



African Population and  
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# Policy brief

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## Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions (TVET) in Kenya: Do they have the capacity to produce wholly developed youth?

**“Degrees do not define us, individually, or as a society... Our society needs to evolve, such that all occupations, crafts and trades, whether the skills are acquired through a degree education or not, are respected and recognized.”** Ong Ye Kung, Minister of Education (Higher Education and Skills), Republic of Singapore, 2017.



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### Introduction

Whole youth development (WYD) refers to the overall development of youth. The term WYD is understood differently by different scholars, but it is largely held that it encompasses social, physical, spiritual, and psychological spheres. This means that youth ought not only to be equipped with academic skills but also non-academic skills such as spirituality, morality, communication skills, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, personal management, teamwork, problem-solving and decision-making among others.

With about 800,000 young people joining the labor market in Kenya each year, there is a need for the creation of an equal number of jobs in the country if the issue of unemployment is to be contained. It is therefore imperative for the youth to be equipped with skills that will not only enable them secure

employment in the formal or informal sectors, but also in self-employment. Post-secondary institutions like TVET and other tertiary institutions are better placed to offer relevant WYD skills since they equip the youth with expertise and skills needed to join and navigate the labor market. For this to happen in these institutions, there has to be effective and efficient systems and structures in place, including quality staffing, curriculum, facilities and equipment among others.

The ability of an institution to produce an all-rounded labor force is dependent on the quality or skill-set of its instructors, the curriculum employed, and the quality and quantity of facilities/equipment in place. For this reason, decision-makers on TVET education need to ensure that there is a reasonable student-instructor ratio, and student-facilities/equipment ratio in each institution, including enhanced quality assurance with a monitoring and evaluation framework.

## Curriculum for production of WYD skills

Within any educational institution, it is expected that the curriculum will impart skills that promote overall development. Put differently, the curriculum should strike a balance between academic and non-academic training, leading to the development of wholesome individuals.

An APHRC study on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has nevertheless established a gap in the curriculum in this aspect. The TVET curriculum does not have adequate WYD components. For instance, 80% of institutional heads and instructors were of the view that the level of coverage of academic/technical skills was higher than that of soft skills (for example, sexual and reproductive health skills and relationships). Moreover, 90% of institutional heads agreed that academic/technical skills documents were available compared to 70% who thought the same for socio-emotional skills and core values.

This is consistent with the students' perception on coverage of soft-skills, also referred to as basic competencies. According to the students, soft skills are inadequately covered compared to academic and/or technical skills:

*'We are taught communication skills and a bit of entrepreneurship skills in first year and it is examinable by the Kenya National Examinations Council, and then it ends there. We are never taught again and so most of us, let me speak for myself, I have forgotten things taught then...'* [FGD10-P4].

The observed similarities in perception among the three stakeholders – institutional heads, instructors and students – confirm that non-academic skills, including life skills, core values, and socio-emotional skills are inadequately inculcated in students at TVET institutions.

This position could however change if the recent curriculum reforms were to be comprehensively implemented. The revised competency based education and training curriculum (CBET) encompasses elements of WYD, academic and non-academic (basic competencies).

The inclusion of the basic competencies reflects the government's policy requirement of having a curriculum that incorporates WYD, including guidelines for assessment of overall WYD. The curriculum, developed through consultations with various TVET entities within the Ministry of Education in light of the existing skills gap and unmet industry demand, embodies the requisite academic and non-academic skills aimed at producing a fully equipped and employable labor force. It emphasizes the training and assessment of non-academic skills, which it refers to as 'basic competencies',

*'We have a new curriculum for TVET institutions and I believe this will be scaled to other levels of colleges. The curriculum I talk about is called Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET). We also have National Vocational Certificate Education and Training (NAV CET). They all have components of soft skills like life skills, communication skills and entrepreneurship skills among others so we seek to develop learners in wholesomeness'* [IDI-R4].

Nevertheless, students still thought that their instructors were better equipped to train them with requisite skills. For instance, 66.9% were optimistic that the knowledge and skills inculcated in TVET institutions were labor relevant and could easily enable them secure employment (65%).

## Existing basic competencies in the curriculum

Respondents interviewed – students and policy-makers – were aware of some of the WYD skills embodied within the revised curriculum's basic competencies, with communication and entrepreneurship skills as the most cited. This could perhaps be attributed to the fact that these skills are already being taught to students attending TVET institutions. Though there are other skills included in the revised curriculum, they did not feature in the students' responses.

However, they featured in the policy-makers' responses, ranging from numeracy skills, digital literacy, employability skills, environmental literacy, and occupational safety and health practices. This means there is a mismatch between the intended coverage of basic competencies espoused in the new curriculum and what actually takes place in classrooms.

*'...There is a TVET Draft Policy Framework and it outlines all information that pertains to the kind of training that TVET institutions should give to students. It encourages institutions to equip students with not only technical skills, but also employable skills like life skills, communication skills, innovativeness, and entrepreneurship skills that are all aimed at making youth passing through our institutions to be self-supporting, or let me say, wholly developed to fit well in society.'* [IDI-R5].

Comprehensive implementation of the revised TVET curriculum – Competence Based Education and Training (CBET) – will play an integral part in producing wholly developed youth and as such, relevant stakeholders, including TVET institutions, should optimally adopt and implement revisions in the new curriculum.

## Existing capabilities with TVET institutions for production of WYD skills

The study revealed that instructors in TVET institutions were more prepared to handle academic courses than non-academic courses. Put into perspective, results from quantitative data revealed that over 90% of instructors were confident that they were prepared and equipped to teach technical courses that they teach. For various features of WYD, the figures across the different topic areas dropped significantly – life skills (60.8%), academic skills (57.7%), core values (57.2%), and social-emotional skills (50%).

The observed low proportions for non-academic skills is in part attributable to poor curriculum prioritization of non-academic skills, and on the other hand, limited understanding of the contribution of WYD to students' academic, career, and social affairs.

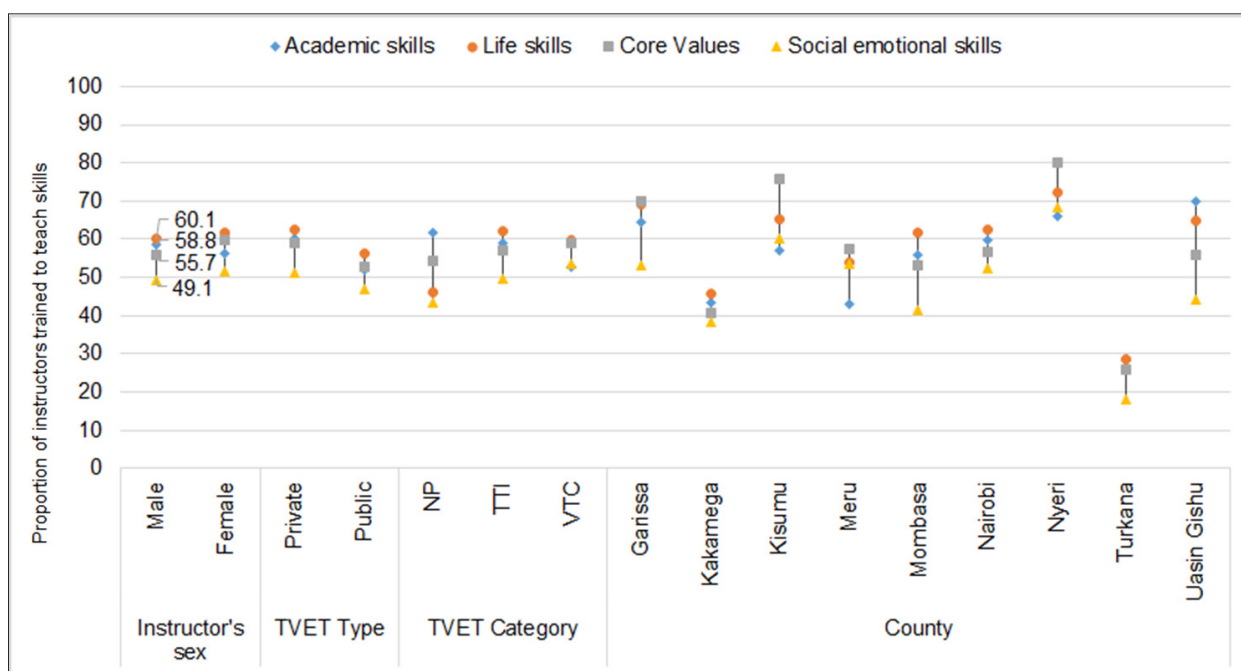
*'The general attitude is that most institutions have not yet understood the core values and importance of the soft skills and values training...so this has affected the capacities of producing core values among students'* [IDI-R4].

The above perception on the existence of limited understanding of core values and relevance of soft skills indicated that though

implementation is not at 100% some courses already have the soft skills integrated as part of the academic content:

*'I can say some subjects like mine, which is Public Relations (PR), we are taught how to talk and relate with clients, customers and even colleagues so yeah, it integrates soft skills in the training and so I can back the curriculum in that line'...* [FGD12-P8].

## Percentages of instructors trained to teach selected skills



## Policy implications

The study findings indicate that whole youth development calls for additional efforts from TVET stakeholders, particularly those in decision-making organs like Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC), Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), and National Vocational Certificate Education and Training (NAV CET) in consultation with labour and employment stakeholders in the design of actionable approaches for WYD in the country's TVET institutions. The approaches could ameliorate coverage of WYD components like life skills, core values, and social-emotional skills among others in TVET institutions. Moreover, it would enhance awareness among TVET instructors on the relevance of WYD for students' increased employability, as well as the capacity of instructors to incorporate these topics in their teaching.

## Making a difference in institutional capabilities

TVET institutions could come up with mechanisms for assessing and/or evaluating instructors' understanding and imparting of WYD skills, and if need be, facilitate instructors with dismal performance to in-service training. Such assessments could help in determining which components of the WYD skills need

more effort for every institution and category, thereby feeding into the larger educational gap identification system.

## Continuous instructor skill enhancement

Continuous professional development of instructors in the teaching of these skills at TVET institutions should be emphasized and resourced (human and capital resources). It is imperative for the training institutions, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), among other stakeholders, to train instructors on adaptive techniques that could help them optimize the utilization of existing facilities. Moreover, there is a need for revised/new instructor curriculum that embody WYD skills, including approaches to infusion of these skills. Where possible, instructors should undergo mandatory pre-service and in-service training on delivery approaches in light of the additions/improvements to the new curriculum.

Only about two fifths of instructors indicated to have had attended an in-service training within a period of three years preceding the study date. Similarly, efforts to improve the levels of soft skills for WYD among TVET instructors should pay attention to the relatively low-skills training like social-emotional skills and core values.

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