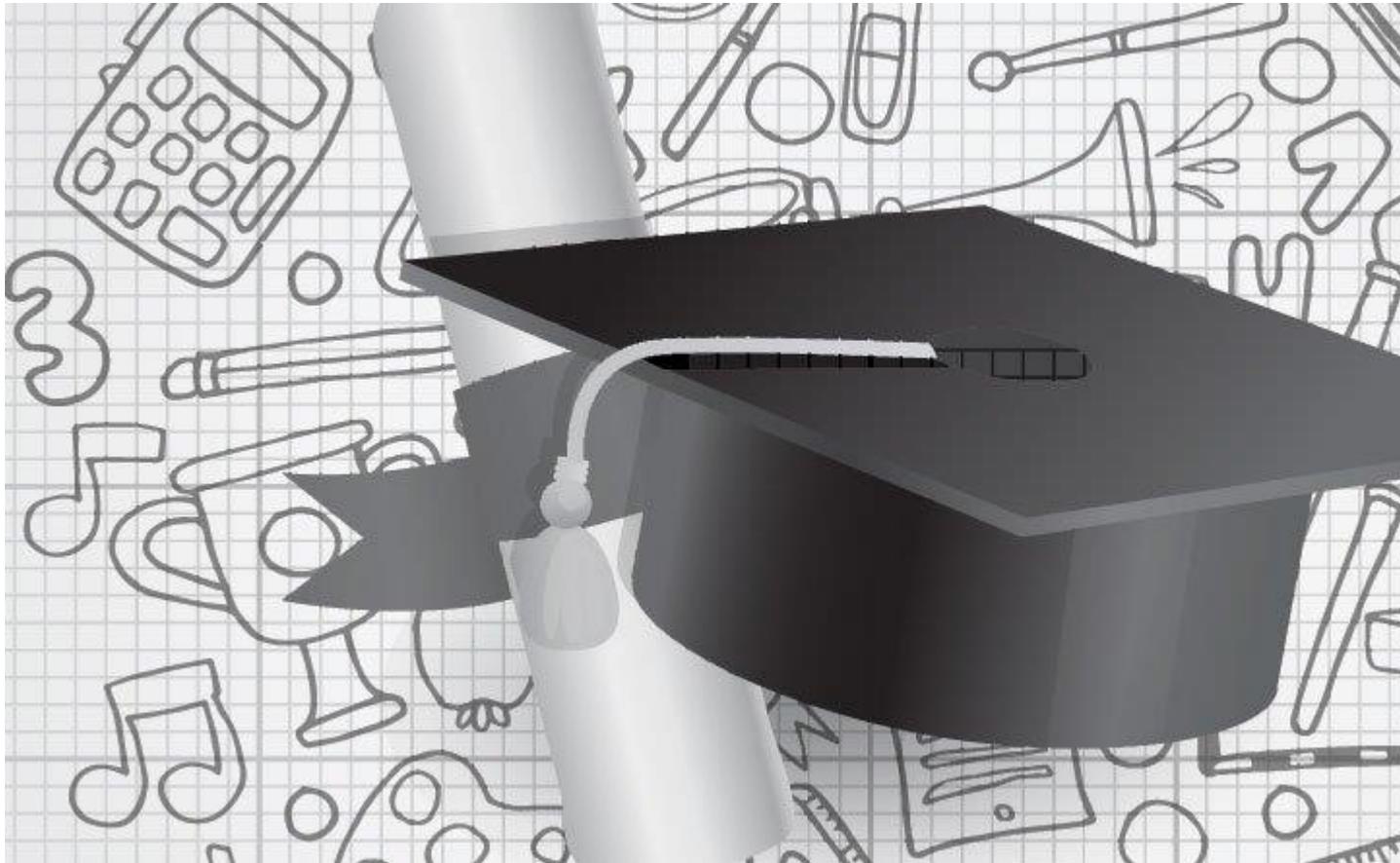


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Why ban on executive MBA does not hold water

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A raging debate ensues in Kenya on the role of executive education in our tertiary institutions. During Business Talk's education mini-series, many readers wrote in seeking opinions on executive MBAs and posed withering comments about the lack of accreditation of the programmes in the country.

Following years of accreditation of executive programmes, the Commission for University Education now deems executive MBAs as non-academic and therefore ceased to accredit them.

Inasmuch, the decision went further to even limit graduates of previously accredited executive programmes to no longer hold academic positions or proceed on to doctoral studies.

Many opinions on both sides of the debate surfaced, both admonishing and praising in equal measure the use of executive education.

Unfortunately, professional bodies in Kenya have started disavowing member accreditation based on previous degrees with “executive” in the title.

These actions put a new proverbial line in the sand unparalleled in almost any other nation.

These same bodies often utilise professional standards or industry advice scientifically proven within their disciplines, but do not apply that rigour to making decisions about earned executive MBA degrees.

Lax previous oversight did contribute to some erroneous executive MBA behaviour in the Kenyan sector. But if one person overeats in gluttony, should regulators ban food for all citizens?

So, a dose of reality could prove helpful for this lingering debate.

The most respected accreditation entities in the world for business schools, AACSB and Equis, accredit universities that teach executive MBA programmes.

Among the over 26,000 universities in the world, only 817 business schools in 53 countries and territories have earned AACSB Accreditation. In Africa, only five institutions of higher learning have achieved the high rigorous standards of AACSB. The best university in Asia (National University of Singapore), the best university in Africa (University of Cape Town), and the best university in Europe (Oxford University) all teach robust accredited executive MBA programmes.

The following universities who are the top in the world in their specific subject field all hold executive MBA programmes: Wharton School of Business for finance, University of Chicago for accounting, and Babson College for entrepreneurship.

Among other top-tier universities that offer executive MBAs include Columbia University, Duke University, London Business School, and the Business School São Paulo.

The best university in the world, Harvard University, among thousands of others, all accept doctoral candidates whose previous masters degrees include executive MBAs. So, while an executive MBA holder in Kenya can proceed on to a PhD at the highest quality universities in the world including Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Princeton, Cape Town, Chicago, Stanford, Tokyo, Melbourne, Durham, etc, those same students cannot obtain doctorates in their homeland of Kenya.

Executives have different needs as at a different life and career stage according to researchers Jay Conger and Katherine Xin and executives in industry help bridge the relevance and rigour

gap whereas lower level managers are often unaware of the high-level workings of the corporate world at any given moment.

Kenya now loses out on this salient industry-academic linkage, the sector misses out on credible revenue, and executives lose access to quality targeted learning and must travel overseas to get it. It seems that a more appropriate policy direction might entail proper delineation and oversight of executive MBAs instead of abandonment of accreditation.

Kenya retains a long impressive history of tertiary education excellence.

Students come from neighbouring countries and around the world just to study in Kenya's public and private institutions.

USIU-Africa alone retains students from 72 nations. Kenyan adult literacy rates rival those of even the most economically developed nations. Therefore, in Kenya's glorious tradition of quality education, let scientific studies done on executive MBAs now guide the direction we take as a nation and how to structure the sector.

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