

Exploring the Employment Transition of TVET Students: A Case Study of the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship Program

*Walter Odondi & Enock Imani
Zizi Afrique Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya*

Abstract

In Kenya, youth unemployment is a major problem. It is linked to gender, geographic area, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status, according to recent evidence. Over 80% of youth from Kenya's lowest wealth quintile are unemployed at a given time. To combat this current problem, the Safaricom Foundation, developed the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship Program (SFS). The initiative focused on the most marginalized youth, who are defined based on evidence. In partnership with two civil society groups, 40 training institutions were selected for to equipping 1027 youth aged 15–28 years, including young mothers and those with disabilities (PWDs), with trade skills and training them in life skills and employability competencies. They were then to be placed in internships and linked to job opportunities both formal and informal. This paper thus explores how Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students transit right from enrolment to the job market. The paper utilizes data collected from the Safaricom Foundation sponsored institutions since 2020. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was adopted for this study. The paper sought to open up discussions and offer solutions on the challenges facing youth in transitioning to jobs while focusing on two questions (i) What are the completion and employment rates of the SFS students enrolled in the program? (ii) What are the barriers to accessing employment? The study used a cross-sectional study design in finding out the transition rates of the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship trainees. Findings indicate that most of the TVET students had the competences and were able to meet the job market demands through support from various stakeholders. However, there was still low transition rates of students to job employment compared to the students that graduated from TVET institutions. This calls for a concerted effort among key education stakeholders on the mentorship of students on course selection for a plausible outcome. In light of the challenges TVET graduates face in transitioning from institutions to the workforce, stakeholders should help them with industrial attachments, employment agencies, income-generating units at the institutions, institutional- industrial links, self-employment, start-up capital, tools and materials for self-employment, and training. TVET graduates should employ these tactics and consider the skills as important since they enable self-employment or formal work.

Key Words: *Soft-skills, curriculum, whole youth development, training, outcome*

Introduction

Kenya is experiencing a youth bulge. 78 percent of the population is below 35 years and has a median age of 19 years. Enrolment to TVET has increased in the past 5 years but five problems persist i.e., i) youth unemployment soaring; ii) few white-collar jobs are available in both the public and private sectors, iii), resources for TVET are very limited; iv) most parents and the community as a whole put less interest to TVET or tertiary education; and v), TVET does not respond to the demands of the market and the needs of the industry. 97% of youth say unemployment is their biggest problem. The acquisition of skills is essential for any society's meaningful development. Any significant progress will be determined by market-driven competencies. It is important to remember that a person with the appropriate skills may survive in any situation. The importance of young skill development in Kenya cannot be overstated because the days when jobs were readily available in both the private and public sectors of the economy are over. Few white-collar jobs are available. As a result, many graduates are anxious for any work to sustain body and soul. Indeed, a paradigm change has occurred in the labour economy. Since independence, the evolution of Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Kenya has been impacted by institutional and curricular modifications that have had an effect on graduates. The passage of the TVET Act in 2013 has indeed accelerated the rate of development in this industry. The Republic of Kenya stated categorically that TVET is vital to the workplace. This assumption is founded on the reality that, for most people, obtaining a job is the expected result of their education, and that it is through their employment that they find contentment. In this regard, TVET must play a significant role in offering solutions by influencing the development of market-driven competencies. This necessitates modifications to school curricula at all levels so that students become more work-oriented and acquire the fundamental skills required to conduct effective work. (Sigu, 2014)

However, only less than half of the eligible youth are accessing TVET despite the enrolment and funding having increased over the past 5 years. Further, there is lack of clarity as to why the youth are not attracted to Government's funding to TVET, and uptake is still below expectations. Dalberg (2019) states that many youths not in employment, education or training (NEET) still lack information about TVET. Despite the Government's efforts to make TVET attractive this information is only reaching a certain stratum of the population. There is little consistency of the available jobs in the market and training areas. Labour market knowledge is hardly linked to training institutions. This has led to over training in some institutions and lack of skills in some sectors.

The goal of the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship (SFS) program is to make a significant contribution towards Kenya's sustainable development through equipping youth with sustainable skills for construction and hospitality industries. The most deserving youths are trained in one of the following trade areas; Electrical Installation, Plumbing, Welding, Food and Beverage (Dalberg, 2019)

This paper tries to establish the school-to-work transitions of the SFS students, drawing on the recent study of the 1027 Safaricom foundation students were placed in 40 vocational training centres in Kenya. The paper presents findings of the quantitative evidence on the patterns of youth transitions over the past 3 years. The main aim is to understand the drivers and barriers of transitions into the labour market, their long-term effects on subsequent labour market trajectories, and how empirical data available has been used in the past to obtain the evidence. We

summarise the available evidence and highlight gaps - in particular regarding the cohorts covered and methods used in the research - before making recommendations about data and methods involved in estimating the long-term outcomes of young people's labour market transitions.

Statement of the Problem

Studies on the growth of youth entrepreneurship and evaluations of the accessibility and usage of youth financing in Kenya have received considerable attention. However, little is known about TVET, especially its function in assisting youngsters to obtain the skills essential for socioeconomic empowerment. This significant gap in information is what the research attempted to explore. Research was undertaken by (CEDEFOP, 2011) to assess "the advantages of TVET in 21 European countries". Despite revealing the various advantages received from TVET institutions in Europe, the research did not indicate if comparable gains may be immediately extrapolated to TVET institutions located under The Safaricom Foundation Scholarship, especially in their present setup. It is noticeable that The Safaricom Foundation Scholarship TVET institutions lack enough resources, have limited personnel competence, and are less flexible to the changing market trends compared to their European counterparts. Taking into mind the existing situation of TVET institutions under The Safaricom Foundation Scholarship, the research analysed the potential of these institutions to impart relevant skills for youth socioeconomic empowerment.

This research mainly focused on grantees from the partner counties of the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship chosen based on specified criteria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the transition rates of students in TVET education in Kenya with a specific focus on the students that are sponsored by Safaricom Foundation scholarship program

Research Questions

1. In what ways has the SFSP program facilitated the students to access employment?
2. Does the TVET training translate to the beneficiary's gaining employment?

Literature Review

The vocational and technical education and training (TVET) sector strives to equip individuals for self-employment and serves as a bridge between formal education and the workforce (Hollander & Naing, 2009). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is widely viewed as a strategy for reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development through the pursuit of self-employment in relation to this topic. Even though this appears to be a valid argument, a number of additional conditions must exist for TVET to have a significant impact on poverty. In addition, there must be a labour market capable of absorbing graduates of TVET programmes and providing them with productive job and a sufficient salary to support themselves. Only then would graduates of TVET programmes be able to engage in self-employment productively. In research, government initiatives, and academic discussions over the past two decades, the literature on young people's perception has occupied a prominent role, notably as a means to encourage

participation in higher education by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008).

The extent to which young people believe that the skills they learn via TVET will be marketable is a crucial determinant of whether or not they will enrol in TVET programmes. Inadequate training for present and emerging labour markets, especially in technical sectors, is one of the most significant hurdles to young employment in Kenya. Other impediments include a mismatch in abilities, a propensity for higher-paying professions, and a search for white collar positions (roads, water, energy, agriculture, ICT and others). There is a popular perception that earning a college degree will help a person to develop marketable abilities that will boost their chances of acquiring a white-collar job. In contrast, the vast majority of higher education institutions prepare students only with theoretical notions and are blind to the reality that labour market requirements are always changing (Harry, 2014). Numerous researchers are of the opinion that, in the current environment, multiple skill sets are essential to increase marketability. A more comprehensive set of skills includes many generic abilities such as the capacity to think logically, to plan precisely, to anticipate challenges, and to be innovative and creative in order to develop and update the – necessary capacities and skills individuals need to be productively employed for their own personal fulfilment and the common good. A more comprehensive skill set includes the capacity for successful communication. The ability to think logically is a component of a more complete skill set. (International Labour Office (ILO), 2008).

The demand for TVET is also driven by the perceived durability of abilities. In a less-than- ideal economic context, the influence over time may be the most persuasive rationale for training. In spite of this, as previously noted, the content provided in training becomes incredibly valuable when seen from this angle. If graduates of TVET programmes are unable to secure employment soon after completing their studies, the perceived value of training may lie in the development of more robust foundational skills. This is because the durability of abilities is essential. Therefore, a diversified skill set is necessary for a healthy institutional and economic environment. This environment must be conducive to the expansion of public and private businesses, the creation of more employment and income possibilities for all citizens, and the attainment of economic development, higher living standards, and social advancement by society. As a result, there is a demand for a labour force with a higher degree of competence, as well as individuals who are more independent, adaptable, and multi- functional (International Labour Office [ILO], 2008). Consequently, there is an increase in demand for TVET classes.

In reality, a successful education is all about the development of core skills. In today's advanced economies, cognitive development that serves as the foundation for vocational abilities is an absolute necessity. Learning a career requires an increasing level of acquaintance with scientific concepts and technological applications, both of which are fundamental components of professions. A portion of this education should precede the actual training to make it simpler and more effective. Workers with a solid balance of practical skills and a conceptual understanding of technology can more easily adjust to new and diversified occupations, advance more swiftly in their careers, and adapt to changes in technology. The primary concern is not whether a person should obtain general or highly specialised instruction, but rather the breadth and depth of the essential skills provided during specialised training.

Rogers and Creed looked at how students move from school to the workforce in Australia. They pointed out that "whereas school-to-work transition programmes are typically designed to assist with this process by providing young people with skills and knowledge to prepare them to enter the world of work, the school-to-work movement has been criticised for its lack of a theoretical basis to guide these efforts to increase the vocational opportunities of young people" (Rogers & Creed ,2000). This was because whereas school-to-work transition programmes are typically designed to assist with this process by providing young people with skills and knowledge to prepare them to enter the world of work.

Research Methodology

The review used both the descriptive and quantitative research design. The study was not only describing the employment trends among the Safaricom foundation scholarship trends but also quantifying the numbers of beneficiaries who successfully transition to employment after schooling. Conclusions were drawn from the design and recommendations made.

The procedure of data collecting included administering questionnaires and conducting in- depth interviews in order to gather primary and secondary qualitative data. The 1027 recipients of a Safaricom Foundation Scholarship participated in the preliminary testing of the data gathering equipment. For purposes of triangulation, one focus group discussion was conducted involving trainees drawn from various TVET institutions in the Safaricom Foundation Program

Findings

Table 1 presents the disaggregation of the Safaricom Foundation Scholarship program beneficiaries as disaggregated in gender, and those with disabilities

Table 1
Categories of Safaricom foundation scholarship Beneficiaries

Category	PWDs	Non pws	Total
Male	38 (53%)	463 (48%)	501 (49%)
Female	34 (47%)	492 (52%)	526 (51%)
Total	72	955	1027

Safaricom Foundation scholarship Program has offered scholarships to 1027 students in partnership with 40 TVET institutions across 22 counties. Of these students 49% were male and 51% were female. 72 (7%) of the 1027 beneficiaries were PWDs. There were more PWDs male than PWDs female beneficiaries. There were more female than male being enrolled into the Safaricom foundation Scholarships. The situation was however inverse for PWDs that had more male than female

Table 2
Table 1 Training Status of the SFS Beneficiaries

Category	PWDs	Non PWDs	Total
In Training	763 (80%)	72 (92%)	835 (81%)
Completed training	186 (20%)	6 (8%)	192 (19%)
Total	949	78	1027

Of the 1027 beneficiaries 192 (19 %) including 4 PWDS have concluded their studies and graduated from training institutions where they were being offered with a scholarship. There are more students still in training compared to those that have completed their studies.

Table 3
Employment Status of the SFS Beneficiaries

Category	PWDs	Non PWDs	Total
Employed	35 (19%)	2 (33%)	37 (19%)
Not Employed	151 (81%)	4 (678%)	155 (81%)
Total	186	6	192

Of the 192 that have completed their training 37 (19%) have been employed three months after completion of studies. This shows that their number of beneficiaries that have not transitioned to employment are more at 81% compared to those that have been employed

SFS Beneficiaries by Gender

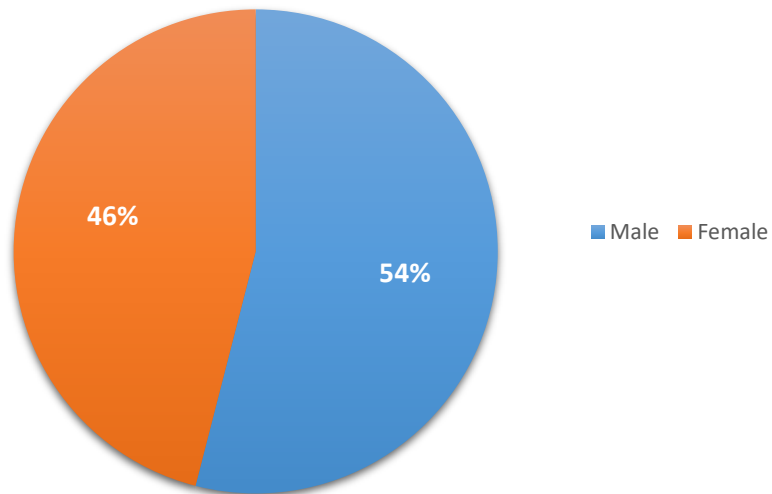


Figure 1: SFS Project Participants Transition to Work Rates

Of the beneficiaries that transitioned to employment, 54% were male and 46 % were female. Of the beneficiaries employed none was a PWDS. This shows that there are more male than female who get employed the situation is even worse for PWDS who take long to get employed as shown in Figure 1.

According to the statistics, the proportion of Safaricom Foundation scholarship recipients was highest in metropolitan Nairobi. Youth in Nairobi are thus more likely to engage in the scholarship programme than their rural counterparts. Of the employed beneficiaries 65% were from urban areas compared to their counterparts in the rural areas. This shows that there are more employment opportunities for TVET skills in the urban centres compared to those in rural areas as shown in Figure 2.

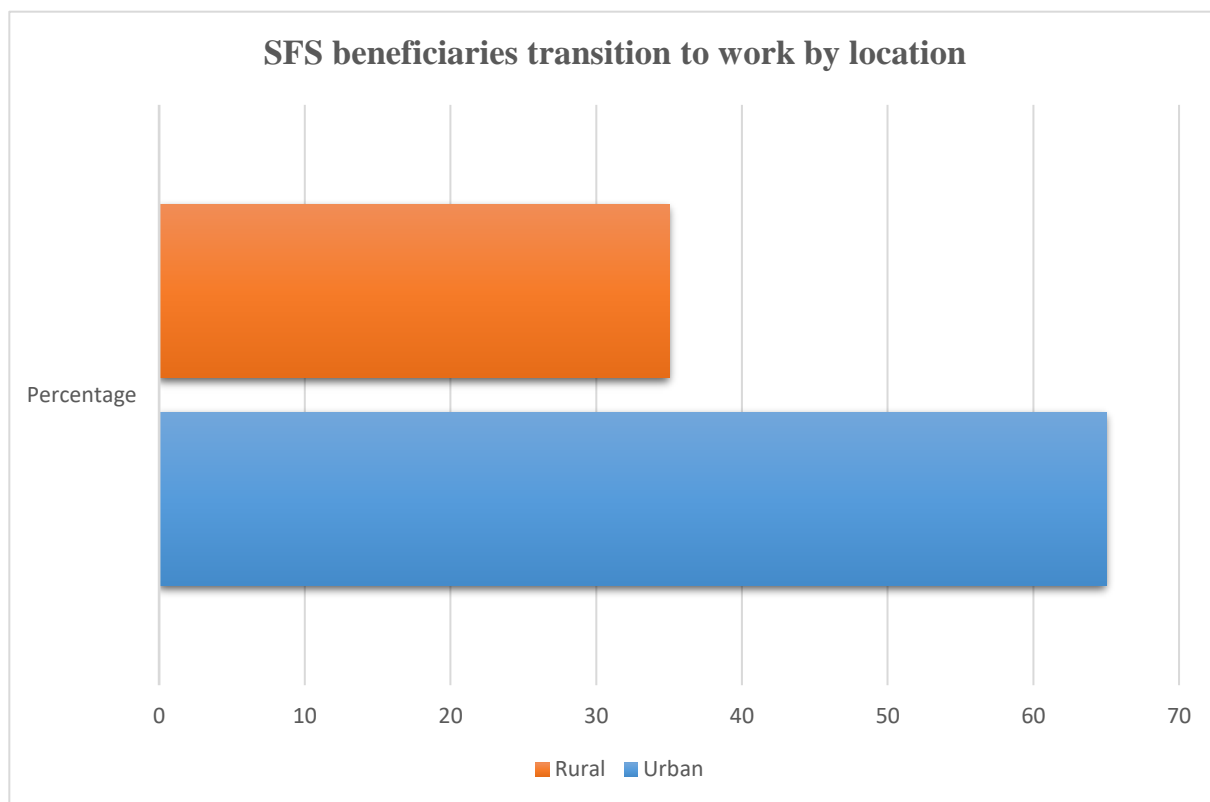


Figure 2: Employment by Location

Of the 37 beneficiaries that got employed, 60% were absorbed in the institutions where they did their industrial attachment, 25% were employed in other firms and 15% ventured into self-employment. This shows that more beneficiaries got employed through their place of attachments, followed by those that sought employment in other firms and lastly those that ventured into self-employment.

Conclusion

TVET is an essential source of skilled labour for industrialization of countries alike because serves a vital function as a transitional platform for the youth into gainful work. As proven by the research, TVET has a considerable influence on youth socioeconomic empowerment, especially in the informal settlements. Through TVET, the youth are able to gain both the technical and soft skills essential for work and are therefore better equipped to satisfy their daily human needs. Contrary to the misrepresentations of TVET as a place of last option for academic failures and school dropouts, the research has found that TVET trainees make well informed decisions based on personal interest, work satisfaction and future career prospects. It is their desire, rather than their weaknesses that motivates them to seek TVET courses. According to the findings of the research, TVET offers several lifelong advantages to young people. Through TVET, students are equipped with the technical, entrepreneurial, and life skills essential for establishing resiliency to life's obstacles, innovation, and creativity.

Recommendations

The structure, programmes, processes, and practises of technical and vocational education and training in Kenya are changing in order to be more effective in improving the quality of learning outcomes, making it more accessible and attractive to all, and ensuring it is relevant and connected to the world of work. In light of this study's findings, it is suggested that:

- Both the National and County governments should work to increase parental and adolescent awareness of the competitiveness of TVET programmes. This could be accomplished through coordinated campaigns involving TVET-based civic education. During these campaigns, TVET should be promoted and its great relevance to the labour market should be proven. This should incorporate the participation of successful TVET graduates from the campaign's geographical area. This is intended to alter the notion that TVET is a place of failure.
- To establish a connection between skill development and the workplace, the government should incorporate incubation centres into training institutions and expand mentorship programmes. These centres may offer programmes geared to enable graduates of TVET to put their acquired talents to use in empowering themselves.
- Since the quality of TVET depends on the collaboration of industry and training institutions, a policy framework should be developed to encourage their collaboration.
- TVET institutions should build an active labour market information system to study, collect, assess, and provide labour market information to identify emerging occupations, skills shortages, and areas of skills redundancy.
- Apprenticeship programmes should be increased between TVET institutions and industry to ease the transfer of TVET graduates into the workforce.
- Graduates of TVET programmes with insufficient skills should be recalled back to their training institutions and assisted through internships and other skills development programmes to improve their employment prospects.
- Institutions of TVET implement the following instructional strategies: community- based case studies, project-based learning, real-world problem-based learning, teamwork learning activities and trainee leadership development.

References

- Bradley, D., Noonan, p., Nugent, H., & Scales, B. (2008). Review of Australian higher education, Final report. Canberra: Department of Education, *Employment and Workplace Relations*.
- CEDEFOP (2021) *The benefits of vocational education and training*. Luxembourg: Office of the European Union.
- Dalberg (2019) *Youth not in Education, Employment and Training in Kenya: Understanding the values, capabilities and barriers toward achieving career and life goals*. Nairobi

- Harry, L. K. (2014). *Kenya Country Report for the 2014 Ministerial Conference on Youth Employment: Policies, Mechanisms and Schemes for Integration of Youth into the Workforce and Job Creation*. . Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.
- Hollander, A., & Naing, Y. (2009). Bridging Academic and Vocational Learning. *International handbook of education for the changing world of work*., 41-57.
- International Labour Office (ILO). (2008). *Conclusions on skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development*. Geneva: International Labour Conference, 97th Session, 2008.
- Rogers , M., & Creed , P. (2000). *School-to-Work Transition: From Theory to Practice*, School of Applied Psychology. Griffith University . Gold Coast. Queensland, Australia .
- Sigu, J. D. (2014) *The Impact of Vocational Education and Training on Socioeconomic empowerment of youth in Mukuru(2011-2015)*. Nairobi. University of Nairobi