



**IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ON QUALITY DELIVERY AT
MOMBASA TECHNICAL TRAINING INSTITUTE, KENYA**

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Abstract

The general objective of this study was to identify the impact of flexible skills development on quality delivery and challenges that the MoTTI fraternity faces in delivering employable skills and sustainable solutions. It takes a multidimensional approach at the impact of flexible skills development and identifies the role that TVET plays in providing programmes that would enhance production and development of skills to meet the requirements of the ‘Kenyan employer’. It also looks at the formal curriculum with the purpose of identifying ways of delivering it in a more flexible approach and without compromising the quality offered. The study recognizes skills development as an important vehicle and a strategy for job creation and improving livelihoods for economic independence of the general public. The study recognizes the concept of flexible skill development as a means by which empowerment is acquired as it identifies that unemployment problems are due to lack of proper or needed skills that drive the economy. Lack of employable skills has been identified as being responsible for the increased poverty, lower GDP in a country among many other challenges being experienced in many parts of Africa, including Kenya. The TVET bill 2012 which provides a clear government strategy on the reforms required for this sector to become an economic driver has been examined. Information gathered and the recommendations thereof will help to improve the delivery of learning in a more flexible way to cater for those who may not have the opportunity to attend the mainstream education system which is more static and at times outdated.

Key words: *Employable skills, TVET programmes, Economic Driver, Education and training, Poverty reduction, Intervention Programmes.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is acknowledged as a means for transforming and empowering people with skills, knowledge and, attitudes to enable them become productive members of the society.

The existing public technical and vocational education training (TVET) system suffers from critical problems including the decline of quality; lack of relevance to occupational and social realities: under-enrolment; and under-funding.

This implies that Kenya will experience strenuous future because the importance of skills and adequate training cannot be over-emphasized as it is expertise and technology that differentiates between the developed and developing countries. In vision 2030, education and training section, Kenya will provide a globally competitive quality education, training and research for development. The overall goal being reduction of illiteracy by increasing access to education, improving the transition rate from primary to secondary schools to higher education and raising the quality and relevance of education.

The TVET system which is expected to play a critical role in this endeavour by providing necessary skills that will catalyze the industrialization processes is in a sorry state. This paper focuses on Mombasa Technical Training Institute, one of the TVET institutions in Kenya which has embraced flexible skills development as a driving force in economic empowerment.

Skills development in Kenya must be in coordination with the education sector which comprises of Ministry of Education (MOE); the Teachers Service Commission and their affiliated Institutions. This sector envisions a globally competitive education, training, research and innovation for sustainable development. To realize this, the education sector should undertake to provide, promote and coordinate quality education and training; integration of Science, Technology and Innovation in sustainable socio- economic development processes. The sector's overall goal is to increase access to education, raise the quality and relevance of education, reduce inequality as well as exploit knowledge and skills in science, technology and innovation for global competitiveness.

Mombasa TTI has undertaken the challenge of increasing access to education and skills through the provision of flexible skills development within the context of the static curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a mixture of secondary sources. It was, therefore, a desk study of an exploratory nature. Orodho (2003) argues that exploratory research is a good tool for analyzing social scenarios characterized largely by qualitative factors. Exploratory studies, therefore, help to formulate important principles, hypotheses and solutions to problems. Development of this report followed an integrated and participatory approach. The study therefore relied on secondary information such as government policy documents, previous research papers and analysis of scholars, newspaper/magazines as well as journals and articles related to the subject.

The secondary data collection methods used in this research includes observations, interviews and trials. The methods of research employed were dependent on the aim of the research, time and resources available to the researcher. Each research method had its limitations and margin of error, and the research analysis had to take all these factors into account. Both exploratory and descriptive research was used during the cause of the research.

Exploratory research is one of the forms of research that was employed as the problem has not been clearly defined. Given its fundamental nature, exploratory research often concludes that a perceived problem does not actually exist or is created to explore its possibilities of its existence, and therefore, a secondary research of an exploratory nature. The study relied on secondary information gathered through the various FaB activities taking place at Mombasa Technical Training Institute. The study also involved an extensive literature review which critically analyzed the present status, problems and prospects of flexible skills development at MombasaTTI.

FINDINGS

Skills development defined

In order to address the issues raised, it is necessary to examine the meaning of skills development. According to Robert Palmer (2005) Skills development is not narrowly equated with formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) alone, but is used more

broadly to refer to the capacities acquired through all levels of education and training, occurring in formal, non-formal and on-the-job settings, which enables individuals in all areas of the economy to become fully and productively engaged in livelihoods and to have the capacity to adapt their skills to meet the changing demands and opportunities of the economy and labour market. So in essence Skills development does not refer to the source of education or training itself, but to the capacities that are acquired through these skills.

Flexible Skills Development

A concept developed by the need to provide skills to individual perceived as disadvantaged in respect to time, space, distance, culture among other factors. Flexible skills development is intended to bridge the gap between those perceived to have access and those without. Its main intention is to enable everyone access employable or workable skills intended to make them self-reliance.

Flexible Skills Development and Poverty Reduction

Skills development is an important aspect and tool for reducing poverty and exclusion and enhancing competitiveness and employability, and therefore an essential element in improving the employability and potential productivity of the working population. Education and skills development can enable vulnerable groups in societies escape the vicious circle of inadequate education, poor training, low productivity and poor quality jobs with low wages among others. Women in these groups face additional difficulties or discrimination in accessing good quality training and using it to secure better work.

Flexible skills development comes in handy to bridge this gap as it provides access to skills which would otherwise be inaccessible.

MoTTI is in the forefront of reaching those with less accessibility to skills through campaigns organized to sensitize the communities around and the secondary schools from where we get most of our learners. In so doing we encourage skills development with an emphasis on employable skills.

CHALLENGES

Curriculum and Examinations

In the process of complying with the formal education, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development is mandated to prepare all curricula for the post-secondary education. This has proved challenging especially to trainers who have to implement it to the letter. Much has been discussed in making the programmes flexible, but the definition of flexibility is not clearly put into focus, instead, modular is the one on focus. Further still, the programmes are given timeline through which learners are expected to have gone through the system and acquired the qualifications.

In light of this, we are coupled with the challenge of examinations. Once a programme has been covered, certification is necessary and only one body is mandated to undertake this process, the Kenya National Examination Council. This becomes a challenge since the curriculum does not always reflect what is in the market and learners do not always become competitive.

The Kenya National Examination council provides for summative examination and does not consider the experience and input from the learners for the period in which they have undertaken the studies.

ICT Infrastructure

MoTTI is one of the institutions with some of the best ICT infrastructure in TVET institutions in Kenya. Nevertheless, the available infrastructure cannot cater for all the growing needs of the institution. Computers with internet connectivity are limited to ICT laboratories, departmental staffrooms and offices. It is a challenge though the institution has taken steps to ensure internet connectivity by provision of hotspots via wireless connectivity and both trainers and learners are encouraged to have personal computers.

The infrastructure is constantly overstretched by the growing numbers. The learners and staff population is growing drastically yet the facilities grow at snail pace. The implication of which, the internet connectivity becomes slow; due to heavy traffic.

The challenge of connectivity can be viewed in cost implications and band width. Connectivity in Kenya is quite expensive and hence a lot of resources go towards funding this area which the

resultant is huge operating cost thus making the project unsustainable without interventions from the government and charges from learners to cater for it.

Expertise

Staff and learners of MoTTI are required to have basic knowledge of computer application knowledge and use of other ICT products for effective learning and teaching to take place. Staff members are encouraged to attend training usually organized by the institution to enhance their skills. Nevertheless, organizing for staff training is an expensive venture though it is with such efforts that results are realized.

Resistance is there as expected but majority of those who attend gain enormous and useful knowledge to enable them deliver quality using available ICT products. Those reluctant to attend are left behind, and in the process drag the progress. In achieving trainers' competencies, the institution engages professional assistance intended to move them to the next level. COL has been contracted a number of times to ensure this is achieved.

MoTTI also has some of its staff members well vast with technology and are made use of by the institution to impart knowledge to the rest.

Mismatch in education/training and labour market

MoTTI has been rated as one that produces a majority of graduates to join the labour market. This is a positive feedback towards the success of any institution. Nevertheless, the labour market has been coupled with the problem of fitting them in effectively without undergoing extra expenses. The challenge can be traced back to the rigidity of the education system and curriculum which emphasizes on theoretical result instead of application.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Curriculum and examination

As part of government initiative to promote skills development, MoTTI is one of the eight TVET institutions year-marked to become a national polytechnic. In so doing, it will be given autonomy to formulate its own curriculum, and also administer its own examination, independent from the national examination.

Before then, MoTTI has a number of short courses offered, tailor-made to meet the needs of the learners and with which a lot of flexibility has been achieved. So far all departments offer a number specialized short courses which have been approved by the academic board to bridge the gaps existing in the industries. These courses have been formulated in conjunction with the industry's stakeholders to ensure relevance and standards.

Some of the courses have been taken a step further by availing copies of the curriculum to Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, the body mandated to prepare and approve national curriculum

MoTTI has set up a committee that is mandated to look at various works being carried out in the preparation of online courses. So far six online course curricula have been identified and being worked on, while one of them is complete and awaiting launching.

ICT Infrastructure

MoTTI is ranked among the institutions with the best ICT infrastructure in TVET institutions in Kenya. Much emphasis has been put to ensure that the institution has internet connectivity in all areas. Investment on Local Access Network (LAN) and wireless connectivity has been enormous and hence internet access is assured

Power outages had been a constant challenge even with the availability of internet connectivity. This problem has been resolved to a great percentage as the institution has invested in a powerful standby generator which takes over in the event of power outage.

COL has played a major advisory role in ICT infrastructure and has been in the forefront to ensure that trainers are up-to-date with the most appropriate technology

An ultra-modern multimedia laboratory has been put in place with the latest technology to enable the preparation of educational videos and other materials necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Expertise

It is the mandate of every trainer to ensure that they are well aware of the training needs of the learner and to deliver it in the most professional way possible. For this reason, the trainer is expected to acquire necessary skills, knowledge and attitude vital for this.

MoTTI in collaboration with COL and other partners has provided training, workshops and seminars to sensitize trainers on the approaches of teaching and learning outside the tradition spectrum. This has seen a large number employ the use of technology most notable use of PowerPoint presentations and videos in the teaching and learning process. Use of online resources has become a prominent feature in the handling of classes, and the trainers have undergone training to understand the use and abuse of these vast resources

A cross section of lecturers has digitalized their yellow notes and a continuous process of doing the same is ongoing so as to enable the use of moodle platform. Once this is achieved it will be quite easy to start using this facility.

Unemployment and poverty reduction

Flexible skills development has made it possible for many to access education and skills at reasonable rates. This provides opportunity for individuals who could not access skills due to its cost implications gain specific skills that could be used to provide them with better livelihood.

Short courses offered at MoTTI provide for single or multiple skills which enables learner to spread out their learning if they cannot afford full payment at once. All these skills are entrepreneurial based hence the learners can go into business to raise more money to pay for the remaining part of the training. At the same time the learners can be in business as they gain the skills more-so in some of the short courses.

By these activities cited, MoTTI can be said to be in the forefront in the fight to poverty reduction.

TVET Bill

The TVET bill 2012 recently established by the government provide interventions on access, equity, relevance, quality, management, governance & efficiency, and financing of TVET.

This bill takes a critical look at the intervention in the following capacities:

Access

- Structure training opportunities and outputs to achieve the ideal workforce ratio of 3 associate professionals to 60 skilled workers for every graduate professional

Quality and Relevance

- Recruit TVET trainers from practicing professionals in relevant sectors of industry
- Develop associate professionals and skilled workers as demanded by national priority areas

Financing

- Introduction of a levy of 2% on the wage bill for all permanent employees in private and public service to support skills development
- Mandate Higher Education Loan Board to provide loans, bursaries & scholarships to students in TVET system
- Development of a secure and sustainable National TVET Financing Framework
- Provide for close coordination of all TVET programmes by Professional bodies, chamber of Industry, Businesses & other relevant training organizations

The TVET reforms in Kenya are intended to address the issues of:

Responsiveness to labour market – this will be achieved through the shift from supply-led training to demand-driven training. This will provide for TVET institutions to formulate training

programmes based on demand. MoTTI is already in the forefront of ensuring this happens through various programmes tailor-made for specific needs of learners.

The need to provide training to the large number of young people who graduate annually from the secondary and primary school system; The TVET bill requires that all learners leaving secondary and/or primary schools have an opportunity access skills necessary for self-reliance. With this in mind, TVET institutions are expected to formulate affordable courses and where necessary partner with the local community and/or government to actualize this.

So far MoTTI has partnered with the local leaders to make accessibility even more. With more than three hundred having undertaken training in various areas of studies courtesy of Constituency Development Fund (CDF)

FaB Team Contribution

MoTTI spearheads the implementation of the flexible skills development. In collaboration with COL, it has mandated a team of lecturers (local experts) to undertake various activities aimed at uplifting the skills of both the lecturers and learners in a number of ways which include:

- Providing training on the use of moodle for all lecturers, and which is intended to trickle down to the learners
- Assisting lecturers on the use of PowerPoint presentation, which also include embedding videos and audios
- Providing guidance on the online courses offered to lecturers by COL
- Providing directions and training on the use of the multimedia facilities

Mismatch in education/training and labour market

The central government in conjunction with education stakeholders has taken initiative to improve and offer skills relevant to the labour market. It has put up programmes to enable training meet the industry requirements. Revision and harmonization of the existing curriculum has been ongoing to ensure relevance.

MoTTI has put emphasis on choice and availability of information to enable learners to have informed decision making in career choice. These provide for guidance and advice at departmental level before one can be admitted to the institution and hence have a better chance on the career path they decide to take.

MoTTI has also taken a broad step to introduce informal sector training. Each department has been mandated by the administration to ensure that flexible informal courses are available and charged at reasonable cost to ensure it attracts even the low earners.

COL Contribution

MoTTI is in the forefront of ensuring skills development has moved to greater heights. Many short courses have been developed for both the formal and the informal sector which reach a majority of individuals who could not previously access it due to the cost implication and timings. Evening classes have been put in place to cater for those with strict qualification requirements for the formal sector but do not have time to attend regular classes.

Flexibility of skills development has been achieved to a high degree but still in the process of improving other areas to maximise it. Development of online courses is in the pipeline with at least five courses confirmed and awaiting launching. There are other courses in the process of being developed that are intended to be online which should be launched upon completion.

Commonwealth of Learning has partnered with MoTTI to promote the concept of flexible skills development, which has led to creating opportunities to those who would otherwise miss the chances. It is estimated that ninety per cent of the workforce in Africa is in the informal sector. COL, in collaboration with MoTTI is working towards flexible skills development by assisting the institutions develop and also launch the informal sector courses.

COL has taken upon itself to ensure that the teacher is well informed on various aspects of flexible skills development through a number of trainings, workshops and seminars to enhance their skills. Appropriate use of new technologies has contributed to a range of benefits for trainers including:

- Improved quality of teaching through relevant, responsive, resource-based learning
- Improved ICT skills of teachers and learners leading to enhanced employability of the latter
- Increased access to MoTTI courses after introduction of flexibly delivered programmes which meet the needs of diverse learners – especially those working in the informal economy

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