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Empowering the Vulnerable Youth with Employability Skills through Non-formal Training Programs in Kenya

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Abstract:

Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education talks about increasing access and equitable education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. This encompasses embedding foundational, technical and employability skills sustainable education and training. Inclusivity in education and training embraces the marginalized and vulnerable youth in education and training programs. The study intended to enhance some selected employability skills; communication, team building, and problem solving and time management, self-confidence and self-expression through non formal training programs. This paper presents findings of a study conducted among the vulnerable out of school youth to determine their level of employability skills and enhance the acquisition of the skills using interactive training methods. Quasi experimental design was employed and a purposively selected sample size of 60 youth drawn from four sub counties in Nakuru County was used. A structured questionnaire and an observation checklist were used to collect data before and after the training. The training was conducted for a period of one month using selected participatory/interactive training methods to enhance employability skills. Data was analyzed and presented using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed improved acquisition of some facets of employability skills in communication, team building, and problem solving and time management. There was no observable improvement of self-confidence and self-expression. It was concluded that acquisition of employability skills does not only depend on the training methods and the environment, but other factors such as the trainee's personality and experience from prior learning may also have an impact. Hence trainers should consider the trainees diversity when developing and planning for skills training programs.

Keywords: Employability skills, Sustainable livelihood, non-formal, transferable skills, empowerment

1. Introduction

There is a growing understanding among scholars that non formal education would bridge the skills gap created by formal education and contribute towards the developmental needs of the youth in developing countries. Accessibility to quality education for all to enhance relevance in technical, vocational and employability skills is vital (UNDP, 2012). In many countries, governments have been promoting youth empowerment through skills by strengthening training programs and policies and Kenya is not exempted. The youth need to be suitably educated and appropriately skilled to contribute and participate in self and national development. However, the socio-economic inequalities may have denied majority of them opportunities to relevant training in formal programs, hence the need to strengthen non-formal training programs. UNESCO (2012) through global monitoring report observes that people keep building their capabilities to be productively functional and relevant in the global world. Furthermore, the three important skills that today's youth should possess are:

- Foundational skills that include literacy and numeracy as a prerequisite for further education;
- Technical skills that are needed to do a job, e.g. operating a machine, design and drawing
- Employability/transferable skills such as creativity and communication.

Emphasis on employability/transferable skills has grown globally and specific technical skills have become inadequate. Most formal, informal and non-formal training programs concentrate on teaching the technical knowhow but not the employability skills which are also very necessary (Marchioro, 2013). Personal behavior, attitude, team work, problem solving and communication skills, which are components of employability skills, play an important role in someone's ability to lead productive lives.

1.1. Employability Skills

Employability skills (ES) also referred as transferable (TS) skills are competencies that are not subject specific and can be applied in diverse situations (Misug, 2014). The skills are also referred to as soft, social or latent skills. Snell, Gekara and Gatt (2016) consider the skills as comprising of communication, team work, problem-solving, self-initiative, self-management and enterprise leadership. These skills are non-job specific and highly transferable and help in supporting the application of 'hard skills' in different life contexts.

According to Lucas (2014), formal and informal training programs emphasize on vocational/technical skills but not application of employability skills as part of the competencies required. Employability skills assist the trainees with the capacity to learn and adapt quickly to different life settings (European Commission Report on Technical/Vocational, Education and Training (TVET), 2013). Mostly, the skills are embedded in formal training programs like any other academic subject and are inaccessible to those not in the school system. This study isolates the following attributes as the most crucial in employability skills: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, time and resource management, self-expression and confidence, creativity, innovation and adaptability. Employability skills can be manifested in different forms such as ability to communicate well, manage resources (allocate time, money, materials, space and staff), working with others, understanding systems and utilizing technology to name but a few (Becker, Trzmiel, Kim & Kemis, 2013).

The skills are inculcated through trainee interactions with the learning environment and methods that simulate everyday life and work situations. Every person possesses some degree of employability skills but their awareness and understanding of the skills varies considerably, limiting their ability to apply (Kim, 2013; Weeden, 2011). Employability skills are becoming more important to a worker than the specific technical skills. The importance of transferable skills for occupational mobility and employability has been noted by educators, careers counselors and labour market analysts. The concern should be on how best to inculcate the skills into the trainees and workers. The skills enable individuals to have a broad-based view to life, set their personal goals and maximize their productivity. The ability to communicate and relate with others is beneficial for one to perform well in business or at the work place (Snell, Gekara and Gatt, 2016; Randall and Katharine, 2011).

Cecile and Mariadara (2011) notes that most of the out of school youth suffer low self-esteem, and may lack the self-confidence required to engage in self-employment. Acquisition of ES would therefore make them more creative and innovative and build their confidence in decision making, maintain a friendly environment with members and take advantage of available opportunities. The skills may also promote good work practices, customer relations and build confidence in the individual. These behavioural traits may result to good communication and improved self-concept, while lack of the skills may interfere with self-concept and ability to work independently, communicate well and personal representation. Lack of these attributes affect the performance of the individual negatively and hence limit their chances to initiate individual growth and productive lives (Sipos, Battisti & Grimm, 2008). Inadequacy of the skills is highly associated with institutionalized learning and trainer centred training methods as observed by Odo, Adenle and Okwori (2012).

Individuals rated high in ES are more confident, captivating and interact well with others. They have the ability to control emotions, listen and accommodate other peoples' views thus increasing productivity in an organization. Raymond (2008) and Raiskums (2005) express that problem solving and analysing requires higher order thinking skills, ability to identify problems and find workable solutions and acquisition may be enhanced by the person's level of academic qualification and life experiences.

According to Attanasio, Kugler and Meghir (2011) the youth need to be better prepared for decision making and leadership roles to cope with the challenges of globalization and new technologies. Enhancing ES among the youth may increase cohesion in their networks, team building and good customer relations, which may increase their functionality and productivity for sustainable livelihood.

1.2. Non-Formal Training Programs

This study defines non formal training program as an organized educational/ training activity outside the formal system that is meant to serve a specific group with customized learning objectives. Through situational curriculum, non-formal training is better placed to address gaps and skills deficiencies created by formal curriculum, and provide interventions as reported by Sharma (2016).

Non formal education in Kenya is closely associated with socio-economically rooted problems among the disadvantaged and marginalized persons and communities. Most of these programs are found in urban slums and Arid and Semi-Arid Regions (ASAR). The programs are carried out by NGOs or Community Based Organizations engaged in Basic education, adult literacy and skills development within the community. In technical and vocational skills, non-formal training programs take the form of apprenticeship training. The relevance of non-formal training program is crucial to address long standing problems in skills gaps, illiteracy and lack of social cohesion. However little has been documented on the role of non-formal training programs in empowering the youth with employability skills (Ndiku, 2008).

While subject or trade specific skills are essential, it is also important for the trainee to possess a range of other interpersonal skills to operate well in the trade as employers both in service and production sectors are not only looking for generic or specific trade skills but also a demonstration of ability to apply a range of other skills (Fraser, Scott, Pauline, Thomson & Debra, 2019). Kenya like any other growing economy is undergoing social, economic and technological transformation. These changes affect the lives of people at all levels, hence the need for mechanisms to support the public especially the youth adapt to these changes (UNICEF, 2011).

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This study is embedded on social learning theory associated with Albert Bandura's work in the 1960s, and transformative theory of learning associated with Mezirow, (1991). The two theories are conjoint as they explain how people learn new behaviors and attitudes applicable to everyday life through interactions. The social learning theory explains that people learn behavior from their environment through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura 2006; 1998). It focuses on the learning that occurs by observation and modeling within a **social context**, as embraced in interactive participatory learning. Transformative theory holds that learners interpret and reinterpret their experiences to make meaning and produce learning. The theory has two elements; Instrumental learning focuses on learning through task-oriented problem solving and determination of cause and effect relationships. Communicative learning involves how individuals communicate their feelings, needs and desires. The planned learning activities and selected techniques created an environment where learners for application of these theories as they apply in different tasks.

2. Methodology

Quasi experimental design was used to provide for control and treatment group during training. The sample comprised of 60 members from youth groups in Nakuru County, who were purposefully selected. Thirty members were used as the experimental group which was trained through interactive methods (role play, simulations, group discussions and games), while the other thirty were used as control group and was trained through expository methods (Lecture, demonstration and question and answer). Data was collected using a guided questionnaire and observation check list designed to capture behavioral changes that reflected the presence or absence of the selected employability skills after the training. The data collection process allowed sufficient interaction between the researcher and the trainees for a better understanding of any form of transformation. The observation checklist was used to capture the trainees' manifestation of interpersonal behavior such as; ability to communicate, listening skills and team work as well as problem solving skills through; creativity and innovation, planning and organization and self -motivation. Qualitative and quantitative data was obtained which was analyzed descriptively and chi square test for association between the training methods and acquisition of employability skills among the youth was done through SSPS package version 20.

3. Result and Discussion

The objective of the study was to enhance acquisition of employability skills and determine the association between the training methods and the level of acquisition of the skills among the youth. The selected facets of the skills were categorized into two; the first was Interpersonal skills in; communication, listening skills and team work. The second was Problem solving through; creativity and innovation, planning and organization and self -confidence and expression

3.1. Communicating, Listening and Responding to Question

An observation checklist was used to collect data from the treatment and control group during training and the results recorded. The instrument sought for observed performance related to the selected facets. The skills level of acquisition was rated as poor, fair, good or very good and the obtained results are as reported in the following sections. Table 1 shows the results obtained from trainees on their ability to communicate listen and respond to questions.

		Communicating, Listening and Responding to Questions				Total
		Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	
Training	Treatment	0	1	10	9	20
	Control	3	18	10	0	31
	Total	3	19	20	9	51

Table 1: Ability to Communicate, Listen and Respond to Questions

The results show that 19 (95%) out of the 20 trainees from the treatment group were rated as having acquired the skills in ability to communicate, listen and respond to questions though in different levels. While 18 (58.1%) of the trainees in the control group were rated fair and 10 (32.3%) good out of the 31 trainees who participated. Majority (95%) in the treatment group acquired this facet of employability skill. The results can be interpreted to mean that there was a high level of acquisition of skills in communicating, listening and responding to questions among the trainees in the treatment than in the control group. To test if there was a statistically significant association between the training method and skills acquisition in communicating, listening and responding to questions a chi square test was done and the results are presented in table 2.

	Value χ^2	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Phi cramer's v-value	Approx. Sig. P-value
Pearson Chi-Square	26.050 ^a	3	.000	.715	.000
Likelihood Ratio	32.749	3	.000	.715	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.958	1	.000		
Number of Valid Cases				51	

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests and Strength of Association for Skills In Communicating Listening and Responding to Question

The calculated results for the Pearson Chi Square test give a χ^2 value of 26.05 and a p less than 0.05. This implies that there is a statistically significant association between the training method and acquisition of skills in communicating; listening and responding to questions. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The results are consistent with the World Bank report (2015) that facilitative training methods could develop employability skills among the youth. However, Jongetal (2006) observes that traditional methods enhance listening skills, but not communication and responding to questions as the learner is passive during the learning process but mostly engaged listening and taking notes. These skills are important to people involved in businesses as most of the customers place their orders through verbal descriptions, which require one to have good listening, and responding skills as well as asking questions for clarification of details. The skills are also useful as they assist one with ability to engage the customer in a conversation. The skills are important in marketing especially for youth engaged in various businesses. Inability to listen and communicate with customers may lead to poor sales or even loss of customers and business.

3.2. Ability in Team Building and Coordination

Ability for team work and coordination is also a facet of employability skills. The observed acquisition on these facets was rated as poor, fair, good and very good based on the performance during group tasks. The results are presented on Figure 1.

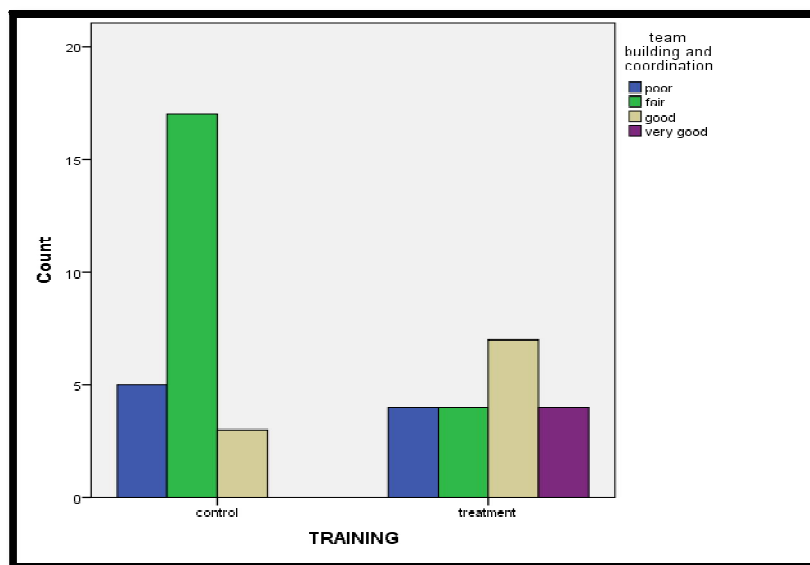


Figure 1: Ability in Team Building and Coordination

The results show that the levels of acquisition of skills in team building and coordination. In the treatment group 4 (21.1%) trainees rated very good and 7 (36.9%) were rated at good levels of acquisition of these skills. In the control group 4 (21.05%) trainees rated fair and another 4 (21.05%) rated poor out of the 19 trainees. In the control group, 18 (69.2%) trainees were rated to have fair level of acquisition, 3 (11.5%) good, while 5 (19.3%) were rated to have poor acquisition of skills in team building and coordination.

These results can be interpreted to mean that both the treatment and the control groups acquired the skills but at different levels. However, the trainees in the treatment group were better in terms of acquisition of the skills compared to those in the control group. To test for association between the training method and acquisition of this facet of the skill, a Pearson chi square test was done and the results are as shown on table 3.

	Value χ^2	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	P-cramer's v- Value	Approx.Sig. P- Value
Pearson Chi-Square	13.867 ^a	3	.003		.003
Likelihood Ratio	15.845	3	.001		.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.258	1	.012		.012
Number of Valid Cases	45				

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests and Strength of Association for Team Building and Coordination

The results show the calculated test of association, Chi square test result is 13.867 with a p- value of 0.003 which is less than $\alpha = 0.05$ level. The result shows that there is a statistically significant association between the training method and acquisition of skills in team building and coordination. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Team building and coordination are important facets of employability skills and are crucial in enhancing unity, cohesion, leadership and ability to make positive decisions concerning one's life (Jin, 2014). The skills are important among the youth in helping them work together and manage their scarce resources for sustainability. The skills are important in enhancing group cohesion which determines sustainability of their networks for social support. In today's

world it is hard for one to work and live in isolation, the heterogeneity of groups working together has increased over the years. People, especially the youth, have been moving to other continents in search of better work opportunities. At workplaces, teams with diverse backgrounds work with newer communities and groups. These heterogeneous groups need not only the technical knowhow for the job, but also need to be sensitive and empathetic to the teams and groups that they work with. This perception is also supported by Sharma (2016) and Raymond & Romanczyk (2008) that in team work interacting with each other directly and effectively improves relationships, functionality and efficiently enabling members to exchange skills profitably.

3.3. Developing Practical Solutions to Problems

The trainee's performance was rated during learning tasks and the results are as shown on table 4.

		Developing Practical Solutions to Problems				Total
		Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	
Training	Treatment	0	6	10	3	19
	Control	11	20	0	0	31
Total		11	26	10	3	50

Table 4: Ability to Develop Practical Solutions to Problems

The results show the observed performance on trainees' ability to develop practical solutions to problems during production. The results indicate that in the treatment group 6 (31.58%) rated fair in acquisition, 10 (52.63%) rated good and 3 (15.79%) rated very good. While in the control group 20 (64.5%) rated fair acquisition of this employability skill and 11(35.5%) rated poor. This means that of those trainees in the treatment group trained using interactive methods, majority were able to acquire the skill but at different levels. However, in the control group that used expository methods of training 64.5% acquired the skill fairly and 35.5% were rated to have poor acquisition. A chi square test for statistical significance in association between the training method and skill acquisition was carried out and the results are as shown on table 5.

	Value χ^2	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Phi cramer's v-value	Approx. Sig. P-value
Pearson Chi-Square	30.410 ^a	3	.000	.780	.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.316	3	.000	.780	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	25.445	1	.000		
Number of Valid Cases	50			50	

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests and Strength of Association for Ability to Develop Practical Solutions to Problems

The calculated Chi square test result is equal to 30.41 with a p- value of $0.000 \leq 0.05$ significant level, which shows that there is a statistically significant association between the training method and acquisition of practical skills to solving problems. The null hypothesis was rejected.

The finding is consistent with Snell, Gekara and Gatt, (2016) who observes that group tasks enables the youth gain confidence and initiative in solving problems within the group or work related. Such youth are able to apply a range of strategies or approaches to solve problems which may include addressing personal and business-related issues. The skills are acquired through identifying a problem and looking for ways to address the challenges. The finding is also supported by Schwarz and Yair (2010) who observe that training in vocational skills in non-formal set up enhances creativity and innovation which is an ingredient to solve problems, risk-taking and identifying opportunities as well as entrepreneurial characteristics.

3.4. Ability to Manage Time and Resources

The observed performance was rated as poor, fair, good and very good. Data obtained from the observation check list was analyzed and the results are as shown on table 6.

		Time and resources management				Total
		Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	
Training	Treatment	0	3	15	1	19
	Control	8	21	2	0	31
Total		8	24	17	1	50

Table 6: Time and Resource and Management

The results on table 6 shows that 19 trainees in the treatment group acquired the skill at different levels, 3 (15.8%) rated fair, 15 (78.9%) good and 1 (5.3%) very good. Trainees who were in the control group were rated as 21(67.7%) fair, 2 (6.5%) good and 8 (25.8%) poor in acquisition of skills to manage time and resources during

production. The results imply that the trainees who in the treatment group showed enhanced acquisition of skills in ability to manage time and resources during production than those in the control group who used expository methods. To test for significant association between the training methods and acquisition of this skill a chi square test was done and the results are shown on table 7.

	Value χ^2	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Phi cramer's v-value	Approx. Sig. P-value
Pearson Chi-Square	31.368 ^a	3	.000	.792	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.006	3	.000	.792	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	25.720	1	.000		
Number of Valid Cases	50			50	

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests and Strength of Association for Time and Resource Management

Table 7 shows the calculated Pearson Chi square test result is equal to 31.368 with a Phi, Cramer's value of 0.792. P value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 significant level set for the study. This result shows that there is a statistically significant association between acquisition of skills in time and resources management during production and the training method used on the treatment group. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings are consistent with Zurcher, (2014); UNESCO, (2012); Raymond and Romanczyk (2008) that interactive and participative methods of learning could develop learners' ability to manage time and resources and also contribute to individual's effectiveness and accountability in different ventures. According to National Quality Council (2010) these skills can be manifested in different forms such as ability to manage resources, allocate time, money, materials, space, and staff. Majority of the youth intend to start small businesses to improve their lives; hence the ability to manage time and meet deadlines is very important in building trust and business relationship with customers.

3.5. Ability to Develop Self Confidence in Expression

This is also an attribute of employability skills and helps to build the self- concept necessary for the youth. An observation checklist was used to assess skills among the trainees and the level was rated as poor, fair, good and very good. The results are as shown on table 8.

		Developed confidence in expressing self				Total
		Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	
Training	Treatment	0	11	8	1	20
	Control	2	19	7	3	31
Total		2	30	15	4	51

Table 8: Developing Self Confidence in Expression

The results on table 8 show that in the treatment group, the trainee's level of skill acquisition rated was; 11 (55%) fair, 8 (40%) good and 1 (5%) very good. While in the control group, 19 (61.3%) were rated fair, 7 (22.6%) good and 3 (9.7%) very good and only 2 (6.5%) were rated poor. The result implies that though all the 20 trainees from the treatment group acquired skills in developing confidence and expressing self but in different levels. There was a higher level of acquisition of this skill among the control group that was taught using expository methods. Table 9 shows the results of the chi square for association between the method and skills acquisition.

	Value χ^2	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Phi cramer's v-value	Approx. Sig. P-value
Pearson Chi-Square	2.965 ^a	3	.397	.241	.397
Likelihood Ratio	3.654	3	.301	.241	.397
Linear-by-Linear Association	.526	1	.468		
N of Valid Cases	51			51	

Table 9: Chi-Square Tests and Strength of Association for Developing Self Confidence in Expression

The calculated Pearson Chi-square test results indicate a p-value $.397 \geq 0.05$ level of significant set for the study. This implies that there is no statistically significant association between the training method and acquisition of skills in developing self-confidence and expression. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted. The result implies that more trainees in the control group were able to develop skills in self-confidence and expression than the treatment group. This could be associated to the fact that developing self-confidence and expression is a personal attribute than a collective one. The acquisition could be associated with the appreciation and compliments that the members received during product exhibition and presentations.

The interpretation is inconsistent with Lucas (2014) who observed that vocational skills develop self-esteem and confidence in a trainee, which is an accomplishment that is normally complimented by those who view the product raising

the individual's confidence and self-esteem. This means that the ability to produce a tangible product motivates the person raising a sense of self-worth and excitement. The compliments and appreciation of the product may have improved the self-worth on the control group which in return enhanced confidence in self-expression.

It is also important to consider that the type of social background of majority youth have greatly eroded their self-worth over time, which in return affects their personality, confidence and self-expression. It may therefore require much more than just a training method to enhance the level of self-confidence and ability to express self. This is consistent with Morton (2011) and Kelly (2003) who observed that to adequately improve the self-concept of the youth a psychological approach is also required to back the training.

The explanation is consistent with the European Commission report (2013), that some facets of employability skills are much more indescribable and difficult to quantify and to formally develop; they also relate to issues of creativity, self-initiative and self-control. However, every person possesses some degree of employability skills but lacks awareness, understanding and ability to apply the skills to different life situations (Kim, 2013; Weeden, 2011). From the preceding results and discussion, it is evident that not all facets of employability skills can be enhanced through interactive training methods. There may be other factors that contribute to acquisition of employability skills but beyond the scope of this study.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant association between the interactive training methods and acquisition of most of the selected facets of employability skills namely; ability to communicate and listening skills, team building, time and resource management as well as ability to develop practical solutions to solve specific problems. However, the interactive methods used did not enhance self-confidence and self-expression among the youth. Out of school youth may require psycho socio support to benefit from skills development programs.

5. Recommendations

The following are suggestions for enhancing the acquisition of employability skills among the youth:

- Educators and policy makers in youth development should set up recognized non-formal programs to bridge the skills gap among the out of school youth.
- Further research should be conducted on how to improve self-confidence and esteem among the vulnerable youth

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