Revamping Youth Polytechnic Training: Assessment of Effects of Capacity Building Training

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Abstract: Youth Polytechnics in Kenya have for a while been a neglected sector. With the constant shift in the ministries i.e. from Ministry of Youth Affairs to the Ministry of Education and finally to their devolvement to the county government, youth polytechnics have experienced a slow growth in terms of development and quality training for a period of time. There has been a negative perception from the community towards these institutions; considered for failures, inadequate training, and their lack of transitioning of graduates to successful futures. CAP Youth Empowerment Institute implemented a capacity building training in Youth Polytechnics based on its Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) model in forty six youth polytechnics in Kenya for the past one year. An impact of capacity building training evaluation was undertaken by interviewing the three level stakeholders. Interviews were tape recorded or note taken, transcribed in verbatim form, and imported to NVIVO and SPSS soft ware for further analyses. It was found that enrolment increased as well as attitude and relationships have improved as a result of capacity building. It was a challenge for the Youth Polytechnic to implement some elements due to rigidity of the ministry of education policy, lack of extra instructors, and lack of syllabus guidelines. There is need for more capacity building for the instructors and the managers to increase their delivery of skills training to enable youth to be successful in both employment and entrepreneurship.

Key words: Youth, skills, training, empowerment, development

Introduction

Statement of the problem

Youth polytechnics (YP) have for a while been a neglected sector in Kenya. With the constant shift in the ministries i.e. from Ministry of Youth Affairs to the Ministry of Education and even finally to the devolvement to the county government, youth polytechnics have experienced slow growth in terms of development and quality training. There have been poor transitions of the graduates from this sector in terms of employment and entrepreneurship that has led to negative perception from the community towards these institutions. In turn, this sector has seen poor enrolment, less investment in resources, and lack of reform to support the sector to match contemporary job market. This has left a big gap that needs to be filled including reviewing the methods of training, curriculum reform, contextualizing courses offered, and capacity building trainings for the trainers.

Purpose of this study

This is a preliminary evaluation exercise that tries to establish the effects of capacity building program in selected youth polytechnics in Kenya by CAP Youth Empowerment Institute (CAP YEI) based on its BEST model. Ultimately, these finding will be used for improving programming as well as identifying opportunities for replication across the country to revamp these youth polytechnics' skills training.

Research questions

The research questions that guided this study were: what challenges are faced by Kenyan YPs in training for successful youth? What capacity building interventions produced desired results and which have been challenging to implement? What do we learn from the capacity building that can be recommended to improve YPs and enhancing youth employability skills training? We argue that YPs in Kenya need capacity building training as implemented by CAP YEI as key contribution to strengthening skills training.

Significance of this study

This study will broadly contribute to the understanding of the challenges affecting Kenyan YPs in skills training and what interventions can be deployed to revamp them. Specifically, this study tries to

identify best approaches that can be used to counter contemporary challenges in skills training in YPs to make these institutions key players in youth empowerment as well as in broadening the skills base for national development. Finally, the publication of this paper will enrich educational and development literature.

Assumptions

This study assumes that contextualized education and training policies and programs, if well implemented results in desired outcomes. Thus, the dismal performance of YPs training, leading to poor transitions and negative perceptions is not only a consequence of mismatch of skills training in these YPs, but also the lack of capacity development in this sector.

Literature review

Conceptual framework

This evaluation broadly, was guided by the Program Theory Evaluation (PTE) with both conceptual and empirical components as essential frameworks—model explaining how a program causes intended or observed outcomes and an evaluation that is at least partly guided by this model (Rogers et al, 2000). However, we recognize the shortcomings of this theory of evaluation and have gone further to supplement it with other conceptual frameworks of evaluations. We also recognize that evaluation might identify achievements as a result of a chain of inputs and activities similar to the hypothesis that deploying activity X will lead to attaining objective Y because it is able to influence process Z which affects the attainment of this objective (Suchman, 1967). Thus, it is understood and appreciated here in this analysis that the three components; program, objectives, and intervening processes are essential elements in conducting program evaluation (Suchman, 1967).

In conducting an evaluation, there is the opportunity to identify possible causal factors in achieving program objectives as supported by evidence (Weiss, 1972). In the simplest terms, Suchman (1967) explain that a program evaluation theory reveal intermediate outcome by which a program achieves its ultimate outcome, as more complex program theories show series of outcomes that combine to ultimately produces ultimate outcomes. In addition, there is the program theory evaluation with series of inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes with arrows indicating that the operationalization of combination of each of the aspects leads to an expected result (Suchman, 1967). Identifying and measuring both

intermediate steps of a program implementation and their initial impacts can help answer evaluation questions related to program success or lack thereof (Suchman, 1967). Furthermore, grounding evaluation questions to "does this program work?" and "can this pilot program be replicated?" provide what Lipsey (1993) and Weiss (1997) explain as how evaluation is very useful in differentiating and informing between theory failure and implementation failure. The next section briefly describes the historical profile of education in Kenya, noting major development of technical education since 1963.

Country profile and historical development of technical education

The Ominde Commission recommendations and implementation began in 1965, but by 1970, a majority of secondary school graduates began to experience unemployment, a crisis that saw massive rural-urban migration among young people in search of white-collar jobs. There was a high turnover of primary and secondary education students who could not access jobs in a shrinking economy (Amukowa, 2013). This prompted government to act, including establishment of the Gachathi Commission of 1976 (Amukowa, 2013).

The Gachathi Commission's report argued for reform of the education system as a way of changing people's attitudes and also a means of establishing social equality, while establishing the use of Kenyan education goals to shape its national character and development including initiating vocational, technical, and practical education (Amukowa, 2013). This recommendation followed the realization that the Kenyan education system was too academic and focused on producing elites. This led to the establishment of a Presidential Working Party in 1981, which recommended a more practical curriculum that would offer a wide range of employment and entrepreneurship skills. Their effort gave rise to the current 8-4-4 education system (Amukowa, 2013).

The change of government policy on education in the 1980s to introduce 8-4-4 system was prompted by the difficulties faced then by graduates of its education system at both primary and secondary levels; most graduates matriculating from these levels could not be absorbed into the job market. The new system of education was meant to make graduates from new system self-sufficient, productive in agriculture, industries, and commerce. Education system was expected to ensure students acquired technical, scientific, and practical knowledge vital for self and salaried employment, lifelong skills, and nation building (Amukowa, 2013).

Technical, vocational, and education training (TVET) are offered to students who graduate from secondary schools but do not meet the university requirement. These programs are offered at national

polytechnics, technical training institutions, and institutes of technologies. TVET education is provided to promote life-long education and training for self reliance (UNESCO, 2010).

This focus to change the education system to cater for employability skills among graduates could be achieved through a new curriculum capable to offer a wide range of skills for employment opportunities. In particular, this new system was intended to correct the previous systemic gaps. For example, the rationale for introducing 8-4-4 system was that the previous system was too short and not rigorous to give graduates enough practical education (Amukowa, 2013). There have been more changes in these institutions since their inception. However, they have continued to face more challenges.

Management of TVET institutions in which YPs belong has been scattered across different ministries, creating huge challenges in management and coordination of this sector (Kenya, 2005). For example Youth Polytechnics were at some point under the Ministry of Youth Affairs; National Youth Service training is under Office of the President; Railway Training Institute is under the Ministry of Transport; Technology Development Centers are under the Ministry of Labor; and other TVET and Special Needs institutions are under the Ministries of Education and Higher Education Science and Technology. In addition, there is low government investment in this sector (Mureithi, 2009) and yet communities where these institutions are located are poor and cannot provide much support (Matanga, 1992). Other challenges are contingent to the poor investment of resources in the sector.

As a result of poor investment in the YP sector, poorly trained students are churned out of these institutions leading to poor transition of these graduates from this sector to internship and employment (Musyoka, et al 2013). This especially led to exacerbated negative attitude towards these institutions, now perceived as for failures in the community. Furthermore, slow adaption to changing trends has rendered skills training in the sector almost irrelevant to current job and enterprise opportunities. For example, competitive products from global markets undermine the products from TVET innovators (Musyoka, et al 2013).

CAP YEI conducted a needs assessment in selected youth polytechnics in Kenya and found that most of them suffered from serious under enrolment, outdated curricular, mismatch between skills training and the job market needs, and poor transitions of graduates to jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. This provided an opportunity for CAP YEI to implement capacity building in these institutions.

Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) model

CAP YEI's BEST model revolves around a nine-step framework of activities guided by objectives including to: (1) ensure that disadvantaged youth learn and acquire life skills, job market relevant skills, savings education, and small business development training; (2) facilitate disadvantaged youth access to internships and job opportunities; and (3) ensure youth receive vital pre and post job placement counseling support.

Successful implementation of the nine activities—market scan, curriculum development, conducting road shows, induction, classroom training, fieldwork assignments, work readiness modules, placements, and program reviews lead to successful implementation of the BEST model and attainment of program objectives.

Market scans identify job market skills demanded in particular area and likely to lead to large rates of employment. In addition, it identifies the specific skills demanded by potential employers. Furthermore, market scans help in designing appropriate curricular. Curriculum development gears towards developing the training guidelines and content *vis*–à–*vis* skills needed in the job market. The curriculum developed not only demand relevance but it also ensures better training of much needed skills among the trainees for their potential employers.

Student recruitment for the program is very strategic; targets those individuals from very vulnerable backgrounds and may not have any chance of further education. These individuals are identified in road shows—involving communities; youth, religious leaders, local administrators, and village elders. Students are taken through induction process and life skills training once they get enrolled into the program. This allows students to rediscover their potentials, build sense of self identity, and to believe in themselves through self confidence building.

Skills training is contextual; students are trained in hospitality, floriculture, electrical and electronic, automobile skills, and etc. This takes three months of rigorous training before students are sent out on sector industry exposure and field visits where they meet and experience the realities of work. After exposure and field visits, work preparedness process is conducted in which students are trained to prepare their resumes, conduct mock interviews, and practice work ethics. Later, students are linked to internship or job placement. Program review is conducted after batch training to identify strong and weak areas for adaptations before new batch of training. This process has seen great success in youth employment and entrepreneurship engagements and CAP YEI decided to transfer some of these program aspects through capacity building for youth polytechnic trainers and management.

Capacity building involved identifying selected County Directors (CD) of youth training, YP managers and trainers to build their capacity with the BEST model elements to complement their own programs. This has been ongoing for the last one year and this study tries to establish its effects on youth polytechnic training.

The study

Methodology

The methodological approach was qualitative with a little bit of quantitative. All the YPs that had participated in the capacity building were evaluated. Institutions were spread across twelve counties with each county having four institutions involved. Interview tools were categorized into three; for the County Directors, YP managers and instructors, and the students. Out of the 220 expected interviews, only 168 were done; 75 students, 88 YP managers and trainers, and 12 County Directors. It is intended that trickle down effects would ultimately occur after capacity building; participants would go and train their colleagues in the same aspects which would ultimately help in training youth polytechnics' students. The data collection technique was guided by open ended in-depth interviews and the responses either recorded or note taken. The questioners were filled, transcribed in verbatim form and analyzed using SPSS version 17 and NVIVO 8 analytical software packages.

Results

Increase in enrolment

The key themes guiding the capacity building include increase access in skills training; enrichment of YP curriculum; diversity of courses; and better learning outcomes. These aspects were looked across the three stakeholders in YP training; County Directors, YP managers and instructors, and students. Students, instructors, and County Directors had over 90% of each saying there had been increased enrolment. One of the stake holders said "*When I came here they were a little bit negative, but you see now you can evaluate using the indicators like large numbers meaning they are now positive about the school."*

There has been change in perception and enrolment in YPs after adopting CAP YEI techniques of mobilization of students which involved creating awareness among the community members as one

participant said *"….we go to the chief barazas, churches, and even put posters, so that the community can know what we offer."* However, it is not known to what extend the change in student mobilization process contributed to enrolment as other factors may have mitigated this aspect. In Nyanza area for example, one participant talked of a change in law that facilitated increase in enrolment in the YPs: *"there is a law that has been passed, not allowing children under 18 to fish, now you see there is nowhere they can go especially if they didn't pass class eight, so they come here."*

While enrolment seems to have generally increased, challenges still were abound. There are dropouts reported especially among the female gender as a result of pregnancy. One participant said *"we have a problem here, drop out due to early pregnancy."* There were also cases of students learning in year one and never came back when they got job opportunities. They are not keen in completing training which include sitting for KNEC mandated exam. One of the instructors said "*you know when students come here … knowing that they will only do practical, and if they come they find the supporting subjects, they start becoming afraid, they fear exams…"*

Curriculum enrichment

There is a lot of emphasis in life skills training among students, an aspect behind great success in CAP YEI. This involves training student to identify and value their identities, build personal confidence, self esteem, relate well with a diversity of people, and cope with different contexts. In addition, offering short courses in modular arrangement was introduced among the trainers, managers, and County Directors at CBT. This is intended to help young people access job opportunities that would support their earning and saving money for other purposes.

A great majority of both levels of stakeholders reported they have had life skills since they came to the institution while similar number said since the last 1-5 years. A great number of respondents said life skills has been there since capacity building training and 2-4 years ago respectively while small proportions said it has been there. Majority of Directors said life skills training just started to be introduced.

While the courses in YPs take 2 years including a 3 months attachment, ICT is offered as a short course. It was found that some institutions are already implementing the courses by adopting the CAP YEI approach. One YP manager said *"when we came back from the capacity building training, I put my instructors on the table and told them let us approach this issue the CAP YEI way".* Unlike CAP YEI's approach of training where both genders get training irrespective of courses, most YPs have gendered

course preferences among the students. Several challenges are experienced implementing CAP YEI elements facilitated in the capacity building training.

Challenges in implementing CB Elements

Adopting CAP YEI's BEST model was challenging as the YPs are regulated by the Ministry of Education policies, KNEC examinations, and also the two years syllabus implementation design. Over three quarters of the trainers and managers said they had not introduced short courses while a third said they consider starting these courses. Similarly, the directors said they consider starting short courses discussed in the CB but they had not authorized their implementation. Instructors, managers, and directors mentioned hair dressing, life skills, driving, catering, tailoring, etc as some of the courses they consider for short term skills training.

While the CAP YEI capacity building training was found to have positive impacts, especially on life skills training, the YP fraternity found it a great challenge to adopt CAP YEI short term training methodology in place of the traditional two years curriculum. One instructor said, *"… I look at a course like electrical, is it possible to teach it in 4 months, is it really possible to squeeze the content…maybe they* (CAP YEI) *should come clear and get us their syllabus…..they were just saying… it is possible to teach electrical in four months…how?...they should tell us..."*

Three of the County Directors each provided their perspective about challenges in adopting elements from the CB training. One director said it might not be possible to implement what he learned at CB because government policy doesn't allow adjustments to the existing ministry mandates while one other director said this model is not appropriate for the YP. In addition, one director said it was not possible to implement the elements because there is no additional funding while the rest two didn't respond to this question.

Large proportion of managers and instructors said it would be hard to implement the elements of the CAP YEI model because of lack of instructors appropriate for those courses and lack of tools and equipment respectively. In addition, 8% of the managers and instructor and about 6% of the instructors said it was going to be hard to implement these courses because of inadequate infrastructure and challenge in coming up with appropriate syllabus for these courses respectively. Regardless of these challenges, students, managers and instructors, and County Directors shared their insights on how the CB can be enriched to improve skills training in YPs.

Improving CB training

Majority of students said there is need for workshops to be well equipped with tools and materials. More students also recommended more capacity building training for the instructor and trainees. They also recommended CAP YEI instructors to train in the YPs. Majority YP managers and instructors proposed more capacity building seminars for instructors. Instructors and managers recommend CAP YEI to liaise with the Ministry of Education to agree on how the curriculum can be harmonized to complement each other. Of all the five County Directors who participated, each of the four gave different opinion on how capacity building could be improved while one didn't respond to the question. County Directors said CB can be improved by widening the training for more YPs, include issuance of recognizable certificates, and allocating more time for capacity building.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Capacity building implemented by CAP YEI to revamp youth polytechnic skills training in parts of Kenya using elements of (BEST) model shows some great success as well as challenges. There is general increase in enrolment of students, indicating increased access in skills training, improved attitudes and relations among students and instructors, and better learning outcomes brought about by new teaching methodologies. On the other hand, there are significant challenges in implementing the BEST model elements, including restrictions by the ministry of education policies, lack of extra instructors to implement the "extra" work as a result of CB recommendations, and negative perception about training in skills within a short time (3 months). In the future, CB for YPs can be strengthened by involving ministry of Education to develop and authorize ways of implementing short courses as to complement the existing two years skills training. In the future, there is need to evaluate changes in employability of graduates from the YPs after curriculum enrichment and diversified courses, including short skills training courses, and determine specific causes of those changes in relation to CB.

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