

Employability Skills Development among Beneficiaries of the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project by Gender in the Selected Counties in Kenya.

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Abstract

In Kenya, in partnership with the World Bank, the government launched an apprenticeship work readiness program known as the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) in 2016 to solve the unemployment challenges among young people. However, there has been a growing concern regarding the continued challenge of youth unemployment, especially among young women in Kenya. Statistics from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics of 2022 show that out of the 13.9% of the total unemployed youth in Kenya, the rate is higher among young women at 20.3% compared to 16.8% for young men. Moreover, Kenyan employers have expressed concerns that youths entering the job market lack the employability skills needed for success in the workplace, which they have termed as part of the reasons for unsuccessful labour market entry. This study assessed the extent of employability skills development among beneficiaries of the KYEOP program by gender in the selected counties of Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu. The study applied the Theory of Change. The study was based on a cross-sectional research design, and a sample of 211 respondents was considered. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and focus group discussions. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression were used to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative data was analysed thematically. The study found variations in the extent of employability skills development between male and female beneficiaries, though they were insignificant. Specifically, a slightly higher percentage of female beneficiaries reported improved employability skills in areas such as decision-making, problem-solving, and communication skills compared to the male ones. The study recommends that the KYEOP program continue refining its training modules to further bridge the skill gap between genders to ensure equitable skill development outcomes.

Keywords: *work readiness, employment, and gender.*

Background of the Study

Introduction

Unemployment, particularly among young people, has remained a pressing challenge globally, with statistics showing that approximately 15.58% of the youth remain unemployed, significantly higher than the overall unemployment rate of 5.1%. This challenge is, however, more acute in most developing and emerging economies. For instance, in Kenya, numbers from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) of 2022 indicate that the overall unemployment rate stands at 5.6%, with a higher rate among the youth at 13.6%. However, unemployment of young women is estimated to be higher than that of young men at 20.3% and 16.8%, respectively. These numbers clearly suggest that young women face a disproportionate burden when it comes to the challenge of unemployment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), (2014), the consequences of youth unemployment are multifaceted and extend beyond an individual level. High levels of youth unemployment can lead to economic stagnation, drug and substance abuse, and social unrest, among other issues (World Bank, 2013).

Omar *et al.* (2012) note that one of the key contributors to youth unemployment is inadequate employability skills. Employability skills are a set of personal attributes, knowledge, and competencies that make an individual an effective employee (Barrera-Osorio *et al.*, 2023). These skills include communication skills, decision-making, problem-solving skills, and teamwork, among others, which are highly valued by employers in the labour market because they play a significant role in the effective functioning of an organisation (Barrera-Osorio *et al.*, 2023). For instance, effective communication skills are crucial for an organisation's interpersonal relationships and work readiness. In order to propel prosperity through quality, productive work, the workforce needs both employability and technical skills. However, equipping young people with employability skills has been one of the biggest challenges facing countries across the globe as the world is grappling with high unemployment rates among the youth (Bakar & Hanafi, 2007). This is especially so in most developing economies, as mismatches of skills are a persistent concern. In fact, Bakar and Hanafi (2007) highlight that employability skills such as leadership, numeracy, and self-confidence are less likely to be enhanced in female-dominated sectors and that

the prevailing curricula are advancing traditional stereotypes rather than meaningfully challenging them.

Therefore, addressing the challenge of unemployment and poverty alleviation in society through skills training has remained a priority in most countries across the globe, as guided by the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four (Plance, 2020). It provides a framework to foster equitable and inclusive quality training and education for all, thereby promoting lifelong learning. Particularly, target number 4.3 advocates for equal access to affordable education and training for all men and women across all levels by the year 2030. As such many countries across the globe have put much emphasis on initiative programs such as apprenticeship training programs aimed at providing young people with the knowledge and skills needed for them to succeed in any labour market, as noted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020). Apprenticeships are structured training programs that combine on-the-job learning with classroom instruction allowing trainees to develop valuable skills, including employability skills that enhance productivity in various labour market sectors (Wolter & Ryan, 2011).

Globally, apprenticeships have been recognised as a focal point of knowledge and skills, and their implementation has contributed to human capital development and subsequent unemployment reduction. According to Mahfud *et al.* (2017), apprenticeships in Balikpapan have expanded significantly over the past several decades, providing the majority of the young people with an opportunity to learn and develop an array of employability skills, including communication skills, decision-making, and leadership, which contributed to about 72% of work absorption among trainees. Consequently, there is some hope that by being equipped with proper employability skills, the ever-growing working population in Africa will soon increase the pace of poverty alleviation and economic prosperity, especially since its population is rather youthful (International Labour Organization (ILO), (2014). However, African countries will only achieve this potential once they invest more in narrowing the existing gap in employability skills. It is against this background that many African countries, including Kenya, have implemented apprenticeship programs such as the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) to address the challenge of skilling and unemployment among the young generation (KYEOP, (2021). Kenyan employers have expressed concerns that most youths joining the job market lack the necessary employability skills

needed to succeed in the job market. However, their criticisms are not based on any empirical evidence, hence the need for the current study.

Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project.

The Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) is a key initiative designed to empower and improve the well-being of vulnerable young people in Kenya by providing them with targeted training, business grants, and internship opportunities (KYEOP, (2021). The primary goal of the KYEOP project is to enhance employment and earning opportunities for targeted young people across Kenya. It intends to support over 280,000 youths in both urban and rural areas. Since its inception, the KYEOP program has been rolled out in 17 counties across Kenya, including Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu. It targets youths of age between 18 and 29 years of age, whose level of education is form four and below, and who are jobless. The project is anchored on four main components, which include enhancing employability among young people, supporting the creation of job opportunities, advancing information about the labour market, and reinforcing youth policy development and project management (KYEOP, (2021). These components are implemented by different government players, including the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA) and the Ministry in charge of ICT, Innovation, and Youth Affairs (MIIYA), among others. According to the National Industrial Training Authority report (2021), the KYEOP skills training component provides the youth with an opportunity to acquire various skills, including technical skills, core business skills, life skills, and employability skills. These skills have significantly contributed to youth absorption into the Kenyan labour market.

The main purpose of this study is to assess the contributions of the KYEOP training program in the development of employability skills among young men and women in Kenya. This is particularly in response to the rampant cases of youth unemployment and continued criticisms by Kenyan employers regarding the inadequate employability skills possessed by the youths entering the job market in the country.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya is faced with the challenge of youth unemployment. By implementing the KYEOP program, the government has attempted to reduce the unemployment rate among the youthful generation by equipping them with the necessary skills needed to secure jobs and participate in the country's economic development. However, key educational stakeholders, including the government and trainees, have expressed concerns about the persistently high youth unemployment rate, which stands at 13.9%. Additionally, within this youth demographic, young women face a higher unemployment rate of 20.3% compared to 16.8% for young men, an indication that while unemployment affects young people, young women are the hardest hit. Often, Kenyan employers have expressed dissatisfaction regarding the inadequate employability skills possessed by the youth joining the job market. Therefore, research in this area is imperative to understand the contribution of the KYEOP program towards enhancing employability skills and subsequent job prospects among young people, and especially young women in Kenya. The existing studies and research that have been conducted locally are mainly focused on technical and entrepreneurship skills rather than employability skills. This study, therefore, aimed to assess the extent of employability skills development among beneficiaries of the KYEOP program by gender in Kenya.

Theory of Change

This study was anchored on the Theory of Change. KYEOP program is a transformative program guided by a comprehensive theory of change that outlines a strategic approach to addressing youth unemployment in Kenya. This approach posits that by providing targeted training, mentorship, and practical experiences, young people can acquire the relevant skills to thrive in the labour market. KYEOP emphasises a holistic framework that integrates various skills, including entrepreneurship skills, technical and employability skills development, recognising that employability is not solely about specific job-related skills but also about critical competencies such as decision-making, leadership, effective communication and problem-solving (KYEOP, (2021). This approach serves as a guiding framework for assessing the extent to which the KYEOP program enhances employability skills among program beneficiaries in readiness for the labour market.

Literature Review

Apprenticeships are structured training programs that combine both practical on-the-job training with classroom learning, enabling individuals to acquire a different range of skills while preparing them for the job market. These programs have been embraced globally and locally as they are deemed a vital strategy for enhancing employability among young people. They provide hands-on experience in the real-world workplace environment, thereby facilitating the development of essential skills such as technical expertise, entrepreneurship skills, teamwork, problem-solving skills, and communication skills, among others. These skills, along with others, are critical in bridging the gap between school-to-work transition since they enhance the readiness of young people to meet the demands of the competitive labour market. Acquiring this range of skills enables individuals to become more adaptable and valuable to potential employers. This alignment of skills development with market needs not only boosts individual employability but also fosters economic resilience by equipping the workforce with the competencies required in these rapidly changing economies. Numerous studies have underscored the critical role of apprenticeships in bridging the gap between education and employment, particularly for young people.

For instance, in Malaysia, research by Puad (2015) highlights that apprenticeship training programs not only provide hands-on experience but also cultivate essential employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Puad (2015) carried out a study to examine the perceptions of employers, educators, and fresh graduates regarding the role of employability skills training programs in human capital development. This was a descriptive study anchored on human capital theory. The study used a questionnaire to gather perceptions from respondents. The responses of the study were analysed using inferential and descriptive statistical methods including means, and standard deviation. Findings from the study revealed the importance of employability skills training programs for improving employability skills, minimising unemployment, and developing the future workforce of Malaysia. While trainers and fresh graduates agreed about the positive impact of employability skills training programs on trainee employability skills, employers perceived that these programs neither ensure improvement in skills, minimise unemployment, nor develop the workforce of Malaysia. Importantly, the study identified key employability skills essential for graduates to secure employment, including creativity and innovation, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and discipline. These findings resonate with the current research on the KYEOP program, which similarly emphasises the importance of

equipping young people with a diverse skill set through an apprenticeship program. However, this study will be conducted in Kenyan settings, utilising a cross-sectional research design. By examining how the KYEOP program contributes to the development of employability skills among Kenyan youth, this study seeks to bridge the gap between educational training and labour market demands, ensuring that young people are well-equipped to navigate the competitive job landscape.

Similarly, Villar and Mourão (2018) studied the influence of an apprenticeship program on employability skills, professional development, and self-efficacy among adolescents aged 15 – 18 years in Brazil. The study adopted a quasi-experimental approach with two data collection moments (at the beginning of the training and six months after the training). The study sampled 250 adolescents who took part in the training and 259 adolescents who did not take part in the training (control sample). The study used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0 to tabulate quantitative data and mixed ANOVA 2 to verify the existence of variations between measures. The empirical evidence resulting from analysing the collected data revealed that those who participated in the training demonstrated significant skill acquisition and professional development compared to the control group. This study reinforces the notion that structured apprenticeship programs play a pivotal role in fostering essential employability skills and preparing the youth for career advancement. Similar to the findings, this research on KYEOP sought to explore how much training contributes to skill development among young people in Kenya. The study on the KYEOP program aims to expand the understanding of apprenticeship's effectiveness in equipping young people with skills critical for navigating the already competitive job market.

Structured apprenticeships have the potential to equip young men and women with a specific set of skills tailored to the demands of various industries, with notable differences in focus across countries and genders. In some regions, apprenticeships aim to bridge gender gaps in high-demand fields, equipping young women with technical and employability skills to increase their representation in sectors such as technology and engineering. For example, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Aramburu (2021) evaluated the short-term causal effects of a high-quality, intensive computer coding boot camp for women on skills acquisition and employment outcomes. The evaluation study sampled 402 participants who received the training and 401 participants who did not receive the training. Data was analysed using descriptive statistical tools, including means and

standard deviation. Follow-up data collected two and five months after the training ended revealed that the training program increased participants' coding skills and their probability of securing a job in the technology sector. This targeted approach highlights the potential of specialised training to support young women's entry into high-demand, male-dominated fields. Yet, while such programs have shown success in supporting gender-specific skills development in targeted industries, there is still a need to explore how broader apprenticeship models address employability skills across genders in diverse sectors. This current study takes on this challenge to examine how apprenticeships in Kenya, particularly the KYEOP program, contribute to employability skills development and job readiness for both young men and women.

In the context of the Midwestern United States, Arthur-Mensah (2015) employed human capital theory to describe an apprenticeship initiative targeted at high school students, which aimed to meet the specific skills needs of a manufacturing company. This study adopted a case study approach and relied on interviews to collect qualitative data from respondents, who reported that their employability skills in areas such as communication, time management, problem-solving, and critical thinking had been enhanced due to participating in the training program. The study also highlighted that using employability skills has become essential in the 21st-century work environment. Consequently, the study demonstrated the relevance of human capital development in preparing young individuals for the ever-evolving demands of the labour market. KYEOP program operates on a robust Theory of Change that posits that enhancing employability skills among the youth will lead to improved job placement and economic empowerment. The theory emphasises the importance of providing targeted training, mentorship, and practical experiences to equip youth with the skills necessary for employment. Anchored on the Theory of Change, the current study describes how the KYEOP program has successfully enhanced measured employability skills among its beneficiaries.

In the Dominican Republic, Acevedo (2018) studied the interaction between soft skills training and job expectations and labour market outcomes in the context of youth skills training programs. Applicants of the program were assigned to one of the 3 modalities; hard and soft skills training plus an internship, soft skills training plus an internship, or a control group (no treatment). The study found strong and lasting effects of the training program on the acquisition of personal skills and expectations. However, results were markedly different for young men and women. According

to the study, women exhibited substantially higher levels of personal skills in the long run and experienced improved labour market outcomes in the short run as compared to their male counterparts. While the study reveals a positive significant impact of apprenticeship training on the development of personal skills, with higher levels among young women, this kind of training focuses on an array of skills. The study on KYEOP aimed to determine the extent of development in communication skills between young male and female beneficiaries in Kenya.

Africa, one of the poorest regions in the world, faces rampant cases of unemployment among its young people, making it imperative to prioritise apprenticeships as a solution. However, while such programs hold the potential to equip the youth with the necessary skills for the job market, the continent is still grappling with unskilled and unemployed youth. According to Limboro (2012), most of the existing apprenticeship programs fail to align with employers' evolving labour market needs and the dynamics of the global economy. Additionally, there is often a lack of adequate resources, infrastructure, and support systems to ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives. As a result, despite the promise of these programs in addressing youth unemployment, significant gaps remain that need to be filled to maximise their impact and facilitate meaningful employment opportunities for young Africans. For instance, in Nigeria, Ezenwakwelu (2019) examined the effect of the Nigerian Apprenticeship System on entrepreneurship development in developing economies. The study examined the extent to which apprentices gained entrepreneurial skills and technical skills for entrepreneurship development. The study used a survey research design and employed interviews to gather data and information from respondents. The sampled data were analysed using the Chi-square test on Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. The study established that apprenticeship training positively affects entrepreneurial skills development. Trainees reported that they acquired both entrepreneurship and technical skills as a result of participating in the training. However, this study solely focused on entrepreneurship and technical skills, leaving a notable gap in how such programs enhance the development of employability skills, including decision-making skills.

In Tanzania, Kinyondo, & Shija conducted a study to examine the soft skills that are inadequate in Tanzania and the preferred coping mechanisms by employers. The study used a questionnaire to solicit data from respondents. The study's findings revealed that the soft skills lacking among graduates in Tanzania include language proficiency, teamwork, and communication skills. Also,

the use of English as a medium of instruction, the inadequate number of instructors, and the use of outdated training facilities have led to the failure to transfer soft skills to the labour market by graduates. Employers in Tanzania have opted to retrain trainees and extend the probationary period for new hires as a coping mechanism, which has proved to be costly. The presented situation underscores the urgent need for apprenticeship programs that not only focus on technical skills but also prioritise the development of essential soft skills. Kinyondo, & Shija notes that such programs can better prepare young graduates for the demands of the workplace, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and competitive workforce not only in Tanzania but across Africa, including Kenya.

In Kisumu County, Kenya, Makanga (2014) examined the influence of an apprenticeship program, the Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (KYEP), on graduates' perceived employability. The study used a stratified random sampling technique to sample 242 beneficiaries who went through the training program. Results from the study revealed a strong relationship between the KYEP training program and perceived youth employability among university graduates, a fairly weak among tertiary graduates, and a very weak relationship among secondary graduates. As a result of participating in the training, trainees gained entrepreneurship skills, including staff appraisal, budgeting, financial record keeping, business proposal development, and benchmarking skills, which were essential for self-employment.

In Kisumu County, Kenya, Menya (2020) did a study to determine the effect of entrepreneurial training under the KYEOP program on the performance of MSEs. The study was guided by a descriptive research design. The study sampled 227 MSE owners in Kisumu County who had participated in KYEOP entrepreneurship training under cycle 4. Respondents agreed that participating in the entrepreneurship training enabled them to acquire a diverse range of entrepreneurship skills, such as time management, financial, planning, and bookkeeping skills, such as credit and cash sales, purchases, prepayments, and receipts. The study revealed that most trainees were in a better position to implement their business plans perfectly after completing the training. The study concluded that KYEOP entrepreneurship training in Kisumu County influenced business performance positively through increased sales and number of customers. Contrary to this study, the current study focuses on the development of employability skills among KYEOP beneficiaries in the counties of Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu. Evidence from this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role that targeted training initiatives play in

enhancing job readiness, ultimately informing policymakers and stakeholders about the potential improvements to existing programs and strategies for youth empowerment in Kenya and the region.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach, particularly a cross-sectional research design. The researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative sets of data. According to Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), a mixed methods research approach advances the systematic integration of both qualitative and quantitative data within a single investigation. This study assessed the KYEOP program to find out how it has contributed to employability skills development for the young beneficiaries of the program in Kenya. The study employed questionnaires that included both structured and unstructured questions, allowing for a synergistic and comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages, were utilised to analyse quantitative data, while qualitative data were examined thematically through narrations.

Study Participants: The study participants were KYEOP beneficiaries (those who completed the training) and non-beneficiaries (who did not participate). The study also sampled 25 policymakers, 25 policy implementers and 33 employers. Yamane's formula was used to calculate this study's sample size with a 95% confidence level (Uakarn et al., (2021). The sample size for this study was estimated at 211 respondents.

Demographic Information of Study Participants.

Table 1: Sample Statistics for Key Variables (N=211)

	Number	Relative Frequency (%)
Participation in KYEOP		
Yes	121 (Male 51; female 70)	57%
No	90 (male 31; female 59)	43%
Gender		
Male	82	39%

Female	129	61%
Employment Status		
Employed	73	35%
Not Employed	138	65%
Age		
Below 20 Years	8	4%
20 – 30 Years	189	90%
30 – 40 Years	14	6%

Source: Study Survey Data.

The data shown in Table 1 presents a sample of 211 young men and women respondents, out of which 121, representing 57% of respondents, participated in the KYEOP training (51 men and 70 women) and 90 respondents, representing 43%, did not participate. In terms of gender, 39% were male respondents, while 61% were female. Employment data revealed that 35% of the sampled respondents were employed during the time of the survey, while 65% had not been employed. In terms of age, 4% of the sample were below 20 years, 7% were aged between 30-40 years, and 90% of the population were aged between 20-30 years.

Findings and Discussion

Table 2: Scale and Interpretation.

Scale	Interpretation
1	Not all
2	Moderate
3	Great

The scale used in Table 2 was designed to measure the extent of employability skills development among participants. This scale provides a clear, quantitative method for evaluating how participants perceive their skills after training. A "Not at all" rating indicates that the participant perceives no development or improvement in the specified skill. A "Moderate" rating signifies a moderate level of skill development, acknowledging some improvement but not substantial. A

"Great" rating represents a high level of skill development, where participants feel confident that they have significantly improved their skills.

Employability skills for all respondents

The study measured the employability skills of both KYEOP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries across three key areas: problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills. These skills were rated on a scale with corresponding frequencies and relative frequencies recorded.

Table 3: Employability skills for all respondents.

Respondents	Employability Skills	Scale	Frequency	Relative Frequency (%)
KYEOP beneficiaries	Communication skills	Not at all	03	1.4
		Moderate	49	23.2
		Great	69	33
	Problem-solving skills	Not at all	03	1.4
		Moderate	38	18
		Great	80	38
	Decision-making skills	Not at all	03	1.4
		Moderate	28	13.3
		Great	90	42.7
Non- beneficiaries	Communication skills	Not at all	39	18.4
		Moderate	21	10.1
		Great	30	14.2
	Problem-solving skills	Not at all	37	17.5
		Moderate	36	17.1
		Great	17	8
	Decision-making skills	Not at all	35	16.6
		Moderate	31	14.7
		Great	24	11.4

Source: Study Survey Data

As shown in Table 3, KYEOP beneficiaries showed significantly higher levels of communication skills, with 33% rating their skills as "Great" compared to only 14.2% of non-beneficiaries. Additionally, fewer KYEOP beneficiaries reported "Not at all" (1.4%) compared to non-beneficiaries (18.4%). A higher proportion of KYEOP beneficiaries (38%) rated their problem-solving skills as "Great" compared to non-beneficiaries (8%). The percentage of those rating "Not at all" was substantially lower among beneficiaries (1.4%) than non-beneficiaries (17.5%). Decision-making skills were notably higher among KYEOP beneficiaries, with 42.7% rating their skills as "Great," compared to 11.4% of non-beneficiaries. A significantly lower percentage of beneficiaries (1.4%) rated "Not at all" than non-beneficiaries (16.6%). The data indicate that participation in the KYEOP training program significantly enhanced the employability skills of beneficiaries. KYEOP beneficiaries demonstrated higher proficiency in problem-solving, communication, and decision-making skills, with a greater proportion rating these skills as "Great" and fewer as "Not at all." These findings suggest that KYEOP training effectively equips participants with essential employability skills, making them more competitive in the job market.

Employability skills for respondents who completed KYEOP training by gender

The development of employability skills among beneficiaries of the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) by gender is described in three essential areas: communication skills, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills.

Table 4: Communication Skills

Participants	Scale	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Male	Not at all	01	.8	.8
	Moderate	28	23.1	23.9
	Great	22	18	41.9
Female	Not at all	02	1.7	43.6

Moderate	21	17.4	61.2
Great	47	39	100
Total	121	100	

Source: Study Survey Data

As depicted in Table 4 above, a significant portion of female participants (39%) rate their communication skills as great, compared to 18% of male participants. This indicates a higher self-assessment of communication proficiency among female beneficiaries of the KYEOP program. A notable percentage of participants from both genders rate their communication skills as moderate, with males at 23.1% and females at 17.4%. As such, many participants believe that their communication skills are adequate but not exceptional. Additionally, very few participants, 0.8% of males and 1.7% of females, rate their communication skills as “not at all”, indicating a minimal presence of very low communication proficiency among the respondents. According to these results, young women who have undergone the KYEOP training program rate their communication skills higher than young men.

Table 5: Problem-solving skills

Participants	Scale	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Male	Not at all	01	.8	.8
	Moderate	22	18.2	19
	Great	28	23.1	42.1
Female	Not at all	02	1.7	43.8
	Moderate	16	13.2	57
	Great	52	43	100

Total	121	100
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Source: Study Survey Data

Table 5 demonstrates that among male participants, 0.8% reported having no problem-solving skills, 18.2% rated their skills as moderate, and 23.1% considered their problem-solving skills to be great. In contrast, female participants showed a slightly higher percentage (1.7%) reporting no problem-solving skills, 13.2% rating their skills as moderate, and a significantly higher percentage (43%) considering their problem-solving skills to be great. This data indicates that female participants are more likely to report higher problem-solving skills than their male counterparts. These findings suggest that the training programs may be more effective in developing problem-solving skills among female participants.

Table 6: Decision-making skills

Participants	Scale	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Male	Not at all	01	.8	.8
	Moderate	17	14	14.8
	Great	33	27.3	42.1
Female	Not at all	02	1.7	43.8
	Moderate	11	9.1	52.9
	Great	57	47.1	100
Total		121	100	

Source: Study Survey Data

According to Table 6, the data shows slight differences in decision-making skills between male and female participants. For instance, among male participants, 0.8% rated their decision-making skills as "not at all," 14% rated them as "moderate," and 27.3% rated them as "great." Conversely, female participants had a slightly higher percentage (1.7%) rating their decision-making skills as "not at all," 9.1% rating them as "moderate," and a significantly higher percentage (47.1%) rated them as "great." These results indicate that female participants are more likely to report higher decision-making skills than their male counterparts.

Discussion

The findings provide a comprehensive overview of the employability skills among beneficiaries of the KYEOP program compared to non-beneficiaries. It particularly highlights significant gender differences in the development of these skills. According to the results, KYEOP beneficiaries show a marked improvement in communication skills compared to non-beneficiaries. Specifically, 33% of KYEOP beneficiaries rated their communication skills as great, compared to only 14.2% of non-beneficiaries. This suggests that participation in the KYEOP program significantly enhances communication skills among its beneficiaries. This skill is essential for effective workplace interaction and teamwork, making it a crucial outcome of the training. A similar trend is observed in problem-solving skills. Among KYEOP beneficiaries, 38% rated their problem-solving skills as great, compared to only 8% of non-beneficiaries. The findings further revealed that about 42.7% of KYEOP beneficiaries rated their decision-making skills as great as compared to 11.4% of non-beneficiaries. These results agree with Arthur-Mensah (2015), who found that participating in apprenticeship programs enhanced participants' employability skills in areas such as critical thinking, effective communication, and teamwork among other critical skills. In terms of gender, the findings revealed notable gender differences in skill development. Female participants in the KYEOP program reported higher employability skills than their male counterparts. For instance, 43% of female participants rated their problem-solving skills as great, compared to 23.1% of male participants. Similarly, in decision-making skills, 47.1% of female participants rated their skills as great, compared to 27.3% of male participants. This suggests that the KYEOP program may be particularly effective in empowering the youth, especially young women with essential employability skills, addressing gender disparities in the labour market. Furthermore, employers reported a preference for hiring KYEOP program beneficiaries over non-beneficiaries, indicating the program's positive impact on employability. This preference is likely due to the enhanced skill set that beneficiaries bring to the workplace, making them more competitive and valuable employees.

Question: Would you prefer to hire a KYEOP program beneficiary instead of a non-beneficiary?

A response from one employer; "As an employer, I would prefer hiring a beneficiary of the KYEOP program as opposed to an individual who has not participated in the training. A program beneficiary is equipped with relevant skills, including effective communication, which is important in our daily operations as an organisation"

As key players in implementing the KYEOP program, policymakers, policy implementers, and employers felt that there is a dire need to monitor and evaluate the KYEOP program to ascertain if it meets the intended objectives, including skills training and subsequent youth employment in the country. The focus group discussion revealed various challenges encountered by respondents. Many of them felt that the KYEOP program application was very competitive, with more than 12,000 applicants, which made some miss out on the training. Additionally, certification among beneficiaries was an issue because most of them reported that they did not get the certificates after completing the training, which they felt was a hindrance to securing employment.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the KYEOP project has a significant positive impact on the development of employability skills of the beneficiaries, particularly in areas of communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. The program is especially effective in empowering young women and contributing to gender equality in the labour market. Based on these results, continued efforts to tailor training and strengthen industry linkages can further enhance the program's effectiveness and ensure that all participants are well-equipped for successful careers.

Recommendations: The KYEOP program should continue refining its training modules to further bridge the skill gap between genders. Tailored training programs could ensure equitable employability skills development outcomes. Additionally, strengthening the linkage between the KYEOP program and employers can enhance the alignment of training with labour market needs, ensuring that beneficiaries possess the most in-demand skills. Youth policies and programs such as KYEOP should be monitored and evaluated regularly to ascertain their impact in addressing the gender disparities in youth unemployment.

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