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TECHNICAL TRAINING: A PATHWAY TO YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

This paper assessed the relevance of technical training as an empowerment tool for youth in Sarawak – hence it shed light on Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) as a pathway to youth empowerment. It is noted that TVET increases youth empowerment opportunities and social-economic development. Qualitative research methodological approach was adopted in this study and the findings show that TVET is a tool for positive change with various potentials for skill development, capacity building, wealth creation, and youth empowerment.

Keywords

Empowerment, Youth Empowerment, Technical Training, TVET

1. Introduction/Background of the Study

This paper seeks to shed light on technical training as a pathway to youth empowerment. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2012) empowerment happens when youth(s), individually or collectively, conceive of, define and pursue better lives for themselves through skills from technical vocational education and training (TVET), so as to attain a better economic and social living condition. Especially, as TVET increases youth empowerment opportunities and social economic development (Ogbuanya and Obierika, 2015). However, the core fundamental understanding of empowerment is tied to the notion of power.

1.1 Empowerment as a Process

Empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process (Nwanesi, 2006); which is basically a process that begins from the grassroots (Oxaal and Baden, 1997). Supporting the above statement in a more recent publication, Sivachithappa (2014) reiterates the effectiveness of the bottom-up empowerment approach – Sivachithappa chime that bottom-up empowerment process is likened to grassroots' empowerment approach.

However, in the context of this study, “empowerment” specifically youth empowerment is geared towards equipping youths with technical know-how which will positively aid to promote national development (Nwankwo et al., 2013).

Building on the above understandings of empowerment, Jimba (2006), suggests that youth empowerment facilitates youth in different ways that causes a positive changes in their lifestyle. Odu et al. (2014) opined that TVET is a tool for positive change with various potentials for skill development, capacity building, wealth creation, and youth empowerment.

1.1.1 Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE)

Launched on 11 February 2008 by then Malaysian fifth Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (see www.hydroworld.com, 02/12/2008) as a development corridor, Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) is located in central Sarawak, Malaysia.

1.1.2 Youth Empowerment, Technical Training, and SCORE

Silberman (2007) notes that technical training is a form of training that leads to productive outcomes connected with the recalling, understanding, and applying specific skills and knowledge that are related to machinery, device, equipment, and system methods, and procedures.

1.2 Problem Statements

Youth empowerment through technical training seems elusive in Sarawak as the state currently faces shortages of technically trained personnel, especially amongst youth (Oxford Business Group 2013 and Fund, 2014). The shortage of human capacity (technically trained personnel) greatly impedes the State's empowerment drive.

It is quite incomprehensible that Malaysia youth who constitute about 41.2% (see 2014 Malaysia Statistic Department) of the entire population has little or no knowledge about government's empowerment drives. For instance, according to a study titled “*SCORE lost on youths,*” which its finding concludes that “*youths understanding of the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) is low.*” The finding added that Sarawakian youth lacks knowledge and awareness to properly participate in the State's empowerment drive (i.e. SCORE) – this conclusion

was based on a study involving 1,000 youth across three major cities in Sarawak – Miri, Kuching and Sibu (Yu Ji, 2011; see Thestar.com 14 May 2011).

1.3 Research Questions

- Why is technical training relevant to youth empowerment in Sarawak?

1.4 Research Objectives

- To assess how relevant technical training is to youth empowerment in Sarawak

1.5 Significant of the Study

This research explored technical training as an empowerment tool. More especially assessing how relevant technical training is, with regards to youth empowerment. This is pertinent, as technical training has been identified by some writers as an avenue for trainees to gain knowledge and abilities on specialized skills or professions.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research emphasized on youth empowerment through technical training. Knowledge of the scope of the study helped in identifying respondents and collecting relevant data required for this research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Technical Training and Youth Empowerment

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) state that the importance of youth empowerment cannot be over-emphasized as it leads to a rise in self-expression values, which is a development stride.

Jimba (2006) believes that youth empowerment involves different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their life. He maintained that youth empowerment means a way of inculcating into the youths the spirit of the transformation of ideas into creativeness.

Exposing youths to relevant skills has taken a new dimension and engages them in income-generating livelihoods (Alhasa and Abdullahi, 2013). They further stated that technical training is key to an improved youth's wellbeing. They viewed that technical training increases youth empowerment opportunities.

In this vein the importance of technical training as a relevant element to youth empowerment and nation-building is crucial, bearing in mind that the purpose of technical training as a means of youth empowerment as explained by Ogundowolo (1998) is to prepare and equip the youths with appropriate skills that can be beneficial to them in future.

Furthermore, Technical training enhances youth empowerment via different creative measures of developing youth basic ideas through training in skills that are relevant to the social and

economic survival of the nation (Ochiagha, 1995). Idoko (2014) viewed that the above empowerment strategies are expected to imbibe in the youths the spirit of craftsmanship and ultimately become beneficial to relevant industries. A good example of the relevance of technical training to youth empowerment in Sarawak is evident in the State Governments' technical-based empowerment program: Tabung Ekonomi Gagasan Anak Bumiputera Sarawak (TEGAS's), known in English languages as FIRM. TEGAS or FIRM was established on the initiative of the State Government on February 28, 2012. TEGAS role is to promote technical and education and training (TVET) among youth in Sarawak, especially those living in rural areas. With the idea that empowering Sarawak youth with skills boost the state development drive (TEGAS, 2013).

2.2 Empowerment as a Development Process

Thompson (2007) stressed that this developmental process is a pathway to empowerment, which in a sense gives individuals or groups some sort of decision making power. This empowerment 'power' is developed over time through processes or stages (i.e., TVET processes), aimed at achieving positive change.

Obviously, nothing on earth has gone un-criticized including the concept of empowerment; Sadan states that most empowerment critics' strongholds are that it is biased which is either based on ethnicity, gender, or religion and this has been great challenges confronting empowerment ideology.

However, the importance of empowerment cannot be overlooked rather these challenges can be addressed to bring about positive change by providing a process that leads to skills acquisition and knowledge which serves as the power that provides the abilities to control and make favorable decisions to improve one's lives, others and the society at large.

Similar to empowerment, technical training has been equally critiqued based on its challenges. Amedorme and Fiagbe (2013) note that these challenges ranging from the limited number of technical institutes available, lack of facilities and materials for training students, inadequate technical teachers or facilitators, and difficulty in career progression to the negative public attitudes and perceptions towards technical training. Ismail and Abiddin (2014) pointed out that TVET in Malaysia faces challenges of youth mindset and public perceptions.

Additionally, technical training faces significant challenges due to the educational policy direction. Although on policy level critics equally argued the TVET system as expensive, inefficient, and unresponsive (Marope et al., 2015).

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

This study seeks to tap on established knowledge of writers that have worked and developed suitable empowerment theories and research frameworks.

2.3.1 Critical Social Theory of Empowerment

Based-off Critical Social Theory of Empowerment, Jennings et al. (2006) proposed that critical youth empowerment (CYE) encompasses those processes and contexts through which youth engage in actions that create change in organizational, institutional, and societal policies, structures, values, norms, and images. Additionally, CYE is built on, integrating, and expanding existing conceptual models of youth development and youth empowerment.

Keiffer's framework gives a clear illustration of the processes of empowerment which are compatible and applicable with technical training.

2.3.2 Keiffer Theory of Empowerment in relation to training

Keiffer's theory applies to individuals in the process of empowerment; where the (empowerment) process passes through several phases in the participants. It shows the patterns and processes of the participants' transition from a state of powerlessness to empowerment (Essay, UK. 2013). This concept-like theory shows the patterns and processes of the participants' transition from a state of powerlessness to empowerment.

These stages or processes leads to proximal and distal outcome. It is essential to note that technical training's role seeks to improve youth wellbeing (Alhasa and Abdullahi, 2013).

This study adapted Keiffer's theory, to explain its conceptual framework "Youth Empowerment Process Concept" below:

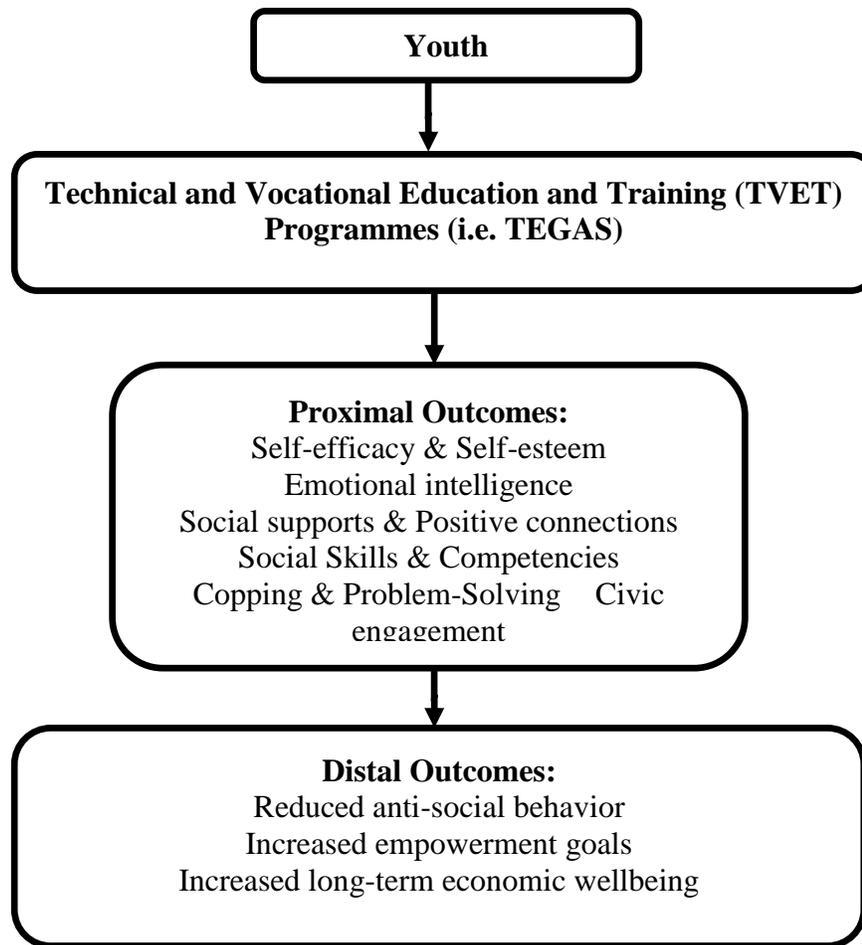


Figure 1: Youth Empowerment Process Concept (Adapted from Keiffer’s 1984 cited in Essay, UK 2013)

Similar to keiffer’s theory – this study’s conceptual framework diagram as seen above equally consists of four stages; Youth — Technical based youth empowerment programmes — Proximal outcomes — Distal outcomes. All these are inter-linked so as to achieve “*Proximal outcomes*” and “*Distal outcomes*” for all parties involved in the processes (i.e. TEGAS, SCORE investors/stakeholders, Sarawakian youths, Sarawak/Malaysian government economy, and host communities).The “*youth*” steps forward in its quest to become empowered by participating in “*Technical based youth empowerment programmes*” and skills acquired during these processes will results to “*proximal outcomes;*” and proximal outcomes leads to “*distal outcomes.*”

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research is commonly referred to as a search for knowledge (Kumar, 2008). This chapter comprised of information on the method that were applied in this study.

3.1.1 Research Approach

This study utilized an exploratory research methodology which is synonymous with research trend that is recognized by a wide spectrum of methodologists (Jupp, 2006).

3.1.2 Qualitative Methods

The Qualitative approach was applied in this study. A qualitative research method was suitable for this study as it provided a more accessible, interactive and sociable rapport between the researcher and the research participants while also providing a bigger picture of situations or issues in a more informed way through its techniques (Nicholls, 2011).

3.1.3 Study Instrument (In-depth Interview)

This study made use of an open-ended interview format because it is an unrestrictive or unstructured question and spontaneous response from research participants (see American Heritage, 2011).

3.1.4 Personal Interview

A common process of applying the qualitative research method is through the interview as it accorded the researcher an opportunity to interview and or dialogue with participants.

3.1.5 Focus Group

Focus group discussion was another interview technique that was applied during the course of this study.

3.1.6 Empirical Observations

This study made use of empirical observation in gathering sensory data through sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch—by various means of record-keeping, as traces of those impressions are stored for careful scrutiny and analysis after the event (Somekh and Lewin, 2005).

3.2 Research Populations

Firstly, this study's common-denominator is research population knowledge of technical training. Secondly, this study's research population fell within Malaysian youth age bracket (15-40-years-old). Thirdly, bearing-in-mind that Sarawak is a multi-ethnic State, this study research population comprises participants from various ethnic groups within the State.

3.3 Research Sample

This study adopted a non-probability sampling approach in selecting research respondents. Non-probability sampling is an approach where the researcher selects elements (the respondents) by non-random methods.

3.3.1 Sampling Size

With non-probability and snowball sampling techniques this study arrived at a total of twenty-seven research populations.

3.4 Data Collection

This study utilised primary and secondary data techniques.

3.5 Study Area

This study was conducted on Sarawakian youths residing in Mukah division and Kuching, Sarawak. The elaborate discussion below is focused on the research areas.

3.6 Outsider and Insider

The researcher is a foreigner in Sarawak, Malaysia, thus is considered an outsider. However, being an outsider did not negatively affect the success of this study, because the researcher have resided in Sarawak, Malaysia for over four years and has read widely about Sarawak, especially in the areas of social and human development.

3.7 Research Ethics

This research was conducted with critical consideration of research ethics. Meaning that it was conducted without exploiting others or breaking agreed ethical rules.

3.7.1 Confidentiality

The researcher made sure participants were not harmed before and after this study.

3.7.2 Informed Consent

The respondents were well informed about the purpose of this study and the types of questions in the interview.

3.8 Research Limitations

Non-probability sampling technique was a limitation. This was due to unavailability of accurate youth population as at the time of this research. Hence, this study finding did not generalized its findings among the entire population.

3.9 Survey Questions

- 1) Would you consider technical training as a relevant approach to empower the youth?
- 2) What best way do you think the youth can be encouraged to partake in technical training?
- 3) What are your views on the technical training initiatives by SCORE?

4. Findings

Although there are significant improvement from previous study by Yu Ji (2011) which findings noted that Sarawak youth lacked knowledge and awareness on the state governments' empowerment programmes – this study participants are of the view that more awareness needs to be created, especially through social media platforms; as that is where most youth have presence.

Below pie chart shows in statistics a vivid picture of participants responds to the survey questions which are based on this paper's research objective.

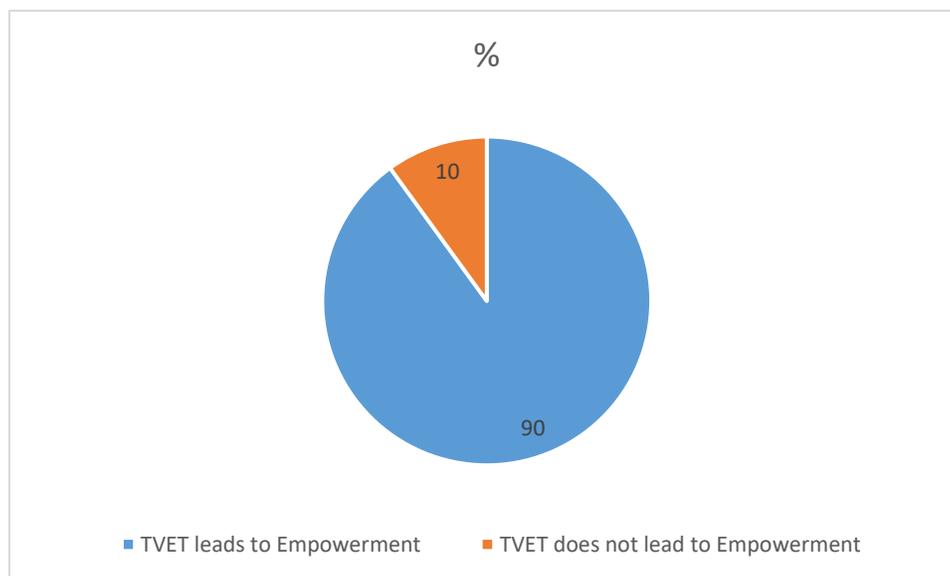


Figure 2: *Technical and Vocational Education and Training Chart*

For further explanation chart – 90% (blue) of the participant affirmed that technical training is relevant and indeed a pathway to youth empowerment, while the remaining 10% (orange) does not believe yet that technical training is a pathway to youth empower and according to the later, this is due to the fact, that they are yet to witness empowerment through skills acquired; either due to lack of sufficient work experiences to fit into higher paying jobs, or/and lack of finance to start-up have deprived them of being empowered through skills acquired.

4.1 Recommendations

This paper recommends that in subsequent related researcher – researchers should adopt quantitative research approach and also try to include other States in Malaysia so as to get a wider reach and a more inclusive research.

4.2 Conclusion

This paper explored and shed light on technical training as a pathway to empowerment and appropriate literatures and theories were applied to explain and recommend a framework (adapted).

Qualitative research method was used in participants' selection, interviews, and data collection techniques. This paper experienced limitation in research population and sample size, as it only made use of a fraction of Sarawakian youth. This limitation was due to the unavailability of an accurate youth population in Sarawak, as at the time of the research – hence the researcher hopes that future research on this topic should cover a broader scope (entire states in Malaysia).

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