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PERCEIVED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND PEACE ATTAINMENT AMONG TVET TRAINEES IN ELGEYO MARAKWET COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT :

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) may support economic inclusion, but its relationship with peace attainment requires context-specific evidence. This study examined perceived employment opportunities and their association with perceived peace attainment among final-year TVET trainees in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. The article reports the quantitative employment component of a wider doctoral study. A cross-sectional survey covered Chepsirei and Kerio Valley technical and vocational colleges. Of 297 questionnaires administered, 274 were returned, a response rate of 92.3%. Five-point Likert responses were summarised using frequencies, percentages, means and sample standard deviations. Most respondents disagreed that TVET increased employment opportunities (92.0%), supported entrepreneurial self-employment (89.1%) or enabled income generation (90.1%). Item means ranged from 1.61 to 2.30, below the neutral midpoint. Nevertheless, employment-opportunity scores were positively associated with peace-attainment scores ($r = .284$, $p < .001$, $N = 274$). Low average endorsement therefore coexisted with a positive association between scores. The findings identify perceived limitations in the employment pathway while indicating that more favourable employment assessments accompanied more favourable peace assessments. The cross-sectional, self-report design does not establish realised employment or causal effects. Institutions should examine employment-transition support and evaluate economic and peace-related outcomes separately.

Keywords: Technical And Vocational Education and Training; Employment Opportunities; Peace Attainment; Youth Livelihoods; Kenya

Introduction

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) can prepare learners for productive participation, yet the availability of training does not establish that suitable work follows. Employment preparation, access to opportunities, income generation and the ability to sustain an independent livelihood are related but distinct concerns. The UNESCO recommendation situates TVET within occupational education, training and skills development, providing a broad basis for considering its economic and social purposes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). For research on peace attainment, the important question is whether the opportunities associated with vocational preparation are experienced as meaningful and whether those assessments relate to perceived peaceful coexistence.

The proposed economic pathway is plausible but requires examination. Productive capabilities may help individuals pursue work and livelihoods, while economic participation could create conditions supportive of social inclusion. Human Capital Theory explains investment in knowledge and productive capabilities, but does not imply that qualifications alone create employment or peaceful relationships (Becker, 1964). Positive Peace Theory directs attention to broader constructive social conditions rather than treating the absence of direct violence as sufficient evidence of peace (Galtung, 1996). Together, these perspectives suggest examining vocational preparation, economic opportunities and peace-related assessments without assuming that one necessarily produces the next.

Evidence from livelihood interventions supports this distinction. In northern Uganda, grants intended to facilitate vocational training and entry into skilled trades improved several economic outcomes after four years, but did not produce detectable improvements in social cohesion or antisocial behaviour (Blattman et al., 2014). The nine-year follow-up found convergence in employment, earnings and consumption, although some differences in assets and skilled work remained (Blattman et al., 2020). These findings show that economic gains and social outcomes require separate measurement, and that the timing of assessment matters when interpreting an intervention's contribution.

Other programmes illustrate the importance of the support accompanying training. The EPAG evaluation in Liberia examined an adolescent girls'

employment programme combining vocational or business preparation with additional support and reported improved employment and earnings (Adoho et al., 2014). In Kenya, the World Bank (2023) reported employment achievements under the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project, including 81% employment among recipients of skills training and internship packages and 90% among recipients of business development services or grants. Such programmes establish the relevance of employment support, but their participants, intervention packages and outcome measures differ from a survey of trainees attending conventional TVET institutions.

Institutional preparation also requires attention. Muchira et al. (2023) identified resource, equipment and practical curriculum-delivery barriers relevant to youth employment preparation in Kenyan TVET institutions. This evidence helps situate trainees' concerns, although it cannot establish the conditions in institutions not included in that investigation. At the social level, van der Veen and Datzberger (2022) showed how a business-development programme within Sierra Leone's TVET strategy encountered difficulties connected to inequality, funding and representation. Their analysis indicates that employment-oriented education operates within wider social relationships and institutional conditions.

The literature therefore leaves a specific empirical question: how do trainees' assessments of TVET-related employment opportunities relate to their assessments of peace attainment in a defined Kenyan setting? Existing evaluations often measure economic outcomes, while the peacebuilding literature cautions against reducing peace to employment alone. Evidence from grant programmes or post-conflict business initiatives cannot automatically describe the experiences of final-year trainees at the two public colleges examined here. This article addresses that question through employment-related item distributions and a bivariate association with peace-attainment scores.

The objective was to examine perceived TVET-related employment opportunities and their relationship with perceived peace attainment among final-year trainees in Elgeyo Marakwet County. The null hypothesis was that the two scores had no statistically significant relationship. The analysis distinguishes the overall level of endorsement from the association between scores: low average agreement can coexist with a positive correlation when respondents with relatively more favourable employment assessments also give relatively more favourable peace assessments. This distinction is central to interpreting the findings.

Conceptual orientation

Employment opportunities were considered through preparation for work, entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation and self-reliance, together with respondents' assessments of the proposed social implications of employment. Peace attainment was approached through perceived contributions of TVET to coexistence, cohesion, non-violent disagreement resolution and community peace. Human Capital Theory informed the vocational and economic dimension, while Positive Peace Theory provided a broader social perspective (Becker, 1964; Galtung, 1996). The framework treats these as proposed relationships to investigate. It does not regard an employment qualification, economic participation and peaceful conduct as interchangeable outcomes.

Methods

Design and setting

The study used a cross-sectional descriptive survey within a wider mixed-methods doctoral investigation. This article reports the trainee questionnaire findings relevant to employment opportunities and peace attainment. The study setting comprised Chepsirei Technical and Vocational College and Kerio Valley Technical and Vocational College in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. No training intervention was introduced and no comparison group was assigned. The design consequently provides evidence about perceptions and associations at the time of assessment, rather than changes attributable to TVET.

Participants and sampling

The eligible trainee population comprised 482 final-year trainees: 237 at Chepsirei TVC and 245 at Kerio Valley TVC. The planned sample allocated 147 trainees to Chepsirei and 150 to Kerio Valley, giving 297 questionnaires. The thesis describes stratification and simple random selection of trainees within the sampling framework. Completed questionnaires were returned by 274 trainees, representing 92.3% of those approached. The available results do not identify the institutional distribution of the completed questionnaires. Participants' reported characteristics are presented to describe the sample, rather than to imply representativeness of all trainees or young people in the county.

Measures and instrument preparation

Questionnaire statements used five response categories, coded from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with 3 representing neutrality. The employment section contained seven statements covering preparation for employment, entrepreneurial self-employment, earning income, reduced economic frustration, economic empowerment and coexistence, the proposition that unemployment contributes to conflict, and knowledge supporting self-reliance. Because these statements address different propositions, item distributions were interpreted separately rather than assuming that each directly measured an individual's employment status.

The peace-attainment section contained six statements concerning TVET's contribution to coexistence, social cohesion, non-violent approaches to

disagreements, reduced conflict-related factors, graduates' contributions to peaceful communities and support for strengthening TVET as a peace strategy. These items measure respondents' assessments of TVET's peace-related contribution, rather than independently recorded incidents of violence or community-level peace. The final recommendation-oriented statement also differs from the experiential statements, which is relevant to interpreting the outcome construct.

The wider study reports expert review and piloting of its instruments. Pilot internal-consistency coefficients were reported as Cronbach's alpha of .78 for employment opportunities and .85 for peace attainment.

Data collection and ethics

The researcher and trained research assistants distributed and collected questionnaires and checked returned instruments for completeness. The thesis reports that participants received information about the study, participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and secure handling of information were maintained. Institutional permission and research authorization were described in the wider study. The analysis presented here uses aggregate questionnaire findings and does not disclose participant identities.

Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the sample and responses to each employment statement. Strongly disagree and disagree were combined to summarise disagreement; agree and strongly agree were combined to summarise agreement. Means and sample standard deviations were checked against the tabulated item frequencies using the stated five-point coding. These statistics supplement the categorical distributions and do not assume that low endorsement establishes absence of employment or competence. The reported two-tailed Pearson correlation examined the relationship between employment-opportunity and peace-attainment scores at the .05 significance level. No item-specific effects, adjusted regression effects or causal relationships were estimated for this article.

Results

Response and participant characteristics

The analysis included 274 of the 297 trainee questionnaires, leaving 23 without a completed return. Male respondents constituted 67.9% of the sample and female respondents 32.1%. The largest age group was 20–24 years (40.9%), followed by 15–19 years (39.4%). Together, these groups represented 80.3% of respondents. Table 1 summarises the available demographic information. These distributions describe respondents and do not establish whether participation differed from the eligible population by age or gender.

Table 1

Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	186	67.9
	Female	88	32.1
Age group	15–19 years	108	39.4
	20–24 years	112	40.9
	25–29 years	21	7.7
	30–34 years	33	12.0

Note. N = 274. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Perceived employment and livelihood benefits

All seven employment-related item means were below the neutral midpoint of 3.00, ranging from 1.61 to 2.30. Disagreement was highest for the statement that training equipped trainees with skills increasing employment opportunities: 252 respondents (92.0%) disagreed, whereas 19 (6.9%) agreed. For entrepreneurial self-employment, 244 (89.1%) disagreed and 29 (10.6%) agreed. For earning income, 247 (90.1%) disagreed and 26 (9.5%) agreed. These results indicate limited endorsement of the proposed livelihood benefits among the surveyed trainees; they are not estimates of graduate unemployment or earnings.

Table 2

Perceptions of TVET related employment opportunities

Statement	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	M (SD)
Training equips trainees with skills increasing employment opportunities	252 (92.0)	3 (1.1)	19 (6.9)	1.61 (0.96)
Graduates have opportunities for entrepreneurial self-employment	244 (89.1)	1 (0.4)	29 (10.6)	1.75 (1.14)
TVET skills enable individuals to earn income	247 (90.1)	1 (0.4)	26 (9.5)	1.68 (1.09)
TVET-created employment reduces economic frustration	207 (75.5)	15 (5.5)	52 (19.0)	2.27 (1.06)
TVET-driven economic empowerment contributes to coexistence	207 (75.5)	13 (4.7)	54 (19.7)	2.28 (1.09)
Lack of employment can contribute to social conflict	212 (77.4)	8 (2.9)	54 (19.7)	2.30 (1.13)
Institutional knowledge supports self-reliance after graduation	211 (77.0)	19 (6.9)	44 (16.1)	1.91 (1.20)

Note. N = 274 per statement. Disagree combines strongly disagree and disagree; agree combines agree and strongly agree. Means and sample standard deviations use the original five response categories, coded 1-5. Statements are shortened for presentation without changing their substantive meaning. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Disagreement was also predominant for self-reliance: 211 respondents (77.0%) did not endorse the statement that institutional knowledge supported self-reliance after graduation. The corresponding mean was 1.91 (SD = 1.20). This item attracted a wider spread of responses than the employment-preparation item, but the distribution remained concentrated towards disagreement. Since respondents were final-year trainees, the result primarily reflects their assessment of the proposition, rather than a measured post-graduation livelihood outcome.

Perceived economic links to peace

For the proposition that TVET-created employment reduced economic frustration, 207 respondents (75.5%) disagreed and 52 (19.0%) agreed. An equal number disagreed that TVET-driven economic empowerment contributed to peaceful coexistence, while 54 (19.7%) agreed. The mean scores were 2.27 (SD = 1.06) and 2.28 (SD = 1.09), respectively. Respondents therefore did not widely endorse either the proposed economic benefit or its connection to peaceful relationships.

The statement that a lack of employment opportunities could contribute to social conflict also attracted majority disagreement, with 212 respondents (77.4%) disagreeing and 54 (19.7%) agreeing. Its mean was 2.30 (SD = 1.13). This item differs from statements asking whether TVET produced benefits: it asks respondents to assess a general proposition about unemployment and conflict. The responses do not establish that unemployment is unrelated to conflict, but they do prevent interpreting this sample's views as uniformly supporting that explanation.

Association with perceived peace attainment

The employment-opportunity score was positively associated with the peace-attainment score, $r = .284$, $p < .001$, $N = 274$. Respondents with relatively more favourable employment assessments tended to report relatively more favourable peace assessments. The association was modest in magnitude and should not be interpreted as showing that most respondents experienced positive outcomes. A correlation describes how scores vary together, whereas the preceding distributions describe how respondents assessed particular statements. The two findings are therefore compatible. The correlation does not identify which employment-related proposition accounts for the relationship or establish that employment opportunities caused peace attainment.

Discussion

Economic opportunities were weakly endorsed

The central descriptive finding is limited recognition of the employment and livelihood benefits attributed to TVET. Disagreement extended across preparation for work, entrepreneurial opportunities, earning income and self-reliance. This breadth matters because self-employment cannot simply be assumed to compensate for restricted access to paid work when entrepreneurial opportunities are also viewed unfavourably. At the same time, the questionnaire did not measure job vacancies, enterprise survival or income directly. The evidence identifies trainees' concerns about the employment pathway; it does not quantify the employment outcomes of former students.

The resource and curriculum-delivery concerns identified by Muchira et al. (2023) offer one relevant comparison for interpreting dissatisfaction with employment preparation. However, that study's findings cannot be transferred as explanations for the present distributions without institutional evidence. Equipment availability, practical exposure, market demand and support after training are possible areas for assessment rather than demonstrated causes of the responses. Institutions should distinguish whether concerns relate to preparation, opportunities to apply learning, or access to work, since these problems require different responses.

The findings also differ in form from the economic achievements reported by Adoho et al. (2014) and the World Bank (2023). Those sources concern programmes with defined support packages and employment-related outcomes, whereas this study concerns final-year trainees' perceptions. The present results do not refute those evaluations. They show why favourable outcomes under particular programmes should not be assumed for every institutional setting. The contribution is contextual: anticipated benefits were not widely endorsed by respondents at the two colleges.

Employment and peace require separate assessment

The positive correlation indicates that the proposed employment-peace connection was present in the ordering of respondents' scores, even though favourable item assessments were uncommon. More positive employment assessments accompanied more positive peace assessments. It would be incorrect to convert that association into a claim that TVET had already improved livelihoods or reduced conflict across the sample. Equally, low average endorsement does not rule out a relationship between individual differences in perceptions. Reporting both results provides a more accurate account than relying on statistical significance alone.

The distinction is consistent with the need to assess economic and social outcomes separately. Blattman et al. (2014) observed economic improvements without corresponding detectable gains in the social outcomes examined, while their later follow-up demonstrated that the durability of some economic differences also required scrutiny (Blattman et al., 2020). The present survey cannot reproduce those intervention comparisons, but it reinforces the importance of measuring each part of a proposed pathway instead of inferring peace from economic preparation. The correlation supports an association between assessments; the pathway connecting those assessments remains unexplained.

A wider social perspective is also necessary. Van der Veen and Datzberger (2022) emphasised the importance of institutional and social conditions in a TVET-related business-development programme. In the current study, the questionnaire does not establish whether access to opportunities was equitable, whether employment was secure, or whether institutional support built trust. These remain substantive questions for interpreting an employment-based approach to peace. It is particularly important that respondents largely rejected the unemployment–conflict proposition: the findings do not justify treating unemployed young people as inherently conflict-prone.

Theoretical and empirical contribution

Human Capital Theory helps explain why vocational preparation may have economic value, while the present distributions show that trainees did not necessarily perceive that value as accessible livelihood opportunities (Becker, 1964). This is an empirical distinction between capability development and opportunity realisation, rather than a rejection of the theory. Positive Peace Theory also cautions against reducing constructive social conditions to a single economic indicator (Galtung, 1996). The descriptive results and modest association together support a framework in which economic participation is one possible component of peace attainment, with its contribution dependent on conditions that this survey did not isolate.

The article addresses the contextual gap by documenting trainee assessments in two Elgeyo Marakwet institutions and reporting their relationship with a peace-related perception score. It also makes an interpretive contribution by distinguishing perceived employment preparation from realised employment and by separating average endorsement from statistical association. This contribution is narrower than establishing the effectiveness of TVET as a peacebuilding intervention. It provides evidence for refining the questions institutions should ask and the outcomes future evaluations should measure.

Implications for institutions and further research

Institutional management should first examine the transition from training to work through programme-level reviews and graduate follow-up. Such reviews should distinguish preparation for paid employment, opportunities for enterprise development and the support required to sustain livelihoods. Career guidance, employer engagement and entrepreneurship assistance are reasonable areas to assess, but their selection should follow evidence of the specific constraints affecting learners. The present findings identify priorities for inquiry; they do not establish which intervention would be most effective.

An evaluation of employment-transition support should track actual placements, self-employment activity, earnings and the sustainability of work over time. Peace-related outcomes should be assessed separately, including experiences of cooperation, perceived inclusion and approaches to disagreements. Independent information from graduates, employers or community sources would help distinguish shared perceptions from observable outcomes. This would extend the existing survey rather than assume that a change in employment necessarily constitutes a change in peace.

Limitations

Several limitations constrain interpretation. First, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal order or causal effects. Peaceful conditions may support economic opportunities, while other circumstances may affect both. Second, the sample comprises final-year trainees from two institutions, so

the findings cannot be generalised automatically to graduates, all county institutions or community populations. The high questionnaire return rate does not establish absence of non-response bias, and the available results do not show whether the institutional distribution of returned questionnaires matched the planned allocation.

Third, all analysed measures were self-reported. The peace items largely concern beliefs about TVET's contribution, including one recommendation-oriented statement, rather than independently measured community peace. Some employment items explicitly mention coexistence or conflict, creating conceptual overlap with the outcome. Shared wording and a general favourable or unfavourable view of TVET may therefore contribute to the correlation. The mixed content of the employment section also means that its seven statements should not be treated as interchangeable measures of employment access.

Fourth, the available summaries do not permit verification of composite scoring, missing-data handling, final-sample reliability or the assumptions of Pearson correlation. Reported pilot reliability does not resolve those issues. No item-specific or adjusted association is claimed, and aggregation may conceal differences by institution, programme, age or gender. Finally, the analysis does not establish sustained employment or peace outcomes after graduation. Future research should use clearer separation of constructs, reproducible scoring, independent measures and follow-up designs.

Conclusion

Final-year trainees at the two surveyed colleges generally did not endorse the employment and livelihood benefits attributed to TVET. Nevertheless, more favourable employment-opportunity scores were associated with more favourable peace-attainment scores. These findings identify perceived limitations in the economic pathway and a modest positive association between assessments, rather than evidence that TVET caused improved employment or peace. Institutions should investigate the specific constraints affecting transition into work and evaluate economic and peace-related outcomes independently. Stronger measurement and follow-up evidence are needed before vocational employment support can be assessed as an effective peacebuilding strategy in this setting.

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