

The Politics of VET: An Historical Safari via KK

Kenneth King

University of Edinburgh

Kenneth.King@ed.ac.uk

From Kenya to India and China: 1965-2021

- Starting from my PhD in Edinburgh & teaching & research in Nairobi
- The politics of skill, skilled, unskilled and semi-skilled – e.g. Brexit
- Political thru skill links to work, employment, self-employment and unemployment; and in Africa their connections to development aid
- Methodologies cover review of historical documents; interviews with young people and entrepreneurs; tracer studies; surveys - & luck
- Particular focus on vocational education and training (VET) in informal, *Jua Kali* sector
- Politics of VET in international goals & targets (EFA; MDGs; SDGs)

Policy transfer proposals in very first Education Commissions to Sub-Saharan Africa

- Text of Commissions (1922 and 1925) brings to SSA the VET politics of the American South – KK finds 2 volumes of these commission quite by chance
- VET Skills for SSA to follow the ‘industrial training’ traditions of Tuskegee & Booker T. Washington rather than the higher education priorities of W.E.B. Dubois
- Large numbers of missionaries, colonial administrators and African students exposed to the ‘adapted’ education model of Tuskegee
- Proposals were particularly attractive to white settlement Africa, e.g. Kenya, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa
- Result: place of industrial education remained in SSA curricula till independence (Jeanes School in Kabete, Nairobi = example of influence)

VET and politics of development aid post-independence

- Many development agencies regarded VET as crucial for balanced education after independence. These included CIDA, Sida, Danida, GIZ, ODA and World Bank (WB).
- From WB's first education project in 1963 till 1979, 'diversified' secondary education in technical, agricultural and commercial subjects was widely required in projects rather than 'dysfunctional' general secondary education.
- Wide range of agency VET projects in Kenya from Sweden, Denmark, Canada etc. So lots of donor research and evaluation.
- Most influential: WB policy paper on VET (1991)- promoting key role of VET in private sector 'most effective & efficient way' for skills devt.

Discovery of the informal (*jua kali*) sector

- ILO's World Employment Commission mission to Kenya internationalized the term informal sector in 1972 (Hart in Accra 1971)
- KK found informal machine-makers in Gikomba, Nairobi same year
- They had their own indigenous apprenticeship system – a version of which had been found in Nigeria by Callaway in 1960
- So, three on-the-job systems in Kenya: v. small ILO-linked formal system; learning on job in Indian firms; & large *jua kali* apprenticeship
- *Jua kali* systems are great majority of VET training in many LDCs – quite formalised in several West and Central African countries

African Artisan (1977) to Jua Kali Kenya(1996) – the value of tracer studies

- KK's Kenya research on informal *jua kali* published in 1977
- President Moi visits informal entrepreneurs in Nairobi c 1991 and initiates support to *jua kali* by provision of sheds etc. Again - serendipity
- This an early example of what would become widespread – government and aid agency attempts to **formalise** the informal sector
- New policy interest in *jua Kali* allowed me to return to Kenya and carry out a kind of tracer study of my early artisans in the new political situation.
- Apart from formalisation of the informal sector, not enough work has been done on the informalization of the formal sector – called in Kenya 'eating from one's job'. See 'Africa's informal economies 30 years on' (2001)

Revisiting 'Vocational school fallacy in development planning' by Philip Foster

- One of the best-known articles in comparative education argued in 1965 that the fallacious view amongst many politicians was that vocationalising the school curricula could alter student attitudes to work. Eventually, this article helped change World Bank view on 'diversified' education
- Foster argued it was in fact perceptions of opportunities in the labour market that drove student aspirations not vocational school curricula
- 40 years after Foster, KK had the chance in same country –Ghana- and schools to ask some of the same questions as Foster –notably what **ideally** do you want to do after school versus what do you **really** expect to do
- KK results showed that there was after all a curriculum effect of VET. Pointing to the value of revisiting key research results (KK & Martin 2002)

VET's multiple connections to other sectors

- 1. Parallel to discovery of informal sector, the parallel of **non-formal education** from 1969 pointed to VET beyond formal systems
- 2. Despite apparent divide between VET and Science and Technology education, clearly a key role for VET in creation of **technological capability**
- 3. Same true for VET role in educational planning; yet UNESCO's key series in this sphere had no volume on VET till King & Palmer 2010; same for several other series
- 4. Key dimension for VET in enterprise development in micro, small and medium enterprises (see Dorothy McCormick, IDS)

VET broadens out to Skills Development

- WB first uses term 'skills development' (SD) in addition to vocational and technical education and training in 1991 – not common till later.
- The new term underlines the realisation that, perhaps like the informal sector and nonformal education, most VET takes place outside the formal ministry of education and labour systems
- However the terminology of 'skills' is very slippery – see its use in life-skills, work-skills, un-, semi- and high-skilled. Politics of 'skill' cf. Brexit
- Politics of Brexit allege that British workers were undermined by the migration of unskilled labour from EU; reality is completely different

VET in relation to world's goals targets- from 1991 Education for All thru MDGS 2000 to SDGs 2015

- Though skills training, apprenticeships & NFE all mentioned in World Declaration on EFA, the new politics prioritise primary education
- Ten years later, the Dakar World Forum 2000 narrows skill into 'life skills'; and the MDGs only emphasise primary education for all.
- Takes a further 15 years (2015) for the SDGs finally to drop life skills, and propose 'equal access for all men and women' to 'relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship'.
- This Goal like much of the SDGs is absurdly if not impossibly ambitious, & has been lost in translation in the relevant indicators

Preliminary conclusions on KK VET Safari

- Detailed history of VET in SSA illustrates its political manipulation
- In the colonial period, evident in 'Bantu education' and in Phelps-Stokes Education Commissions.
- In early independence years, seen in the politics of VET in aid agencies, especially World Bank
- With the discovery of large-scale VET outside the formal education & training systems many attempts to 'formalise the informal sector'
- Very few attempts to explore the parallel 'informalisation of the formal sector' not just in Kenya and LDCs more generally, e.g. India.
- Important to follow latest *Jua Kali* insights e.g. in Simon McGrath's research with colleagues in Uganda and South Africa.

Some relevant reading on KK's VET safari. Do contact me at Kenneth.King@ed.ac.uk

- KK. *Pan-Africanism and Education* (Clarendon, 1971)
- Jones, T. J. (1922;1925). *Education in Africa. Education in East Africa*
- World Bank.(1991). *Vocational and technical education and training*
- King, K. (1977). *The African artisan: Education and the informal sector*
- King, K. (1996). *Jua kali Kenya: Change and development in an informal economy 1970-1995*
- KK. (2001) 'Africa's informal economies – 30 years on' SAIS Review
- Foster, P. (1965) 'The vocational school fallacy in develop. planning'
- with Chris Martin 2002 'The vocational school fallacy revisited'
- For fuller citations see articles for this webinar.