



Investigating Attitudes of Learners and Graduates to Blue Collar Jobs in Institutions of Higher Education in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Based on the previous A-level education system in Kenya, students in colleges and universities still believe in being provided with “white-collar jobs” in the government sector or NGOs. Unfortunately, their dreams turn out otherwise, as this is not realized. Some end up sinking into confusion and eventually depression. Lack of “white collar jobs” affect their lives negatively.

This paper looks into the changing attitudes of learners on their future employment particularly in Kenya. According to the speech made by the Minister of Education in Kenya, Prof. George Magokha, some college and university graduates hold academic papers for disciplines that may be obsolete. Kenya’s Ominde Commission Report 1963/64 recommended an “Education for

self-reliance”. However, there are setbacks in realizing this goal. According to the report, training of students should be focused on self-reliance, practical skills and converting acquired knowledge and skills to benefit self and the community. In this respect, universities should train learners on practical jobs “hands at work” such as engineering, construction, agriculture, plumbing, tailoring, housekeeping, grooming, among others. The paper provides insight into these issues.

The population of study consisted of university and college graduates; and continuing students. Research methods used were online google questionnaires. Findings showed that graduates spent a lot of time applying to various institutions for employment with little or no success. Some opted for self-employment in cybercafés,

hairdressing, grooming, cookery, agriculture, to name but a few. Others opted to retraining for manual jobs and these turn out to be time consuming and costly to parents sponsoring the students. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested: Apart from adopting the Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) that was already on course, guidance and counselling programs should be emphasized in formal and non-formal education. Parents and other stakeholders should participate in moulding the youth to participate in development. This would reduce the costs of importing expertise into the country.

Keywords: Attitudes, Curriculum, Learners, Blue-Collar jobs, White-Collar jobs.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Understanding attitudes and attitude change has been an area of interest to psychology and educators due to the impact of attitude on learning and an important component of the outcome of education.

In this study attitude change is discussed based on changing attitudes of learners in higher institutions of learning in Kenya from white collar jobs to blue collar (hands - on) jobs. Attitude change is needed due to the problems learners face after graduating from institutions of higher education. This problem not only affects Kenya as a country but also other developing countries.

Attitude formation studies indicate that one's environment directly influences behavior and the formation of attitudes. The internal events to attitude formation are the outcome of observable actions. For one to change attitudes there must be reinforcement from reinforces.

Attitude predispose a person to take action for change. When positive attitudes occur they orient towards that idea though may not

predict actions directly. Attitude impacts learning. For this, it is worth arguing that changing attitudes of learners is important. Learners must accept the need for changing of attitude towards certain concepts and actions.

Change of attitude motivates learners to develop more interest in the idea developed for change, for example, if the learners at university level are influenced to change attitude on self – employment or hands- on – job careers, they would spend more time practicing how to achieve the idea towards their area of interest. Attitudes produce observable actions in people.

Employment is a main factor to peoples' contribution to the economic growth of a country. The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2008) notes that youth particularly at one point in their lives will enter the world of life as a path towards social integration and as a means to earn income. Youth employment progressively emerges as a major problem in many developing countries. Many youths enter the labor market directly after completing school, this however, depends on the schools exit point in a particular country. In Kenya, the exit points are after primary education and attaining Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, Secondary education after attaining Kenya certificate of secondary education (KCSE) and then on attaining college training or university education. This exit points challenge youths as they normally hope to acquire white collar jobs as a means to earn a living.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2002), states that unemployment is also characterized by poor economic growth in many world regions, a continuous fast change in demand for skills, thus increases the need for on training or

lifelong learning to raise employability and access to employment, the rapid population growth, sluggish economic growth, poor quality education are also factors to unemployment in African region and worldwide.

Verma (2004) cites youth unemployment as at the rate of 21% in Sub-Saharan Africa. ILO (2008) indicates the number of unemployed youths as at 40.2% of the world total unemployment.

In Botswana unemployment was at 23.8% in 2002 – 2003 (Siphambe, 2003). Still in Botswana unemployment rate was at 21.6% in 1994 and declined to 19.5% in 2001. Although the rate is fairly declining in Botswana, other developing countries Kenya inclusive, face the same problem.

Of great concern is that youth hardest hit by the problem of unemployment seem to shun certain jobs. In Botswana, a Member of Parliament, Lesego Motsumi (2008), observed that most youth in Botswana tend to shun blue-collar jobs, yet the country is faced with the problem of unemployment (Daily News, 7th February 2003) Mukamugambira and Osei-Hwedie (2007), noted negative attitude towards manual works/ blue collar as one of the reasons for youth unemployment, not realizing that blue-collar jobs can provide an equally excellent means of survival.

Manual work, referred to as hands-on jobs is defined by Kigwatalala Diana as ‘the production of material goods through work activities that are predominantly physical in nature, the activities may be carried out in factories or outdoors. This kind of activities are also called blue-collar jobs (BNET, 2010).

Graduates from colleges and universities are victims of negative attitude towards blue-collar jobs due to attitudes such as low social status, poor-working conditions attached to such jobs. Firms that recruit graduates offer

cheap, temporary labor. Such negative factors associated with blue-collar jobs, escalates unemployment. Also due to problems in maintaining self-respect among their peers and society, manual works being referred to as "trash jobs" (Smith 2002).

Covid-19 pandemic has led to workers' change of attitudes. This is more so due to increased job lay-offs. This led to an increase in unemployment in the young educated population.

2.0 Material and Methodology

2.1 Study Area Description

Research is described as a systematic and organized effort to investigate a specific problem to provide a solution (Sekaran 2000) and (Burn 1994). The Researcher used descriptive design. Descriptive design involves gathering data that describe events. It organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collected. This follows the view that description emerges following creative exploration, and then tests or validate those explanations (Krathwohl, 1993). In descriptive design, researchers do not have direct control over independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulated (Kerlinger 2000). The purpose of descriptive research is to become more familiar with natural or psychological phenomena, to gain new insight, and to formulate a more specific research problem or hypothesis.

This research focused on learners and graduates of higher Institutions of education who had taken or were taking various courses at higher institutions of learning in Kenya. The sample population selected was 100 learners and 100 graduates from Institutions of higher education in Kenya.

The research method used was online questionnaires using Google Forms

technology tool. Emails for both learners and graduates were obtained from institutions of higher education. Google Form questionnaires were sent to the respondents. Telephone Interviews were also conducted as an additional method of data collection. Previous related reports on attitude change were also studied and analyzed. Experts were also interviewed via Zoom video conferencing to obtain their opinions concerning the topic, attitude change. The use of online technology during the research stage of this study was due to the Covid-19 crisis which limited people's ability to meet face to face due to social distancing rules.

2.2 Data Analysis

The process of collecting data via Google Forms online questionnaire technology allowed the respondents to fill the questionnaires online and the data was automatically analyzed and organized in the graphical form of charts and graphs which were later analyzed, interpreted and combined with the other data sources to gain new insights into the study.

3.0 Findings

This section includes data for both learners and graduates pertaining to gender, level of study, course of study, motivation for studying the course, job expectation after graduation, year of graduation, course taken at the university and the type of employment if any.

3.1 Response rate

The response rate is calculated from the number of people who were surveyed, divided by the total number of people in the entire sample, including those who refused to participate and those who were unavailable.

During data collection phase, 100 online questionnaires were distributed to learners

and another 100 online questionnaires to the graduates. These questionnaires were sent to the participant's emails and the participants were asked to fill the online questionnaires and submit the results via the Internet. After data preparation stage which involved cleaning the data by carefully scrutinizing to ensure all questions were filled appropriately, 52 online questionnaires from learners were filled appropriately giving a response rate of 52%. A total of 55 online questionnaires were filled appropriately by graduates giving a response rate of 55%.

3.2 Gender of the respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender and the results were as follows; for the learners 50% of the respondents were male and 50% were female giving a 1 - to - 1 ratio of gender disparity. For the graduates 55% of the respondents were female and 45% were male. This almost equitable distribution of the gender of the respondents ensures that there is no bias towards any one gender in the research study.

3.3 Level of study

The results for the level of study of the learners indicated that fourth year students constituted over 50% of the respondents. This could be attributed to their interest on job search given they are about to complete their studies.

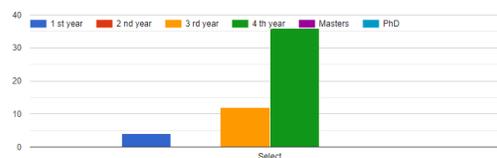


Figure 1: Level of study. Source: Author (2020)

3.4 Course of study

This question was posed to the learners and graduates. Majority of the learner respondents were undertaking Bachelor of Education degree. Others were undertaking Bachelor of Computer Science, Business Management and Business Administration. The graduates indicated their fields of study were: Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of IT, Social Work and Community Development, Biochemistry, Human Resource Management and Business Administration. The results of the level of study for the learners were as indicated in Figure 2.

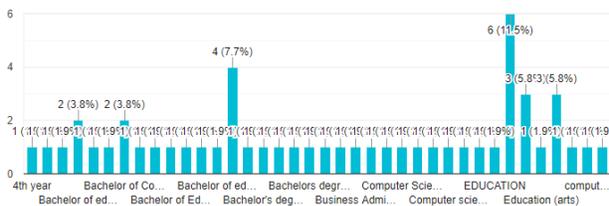


Figure 2: Course of study for learners. Source Author (2020)

3.5 Enjoying the course of study

Learners were asked whether they enjoyed their course of study, close to 60% indicated they were very much enjoying the course of study and a further 35% were enjoying the chosen course of study implying that the selected courses of study were consistent with their passion and professional goals after graduation. The results of data analysis were as depicted in Figure 3.

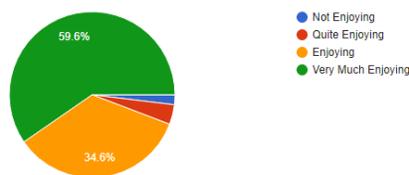


Figure 3: Enjoying course of study. Source Author (2020)

3.6 Motivation for choosing course of study

Various motivational factors were advanced as the chief reasons for the learners' choice of study. The main reasons included; the desire for radical changes in society, mentorship, availability of jobs, passion for teaching, love for technology and the desire to be a role model for the youth. The results of data analysis were as depicted in Figure 4 below.

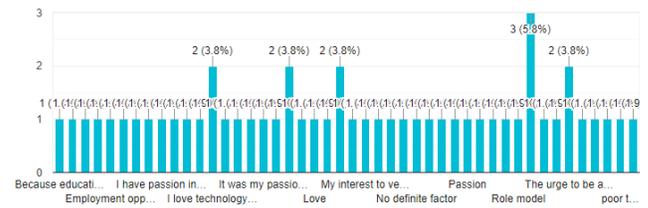


Figure4: Motivation choosing course of study. Source Author (2020)

3.6 Expectation after graduation

Learners were asked to state their job expectation after graduation. A total of 46% stated they would further their studies, 23% would go for blue collar employment, 19% for white collar employment and 11% stated they would start their own businesses. The reason why students still want to further their studies after graduation could be because they expect to get a good white collar job due to the high competition among graduates. This points to the attitude towards white collar employment as opposed to blue collar employment. The results of data analysis were as depicted in Figure 5 below.

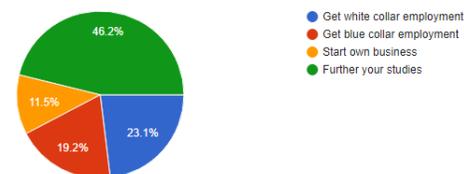


Figure 5. Expectation after graduation. Source Author (2020).

3.7 Jobs taken by peer graduates

The learners were asked whether they knew any graduates in their field and the type of job they had taken after graduation. The learners reported that close to 54% of the peer graduates they knew had opted for white collar employment and another close to 46% had taken blue collar employment. This indicates that the attitude of the graduates was skewed towards white collar jobs as opposed to blue collar jobs as shown in Figure 6 below

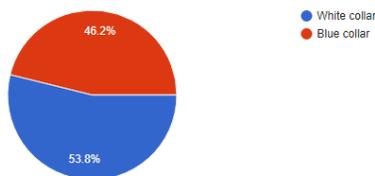


Figure 6: Jobs taken by peer graduates

Source Author (2020)

3.8 Year of graduation

The graduates were asked to state their year of study to determine how recent and relevant the data collected was. The results indicated majority of the respondents, over 44% graduated in the year 2017, giving relevance to the study undertaken and results depicted in Figure 7.

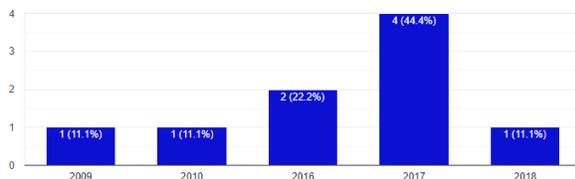


Figure 7. Year of graduation. Source Author (2020)

3.9 Employment

The key feature of the online questionnaire sent to graduates was to capture data concerning employment and type of job taken after graduation. Over 66% indicated that they had been employed. When asked whether their employment was related to the course of study they undertook, 66% responded in the affirmative. 77% of the graduates indicated that they chose white collar job and 22% indicated they opted for blue collar jobs. Many graduates indicated the reason for going for the white collar jobs was the educational background, the experience in the field, internship opportunities, volunteering opportunities and personal skills such as effective interpersonal communication. Over 66% of the graduates cited frustration after unsuccessful search for white collar jobs as the main reason for opting for blue collar job. The duration for successfully securing a job among the graduates ranged between 6 months and 3 years. The results are shown in Figures 8,9,10 and 11.

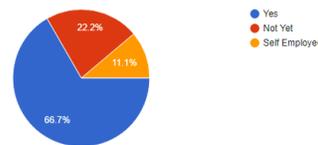


Figure 8: Are you employed. Source Author (2020)

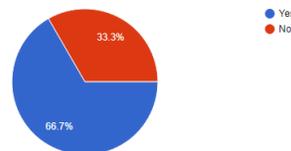


Figure 9: Job related to course of study. Source Author (2020)

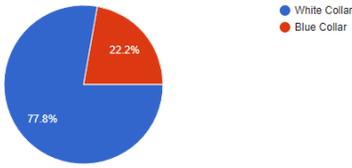


Figure 10: White Collar or Blue collar job.

Source Author (2020)

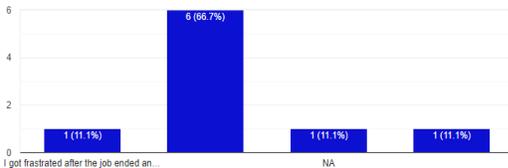


Figure 11: Reason for blue collar job.

Source Author (2020)

4.0 Discussions

4.1. Course selection as a determinant for Job type

From the results of the analysis, the type of course chosen at the university is a strong determinant of the type of job chosen after graduation. This is because the current curriculum is more focused on training the students to get a formal job as opposed to acquiring the skills necessary to be able to work anywhere including blue collar jobs. As a result, the course selected in the university has a strong influence on the attitude towards jobs after graduating.

4.2 Learning environment as a factor of attitude

The results of the analysis also indicate that the learning environment of a student has a major influence on attitudes towards blue collar employment. Students exposed to blue collar jobs either through apprenticeships, mentorships or volunteer activities in or outside the university are more likely to opt for blue collar employment as opposed to students who do not have this kind of exposure.

4.3 Job competition affects attitude formation

Many of the respondents reported that frustration with job search for white collar employment led to shifting attitudes for blue collar employment. Competition for jobs is further escalated by technology and social media which makes it easy for any employer to list available jobs online and get thousands of applicants for the same job.

4.4 Motivation correlates to attitudes on job types

The respondents indicated that their motivating factors towards certain job types included: Passion, career goals, mentorships, love for teaching and wanting to transform the society. These motivational factors seemed to have a controlling effect on their attitudes toward jobs selected.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings above the study concludes that most graduates and learners have a negative attitude towards blue collar employment this affects their ability to secure employment after graduation. The predominant factors influencing attitudes towards the type of job chosen include the course of study, environment, job competition and motivational aspects. This can be corrected if the students and graduates start appreciating blue collar jobs as a viable way to apply the skills and competencies acquired in school. Due to these it is recommended that:

1. The learning environment for students should offer technical skills, mentorship and apprenticeship programs to train students on blue collar jobs.
2. A comprehensive career advisor program to guide and advice students on the careers and skills in both

formal and non-formal education systems.

6.0 Acknowledgement

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