 10.6 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24, more than double the rate of 4.5 for the total population, were unemployed (ESCAP, 2013). There is growing concern and recognition of a mismatch between skills acquired through education and training and those needed by occupational sectors. Employers in the region are struggling to find qualified employees for increasing knowledge-based positions. A survey of 8,600 hiring managers in five Asian countries revealed that more than 51 per cent of employers report skill gaps as factors posing difficulties in the hiring process (Manpower Group, 2012).

The same view was held by The 2013 World Development Report and 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report which identified expanding and improving youth skills development as a critical priority for reducing youth unemployment and strengthening the economies of lower-middle income and lower income countries (World Bank 2012a; UNESCO 2012).

A 2003 survey completed by the Institute for Economic Affairs, says that youth skills development and employment interests do not align well with existing labor possibilities.

This is the situation reflected in Kenya. Based on the Kenya National Population Census 2009 and records of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), (Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, on Reforming Education and Training Sectors in Kenya), there are approximately 5 million young people aged 18 - 23 out of which only 0.5 million are attending either university or college education and training. The current annual entrance into the employment world shows that at age 18, the end of formal school and beginning of the adult age group, about 1.2 million youth enter the labor market without any formal training or skills. At the age of 24 only 11% of this age have had formal training.

Problem Statement

Further, in 2011 nearly 40% of Kenyan youth were neither in school nor working, and the informal sector accounts for nearly 80% of jobs. Despite the complex and unclear relationship between education and employment, post-basic education in youth polytechnics and skills development programs have been identified as potential solutions to employability challenges facing Kenya's youth.

This is a clear indication that a gap has already been established between the courses offered by TVET and by extension the target group and the market analysis. This study joins in the effort to bridge this gap.

The Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- a) To find out the usefulness of short courses towards preparing TVET students for the world of work
- b) To establish the skills provided by the short courses that are necessary in meeting the market demands
- c) To establish the impact of short courses in inclusivity and equity in employment

Literature Review

This part involves a systematic identification, location and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem under investigation which is the use of short courses as a pathway to enhance inclusion, diversity and equity. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), the main purpose of literature review is to determine what has been done in relation to the research problem being studied so that the researcher may avoid unnecessary and unintentional duplication.

Employment and skills are pressing challenges for developing countries. Paradoxically, there is also a growing concern of skills mismatch. How do skills training systems support skills acquisition for employment? How does the education system interface and interact with labor markets and industries to coordinate skills development with changing industry needs? What are good practices and lessons from different countries and regions that can better inform skills development policy making?

The bottom line of this study is that the short courses in TVET not only enhance employment but also enhance inclusion, diversity and equity.

“While education is the key to any development process, TVET is the ‘Master Key’ that can transform the world of work and the economy, alleviate poverty, save the environment and improve the quality of life” (Luisoni, 2005: 250)

This central role of TVET is also echoed in TVET Strategy (2010-2015). UNESCO explicitly recognizes the value of TVET in addressing a host of issues, such as youth unemployment and socio-economic inequalities. Specifically, the TVET Strategy aims to ‘strengthen its assistance to Member States to improve their TVET systems and practices by promoting long-term solutions based on an inclusive and rights-based approach’. The Strategy explicitly recognizes the importance of research, knowledge generation and debate as one way of achieving this aim; indeed one of its three core areas is to ‘act as a clearing house and inform the global TVET debate’.

Reflecting this shift in emphasis, the latest World Bank Education Strategy (2011), suitably subtitled Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development, argues that 'growth, development, and poverty reduction depend on the knowledge and skills that people acquire, not the number of years that they sit in a classroom' (World Bank, 2011, p. vii).

The stress on the fact that how long one stays in school is not the key to acquisition of skills drums up support for short courses which in essence capitalize on limited time to instill specific skills.

According to the UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, UNESCO-UNEVOC, TVET is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work. TVET is an incredibly diverse sub-sector of education and training. It comprises formal, non-formal and informal learning. At its best, TVET enhances skills for working, further learning and living, and for contributing to human, economic, social and environmental aspects of development. TVET thus equips people not only with vocational skills, but with a broad range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are now recognized as indispensable for meaningful participation in work and life.

The demand for these work related skills is enormous. Three out of five unemployed in sub-Saharan Africa are young people, mostly surviving in the informal economy. It is here in the informal sector that they need to be empowered to be more productive.

The Kenyan Case

The Kenyan situation is explicitly so. According to Education for All Global Monitoring Report Fact Sheet October 2012 on Education in Kenya Progress towards the six Education for All goals in Kenya, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World "About 50% of men and 80% of women aged 15 to 24 in the slums have no income-generating activities. Of those who are employed, about 60% of men and 40% of women are in casual employment earning only around the poverty line. Around one-third work in the formal sector, but seldom in formal, salaried jobs. Most are in casual jobs with daily or short-term engagement."

The Kenya Country Report for the 2012 Ministerial Conference on Youth Employment on 'How to Improve through Skills Development and Job Creation'(2012: 27), recommended: Institutions of higher learning to regularly update their curriculum to fit the requirements of the labor market. On the same note, they should upgrade the content of the courses offered to ensure that students do not end up with valueless education. The courses in this sense should be informative and relate to the issues in the contemporary economy.

"To be successful, vocational skills and training providers have to take into consideration the characteristics of national and local labor markets and employability which is commonly defined as a combination of assets and competence. Enhancing the employability of deprived youth and rural poor, in particular women, is a prerequisite for mitigating the risk of further poverty and marginalization." (IFAD: 2009)

The gist of this paper is that there are many skills that can be taught within a short time and which would both impart and impact on our youth.

Statistics from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2012) show that youth (15 – 34 year olds), who form 35% of the Kenyan population, have the highest unemployment rate of 67%. Over one million young people enter into the labor market annually without any skills some having either dropped out of school or completed school and not enrolled in any college. A further 155,000 join the labor market annually after completing training in TVET or at the university. A total of over 1.3 million new employment places have to be created annually to meet this demand. There is therefore urgent need for the Government to strengthen and scale up successful measures targeting quality skill development and employment creation for the youth.

Youth face many challenges while seeking for employment. These include few available employment opportunities against a fast growing pool of employment seekers; lack of requisite skills sought by industry due to mismatch of TVET acquired skills and industry expectation; and poor access to information on available opportunities.

This is where the short courses come in handy to bridge the gap by providing the youth with skills that enhance their productive prowess either through self employment or formal employment.

Methodology

Exploratory research is defined in the Business Dictionary as investigation into a problem or situation which provides insights to the researcher. The research is meant to provide details where a small amount of information exists. It may use a variety of methods such as trial studies, interviews, group discussions, experiments, or other tactics for the purpose of gaining information.

Exploratory research tends to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done. Moreover, according to Kothari (2004) exploratory research is the initial research, which forms the basis of more conclusive research. It can even help in determining the research design, sampling methodology and data collection method.

Simple random sampling was used to select respondents for study. A number was assigned to trainees and staff at FAB and then a number was picked at random with replacement till a sample size was obtained appropriately. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) research requires at least 10% of the accessible population. The research utilized a 30% sample for staff and 10% for trainees in order to get a more accurate representation of the population characteristics.

This study was done through a combination of instruments including questionnaires and interviews, to get the opinions and views of the respondents. A number of trainees and staff in Food and Beverage Department were interviewed individually and collectively to obtain information in order to examine the objectives. Furthermore, participant observation was carried out for a period of one month to establish the general functioning of the institution

and characteristics and segmentation of trainees.

A document analysis was also done on indicators of inclusiveness, diversity and equity that include the strategic plans, brochures, disaggregate admission data, teaching documents, newsletters, and other documents that reflect the level of inclusiveness and diversity in the college. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), content analysis systematically describes the form or content of written and/or spoken material. Like the observation schedule, the content analysis will be used to validate the responses from other instruments.

Findings and Analysis

The following short courses are on offer at Thika TTI: Basic Financial Skills, Homecare and Nutrition, Public Relations and Customer Care, Biogas Production Technology, Poultry Keeping, Green House Framing, Fish Farming and Rabbit Keeping.

These courses are skills based and seek to instill competence in the trainees in areas that are directly relevant to the immediate catchment area. The study found out that in the preliminary stage 190 students were trained in Basic Financial Skills, 215 in Homecare and Nutrition; 38 in Public Relations and Customer Care, 66 in Biogas Production Technology.

To begin with, the respondents were asked to rate how useful they found their courses in view of their expectations and in helping them cope with the market. Their responses gave their opinions on the usefulness of the courses as follows:

Table 1: Ratings on the usefulness of Short Courses

<u>Opinions Expressed</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Course is very useful	61
Course is useful	28
Course is adequate	15
Course needs improvement	6
Course is not useful	0
Don't know	0

This can be represented as follows:

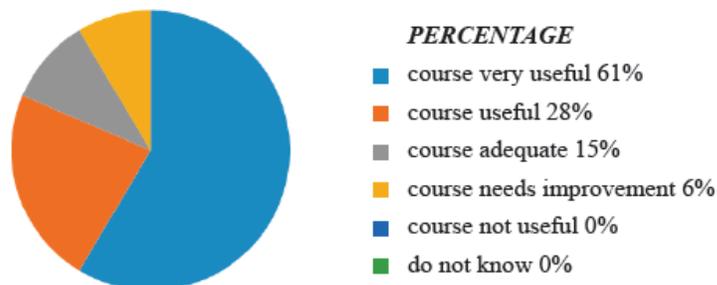


Fig. 1: Percentage Representation of Ratings on the usefulness of Short Courses

Secondly, from the sampled group, it was established that jobs were created, opportunities opened for self employment, quality of employment and earnings enhanced through provision of certificates for those who completed courses and also that biogas production plants were established.

All respondents indicated that they found the courses useful for preparing the learners with entrepreneurship and business skills to operate, maintain and sustain small businesses in their locality.

The management further indicated that since the catchment area is agriculture based, they hoped to provide other agriculture related courses such as Poultry, Fish, and Pig farming to supplement their prior knowledge on agriculture.

The study also established that the institution had endeavored to open up opportunities for inclusion and diversity through short courses lasting from a few days to several months, apprenticeship programmes and Open and Distance Flexible Learning (ODFL) opportunities that were well suited to the needs of the immediate catchment area through:

- a) Skills based courses to a wide variety of trainees at all level for those Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET).
- b) Affordable opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills at low cost and which relate to their needs and the local market.
- c) Courses that can be used as bridges to further training and thus help trainees overcome inequalities and exclusion in training, economic and income-generating activities
- d) Through certification, it ushers them into the world of professionals and boosts their professional competence and confidence
- e) Those in employment have room for professional aggrandizement and improvement of their efficiency.
- f) A course such as Biogas Production Technology can be very cost-effective and available to the local people, especially if it is conducted practically in a local site.
- g) Short courses can also benefit those who are self employed. The world of self employment can sometimes become mundane, monotonous and lacking in innovation and progress. A short course, like Basic Financial Skills, may offer fresh ideas and skills, leading to inspiration and spur business success.

Conclusions

This study is expected to generate such information that would at least provide a baseline data from which to understand, and evaluate the progress of the short courses offered in Thika TTI and provide insights into areas of possible improvement and expansion.

Out-of-school youth make up an important aspect of the Kenyan society. Many have sought regular schooling as the key to opportunities for employment and improvement in life.

However, time has proved that this does not guarantee inclusion, diversity and equity. This study indicates that short courses should be explored as one of the efforts towards greater inclusion and diversity in economic and income-generating activities.

Short courses are both good practice and opportunity providers for initiating and implementing innovative approaches that will guarantee inclusion of a wide variety of trainees and open up for many who are disadvantaged by social-economic inequalities. The traditional approach of placement and training is restricting and bureaucratic and thus erecting a lot of barriers for many. By providing short courses that have certification and tailored to meet the needs of the catchment, a lot of people can be factored in and their livelihood enhanced greatly. Furthermore a lot of people in self employment can develop their entrepreneurial skills and improve competitive advantage leading to business growth.

Ideally, this information will allow for more specific and effectual state and national policies to be designed, which could contribute further to the success of short courses in TVET. Additionally, there is need to draw in-depth curricula that will ensure that the graduates thereof are well horned out for the market.

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