

Assessment of Art and Design Students Attachment Learning Experience Relevance towards Job Market in 2021 in Kenya

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Abstract: The Vision 2030 in Kenya which was officially launched in July 2008 has the Economic Pillar that aims to achieve an average economic growth rate of 10 per cent per annum and sustaining the same until 2030. Art, craft and design program at the higher institutions in Kenya embody some of the highest forms of human creativity meant to fulfill vision 2030. A high-quality art and design education engage, inspire and challenge university students, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to experiment, invent and create their own works of art, craft and design. The students are exposed after third year in their undergraduate program to attachment which is supposed to translate what is taught in class to the job market. It is upon this backdrop that this study assessed art and design student's attachment learning experience relevance towards job market in 2021. The objective of this study was to establish whether what was taught in class was the same as what they found in attachment work stations. The population of this study was 60 third year students in public universities in Kenya. The study focused on fashion and interior design students at university level in Kenya who belong to Art and Design Department. The findings revealed that students are exposed to both theory and practical which have components that rated so high in terms of relevance while on attachment.

Key Words: Relevance, Skills, Attachment, Art and Design

I. INTRODUCTION

Ketamo and Passi-Rauste (2019) points out that our society is facing the challenges of continuous change, global competition, digitalization, and the replacement of human labor by smart automation. At the same time, companies are reporting a lack of skilled workers and global skills mismatches. This does not mean that there are no skills on offer – rather, available skills do not have enough demand. Katemo and Passi-Rauste are interested in why labour market has skills yet they are not on demand but this study was establishing whether what was taught in class to fashion designers and interior designers in the art and design department was relevant to what the students were to find in the workstation while on attachment. The design students in higher institutions of learning have skills ranging from tailoring to interior designing that are meant to meet the market demand in terms of relevance. In addition, skills have not been defined in a commensurable manner between different actors, not even in terms of the terminology used, not to mention the precise semantic meanings of these terms.

Charu (2019) on the other hand points out that Students usually enroll in higher education institutes for earning an academic qualification or degree, gain appropriate skills and to step into the corporate world via employment opportunities. The purpose of the study was to find out student's perceptions about which skills are important to attain for job while they are studying. Also, to find employer's perceptions about most important skills required in the future employees. The study findings revealed that skill gap exist between employers and students' perceptions of the skills and traits critical for securing employment. Based on literature review, skills important for employment were identified and grouped under three categories namely technical skills, non-technical skills and behavioral skills. The above study dealt with university students and skills required by employees but failed to look at the relevance of university students on what they are taught in class and what they found out while on attachment which this study looked at so that in the event there is a mismatch then this could be coopted in the curriculum.

Barbara (2021) observes that Universities are under pressure to produce work-ready graduates. This study analyzed 130 job advertisements to identify skills required by environmental science employers in Australia. For degree-related criteria, the most frequently required were content knowledge, a tertiary qualification and experience. For generic skills, more than half of advertisements required strong interpersonal, communication, writing and project management skills. It was concluded that universities should prioritize skills that occur most frequently in advertisements, and students should be given opportunities to participate in work experience. Senior undergraduate and postgraduate programs should include content on environmental policy and legislation, and the opportunity for students to hone their project and time management skills. The above study focused on university just like the current study and the pressure universities go through to produce work ready graduates but failed to consider the importance attachment plays in the life of a student in establishing what is taught and relevance on what they find in the job market before they finally finish their fourth year and graduate.

Rhew, Janice, and Keels, (2019) confirms that employers and policy makers have criticized higher education institutions for the perceived knowledge and skills deficiencies of their

graduates. This article sought to identify the gaps between employer needs, curricular priorities, and accrediting standards, specifically in the management domain. The authors content analyzed 200 job announcements for entry-level management positions in the 10 largest metropolitan statistical areas in the United States and the learning goals of 51 business programs, comparing both to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business's Standard 9. While the findings demonstrate considerable overlap between employers' stated needs, business programs' curricular focus, and accrediting standards, notable gaps emerged, especially in the area of self-management. The authors discuss the implications of these findings for both business programs and accrediting bodies. It is clear that the concerns of the above study were on higher education particularly on the perceived knowledge and skills deficiencies of their graduates, however, the current study looked at the graduate's relevance while still in the university but only when they break for one semester of three months in order to relate that is taught in class with what they find in the firms they were attached to.

While many universities have implemented various initiatives and teaching and learning methods to embed the most in-demand skills into their degree programmes, there is little evidence in the literature of students' opinions and awareness of these skills as confirmed by Osmani, Hindi, Al-Esmail, Weerkody (2017). According to their findings, the most important graduate skills are communication skills, followed by analytical skills and self-management. The findings also revealed that the language of instruction is statistically significant for a few graduate skills, including interpersonal, planning and organization, communication, self-management and analytical skills. Age is statistically significant for critical thinking skills and gender is statistically significant for leadership, technological and communication skills. Osmani *et al* (2017) failed to focus on Art and Design skills embedded in fashion and interior that the current study looked at while on attachment.

The Social Pillar in Kenya Vision 2030 aims at creating a comprehensive, equitable and just society based on democratic ideals. Under this pillar, education and training is expected to be the principle catalyst towards realization of Vision 2030 (Ministry of Education Science and Technology 2013) This paper was to contribute to the transformation of education and training in the country by enhancing quality and relevance of education hence the purpose of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Studies have revealed that the graduates are underprepared to meet the demand of the modern workplace and are unable to create creative solutions leading to a shortage of competent and skilled workforce required for the national digital transformation yet university students are all exposed to digital skills such as CAD skill for the design students. Studies have confirmed inappropriate competencies that are being developed among the graduates which makes them unqualified for meeting the demand of the industry and the

country. Some graduates' attempts to start their own enterprises but fail as a result of limited training. This necessitated the assessment of art and design students' attachment learning experience relevance towards job market in 2021 in Kenya

Scope of this Study

Scope of this study was attachment of students within a period of three months in Art and design programs –Fashion design and interior design in Kenya.

Theory of the Study

This study was guided by skills formation theory by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) Skills formation theory says that the novice phase is the stage in which the trainee acts only according to the instructions specified. For example, when the students join the art and design department upon fulfilling the university requirements and their interest in the course it is presumed that they are at novice stage. The lecturers assume they know nothing in relation to design hence the imparting of interior design and fashion design skills starts. The amateur stage is where the student is guided to do something in a clear-cut way. This is when the skill acquisition in the art and design programs has just started progressively from first year, second year to third year where the learners go through eight units per semester. The competent stage is where the trainee is able to perform the tasks assigned. By the time they reach third year they have acquired competence in their area of specialization therefore there is need to translate what they have been learning in class to attachment. Proficient level trainees are able to see the important aspects of the skills, which can be performed better while expert trainees are no longer, bound by rules as they are able to accomplish things. Once this student come back to do their fourth year from attachment they give a feedback through report writing on what should be included in the curriculum for the program to remain relevant for job market. After fourth year the art and design students should be competent to join the job market with relevant skills. They become experts when they open their own firms because this department, the core values are job creation.

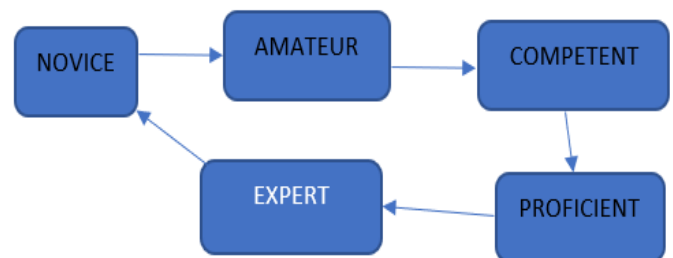


Figure 1: Skills-formation Process (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980)

The model above by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) describes the stages which one must go through before he/she reaches the level of expertise. However, it does not involve other social aspects that support the skills development process.

Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993) explain the concept of apprenticeship skills formation through five stages which are different from that proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) but involve similar aspects of staging skills level. The model is divided into two stages i.e. cognitive modeling and behavioral modeling. This stage only involves the observation of the behavior of the instructor. The leveled approach also involves an attempt to gain skills and the process of reflection on what is being done. Gradually, the levels diminish the role of teachers and improve the ability of trainees. The ability of trainees is increased and they are finally able to perform according to Novice, Expert, Competent, Amateur, Proficient

Figure 1: Skills-formation Process (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Barke, (2019) did a study on skill gap from graduates. The study findings revealed that curriculum offered in the learning institutions is mismatched leading to inappropriate competencies to be developed among graduates. Barke, (2019) further confirms that the graduates are underprepared to meet the demand of the modern workplace and are unable to create creative solutions leading to a shortage of competent and skilled workforce required for the national digital transformation yet university students are all exposed to digital skills. Harri and Anu (2019) did a study on Labor market analysis and curriculum gap assessment using big data in Kenya. This study used Kenya as an example and the result shows the similar trend in Kenyan universities as observed among European universities: Kenyan universities do have good academic curriculums, but there are several ways to enhance the curriculum and course descriptions that can better address the needs of the labour market. In some cases, adding the terminology into course description would be enough. This study also analyzed the top industries, skills and jobs presented in the online job posting data. From the data, it could show historical trends and current skill needs as well as predict what skills or jobs are down trending, i.e. what skills and jobs are most likely not to be sought in the near future. In addition, the findings showed that most of the job advertisement was related to digital and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills. The most trending jobs in the past few years included officer, manager, and assistant. The studies above looked at skills taught in the universities in relation to job market but failed to link it to specific programs in the Art and Design programs particularly the relevance of what students find while on attachment with what is offered at the Art and Design Department.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design presents a procedural outline and is used for selection of sources and types of information (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). The study adopted descriptive survey research design. This design was appropriate for this study since it gives explanation on the state of affairs as they exist presently (Kothare, 1999). In addition, the design assisted to generate descriptive data that was to be used to describe

information concerning current status of the variables in question. Art and design students who had come from attachment were given open and closed ended questionnaires to fill in the presence of the researcher.

Population of the Study

In research, population is defined as the entire group of people or items that is of interest to the researcher (Kombo, 2006; Cooper and Schindler, 2011). The population of this study was 60 students who had just come from attachment.

Sample Size.

Benard and Paolo (2012) points out that the main objective of the census is to provide information on the population and its characteristics. Cochran (1963), Gupta and Kapoor (1970) and Israel et al. (1992) proposed four methods to determine the sample size for the research out of which census method is used on small populations. This study used census method which considered the entire population as the sample; this method is suitable only when population size is very small, and for this study all the 58 respondents were used. This method is very suitable for research because of its accurate preciseness. Therefore, all the 58 were collected data from, except the two who failed to hand in their questionnaires.

Data Collection Methods

This study used a questionnaire to collect data. According to (Krosnick & Presser 2010) open ended questions are more suitable for measuring knowledge since they yield more reliable & valid answers and minimizes the likelihood of respondents trying to guess the right answer. Both open ended and closed ended questionnaire was used in the study. Open ended questions offered the respondents ability to elaborate on their thoughts

Validity and reliability of research instruments

Validity is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of data actually represent the variables of the study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Orodho (2005) on the other hand defines reliability as the extent to which an instrument yields the same responses every time it is used. To ascertain the validity of the research instruments, they were shared for review by another researcher to ensure that they are in line with the study objectives. Reliability on the other hand was measured by carrying out a pilot study with a few students who were fourth years in the Art and Design Department and who were not part of the respondents and the findings assisted in revising the instruments for the study.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Collected data was cleaned, organized and coded for analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and presented in pie chart and graph. This was aided by the use of excel sheet. Qualitative data on the other hand was transcribed and analyzed thematically with the use of narratives and direct quotations.

IV. RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

There were 60 students involved in the study who had just come from attachment. Only 58 questionnaires were returned and analysed. According to Mugenda (2008) a response rate of more than 50% was enough to analyze and draw conclusions. From Figure 2 below students from attachment were to rate how lecturers teach and what they found in the place of their attachment.

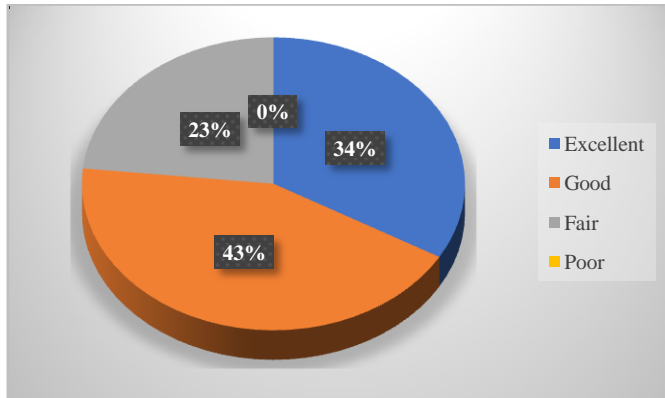


Figure 2: Rating of students

The findings show that the rating by students on how lecturers teach the art and design courses in relation to what they found on attachment, 43% found it good, 34% found it excellent, 23% found it fair and none said it was poor. When excellent and good was combined the findings further revealed that 77% on how lecturers teach, and in relation to what they found on attachment was promising. There was a strong positive correlation. When students were asked further to give opinions of their response on the rating scale they had picked, the ones who picked on excellent said the following and I quote:

At the office I was mainly involved in redesigning spaces and furniture designs which were all taught and explained in class

As compared to other attaches in the same firm I had skills solving problems and better site supervision

There was a lot practical's where I got to get more experience on garment construction

The way they were handling their interns was just good one and I was able to consult in case of anything anytime

Most of the assignments given to me I was able to cover them compared to other students

The ones who rated 'good' were not far from the above responses and I quote:

In my specialization area, there was a direct relation to design units in applications eg CAD (Computer Aided Design)

We get much knowledge from our lecturers which helps us out there in learning with others

The firm was mainly using Arch cad to design and it's the only software that have been taught so far

There are units such as CAD which form a basis of attachment work but it's not excellent because there is very short time to learn it

What was taught in class enabled me to relate to real life designing of furniture

The elements we learn in school and the experiences we here from lecturer's aid in adapting to the work

What I found in my attachment content was more amplified compared to what is taught at school but there is one similarity also

The school offers a lot of theoretical work which when used in the field yields fruits

The ones who rated 'Fair' were not far from the above responses and I quote:

Most of what is taught is relevant to field of practice

There should be more field work than theory work

Most of what they do there are practical like fitting gypsum ceiling and other fittings

Most of the equipment's we found in the company are not found in school

Some of the things taught in the university were applicable, however, not all were relevant

From the responses it is clear that what is taught was what was found in the field however a few instances they could come across new tools and materials because design world evolves, it is not static. This is supported by Eradatifam, Heydarabadi and Shahbazi (2020) who states that where a world that gets harder and tougher every day, companies need creative and multifaceted solutions for facing their challenges. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) theorizes that skill acquisition moves through the five stages of novice, amateur, Competent, proficient then finally expert. From the opinion above the journey of skill acquisition cannot be at the last level while the student still has to come back from attachment and do his/her fourth year. This is supported by Linn (2015) who points out that placements, co-operative education and internships, where students use and extend the knowledge and skills gained at university in the workplace, are not a new feature of higher education. They are, however, increasingly cited as a panacea for bridging expectations between employers demanding skilled graduates and universities tasked with supplying them (Silva *et al.*, 2016). Sally *et al* (2018) pointed out that the headline statistics would support this view (for example, Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2016): employment experience, such as a student work placement, is consistently associated with improved employment rates when graduates who did a work placement are compared with those who did not do a placement. On the face of it, this is a

compelling reason for gaining work experience while studying, but not all students have access to work experience through their courses. Furthermore, many university-organized placements are competitive, so that even those who aspire to gain a placement may be unsuccessful, while some simply do not recognize the potential benefits and fail to pursue the opportunity. This confirms the importance of attachment program offered to art and design students at university level.

Students from attachment were asked to write what they found most excellent in the units taught from the Art and Design department that made them remain relevant in their place of attachment and the responses are shown in figure three below

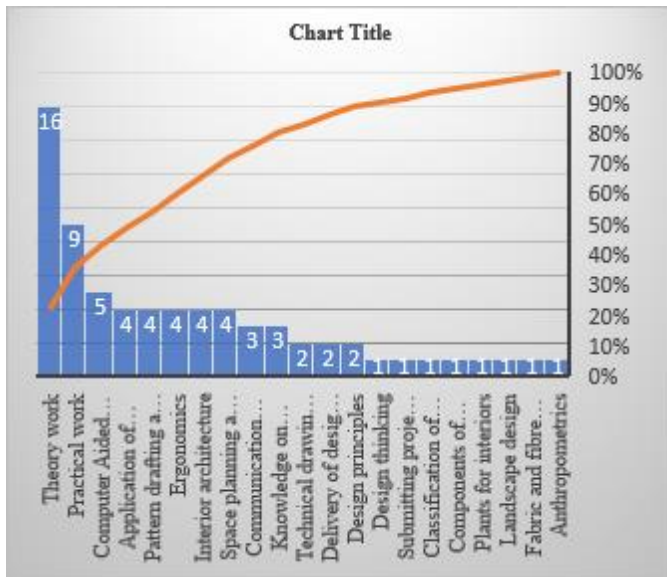


Figure:3 Relevance in Attachment

The findings in figure three above indicates that students are well grounded in theory followed by practical which is the core for design department. It is also clear that from figure three that there are many areas in the design department that are taught excellently and was very relevant to the students on attachment. This is supported by Wrenn and Wrenn (2009) who pointed out that educators in professional or service-related fields desire their students not only to learn theory and understand why theories are important but also to learn how to apply the theoretical frameworks in practice. Too often there are anecdotal accounts of students in internships who are unable to make this transition from theory to practice with confidence and effectiveness. Perhaps the difficulty in making the transition from theory to practice arises, at least in part, from a failure of the teacher to integrate both theory and practice into the same course in the curriculum in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the student. Such integration helps students to more closely associate the practical value of learning theoretical concepts. An essential additional skill is the ability to gain and utilize knowledge from practice (Dorfman, 1996).

V. CONCLUSIONS

what is taught was what was found in the field however a few instances students came across new tools and materials because design world evolves, it is not static as Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) theorizes that skill acquisition moves through the five stages of novice, amateur, Competent, proficient then finally expert. There are many areas in the design department that are taught excellently and was very relevant to the students on attachment.

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