

**FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE OF VOCATIONAL COURSES BY  
LEARNERS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS IN SELECTED  
VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRES, KENYA**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing choice of vocational courses by learners with Hearing Impairments (HI) in selected Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), Kenya. The objectives of the study were: types of vocational courses, learners' career aspirations, peer influence and factors within the school environment that facilitate choice of vocational courses. The research study adopted mixed method approach design in achieving its objectives. Data was collected from selected VTCs in Kenya. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the institutions, administrators, instructors and learners. Stratified sampling was used to select male and female learners i.e four administrators, eleven instructors, sixty-two learners. Descriptive statistics in SPSS such as frequency tables, percentages, graphs and charts were used to analyse quantitative data while thematic texts were used to present qualitative data. The findings of this study indicated that most of the vocational courses offered in VTCs were tailoring, masonry, carpentry and joinery and beauty therapy and were relevant to job market. The study also established that peers influenced how learners with HI chose vocational courses and acted as role models and they encouraged each other to choose same courses they had undertaken. The study also found out that learners with HI lacked career awareness in the choice of vocational courses due to lack of proper guidance by the parents/guardians and also partly by the instructors and this greatly influenced how they chose their vocational courses. The study showed that factors within the school environment influence the type of vocational courses learners with HI chose and that instructors advised the learners on how to choose vocational courses depending on their interest and abilities. It is thus recommended that on the effect of peer influence on the choice of vocational courses, the VTCs should employ or hire career experts whose responsibilities should be to guide learners on the suitability of various courses.

**Key words:** *Vocational courses, career aspiration, peer influence*

## **Factors Influencing Choice of Vocational Courses by Learners with Hearing Impairments in Selected Vocational Training Centres, Kenya**

Vocational training services prepare Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to achieve a lifestyle of independence and integration within their workplace, family and local community. This transition should ordinarily be achieved through career guidance, vocational training, choosing career and later on job placement and support through job counseling services, medical and therapeutic services and supporting them on job (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2012). Vocational training for learners with Hearing Impairments (HI) in particular, is meant to assist them settle in gainful and skilled employment. The goal of training and employment is the same for both handicapped and non-handicapped. Work offers opportunities for social contacts, facilitates independence, and allows greater access to community services and programs (Hardman et. al, 2012). Research conducted by Punch, Creed & Hyde (2005) on learners who are hearing impairment in Australia suggests that these learners do not have the “career knowledge” like their counterparts without disabilities; often they do not undertake part-time work while still at school which would assist in improving their knowledge of what is available and determining what is suitable. They often think that there are potential barriers that will restrict their choice of career. As observed by Ochs & Roessler (2001) learners with HI should be fully equipped with skills to enable them develop self-confidence and positive career related intentions that enable other learners without disabilities to succeed. It is possible that lack of career guidance and job support could partly be blamed for career challenges among learners with HI. Surprisingly, many learners with HI have been fitted to job training opportunities in vocational training that happen to be available as opposed to what the learner really wishes to pursue in terms of career.

Lack of vocational training, career guidance and support leading to wrong career choices for learners with HI is wide spread (Ochs & Roessler, 2001). Katende (1994) observes that in Uganda, PWDs who are lucky to join vocational rehabilitation institution are often subjected to low skill courses whose marketability is very poor. Consequently, after graduation and engaging in work they have no option but to abandon their unprofitable jobs and go back to begging. Katende (1994) further asserts that in the 1960's such courses as carpentry, tailoring, telephone operating, typing and other handicrafts were fashionable but they have always been equated to low educational levels and therefore, low income. These are the courses that many learners with HI enroll for in most of vocational institutions in Kenya.

To be ready for competitive employment, learners with HI are included in vocational programs where appropriate technical training is provided (Krajewski & Callahan, 1998). The trend in Kenya is that there is more transition to vocational centres for learners with HI than secondary schools. This is mainly due to poor academic performance, unresponsiveness of schools to the needs of these learners with HI hence; they opt for the Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) for the skills they will use for survival. Most of these VTCs are disability specific and in most cases are located near special schools (MOEST, 2003). Scholars such as Okombo (1994) and Adoyo (2001; 2004) decry the decimal performance of learners with HI in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education which negatively affects their transition to secondary schools.

The VTCs aims at helping learners with HI to discover hidden talents as well as equipping them with the necessary skills that would prepare them for salaried or self employment for life. Some of the skills offered include tailoring, carpentry, joinery, knitting and dressing making. The

disadvantage they face is that the type of training offered in these centres is basically of a traditional outlook and may fail to meet the global trends of current/modern times.

Thus, the study focused on this group of learners with HI because studies have shown that successful graduates from the VTCs do not transit to employment as expected and many get employed to do jobs they were not trained in or some do not get any employment (Republic of Kenya, 2003). It is against this background that the researcher found it important to investigate factors influencing choice of vocational courses by learners with HI in VTCs.

### **Conceptual Framework and Review of Related Literature on Vocational Training**

The study was guided by the Human Capital Theory. The concept of Human Capital was introduced by Becker (1994) due to the realization that growth of physical capital has only small part of growth of income. Relatively, the emergence of education and skills training in military technology has also played an important part in the discovery of this theory. The theory suggests that education and training raises the productivity of workers by imparting useful knowledge and skills, hence raising workers' future income by increasing their lifetime earnings (Becker, 1994). It also asserts that investment in education and training is essential to achieve social economic progress and postulates that expenditure on training in education is costly, and should be considered an investment since it is undertaken with a view to increasing personal incomes.

The theory is basically concerned with comparing costs and benefits of educational investment. Skills and knowledge obtained from education are a form of capital (Human Capital) embodied in a learner. The various skills and knowledge that learners with HI get from vocational training form the basis of career opportunities in the labour market. Learners must choose vocational courses, and career in relation to their abilities and through training settle in their chosen career path. The proposed human capital theory fits into the study because it entails initial choice of vocational courses and career as reflected by course choice right throughout the entire training. Education and training play a significant role in the determination of learner's performance.

Learners with HI are admitted in vocational centres from various institutions and they are expected to make choice of vocational courses in the VTC. The choice of vocational courses may be influenced by several factors like career aspiration of learners, peer pressure, factors within school environment and available vocational courses. Relating Human Capital to vocational training of learners with HI entails, successful completion of vocational skills training which may lead to three options: life time earnings, job satisfaction and transition to job market. Through, proper formal training, use of adapted curriculum and career guidance to learners with HI in VTC may help them to make their optional career choice diligently to avoid mismatch between education, training and the labour market requirements.

### **Research Design**

This study employed mixed methods approach design which is an aspect of both quantitative and qualitative procedures (Creswell, 2003). This method emanates from the conviction that neither quantitative nor qualitative approach is self-sufficient. The concurrent procedures; a mixed method strategy was applied whereby the researcher converged quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2003). The design explored in-depth and holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

## **Location of the Study**

The study was carried out in selected VTCs in Kambui (Kiambu County), Kerugoya (Kirinyaga County), Nyandarua (Nyandarua County) and Murang'a (Muranga County), Kenya that train learners with HI in vocational courses. The VTCs were selected on researcher's judgment since institutions dealing with HI are quite few and not evenly distributed or equally accessible. The VTCs were purposively selected for the study because each of them has unique potentials (they offer diverse courses) that are worthy studying. Secondly the VTCs have had a relatively longer history of training learners with HI.

## **Target Population**

The study targeted 91 learners with HI, 12 instructors and 4 administrators in the four selected VTCs. Thus the total population was 107 from which the sample size was drawn.

## **Sampling Techniques and Sample size**

### **Sampling Techniques**

This study used a combination of purposive sampling and stratified sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is a technique that allows the researcher to use cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of the study. In purposive sampling, the subjects are chosen according to a certain specified criteria. Purposive sampling was used to select the VTCs, instructors and learners. The instructors and the administrators were purposively selected considering that they have direct contact with learners, and hence had varied opinions about the issue being addressed in the study. All the learners in their three years of study were purposively sampled because they are training in the VTCs and randomised to get equal distribution of gender in the study. This ensured that male and female learners had equal chances of being chosen in the study. The representation of year of study was catered for through stratification. Every year of study was considered a stratum that was then randomised to get respondents for every year.

### **Sample Size**

There were seventy seven respondents for the study. According to Fraenkel&Wallen (2009) a sample with a minimum number of one hundred (100) respondents is essential for descriptive studies. The respondents were chosen using statistical formula for calculating sample size in survey given by  $n' = n / (1 + n/N)$  (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This formula was preferred because by using it the researcher was able to adjust the sample size for small population that was less than 100,000.

$n'$  = required sample size

$n$  = 384 (used for target population of less than 100,000)

$N$  = Target population.

Using the formula the researcher was able to determine the sample size. The sample sizes were presented in table 3.1.

## **Research Instruments**

Two types of research instruments were designed for use by the researcher. There were interview guides and questionnaires. They were developed by the researcher and were used as a guide in getting information towards the building of the findings of the study.

### **Interview Guides for Administrators and Instructors**

The researcher used two interview guides developed for the administrators and instructors. Interview guides consisted of open-ended questions. Semi-structured interview guides involved asking a series of structured questions and then probing using open-ended questions to obtain additional information that was quite vital in the study. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2001) an interview schedule can produce in-depth data not possible with the questionnaire and the reason for particular responses can be determined. Interviews are adaptable in that questions can be adjusted as the need arises. Both interview guides were face to face interviews.

### **Questionnaire for learners with HI**

The researcher used one set of questionnaire containing background information and structured close-ended questions. They were used to investigate personal characteristics of respondents, provide information on types of vocational courses offered in VTCs, peer influence, learners' career aspiration and factors within the school environment that facilities learners choice of vocational courses in the VTCs. They were administered to learners training in the VTCs.

## **Data Analysis**

Data, both quantitative and qualitative were analyzed. Descriptive statistics in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyse quantitative data and was presented in form of pie charts, graphs, frequency tables and percentages. Qualitative data were analyzed according to the themes of the study which were types of vocational courses, learners' career aspirations, peer influence and school environment. Both quantitative and qualitative data on the objectives of the study were then triangulated to generalize conclusions on the findings of the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Demographic Characteristics**

#### **Gender of Learners**

The study required the learners to indicate their gender. The data obtained revealed gender disparity in favour of males in enrolment in VTCs. There were more males (56%) than females (44%). The findings concur with UNESCO (2002) who notes of gender disparities in access to educational opportunities in developing countries. The Kenya MOE (2009) also contends that the national education system has been characterized by gender disparities at the national level and across regions. The MOE reported of glaring gender disparities in SNE which widens with every additional level of schooling including vocational training. This is likely to affect the social – economic empowerment of female learners with HI. The literacy levels for girls and women are generally lower than for boys and men and this affects educational and economic activities for girls and women, the female learners with HI included. The data on gender of the learners is presented on table 4.1

## **Educational background**

The study also investigated the educational background of the learners with HI who took part in the study. Table 4.2 shows majority of the learners 54 (87%) had primary level education. The findings point to low transition to secondary school for learners with HI. Scholars such as Okombo (1994) and Adoyo (2001; 2004) decry the decimal performance of learners with HI in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. This negatively affects their transition to secondary schools. The data therefore validates the critical role played by VTCs in providing additional training that prepares learners with HI for employment and involvement in income generating activities.

However, the low level of education for the learners with HI who enrol in VTCs presents a challenge for vocational training. Interviews with administrators and instructors revealed that the learners were unable to cope with the academic demands of the vocational training courses due to low entry behaviour. This is in line with Mustapha (2004) who argued that the curriculum designed for such institutions are insensitive to the needs of learners with HI. This is a major dilemma for the instructors considering that the syllabus for the courses offered in VTCs does not provide bridging courses for weak learners or even for those who had no opportunity for any formal schooling.

## **Duration of stay in the institution**

The study sought to establish the duration the learners had stayed in the VTCs. Data presented on table 4.3 revealed that 17 (27 %) of the learners had stayed in the institutions for 1 year, 24 (39%) had stayed for 2-3 years while 21 (34%) had stayed for more than three years. Interviews with the instructors revealed that learners with HI take more time to complete vocational training courses. This is due to low entry behaviour and the structure of the courses provided. The duration for vocational training takes three years after which learners sit for their trade test which is also determined by individual learner performance.

Moreover, the MOE guidelines require that a learner who has attempted a trade test cannot move to the next level immediately after completing a level. A one year break is recommended after one level. This suggests that learners with HI spent more time in the VTCs while acquiring the intended vocational skills. For example, a learner with HI pursuing dress making has to start from grade three and the highest grade is grade one. Considering that after every grade the learner has to take a one year break, the learner will require at least five years to complete grade one. This is more than the time required to complete secondary school education or a regular degree course in a public university in Kenya.

## **Age of the Learners with HI in VTCs**

The researcher wanted to establish the age of the learners with HI in the VTCs. The age distribution of the learners in the centres presented on table 4.4 revealed that majority 36 (58%) of the learners were aged between 22 and 26 years implying delayed age of enrolment in basic education for learners with HI. The findings concur with Republic of Kenya (2005) who established that learners with special needs in most cases enrol at school late compared with other 'normal' children and consequently many become adults before they complete their education programs.

## **Vocational Courses available for Learners with HI**

The first research question sought to establish the kinds of vocational courses offered in selected VTCs Kenya. Similar to Puakyiene (1996) findings, the data obtained from the learners,

administrators and instructors indicated that the vocational courses offered in the VTCs ranged from tailoring, masonry, carpentry, joinery, beauty therapy, beading, welding and soap making. There were also other innovative courses in line with changing market demands such as computer studies and mobile phone repair. From the range of courses offered, the instructors reported that dressmaking, carpentry and joinery were examined by the DIT.

### **Reason for Choice of Vocational Courses in the VTCs**

The study sought to establish the main reasons for learners' choice of vocational courses offered in the VTCs. The respondents indicated various reasons for the choice of vocational courses. Figure 4.1 shows that majority 24 (40%) were influenced by peers, 16 (25%) copied friends, 10 (15%) had an interest in the course they were pursuing, and 6 (10%) were advised by both parents and instructors respectively.

Interviews conducted with instructors revealed that learners' choice of vocational courses was based on whether the course was mainly pursued by male or female learners. For example, it was noted that female learners preferred beauty therapy, knitting and computer studies. Courses such as carpentry and joinery were dominated by male learners. This may be as a result of gender socialization.

The study also established that the nature of disability influenced choice and placement of learners with HI in vocational courses. Some learners had additional disabilities such as being mentally handicapped. The instructor therefore admits such learners in less demanding courses. For example, in Kerugoya VTC, there were three learners with additional disabilities who were only involved in courses like soap making and beading because they could not cope with technical courses which require a lot of arithmetic.

### **Entry Qualifications to join VTCs**

The study sought to establish the requirements for entry qualifications to join VTCs for learners with HI. The respondents were asked to state the entry qualifications for joining the VTCs

Data presented on table 4.5 revealed that majority 31 (50%) of the respondents indicated that entry qualifications to join the vocational courses were Kenya certificate of primary education, 25 (40%) secondary education and adult learners 6 (10%). Administrators and instructors also revealed that one must have attained the age of 17 years and above. Further, they must undergo assessment at Educational Assessment and Resource Centres for learners with special needs. Similar findings were reported by Shah (2005) who pointed out that in Thailand many of the vocational courses required learners to have a level of formal education, functional literacy and numeracy. He also revealed that training is provided to learners aged between 17 to 40 years.

### **Limitation to Career Choices**

The study required the learners to indicate whether there were limitations to career choices in courses offered at the VTCs. Figure 4.2 shows that majority 40 (65%) of the learners were of the opinion that there are limitations to career choices in courses offered at the VTCs. The learners pointed out that they were not given enough career choices to select from. This was the case for learners in Muranga and Nyandarua VTCs which offered only dress making, carpentry and joinery. The findings concur with Mustapha (2004) who reported that learners who are deaf are not given enough choices in VTCs to select from.

Administrators and instructors revealed that donors limit learners for admission in courses like knitting because required tools are expensive to purchase and the government financial support is limited. This finding is in line with Forum for Actors in Street Children Work (FASCW, 2001). The forum revealed that the training offered was too narrow and traditional in focus, as it usually comprised of only carpentry, dressmaking, masonry, joinery and auto mechanics.

### **Whether Decision to Join VTCs was Voluntary**

The study sought to find out whether the learners' decision to join the vocational training was voluntary. Figure 4.3 show that majority 32 (52%) of the respondents made the decision voluntarily while 30 (48%) were influenced by other persons. The learners gave their reasons for the voluntary decision to join vocational centre as prospects for employment upon completion of the training. They also noted that the skills would help them initiate income generating activities.

### **Implication of the Research Findings**

The study established that the vocational courses offered in the VTCs included tailoring, masonry, carpentry and joinery, beauty therapy, beading, welding and soap making. There were also other innovative courses in line with changing market demands such as computer studies and mobile phone repair. Dressmaking, carpentry and joinery were examined by the DIT. Vocational training for learners with HI took three years after which the learners sat for their trade test. Some of the reasons raised by instructors for the choice of vocational courses by the learners were parent advice or teacher advice, peer influence, interests, grade trends as well as employment opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of all these finding, the study concluded that while the VTCs provide courses to learners with HI, the range of courses for the learners to choose is limited. Learners in the centres pursue the courses not because of their career aspirations but because these are the only courses available. Even their friends are pursuing the same traditional courses. Inevitably, the MOE has prescribed and predetermined the career path for learners with HI.

### **Recommendation**

The researcher found out that the vocational courses offered in the VTCs limited learners choice. The vocational curricular offered in the VTCs should be expanded to include vocational technical training for service occupation such as agriculture, business studies, metal work and secretarial. This would allow a wide variety of courses where learners could select from to enhance their skills training.

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## Tables

Table 3.1: Sampling Grid

Respondents	Kambui	Murang'a	Kerugoya	Nyandarua	Target Population	Total sample size
Administrator	1	1	1	1	4	4
Instructors	4	2	5	2	12	11
Learners	45	20	16	20	91	62
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>77</b>

Table 4.1: Gender of Learners' (N=62)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	35	56
Female	27	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.2: Educational background for learners with HI (N=62)

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
No school	5	8
Primary	54	87
Secondary	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100.0</b>

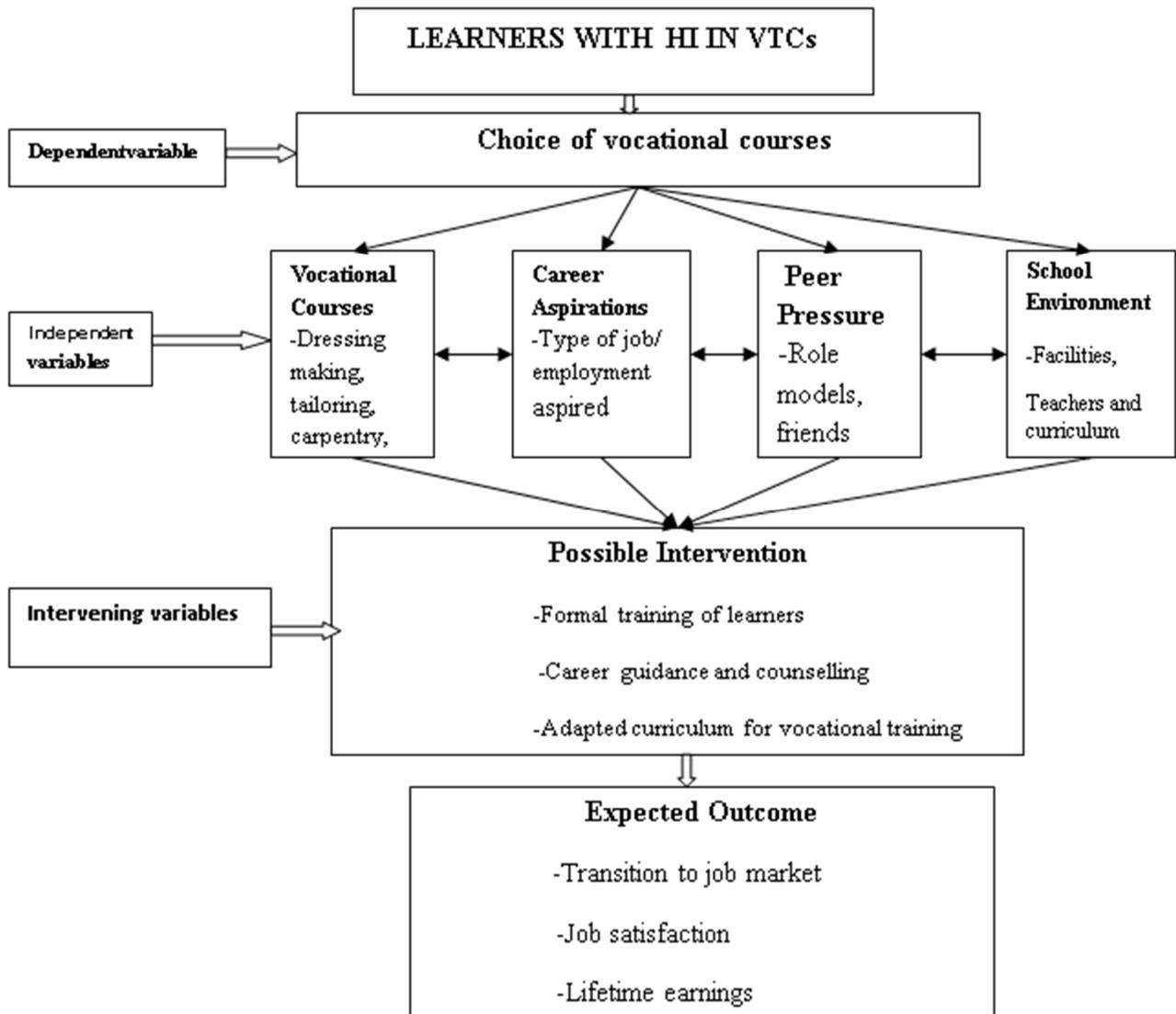
Table 4.3: Duration stayed in the institution (N=62)

Duration in VTCs	Frequency	Percentage
1 year	17	27
2 -3 years	24	39
Above 3 years	21	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.4 Age Distribution of the Learners (N=62)

Age	Frequency	Percentage
17-21 years	5	8
22-26 years	36	58
Above 27 years	21	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 1.1



Source: Researcher

**Fig 2:1**

