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Using core competency frameworks to explore the needs of Kenyan youth workers

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ABSTRACT

Since youth work is a relatively new career path, there is debate regarding the competencies necessary to advance overall professional practice. This debate is particularly relevant in African countries, such as Kenya, with a growing number of youth in need of assistance. The purpose of this study was to identify the competencies needed to meet the goals and challenges of Kenyan youth workers, and assess whether these competencies align with prominent youth development competency frameworks. Data were collected from Kenyan youth workers related to the challenges, goals, and barriers they faced. These data were matched to two competency frameworks. Four themes emerged: (1) programs management competencies are most important; (2) holistically developed youth is a primary goal; (3) differences exist in how competency frameworks map to Kenyan youth workers; and (4) all competencies are not equal in the view of youth workers. Implications for program and system development are discussed.

KEYWORDS

core competency frameworks; Kenya; qualitative analysis; youth worker; professional preparation

Introduction

More than one-third of the population in Kenya is between the ages of 18 and 34 (UNDP, 2013), with growth in this age bracket expected to continue until mid-century. Some scholars have labeled this specific growth as the “youth bulge” (Hope, 2012). Others have stated that the sheer numbers of youth represent a “youth crisis” (Bennell, 2007) due in part to the lack of attention given to young people in Kenya and other African countries. These numbers are exacerbated by the estimate that more than 68% of secondary school-age youth (ages 14–17) were not enrolled in a formal education program in Kenya (Munga & Onsomu, 2014), and only 31% of secondary students who sit for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary

Education examination achieve the minimum grades for university entry (Ng'ethe, 2016).

Recently, there has been a recognition of these youth circumstances and a growing understanding of the significant roles and responsibilities of young people in the future of Kenya (Okoth et al., 2013). Also, there has been a greater appreciation within Kenyan culture for the complexities and difficulties young people experience making the transition from childhood to adulthood. Changes in family structure and values, increased family mobility, continued economic instabilities, and shifts in the level of available support for youth have worsened this normal transitory period. In response to this youth crisis, there has been an emergent effort to provide youth programs to prepare Kenya's youth for their responsibilities as adults (Awiti & Scott, 2016). A multitude of youth development (YD) programs have been established in the country to address the many social, economic, and familial circumstances these young people face that are preventing them from being productive members of the Kenyan culture.

For example, a critical need within Kenya is properly preparing young people for future employment; often this need is met through programs intended to provide youth the necessary work and entrepreneurial skills to establish their own businesses. These programs are well-intended and noteworthy initiatives but to date have met with limited success in terms of sustained youth employment, reducing inequalities, and strengthening national economic performance (USAID, 2014) because they are not of sufficient scale, not well organized, have limited coordination among efforts, and the content does not reflect the skills young people need or desire (Balwanz, 2012; Hope, 2012; Mabala, 2011). Further, employment programs such as these do not often address the many other issues young people experience in terms of education, health, civic participation, and well-being. One might suggest that the lack of success is due to the limited number of programs offered (i.e., the scale); however, there is also the question of quality, including the comprehensiveness of programs because program quality is linked to program success (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). This latter perspective raises the issue of the preparation and orientation of the youth workers themselves since program quality is most impacted by the preparedness of its youth workers (Fusco & Gannett, 2012; Quinn, 2004). Are they prepared adequately to offer well-organized, coordinated, and effective youth programs and services, and is their approach sufficiently holistic to address the variety of issues impacting youth success?

This question of professional preparation of Kenya's youth workers has received increased attention in recent years, not only because of the aforementioned challenges but also because of the natural evolution of any new employment area (in this case, youth work) requiring a specific set of skills

and knowledge to be effective. Youth work is a relatively new area of professional practice; it has only received recognition over the past three decades as a career path rather than a stepping stone toward other professional opportunities. As with any evolving area of professional practice, there is considerable debate regarding the skills and competencies necessary to be an effective youth worker, one who can achieve program goals and advance the overall professional practice. This debate is global, from the United States (Astroth, Garza, & Taylor, 2004) to Australia and to Africa (Global Social Science Workforce Alliance, 2015; Active 4 Future, 2016; South African News.gov.za, 2016). Researchers have called for a closer look at core competency models (Allen, Garst, Bowers, & Onyiko, 2016; Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, 2015; Matshediso, 2016) as a means of enhancing youth worker preparation, program quality, and the likelihood of achieving program goals (i.e., positive youth development); however, the core competencies required for promoting quality and positive youth outcomes may be culturally based (Leman, Smith, & Petersen, 2017; Smith, 1996). Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the goals and challenges of youth work as perceived by Kenyan youth-serving professionals, identify the competencies needed to meet these goals and challenges, and assess whether these competencies align with prominent YD competency frameworks to inform future cross-cultural youth work collaboration.

Review of literature

This study was informed by a youth development competency perspective, that is, an understanding that “effective professional development builds on the emerging consensus of knowledge and core competencies” (Quinn, 2004, p. 21). Also, there is the perspective that through competency development, youth workers are better able to address the needs and challenges faced within the context of their professional work. In this section, we present an introduction to youth work core competencies, followed by an examination of two prominent competency frameworks—one from an international perspective and another from a mostly Western perspective—that guided this study (see Table 1).

Youth work core competencies

One of the first steps in building a quality workforce is defining the set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to successfully fulfill the responsibilities of youth work. Core competencies articulate what adults working with youth need to know to deliver high-quality programs that contribute to

positive outcomes in youth (Starr, Yohalem, & Gannett, 2009). Considerable efforts have been made to determine a set of core competencies needed by any youth worker, but to date no set has been deemed at the core of professional practice. Because youth work is so broad, encompassing many settings and distinct age groups with significant developmental differences, it has been difficult to establish a succinct listing of competencies. However, the efforts have provided promising core competency frameworks that reflect cross-cultural differences.

Vance youth development competency framework

In 2010, Vance conducted a comparative analysis of 11 of these different competency frameworks for youth workers. Frameworks representing a broad array of sectors in the YD field were included, such as “after-school, child welfare, civic engagement, college and career assistance, employment and job training, advocacy, and juvenile justice” (Vance, 2010, p. 421). Each of these frameworks was developed with the input and assistance of various experts in YD from front-line workers and agency administrators to researchers and faculty with expertise in YD. For the purposes of this analysis, core competencies were defined as “the knowledge, skills and abilities used to provide youth with high quality programming” (Vance, 2010, p. 422). Vance also stated that one of the barriers to creating a pipeline of highly qualified youth workers is the lack of clarity of the knowledge and abilities essential for creating and maintaining effective youth programs. Her analysis identified 12 competencies that were inclusive of working with youth from ages 5 to 29. The 12 competencies for working with these youth and their descriptors are presented in [Table 1](#).

Commonwealth youth program competencies

One of the most comprehensive efforts to identify competencies for youth workers was initiated by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2007) via its Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP). The Programme, comprised of 52-member countries, established 13 core competency areas (i.e., modules) using experts in YD and instructional design from around the world. These competency areas are more reflective of an international perspective than many of the other competency frameworks that have been developed almost exclusively in Western cultures. The 13 modules are also presented in [Table 1](#).

These two frameworks were targeted for two specific reasons. The Vance framework is a composite system representing a core set of competencies across 11 competency structures, providing a strong validation of the

Table 1. Vance and commonwealth youth programme core competency frameworks.

Competency Areas (Modules)	Descriptor
Vance Competency Framework (Vance, 2010, p. 433–434)	
Child/youth Development	Understands the principles of child and youth development and applies them to the implementation of the program
Positive Guidance	Uses positive guidance techniques to manage the behavior of youth
Families and Communities	Builds relationship with families and other organizations in the community that encourage support of and involvement in the program
Program Management	Demonstrates management skills that are necessary for program implementation such as resourcefulness and time management
Professionalism	Acts in a professional manner by following program policies and shows a commitment to professional growth by pursuing opportunities to enhance skills
Safety	Maintains a program environment that minimizes the risk of injury to youth and teaches youth to develop habits that help ensure their safety
Health	Instructs youth in and encourages behaviors that promote wellness
Physical	Manages the program environment to meet the physical needs of youth while providing opportunities that foster physical development
Communication	Interacts with youth in ways that build upon and encourages development of strong communication skills
Self	Helps youth explore their interests and abilities while nurturing good self-esteem
Diversity	Creates a bias free environment that reflects the diversity (e.g., cultures, religions, race, sexual orientation) of participants and provides activities that explore differences between individuals.
Curriculum	Designs programs activities that meet the needs of the youth and encourage youth to grow in key developmental areas
CYP Competency framework	
Learning Processes	Focuses on youth workers as educators and introduces ideas and practices of learning that are relevant in youth development settings. Includes knowledge of various theories of learning and factors that impact learning
Young People and Society	Understanding of the various theories and concepts of youth and adolescence across different cultures, and varying roles and responsibilities of youth and families across cultures
Principles and Practice of Youth Development Work	Includes the history and traditions of youth work; various models and approaches to youth development work; skills when working with groups and individuals; the overall role of youth workers, and professional conduct of youth workers
Working with People in their Community	Focuses on the techniques and strategies for effective group work in youth development. Theories and practice of community development are part of the knowledge and skills developed in this module
Gender and Development	Includes the theory and practice of gender equity from both a female and male perspective. Understanding the role of gender in society including issues of inequality and discrimination is included in this module
Commonwealth Values	Includes ethical issues in youth development work, and it presents universal values of human rights and democracy. Other key concepts related to citizenship, participatory democracy, pluralism, and empowerment are included
Management Skills	Focuses on the range of management knowledge and skills the youth worker needs to effectively administer a comprehensive youth development program

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Competency Areas (Modules)	Descriptor
Project Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation	The emphasis is on the knowledge and skills necessary to plan, design, implement, monitor and evaluate projects in a comprehensive youth development program. It includes how to develop and write a proposal to acquire funding
Policy Planning and Implementation	Focuses on the definition of policy, the nature and scope of youth policy, and why policies are important. How policies are formulated, and knowledge and skills related to the policy-making process also are included
Conflict Resolution Strategies and Skills	Focuses on understanding conflict and its potential in working with youth. Theories of conflict resolution and techniques for successfully utilizing these theories are included
Promoting enterprise and economic Development	Includes an understanding of economic development, and its role and impact on youth enterprises at the local level. It focuses on the skills necessary to help youth establish and management small enterprises including the development of effective business plans
Youth and Health	Prepares youth workers to address healthy lifestyles from a holistic perspective, and it provides youth workers with knowledge and skills related to major health issues
Sustainable Development and Environmental Issues	Promotes an understanding of environmental issues, and the importance of sustainable development and environment protection

importance of each competency area from a mostly Western culture orientation. In contrast, the CYP competency framework was chosen because of its strong international orientation. It should be noted that the CYP was one of the frameworks included in the Vance analysis, but the final competency framework advanced by Vance would not have changed if the CYP framework were excluded. However, the CYP framework was deemed critical to this project because it presented a more global orientation and included competency areas not reflected in the Vance framework.

Furthermore, although the structures vary, the set of competencies identified by Vance (2010) and the CYP (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007) have many similarities in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be an effective youth worker. Additionally, they have variations that may be significant in the context of working in countries where the economies and opportunities are not as developed or as plentiful as in many Western cultures. Thus, these competency frameworks should not be viewed as core from the perspective of being entirely inclusive. They provide a frame of reference, but every situation has different circumstances that suggest that competencies must ultimately be locally or regionally articulated.

This acknowledgement of the contextualization of youth development competencies is especially relevant as we look at youth work in the global context. There are competencies to which all cultures and organizations can subscribe, but there will be other competencies that are critical for distinct regions or areas of the world. Or there may be the need to contextualize competencies to maximize the effectiveness of youth workers. What

seems unorthodox in the United States may be critically important and common in Kenya or Japan (Geldhof et al., 2015).

Method

Study context and participants

The current study, focusing on the identification of competencies for Kenyan youth professionals, grew out of a larger multiyear program of collaboration with youth workers in Kenya. Initial efforts in 2014 were to complete a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis to inform the development of a more sustainable youth development system in the country. (For the full SWOT analysis and complete methodological details covering two different data collection periods, see Allen et al., 2016). A second part of this multiyear effort was the creation and implementation in July 2015 of a training program for youth workers. This three-day youth development workshop provided an opportunity to assess the present state of youth work in Kenya with participants, deliver core content related to YD, and determine strategies and programmatic priorities that could address the needs of Kenyan youth. Data for the present study were collected at this workshop.

The 2015 workshop participants consisted of early and mid-career youth work professionals from Nairobi City County and Narok County, Kenya. Nairobi City County is Kenya's major urban center and Narok County is rural and comparatively small, yet it is experiencing significant population growth. Under the new 2010 Kenyan Constitution, a devolution process occurred in which county governments have been given additional authority and funding to undertake more programs and services that had traditionally been offered through national government organizations. This change necessitates the need for county agencies and programs to gain a deeper understanding of YD principles and organizational functioning since more leadership is being transferred to the counties from the national government.

Data collection

Qualitative data were collected during the three-day workshop using a pencil/paper questionnaire to explore participants' current perspectives of their youth work organizations and experiences. This study focuses on data specifically related to identifying competencies of youth workers based on the challenges, goals, and barriers they faced.

Rather than asking participants directly about what competencies are needed to operate a youth program in Kenya successfully, we asked participants to respond to four open-ended questions that would provide a more

contextual understanding from which to articulate any unique and/or adapted competencies possessed by youth professionals in Kenya to maximize their effectiveness. The four questions were: (1) What do you find most challenging about your position? (2) What are your goals for your work with youth? (3) What prevents you from reaching your goals? (4) What do you want to learn from this workshop? Based on participant responses to these items, we explored potential alignment between participants' stated needs/goals/barriers/and learning objectives and competencies that could address these areas. Indeed, "it is impossible to define quality without considering cultural goals. Definitions of quality do not emerge from research alone" (Smith, 1996, p. 12).

Data analysis

Responses to the four open-ended questions were independently analyzed by a team of three coders using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which is a subjective approach for understanding qualitative data using a systematic process to identify codes, relationships among codes, and central themes (Patton, 2002). The data were deconstructed into coded categories (i.e., blocks of words representing a central idea or concept). The categories were then matched to the competency frameworks advanced by Vance (2010) and the Commonwealth Secretariat (2007).

To match coded categories to competencies, the three coders independently reviewed each code and matched it with a competency area or multiple areas consistent with each framework. Following the independent assessments, the coders met to clarify their matching efforts and discuss themes that did not appear to align with either competency framework. Each coder then completed the matching exercise for categories that did not readily match up with an existing competency area. Intercoder agreement was assessed based on consistency in coding between at least two of the three coders. This agreement allowed a particular coded category to be maintained as a competency area viewed as important for participants' work with youth in Kenya. From the salient codes that emerged during the matching process, the research team constructed themes across the four questions using an inductive approach that progressed from the open-ended data to the broader generalizations represented by the themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness (or validity) is best understood as the "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 114) of qualitative data. Trustworthiness

was addressed through the triangulation of multiple coders (as previously described above; Patton, 2002) and research team reflection. Reflection centered on acknowledging how the research team's experiences, values, and expectations may have influenced how the data were interpreted. Reflexivity is an important process for recognizing and reducing bias (Maxwell, 2013). The research team practiced reflexivity by returning to the raw data throughout the data analysis process to ensure that codes, code-competency matches, and constructed themes accurately reflected participants' responses to the questions.

Results

Descriptives

Descriptive data were collected for 28 of the 35 participants (seven participants chose not to provide demographic information). Of these 28 participants, 15 were male and 13 were female. Participants ranged from 21 to 55 years old. They held various positions, including instructors in youth training programs (7), youth center coordinators (3), community health workers (3), and agency administrators (6). Other positions included a youth pastor, accountant for a youth agency, youth volunteer, youth fund officer, and student interns. Sixteen participants were county or city government employees, eight represented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and three had blended positions representing both government and an NGO. Finally, 16 participants resided in Nairobi City/County, 10 in Narok County, and two were from other counties in Kenya.

One perspective from which to determine the importance of certain skills or competencies is to identify the primary emphasis areas for youth-serving organizations in Kenya. The organizational focus for most participants was education (14 participants), followed by national service (five participants), vocational training (two participants), entrepreneurship (two participants), environmental conservation/sanitation (two participants), fundraising (one participant), substance abuse (one participant), and HIV/AIDS/sexuality (one participant).

The first emphasis area was education. The formal Kenyan education system has several challenges, such as access for impoverished youth, a system that still retain the vestiges of colonization, cultural traditions that do not value formal education, and relevancy of the curriculum to Kenya's present employment environment (Balwanz, 2012; Hope, 2012; Mabala, 2011). Thus, many youth-serving agencies have taken it upon themselves to supplement the formal education system in the country.

The second emphasis area was developing public service skills in youth. The Kenya National Youth Service is an example of a leading agency that

provides these skills to youth and gives them a variety of opportunities to demonstrate these skills through public services offered throughout the country. A third emphasis was related to vocational training and entrepreneurship. These agencies have a stronger employment and entrepreneurial focus. Fourth were programs that sensitized young people to the many conservation issues facing Kenya, from climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, and wildlife habitat loss to limited water resources and sanitation. Lastly, there was a focus on youth risk behaviors, sensitizing and educating youth on drugs and sexual behaviors and their long-term impacts and consequences. Therefore, it was expected that each of the emphasis areas could be linked to specific content competencies for youth workers to effectively address these critical areas.

Needs, goals, barriers, and learning targets of Kenyan youth development professionals

To better understand perceptions of needs, goals, barriers, and learning targets, the youth workers were asked to respond to the four previously identified open-ended questions. This yielded 112 responses to the four questions across all respondents. One researcher reviewed all responses and identified common coded categories among the 112 initial responses. This initial list of common categories was then independently reviewed by two other researchers, who agreed with the initial theme, adapted the wording of the category, or created a new category. Following this, the three researchers met to review and discuss each of the identified categories in relation to each respondent's raw response to build a consensus of the final themes. The raw responses collapsed into 20 coded categories of knowledge, skills, or attitudes the respondents identified. These ranged from "securing financial resources" to "applying knowledge and disseminating information to youth and families." Following this process, the coded categories were matched to core competencies previously identified in the Vance (2010) and CYP (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007) frameworks. Table 2 provides several examples of how the research team moved from the raw data to the coded category-competency match.

Table 3 summarizes the coded category-competency matches. The left-hand column presents the core competency areas identified by Vance (2010) and those established by the CYP (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007). The next four columns relate directly to the number of times each competency area was matched with the corresponding coded categories identified through the respondents for each specific question. The sixth column presents a summary across the four questions, and the last column ranks the top competency areas receiving at least 10 matches for each of the two competency frameworks.

The results for [Table 3](#) are presented within each framework across the four questions. Relative to question 1: “What do you find most challenging about your position?”, the Vance competency area of “Program Management” was dominant, with competencies such as “Child/Youth Development,” “Positive Guidance,” “Professionalism,” and “Health” receiving multiple mentions by the respondents. (Please refer to [Table 1](#) for the description of these competency areas.) For question 2: “What are your goals for working with youth?”, the dominant competency area was “Positive Guidance” followed closely by “Child/Youth Development” and “Curriculum” being a third area receiving multiple responses. Question 3: “What prevents you from reaching your goals?”, revealed that “Program Management” was the most dominant competency area followed by “Positive Guidance.” No other competency area received more than four responses related to question 3. For question 4: “What do you want to learn from this workshop?”, “Program Management” and “Professionalism” received the majority of responses, closely followed by “Positive Guidance.” Other competencies receiving significant responses were “Child/Youth Development,” “Self,” and “Curriculum.” Thus, the core competencies in the Vance framework that appear to be most relevant and important to this sample of youth workers in Kenya, in ranked order, are “Program Management,” “Positive Guidance,” “Child/Youth Development,” “Professionalism,” “Curriculum,” and “Self.”

For question 1, the core competency area in the CYP framework that respondents found most challenging was “Management Skills.” This competency was followed by three competency areas that matched the respondents’ open-ended responses: “Young People and Society,” “Youth and Health,” and “Project Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.” No other competency area received more than four responses related to question 1. For question 2, “Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development” was the dominant competency area, followed by “Commonwealth Values in Youth Development Work” and “Young People and Society.” Learning processes also received multiple responses for question 2. For question 3, “Management Skills” again rose to the top as an area limiting youth workers success, and this area was followed by “Learning Processes.” For question 4, “Principles and Practices in Youth Development” was the dominant response followed by “Management Skills.” Thus, the core competencies in the CYP framework that appear to be most relevant and important to this sample of youth workers in Kenya, in ranked order, are Management Skills, Young People & Society, Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development, Principles and Practices in Youth Development, Learning Processes, Commonwealth Values in Youth Development, and Youth and Health.

Table 2. Examples of coded categories based on expressed needs, goals, barriers and learning targets matched to youth development competencies with supporting evidence from participant responses.

Coded categories based on needs, goals, barriers, learning targets	Matched Youth Development Competencies per Vance and CYP	Representative participant responses
Securing financial resources	Program management ^a ; Management Skills ^b	"Many a times resources are limited hence cannot be able to reach out to as many youth as possible and as I wish" "The most challenging aspect is that the government does not allocate enough funds to support youth programs."
Lack of understanding of the importance of the environment	Sustainable Development and Environmental Issues ^b	"The importance of environmental conservation is still not very well embedded in young minds so most often I have to start explaining from scratch." We want youth to "realize that the 'natural' environment and human beings have to co-exist in a healthy relationship."
Building youth entrepreneurial and employment skills	Promoting Enterprises and Economic Development ^b	"How we can improve the quality of training in vocational training; know more about entrepreneurship and life skills in relation to vocational training" "Support youth-oriented micro, small and medium enterprises"
Organizational capacity; Inflexible and weak organizational infrastructure	Program Management ^a ; Management Skills ^b	"Financial, human resource short falls and occasionally bureaucratic government systems in terms of resource procurement and requisition" "Rigidity in our institutions and systems"
Reducing youth risk behaviors- drugs, alcohol, sexual activity	Positive Guidance ^a ; Safety; Youth and Health ^b	"Dealing with emerging issues especially drug and alcohol substance abuse, HIV and AIDs ... " "To create awareness on HIV/AIDS, provide health education to youths, risk reduction among the youths ... reduce new HIV infections."
Applying knowledge and disseminating information to youth and families	Principles and Practices in Youth in Development Work ^b	"Putting theory into practice ... - great ideas are discussed ... but the information is not disseminated to institutions, organizations and to the community at large ... " "To understand why youth programmes are not having a great impact in our society & how can we improve on that"
Creating effective internships, mentorships and apprenticeships and establishing their sites	Promoting Enterprises and Economic Development ^b	"The need to lease with the organizations to offer places for internship and attachment ... "; "Finding appropriate collaborators and mentors for youth viz a viz their chose careers" "Shortage of mentorship institutions and mentors"

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Coded categories based on needs, goals, barriers, learning targets	Matched Youth Development Competencies per Vance and CYP	Representative participant responses
Improving attitudes of youth; impatience, optimism, understanding consequences	Child/Youth Development ^a ; Positive Guidance ^a	"Dealing with [youth] who lack focus"; "Lack of [youth] motivation" "To change youth from idleness which can lead to poverty to busy mind, focused and to be a resourceful generation ..."
Addressing youth poverty	Promoting Enterprises and Economic Development ^b	"Poverty is the main challenge"; "Lack of money (lack of employment) ... poverty" "High rate of poverty"
Understanding youth from diverse backgrounds	Young People in Society ^b ; Diversity ^a	"Helping the youth appreciate unity in diversity (different cultures of the youth in my organizations)" "Dealing with [youth] from all backgrounds - very different backgrounds"
Creating accessible educational opportunities for all youth	Learning Processes ^b ; Curriculum ^a	"Pursuing concepts [youth] are not interest [in]; Diluted education" "There is a poor distribution of information from the university to the community"
Developing civic minded leaders	Young People in Society ^b	"To ensure the youths are properly nurtured to bring out the potential in them and help in nation building" "To develop and empower the youth to be responsible citizens of this country."
Building leadership skills	Positive Guidance ^a ; Promoting Enterprises and Economic Development ^b	"How to develop leaders in our youth; the role of youth leadership in economic development and the country" "Making a better youth leader in the community ..."
Creating better youth programs	Principles and Practices of Youth Work ^b ; Child/Youth Development ^a	"[To] be able to identify and come up with effective programs to enable youth development whole roundedly" "Building training programs that are problem based and experiential"

^aVance (2010).^bCommonwealth Secretariat (2007).

Emergent themes related to Kenyan youth development core competencies

Based on the matching of salient coded categories to competencies, the following themes were constructed from the open-ended responses to the four questions. These themes are: (1) program management competencies are central to Kenyan youth workers success, and these professionals feel a need to be better equipped to develop and administer programs; (2) properly developed and guided youth are targeted outcomes of Kenyan youth development programs; (3) differences can be identified in how competency frameworks map to Kenyan youth workers' needs, goals, barriers,

Table 3. Code-competency matches based on frequency of responses ($n = 28$).

Competency Area	What do you find most challenging?	What are your goals for working with youth?	What prevents you from reaching your goals?	What do you want to learn from this workshop?	Total	Rank
Vance Competencies						
Program Management	20	4	15	12	51	1
Positive Guidance	6	21	6	10	43	2
Child/Youth Development	7	15	3	8	33	3
Professionalism	5	0	4	12	21	4
Curriculum	1	7	3	5	16	5
Self	0	4	3	6	13	6
Health	5	3	1	0	9	
Safety	4	2	1	0	7	
Families & Communities	2	2	2	0	6	
Communication	4	1	0	0	5	
Diversity	2	1	0	2	5	
Physical	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	56	60	38	55	209	
CYP Competencies						
Management Skills	20	2	14	8	44	1
Young People & Society	4	9	2	6	21	2 (tie)
Promoting Enterprise & Econ. Dev.	2	13	3	3	21	2 (tie)
Principles and Practices in YD	1	1	0	16	18	4 (tie)
Learning Processes	3	7	7	1	18	4 (tie)
Commonwealth Values in YD	0	9	1	2	12	6
Youth & Health	4	3	1	3	11	7
Working with People in Communities	3	2	0	3	8	
Project Planning, Monitoring & Eval.	4	0	1	0	5	
Conflict Res. Strategies and Skills	2	0	0	1	3	
Sustainable Dev. & Environmental Issues	1	1	1	0	3	
Policy Planning & Implementation	1	0	0	0	1	
Gender & Development	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	45	47	30	43	165	

and learning targets; and (4) all competencies are not equal in the view of youth workers. These themes are described in greater detail below.

Theme 1: Programs management competencies are most central to Kenyan youth workers' success

The results of the coded category-competency match suggest that youth workers in Kenya view technical skills relating to programmatic and organizational management as most critical for professional development. The salient association with “Program Management” in the Vance framework and “Management Skills” in the CYP framework reveal the dominance and consistency of this theme across the four questions. The participants clearly see these competency areas as most challenging in terms of successfully fulfilling the responsibilities of their position (Question 1), and these areas have the greatest influence on the workers being able to achieve their goals (Question 3). Question 4, relating to what the participants wanted to learn from the workshop, also revealed that these competency areas were high on their desired outcomes from the workshop. These results would suggest that more training be available related to both program development and administration of the youth development agency and/or organization.

Theme 2: Holistically developed and appropriately guided youth are targeted goals of Kenyan youth development programs

Theme 1 suggests that Kenyan youth workers recognize they need strong technical skills to offer high-quality youth programs. However, in terms of goals related to working with youth (Question 2), Kenyan youth workers clearly emphasized youth-centered goals as evidenced by the salience of responses related to “Child/Youth Development” and “Positive Guidance” in the Vance framework and “Young People in Society” and “Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development” in the CYP framework. Specifically, youth workers expressed a desire to support and promote the principles of youth development, and they hoped to provide young people with positive guidance in establishing appropriate and positive behavioral orientations.

Theme 3: Differences can be identified in how competency frameworks map to Kenyan youth workers' needs, goals, barriers, and learning targets

Themes 1 and 2 revealed strong consistencies across the Vance and CYP frameworks in terms of technical skills for program and agency management as well as youth program and system goals. However, the results also revealed notable differences. First, in terms of goals and outcomes, providing youth with the necessary employment skills and skills to establish their own businesses were very important, but this competency is not captured

as effectively by the Vance framework as it is in the CYP framework. Also, establishing strong values and promoting societal interests were dominant outcomes sought by Kenyan youth workers and these are quite consistent with the Vance framework but not as easily established in the CYP framework. Another example of differences across these frameworks was reflected in a few responses associated with the “Sustainable Development and Environmental Issues” competency area. The responses were easily coded to the CYP framework yet a comparable connection could not be identified for the Vance framework.

Theme 4: All competencies are not equal in the view of youth workers

Six core competency areas in the Vance framework received relatively few responses from the sample of Kenyan youth workers, including “Families and Communities,” “Safety,” “Health,” “Physical,” and “Diversity.” In the CYP framework, six competency areas also received relatively few responses since they relate to challenges, goals, or barriers affecting youth workers in Kenya. These competencies were “Working with People in Communities,” “Gender and Development,” “Project Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation,” “Policy Planning and Implementation,” “Conflict Resolution Strategies and Skills,” and “Sustainable Development and Environmental Issues.”

Do these results suggest that these competencies are not important in the Kenya context, or do they simply reflect the nature of the questions asked of these respondents? The focus was on the most relevant competency areas for addressing the most salient needs of youth and youth workers in Kenya. The questions did not address all the competencies they saw as valuable in being a successful youth worker.

On the other hand, these results also raise the question of whether youth workers in Kenya might be more effective if they address these additional competency areas in their programs, services, and opportunities for youth. Clearly, this question needs further debate among Kenyan youth workers.

Discussion

This study examined competencies needed by Kenyan youth professionals to address critical program and system issues and compared the identified competencies using two prominent YD competency frameworks. The most salient competencies were identified across the two frameworks as they related to respondents’ descriptions of their professional challenges, goals, barriers, and learning targets. Three key findings surface from these results. One, technical skills related to program development and organizational management take precedence above all other competency areas for this group of Kenyan youth workers. Second, these technical skills enable the

youth workers to accomplish a clear set of goals related to holistic development of youth and preparedness for adulthood and financial security either as an employee or entrepreneur. Third, there are contextual differences in competency frameworks that come to light when addressing challenges, goals, and opportunities for youth in a non-Western culture.

Key finding number 1—primacy of technical skills

The prominence of, and need for, proficiency in management-related competencies is embedded in youth work leadership. Organizations are complex, open systems (Bolman & Deal, 2013), and as such represent “a changing, challenging, and erratic environment” (p. 30). Therefore, youth workers need to have a high degree of management competence across multiple organizational frames (e.g., work structures, human resources, internal politics, organizational culture; Bolman & Deal, 2013). Youth serving organizations also face increasing pressure to perform at high levels and to demonstrate success (Salamon, 2010), which can enhance the relative importance of management-related competencies.

Key finding number 2—primacy of holistic development with strong value orientation

The salience of providing proper guidance to youth (i.e., Theme 2) strongly reflects best practices in youth development. Existing expectations of high-quality youth programs emphasize that basic understanding of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of young people (Mahoney & Warner, 2014). In addition, knowing about the social contexts in which those young people live (Bradshaw & Garbarino, 2004) are central to youth workers addressing youth needs. Participants’ acknowledgment of “Positive Guidance” as a key goal is consistent with evidence that across contexts, youth-adult relationships are one of the most important assets in adolescents’ lives for promoting thriving (Bowers, Johnson, Warren, Tirrell, & Lerner, 2015; Li & Julian, 2012; Theokas & Lerner, 2006), and these relationships are a key characteristic of quality youth development settings (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015).

Key finding number 3—social and cultural context of youth development

Contemporary approaches to youth development emphasize that one must understand the role of the social and cultural contexts in the positive and healthy development in young people (Leman et al., 2017). Incorporating culture and context into the implementation of youth-serving programs can be integral to their success (Leman et al., 2017). For example, Kenyan

youth workers perceptions of outcomes related to positive and healthy youth development, and their concerns with programming emphasis, can be linked to the contemporary needs and cultural norms of youth in Kenya. For instance, the meanings of health and safety are culturally situated. Whereas in U.S.-based youth-serving programs there is an emphasis on youth physical activity and healthy habits, participants in this study most often described health in terms of HIV awareness and prevention.

Additionally, Kenyan youth workers' responses reflective of "Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development" are consistent with the strong focus in Kenya and East Africa on preparing young people for the work world (Balwanz, 2012; Hope, 2012; Mabala, 2011). Thus, within the Kenyan context, the development of basic work skills and entrepreneurial skills are key outcomes for Kenyan youth programs. Furthermore, in Kenyan culture, youth are defined as individuals up to age 30. The inclusion of youth up to this age may also influence the low proportion of responses being matched to the Vance (2010) competencies of "Families & Communities." Engaging families may not be as much of a program priority as someone in their late 20s and 30s would not necessarily be living with their families.

There also were similarities in the salience of core competencies identified in this study with other studies of youth work core competencies. For example, Starr et al. (2009) conducted an analysis of 14 core competency frameworks and found that "curriculum" and "professionalism" were the most universal competencies, and that "child and adolescent development," "guidance," and "program management" also were common. More than anything, the similarity in these findings suggests that youth workers have many of the same perceived needs for competency development, even though the socio-cultural context of their work may differ, and some competencies may be "universal."

Finally, it is interesting that environmental issues were not a salient concern among many youth workers in Kenya, considering that loss of biodiversity, protection of wildlife, global warming, and population dynamics are dominant concerns of national and international governmental and NGOs working in Kenya. This finding may suggest that Kenyan youth workers are more focused on those efforts that may immediately improve the quality of life for Kenyan youth while the long-term impact of environmental issues are relegated to a secondary level of concern.

Implications for research

The exploratory nature of this study opens a new thread of discussion that has not been extensively researched. A greater understanding of professional competencies and the social and cultural context of YD practice will

enhance youth workers effectiveness and overall impact. However, this study was only an initial effort in articulating core competencies from a global perspective and provides opportunities for the findings in this study to be further clarified. Future studies of YD competencies of Kenyan youth workers could explicitly integrate these frameworks to assess how well they inform current YD practice. As contexts (i.e. communities, organizations, and programs) evolve, such an assessment will inform modifications to the existing YD competency frameworks.

It is also important to note that these data are derived from the perspective of youth workers; therefore, obtaining the perceived needs from the perspective of other stakeholders (e.g., youth, policy makers) may identify different or additional, and potentially more impactful, drivers of success in youth programs. In addition, there may be the concern that participants' subjective perceptions may not be as strongly linked to youth outcomes as objective assessments. However, prior research has shown that both youth program participants' and implementors' subjective perceptions of programs were linked to program effectiveness and objective outcomes (Shek, 2014; Shek, Tsui, & Ng, 2015). Future research on the needs, barriers, and goals to promote positive development in Kenyan youth should include a greater diversity of perspectives to provide a fully informed comprehensive view of the issues.

Implications for practice

The study findings suggest that the competency framework to which a youth worker or youth organization subscribes can have significant implications for program and system development. Thus, one should carefully review competency frameworks before a framework is selected to forge a long-term training and education program for youth workers.

Additionally, applying a competency-based framework helps to identify the knowledge and skills that youth-serving professionals need to acquire to implement a quality program. In turn, program quality influences the likelihood of a program achieving its goals and outcomes (Durlak et al., 2010). Defining these competencies provides guidance for decisions and practices regarding the youth experiences as well as for staff training and hiring purposes (Mahoney & Warner, 2014). Mapping competencies to the needs, goals, barriers, and learning targets of youth workers can identify new opportunities for youth development and future training to advance program success.

Finally, youth researchers and program specialists can use these findings as a guide when developing YD-related programs or collaborations in cooperation with Kenyan youth workers and/or researchers, as attempts

can be made to represent training in a way more authentic to local competency needs. As noted by Bolden and Kirk (2009), “not only do appropriate models and ways of thinking need to be developed and presented but, ideally they should be couched within culturally relevant language and concepts” (p. 81).

Study limitations

The small sample size reflected in this case study may not be representative of the broader perspective of Kenyan youth workers. Further, the validity of the findings might be affected because of investigator effects (e.g., power dynamics associated with how the research team may have been perceived by the Kenyan youth workers). Finally, given the social-cultural status of youth workers in African society, many have influenced the results of this study. For example, socio-cultural differences in what it means to be a youth development leader have been identified in the literature. Bolden and Kirk (2009) discussed the tensions involved in the labeling of oneself as a leader within African society, with many people viewing the term as having negative connotations. These multiple meanings of leadership within African society may have influenced how participants engaged in the training as well as the accuracy of their responses to the questionnaire. Despite these limitations, the current study provides evidence of the benefits of integrating practitioner-generated knowledge with theoretical and empirical knowledge from multiple perspectives to address the needs of youth workers.

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