

A Synthesis of Innovative Approaches and Implementation of Career Services in Kenyan Universities and Colleges

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ABSTRACT

Though there are many reasons for unemployment in Kenya, lack of technical competencies and skills has been flagged as one of the major reasons. This revelation triggered the Ministry of Education to roll out the establishment of the Office of Career Services (OCS) in all universities and tertiary institutions in 2018. The objective of this paper was to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of career services offices in colleges and universities in Kenya and to identify innovative approaches adopted. Primary data was collected by interviewing career services officers in selected institutions while secondary data was collected through a synthesis of relevant research and publications. Quantitative and qualitative data collected were analyzed using mixed methods and presented in summaries, tables, and percentages. The study found out that the three major and common factors driving change in career services are reforms in the education sector, changes in the labor market, and globalization. Regarding the implementation of the office of career services, 88% of the institutions placed internships and attachment programs as very important areas of focus. It was further found that only 8% of the institutions consider innovation programs as a very important element of the career services office. Furthermore, the study found that in the adoption and use of technology, 60% of the institutions rated high use in the adoption of technology in training while only 6% rated high use in the adoption of labor market information systems. It was noteworthy that 100% of the participating institutions had adopted technology in the provision of career services information to students. The study also found that 60% of the institutions somewhat consider the role of parents in students' careers while 40% did not. This paper observed that successful implementation and delivery of career services in Kenya requires the adoption of innovative approaches in methods of delivery, adoption, and use of technology, robust and responsive partnerships, and redefining the role of all stakeholders including parents and guardians in students' career development journey. It is thus recommended that these four areas should be delivered in a way that allows for education and training systems to be responsive to the skills for the future.

Keywords: Career Services, Innovation Approaches, Higher institutions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is and remains one of the greatest challenges in developing countries including Kenya (Graham and Anwar, 2019). According to International Labor Organization (ILO) reports of 2020, unemployment is highest in the Middle East and North Africa (22%) and sub-Saharan Africa at 17% (ILO, 2020). It has been observed that unemployment is majorly affecting young people causing detrimental consequences both to them individually as well as the society at large in the form of social, economic and development prospects (ILO, 2019).

The conversations on the role of educational institutions in the job market and in particular preparedness for industry emerged as early as the end of the 19th century and became more pronounced in the Victorian age (Peck 2004). This initial attempt was focused on placement-oriented services (Bao, 2011). Towards the end of the 20th century, higher

education started to move towards the developmental model placing the responsibility of career growth, development, and learning on the student (Kretovics *et al.*, 1999). During this time, students found themselves taking charge of their career and professional growth while institutions offered guidance and counseling services. The social and technological dynamics of the time are significant drivers for change in both the academic and economic sectors. Playing an effective role in preparing learners for the job market thus requires that training institutions are responsive to the social and technological dynamics of the time. This should shape how education is delivered and consequently how career services are offered (Dey, 2017).

The services offered by the career office are a composite of expert services designed to assist students to make educational, training, and occupational choices and managing their careers. They are critical in helping students make clear, careful, and individual choices for programs of study, courses, and careers based on their interests, passion, and abilities

(Oigo and Kaluyu, 2016). This function puts universities at the center of student employability questions. Traditionally, employability has been viewed as the development of skill sets that are desirable to potential employers (Bridgstock, 2009). This position has recently shifted to incorporate broader areas that acknowledge an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing labor market (De, 2017).

1.1 Problem Statement

In 2018, Kenya made it a requirement for all universities and colleges to establish a career services office. This development was aimed at preparing young people for the world of work and thus contributing to the achievement of vision 2030. This requirement places universities and colleges as critical players in enabling young people to participate in the global economy. According to Andrei and Solberg, 2020, globalization, technological advancement, and demographic changes are increasingly changing and impacting education, training, and labor-market systems. The way individuals learn, and work has significantly changed while at the same time the job market is constantly changing. These dynamics require that individuals become lifelong learners adapting skills necessary for coping with change that comes with labor-market evolutions. To be able to realize this, the offering of career services ought to be done in a way that innovative approaches are used to ensure that the students are equipped with the skills required for the future of work. These are skills that make them lifelong learners able to adapt to the ever-changing labor market. This paper seeks to assess the implementation of career service offices in selected universities and colleges in Kenya. It further seeks to identify innovative approaches adopted.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study targeted universities and colleges in Kenya. A total of 50 colleges and universities which had implemented career services offices were selected using the purposive sampling method. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Primary data was collected by interviewing career services officers in selected institutions. Interviews were conducted using an interview questionnaire that was developed and subjected to a validity test. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and presented.

Secondary data was collected through a synthesis of relevant research and publications. Quantitative and qualitative data collected were analyzed using mixed methods and presented in summaries, tables, and percentages

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Drivers of Change

Changes in career services in institutions manifest differently in different institutions, countries, and regions. Factors that affect the job market by extension have a primary or secondary effect on educational institutions. According to Barnes *et al.* 2020, Cedefop 2019, and World Economic Forum 2020, changes in education and the job market that impacts career services in institutions result from demographic change, globalization, and technology. The effect manifests in different ways including changes in the world of work and learning and change in skills required in the economy. The study sought to find out from career services officers the key factors responsible for the change in

career services. The study revealed three major and common drivers of change in career services in higher institutions in Kenya i.e., reforms in the education sector, change in the market, and globalization.

3.1.1 Reforms in the Education Sector

Since Kenya got its independence in 1963, six commissions and several task forces have been set up to consider the education system and review it to respond to the diverse social, political, and economic needs of the time. The most recent review happened in 2017 which saw the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) to consider the abilities and needs of the learners.

According to European Training Foundation, 2020, a quality education system is a critical foundation for the stable and successful economic development of any country. As such, countries ought to put in place legislation, policies, and processes that ensure that the learners are well-prepared to participate in the economy of the country. To realize this, countries should invest in curricula, learning environments, teachers' capabilities, and the transition between education and the workplace so that learners are equipped with competencies relevant to now and the future (Mann *et al.*, 2020). In the same breath, Career services in universities and colleges should evolve to align and respond to the new realities. Studies including Barnes *et al.*, 2020; European Commission, 2019; OECD, 2020 World Bank, 2020 content that the offering of career services ought to be done in such a way that learners are not only prepared for existing jobs but also future employment and job creation.

The telephone interview conducted revealed that most of the institutions (60%) established the career services office as a response to the government directive while 40% had the office in place before the directive. The survey further revealed that 90% of the institutions had made significant investments in improving the office after receiving the directive.

Changes in the education sector are a key driver in the changes witnessed in the career services office in universities and colleges. The changes witnessed in the career services office are positive. It is however observed that to effectively respond to dynamics, institutions ought to have an inbuilt mechanism of ensuring that the offerings are robust and responsive and not wait for changes in the education sector. This trend has a clear impact on the indicators to measure the success of the services offered. This is the same position held by Teichler (2007) who notes that building employability not only expresses involvement within the curriculum but the creation of a surrounding environment capable of bringing meaning and perspective to the transition in a perspective of mutual collaboration.

3.1.2 Changes in the Labour Market

Economic changes and subsequent changes in the market affect the labor sector as well as the education sector. A synthesis of studies made has revealed that there exist possible measures that institutions can adopt to ensure that career development is relevant and responsive to the changes in the market. These initiatives include the development of programs that promote skills development. Such programs

have been found to combine labor market information with skills development (OECD, 2019).

The interviews conducted revealed that 100% of the career services offices are primarily involved in preparing students for internship and attachment. In so doing, different institutions have different packages which range from training on the writing of resumes to job search and interview skills. This function places the career services office at the frontline of the job market. The survey further revealed that 72% of the practitioners noted that dynamics in the job market inform regular changes in the offering of the office and are a key challenge in keeping students ready and prepared. It was further found that 90% of the respondents noted that the shift to a digital economy was one of the most unprecedented changes witnessed. As a result, 100% of the respondents indicated the need for training to continuously build the capacity of practitioners to keep abreast with the changes and thus support students in building the requisite skills.

Having the employability of students at heart means taking care of all aspects of training, education, experience, and exposure. This is paramount in building relationships with companies and organizations that offer training opportunities inside and outside their course of study. This is fundamental in building Career Service that looks to the future of education and employment, able to connect them to help improve the lives of students, future graduates, and future workers.

3.1.2 Changes in the Labour Market

Internationalization of higher education is a quest that has picked momentum in the 21st century because of globalization. This concept has been described as a process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the higher education system. This has majorly been necessitated by international students and labor export. In such a context, experts observe that students need to be afforded career guidance that can help them explore future options and facilitate their career decision-making process globally (Cedefop, 2014).

Kenya has over time grown as an academic hub and plays a critical role in the East African Community as well as Africa at large. Career services need to be responsive to the realities of globalization and international cooperation. International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP) recommends that states should support innovation in career development through resourcing, training, and capacity building (ICCDPP, 2019).

The survey conducted revealed that 58% of the participating institutions have non-Kenyan students. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 40% of the respondents have a focus on international students in the offering of their career services. This majorly was about making special arrangements for internship placements. This finding reveals the existing gap in ensuring that universities and colleges are better equipped to offer career services that are responsive to the needs of students from the region and beyond. This calls for broader engagement to ensure that policies are in place to enhance engagement within and beyond the country. This is fundamental in supporting international students within Kenya as well as opening opportunities for internship and job placements beyond the boundaries of Kenya.

3.2 Implementation of Career Services Office

Studies done in different parts of the world have given considerable evidence that career services have a positive impact on learners' educational outcomes, economic, employment, and social outcomes (Hooley, 2014 Hughes *et al* 2016). In this study, the researcher sought to assess how universities and colleges in Kenya have adopted innovative approaches in the implementation of career services in relation to areas of focus and methods, adoption of technology, partnerships and co-operations, and the role of stakeholders.

3.2.1 Areas of Focus and Methods

Implementation and delivery of career services in institutions are critical in helping learners, identity, pursue and thrive in career paths that are helpful to themselves as well as the social and economic development of the nation in the present and the future. To effectively do this, learners need to be afforded effective career guidance. The study sought to find out the key areas of focus that the universities and colleges are investing in while implementing career services offices. The results are shown in table i:

Table i: Areas of focus in the career services

ITEM/FUNCTION	What level of importance has been attached to the following functions/items in the Career Service?			
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Student Skills, values, and Interests	4%	20%	40%	36%
Career Planning programs	0%	22%	24%	54%
Occupation and job market choices	0%	12%	56%	32%
Academic Progression	0%	28%	32%	40%
Employment and Job Search	0%	12%	16%	72%
Skills for the future programs	12%	28%	48%	12%
Internships and Attachment programs	0%	0%	12%	88%
Innovation programs	12%	14%	66%	8%
Entrepreneurs hip Programs	8%	22%	58%	12%

The data from the survey shows that the implementation of career services in colleges and universities in Kenya has seen the adoption and consideration of key functional areas. These include student internships, job searches, and academic progression. It is also observed that there are key functional areas that are not considered important in some institutions. Skills for the future programs (12%), innovation (12%), entrepreneurship programs (8%), and student interest (4%) were rated as not important in different institutions. It was established that this was because of varied reasons including lack of capacity, poor resourcing, misalignment, and silo nature of institutional management leading to fragmentation of related functions.

Institutions need to endeavor to prepare students to respond to the current job markets while at the same time preparing them to adapt to the dynamics that come with time. This calls for investment and focuses on the key areas of student interests, skills for the future, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Career services in universities and colleges should be delivered in a way that positively impacts individual students as well as contribute toward the social and economic development of the nation. The choice of priority areas of focus of the office should be data-driven to guarantee this outcome. As Kenya makes progress in implementing career services in institutions, an evaluation mechanism should be put in place to measure the impact of the office on the career journey of students over time. This will inform appropriate areas of focus as well as methods of delivery. This corroborates the finding by Whinston *et al* (2017) that different focuses and methods of delivery of career services yield different impacts on students and the economy at large. In this regard effective delivery of career services require that the methods chosen should be lifelong and progressive with a capacity to connect meaningfully to the lives and experiences of a diverse student population in a holistic and integrated way.

3.2.2 Adoption and Use of Technology

The use of technology is one of the innovative ways of getting things done that cannot be ignored. Information and communication technology (ICT) encompassing different technologies and tools (e.g., email, SMS/text messaging, websites, chat, newsgroups, telephony), have become core to the delivery of services in higher education. According to Attwell and Hughes, 2019, the significant growth in the use of technology enables new methods of adopting and delivering career services in institutions. This study sought to find out how the institutions in Kenya have adopted and used technology as part of innovative ways of delivering career services and the results are as shown in table ii below:

Table ii: Adoption and use of technology in Career services Offices in Kenya

TECHNOLOGY	EXTEND OF ADOPTION/USE			
	Not at all	Some what	High Use	Don't Know
Use of social media	18%	24%	58%	0%
Use of technology in training	0%	40%	60%	0%
Use of mobile applications	20%	52%	16%	12%
Use of technology in Evaluation of the impact	32%	44%	20%	4%
Web-based information and interaction	16%	60%	16%	8%
Online provision of Information	0%	44%	56%	0%
Use of labor market information system	40%	24%	6%	30%
Use of career information system	32%	40%	10%	18%

The study revealed that institutions have adopted the use of diverse technological approaches in the delivery of career services. Most of the institutions recorded high use of technology in training (60%), social media (58%), and online provision of information (56%). The survey further revealed the non-use of technology in the following areas mobile applications (20%), evaluation of impact (32%), labor market information system (40%), and career information system (32%). The survey further revealed that there are areas of technology use that institutions were not aware of for example labor market information systems (30%), career information systems (18), and the use of mobile applications in career services (12%).

The adoption and use of technology in career services range from simple systems like audiovisual systems to more specialized tools and platforms like Moodle, messaging, and chatrooms (Bakshi & Goss, 2019). ICT has the potential to transform roles, alternate or replace and be a change agent in the delivery and roles of career services. In its use, ICT can complement and/or be integrated with other ways of providing career services.

The findings of this survey corroborate the findings of a study conducted by Kettunen, Vuorinen, and Ruusuvirta (2016) in Europe on conceptions of the role of ICT in career services where it was found that the extent to which countries and institutions use ICT in career services varies widely from unexploited to strategic corroborating. In their recommendations, Kettunen *et al*, 2016, they note that to effectively use ICT for responsive career services there is a need for a clear legal framework and adequate funding. In the same vein, there is a need for a review of policies to ensure the effective adoption and use of information technology in the delivery of career services. The recent past has seen great ICT-related initiatives targeting learning institutions that career services can take advantage of. One of these programs

is the presidential digital talent and Ajira program. This and other programs are aimed at creating opportunities for students to utilize ICT in their career development as well as engage in productive online employment.

In the implementation of career services, universities and colleges need to conceptualize ICT as a tool to assist, enhance, and support other methods of delivery of career services. This calls for policy review, training, and capacity building.

3.2.3 Partnership and Cooperation

The study found that different institutions have put in place frameworks and mechanisms for partnership and cooperation to support the functions of career services offices. Most common partnerships and cooperation include stakeholder fora, employers' engagement, professional bodies' engagement, media and broadcasting, government and non-governmental bodies' engagement, and local and international institutions.

Different nations look to find ways to enable different institutions, service providers, and employers to work together effectively with the aim of empowering citizens with the best skills and preparing for their working lives. A classic example is an initiative by the European Commission to establish an expert group on lifelong guidance in 2002 to strengthen information, guidance, and counseling policies, systems, and practices (Vuorinen, 2017). As career services offices mature in Kenya, leave must be borrowed from the advanced frameworks of partnership and collaboration. Innovation along with partnerships should take into consideration the development of national cross-sectoral strategies for career development linked to skills, education, employment, and social policies. A national mechanism to support coordination and cooperation between government departments and agencies with responsibility for career development and associated fields ought to be put in place. This will create a much-needed impetus to enable career services to leverage on partnerships and collaborations both locally and internationally.

Internally, career services should have a mechanism to link and work together and contribute to the work of other units that relate to student career development. This includes curriculum development and review and teaching and learning. In so doing, the office will be better placed to share experiences as a bridge between training and employment and add value to the discourse of education. This is possible through the robust and responsive structuring of the institution.

3.2.4 The role of Parents

Studies conducted on the influence of parents on children's career development have presented evidence that parents have a major influence on children's career development (Keller

Whiston and 2004). It is postulated that parents are key and play an important role in children's career development decisions. It is equally observed that over-involvement in the decision-making process can undermine parental effects as a positive source of influence (Selingo, 2016).

This study sought to find out to what extent the career services offices reflected on the role of parents and guardians in the career development of the students. The survey found that 60% of the institution somewhat consider it while 40% do not consider it at all. The survey also took note of some innovative approaches in some institutions where career guidance was offered to parents and children to enhance common understanding and support decision-making at the family level.

Synthesis of studies done by Warps 2013 and Oomen 2019 reveals that the involvement of parents and guardians in career education and guidance had a significant contribution to the increased success of students. It is appreciated that this area requires more research. This notwithstanding, the influence of parents on students cannot be wished away and as such, there is a need for the implementation of a career services office to put this into consideration. To effectively do this, there is a need for institutions to establish a framework for undertaking collaborative interventions in schools, communities, and families. Furthermore, there is a need to enhance communication and build cooperation between teachers, guidance counselors, and parents.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Career guidance has positive impacts on students' educational outcomes, economic, employment, and social outcomes, and thus its implementation in Kenyan universities and colleges is a step in the right direction. In its delivery, institutions should adopt methodologies that enhance lifelong and progressive learning with a capacity to connect meaningfully to the realities of the time and future. Furthermore, institutions should be able to adopt the use of technology as a tool to assist, enhance, and further develop traditional approaches to delivery. Frameworks for partnership should be devised in a way that enhances the development of national cross-sectoral strategies for career development linked to skills, education, employment, and social policies. To effectively implement this, it is important to enhance resourcing of the career services office. This will ensure that the office can deploy appropriate tools and methods. Resourcing should also include appropriate staffing and proper skilling through continuous training and capacity building. This is fundamental in ensuring that the practitioners are well prepared to support students' career development and management journey. Finally, it is recommended that the institutions put in place a proper mechanism to enhance stakeholder involvement in students' career journeys. This should be built on a robust framework that enhances communication and cooperation between teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and other stakeholders.

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