

Policy Brief

Background

Gaps in skills arise due to the dynamic nature of the world of work. The nature of work demands a workforce with a broader set of skills including critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, information literacy, and creativity, among others (Foresight Africa, 2017, Otieno et al., 2024). Other essential soft skills also considered transferable include communication, leadership, perseverance, empathy, emotional regulation, financial and information technology literacy and entrepreneurship capabilities (Brown et al., 2015). Transferable skills have improved employment and livelihood outcomes and increased productivity, particularly among women and marginalized groups (Nyerere, 2018). Nyerere (2018) notes that core transferable skills constitute "learning to learn" and require a change in teaching methodologies and assessment procedures.

Kenya has started to focus on integrating a broad range of cognitive and non-cognitive transferable skills into the schools and colleges' curricula frameworks, policy systems, and practices to prepare young people for the 21st-century workplace characterized by globalization, technological innovations, and rapid urbanization (Nyerere, 2018). Transferable skills form a significant component of the recently rolled out Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and Competence-Based Education and Training (CBET) (Republic of Kenya, 2018) at basic education and Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) levels, respectively. Specifically, CBC focuses on teaching transferable skills, including critical thinking and problem solving, learning to learn, imagination and creativity, digital literacy, communication and collaboration, citizenship, and self-efficacy.

Methods

Using a mixed research method, the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women's Economic Empowerment (IWWWE) undertook an impact assessment on CAPYEI graduates to fill the evidence gap on how to integrate training on transferable skills into the formal education system in Kenya, focusing on enhancing the employability of women and girls. The evidence from the impact evaluation illustrates various ways of integrating transferable skills into basic and TVET levels of education through CBC and CBET policy reforms delivery; and enhancement of roles played by multiple actors to promote women's economic empowerment.

Highlights

- Transferable skills are important in enhancing the employability and productivity of young people.
- They have a huge impact on various labour market outcomes such as employment, self-employment, and earnings especially for women who are underrepresented in quality employment.

- Kenya integrating cognitive and non-cognitive transferable skills into their curricula frameworks, CBC & CBET

The Gaps

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified in the effective implementation of transferable skills within CBC. Infrastructural limitations and inadequate teacher training emerged as major barriers. One participant noted, *"Even right now, deep into the implementation of CBC, some schools do not have labs and basic equipment to effectively implement the CBC programme."* This highlights the systemic issues that affect the effectiveness of these educational programs.

Additionally, the study revealed significant gender-specific barriers that hinder girls' participation and success in these programs. As one participant explained, *"Most girls are taught to be complacent, not creative; to be timid and not to respond or ask questions. For example, in science subjects, they were not supposed to touch equipment whereas boys are allowed to touch."* These cultural norms need to be addressed to ensure that girls can fully benefit from CBC programs.

Findings

Stakeholder Buy-In and Collaborative Effort

Stakeholder buy-in has been critical for the success of CBC. However, the process has not been without challenges. Negative attitudes and perceptions among some policymakers and educators have hindered the full acceptance and implementation of these curricula. Prejudice, and lack of acceptance still exist even among education officials in higher education. A participant highlighted, *"We have the political goodwill; yes, there are noises out there, not everyone values CBC programmes yet."* High-level political support has been essential in driving these reforms,



but more effort is needed to change negative perceptions at all levels.

Gender-Specific Training Models and Pedagogical Approaches

The study identified several gender-specific training models and pedagogical approaches that have been effective in enhancing girls' employability. These include experiential learning, project-based learning, and peer interactions. Case studies and dual training programs have also been instrumental in providing practical, hands-on experience that prepares students for real-world challenges. One respondent explained, *"The practical tasks we engage the students in are designed to mirror real-life job requirements. This not only helps them perfect their skills but also prepares them for immediate entry into the workforce."*

Participants emphasized the importance of integrating soft skills training into all subjects, not just business-related studies. A key soft skill that students acquire from CBC is leadership. As one participant noted, *"Most of the time, they are encouraged to have a group. In each group, there is always a team leader to lead the discussion; in the hands-on activities, there is a leader to lead."* This focus on leadership and collaborative skills is crucial for preparing students to meet the demands of the modern workforce.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors

The study highlighted the socio-cultural and economic factors influencing the integration of transferable skills. Cultural norms and gender stereotypes were found to hinder girls' participation in technical and vocational education. However, the inclusive nature of CBC programs showed promise in breaking down these barriers. *"We've seen a shift in attitudes towards girls participating in technical fields, thanks to the inclusive approach of these programs,"* said one respondent. Additionally, the programs provided students, especially girls, with the skills needed to pursue various economic opportunities, thereby enhancing their employability and potential for self-employment. *"These programs are equipping our girls with the skills they need to not only find employment but also to start their own businesses and become self-reliant,"* remarked another respondent.

Photo

Lessons

1. Implement ongoing training programs for CBC teachers to ensure they are well-equipped to deliver the curricula effectively. This includes workshops, seminars, and hands-on training sessions focused on pedagogical approaches and integrating soft skills into their teaching.
2. Ensure that teachers have access to adequate teaching materials and resources. This includes digital tools, updated textbooks, and practical equipment necessary for hands-on learning activities.

Policy Recommendations

Enhancing Teacher Training and Support

Addressing Gender-Specific Barriers

1. Develop and implement programs aimed at changing societal attitudes and breaking down traditional gender roles and stereotypes that hinder girls' participation in technical and vocational education.
2. Introduce mentorship programs where female students can interact with successful women in technical fields. This can inspire and motivate them to pursue and excel in these areas.

Infrastructure and Resource Allocation

Invest in the infrastructure of educational institutions to provide a conducive learning environment. This includes building and maintaining classrooms, laboratories, and workshops equipped with the necessary tools and technology.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

1. Foster a collaborative approach to support the implementation and acceptance of CBC curricula.
2. Launch awareness campaigns to educate the public on the benefits of CBC focusing on their potential to enhance employability and economic opportunities for all students, especially girls.

