

Improving the TVET Curriculum as a Strategy for Better Performance

Hillary Kirior

Rift Valley Technical Training Institute, Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract

Every nation requires a steady growth of the economy for efficient productivity. This can be achieved by equipping the labor-force with the necessary skills, attitudes and knowledge so that they can be effective at their place of work. Competence- based learning has been seen as the best approach to equip the labor-force to match the demands of the job market. It has been endorsed that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the best system of education that can equip the general public with the necessary capabilities. For this reason, several countries have implemented the TVET curriculum as an absolute instrument to attain national development. In the last few years, the Kenyan education system launched ambitious and comprehensive reforms on the primary and secondary education with the aim of increasing quality and expanding opportunities in post-secondary education. However, TVET curriculum has lagged leaving behind several learners who cannot join university education without adequate skills to join labor market and build the nation. The TVET curriculum has been seen as one that offers no guidance to learning that is necessary for both the participants and the trainers. It seldom involves various stakeholders and individuals who will benefit or even have something to contribute to training. It is evident that most of the institutions still teach Euro-centric contents with learning materials imported from European countries and little is taught about Africa. Hitherto, if the philosophy of TVET has to be realized, its curriculum should be understood by the locals, attuned by their ambitions, accustomed to the natural environment and within the disposal of their culture. It is the right time therefore for the locals to take appropriate initiatives and develop their curriculum which is relevant to their social and economic needs; A curriculum that enhances training opportunities to increase access and equity, one that accommodates soft skills and link TVET Institutions with the demands of the Industries. It is therefore recommended that the government should encourage all industrial organizations to take part in designing TVET curriculum as well as provide in-service and on-job- training programmes in those institutions.

Key words: *Improved performance, strategies, TVET curriculum*

Introduction

There is no doubt that quality human labor is a key factor for development and survival in the modern economy (Singh, 2011). Every nation requires a efficient productivity for steady growth of the economy. This can be achieved by equipping the labor force with the necessary skills, attitudes and knowledge so that they can

be effective at their place of work (Government of Kenya, 2005). At the moment, the world economic vibrancy and survival mainly depend on the productivity of the labor market (Flash Eurobarometer, 2010).

According to UNESCO (2006), labour-force refers to a measure of the economic growth of a particular country. Therefore, it is the effectiveness at which the labor force can produce goods or render services at any given time. On the other hand, labour force is a direct consequence of the human capital development (Singh, 2011). This simply means that developed nations are made by a swarm of great potentials that are ready to utilize and harness the available resources, or even tap the resources from other countries (Wenglinisky, 2012).

Regrettably, most of the developing countries in Africa have a lot of deficits of these human capital potentials which are acquired through TVET training. This is a sign that most of their educational systems are dysfunctional or ineffective (UNESCO,

2006). Odhiambo (2010) acknowledged that the predicament of the nation is entirely dependent on her capability to raise dedicated and competent technical workforce. At this point, TVET stands tallest in assisting the country out of the problem of lack of suitable manpower (Athuman, 2005). Nevertheless, according to the Economic Commission in Africa, the main difference between developing and developed countries lies in the technological capabilities. Therefore, chief educational reforms in Africa have been to streamline the colonial-type of education with a lot of emphasis on vocationalization (OECD, 2013).

In spite of the abundant resources in the country, Kenya has had continuous manifestation records of abysmal industrial performance due to its inability to synergize its resources (UNESCO/ILO, 2002). Failure to streamline and re-organize the colonial education will continue to open the gap of mismatch between the education output and economic growth (Republic of Kenya/UNICEF, 2012). It is, therefore, imperative and timely to reconsider improving the TVET curriculum for better performance. This paper thus discusses the conservative curriculum, stressing on the challenges and proposing ways of enhancing TVET curriculum for improved performance.

Literature Review

Conservative TVET Curriculum

To some people, curriculum means a particular course, while to many; it means the whole educational environment. This paper will focus on the curriculum within the TVET setting: curriculum development as the process planning learning opportunities which are intended to transform the learner positively and attainment of the set goals. It encompasses four fundamental elements as underscored by the world agro-forestry center (Engleson, 2008). Curriculum may also refer to identifying the learning needs and deciding on the appropriate training type to meet the learning needs (Republic of Kenya/UNICEF, 2012); Careful planning of training so that learning takes place as scheduled (Engleson, 2008); Delivering the

training itself so that learning is accomplished or evaluating and assessing the training to prove that learning took place (Government of Kenya, 1999).

Therefore, curriculum development refers to total planning, implementation, evaluation and innovation within the teaching and learning process (UNESCO/ILO, 2002). The conservative approach to curriculum development offers no guidance to learning that is necessary for both the participants and the trainers. It seldom involves various stakeholders and individuals who will benefit or even have something to contribute to training (Hungerford, Volk, & Ramsey, 2009).

In essence, the TVET curriculum is an authentic instrument for economic transformation and technological leap. Typically, TVET was designed to meet the social and economic needs of young people who want to increase their job competencies and raise performance standards at the place of work (UNESCO, 2006).

According to the World Bank report (2011), an effective TVET should generate labor force with adequate skills, knowledge and attitudes for better productivity and bring about the desired national development. After several years of introducing TVET into the African education system, there is little that has been achieved (Engleson, 2008).

Challenges facing TVET in Kenya

Many concur with the fact that the TVET curriculum has remained to be a colonial legacy. Most, if not all institutions in Africa, still teach Euro-centric contents with learning materials imported from European countries, in case they are affordable (Athuman, 2005). There is very little that is taught about Africa. This is based on the research carried out by OECD (2013).

Nonetheless, most of the Africans feel that they are fulfilling their aspirations, yet they are revolving around the colonial rule. Even though development is not just an economic process, it is a complex process that should rise indigenously from every society (Wenglinsky, 2012). It has to rise from the culture in question and can never be reduced to simulations of developed societies (Republic of Kenya/ UNICEF, 2012). This implies that if the philosophy of TVET has to be realized, its curriculum should be indigenous i.e. native; understood by the locals, attuned by their ambitions, accustomed to the natural environment and within the disposal of their culture (Oliver, 2007). Furthermore, the conservative TVET curriculum development establishes very weak bonds between training institutions and the industries (UNESCO/ILO, 2002).

According to the research carried in sampled technical institutions in Kenya, it was evident that the curriculum lacks relevance to the market. There is little connection with what is taught and the demands of the job market. Out of the sampled institutes, according to Kerre (1992), about 40% of the respondents said that the

courses they offer are irrelevant to the job market and the business organizations. To others, TVET graduates are inferior in serving their customers and lack confidence in what they do (Government of Kenya, 2005). This calls for urgent attention to the type of curriculum offered in those institutions so as to restore the identity of TVET institutions and align industrial needs with what is taught in those institutions.

Most researches conducted have shown that other challenges confronting TVET are low absorption rate of TVET graduates, lack of recognition of graduates by industries, lack of attractiveness of TVET institutions, insufficient competent teachers, and high unit cost, among others (The African Union, 2006). Basing on these challenges, the following are new strategies towards the implementation of TVET curriculum for improved performance.

Ways of Improving TVET Curriculum

Adoption of Indigenous Curriculum. Institutions in Africa should take appropriate initiatives and develop their curriculum which is relevant to their social and economic needs. Although it should borrow some ideas from the internationals, it has to consider the conditions of its culture, resources and the natural environment. The World Bank and the Association of Social & Economic Research of Kenya (Odhiambo, 2010) noted that one of the major causes of declining quality of tertiary education in Kenya is the irrelevant curriculum.

The African education system has for several years looked at the issue of curriculum development as an international project and subsequently, almost forgetting her needs (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The African institutions have great potentials to do better in curriculum development and implementation if only they consider it as a curriculum that prepares them for better lives and satisfies their needs. This calls them to adopt and make use of the local materials and technologies and even prepare them to live better in other parts of the world (Engleson, 2008). This, in essence, is very significant for the TVET curriculum. It makes it more valuable for those people living in remote areas.

A good curriculum attracts upright people and engenders the use of local materials, tools and ideas (UNESCO, 2006). Therefore, reducing the dependence on imported products and technologies stimulates the African intellect towards improving indigenous materials and technologies (African Union, 2006). It is needless to say that over-reliance of imported TVET curriculum has yielded high unemployment rate, because what the society needs is not learned or taught (Flash Eurobarometer, 2010).

Connecting TVET Institutions with Industries. According to Singh (2011), he argues that for training systems to be more effective and meaningful there is the need for collaboration between the training institutions and the industries. This will help in improving the match between the training provisions and the rising demand and mobilizing extra resources. The main agenda of TVET is to identify and to address the labor demands regarding employees' competencies (UNESCO/ILO,

2002). However, to achieve this, according to Flash Eurobarometer (2010), is by carrying out occupational analysis, developing recommended standards, designing appropriate curriculum as well as writing assessments for approval and certification. At the center of these processes, there is the need to involve industries so that they can offer provisions on available opportunities and ways of improving TVET (Ministry of Labour and Youth Development, 2007).

Quality TVET recognizes that training and education should be based on steadfast labor market information, employer and demand need, especially in primacy trades and occupations (UNESCO, 2006). However, this is vibrant process since the needs of the employer must be in pace with the dynamic technology and the rise of new ideas and skills (Kerre, 1992).

A responsive TVET system should include approaches to monitoring employers to look for information about the labor market. Such information helps as guidelines for the training of graduates and the employers on up-to-date skills (The Republic of Kenya, 2005). Close relationships between TVET learning institutions and the industries is the platform that shows best practices, modern technological advancements, how to implement and the effect on the industry (Narayana, Brady, & Jagathrakshakan, 2009). With close relationship at hand, industries can then take part in TVET programs, with the aim of sharing ideas for the betterment of education system. In response to what UNESCO (2006), to incorporate industrial training with the learning processes, there is the need for close interaction.

Adaptation of the Teaching/Learning of Imported Technological Knowledge/Skills. Modification and adoption instead of general adoption of the learning/teaching of foreign technologies in TVET must be encouraged (Republic of Kenya/UNICEF, 2012). It has been realized that several products of foreign technologies have degraded in Kenya because of lack of spare parts. Therefore, Kenyan technicians and craftsmen must learn the techniques of modifying and adapting imported or foreign technology so as to be effective and efficient (Wenglinsky, 2012). The manufacture of non-available spare parts will provide employment opportunities to those who are not employed.

Africa and other developing countries do not necessarily need to re-invent the wheel in its quest for originality, and this is the goodness with globalization (OECD, 2013). Africa derives benefits from the technological and scientific breakthrough of the other African countries. Ideas that are imported can be adopted or developed so as to improve performance. World Bank (2011) observed that the newly industrialized countries got technology through incremental or minor technical change.

Including Soft Skills. Soft skills are those skills that all the employers desire of employees such as teamwork, productivity, and timeliness (UNESCO/ILO, 2002). The current global economy has demanded a lot from the populace more than it did in the previous years. Competition has also gone global where the demands of the employees have also increased, which has forced most of the employers to concentrate on developing the employees who are more dedicated to their work (African Union, 2006). The demands might be felt during the time of

work, type of work or various interactions. These demands may also be in constant clash with the local beliefs or customs. Rather than trying to do away with these beliefs and customs, TVET students must be trained in a way that meets the requirement of a particular industry (Ministry of Labour and Youth Development, 2007).

Enhancing Training Opportunities to Increase Access and Equity. According to Odhiambo (2010), in the contemporary society, there is an increase in the number of youths who are un/underemployed and some of the reasons being the lack of saleable skills. TVET program has been like the only tool that can transform graduates from being job seekers to job creators. It is therefore very important to make TVET more accessible and available to the general public (Narayana, Brady, & Jagathrakshakan, 2009). This can be achieved by taking the advantage of the availability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Hungerford & Peyton, 2010). Also, courses should be offered in the form of modules so as to equip the learners with some skills to make be successful in their places of work. This will minimize the cost of studying the whole program at once (OECD, 2013).

Teacher Training. According to UNESCO (2006), teachers are the pivot or a hub where every successful education hinges. Training of teachers should start by developing teachers, important discourses that challenge the societal ills such as sexism, white collar syndrome, exploitation, kleptomaniac and other vices (Hungerford & Peyton, 2010). Teacher education programs should produce the caliber of teachers whose mission is to challenge the status quo of the society as a result of their serious disposition and emancipatory outlook (Flash Eurobarometer, 2010). As a result, teachers should be all-rounded people who can analyze critical issues that affect the Africans and more so the Kenyan society and come up with solutions that will remove the country and the continent at large from exploitation (Hungerford & Peyton, 2010). This demands a new system of education the puts into consideration the conjoint role that both the teachers and the students give during the process of learning (Hungerford, Volk, & Ramsey 2009). Instructors are recommended to go for continuous training and retraining so as to make them adapt to the ever changing theoretical knowledge, pedagogical and technical skills and the new technologies in their places of work (OECD, 2013).

Attitudinal Re-Orientation. According to UNESCO/ILO (2002), a vocational curriculum does not only battle against the resistance of academic curricular, but also there is a lot of suspicions that it also offers lower class education and track to some people of lower caste or class, women and racial minorities away from educational training and jobs with highest paid salary. As a result, this attitude has to be re-oriented. To echo the words of Engleson (2008), creating awareness is the first step towards orientation- a process by encompassing absorbing better skills, principles, values, and perspectives. It is until the leaders, and the entire public is well informed of the influences of TVET that there can be a level ground for re-orientation (UNESCO/ILO, 2002). The entire public must understand that TVET a strategic tool that can be used to produce a productive employee that can enhance

the success of a country, rather than a mere educational tool for only those who failed in their education (Ministry of Labour and Youth Development, 2007).

Conclusions

This paper has studied the development of TVET curriculum in Africa with Kenya being a case study. One of the major issues being raised is that despite IVET having good philosophies, and with the introduction of TVET education system for several years now, little results have been achieved (Singh, 2011). This paper also pointed out that the Euro-centric curriculum embraced by African countries has not addressed the aspirations and the needs of the African society at large (Engleson, 2008). Among the areas mentioned in this paper is the need to drum up the support of local curriculum, collaboration between the local industries and the corresponding TIVET institutions, adaptation instead of adoption foreign curriculum, inclusion of soft/ ICT skill, re-orientation of attitude towards TVET curriculum, increasing the ease access and opportunities to TVET programs (taking advantage of ICT potentials), and redesigning teacher training programs to sufficiently influence in the redesigning of TVET programs (World Bank , 2011).

Recommendations

The government should encourage all industrial organizations to take part in designing TVET curriculum, provide in-service and on-job-training programmes and approve the competencies offered in those institutions. There is need to give an equivalent attention to TVET sector as that offered in the university education. Also, industrial organizations should be encouraged to participate in TVET fairs by giving incentives for business organizations and companies, compensating training costs, giving subsidies to apprenticeship wages and allowing tax claims. Further, there is need to raise funds allocation to TVET sector. These funds should be directed to research and development, procuring suitable and up-to-date machinery, tools and equipment and general management of entire TVET institutions. Lastly, it is worth setting clear national TVET policies and strategies on curriculum development and implementation.

References

- African Union. (2006). *Second decade of education for Africa (2006–2015) draft plan of action*. Maputo: Sage.
- Athuman, A. (2005). *Education sector situation analysis: Final draft report on technical and vocational education and training*. Daresalaam.
- Engleson, D. (2008). *A Guide to curriculum planning in environmental education*. Wisconsin: Department of Instruction.
- Flash Eurobarometer. (2010). *‘Employers’ perception of graduate employability, analytical report’*. Hungary: European Commission.

- Government of Kenya. (2005). *Kenya education sector support pro-gramme 2005-2010: Delivery of quality education and training to all Kenyans*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Government of Kenya. (1999). *Report of the totally integrated quality education and training*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Hungerford, H., & Peyton, R. (2010). *Strategies for the training of teachers in environmental education*. Paris.
- Hungerford, H., Volk, T., & Ramsey, J. (2009). *A prototype environmental education curriculum for the middle school – A discussion guide for UNESCO Training Seminars on Environmental Education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Kerre, B. W. (1992). *Innovative strategies in the implementation of the 8-4-4 curriculum in Kenya. (Mimeographed)*. Nairobi: Kenyatta University, Centre for Curriculum Studies in Africa.
- Ministry of Labour and Youth Development. (2007). *National youth employment action plan*. Dar es Salaam: MOL.
- Narayana, R., Brady, D. B., & Jagathrakshakan, T. (2009). Integration of environmental components into technician curricula: A global and Indian perspectives. *Journal of Technical and Vocational Education*, 1-12.
- Odhambo, D. (2010). *Task force on re-alignment of education to the Constitution 2010 and Vision 2030 and beyond*. Nairobi: The Government of Kenya.
- OECD. (2013). *Ensuring fragile states are not left behind: Fact sheet on resource flow and trends*. Nairobi: JKF.
- Oliver, G. (2007). Effects of expectation and disconfirmation on post exposure product evaluation: An alternative interpretation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 480.
- Republic of Kenya/UNICEF. (2012). *Education for all (EFA) end of decade assessment (2001-2010)*. Nairobi: Ministry Of Education and UNICEF.
- Singh, M. (2011). Combining work and learning in the informal economy: implications for education, training and skills development . *International Review of Education*, 599-620.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Starting my own small business. A training module on entrepreneurship for students of TVET at secondary level participants workbook*.
- UNESCO. (2006). *Procedures for developing an environmental education curriculum. Division of science, technical and environmental education*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO/ILO (2002). *UNESCO and ILO recommendations (2002), technical and vocational education and training for the twenty-first century*. Thai: UNESCO.

UNESCO/ILO (2012). *Technical and vocational education and training for the 21st century*. Geneva/Paris.

Wenglinsky, H. (2012). *How teaching matters: Bringing the classroom back into discussion of teacher quality*. Princeton NJ: Education Testing Service.

World Bank (2011). *World Development Report*, Washington DC: Word Bank.