Opinion

Vocational education not for failures



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Students in a workshop. Business, technical and vocational education present greater opportunities for Ugandans to generate competitive graduates in the region with unlimited potential across the globe

When Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) released the 2016 Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results, media houses were dominated with news of the 99,744 candidates who failed.

The overriding opinions and experts recommend the 'PLE failure' to join vocational education and get skills per se.

This is a wrong perception that underscores the Government's commitment to skills development for robust industrial growth and building specialised skilled human resources for critical sectors such as information technology, construction, health, geology as well as oil and gas.

Vocational education is not for failures, but presents good opportunities by bridging up the knowledge gaps at Primary Seven. Like in other countries, complementary studies/programmes offer an opportunity to a person to bridge the gap and qualify for the next academic level.

Under the Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF), any person interested in skills acquisition can enroll for non-formal education training which is a typically a hands-on training programme that equips the students with practical skills.

Under the non-formal training programme, various career options are presented, including tailoring, carpentry and joinery, brick laying, fashion and design, cosmetology and others. These programmes take a period of three months and students will be undertaking three modules.

Under UVQF, the students will join the formal training and pursue Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4.

Each of these levels is equated to careers under the normal vocational career paths of certificate, diploma and degree programmes.

Students who undertake these career paths will graduate with diplomas and degrees in their respective vocational academic programmes.

Most important to note is that under the vocational career paths, one's prior academic qualifications are considered in career progression. For example, students who join vocational education after Senior Six and pursue a diploma and higher diploma in engineering programmes join Kyambogo University to pursue the relevant degree in second year or third year depending on the class of the diploma in engineering.

This training offered by Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (BTVET) offer greater opportunities to acquire relevant skills that address the needs of the communities.

Under the competence-based training and assessment, BTVET made it mandatory for each student to undertake a real life project.

Real life project refers to any activity that is undertaken by students in a particular discipline with the aim of addressing social and economic needs. Under real life projects, the students are assessed and awarded on the projects done, the presentation made and project report submitted.

The new curriculum for vocational training institutions is tandem with addressing the skills gaps that the world of work requires most and this has paved a greater opportunity for job creation through enterprise growth and development thus boosting the economic and social development.

This is no surprise that most of the students who have graduated under the new curriculum have been absorbed in leading projects such as the Standard Gauge railway and the Karuma Dam construction. Some of the students have started enterprises in Uganda and the neighbouring countries.

The new wave of competence-based assessment is an assurance of spearheading an impactful revolution in the education sector that has for long ignored vocational education on the premise of unfounded attitudes.

In terms of economic rewards, the vocational education graduates are skyrocketing with greater potential for job creation and economic development.

Look at the cost of designing a building plan, wiring a house, salon shave, executive lunch service, corporate fashion design, information technology systems design and filming, among others. They all present a virgin and ever growing enterprise growth base and yet few enroll for these professional programmes.

Business, technical and vocational education present greater opportunities for Ugandans to generate competitive graduates in the region with unlimited potential across the globe.

It is high time we embraced President Yoweri Museveni's call for support of vocational educational at all levels of governance, including households.

It is better to to undertake vocational career paths than pursuing a prestigious course that does not give any skill and one ends up on an everlasting job search.

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