

Influence of the global labor market on course design of university degree programmes: 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 establish the influence of the global labor market on course design of university degree programmes in Kenyan universities. 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 the way global labor market players inform universities on labor market oriented programmes was poor and that surveys on global labor market changes by universities are not common. This study recommends that the government, through the Ministry of Education should spearhead the establishing and strengthening of an effective mechanism of continuously monitoring of the labor market signals and determining appropriate value weightings on academic programmes so as meet labor market shortages.

Keywords: Influence, Global Labour Market, Course Design, Degree Programmes, University

INTRODUCTION

A good degree programme should be one that guarantees a speedy absorption in the labor market. Most youth in Kenya are either unemployed or underemployed. Among these are many university graduates. Pursuing a degree programme that guarantees a job is the dream of most student who joins university.

Through training and education a knowledge based society is created with relevant skills for a global work force.. Higher education has however, been experiencing unprecedented challenges due to the convergence of powerful forces of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a driver of growth and the information and communication revolution, It has also been undergoing tremendous changes particularly in terms of growth in student enrolment and in the number of higher education institutions (Katana & Khaemba, 2009).

Increased competition among universities has created a need to design new programmes distinct to each university. Education geared to the goal of individual fulfillment is the key to the development of the entire nation. This view can however be disputed. The individual exists in a society that has demands ranging from economic demands, political and social demands. Information should enable one not only to make the right choices in interests but also whether that interest can be curved into economic fulfillment in the labor market (Ogola, 2010). Employer must play a great role in training if the skills gained by technical institutions graduates

have to be useful in the labor market. Technical institutions often trained without consultation with the employers (Muthaa & Mbugua, 2010). Graduates from most institutions have to be retrained for periods of up to 12 months to fit in the industry. If technical institutions have to remain relevant in skill development and training they will need to urgently review their curriculum in the light of the industrial and business organizations. There lacks flow of information from the job market to the course designers at the institutions of higher learning (Muthaa & Mbugua, 2010).

Chume (2011) notes that creating opportunities in terms of employment is of critical concern to every country in the world. While developed countries have some strategies to cushion the citizen against unemployment, the developing and underdeveloped countries are still struggling with the impact of unemployment.

The major cause of unemployment in the developing countries is industrialization. It brings change in the social-economic set-up in a country. Due to such changes a country experiences radical changes in the type of labor demanded in the job market. For instance, technological advances may declare workers redundant (Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005).

Despite the several institutions of higher learning and a pool of diversified courses on offer, high cases of unemployment in labor market in Kenya still persist. It is not clear from existing literature and relevant theory whether the disparity is due to lack of job vacancies or inappropriate course design of university degree programmes with respect to global labor market. Some 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 aims at establishing the influence of the global labor market on course design of university degree programmes in Kenyan universities.

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 (Commission for Higher Education, 2012). Purposive sampling was used to pick participating universities. Purposive sampling was also 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 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%). This study sought to assess the influence of the global labor market on course design of university degree programmes. To achieve this, attempt was made to analyze various aspects surrounding university degree programmes design. Such aspect covered are: organizing of conferences and workshops involving global labor market players, establishment of specific departments within the university that keeps curriculum designers informed on the trends in labor market, having some university staff attached to some organization in order to learn about trends in labor market and incorporating views of labor market players in course design. Table 1 below shows how well the university has been organizing conferences and workshops that invited global labor market players.

Table 1
Conferences and workshops by global labor market players

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very good	3	5.7
Good	7	13.2
Fair	14	26.4
Poor	17	32.1
Very Poor	12	22.6
Total	53	100.0

It can be observed from the Table 1 that majority (32.1%) of the respondents were of the opinion that universities has been doing poor in organizing conferences and workshops that invite global labor market players. About 26.4% considered the universities efforts in organizing such conferences and workshops as fair and were closely followed by those who considered the efforts as very poor as represented by 22.6%. It was just 13.2% of the respondents that rated the universities efforts in organizing conferences and workshops that brings together global labor market players as good while just 5.7% rated such efforts as very good.

It is very important for all institutions of higher learning to have a department that concentrates on the curriculum design and ensuring that the university programmes offered are all in line with the requirements of the global labor market to avoid boosting unemployment in the country. Most universities were not performing well in the establishment of a department in the university that keeps curriculum designers informed on trends in the labor market. This is as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2
Existence of a department to guide curriculum designers

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very good	4	7.5
Good	5	9.4
Fair	13	24.5
Poor	17	32.1
Very poor	14	26.4

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very good	4	7.5
Good	5	9.4
Fair	13	24.5
Poor	17	32.1
Very poor	14	26.4
Total	53	100.0

Majority of the faculties and schools were rated as poor (32.1%) in establishing a department in the university that keeps curriculum designers informed on trends in the labor market. This was closely followed by faculties and schools that were rated very poorly and fairly (26.4% and 24.5% respectively) in the establishment of such departments. It was just 9.4% and 7.5% of the respondents that rated the establishment of the departments as good and very good respectively. The table below shows how the universities were underperforming with respect to attaching some of their staff to some organizations in order to learn about trends in the labor market. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Attachment of staff to different organizations to learn about labor market trends

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very good	2	4.3
Good	5	8.7
Fair	10	17.4
Poor	18	34.8
Very poor	18	34.8
Total	53	100.0

Respondents rated the universities efforts in attaching its staff to organizations to learn about trends in the labor market as either poor (34.8%) or very poor (34.8%). About 17.4% of the respondents however rated the efforts as fair. Other responses were good (8.7%) and very good (4.3%). The universities lack of commitment to attaching its staff to some organizations implies that the programmes that they offer may not be well designed and blended to suit the requirements of the employers. This in effect may contribute to unemployment. The situation in the harmonization of the university degree programmes with what is required in the labor market is further made complicated because on the other hand, the global labor market players do not adequately inform the universities on labor market oriented programmes.

Table 4

Global market players' role in labour market oriented programmes

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very good	2	3.8
Fair	14	26.4
Poor	16	30.2

Very poor	15	28.3
Total	53	100.0

Majority of the respondents indicated that the way global labor market players inform the university on labor market oriented programmes was poor as represented by 30.2% of the respondents. This was closely followed by 28.3% and 26.4% of the respondents who felt that the participation of the global labor market players in informing the universities was very poor and fair respectively. Other responses were good (11.3%) and very good (3.8%).

The poor coordination and lack of enough avenues that bring the global market players and universities together may be the main cause of this scenario. Owing to the benefit of incorporating global labor market players in the design of academic programmes in the institutions of higher learning, the universities must take visible action to ensure that students are prepared for jobs in which job markets demand. To ensure this, the government must provide the necessary support to the universities to make the necessary changes including those needed to develop new areas for which there is a great demand, as well as organizing forums in which players in the job market are linked to the learning institutions. A non-parametric chi-square test was carried out to determine the factors that inform the introduction of new courses in the universities.

Table 5

Factors that inform the introduction of new courses in the universities

Opinion	SA	A	DK	D	SD	Total	χ^2	p
Demand from students	18 (34.0%)	23 (43.4%)	1 (1.9%)	10 (18.9%)	1 (1.9%)	53 (100.0%)	25.54	.017
Competition from other universities	20 (37.7%)	21 (39.6%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (22.6%)	0 (0.0%)	53 (100.0%)	23.76	.022
Advice from global market players	2 (3.8%)	5 (9.4%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (54.7%)	17 (32.1%)	53 (100.0%)	34.47	.000
Consultation with other universities	6 (11.3%)	12 (22.6%)	7 (13.2%)	14 (26.4%)	14 (26.4%)	53 (100.0%)	14.59	.042
Increase in student population	18 (34.0%)	15 (28.3%)	4 (7.5%)	12 (22.6%)	4 (7.5%)	53 (100.0%)	15.40	.004
Decisions by senior university staff	13 (24.5%)	29 (54.7%)	3 (5.7%)	4 (7.5%)	4 (7.5%)	53 (100.0%)	46.15	.000
Print and electronic media information	20 (37.7%)	21 (39.6%)	4 (7.5%)	6 (11.3%)	2 (3.8%)	53 (100.0%)	31.62	.000
Advice from human resource practitioners in Kenya	4 (7.5%)	5 (9.4%)	2 (3.8%)	26 (49.1%)	16 (30.2%)	53 (100.0%)	39.17	.000

Critical Chi-square value = 9.49, Degrees of freedom = 4, Level of significance = 0.05

Introduction of new courses in the universities is mainly influenced by a number of factors. One of these factors is demand from students (significant at 5% level since the p-value of 0.017 is less than the significance level). Majority (43.4%) of the respondents agreed that demand from students influence the introduction of new courses. This was closely followed by respondents who strongly agreed (34.0%). On the contrary, only 18.9% of the respondents disagreed with the statements that demand from students influence introduction of new courses. About 1.9% strongly disagreed while an equal proportion did not know.

Competition from other universities (significant at 5% level since the p-value of 0.022 is less than the significance level) also influence introduction of new courses. Majority (39.6%) of the respondents agreed that competition from other universities influence the introduction of new courses. This was closely followed by respondents who strongly agreed (37.7%). On the contrary, only 22.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that competition from other universities influence introduction of new courses.

Increase in student population who wish to be offered a variety of courses (significant at 5% level since the p-value of 0.004 is less than the significance level) also influence introduction of new courses. Majority (34.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed that increase in students population influence the introduction of new courses. This was closely followed by respondents who agreed (37.7%). Only 22.6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 7.5% strongly disagreed while an equal proportion (7.5%) did not know how student population in universities influence introduction of new course.

Decisions by senior university staff was found to be a major factor that influence introduction of new course in the faculties and schools that were investigated. The calculated chi-square value of 46.151 at 4 degrees of freedom is significant at 5% level (P-value = 0.001). A close look at the data shows that majority 54.7% and 24.5% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that it was usually the decisions of the senior university staff to introduce new courses. Other responses were disagree (7.5%) and strongly disagree (7.5%). However, 5.7% of the respondents did not know about the involvement of senior university staff in the introduction of new courses.

Information available in print and electronic media was found to be a major factor that influence introduction of new course in the faculties and schools that were investigated. The calculated chi-square value of 31.623 at 4 degrees of freedom is significant at 5% level (P-value = 0.001). A close look at the data shows that majority 39.6% and 37.7% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that information available in print and electronic media influence the introduction of new courses in the universities. Other responses were disagree (11.3%) and strongly disagree (3.8%). However, 7.5% of the respondents did not know and could not comment about influence of information available in print and electronic media on the introduction of new courses.

Some of the factors that were noted not to significantly influence the universities decision of introducing new courses are: advice from global market players, consultation with other universities and advice from human resource practitioners in Kenya. This is however and unfortunate situation since failure to incorporate these key players/stakeholders in the introduction of new courses may mean that some of the courses introduced may be irrelevant and not able to appeal to the employers.

Advice from global market players was not well incorporated by faculties and school heads in the introduction of new course in the universities. The calculated chi-square value of 34.472 at 4 degrees of freedom is significant at 5% level (P-value = 0.001). Specifically, majority 54.7% and 32.1% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that advice from global market players was incorporated in making decisions to introduce new courses. Other

respondents agreed (9.4%) while a few strongly agreed (3.8%) that advice from global market players is incorporated in the introduction of new courses.

Despite its advantages, consultation with other universities was found not to be considered when making decision of introducing new courses in the universities. The calculated chi-square value of 14.585 at 4 degrees of freedom is significant at 5% level ($P\text{-value} = 0.042$). A close look at the data shows that majority 26.4% of the respondents disagreed that there was consultations with other universities when making decisions to introduce new courses in the universities. A similar proportion (26.4%) strongly disagreed on the issue. About 22.6% and 11.3% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that there were consultation with other universities every time new courses were being introduced. However, 13.2% of the respondents did not knew of whether there were consultations with other universities during introduction of new courses. This implies that there might be great duplication of course/programmes which could result to flooding of graduates from a particular field in the job market.

Advice from human resource practitioners in Kenya was not well incorporated by universities in the introduction of new course in the universities. The calculated chi-square value of 39.170 at 4 degrees of freedom is significant at 5% level ($P\text{-value} = 0.001$). Specifically, majority 49.1% and 30.2% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that advice from human resource practitioners in Kenya was incorporated in making decisions to introduce new courses. Other respondents agreed (9.4%) while a few strongly agreed (7.5%) that advice from human resource practitioners in Kenya was incorporated in the introduction of new courses. The danger behind this scenario is that most universities might be offering course that are not well designed with the aim of offering what most organizations were looking for in their human resources.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of the respondents indicated that the way global labor market players inform the university on labor market oriented programmes was poor. Introduction of new courses in the universities is mainly influenced by demand from students, competition from other universities, increase in student population, decisions by senior university staff, information available in print and electronic media. Surveys on global labor market changes are not very common. Advice from global market players does not significantly influence the universities decision of introducing new courses. This means that universities did not worry about whether the degree programmes they were offering were relevant in the job market as long as they got as many students as possible.

The government, through the Ministry of Education should spearhead the establishing and strengthening of an effective mechanism of continuously monitoring of the labor market signals and determining appropriate value weightings on 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. 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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