

FOSTERING LIFE LONG LEARNING: RE-IMAGINING EMPLOYABILITY AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITY: A CASE OF TVET INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis was a turning point in skills development, propelled by the rapid expansion of technology-enabled solutions. According to the World Economic Forum report 2020, the rapid acceleration of automation and economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic shifted the division of labor between humans and machines, leading to 85 million jobs being displaced and 97 million new ones created by 2025. As the demand for new opportunities gather pace, skilling and reskilling strategies are crucial in meeting the perennial skills shortage. This paper addresses interventions for skills development through the skilling and reskilling models, training and preparing for the future of work. Mixed method research design was used to collect data which was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The study revealed that the 21st century labor market demands the ability to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world of work. The study recommended that skills development and preparedness is an inclusive approach that calls for robust preparation for the world of work, skilling and reskilling and thus should remain a policy priority.

Key words: Employability, skilling, reskilling

1.1 Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum report 2020, the rapid acceleration of automation and economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic will shift the division of labor between humans and machines, leading to 85 million jobs being displaced and 97 million new ones created by 2025. Further, the pandemic has triggered the need to rethink the way we work and train employees for the future of work. The industry's global megatrends, comprising of new technologies, globalization, demographic shifts, climate change, and migration, has led to the loss of some jobs while creating new opportunities that came with the challenges of COVID 19. While exploring these challenges in the world of education and the world of work, there is an urgent demand on to acquire new skills, reskill, and up skill to adapt to employability the new normal.

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) done in 2018, recorded that 7 million Kenyans were unemployed with 1.4 million out of this figure desperately looking for jobs. While it was envisaged that the government would create 1 million jobs annually to meet the demand for the Big 4 Agenda and Vision 2030, there was a key concern on mismatch between the skill development and youth employability.

A key concern for educators, policy-makers and employers is increasing the employability skills of persons with disability and to prepare them for their working life in the 21st Century characterized by industrial revolution. Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. As such, persons with disabilities and the disability perspective needs to be central in all future of work debates at global, regional, national and local levels.

Over the years, there have been unsuccessful attempts in Kenya to determine the disability status. Lack of evidence-based data on the nature and extent of disabilities as well as other factors that affect persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Kenya have therefore posed challenges in terms of planning, allocation of resources and employment opportunities. The unemployment rate for persons with a disability, at 10.1 percent in 2021, decreased by 2.5 percentage points from the previous year but remains higher than in 2019 (7.3 percent).

The expected transformations in the future of work entails risks and opportunities for persons with disabilities. To mitigate these risks and maximize the opportunities, measures must be urgently put in place, and it is essential that persons with disabilities play an active role in decision-making concerning future employment policies. TVET training institutions must endeavor to provide relevant skills and re-imagine employability of persons with disability to meet the employer expectations and dynamic market demands. It is in the backdrop of this that the study sought to address interventions for skills development through the skilling, up skilling and reskilling models, training and preparing for the future of work among persons with disability.

Masai Technical Training Institute is a TVET institute in Kenya with a growing enrolment of persons with disability (youth) in pursuit of skills for self-reliance and employment. The study generated important questions: What are the appropriate skilling, up skilling and reskilling models for persons with disability? What are the basic work habits approaches expected by employers for employability in the market? Are persons with disability prepared for transition from school to work? It is envisaged that study will inform the TVET training institutions, policy makers and the industry on gaps for improvement and meaningful inclusion of persons with disability in training for employment in of Kajiado County, Kenya and beyond.

1.2 Problem Statement

Employability of persons with disabilities is a developing discussion in the world of work. However, data on unemployment and participation of persons with disability is hard to obtain since majority of persons with disabilities are not even registered as unemployed. The entry of persons with disabilities in the labor market is significantly lower than that of persons without disabilities. Similarly, they are more likely to be in vulnerable employment, or to be paid less than persons without disabilities. With the foreseeable changes in the future labor market, this gap could widen further, and action must therefore be taken to ensure persons with disability participate and contribute meaningfully in employment for sustainable development.

1.3 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to examine interventions for employability among persons with disability.

1.4 Specific Objectives

- i. Identify skilling and reskilling models for persons with disability.
- ii. Assess the preparedness of persons with disability into the world of work.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.5.1 TVET in Sustainable Development Agenda

Vocational training, education, and life-time learning are primary supports of employment of personnel, employability, and sustainable inventiveness development within the Decent Work Agenda, and consequently leads to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to fight poverty.

The Government through Vision 2030 blueprint recommends intensified application of science, technology and innovation to raise productivity and efficiency by developing critical mass of skilled youths and adults in many technical fields. This is anchored on the realization that the country can accelerate its development agenda with a highly productive and competitive workforce locally, regionally and globally. TVET is a critical key player in igniting the employability revolution in Kenya and beyond through the skills development well outlined in the education programs.

1.5.2 Skills Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is at the core of skills development and provides a framework to re-orient education and training at all levels towards the sustainability agenda. ESD and TVET are powerful forces that can help people to become productive and socially responsible citizens, workers and consumers, able to address local and global challenges. (UNESCO, 2012).

Prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic, skills development and lifelong learning systems were facing increasing challenges in meeting the fast-changing demand of labour markets. Skills development, competencies and employability skills provide a foundation for skilling and reskilling to match the labour market needs. The recent commitment to the education reforms has unveiled an integrated learning approach in the CBET programs to make training relevant, outcome based, demand driven and industry based.

Effective skills development system depends on close coordination between governments, social partners, the private sector, and education or training providers. In order to enhance the agility and resilience of societies to deal with the challenges posed by the pandemic and similar crises in the future, involved stakeholders have a crucial responsibility in ensuring the continuation of training, development of skills, improving the effectiveness of skills development and lifelong learning systems.

1.5.3 Skilling and Reskilling

The 21st century labor market calls for increasingly advanced skills. This means that education and training systems must respond by developing skills such as adaptability, persistence, problem-solving, and digital skills, in addition to foundational literacy and numeracy as well as technical skills. Skilling and reskilling models provide an inclusive life-long learning approach of persons with disabilities.

1.5.4 Industry - Training Institutions Partnerships for Sustainable Employability Skills

Collaboration and partnerships with training institutions, business, industry, and government and community organizations promote relevance and skills development and prepare a skilled workforce. Partnerships between industries and training institutions is an opportunity for creating in - house skills program that go along up-skilling its employees. Therefore, training institutions will have to thrive and withstand competition by producing trainees who are work ready with hands on industry experience.

1.5.5 Work Integrated Learning and Workplace Based Learning

Literature sources reviewed suggested that skills for sustainable development could and should be developed before and after entering employment. As such, work integrated learning (WIL) and workplace based learning is a key instrument that helps trainees and employees to be in developing their broad understanding and awareness of industries and the possible career that are available to them; a career development resource.

Exposure through work integrated learning and work based learning ensures that trainees understand the market demands and can cope and solve problems in the world of work while maintaining proper sustainable linkages that not only increases the employability but also reduces skills gap or mismatch for economic prosperity.

Work based learning enhances on job experience and productivity, addressing the skills and labor shortages and retention of relevant skills for sustainable employment and development.

Work integrated Learnings equips trainees with intellectual, technical and soft skills needed to compete and contribute meaningfully towards the country's socioeconomic development agenda becoming a professional pathway for career preparedness. The concept of WIL is a fertile ground for TVET its agenda towards sustainable development and recommended for future research.

1.5.6 Employability Preparedness for Persons with Disability

With accelerated changes in the demand for skills and raised the possibility of structural shifts in labour markets around the world, there is an urgent need for quality training and preparedness to support a robust economic recovery. There is need for remediation, to reduce the risk of leaving behind the most underserved population and future workers with lower earnings and lower quality jobs over their lifetime. Literature revealed that preparation of youth trainees for employability in the 21st century while imparting skills for development is an ingredient for sustainable skills development. The hard and soft skills define the desired learning outcomes in the 21st century skills that characterize the pathway to employment and sustainable development. Soft skills prepares the employees to face uncertainties while responding to the dynamic market demands calls for growth mindset, agility and resourcefulness. Persons with disability continue to be marginalized in the preparation and transition to the world of work.

Employers are concerned with inability to meet basic work habits such knowing how to finish a job, punctuality, the ability to cooperate in a work team, capacity for problem solving, critical thinking and good communication skills. Deficit of skills as such; basic IT skills, basic literacy, ethical skills, interpersonal skills, management and entrepreneurial skills; is a great concern for employers and a high burden on the employees and in particular those with disability.

TVET institutions have incorporated employability skills in to their programs to prepare graduates for the world of work. In this study, Persons with disabilities have undergone training and mentorship sessions to prepare them for waged employment in the private sector.

This study aimed at ensuring that persons with disability were not left out in the rapid recovery after the crisis and in future, and to build skills development systems capable of adapting to labor market transformations in the long run.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

A study was conducted among persons with disability who were already in the informal employment, preparing to join employment and those who had joined technical training institutions for a competency based course. The study adopted descriptive survey design employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study sampled 10 trainers, 50 trainees, 13 with disability and 10 employers. Stratified random sampling was used to select the respondents from different strata. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the trainees, former trainees and trainers. This was further triangulated with interviews and discussions with selected employers and panelists during conferences on skills development employability skills and preparedness for persons with disability. Descriptive statistics was analyzed using frequency tables and figures.

1.7 FINDINGS

Interactive research and technologies provided quantitative and qualitative interactive feedback systems that allowed the respondents to give more important contextual information, remarks and ideas to researchers.

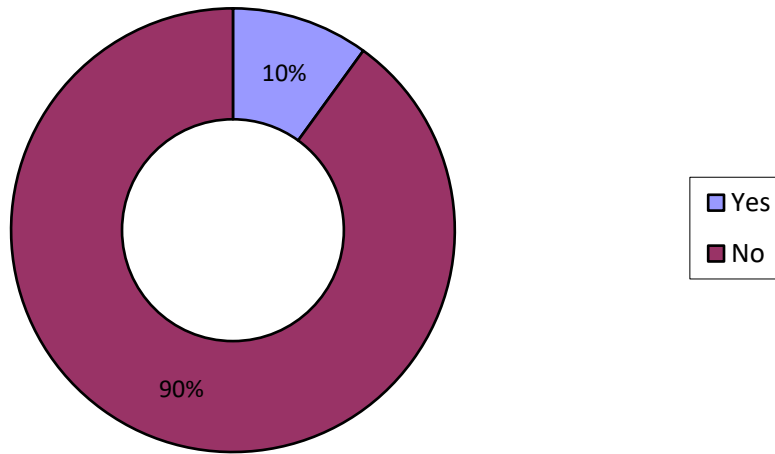


Figure 1. Presence of Transition Service to help Trainees with Disability find Employment after Training

Figure 1 showed that majority (90%) of trainees with disability disagreed that the institution offers some type of transition service to help trainees find employment after training while a few 5 (10%) agreed that the institution offers the transition service. The trainees indicated that sometimes professionals visited their institution to offer a talk on the available employment opportunities in their area of specialization. This meant that the institution did not have adequate, and well-coordinated transition services to help the trainees.

Table 1: How Former Trainees got their Jobs

| How they got their jobs | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Attended an interview and got the job | 3 | 21 |
| Through the training center | 2 | 14 |
| Through family members or friends | 8 | 58 |
| Through government placement officer | 1 | 7 |

Table 1 showed that majority 8 (58%) of former trainees indicated that they secured a job through family members or friends while a few 3 (21%) indicated that they applied and were invited for an interview and were offered the job. Only 2 (14%) got the job through the training center. This means that training centres should explore ways to link their trainees to employers. Maintaining industrial linkages and public private partnerships would improve the performance and reduce the level of employability.

Table 2: Type Transition Services Offered in the Institution

| Transition services | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Guidance and Counseling | 4 | 8 |
| Apprenticeship | 3 | 6 |
| Career Education | 10 | 20 |
| Job Placement | 6 | 12 |
| No transition services | 27 | 54 |
| Total | 50 | 100 |

Table 2 showed that majority (54%) of the trainees respondents indicated that there were no transition service offered in the institution while (8%) indicated there was guidance and counseling services. The findings revealed that the institution did not offer adequate apprenticeship or job placement to the graduate trainees. This would still increase the vulnerability of persons living with disability whose chances of employment were dismal.

Career education (20%) was proposed to be a suitable transition service for many trainees. This implied that trainees required transition services into the job market. For PWDs, career education had provided a new entry for skilling, up skilling and reskilling. The study found that many PWDs were able to recognize their career pathways through career services. 30% of the enrolled trainees with Disability chose technical courses compared to the previous enrolment (7%). PWDs who had acquired training through skilling, reskilling and up skilling programs been employed in various law courts as data entry clerks, at sub county hospitals, schools, front office digital media marketing, national and county government.

Table 3: Stakeholders involved in the transition planning for Persons with Disability in employment

| Stakeholders | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Trainees | 0 | 0 |
| Family representatives | 0 | 0 |
| Institution staff | 1 | 10 |
| Community Representatives | 2 | 20 |
| Potential Employers | 3 | 30 |
| Trainers | 4 | 40 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

Table 3 indicated that majority (40%) of the stakeholders involved in the transition planning were trainers while (30%) indicated that it was the potential employers. A few (20%) indicated that they involved the community representative. The study acknowledges the involvement of community compared to the previous trend (4%) was gaining popularity to awareness creation in supporting PWDs at community level.

Table 4: How employers Rated the Training for Persons with disability in Relation to Job Market needs

| Frequency | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Very well | 3 | 30 |
| Fairly well | 6 | 60 |
| Well | 1 | 10 |
| Not very well | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

Table 4 revealed that more than half 60% of the employers rated the training to be fairly well in terms of preparing them for the job market while 30% indicated that it was very well. This meant that the institution had imparted the relevant skills to the trainees for job market however, employers indicated the graduates lacked basic employability skills such as basic work ethics, soft skills, and creativity among others. This called for the re-imagining of employability for persons with disability. The TVET institutions that participated in the study have provided innovative approaches into the existing skilling, reskilling, up skilling and work integrated learning programs. This is to make their graduate trainees with disability more employable and increase their productivity.

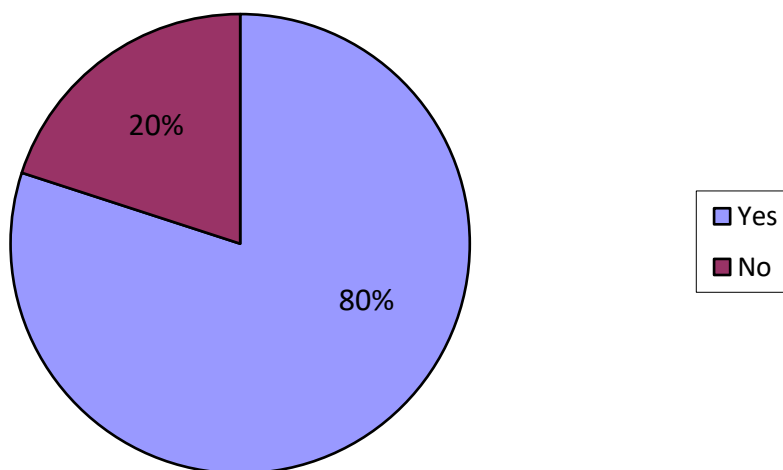


Figure 2. Persons with Disability having Required further Training on their First Job

Figure 2 indicated that majority (80%) of the PWDs agreed that they were required to undergo further training when they got their first job. A few (20%) disagreed that they were required to undergo further training. The PWDs argued that the industry needed more than just what they had learnt in the institution. There was therefore need for the syllabus to be updated to cover the current needs of the job industry integrating preparation for transition to work. Digital Literacy for PWD preparing to transit to the world of work was urgent call to action. This was crucial in connecting them to globe while preparing them for emerging trends in the future of work that comes with automation.

Table 5: Related Factors Perceived to influence Employers from Engaging trainees

| Factors | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Productivity | 2 | 20 |
| Professional approach to work | 2 | 20 |
| Basic work habits | 1.5 | 15 |
| Skills and training | 4.5 | 45 |
| Total | 10 | 100 |

Table 5 showed that mmajority (45%) of the employers indicated that skills and training were factors they perceived to influence their engagement with trainees in employment while 2 (20%) indicated productivity and professional approach to work. There was need to prepare PWDs while transiting to work in order to increase their retention and improve productivity.

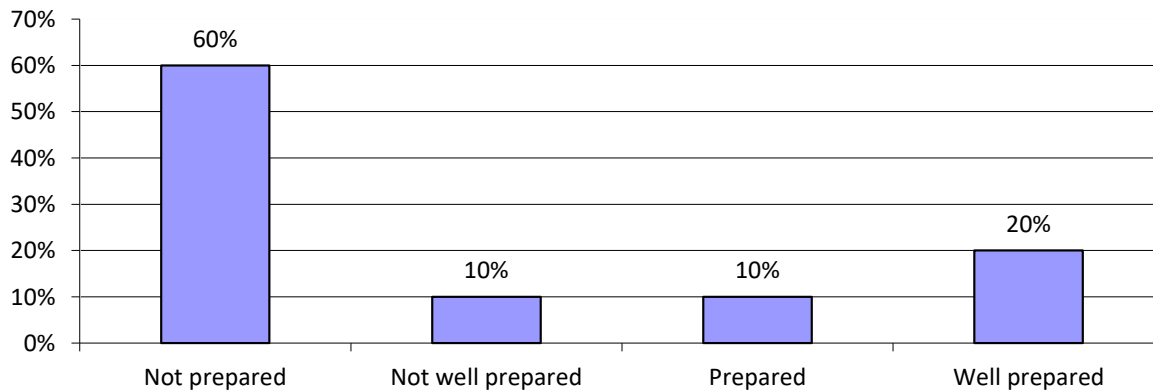


Figure 3. Level of Preparation of PWD Trainees for Transition into Employment

Figure 3 showed that majority (60%) of the employer respondents indicated that the trainees were not well prepared for transition into employment while 20% indicated that they were well prepared. This means that the employers do not have confidence with the trainees in terms of them being ready for employment. The trainees need to be prepared fully to handle any working environment. The employers proposed that a partnership between industries and institutions would improve the status. Attitudes displayed by the people around them can be a bigger problem for PWDs than the disability condition they must cope with. An engagement with possible employers would improve this attitude.

1.8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Employers' expectation indicated that they were concerned with the relationship between skills development and employability skills while the gap between preparedness for employability and transition should be closed through integrated training approaches such as work based integrated learning in the education system and collaborative partnerships for increased employability and sustainable development.

Employers' engagement in designing and delivery of training programs is key in enhancing the responsiveness of formal TVET and work-based learning programs to labor market needs.

Various interventions have proved that it is possible to minimize the degree of limitation and enhance the performance of PWDs, e.g., education policy on inclusion of PWDs into learning institutions, employment opportunities and service provision to PWDs. While most PWDs are unlikely to have active or viable socio-economic engagements to earn a living. Equipping them with hands on skills, preparing them for employment and social security grants is a lifelong approach to increasing their participation in the economy. The aim is to increase meaningful employment of Persons with Disabilities

PWDs have the capability and same opportunity in workplaces and should be able to access job opportunities easily and on equal ground. There is need for employers to change their attitude and mindset towards persons with disability. Advocate for their rights to social inclusion and societal acceptance.

1.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Learning institutions should equip trainee graduates with 21st Century labor market demands required to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world of work.
- ii. Persons with disability should be provided with skills development and adequate preparedness for the world of work.
- iii. An inclusive approach that calls for robust preparation for the world of work, through skilling, up skilling and reskilling should remain a priority for policy makers and employers.

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