DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AMONG KENYAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

BY
HELEN BOKEA

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY - NAIROBI

FALL 2005
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A Project Report Submitted to the School of Business in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Science in Management and Organizational Development (MOD)

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY – NAIROBI

FALL 2005
STUDENT’S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college, institution or university other than the United States International University in Nairobi for academic credit.

Signed: ___________________________  Date: 28/3/06
Helen M. Bokea (ID 601741)

This project has been presented for examination with my approval as the appointed supervisor.

Signed: ___________________________  Date: March 28, 2006
Ms. Mwanashehe Mohamed

Signed: ___________________________  Date: 15th May 2006
Dean, School of Business

Signed: ___________________________  Date: 23rd May 2006
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs
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October 2005
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ABSTRACT

Since Independence, the Kenyan education system has been characterized by rapid expansion. At the Early Childhood, Development and Education (ECDE) level, enrolment grew from 483,148 children in 1982 to 894,295 children in 2003. At the primary level, enrolment in formal public primary schools grew from 891,533 pupils in 1963 to 7.2 million pupils in 2004. At the secondary level, enrolment grew from 30,000 students in 1963 to 862,908 students in 2003.

At the higher education level, the number of public universities has increased from one in 1980 to six in 2004, while private ones have risen from 8 in 1999 to 17 in 2003. Despite this phenomenal growth, there has been a lack of clear relationship between university education and potential employment opportunities. One of the consequences of this rapid growth has been deterioration in the quality of education. Education in public universities today is characterized by poor quality of physical facilities; inadequate teaching, learning resources and references; overburdened facilities and infrastructure; outdated and limited equipment for practical lessons; poor quality of lecturers; questionable quality of students with regard to their preparedness, competence, motivation and maturity at the time of admission to university; and the inability of the economy to absorb manpower produced by universities. Concern has been raised on the content and relevance of university education to developmental needs and in meeting the changing needs of the Kenyan economy and society; and in particular the labour markets needs.

This study:

◊ Assesses the transition from higher education to employment in Kenya by attempting to establish the qualities that make Kenyan university graduates of today employable; and

◊ Endeavours to determine whether these graduates are adequately prepared to meet the needs of the labour market.
Specifically the study addresses the following:

- What employability skills are relevant and why they are becoming increasingly important;
- What skills employers in Kenya seek in graduate job applicants and which of these are most in demand today in the workplace;
- The extent to which employability skills are currently developed among Kenyan University graduates; and
- The consequences of the absence of employability skills among Kenyan university graduates.

The study is a survey of a sample of recruitment agencies based in Nairobi.

Overall the study established that although there exists no formal employability skills profile in Kenya, an informal one is developing slowly. It is however not as well developed as those found in countries that are already pursuing an employability agenda formally such as UK, Australia, Canada, Denmark and South Africa.

From the findings of this study it is clear that because of the increasing importance of employability skills globally, more attention needs to be paid to the employability skills agenda. Employers and universities need to work closely together to come up with ways of influencing the kind of graduates coming out of universities at undergraduate level.
Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge the support of the following without whom this research project would not have been possible: a) All the respondents who took time out of their busy schedules to provide me with much needed data on the subject area; b) My supervisor Ms. Mwanashehe Mohamed of USIU who supervised my work; c) Queenvelle Owala for her understanding, constant gentle reminders and encouragement; and d) lastly but not least, all those who contributed in any way, big or small.
Dedication

This research project is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Alfred Gerald Nicholas Mbuya, who taught me by example, for the short time that I knew him, that a sound education is the best thing that you can bequeath your child.
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CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

As the 21st century opens, higher education is facing unprecedented challenges, arising from the convergent impacts of globalisation, the increasing importance of knowledge as a principal driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution (WB/IBRD, 2002). Globalisation, declining communication, and transport costs and the opening of political borders combine to facilitate increased movements of skilled people. This dynamism is leading to a global market for advanced human capital in which individuals are most likely to participate (Iuma, 2003). With these challenges emerge opportunities. Other notable trends in the new century include the emerging role of knowledge as a major driver of economic development; the entry of new providers of higher education in a borderless environment; the transformation of modes of delivery and organisational patterns; the rise of market forces in higher education; and the emergence of a global market for advanced human capital. The role of education in general and of higher education in particular is now more influential than ever in the construction of knowledge economies and democratic societies. Higher education is held central to the knowledge production and utilization and to the promotion of the lifelong learning practices necessary for updating people’s skills and knowledge.

Until the massive expansion of UK higher education in the late 1980s and early 1990s the employability of graduates was largely taken for granted by higher education institutions (Mason, Williams, Cranman and Guile, 2002). Most graduates found satisfactory employment within a short time after graduation and earned sufficiently high incomes to show high private and social rates of return. The types of employment available to graduates were fairly well defined and preparation for employment meant the acquisition, often implicitly, of the knowledge and technical and social skills needed for these occupations. While some employers had complained from the 1970s onwards
that many graduates did not have the precise skills they needed, most employers were keen to snap up the available graduates.

The idea that graduates should be expected to possess certain general qualities and attributes as a result of their higher education experience is long established. A century and a half ago, Cardinal Newman suggested that higher education enabled individuals “to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical and to discard what is irrelevant... to fill any post with credit and to master any subject with facility” (Mason et al., 2002).

Across Europe for example closer integration of learning and work has been a central theme of policy debates about skills formation of the work force and strategies for economic competitiveness and enterprise renewal (Little & Contributors, 2003). Looking beyond Europe we also see debates about links between higher education and the economy. For example in the United States some commentators have noted growing employer criticism and public dissatisfaction with higher education and mismatches between what American Society needs of higher education and what it is receiving. In Hong Kong, the University Grants Committee annually surveys 2,000 employers to establish their satisfaction with graduates from the regions’ seven universities in terms of for example ICT skills, communicative competence, problem solving and English language proficiency.

According to Little (2003), formerly academic skills were the critical and often the only employment criteria and new work-force recruits had the luxury of “extended time” in their first position to develop interpersonal, applied reasoning, and self-management skills. But the complex demands and pace of the new economy now require college students to attain a better balance between their academic skills and people-related applied competencies before graduation. It is no longer enough to have a university degree. More and more employers are looking for employees who will “hit the ground
running". Graduates who have additional skills that will facilitate their quick settlement into the job therefore have an edge over those without.

Tertiary institutions and particularly universities in their present form in Africa overwhelmed with problems related to limited opportunities, finance, internal and external efficiency are not able to provide quality education. Limited space and declining budgetary levels prevent universities from servicing the growing demand for higher education. As a result, public universities in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from low numbers of trained faculty, practically non-existent levels of research, outmoded programmes, and poor quality of educational materials. Moreover universities do not foster critical thinking, problem solving and creativity (Juma, 2003). These constraints have prevented institutions of higher education from being able to produce graduates with skills that relate to the needs of the country. The profile of graduates is inconsistent with labour-market needs. To a large extent, many African universities have failed to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

In Kenya, university education forms the apex of formal education and training. In addition to preparing high-level manpower for national development, university education is charged with undertaking research, development and dissemination of knowledge. According to the 2004 Economic Survey, there are 23 universities in Kenya, 17 private and 6 public. Unlike public universities, private universities have increased significantly from 8 in 1999 to 17 in 2003 thus contributing significantly towards enhancing tertiary education in Kenya (Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis [KIPPRA], 2004).

While the rapid expansion of universities in Kenya has created more opportunities for higher education for secondary school leavers it has had far-reaching implications on the quality of education. Education in the public universities today is characterized by:
Poor quality of inputs and physical resources, inadequate teaching and learning resources and reference books, overburdened facilities and infrastructure, and outdated and limited equipment for practical lessons. For example, Egerton University, with an enrollment of 8,000 students has nearly the same facilities that were designed for only 1,600 students (Abagi, 2003). While the numbers of students enrolled continues to grow in leaps and bounds over the years, the corresponding growth in resources is not matched. This certainly impacts negatively on the resultant quality of education.

Questionable quality of students with regard to their preparedness, competence, motivation and maturity at the time of admission to university. A lot has been said about the current education system. Following the introduction of the 8-4-4 system which shaved off the "A" level as well as saw an increase in the minimum number of subjects a student could take at "O" level, a good number of people feel that students are not properly equipped with knowledge and ability by the time they join the university. While the overall number of years spent in school remains the same as those of the previous system, 7-4-2-3, it is felt that the extra year spent in "A" level prepared the students better for joining the university. The concentration on a minimum of four and maximum of five subjects at "A" level also enabled the students to be better prepared on what they wanted to pursue when they joined the university.

Poor quality of lecturers. Because of poor remuneration and difficult working conditions in the public universities, a good number of lecturers continue to leave for better offers either in private universities or abroad. To recruit academic staff for the public universities, the tendency has been towards relaxing the recruitment and promotion criteria. In practically all the universities a Ph.D. degree is no longer a requirement for tenure and publication is less important criterion for judging who should be promoted. Moreover under these conditions, it is no longer possible to attract competent staff from abroad to teach in public universities (Juma, 2003).
Inability of the economy to absorb manpower produced by universities. Thousands of graduates trudge the streets in major cities across the country (and the continent) in a painful search for a job. Although the number of universities continues to grow so as to meet the demand for university education, the growth of the employment sector has not been the same. The result is that a good number of graduates spend many years searching for a job long after graduation.

The competence of graduates, demand for their services and how they fit and perform in the labour market are never addressed (Abagi, 2003). There are questions about the caliber of graduates from local public universities. Because of better learning facilities and the availability of more opportunities in private and western universities, graduates from these universities tend to have better developed skills. Noticeable among these are communication skills and computer skills. For this reason, and probably not necessarily because they are superior to graduates from local universities, employers are more inclined to employ graduates from these universities rather than from local public universities.

Frequent boycotts and strikes, which in most cases are followed by closures of public universities. The difficult circumstances faced by university students as described above result in considerable unrest among them. This leads to frequent closures and strikes the result of which is a lengthened stay at the university, which is not only costly to both the university and the students but results in unnecessary backlogs.

In a nation where unemployment is running at 58%, it is important for students to pursue a degree, which will lead to employment (Brown, 2004). The problems that bedevil higher education in its current form are so numerous that its ability to achieve national goals seems to be severely compromised. There has been a lack of clear relationship between university education and potential employment opportunities.
Improving the university-labour market relationship is of utmost importance and urgency. The government, university administrators, scholars and donors must redefine the goals of university education. The overall objective should be to develop the universities, the aim being professionalism, quality and excellence, equity relevance, good governance and accountability of outputs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Employability and its relationship with higher education has become a more prominent issue over the past few years. Global Economic factors mean that graduates are not necessarily restricted by national borders in their search for employment and there is therefore an increasing necessity for a model of generic skills that are recognized not just nationally but internationally (Bowers-Brown and Harvey, 2004). The issue of employability linked to higher education has been encouraged in the UK for many years and to a much greater extent than in most other countries.

Evidence shows that some countries have taken greater steps towards incorporating the employability agenda within the higher education system than others. Although what is expected of a graduate is similar throughout the world, there are differing methods of ensuring that this is achieved. In certain parts of the world it is apparent that higher education institutions regard a university qualification as sufficient evidence of graduate employability (Bowers-Brown et al, 2004). This could probably be due to the efforts universities in these regions are making to ensure that university education equips one with the skills that will enable them fit in easily in the world of work. Universities in these countries are more and more embedding employability skills into the curriculum.

In Canada as elsewhere, the enhancement of student employability is a growing priority for higher education (Little, 2003). The Corporate Council on Education has the Business and Education Best Practices Handbook, which outlines what the Council sees to be the critical skills required of the Canadian Workforce. In Australia, there is a generally accepted set of graduate attributes, which are delivered through either stand-
alone courses or are embedded in the curriculum. In Denmark, a Danish Qualifications Framework has been developed, part of which requires the research-based bachelor and master's degree courses to have a clearer competence profile. Closer home, South Africa has a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that higher education institutions have to comply with. The NQF uses two kinds of outcomes-based education – critical and specific (Bowers-Brown et al, 2004).

Back home in Kenya, the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) is charged with the responsibility of supervision of university education. Its role however appears to concentrate more on accreditation and less on quality control. Professional bodies are involved in approving curriculum offered or taken by prospective members of their profession. The Engineering Council of Kenya for example has to approve the curriculum taken by prospective engineers. The Council on Legal Education has to approve the curriculum taken by prospective lawyers (Uvalic-Trumbic S., 2003). This means that the responsibility of ensuring quality education is offered is still left to the universities. Considering the different challenges these institutions are faced with, coupled with the fact that policing oneself can be extremely difficult, it is hardly surprising that quality control remains elusive. A literature search does not reveal much on the concept of employability in Kenya, neither does there seem to exist a list of attributes that all graduates from Kenyan universities are expected to have by the time they graduate from university. While in the other regions mentioned above mainly Canada, Australia and Denmark and South Africa the universities appear to be working with employers so as to ensure that the output of universities is what the market requires, this does not seem to be the case locally.

While phenomenal growth of higher education in Kenya cannot be disputed, it is important to ensure that the growth is not only quantitative but also qualitative. Establishing a set of desirable graduate attributes is a good starting point towards achieving this goal. This study hopes to fill that gap. It is certainly a first step in
moving towards ensuring that university education serves the purpose of employment and does not just remain education for its own sake.

1.3 Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study was to determine the existence of and establish a set of desirable skills that make the Kenyan University graduate employable, explore their existence in the market, and find ways of developing those that are lacking.

1.4 Research Questions
The study was guided by the following questions:
1.4.1 What are employability skills among Kenyan graduates?
1.4.2 Why are they becoming increasingly important?
1.4.3 What skills do employers in Kenya seek in graduate job applicants and which ones are most in demand in today's workplace?
1.4.4 To what extent are employability skills currently developed among Kenyan University graduates?
1.4.5 What is the cost or positive and negative consequences of employability skills not being there?

1.5 Significance of the Study
It is anticipated that the study will be of importance to the following groups:

1.5.1 Higher Education Policy Makers
These include education ministers and members of governing bodies who need to understand the special needs and opportunities that higher education faces in the new century. Dynamic changes in the labour market over time have made the task of universities in preparing graduates for the world of work increasingly difficult and challenging. A university degree is no longer adequate to guarantee one employment. Higher education programmes that take employability seriously can strengthen graduates' "work-readiness" by ensuring they have the ability to apply theory and
knowledge in practical ways in the workplace. This study identifies the additional skills required to facilitate smooth entry and adjustment of university graduates into the workplace. On the basis of this identification, policy makers can translate these additional skills into policy as prerequisites for delivery of university education.

1.5.2 Higher Education Practitioners and Professionals

Vice-chancellors, deans and university professors who are responsible for enacting reforms and creating institutions that develop a high quality, relevant and efficient service. To enable them frame relevant training programs as educators, they need to know what the job market needs, what skills are required. The changing nature of the labour market and economy over the past several years has impacted the role that training systems play in the preparation of graduates for the opportunities and challenges of entry into the workplace. As the economy and labour market continually evolves, universities need to rely less on traditional teaching techniques and greater embrace a teaching and learning paradigm that makes the learning environment a true reflection of the workplace. Through the findings of this study, it is hoped that higher education professionals can see the importance of orienting university curriculum towards this goal.

1.5.3 Prospective Jobseekers and Employed Professionals

Ultimately the responsibility for competence development lies on the individual himself/herself. While schools and enterprises do provide people with the opportunities to develop their competence, they can never take over the responsibility of the individual. Through this study, it is hoped that employees can have a clearer understanding of the changing conceptions of work and easily identify the skills relevant for the workplace of today. Prospective employees will from the findings of this study, better understand how to package themselves so as to increase their chances of getting and remaining in employment.
1.5.4 Employers

A good number of employers continue to express considerable dissatisfaction with the
general level of preparedness of recent graduates and of entry-level employees. In a
world of uncertainty employers want people who are able to work on a range of tasks
simultaneously and hence who possess a variety of skills. The findings of this study
provide an indication for employers on the kind of skills available in the market.
Through their participation in the study, employers can influence the development of
skills according to the labour market needs.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study covered four of the major recruitment agencies in Kenya based in Nairobi as
at the end December 2004, which have been in operation for at least two years. The
study targeted the senior most person responsible for recruitment (specifically short
listing and interviewing of candidates) in the respective organizations. Additional
information was also obtained from the Friday edition of the main local daily, The
Daily Nation over a period of three months that is between April and June 2005. This
ensured that those organizations that advertise directly through the media rather than
through a recruitment consultant or agency were included in the study. Although it was
initially intended to obtain more information from the website of the United Nations
where all vacancies in the United Nations system are advertised, and a large number of
the major international organisations linked, this was not done because all the positions
advertised here required experience. The information obtained would therefore have
been irrelevant since the study focused on fresh university graduates.

In carrying out the study several limitations were encountered including:

✓ Access to data. This proved particularly challenging. The targeted persons for
the interviews within recruitment agencies have heavy workloads. For this
reason although the researcher intended to collect data over a period of 8 weeks,
in some cases it took as long as 10 weeks and in the end some respondents did
not return their questionnaires at all despite several reminders. This limitation
however was overcome because the few organizations that were interviewed are major players in the recruitment industry and are therefore adequately representative.

✓ The delay in accessing data resulted in the implementation schedule being prolonged. However, the researcher managed to overcome this limitation by moving faster in the remaining stages namely data analysis, data entry and report preparation.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Employability

For purposes of this study the definition of *employability* as adapted at the 2000 International Labour Organisation (ILO) conference will be employed (ref. Page 12 under Defining Employability).

Graduate

In this study graduate refers to one who has completed university education and obtained a bachelor’s degree but has no work experience.

1.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the research problem while providing some background information on the subject. It outlined the purpose of the study and identified the research questions addressed by the study. The major stakeholders expected to benefit from the study are also identified in this chapter and the scope of the study delineated.

Chapter 2 examines existing literature on the concept of employability while Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in carrying out the study. The findings of the study are presented and analysed in Chapter 4 on the basis of the research questions. In Chapter 5 the results of the study are interpreted, conclusions from the research findings drawn, and recommendations for practice made.
CHAPTER 2

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section attempts to establish from existing literature an employability skills profile. It also explores reasons for the increasing importance of employability skills and attempts to identify the existence of these skills in the Kenyan context.

2.2 Employability Skills

Defining Employability

The 2000 International Labour Organisation (ILO) conference defined employability as a key outcome of education and training of high quality, as well as a range of other policies. It encompasses the skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a workers ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he/she so wishes or has been laid off and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle (ILO, 2000).

2.2.1 Towards a Skills Profile

One of the challenges in identifying, developing and assessing employability skills is a clear articulation of characteristics that constitute employability skills. Early in the 1990s, senior executives from 25 companies in Corporate Canada came together to prepare an outline for the ideal job applicant. They came up with a document: *The Employability Skills Profile: What Are Employers Looking For?*, which was updated in 2000 (Foord-Kirk, 2004). Despite its educational focus, the profile developed by these employers has broad implications for everyone. The Employability Skills Profile does not include labour force projections or specific job related skills. It does not look at how many accountants will be needed in 2004, nor does it examine the skills mechanics need to deal with computerized car maintenance systems.
It attempts to cut across all occupations and fields, to define a set of universal skills that make people trainable, which give people the foundation to develop and grow throughout their lives. It looks for skills that would apply no matter where a person wanted to work, whether as a social planner, a cook or an engineer.

The research indicated the following:

◊ Employers stress the importance of life-long learning and want to hire people who feel the same way;

◊ They look for people who communicate well, listen carefully and who understand, speak and write effectively “in the languages in which business is conducted”;

◊ They want workers who think clearly, assess critically, act logically, and make decisions; people with mathematical abilities who can solve problems;

◊ They are looking for people who can “use technology, instruments, tools and information systems and can access and apply specialized knowledge from fields such as skilled trades, technology, arts and science and physical sciences”;

◊ People who feel good about themselves and who know how to manage their lives well and with integrity are high on an employer’s list. Employers respond to applicants with positive attitudes and people who behave in positive ways. They are attracted to potential employees who have personal ethics and who display initiative and persistence;

◊ Today’s employers want to hire people who take responsibility, who are accountable. They want people who set goals and priorities and who plan and manage their own time;
They want adaptable employees who think creatively and who work successfully in a team. They want their employees to automatically include others in their decision-making process and to show respect for the opinions and concerns of co-workers (Foord-Kirk, 2004).

Evidently this is a long list and it is hard to imagine one person embodying all these characteristics, which employers say they want. Nonetheless the profile provides a graphic glimpse of the self-management skills that employers in major corporations feel people need to successfully compete in their workplaces.

In another study carried out by the Department of Education, Science and Training and the Australian National Training Authority (DEST, ANTA March 2002), identified the following as the most common skills sought by employers (ref. page 15):
Table 2.1: Skills sought after by employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Skills</th>
<th>Basic Definitions – Ability to...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Convey information in both verbal and written formats as appropriate for the needs of the target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Develop a rapport with others and form working relationships, listen effectively, manage conflict, understand human motivation, understand and respect cultural difference and have a global focus on interpersonal skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Work in groups towards a combined effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Influence, supervise, direct and motivate others to achieve a recognised objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Understand and deal with difficult questions or things, apply logic or reasoning to review information, identify problems, their causes, evaluate options and select the best solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative and enterprise</td>
<td>Act without prompting, readiness to be energetic and inventive and contribute to innovative outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organising</td>
<td>Coordinate and give orderly structure to things or tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self management</td>
<td>Cope with, prioritise and meet one’s own work and personal commitments, have clear personal goals and strategies and measure performance in regards to these goals, be pro-active in career planning, time management and setting challenges, show personal and professional restraint and seek balance in all life aspects, including health and fitness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>Be precise and correct in approach to tasks, have an eye for detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to learn</td>
<td>Acquire additional new knowledge or skills via study, experience or through teaching or training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Vary or adjust ones approach or style according to situational demands, welcome and manage change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Originate or imagine new ideas, methods, or products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and Computers</td>
<td>Work with new technology and demonstrate proficiency with computer programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of South Wales, Australia, 2002
Table 2.2: Most common personal attributes sought by employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Attributes</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Sense of humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Commonsense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty/Integrity</td>
<td>Ability to deal with pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Adapability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal presentation</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balanced attitude to work/home life</td>
<td>Positive self esteem and confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: University of South Wales, Australia, 2002*

The two lists presented above from Canada and Australia respectively, share a lot of commonalities and possibly summarise what an employability skills profile should consist of.

Individuals are most employable when they have broad-based education and training, basic and portable high-level skills, including teamwork, problem solving, information and communications technology (ICT) and communication and language skills, learning to learn skills, and competencies to protect themselves and their colleagues against occupational hazards and diseases. This combination of skills enables them to adapt to changes in the world of work (Harvey et al, 2003). Bearing this in mind, a good university education should aim to inculcate these skills in its graduates.

2.3 The Importance of Skills in the Global Economy

Changes in the global economy increase the importance of ensuring that everyone is able to improve and update their skills. The increasing openness of the global economy
means that fewer and fewer industries including the service sector are sheltered from international competition. This means that a country cannot compete on the basis of a low-skill economy and must instead build on its strengths. New technological developments also mean that workers need to update existing skills and acquire new skills.

Graduates comprise a key source of talent that can bring a currency of knowledge and intellectual capacity to employers. The costs of recruiting and keeping them are relatively high. It is therefore vital that they are in a position to contribute positively to the organization speedily and without major additional resource (Little, 2003). Their readiness to do this is heavily influenced by the extent to which they have developed employability skills. One thing is certain – the need for a better-educated, more mature workforce in the increasingly knowledge-based economy is paramount and will not diminish.

The higher education to work interface is at the center of current debates about employability in the UK. Studies in the 1990s and earlier showed that although employers consider an undergraduate experience to be beneficial, they doubted its efficacy as a preparation for work. Younger, full-time students other than those who have had a significant placement experience on their course, often leave university with little idea of the nature and culture of the workplace and find it initially difficult to adjust. This period of adjustment – the time it takes for a graduate to become effective in the workplace – is a cost that graduate employers are no longer able or willing to bear. This means that higher education programmes are expected to better prepare graduates for workplace culture (Harvey et al, 2003).

2.3.1 Changing Conceptions of Work
The ways in which we go about getting work done have changed and this has created or facilitated fundamentally different social arrangements in the workplace (Trent, 2000). Indeed the application of new technologies has created new workplaces and challenged
our thinking about where certain kinds of work can and should be done. At the same
time technology has necessitated that we rethink who can do the work.

According to Trent, jobs are changing due to shifts in organization and management.
The workplace of today is characterised by flatter structures, networks of cross-
functional teams and flexibility. The jobs are designed broadly and the ideal employee
is one who can do many jobs and handle multiple responsibilities. He or she is multi
skilled and self manages. Information is widely diffused and decision-making is
decentralized. Procedures and processes are under constant change and worker
autonomy is high with the employee having broad rather than narrow knowledge of the
organization.

Computer based automation has fostered the restructuring of work organisations and
produced changes in skill requirements and occupational composition in offices (Jacobs
and Yudken, 2003). Lean production has become a major paradigm guiding the
restructuring of work organisation in almost every industry sector. Today you will hear
of the horizontal organisation essentially a version of lean production which is inclined
towards flatter organisations where managing across is more critical than managing up
and down in top-heavy hierarchy. Other elements of the horizontal organisation include
organisational structures built around core processes, self-managed teams, customer-
driven performance, maximized supplier and customer contact, multi-skilled,
empowered employees and a team-based performance reward system.

These changes have also been witnessed in the Kenyan work place. The share of
employment in the formal sector in Kenya has declined over time especially in the
1990's, the time for rapid liberalisation in Kenya. (Manda, 2004). The shift is due to
several factors including civil service reforms, retrenchment in the private formal sector
and increased unemployment due to the large number of school leavers joining the job
market. In general there has been a shift towards employing highly skilled manpower
especially in the manufacturing sector.
With all these changes in the way work is done and the skills required heavier demand is placed on graduates to better prepare them for the workplace. No doubt skills are becoming more and more important and only those who are better equipped will be able to compete effectively.

2.4 Skills in Demand

According to Harvey (2003), employers consistently say that there are still too many people emerging from education who lack the "can do" attitude and the interpersonal and customer-related abilities that enable them to become quickly effective at work. There is considerable agreement about a set of desirable skills employees should possess, often independent of the degree.

In the skills language, the core set consists of interactive attributes – communications skills, interpersonal skills and team working – and personal attributes. Personal attributes include, intellect and problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to learn and continue learning, flexibility and adaptability, risk-taking and self skills. In short, attributes that help organizations deal with change. An understanding of the world of work, some commercial awareness and appreciation of work culture are often desirable attributes. In some cases, subject knowledge and understanding are desirable, as are specific technical skills. However, more often than not subject knowledge is often not high on the list of desirable attributes. A decade ago, Employer Satisfaction revealed the low importance placed on subject knowledge overall, with over a third (38%) who said it was of little or no importance (Harvey et al, 2003).

2.4.1 The Kenyan situation

For many years since independence, attaining university education was a guarantee for employment. As late as the early to mid 1990’s graduating from the university in
Kenya was synonymous with getting employment. It is common to hear Kenyans reminiscing about the good old days, when academic excellence was seen as a license to a good job and a better life. But that now seems to have faded away. There is no guarantee that a graduate will walk straight into their dream job after leaving university (Muthengi, 2003). It is in fact quite common today to meet graduates who have been out of university for more than five years and have never been employed.

While there is no doubt that the skills, knowledge and competencies required for survival in today’s labour market are different from those of recent times, what remains unclear is the specific skills that give one a competitive advantage in the Kenyan job market. Companies invest in their workforce through provision of education and training to help them cope with greater complexity of work tasks. Employers place a premium on communication skills, analytical skills and the ability to access and use knowledge and information. Existing jobs currently demand substantial skills from employees and the demand for better skilled workers increases every day. According to Trent (2003), restructuring and the introduction of new technology have increased the skills demands for non-managerial employees.

2.5 The Skills Gap

Analytic studies of the labour market have suggested that there is a skills gap between labour requirements of industrially developed societies and the outputs from the education system. For example, the Welsh Development Agency in partnership with eleven other agencies, and supported by the European Social Fund, undertook a future skills needs study for Wales. The study explored the extent of skills shortages, usually from the employers’ point of view, and made tentative suggestions about overcoming them (Harvey et al, 2003).

In recognizing the importance of skills to economic growth and personal prosperity, the British Government developed in December 2004 a strategy that will ensure that the
British workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to compete effectively in the global economy. The document *Skills in the Global Economy* sets out the scale of challenges that global economic change will place on the British workforce at all skill levels and the next steps the government will take to ensure that all adults have skills they need for sustainable employment and the opportunity to improve their skills throughout their working lives.

In the United States, studies show that college students continue to have strength in their content and academic skill base but lack competencies to handle successfully the principal complex issues of work: interpersonal communication, teamwork, applied problem solving, time management, setting priorities and taking initiative (Little, 2003). Similarly, Ireland’s success in the 1990s in attracting overseas electronic companies has put pressure on Ireland’s supply of certain skills. The Irish government announced a new business, education and training partnership in late 1997 to develop national strategies to tackle the issue of skill needs, manpower estimating and education and training for business (Harvey et al, 2003).

### 2.5.1 The Growth of Higher Education and Its Consequences

Higher education has developed tremendously since independence. Kenya has six public and seventeen private universities with an enrollment of about 50,000 students (Teferra and Altbach, 2003). Roughly 80 per cent are enrolled in public universities while 20 per cent of the total university student population attend private universities. Enrollment in the universities has been steadily increasing since the establishment of the University of Nairobi (formerly Royal College) in 1970. By 1980, the University of Nairobi could not cope with the demand for university education, hence the establishment of the other public universities (Moi, Kenyatta, Egerton, Jomo Kenyatta and Maseno) and the rise of private universities. The number of students rose from 572 students in 1963 to over 50,000 in 2002 in public universities. Table 2.3 on page 22 shows the trend in enrolment in university education from 1995 to 2004.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>39902</td>
<td>4784</td>
<td>2903</td>
<td>47589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>39428</td>
<td>5964</td>
<td>4318</td>
<td>49710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>38526</td>
<td>4970</td>
<td>4835</td>
<td>48331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td>40570</td>
<td>6991</td>
<td>5337</td>
<td>52898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>41268</td>
<td>8085</td>
<td>5108</td>
<td>54461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>42508</td>
<td>8212</td>
<td>5123</td>
<td>55843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>48436</td>
<td>8887</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>57323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>59593</td>
<td>9129</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>68722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04*</td>
<td>58017</td>
<td>9541</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>67558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KIPPRRA, 2004 *N/A – Not available, *Provisional

By the late 1990s about 5,000 students were traveling outside the country each year for university education mainly by self-sponsorship. Subsequently there has been a surge in the number of graduates. Unfortunately, employment opportunities have not kept pace with this increase. This situation is made worse by over-enrolment in arts programs (Brown, 2004).

While Kenya displays a fairly well developed infrastructure for university education most of them (especially public ones) suffer from a lack of adequate resources to perform their functions effectively. The university system is faced by numerous challenges including student political activism, political interference, unemployment among university graduates, the poor state of research teaching and publishing, brain drain, the poor physical infrastructure, instructional facilities, and quality of education.

Although Kenya like other African countries in recognition of the importance of education has recorded rapid growth in higher education, there is still much more to be done. Higher education institutions clearly need well-designed academic programs. High quality faculty, committed and motivated faculty is critical to the quality of higher education. Because of rapid growth, most of it has been unplanned leading to outmoded teaching methods and rote learning. There is little active intellectual engagement because of large numbers. Students too face difficulties of overcrowding, inadequate library and laboratory facilities and distracting living conditions. All this affects the
quality of training offered. There is a need to offer courses that will maximise chances
in the labour market.

Basic education and training as well as continuous training and lifelong learning
combined with learning in the workplace have distinct functions in promoting an
individual’s promotability over her or his lifetime. (ILO, 2000). As summarised in Can
Africa Claim the 21st Century, Africa’s future lies in its people. Investment in people is
most important for Africa because in future economic growth will depend less on its
natural resources, and more on its labor skills. Growth in today’s information-based
world economy depends on a flexible, educated and healthy workforce.

2.6 A Balance between Employable and Academic Skills
Ideally an undergraduate education ought to provide students with necessary
knowledge, skills, attitudes and values critical to navigate the dynamic complexities of
the changing workplace. More and more universities are being asked what the students
are learning and what they will be able to do upon graduating from university. Among
responses to this question is a focus on a developmental approach, which pays attention
to how the curriculum is organized enabling students to develop competence in several
general employability skill areas such as communication, analysis and problem solving.

Studies have shown that employability skills are best developed when these skills are
integrated across the curriculum (Kwok, 2003). Embedding these skills and attributes
into the curriculum indicates the comparable importance to content knowledge and
compels faculty members to teach employability skills in the context of their courses.
Other characteristics of effective teaching which helps to foster employability skills
development include the use of multiple teaching and learning strategies, use of active
learning techniques, provision of prompt feedback and respect for divers talents and
ways of learning. Job preparation skills can be enhanced and student learning
maximized through other ways such as developing a positive classroom environment,
promotion of critical thinking skills and use of higher-order thinking skills such as synthesis and analysis.

The growing dichotomy between the purposes of education for employment and education for its own sake poses a major challenge in this country. While many faculty members continue to uphold the preserving, transmitting and creation of knowledge and the development of the intellectual mind, employers demand highly-skilled workers. Striking a balance between the two is particularly challenging in Kenya because of the significant expansion of university education. Although facilities are of decisive importance for any university to realise its mission, the facilities and the physical infrastructure of the public institutions of higher learning in Kenya are ranked last in the priorities of planning. The massive student enrollment in these institutions has over stretched the capacities of existing libraries, lecture halls, science laboratories, dormitories and dining halls.

These circumstances do not allow lecturers to adopt a teaching style that will permit students to acquire skills they will later apply in the day-to-day challenges after graduation but rather forces them to concentrate on the theoretical aspects of teaching.

2.7 Chapter Summary
This chapter is a presentation of existing literature on the subject of graduate employability. Under each sub-heading, a global picture is first presented before an analysis of the current Kenyan context is discussed.
CHAPTER 3

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction
This chapter presents the methodology used to carry out the research. A sample survey was done.

3.2 Research Design
This research is a descriptive study that targeted all the major recruitment agencies in Kenya based in Nairobi as at December 2004. It was a survey of a sample that used both primary data and secondary data. The decision to carry out a survey was based on the fact that surveys are suitable for getting a good picture of the current state or characteristics of a group. Surveys are quick to conduct, relatively inexpensive, efficient, accurate and flexible. Additional rationale for carrying out a descriptive study was based on the fact that very little work, if any has been done on the subject of graduate employability in Kenya.

3.3 Population and Sampling Design
3.3.1 Population
In order to access additional information, the study also looked at job advertisements in one of the main local dailies (Daily Nation) over a period of three months (April to June 2005). Although it was initially planned to look at the other leading daily, The Standard, this was not done because it was not necessary. Upon examining The Standard, the researcher found out that all the jobs advertised in this paper were also advertised in the Daily Nation. It was also initially envisaged to visit the UN website but the researcher dropped the idea when it became clear that all jobs advertised on this website for university graduates required a certain number of years of experience. Since this study focuses on fresh university graduates, clearly this information would not have been relevant.
3.3.2 Sampling Design
Seven recruitment agencies were selected through non-probability sampling. Employment and recruitment agencies as listed in the *Nairobi Business Directory* and yellow pages of the *Kenya Postel Directory, Nairobi Edition* are grouped under management consultants. A closer look at these two publications revealed that the major recruitment agencies were not even listed. Further investigation also revealed that many of the companies do not engage in recruitment but rather offer management consultancy services. For this reason it was decided to pick out the main organizations that are known by the Researcher to be involved in recruitment of recent Kenyan University graduates. This ensured fair representation (though it may be biased due to selection) and generalization of the findings to the rest of the population.

3.3.2.1 Sampling Frame
The sample of 7 organisations to whom questionnaires were distributed are well known institutions involved in recruitment of recent Kenyan University graduates and were identified by the researcher.

3.3.2.2 Sampling Technique
Non-probability sampling techniques were used as necessitated by the sample frame. The researcher identified seven recruitment agencies known to her, two of which are involved in recruitment at an international scale and five on a national/regional scale.

3.3.2.3 Sample Size
Altogether, the researcher distributed seven questionnaires, she administered four of these personally. The other three were hand delivered by the researcher because the respondents indicated that they did not have time to grant personal interviews. After constant follow-up stretching over a period of more than two months, it became clear that the respondents would not be in a position to complete the questionnaires. The researcher therefore proceeded to analyse data from the four questionnaires returned.
However because the four organizations interviewed are reputable organizations known to be heavily involved in recruitment of recent Kenyan university graduates, they are representative enough to allow for generalization of the findings of the study.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data for the study was obtained by the use of structured questionnaires. A structured guide was prepared and used to facilitate the collection of secondary data. Another questionnaire was prepared to guide the collection of primary data. The researcher developed both of these tools (Appendices 1 & 2).

The researcher administered questionnaires for the collection of primary data personally. It was not possible to do so in some cases due to time constraints on the part of the respondents. In this case the questionnaires were hand-delivered with a view to being collected once completed. Follow-up was done by telephone where necessary.

Secondary data was collected from back editions of the Friday copy of one of the main local dailies *Daily Nation*. Although initially it was planned to collect secondary data from another leading daily, *The Standard*, the idea was dropped after it emerged that all job adverts carried in this paper also appeared in the *Daily Nation*.

### 3.5 Research Procedures

Both primary and secondary data was collected for the study. Secondary data was used to complement primary data. The researcher developed a questionnaire using the research questions as a guide. Similarly, a guide for collecting secondary data was also developed by the researcher. The researcher pre-tested the questionnaires after development, on one organisation, which constitutes 14% of the total sample of seven organisations. Refinement of the research instruments was done then the research was carried out. Procedures that were followed in collecting primary data are described in 3.4. Although it was initially envisaged to use Research Assistants to assist with collection of data, this did not happen because the researcher was able to collect all the
data personally. Secondary data was extracted from the relevant documents by the researcher using the guide prepared for this purpose.

3.6 Data Analysis Methods
Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of means and percentages. Qualitative data has been summarized and categorized according to common themes and presented in frequency distribution tables (ref. Figs. 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). Data has been presented in terms of tables, graphs and charts. SPSS software was the tool used for data analysis.

3.7 Chapter Summary
Chapter 3 described the research design while outlining the sources of data, the sampling design and procedures, and the research procedures.
CHAPTER 4

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Employability skills among Kenyan graduates

As per the results of the study all respondents identified employability skills among Kenyan university graduates as those skills that make an individual stand out from a group of prospective employees and which make him or her suitable to fit into the workplace. They identified the following as examples of what they consider to be employability skills:

✓ IT/Computer skills;
✓ Written communication skills;
✓ Spoken or verbal communication skills;
✓ Time management skills; and
✓ Natural integrity.

Others factors or attributes identified as increasing the employability of Kenyan graduates are:

✓ Personality;
✓ Risk taker as opposed to being risk averse;
✓ Cross cultural sensitivity; and
✓ Fast learner.

The following pie chart (Fig. 4.1) presents the skills, attributes or factors identified as constituting employability skills by proportion.
Although the other category appears significant, it is a grouping of many factors, attributes and/or skills including gender, numeric skills, problem solving ability, accuracy, initiative, creativity, teamwork, ability to deal with pressure, personal presentation, honesty, integrity, cultural sensitivity, type of degree, university attended (local vs. foreign), driving license, foreign language, passport holder etc.

4.2 The Increasing Importance of Employability Skills

In an attempt to establish why the employability skills agenda is becoming increasingly important, the study came up with the following:

✓ With the unemployment rate standing at 58% (Brown, 2004), the labour market in general and specifically for university graduates is flooded. This means that getting a job has become increasingly difficult and only those with superior skills stand a chance.
✓ Because most employers are operating on the basis of global trends, university graduates find that they must have the necessary skills that will enable them to compete effectively not only locally but even abroad. A good number of graduates are finding that if they must get a job, it sometimes requires that they look beyond the national borders. This means that if they are to compete effectively, they must equip themselves with the necessary skills. With the world becoming a global village where job market borders are merging and slowly disappearing, it is imperative that university graduates conform to global trends so as to increase their chances of getting employment.

✓ Despite the flooded labour market, competition is stiff among organizations for skilled employees. A good number of employers have to contend with high staff turnover. This kind of turnover is often as a result of poaching from other organizations looking for skilled workers who are in short supply from the large pool of available workers. This requires that they find quick replacements for staff that leave and that the replacements should ideally be people who can immediately fit into the work place. Typically these will be those who have superior employability skills.

✓ With cutbacks in training budgets, employers find that they have less funds at their disposal to spend on training. For this reason, employers prefer recruiting employees who are already equipped with the necessary skills to enable them function effectively in the work environment.
4.3 The Kenyan Workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand rating for skills</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Very important</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>85.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4.2 Demand rating for skills/Skilled workforce

The frequency table and bar graph above represent the demand for various skills in the workplace among Kenyan university graduates. These are the skills most sought after by employers today. In an attempt to identify these skills, a skills profile was adopted consisting of 25 skills/attributes from the Canadian and Australian profiles presented in the literature. On a scale of 1 – 5 ranging from very important to unimportant, 85% of the skills scored between 1 and 3. This means that 85% of the skills in the profile presented are on demand and employers look out for them when recruiting. They include mathematical ability, numeric skills, problem solving ability, initiative,
accuracy, creativity, ability to deal with pressure, personal presentation, honesty, and integrity.

Further analysis of the data collected indicates that 46.7% of the skills in the profile are considered to be very important. From the data the following skills were identified as those most sought after in graduate applicants.

✓ Written communication skills – 7.7%;
✓ Spoken or verbal communication skills – 7.7%;
✓ Computer skills or use of technology – 12.9%;
✓ Teamwork – 5.6%; and
✓ Analytical skills – 3.5%.

Other factors or attributes identified that will determine one’s employability level that were not necessarily in the profile presented include:

✓ Age (7.0%). Increasingly employers are considering the age of prospective applicants and even setting age limits for applicants in some instances. There seems to be a preference for young employees especially when recruiting fresh university graduates.

✓ Professional qualifications (7.7%) relevant to the respective careers are more and more sought after. For example if one wants to be employed as an accountant then in addition the university degree, they must have either ACCA or CPA qualifications.

✓ In general there seems to be a preference for science degrees (13.9%) and the social sciences rather than pure arts degrees. This is consistent with the Canadian skills profile presented on page 12, which ranks clarity of thought, critical assessment, logic and mathematical abilities for problem solving as crucial employability skills.
4.4 Extent of development of employability skills among Kenyan university Graduates

The following frequency table and bar graph summarises the extent of development of employability skills among recent Kenyan graduates. On a scale of 1 – 5 ranging from commonly available to rare, 65.3% of the skills listed were found to be averagely available. This means that even though the skills are found, they are not as well developed as they should be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Availability rating for skills</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4.1</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 4.3 Availability rating for skills**
Of the listed skills, only 10% were found to be commonly available and well developed among recent university graduates. Clearly a shortage of 90% is quite significant, and suggests that this area needs to be looked into urgently.

4.5 **Pros and Cons of skills shortage**

A general look at the results indicates that not only is the extent of development of employability skills among university graduate average, but that there are instances when it is not possible to find the skills an employer may be looking for. For example while gauging availability of skills listed in the profile 8.2% were found to be rare that is a score of between 4 and 5. Additional data collected indicated that in instances when the required skills are not found in the market, the employer might resort to one of several options. These include:

* Headhunting;
* Promoting staff from within the organization;
* Re-advertising in local and international media;
* Training trainable employees from within the organization to take up the vacant position; or
* Adjusting the requirements for the advertised position according to market realities.

In circumstances whereby there is a shortage of skills, both negative and positive consequences arise.

Among the **positive** consequences are:

* In the event that the employer promotes one of the employees, it creates an opportunity for staff to grow professionally; and
* As a result of promoting from within, and especially where the promotion is based on merit, employees get motivated to perform better because they know that their efforts are bound to be recognized.
Negative consequences include:

✓ The whole process of recruitment is lengthened and becomes very expensive;
✓ Valuable time is lost as a result of having to go through the process all over again;
✓ The workload for other persons working closely with the position yet to be filled increases;
✓ Undue stress caused by understaffing may lead to high staff turnover;
✓ Depending on how critical the position is within the organization, it may eventually lead to overall poor organizational performance; and
✓ At the individual level graduates are forced to accept lower paying jobs because they do not have the requisite skills while the employer has to spend more to train these recruits to bring them to the required skill level.

Clearly although the employability skills agenda in Kenya is far from formally established, it is slowly beginning to take shape. The fact that it is possible to identify a set of skills that there is certainly a case for developing an employability skills profile for Kenyan university graduates.
CHAPTER 5

5.0 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction
In this chapter a summary of the key elements of the study is presented. The findings of the study are discussed here, conclusions drawn and recommendations for further action made.

5.2 Summary
The purpose of this study was to determine the existence of an employability skills profile among Kenyan University graduates and to consider the need of developing those skills in short supply. Specifically the study aimed to address the following research questions:

- What employability skills are relevant and why they are increasingly becoming important;
- What skills employers in Kenya seek in graduate job applicants and which skills are most in demand in today’s workplace;
- To what extent these skills are currently developed; and
- The positive and negative consequences of them not being there.

The study was a sample survey that covered four of the major recruitment agencies in Kenya based in Nairobi.

The findings of the study indicate that although formally there does not exist an employability skills profile, an informal one can be identified. Employers are today looking for people who have more than a university degree, people equipped with additional skills, which will make them adjust easily and fit into the world of work. There is a need to identify the additional skills required. There is also a need to orient the university curriculum towards making the learning environment a true reflection of the workplace with a view to facilitating the transition from university to the world of work.
5.3 Discussion

The findings of the study are consistent with the literature on what employability skills are. All the skills identified by the study are replicated on the two lists presented from Australia and Canada. A notable distinction though is that the Kenyan list is much shorter. One probable explanation is the fact that the employability agenda is not yet formalized in this country.

A comparison of the findings of the study with the theoretical background presented in the literature review, indicates that a lot more needs to be done in order to come up with a local employability skills agenda.

The demand for skills has risen at both the company and economy level. This is as a result of several factors, which are likely to boost further skills demand in the coming years:

✔ Rapid technological change: in an era of rapid technological change, skilled workers are better to adapt to new business and production techniques;

✔ Global competition: Increasingly, employers are operating in a global market, no longer insulated from the pressures of international competition; and

✔ Product and Service specification: customers increasingly demand products and services tailored to their individual needs. Achieving this requires a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Possible ways of enhancing graduate students’ workplace readiness include:

- Academic staff in universities should highlight opportunities to develop leadership, teamwork and communications skills in their courses;
- Academic staff should be more involved in experiential programs for example providing opportunities for student reflection on experiences and setting rigorous standards and evaluation criteria for internships/work-based placements; and
- Academic staff should seek to engage students in contextual situations such as community projects.
While recognizing the importance of the employability agenda, it is important to note though that Kenya is currently faced with one major hurdle, which may hinder the immediate adoption of the agenda. The slow economic growth leading to runaway employment levels must first be dealt with. In Britain for example where unemployment stands at 4.6% compared to Kenya at 58%, it is easy to understand why the skills agenda is getting the attention that it deserves.

Other factors that may delay the adoption of the employability agenda include the recruitment patterns in the country. Because of high levels of unemployment, getting employment is no longer always based on qualifications or skills. The recruitment process has become riddled with unfair practices such as favouritism, ethnicity and political patronage. These factors no doubt cloud the importance of employability skills.

5.4 Conclusions

Kenya as a member of the global community can no longer ignore changes going on around it. In order to compete effectively in the global labour market, it has to begin thinking seriously about embracing the employability agenda. Considering that lack of skills can be costly, it is imperative that the employability agenda be formalized and adopted in this country as soon as possible.

Clearly employment prospects for workers without skills are significantly worse than for those with skills. This disparity is likely to further worsen as global trends further increase demand for skilled labour.

Higher education needs to work with employers to identify what is necessary in graduate education to develop added value but also to ensure that the essential transformative element of a degree programme is retained and enhanced. The agenda should be to empower students as critical reflective citizens while making them aware
of organizational imperatives and modes of working that allow them to grow and add value.

The purpose of university education should therefore go beyond the acquisition of facts, theories, generalization and ideas, acquisition of information and knowledge. It should also serve the purpose of imparting a variety of basic intellectual skills and habits of thought.

5.5 Recommendations

With the future economy and labour market needs changing rapidly and becoming difficult to anticipate, the need for individuals to continuously update existing skills, and obtain new skills and qualifications is mounting.

In view of the above, and based on the findings of the study, top among recommendations is that the employability agenda be adopted immediately in Kenya. Concerned stakeholders must get together and find ways of working together fast to establish and formalize an employability skills profile like in other parts of the world. Key among stakeholders would be employers and providers of university education.

Because of changing trends in the global labour market, university students and graduates ought to think in terms of preparing themselves for lifelong employability as opposed to lifelong employment as it is expected that workers will be changing jobs and careers several times throughout their working lives unlike previous generations. The need to identify, enhance and develop general employability skills is more important now than ever before.

5.5.1 Future research

Based on the findings and conclusions an immediate possible area for further research would be a study to identify what universities are doing with respect to employability
skills development. The findings of such a study would probably lead to another on how to better integrate the teaching of employability skills into the graduate curriculum.
REFERENCE


Appendix 1

Developing Employability Skills among Recent Kenyan University Graduates

Research Questionnaire (primary data)

1  Serial no. __________________________________________

2  Introduction:

The wealth of a country does not lie so much in its natural resources as in the manner in which it is able to develop and effectively utilize the net capacities of its people - that is human resources. Such resources are in continuous need of evolution, adaptation, survival and growth, so that they can withstand the challenges of the age and eventually overcome them with strength, courage and self-confidence. Nothing could be a more potent tool for such evolution, adaptation, survival and growth than skills training. Skills training implies training in life skills, communication skills, behavioural skills, attitudinal skills, survival skills, vocational skills and entrepreneurial, managerial and supervisory skills. Human capital can best be harnessed with skill formation and skill enhancement, which must be a continuous process. The country with the required capability and skills in place at the right time has a much better chance of taking advantage of the gains which emerge from the interface between rapid globalization and technological change.

As an organisation that interfaces directly between employers and employees, you are strategically placed to contribute towards skill formation. That is why your role in identifying the skills that are currently relevant yet perhaps in short supply is very useful and highly appreciated.

Thank you for taking time to fill out this questionnaire.

3  In your opinion what do you perceive to employability skills among recent University graduates? __________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

45
4 What is the role of your organization in the employment and recruitment sector?


5 Is your organization involved in the recruitment of recent Kenyan university graduates?
(a) Yes  (b) No

6 For how long have you been involved in this business?
(a) less than 5 years  (b) between 5 and 10 years  
(c) more than 10 years

7 What is the size of your client base at a given point in time?
(a) less than 10  (b) between 10 and 20
(c) between 20 and 30  (d) more than 30

8 How do you rate the demand for the following in respect to employment of recent graduates in Kenya. (please tick the appropriate cell).

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<tr>
<th>Skills/Attributes/Factors</th>
<th>Very important 1.00</th>
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<th>Unimportant 5.00</th>
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9 How do you rate the availability of following skills among recent Kenyan university graduates? (please tick the appropriate cell)

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<tr>
<th>Skills/Attributes/Factors</th>
<th>Common 1.00</th>
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</table>
10. What other factors currently influence recruitment patterns in the Kenyan labour market for graduates?

11. Are there instances when you do not get the candidate you are looking for?
   (a) Yes       (b) No

12. If yes how often?
   (a) Very Often       (b) Often       (c) Sometimes       (d) Rarely

13. What action do you take in such a case?

14. What are the implications of such a situation?

15. What challenges do you face in carrying out your core responsibilities and what is your proposed plan of action in dealing with them?

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<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Cause of challenge</th>
<th>Proposed solutions</th>
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48
16 What other institutions do you interact with in executing your mandate in respect to employment?

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<th>Institution</th>
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17 What is the nature of your interaction?

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<th>Nature of Interaction</th>
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Appendix 2

Guide for collecting secondary data

1. How do you rate the demand for the following core skills/attributes in respect to employment of recent graduates in Kenya? (please tick the appropriate cell).

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<th>Skills/Attributes/Factors</th>
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