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Research Article

The Effectiveness of Curriculum Review in Improving Quality, Relevance, and Students' Employability in University Education in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between curriculum review and students' employability in the faculty of science at Kyambogo University, Uganda. The population comprised of lecturers in the faculty of science and the sample size consisted of 66 full time lecturers. The specific objective of the study was to assess the relationship between curriculum review and students' employability. Curriculum review was assessed regarding its relevance in developing professional skills, personal skills, and interpersonal skills as important employability skills for students. Quantitative results revealed that there is a positive statistically significant correlation between curriculum review and students' employability (Professional skills $r = 0.766$, $p = 0.001$; Personal skills $r = 0.596$, $p = 0.356$; interpersonal skills, $r = 0.349$, $p = 0.497$). Regression analysis indicated that curriculum review ($\beta = 0.75$, $P = 0.00$) < 0.05) had a strong positive significant effect on students' employability. Qualitative results revealed that curriculum review is one of the strategies of quality assurance at the programme level; participation of key stakeholders in the curriculum review ensures the quality and relevance of the curriculum; and financial facilitation of curriculum review process motivates higher levels of output. It is therefore recommended that: the University financially facilitates curricula reviews so that key stakeholders get involved to improve the quality and relevance of curricula; Kyambogo University should collaborate and develop partnerships with industries to improve educational innovation, University technology, and promote knowledge transfer from university to industry and society, and consequently enhance students' employability.

Keywords: Curriculum Review, Quality, Relevance, Students' Employability

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Introduction

Universities need to recognise students need to be duly equipped with relevant knowledge and skills that ensure their holistic development towards employment in the society. This makes them to be fully aware that there is a life after school which is solely dependent on what every individual can contribute towards the improvement of the economy. This implies that there is need to carefully select the relevant knowledge and skills that are to be inculcated in these students. This knowledge and skills are contained in the curriculum of these institutions. Here, the relevance of the curriculum is emphasised to produce employable graduates that fit into the society. The 21st century is a knowledge economy society which is based on knowledge and skills that are context based. This is because of the rapid advances in the field of education due to the massification of University education and advances in the field of business due to increased use of new information technologies which have changed the nature of business skill supply and demand. As a result of these changes, there is stiff competition between firms, and now employers want graduates who are competent technically but are also well equipped with relevant generic skills (Brennan et al., 2018; Chidinma & Idoghor, 2020). Under these circumstances, questions of how quality can be maintained and students' employability improved are concerns raised by university education stakeholders. Much as mass education is good, Universities must demonstrate that they are producing value and that they have the right processes in place to do so (Brennan et al., 2018). Curriculum review which has precisely this function becomes very important in maintaining quality and improving students' employability. The concept of students' employability evolves along the labour market and higher education as it expands and diversifies. This implies that central to curriculum review is that courses and programmes are adaptive to reflect changing market conditions which include the future employment needs of students. One of the ways in which this can be done is through industry representation in curriculum review (Manwaring et al 2020).

Curriculum is the basis of the teaching and learning process. It involves developing programmes of study, teaching strategies, and assessment of students. According to OECD learning framework (2030), a quality curriculum addresses the needs of individual students and helps every learner to develop as a whole person for personal fulfillment and employability. Unfortunately, it is widely documented in literature (Khan & Law 2015; Butler et al. 2018) that how the curriculum is reviewed is disintegrated and the role of industry in developing high quality and relevant study programmes is given isolated considerations. Essentially, considering what is to be learned, how it is to be learned, and why it is to be learned are consequential questions in the curriculum review, that should be considered in understanding the important components of students' employability in order to develop relevant curricula responsive to contemporary societal needs and labour market. Accordingly, this paper assessed the relationship between curriculum review and students' employability in public Universities in Uganda, using Kyambogo University as the case of the study. Given the above objective, the following null hypothesis was tested; H₀: There is no statistically significant correlation between curriculum review and students' employability. The study further explored how curriculum is reviewed at Kyambogo University and the challenges involved in curriculum review, with the ultimate aim of improving and facilitating better links between the University and industry.

Review of Related Literature

According to Chidinma and Idoghor (2020), employability and good learning are seen as being closely aligned and not oppositional constructs. They continue to note that an individual's employability is dependent on his/her: knowledge (what he/she knows) ; skills (what he/she does with what he/she knows); and attitudes (how he/she approaches things). This implies that the way one uses his/her knowledge and skills and present them to employers, determines his employment outcomes. Employers want graduates with relevant subject skills, knowledge and understanding, but in

addition to this are looking for well-rounded individuals who have a set of personal and general life skills that equip them to adapt well, learn new and specific skills of the job and participate and contribute in a valuable way in their organisation (Chidinma and Idoghor (2020).

Manwaring et al., (2020) recognized that despite its extensive practice, university-industry collaboration on curricula has received little scholarly consideration in the general literature. Chidinma and Idoghor (2020) found out that an effective curriculum helps to determine the employability level of education graduates but that does not seem to be of much existence in most tertiary institutions. UNESCO (2016) noted that good learning is greatly enhanced by the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum. However Nkamwesiga et al., (2021) reported that the Industry- University link in Ugandan Public Universities is loose leading to students obtaining insufficient skills leading to employment failure by the companies or self. Engaging with industry in curriculum review can significantly benefit teaching and students' learning outcomes.

Students' employability is one of the drivers that is placing increased pressure on universities to engage with industry. Predominantly why it is important for universities to engage with industry and key stakeholders in curriculum review is to get their input into curriculum content, as well as the delivery of that content to ensure that the relevant skills and knowledge are taught. These skills may be categorised into specific content and generic knowledge and skills that enhance potential employability of students. Industry engagement in curriculum review potentially provides curriculum reviewers with significant input in defining what constitutes valid knowledge. While some scholars have expressed concern over the capacity of industry to manipulate knowledge through curriculum interventions (Krimsky, 2003; Lehtimäki and Peltonen, 2013; Slaughter and Leslie, 1997), others have raised different concerns with whom universities should be engaging (Manwaring et al 2020). However, a more recent study by Pereira et al., (2020) showed that key stakeholders include students, employers and academics that are

crucial for the development of curricula that provide students with working-life competences and key skills that may increase their employability. Manwaring et al., (2020) suggested that key sectors to potentially and directly engage with are the range of professional bodies and related institutions. They continue to argue that key sectors shed highly useful insights about recruitment factors and employability skills and trends in the labour market which provides clear insights into specific skill sets that graduates might need to adapt and acquire during their university education.

Theoretical Review

Human capital theory developed by Becker (1962) guided the study. The current growing importance of students' employability stems from the disappearance of traditional jobs to a demand from business and employer organisations for graduates to possess both hard skills and generic skills due to economic and technological advancements. Employability is concerned with the development of an individual student's hard skills and generic skills in order to be employable. This implies that a student who is able to sell his/her own personal identity, brand, and profile, is the most employable graduate, hence the human capital theory.

Human capital theory is one of the most considered theories used to address students' employability (Al Hinai, et al., 2020). Human capital refers to the collection of knowledge, skills, attitudes, social and personality attributes embedded in the ability to perform tasks so as to produce economic value (Al Hinai, et al., 2020).

Human capital theory explains that education is a form of individual investment aimed at obtaining explicit returns regarding the individual's career path, with the purpose of ensuring that individuals, by investing in their education, develop their knowledge and skills to increase their competitiveness in the labour market. Human capital theory (Becker, 1962) is based on the assumption that education and training is important because it involves acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competences which are acquired formally through institutionalised and planned specialised curricula for professional training (Marginson, 2019). Thus,

human capital theory adequately explains how curriculum review connects education with the job market.

Methods

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive mixed research design to assess the relationship between curriculum review and students employability. This research used a mixed methods research approach because the study objectives, hypotheses and research questions required the depth (qualitative) and breath (quantitative) of the two methods which strengthened validity of the study. The study used explanatory sequential approach which allowed quantitative type of data to provide a basis for the collection of qualitative type of data (Creswell, 2009).

Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of the academic staff in the Faculty of Science, Kyambogo University. The study population was 80 which was drawn from the departments of Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Food Processing technology, Computer Science, mathematics, Physics, A sample size of 66 full time

academic staff was selected from the population with the aid of cluster and purposive sampling techniques.

Data Collection Methods and Instrument

This study used quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to achieve high levels of reliability of gathered data due to mass surveying (Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Yin, 2014; Mckim, 2017). Quantitative methods included the use of self-administered questionnaires. Qualitative methods included interviews. The research instrument on curriculum review was adopted from Mwebai and Kyuli, (2016). The reason for adapting this tool was because it had been used before and its validity had been tested and proved. Reliability of the instrument on curriculum review was determined using the Cronbach alpha method as provided by statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The results had a reliability index of 0.74. Means and standard deviations were used to analyse data at descriptive level. Research questions were answered thematically while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Participants Background Characteristics; Academic Staff n=66

Lecturers Faculty Science	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	36	54.5
Female	30	45.5
Total	66	100
Employment Status		
Fulltime	66	100
Total	66	100

Table 1 summarises the lecturers totaling 66 (100%). Majority of the lecturers totaling 36 (54.5%) were males and only 30 (45.5) were females. All the participants 66 (100%) were full time academic staff from the faculty of science, Kyambogo University.

Curriculum Review

The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between curriculum review and

students' employability. Curriculum review was examined regarding its relevance in developing professional skills, personal skills, and interpersonal skills as important employability skills for students. In order to get appropriate indicator variables that would be used in measuring the relationship between curriculum review and students' employability, the principal component analysis was run for the variables that were under analysis as presented in Table

2. Subsequently variables: programmes are reviewed periodically $\lambda=0.690$, representatives from industry are involved in curriculum review $\lambda=0.742$, key stakeholder consultations and workshops are organised to revise and develop content $\lambda=0.960$, subject experts are given ample time to attend to the integration of

subject competences with subject content $\lambda=0.611$ qualified to be used in the analysis. Curriculum review was measured using four indicator variables as indicated in the principal component analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Curriculum Review: Item Analysis (n=66)

Indicators	Mean	Std.Dev	95%CI
Programmes are reviewed periodically	3.34	.512	3.21-3.47
Representatives from industry are involved in curriculum review	2.53	.880	2.31-2.74
Key stakeholder consultations and workshops are organised to revise and develop content	2.04	1.058	1.78-2.30
Subject experts are given ample time to attend to the integration of subject competences with subject content	2.93	1.050	2.68-3.19
Overall Average	2.71	0.875	2.49-2.93

On the scale of 1-4 (Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1), Table 2 presents results for indicators that measured curriculum review. Looking at the overall statistics of Table 2, the average mean was 2.71 which falls in the range of 2.50-3.49 in the moderate level. The Std Dev. of 0.875 indicates that majority of the participants reported that curriculum review is moderately reviewed. Focusing on the 95% confidence interval for this measurement which has the overall average of 2.49-2.93, this simply means that if a respondent was randomly chosen from the population of lecturers where this sample came from, and was measured on the same variables, he or she could give an average of 2.71 which is a relative disagreement of how curriculum is reviewed since 2=disagree and 3=agree. This means that over all, we are 95% confident that respondents could give scores with the least not going below 2.49 and the highest not going above 2.93. The interpretation of this finding is that lecturers relatively disagreed with the way how curriculum is reviewed in the Faculty of science at Kyambogo University.

This finding of the study can partly be explained by 74.3% of the lecturers who reported that representatives from industry are not

involved in curriculum review, 81% reported that stakeholder consultations and workshops are not organised to revise and develop content, and 85.4% of the lecturers reported that subject experts are not given ample time to attend to the integration of subject competences with subject content. This implies that the quality and relevance of the programmes developed is weak due to lack of industry input into undergraduate study programmes. Consequently, this may deepen persistent students' employability skills gap thus negatively affecting students' employability opportunities. In running the correlates between curriculum review and students' employability, the correlation coefficient showed that the variable "representatives from industry are involved in curriculum review" turned out to be the most highly correlated with students' employability.

The Involvement of representatives from industry in curriculum review

The findings of this study revealed that industry engagement in curriculum review potentially provides curriculum reviewers with significant input in defining what constitutes valid knowledge towards employability of students. This finding concurs with the research conducted by Ngulube (2020) which revealed

that to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the workplace; there should be continuous interaction between the industry and the university. He further argued that this interconnection keeps the two institutions well-informed about what is needed by the dynamic world. Consequently, irrelevant programmes would be dropped and relevant study programmes would be determined which would further determine the number of students to be admitted to particular study programmes. This would be an indicator that the University understands, considers and integrates the evolving needs of the labour market, economy, and community to improve students' employability.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This section answered the research questions:

1. How is curriculum reviewed at Kyambogo University in order to enhance students' employability?
2. What challenges are experienced during the curriculum review?

The results from qualitative data were summarised in three different themes.

Themes that were developed to discuss qualitative Data

1. Curriculum review is used as one of the strategies of quality assurance at the programme level.
2. Participation of key stakeholders in the curriculum review ensures the quality and relevance of the curriculum
3. Financial Facilitation motivates higher levels of output

Curriculum Review is used as one of the Strategies of Quality Assurance at the Programme Level.

It was found out that for satisfactory work to be done, and for lecturers to review content properly, curriculum review should be given enough time. Further still lecturers emphasised that curriculum review workshops should be organised because they enhance sharing of knowledge and expertise which improves the

quality of the curriculum. This is justified by some of the following key participants' responses:

The review is given two days so no satisfactory work is done. The time given is too short for somebody to real review content properly.

Somebody could be teaching a course for which he is not an expert. So he may not be competent in knowledge to review the unit. But if there is a workshop there is sharing of knowledge and expertise which improves the quality of the curriculum.

If curriculum is to be reviewed after three or five years, the standard practice would be to organise review workshops so that the academic staff members come together, work in groups, and review the curriculum.

These findings are consistent with OECD (2020) which posits that curriculum review is an important and necessary measure that requires enough time, and human resources to produce quality study programmes to thrive in the 21st century society.

The 21st century is a knowledge and information century that requires learners to be problem-solvers and creative thinkers. Similarly, Andrade, (2018); (OECD, 2018), concurred that Universities must review current courses and programme offerings to determine their efficiency and relevancy in terms of cross-cutting skills and subject-based knowledge in response to industry needs. Consequently, the curriculum needs to shift from a focus on content to one that integrates content with process. Gouédard et al., (2020) posit that the new trend in the 21st century has seen countries progressively shifting from content-centered curriculum to competence-centered curriculum, positioning the learner at the center of the curriculum. This implies that innovations to the institution's curricula review are needed to ensure that the University is providing academic programmes that are current and in demand. This will improve the University's reputation.

Participation of key stakeholders ensures the quality and relevance of the Curriculum

In order to determine the quality and relevance of the curriculum, lecturers emphasised the involvement of employers and professional bodies to continuously participate in the review of the curriculum to keep relevant with the changing labour market demands of key skills and specific competences. This is justified by the following key participant's response:

Science is a dynamic discipline which requires the involvement of employers and professional bodies to continuously review the curriculum in order to keep relevant with the changing labour market expectations in terms of key skills and specific competences.

This finding from key participants' responses concurred well with the findings from quantitative data analysis which indicated that the item "representatives from industry are involved in curriculum review" turned out to be the most highly correlated with students' employability. These findings are consistent with several conceptual papers (Andrade, 2018; Hyttinen & Huang 2018; Khan & Law 2015) who established that participation of a wide range of stakeholders, and emphasising the student centered approach in curriculum review ensures the quality and relevance of the curriculum to anticipate the needs of a rapidly-changing labour market.

Adopting a participatory approach is important because it is an interactive and dynamic process by which what to teach is selected and what to exclude concerning the new curriculum to increase quality, and relevance of curricula goals and values. This type of collaborative structures helps to develop a degree of ownership of the curriculum innovation and can further support its implementation. Consistent with the findings of this study, (Pegg, 2013) posits that to improve student outcomes and the student learning experience, it is important that any discussion of curriculum review takes note of the influence of internal and external quality assurance processes on current initiatives. Consequently, embracing curriculum review as a shared responsibility among University education stakeholders

provides a strong foundation for a comprehensive process for the delivery of a quality student.

Financial Facilitation motivates higher levels of output

This study found out that the University was not willing to facilitate curriculum review because the University regards it as part of the lecturers' tasks. The lecturers pointed out that in professional management; financial facilitation stimulates motivation which is a key issue if you want to get the best out of your staff. This is justified by the following key participant's response:

The managers in this institution overlook financial facilitation and we do not know whether it is the norm. Yet in professional management, motivation is a key issue if you want to get the best out of your staff.

These findings concur with previous researches such as Honkimäki et al (2021) and Kohtamäki (2019) which point out that contemporary ways of managing higher education institutions (HEIs) are arousing discontent in the academy thus negatively affecting the academic staff's commitment to curriculum review. Similarly, Ferns, Dawson, and Howitt (2019) argue that policies, procedures and priorities of an institution inhibit innovative teaching approaches and engagement with industry partners. It is worth noting here that the performance of an employee does not only depend on his qualifications and abilities. The gap between willingness and ability has to be filled by financial resources which set human resources into action.

According to Herzberg (1959), Two Factor Theory of Motivation, there are some job factors that are extrinsic to work and result into satisfaction. These factors include pay, organisation policies and administrative priorities among others. These factors are essential for existence of motivation at the workplace. Managers need to know that employees need to feel that their efforts will yield some kind of material reward and these efforts can only be sustained in the presence of such opportunities. According to Khan and Law (2015), conducive,

dynamic and supportive leadership is vital in the process of assuring quality. At the University level, the Vice chancellor, Directors, the deans, department heads, and coordinators constitute the leadership team which is directly responsible for the effectiveness and efficiency of the management of the institution.

Basing on scientific management by Taylor (1856–1917), obtaining increased productivity from individual workers depends on technical structure of the work and provision of monetary incentives as the motivator for higher levels of output. This method improves management–labour relations and contributes to improved organisational effectiveness and success. This implies that managers of Kyambogo University must make sure that curriculum review process is stimulating and rewarding so that staff are motivated to work to improve

quality. It was noted that professional and quality University leadership is a very important and critical factor for the efficient functioning of the whole University quality assurance system. This reminds the leadership team that for quality to be best assured, policy and strategy should be seen as an integral part of the key responsibilities of leadership at all levels of the institution.

Correlation Analysis for curriculum Review and Students Employability

To establish whether there was a relationship between curriculum review and students' employability, under here, the null hypothesis that was tested was: H₀: There is no statistically significant correlation between curriculum review and students' employability. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation of Curriculum Review and Students' Employability

		Curriculum Review	Professional Skills
Curriculum Review	Pearson correlation	1	0.766
	Sig.(2tailed)		0.001
	N	40	26
Professional Skills	Pearson correlation	0.766	1
	Sig.(2tailed)	0.001	
	N	26	40
		Personal Skills	
Curriculum Review	Pearson correlation	1	0.596
	Sig.(2tailed)		0.356
	N	26	40
Personal Skills	Pearson correlation	0.596	1
	Sig.(2tailed)	0.356	
	N	40	26
		Interpersonal Skills	
Curriculum Review	Pearson correlation	1	0.349
	Sig.(2tailed)		0.497
	N	38	28
Interpersonal skills		0.349	1
		0.497	
		38	28

Curriculum Review and Professional skills

Results presented in Table 3 show that the relationship between curriculum review and professional skills was statistically significant (r=0.766, P=0.001). To measure the strength of the relationship between curriculum review and professional skills, coefficient of

determination was calculated (R²) and the analysis revealed that curriculum review contributes 58.7% to the development of professional skills. Hence, curriculum review has a positive statistically significant correlation with professional skills. Based on the p-values, since p-value < 0.05, it is statistically evident

that curriculum review has a positive statistically significant correlation with students' employability.

Curriculum Review and Personal Skills

Results presented in Table 3 show that the relationship between curriculum review and personal skills had a positive but statistically insignificant correlation ($r=0.596$, $P=0.356$). To measure the strength of the relationship between curriculum review and personal skills, coefficient of determination was calculated (R^2) and the analysis revealed that curriculum review contributes 35.5% to the development of personal skills giving a weak correlation. Based on the p-values, since $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ($P=0.365$), it is statistically evident that curriculum review has a positive but statistically insignificant correlation with personal skills. This implies that personal skills have less dependency on curriculum review.

Curriculum Review and Interpersonal Skills

Results presented in Table 3 show that the relationship between curriculum review and interpersonal skills was not statistically significant ($r= -0.349$). To measure the nature and strength of the relationship between curricu-

lum review and interpersonal skills, the coefficient of determination was calculated (R^2) and the analysis revealed that curriculum review contributes 12.2% to the development of interpersonal skills giving a weak correlation. Based on the p-values, since $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ($P=0.497$), it is statistically evident that curriculum review has a positive but statistically insignificant correlation with interpersonal skills.

In Table 3, it's only curriculum review and professional skills that are statistically and significantly correlated with students' employability. This implies that at the moment, subject content is the component of teaching and learning which is pushed and gets a center stage for the development of hard skills (professionalism) and soft skills are overlooked. However, personal skills ($P= 0.356$) and interpersonal skills ($P=0.497$) tested to have a positive but statistically insignificant correlation since their p-values were greater than the hypothesised value of 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis: H_0 : There is no statistically significant correlation between curriculum review and students' employability was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis: There is a statistically significant correlation between curriculum review and students' employability was upheld.

Table 4. Regression of Students' Employability and Curriculum Review: Level of Significance=0.05

Students' Employability	Unstandardised Coefficients	Standardised Coefficient (β)	Significance P
Curriculum Review	20.108	0.75	0.00
$R^2 = 0.1156$			
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.84$			
$F = 4.6$			

The results in Table 4 show that curriculum review explained 84% of the variation in students' employability ($R^2 = 0.84$, $F= 4.6$). This means that 16% of the variation in students' employability was accounted for by factors that were not investigated in this study. The current study empirically proved that curriculum review ($\beta = 0.75$, $P = 0.00$) < 0.05 had a strong positive significant effect on students' employability. This finding is consistent with several other studies that have examined university curriculum and provided evidence that sup-

ports its effect on students' employability (Jansen and Suhre, 2015; Harry et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2019; Aguila et al., 2016; Iyer and Dave, 2015; Pheko and Molefhe, 2016; Misni et al., 2017). This implies that Kyambogo University needs to consult with industries when designing curricula and learning programmes in order to enhance students' employability. Thus, there is a great need for Universities and industries to collaborate in order to ensure demand-driven curricula that are responsive to a country's real needs.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study established that curriculum review in the Faculty of Science at Kyambogo University involves all lecturers. However, lecturers relatively disagreed with the way how curriculum is reviewed. Majority reported that representatives from industry are not involved in curriculum review, stakeholder consultations and workshops are not organised, and subject experts are not given ample time to attend to the integration of subject competences with subject content. They also reported that one of the major challenges in curriculum review was that the activity is not financially facilitated. Due to these anomalies, the study found out that the current curricula in the Faculty of Science, subject content is the component of teaching and learning which is pushed to the center stage and soft skills are overlooked.

It was therefore recommended that the University should facilitate curricula reviews to address the anomalies that were found out so that key stakeholders get involved to improve the quality and relevance of curricula in Faculty of Science at Kyambogo University. Kyambogo University should also collaborate and develop partnerships with industries to improve educational innovation, University technology, and promote knowledge transfer from university to industry and society, and consequently enhance students' employability.

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