

Young people need skills in robotics, artificial intelligence and virtual reality to meet current market needs

BY ALEX AWITI

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the economy hard but it's slowly picking up. The World Bank projects (c1) a GDP growth of five percent in 2022. One would expect that with healthy economic growth comes decent jobs. However, the unemployment rate (c2) was estimated at nearly six percent in 2021.

But the slow pace of job creation is not the only reason politicians and policymakers should lose sleep every night. Research by the Aga Khan University (c3) shows that youth who hold entry level jobs lack critical skills and competences.

The 2016 Youth Entry Skills study was conducted in 24 counties, which represent all of Kenya's eight regions and are home to over 85 percent of Kenya's formal sector

Resolve dearth of skills and jobs and prepare the youth for the tech intensive jobs of the future

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A technician from Opibus tests the lighting system on an electric motorcycle at their warehouse in Nairobi. PHOTO: IAFP

business establishments. About 6,300 youth aged 18-30 and 2,300 employers were interviewed.

Youth in entry level jobs, in formal and informal sectors, reported that besides technical skills, they lacked computing skills, so-

cio-emotional skills, and life skills such as time management, communication and interpersonal skills.

According to employers, youth in entry level jobs lacked integrity, numeracy, communication, sales

and marketing skills.

The study revealed that level of education, soft skills and work experience were critical requirements for getting entry level jobs in the formal sector. For the informal sector, soft skills and hands-on experience were more important to securing entry level jobs. Moreover, 30 percent of youth cited low pay as a barrier to entry level jobs; 47 percent said lack of experience was a barrier; 50 percent cited corruption.

Where are the entry level jobs? Data contained in the Census of Enterprises published by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, show that 84 percent of businesses are in the service sector, with 32 percent in the wholesale and retail subsector.

The study shows that youth don't possess the skills for the jobs that exist today, which are dominated by wholesale and retail. Hence, our efforts in training and

skills development must consider the structure of our economy and prepare the youth to thrive in a job market dominated by the service sector.

A national qualifications framework for key subsectors in the service sector is a critical starting point. But we must also prepare youth for the technology intensive jobs of the future; defined by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality.

The Aga Khan University is committed to doing this through its academic and research programmes. For example, our clinical simulation centre uses learning experiences that mimic real-life situations in clinical environments. Simulation-based teaching and learning allows acquisition of clinical skills through practice rather than the apprentice model of See One, Do One, Teach One.

These are just some of the innovative and futuristic skills that are required for the job market. A critical investment for institutions of higher education.

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