

Perception towards Youth Polytechnic Training in Nandi County

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Abstract

The Government of Kenya has invested in Youth Polytechnics because it has realized that technical and vocational skills at lower and middle levels are very important in manufacturing and service providing industries. These industries play a role in the development of the country. Enrolling in youth polytechnic will also eliminate idling of the youth in society while preparing them for formal and non-formal employment and for self-employment. However, technical and vocational training has had its own challenges since its introduction during colonial era as a fitting education for the Africans such as low enrollment of local populations, lack of data on graduate career progression and outcome, and gender imbalance in enrollment favouring males over females. The aim of this study was to find out the perception of the Nandi County population towards youth polytechnic training. The objectives were: to establish the perception of parents towards youth polytechnic training; to establish the perception of primary and secondary school teachers towards the youth polytechnic training, and to determine attitudes of the youth in primary and secondary schools towards youth polytechnic training. Youth polytechnics were identified and cluster sampling was used to identify one from each of the five constituencies of the county. Parents, teachers and students were randomly sampled and data was collected using questionnaires. The data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings reveal respondents' positive attitudes and perceptions towards youth polytechnic training in Nandi County with regard to acquiring skills for gainful employment and as an avenue to furthering one's education. However, the teachers were the least aware of sources of funding for youth polytechnic training and were less likely to recommend students to pursue such training, which perpetuates the stigmatization of youth polytechnic training in the County. This study concludes that youth polytechnic training still fulfils the government's vision for achieving a skilled workforce while curbing ills that tend to befall idle youth. Consequently, it is recommended to improve youth polytechnic training in the County through sensitizations, increased funding, introduction of extracurricular activities, improvement of facilities, tracking of graduates in the marketplace, and early identification of students' talents by teachers in order to guide them towards technical and vocational training.

Key words: *Youth Polytechnic, Non-formal employment, Perception, TVET*

Introduction

This study was limited to perceptions or attitudes of students, parents and teachers of schools in Nandi County neighboring established Youth Polytechnics. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is defined as that aspect of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical

skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge related to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO, (2000). VTE training was introduced in Kenya in the colonial era after Phelps Stroke Commission on Education in Africa recommended that this kind of education would be suitable for Africans as it was suitable for African Americans. Two training institutions were opened, first Kabete in 1925 and Maseno in 1953. VTE did not succeed because Africans suspected that such training would ensure cultural divisions and relegation of Africans to the position of subjugation (Sifuna and Otiende, 1994).

After independence, formal education was emphasized because Africans were needed to replace foreigners in White Collar jobs. However, as the number of primary and secondary graduates increased, idleness of the youth was noticed. Consequently the nation's leadership appreciated the crucial role of VTE to the nation's development (Bogonko, 1992). Therefore, the government, in a change of heart, and in conjunction with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sought solutions to solve school leavers' problems of idleness and lack of gainful employment. This led to the emergence of vocational training centers, and in particular, the village youth polytechnics (Mureithi, 2012) which later became known as youth polytechnics in 2005 and currently exceed 817 institutions (Makari and Ochieno, 2014).

In reality VTE provides alternative education and training opportunities upon completion of primary and secondary school levels and lead to careers as skilled workers (artisans), technicians and professionals for various sectors of the economy. Trained youth contribute to the socio-economic development of the communities and ultimately to that of the country. VTE therefore reduces unemployment among the youth, solves issues of idleness in rural and urban areas, thus reducing incidences of unlawfulness while fighting against poverty and hunger (Canadian International Development Agency {CIDA}, 2013). Consequently VTE reduces wastage of human resources and any negative impacts on investment climate, growth and social stability (CIDA, 2013). The skills provided by VTE are similar to those sought by current employers in the manufacturing and service providing industries in a growing economy such as Kenya's: transferable skills including problem solving, decision making, communication and teamwork (CIDA, 2013).

Currently VTE curricula are offered in youth polytechnics and TVET institutions. According to the changes made to youth polytechnic curriculum in 2005 VTE is meant to provide practical skills in metal processing technology, electrical and electronics technology, motor vehicle technology, building technology, appropriate carpentry and joinery, information communication technology (ICT), fashion design and garment technology, hair dressing and beauty therapy, general education subjects: communication skills, entrepreneurship education, life skills, and ICT studies and technical drawing (MOYA, 2006). In addition, people enrolled in VTE undergo formal assessment and certification by Director of Training (DIT) or Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) enabling graduates to further their education and training in applicable areas in the formal educational system at tertiary levels.

However, the negative perceptions and stigma continue to bedevil VTE in Kenya, and especially the former village polytechnics for the following reasons: perceived as a last resort

instead of an option of choice after primary education, especially for primary school leavers, dropouts and lockouts, and a training centre for blue-collar jobs (MoEST, 2009; CIDA, 2013); does not lead to long-term formal gainful employment because it prepares graduates for blue-collar jobs (Makari and Ochieno, 2014); and forecloses access to higher levels of education (UNESCO, 2006).

Nandi County has 12 Youth Polytechnics with a current total student enrolment of 1500. Given that each polytechnic can accommodate 300 students every year which could translate to 3600 students; it is obvious that there is a significant under enrolment in youth polytechnics in Nandi County. This is especially unfortunate since many students miss out on the subsidized Youth Polytechnic Training (SYPT) scholarships of 15000 Kenyan shillings to every enrolled student. Furthermore, Nandi County Government is working on bursar funding of between 15,000 and 30,000 Kenyan shillings for 30 students from each ward. Therefore, with the current under enrollment, this money will be underutilized while almost 20,000 Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) graduates who are locked out of form one places remain idling at home.

Problem Statement

There are many youth in developing countries who do not progress in the academic system due to the 'drop-out' and 'lockout' syndrome as stated by UNESCO (2006) and CIDA (2013). The scenario is no different in Nandi County as depicted by the many idle youth in shopping centers in rural and urban areas. The researchers wanted to find out why the youth from the local community do not find training in youth polytechnics appealing. Therefore, it was necessary to identify local community perceptions towards youth polytechnic training in Nandi County given that they engage youth productively and reduce incidences of unlawfulness in Kenya (Makari and Ochieno, 2014).

Purpose

The aim of the study was to find out the perception of the Nandi County population towards youth polytechnic training.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to: establish the perception of parents towards youth polytechnic training; to establish the perception of primary and secondary school teacher towards the youth polytechnic training, and to determine attitudes of the youth in primary and secondary schools towards youth polytechnic training.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Nandi County. Youth polytechnics were identified and cluster sampling was used to identify one from each of the five constituencies in the county. However, only four youth polytechnics were identified from four of the five constituencies because the fifth constituency did not have a youth polytechnic. A survey research design was used in the

Study. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from parents, teachers and standard eight and form four students from schools neighboring youth polytechnic in the four constituencies in Nandi County. Standard eight and form four students were selected because they are potential candidates of youth polytechnics. Parents, teachers and students were randomly sampled. Questionnaires were used to collect data from primary and high school students, their teachers and parents. The data collected was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The total number of respondents consisted of 63 parents, 72 teachers and 152 students from a target population of 100, 100, and 200 respectively. A total of 287 filled the questionnaire. The data was coded, organized and entered into SPSS version 20 and analyzed into frequencies and percentages.

Results and Discussions

Tables 1, 2 and 3 present the respondents’ answers to questions asked to determine their perceptions of and attitudes towards youth polytechnic training in Nandi County according to the objectives of the study.

Table 1: Parents’ Response to Questions

QUESTIONS	YES		NO		NO OPINION	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
Are you aware of a YP in your area?	62	98.4	1	1.6	0	0
Do you know of a student from your area in YP?	51	81	12	19	0	0
Did the student finish youth polytechnic training	45	71.4	18	28.6	0	0
Is there sponsorship to study in youth polytechnic?	20	31.7	43	68.3	0	0
Do you know a student who has pursued higher ed.?	22	34.9	41	65.1	0	0
Would you enroll your child in youth polytechnic?	51	81	9	14.3	3	4.7
Does youth polytechnic training reduce idleness?	54	85.7	3	4.8	6	9.5
Does youth polytechnic reduce unemployment?	41	65.1	9	14.3	10	15.9
Does youth polytechnic training create skilled workforce?	49	77.8	4	6.3	7	11.1
Does YP training promote human development?	41	65.1	9	14.3	10	15.9

Objective 1: To Establish the Perception of Parents towards Youth Polytechnic Training.

Table 1 above presents parents’ responses. Most of the responding parents were aware of existing youth polytechnics in Nandi County (98%), knew of a youth polytechnic graduate (81%), who had completed youth polytechnic training (71.4%), and would consider enrolling their child in a youth polytechnic after class 8 or form four (81%). Most parents also believed that youth polytechnic training could reduce youth idleness (85.7%), reduce unemployment (65.1%), create a skilled workforce (77.8%) and promote human development (65.1%), compared to 9.5%, 15.9%, 11.1% and 15.9% respectively who had no opinion on the same. These positive perceptions of parents concur with the goals for youth polytechnic training set by the Kenyan Government’s current policy on youth polytechnic training through the Ministry of Youth Affairs (Mureithi, 2012, MOYA, 2006).

The main reason for enrolling their children in a youth polytechnic if they failed to secure places elsewhere in the educational system were positive including: gaining skills for self-employment (27%), to facilitate further future studies and because it was cheaper than secondary school education (both at 6%), because it was a good thing (3%) and to reduce youth idleness (2%). These results portray a positive perception of youth polytechnics in Nandi County as a means of providing youth with skills for self-employment reported by 27% of the parents, given that 20% of the parents knew of youth polytechnic graduates employed in their areas of specialization.

Most of the responding parents were also knowledgeable about the courses offered at youth polytechnics such as masonry, tailoring, catering, mechanical engineering, carpentry, plumbing, electrical engineering, hair dressing, driving, computer, and welding, with hair dressing and beauty therapy, life skills, communication skills, entrepreneurship, and computer being added to the curriculum when MOYA took over the management of youth polytechnic training (MOYA, 2006). However, according to 13% of the parents, youth polytechnic students did not complete their training mainly due to lack of school fees. 15% of the parents were aware of national and county government as well as non-government sources of scholarships for students enrolled in youth polytechnic whose qualification was mainly based on need. Furthermore, 18% of the parents were aware that youth polytechnic graduates could further their education at other youth polytechnics offering higher qualifications (2%), Eldoret polytechnic (8%), and RVTTI. This finding proves that youth polytechnic training is actually neither a dead-end educational route nor an option for failures in the educational systems as earlier proved by CIDA (2013).

However, fewer of the responding parents (31.7%) were aware of existing sponsorship for youth polytechnic training or of youth polytechnic graduates who had pursued higher education (34.9%). This means there is a need for Nandi County parents' sensitization of existence of such sponsorship since lack of money was the main reason students dropped out of youth polytechnic training (13%) as well as early marriage (1%) and negative perception (1%). Nandi County Parents also need to be sensitized on the amounts of scholarships offered to all enrolled youth polytechnic students by both national and county governments as well as the opportunities for furthering education after graduating from a youth polytechnic so that they can advise their children appropriately.

Table 2: Teachers’ Response to Questions

QUESTIONS	YES		NO		NO OPINION	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
Are you aware of an YP in your area?	67	93.1	5	6.9	0	0
Do you know of a student from your area in YP?	35	48.6	37	51.4	0	0
Did the student finish youth polytechnic training	32	44.4	40	56.6	0	0
Is there sponsorship to study in youth polytechnic?	22	30.6	50	69.4	0	0
Do you know a student who has pursued higher ed.?	22	30.6	50	69.4	0	0
Would you enroll your child in youth polytechnic?	37	51.4	35	48.6	0	0
Does youth polytechnic training reduce idleness?	57	79.2	8	11.1	7	9.7
Does youth polytechnic reduce unemployment?	51	70.8	10	13.9	11	15.3
Does YP training create skilled workforce?	60	83.3	5	6.9	7	9.7
Does YP training promote human development?	53	73.6	6	8.3	13	18.1

Objective 2: To Establish the Perception of Primary and Secondary School Teachers towards the Youth Polytechnic Training.

Table 2 presents teachers’ responses. Almost all responding teachers (93%) were aware of existing youth polytechnics in Nandi County. However, less than half of the teachers knew of a student in the area who was enrolled in a youth polytechnic (48.6%) or whether students completed the training (44.4%). Only a third of the teachers were aware of any sponsorship for youth polytechnic training (30.6%) from national government (21%) and CDF (8%) or knew of a youth polytechnic graduate who had pursued higher education (30.6%). Thirty percent of the respondents were aware of varied amounts of money given to enrolled students based on enrolment (10%) and need (19%). These findings imply that most teachers might not be aware of these sponsorships to youth polytechnic students, given their main reason why students dropped out of youth polytechnics due to lack of school fees (10%, early marriage and negative perception were other reasons given for dropping out of school at 1% each) and therefore, they might not advise them to choose youth polytechnic training after primary or secondary education. Consequently, there is a need to sensitize teachers on the availability of such scholarships and how they can be accessed by enrolled or needy students in the County. The fact that more than half of the teachers (69.4%) did not know of any youth polytechnic graduate who had pursued higher education implies that there is a need to track the academic and career progression of such graduates in order to facilitate appropriate career guidance.

However, more than half of the teachers would consider enrolling their child in a youth polytechnic (51.4%). Majority of the teachers positively felt that youth polytechnic training helped to reduce youth idleness (79.2%), reduced youth unemployment (70.8%), create a skilled workforce (83.3%) and promote youth maturity / human development (73.6%). The teachers’ only reason for enrolling their children in youth polytechnics was to enable them gain skills for self-employment (17%) as compared to the many reasons given by students and parents. This finding might imply that teachers have a negative perception towards youth polytechnic training as earlier revealed by CIDA (2013) and UNESCO (2006) and Makari and Ochieno (2014).

Nevertheless, teachers gave varied reasons for motivating increased youth enrolment in polytechnics such as: sensitization of the youth and their parents in the usefulness of youth polytechnic training (70%), providing sponsorship for enrolled students (47%), availing start-up capital for youth polytechnic graduates (29%), assuring employment after graduation (13%), equipping youth polytechnics adequately and providing boarding facilities (11%), building more youth polytechnics (6%), assuring progression to degree level (3%) and employ qualified tutors (3%), track graduates (1%), provide extra-curricular activities (1%), demystifying youth polytechnics as a place for failures (1%) and school teachers to identify students' talents early and guide them accordingly (1%). These suggestions further confirm the persistent negative perception and attitude towards youth polytechnic training even to date. Therefore, it is necessary to come up with better ways of removing this stigmatization of youth polytechnic training.

Table 3: Students' Response to Questions

QUESTIONS	YES		NO		NO OPINION	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
Are you aware of an YP in your area?	13	89.1	16	10.3	0	0
Do you know of a student from your area in YP?	107	68.6	47	30.1	0	0
Did the student finish youth polytechnic training	89	57.1	65	41.7	0	0
Is there sponsorship to study in youth polytechnic?	42	26.9	110	70.5	0	0
Do you know a student who has pursued higher ed.?	52	33.3	99	63.5	0	0
Would you enroll in youth polytechnic?	108	69.2	45	28.8	0	0
Does youth polytechnic training reduce idleness?	103	66	17	10.9	24	15.4
Does youth polytechnic reduce unemployment?	90	57.7	36	23.1	20	12.8
Does YP training create skilled workforce?	110	70.5	17	10.9	20	12.8
Does YP training promote human development?	80	51.3	38	24.4	26	16.7

Objective 3: To Determine Attitudes of the Youth in Primary and Secondary Schools towards Youth Polytechnic Training

Table 3 presents the responses of the youth. The majority of the youth (89.1%) were aware of existing government youth polytechnics in Nandi County, namely Sigilai, Tangaratwet, Cheptarit, Kurgung, Kaplamai, Kipsebwo, Kemeloi, Kobujoi, Kaptel, and Labuiywo. Most youth (68%) knew of a youth polytechnic graduate and would consider enrolling in a youth polytechnic (69%). More than half of the youth (57%) knew of a youth polytechnic graduate. The youth stated that 39% of these graduates were gainfully employed in their areas of specialization, while only 10% were employed in other forms of casual work, 16% were at home, while 14% were unemployed. Of the 14% who had other gainful employment, 3% engaged in farming, 1% was shop assistants, and 10% were in unspecified forms of self-employment. Thirty four percent of the youth positively felt that youth polytechnic training was useful in gaining skills for self-employment (20%), was cheaper than secondary school training (3%), one could secure sponsorship (3%), helped one avoid idleness (3%), or it was a good thing to do (3%), while 1% each thought it could help one improve their living standards, continue studies, could be completed over a short period, or because there was no other option.

These findings of more than half of the graduates (61%) being gainfully employed clearly reveal that youth polytechnic training is an acceptable way of acquiring skills for gainful employment.

However, only a quarter of the youth (26%) knew of the existence of national government and Constituency Development Fund (CDF) sponsorship for youth enrolled in youth polytechnics while a third of the youth (33%) knew of youth polytechnic graduates who had pursued higher education. In addition, only 4% of the youth were aware of 15000 shillings per enrolled student government funding, even though 16% of the youth were aware that needy students (vulnerable, orphans, disabled) could qualify for financial support from the government and other sponsors. At the same time, 24% of the youth identified lack of fees as the main reason students dropped out of youth polytechnic training, followed by early marriage (6%), early pregnancy (3%), and getting a job halfway through training and being on drugs tying up at 1% each. These findings reveal a need to sensitize Nandi County students in primary and secondary schools of existing national government and CDF sponsorship as well as other forms of sponsorship for students enrolled in youth polytechnics in the County.

Furthermore, most youth positively felt that they would enroll in specific courses in youth polytechnics such as engineering (20%), tailoring (15%), mechanic and masonry (8% each), plumbing (6%), catering (5%), driving (4%), hair dressing (3%), carpentry (2%), and the following courses at 1% each: agribusiness, computer, and welding.

Conclusions

From these descriptive survey research findings it is concluded that: Parents, teachers and students have positive perceptions and attitudes towards youth polytechnic training in Nandi County. Negative stigmatization of youth polytechnic training persists as depicted by the low enrolment and the teachers' unwillingness to enroll their children in youth polytechnics. Most of the respondents are unaware of sponsorship sources for students enrolled in youth polytechnics.

Youth polytechnics provide an avenue to further education since graduates can progress to higher levels at other youth polytechnics, technical institutes and universities. Therefore, this demystifies the myth that youth polytechnic training is for failures or is a last resort when there are no other academic options.

Recommendations

From this descriptive survey research findings the following eight recommendations are made: There is a need to sensitize the community on the advantages of enrolling in youth polytechnics in the County so as to increase student enrolment. These advantages include; the guaranteed partial sponsorship, reduction of youth idleness and unemployment, the creation of a skilled workforce, stepping stone to further education, and the promotion of human resource development in general. This sensitization can be done through managers of youth polytechnics giving talks in primary and secondary schools, and County forums such as bursary committees, open houses in youth polytechnics, use churches and other religious meetings, take application

forms to school, advertise courses offered, carry out graduation ceremonies as a way of advertising youth polytechnics while motivating students to do well in their courses. Teachers should identify students' talents and interests early so that they can advise them to pursue technical and vocational education as an acceptable career option. Make youth polytechnic training free like primary and secondary school education. Provide boarding facilities and adequately equip youth polytechnics. Provide qualified teachers and Track students in the market place to identify existing gaps of knowledge and how to rectify them. Promote extracurricular activities in youth polytechnic similar to that offered in other educational institutions and seek further financial support from other places like banks, church and individuals.

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