Effectiveness of Training Programs in Improving Youth Employability in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment remains a persistent socioeconomic challenge in Kenya, with limited formal employment opportunities constraining the capacity of young people to secure sustainable livelihoods. Skills development programmes have consequently become an important policy intervention for improving employability and strengthening youth economic participation. This study assessed the effectiveness of training programmes implemented under the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) in improving youth employability among beneficiaries in Kibra, Mathare and Kasarani sub-counties of Nairobi County. A mixed-methods cross-sectional research design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from 367 KYEOP beneficiaries selected through stratified random sampling, while qualitative evidence was obtained through 13 key informant interviews and three focus group discussions involving 20 beneficiaries. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings established a statistically significant positive relationship between training programme effectiveness and the sustainability of youth economic outcomes. Training programme effectiveness significantly predicted sustainability outcomes ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < .001$). However, the beneficiaries reported substantial shortcomings in the actual quality and relevance of training. Overall perceptions of training effectiveness were low (mean = 2.22), while 83.9% of respondents reported that their technical skills had not improved meaningfully, producing a mean score of 2.06 for technical skills improvement. Qualitative findings attributed these shortcomings to outdated curricula, inadequate practical exposure, limited alignment with labour market requirements and variations in trainer competence. The study concludes that participation in training alone does not guarantee improved employability; rather, the relevance, quality and practical orientation of training determine the extent to which skills can be translated into sustainable employment and livelihood outcomes. The study recommends competency-based curriculum reform, stronger employer participation in curriculum development, extended practical training and integration of digital skills across vocational training programmes.

Keywords: youth employability, skills training, KYEOP, vocational training, sustainable livelihoods

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment has emerged as one of the most consequential socioeconomic and security challenges confronting developing nations in the twenty-first century. Globally, the International Labour Organization (2022) estimates that approximately 73 million young people remain unemployed, with the burden falling disproportionately on Sub-Saharan Africa where demographic growth consistently outpaces economic expansion and formal job creation. In this context, skills training has been elevated within national and international policy frameworks as a primary instrument for bridging the gap between labour supply and market demand, enhancing youth productivity, and reducing social vulnerability associated with prolonged unemployment.

Kenya presents a compelling illustration of this challenge. With approximately 36% of its 57 million citizens aged between 18 and 35 years, the country faces an annual influx of more than one million young people into

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the labour market, yet formal sector absorption remains critically constrained (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2022; CompleteEra, 2024). Youth unemployment stands at 15% among those aged 15 to 24 years, while underemployment and informal sector confinement affect a substantially larger proportion of the youth population (Afrobarometer, 2025). This structural imbalance has elevated the youth employment crisis beyond a welfare concern into a matter of national stability, with growing empirical evidence linking youth economic exclusion to increased vulnerability to radicalization, criminal recruitment, and civic unrest (Kimari & Mwaura, 2020; Botha & Abdile, 2019). In response, the Government of Kenya has progressively institutionalized skills-based youth empowerment as a central pillar of its national development strategy, culminating in the launch of the Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project in 2016 as its most ambitious and comprehensively funded youth training intervention to date.

Despite sustained policy commitment and substantial public investment in youth skills training, Kenya's labour market continues to fail the majority of young people seeking stable and dignified employment. Each year, more than one million youth enter the labour force yet the economy generates insufficient opportunities to absorb them into productive formal employment, leaving large proportions unemployed, underemployed, or confined to precarious informal activities (Federation of Kenya Employers, 2026; Huduma Global, 2026). This persistent mismatch between skills supply and market demand has raised fundamental questions about whether existing training interventions are genuinely building the human capital that employability requires, or whether they are producing certificate holders whose competencies do not match what employers seek.

The Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project, implemented between 2016 and 2023 at a cost of KSh 15 billion and reaching 310,889 beneficiaries nationally, represents the most significant test of skills-based youth empowerment in Kenya's recent history (World Bank, 2023; MSEA, 2023). Yet existing evaluations of KYEOP have predominantly focused on short-term output metrics such as training enrolment rates, course completion figures, and immediate post-programme employment placements. World Bank tracer studies report that 81% of beneficiaries who received training and internships found some form of employment; however, these figures do not interrogate whether training content was relevant to career needs, whether technical skills meaningfully improved, or whether post-programme employment was stable and sustainable beyond the initial transition period (World Bank, 2023). This exclusive focus on output over outcome leaves a critical evidence gap regarding the actual human capital development impact of KYEOP's training component.

Study Objective

The objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of training programs delivered under KYEOP in improving youth employability among beneficiaries in Kibra, Mathare, and Kasarani sub-counties of Nairobi County.

Contribution of the Paper

This study makes distinct contributions to existing knowledge. Empirically, it provides rare evidence on long-term training effectiveness outcomes within KYEOP, moving beyond enrolment and completion metrics to assess actual competency development and sustained employability. Theoretically, it tests the propositions of Human Capital Theory and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework within an urban Kenyan youth employment context, contributing to ongoing debates about the conditions under which skills training generates durable economic returns. From a policy standpoint, the study generates actionable evidence for redesigning KYEOP's training architecture to align curriculum content, pedagogical delivery, trainer quality, and programme duration with Kenya's evolving labour market demands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between structured skills training and youth employability has been extensively examined across diverse national contexts, with accumulated evidence pointing to both the transformative potential and the significant limitations of training-based interventions. In developed economies, education and training systems are deliberately designed to align learning outcomes with labour market requirements, producing graduates equipped with competencies that employers actively seek. Finland's competency-based curriculum, which integrates digital literacy, critical thinking, and civic education across all educational levels, is widely cited as an exemplar of coherent skills-market alignment that produces socially adaptive and economically productive graduates (Niemi, 2018). Singapore's Institute of Technical Education model similarly demonstrates how tightly coordinated vocational training systems linked directly to national industrial priorities can generate consistently high graduate employment rates and sustained workforce productivity (Tan & Gopinathan, 2020).

However, scholars caution that the institutional conditions enabling these successes-strong state capacity, adequate public financing, centralized curriculum coordination, and minimal socioeconomic stratification-differ markedly from the realities confronting most low- and middle-income countries. Research by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) further demonstrates that even in advanced economies, training effectiveness is strongly mediated by the quality of employer engagement in curriculum design, the availability of work-based learning opportunities, and the existence of robust labour market information systems that guide training content toward areas of genuine skill shortage. These findings establish a foundational insight that informs the present study: training quality, rather than training access alone, is the decisive determinant of whether skills investment generates durable employability returns. This insight is particularly significant for evaluating KYEOP, where enrolment rates were high but beneficiary assessments of training quality were deeply unfavorable.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to link skills training with youth employment and national development objectives have produced substantially more mixed outcomes than the models observed in developed economies. Nigeria's National Policy on Education and subsequent TVET reforms were explicitly designed to reduce youth unemployment and combat the socioeconomic conditions associated with insurgent recruitment, yet empirical evaluations by Adebayo (2021) and Nwosu (2019) reveal that chronic underfunding, outdated curriculum content, and weak industry linkages have significantly limited programme impact. Large proportions of Nigerian TVET graduates continue to face unemployment or underemployment, suggesting that training investment without sustained quality assurance and employer engagement fails to generate meaningful employability gains.

South Africa's experience provides a further cautionary parallel. Despite substantial government investment in youth education and skills programmes through the National Youth Development Agency, Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) document that structural economic inequalities and persistent racial labour market segmentation have prevented training investments from translating into commensurate employment gains, producing widespread graduate disillusionment and contributing to periodic violent service delivery protests. Uganda's Youth Opportunities Program, rigorously evaluated by Blattman and Ralston (2015) through a randomized controlled trial, demonstrated that cash grants combined with vocational training significantly increased earnings and enterprise creation in the short term; however, income gains progressively eroded after the third year as market saturation, limited reinvestment capacity, and absence of post-programme support undermined the sustainability of initial skill application. These regional findings consistently highlight a shared structural limitation: training programmes that generate initial human capital gains frequently fail to sustain these gains in the absence of complementary post-programme support, adequate capital, and enabling market conditions-a pattern that resonates strongly with the KYEOP experience documented in this study.

Within Kenya, empirical evidence on the relationship between skills training and youth employability reveals persistent structural challenges that successive policy reforms have not yet resolved. UNESCO (2023) documents that only 16% of secondary school leavers transition to technical or vocational institutions, and fewer than 30% of TVET graduates secure formal employment within two years of completing their programmes. These figures reflect a systemic misalignment between training content and employer demand that has characterized Kenya's vocational education system across multiple policy cycles. Research by Mujuri and Kathomi (2025) further establishes that even vocationally trained youth in Kenya frequently require substantial additional competency development before achieving stable labour market insertion, as curriculum content often lags several years behind current industry practice.

Studies examining specific youth employment programmes illuminate the mechanisms through which training quality failures undermine employability outcomes. Chege and Wanjohi (2022) observed that while 52% of KYEOP trainees in Nairobi secured some form of employment following programme completion, only 30% retained stable positions after 12 months. The primary explanatory factors identified were insufficient practical training exposure, curriculum content disconnected from employer expectations, and the absence of post-programme mentorship that might have helped graduates navigate early employment challenges. Wamalwa and Gakuru (2018) similarly found that youth enterprise failures among beneficiaries of Kenya's Uwezo Fund were attributable not to lack of entrepreneurial motivation but to inadequate business management training that left graduates ill-equipped to manage cash flow, customer acquisition, and competitive market pressures. Ouma and Mwangi (2019) extend these findings by documenting that the frustration generated by training investments that fail to deliver promised employment returns significantly elevates youth vulnerability to radicalization in Kenya's coastal and northern regions, confirming that training ineffectiveness carries security consequences that extend far beyond individual economic hardship. Collectively, these Kenyan studies establish that the critical challenge is not access to training but the quality, relevance, and duration of training delivered-dimensions that this study directly assesses within the KYEOP context.

The Kenya Youth Employment and Opportunities Project's training component has attracted growing evaluative attention since the programme's implementation phase, though existing assessments have predominantly focused on output and short-term outcome metrics rather than sustained human capital development. World Bank implementation reports confirm that over 280,000 youth received employability and life-skills training under KYEOP, with 64% completing internship placements across various sectors by project closure (World Bank, 2023). Administrative monitoring data further document high training completion rates and positive immediate post-programme employment transitions, with the programme surpassing its original beneficiary targets across most implementation counties.

However, independent scholarly assessments reveal a more complex picture beneath these headline figures. Chege and Wanjohi (2022) established that KYEOP's positive short-term employment transitions masked significant medium-term attrition, with fewer than one-third of beneficiaries retaining stable employment after 12 months. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's (2023) internal implementation review acknowledged curriculum alignment gaps but attributed these to the administrative complexity of updating training content across multiple implementing agencies and county contexts. No rigorous longitudinal study has examined whether KYEOP's training translates into sustained competency gains, career progression, or long-term income stability among beneficiaries-the outcomes that Human Capital Theory identifies as the ultimate measure of training investment returns. This absence of evidence on sustained human capital outcomes represents the central literature gap that this study addresses.

Research Gap

The existing body of literature on youth training effectiveness in Kenya and across Sub-Saharan Africa reveals a pronounced imbalance between research on programme design and delivery and research on long-term human capital outcomes. Most evaluations of KYEOP and comparable youth employment programmes assess immediate post-programme employment rates, business start-up counts, or income changes measured within six months of completion. These metrics, while useful for administrative accountability, do not capture whether training translated into durable competency gains, whether beneficiaries retained employment over extended periods, or whether the skills imparted remain relevant as labour market demands evolve.

Specifically, no rigorous empirical study has assessed the long-term effectiveness of KYEOP's training component in building sustained workforce capacity among beneficiaries in Nairobi County's diverse urban contexts. The absence of such evidence leaves policymakers unable to determine whether the substantial investment in KYEOP training is generating genuine human capital development or merely facilitating temporary labour market transitions that erode over time. This study addresses this gap by systematically evaluating training program effectiveness through beneficiary perceptions, institutional assessments, and statistical analysis of the relationship between training quality and sustainability of livelihood outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted Human Capital Theory. The foundational theoretical lens guiding this study is Human Capital Theory, originally formulated by Becker (1964) and subsequently elaborated by Schultz (1961) and Mincer (1974). The theory posits that individuals who invest in education, skills acquisition, and structured training accumulate productive capacities that translate into improved labour market performance, enhanced earnings potential, and greater long-term economic security. At its core, the framework treats human beings not merely as passive recipients of economic opportunity but as active agents who build their own productive value through deliberate investments in learning and competency development. Within this paradigm, vocational training programmes such as KYEOP are understood as institutional mechanisms through which society collectively invests in expanding the human capital stock of economically vulnerable youth, thereby improving both individual livelihood prospects and aggregate national productivity.

Applied to the present study, Human Capital Theory generates specific and testable predictions. Youth who receive high-quality, market-relevant technical and business skills training under KYEOP should demonstrate measurable improvements in competency, enhanced confidence in workplace decision-making, greater success in securing employment, and stronger capacity to sustain livelihoods over time. The theory further predicts that the returns to training investment are mediated by the quality and relevance of the skills imparted: training that closely mirrors actual employer requirements and industry standards should yield higher and more durable employability gains than generic or outdated instruction disconnected from current labour market realities.

However, critics of Human Capital Theory caution against treating skills acquisition as a sufficient condition for employment in contexts where structural labour market barriers persist independently of individual competence levels. Acemoglu and Pischke (1999) argue that imperfect labour markets often prevent workers from fully capturing the returns on their training investments, particularly when employer monopsony power, discrimination, or information asymmetries distort hiring decisions. Fox and Thomas (2016) further emphasize that in Sub-Saharan African labour markets characterized by high informality and weak formal sector absorption, skills quality improvements may generate only modest employability gains unless accompanied by broader structural economic reforms. These theoretical tensions are directly relevant to the Kenyan context and inform the study's interpretation of findings on the relationship between KYEOP training quality and beneficiary employment outcomes.

Complementing the human capital perspective, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) developed by Chambers and Conway (1992) and subsequently operationalized by the Department for International Development (DFID, 1999) provides a holistic analytical lens for situating training effectiveness within the broader ecosystem of assets, vulnerabilities, and institutional structures that shape youth livelihood trajectories. The SLF conceptualizes sustainable livelihoods as outcomes that emerge when individuals and households can access and productively combine five categories of capital assets: human capital encompassing skills, knowledge, and health; financial capital including savings, income streams, and credit access; social capital comprising networks, trust, and associational membership; physical capital covering tools, equipment, and infrastructure; and natural capital relevant in rural contexts involving land and environmental resources.

Within the SLF, training effectiveness is understood as a human capital input that contributes to livelihood sustainability only when it is reinforced by complementary asset access and enabling institutional structures. A youth who completes KYEOP technical training but lacks access to start-up capital, market networks, ongoing mentorship, and post-programme institutional support operates within a depleted asset portfolio that undermines the translation of human capital gains into sustained livelihoods. The framework therefore shifts analytical attention beyond the training programme itself to encompass the broader livelihood ecosystem

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within which training outcomes must operate, making it particularly relevant for explaining why even technically well-designed training interventions may fail to generate durable employability improvements in resource-constrained urban informal settlement contexts such as Kibra, Mathare, and Kasarani.

The SLF also foregrounds the role of vulnerability contexts-including seasonal income shocks, market volatility, household financial pressures, and limited social protection-in eroding livelihood gains made through skills training. For KYEOP beneficiaries operating in Nairobi's high-density informal settlements, these vulnerability factors are particularly acute, suggesting that training effectiveness assessments that ignore post-programme livelihood contexts may systematically overestimate the durable impact of skills interventions. The framework thus provides a critical corrective to purely human capital-centric analyses by demanding attention to the structural conditions that enable or constrain the conversion of training into sustained economic security

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study synthesizes the predictions of Human Capital Theory and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework into an integrated analytical model that maps the hypothesized pathways through which KYEOP training program effectiveness influences the sustainability of youth economic outcomes.

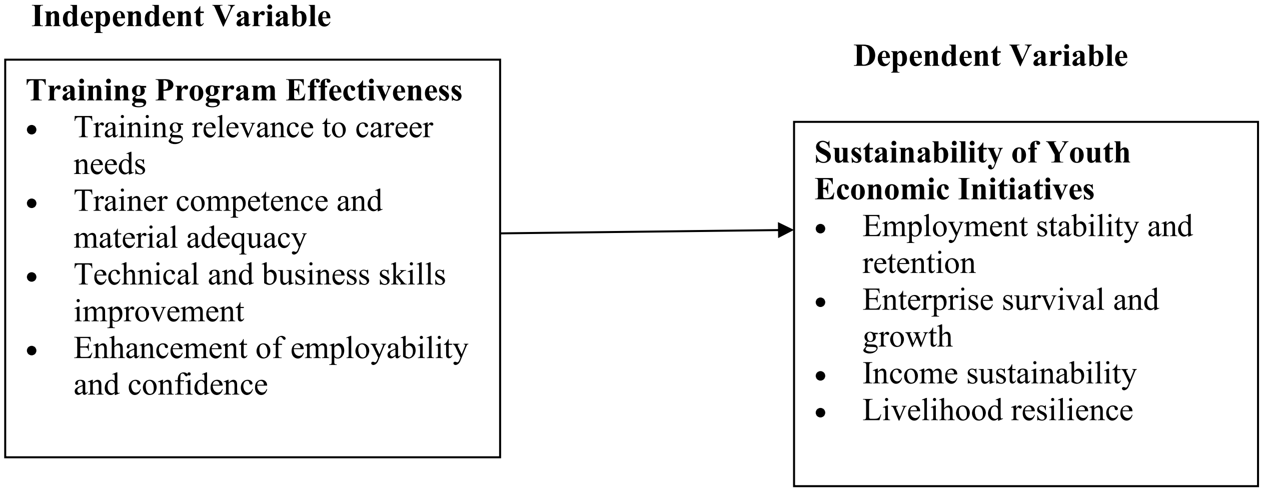

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Field data 2025

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design within a convergent mixed methods approach. It was conducted in Kibra, Mathare, and Kasarani sub counties in Nairobi County. The target population comprised KYEOP beneficiaries and key institutional stakeholders involved in programme implementation. A sample of 400 youth respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. Stratified random sampling was used to select youth respondents, while purposive sampling was used to select 13 key informants. Three focus group discussions involving 20 beneficiaries were also conducted. Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 367 were validly completed, giving a response rate of 91.8%. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interview guides, and focus group discussion guides.

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Validity was established through expert review and a pilot study involving 40 respondents outside the study area. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with the training programme effectiveness scale attaining a coefficient of 0.891, indicating high internal consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS through frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and integrated with the quantitative findings to provide contextual interpretation. Ethical requirements were observed through NACOSTI approval, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymization of responses, and secure storage of research data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The study targeted a total sample of 439 participants comprising 400 youth respondents for structured questionnaires, 15 key informants for in-depth interviews and 24 KYEOP beneficiaries for focus group discussions across Kibra, Mathare and Kasarani sub-counties in Nairobi County. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 367 were duly filled and returned representing a response rate of 91.8 percent. This high response rate was attributed to several factors including the researcher's direct involvement in questionnaire administration, the use of trained research assistants familiar with the study areas, follow-up visits to non-respondents and the relevance of the study topic to beneficiaries lived experiences. The 33 unreturned or incomplete questionnaires resulted from beneficiaries who had relocated outside Nairobi County, those who declined participation citing time constraints and questionnaires with missing critical data sections that were excluded from analysis to maintain data quality and validity.

For the qualitative component, the study successfully conducted 13 out of 15 planned Key Informant Interviews representing an 86.7 percent response rate. The achieved interviews included 4 KYEOP coordination officers from MSEA and county government, 3 master craftsmen providing apprenticeship training, 2 business development service providers offering mentorship, 3 financial institution representatives and 1 NITA training coordinator. Two planned interviews could not be completed due to scheduling conflicts and stakeholder unavailability during the data collection period. Additionally, 3 Focus Group Discussions were conducted with 20 out of 24 targeted KYEOP beneficiaries representing an 83.3 percent FGD participation rate. Kibra FGD had 8 participants, Mathare FGD had 5 participants and Kasarani FGD had 7 participants with lower turnout attributed to last-minute participant withdrawals and scheduling challenges. The qualitative response rates were considered adequate for thematic saturation and provided sufficient data for comprehensive triangulation with quantitative findings.

Training Program Effectiveness

Table 1 presents the respondents' views on the effectiveness of the training programmes offered under KYEOP. The findings assess the extent to which the training enhanced participants' skills, employability, entrepreneurial capacity and overall economic empowerment.

Table 1: Training Program Effectiveness

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
The training I received was directly relevant to my career goals.	21.80%	58.30%	6.80%	9.80%	3.30%	2.14	0.98

The skills taught during training are applicable to my current work.	28.90%	45.00%	6.00%	13.90%	6.30%	2.24	1.19
The trainers were knowledgeable and well-prepared.	21.30%	47.10%	11.20%	13.60%	6.80%	2.38	1.16
Training materials and equipment were sufficient for effective learning.	21.30%	48.80%	5.70%	19.90%	4.40%	2.37	1.01
My technical skills significantly improved after KYEOP training.	29.40%	54.50%	3.00%	6.80%	6.30%	2.06	1.08
My business management skills are now better than before KYEOP.	15.50%	62.10%	4.60%	12.00%	5.70%	2.30	1.05
KYEOP training increased my chances of finding employment.	29.70%	45.80%	9.00%	11.20%	4.40%	2.15	1.10
I feel more confident making business or job-related decisions now.	35.40%	43.60%	3.30%	12.80%	4.90%	2.08	1.16
Average						2.22	1.09

Source: Field data 2025

The results of the training program effectiveness showed that 80.1% (21.80%+58.30%) disagreed that the training they received was directly related to their career goals, while 13.1% (9.80%+3.30%) agreed with this statement with a mean score of 2.14 and standard deviation of 0.98. Similarly, 73.9% disagreed that skills taught during training were applicable to their current work compared to 20.2% who agreed with a mean of 2.24 and standard deviation of 1.19. In terms of trainer competence and preparation, 68.4% disagreed and 20.4% agreed with a mean of 2.38 and a standard deviation of 1.16. On training materials and equipment sufficiency, 70.1% disagreed while 24.3% agreed that resources were adequate for effective learning with a mean of 2.37 and standard deviation of 1.01. The overall mean score of 2.22 reflects mostly negative perceptions of training effectiveness, and relatively low standard deviations suggest that there was a consistent disagreement among respondents about the quality and relevance of training.

The assessment of the outcomes of skill improvement after KYEOP training revealed that 83.9% of the respondents disagreed that their technical skills had improved significantly after the training, while 13.1% agreed, giving the lowest mean score of 2.06 with a standard deviation of 1.08. In terms of business management skills, 77.6% disagreed that their skills had improved while 17.7% reported positive improvements with a mean of 2.30 and a standard deviation of 1.05. When evaluating employment prospects, 75.5% disagreed that KYEOP training increased their chances of finding employment while 15.6% agreed producing a mean of 2.15 and standard deviation of 1.10. Regarding decision making confidence, 79.0% disagreed that they felt more confident making business- or job-related decisions, while 17.7% felt more confident with a mean of 2.08 and a standard deviation of 1.16. The mean scores for all skill improvement indicators are consistently below the neutral score of 3.0, indicating that beneficiaries are generally not satisfied with the training results and feel that the training has not added much to their professional skills.

The overall negative ratings for all the training effectiveness indicators have important implications for understanding KYEOP's contribution to youth capacity development. The mean scores from 2.06 to 2.38 are all below the neutral score of 3.0, indicating a systemic problem in training design, delivery and relevance, not individual implementation issues. The relatively low standard deviations (0.98 to 1.19) suggest high level of agreement among the beneficiaries on the training gaps, which means that the experiences were similar across the sub-counties, cohorts and training components. The results indicate that training content might not have been sufficiently adapted to the changing needs of the labor market, or pedagogical methods might not have been effective in transferring transferable skills to beneficiaries. The disparity between training delivery and career relevance suggests that training needs assessment, training design, or the competence of trainers may be lacking, which may have hindered the program from providing youth with market-relevant skills and capabilities, thereby raising questions about the return on training investments.

The effectiveness of the training has significant implications for KYEOP's underlying theory of change that skills development leads to improved employability and sustainable livelihoods. The lack of consensus about training relevance and skill development indicates that many beneficiaries may have been entering into the labor market after training without any significant human capital development, which may account for the difficulties they faced in securing jobs and sustaining their businesses. The perceived lack of technical skill development with the lowest mean of 2.06 is especially alarming because technical skills are the value proposition of vocational training programs and are essential employability skills in competitive labor markets. Likewise, the lack of business management skills development negatively affects the success of the beneficiaries' entrepreneurial endeavors who were granted and tried to pursue self-employment. The results suggest that future youth empowerment programs should focus on a thorough market demand analysis, competency-based curriculum development, qualified teacher recruitment and regular quality assurance systems to ensure that investments in youth training yield measurable and lasting benefits in youth economic capabilities and competitiveness in the labor market.

Sustainability of Youth Economic Initiatives

Table 2 presents the respondents' views on the sustainability of youth economic initiatives established through KYEOP. The findings evaluate the ability of the initiatives to generate continuous income, maintain operations, and support long-term economic empowerment among the beneficiaries.

Table 2: Sustainability of Youth Economic Initiatives

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
My employment situation is more stable now than before KYEOP.	26.70%	54.50%	4.90%	12.00%	1.90%	2.08	0.98
I have not struggled to maintain stable employment since KYEOP.	18.30%	57.50%	5.40%	14.20%	4.60%	2.29	1.07
My business has survived and is still operating.	20.70%	51.00%	4.60%	17.20%	6.50%	2.38	1.18

My business has grown since I completed KYEOP.	14.70%	64.30%	2.70%	13.40%	4.90%	2.02	1.03
My income is more sustainable now than before KYEOP.	26.70%	42.00%	6.30%	19.90%	5.20%	2.35	1.21
My income rarely drops below what I need to survive.	14.20%	56.40%	7.40%	13.40%	8.70%	2.46	1.15
I can handle financial shocks better now than before KYEOP.	22.60%	55.90%	4.90%	10.90%	5.70%	2.21	1.09
My livelihood is not vulnerable to economic challenges.	30.00%	50.40%	2.70%	11.40%	5.40%	2.12	1.12
Average						2.24	1.10

Source: Field data 2025

The findings on sustainability of youth economic initiatives show that 81.2% of respondents disagreed that their employment situation was more stable now than before KYEOP while only 13.9% agreed recording a mean of 2.08 and standard deviation of 0.98. Regarding employment maintenance struggles, 75.8% disagreed that they had not struggled to maintain stable employment since KYEOP while 18.8% agreed yielding a mean of 2.29 and standard deviation of 1.07. On business survival, 71.7% disagreed that their businesses survived and were still operating while 23.7% agreed with a mean of 2.38 and standard deviation of 1.18. Concerning business growth, 79.0% disagreed that their businesses had grown since completing KYEOP while 18.3% agreed recording a mean of 2.02 and standard deviation of 1.03. The overall mean of 2.24 suggests that the sustainability outcomes are mostly negative, while the standard deviations suggest moderate economic resilience variability across the beneficiary segments.

Assessment of income sustainability reveals that 68.7% of respondents disagreed that their income was more sustainable now than before KYEOP while 25.1% agreed yielding a mean of 2.35 and standard deviation of 1.21 the highest in this section. As far as income adequacy is concerned, 70.6% disagreed that their income rarely fell below survival needs, 22.1% agreed with a mean of 2.46 and a standard deviation of 1.15. On financial shock resilience, 78.5% disagreed that they could handle financial shocks better now than before KYEOP while 16.6% agreed with a mean of 2.21 and standard deviation of 1.09. Concerning livelihood vulnerability, 80.4% disagreed that their livelihoods were not vulnerable to economic challenges while 16.8% agreed yielding a mean of 2.12 and standard deviation of 1.12. These results show that most beneficiaries continued to be economically insecure and lacked livelihood resilience after the program.

The sustainability results have significant implications for assessing the long-term effects of KYEOP on youth economic security. All mean scores from 2.02 to 2.46 are well below the neutral score of 3.0, indicating systematic failures in the ability to achieve lasting livelihood improvements despite investments in training, capital and mentorship. The lowest mean (2.02) for business growth suggests that even for the minority who had businesses that survived, there was little growth and development, suggesting stagnation at micro-enterprise level with no avenues for growth into larger businesses. Standard deviations of 0.98 to 1.21 indicate moderate variation, with higher standard deviations for income-related indicators indicating that there was some variation in program outcomes, with a small number of beneficiaries experiencing relative stability while others experienced greater variation. The relatively high mean of 2.46 for income adequacy, compared to the

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means for employment stability and business survival, indicates that some beneficiaries had income from a number of informal activities, but not from stable employment or viable businesses.

The overwhelmingly negative economic results fundamentally question the effectiveness of KYEOP as a youth empowerment intervention and highlight important issues of program design assumptions and implementation quality. The employment instability and business failure rates suggest that short-term training and small capital investments were not enough to cope with the complex labour markets and competitive business environments without institutional support. The continued income insecurity and low financial shock resilience indicate that beneficiaries continued to be in precarious economic situations even after participating in the program, and were unable to save or create safety nets that would lead to economic security. These sustainability gaps confirm previous research on training irrelevance, capital inadequacy and institutional support failures, which showed how weaknesses in various aspects of the training program multiplied to yield poor long-term results. The findings indicate that sustainable youth economic empowerment cannot be achieved through short-term service delivery models that dominate youth intervention approaches, but through program redesign that focuses on longer support periods, skills development that is market responsive, sufficient funding, and strong mentorship systems and integration into economic governance processes.

Correlation Analysis

Table 3 below presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between the study variables. The Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to test the relationships between the independent variable (training program effectiveness,) and the dependent variable (sustainability of youth economic initiatives). To determine the strength and direction of linear relationships between study variables, the correlation analysis was carried out at the significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Results

		Sustainability of Youth Economic Initiatives	Training Program Effectiveness
Sustainability of Youth Economic Initiatives	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Training Program Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	.719**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	

Source: Field data 2025

The correlation analysis results presented in Table 3 show a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between training program effectiveness and the sustainability of youth economic initiatives. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.719 indicates a robust correlation between these two variables, with a p-value of 0.000, which is highly significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the effectiveness of training programs plays a critical role in enhancing the sustainability of youth-led economic activities. As the quality of training programs improves, so does the likelihood of these initiatives achieve long-term success and sustainability. These findings support the human capital theory proposed by Becker (1964), which posits that investments in skills development and vocational training increase individual productivity, employability, and long-term economic outcomes.

The positive correlation between training program effectiveness and sustainability in this study affirms that KYEOP's training component significantly contributes to durable livelihood outcomes for its beneficiaries. This aligns with Becker's theory, which emphasizes that acquiring relevant skills enhances the ability to generate sustained economic gains, especially when the labor market offers supportive conditions. The results underscore the importance of investing in high-quality training programs as a pathway to fostering sustainable economic initiatives among youth.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis presents the coefficient results of the regression analysis. Table 4 below presents the results.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.371	0.074		5.051	0.000
	Training Program Effectiveness	0.333	0.033	0.434	10.199	0.000

Source: Field data 2025

The regression equation was

$$Y = 0.371+0.333X$$

Where; Y= Sustainability of Youth Economic Initiatives; X= Training Program Effectiveness

The regression coefficients indicated that the effectiveness of the training programs had a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainability of youth economic initiatives (β= 0.333, = 0.000), which implied that an increase in the effectiveness of the training programs by one-unit increased sustainability of youth economic initiatives by 0.333, and thus it was the most significant predictor in the model. These results are corroborated by Chege and Wanjohi (2022) who have determined that quality training had a strong positive effect on retention of employment among KYEOP beneficiaries.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data gathered through open-ended questionnaire responses, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions provided detailed contextual explanation for the predominantly negative quantitative assessments of startup capital mechanisms, exposing a fundamental distinction between grant receipt and grant sufficiency that KYEOP's administrative monitoring data had consistently obscured. Respondent narratives across Kibra, Mathare, and Kasarani converged on the finding that while the majority of eligible beneficiaries received grants or business toolkits, the amounts disbursed were structurally insufficient to establish viable enterprises capable of competing in Nairobi's informal market environments. A Kasarani respondent (KSR-Q07) explained that grant capital used to purchase secondhand clothing stock covered only one small bale that sold within two weeks, leaving no funds for restocking and effectively collapsing the enterprise before it could generate sustainable revenue. A Kibra respondent (KBR-Q09) similarly described an impossible capital allocation trade-off in which the KSh 50,000 grant could cover either equipment or initial stock but not both, resulting in tools sitting idle without operating capital. These accounts directly corroborate the quantitative finding that 76.3% of beneficiaries disagreed that grants made a real difference to their enterprises, yielding a mean of 2.12 that reflects a systemic capital design failure rather than isolated individual mismanagement across all three sub-counties.

Disbursement delays constituted the most operationally damaging capital mechanism failure documented across all qualitative data sources, with beneficiaries, implementing officials, and master craftsmen converging on the assessment that chronic delays of three to eight months between training completion and grant receipt fundamentally disrupted entrepreneurial momentum and market opportunity capture. A financial institution representative (FIN-KII10) stated that the standard KSh 50,000 grant fell far below the estimated minimum of KSh 150,000 required for meaningful enterprise startup, while an MSEA grant officer (MSEA-KII11) acknowledged that multi-agency bureaucratic approval processes and Treasury budget release constraints routinely caused disbursement delays spanning three to six months. A master craftsman from Kasarani (MCR-KII12) observed that delayed grants caused youth to take on casual employment while waiting, causing them to lose the entrepreneurial focus and business planning momentum developed during training — so that when capital eventually arrived, beneficiaries had mentally and practically disengaged from their original enterprise plans. A Kibra respondent (KBR-Q08) recounted losing a targeted business premises because the grant arrived three months after training completion, by which time the space had been rented to another tenant. These accounts directly explain the quantitative finding that 81.8% of beneficiaries disagreed that grants arrived in a timely manner, recording the lowest startup capital mean of 2.02 across all measured dimensions.

Key Informant Interviews with institutional stakeholders provided critical supply-side corroboration for beneficiary experiences of capital inadequacy, while revealing the structural administrative constraints that prevented implementing agencies from redesigning grant mechanisms even when officials recognized their inadequacy. The MSEA grant officer (MSEA-KII11) explained that disbursement processes required sequential approvals across multiple agencies including the Ministry of Labour, MSEA, and the National Treasury before funds could be released to beneficiaries, creating bureaucratic bottlenecks that no individual agency had unilateral authority to resolve. Mathare FGD participants (MTR-FGD12) described waiting periods of up to eight months between training completion and grant receipt, by which point they had forgotten significant portions of what they had learned and had already committed to alternative livelihood strategies, rendering the delayed capital largely ineffective as an enterprise establishment mechanism. These institutional admissions reveal that KYEOP's grant disbursement failures were not administrative oversights but structural programme design weaknesses embedded in multi-agency implementation architectures that prioritized compliance procedures over entrepreneurial timing — a finding that directly explains why the theoretically strong correlation between startup capital mechanisms and sustainability outcomes ($r = 0.623$) was operationally undermined by chronic disbursement failures documented consistently across all three sub-counties.

Capital utilization flexibility and integration into broader financial ecosystems represented additional dimensions of startup capital mechanism failure illuminated through qualitative evidence. Respondents described experiencing informal constraints on grant utilization that prevented responsive adaptation to local market realities, with implementing agency guidelines restricting capital deployment in ways that did not accommodate the diverse enterprise contexts across Kibra, Mathare, and Kasarani. Kibra FGD participants (KBR-FGD11) noted that establishing a salon required at minimum KSh 200,000 to cover equipment, rental, and initial stock simultaneously, yet the grant forced a choice between these necessities, resulting in businesses opening in an incomplete state that undermined market competitiveness from inception. On complementary financial services, questionnaire respondents, Key Informant interviewees, and FGD participants unanimously described KYEOP's failure to integrate beneficiaries into formal financial ecosystems including savings accounts, credit facilities, and business banking services that would have provided growth capital beyond initial grant exhaustion. An MSEA officer (MSEA-KII02) acknowledged that financial ecosystem integration was intended as a programme component but was consistently deprioritised relative to enrolment targets, leaving entrepreneurs without the ongoing financial infrastructure necessary for enterprise expansion and resilience — directly explaining the quantitative finding that 75.5% of beneficiaries disagreed that KYEOP helped them access complementary financial services, recording a mean of 2.15.

Post-programme institutional abandonment in mentorship and ongoing capital support represented the qualitative theme with the strongest cross-method consensus in Paper 3, with beneficiaries, Key Informant interviewees, and Focus Group Discussion participants unanimously describing near-total withdrawal of advisory and financial guidance following programme completion. A Mathare respondent (MTR-Q10) recounted that KYEOP staff were entirely absent after the graduation ceremony despite beneficiaries facing significant cash flow and enterprise management challenges that structured mentorship could have addressed, while a Kibra respondent (KBR-Q11) described a business that nearly collapsed in its third month due to cash flow problems with no institutional advisor available for consultation. Kasarani FGD participants (KSR-FGD14) confirmed that when enterprise income dropped, beneficiaries relied on borrowing from family members or informal chama savings groups rather than any KYEOP-provided financial support mechanism, while Mathare FGD members (MTR-FGD15) described forming an informal graduate peer support group because official programme support had ceased — yet acknowledged that peer networks lacked the technical expertise to address serious enterprise challenges requiring professional financial and business advisory guidance. These convergent qualitative findings align precisely with the quantitative mediation analysis result demonstrating that institutional support mechanisms significantly intervened in the relationship between startup capital mechanisms and sustainability outcomes, confirming that initial capital investments dissipate rapidly without the sustained mentorship and market linkages that KYEOP's post-programme support architecture systematically failed to deliver across all three implementation sub-counties.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on findings, this study concludes that while skills development theoretically constitutes the most critical sustainability determinant as demonstrated by a strong regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.333$), KYEOP's training systematically failed to deliver market-responsive competencies necessary for sustained employability and entrepreneurship. The paradox of strong statistical relationships ($r = 0.719$) alongside a high dissatisfaction (mean = 2.22) reveals fundamental implementation challenges where curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, trainer quality and practical exposure remained disconnected from Kenya's evolving labor market realities. The lowest mean of 2.06 for technical skill improvement represents not isolated dissatisfaction but systematic evidence that KYEOP produced certificate holders rather than competent practitioners requiring fundamental redesign prioritizing industry-validated competency frameworks, extended hands-on learning and digitally-integrated curricula.

The study therefore recommends that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, NITA and county governments should urgently redesign KYEOP and similar youth training curricula to achieve alignment with contemporary labor market skill requirements. This addresses findings that 83.9% reported technical skills did not improve (mean = 2.06) despite training being strongest sustainability predictor ($\beta = 0.333$). Training duration should extend from three-week modules to minimum three-month intensive programs allowing competency mastery. Curriculum must integrate digital literacy across all trades recognizing technology as foundational. Training delivery should adopt competency-based assessment requiring demonstrated skill mastery before certification. NITA should establish mandatory industry advisory committees comprising private sector employers who validate curriculum relevance annually and provide apprenticeship placements ensuring content reflects actual workplace requirements.

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