



**MODERATING THE CHALLENGES OF CURRICULUM DELIVERY IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES: A CASE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The quality of university education is as good as its implementation process and in particular the curriculum delivery process. In Kenya, the quality of curriculum delivery at the university level has generated a lot of concern from the stakeholders since the beginning of the 21st century. The undertones are largely centered on the regulatory framework regarding curriculum delivery and the quality of graduates, perceived as not possessing the requisite pedagogical training and skills. The poor implementation of university curriculum has been largely attributed to dynamics within the university system. Part of the problem is that those directly responsible for curricula implementation, lecturers, visage several bottlenecks. To alleviate some of the challenges, the Government of Kenya enacted the Universities Act 2012, which inter alia regulates curricula across universities. In line with the university Act, the Commission of University Education regulates the quality of the implementation of the university curriculum. This paper is the outcome of a survey that examined the challenges faced by lecturers in curriculum delivery in both public and private universities in Kenya. The findings of the study revealed a variety of challenges that inhibit successful curriculum delivery including student's enrolment, scarcity of resources, professionalism and administrative issues.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The university education in Kenya has grown gradually since independence. The need for higher education in the 1960s was triggered by the exodus of expatriates after Kenya got her independence in 1963 (Republic of Kenya, 1964). Immediately after independence up to early 1980s University education was mainly provided at the University of Nairobi and its constituent Kenyatta University College. During this time, the students' enrolment in undergraduate courses increased tremendously. In attempt to fill this gap, the Kenyan Government increased opportunities at the University of Nairobi, as a measure to generate high-level labour for cerequired for National development. This desire led the government to appoint *The Report of the Presidential Working Party on the Second University in Kenya in 1981* popularly known as the *Mackay Report*.

The MacKay report (1981) had two main objectives; to restructure the system of education with special reference to making learners self-reliant and to establish a second university in Kenya. Apart from restructuring the entire education system from 7-4-2-3 to the current 8-4-4 model, of eight years of primary schooling, four years of secondary and a minimum of four years at the university, the Mackay Report

also recommended the establishment of a second university in the country. The second phase of the implementation of the MacKay report witnessed the establishment of Moi University in Eldoret in 1986, which mainly focused on training of manpower in science and technology.

The desire to expand univesrity education in Kenya was further rekindled in 1998 when the government of Kenya appointed yet another committee to look at the quality of education in the curriculum. The Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Koech Report) having reviewed all the submissions made and the challenges facing Kenya at the dawn of the 21st Century proposed a new system of education. With respect to university education the Koech report recommended that the government increases opportunities of university education through opening more universities and the introduction of the open distance learning Modules. However, despite the quest of expanding higher education, the reoprpt gave more emphasis on the quality of delivery and outcome of the education and training processes.

Indeed, the recommendations of the Koech Report have witnessed the growth of public universities from seven (7) in 1990s to the current twenty two (22) and nine (9) university colleges. A similar growth of university education is also evident in private sector with thirty six (36) private universities. The tremendous expansion of university education has been faced by several pitfalls; availability of

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physical resources, inadequate human resource student over enrolment and insufficient teaching resources among others (Etemesti, 2010). Such major challenges will definitely affect the implementation process of the university curriculum.

The poor implementation of the university curriculum has triggered a lot of concern among the stakeholders (Brown & Brown, 2009). The government reacted to this concern by forming the Commission for Higher Education which was mandated by an Act of Parliament to oversee the quality of programmes offered by both private and public universities in Kenya. In attempt to fill this gap the Commission for University Education (formerly Commission for Higher Education) drafted a policy on curriculum development which was meant to synchronize the academic programmes in all universities. Despite the efforts made by the Commission for University Education to improve the quality of university education, there still persists a public outcry about its quality and in particular, the implementation process.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by university lecturers in curriculum delivery in both public and private universities in Kenya. This purpose was facilitated through the following research objectives:

- i. to determine the adequacy of teaching and resources in both public and private universities.
- ii. to determine the student related factors that influence the curriculum implementation process in both public and private universities
- iii. to establish the qualifications and competencies of the university lecturers

## **METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

The study adopted survey design. The survey design was selected due to its suitability as it is commonly used in exploratory studies (Ingule and Gatimu 1996; Kombo and Tromp, 2006). This design aimed at collecting information from students and lecturers on their opinion in relation to challenges faced by university lecturers in the implementation of the university curriculum. Secondly, it also allowed the researchers to collect data, present and interpret it for the purpose of making suggestions for moderating these challenges and further research.

### ***Location of the Study***

This study was carried out in Nairobi County. Nairobi County is also the capital city of Kenya. The researchers selected the county since it was easily accessible and also hosts the highest number of both public and private universities in Kenya.

### ***Research Instruments***

The research instruments used in this study were two questionnaires; Students' Questionnaire and Teachers' questionnaire. The validity of the instruments was established through consultation with subject specialists while the reliability was done through a pilot study. The Students' Questionnaire and Teachers' questionnaire had 0.73 and 0.79 coefficients of reliability which were acceptable since they were based on the threshold of 0.7 according to Kerlinger (1973).

### ***Sampling Procedures***

The sampling techniques used in this study were stratified and simple random sampling methods. Four universities were randomly sampled, two of which were private universities and two were public ones.

According to Kothari (2003), a sample refers to a portion of selected items from "universe" or population for the study. Gay (2004) suggests that at least 30 per cent of the target population is a good representation of the entire population for research in social sciences. Based on these guidelines, 4 universities were sampled for this study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 160 subjects comprising of 40 lecturers and 120 students.

### ***Statistical Techniques for Data Analysis***

The data collected was processed and analyzed by use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were applied in this study. The findings were presented by use of frequencies, tables, graphs and pie-charts.

## **RESULTS OF RESEARCH**

The first objective of the study was to determine the adequacy of teaching facilities and resources in both public and private universities. The study findings indicated that both public and private universities do not have sufficient teaching facilities and resources for effective implementation of the university curriculum. Eighty seven percent (87%) student respondents reported that the lecture halls and rooms were not enough especially when all students were present in their universities. This finding was supported by 68% of the lecturers who reported that they were even forced to use their offices as classrooms. Other 52.7% student respondents stated that sometimes even although the lecture halls were available some of them were too small to accommodate large classes. The teaching facilities and resources for the science courses were the worst affected. According to 87.9% teacher respondents most 'young' universities did not have well equipped laboratories for science practical lessons. The university colleges were found to be the most ill equipped. Indeed, a lecturer respondent reported that one university college had students pursuing BSC in Zoology and Botany, yet it lacked laboratories for most science programmes. Although, almost all universities had library space, majority of the student respondents (88.9%), noted that there was no relevant university level textbooks for reference in many of the programmes offered in their universities.

With regards to the second research objective that investigated the influence of student related factors on curriculum implementation process in both public and private universities, the respondents gave divergent opinions. According to majority of the lecturer respondents (85.7%), the quality of teaching at the university level was highly dependent on the size of the class. Other 69.5% lecturer respondents noted that most classes were overenrolled, with some classes having over 700 students. Such a big class affected effective communication during curriculum delivery process. At the same time, this made it difficult for lecturers to monitor class attendance and thus negatively affecting the quality of curriculum delivery. The finding from 73.3% student respondents revealed that in the large classes, many students

did not attend classes regularly due to poor monitoring procedures by their course lecturers. Students' indiscipline was also reported as a major drawback in the curriculum implementation process. This included; failure to do assignments, attending classes while drunk among some students, reluctant to participate in group activities, negative peer influence and examination malpractices.

The last objective of the study was to establish the qualifications and competencies of the university lecturers. According to 68.6% student respondents, most of the university lecturers especially the part-time ones seemed not to be competent. Such lecturers did not have sufficient time in class, while others were always absent from class. 75% of the part time lecturers who were available were reported to have been going to class late. This forced them to use unprofessional strategies of teaching or the methods that facilitated fast coverage of the syllabus. For example in all the four universities selected for this study, the lecture method was commonly used as a method of instruction. This encouraged learning by rote and memorization. Expository methods of teaching were rarely used in the universities selected for the study according to 93% of the teacher respondents. The HoDs' ability to supervise the curriculum implementation process further lead to the adoption of unprofessional methods of instruction such as dictation of notes and the provision of hand-outs by a good number of the curriculum implementers.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The results of the study indicated that the quality of the implementation of the university curriculum was affected by several variables related to the availability of teaching facilities and resources. Majority of the teacher respondents (87%) reported that both public and private universities lacked the requisite teaching halls, theatres and laboratories. This finding concurred with that of Kilonzo (1981), in his study on the factors that affect the implementation of university curriculum in public universities in Kenya. The results of this study (Kilonzo's), also found out that there was a significant relationship between the availability of teaching resources and effective curriculum delivery. This researcher attributed this result to lack of sufficient financial resources in both public and private universities in Kenya. He also alleged that recent upgrading of former teacher training colleges and technical institutes to university colleges forced the greatest challenge, since the initial infrastructure was not meant for university programmes. However, this finding differed with that of Ndunda (1987) in her study which found out that the quality of the implementation of the university curriculum was not significantly influenced by availability of physical facilities. Similar findings in support to those for Ndunda had also been reported by Andrew (1991) in another study when he pointed out that there was no positive relationship between efficiency in curriculum delivery and adequacy of curriculum support materials. Hence, there are other factors that may influence effectiveness of curriculum delivery apart from the ones reported in these three studies.

However, according to James (2007), one of the factors that significantly influence the curriculum implementation process is availability of curriculum support materials. It is therefore necessary to ensure that curriculum support materials and references are available for use so as to promote effective implementation of the university curriculum (CHE, 2005).

Therefore the lecturers need to ensure that there are adequate curriculum support materials in their universities. Lack of proper training in procurement and resource mobilization may also lead to poor curriculum implementation. In a similar study, Olouch (2009) revealed that one significant factor that influences a lecturer's performance in class is lack of administrative and management skills. The current study confirmed that incompetence among some of the lecturers was a major pitfall in curriculum implementation in the selected universities. These findings were in agreement with those of Mule (1994), who found out that, some lecturers neither attempted to pursue matters on students' class attendance while others were not bothered at all. Such attitudes by lecturers on students' class attendance may encourage students to abscond classes

In the university system, the student related factors play an important role on the implementation of the curriculum. Prior research has found that effective curriculum delivery is influenced by students' ability and personal characteristics. Benard, Fisher and Scott (2005) indicated that students' truancy negatively affects the quality of the curriculum implementation at the university. In addition, the students who do not attend classes regularly have less contact hours in class and this limits their understanding of new concepts in class and consequently affects continuity in the teaching process. This is likely to negatively influence the curriculum implementation process. The findings by Benard, Fisher and Scott (2005) seems to agree with those of the current study that the university students are more pre-occupied with other non-academic activities at the expense of their learning. Since the lecturers also act as role models for their students in terms of class attendance, their absence from class is easily imitated by the students which may directly affect students' attitudes towards class attendance thus leading to poor curriculum implementation.

The presence of the challenges as identified in the preceding paragraphs suggests that the implementation of university curriculum is questionable. This finding concurs with Harrison and Krapf (2004) whose study revealed that lecturer's competence greatly influenced the curriculum implementation process. These researchers also reported that the workload of an individual lecturer could positively or negatively influence the lecturer's efficiency in class and in particular hence the quality of curriculum delivery. The findings of another study by Stanley (1989) contradicted those of Harrison and Krapf (2004) when it reported that there was no significant relationship between workload and the quality of curriculum implementation process. According to their study, there are other variables that may influence the curriculum implementation process such as motivation of lecturers and co-operation among the teaching staff. Therefore there is a need for similar studies to be carried out in other institutions to confirm whether such findings are applicable in the current set up.

The findings of the current study revealed that the lecturers are overburdened by many other responsibilities apart from their chore duty of ensuring effective curriculum implementation. Some of them are also members of several university committees which reduces their time to prepare effectively for their lectures. The attendance to these activities reduces the lecturers' efficiency in curriculum delivery. These findings tally with those of Simiyu (2005) who stated that the university

programs should be structured in such a way that the lecturers have adequate time to carry out their chore mandate of supervising, teaching and carrying out research which translates to effective curriculum implementation.

Kamau (1997) appears to support these findings by pointing out that lack of the requisite pedagogical skills by lecturer also had a negative impact on the curriculum implementation process. Kamau (1997) seems to concur with the findings of the current study, although he did not explicitly identify the type of skills that were deemed necessary for effective curriculum implementation. For effective curriculum implementation, the lecturers require to be well grounded on the pedagogical teaching skills, as they will be knowledgeable with the aspects of quality teaching. However, this was found to be lacking among some of the lecturers, who were found to have no background in the teaching profession. This implies that universities should explore the possibilities of inducting all lecturers on the teaching pedagogy as this would improve the quality of the curriculum implementation process (Brooks & Brown 1990). Jason & Stephen (2009) also noted that many university lecturers also require to be trained on the importance of time management and its impact on curriculum implementation.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that effective curriculum delivery is faced by a myriad of challenges. These challenges range from lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities and resources, lack of proper training in pedagogical skills among lecturers, poor motivation by the employer and multitasking. Such challenge impede on the effectiveness of the lecturers in their supervisory role in curriculum implementation and even their personal competence in class. In order to mitigate against these challenges, several strategies can be put in place. These include capacity building workshop on teaching pedagogical skills, review of the roles of lecturers, motivation and provision of adequate curriculum support materials. In addition, the size of the classes should also be made manageable, in order to increase contact hours between lecturers and their students. Similarly, the lecturers should be encouraged to adopt learner centered strategies of teaching in order to actively engage students in learning activities.

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