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Perception of Student Teachers' on Quality of Skills Provided in Public Universities in Kenya

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Abstract
Good quality education facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that have intrinsic value and helps address important human goals.With the increasing numbers of students seeking places in public universities, expansion, diversification and challenges facing these institutions, the question of quality is critical and requires urgent attention. The purpose of this study was to evaluate perception of student teachers' on quality of skills provided in public universities in Kenya.The study relied on descriptive approach to detect and interpret facts. A questionnaire was used for data collection, where 400 sets were distributed to student teachers' in eight public universities and constituent colleges. A five-point Likert scale was applied to the statement responses in a questionnaire. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 17) was used for data analysis.Means and standard deviations were used to indicate the dispersion of sample responses regarding statements T-test and kurtosis were also run. The results indicate that majority of the student teachers were satisfied with quality of guidance in research work (3.4533) provided, the level of communication skills (3.7584) social skills (3.4295) and planning skills (3.4495). Overall, majority of the student teachers rated the level of quality of skills provided at public universities as being average (3.4800). A test of normality indicated that none of the variables fell outside the ± 2.58 range and thus, the data was normal in relation to Skewness and kurtosis. Generally, the quality of skills provided was fair and therefore it requires improvement. The study recommends that in order for public universities in Kenya offer high quality education, careful investment in physical facilities, teaching and research resourcesare vital.

Keywords
Student Teachers, Quality of Skills, Public Universities, students' perception, quality education

Introduction

Quality education is perceived to have a strong impact on a country's development goals. It is generally believed that formal schooling is one of the key contributors to individual skills as well as human capital. Although there are other factors which play a similar role, schools have a special place, not only because education and skill creation are among their prime explicit objectives, but also because they are the factors most directly affected by public policies. It is also well established that the distribution of personal incomes in society is strongly related to theamount of education people have had. In general terms, more schooling means higher lifetime incomes. These outcomes emerge over a long term. It is not people's income while at school thatis affected, nor their income in their first job, but their income over the course of their working life (UNESCO, 2004).

Chacha (2002) argues that universities all over the world are supposed to be characterized by quality and excellence, equity, responsiveness, effective and efficient provision of services, good governance and excellent management of resources. However, last year the World Bank raised concern over the quality of graduates being produced by universities and colleges in Kenya. The bank observed that the country's education system is failing to produce graduate with knowledge and skills crucial for vision 2030 (World Bank, 2015) Despite the fact that there has been an unprecedented increase in student enrolment and the physical expansion of universities in Kenya. In total the country had 34 universities and 19 constituent colleges by the end of 2011. The impact of this sporadic expansion of university education has resulted into the prevalence of poor teaching and learning conditions; inadequate learning facilities; and further dilapidation of an already inadequate infrastructure (Ntaranqwi, 2003).

Due to inadequate government funding, these institutions are facing demand-related challenges especially in terms of access and equity, relevance and quality, science and technology, management and global marketability (Republic of Kenya, 2005b). These challenges have led to poor teaching and learning environment, decline in quality of education and morale of the academic staff. Many lecturers in public universities use old material (yellow notes), which means that the courses they teach are also out of date. This coupled with the flight of the best lecturers from the public universities hasaffected the quality of instruction in the public universities. With lack of reading materials, students prefer the familiar expository method of teaching as they perceive university education to consist primarily of the reproduction of assimilated lecture materials for purposes of passing examinations. (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010).

In crumbling with diminished resources, public universities resorted to a flurry of survival techniques, such as the introduction of Private Sponsored Student Programmes (PSSP) otherwise known as Module II Programme and non-teaching income generating ventures (Chacha, 2004). Moi University, for example established the following income ventures; consultancy, research and development, Business Unit, Production Units and Service Units, while the University of Nairobi incorporated a limited liability company to supplement its income (Chacha, 2004). Nevertheless, issues of quality continue to be a critical area of concern in public Universities in Kenya, resulting in disruption of programmes because of boycotts by students (Otieno and Levy,2007). Most universities were pushed beyond their capacities and, as a result, there are extremely large classes which make it difficult to manage lectures. Similarly, library facilities have been stretched beyond limits while congestion in the halls of residence has been a common feature (Otieno, 2009). It is because of the aforementioned issues that the study intended to evaluate the quality of skills provided to student teachers' in public universities in Kenya.

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Study Methodology

The study relied on a descriptive approach that can be used to detect and interpret facts.The importance of this approach is not limited to data collection but also allows for an appropriate degree of interpretation.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised of fourth year student teachers' who had already completed teaching practice from public universities and constituent colleges. A total of 400 student teachers'selected randomly from Chuka University, University of Nairobi, Egerton University, Laikipia University, Kisii University, Kenyatta University, MeruUniversity, Moi University and University of Eldoret as well as Machakos and Embu Constituent Colleges were engaged in the study.

Study Instrument

The study used questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. A five-point Likert scale was applied to statement responses in a questionnaire. The instrument covered the quality of research, social, communication, planning skills and overall quality aspects.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used for study sample distribution breakdown.Means and standard deviations to indicate concentration levels or dispersion of sample responses regarding statements related to the qualityof skills offered by the universities. T–test for independent samples was used to determine the statistical significance difference in perceptions of quality of skills provided between male and female student teachers.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' Characteristics

The students characteristics that were assessed by the study included; gender, age, name of the university and their academic programmes. The study focused on student teachers from public universities who had successfully completed teaching practice. Among the respondents, 15% and 14.7% were from Embu and Machakos university colleges respectively whereas 16.7%, 19.7%, 10.7%, 4.0%, 9.3% and 8.0% were from Kisii, Chuka, Egerton, Eldoret, Kabianga and Nairobi universities respectively. Their ages ranged from 17 to 30 years and the mean age was 21.94 years.The results also indicate that 55% of the respondents were male while 45% were female. This shows that majority of the student teachers in the public universities in Kenya are male. Regarding their academic programmes, 20% were undertaking Bsc AGED, 23.3% were Bed. Science student teachers, 38.0% were from Bed. Arts programme and 12% were undertaking diploma in education. This implies that among the student teachers in the public universities in Kenya, majority were undertaking Bachelor of Education Arts programme.

Research Skills

Research knowledge and skills imparted to students in the universities was evaluated through a set of statements measured by use of a 5 scale likert where 1 implied strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= somehow agree, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. The mean responses and standard deviations were computed as shown in Table 1. The results indicate that most of the students' teachers (3.4384) felt that the library facilities in the universities fairly supported research activities.However, these facilities are among the worst hit facilities in public universities because of increased enrolment. Despite the importance of these facilities in the learning process, universities do not invest much in the acquisition of books. The facilities holdless capacity of the required books most of which are too old. Apart from inadequatespace, most libraries cannot afford to contribute to current journals and other scholarlypublications.Gudo et al. (2011), argues that providing students with appropriate learning resources increases the quality of learning.

The respondents further indicated that research supervision (guidance) was available when they needed it (3.2123) and the guidance helped them (3.7329) to sharpen their analytical skills. They further stated the lecturers provided them with helpful feedback when undertaking research activities (3.3267). The students' teachers (3.7533) also felt that as a result of engaging in research activities, they had developed the ability to learn independently.

The students further stated that as a result of research ambience in the department they were stimulated to engage in research activities (3.5467) and that universities provided adequate knowledge and skills in research (3.3867). Overall, they confirmed that they were satisfied with quality of guidance in research work (3.4533). The standard deviations were also computed to establish the level of scatteredness of the responses. The deviations ranged from 1.05923 to 1.35937 meaning that the responses were fairly varied from the mean.

Table 1: Research Skills

Statement	mean response	Std deviation
The library facilities supports Research	3.4384	1.35937
Research supervision (guidance) is available when i need it	3.2123	1.30362
Research supervision (guidance) help us to sharpen our analytical skills	3.7329	1.37109
As a result of engaging in research activities, i have developed the ability to learn independently	3.7533	1.32572
The university provides adequate knowledge and skills in research	3.3867	1.14568
The university lecturers provides us with helpful feedback when undertaking research activities	3.3267	1.28751
The research ambience in the department stimulates my work	3.5467	1.05923
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of guidance in research work	3.4533	1.15617

Communication skills

Effective communication skills are essential for student's teachers in order to gain entry to and be successful in their future professions. Learning and developing effective written, oral and interpersonal communication skills develops students' emotional intelligence and empathy through an understanding of their audience; these skills contribute significantly toward positioning graduates as global citizens. It is due to this reason that the study sought to

assess the level of communication skills that the students were exposed to in our public universities. The assessment was done through a set of statements measured using a likert scale of 1 – 5; where 1 implied very low, 2= low, 3=average, 4=high and 5=very high.

The results in Table 2 indicate that majority of the student teachers rated the level at which they were exposed to listening and understanding skills as high (3.7584). The student teachers also confirmed that university education enabled them tospeak clearly and directly (3.8456), write to the need of the learners (3.5772), read independently (3.8591) and also exposed them to writing skills to a great extent (3.6980).The results further shows that the student teachers were exposed to skills of understanding the needs learners (3.8255), sharing information (3.7852) mastery of teaching content (3.6980) and effective classroom teaching (3.7584) at a great extent. This shows that majority of the student teachers confirmed that the level of communication skills that they were exposed to was high.Overall the quality of communication skills was perceived to be good (3.5034). The findings are in line with those of Masitah Misdi, et al. 2010 who found that although the overall communication skills among university students are good, there are still certain aspects thatare not up to the expectations of potential employers.Ilmeideh et al. (2010) reported that creating a positive communication environment that provides opportunities to students to learn how to communicate, and thus, have better communication skills.

Table 2: Level of student teachers' exposure to communication skills

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening and understanding	3.7584	1.20051
Speaking clearly and directly	3.8456	1.05731
Writing to the need of the learners	3.5772	1.07917
Reading independently	3.8591	1.13316
Written communication	3.6980	1.13128
Understanding the needs learners	3.8255	.96375
Sharing information	3.7852	.87429
Mastery of teaching content	3.6980	1.11927
Effective classroom teaching	3.7584	1.14284
Quality of communication skills	3.5034	1.17763

Social skills

Social skills are components of behavior that help an individual understand and adapt across a variety of social settings. According to Kavale, K.A., & Mostert, M.P. (2004)social skills are a set of competencies that allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social relationships, contribute to peer acceptance and to a satisfactory school adjustment, and allow an individual to cope effectively with the larger social environment. The level at which students were exposed to social skills was assessed using a likert scale of 1 – 5; where 1 implied very low, 2= low, 3=average, 4=high and 5=very high. The student teachers stated that the level at which they were exposed to class management, keeping remarks to an appropriate length, building on others comments and ideas, asking for direction or assistance, initiating and responding to humor was average as shown by the mean responses of 3.1745, 3.4295, 3.4161 and 3.3289 respectively (Table 3).

The social skills that the students teachers were exposed to at a high level included; use of appropriate loudness and tone of voice (3.5235), encouraging everyone to participate, making eye contact with student when speaking, checking the learners understanding of the lesson content and asking appropriate questions, supporting others both verbally and nonverbally. The items standard deviation ranged from 0.95334 to 1.30021 indicating a high degree of response scatteredness.

Table 3: Level of student teachers' exposure to social skills

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Class management	3.1745	1.25597
using appropriate loudness and tone of voice	3.5235	1.04999
Encouraging everyone to participate	3.6913	.99254
Looking at the person who is presenting	3.4932	1.05944
Making eye contact with student when speaking	3.6510	1.07128
Checking the student understanding of the lesson content and asking the appropriate questions	3.4899	1.14854
Keeping remarks to an appropriate length	3.4295	.95334
Building on others comments and ideas	3.4430	1.17048
Supporting others both verbally and nonverbally	3.5034	1.18335
Asking for direction or assistance	3.4161	1.30021
Initiating and responding to humor	3.3289	1.08704
Mentoring and coaching activities	3.4564	1.21078

Planning and Organizing Skills

The study further assessed planning and organizing skills were assessed using a likert scale of 1 – 5; where 1 implied very low, 2= low, 3=average, 4=high and 5=very high. The study revealed that majority of the student teachers were satisfied with the level at which they were exposed to planning and organizing skills (Table 4). The results indicate that majority of the student teachers they were able to manage time and set priorities (3.8867), take initiatives and making decisions (4.0000), set time lines, coordinate tasks for self and with others (3.8800) as a result of the skills that they had learnt. Further, they confirmed that they were exposed at a high level to the skills of preparing scheme of work (4.5400), lesson plans and their implementation (3.8067), improvising teaching aids and resources of make teaching more effective (3.8067) as well as planning the use of resources including time management (3.9533).

The student teachers also rated high the level at which they were exposed to the skills of; setting continuous and terminal assessment tests (3.7933), collecting, organizing and analyzing students' performance data (3.8267), assigning students learning tasks (3.9533), and organizing students for groups activities (3.9400). The standard deviation ranged from 0.93648 to 5.98839

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indicating that there was a high variation in the student teachers responses as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Level of student teachers' exposure to planning and organizing skills

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am able to Manage time and set priorities	3.8867	1.25605
Taking initiatives and making decisions	4.0000	1.15857
Setting time lines, coordinating tasks for self and with others	3.8800	1.12280
Preparation of scheme of work, Lesson plans and their implementation	4.5400	5.98839
Improvising teaching aids and resources of make teaching more effective	3.8067	1.10336
Planning the use of resources including time management	3.9533	3.49753
Set continuous and terminal assessment tests	3.7933	.96445
Collecting, organizing and analyzing students' performance data	3.8267	.97448
Assigning students learning tasks	3.9533	.93648
Organizing students for groups activities	3.9400	1.01816

Test for Normality

Kurtosis test was run to establish normality of the distribution. Kurtosis that is normal involves a distribution that is bell-shaped and not too peaked or flat. Positive kurtosis is indicated by a peak. Negative kurtosis is indicated by a flat distribution. According to Hair et al., (2006) if the calculated z value for skewness and kurtosis goes beyond the critical values of ±2.58 at 0.01 significance level or ±1.96 at 0.05 significance level, the distribution of data is considered non-normal The result of the analysis shows that none of the variables falls outside the ± 2.58 range of skewness and kurtosis in this study. Thus, the data for this study is normal in relation to Skewness and kurtosis as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Kurtosis results

	research skills	communication skills	social skills	planning skills
Skewness	-.608	-.813	-.753	-1.052
Kurtosis	-.244	.011	-.290	.449

Perception of Student Teachers' on Quality of Skills

Academic quality is a description of how well the learning opportunities available to students help them achieve their award. It is ensuring that appropriate and effective teaching, research, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided (Billing, 2000). The quality of skills provided at public universities was measured using a likert scale of 1 – 5; where 1 implied very low, 2= low, 3=average, 4=high and 5=very high. According to the results, 44% of the respondents felt that the skills were of high quality, 30% indicated that the quality was average and 16% were of the opinion that the skills were of poor quality. The mean student teachers' response was 3.480 and this shows that the quality of skills provided was perceived to be average.

Further, the results indicate that the major factors affecting the quality of education included; lack of adequate lecturers, inadequate physical facilities such as lecture rooms, computers, laboratories and workshop equipment negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning while others complained that they were not given ample time and guidance. The findings confirms those of Mbithi 2013 that public universities are faced with such challenges as limited research funds and finances for running the universities, inadequate teaching staff which means that there were high learner-lecture ratios, poor remuneration of lecturers and non-teaching staff, which demotivates lecturers and non-teaching staff, inadequate teaching and learning resources which in turn compromises the quality education.However, UKCES (2009a) and CBI (2009) case studies illustrate how some universities are changing the way courses are taught to build employability skills into the curriculum.

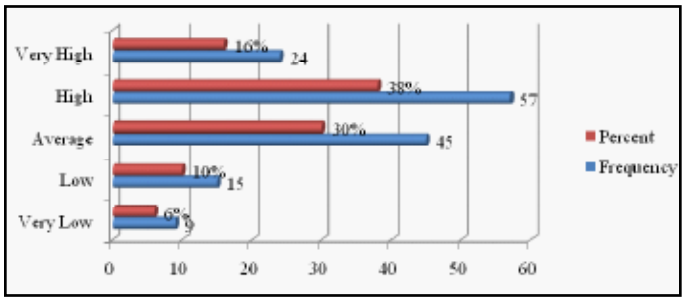

Fig.1: Quality of Skills Provided by Public Universities

Perception of Quality of Skills Provided between Gender

The study also sought to establish if there was statistical significant gender difference in perception of quality of skills provided by public universities. T-test was run to compare the mean responses of student teachers. T-test facilitate the analysis of sample means to determine if statistically significant differences in means exist when comparing groups within a sample (Campbell, 2011). The results in Table 5 indicate that there was no significant differencein perception of quality of skills between male and female students in public universities. This is because p-value (0.429) was greater than the significance level (0.05). The t value is -0.74 at 148 degrees of freedom.

Table 6: Independent Samples Test results

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Quality of skills	Equal variances assumed	14.406	.000	-.794	148	.429	-.13918	.17536	-.48571	.20734
	Equal variances not assumed			-.832	139.649	.407	-.13918	.16724	-.46983	.19146

Conclusion

It is clear from the study findings that generally the quality of skills offered in public universities in Kenya was average and therefore, there is need for improvement. This was as a result of lack of adequate number of qualified lecturers,insufficient physical facilities such as lecture rooms, computers, laboratories and workshop equipment negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning as well as lack of proper guidance. Specifically, the level at which research skills were offered was perceived to be average and this might have been contributed by inadequate research resources and proper guidance. However, quality of communication skills provided at the universities was perceived to be good. The quality of social skills was rated as good and this might be as result of the fact that the skills can be learnt without a lot of guidance. Among the skills provided, planning and organisation skills were rated to be of higher quality compared to the others because of the fact that most of the aspects of planning and organizing were taught and examined directly.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings the following recommendations were made;

- Lecturers should create as many learning activities as possible to stimulate the provide opportunity for students to practice and horn their communication skills.
- Urgent attention should be paid to the establishment and gradual implementation of standards of provision for the full range of inputs to teaching and research.
- The provision of libraries with the necessary books and periodicals should be the highest priority, closely followed by supplying laboratories and workshops with consumables and materials needed for equipment maintenance and repair.
- The revival of long-term efforts to upgrade the academic qualifications of staff is also quite essential through postgraduate training in masters and doctoral programmes.

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