

Evolution of TVET in Kenya: From Then to Now

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Abstract

Technical, vocational education and training (TVET) in Kenya has undergone major changes since colonialists introduced it in the nineteenth century. While the colonial government viewed TVET as a social and economic weapon against “an academic inferior” race, the present day TVET is viewed as the answer to economic and financial freedom and the solution to youth unemployment, skills acquisition, lifelong learning and fulfillment of a country’s ideal. This paper takes the reader through documented progression of TVET from the nineteenth century to the present day. The paper relies on government policies and research documents to chronologically detail the events leading to present day TVET noting that

TVET has evolved in the areas of science, technology and innovation to provide skills that are expected to propel Kenya to middle-level industrialized status by the year 2030.

Key words: Evolution, Kenya, TVET, Technology

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Introduction

Technical, vocational education and training (TVET) can generally be viewed as acquisition of skills, vocations and the development of ways of learning to facilitate workplace success (Munro 2007). In Kenya, TVET is recognized as a priority area, contributing to sustainable development. This is manifested in key policy documents among them: *Economic Recovery Strategy Programme (ERS) for wealth and employment creation: 2003-2007* (Government of Kenya [GoK] 2003), and *Kenya Vision 2030* (GoK 2007).

Over the years the Kenyan government and relevant institutions have made progressive changes in line with skills development and the dynamics of the workplace. The government realizes that TVET plays an important role in supplying requisite skills to improve employee’s productivity, occupational integration, economic progression, fostering income levels and increasing employment opportunities (Ngure 2013; Budría and Telhado-Pereira 2009). Additionally, TVET contributes to equity and access, while expanding social responsibility, encouraging entrepreneurship, stimulating competitiveness for life-long learning concepts and sustainable development.

This paper recounts the development of the TVET from the colonial era to the present, highlighting the major documents and policies that have informed the progress.

TVET in the Nineteenth century

Africa made a shift from slave trade to colonisation in the mid-nineteenth century (Mwiria 2001). This shift was primarily motivated by the European colonisers’ desire to establish what was commonly known as “legitimate commerce” – a tool for economic domination. It was clear from the outset that colonialism was not to be carried out in the interest of the colonised people; rather, it was designed and operationalised to the exclusive benefit of the imperial states. The nature of the colonial economies and their supporting infrastructures attest to this fact. To a large measure, colonial economies focused on the production of major cash crops such as tea, coffee, cocoa and cotton, and the extraction of forest products and minerals (Sifuna1990). No major industries were established in the colonies and infrastructure was only developed around the key economic centres. These economies did not expand as to require much local labour except for tasks requiring unskilled labourers; hence, there was very little demand for education and training.

Education for Africans was limited to only a small elite, primarily for social control. Skilled native labour would help the colonisers achieve the goal of economic advancement as well as help in the propagation of Christianity (Sifuna1990). In an 1847 Memorandum on Education on industrial schools for coloured races in West and Central Africa, the Privy Council severely criticised what it called “a bookish type of education” for the small elitist African group. Instead, the Council recommended “a strong vocational orientation” that would lead to

“settled and thriving peasantry” as a major component of African education. Curiously, the colonial school curriculum did not put emphasis on professions such as engineering, technology and allied subjects (Mwiria 2001). The so-called vocational education carried a racial overtone by stressing that Africans should be trained so that they would fulfil tasks appropriate to their presumed intellectual and social inferiority.

The Council’s view on vocational education was amplified by Lord Frederick Lugard, the architect of the British Empire in East and West Africa. In his 1922 book, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Lugard argued that colonial education ought to be designed so that it serves the needs of the colonial state. Colonial schools therefore functioned as part of an ideological state apparatus, designed for capital reproduction and accumulation. Accordingly, the educated labour in Africa consisted largely of low-level functionaries whose main task was to promote and maintain the status quo (Lugard 1922). Inter-territorial education reports like the Phelps-Stokes Commission of 1924 and the “African education; a study of educational policy and practice in British tropical Africa” of 1952, published by Oxford University Press, also emphasised on technical and vocational education. Consequently, technical and vocational education became a major feature of colonial education policy and practice.

For a long period during the colonial era in Africa, most missionary and government primary schools were vocational. Students were bound to follow such basic trades as masonry and carpentry (King 1987). Government grants-in-aid, particularly in the early years, were primarily allocated for artisan apprenticeship in such countries as Kenya. No school could attract substantial grants unless it was strictly following a vocational and technical curriculum.

The evolution of TVET in Kenya

The transfer of such skills as building, pottery and making of tools like pots, knives, hoes, axes and spears was an integral part of the traditional African society. Mwiria (2001) narrates how the traditional African societies functioned. As children grew up, they were expected to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that would fully integrate them into the traditions, customs and relevant activities of their respective societies. Parents, siblings, elders and villagers were responsible for the transfer of these skills to young people. This indigenous training was essentially an education for living, its main purpose being to train the youth for adulthood within the society. An apprenticeship system also existed where young people received occupational training from experienced craftsmen such as blacksmiths, potters and basket makers. This type of learning did not have a formal curriculum.

Western education was first introduced in Kenya by missionaries (Sifuna 1990). The Portuguese Roman Catholics were the first missionaries to settle on the East African coast. By 1557 they had established monasteries at the Kenyan coastal towns of Mombasa and Lamu. The Lutherans, through the Church Missionary Society (CMS), were the second set of Christian missionaries to come to Kenya. Among them were Johann Ludwig Krapf, Johann Rebman, and Jacob Erhardt. When Africa was partitioned in 1884, the British established rule in Kenya, which led to an increase of Christian missionaries who moved further inland (Mart 2011). The primary goal of missionary education was to make converts and train catechists, but it also established practical skills in the curriculum, like carpentry and gardening – chiefly to maintain mission stations – and literacy. The British colonial government would, however, urge the missionaries to expand the educational system to include a technical focus in the curriculum, in addition to religion.

When the British colonial government’s first educational concern was to provide schools for the European settlers’ children leaving the education of African children in the hands of missionaries. However, the government established an education department in 1911 to help in the development of education provided by Christian missions.

In 1914, the first government school for Africans, known as Government African School (GAS), was set up in Machakos. This, according to Generals (2000) was an industrial school modelled

... on the Negro industrial schools of America founded by General Hampton and Booker Washington . . . to educate the boys mainly through the hands, providing a sound general education and technical training in one trade for each pupil.

When the colonial government started the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway in 1896, it had brought Indian traders and labourers. These traders and labourers were instrumental in the training of local artisans and craftsmen, complementing the work of Christian missionaries who had brought technicians from Britain to train Kenyans in different skills. The newly trained local artisans and craftsmen assisted in the maintenance of tools,

equipment and services for the railway (GoK 1978). Formal skills training started when the colonial government formally established the Native Industrial Training Depot (NITD) at Kabete, west of Nairobi in July 1924. NITD offered three-year trade courses for primary school leavers (King 2007).

Education for Africans

Education in Kenya was modelled around practices in other British colonies and consisted of three broad and overlapping phases, namely traditional, missionary and government. The three goals of education were to provide universal primary education, to ensure enough places at the secondary and higher levels for those who passed the primary school level, and to organise the educational system to respond to the country's manpower needs. The latter was in recognition that expenditure in education was an investment in economic development.

The Phelps-Stokes Commission Report of 1925 had recommended that education “should develop pupils for usefulness in their own community, in government, or in farming.” Following on this, the Education Department's annual report for 1926 stratified the African community into three groups:

1. The great mass living in villages of the Native Reserves,
2. Artisans and craftsman, and
3. Members of the educated and skilled professions required by the state and by commerce.

Both through legislation and socioeconomic factors, Kenya developed a three-tiered racially stratified society: 1) European farmers, civil servants, and businessmen; 2) Asian shopkeepers and artisans; and 3) Africans working on farms owned by the Europeans, or living in their own reserves. The "Devonshire White Paper" of 1923 made an official declaration that African interests were "paramount." Such a policy, however, was prevented from being implemented through pressure exerted upon the Legislative Council by the European settlers (Mart 2011). To further the cause of these settlers, who considered Africans as a source of cheap labour, the government passed legislation prohibiting them from growing cash crops (Sifuna 1991). In 1937, however, a government-appointed commission under the chairmanship of Bertrand Sackville De La Warr, emphasised technical over academic education for Africans.

In 1948, an institute was established to provide technical education to Muslim students in East Africa (Mackatiani et al. 2016). The Mombasa Institute of Muslim Education, as it was called, offered courses in mechanical and electrical engineering, seamanship and navigation, and woodwork. In the early 1950s, the Utrecht Brothers, Catholic missionaries from the Netherlands, established the Mawego Vocational Trade School in Homa Bay and later, in 1962, the Kaiboi Vocational Trades School in Kapsabet (Berman 1975; King 2007). In 1953, Modern High School in Nairobi (the current Nairobi Technical Training Institute), which had been offering vocational courses in mechanical engineering, carpentry and joinery to the Asian community, changed its name to Technical High School. More technical secondary schools were established in Thika, Machakos, Meru and Sigalagala between 1949 and 1957 (Berman 1975). In addition to the school curriculum, they offered two-year artisan courses in such areas as auto repair, welding, masonry and electronics.

A new educational tempo was first felt in Kenya around 1960 when the end of the Mau Mau Emergency instigated the European community and the government in particular to accelerate the training of Africans to occupy responsible positions (Berman 1975). More and improved training was offered, particularly for the African staff of African District Councils, and in agriculture. Firms also began to consider accommodating African management trainees. The economic need for high-level manpower began to influence and shape education to a great extent. Political factors too played a major part as education was considered a tool for preparing Africans for responsibility in an independent nation. Under the Sessional Paper No.77 of 1956/1957 on the Development Programme (1957-1960), crash programmes for Africanising the civil service commenced (Hunter 1963; GoK 1970).

Independence

Kenya attained independence from Britain on 12 December 1963. From that point on, the new post-colonial government started confronting the difficult problems of nation building and economic and social development (GoK 1978). With a high dose of enthusiasm, the government immediately committed itself to addressing the challenges of poverty, ignorance and disease. Education, therefore, became one of the independent nation's key priorities.

Within a week after attaining independence, the Minister for Education, Joseph D. Otiende, appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Professor Simeon Ominde of the University College, Nairobi, to restructure the entire education spectrum.

The Ominde Report was perhaps summarised best in the first Development Plan of 1964-1970. Kenya's long-range educational goals were outlined as:

1. To provide universal primary education,
2. To ensure enough places at the secondary and higher levels to educate those with recognised abilities, and
3. To organise the educational system to meet the country's manpower needs.

Vocational education was introduced in the secondary school curriculum following the recommendations of the 1976 National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (popularly referred to as the Gachathi Commission) (GoK 2015). The Committee recommended the

...restructuring of the education system in order for it to more effectively meet basic needs and promote income earning opportunities for school leavers, a change in the attitudes of pupils in favour of agriculture, crafts and productive manual labour and pre-vocational skills that would stimulate self-confidence and creativity related to self-employment.

It was hoped that through vocational education, young people would learn the skills that would enhance their chances of pursuing active, productive and meaningful careers and lives.

The 8-4-4 system of education

The Government of Kenya established a Presidential Working Party in 1980 to examine the feasibility of setting up a second university in the country. The working party was also to address itself to the need of restructuring the entire school system.

In its 1981 report, referred to as the Mackay Report, the working party recommended an extension of primary education from seven to eight-years (GoK 1999). The eight-year primary education was to be restructured to offer numeracy and literacy skills in the first six years and basic education with practical skills in the last two years. The immediate implementation of the recommendation was the abolishment of the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) examination in 1984, which was frantically replaced with the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) (GoK 2012). The first cohort of Standard Eight pupils took the examination at the end of 1985.

According to GoK (1984) in a booklet titled, *8-4-4 System of Education*, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology outlined the rationale for the programme as:

- *Challenge for national development*: The concept of the 8-4-4 system is aimed at responding to the challenge of national development and the participation of youth in development.
- *Need for a more relevant curriculum*: The education system hitherto followed by the country did not cater for the greater number of pupils enrolled. There is the need therefore to provide practical oriented curriculum that will offer a wide-range of employment opportunities.
- *Equitable distribution of education resources*: To ensure that there are equal opportunities for all students regardless of their place of origin, creed or race by providing equitable distribution of educational resources.
- *Technical and vocational training*: To ensure that students graduating at all levels have some scientific and practical knowledge that can be utilised for either self-employment, salaried employment or further training.

The primary school curriculum was therefore expanded to include practical subjects such as Arts and Crafts, Home Science and Agriculture, with the aim of achieving mastery of skills. The new secondary education curriculum included Industrial Agriculture Education and Business Education courses. One of the objectives of secondary education was to enhance the transition of graduates into the world of work as well as prepare them for further training in relevant post-secondary training institutions.

As early as 1988, however, the 8-4-4 system, whose guiding philosophy was "Education for self-reliance", was already under significant scrutiny. It was criticised for being only practically oriented on paper, and for being "overambitious" and "overloaded." The curriculum became content-driven and focused more on breadth rather

than depth, leading to rote learning. Further, the government failed to put up workshops and laboratories in schools, relying on parents and communities to construct and equip them.

In 1998 the government formed another commission on the education system in Kenya known as the “Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya” or the Koech Commission (GoK 2012). A key feature of the commission was the proposal to introduce a new system of education with the concept of a “Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training” (TIQUET).

The Commission’s report, published in 1999, recommended an additional responsibility:

... a core of generic skills that would aid the graduate to better communicate, work in teams with less supervision, use information technology to access new ways of doing things, promote entrepreneurship education that has become invaluable to those in paid employment or in self-employment... and the ability to be creative, innovative as well as an intrinsic initiative for problem-solving. (GoK 1999)

The Commission report was ambiguous on how many vocational subjects could be taught in schools, recommending instead a reduction of vocational subjects and specifically the scrapping of industrial courses from the secondary school curriculum. In effect, the Commission could have been the genesis of the mutilation of the original intent of the 8-4-4 system of education.

Notwithstanding the commission’s recommendations, various policy documents came to recognise gaps in the 8-4-4 curriculum (GoK 1999). These gaps included the following: the curriculum for basic education was not aligned to the requirements of *Constitution of Kenya 2010* and the Kenya Vision 2030; the curriculums for some education levels were not appropriate for the age of the learners; the 8-4-4 curriculum did not provide for essential pathways, therefore impeding pursuance of individual interest and development of talent; and, the education structure framework was rigid and did not facilitate entry and re-entry at different levels.

By the early 2000s, there was overwhelming evidence pointing to the urgent need for a complete overhaul of Kenya’s education system. The momentum was accelerated by the June 2008 launch of the Kenya Vision 2030, which was quickly followed by the promulgation of a new constitution in August 2010.

Kenya’s curriculum reform

The Kenya Vision 2030 is a long-term development blueprint that seeks to transform Kenya into a newly industrialising, middle-income country by the year 2030 (GoK 2007). The blueprint envisions a high quality of life for all citizens. It designates education and training to play a critical role as enablers of this transformation, primarily through technological innovation and a shift from knowledge-reproduction to knowledge-production. To achieve this, Vision 2030 advocates the availability of a critical mass of well-qualified human resources through life-long training and education.

Kenya, like most African countries, faces a growing challenge of a ‘youth bulge’, with 80 per cent of the population being under 35 years old (UNDP 2013). Those aged 15–34 years, or 35 per cent of the population, have the highest unemployment rate at 67 per cent. Views differ as to the causes of this predicament. While policymakers on the one hand are reluctant to admit the extent of youth unemployment, employers apportion more blame to the institutions of learning for producing “half-baked” graduates. On the other hand, the institutions of learning blame employers for not offering students with apprenticeship and internship opportunities, which would provide them with work-related skills (Bozo, et. al, 2019).

Resulting from many years of feedback from the labour market and other major stakeholders, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) conducted an evaluation on the primary and secondary school curriculum in 2009 (GoK 2015). The evaluation report revealed gaps in the achievement of the national goals of education, curriculum objectives, implementers’ capacity, assessment and the management structures that support curriculum implementation. The findings further indicated that the curriculums were not in tandem with the global trends with regards to competency-based learning (Ngure 2013). It recommended greater emphasis on practical and vocational education, nurturing of talents and inclusion of critical life skills. It also recommended that the focus on the cognitive domain should be de-emphasised. Appreciating that education must respond to the emerging social, technological and economic demands of the work-place, and to address the twin problems of youth unemployment and inequality, the government established a Taskforce on the ‘Realignment of the Education and Training Sector to the Kenya Vision 2030 and Constitution of Kenya 2010,’ in 2011. The taskforce was chaired by Professor Douglas Odhiambo (GoK 2014).

Based on the taskforce’s 2012 report, the government developed Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2015 on ‘Reforming Education and Training in Kenya’ (GoK 2012). The Sessional Paper recommended the reforming of the Education and Training Sector to provide for the development of the individual learner’s potential in a holistic and integrated manner. It further recommended a competency-based curriculum, establishment of a national learning assessment system, early identification and nurturing of talents, the introduction of national values and national cohesion and their integration into the curriculum, and the introduction of three learning pathways at senior school level (Riechi et al. 2015). Another major outcome of the Taskforce was the subsequent development of a National Curriculum Policy which paved way for curriculum reform, with the aim of preparing the Kenyan youth for a knowledge-intensive economy. This was in alignment with the 2012 African Economic Outlook that recognised the pivotal importance of education and appropriate skills as the prevailing solutions to mitigating unemployment and vulnerability among the youth.

Two of the goals that the policy identified for a new national curriculum were (1) to improve quality of education at all levels through competency-based curricula, and (2) to increase enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related programmes and courses and enhance gender parity in these areas (GoK 2015). To achieve the overarching goal of quality, the new curriculum was grounded in a competency approach. In this approach, quality is perceived as the effectiveness of the degree to which objectives are met, or described levels of competence are achieved. While this is useful, what’s however essential for the curriculum’s effectiveness are the actual competencies that are used, and how their achievement is measured (UNDP 2013). It was also argued that to implement a competency-based curriculum effectively, the structure of the education system also needed to change from the 8-4-4 system a 2-6-3-3 format (as shown in Fig. 2.1), with a mission to “nurture every learner’s potential.” (Mutebi & Kiplagat 2022).

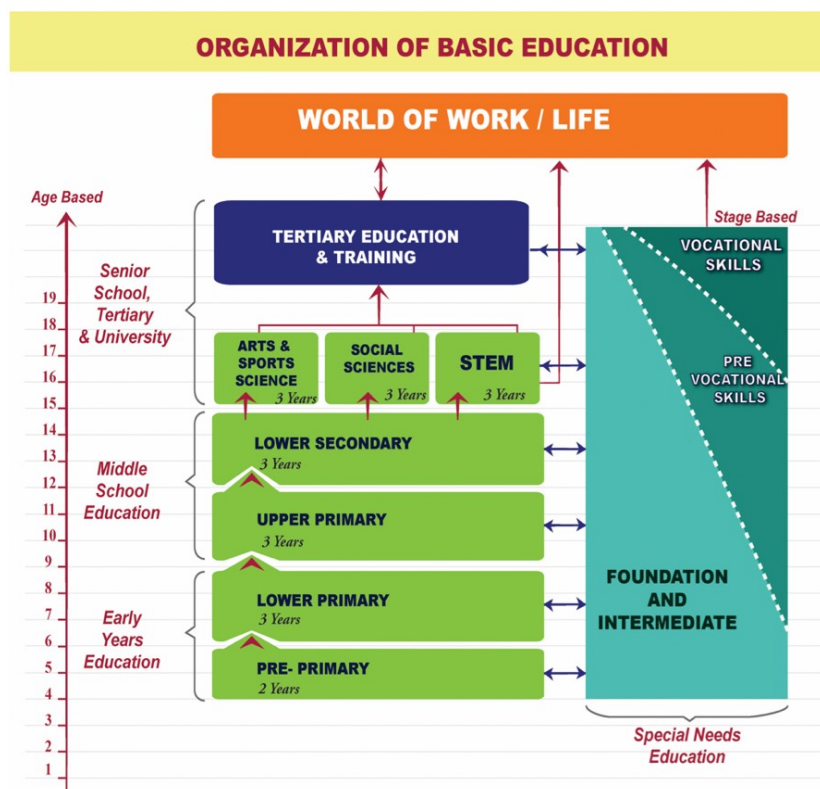


Figure 1. Basic education structural model

The competency-based curriculum was implemented in 2017 as a national pilot starting with Grade 1.

The TVET curriculum

In Kenya today, TVET encompasses effective ways of skills upgrading such as apprenticeships, on-the-job training, vocational secondary schools, sector-specific TVET institutions, and vocational pathways within training institutions (Rodgers & Boyer 2006). TVET incorporates technical training institutions (TTI), vocational

polytechnics, micro and small enterprises training and demonstration centres, and National Technical Training institutions (Nyerere 2009; Ngure 2022). At the end of the training period, TVET graduates acquire certificates or diplomas in various disciplines, while university graduates from the Technical training Universities are awarded technical degrees.

The curriculum offered by the public TVET institutions in Kenya is a collaborative effort of several agencies, which include Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Kenya Accountants and Secretaries National Examination Board (KASNEB), National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council (TVET CDACC) (Akala & Changilwa 2018). KICD coordinates and facilitates various subcommittees by serving as a secretariat for curriculum development and providing logistical support. KASNEB develops syllabuses in accountancy, finance, credit, governance and management, information technology and related disciplines (Ngure 2013). On its part, NITA is in charge of developing and revising curriculums for apprenticeship programmes and trade test syllabi.

A major function of TVET CDACC is to undertake the design and development of curriculums. Given the strategic role of TVET in human capital and economic development, it should be a goal of TVET CDACC to structure curriculums in a way as to extend it beyond the trainer-controlled environment and include learning beyond the institutional context (Kogo 2020). It should also extend beyond the student years through the concept of 'lifelong learning' where individuals constantly work to become self-determining. Further, curriculums ought to promote students' emotional, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as prepare the students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life (Ondieki et al. 2019). This model fits the needs of employers and makes the curriculum more responsive to the needs of the industry.

Conclusion

This paper details the evolution of TVET in Kenya from the mid nineteenth century to the present. The vital role that TVET plays in the economy has been documented in this paper with underlying importance being shown by the numerous government policy documents and academic research that has been carried out in the TVET field. While the technical skills were used by the colonial government for servitude, presently the Kenyan government has emphasized TVET's role in dealing with unemployment and technological advancement in line with global trends. The establishment of different bodies that deal with TVET has given a major boost to proponents of this sector. Further, the expansion of institutions and increase in funding has placed the sector among the major players in the economic advancement of the country. Unfortunately, TVET continues to suffer from poor perception and insufficient infrastructure, which is a major concern for the government and the industry. This situation is expected to change in the coming years, as shown in the sector's trend.

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Author profile

Dr. Susan Wanuri Ngure holds a PhD in Human Resources Management from the Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. She has been a teacher of a secondary school, a senior government officer in the Ministry of Education and a lecturer at various institutions both in Australia and Kenya. She has researched widely in Training and Development and specifically transfer of skills from training institutions to the workplace. She is also passionate about women and Youth labour participation. Susan is a resource person in the Kenya National Qualification Authority (KNQA), where she participated in the development of the "Recognition Of Prior Learning" policy. Currently Susan is a Senior Lecturer, at the School of Business and Management Department at the Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Nyeri. She is a member of the Academy of international Business-Sub Saharan Africa (AIB-SSA), Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) and the Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM) Kenya.