

Trainees Employability Skills and Students' Decisions in Selecting Public TVET Institutions in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

Career choices among young people is essential since it determines their future prospects. As such, careful consideration ought to be undertaken at career selection stage to enable students make rightful decisions for both the course and the TVET institute where to undertake training. Subsequently, TVET institutions have adopted measures to ensure that students make informed career education decisions, and also acquire employable skills needed in the job market. Regular revision of curricula to fit employers' needs, integration of technologies in training, deployment of modern equipment, and partnership with industries and secondary schools are critical. Nevertheless, TVET institutions have continued to experience issues in enrolment even as complaints on employable skills gaps continue to be cited by many employers. This study aimed to assess the influence of trainees' employability skills on students' decision in selecting public TVET institutions in Nairobi County, Kenya. It adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population of 3505 participants comprised officers in charge of admission, principals and module three trainees. Purposive sampling and stratified random sampling techniques were used in drawing a sample size of 361 respondents, which comprised of 6 principals, 6 admission officers and 349 module three trainees. Data was collected by means of questionnaires and interviews. The validity and reliability of research instruments was ascertained accordingly. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS, then, computed descriptive and inferential statistics. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings of the study indicated that TVET institutions produced competitive graduates who are equipped with employable skills required for employment. The study concluded that there was a significant relationship between trainees' employability skills and students' decision in selecting public TVET institutions. Consequently, The TVET Authority and National Industrial Training Authority should collaborate with public TVET management for effective enforcement and establishment of follow-up mechanisms to ensure industry linkages during the training.

Keywords: *Employability skills, Students' decision, Public TVET, Technical education, Selection of TVET*

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1.0 Introduction

The future prospects of young people can be determined through their career choices. This implies that careful consideration ought to be undertaken at the selection stage of career in order to make the right decision, including where it is offered. Among many learning institutions that offer career education and training are the Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutes (TVET). TVETs are advanced levels of learning that aim to transform trainees' abilities and attitude by equipping them with problem solving skills and competencies that are required in the labour market (Hassan & Awan, 2019; Dahalan et al., 2020).

In the course of developing and spreading TVET education and training, different countries have adopted different names for TVET institutes. Despite the names given in different countries, TVET institutes are critical in developing human resources required in the market. Therefore, enrolling in TVET increases one's chances of getting employment and/or acquiring skills that would enable one to start a self-employment venture (Tamang, 2022).

VET institutions' enrolment is influenced by several factors. For instance, Hong et al. (2023) shows that young people in Japan have limited access to vocational training schools because they perceive that taking such courses will limit their career and educational options. Furthermore, parents are hesitant to counsel their children on career options because doing so does not guarantee they will find a good job with a good salary. This has forced many colleges globally to rethink their marketing strategies and revamp

internal processes and systems. As such, many developed countries have introduced a variety of mechanisms; for example, funding conferences and workshops, providing scholarships and marketing alternatives to enable learners to make correct choices in joining technical institutes (Hong et al., 2023; Hougue et al., 2022; Pilz & Hao, 2021; Clement, 2014).

According to Ramamurthy et al. (2021), the most competitive TVET institutions are evidenced by graduating learners with competitive employability skills. Globally, efforts have been made to enhance the attractability of TVET institutions such regular revision of curricula to fit employer's needs, integrating technologies in training, and partnering with industry and secondary schools (Hong et al., 2023). Gretch and Camilleri (2020) explain that students' interest in joining TVET institutes has been heightened by ensuring the education system promotes innovation among youths. In spite of the little attractiveness of TVET institutions, developing nations such as Africa cherish the value of TVET education in securing youth employment, gaining the country's economic development, and as a source of skilled labour (Yiga, 2022; Mumbé, 2020; Chitema, 2021).

Statement of the problem

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education refreshed TVET management by introducing reforms to respond to the current human resources in the marketplace (Kipngetich et al., 2022). Such reforms included TVET Act, which guides on admission, registration of

learners, curriculum development, administration, management and evaluation of the sector's performance. Moreover, career guidance offices have been established in most TVET institutes, while the HELB loan facility has been expanded to TVET learners (Nawaji et al., 2022; Maiyo & Wasike, 2021; Sankale et al., 2017). These reforms are expected to enhance quality of training, attract registration and enrolment of trainees, improve operational performance, and improve employable skills.

“Trainees’ employability skills include creativity, decision-making, conceptual, problem solving and technical skills.”

Despite these endeavours, some TVET institutions are still experiencing poor enrolment, while others have more than they can handle (Nawaji et al., 2022; Maiyo & Wasike, 2021). Besides, there have been numerous complaints from many employers describing TVET graduates as deficient of employable skills (Magut & Kihara, 2019; Ngware et al., 2022; Korir et al., 2020). This raised the need to investigate the aspects of employability skills with a view to establish whether they influence the students’ selection decision for public TVET institutions. Several related past studies such as Gichuki et al. (2019) and Simiyu et al. (2018) investigated competition and resource

mobilization in TVET institutions; hence negating the linkage between employability skills and students' choice decisions for public TVET institutions.

Research objective and hypothesis

The objective of the study was to assess the influence of trainees’ employability skills on students' choice decisions for public TVET institutions in Nairobi County. The investigation aimed to test null hypothesis, H_{01} , that there is no statistically significant relationship between trainees’ employability skills and students' choice decisions for public TVET institutions in Nairobi County.

Literature Review

Trainees’ employability skills are skills that an individual need in order to succeed in a workplace. These skills include creativity, decision-making, problem solving, among others which allow trainees to take initiative and be more effective in workplace. The study was informed by the Jackson Model developed in 1892. The model was established to facilitate an understanding of how students make choices for joining universities and colleges (Hanson & Litten, 1982).

Jackson identified the behaviour that influenced decision-making, categorized as learner's economic and social factors. This conclusion on economic and sociological factors influencing learner decision-making led to the establishment of three main steps. These steps were: preference, exclusion and evaluation. (Jackson, 1982; Hanson & Litten, 1982). The model is essentially helpful in addressing the interplay of the factors that influence the students' choice decisions for

public TVET institutions in Nairobi County. Globally, employers look for individuals who can demonstrate their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively. Through developing and refining employability skills, trainees become more attractive to potential employers and increase their chances of getting hired and advancing in their chosen field (Bong-Woo Woo et al., 2015). Mansour and Dean (2016) noted that the employability skills offered in TVET institutions in India are adequate for helping graduates to secure jobs. However, in Kenya, weak trainees' employability skills have continued to be reported (Magut & Kihara, 2019; Omwando & Ken, 2014). This in turn has led to low enrolment rates in public TVET institutions in Kenya.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was undertaken in Nairobi County in Kenya. It adopted descriptive survey research design which best describes the students' behaviors and perceptions when selecting a particular TVET institution. The target population was module three trainees, principals and officers in charge of admission of TVET institutions. A total of 6 public TVET institutions were selected and 6 officers in charge of admission, 6 principals and 3493 module three trainees were identified as key informants. Purposive sampling (on principals and officers in charge of admission), and stratified random sampling (on module three trainees) techniques were used in drawing a sample size of 361 respondents. The sample group comprised of 6 officers in charge of

admission, 6 principals and 349 module three trainees.

Questionnaires were self-administered to module three trainees, while principals and officers in charge of admission were interviewed accordingly. The research instruments were checked for content and construct validity, while reliability was measured by computing Cronbach's alpha value. Quantitative data collected from module three trainees was analyzed by keying in the data into SPSS, and computing descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential analysis (Spearman correlation). The qualitative data gathered from principals and admissions officers was analyzed by categorizing information into emergent themes. The information was presented using tables and themes.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Response Rate

The study collected data from 3 categories of respondents; that is, module three trainees, principals and officers in charge of admission. Out of 349 questionnaires distributed to module three trainees, 289 questionnaires were correctly filled and accepted for analysis, translating to 83% response rate. Out of the 12 admissions officers and principals scheduled for the interview session, only 11 were available, representing 91.7% response rate. An overall response rate of 87.4% was achieved which was termed as acceptable according to Stedman et al. (2019) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

Demographic Information of Module Three Trainees

The study specifically sought to investigate gender, age and education level of module three trainees. The findings on demographic information of module three trainees indicated that male trainees outnumbered female trainees by a small margin. The study by Miheso (2020) noted gender disparity in Kakamega County, with most TVETs being male nominated. Munyite (2018) agreed with these findings in Teso North Sub-County TVET institutions where male gender dominated.

The results also noted that module three trainees were aged between 20-29 years. Singoei (2021) also noted that tentatively, the dominant age bracket of learners enrolled in TVET institute in Western Kenya was 21-24 years. Also there was evidence of elderly trainees of above 60 years. This indicated that TVET training and education is also appealing to elderly people who seek to

acquire useful skills required in labor market or entrepreneurial ventures. Agreeably, Mulondanome (2017) and Ongulu (2018) found some common trends of elder students pursuing some courses among TVETs in Kakamega and Busia Counties respectively, although they were so few. The findings on level of education of module three trainees indicated that majority of them had attained secondary school education level. This indicated that they had good experience of the institution and are knowledgeable in providing comments regarding this study (Ongulu, 2018).

Results on Trainees’ Selection Decision of Public TVET Institutions

This was the dependent variable of the study. Several statements were presented to respondents requiring them to rate their level of agreement on aspects of trainees’ selection decision of public TVET institutions. The findings were presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Trainees’ selection decision of public TVET institutions

Statements on the trainees’ selection decision of public TVET institutions (N = 289)	Min	Max	Mean	Std
• Students consider reputation when selecting a public TVET institute	1	5	4.03	1.204
• The employability skills of trainees determine the students’ choice of a public TVET institution	1	5	4.21	1.110
• The location of TVET institution determines the students’ choice of a public TVET institution	1	5	4.03	1.231
• Students consider conducive learning environment when selecting a public TVET institute	1	5	4.11	1.104
• Courses offered determines the students’ choice of a public TVET institution	1	5	4.04	1.230

• Student support services determines the students' choice of a public TVET institution	1	5	4.01	1.221
• TVET institution with good physical facilities are a great determiner in students' choice	1	5	4.05	1.147
• Adequacy of trainers determines the students' choice of a public TVET institution	1	5	4.00	1.141
• The quality of training determine the students' choice of a public TVET institution	1	5	4.18	1.031

According to the findings in Table 1, there is a high agreement level on all indicators regarding trainees' selection decision of public TVET institutions. From the findings, it is clear that the trainees' selection decision of public TVET institutions is informed by the employability skills of trainees (mean = 4.21; SD = 1.110). This indicates that the indicator, trainees' employability skills has a weighty impact on trainees' selection of public TVET institutions in Nairobi County. These results agreed with a report by Obwoye and Kibor (2016) who found out that students' career choices and selection decisions was influenced by social, infrastructural, financial, job market dynamics and marketing factors in North Rift region.

The above findings were consistent with views gathered from principals and heads of admission during interview. From 33 statements gotten from principals and heads of admission, the study narrowed them by categorizing identified determinants, namely ;co-curricular activities, access to sponsorship opportunities, quality of

training, security, accessibility of the institution (location), accommodation, and recommendation from former students among others.

These findings point out the need for TVET to offer market driven courses, engage in co-curricular activities, and collaborate with industries to attract more students. The findings are consistent with different results reported by Maiyo and Wasike (2021), Obwoye and Kibor (2016), Miheso (2020) and Beharry-Ramraj et al. (2020) which; demonstrate, the role of individual trainer competencies in influencing student selection decision to join TVET institutions for their career choices.

Results on Trainees' Employability Skills in Public TVET Institutions

This was the independent variable in the study assessed by presenting to respondents several statements based on indicators regarding trainees' employability skills, requiring them to indicate their level of agreement to those aspects. The findings were presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive results on trainees’ employability skills and choice decision for public TVET institutions

Statements on trainees’ employability skills (N = 289)	Min	Max	Mean	Std
• Employable skills are continually developed through practical application in the everyday life	1	5	4.07	1.122
• TVET institutions offer interpersonal skills which help students in the market space	1	5	4.21	1.041
• TVET institutions offer numeracy and literacy skills which help students in the market space	1	5	4.11	1.313
• TVET institutions offer critical thinking and problem-solving skills which help students in the market space	1	5	3.93	1.041
• TVET institutions offer time management skills which help students in the market space	1	5	4.02	1.041
• TVET institutions train students on communication skills which equip them with capabilities to communicate well	1	5	4.00	1.240
• Trainees employable skills training program helps to promote the employability of our graduates	1	5	4.06	1.221
• The employable skills training promote TVET-industry linkages	1	5	3.77	1.413

The results in Table 2 notes a high agreement to all aspects regarding trainees’ employability skills. The high agreement level indicated students were aware of the employable skills posed to them and that graduates leaving TVET institutions were purported to having these skills. From the findings, it can be observed that TVET institutions offer interpersonal skills (mean =

4.21; SD = 1.041), , numeracy and literacy skills (mean = 4.11; SD = 1.313), time management skills (mean = 4.02; SD = 1.041), and communication skills (mean = 4.00; SD = 1.240), to which the students said help in the job market. The findings show that TVET institutions are making good effort to build capacity in students on employable skills. The above findings contradict

Omwando and Ken (2014) who noted that availability of key competencies among graduates, particularly those from TVET institutions, was extremely low in TVET institutions in Mombasa County.

The results in Table 2 further show that the employable skills taught are continually developed through practical application in everyday life (mean = 4.07; SD = 1.122). This is done through established employable skills training program which further helps to promote the employability of TVET graduates (mean = 4.06; SD = 1.221). This meant that TVET institutions have laid down measures for continuous development of employability skills of graduates. This implied that majority of TVET institutions (over 75%) had established employable skills training programs. Magut and Kihara (2019) found contradicting results regarding the development of employable skills among trainees in Nakuru County.

The officers in charge of admission and principals were asked, during the interview, to highlight the measures undertaken by TVET institutions in equipping students with employable skills. The responses from admissions officers indicated that measures put in place included dual training arrangement; where trainees go to industry 50% of their training to acquire skills. Another common practice was effort to encourage students to have positive attitude towards TVET education and training. The

same was also noticed in Uganda, where Kamble (2021) reported that trainees were given opportunities to study a range of courses that focus on developing employability skills, such as leadership, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, customer service and business skills. In contradiction, Mansour and Dean (2016) said that trainees lack opportunities to be impacted with specific skills needed by the labour market, and this was the reason for many unemployed graduates in Tanzania.

The attempts by TVET institutes to equip trainees with employable skills have however suffered several setbacks such as skills gap between the training and industry requirement, lack of industry exposure, and fewer opportunities for attachment and internship as indicated by admissions officers. In ensuring TVET institutions produce employable graduates, principals indicated incorporation of aspects such as industry-driven courses, maintaining industry set standards, keeping abreast with current industry requirement; for example , use modern technology (Robotics, VR, and AI), learning resources (smartboards) and equipment (3D printing, laser engravers) in training. The findings were consistent with the recommendations presented by Mansour and Dean (2016) on the need to match between skills taught and those required by industry.

Table 3

Correlation between trainees’ employable skills and trainees’ choice decision for public TVET institutions

		Choice of the Public TVET institutions in Kenya
Trainees’ Employability Skills	Spearman Correlation	0.175**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
	N	289

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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According to the findings in Table 3, there is a positive association between trainees’ employable skills and the trainees’ choice decision for public TVET institutions in Nairobi County, $r = .175$, $p = 0.003$. In this case, the p-value is less than 0.05 and, therefore, the association between these two variable is statistically significant. Consequently, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that trainees’ employable skills had a relationship with the students' choice decision for public TVET institutions in Nairobi County.

It was therefore clear that the trainees’ employable skills was influencing the students' choice decision for public TVET institutions in Nairobi County. In comparison, Kamble (2021) also found out that trainees' employability skills were a significant factor in influencing students' choice of TVET institutions in Uganda.

4.0 Conclusion

The study established that trainees’ employability skills were a crucial determinant in the choice decision made by students when selecting TVET institutions.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that TVETA should collaborate with public TVET management for effective enforcement and establishment of follow-up mechanisms to ensure industry linkages during the training. The role of NITA should also be enhanced to foster actualization of acquired skills. Furthermore, the study recommends a concerted effort from TVETA, KICD and the Ministry of Education in revising the curriculum review guidelines to accommodate new technological changes in a continuous manner. The results have implications on policy on industrial attachment and internships, and indicate a need to revamp teaching pedagogies in TVET institutions to ensure acquisition of employable skills.

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