

Increasing Public Awareness on TVET Roles as A Government Strategy for Reducing Youth Unemployment in Uganda

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Abstract: This paper with more focus on how public awareness of Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) programs can improve the image and attitude of education stakeholders towards BTJET education system. Applying thematic review qualitative approach with secondary data from Ugandan government units and other international organization accessed through online internet search engines, this paper highlights TVET status, and its challenges in Uganda. The results indicate: most graduates lack appropriate skills and competence required in the labor market as well as entrepreneurship skills for job creation. With reference to Philippine's success story, we suggest possible strategies applicable to popularize the gospel of TVET, its roles as mitigation measure towards youth unemployment and poverty among the marginalized and disadvantaged groups in the country.

Key Words: public sensitization, TVET awareness, education reform, youth unemployment, Ugandan education system, Uganda BTJET

Abstrak: Tulisan ini lebih fokus pada bagaimana kesadaran masyarakat terhadap program Pendidikan dan Pelatihan Kejuruan Teknik Bisnis (BTJET) dapat meningkatkan kesan dan sikap para pemangku kepentingan pendidikan terhadap sistem pendidikan BTJET. Dengan menerapkan pendekatan tinjauan tematik kualitatif dengan data sekunder dari unit pemerintah dan organisasi internasional yang diakses melalui mesin pencari *online*, penelitian ini menyoroti status TVET, dan tantangannya di Uganda. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar lulusan minim akan keterampilan kewirausahaan untuk penciptaan lapangan kerja. Mengacu pada kisah sukses Filipina, kami menyarankan strategi yang mungkin untuk mempopulerkan pendidikan TVET, perannya sebagai langkah mitigasi terhadap kemiskinan dan pengangguran di antara kelompok-kelompok yang terpinggirkan dan kurang beruntung di negara ini.

Kata kunci: sensitisasi publik, kesadaran TVET, reformasi pendidikan, pengangguran kaum muda, sistem pendidikan Uganda, BTJET Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Uganda is a developing countries suffering with the problem of high youth unemployment in Sub Saharan Africa. According to Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) 2015 report, it was youth unemployment rate was 6.5%. When observed from the statistics figures, unemployment seems not to be a serious problem however, from the reality on the ground it's so alarming. Although there has been a significant increase in accessibility in education services, the quality of education has been compromised with which has limited its impact on employment creation especially for secondary and tertiary graduates. For example UBOS report also indicate that high un-

employment rate has been increasing with an increase in additional level of education attainment with the tertiary level unemployment rate being 11.8% also being the highest (UBOS, 2014, 2016). This is because tertiary graduates are trained as professional workers preferring formal employments than informal jobs that employs the majority of young population due to the smaller size of Uganda's economy (Magelah & Ntamirweki-Karugonjo, 2014; World Bank-Uganda, 2013).

Education is an essential tool in society transformation however, its quality matters. Provision of quality education is an empowerment of the marginalized groups such as the rural population, school dropouts for example the youth for competitiveness and social inclusion. Although, education quality is complex to

define, in this context it is associated with provision and equipping young people with skills, knowledge and competences that enables them to become economically independent and responsible citizens who can contribute to the economic welfare of their communities as well as to national economic growth, easily adapt to newer technologies, and increase their employability potential, become innovative and potential entrepreneurs. Uganda's education system has lost a point in this area that is why the government of Uganda through Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) initiated the reform of lower curriculum (MoES, 2016). Since independence, Uganda has followed colonial system of education which emphasized and boosted more of general education (86.6%) with its theoretical curriculum than practical skills that has led to the production of more job seekers than job creators. As a result, this has created skills mismatch or skills gap between the graduates skills owned with the skills demanded in the labor market or industries and businesses (UBOS, 2014, 2016). Educators like Prof. Augustus Nuwagaba, director of Reeve Consults Uganda also believes that following colonial education system is Uganda's number one challenge as reported in The Guardian news.com Thursday, January 2014;

“the country is stuck with the colonial education system that trains students to be clerks, teachers and lawyers. Times have changed, and the country needs metal fabricators, carpenters and mechanics. Foreign investors also bemoan the lack of skilled workers in Uganda” (Alon Mwesigwa, The Guardian, 2014)

(Mwesigwa, n.d.)

Among the noticeable causes of youth unemployment in Uganda is: lack of appropriate skills (due to skills mismatch), small size of the formal sector of Uganda's economy, rural urban migration, lack of innovation and entrepreneurial skills (Peterson 2016, Pletscher, 2017). Although vocational education and training has long existed in Uganda, less attention has been equally accorded to it by many educators, policy makers, students, and parents compared to general education track. This explains why many young people leave school with little or no skills that can support them to be employable or potential entrepreneurs thus rotating from place to place as job seekers (Moses Ngunwe, Njora Hungu, Gerald Mahuro, 2016). There has been less emphasis in tailoring and integration of school curriculum with workplace related skills and competence in Ugandan education system.

Problem Statement

In, UBOS 2015 report, Uganda's youth unemployment rate was 6.5% higher compared to 4.7% in 2009 and 1.9% in 2006. Studies by the World Bank (2015) and William (African Center for Economic Transformation/ACET) in Sub Saharan Africa of which Uganda is part of indicate that unemployment rate of young people between 15–24 years is a big challenge for (William Baah-boateng, n.d.) low adaptation by Sub Saharan Countries including Uganda to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a mitigation measure for skills mismatch and provider entrepreneurship skills that can prepare the young people into potential entrepreneurs and job creators (William Baah-boateng, n.d. pp. 4–6).

The small size of Uganda's formal sector absorbs only 20% of formal workers according to Uganda's finance minister which explains why informal sector is still dominant sector employing many young people in Uganda's economy (Uganda Youth Network, 2015). This implies that Uganda requires more innovative, entrepreneurs who can create more jobs for others in the economy however, many young people lack such skills (Magelah & Ntambirweki-Karugonjo, 2014). These skill deficiencies are attributed to quality of education provided (ManpowerGroup, 2012a, 2012b. p.18–20), during school curriculum implementation. The curriculum in general education – the main priority track in Uganda emphasizes knowledge acquisition (with more theoretical curriculum, focus on examination score/grade) to practical skills; many students are “book worms” with much cram work, memorization at the expense of skill acquisition that would support them outside school to be employable or become entrepreneurs (thus becoming more job seekers than job creators). Coupled with the negative perception, image and attitude of Ugandan towards TVET programs has delimited the active role of TVET implementation in reducing youth unemployment and poverty in the country to the current situation (MoES, 2014; UBOS, 2016; Uganda Tehnology and Management University, 2016).

Negligence, poor image and attitude towards the contribution of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Uganda applies to the country's great challenge of skills mismatch and deficiencies in entrepreneurial skills belittles many employers. On the face of it, public awareness by the government and other education stakeholders in making national sensitization about the role of TVET as one

of the mitigation measures by the government in addressing the alarming youth unemployment and poverty challenges is crucial. For effectively implement, Uganda can adapt good practice of this strategy by modeling the success stories of public awareness on TVET in Philippine and Afghanistan that changed the negative attitude and mindset towards TVET (Farooq, 2013; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2010).

Public awareness in this context refers to increased government engagement in sensitization of the public on the role of TVET and its contributions, availability and accessibility of vocational education programs by all individuals in the nation as one of its mitigation measures to unemployment. In other words, it is a deliberate struggle by the government, and all education stakeholders to make Ugandans aware about the role, benefits and accessibility of TVET programs.

Attitude and Image of TVET in Uganda and Philippine

TVET in Philippine suffered a similar situation like that of Uganda (UNESCO-TESDA, 2010), before Technical Education and Skill Development Authority (TESDA)'s efforts to make TVET programs more popular, relevant and valuable Filipinos. According to TESDA, TVET stigma was immersed in Filipinos culture (TESDA, p.5) which delineated its value, role and contribution to economic growth of both individuals and communities and the nation. However, between 2008 and 2009, TESDA started serious campaigns nationwide under the program called "Social Marketing and Advocacy Program (SMAP)" which lasted for one full year. Several government agencies reported inadequacy of TVET program awareness not among the young Filipinos but even parents, policy makers, educators and communities for example:

The National Sectoral Skills Plan for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Manufacturing Industries (2004) reported that there is a lack of public awareness of TVET programs and partiality of the general populace towards degree courses. The National Sectoral Skills Plan for the Information and Communications Technology Sector (2004) reports that TVET is often regarded as preparation for menial jobs while degree courses often lead to the usually more preferred office work. Syjuco (2007), in an attempt to describe the stigma associated with TVET, posits that the bias against vocational training has deep historical roots and points out that the public perceive TVET to be the last choice among stu-

dents who cannot afford to take degree courses in colleges. (UNESCO-TESDA, 2010, p.7)

This resulted in the desire for public sensitization for creating awareness of TVET programs availability, accessibility, and its benefits in building potential of individuals, communities and the nation at large. Among TESDA's initial steps was communication advocating for TVET roles, values and benefits for its stakeholders in the country. Its focus was mindset change among parents, students and unemployed youth as well as policy makers. TESDA, made it a point that schools are encouraged to integrate labor market skills in their school programs and encouraged policy makers to allocate more resource envelope in TVET sector. TESDA's hypothesized TVET awareness and change of attitude correlated with increased public campaigns and sensitization and TVET programs. This later become true as indicated in Filipino's positive change in attitude witnessed by increased enrolment in TVET in the following years (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2010).

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as it is well-known today is a subset of education system that focus its training for work (that is prepares students with required skills for work in particular fields of their expertise) (NICHE, 2010; Onderi, Ajowi, & Malala, 2014). TVET is considered as a toolbox which individuals can use to unlock their potential, talents and skills for self-reliance and sustainability in this competitive world. It is a potential tool for youths and marginalized group empowerment and inclusive growth that can be a yardstick for equity and poverty alleviation among different age groups, gender and backgrounds. It is a competitive power for children (youth) from low social economic status to equally rise to same level with a similar youth from high social economic status if all factors like open pathway, progress qualification, and flexibility of TVET programs are held constant (Farooq, 2013; Onderi et al., 2014).

The global perspective, indicates TVET as a potential weapon for fighting unemployment and poverty challenges whilst improving economic productivity of nation's workforce essential for developing countries like Uganda (Asian Development Bank, 2014; Farooq, 2013; Kingombe, 2012; Krönner, 2005; Purwanto et al., 2013; Suzaina, 2016). Also, in addressing the challenges, TVET programs have to provide relevant skills and competences aligned to labor market demands in order to create competitive, adaptable and employable workforce capable of driving economic

growth and development (UNESCO, 2015:50) (Manpower Group, n.d.; ManpowerGroup, 2012b, 2012a).

TVET implementation in Uganda suffer similar delimiting factors like those outlined in Philippine for example:

poor coordination and cooperation between TVET providers, industry, commerce and stakeholders (European Training Foundation, 2003); lack of alignment between technical qualifications earned in vocational schools with degrees from colleges and universities; inadequate funding; lack of awareness or limited knowledge of TVET programs; and, being regarded as second class education and for less fortunate or less intelligent individuals (UNESCO_TESDA, 2010. p. 6)

TVET has increasingly captured an attention as a priority issue on the agendas of many countries globally due to its perceived contribution to empower young people with skills and competences that enables them to engage in productive and sustainable livelihood. For example, in developed countries Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, etc; TVET for so many years has been a priority tool for workforce development. Similar to this, other developing countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippine, Ghana, Nigeria, Mauritius, Botswana etc have adopted it as a national tool for equipping young people with relevant skills demanded in the labor market for social and economic reasons. However, this is the opposite for the Ugandan case as TVET is looked at as a supplementary education for those who have failed to gain access to the main general education pathway from primary to higher institutions of learning hence the value attached to TVET is still not good as people continue to perceive TVET not as valuable as general education.

According to African Union survey report on TVET priority areas conducted in 18 African countries, agriculture sector was on forefront as the first priority (African Union, 2007, pp. 1–11). In Uganda agriculture is the backbone employing 85% of Ugandan workforce thus making it imperative for awareness of BTVET strategic programs to follow that direction. Research findings indicate that as Uganda is currently aiming at becoming a middle income country by 2040, several development strategies have been put forward – of which some of them are geared towards the youth among which include those programs targeting how to help youths get out of poverty due to unemployment for example:

Ahaibwe and Mbowa (2014) wrote in Brookings.edu blog that “Youth Venture Capital Funds; Graduate Venture Fund, and Youth Livelihood Program” were the three major government programs which was geared towards youth programs especially capital for business venture. However, in the blog, Ahaibwe & Mbowa indicated that these venture capital funds did not benefit all the youth as the programs were urban based, attached with strict criteria for example demanding for collateral security, making accessibility very hard for rural youth in agriculture, short livelihood of business ventures due to inadequate entrepreneurial, financial and business management skills among the youths who had acquired the loans which is a general problem for many youths in Uganda hence contributing to unemployment problem.

Also, for Uganda to succeed in achieving Uganda Vision 2040 through strategies like Skilling Uganda which denotes new strategy in paradigm shift of Business Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) with all possible BTVET strategies, there is need for increased awareness, sensitization (social marketing) of BTVET programs nationwide targeting all BTVET beneficiaries including marginalized and disadvantage groups such as youths, unemployed, rural communities, school dropouts, people with disabilities (PWDs), women and girls at the grass root levels to creating awareness, sensitization on the availability, importance, roles and accessibility of BTVET programs in pursuit of workforce skill development for sustainable development in Uganda.

Although the government rebranded technical and vocational education and training with BTVET as a sub sector with the objectives of Skilling Uganda, its strategies to improve the image and attitude of Ugandans towards BTVET until now there is less prestige attributed to it by all stakeholders in the country. However, the challenge to this effort is aligned to lack of adequate publicity of BTVET program to popularize it in the community more so in the rural areas which constituents 70% of the nation’s population. Therefore, this has led to limited awareness of BTVET programs for example the current new strategy of Skilling Uganda 2011-2020 has not been enacted or imparted fully into community mindset to change hence leading to prevalence of negative perception of citizens towards TVET (Kemevor & Kassah, 2015; Pettersen, 2017; Pletscher, 2015; Russo, 2017; Tukundane, Minnaert, Zeelen, & Kanyandago, 2015; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2014). Thus for Uganda to benefit from BTVET

benefits, it necessitates her to increase awareness and popularity of BTVET programs particularly in line with agriculture the backbone of the country and informal sector that employ about 85% of her population especially in rural areas as it constitutes 70% of the total country's population.

From the above discussion therefore, the increase in the awareness and popularity of BTVET programs will result into: (1) change of attitude and perception towards BTVET programs in the nation; (2) it will be a motivating factor for education stakeholders to achieve employable skills; (3) enable learners and community to embrace vocational education as they do to general education that is it will not be a second option or education for residual school output; (4) it will necessitate allocation of a much larger share of the government financial resources putting in place BTVET learning facilities with good learning environment; (5) it will increase the community knowledge about the importance and the great role of BTVET in relation to poverty eradication, unemployment checks as well as a strategy towards sustainable development.

This forms the background of this paper with more focus on how public awareness of BTVET programs in Uganda can improve the image and attitude of education stakeholders towards BTVET education system. The findings of this paper are timely essential for Ugandans as the country aspires for industrialization the prerequisite for economic growth and development following the long term forecast of Uganda Vision 2040. In this case, skilled and semi skilled workforce the product of TVET is an essential asset.

METHOD

This paper applied qualitative approach with thematic review relevant literature on the intended topic in reference to TVET roles, and contributions towards economic development, poverty alleviation and reduction of youth unemployment in developing countries. Secondary data obtained with the aid of internet search engines especially Google search and Google Scholar search engine using several keywords. Through these literature review, relevant findings applicable to the topic of this paper were obtained in the case study of Philippine and Afghanistan. For more clarity, Philippine's public awareness strategy was deemed to be more applicable to Uganda due to similarities in the challenges that was existing before in former nation and those current in the later. From Philippine's suc-

cess story, Uganda can reduce on the current youth unemployment through adopting quality TVET system in cooperation with industries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Therefore, in this paper, we outline some of the strategies Ugandan government can undertake to increase public awareness of VET programs with reference to Philippine's social marketing and advocacy program (SMAP) success story in increasing public awareness are as follow.

Application of Broadcasting Media; as the case in point from Philippine experience in increasing public awareness of TVET programs, TESDA started broadcasting of successive individual beneficiaries from TVET programs. Documentation of stories successful people on video, also featuring such stories on selected radio and TV programs for almost a year. Similarly, CD copies of such success stories were produced and later used for public shows by field officers during public assemblies and other gatherings. Also, entertainers such musicians and actresses composing songs and drama acting, playing jingo on communication media promoting TVET programs which transformed the community mindset and perception about TVET were applied in Philippine.

Application of print media such as newspapers, magazines and press release; in its efforts, TESDA took the advantage of documenting TVET success stories in media. This was on a regular basis through the country where thousands of leaflets, flyers, and brochures describing TVET programs, application process as well as required qualifications were all detailed in those media. Note only these were applicable but also comics to show the benefits of TVET programs, successful graduates were developed printed out. Outdoor advertising media such streamers, banners and billboards posters inviting the public to enroll in TVET programs were designed and displayed in strategic locations.

Setting up digital and social media; due to the population of Filipinos with cellular phones, it was easy for TESDA to connect with the public. This was more effective when an independent one-way communication channel was setup for quick response and feedbacks. For instance, two numbers accessible by the public were setup by TESDA for reception of inquiries, complaints which facilitated automatic feedbacks besides application of emails, Facebooks and

Twitter as social communication media of TVET programs to TVET clients public until now. It is noted that TESDA also utilized the internet opportunity to propagate TVET programs alongside SMS broadcasting to 45,000 subscribers. This resulted into massive growth of audience rising two million people per month totaling 12 million for six months. This is possible due to increased telecommunication companies providing easy communication through accessibility of cellular phones like MTN, Uganda, Airtel, Africell, Vodafone and other telecommunication networks available in the country.

Application of interpersonal and face-to-face communication; as an enforcement system, face-to-face communication was envisioned as engagement of TESDA officials with their clients in the country especially during “recorrida” assemblies where the public could discuss with TESDA officers about its programs and services which could also take place even in schools, gymnasium, malls and other public places. In case of easy follow ups, attendance lists were recoded as well as activities undertaken after which TESDA later invited the participants to their offices for any other training programs.

Application of Focus group discussion (FGD); this was conducted through invitation of focal point persons for example school representatives, employers, students/trainees, media outfits, labor unions and government agencies. FGD were meant for data validity, drawing preliminary conclusion, and seeking further recommendations. During these discussions, participants agreed that promotion through a number of strategies contributed greatly TVET awareness and acceptance among employers which increased industry engagement as TVET partners. Uganda can utilize similar strategy to lure the inactive industry partner to own TVET programs as equal beneficiaries of TVET programs and services.

Establishing TVET contest award; skills competition in search for best TVET graduates can be a potential bite for promoting TVET among Ugandans as conducted in Philippine. Launching nationwide search for TESDA Idols engaged all Filipinos of all caliber targeted at those graduates who successfully excellence in TVET and have contributed to their community development. The awarding process of the TESDA Icon based on the following criteria:

a graduate of any TESDA programs whose consequent immediate employment / business is in line with his/her techvoc course; 2) outstanding accomplishments / achievements in line with his/her trade

for the past three (3) years; 3) working in line with his / her techvoc education / training for at least one year; and 4) recognized by community socio-civic organizations (UNESCO-TESDA, 2010, p.18).

Author believe Uganda can manage to organize this contest award just like the *Uganda Beauty Contest* organized in search for *MISS UGANDA* on an annual basis.

Linking employers with TVET providers; graduates through job bridging events in various strategic locations in order to bring together TVET graduates with the prospective employers to facilitate the graduates’ employment through organizing TVET trade fairs and exhibitions in which skills competition. For example, in Uganda, Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA), organizes trade fairs and exhibitions on annual basis to bring together all Manufacturers in the country together with the Consumers similarly this can be an opportunity to integrate with BTVET programs or organize independent exhibitions nationwide on rotational basis to cater for disadvantage community members who can’t afford to reach and access the central location like for the case of UMA.

Offering scholarships for TVET students to continue pursuing further studies in higher education both locally and internationally to broaden their mindset in their respective fields of expertise. Through exposure learners can develop new skills through collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving especially those on international scholarships abroad in they acquire knowledge which can be vital in fostering and furthering BTVET programs in the country. All these strategies opened up the Filipino’s eyes and broadened their mindset changing their attitudes towards TVET which increased more TVET enrollment and resource allocations which improved and increased the quality of human resources and economic development.

Similarly, Indonesia increased the ratio of TVET to general education from 30:70 to 70:30 respectively on top of establishing of more TVET institutions. Integration of vocational education curricula with general education at all levels as well as setting a clear pathway for TVET graduates to continue studying in higher institutions of learning like colleges and universities can be of great importance as far as awareness is concern (MOEC (Republic Indonesia), 2016). The reason for this was to ease accessibility of TVET programs and service by all citizens including disadvantaged and marginalized groups. This is because the higher the number of quality BTVET schools in

the area, the more accessible it may be for community members or learners as a result it will increase the number of learners' enrolment in the country compared to the current situation where there are just a few technical schools and colleges offering limited BTVET programs.

Lastly but not the least, recognition and integration of informal sector training programs with the formal TVET to bridge the existing gaps so that the performance of informal sector can be recognized. Because in Uganda, the informal sector TVET has a great impact though its performance is rarely recognized in the country therefore by integrating it with the formal TVET sector places a higher opportunity for participants in it to access formal accreditation for further formal programs in country like enrolling for further studies.

Therefore, Uganda government can greatly be convinced to increase public awareness or knowledge of BTVET programs taking Philippine as a role model in that strategy. The success results from Philippine's case of increased Public awareness were as follows: 1) there was increased TVET awareness and public approval, 2) increased number of new registered TVET programs nationwide an indication of positive public response, 3) increased support from stakeholders like increased TESDA's scholarship budget, 4) positive changes in attitude, 5) low levels of youth unemployment.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced from Philippine case results of success in implementing public awareness about TVET, it is clear that increased public awareness has great impact and plays a bigger role as far as increasing and popularizing TVET programs. As already known that Communication is the life blood of any organization, it plays a vital role in keeping the organization's public and stakeholders constantly informed about its programs and services. Therefore, Uganda government can be a student to Philippine's government learning how to successfully reduce the high rate of youth unemployment through increasing public awareness of BTVET programs.

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