Challenges Encountered by the Deans, Chairs of the Academic Departments, and the Faculty in Training of Quality Graduates in the Universities

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Abstract

Training of quality graduates in the universities requires a multifaceted approach at all levels of management. Universities having been accredited it is presumed that they have policies in place, appropriate curricula, resources, appropriate management structures, processes, and best management practices to support the training of quality graduates. Deans, Chairs of Academic departments, and faculty are key in ensuring that training of quality graduates is successfully attained by facilitating curriculum development, implementation and leadership, effective teaching and learning, and faculty support. This is made possible by identifying management practices that are important for each key area to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. However, the literature available indicates that Deans, Chairs of Academic departments, and faculty are not able to successfully identify and implement these best management practices due to several challenges encountered in day-to-day activities. These challenges affect the entire process of producing holistic graduates. Therefore, the study set out to establish the challenges encountered by the Deans, Chairs of Departments, and faculty staff in implementing management practices in the universities with a view to training quality graduates. The research used a descriptive survey research design. The target population was the universities in Kenya where six universities were sampled. The study revealed that there exist challenges that limit deans, chairs of departments, and faculty in producing holistic graduates in the universities. Based on the findings there is a need to review policies on staff loading, resource allocation, and institutionalizing rewards systems.

Keywords: *Management practices, Challenges of producing quality graduates, Quality graduates*

1.0 Introduction

Universities are expected to train quality graduates. Notably, universities are accredited to offer programmes by regulatory bodies which means they have relevant resources, appropriate curriculum, and organizational structures to support the training of quality graduates (Dada & Fogg, 2016). Literature available has shown that these factors on their own cannot guarantee university success in producing quality graduates and research output. A study done by Howells, Fitzallen, and Adams (2016) observed that resources and leadership under the control of the institutions of higher learning are not able to afford universities a competitive advantage in training quality graduates. Universities need to identify challenges that various management

levels face in day-to-day activities to develop and implement interventions to minimize or eradicate them. This study aims at identifying various challenges faced by the Dean, Chairs of Academic Departments, and faculty in the process of training quality graduates.

1.1 Research Hypotheses

There are no significant differences in the challenges faced by Deans, Chairs of Academic departments, and Faculty in the training of quality graduates across the universities.

2.0 Literature Review

In the recent past, there has been an outcry that the graduates produced by the universities, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa lack relevant skills to perform effectively in the job market. This is supported by studies undertaken by World Bank Group (2016) and World Bank and Kenya Vision 2030 (2014) which revealed that graduates from colleges and universities in Kenya lacked the requisite skills to take up jobs available in the market that drives the country towards achieving Vision 2030.

Similar studies by Murthi and Sondergaard (2012), showed that Kenya's basic education system continued to overemphasize teaching facts and imparting knowledge, rather than the development of analytical and problem-solving skills. The study indicates that the education system is weak in creating job-relevant technical skills (for example, through technical and vocational education, higher education, pre-employment, and on-the-job training), along with other skills valued by employers, such as accessing information, using computers, solving complex problems, and learning new skills while on the job among others.

The fundamental question is what makes our universities unable to train holistic graduates whereas they are accredited to do so. Accreditation means that universities have relevant resources, appropriate curricula, management structures and frameworks, policies, and qualified students. To harness all of these to produce the desired outcome requires appropriate management practices. Management practices mean proven ways of doing consistent things and produces the desired result. According to Mbeche et.al. (2010), there are various approaches to management practices that can help institutions of higher learning to effectively harness resources and effectively implement curricula that translate into quality graduates. On the same note, Dada and Fogg (2016) argue that universities have to adopt different management approaches in addition to self-assessments and external assessments of the institutions, accreditation, and certification systems to be able to produce relevant and quality graduates. Bloom et al. (2010) present management practices adopted in the UK universities notably in the management of faculty recruitment, retention, and promotion of staff which has a significant impact on outcomes of university graduates and research. Bloom, et al., (2010) further notes that this also applies to both the Anglo-Saxon and the continental European countries, suggesting that the researchers' characterization of good management practice is not intrinsically biased towards UK and United States (US). It also applies to all the universities around the globe. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) chapter six echoes the quality of leadership which is closely related to the management of institutions.

While management practices play a crucial role in the process of preparing quality graduates, universities particularly Deans, Chairs of academic departments and the faculty have not found it easy to identify, document, and implement these practices as a result of several challenges they have to deal with in their day-to-day active activities. Bloom et al. (2013) provides both static and dynamic reasons for institutions not adopting innovative managerial practices. Bloom indicates that providing curriculum leadership is limited by the curriculum design that is unresponsive to local needs, lack of resources for proper implementation of the curriculum,

lack of organizational support, lack of freedom and authority to exercise leadership roles, being overburdened with varied administrative functions, inadequate reward systems, and unfavorable policies. This proposition is also supported by (Kafetzopoulos et al., 2015). Teaching and learning are affected by various factors. The ability to integrate technology and learning, limited resources, and also keeping pace by the faculty to develop personal skills that enhance the delivery of the curriculum (Youssef et al., 2011).

A study carried out by Kafetzopoulos et al. (2015) convincingly pointed out that while the general philosophy and language behind management practices are attractive to nearly all academics; many elements of modern university culture make it difficult for management practices to be implemented. Perhaps the most important element in an academic culture that frustrates the introduction of conventional management practices and procedures is the doctrine of academic freedom as it plays out in individual professorial classrooms and their professional lives.

Faculty members traditionally have had the right to profess their disciplines as they see fit and to seek truth, wherever that search leads them. The content of their courses, the nature of their research, and their professional values over the years have been subsumed under the umbrella of academic freedom (CUE (2014). Consequently, faculties are free (and perhaps well justified) to reject evaluative processes such as management practices that might result in satisfaction or productivity measures that could be used to influence how they do their teaching and research. Many faculties are repelled by the idea that they might force them to pre-and post-test the students in their courses, or administer student satisfaction surveys on a weekly or even daily basis, to gauge faculty effectiveness. Youssef et al. (2011), observe that there is a remarkable lack of consensus on universities regarding why universities exist. The introduction of management programmes that emanate from the corporate sector and the notion of continuous measurement are antagonistic actions to many faculties. Youssef et al. (2011), correctly noted the usual faculty member was accustomed to measurement such as teacher evaluations occurring once a semester, at the end of a semester. The ability of faculty to implement management practices that support the production of quality graduates can easily be frustrated by the top management. The top management should seek to understand the content of the curricula and make decisions within their areas of responsibility to support its delivery. This could be achieved through providing effective policies, and resources and adopting participative leadership styles (Evans & Davis 2012).

3.0 Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey design was considered appropriate for this study because the study was concerned with collecting information on the perceptions of the participants on the challenges of training quality graduates in the universities. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) recommend this kind of design when dealing with perceptions of people on education or social issues. Six (6) universities formed the sample which included Kenyatta University (A), University of Nairobi (B), African Nazarene University (C) Kenya Methodist University (D), Meru University of Science, and Technology (E), and Strathmore University (F). Five universities participated in the study. A total of 120 faculty including chairs of academic departments were included in the study. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from Chairs of Academic departments and faculty. The interview schedule was used to collect data from the Deans.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

A sample of one hundred and eighty was considered for the study. Out of one hundred and eighty expected faculty members, one hundred and twenty participated in the study accounting for 66.7%. The interview was conducted with five Deans of Schools out of six expected.

4.2 Challenges of Preparing Quality Graduates in the Universities

The researcher had set out to establish challenges that the Deans, Chairs of Academic Departments, and the faculty encounter in the Universities in the process of training quality graduates. Based on the literature review there were nine challenges examined in this study. These were; Fast-paced change impacting the curriculum, unresponsive curriculum design to local needs, inadequate resources for proper implementation of curriculum content, inadequate institutional support, lack of freedom to exercise leadership roles, overburdened with administrative duties, inadequate rewards systems, unfavorable policies, and diminishing faculty commitment. Based on the data collected from the participants, the results were analyzed by use of ANOVA to determine whether there were significant differences in challenges affecting the training of quality graduates across the Universities. The ANOVA yielded a $P<0.05$. The DMRT results in Table 1 showed where the differences existed.

Table 1: *Challenges of Preparing Quality Graduates in the Universities*

University	N	Subset		
		1	2	3
B	24	26.00		
F	21	26.29		
A	20		33.00	
C	25		34.60	34.60
D	30			38.00
Sig.		.878	.392	.071

Challenges faced by Deans, Chairs, and faculty were similar across the Universities where $P<0.05$. However, some Universities were more affected than others based on the DMRT results in Table 1. University B and F were less affected as compared to universities C and D. Using descriptive statistics, the researcher sought to determine the extent to which each challenge influences the production of quality graduates. Frequencies were computed and results were presented as follows:

4.3 Fast-paced Change Impacting on the Curriculum

The context in which University curricula exist today is experiencing rapid changes. Changes that include; the legal and regulatory environment which affect transitioning to quality standards, and technological advancement all of which pose a challenge to the integration of the technology into curriculum and delivery, implementation of faculty evaluation systems, and emphasis on application-based learning. The researcher sought to determine the extent to which fast-paced changes have affected curriculum implementation in the Universities. The researcher used frequencies to determine at what percentage level was fast-paced change impacted curriculum implementation. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Fast-paced Change Impacting on the Curriculum

Scale Item	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	11	9.2	9.2
Disagree	11	9.2	18.3
Not Sure	19	15.8	34.2
Agree	34	28.3	62.5
Strongly Agree	45	37.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 79(66.8%) of the participants were in agreement that rapid changes have continually affected the implementation of the curriculum in the Universities. 41 (34.2%) were categorized as either in disagreement or not sure. This implies that Universities need to put in place long terms strategies to deal with emerging issues that have continually affected instructional processes in the institutions. This included changing market needs, government policies, and the impact of globalization.

4.4 Unresponsive Curriculum Design to Local Needs

Curriculum design is a focused, thoughtful and logical organization of the curriculum. This could also be referred to us as a plan for instruction. The design identifies what is taught, by who, and when. The ultimate goal is to improve student learning for the benefit of the student and society. Three basic types of designs include subject-centered, learner-centered, and problem-centered. The researcher sought to determine the extent to which the curriculum design is a challenge to preparing quality graduates. The table of frequencies (Table 3) provides information on how each indicator was rated on a Likert scale.

Table 3: Unresponsive Curriculum Design to Local Needs

Scale item	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	11	9.2	9.2
Disagree	28	23.3	32.5
Not Sure	31	25.8	58.3
Agree	35	29.2	87.5
Strongly Agree	15	12.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

The findings indicated that 50 (41.7%) of the participants indicated agreement that unresponsive curriculum design to local needs affected the quality of graduates. 31 (25.8%) were not quite sure whether unresponsive curriculum design was a challenge to producing quality graduates. Since this was a large percentage, it is possible that most of the Deans, Chairs, and faculty members did not understand the concept of curriculum design and consequently its impact on student learning.

4.5 Inadequate Resources for Proper Implementation of Curriculum Content

The success of the curriculum is pegged on the provision of adequate resources to execute it. Though the researcher had assumed that since universities are accredited by the Commission for University Education, they had the relevant resources to implement the curriculum, analysis of test results revealed that was not the case across the Universities. Table of frequency (Table 4) presents the results.

Table 4: Inadequate Resources for Implementation of Curriculum

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	8.3	8.3
Disagree	11	9.2	17.5
Not Sure	32	26.7	44.2
Agree	49	40.8	85.0
Strongly Agree	18	15.0	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Results in Table 4 indicated that 67 (55.8%) of the participants agreed that inadequate resources were a challenge that influenced the production of quality graduates in the universities. 32 (26.7%) of the participants indicated 'not sure.' This was unexpected to the researcher. The question was very precise and within the ability of the participants to determine whether the University provided relevant resources to support curriculum implementation. This could suggest that the respective faculty were either in haste to complete the question without giving it due to the seriousness required.

4.6 Inadequate Institutional Support

Institutional support in curriculum implementation was considered to involve effective communication; staff development, and financial and resource support at all the levels of management when required. Results on the extent to which inadequate institutional support influences the production of quality graduates are presented in 5 indicating the percentage ratings for each scale item.

Table 5: Inadequate Institutional Support

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	4.2	4.2
Disagree	10	8.3	12.5
Not Sure	18	15.0	27.5
Agree	76	63.3	90.8
Strongly Agree	11	9.2	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

The findings in Table 5 revealed that 87 (72.5%) were in agreement that lack of institutional support was a major challenge as indicated in Table 5. This hampered the process of preparing holistic graduates by the Universities. This implied that at one point or another, Deans, Chairs, and faculty staff in all the Universities were not accorded the necessary support to be able to discharge their core mandates.

4.7 Lack of Freedom and Authority to Exercise Leadership Role

Freedom and authority among the faculty are perceived as entitlement and levels of control to participants in making and implementing decisions that affect the effective delivery of the curriculum. Faculty should be allowed to address educational issues of teaching, learning, and research both inside and outside the classroom. This is further confirmed by the frequency in Table 6.

Table 6: Lack of Freedom to Exercise Leadership

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	4.2	4.2
Disagree	15	12.5	16.7
Not Sure	26	21.7	38.3
Agree	48	40.0	78.3
Strongly Agree	26	21.7	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Results in Table 6 indicate that 50 (61.7%) agreed that the lack of freedom and authority to exercise leadership in the areas that concern the faculty was a challenge in preparing quality graduates in the Universities. It was noted that Universities did not create avenues for participative leadership. Interview with Deans pointed out that decisions relating to academic issues should be dealt with by use of a bottom-up approach. Faculty felt they were in a better position to provide solutions to academic issues as opposed to the top management approach. This is considered detrimental to progressive growth, creativity, and innovativeness in problem-solving to critical issues that affect curriculum development, review, monitoring, and evaluation.

4.8 Being Overburdened with Varied Administrative Functions

The core responsibility of the faculty is to provide instruction and student advisory services. Instruction includes facilitating learning the entire period when learning is programmed, assessing student work, and proving student achievement reports. In practice, University faculty have found themselves devoting a lot of time to administrative duties that do not relate to teaching and learning. Such administrative functions include attending meetings, attending University functions, management of student data, and preparing institutional plans and audit reports. Frequency Table 7 provides information on the percentage level of agreement for each scale item.

Table 7: Overburdened with Varied Administrative Duties

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	5.0	5.0
Disagree	22	18.3	23.3
Not Sure	6	5.0	28.3
Agree	45	37.5	65.8
Strongly Agree	41	34.2	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Results in Table 7 indicate that 86 (71.7%) agreed that faculty staff was being overburdened with administrative duties. This implied that less time was spent on the core mandate of the faculty to teaching, research, and community services. Most of the faculty time including deans and chairs of departments was spent on non-core meetings, representation in functions, and other assigned duties not related to their roles and responsibilities. This left them with little time to engage in productive work to improve the development and delivery of the curricula.

4.9 Inadequate Reward Systems

Faculty recognition for contributions made highly contributes to strive for excellence among them. Literature review showed that rewards foster a commitment to instructional improvement among the faculty. Rewards are perceived in terms of recognition awards, respect,

encouragement, compensation, and assistance for the faculty, who need support. Inadequate reward systems could be a source of dissatisfaction among the faculty. This could eventually affect curriculum delivery. Results for the extent to which faculty perceived rewards systems were inadequate in their respective Universities are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Inadequate Reward Systems

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	4.2	4.2
Disagree	21	17.5	21.7
Not Sure	11	9.2	30.8
Agree	56	46.7	77.5
Strongly Agree	27	22.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

The result in Table 8 shows that 83 (73.7%) of the participant's agreed rewards systems were inadequate in their respective Universities. This implied that the majority of the faculty perceived their universities as either lacking or having inadequate reward systems. Some Deans indicated in the interviews that most of their staff had stagnated in the same position for more than five years regardless of their improved performance. This acted as a source of demotivation among the faculty.

4.10 Unfavorable Policies in the University

Policies are perceived as guide principles that influence decisions and actions in a defined direction. Policies provide processes and procedures. Such policies in the University may include; faculty appointment, promotion, terms and conditions of service, and workload/teaching load policies among others. Frequency Table 9 provides information on the percentage rating on the extent of agreement.

Table 9: Unfavorable Policies in the University

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	8.3	8.3
Disagree	17	14.2	22.5
Not Sure	19	15.8	38.3
Agree	41	34.2	72.5
Strongly Agree	33	27.5	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Table 9 shows that 74 (61.7%) agreed that unfavorable policies posed a major challenge to learning improvement.

4.11 Diminishing Faculty Commitment

Universities operate with the premise that faculty members are loyal and committed to participating in policy and curriculum implementation in the University. The notion that a university is made up of a community of scholars who will make positive decisions on the curriculum, course content, evaluations, appropriate resources, and instructional strategies may not be sustainable in the current changing environment. Faculty is faced with several demotivating factors within and outside the Universities. Such would include; poor institutional governance, lack of collegiality hence lacks trust and mutual respect, high workload, and

inadequate reward systems among others. This leads to declining institutional commitment among faculty members. Table 10 presents information on the diminishing faculty commitment.

Table 10: Diminishing Faculty Commitment

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	15	12.5	12.5
Disagree	22	18.3	30.8
Not Sure	19	15.8	46.7
Agree	30	25.0	71.7
Strongly Agree	34	28.3	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Table 10 shows that 64 (53.3 %) were in agreement that over time, Universities have experienced diminishing faculty commitment. This could impact the way Universities implemented their curricula and also the output (graduates).

4.12 Findings from Qualitative Data on the Challenges of Production of Quality Graduates

Qualitative data was generated from open-ended questions included in the questionnaire. The open-ended question is aimed at obtaining additional challenges faced by the faculty in the process of training quality graduates in the Universities. The participants were asked to provide any other challenges that they encountered in the process of preparing quality graduates. The data obtained was analysed by creating main themes. Four emerging themes were observed. These were: teaching challenges, classroom situations, University research that does not translate into practice, and heavy workload. The data were transformed into quantitative data, analysed and the results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Other Challenges

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Teaching challenges	29	24.2	24.2
Classroom situation	15	12.5	36.7
Research not translated into practice	26	21.7	58.3
Heavy workload	50	41.7	100.0
Total	120	100.0	

Table 11 shows that 50 (41.7%) of the faculty felt that heavy workload was a major concern. The workload included teaching responsibilities, research, community service, and to a larger extent administrative duties. 29 (24.2%) indicated teaching challenge was also a concern. This mainly affected new faculty staff. It was noted that some Universities had no well-established programmes for professional development to continually support the pedagogical needs of the faculty. 26 (21.7%) reported that though Universities had engaged in an enormous amount of research, the output was not translated into meaningful functional units that could be used to improve learning. 15 (12.5%) reported that classroom situations could also affect the preparation of quality graduates. This was attributed to the highly shared lecture room among many groups. The multi-use caused some challenges where lecturers would find the lecture rooms occupied by other groups, sometimes equipment was broken or malfunctioning, and furniture scattered depending on the teaching methodologies of each lecturer.

5.0 Conclusion

The challenges of training quality graduates affecting Deans, Chairs of Academic departments, and the faculty were similar across the universities but with varying degrees, $P<0.05$. The major challenges included being overburdened with administrative duties where 86 (71.7%) agreed that faculty staff was overburdened with administrative work which implied less time was spent on the core mandate of teaching, research, and community services. Also, 83 (73.7%) of the participants' agreed rewards systems were inadequate in their respective Universities. This implied that the majority of the faculty perceived their universities as either lacking or having inadequate reward systems which demotivated them. Rapid changes happening in the education system and the industry also affected the training of quality graduates in the universities where 79 (66.8%) of the participants were in agreement. Inadequate resources were also a major challenge in training quality graduates, where 67 (55.8%) of the participants agreed it affected quality. Further, 64 (53.3 %) were in agreement that over time, Universities have experienced diminishing faculty commitment resulting in high turnovers. Last but not least 50 (41.7%) of the faculty felt that heavy workload was a major concern. Too much was expected of the faculty i.e., facilitating teaching and learning for many courses, student advisory, research, community service, administrative duties, attending meetings, and supervision among others.

6.0 Recommendations

There should be an urgent redress by the University management to address issues of faculty workload across the universities. The Commission for University Education in Kenya provides a guide on the faculty workload and computation process. However, most Universities do not adhere to this standard. If this is done it will address the issue of overburdening faculty with administrative duties. As well universities based on the findings need to review policies on resource allocation and institutionalizing rewards systems.

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