Complexities and Contradictions to Vocational Education and Training: A case of Uganda.

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Abstract

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Uganda has undergone major changes since colonialists. It is believed that it was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century. TVET, since then has evolved in the areas of Science, Technology and Innovation to provide skills that will propel Uganda to middle-level industrialized status by the year 2040 as envisaged in the country's strategic plan. However, currently training and development processes in Uganda have been criticized for being rigidity and irrelevant to industry, creating a mismatch of skills produced by the training institutions, it is upon this criticism that this essay is written. The focus of this essay is to analyze complexities and contradictions faced by TVET institutions in Uganda. The paper advocates that apprenticeships should be promoted so that people can get trained from the work places.

Keywords: Complexities, contradiction, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Apprenticeship, Uganda.

Introduction

Education is a major aspect of life that equips learners with knowledge, skills, and values desirable for their survival in society and the development of the nation. Education is a powerful tool for transformation of a society. It plays a key role in achieving moral, intellectual, ideological, cultural and social development of the people in a society, as well as the national goals of unity, democracy economic progress and security for all its citizens (Uganda Ministry of Education & Sports, 1992). Therefore, an education system that equips learners with competences for action and production is relevant, hence gearing the development of the nation. The idea that education should be 'locally relevant' appears essential to a 'holistic approach' to vocational training (Garth, 2007). This is because skills acquisition helps the learners to be innovative and productive hence less need for employment. The united nation development Report (1990) says enhancing the human factor is the real wealth of a nation. It is through human creativity, initiative, capability and dedication that true development can be achieved (Denjor, 2011).

According to the latest State of Uganda Population Report 2012 released in December 2017, Uganda has the youngest population in the world, with over 78% below the age of 30 years. Experts warn that such a big young population will exert more pressure on the economy, unless it is transformed into productive work force (Taddeo, October 19, 2017). As Uganda's population explodes; few jobs are at stake and this has created unemployment in the country already. The causes of youth joblessness are said to be complicated, ranging from an inadequate investment/supply side of jobs, insufficient employable skills (i.e., youth possess skills that are not well matched with available jobs) and high rates of labor force growth at 4.7% per annum (Ahaibwe & Mbowa, 2014). In a bid to avert the drift, the president of Uganda launched the vision 2040 campaign in 2011 which ascertains that by 2040, Uganda must be in the middle income through skills acquisition in order to enhance production (Uganda National Planning Authority, 2013). Launching Vision 2040 by Uganda is not enough there should be a national program to skill the youths with hands-on skills through vocational training and apprenticeship at work places.

For more than 50 years, every education report on education emphasizes the importance on technical education and vocational training in national development. But at a practical level, this area of higher education has never received the attention it deserves. Because of the contradictions in the TVET system, vocational education has not been popular in Uganda as the National council of higher education in Uganda (National Council for Higher Education, 2000).

Kajubi (1991) frustrated by the contradictions in the education systems that had afflicted the Vocational and Technical Education wrote in the following words:

"*There is a low regard for technical and commercial studies, physical work is not necessary considered as essential part of education*".

Kajubi, in that statement asserts that general education is for the "bright" students to go on and on with theoretical studies and for the less talented to branch off into technical or vocational courses. Cleverness is still judged only on the basis of ability to memorize and regurgitate theoretical information and practical people are automatically regarded as less bright.

Contradiction is a situation or ideas in opposition to one another (Vocabulary.com, n.d.). It also mean when a situation is not straight forward coupled with of challenges. It may also mean in layman's language as a combination of statements, ideas, or features of a situation that are opposed to one already made. In the case of contradictions TVET, we can analyze those factors that have turned out to be the exact opposite of what would have been expected to exist in this type of education.

However, **complexity** characterizes the behaviour of a system or model whose components interact in multiple ways and follow local rules, meaning there is no reasonable higher instruction to define the various possible interactions (Johnson , 2001). One can also say that; complexity being a midpoint between order and disorder for this presentation and in this case complexity is a property of contradiction.

Contradictions and Complexities in Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education and training (VET) are an activity directed to identifying and developing human capabilities for productive and satisfying working life. According to this statement, it is possible to say VET is: a complement of educational activity oriented to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to perform a particular job post an occupation or professional activity in the labor market (Mohamad & MeiHeong, 2012). In Uganda, Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) are put together as separate, but all of them can be conveniently be called vocational education just like it was in U.S.A in 1990's (Castelleno et al, 2003). A layman, can even say that TVET is a program that provide an education that directly relates directly to getting a job to earn a living.

Because of the contradictions in the education system, vocational education has not been popular in Uganda as the National council of higher education in Uganda (NCHE report. 2006) states:

For more than 50 years, every education report in Uganda has emphasized the importance of technical education and vocational training in national development. But at a practical level, this area of higher education has never received the attention it deserves. Unlike university education, it has not in the past enjoyed prestige in popular imagination.

Contradiction from Missionaries

The introduction of western type of education systems was brought into Uganda by early missionaries. They introduced this type of education as a process of conversion of their subjects to Christianity. The first Christian schools that were built included among others: St. Charles Lwanga – Koboko, St. Joseph's College – Ombaci. These schools were built for the sons and daughters of chiefs who were entitled to attend to these schools at the time. The curriculum designed was mainly academic, although vocational schools were also opened (Wandira, 1972). Training of vocational people previously had no place in their holy summonses. There were for many reasons why this was so. The colonial government was not in a haste to involve itself in the education of the indigenous Ugandans until 1925, when they issued a policy after a scorching criticism of the missionary form of education by the Phelps-stoke Commission. Otherwise education was not their business. Lansdowne, the secretary to foreign office in London stated in 1901 regarding the role of the colonial government in education thus:

"Education is certainly our business in the last resort, but if the missionaries will do the work for us, it would be better to give them facilities in the form of tax rebate (Ssekamwa, 1997)."

When the missionaries started educational and education itself, government was not at all involved, they educated Africans single handed (Okello, 2014). As the government was not involved in running of technical education in Uganda. This meant that technical education lacked a clear policy right from the beginning making its organization haphazard, and devoid of a clear syllabus and co-coordination let alone clear education policies. This is compared to literary education, which aimed at creating a "white man in a black skin" in behaviour and attainment of white-collar jobs. Technical education was purportedly to create village-oriented person whose work was conceived as dirty, and indeed a work for a failure. Society therefore scolded this type of education sooner than later right from its introduction. By 1920's some section of the Ugandan societies were already averse to this type of education as was expressed by the son of Apollo Kagwa in the following words:

> *".....the chiefs send their boys to school not to learn to drive bullock wagons and to look after cattle, but they learn to be fitted for posts of high standing (Ssekamwa 1997. 227).*

Internal contradictions in TVET

TVET system with its good intentions of promoting hands on employable skills demanded by world of work is seen as education system that does not appreciate academically progressiveness. As the terminal ended nature TVET in Uganda, most of the TVET courses before then used to end at certificate level. Courses such as shoemaking, carpentry and joinery, tailoring and cutting, fitter machinist, motor vehicle technicians, home economics etc. terminated at a certificate level until Kyambogo University introduced diploma and degree programs for some of them. It is still not easy to progress from certificate level through diploma to degree qualifications. No one would wish to go through an education system which retards academic progress. It is not a surprise that a youth who has a degree in arts who is unemployed thinks himself to be better than a technician who has a certificate or diploma but working, the reason being that a degree holder is considered to be superior amongst Uganda communities. This mentality started way back from colonial period; parents could not willingly take their children

to vocational institutions because of the terminal nature of this education system. Ssekamwa (1997), points out that some parents had developed a perception that technical education was retrogressive and made their children stagnant. Therefore they did not value TVET at all. Whoever went through this type of education would be seen by society as an academic failure. To date most students are not willing to join TVET institutions. But they do so as a last resort.

There following are the contradictions in the technical and survey education in Uganda (Benson, 2010):

- Theoretical Contradiction
- Outdated curriculum

These two internal contradictions continue to hinder the development of technical education in Uganda. We look at the;

Theoretical contradictions

It is known in Uganda most cases that TVET education system employ generally theoretical methods of training. Presenting a paper on the state of the infrastructures in the TVET institutions, the commissioner in charge of BTVET uttered:

Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) institutions lack lecture rooms, workshops, tools, outdated or good text books, training equipment's, and libraries to mention few. Yet, TVET is practically oriented and its success is dependent on the availability of teaching materials, tools, machines, and equipment. If these are grossly lacking in the TVET institutions, then products from these institutes will not have the competences directly required in the labour market (Okinyal, 2006).

However, up to today, the Ugandan education system is producing the agriculturalists who do not know the combine harvesters, civil engineers who do not know how to drive a bull dozer, we are training mechanical engineers who cannot make a mere needle for the sewing machines, neither can they make an engine of a motor vehicle, let alone telecommunication engineer engineers who cannot produce a mere design of a television screen or make transistor which is an old technology. The engineers, vocational graduates being produced by the Ugandan

education systems are not even copycats; they are technicians who look at the simplest technology from Europe and America or even India and China with amazement. They cannot think beyond being more than repairers of the imported technology (Okello, 2010).

Outdated curriculum

According to (Okinyal, 2006) most of the TVET curricula in Uganda are outdated and there is need to review this to meet the industrial demands. For example as part time lecturer at St. Benedict Technical College Kisubi, different departments design "table" curricula slightly different from that designed by the national curriculum development center (NCDC). This idea came after analyzing the requirements of the different industries where our students go for their industrial training. It was found out that what is taught at TVET colleges is theoretical and most cases outdated. Effective curriculum planning and development in this area should be a dynamic process. It must respond both to the needs of the individual and to the technical requirement of the job, as well as to the changes in job patterns caused by scientific and technological development and socio-economic change (Okello, 2010).

There are other contradictions which are generated from outside the education system of Uganda.

External Contradictions and Complexity

Technical vocational education and training (TVET) is particularly vulnerable to the pressures of globalization, commercialization and trade liberalization. "Globalization" refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, especially in terms of trade and financial flows, but also including labour and knowledge. Market-led economic globalization and labour market deregulation has intensified the commercialization of vocational education at both the national and international levels. As the world turns into the global village with free movement of labour and capital across national borders, a new need has arisen that calls for the immediate review of the education system especially in the area of technical and vocational education. It has been shaped by the demands within the states to prepare labour for participation in its economy and to prepare citizens to participate in its policy. This approximate congruence of nation state and formalised education becomes problematic as globalization blurs national

sovereignty and puts limits on state autonomy (Torres, 2002)**.** If our contemporary discussion of education is to have any meaning, it must move beyond assumptions about national boundaries and goals internal to national agendas. It should address the questions raised by globalization of the twofold traditional bases of formalized educational systems. Uganda can avoid this contradiction by collaborating with international community by way of exposing TVET students to technological experts. Developing economies can gain access to these technical advances while sharing in global production via multinational enterprises (Yvette, 2007). The TVET training which are carried out must equip students or TVET graduates with hands-on skills that is ready for any labour market globally. To achieve this, TVET institutions should modern technologies in our training though in Ugandan context.

Globalization is a contradiction to the present day technical education not only in Uganda but all over the world. As globalization lifts the state boundaries and promotes the capital transfers, new technology are coming into the job market. This calls for a total overhaul of the training curriculum, it calls for the integration of new technology in our training, it calls for retraining of teachers, redesigning of our workshops and lecture rooms. The globalization is a serious contradiction to the type of education we have because, we are still training on people as workers of the last century but not the 21st century. Whereas we are training labour force the use of the manual wheel alignment machines, the world has moved to the computerized system, we still train on old technology when the world has gone to technologies-computerized diagnostics in auto repair, numerically controlled machines in machine shops and sophisticated medical equipment in health occupations classes, operation of robots in industries, computerized surveying gadgets (Okello, 2010). Currently in Uganda, many industries are building factories in the country which increases possibility that some of the graduates get employed outside Uganda and beyond.

Information of Ccommunication and Technology (ICT) integration

We cannot ignore the importance of ICT in TVET education system. As a key skill for today's young people in the modern world for learning, for life, and for work, ICT should be seen as a goal in itself and not simply as a novel medium for delivering educational content (Kafika, 2013). As the impact of ICT is positively used to improve access and provide quality to TVET, it has huge challenges of adoption in TVET institutions in Uganda. As earlier mentioned

there is lack of infrastructure, initial costs of setting up ICT laboratory are simply high & maintenance costs, security issues and upgrades of the software's. With the issue of the 'digital divide' between those who have and those who lack access to ICTs growing more stark, who should be responsible for promoting access for those currently excluded from the benefits of ICTs in TVET (Kafka, 2013).

The training of teachers on ICT is also hindered by lack of funds to purchase adequate computer, internet facilities and conducting of workshops in relation to training teachers on the use of ICT. For example in Jinja vocational training, the computers are very inadequate that is to say only twenty five computers are available in the computer laboratory to be used by fifty teachers and six hundred students .This has affected the metal fabrication students because they don't get the appropriate competence in computer applications. The infrastructures such as classroom and furniture are inadequate in metal fabrication section.

Cultural Issues

Traditionally TVET was regarded to be a provision reserved for the male gender in Developing Countries. This belief has resulted in serious omissions in national government development plans where women are given a raw deal. Consequently, most of the TVET facilities are planned without taking into consideration the female gender. Coupled with this cultural belief among most of the communities in Developing Countries, women are discouraged from enrolling for vocational career training opportunities. Enrolment data from TVET institutions indicate that very low percentage of the women's total enrolment is in Vocational areas within Developing Countries (Wahba).

Some cultures in Uganda like Lugbara and alike have taboos that prohibit women from climbing trees, poles etc. This alone prohibits women from pursuing courses like electrical and electronics engineering. For example in the field of metal fabrication in Jinja Vocational Training Institute second year class of thirty nine students has only two girls and thirty seven boys. Cultural behavior of communities escalate gender in balance in Technical and Vocational Institutions by emphasizing that girls should not enroll for courses like metal fabrication which involves hard labour. From the cultural beliefs, the general attitude of the community towards metal fabrication

is very negative. They see metal fabrication as a course which involves welding that causes permanent damage to the eye sight. The cultural beliefs of the community can be mitigated by sensitizing the public about the advantages of metal fabrication course as a resourceful trade which easily gives the opportunity to the graduate to easily be self-employed. There is a low regard for technical and commercial studies, physical work is not necessarily considered as essential part of Education. We should encourage girl child Education by offering sponsorship for girls who enroll for TVET courses at all levels.

Conclusion

The contradictions and complexity are a reality in the technical vocational education and training system. There is need to adjust the training system, taking into consideration the international trends of education. Apprenticeships should be promoted so that the people can get trained from the work places. TVET institutions be well equipped to encourage research in the technical education system so that our people are made aware of the current state of technical education elsewhere in the world. TVET education system in Uganda has not received the attention it requires. The high level of unemployment amongst graduates in Uganda cannot be ignored due to unemployable skills they possess. According to (NCHE 2009), for more than 50 years, every education report in Uganda has emphasized the importance of TVET in national development. But at a practical level, this area of higher education has never received the attention it deserves.

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