



Lecturers' Perception on the Extent of Development of Soft Skills among Education Students in Private Universities in Western Kenya

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Abstract: Currently, Kenya is recording an increase in the number of private universities offering various bachelor's degree programs including education. This suggests that there is a high number of education graduates released into a very competitive job market. In response, private universities adopted soft skills required by employers in order to provide graduates with an edge over their counterparts. Soft skills evidently offer better employability in the job market. The present study was conducted in four targeted Western Kenya private sponsored universities offering education program in Kenya. The target population of the study was education lecturers in school of education. Concurrent mixed-methods research design was employed. Data was acquired using closed ended questionnaire and analysis was done descriptively. Findings revealed that lecturers strongly agreed that they developed communicative skills and ethics and professionalism during teaching and learning activities. It was recommended that lecturers in schools of education in private universities continue emphasizing on implementation of soft skills among education students during teaching and learning process as this is vital to their employability.

Keywords: Soft Skills, communicative skills, ethics, professionalism, employability

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1. Introduction

Soft skills are the skills that enable employees to fit in at a workplace. They include employee personality, attitude, flexibility, motivation, and manners. Soft skills are so important that they are often the reason employers decide whether to keep or promote an employee. Each state, if it has to achieve its national development goals and hence fulfill its growth goals, should, ideally, develop and implement an appropriate educational curriculum program through a defined and deliberate pedagogical procedures and practices relevant to the defined developmental goals and specific manpower with soft skills as prescribed in its requisite vision, mission and national philosophy. Circumscribed by the workplace environment prevailing,

the prescribed curriculum structure and strategy, these parameters synergize towards the institutional or national performance goals and leading to the workplace productivity and ultimate employer satisfaction. Through the defined vision and mission, the educational curriculum under reference, coupled with the parallel pedagogical application and procedures aforesaid, the apparent skills gap noted in the schooling process which affect institutional performance and the actual application of the skills in the workplace, should be addressed and bridged accordingly, (Rabah, 2015).

Reinke and Chamorro-Premuzic (2014) observed that each individual or workplace entity and its respective workforce, work together and get ahead, get along, and find meaning to the aspect of work. Hrica and Eiter (2020)

also denote that the workplace competencies give employees a clear guide for what is expected of them in terms of their performance and hence, formal qualifications and career history will begin to shift towards proven capability to do the job as demonstrated through recorded workplace experience; individual's capabilities that directly relate to the job. Hay Group (2020), on their part, concluded that "talented employees represent a suitable workplace performance of an organization". Talents and their workplace application reflect the soft skills possessed and applied by the respective employees in the workplace environment. Clearly, the workplace interpersonal dynamics and operations are indeed critical to the work performance of any organization.

Vathanophas and Thai-ngam (2007), while arguing in favor of the need for a national public sector management reform plan, emphasized the urgency for a corresponding human resource capital which comprises the attributes of trustworthiness, integrity, courage, accountability and vision in a work environment. Likewise, Bertolin and Leite (2008), recommended an urgent need for the appropriate educational reform to prepare better the undergraduates or students in order to meet the demands of citizenship skills and careers in response to the job market dynamics. Rios et al. (2020) also summarized the critical role of soft skills in the workplace environment and concluded that no longer is the recollection of facts or terminologies from textbooks adequate enough for other cognitive skills. A deeper demonstration of the understanding through planning, use of evidence and abstract reasoning is more demanding. This approach, according to the author, demands extended thinking and higher cognitive skills, which can be harnessed through an effective educational curriculum and program.

Ngang (2011), on the subject matter, has however observed that the incorporation of soft skills in the training of the personnel in the respective educational institutions and the inculcation of the same in the subsequent learning institutions, has been hampered partly by lack of respective and specific expertise in the personnel training and yet arguably, it is in the inculcation of such soft skills in the training curriculum and pedagogy that can be termed as the central pillars of the educational processes hopefully, towards the aspired, sustainable development. The above author, further affirms that transferable skills, e.g. communicative skills, ethics and professionalism, teamwork and dynamics and leadership skills to name but a few, have great influence on the employment aspects of youth and evidently according to this author, youths who understand transferable skills training program were about 12% more likely to be employed as compared to those who didn't.

Out of a wide range of possible soft skills attributes commonly associated to an educational setting, workplace experience and employer/employee expectations, two elements have been purposely selected for this study and

subsequent to this, the following question guided the research study:

1. To what extent are the following soft skills developed among education students in private universities in western Kenya as perceived by the lecturers?
 - a. Communicative skills
 - b. Ethics and Professionalism skills

2. Literature Review

The Soft Skills Concept

Soft skills refer to all aspects of generic skills that include the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills and which are identified as the most critical skills in the global job market relative to the evolving dynamics in technology and other scientific innovations. Soft skills as a term is used to describe skills that managers and leaders use, however subjective such definitions maybe in the finer, routine application. YEFEG Steering Committee, Mastercard Foundation; USAID; ILO define soft skills as the mix of skills, attitudes, behaviors, personal qualities and mindsets that individual use to be successful across different situations in work and life. Some examples of soft skills include creative thinking, dealing with people issues, coaching for performance etc. (Cimatti, 2016). Goleman (2005), a renowned psychologist, describes the critical importance of soft skills in a workplace and concludes that soft skills contribute to a person's ability to manage him or herself and their relationship to other people in the workplace –skills which matter twice as much as intelligence quotient or technical skills in job success. A learning environment where teachers and students are involved demands a great deal of human interaction, hence it is an avenue for the application of a variety of soft skill attributes in the pedagogy leading to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills applicable in a workplace.

Communicative Skills

Nghia (2019) presented a systematic approach to defining, applying, evaluating, refining, and revising metrics for students' soft skills. He examined their abilities like critical thinking, problem solving, leadership and responsibility, communication, and collaboration. According to the authors, the importance of these skills in educational and work settings is growing rapidly. They clarified that while such skills are easy to notice, they are hard to measure. Metrics do exist, but vary from one case to another, and are often rather implicit and vague. Contrary to that, they found out that it was possible to use precisely specified, measurable, low-inference indicators (metrics) to assess soft skills.

Mukmimnin and Diamandidou (2011) examined and documented the practices of soft skills, which included, communication, IT, numeracy, learning how to learn, problem solving, working with others, and subject-

specific competencies among English as foreign language student teachers at one public university teacher education program in Jambi, Indonesia. The study centered on examining the level of soft skills practiced by English as first language student teachers in their learning process and the level of student engagement in every statement of soft skill components. Data was collected through distributing a questionnaire to student teachers. The findings of the study showed the mean score of soft skills practices in overall was an average level. A closer examination on more specific skills, five of seven soft skills were practiced at medium level; they were numeracy, learning how to learn, IT and problem solving and subject-specific competencies. However, they rated their soft skills in terms of communication and working with each other at high level. The findings implied that the soft skills were not well-blended and practiced in learning and teaching process.

In response to increasing complexity of today's work environment, Ritter et al. (2017) observed that the need for soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem solving, are more salient than ever. Employers hire for these skills because it is increasingly the human resources that give organizations a competitive advantage. Therefore, the author suggested that academia must respond to these external stakeholder needs by re-examining curriculum in light of how degree programs, particularly in management, are preparing students for the demands of the workplace. They introduced a curriculum redesign that used a backward design process to focus on developing the soft skills that employers need, focusing in particular on developing teamwork-related skill sets.

In addition, Sreehari (2021) concluded that the inherent problem was that some college graduates are not equipped with the necessary soft skills in order to be successful in the workforce. Executive directors and human resource managers brought this problem to the attention of the career center directors in the community. From the perspective of human resource directors and managers, soft skills were found to be lacking in some college graduates. There was a consensus among the participants of the study that higher education leaders need to incorporate different approaches to teach skills; therefore, a 24-hour professional development program for faculty was developed as a solution for improving the learning of soft skills of college students. The social change expected from having well-equipped college graduates with soft skills was more successful professionals with better opportunities to have upward mobility, and more meaningful careers that fit their families and their organizations.

Furthermore, McNelly (2016) substantiated that communication from students to others is a major obstacle for students' postsecondary success. Communication modalities from adults to students have evolved to assist students to postsecondary transition, and postsecondary communications and articulation hinders smooth student

transitions. Self-advocacy is a crucial skill for students' success, organizational skills are critical for postsecondary success, and teamwork is crucial for student engagement, problem solving is a skill students must possess to succeed throughout postsecondary education, and time management is lacking with postsecondary student.

Ethics and Professionalism Skills

Since the 1920's many researchers have conducted several studies in this field. Holmes (1991), in exploring the qualities of good teachers, undertook some two parallel studies for two objectives. The first one aims to compare a good teacher's characteristics in China and the USA. The second objective was to test whether or not there are differences among teachers', students' and parents' perceptions of a good teacher's characteristics in China. The qualitative data analyses revealed four themes about the characteristics of good Chinese teachers: Teacher ethics, professional skills, professional development, and students' test scores. It was found that there were no differences among teachers', students' and parents' perceptions of the qualities of good teachers in China on most of the items.

Professionalism and ethics have gained widespread recognition as competencies to be fulfilled, taught, and assessed within medical education apart from basic education. The Medical Council of India recently recommended the integration of professionalism teaching in undergraduate medical curricula. The authors investigated whether the initial orientation lectures and instructions given by faculty at the outset of undergraduate medical anatomy courses throughout India served a "hidden curriculum" regarding professionalism practices, and whether these orientation messages could serve as an early exposure to medical professionalism and ethics for medical students. It was found that most faculty members regularly instruct students regarding expected behavior during the anatomy course, including dissection practices. These instructions stress attributes of professionalism like humanism, accountability, and honesty. Despite the absence of clear guidelines for professionalism teaching in medical education in India, the existing framework of anatomy education provides an opportunity to introduce the concept of professionalism (Karunakaran et al., 2017). A clear parallel can be drawn with the educational training institutions the object of this research study.

In a study to understand how teacher educators teach professional, anti-racist teaching practice lessons to novice teachers, it was identified that there were four endemic requirements of practice-based teacher education work aimed at anti-racist practice: the importance of forming productive pedagogical relationships with novices in order to teach anti-racist practice; the need to connect instruction in the practice to the professional ethics of the practice; the requirement to develop decompositions of focal practices that both capture their complexity and reflect enactment; and managing

challenges associated with designing meaningful approximations of focal practices. Some of the complexity arises from common features of programmatic contexts that perpetuate practices that are rooted in structural racism and can interfere with teacher educators' efforts to teach anti-racist practice. Some of the complexity stems from the inherent difficulty of making anti-racist practice accessible to novices in practice-based teacher education (Achinstein & Fogo, 2015).

The Far Eastern Island of Hong Kong since the 1970s, has been striving to train and impart professionalism among teachers. Lee (2016), reviewed the process of professionalizing school teachers in Hong Kong from the early 1970s which marked the beginning of the significant growth of the size of the teaching profession. The author proposed the idea of setting up a General Teachers' Council as a professional organization for the teaching profession, an idea that was considered by the government with an intention of improving the professional status of school teachers. However this proposal has never been materialized but instead the government turned its focus on other aspects of the teaching professional development such as formulation of the code of ethics for school teachers, the imposition of more stringent requirements in terms of the academic qualifications for new and existing school teachers who are supposed to be degree holders and also the institutionalization of professional development programs and requirements for school principals and teachers. It was argued that the institutionalization of teaching professional development does not necessarily mean teachers having an improved professional status nor teachers are really a well-respected profession in the society.

In a related study conducted by Al-Hothali (2018) focusing on the ethics of the teaching profession among Muslim secondary school teachers from the school leaders' perspective in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, it was revealed that the sample response means were moderate and high in the domain of teacher professional performance, and in their relationship to students, community, and school community as well as family. There were no statistically significant differences in the sample responses due to school type, age, years of experience, and qualification. The author recommended developing a code of ethics approved by the Ministry of Education to be adopted by teachers, preparing rehabilitation training programs for teachers, designing a website of educational supervision and ethics of teaching, creating an atmosphere of mutual relations among teachers, educational supervisors, and school leaders

According to the Canover Company, ethics are principles that help people decide between right and wrong. Ethics are similar to morals or values but ethics typically hold people to a higher standard. Just as it is important to be moral in everyday life, it is important to be ethical in the workplace. According to Ngang et al. (2015), soft skills, especially ethics, morals and professional skills play an

important role in sharpening individual's excellent personality by complementing the hard skills to the teacher communities, school administrators, etc. according to the two authors, ethics, moral and professional skills has been rated as second least needed after entrepreneurship skill in the workplace. However, school administrators have stated that soft skill components are the most needed and most of the novice teachers are lacking of its ethic, moral and professional skill. Novice teachers therefore should be assisted to attain the job market job skills through efforts by teacher educators, institutions, etc. in order to compete in "the world without boundaries".

3. Methodology

Population

The researcher targeted the whole population of the education lecturers concerned with the teaching of education courses at the four targeted universities.

Sampling Techniques

The researcher purposively sampled four privately sponsored universities in the western region of Kenya: University A in Nandi County, University B in Nakuru County, University C in Trans-Nzoia County, and University D in Kisumu County. The four universities are considered to be statistically manageable. All the universities are located in western region of Kenya which is the West of Rift Valley. University A is approximately 320 kilometers from Nairobi, located near Kapsabet town in Nandi County. University B is approximately 10 kilometers west of Nakuru town in Nakuru County and approximately 167 kilometers North West of Nairobi city. University C is located in Trans-Nzoia County which its headquarters is Kitale town. The campus is 390 kilometers North West of Nairobi city. University D is situated in the lake side city of Kisumu and is approximately 450 kilometers west of Nairobi city.

Currently in Kenya (2019), there are a total of 31 accredited public universities and 18 private ones. A further observation confirms that an additional 14 have also been issued with letters of interim authority, 6 public constituent colleges and 5 private constituent colleges in Kenya add up to the list of such institutions of higher learning.

Research Instruments

This research utilized a researcher-developed questionnaire. The research questionnaire with both closed and open-ended items was administered to the lecturers and students. The closed-ended questions were rated on a modified Likert scale (four-point) as follows: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

It was appreciated that the development of the questionnaire was based on the objective of the study. The questionnaire has a section to measure each variable. Indicators for the variables were obtained from the

literature review undertaken and in consultation with the advisors from the School of Education at the university. Subsequently, these questionnaires were administered to the School of Education lecturers.

Teachers' Questionnaire

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
Communicative skills	0.734
Ethics and Professionalism	0.709

4. Results and Discussion

Presentation of findings is done in the order of the research questions. For quantitative findings, tables are used to

present the data, which are arranged in accordance with the two variables that were being studied. The scale of interpretation of means is shown below.

Scale of Interpretation

Mean range	Interpretation
1.00-1.49	Strongly Disagree
1.50-2.49	Disagree
2.50-3.49	Agree
3.50-4.00	Strongly Agree

Table 1: *Lecturer's Perception on Development of Communicative Skills among Education Students*

<i>As a lecturer...</i>	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I listen to my students keenly during lecture and I too, inculcate the same to them	41	1	4	3.71	.602
I carefully select words that are appropriate to my students in class.	41	3	4	3.78	.419
I make sure that my communication is clear and concise	41	3	4	3.83	.381
I nurture and develop confidence among my students when in class	41	3	4	3.88	.331
I ensure that there is mutual respect between me and students	41	3	4	3.80	.401
I mind the tone of my voice during lecture	41	2	4	3.73	.501
Communicative skills	41	3.00	4.00	3.79	.294

From table 1, it is observed that lecturers strongly agreed that they listen to their students keenly during lecture and inculcate the same listening skills to them, with a mean rating of 3.71 and standard deviation of 0.60. The study further revealed that lecturers strongly perceived that they carefully select words that are appropriate to their students in class, with an average mean rating of 3.78 and standard deviation of 0.42. It was also revealed during the study that lecturers from private universities strongly believed that their communication to their students is clear and the mean rating for this item was 3.81 and its standard deviation is 0.38. When lecturers were asked to indicate the level of perception on development of confidence in students while in class, majority of them strongly agreed that they do with a mean rating of 3.88 and standard deviation of 0.33. Mutual respect between students and lecturers is way through which institutions develop soft skills in their students to achieve higher market absorption. It was revealed during the study that the mean rating was 3.80 and the standard deviation of 0.50, suggesting that lecturers strongly agreed that they do develop the soft skill during teaching and learning process. It was also observed that lecturers mind their tone of their voice during lecture, the mean rating was 3.73 and the standard deviation was 0.50 suggesting that they indeed strongly agreed that tone is very important during the process of developing soft skills among students.

A summary analysis output also shows the overall lecturer's perception on the development of communicative skills among education students. The lecturers strongly agreed that they develop communicative skills during learning process in their respective universities. The mean rating was 3.79 and standard deviation of 0.29.

The standard deviation is an indication of how dispersed the data is from the mean. A low standard deviation implies that the data is grouped and close to the mean, while a high standard deviation suggests that the data is more spread out. In reference to the findings of this study, the standard deviation shows whether lecturers had almost similar perception or there were various selections of level of agreement. The highest standard deviation is 0.60, the item on whether lecturers listen to their students keenly during lecture. This higher standard deviation shows that

there was varied opinion on this particular item, hence, it can be concluded that some lecturers indicated that they may not be listening to their students keenly during lecture.

On the other hand, development of confidence among students had lowest standard deviation, revealing that a significant percentage of the participants agreed that they strongly nurture their student's confidence. The standard deviation is used in this study to show which communicative skills is paid much attention by the lecturers during teaching and learning process. This study presents that in private universities, attention is paid more to make sure that graduates communicate clearly and also that they are confident in their work place. However, lecturers do not pay much attention to development of listening skills to their students.

The average rating shows that the standard deviation is 0.29, this is low standard deviation revealing that in general, all lecturers from the four institutions from which data was collected had closely similar agreement that they strongly agreed that soft skills are developed among their students during teaching and learning process.

Recent studies (Ritter et al., 2017; McNelly, 2016) have identified that in today's complex work environment, there is a need for soft skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem solving. Employers recognize that these skills give organizations a competitive advantage and are vital for students' post-secondary success. To address this issue, the authors proposed a curriculum redesign to focus on developing these skillsets. It was also noted that the lack of soft skills in college graduates was an issue that needed to be addressed. Consequently, a 24-hour professional development program for faculty was created to help teach these critical skills. If college graduates are equipped with the necessary soft skills, they will have more successful careers and better opportunities for upward mobility, which will benefit both them and their organizations. Students must possess self-advocacy, organizational skills, teamwork capabilities, problem solving abilities and time management if they are to successfully transition into post-secondary education.

Table 2: Lecturers' Perceptions on Development of Ethics and Professionalism Skills Development among Education Students in Private Universities

<i>As a lecturer...</i>	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I ensure that my class activity is only consistent with my professional ethics.	41	1	4	3.71	.602
I encourage my students to emulate my mode of conduct wherever they are.	41	3	4	3.54	.505
I contact my students through their class representative only	41	1	4	2.73	1.119
I ensure that my students are honest both in their teaching practice and other classes	41	2	4	3.61	.542
I discourage any irresponsible behavior in my classes.	41	3	4	3.93	.264
I use only current teaching materials in my classes.	41	1	4	3.22	.988
I ensure that there is observable mutual respect between me and my students in class.	41	1	4	3.85	.527
I give my students time to ask questions and respond to the questions in class	41	3	4	3.76	.435
I appreciate all level of types of learning without victimization	40	3	4	3.72	.452
I receive students in my office for tutoring	40	1	4	3.25	.927
Ethics and professionalism skills	41	2.78	4.00	3.53	.364

In order to develop professionalism and ethics among students, lecturers should ensure that they give their students time to ask questions and respond to the respective questions in class. When lecturers from private and public universities were asked to give their perception whether they develop this soft skill during learning and teaching process, their perception average to 3.76 and a standard deviation of 0.44 implying that they strongly agreed that they give their students time to ask questions and respond to those questions in class.

Education students during their training are instilled with the abilities to appreciate all levels of types of learning without victimization, the study focused on finding out whether lecturers in private universities develop their students to appreciate all levels of learning without victimization. The findings revealed that lecturers strongly agreed with a mean rating of 3.72 and a standard deviation of 0.45 that during lectures, lecturers appreciate all levels of learning among education students without victimizing them. As part of ethics and professionalism, lecturers should receive students in their offices for tutoring. In

comparison to other items, it was evident that this particular item was rated a little bit lower than the others, though it was strongly agreed by the lecturers that they receive students in their offices for tutoring, the mean rating was 3.25 and a standard deviation of 0.93.

The overall rating of ethics and professionalism skills development among learners in private universities in Western Kenya shows that lecturers strongly perceive that they demonstrate ethics and professionalism during lecture time and that they are feel the skills are passed on to their students who will subsequently demonstrate the same during teaching practice and even after during their employment. The overall mean rating was 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.36.

In terms of standard deviations, it was evident from the findings that there were very varied opinions on two items about the use of the current teaching material as a demonstration of professionalism and contacting students through their class representatives. Either these two items were not clear or some lecturers do not have access to

current teaching materials. The standard deviations for these two items were 1.11 and 0.99, respectively. These deviations are above 1 and close to one in that order. This implies very high dispersion of opinions from the average of 3.53. The lecturers unanimously agreed that ethics and professionalism also mean discouraging student's irresponsible behavior. This is because looking at the standard deviation of this particular item the standard deviation is 0.26.

Professionalism and ethics skills have become essential competencies to be developed and assessed in medical education, beyond basic learning. The Medical Council of India recently proposed the implementation of professionalism teaching in undergraduate medical curricula. This research examined whether the orientation of lectures at the start of undergraduate medical anatomy courses served as a "hidden curriculum" for teaching professionalism practices, and whether these talks could be utilized to introduce medical students to professionalism and ethics. Results showed that most faculty members regularly informed students about expected behavior during the anatomy course, such as dissection practices that involve attributes of professionalism such as humanism, accountability, and honesty. Even though there are no clear guidelines for teaching professionalism in medical education in India, the existing anatomy learning framework provides a good opportunity for introducing this concept (Karunakaran et al., 2017). The findings of this research are analogous to educational training institutions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

There is development of soft skills by education lecturers during teaching and learning process. Lecturers agreed that there is development of communication skills, ethics and professionalism during teaching and learning process. This means that education students graduating from private universities in Western Kenya have acquired soft skills from their lecturers. They also have a higher chance of employability.

5.2 Recommendation

It is recommended that lecturers in school of education continue emphasizing on implementation of soft skills among education students during teaching and learning process. However, lecturers need to improve on how they contact students, it should be through their class representative. They should use current teaching materials as this was rated low.

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