

## A Paradigm Shift In Kenya's Education System: A Move From University Degree To Diploma Courses

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### Abstract

There has been an increasing trend where secondary students who qualify to join university to do degree courses are opting for diploma courses in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions (TVET). According to the statistics by Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Services (KUCCPS, 2020), a total of 122,831 candidates secured placement to degree courses in Universities while 88,724 were placed in Technical and Vocational Education Training. Those placed in the degree courses were 57 per cent male and 43 per cent female. Of this, 2,632 candidates who scored C+ and above in the 2019 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations and had qualified for the placement for direct entry to the university opted for diploma courses in TVET institutions as opposed to degree courses. This number of students has been growing over time. This may be explained by the demand for students with technical skills in the job market and subsequently increasing the intake for diploma courses. Kenyans are hard wired to the fact that a university degree is co-related to social mobility and economic well-being. The increasing preference for Vocational Training is partly an indictment of lack of academic leadership in degree offering institutions. Kenyan students are beginning to be guided more by passion, and what they intrinsically desire for their lives, rather than societal constructed pressures of success. While the emerging assertiveness of the Kenyan student in steering his or her career is admirable, it also exposes to scrutiny the role of institutional structures in inhibiting and frustrating the career choices of students. The decision for the students who qualify for a direct entry to university opting for diploma courses is an important life choice that needs evaluation with all facts in mind. This paper attempts to explain why the sudden paradigm shift and outlines a number of policy recommendations.

**Keywords:** Direct Entry, Diploma Courses, Vocational Training, University Education, Kenya.

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### I. Introduction

The Kenya development plans have, over the years, consistently stated that the one major educational objective as that of producing properly and effectively trained, disciplined and patriotic youth who can in turn make a positive contribution to the development of the nation (Adhiambo, 2014). Over the past three decades, diploma courses in Kenya have experienced both structural and curricular changes that have in turn impacted on its graduates. Diploma education is fundamental to the world of work. For most people, work is the desired outcome of their education and it is through their work that people achieve self-fulfillment. One of the major issues relating to the world of work where diploma courses have played a major role in providing solutions is the question of what changes should be made to school curricula at all levels so that young people are more work-oriented and have the basic skills needed for productive work (Koros, 2007).

There has been evidence of negative attitudes towards diploma education by a large section of the Kenyan community (Masardo & Shields, 2015). It has been claimed that the negative attitude was bred and crystallized with the advent of colonial rule in Africa and the discriminative approach of colonial administration to the education of the African in relation to that of children of the white colonialists. These actions could have influenced negatively the smooth incorporation of diploma programs into the regular school system of education (Masardo & Shields, 2015). However, it has been argued that, because of certain economic realities, attitudes seem to be increasingly changing in a positive direction with regard to the acceptance of the need for diploma education in school systems, especially at secondary level (Mburu, 2017).

Over recent years and especially in developing countries, learners have begun to show more interest in technology (Adhiambo, 2014). As a result, countries have infused this essential component of technology into their school curricula as diploma education. It is clear that the role of diploma education as an effective means of empowering society to engage in productive and sustainable livelihood cannot be overemphasized (Mburu, 2017). The diversity in provision of diploma education in many countries is associated with disparities in

historical, political, educational, cultural and economic contexts. Thus diploma education has not been spared changes caused by the political, economic and social forces (Conley, 2008). Variations abound in terms of structures, operating conditions and outcomes (Robles, 2012).

Long are the days when entry to a university was something that brought excitement. The value of a university degree has been declining with years, making it almost not meaningful (Lamb, 2014). Post-graduate degree and doctorate are now replacing the undergraduate degree as they are almost becoming mandatory in the work field. Also, many students owing to many factors have preferred a diploma course. The students may have attained above a minimum of the entry level of a degree course yet insist on doing a diploma course.

Diploma courses have recently become marketable. Many factors have contributed to it. Diploma courses offer broad and in-depth knowledge and skills in the creative, career, and technical fields. The diploma students then develop problem-solving, communication, and analytical abilities upgrading their theoretical and practical skills (Proctor, 2018). Diploma students tend to be well-groomed for a job after completion of a course. It is because of the skills acquired there which would not have been grabbed in a university degree. Most jobs have a preference for someone with skills than a theoretical mind. It is one of the significant factors contributing to an increase in the diploma courses taken (Lamb, 2014).

In order to enhance productivity, stimulate competitiveness and bring about sustainable economic development, it is essential to marshal in technical, vocational education and training which plays a vital role in the provision of the required skills, knowledge, attitude and values needed for development. This has turned to be one of the most effective human resource development strategies which many countries need in order to train and modernize their technical workforce for rapid industrialization and national development (Oketch, 2018).

According to the statistics by Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Services (KUCCPS), a total of 122,831 candidates secured placement to degree courses in Universities while 88,724 were placed in Technical and Vocational Education Training translating into 57 per cent male and 43 per cent female. The placement into to the degree courses is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** University Enrolment of Diploma and Certificate Courses Students by Sex

INSTITUTION	Number			
	2018/19		2019/20*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Public Universities</b>				
University of Nairobi.....	2,642	175	3,187	251
Kenyatta.....	9,215	5,316	3,261	2,734
Moi.....	304	377	317	384
Egerton.....	435	336	445	380
Jomo Kenyatta (JKUAT).....	1,565	1,234	206	115
Maseno.....	504	562	432	580
Masinde Muliro.....	532	545	76	39
Technical University of Kenya.....	1,898	919	1,117	590
Technical University of Mombasa.....	765	450	1,396	914
Dedan Kimathi.....	255	168	360	201
Chuka.....	815	842	1,057	1,147
Karatina.....	152	126	107	92
Kisii.....	1,112	1,031	801	821
Meru.....	290	214	318	118
Multimedia.....	340	356	332	346
South Eastern.....	20	8	15	4
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga.....	600	761	183	410
Laikipia.....	197	263	107	87
University of Eldoret.....	121	209	115	199
Kabanga.....	137	125	124	147
Pwani.....	152	114	45	48
Masai Mara.....	106	104	131	154
Kibabii.....	142	159	218	256
Embu.....	87	166	185	293
Machakos.....	258	251	373	315
Murang'a.....	106	66	95	59
Rongo.....	540	414	508	415
Kirinyaga.....	115	72	60	70
Co-operative.....	252	303	493	535
Taita Taveta.....	40	68	346	245
Garissa.....	218	80	282	161
University Constituent Colleges 1.....	169	151	224	198
<b>SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>24,084</b>	<b>15,965</b>	<b>16,916</b>	<b>12,308</b>
<b>Private Universities</b>	<b>14,205</b>	<b>13,853</b>	<b>13,504</b>	<b>14,375</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>68,107</b>		<b>57,103</b>	

Source: Individual Universities/ Commission for University Education  
\* Provisional

According to the KUCCPS 2,632 candidates who scored C+ and above in the 2019 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations and had qualified for the placement for direct entry to the university opted for diploma courses in Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions (TVET), as opposed to degree courses which explains the changing perceptions for diploma courses among the candidates. This number of students has been growing over time. The growing number of TVET champions is a clear indication that concerted efforts in improving enrolment in TVET courses are yielding fruits. 45 per cent male students and 55 per cent female students were placed in TVET.

There was a total increase in enrolment in TVET institutions by 19.7 per cent to 430,598 in 2019 from 359,852 in 2018. Enrolment of students in national polytechnics rose by 35.5 per cent to 102,078 in 2019, while that of public technical and vocational colleges increased by 32.8 per cent to 112,110 in 2019. During the review period, enrolment of male students in TVET institutions accounted for 57.2 per cent of all students. Enrolment in TVET institutions from 2015 to 2019 is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Enrolment in TVET Institutions by Sex, 2015 – 2019

Institution	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kenya Technical Training College	913	1,119	2,806	2,114	1,750	1,219	1,730	1,374	4,871	2,157
Kisumu National Polytechnic	2,078	1,325	2,941	1,415	3,608	1,887	5,137	3,113	6,407	4,349
Eldoret National Polytechnic	2,726	1,484	3,793	2,174	4,965	3,215	7,875	6,040	8,827	6,561
Meru National Polytechnic	-	-	744	287	2,727	1,990	4,730	3,113	5,810	4,155
North Eastern National Polytechnic	-	-	613	428	256	200	690	449	898	381
Kenya Coast National Polytechnic	-	-	736	1,142	822	1,318	4,033	2,957	4,107	3,011
Kitale National Polytechnic	-	-	907	512	978	673	2,860	1,998	3,973	2,970
Kisii National Polytechnic	-	-	1,733	1,217	2,219	1,810	3,654	3,137	5,446	4,792
Kabete National Polytechnic	-	-	2,048	979	2,607	1,051	7,034	3,642	11,711	6,260
Nyeri National Polytechnic	-	-	1,218	646	1,874	1,282	2,625	1,807	3,709	2,926
Sigalala National Polytechnic	-	-	1,001	762	2,399	1,868	4,140	3,208	4,475	4,282
Sub Total	5,717	3,928	18,540	11,676	24,205	16,513	44,508	30,838	60,234	41,844
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,645</b>		<b>30,216</b>		<b>40,718</b>		<b>75,346</b>		<b>102,078</b>
<b>Other TVET Institutions</b>										
Public Technical and Vocational Colleges <sup>2</sup>	32,221	23,087	17,589	9,569	29,584	17,982	49,454	34,948	65,347	46,763
Private Technical and Vocational Colleges <sup>2</sup>	-	-	27,280	30,298	35,951	38,689	41,623	43,997	39,484	41,376
Vocational Training Colleges <sup>3</sup>	47,625	29,840	46,340	34,565	59,756	44,685	66,894	47,590	81,421	54,129
Sub Total	79,846	52,927	91,209	74,432	125,291	101,356	157,971	126,535	186,252	142,268
<b>Total</b>		<b>132,773</b>		<b>165,641</b>		<b>226,647</b>		<b>284,506</b>		<b>328,520</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>142,418</b>		<b>195,857</b>		<b>267,365</b>		<b>359,852</b>		<b>430,598</b>

Source: Technical Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA)

In 2019/20 academic year, the number of students placed into TVET institutions to pursue diploma increased by 12.3 per cent to 64,539 in 2019/20, while those students placed to pursue certificate courses went up by 34.3 per cent to 43,662 in 2019/20. During the review period, 7,722 students were placed to TVET institutions to pursue artisan courses as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Government Sponsored Students Placed to Universities and TVET Institutions by Programme and Sex

Programme	2015/16			2016/17			2017/18			2018/19			2019/20*		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Degree	39,019	27,108	66,127	47,505	35,605	83,110	49,896	38,427	88,323	40,509	28,041	68,550	52,611	36,877	89,488
Public Universities	39,019	27,108	66,127	41,382	30,744	72,126	39,487	31,474	70,961	33,163	22,731	55,894	42,939	29,038	71,977
Private Universities	-	-	-	6,123	4,861	10,984	10,409	6,953	17,362	7,346	5,310	12,656	9,672	7,839	17,511
Diploma	-	-	-	9,168	8,431	17,599	14,110	14,151	28,261	31,530	25,954	57,484	35,024	29,515	64,539
Certificate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16,425	16,095	32,520	20,896	22,766	43,662
Artisan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,802	2,096	4,898	4,264	3,458	7,722

Source: Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS)

Total diploma and certificate courses enrolment in public and private universities is expected to drop by 16.2 per cent from 68,107 in 2018/19 to 57,103 in 2019/20. Student enrolment for diploma and certificate courses in public universities is expected to reduce from 40,049 in 2018/19 to 29,224 in 2019/20, representing a decrease of 27.0 per cent. During the same period, enrolment of diploma and certificate courses students in private universities is expected to marginally decrease to 27,879 in 2019/20 (Table 4). The reduction in student's enrolment for diploma and certificate courses at the universities is partly attributed to a policy by the Government requiring universities to focus on offering degree courses, and strengthening of TVET institutions.

**Table 4:** University Enrolment of Diploma and Certificate Courses Students by Sex

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Source: Individual Universities/ Commission for University Education

## II. Why Students Who Qualify for Direct University Entry Opt for Diploma Courses

Nature of knowledge gained: Many university degrees will focus on theory-based knowledge that may not guarantee the student the career or position students want. Vocational education gives the students the opportunity to understand the skills the student need while allowing the student to put these skills into practice while you study. Once the students are qualified, the student will feel confident to apply their knowledge and capabilities in an interview and on the job (Conley, 2008).

Availability of opportunities: There is currently a shortage of vocational workers in a range of sectors. The skill shortage in Australia ensures that what the student learn from completing a diploma is highly valuable to employers. Recent research has proven that 78% of TVET graduates are employed after training and were able to find work after their studies exceeded the number of jobs found by Bachelor degree graduates. In the current world, technical jobs are more available than office jobs. Employers need individuals with practical knowledge and skills rather than theoretical knowledge and skills. Degree graduates struggle a lot before securing a job opportunity because they do not have any skills to showcase. The technical part taught in diploma courses

makes students ready for the job market; therefore, the demand increase for individuals with technical knowledge and skills; thus, easy to secure a job (Lamb, 2014).

#### **Duration of the course**

University degrees require a minimum of three years of full-time study, while diplomas need only two years at the very most. Most diplomas can be completed within a year or much less. Due to the practical nature of diplomas, the amount of time the student spends learning and completing assignments will be greatly lessened, allowing them to enter the workforce and reap the benefits sooner (Oketch, 2018).

#### **Cost**

Undergraduate degrees can cost upwards of KSh. 600,000 in course fee alone, whereas diplomas can cost less than half, or a third of that price. In addition, just like university degrees, the government offers some fee help schemes for people who undertake courses for a diploma (Robles, 2012). In addition, the Kenya government has increased capitation to TVET and students are given enough stipend for their tuition. This has made TVET education affordable.

#### **Qualification requirements**

Particularly for high-school graduates, Universities do look for specific scores and there is a competitive application process for acceptance into their limited-seats courses. According to Koros (2007) vocational courses are less reliant on these scores, giving the student a better chance of being accepted into the course of their choice.

### **III. Policy Recommendations**

The paper makes the following recommendations; that undergraduates to back up their degrees with a diploma course to acquire practical skill, Kenyan students to choose courses according to their passion and that more promotions to be done for diploma courses. Goal setting or some kind of (theoretical) framework that ties in with the vision and mission of the institution offering diploma courses and strategic plan are an asset in having the institution to realize its function. Tangible targeted results should be recorded every time in order to encourage persons to work harder and produce more. This, in itself, is an incentive scheme whose payments should be related to production; for every result there must be a reason or an explanation.

The first determinant of the quality of University Education in any country is the level of academic preparation of incoming students. By requiring that candidates achieve at least a grade of a 'C -' when taking the KCSE, the Commission for University Education (CUE) has already raised the bar to increase the likelihood of success of new students. The commission could further help improve the chances of incoming students through the following four measures: improvement in primary and secondary education, strengthening of academic counseling programs, development of bridge and outreach programs, and introduction of foundation courses in the first year of university education.

The Kenyan government should strengthen math and science education at the primary and high school levels and encourage more students to view Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs as attractive careers early on. Putting in place mentoring activities and scholarships targeting girls is particularly important to ensure gender balance in STEM programs. A solid and comprehensive system of academic and career counseling represents an essential instrument to improve the transition from high school to higher education, especially for students from underprivileged backgrounds who often lack the information and motivation to pursue their studies. Commission for University Education (CUE) would be well advised to assess the effectiveness of existing services in Kenya.

Along the same lines, programs that link higher education institutions to the lower levels of education through outreach and bridge activities can also be effective in improving transition rates and raising the probability of success in higher education, especially for at-risk students. Outreach and bridge interventions seek to reduce the academic, aspirational, informational, and personal barriers that restrict access among students currently underrepresented in higher education.

Strengthening links with industry is an effective way of increasing the relevance of higher education programs. The Kenyan universities could use a large variety of mechanisms, including internships for undergraduate students, in-company placements of research students and academics, and practitioners from industry as visiting lecturers. Close consultation between firms and universities is needed so that the latter can react quickly to changing skills needs. Incorporating training for entrepreneurship into regular university programs can also help bring them closer to the productive sectors. Finally, universities may consider establishing cooperative learning programs that alternate on-campus learning periods and regular in-firm internships.

#### IV. Conclusion

Diploma courses are the way to go. The market for diploma courses is going to boom in the future due to rapid technology changes. Parents should watch the space and encourage their kids to pursue diploma courses. The courses will apt them with skills required in the market. The low status syndrome of the diploma courses is slowly fading away. Some misgivings with regard to working by hand as well as parental expectations about careers do persist. Attractiveness of the diploma courses begins with the way of administration of the colleges.

Today, the Kenyan government's main challenge in higher education is to find a financially sustainable way of expanding access, improving the quality and relevance of the programs offered, and strengthening university-based research and technology transfer.

Any financing reform therefore needs to be an integral part of Kenya's Vision 2030 and support its ambitions for the future of higher education and a meaningful contribution to economic and social development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Improving the quality and relevance of Kenyan higher education institutions will require a combination of interventions: Better preparation of incoming students, enhanced qualification of academics, innovative curricular and pedagogical practices, closer links to employers, and increased internationalization.

Finally, Kenyan higher education institutions can follow the example of innovative Universities in other parts of the world, which have demonstrated good practices in building, implementing, and scaling up digital programs, addressing challenges similar to those faced by the Kenyan higher education system. Examining how these institutions have implemented such strategies and models can provide useful lessons that Kenya can learn from to deliver its priorities and programs. The five core initiatives for the government to consider in that respect are investing in expertise in online course development; developing student support structures; innovating in program design through the use of open educational resources; innovating in program delivery by leveraging online learning to serve working adults; and providing practical Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills education through partnerships with coding education providers, hubs, and industry leaders.

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