

# Relationship Between University Degree Programmes And Self-Employment And Self-Reliance: A Survey Of Kenyan Universities

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**Abstract:** The rising cases of unemployment in many countries are a worrying trend. In Kenya despite the rising levels of education, many graduates remain unemployed. The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between university degree programmes and self-employment. 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 descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and presented in tables. This study found that most universities have degree programmes aimed at ensuring self reliance and self employment among its graduates. However, there are dismally low efforts by most universities in holding workshops on self employment and self reliance every semester, establishment and support of many mentorship programmes for students by successful entrepreneurs and mainstreaming of self employment and self reliance in the curriculum. This study recommends that the university programmes offered in the country should be monitored to ensure that they instill skills for self employment, self reliance and self direction on the part of the learners. This would compel the learning institutions to offer programmes that are more relevant and reduce the menace of unemployment.

**Index Terms:** Graduates, University degree programmes, Higher Education, self-employment, self-reliance.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A good degree programme should be one that guarantees a speedy absorption in the labor market. In Kenya today, 70% of the youth are either unemployed or underemployed. Among these are many university graduates. Many private and public universities have been opened in many urban centers. Flexibility in the mode of study has made access to education a lot easier to many aspiring students. Pursuing a degree programme that guarantees a job is the dream of every student who joins university. There are over fifty institutions of higher learning in the country (Commission for Higher Education, 2012). Every year 75000 students graduate from these universities. According to a study by Youth Banner (2012), Kenya unemployment rate is approximately 40% and an estimated 64% are the youth. The study further reiterates that the current economic growth is currently unable to cope with large numbers of unemployed youth completing school. It is the dream of every high school student to enroll for a degree programme, complete and secure a good job. Over the years, demand for university admission has gone up steadily. Among the most important challenges of post independence Kenya was the question of employment and unemployment. Between 1974 and 1984 employment grew at 3.3% which was slightly lower than growth rate of the labor force (Ochieng and Maxon, 1992).

The public sector has been the main engine of employment creation in Kenya since independence. In the 1980's the government signaled its intention to withdraw from previous interventions in the labor market as part of the government's program of structural adjustment of the economy which committed the government among other things, to cutting government expenditure and employment and reducing government regulation of the economy so as to allow market prices to determine allocation of resources. The education sector 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. But the question begs, are these courses guided by trends in the labor market? Every year about 25000 graduates are churned out into the labor market. If each of the universities trains 100 students in Bachelor of commerce for example, how many vacancies are likely to be available for 5000 graduates in the year 2015? If only 50 graduates in Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology can be absorbed by the labor market today, will it be necessary to train 2000 students in anthropology? How versatile are these courses in relation to the labor market? Who is matching the labor market demands with the courses being offered at the university? My input is that universities should not be judged by expansion and growth of the student population but how many of their graduates find jobs and the period they take to find those jobs. The challenges that Kenya faced after independence are not the same today almost fifty years after. A lot of resources are going into training students in redundant courses. These resources should be channeled into courses that match job market demands. Ogola (2005) observes that students often harbor different educational goals and this is expressed in their ambitions, needs and interests. Yet, 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. Nafukho and Muyia (2009) notes that for universities in Kenya to manage the challenges being experienced by the

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Kenyan society, they require well designed academic programmes and clear missions and visions. Developing education programmes should not be a secretive affair. Ndirangu (2007) says that by not consulting learners, parents, guardians and employers, universities deny citizens informed opinions about programmes that are critical to their lives and well being of the country. We have few resources; therefore, we must devise social institutions that will mobilize human energy for productive purposes, Heilbroner (1980). A school that emphasizes on academic excellence but ignores physical, moral and economic outcome is a low quality school. 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 lead. 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 (Daily Nation September 12, 2011) 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. Digital Age institute, a company that deals in software development has been engaged by the government to provide training to government employees on upcoming IT upgrade. The local, national and global labor market trends should forthwith inform university course designers. If degree programmes are not offered in tandem with demands in the labor market, unemployment will continue rising and it will be impossible to fight brain drain or even account for the resources used to train these graduates. 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. The plan aimed at creating 500,000 jobs by 2012. By 2011, only 55,500 jobs had been created. This is indicative of a serious disparity between the university

educated population and labor market demand. It is not clear from existing literature and relevant theory whether the disparity is due to lack of job vacancies or relevance of university programs learners undertake. Further, the studies carried out in this field 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 relationship, if any, between the demand for various university academic programs and labor market needs.

## 2. 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 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.

## 3. 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 extent to which the universities programmes make the students self-reliance and self-employed, non-parametric chi-square test was employed and results recorded in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:** Extent to which the universities programmes make the students self reliant and self employed

Statements	SA	A	DK	D	SD	Total	P-value	Chi-sq
Existence of self-reliance and self-employment programs	16 (30.4%)	28 (52.2%)	2 (4.3%)	5 (8.7%)	2 (4.3%)	53 (100.0%)	0.000	21.108
Semester workshops on self-employment and self-reliance	7 (13.0%)	9 (17.4%)	5 (8.7%)	28 (52.2%)	5 (8.7%)	53 (100.0%)	0.000	28.358
Successful entrepreneur student mentorship programs	5 (8.7%)	9 (17.4%)	2 (4.3%)	21 (39.1%)	16 (30.4%)	53 (100.0%)	0.000	18.841
Mainstreaming of self employment and self employment	5 (8.7%)	7 (13.0%)	5 (8.7%)	23 (43.5%)	14 (26.1%)	53 (100.0%)	0.000	18.153

Allocation of entrepreneurship skills resources to students	7 (13.0%)	12 (21.7%)	5 (8.7%)	14 (26.1%)	16 (30.4%)	53 (100.0%)	0.066	7.197
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Critical Chi-square value = 9.49, Degrees of freedom = 4, Level of significance = 0.05

Table 1 above shows that generally, most universities have degree programmes aimed at ensuring self reliance and self employment among its graduates. However, there are dismally low efforts by most universities in holding workshops on self employment and self reliance every semester, establishment and support of many mentorship programmes for students by successful entrepreneurs and mainstreaming of self employment and self reliance in the curriculum. A Pearson's chi-square statistic to show how university programmes are aimed at ensuring self-reliance and self-employment among its learners was calculated as 21.108 at 4 degrees of freedom (df). Since the p-value of 0.000 is greater than 5% significant level, this study concludes that, on the statement, there are degree programmes aimed at self reliance and self-employment; most respondents (68.6%) were in consensus about the issue. Specifically, 52.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement while 30.4% strongly agreed. However, 8.7% and 4.3% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. About 4.3% of the respondents were undecided (did not know). A Pearson's chi-square statistic to evaluate universities efforts of holding workshops meant to build self-employment and self-reliance spirit are aimed at ensuring self-reliance and self-employment every semester was calculated as 28.358 at 4 degrees of freedom (df). Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 5% significant level, this study concludes that, on the statement, workshops are held on self employment and self reliance every semester; most respondents (60.9%) were not in consensus about the issue. Specifically, 52.2% of the respondents disagreed with the

statement while 8.7% strongly disagreed. However, 17.4% and 13.0% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively. About 8.7% of the respondents were undecided (did not know). 69.5% of the respondents seemed to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, 'there are many mentorship programmes for students by successful entrepreneurs'. Specifically, 39.1% of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 30.4% strongly disagreed. However, 17.4% and 8.7% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement respectively. About 4.3% were not decided. A Pearson's chi-square statistic was calculated as 18.841 at 4 degrees of freedom (df). Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 5% significant level, this study concludes that the studied universities did not have adequate measures to establish mentorship programmes for students by successful entrepreneurs. On the other hand, 69.6% of the respondents seemed to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, 'there is mainstreaming of self employment and self reliance in the curriculum'. Specifically, 43.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 26.1% strongly disagreed. However, 13.0% and 8.7% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement respectively. About 8.7% were not decided. A Pearson's chi-square statistic was calculated as 18.153 at 4 degrees of freedom (df). Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 5% significant level, this study concludes that the studied universities did not have adequate mainstreaming of self employment and self reliance in the curriculum.

**TABLE 2:** Assessment of the influence of the global labor market on course design of university degree programmes

Statement	Majority		VG	G	F	P	VP	Total
	Opinion	Percent						
University organization of conferences/workshops inviting global labour market players	Poor	32.1	5.7	13.2	26.4	32.1	22.6	100
Existence of university department informing on labour market trends	Poor	32.1	7.5	9.4	24.5	32.1	26.4	100
University staff industrial attachment on labour market trends	Poor/very poor	34.8	4.3	8.7	17.4	34.8	34.8	100
Global labour market players collaboration with university on labour market needs	Poor	30.2	3.8	11.3	26.4	30.2	28.3	100

Table 2 indicates the involvement of global labor market players in course design. 32.1 percent felt that the university organizes conferences where global market players are invited. 22.5% felt that indeed their universities performed poorly on this score. Majority of the respondents also reported that there was no department at their university to relay information on trends in the labor market to curriculum designers. Majority of the respondents that is 34.8 % reported that staff attachments to other organizations to learn labor market trends was not felt. 58.5% of the respondents felt that not much was done to inform the university on labor market oriented programmes. This therefore shows there is a huge gap to be filled between the universities and labor market players

**TABLE 3: Examination of Influence of Type of Degree Programmes on Employability**

	Majority							
	Response	%	Yes	No	DK			
Existence of low demand degrees	No	49	30	49	21			
Particular degree demand levels	Yes	86.8	86.8	1.9	11.3			
	Response	%	SA	A	DK	D	SD	Total
Labour market demand and degree programme migration	Strongly agree	56.6	56.6	30.2	3.8	5.7	3.8	100.0
Specific degree programme enrolment and labour market demand	Agree	39.6%	37.7%	39.6%	3.8%	11.3%	7.5%	100.0

From Table 3, 49 percent and the majority of the respondents felt that most degree programs had a high probability of getting jobs. However 30 percent didn't agree with this and 21 percent did not know. It was noted that 86.8 percent of the respondents felt that there are employers who have a high demand for some degree programmes. It is also important to

note that 56.6 percent of the respondents felt that if there were clear projections many students would drop the degree programmes they were taking and pick new ones. These indeed then shows there are no clear projections on the labor market.

**TABLE 4: Factors that inform the introduction of new courses in the universities**

Opinion	SA	A	DK	D	SD	Total	Chi-square	P-value
Demand from students	18 (34.0%)	23 (43.4%)	1 (1.9%)	10 (18.9%)	1 (1.9%)	53 (100.0%)	25.539	.017
Competition from other universities	20 (37.7%)	21 (39.6%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (22.6%)	0 (0.0%)	53 (100.0%)	23.755	.022
Advice from global market players	2 (3.8%)	5 (9.4%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (54.7%)	17 (32.1%)	53 (100.0%)	34.472	.000
Consultation with other universities	6 (11.3%)	12 (22.6%)	7 (13.2%)	14 (26.4%)	14 (26.4%)	53 (100.0%)	14.585	.042
Increase in student population	18 (34.0%)	15 (28.3%)	4 (7.5%)	12 (22.6%)	4 (7.5%)	53 (100.0%)	15.396	.004
Decisions by senior university staff	13 (24.5%)	29 (54.7%)	3 (5.7%)	4 (7.5%)	4 (7.5%)	53 (100.0%)	46.151	.000
Print and electronic media information	20 (37.7%)	21 (39.6%)	4 (7.5%)	6 (11.3%)	2 (3.8%)	53 (100.0%)	31.623	.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%)	39.170	.000

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

From Table 5, majority of the respondents felt that demand from students may have prompted the introduction of some courses. 43.4% agreed while 34.4% strongly agreed. 18.9% of the students disagreed. Competition from other universities was also seen as influencing introduction of new courses as 37.7% strongly agreed while 39.6% agreed. 22.6% disagreed. It was also clear that advice from global market players did not feature in the introduction of courses as only 9.4% of the respondents agreed while 54.7 percent disagreed and 32.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Introduction of new degree programmes is not done with consultation with other universities as only 11.3% strongly agreed and 22.6% agreed. 39.6 who were the majority disagreed. Increase in student population was also seen as influencing introduction of new courses 34.0 percent strongly disagreed and 28.3% agreed. 7.5 % of the respondents agreed while 22.6% strongly disagreed. Print and electronic media also informed the introduction of new courses with 37.7% of the respondents strongly agreeing and 39.6% agreeing. Suffice it to say that advice from human resource practitioners was not taken into consideration in introducing new courses as only 9.4% strongly agreed, 3.8 % agreed while 49.1% who were the majority disagreed and 30.2% strongly disagreed.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that most universities have degree programmes aimed at ensuring self reliance and self employment among its graduates. However, there are dismally low efforts by most universities in holding workshops on self employment and self reliance every semester, establishment and support of many mentorship programmes for students by successful entrepreneurs and mainstreaming of self employment and self reliance in the curriculum. It is important to note that although many universities claim to have courses where their students are honed on self reliance and self employment, it was clear that many respondents were not aware of any resource allocations to make these programmes a success. It is then clear that measures have not been put in place by universities to mentor their own students to be 'producers' in the job market rather than being consumers. There is need for increased efforts by most universities in holding workshops on self employment and self reliance every semester, establishment and support of many mentorship programmes for students by successful entrepreneurs and mainstreaming of self employment and self reliance in the curriculum. This study recommends that regular surveys need

to be undertaken to obtain perceptions of university students on various jobs and industry. Such studies shall produce information that would inform curriculum development process in Kenyan universities so as to make higher education in Kenya more relevant to the country's current and future development needs. University programmes offered in the country should be monitored to ensure that they instill skills for self employment, self reliance and self direction on the part of the learners. This would compel the learning institutions to offer programmes that are more relevant and reduce the menace of unemployment.

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