

## Influence of Type of Degree Programmes on Employability of Graduates: A Case of Kenyan Universities

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**Abstract:** Many countries in Africa are reporting a worrying, rising cases of unemployment. In Kenya despite the rising levels of education, many graduates remain unemployed. Many private universities and public universities have been established to cope with the demand for university education. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of type of degree programmes on employability of graduates in Kenya. The selection of private and public universities to participate was done by purposive sampling. Stratified sampling was used to select degree programmes under investigation. Simple random sampling was used to pick the participants. Data was collected through administration of self-administered questionnaires. Data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages, pie charts and tables. The study found that although most university curricula for degree programmes were initially developed to suit labor market demands, changes in time and technology have rendered some programmes irrelevant and no longer suitable for the labor market demand. Although resources are allocated to cater for new curriculum implementation every year, teaching methods are not regularly reviewed, and lecturers trained yearly on changes in curriculum. There are a number of degree programmes where probability of getting jobs by the students is very low and universities should try to streamline them with the job market. This study recommends that the government, through the Ministry of Education should spearhead the establishing and strengthening of an effective mechanism of continuously monitoring the labor market signals and determine appropriate value weightings on some academic programmes so as meet labor market shortages.

**Keywords:** Influence, Degree Programmes, Employability, University, Graduates.

### INTRODUCTION

The education sector in Kenya has grown by leaps and bounds since independence. Public and private universities have grown rapidly in response to liberalization. Presently there are over 15 public universities, 13 chartered private universities. Various degree programmes have been started to cope with the rising demand for university education which is widely seen as an avenue to land jobs in both private and public sector.

The public sector has been the main engine of employment creation in Kenya since independence. With respect to university education, a persistent question on whether the available degree programmes/courses are guided by trends in the labor market still remains. Students often harbor different educational goals and this is expressed in their ambitions, needs and interests. It is possible to have a form of education that can at the same time develop individual potential and also foster the needs of the society [1]. For universities in Kenya to manage the

challenges being experienced by the Kenyan society, they require academic programmes that are sensitive to the labour market [2].

Course designers at universities must make decisions based on real facts, emerging trends and the national and global labor market. Universities must make effort to connect students with prospective employers. More focus should now be on productive courses (courses that train students to create jobs) instead of consumption courses (courses that train students to be employed). A number of employers have seen this need and tried to bridge the gap between their needs and the human resource available. Kenyan employers have time and again complained that lack of standardized training in same fields has left them with the burden of investing in skills upgrade for new employees adding to their labor costs [3]. Employers must be involved in determining the readiness of graduates for the job market. An example could be Samsung Company that has been partnering with some

Kenyan universities by retraining graduates on mobile technology.

One of the major causes of educated unemployment is a biased school curriculum. Education should equip learners with knowledge and skills which would enable them to promote self-employment and self-reliance. A well designed education system should be able to impart values, attitudes and ideas that promote a culture of entrepreneurship. For education to promote employment it should inculcate skills and knowledge needed by the labor market. In the country today there are over twenty engineering degrees yet the engineering board only recognizes three [3]. A number of professional registration bodies announced that some graduates would have to go back for extra courses. Affected graduates have expressed fear that years spent toiling for their education may be wasted by the announcement that their degrees were not acknowledged in Kenya and also globally. The Engineers Registration Board (ERB), The Kenya Medical Laboratory and Technicians Board (KMLTB), The Pharmacy and Poison's Board (PPB), Nursing Council, The Medical Practitioners and Dentistry Board, The Clinical Officers Association and the Council of Legal Education (CHE) Aare professional bodies that have expressed concern about some degrees [4]. These bodies cite low quality curricula and insufficient student supervision and instruction as the major reasons for their decisions not to recognize some degrees. ERB has queried Kenyatta University Engineering courses in the field of energy water, environment, mechanical and civil Engineering.

Some universities design their curricular without involving professionals. This is indeed very costly to the students and the government. Graduates cannot practice and this lack of coordination between the needs of the job market and universities is indeed appalling. As a result of this conflict, many foreigners have been employed in the fields of technology, media, road construction, oil drilling where these graduates would have found jobs. Potential employers say that our institutions are not graduating people with skills they need to enhance their success. This means that there is need to fundamentally address the skills gap as well as the mismatch. The abilities of job seekers are falling short of the ambitions of the industry. The quality of education must be defined in terms of post school outcomes including how well the graduates perform in their jobs and the quality of life they live. Course designers at the university must make decisions based on real facts, emerging trends and the national and global market [5].

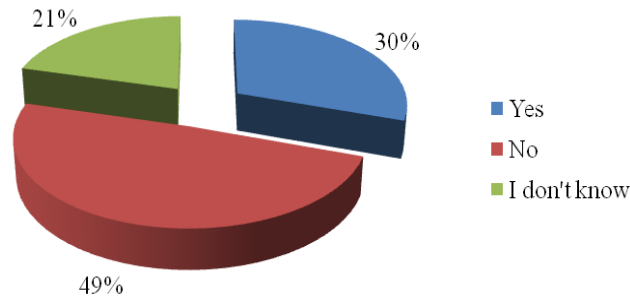
To curb the rising cases of unemployment, the government created the ministry of youth affairs and sports in 2005 to address lack of jobs among the youth. In 2007 the same ministry unveiled a youth employment marshal plan which sought to promote the successful transition of youth from school to work. There exist a serious disparity between the university degree programme development and labor market demand, hence persistent unemployment amidst growing degree courses. Several studies have attributed unemployment to the rising population but none has been able to show the relationship between the labor market and the academic programs offered at the university. This study aimed at determining the influence of type of degree programmes on employability of graduates in Kenya.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive survey research design. This study was conducted in Nakuru County of Kenya in the Rift Valley region. Nakuru County was particularly picked for this study as it has a high concentration of both private and public universities. There are 4 public and 5 private universities in Nakuru County [6]. Purposive sampling was used to pick participating universities. Purposive sampling was also be used to pick heads of faculties or schools. In universities that had the main campuses in Nakuru, all heads of departments were sampled so as to raise external validity of the study. To pick the departments under each faculty, (for universities that only have satellite campuses) stratified sampling was used. Simple random sampling was be used to pick the respondents. Self-made questionnaires and interviews schedules containing both structured and unstructured questions were used. Data was collected using the drop and pick procedure. The data was coded, keyed into the computer, and analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS computer software. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation). The findings were presented in tables, percentages and bar graphs.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The subjects of the study comprised of 53 faculty and school heads in selected universities in Kenya. Majority (47.8%) of the faculty members and schools heads were aged between 36 - 45 years and had worked in the university for 2 years and below (37.7%). In order to determine the relationship between the type of degree programmes offered in the universities and employability use of descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) in the analysis was employed.



**Fig-1: Presence of degree programmes where probability of acquiring jobs is very low**

Despite the fact that majority of the universities indicating not to have degree programmes where probability of getting jobs by the students is very low, a substantial proportion of respondents had a different opinion or did not have facts to reasonably comment on the issue. 49% of the total respondents disagreed that there were programmes in their institutions that subjected their graduates to low possibilities of getting employment. However, about 30% of the respondents agreed that there existed some

university programmes in their institution whose probability of getting employed was low. About 21% of the respondents lacked facts to reasonably comment on the issue.

Most respondents suggested that irrelevant degree programmes in the universities should be streamlined with the job market or provided to interested students with caution.

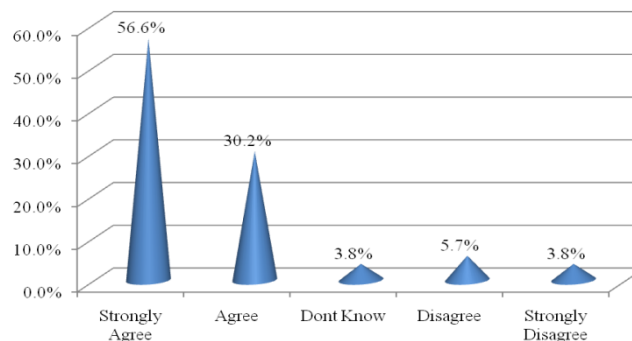
**Table-1: Suggestions on what should be done with irrelevant degree programmes**

Suggestions	Frequency	Percent
Should be streamlined with the job market	28	52.8
The university should continue offering them	4	7.5
Should be provided to interested students and inform them on labor market demands	21	39.6
Total	53	100.0

About 52.8% of the respondents' suggestions were that the best way of dealing with irrelevant degree programmes is to streamline them with the job market. This suggestion was closely related with the idea to only offer such programmes to interested students but cautiously inform them on labor market demands as represented by 39.6% of the total responses. However, a few respondents (7.5%) suggested the maintaining of status quo and continue offering irrelevant course. This may be due to the possibility that such respondents may

have believed that there were no irrelevant courses in their institutions.

A possible reason why some irrelevant courses may still continue to be offered in the institutions of higher learning is the fear of what may happen if students get to discover about the employability of the courses they are enrolled to. This is depicted in the figure below.



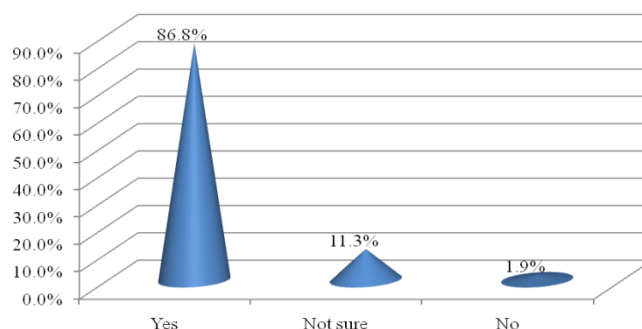
**Fig-2: Probability of students changing programme resulting from information on labor market demand**

Most respondents (56.6% and 30.2%) strongly agreed and agreed that if there were clear projections on

labor market demands, many students would drop the degree programmes they are taking and pick others with

a labor market orientation with only 5.7% and 3.8% having contrary opinion (disagree and strongly disagree respectively). About 3.8% of the respondents did not know. This is a clear indication that most students often get concerned about probability of getting employment.

Almost all respondents agreed that there are employers who have a high demand for students graduating with some particular degree programmes as shown in the figure below.



**Fig-3: Whether there are employers who have a high demand for students graduating with some particular degree programmes**

Majority of the respondents (86.8%) believed that there were employers who high a high demand for students graduating with some particular degree programmes with just 1.9% of the respondents having a contrary opinion. Only 11.3% of the respondents were not sure.

The following table shows reasons that respondents attributed to the fact that some employers were in demand of graduate with particular degree programmes.

**Table-2: Reasons for employers high demand graduates in some disciplines**

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Rarity/shortage of graduates in the labor market	41	77.4
High level of communication between the university and prospective employers	4	7.5
Proximity of the employers to the university	8	15.1
Total	53	100.0

Shortage of graduates in the labor market is the main cause for the high demand of graduates with particular degree programmes as represented by 77.4%. This implies that the design of courses in most universities may not actually be aimed at what the job market actually requires. Other reasons for high demand of such graduates were cited as proximity of the

employers to the university (15.1%) and high level of communication between the university and prospective employers (7.5%). Employability of graduates in the labor market is significantly affected by the number of students taking a particular degree programme as shown in the table below.

**Table-3: Number of students in relation to unemployment**

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	20	37.7%
Agree	21	39.6%
Don't know	2	3.8%
Disagree	6	11.3%
Strongly disagree	4	7.5%
Total	53	100.0%

Majority of the respondents agreed (39.6%) and strongly agreed (37.7%) that demand and employability significantly depends on the number of students taking a particular degree programme. It was just 11.3% and 7.5% who disagreed and strongly

disagreed with the statement respectively. However 3.8% of the respondents did not know. Some of the factors that inform most universities on issues to do with expansion are listed in the table below.

**Table-4: Factors that have informed expansion of universities**

Factors	Frequency	Percent
Demand for education due to increase in student population	39	69.6
Competition among other universities	9	17.4
Extensive consultation between the university and the global labor market players	5	8.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

Most universities (69.6%) are guided by the demand for education (increase in student population) when making a decision of expansion. The next most important factor that informs universities on the expansion is the competition among other universities as represented by 17.4% of the total responses. The one key factor that should be considered; which eventually strengthens the fight against unemployment and self-reliance among the learners was ironically noted not to be highly considered among the universities considered in this study. This factor, 'extensive consultation between the university and the global labor market players' was only featured in 8.7% of the total responses. This implies that it is not a wonder to find that some universities may be offering irrelevant courses to its students.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most universities degree programmes curriculums were initially developed to suit labor market demands. However, with changes in time and technology, some programmes have reduced in relevance and no longer suit the labor market demand. Although resources are allocated to cater for new curriculum implementation every year, majority teaching methods are not regularly reviewed and lecturers yearly trained on changes in curriculum.

Students are also not informed on the need to change the curriculum to suit labor market demands. Most universities rarely organize conferences and workshops that invite global labor market players and have no departments that keep curriculum designers informed on trends in the labor market. Little or no efforts are exerted in attaching university staff to organizations in order to learn about trends in the labor market. Consequently, global labor market players do inform the university on labor market oriented programmes and introduction of new courses in the universities is not influenced by advice from such players or consultation with human resource practitioners in country. There are a number of degree programmes where probability of getting jobs by the students is very low and universities should try to streamline them with the job market. Employers have a high demand for students graduating with some particular degree programmes in which universities are not providing graduates with such skills.

All degree programmes and degree-offering academic units need to be reviewed on a regular basis in order to ensure that the courses being offered are

relevant. Among the outcomes of the above reviews should be a clearer understanding of how the programme assists the students in meeting employers' expectations; quality of instruction, research, and public service; value to students' general education and preparation for society; resource requirements; future objectives and changes necessary to achieve them. Labour market players should be widely incorporated in the review of academic courses. The government, through the Ministry of Education should spearhead the establishing and strengthening of an effective mechanism of continuously monitoring the labor market signals and determine appropriate value weightings on some academic programmes so as meet labor market shortages. Universities in the country as well as other stakeholders including relevant government departments should be conducting regular surveys to specifically seek opinions of prospective employers on what academic programmes and specific skills they consider critical for various jobs. The government should embark on measures meant for strengthening the employer voice on dictating the types of skills that should be created by universities as well as the contents of academic programmes offered. Universities in Kenya should value and provide an enabling environment for encouraging partnerships and consultations with employers. This will assist in development of university programmes that are relevant to the job market and improvement in the courses design.

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