STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVEMENT IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND REVISION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION IN SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

University education is witnessing a lot of focus in regard to addressing the needs of the society world over. This is in response to a greater societal value that has been attributed to university education besides the individual private benefits. Today, the curriculum content is to a larger extent being determined by stakeholders both within and without the university establishments. In this regard, the input and feedback from the students, employers, regulators and alumni among other stakeholders is of critical importance in order to develop curricula that meet the needs of the local and international community. Any effort to develop or review a curriculum must progressively evolve into a public debate engaging policy makers, practitioners, subject experts, students and employers. The paper sought to explore the extent of stakeholders' involvement in curriculum development and its influence on the quality of education in selected public universities in Kenya. Methodology: The paper was exploratory in nature and was informed by General Systems Theory by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) and later on adopted by Robert Owens (1981) in educational insitutions. The study was carried out in two public universities in Kenya, which were purposively sampled. The target population constituted 21 deans of schools from the two public universities. It was found out that although the universities had put in place some efforts to involve stakeholders in a variety of activities taking place in the universities, the extent of their engagement in curriculum development and review processes was inadequate as this was only done occasionally. The paper contributes to the empirical evidence on the extent to which stakeholders have been involved in curriculum development and review in the public universities in Kenya. It is hoped that the findings will be important to the university management and regulatory bodies in developing policies to strengthen stakeholder involvement in curriculum development and review process in universities in Kenya.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

University education has become a central pillar of social, economic and political transformation of all nations across the world largely due to its contribution in development of human capital. For a country to make any progress in today's dynamic world, it must heavily invest university education for capacity development of her people in terms instilling them with knowledge, skills and competencies (Materu, 2007). It is further envisioned that university education is an important element for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG'S). Many nations across the world are thus striving to expand this level of education with the sole aim of advancing their economies. Bloom et.al. (2006), observed that university education must be expanded in order to promote faster technological advancement for world and local economies. It has further been attested that the transition to knowledge economy of the 21st century demand workforce with quality knowledge and skills. There is a gap though between the developed and developing countries in terms of universities producing graduates that are relevant to the market. For instance in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are few people trained in high quality levels in relevant fields such technology and medicine among others (Materu, 2007). In the year 2000, UNESCO through a taskforce on higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, observed that for developing countries to prosper and bridge the gap, they must invest in quality higher education that is market driven (UNESCO, 2000). Unfortunately, studies have shown that universities in the Sub-Saharan Africa are producing graduates with knowledge and skills that are not relevant in the market thus leading to high levels of unemployment. In 2013, a report by Results for Development (R4D) found out that most graduates from universities in Kenya were uncompetitive in the job market due to gaps in their training. The report noted that despite getting themselves degrees, most graduates had to look for jobs for up to 18 months before getting a decent job (R4D, 2013). Similarly, Ponje (2013) observed that the unemployment rate in Kenya stood at about 40% and of this population 70% were youths who were unable to get formal employment mainly due to gaps in their training. World Bank (2015), in its report *Kenya's Education Achievement and Challenges* observed that university education in Kenya is not producing graduates with knowledge, skills and competencies crucial for the 21st century and attainment of the Vision 2030. Notably, there is a serious mismatch between skills needed in the world of work and what the universities in Kenya are training their students (British Council, 2016). Another study by the Workforce Connections observed that university graduates are facing unemployment due to lack of both soft and technical skills, and even if they possess technical skills, most of them are irrelevant and out of date (USAID, 2014). This assertion is supported by the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA, 2014), who found out that that 49% of new graduates from universities in Kenya do not possess skills required by the employers. In addition, a report by Tumuti, Wanderi and Thoruwa (2013), *Enhancing Graduate Employability*, found out that Kenya universities are not equipping their students with skills needed in the job market.

Interestingly, most of the reports and studies attributed these challenges to poor linkages between universities and stakeholders in curriculum development and/or revision, lack of labour market information and shortage of suitably qualified staff with modern pedagogical skills that can transform and impart desired skills among learners. For instance, the study by the British Council (2016), asserted that universities have been introducing new courses that do not seem to have been informed by the market needs and thus contributing to graduate unemployment. Tumuti, Wanderi and Thoruwa (2013), further found out that universities in Kenya do not connect with needs of the local environments and context when developing curriculum. They recommended that universities must engage in off-campus activities within their localities to enhance employability mainly through community engagement programmes such as volunteering.

It is therefore important that universities engage various stakeholders such as employers, students, alumni and regulators in curriculum development and/or revision in order to have a quality curriculum that is relevant to the market. Learners must be facilitated with a curriculum that is challenging and intrinsically motivating to respond to the needs of the society (Mwebi, 2015). Various studies have shown that stakeholder involvement in curriculum development and/or revision play a significant role in ensuring that the curriculum implemented is adaptable to the needs of the society. For instance, Koskei (2015) observed that stakeholders play a significant role in the implementation of a new curriculum innovation. In support, Msiska and Chulu (2006), asserted that stakeholders who include students as customers, professional bodies as contributors to curriculum content as well as employers must partner in curriculum development, delivery and revision. According to the education acts in Belgium, Netherlands, Finland and Sweden, there are clear stipulations for collaborating with stakeholders in universities with regard to curriculum development (Thijs and Von den Akker, 2009; Eurydice, 2008). In England Hoogholf and Bron (2008), argues that curriculum development largely relies on advisory committee of educators and a review panel made up of teachers, academics and the industry (employers) each with their own input in order to come up with a curriculum that is holistic. In support of this view, Olibie (2014) agreed that curriculum developers must work together with the society in order to come up with a curriculum that represents the local needs and aspirations. In addition, UNESCO (2009) claimed that employers are key stakeholders in any university and by engaging them in curriculum development and/or revision students are exposed to opportunities for placement, research as well as curriculum that is market driven. This is further supported by Mwebi (2015) who contended that employers are important sources of information on the needs of the labour market as well as challenges the students are likely to face in work place. More so, embedding the skills and experiences from the industry enhances students' employability whilst grounding them with locally required skills and attributes. It is therefore imperative that universities must engage stakeholders in their curriculum reforms in order to validate their curriculum to the needs of the industry.

Concept of University Stakeholders

The concept of a stakeholder was coined by R.E. Freeman, in his management theory that he formulated in 1984 (Fontaine, Harman and Schmid 2006). Freeman's definition of a stakeholder was taken as a tradition definition of a stakeholder which meant any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Fontaine, et.al. 2006). In learning institutions, Amaral, Jones and Kerseth (2002), defined stakeholders to include the teaching staff, students, parents, employers, the state and institutions themselves. With reference to universities and other institutions of higher learning, Amaral et.al, distinguished between two types of stakeholders namely; internal and external. They defined internal stakeholders as all those individuals or groups who participate in the daily life of the institution, including the academic staff, non-academic staff and students. External stakeholders on the other hand are representatives of outside interests who also play the management role just like the internal stakeholders. In this case, external stakeholders represent the industry and employers, the regulators and the alumni among others. These stakeholders have a critical part to play in informing management the quality of products they want from the institution as well as encouraging positive attitudes in the interest of the society of which the institution are part. Universities being part of the society therefore must constantly engage both internal and external stakeholders especially with regard to curriculum development and/or revision in order to remain relevant.

The focus of this paper was to establish the extent at which the selected universities involve stakeholders in curriculum reforms especially with regard to curriculum development and/or revisions. The key stakeholders that the study focused on were: the employers, the regulators (Commission for University Education) and the alumni.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was based on General System Theory that was first introduced by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) and later adopted by Robert Owens (1981) in education institutions. This theory perceives an organization as holistic system made up of several elements (subsystems) that are working together towards the achievement of whole. The proponents of this theory argue that reducing any part of the whole will jeopardize the operations of the organization. In addition, organizations operate within an environment from which they get the inputs that are processed and later transmitted back to the environment in form of outputs. The university as an organization is an open system which constantly interacts with the environment. It receives inputs inform of students, resources and information among others. The students are transformed through a curriculum and other processes that lead to acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are relevant to the society. For this study, the subsystems that make a university consist of the students, employers, regulators and the alumni (stakeholders). For a university to have a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the society, the involvement and input of these stakeholders is paramount as it promotes collective effort of individuals, groups and the society at large. Lack of involvement of these key participants in curriculum development and/or revision, will mean that the curriculum used to transform the students is not based on information from the society which in the end jeopardizes the system. It is imperative therefore, that institutions of higher learning focus and put in place mechanisms to involve stakeholders in curriculum development and/or revision in order to have a curriculum that is based on the needs of the society in which the institution operates.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was exploratory in nature. Exploratory design is appropriate in situations where there is inadequate information regarding a particular phenomenon and the researcher wishes to explore that area in order to form basis for future research. It was the most appropriate design for this study since many cases related to stakeholder involvement in curriculum development in universities have not been documented in Kenya. The target population comprised of 21 deans of schools at two public universities in Kenya. The two public universities (Kenyatta University and Technical University of Kenya) were purposively sampled. Kenyatta University (KU) was selected based on the fact that it has the highest number of students' enrolled as well as being a centre of excellence in educational programmes in Kenya. Technical University of Kenya (TUK) was selected because of its focus in technical courses that are crucial as the country moves towards its vision 2030. At the same time TUK, has the highest number of students enrolled in the Technical Universities category. All the 21 deans participated in the study. Questionnaires (both open and close ended) were used to gather information from the deans of schools. Permission to conduct research was sought and granted by the two universities subject to the information collected being used for academic purposes only.

RESULTS

The results for data collected on the level of involvement of employers, students, regulators and the alumni being key stakeholders in regard to curriculum development and/or revision and the influence this has on the quality of education are presented in this section.

Involvement of employers in curriculum development

Employers are essential stakeholders in curriculum development and revision in any university. The employers provide placement and work opportunities to students as well as acting as a linkage between universities and the industry. Importantly, employers are the main consumers of the products generated by the universities in form of graduates with knowledge, and skills that they utilize in production. The curriculum universities are offering must

therefore be in tandem with the needs of the labour market. In this regard, universities must engage employers in getting information that they need to input in their curriculum in order to come up with programmes that meet the expectations of the industry. The researchers sought to establish the extent to which universities involve employers when developing or reviewing their curriculum and the influence this has on the quality university education (See Table 1 below).

Table 1: Extent of employers' involvement in curriculum development and revision (N=17)

Extent of employers involvement		
Answer option	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Occasionally involved	11	64.7%
Involved all the time	6	35.3%

Source: Deans' questionnaire

Findings showed that 11 (64.7%) deans did not involve employers all the time they were developing or revising their curriculum. They only did this occasionally. It is only 6(35.3%) deans who involved employers every time they were reviewing or developing their curriculum. This finding is worrying especially when many studies have shown the importance of involving employers in curriculum development (Mwebi, 2015; Quality Assurance Agency, 2015). According to these studies, involving employers ensures universities offer curriculum that is relevant based on the information from the industry (employers). Interestingly, the study found out that majority of the deans 11(64.7%) had a comprehensive database of the skills required by the labour market. It is thus worrying when many universities in Kenya continue to oversupply graduates especially in the Arts related programmes when studies (World Bank, 2015; British Council, 2016) have shown that there are growing unemployment rates especially in Art related professions.

Involvement of Commission for University Education (regulator)

The commission for University Education (CUE) is a major stakeholder for universities in Kenya as it is the body in charge of regulation of university education. It is the CUE that establishes the guidelines that all universities operating in Kenya must follow. The Commission ensures that among others any academic programme being offered in the university: Is relevant and contextualized; Contributes to the overall national human resource development and requirements and higher education reforms; Is broad-based, diversified and integrated; and has as much as possible practical-orientation. This body is also mandated to carry out regular audit checks on whether universities are adhering to the stipulations set out. In Kenya, there is no central body charged with the responsibility of developing the university curriculum. It is the responsibility of individual universities to develop their own curriculum depending on their uniqueness, mission and vision (Mwebi, 2015). The guideline by the CUE however, is that universities should develop and peer review their academic programmes at the departmental or school level under the guidance of experienced staff before it is passed to the senate for adoption. Once it is adopted it is a requirement that the curriculum is passed on to the CUE for external review and their input. The researchers sought to establish from the deans, whether universities involve the CUE in curriculum development process (See Table 2).

Table 2: Involvement of Commission for University Education (N=17)

Extent of CUE involvement		
Answer option	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Occasionally involved	11	64.7%
Involved all the time	6	35.3%

Source: Deans' questionnaire

Out of 17 respondents, only 6(35.4%) indicated that they involved the CUE all the time they were developing their curriculum. This finding is worrying especially when CUE requires all academic programme that the universities develop must go through the Commission for external review. The implication of this finding is that universities could be developing academic programmes and delivering them to students without these programmes having been approved by the regulator, thus compromising the quality of the curriculum offered.

Involvement of the Alumni

Involvement of alumni in curriculum development and review processes is a basis for universities to offer curriculum that is relevant to the industry. Trends in higher education have emphasized the need for close collaborations between the alumni and universities in curriculum development and review process (Hendrich, 2016). It is important to recognize that alumni were at one time students thus giving them a deep and strong connection with their former institutions. According to Gaskins (2006), alumni represent a window to the past, enhance progression of the university over time and provide aspiration for the institution to focus on the future. They can contribute by providing the expertise they have gained in the industry to develop new study programmes. Besides, they can contribute in the advisory committees as they provide an opportunity for universities to improve in particular industry by applying knowledge, skills and theories that have been tested in real work environments. In addition, engagement of alumni will enhance knowledge transfer which will in the end improve the reputation of the university both nationally and internationally. The researchers investigated the extent to which alumni are engaged in curriculum development and review processes in the two selected universities and came up with the following findings (See Table 3 below).

Table 3: Involvement of Alumni   in curriculum development and review   (N=17)

Involvement of alumni		
Answer option	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Never involved	5	29.4
Occasionally involved	9	52.9
Involved all the time	3	17.6

Source: Deans Questionnaire

Findings showed that it is only 3(17.6%) deans who involved the alumni every time they were developing or reviewing their curriculum. Majority of the deans 9 (52.9%) involved the alumni occasionally meaning not all the time while 5 (29.4%) deans never involved the alumni at all. This finding is worrying as it shows that universities are not adequately involving the alumni despite studies showing the importance of engaging them in curriculum development and review processes (Hendrich 2016; Gaskins, 2006). To some extent this is bound to ultimately affect the quality of curriculum being offered at the universities. The input of the alumni could be critical in identifying the gaps in the curriculum as they utilize the knowledge and skills they gained in the industry.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the extent to which stakeholders key among them being employers, regulators and the alumni have been engaged in curriculum development and review processes in the universities in Kenya. It is envisioned that adequate engagement of stakeholders in curriculum development and review process will lead to universities offering quality curriculum that is based on the needs and aspirations the industry. The paper found out that these important stakeholders have not been adequately engaged in the study universities. This may mean that to some extent the universities are offering curriculum that is not based on the input of these key stakeholders.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The main aim of this study was to establish the extent to which stakeholders have been engaged in curriculum development and review process in public universities in Kenya. Stakeholder engagement is a critical element for quality curriculum in universities. Various studies and policy documents have outlined the importance of stakeholder involvement in curriculum development and review process in the universities (CUE 2014; Hendrich 2016; Gaskins 2006). The major practical contribution of this paper is that it empirically shows the extent to which three key stakeholders being: employers, regulators and alumni have been engaged in curriculum development and review processes within the study universities. The information is important given that there are very few studies that have focused in this area. In addition, the findings will be very important in supporting the Ministry of Education, the Commision for University Education and the University Management especially at this time that many stakeholders have complained that the graduates being churned out are not having relevant skills for the industry (ICUEA 2014; British Council 2016; World Bank 2015; R4D 2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper has concluded that stakeholders' engagement in curriculum development and review processes is key in enhancing reforms in education programmes being offered at the universities. The input of stakeholders is important in enriching the curriculum and ensuring that the curriculum being offered is based on the needs and aspirations of the job market. Based on the findings of this paper, it is recommended that

i)   Universities should adequately engage and strengthen the relationships between the employers, regulators (CUE) and the alumni in the curriculum development and review processes

ii)   Universities should come up with a clear roadmap in terms of developing policies and procedures that are universally acceptable in all departments on how stakeholders will be engaged in curriculum development and review process to ensure the curriculum that is being offered is based on the input of both internal and external stakeholders.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The paper focused on the extent to which stakeholders are involved in the curriculum development and review processes and the influence it has on the quality of education in two public universities. Further research could be carried out in the following areas:

i.   A comparative study between private and public universities to determine the extent to which stakeholders are engaged in curriculum development and review process.

ii.   A similar study could be carried out focusing in developing a model illustrating how stakeholders could be engaged in curriculum development and review process for quality university education.

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