

Assessment of Social Challenges on University Students' Academic Achievements

Murage Lucy Muthoni

Karatina University, P.O. Box 1957-10101, Karatina, Kenya
ORCID 0000-0003-4912-5018

ABSTRACT: Students in public universities in Kenya usually experience a myriad of challenges that could affect their study, relationship and living. In every academic semester, some students have deferred or discontinued their studies while others have lost their lives due to unbearable social problems. Some of these problems could be isolated and mechanisms of managing them be devised to alleviate the students' concerns. The purpose of study was to assess social challenges' management strategies used by university students to enhance academic achievements. The study objectives were to: determine the effects of social challenges on students' academic performance; examine the approaches put in place to mitigate the effects of social challenges, and evaluate students' management skills of social challenges in public universities in Kenya. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. A total of seven public universities were purposively selected. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample size of 384 students from both art and science-based degree programmes in the seven public universities. A questionnaire that was open-ended for qualitative data and closed-ended for quantitative data was used. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Qualitative data was presented using narration while means, percentages and frequency tables were used for quantitative data. The results revealed that most of students (55.7 %) in public universities lack adequate skills to manage social problems which in the long run, negatively affect their university academic journey. Social support programmes are recommended to cushion students from adverse impacts of social dynamics.

KeyWords: *Academic Achievements, Public Universities, Students, Social Challenges*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as an essential key to unlocking underdevelopment in nations. Countries have identified education as a major instrument for bringing about socio-political, economic, scientific and technological advancement. University education system determines the prosperity and international competitiveness of a nation. Kenyan relies on university education to generate a maintainable quantity of extremely qualified man power that supports the national determinations of becoming a knowledge-based economy (Republic of Kenya, 2012). To match the above ambition, universities have been reformed in the nature and scope of their mission, governance, the knowledges they produce, the value of these knowledges and their relations with the wider society (Barnett, 2009). The renovations are part of global paradigm shift facing all societies and educational institutions at large (Santos, 2010). A number of scholars have agreed that learning is the main prerequisite of human development that enhances the essential life skills in an individual (Hafeez, Kazmi, Tahira, Hussain, Ahmad, Yasmeen et al., 2020). Students having completed certain levels of education successfully move to universities with the aim of benefiting from their missions.

Universities play a momentous role in developing the student's personality and shaping a reasonable future career (Peretomode & Ugbokeh, 2013). Nevertheless, universities have complex social systems that bring about various

issues that a student must work hard to overcome over time. Adjusting to this extensive transition from a familiar simple environment of high-school to a whole new multifaceted university life is quite a challenge itself (Hopper, 2016). University life is totally different compared to high school. It is undisputable that the university curriculum is heavier. Time and again, students have trouble balancing between their studies and social life. Strategies that worked well for them when they were in high school may, however, fall short in meeting the obligations of university life. Lectures, assignments, jobs and social activities compete for the limited hours in a semester. The sooner the university students learn to adjust their time management skills, the better their chances of academic success.

Academic achievements are the degree to which students have achieved the intended educational goals. The achievements are mainly evaluated through examinations and procedures that differ from one institution to another (Annie, Howard & Mildred, 1996). Hoyle (1986) and Woolfolk (2007) contend that universities are established with the aim of imparting knowledge and skills to those who go through them and behind all this is the idea of enhancing good academic performance. Academic achievements are used in career progression and job placement. In most cases, the higher the achievement the better possibilities of job appointment and upward social mobility (Kyoshaba, 2009). However, some students may be too busy involving themselves in social activities and later on realise that they are neglecting their studies leading to low academic achievements.

Studies conducted by Ellis (2016), confirm that university students face innumerable obstacles on their academic paths. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, only 59% of first-time, full-time undergraduate students graduate while 41% do not graduate. Instructors were requested to rate the challenges faced by students. The majority, 90%, of instructors believe the biggest challenge to student success is time and balancing priorities. Following that response is lack of knowledge, being unprepared and social distractions — all at 66%. Less selected obstacles were, not knowing where to get help (17%) and the material being too hard at 6% (Ellis, 2016). According to Koo, Wong, Tran, YuChen, and Yvonne (2011), a number of Asian Americans students commit suicide because of social issues such as family problems, relationships, cultural differences and racism. Sawyer (2002) asserts that challenges experienced in African universities include a mismatch between the students' intake and the available infrastructures. There is no proportionate growth in manpower and provision of resources to cater for high student enrolments. Moreover, the problematic sexual harassment issue has not been fully resolved. Such problems make the already bad situation worse and add to miseries of student life which in long run negatively affect their academic achievements.

Kenyan public universities have steadily grown from seven in 2008 to 38 in 2022, with an unprecedented expansion in student enrolment (Commission of University Education, 2022). Student enrolment has unceasingly surpassed growth in fundamental input. The inputs such as infrastructure, funds, lecturers and other facilities in university system are processed or converted by way of lectures, readings, seminars, counselling, interaction with colleagues and other social activities. The product is anticipated to be a holistic graduate (Peretomode & ugbomeh, 2013). Nevertheless, a number of social problems may exist within or outside the university that could make it difficult for the intended outcomes to be achieved.

Problems or challenges are those things that make it difficult for effective training and learning. In higher institutions of learning, problems also militate against the achievement of excellence in research, innovations and community outreach. Problems of accommodation, drug and substance abuse, technological addiction, emotional conflicts and harassment by peer or lecturers may negatively affect students' academic achievements. Accommodation problem becomes the first encounter for students leaving their home and moving to universities. Moreover, due to the increase in enrolments, hostels have fallen short of meeting needs, making the problem of accommodation more serious for university students (Kaya et al., 2005). Roommates habitually have diverse lifestyles and values. Some may have unlikeable and intolerable behaviour that makes the life of others difficult. Peers do play an influential role in pressuring others to party and do drugs, especially roommates. As far as emotional

conflicts are concerned, stress and depression represent the majority of them (Miller, 2010). This depression will eventually lead to a decrease in overall performance.

Social communication continues to thrive in the current university's environment where toxic contamination, through the internet is spreading fast (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). There is a nexus between social networking and academic achievements. Today, social media can be a useful resource for educational information. However, majority of students network for fun or to make new friends. With numerous social networking applications on internet, there is a tendency for students to be tempted to desert their class work and assignments in favour of online useless chats with friends (Oye, 2012). Many students are now addicted to the online rave of the moment, with Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc, which is likely to lower the academic achievements. The above challenges generate enormous pressure on the students in addition to the existing academic problems and inadequate facilities.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Social challenges are some of the issues that have not been adequately addressed when examining challenges facing university students in Kenya. Social challenges may eventually make some students to perform poorly in academic work, defer their studies or drop out. Most students are not prepared for social challenges in universities and end up being overwhelmed, which results in them taking extra time to adjust to their new life. However, a far better course of action would be to prepare students mentally and emotionally for any challenge they may face at university level. This may require students to identify the challenges so as to either eliminate or at least minimize to enable them achieve optimal in their academic endeavours. This necessitated the researcher undertake the study to assess students' mitigation measures against social challenges.

1.2 Purpose of The Study

Purpose of this study was to assess social challenges' management strategies used by university students to enhance academic achievements.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study objectives were to:

- i. Determine the effects of social challenges on students' academic performance.
- ii. Examine the approaches put in place to mitigate the effects of social challenges.
- iii. Evaluate students' management skills for social challenges in public universities in Kenya.

1.4 Research Questions

The study objectives were to:

- i. What are the effects of social challenges on students' academic performance?
- ii. What approaches have been put in place to mitigate the effects of social challenges?
- iii. What management skills do students use for social challenges in public universities in Kenya?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive research, employing the survey method. Questionnaires were used as instruments for data collection (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Questionnaires were structured and semi structured to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.78. Stratified random sampling method was used to get the sample of 384 undergraduate students. The study used Krejcie and Morgan Table for determining sample size where a large population of over 100,000 use a sample size of 384. Data was analysed descriptively and presented using narration and frequency tables.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 First Objective.

The first objective of the study was to determine the effects of social problems on academic achievement. Students were asked to select the most distracting social challenge on their academic achieve. The results are shown on the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Most distracting social challenge on academic achievement

Nature of social challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Addiction to social medial	128	33.3
Relationship and emotional conflicts	101	26.3
Drug and substance abuse	80	20.8
Accommodation problems	52	13.6
Harassment from lecturers	23	6.0
Total	384	100

The results on Table 1 indicate that the most distracting social challenge on academic achievement was addiction to social media at 33.3%, followed by relationship and emotional conflicts at 26.3%. Drug and substance abuse was third at 20.6%, fourth was accommodation problems at 13.6% and the least affecting was harassment from lecturer at six (6%). According to the outcome, students' academic performance was affected most by addiction to social media. According to Olubiyi (2012), students are absorbed in social media almost 24 hours online. Moreover, some are ever busy facebooking while lecturers are still going on. The time that should be focused on learning and research as been diverted to discussing insignificant issues on internet.

Relationships and emotional conflicts also present challenges to students at 26.3%. Students in public universities interact with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. The dissimilarities range from cultural, racial, religion, economic, political and social orientations. The diversity may be overwhelming to adopt to new lifestyle, making new friends and developing a new identity. There are possibilities of being accepted or rejected. Rejection may lead to stress and depression. Other times students develop intimacy with their colleagues of opposite sex which escalate to premarital relationship. This has resulted to pregnancy, young mothers, abortions or sexually transmitted diseases. All the above have negative effect on academic success as much of learning time is taken trying to sort out the mess. Love relationships that have gone sour have caused death to students.

Partying is a common social activity designed by students to have good time. Nevertheless, most of parties involve drinking alcohol, drug abuse and immorality. Too much alcohol can lead to drunkenness and potentially deadly situations. However, the person consuming alcohol is not the only one who suffers, but also others around him/her as well. Students have been interrupted during their study or sleep time to take care of fellow drunken student. Some have been assaulted, injured while others have suffered sexual assault or rape. Property have been damage or lost when there are students scuff.

Inadequate accommodations within the university make students to reside in private hostels far from the main campus. Off campus accommodation has a number of challenges which include, long walking distance, high rent rates, water shortage, noisy environment, unfriendly neighbours etc. In most cases students solve accommodation problems by squatting with friends in private hostels, staying with relatives and acquaintances in town, teaming up to rent cheap accommodation in town, and cohabiting with their boyfriends or girlfriends. Living far from campus may cause laxity to attend classes and other activities in university. Absenteeism may eventually lead to low academic achievements.

The study sought to find out the rate at which the social challenges affected their academic achievement.

Table 2: Rate at which social challenges affected academic achievement

Social Challenges	Frequency	Percentage %
Frequently	188	49.0
Rarely	70	18.2
Occasionally	126	32.8
Total	384	100

The results on Table 2 show that 49% of the participants, frequently, the social challenges affected their academic performance, 32.8% occasionally and 18.2% rarely.

3.2 Second Objective

Approaches put in place to mitigate the effects of social challenges on student academic achievement in public universities.

Table 3: Approaches put in place to mitigate the effects of social challenges

Approaches to mitigate effects	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Co-curricular activities	207	53.9
Peer counselling	78	20.3
Guidance and counselling programmes	61	15.8
Mentorship from lecturers	38	10
Total	384	100

The study sought to find out the most effective approach put in place to mitigate the effects of social challenges on student academic achievement. The results showed that co-curricular activities were the most effective at 53.9% followed by peer counselling at 20.3%. Guidance and counselling programme was third at 15.8% and mentorship by lecturers was the least effective at 10%. This implies that involvement of students in co-curricular activities is the most recompensing method of engaging young people to keep them away from social evils. To avoid social distractions, students should determine how much time their various obligations will take from their week. Avoid online social distractions as well. To get the most from online reading, disable or ignore phone notifications and tune out social media. Save them as a quick reward for completing your sections of reading. There should be more programs to raise awareness and inform students of the effects of alcohol abuse. If peers, lecturers or other influential members of the institution identify a problem within a student they should refer them to counseling and seek proper help needed. Peers do play an influential role in pressuring others to party and do drugs, especially roommates should be avoided.

3.3 Third Objective

Management skills for social challenges to enhance academic performance in public universities in Kenya. The study sought to find out whether students have management skills for social challenges using social problem-solving process.

Table 4: Social Problem-Solving Process

Social problem-solving process	Yes	No	%
I am able to recognize I have a problem	78	22	
I can describe my problem	72	28	
I can generate many solutions to my problem	43	57	
I can evaluate my solutions to select the one likely to solve my problem	17	83	
I can determine whether my problem was solved or not	12	88	
Percentage	44.3%	55.7%	100%

The result revealed that 55.7% of the students lacked management skills to solve social challenges and only 44.3% could solve their problems. Students should be taken through a social problem-solving process. This is the cognitive-behavioural process that enables a person to solve social problems. Students should be assisted to acquire knowledge and skills for solving problems

Table 5: Management skills of social challenges

Management skills of social challenges	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Students recognize that they have a problem and seek for assistance from friends	157	40.9
Students recognize that they have a problem and seek for assistance from student counsellors	108	28.1
Students recognize that they have a problem and seek for assistance from close family members	69	18
Students recognize that they have a problem and do not seek for any assistance	50	13
Total	384	100

The study sought to establish the management skills of social challenges the students have to enhance academic performance. The results indicated that 40.9% of students recognize that they have a problem and seek advice from friends while 28.1% recognize that they have a problem seek help from student counsellors. Research shows that 18% recognize that they have a problem and rely on close family members to assist them and 13% of students do not seek for any assistance. Peer counselling was indicated as the most preferred avenue of students to communicate their problem. Strengthen peer counselling in university for more students with social challenges rely on friends for help.

3.4 Summary of Results

- i. The most affecting social challenge on academic achievement of students is addiction to social media.
- ii. Social challenges frequently affect students' academic achievement.
- iii. The most effective approach to mitigate the effects of social challenges on academic achievement is involvement of students in co-curricular activities.
- iv. Most of students seek for assistance from friends when they recognize that they have a problem.
- v. Most students lacked management skills to solve social challenges.

IV. CONCLUSION

Social challenges negatively influence the academic achievement of students. Students should be sensitized on social challenges affecting them and guided on management strategies. Social media addiction and emotional conflicts were the most influence on students' academic achievements. Therefore, it was imperative to provide social supports and interventions that assist students to overcome social challenges. There is need to assist students to develop and display prosocial behaviour while at university.

V. RECOMMENDATION

- i. Encourage students to use social media academically.
- ii. Encourage students to engage in offline activities during leisure.
- iii. Strengthen peer counselling in public university as it is the most preferred method by students to communicate their social challenges.
- iv. Design a curriculum that offers problem-solving skills and integrate problem-solving instruction in all subject areas in public universities.

- v. Students need to be seriously engaged with academic work outside the formal lecture periods with assignments to keep them away from distractions such as social media, unhealthy relationships, drug and substance abuse.
- vi. Provide recreational activities that inculcate discipline and keep students away from deviant.
- vii. Provide adequate facilities to enhance a conducive atmosphere for learning thereby minimizing student stress which often prompt acts of deviance.

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