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HOW DIFFERENT ARE MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION CURRICULA IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES? A COMPARATIVE SURVEY

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Abstract: *Many universities in Kenya offer Master of Business Administration in Strategic Management. The research on which this paper is based sought to compare the curricula for MBA, Strategic Management (MBA-SM) programmes with the aim of standardizing the programmes in different universities in Kenya. The research design for the study was descriptive, which applied purposive and systematic sampling techniques. Hundred MBA students and fifteen lecturers were recruited in this study from five selected universities in Kenya. The data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. The data were analysed using SPSS Version 23 and presented through tables, graphs, and charts. The study found that MBA-SM programmes in different universities in Kenya are similar with slight differences in the way they are delivered. Some MBA programmes are enriched with Christian based courses. Some universities enrich their MBA programs with experiential learning and mentoring. Others consulted the industry when developing their curricula. The study recommended integration of experiential learning in their MBA-SM, mentoring and consult more with the industry in curriculum development.*

Key Words: *Strategic Management, Master of Business Administration, Curricula, Kenyan universities*

1.1 Introduction

Universities and business schools in general differentiate their products by offering prospective students various curriculum and program options. The purpose of this study was to compare several universities and their MBA programs and thus establish emerging similarities and differences in their curriculum in pursuit of recommending a standardized MBA curriculum. One key element that might be noted in the differences of various universities in their MBA programs is that they customize their programs to suit different needs of students. Some universities customize their MBA programs to suit Christian students while others may target Muslims and others. Some universities may give more weight in practical aspect in their MBAs while others may concentrate on lecturers, case studies and analysis.

Business schools are under increasing pressure to review their MBA programs within the context of market needs. To meet the challenges of 21st century business schools are revising curriculum, delivery and outcome assessment modalities. These dynamics can be traced to a variety of phenomenon which includes student demographics and religious backgrounds.

1.2 Related Literature

According to Goorha and Mohan (2010), a business school education is unique in that the objectives of the learner are mainly market driven. Therefore, if the objective of a business school education is to equip the student with a more effective signalling tool for the job market, then a better curriculum needs to acknowledge the learning preferences of students. This goes together with the teaching strategies and course content that would be conducive to these preferences. There are five desirable properties of the business school curriculum. First, there should be a set of conceptual subjects that provide the student with a methodical academic perspective of how organizations function to complement their experience at place of work.

Goorha and Mohan (2010) argue that these subjects become the conceptual framework that forms the backbone of the business education and provides a job-market signal. A standard business curriculum has some combination of core subjects which include managerial economics, financial management, marketing, accounting, empirical analysis, public policy, operations management, negotiation, ethics, and technology management. Second, the business school curriculum must facilitate application of these theories and concepts in a real world of business. Business students prefer curricula that cater for development of specific applied skills such as negotiation, as well as interaction with industry representatives. This is because the absorption of abstract theories without immediate application has little value for a career professional (Goorha & Mohan, 2010).

According to Goorha and Mohan (2010), the third aspect relates to the impact of globalization of business networks and the response of business schools in providing curricula that suit the global manager. Different business schools have divergent views on the point that global managers require certain soft skills such as cultural sensitivity, the awareness of local customs, and fluency in a second or third foreign language. The fourth observation relates to the increasing need for business schools to keep pace with the changing business environment. This has called for the flexibility in the business school curriculum. Finally, the rapidly changing business environment also fosters innovation in terms of course content as well as the incorporation of technology in teaching methodologies such as simulation games, case studies, internet-based assignments, etc.

Thompson (2008) notes that, the MBA industry is in turmoil and many business schools are revisiting their offerings to see if they still have relevance in the 21st century. Key issues include critics who claim MBA programs put too much emphasis on theory and not enough on leadership skills in a global environment. In an increasingly globalized world, deans and recruiters generally believe that business schools have not gotten globalization right. Many deans and recruiters complain that MBAs don't understand the practice of leadership or have insufficient awareness of their impact on others.

The nature of business is changing rapidly to become more global, more technology-dependent, and less hierarchical. Faculty members at the HBS colloquium agreed that business schools are skilled at “know what”- teaching disciplinary and functional knowledge, but they fall down on “know how”- teaching students how to think beyond information silos and to be more self-aware as leaders (Thompson, 2008). HBS acknowledged that they could do more in the areas of globalization, experiential learning, and leadership development. Deans and recruiters told researchers at HBS that MBAs in general need more soft skills such as self-awareness and the capacity for introspection and empathy. They also found MBAs lacking in critical and creative thinking as well as communication skills. These skills lie much more on the ‘doing’ side of the scale than the ‘knowing’ side. The scholars also suggested flexibility in staffing the faculty to accommodate all disciplines and skills.

Kagame (2011) asserts that universities in Africa have to adapt and meet our ever-changing demands if we are to seize the opportunities of this new century. This generation has the potential to use new technologies and this can shape the social and economic development of Africa. To achieve these social and economic developments, Africa needs skills in science and technology, in finance and business, in health and education, and so forth. African countries need to invest more in quality higher education so as to attain the shared goal in Africa. This means going beyond giving students a firm foundation of knowledge in their subjects by giving today's graduates the practical skills to find innovative and practical solutions to the needs of their communities. This is not always the case in African universities, which is a sad situation. Africa needs universities that can train students in practical as well as leadership skills that the future leaders of Africa should have in order to drive development effectively.

The answer to this problem could be acquired through scrutinizing what and how universities teach their students especially the MBA ones. Some managers cannot make sound and contingent decisions and this questions the skills and capability of today's MBA graduates. Greiner et al. (2003) point out that, these purported MBA program's inadequacies have raised concerns as to whether business schools are producing graduates that have the attributes and skills desired by organizations that hire graduates. The so called executive skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, decision making, and planning/organizing. Therefore, this study sought to provide an answer to these existing problems.

According to Windsor and Tuggle (1982), the MBA curriculum is explicitly and deliberately a blend of the analytical, case and simulation approach. “Discussion of MBA courses in the business press tends to be critical of them for emphasizing on theoretical and analytical content at the expense of people management skills” (Murray and Morley 1995, p.176).

According to Brewer and Brewer (2010), higher learning institutions are challenged with the task

of keeping pace with the changes in the global business environment as well as the increased demands of stakeholders for accountability. “The generation and availability of new and existing knowledge presents a tremendous challenge and opportunity to organizations attempting to compete in a global arena” (Brewer & Brewer, 2010, p.330). They note that examining the relationships between knowledge management, human resource management activities and university business program goals may lead to a better understanding of ways to prepare graduates to assume roles in the business environments as well as give university programs a good way to measure assurance of learning.

The reality is that individuals live in an information society, work in knowledge-based workplaces, and value knowledge workers, and therefore academic communities should be viewed as knowledge-based organizations involved in the process of developing knowledge workers. Brewer and Brewer (2010) regrettably note, however, that educational institutions are among the last to implement knowledge management principles and programs and suggested that academic cultures need to shift from knowledge hoarding to knowledge sharing. They suggest that organizations could classify knowledge into explicit and tacit as shown in table 1 below. Explicit knowledge is shared through written documents such as manuals and memos while tacit knowledge is shared through socializing.

Table 1: Explicit and tacit knowledge

Variable	Explicit knowledge	Tacit Knowledge
Features	Codified Stored Transferable Easily expressed and shared	Personal Context-specific Difficult to formulate Difficult to capture, communicate, share
Sources	Manuals Policies, procedures, databases, reports	Informal business processes & communications Personal experiences Historical understanding

Source: *Brewer and Brewer (2010)*

According to Brewer and Brewer (2010), knowledge is an intangible asset impeded in individual workers in organizations that leads to decision making and action plans. Tacit knowledge can become explicit organizational knowledge with deliberate efforts on the part of management to encourage personal and professional growth of knowledge workers, to encourage sharing of knowledge and skills throughout the organization, and by developing a knowledge sharing culture and environment in the organization. Brewer and Brewer (2010) comment on Bloom’s revised taxonomy on educational objectives and suggest that business schools and universities could use such tools to train their students. It would seem logical that university learning and knowledge

goals should somehow correspond with knowledge management goals of organizations that hire their graduates (Brewer & Brewer, 2010).

Table 2: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Knowledge Dimension	Cognitive process dimension					
	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Factual Knowledge						
Conceptual Knowledge						
Procedural Knowledge						
Metacognitive Knowledge						

Source: *Brewer and Brewer (2010)*

According to Brewer and Brewer (2010), it would be helpful for faculty and staff to become very familiar with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy before adopting it for use. They give a more detailed breakdown of the knowledge dimensions.

- a) Factual knowledge: basic elements students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it. That is, knowledge of terminology and knowledge of specific details and elements.
- b) Conceptual knowledge: the interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together. This includes knowledge of classifications and categories, principles and generalizations, knowledge of theories, models and structures.
- c) Procedural knowledge: how to do something, methods of enquiry, and criteria of using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods. Knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms. Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures.
- d) Metacognitive knowledge: strategic knowledge- knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate conceptual and conditional knowledge, self-knowledge.

Audebrand (2010) argues that metaphors in strategic management education are a common phenomenon that hardly could be done away with. Some scholars see metaphors and analogical thinking important while others see their use restricted and eliminated. Some metaphors like the war metaphor and the BCG matrix could have some adverse effects in the way students think and even behave as future managers. Metaphors have a great influence on our behaviour i.e. the way we act, socialize, and think about the world. The BCG matrix uses animals (i.e. cows, dogs) to advise organizations on how to distribute cash to their business units. The warfare or military metaphor has been the main source of models and analogies in strategic management education.

However, according to Audebrand (2010), this war metaphor has some pitfalls such as: It creates a bias towards adversarial business relationships. In a world characterised by competition and antagonistic relationships, mutual and reciprocal relationships are marginalised and discouraged. War metaphor also brings the idea that there are no rules in the conduct of warfare. Again, it comes with the perception that there is disconnection between morality in business and morality in society at large. Another pitfall of war metaphor is that it equates the business environment to a state of war. It also uses a language that can depersonalize actions in business.

Audebrand (2010) adds that we can develop alternative root metaphors that will create new concepts and views to business activities. If we change the name of an object, we change our relationship to the object and how we will behave in relation to it. Audebrand (2010) suggests that, in business schools, true transformation can only be realised if educators accept the problems with the root metaphors and work to replace them with new metaphors to realize sustainable development. In the last few decades, scholars have developed new and challenging metaphors to describe what is happening inside, outside and between organizations. The theatre metaphor has provided a language of theatre i.e actors, scenes, scripts etc that framed and communicated identity and role attachment in organization and also understanding the strategising process. There are also several musical and dance metaphors used to describe business activities. A food metaphor could also be used to describe corporate strategy. Cooking involves mixing things together, using heat to transform things, and giving them time to cook. Other scholars compare strategic management with safari (journey) and organizations to different animals (Audebrand,2010).

Weistein and Barrett (2007) note that case method is an integral part of MBA program. Many MBA students are not well exposed to case analysis. In addition to teaching the students in the traditional manner, lecturers should focus on the analytical skills. Students are put into teams of two to four and prepare case studies. The case studies depict actual situations faced by managers in dynamic industries. They act as consultants and provide business expertise, objectivity and creativity.

Stark, Briggs, and Rowlands (2002) argue that curriculum improvement effort was coupled with a parallel administrative movement commonly known as “continuous quality” initiative. This initiative urged regular examination of aspects of college operations. They continue to say that the calls for curriculum reform suggest regular appraisal of academic programs in the effort of developing greater capacity for continuous improvement in colleges. Reeves and Jauch (1978) note that, curriculum developers should seek of business managers about what is useful and is practical in a business curriculum and what kinds of knowledge are lacking in today’s business graduates.

Amutabi (2011) notes that there is a difference in the way public and private universities operate in Kenya. Public universities have been enjoying undue advantage in accessing government funds and therefore they have lost edge of innovation since they have no pressure exerted on them. On the other hand, private universities are market driven and therefore create new and innovative programmes for the market. Public universities are overloaded with students, a phenomenon characterised by limited facilities and resources.

Some programmes and courses at some public universities have not been revised in decades. Public universities tend to suffer from shortage of staff and there are cases where master’s degree holders teach masters students, a situation which is unacceptable. Allowing both public and private universities to tap into the same pool of students might change things for better. This will allow public universities to seek to be service oriented and attractive to students (Amutabi, 2011).

1.3 Method

The research design for this thesis was descriptive. The target population was MBA, Strategic Management students and their lecturers in Kenya, and the corporate world in Kenya. The

preferred sampling method for this study was a combination of purposive and systematic sampling at different levels. Purposive sampling method was used to select five universities out of the thirty two universities in Kenya. The study covered five universities that include University of Nairobi (UoN), Kenyatta University (KU), Daystar University (DU), Strathmore University (SU) and Africa Nazarene University. Systematic sampling method was used to select MBA, Strategic Management students and their lecturers in the five universities mentioned earlier. The five corporate companies were selected by purposive sampling method. They include EABL, KAA, KCAA, Cooperative bank, and Compassion International.

The data was collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 and the data presentation was done by use of tables, charts and graphs. The study covered twenty students doing their MBA, strategic management in each of the five selected universities. This makes a total of hundred students. The study also targeted three lecturers teaching MBA in each of the five selected universities. This makes a total of fifteen lecturers. The researcher also interviewed all the five heads of commerce departments in the five selected universities. The researcher targeted three managers and five members of staff in each of the five selected companies. This makes a total of forty members of staff. In total, the sample size was made up of one hundred and sixty respondents. The researcher used both questionnaires and interviews to collect data. Out of the hundred students contacted in this study, only seventy five students (75%) responded. Out of the fifteen lecturers contacted, only ten lecturers (66.7%) responded. Out of the forty employees contacted in this study, only thirty employees (75%) responded.

1.4 Results

In order to understand further the program contents in the five universities, this study had a specific objective that compared the University's curriculum. Most of MBA programs offered wide scope of areas of specialization. They include: Marketing, Insurance, International Business Management, Management, Human Resource Management, Strategic management. This implied the students had a very wide scope of choosing their elective courses to beef up their Strategic Management courses. To some extent this produced a more competent MBA, Strategic Management graduate. It was to the opinion of this study, such options were very necessary since the study realized that the students called for additional courses in their MBA course. In public universities different approaches to their course patterns were evident. However, the programs were offered in two modes, full-time and part-time with students in both modes being required to take a total of twenty (20) units by the end of the program.

In the private universities, the courses had a bias to the particular university's core values. In some private universities, the MBA, Strategic Management Program is structured to train their students as servant leaders in their places of work. This is in line with Christian values and ethics upheld by the University of helping in building a just society within and without their organizations. In some private universities, the MBA is designed to broaden the student's knowledge and expertise through the application of new tools and ideas directly related to the workspace.

Most MBA programmes are based on coursework, examination and a business research project. The curriculum is composed of 18 course units in average including 8 methodological and analytical course units, 6 leadership course units and a further 4 elective units. In addition, all

participants must undertake a business research project equivalent to three (3) course units. In some other private universities, the MBA Strategic Management program aims at providing a holistic learning incorporating academic, spiritual, cultural and physical skills of ensuring managers who are competent with Christian values for the job market.

The students were for the opinion that there was much to be done to sharpen the curriculum. Thirty-six students (47.9%) of the respondents (Table 3) thought the curriculum needed to be reviewed, and suggested a number of topics of areas to be included to enhance the effectiveness of MBA as a program. Over and above what the current curriculum offers, they suggested the curriculum should be broadened. Such an effort would see the curriculum have more courses that concentrate more on entrepreneurship, project management, counseling, conflict management, public relations, international communication, leadership management, planning, resource mobilization, risk & insurance, and auditing. By so doing, these courses would make the program sufficiently equip its graduates, and the public and labor at large, with qualified personnel in line with Kenya Vision 2030 ; provide an in-depth, more practical approaches in the delivery of the course, and allow for an updated, dynamic curriculum in line with the prevailing market needs.

Additionally, as some student verbally informed the researcher they thought the course duration could be reduced and offered in flexible methods or approaches since the students experienced different need requirements and backgrounds. Thirty-three students (43.8%) thought there were no gaps to be filled in the program. See table 3

Table 3: Whether there are gaps in their MBA curriculum that need to be addressed

Category	Percent
Yes	47.9
No	43.8
N/a	8.3
Total	100.0

Source: *Field data, 2019*

Apart from the students, keeping in mind majority were already employed or anticipating being absorbed in the job market, managers in the corporate world were included in this study. The study targeted managers and staff in five reputable organizations and companies in Kenya. Out of the forty employees contacted in this study, only thirty employees (75%) responded. The staff interviewed held different organizational positions (Fig. 1). The majority were staff members representing ten employees (33.3%) of the total respondents and senior managers were six employees (20%) of the respondents. Irrespective of the positions held, thirteen employees (43.3%) of the respondents had only been in the specific organizations for less than five years. The rest equally represented had between five and twenty years with only four employees (13.3%) each, and only two employees (6.7%) who didn't indicate the number of years worked in the organization (Fig. 2).



Figure 1: Positions held by employees in their organizations (N=30)

Source: Field data, 2019

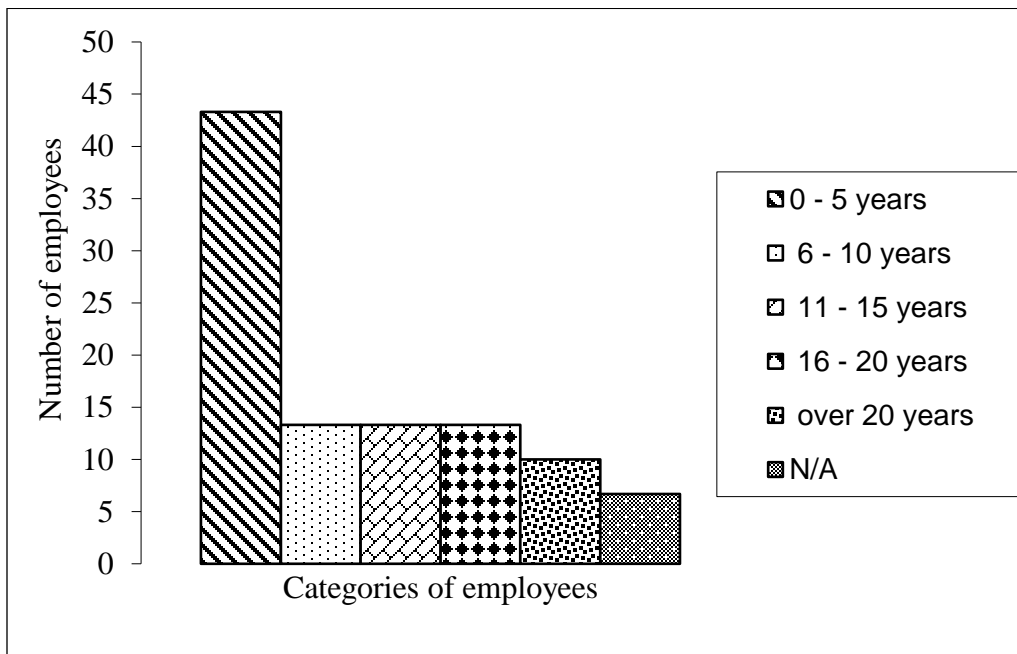


Figure 2: Period of service as a manager

Source: Field data, 2019

The managers however favoured private universities to public universities. When asked why they preferred private universities or some university MBA –Strategic Management graduates, the

respondents had a number of reasons. These universities had: fully developed business school, incorporated case studies in learning, had Market focused course program thus their MBA, Strategic Management graduates were not mere paper braded, serious lecturers with an in-depth training and, they equipped their students thoroughly.

However, the impact so realised can be enhanced if the program would be more practical to increase the competence levels of the students. This would mean increased skills and knowledge. As a means towards this end, the program review is mandatory most often. Such approach would equip the students with current and practical skills efficient and effectively applicable in the corporate world. As noted earlier, majority of the MBA, Strategic Management students were employed. As to achieve this objective, it is necessary to have a participatory approach in the review of the program by involving all the stakeholders with much emphasis on the corporate world. The students should not be left out either. Such realised, MBA, Strategic Management would not only be relevant but very instrumental in shaping a workforce that is efficient and innovative for the dynamic corporate world they are made to operate from upon their graduation.

The lecturers shared similar opinions as the managers and the students' views on gaps that they thought should be addressed in the MBA, Strategic Management program as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Gaps that need to be filled in MBA (strategic Management) program

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Attachment	1	10
International Relations	1	10
More practical approaches, treating each company employee differently	4	40
Strategic leadership; International business leadership	1	10
Teaching methodologies that incorporate industrial experience	3	30
Total	10	100.0

Source: *Field data, 2019*

Even though the study did not undertake an in-depth enquiry on the state of the universities, a number of factors would be implied as to the state of the MBA, Strategic Management program in Kenya. First of all, was the level of investment by the universities into the program. To the lecturers, only two lecturers (20%) of the respondents thought their universities had to great extent (very good) invested well into improving the program (table 5). Three lecturers (30%) of the respondents thought their universities invested averagely. Five lecturers (50%) said the universities were good in investing to improve the program. It can be implied there is more room for improvement.

Table 5: Lecturers' rating their university in relation to investment (money, human resources, time) towards improving MBA (Strategic Mgt)

Categories	Frequency	Percent
Average	3	30
Good	5	50
Very good	2	20
Total	10	100.0

Source: *Field data, 2019*

1.5 Discussions

As the study intend to compare the curricula, it was evident the courses though not able to get the specific details on course outline, all aimed at equipping the students with skills that would enable the students to act, reflect, re-frame, and apply such skills in their workplaces. Such courses were tailored around entrepreneurship and project management, counseling, conflict management, public relations, international communication, leadership management training, planning, resource mobilization, risk and insurance, and auditing.

According to the respondents, these courses will enable the program to sufficiently equip its graduates, the public, and labor at large, with qualified personnel inline with Kenyan Vision 2030 aspirations; provide an in-depth, more practical approaches in the delivery of the course; and allow for an updated, dynamic curriculum inline with the prevailing market needs.

The corporate world, lecturers and students raised the following concerns:

- a. Some MBA programs have been commercialized and are overenrolled. The graduates have the paper qualification but are unable to exhibit the requisite skills and competencies required at the workplace. However, in this study, the average class size for the selected universities was 25 especially in private universities. This class size is adequate for teaching and learning, since each student can get personalized attention.
- b. The findings of this study revealed that a majority of managers in the corporate world were satisfied with the quality of graduates produced in the MBA programs.
- c. From the research, case studies were used for teaching but there was insufficient case studies from local organizations. This is due to lack of documentation of the cases.
- d. Innovative ways to lead teams and understand the dynamic world were lacking in the graduates thus its believed the course was more a theoretical over practically administered in the universities.
- e. All MBA students are treated the same regardless of the nature of their organization or employer. Most universities had a standard curriculum and teaching focussed on completing the syllabus. There is need to alter approaches to suit diverse needs and tap into the experiences that students bring from the workplace.

For the public universities, the bureaucratic procedures of implementing and making decisions, heavily impacted on the curriculum development and its review. The Commission for Higher Education approves all the curricula offered by private universities while it remains not responsible for regulating quality education at public universities. Due to watered standards of education at public universities, their ought to be an external regulating body to check the quality of education at public universities.

Apart from the contents of the curriculum, the mode of delivery was found to affect the level and efficiency of learning. As realised from literature, learning needs be more simulating, with experiential learning, results- oriented, for effective adaptability and openness. This would imply easier and faster integration of the students into the dynamic natural systems and complex social processes with control-oriented management systems.

The study found out that the approaches used to teach were varied but mainly with a mixed approach in the course delivery. Such approaches included lectures, discussions and case studies. To the students, these approaches were well with them. The level of interaction between students and their teachers was found to be mutual. Even though the classes did not have many students, according to the lecturers, the students were mainly working and therefore learning in the evening and the lecturers having a loaded work, it was found that the interaction was critical to mould the students for better adaptability in the corporate world.

1.6 Recommendations

Lastly, were the recommendations to make MBA strategic management more relevant and effective in its mandate. The major recommendation was the approach used in its delivery, its formulation, and its structure. On the approach, it was found out that there was need for more discussions over normal lectures, mentorship by experienced persons in the field, more practical based teaching, with much more discussion, teach relevant practical subjects as case studies. On matters of curriculum, the respondents were for the opinion that such should be updated to be inline with the current market demands so are the approaches.

In response to the findings, the researcher gives such recommendations as:

- a) Universities offering the program should always consult with the industry when reviewing or developing their MBA programs and come into terms with the expectations of the employer. This would enable universities to train and prepare the graduates for the industry in the right way.
- b) MBA Strategic Management programs should become more practical and embrace simulation style of teaching. This approach opens the minds of the students and prepares them to face the job challenges ahead of them.
- c) Address the various needs of students depending on the nature of the job and challenges they face at their places of work. Different companies have different challenges and therefore this means a manager, an accountant, a teacher, a doctor, a consultant and so forth work in different environments.
- d) Review the MBA, Strategic Management curriculum every five years to suit the job market expectations. Such would mean more courses that concentrate more on entrepreneurship and project management; counseling; conflict management; public relations; international communication; resource mobilization; risk and insurance.
- e) Have expertise from different fields during class sessions and bring the students into the real situations that take place at the work place (mentorship).
- f) Use local market scenarios such as case studies in addition to international case studies when training MBA students. This will give MBA students a diverse way of exposure in organizational leadership.

1.7 Conclusions

Universities in Kenya offer similar MBA programs with slight differences in the coding and naming of their courses, and also depending on each university's core values. As the study intended to compare the curricula, it was evident the courses aimed at equipping the students with skills that would enable the students to act, reflect, reframe, and apply such skills in their workplaces.

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