The contribution of entrepreneurship education course offered in technical training colleges in enhancing management skills of informal sector entrepreneurs in Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is broadly defined as education which is mainly to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, know how and understanding, and necessary for employment in a particular occupation, trade or group of occupations (Atchoarena, D & Delluc, A 2001). It is the provision of skills, knowledge, attitude, and values needed for the place of work. Technical and Vocational Education Training in Kenya is targeted to produce entrepreneurs who are able to create own jobs rather than seeking employment in any organization. That is why entrepreneurship training in Kenya is incorporated in TVET college curriculum. Entrepreneurship education is designed in order to support graduates, existing and potential entrepreneurs to create and run their own business rather than expecting employment from government, private or NGOs. So as to develop entrepreneurial culture to all groups of the society, entrepreneurship education is given in different countries including Kenya in formal, informal and non-formal way through TVET colleges/institutes.

In Kenya there are thousands of technical training college graduates who pass their certificate or diploma examinations but due the prevailing unemployment crisis they cannot find employment. The informal sector has turned out to be one alternative. Their success in business in the informal sector greatly depends on entrepreneurial management skills they gained in college though entrepreneurship education subject. In Kenya, entrepreneurship education is delivered to all public postsecondary training institutions. The introduction of entrepreneurship education in technical training colleges in Kenya represents an innovation in tertiary education institutions that is relevant to the informal sector. According to Haan (2006), entrepreneurship education programmes help develop attitudes favourable to starting one’s own business and provide knowledge and skills for running a business, e.g. business law, accounting and bookkeeping, credit and finance, and marketing.

Farstad (2002) researched on entrepreneurship education programmes offered in secondary and tertiary education institutions in Kenya, Botswana, and Uganda. He found that in
a comparison of graduates of general secondary education programmes and those from technical and vocational education programmes, the latter group was more likely to start businesses within a few years of graduation. This is because graduates from technical and vocational education were equipped with entrepreneurship skills through Entrepreneurship Education and Business Planning courses they were taught. The technical education provided a skill that was then honed on the job with an apprenticeship and wage employment before setting out to start a new business. Skills development encompasses a broad range of core skills (entrepreneurial, communication, financial, management and leadership) so that individuals are equipped for productive activities and employment opportunities (wage employment, self-employment and income generation activities). Furnishing management skills is required to improve productivity in the informal sector.

Entrepreneurship education has encouraged schools to think outside traditional patterns of pedagogy and classroom instruction. Periods of mandatory work placement have been introduced along with compulsory development of a business plan subject to examination and grading. This subject is aimed at imparting graduates with entrepreneurial, communication, financial, management and leadership skills with are essential to entrepreneurs. The researcher conceptually assumes that with the ‘right’ entrepreneurship education, the informal sector operators would develop and most of the operators’ problems on management skills would be alleviated. Against this background, the study aimed at determining the contribution of entrepreneurship education in public technical training colleges in enhancing management skills of informal sector entrepreneurs in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using case study approach. A case study of informal sector entrepreneurs in Nairobi region was conducted. The case study was chosen as it is more focused in yielding the type of data anticipated. A case study allows a researcher to explore in depth a program, an event; an activity and researchers collect detailed information using variety of data collection procedures (Creswell, 2003). The case study was ideal in that, relevant data was collected using one group as the idea of comparison was deemed not necessary. The population of the study consisted of all technical college graduates working in informal sector in Nairobi region. The Nairobi region was chosen because it has a high number of informal sector operators compared to other regions in Kenya. The population was selected because they are better placed to investigate the contribution of entrepreneurship education in public technical training colleges in enhancing management skills of informal sector entrepreneurs in the Kenya informal sector. A sample of thirty participants was randomly selected from the population. There are many informal sector establishments in Nairobi area. However, the researcher concentrated on only four informal sector centres (Gikomba, Kamkunji, Jericho, and Ziwani) which are the biggest and most popular and populous. This gave the advantage that both mature and young operators were interviewed.

In order to triangulate findings, multiple strategies were employed for data collection. The study employed a combination of interviews and participant observation in collecting data. A detailed interview schedule was developed to guide the data collection. Participant observation was the other data gathering strategy used. Items and points observed were carefully screened and then listed. An observation checklist was then constructed to guide the observer. Observation of the operatives at work also helped in validation and cross checking of the issues discussed in the interviews. Hair et al (1998) suggests that the best way in which to ensure content validity is to subject the instrument to judgmental validation by experts in the area. In this study the experts were two lecturers at Gusii Institute of Technology, Research and Development department who examined them and provided valuable suggestions and comments, which were used as basis to modify the research items to make them adaptable to the study. Based on the feedback offered by those experts who examined the interview schedule, the terminologies, questions, objectives and content of the interview schedule was modified to either include or exclude some items. This is due to the fact that some items could have been included that captures irrelevant data or some items have been excluded that would have helped the researcher to capture some important information regarding the study. Their feedback, both positive and negative, shaped the final version of the interview schedule.

The researcher made many visits to the informal sector business site, to familiarize himself with the operations and people at the Nairobi informal sector centers. This is important because people tend to resist any new person who would want to interview them. Talking to individuals began as soon as rapport was established. Many visits were necessary because of the conversational techniques used. After interviewing, the researcher watched the operations to cross-validate the interviews. A report was compiled immediately after the interview. It was necessary to revisit some interviewees to get them to clarify certain issues which would be missing when writing the draft report. Data collected from the interviews was analyzed by qualitative means. Meanings of the discussions were drawn, coded and categorized into themes using the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The responses from the interviews were analyzed into concepts and related concepts were categorized into families. Themes were then deduced from the code families. Themes from the data then told the story. Some data was quantified to give clearer meaning to the story. Values and meanings were attached to the observations. Cross validation between what was discussed and observed was done. This was done by changing and observing what was discussed.
FINDINGS

The results showed that the operatives in Nairobi informal sector were characterized by low levels of secondary school passes or had only attained primary education. Their ages ranged from twenty to forty-five years. The sector also had many school drop-outs. Forces that made people join the home industry were varied. Notably, some joined as a result of job losses in the formal sector as a result of lack of employment in the formal sector. Others were drawn by the successes of those already operating in the home industry. Family influence also brought some to the informal sector industry. Family tradition in craft still extended to junior family members. These came to Nairobi informal sectors when the Nairobi Municipality designated these areas for craft and trade in the informal sector. Of importance was the fact that the operatives indicated that they were not willing to go out to seek work in the formal sector any more because they felt that what they were now doing was important and that it paid well besides the fact that they were not formally qualified. The operatives enjoyed the fluidness, flexibility and diversity of the products and trade at Nairobi informal sector. The independence they enjoyed was better than the constrained atmosphere of the formal sector they said.

Because of their low level of formal education most operatives interviewed had, they were not formally trained in the jobs they were doing. The entrepreneurship skills they engaged in were mostly acquired through on-the-job training. They gained skills by acting as assistants to those who were experienced or through association with the trade over a long period of time. Some had formal training from companies they worked for before they were retrenched. The spaces the operatives worked from were owned by the municipality owned and they lease the stands. Some of the working system is feudal. The original owner sub-leased to tenants who paid every month for their work places. Some operatives shared stands and contributed equally at the end of the month. In some cases the original landlord still operated their stands. When asked what they (operatives) thought about how their entrepreneurship education was helping their operations, they said whatever education or literacy they had was adequate.

The Nairobi informal sector operators said their businesses were mostly manufacturing or repairing and marketing which did not demand high levels of education. Their ‘O’ level or primary education seemed adequate for their purposes. However, they expressed high consideration for anyone among them with entrepreneurship education. Those with technical education certificates were regarded as better skilled in entrepreneurship and that they were quick to learn new tasks and improved business capabilities. The operatives yearned for more education if given a chance. They longed for training in entrepreneurship training skills that were in line with their trade and the present business technology. There was also desire to be trained in management. Observations made tended to confirm that services offered depended on the craftiness of the person, customers specifications and that the clients’ money demanded better products and quality of the products. Operatives with entrepreneurship education seemed more organized in their work compared to those with lower qualifications.

The study investigated the contribution of entrepreneurship education in technical training colleges in enhancing management skills of informal sector entrepreneurs in Kenya. It identified and confirmed the idea that entrepreneurship education has a lot of potential in the TVET graduates who end up working in the informal sector. Such education offers the only viable alternative in successive business development development. Entrepreneurship education in Technical and vocational education and training provides a sound base for both the formal and informal sector manpower needs of the economy, particularly in the developing world.

The study found that those involved in the informal sector at Nairobi informal sector centers had qualifications ranging from primary to tertiary education. School drop-outs were also found there. The operation level of the informal sector provides simple but basic and necessary everyday needs of the local artifacts and services to meet the community. This being the case, the entrepreneurship educational qualifications necessary to enable the manufacture and provision of services maybe somewhat low. The low educational demands of the sector should not necessarily mean total absence of entrepreneurship education. Those with primary education seemed to do well in the sector. The output and quality of goods and services tended to improve with entrepreneurship education. The operatives at Nairobi informal sector centers indicated that even primary education was adequate for them. The main issue was not education levels but the type of education required. Those with entrepreneurship education were highly regarded and seemed to do well. Technical and vocational education contributed positively to the operation of the informal sector development.

Many operatives thought entrepreneurship education gave them better chances of quickly grasping the problems that they confronted in their businesses. Those with entrepreneurship education seemed to have better business management skills. The group which was retrenched from the formal sector but was operating from Nairobi informal sector centers, ranged from those without high educational qualifications to those who had on-the-job training experience. Again, entrepreneurship education had helped those retrenched from formal industries to join the informal sector easily. There was a call by almost all operatives that there was a dire need to expand and improve both technical and trade skills. They felt that with a good entrepreneurship education base, they could expand and improve their operations. Some indicated the need for business training. If the operatives were granted entrepreneurship skills, surely the image and outlook of the informal sector would improve.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, there is definitely a need for an educational intervention if the informal sector is to develop. The members in the informal sector seem to appreciate the contribution of entrepreneurship education in informal sector development. The study has shown that entrepreneurship education contributes immensely to the everyday operations of the informal sector. Those with entrepreneurship education tended to do better than those without or with general education. One can recommend the strengthening of technical and vocational education in schools, mostly at secondary level, by introducing entrepreneurship education so as to help those who drop out of school for one reason or the other or for those who are unable to proceed to tertiary institution. This would help in that, those who drop out of the system would benefit from whatever entrepreneurship education they had acquired. Those who finish school could then be involved in self-employment or join the informal sector like Nairobi informal sector centers, if they failed to secure employment in industry. These school leavers could utilize the entrepreneurship education acquired from schools, to find something worthwhile to do. They could start joint ventures as cooperatives or go solo using whatever skills they learnt at school. Many retrenchees from the formal sector bring entrepreneurship skills learnt in their jobs to the informal sectors. This proves that technical and vocational skills are essential for the survival of the school leaver and the retrenchee.

The study recommends that schools teach and train skills which are directly usable in the informal sector. The study also recommends entrepreneurship education training programmes for those already working in the informal sector. A needs analysis research should be carried out to determine the exact educational requirements useful in the informal sector. There is also a need to carry out a research to assess the productivity and performance of the operatives at Nairobi informal sector centers in comparison to that of school leavers, drop-outs and those from the formal sector. This would then facilitate a base for drawing up programmes of action.

REFERENCES


