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Negative views towards TVET the role of colonial and post-colonial TVET policies in Kenya

Introduction

While vital for social and economic development, Vocational Education remains hampered by a negative parity of esteem. Individuals and households continue to view vocational education as a second option (Winch, 2013). However, colonial and post-colonial governments in Kenya have held a more positive view of vocational education and training (Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995). Each successive government has therefore attempted to provide vocational education and made policies to effect widespread provision. Despite these efforts, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) remains a second option for many in Kenya. This article reviews the history of these policies. It identifies the source of negative views towards vocational education on the one hand to discriminatory approaches by colonial governments and, on the other hand, to the burdening of education with the task of employment creation.

Pre-Colonial Kenya

Kenya, as a legal-political entity, was formed after the Berlin Conference in 1884, at which point it became a British protectorate. However this often obscures the fact that the country had always been inhabited by diverse peoples. As the cradle of humanity, the country is the home of all; Hominid habitation was dated back 2.5 million years ago; in the second millennium B.C.E the Stone Bowl Culture emerged in the Kenyan Highlands, and Bantu speakers started agriculture circa 500 B.C.E (Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014).

In modern history, Swahili speakers had formed towns and cities along the Indian Ocean coast as early as the ninth century. These towns and cities formed important trading points with Persians and Arabs as well as entry points to the interior. The Portuguese were among the first westerners to visit these towns in the 15th century (Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014).

Education in Pre-Colonial Africa

Assuming that there was no education in pre-colonial Africa would be incorrect. Like all other societies, African societies needed and therefore provided education to their members. The education provided was vocational with basic and advanced skills needed to live autonomous yet dependable lives being taught on a day to day basis and in on going manner (Mitei, 2015).

It would also be incorrect to make further dichotomies such as vocational versus general, practical versus liberal, and utilitarian versus egalitarian. The education was as vocational as it was general, practical as it was liberal and utilitarian as it was egalitarian. The intention was not to pigeon-hole people but to make them autonomous yet dependable members of society. With such an aim, it makes no sense to emphasize one characteristic of education over the other. This functional approach to education was disrupted when Europeans introduced Western approaches to the provision of education at the turn of the twentieth century (Akala, 2017).

This article gives a brief overview of the provision of vocational education in Kenya from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, with a special focus on the development of vocational education policies.

Development of Vocational Education Policies in Kenya

Vocational education and training have a long history, especially as a tool for solving the challenges of school to work transition. In its long history, it has been strongly influenced by the historical context in which it has been provided. Consequently, its provision reflects the evolution of social, political, and economic conditions, as well as the influential philosophies that have shaped the rest of society. McGrath (2011) thus observes that the history of formal TVET in Africa is intertwined with Africa's colonial history and the ensuing racial, social, and conflicting notions of the authentic African identity.

Much of Kenya's education policy making has been through education commissions. These commissions are groups of experts appointed to review the state of education in the country and offer recommendations upon which policies can be made and implemented. All the commissions have addressed the issue of vocational education and made various recommendations, many of which were adopted. A common rationale in all the recommendations made has been the view that vocational education can enable socio-economic development through improved productivity.

Development of Educational Policies in Colonial Kenya

Construction of the Uganda Railway line began in 1896 and completed in 1901 when the railway reached Kisumu (Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014). The railway led to an influx of white settlers who needed cheap, reliable, and skilled labor. This demand for labor prompted the development of vocational education to suit their needs, adopting the vocational education practices that had been used on slaves and freed slaves in America (Berman, 1971; Mafela, 2015; Mitei, 2015).

Formal TVET provision and policies thus emerged in the early 1900s through to 1920s as colonialists sought to create a kind of docile but skilled slave labor to serve their interests (Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014). They drew heavily from the lessons of "negro" education in the USA (King, 1971 in McGrath, 2011), which led to the establishment of industrial schools in Africa.

The Fraser Report, named after a commission headed by Nelson Fraser in 1909, recommended racially segregated education, arguing against liberal education for Africans. The fear was that Africans would become insolent; instead, the commission recommended basic manual skills such as carpentry and brick laying to replace the more expensive Indian labor. The commission also recommended the establishment of an Education Department to coordinate education in the colony. This allowed the colonial government to formalize its role in education, including providing financial aid to schools (Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995).

Similar views were held by the Education Commission of 1919. The Education commission argued against liberal and literal education for Africans and rejected their demand for access to higher education, arguing that such access would lead to rural-urban migration. Instead, the commission recommended technical education to enable Africans to engage in labor as opposed to clerkship and other similar occupations (Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014; Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995).

Later in 1925, the first Phelps Stokes commission recommended the learning of crafts rather than general education for Africans. The crafts, in this case, were gardening and simple, practical skills (Berman, 1971; Mafela, 2015; McGrath, 2011). It was not lost to Africans that the Phelps Stokes commission viewed Africans as inferior and only useful when laboring for the colonialists.

The policy of limited general education for Africans continued in the ensuing years. The Native Industrial Dept, meant to be a training and production school, was started in 1926. In line with the recommendations of the Phelps-Stokes commissions, the Jeans Schools was started in 1925 to train women in basic household practices (Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995).

Other commission reports such as the Beecher report of 1949 and Binns report of 1952 emphasized vocationalized education for Africans. Agriculture was recommended as the more important subject for the rural African, who was also to be provided with handcraft and carpentry skills. The Beecher report felt that education should develop rural attitudes for rural development, teaching rural sciences and handicrafts. One outcome of the report was the opening of 300 intermediate schools aimed at

training learners in carpentry and handicrafts and provided with land for agriculture and animal husbandry (Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995).

As expected, the reaction to these policies by Africans was more than negative. The sentiment of many, especially Africans, was against limiting what they could learn, viewing the vocational education as “servitude education”. Africans thus started, against the wishes of the colonial government, African Independent schools. Believing that the independent schools encouraged anticolonial views, the colonialists never liked these schools, so much so that at the start of the emergency period in 1952, all the independent schools were closed (Maxon & Ofcansky, 2014; Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995).

While the value of vocational and practical training was accepted, many viewed general education as what mattered, and over time this argument won. The desire for more general education informed demands for independence with many post-independence governments implementing policy changes to effect the same (Berman, 1971; McGrath, 2011).

However, due to its relevance in meeting social and economic needs, vocational education continued to be offered, albeit with less support and resources. Curricular changes to improve the quality of education expanded the provision of vocational education to non-vocational schools. As educational debates moved from access to quality and relevance, vocational education was seen as a viable solution to the question of relevance. Vocational education was also necessary to bridge skill gaps after colonial officials left.

Development of Educational Policies in Post Colonial Kenya

In Post-Independence Kenya, the Ominde Commission of 1964 was tasked with reviewing and recommending education policies for the newly independent country. The commission was in favor of more academic learning. It advised against the Common Entrance Exam (CEE) at the end of the fourth grade. The CEE was seen as a tool to limit the progression of the majority of Africans in education. The Commission instead recommended a primary education cycle of seven years, followed by four years of secondary education, two years of advanced secondary education, and finally, three years of university education, so-called 7-4-2-3 system.

Later, the Gachathi report of 1976 questioned the removal of vocational education from the school curriculum. The expansion of access to primary education had led to a large number of youngsters who completed primary education while still young but lacking in employable skills. It was felt that vocational primary education could have provided these youngsters with skills to engage in self or paid employment after primary education.

In the ensuing years, the government announced in 1981 that country would adopt the 8-4-4 system, eight years of primary, four years of secondary, and four years of university education. This announcement followed the recommendation of the Mackey report, the outcome of the Presidential Working Party on the Establishment of a Second University. However, implementation started in 1984. This is the system that the country has used since then to present, although there have been major changes in the content and structure of the curriculum. The curriculum of the 8-4-4 system represented a desire to vocational education, in the hope that primary and secondary school leavers would be immediately employable, or could start their craft businesses.

Initially, primary and secondary education under the 8-4-4 system was heavily vocationalized. In addition to more academic subjects, vocational subjects such as agriculture, home science, arts and crafts, and music were included in the primary level. At the secondary level, applied education subjects such as agriculture, commerce and accounting, and home science were offered. In some secondary schools, industrial education, e.g., electricity and automotive mechanics, were offered. It was also hoped that the curriculum would be implemented using the education and work approach, where the learner would produce marketable products to supplement school resources (Sifuna & Shiundu, 1995).

A particular outcome of the move to the 8-4-4 system was the elevation of the existing fifteen secondary schools to technical training institutes to offer diploma courses in vocational subjects. This represented the need to provide post-secondary vocational education in the non-university sector. In

1966, the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) produced a report on the issue of teenage unemployment, after observing a large number of primary school dropouts and primary school leavers. The report was presented and discussed in 1972 at the Kericho Conference on Education and Employment and Rural Development.

The NCCK had thus started Youth polytechnics to provide employable skills to such youth. Other communities, including the government, copied this approach, leading to the proliferation of youth polytechnics throughout the country. Communities using fundraisings, called Harambees in Kenya, started the "Harambee Institutes of Technology", while the government started National Youth Service. These institutions offered artisan and craft courses by, owing to their voluntary foundations have always been bogged down by lack of sufficient funding, as well as low prestige, being attended by those who could not advance to secondary school.

In 1999, the Koech Commission carried out an assessment of the system and found it to be overloaded. The commission found that teachers were never properly prepared to teach so many diverse subjects; neither was the rationalization effective at such an early age. Thus, the commission recommends denationalizing primary education, trimming the content, and pushing some of the essential content to the secondary level. This recommendation was adopted.

In 1965, Foster argued that given the nature of formal labor in Africa, general education was better than vocational education, using the moniker 'Vocational education fallacy' to describe arguments for vocational education. Foster had identified that the incentive structure favored general education rather than vocational education. The vocational education at the time was also poorly resourced, simplistic, and of low quality, as it was based on the recommendations of Jones in the Phelp-Stokes Commission Reports (Berman, 1971). Thias & Carnoy, (1969) conducted the initial cost and benefited analysis of education in Kenya. The economic unattractiveness of vocational education at the time was supported by later academic research based on cost-benefit analysis: Pachoropoulos (1981), Heyneman(1985), Loxely (1985) and Lauglo and Lillis (1988), etc. Using these and similar studies that compared the returns of vocational education with returns from general primary, secondary, post-secondary, and university education, the World Bank argued and pushed for policy changes that supported general, known-vocationalized primary education as the most efficient way to reduce poverty (McGrath, 2011).

These views of vocational education are, however, changing. Donor countries and organizations that advocated against vocational education are challenged in the light of positive outcomes of vocational education in their own countries. Cost-benefit analysis suggests that vocational education is worthwhile (Hoeckel, 2008) while improving employability (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013). As a larger number of youth complete secondary education, governments are challenged to create pathways for the entry of youth to the world of work. Vocational education has thus regained priority, in contrast to the lull experienced in the first decade of the 21st century. For example, in 2009, UNESCO declared vocational education as one of its main thematic areas. But the dilemma of whether the content and practices align with the larger incentive structure remains unaddressed and unexplored.

In the 21st century, basic education is almost completely denationalized in Kenya. Never the less, debates on the relevance of vocational education at the basic level have not abated. Access, quality, and relevance of the vocational education offered at the post-basic level remain as issues of concern. Vocational education facing multiple challenges today, some occasioned by declining funding, is criticized as being costly and irrelevant in terms of the skills developed. It is also challenged as being slow in responding to modern industrial trends. Solutions suggested are new governance structures and autonomy to deal with the internal challenges of poor quality staff, out-dated curricula, and lack of engagement with the world of work (McGrath, 2011).

Analysis

An ability to do and create things necessary for the welfare of any society is essential, necessitating systems of vocational education. While pre-colonial African societies had established systems of education that were unified, colonization, as a forerunner to the globalization of Africa, was disruptive. Colonization forcefully introduced western concepts schooling and differentiated education-based one level on incomes from years of schooling, content, and race. Education was no longer about autonomy and dependability but status.

The economic benefits of academic education over vocational education offered only to Africans on racist grounds meant that Africans would never consider vocational education over academic education unless they had no choice.

Policy Swings

The review of the policies shows four stages in the vocational education policy of Kenya from the beginning of the 20th century. In the first stage, from 1900 to 1963, vocational education was for the African masses, to keep them docile and in servitude to the White race. In the second stage, 1963 to 1980, vocational education was not necessary for the basic education. In the third stage, 1981 to 2000, vocational education was an essential part of the education of Kenyans. In the final stage, 2000 to present, a repeat of the second stage, vocational education is not necessary for basic education. Instead, it ought to be offered at post-basic levels.

While these policy positions have never had universal acceptance, they represent the dominant positions at each stage. The racist undertones in the first stage lead to the second, an apparent overreaction. The third stage, a response to the problem of teenage unemployment, reflects the faith in education to address the problem of unemployment. However, education alone, especially if underfunded, cannot solve unemployment. The fourth stage represents the position of a more prosperous society that is willing to invest more in general education at the early stages, in the realization, it can afford to invest in vocational education at the post-secondary level.

Conclusion

However, the value of vocational education cannot be denied. As the swings in policy have shown, the Kenyan society attempted to ensure that vocational education was available to all. Unfortunately, the parity of esteem that took root in the early twentieth century has never been adequately addressed. Students and families still consider vocational education as a second alternative. Despite the confidence in the inherent current policy position, the lack of parity of esteem should be addressed. Otherwise, post-secondary vocational education may never take root, as is hoped in the current policy position.

It is strange that improving vocational education and making it truly worthwhile has never been critically explored. The response to the issues that dog vocational education should depend on the root cause of the problem. If the curricula and its implementation are flawed, lower economic returns ensue. However, the labor market available for the vocational skills must also be considered. For example, how well one learns to repair vehicles is irrelevant if there are no vehicles to repair. On the other hand, if general education appears to lead to better outcomes, learners are dis-incentivized from pursuing the vocational track irrespective of its quality; and likely so will resource allocators. If vocational education is of low quality, that would only be an additional reason not to pursue it. It is, however, likely that both causes operate and feed into each other. The challenge then is to identify a set of policies to address both, not merely demanding better implementation of the extant curriculum. But either root cause is likely not in the domain of education policy makers to address, especially when both causes reinforce each other.

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