

Institution-Based Factors Influencing Trainees' Completion Rate in Vocational Training Centres in Kenya: A Case of Selected Counties.

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Abstract

Non-completion of an educational process greatly limits the chances of future success to school going youth. This paper investigated the influence of institution-based factors on trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Kenya. The study was guided by the Theory of Student Departure advanced by Tinto in Long, 2012. Data was collected from the five VTC sites which were the first to implement the National Vocational Certificate of Education and Training (NVCET) curriculum in the selected counties. This paper therefore focused on the trainees taking NVCET courses in the VTCs and adopted sequential explanatory mixed methods design. Data was collected using two sets of questionnaires and interview schedules. Observation checklist and document analysis was also used to enrich data collected. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The findings of this study revealed that difficult NVCET curriculum, low qualification of instructors, inadequate general facilities and instructional materials, inadequate handling of guidance and counselling issues among others greatly influenced trainees' low completion rate in VTCs. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made: VTCs together with parents should enhance guidance and counselling programs, Government and VTCs should employ additional qualified instructors, develop infrastructure and instructional materials, and the NVCET curriculum should be urgently reviewed.

Key words: Institution-based factors, NVCET curriculum, Vocational Training Centres

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Introduction

Students who withdraw from school prematurely do not obtain any certificate (Ajaja, 2012). This study investigated the institutional-based factors that influence trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Kenya. The study focused on the new National Vocational Certificate of Education and Training (NVCET) curriculum. This NVCET curriculum was piloted in Kenya in 2008 and implemented in 2010 in a number of selected VTCs. Over the years, the NVCET curriculum has experienced low completion rate of the trainees. A report by APHRC (2013) pointed out the following as causes of drop-out in developing countries: school-related factors - ineffective teaching, insufficient qualification of teachers; student-characteristics - poor motivation, behavioural problem; and family-related factors - illiteracy or low education of parents and income.

The new curriculum was meant to offer an alternative avenue for those who do not qualify for secondary school admission and give them a chance to advance their education up to the university. This study was guided by the Theory of Student Departure advanced by Tinto (in Long, 2012). Tinto argues that students depart college or university without earning a certificate or a degree because of the nature and quality of their interactions with college or university. Tinto's integration framework is commonly used to examine student persistence in the four (4) year sector. The NVCET curriculum in Kenya has two levels, each having two years; hence Tinto's framework was appropriate for this study.

Turning to the focus of this study, Moturi, Onderi, and Mwebi (2015) argue that low qualification of instructors in Youth Polytechnics (YPs) was one of the major challenges facing Youth Polytechnics (currently referred to Vocational Training Centres) in the provision of quality education and training. A study by Yungungu, Maleche, Ndurumo, and Ogolla (2014) further revealed that the YPs had irrelevant curriculum, inadequate and unqualified instructors, limited teaching and learning resources, lacked clearly defined starting entry point criteria based on class eight results, secondary school drop-outs and Form Four leavers. The school characteristics that contribute to drop out include: composition of the student body, resources and facilities, structural features and policies and practices (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

A study by Osodo (2015) further demonstrates how negative school characteristics can cause learners to drop out of school. The study revealed that crowded curriculum, difficult curriculum, unavailability of learning resources, many curriculum related levies and irrelevant curriculum to job market contributed to non-completion of school. The Osodo's study supports an earlier study by Mandina (2013) which revealed that, school dropout was primarily grounded in irrelevant curriculum that failed to meet the individual's vocational and intellectual needs. Perhaps that was the reason why Deya, Oloko, and Orwa (2015) argued that there was need to review and develop the curriculum that addresses the emerging issues of the society in order to enable the learners to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for life in the emerging knowledge society.

The reviewed studies clearly show how the characteristics of a learning institution can influence the completion rate of the learners. While there may be several factors that influence completion rates in VTCs, this study focused on the influence of institution-based factors on trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres.

Research Approach

Data was collected from Mogotio, Iten and Mugen in Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet and Nandi Counties respectively and from Lugala and Mautuma VTCs in Kakamega County. The five sites were the first to implement the NVCET curriculum in the selected counties and were also the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) centres. The study adopted a mixed research approach. Hence, pragmatism paradigm was considered as an appropriate philosophical underpinning for this study. This study employed explanatory sequential mixed method design. The design is one in which the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyzes the results and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail using qualitative research methods. The study targeted the County Directors of Youth Training, VTC Managers, Instructors and Trainees. The study population was 345 and the sample size was 228. Questionnaires, interview schedule, observation checklist and document analysis were used to generate data. The use of more than one instrument enabled the study to gain an indication of why a particular behavior pattern that the researcher observed actually occurred (Burgess, 1981). Triangulation is a process of verification that increases validation by incorporating several viewpoints and methods (Yeasmin, 2012).

Results and discussion

The completion rates of trainees at level 1 from 2009-2015 are presented in Table 1. The findings show decrease in trainees' completion rate from 2009 to 2015. In 2009, 86% of the trainees completed level 1, 2010 70%, 2011 80%, 2012 76%, 2013 66%, 2014 66% and 2015 64%. The reduction in the completion rates was attributed to the institution-based factors among others as outlined by the trainees, instructors, Managers and the County Directors.

Table 1: Trainees' Completion rate annually at Level 1

Year	Completion rate
2009	86%
2010	70%
2011	80%
2012	76%
2013	66%
2014	66%
2015	64%

Completion rate at level 2 is shown in Table 2. The completion rate has improved slightly over the years. However, this shows a huge number of wastage among the trainees who enrolled into the NVCET curriculum. Completion rate in 2011 was 2.99%, 2012 2.53%, 2013 2.75%, 2014 6.60% and 2015 8.73%. The slight improvement on completion was attributed to the awareness created by the instructors on the need to move to level 2 and get a certificate to be able to progress to other levels of education or get meaningful employment. The other reason for improvement was the instructors promising the trainees a curriculum review to look into the course content and the duration of the programme.

Table 2: Trainees' Completion Rate Annually at Level 2

Year	Completion rate
2011	2.99%
2012	2.53%
2013	2.75%
2014	6.60%
2015	8.73%

An analysis of the institutional-based factors causing trainee drop out in VTCs as shown in Tables 1 and 2 was provided by the qualitative questions in the trainee and instructor questionnaires and the interviews with the Managers and the County Directors of Youth Training.

Some of the reasons given by the trainees for low completion rates included harsh instructors, lack of motivation from teachers, and lack of certification for those who have already completed the programme. The instructors indicated that inadequate training materials and facilities made the trainees drop out of Vocational Training Centres.

On the other hand, VTC managers stated that lack of adequate, trained and qualified staff, expensive curriculum to implement, lack of equipped workshops and laboratories, lack of trained and qualified staff to handle Guidance and Counselling matters, too much work for the trainees especially theory and support subjects; and poor remuneration of Board of Management (BOM) instructors negatively affected trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres. Further, the County Directors of Youth Training pointed out the following institution-based factors as causes of non-completion in VTCs:

- i. Low qualification of instructors
- ii. Inadequate instructors
- iii. Inadequate infrastructure; classrooms, workshops, labs, instructional materials, tools and equipment
- iv. NVCET content discourages trainees because of more theory than practical
- v. Lack of certification of trainees at level 1 and level 2
- vi. Inadequate handling of guidance and counselling matters
- vii. Low capacity of management boards
- viii. Too much work at ago, that is, trade and general education subjects
- ix. Lack of clear linkage policy with industry and higher TVET institution
- x. Poor quality of instruction
- xi. Low qualifications of managers (have diploma or craft certificate). They lacked managerial skills
- xii. Poor standard or state of the existing facilities

To further support reasons for trainee dropping out of VTCs, the researcher's observation at the VTCs established that there was inadequacy of general physical facilities, tools and equipment for courses implemented, study rooms or libraries, workshops and laboratories and drawing rooms, among others.

The findings of this study indicate that some of the reasons for dropping out of VTCs were similar across all the selected target groups. The findings on causes of trainees drop out in VTCs are closely related to those of Ngangi (2012). The study established that lack of feeding programs in school and overloaded curriculum among others were responsible for pupils' dropping out of school. Similarly, Rumberger and Lim (2008) identified school factors among others as predictors of whether students will drop out or graduate from high school. Further, Hussain, Salfi, and Khan (2011) revealed that lack of physical facilities was one of the major reasons for students dropping out of school in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the causes for drop out in the present study closely corroborates those of Joubish and Khurram (2011) in a study that investigated factors influencing drop out in government primary schools in Karachi, Pakistan. Joubish and Khurranv (2011) observed that teacher related factors such as uncaring and professionally less committed teachers; harsh attitude, sub-standard teachers, and shortage of teachers, among others were the major factors that caused drop out in government primary schools in Karachi. Also, pedagogy and curriculum related factors such as formal and traditional way of teaching, unattractive books, unpleasant class and school environment, less provision of sports and co-curricular activities, no use of instructional technology, and infrastructure related factors such as lack of basic physical facilities, among others, influenced drop out in schools.

Respondents' views on the presence of a Church sponsor in VTC

The findings from both the trainees and instructors indicated that majority of the institutions had church sponsors. According to Mabeya, Ndiku, and Njino (2010), the church sponsor contributes to the maintenance of religious traditions and church doctrines in schools. These findings show that the Government of Kenya and the church have greatly promoted and developed education in Kenya. Earlier study by Aspinall (2004) reported that as an absolute minimum, there is need for all schools to ensure that students operate within religious dimension of human life to perform well in academics. These studies demonstrate the critical role that church sponsors play in motivating trainees to achieve good performance and acquire good habits.

Respondents' views on the effects of NVCET curriculum on trainees' completion rate.

The trainees and instructors cited too much theory focus and also many support subjects at the expense of practical work. The managers confirmed that the curriculum had too much theory and sometimes instructors discouraged trainees due to too much work. Since the trainee had to do six

projects at each level, managers argued that the projects were too many. The County Directors also confirmed that too much focus on theoretical component discouraged a number of trainees.

This study further observed that NVCET curriculum was challenging to understand the content being taught. This view was expressed by the trainees and instructors in their questionnaires. The theory was said to be difficult to understand due to poor English foundation of many trainees and their low qualifications at entry into VTCs. Trainees and instructors also indicated that lack or less practical work due to inadequate materials and staff, contributed to other challenges on the implementation of the NVCET curriculum.

This study also revealed that though students do not pay extra school fees for NVCET as compared to other programmes like trade tests, it was evident that students taking NVCET courses have to cater for material fee. Trainees do six projects at each level which translated to higher cost of material fee which has to be met by the trainee. Trade test trainees do only one project. On the cost of implementing the NVCET curriculum, instructors agreed that this was expensive. This view was also supported by the managers when they reported that NVCET course implementation attracted a huge capital investment on training materials, tools and equipment. The managers also mentioned that the examination materials changed annually, forcing the institutions to purchase new materials, tools and equipment.

Though the study established that the content available could be covered within the specified time of four years, a curriculum review could be done to reduce course duration to 2 or 3 years and make it modular-based. One of the challenges associated with NVCET curriculum as reported by trainees, instructors, managers and County Directors was lack of certification at all levels. This issue lowered completion rate since many trainees and instructors were demotivated. The findings of the study support those of a study by Mandina (2013) in Zimbabwe who revealed that, school dropout was primarily grounded in irrelevant curriculum that failed to meet the individual's vocational and intellectual needs and other school problems. He reported that the curriculum in Zimbabwe lacked diversity, was irrelevant to the world of work, did not cater for the learners interest, lacked pay off and upward mobility and low job opportunities after school. The current findings corroborate with those of Deya et al. (2015) who argued that there is need to review and develop a curriculum that addresses the emerging issues of our society in order to enable the learners to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for life in the emerging knowledge society. Kerre (2009) observes that without a good curriculum, TVET will

not be able to furnish skills required to improve productivity, raise income levels and improve access to employment opportunities for people.

The studies discussed have shown the disadvantages of an irrelevant curriculum and advantages of a relevant curriculum to the learners. Therefore, the current challenges affecting the NVCET curriculum should be addressed to curb high dropout rates in VTCs in Kenya and at the same time produce learners that can fit in the labour market.

Respondents' views on the influence of instructors on trainees' completion rate

This study revealed that some of the instructors, based on their qualifications, may not be able to handle the NVCET curriculum well. The curriculum was too demanding in terms of depth and scope of the content to be covered. The instructors and trainees argued that the VTCs should employ qualified instructors to improve trainees' completion rate. This implied that there were some instructors who were not qualified. Managers also pointed out that VTCs lacked qualified instructors and the County Directors observed that there was need to retrain already employed instructors. This study also revealed that there was only one instructor qualified in both content and pedagogy in one of the VTCs. These findings agree with those of Sang, Muthaa, and Mbugua (2012), who established that trainers were not adequate and did not possess the required qualifications for training. Based on observations of the present and previous studies, there is need to employ adequate and qualified instructors. This remedy could form part of the solution to improving trainees' completion rate in VTCs in Kenya.

Respondents' views on the influence of teaching and learning resources on trainees' completion rate.

The trainees and the instructors observed that there was need to increase the training materials in VTCs. They also indicated that classrooms in VTCs were inadequate which was also supported by the observation made during the study which revealed that there was shortage of classrooms. The respondents further emphasized the need for improving the learning environment which had occasionally resulted to trainee drop out.

The managers reported that workshops were either poorly equipped or not equipped, classrooms and workshops were inadequate, or there were lack of facilities to fully implement NVCET courses. On the other hand, County Directors observed that workshops, classrooms and equipment were in poor state in most VTCs. The observation by the researcher revealed that workshops and

laboratories were inadequate in some of the VTCs while others did not have a workshop or laboratory. Some of the VTCs had converted classrooms into laboratories or workshops. Computer laboratories were fairly equipped in most VTCs but the food laboratories were poorly equipped. Though trainees and instructors agreed that the libraries were well equipped, most of them were small rooms which could not be used as study rooms. The observation revealed that generally, facilities in VTCs were not in good condition. Some institutions had drawing rooms but not well furnished. For instance, a Vocational Training Centre could have drawing tables but no chairs, while others used classrooms during drawing lessons. Teaching equipment and materials were out dated. One could rarely see any modern equipment and, the old ones were poorly maintained as in the case of old vehicles used for instruction.

The current observations support those of Yungungu et al. (2014) who observed that limited teaching and learning resources negatively affected curriculum implementation in YPs in Machakos District, Kenya. The authors argued that the instructors should get the required materials early enough to be able to give quality services. According to UNESCO (2012), quality facilities and equipment are fundamental to the provision of quality and relevant TVET education.

The present study revealed that there are inadequate and out-dated facilities and resources in some of the VTCs. The previous studies demonstrate the benefits of having adequate and quality learning facilities in institutions of learning. Therefore, there is need to reverse the current state in VTCs through adequate funding from the Government and other stakeholders so as to enhance the quality and adequacy of learning equipment. This strategy will aim at improving trainees' completion rate in VTCs in Kenya.

Respondents' perception of the influence of guidance and counselling services on trainees' completion rate

All the managers pointed out that VTCs lacked trained and qualified staff to handle guidance and counselling issues. The managers pointed out that the instructors, who had been tasked to manage guidance and counselling matters, were not able to handle issues related to personal/social aspect of trainees confidentially. This resulted in poor trainee-instructor relationship and even dropping out of VTC. The managers further mentioned that some of the instructors had been taken through some short courses but could not do a good job. This necessitated some VTCs to occasionally invite experts from outside to come and guide and counsel trainees.

The County Directors reported that guidance and counselling was inadequately handled in most VTCs. They argued that though some of the instructors had been sensitized on guidance and counselling, there was need for proper training since most of them could not keep secrets. From the findings presented from trainees, instructors, Managers and County Directors of youth training, it was evident that guidance and counselling services needed to be enhanced in VTCs in Kenya. The current state of guidance and counselling services in VTCs supports the findings of Wambu and Fisher (2015) on the study of school guidance and counselling in Kenya. The authors observed that school counselling in Kenya was a relatively young profession, still struggling to find its identity. The study further observed that schools continue to grumble with various emerging students' behavioral, social, and psychological problems such as drug abuse, bullying, violence, suicides, and high drop-out rates. The study also notes that though the Kenyan government had acknowledged the need to strengthen school counselling, the practical implication of it is yet to be realized. The availability of school counselors is critical because they provide counselling programs in three critical areas: academic, personal/social, and career (American Counselling Association, 2007). The report further observed that effective programs are important to the school climate and are a crucial element in improving student achievement. Croninger and Lee (2001) observed that students who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and who have had academic difficulties in the past find guidance and assistance from teachers especially very helpful.

The current study has revealed that VTCs have low capacities to deal with guidance and counselling issues. Based on the reviewed studies, the availability of well trained and qualified VTC staff in guidance and counselling and support from the government can greatly assist trainees, hence curbing trainees' low completion rate.

Respondents' perception on the influence of Boards of Management on trainees' completion rate

The respondents were not satisfied with the management of Boards of Management (BOMs). The poor performance of the BOMs could be attributed to poor remuneration of instructors as mentioned by the managers during the interview sessions. The poor remuneration occasionally resulted in poor implementation of some courses because of the demotivated instructors. County Directors also reported that instructors had a low commitment to work because of poor remuneration by the BOM. The County Directors further revealed that some of the Boards of

Management (BOMs) were of low capacity, hence could not contribute effectively to the running of the VTCs on matters such as of infrastructural development. The findings of this study agree with those of Mutinda (2015) in a study of the challenges facing Boards of Management of public secondary schools in Kamwangi District Kenya. The study found that BOMs faced many challenges in management of public secondary schools. The challenges involved inadequate staff personnel, staff discipline, inadequate funds and lack of skills in budgeting, accounting and auditing procedures. The study recommended that appointment of BOMs should be from among people of integrity and competence with a minimum requirement of University education. Despite the challenges facing BOMs, the participation of BOMs in schools or educational institutions has been widely acknowledged in both developing and developed countries (Kamba, 2010). As stated by the Kenya's Education Act (2013), BOMs are the agents of the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission, there is need for the government to develop clear policy guidelines on governance and management of VTCs. Otherwise, the poor management leadership in VTCs may negatively affect their growth which may result in lower trainees' completion rate.

Conclusion

This study concludes that institution-based factors such as the present difficult NVCET curriculum, low qualification of instructors, inadequate general facilities and instructional materials greatly influenced trainees' low completion rate in VTCs. Other factors that influenced trainees' low completion rate include: inadequate handling of guidance and counselling issues, low status of guidance and counselling systems, lack of trained and qualified guidance and counselling staff and the poor leadership of Boards of Management (BOMs). This study further concludes that majority of the VTCs had church sponsors that contributed to the maintenance of religious traditions and doctrines.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion of this study, the following interventions can be done to improve trainees' completion rate in Vocational Training Centres;

- i. VTCs together with parents should enhance guidance and counselling programs.
- ii. VTCs should urgently develop linkage with higher institutions and industry, and build capacity of its Boards of Management.
- iii. Government and VTCs should mobilize more funding to: employ additional qualified instructors, develop infrastructure and instructional materials.
- iv. Government should urgently review the NVCET curriculum.

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