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Students' Diversity and Quality of Education in Universities in Kenya: A Case of Jaramogi Oginga University of Science and Technology

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Abstract
Kenya government has clearly set out national goals of education to be achieved at all levels. To play their expected role, universities have had to consider increasing access to eligible students and providing quality education. In recent years, university education in Kenya has become increasingly diverse. Many secondary school graduates and the working class, who would otherwise miss admission at a university, continue to look for opportunities to pursue university education. The result is a rapid rise in student enrolment and a diverse entry behavior of university students. The purpose of this study was to consider the extent to which Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST) offered quality education in an environment of surging demand for university education and diverse learners. The variables of diversity tested in the study included gender, age, tribe (ethnicity), geographical region, preferences and opinions of the students. Data was collected from Bachelor of Education students. It was found out that there were areas of quality gaps that require attention of University leadership.

Background
The term "quality" means different things to different people. Consequently, many terms have been associated with quality. Such terms as assurance, control, assessment, and audit have been used. According to the Commission for Higher Education (2008), quality in higher education is perceived as consisting of a synthesis of conformity, adaptability and continuous improvement. Quality in higher education can thus be defined as "fitness for purpose" and conformity to predetermined "standard". Education standards are set out by the Ministry of Education through policies, rules and regulations. At times politicians make pronouncements that have far reaching implications on the standards and the concept of fitness of quality education.

Kenya government has clearly set out eight national goals of education to be achieved at all levels (ROK, 2002). These goals include:
  i)   To foster nationalism, patriotism and promote national unity
  ii) To promote the social, economic, technological and industrial needs for national

development

iii) To promote individual development and self-fulfillment
iv) To promote sound moral and religious values
v) To promote social equality and responsibility
vi) To promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures
vii) To promote international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations
viii) To promote positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection.

Quality university education can be understood better if individual and national perspectives are considered as tools of measuring that quality. At individual level, improved career prospects define to a large extent quality education while at national level, university education should achieve national socio-economic goals.

In this study, diversity is conceived to include issues such as gender, age, tribe (ethnicity), geographical region, preferences and opinions. These are characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals. Whereas a gap may exist between the reality and students' perception of the learning environment, the University, like other businesses, is forced to confront the fact that, perception is the reality to students, thus, it is their perceptions that must be considered if improvements are to be recognized (Gudo, 2012).

Problem Statement

Knowing who your students are, as a group and as individuals, is an important part of quality education. Educational psychologists know too well that effective teaching focuses on individuals rather than groups. In recent years, university education in Kenya has become increasingly diverse. Many secondary school graduates and the working class continue to look for opportunities to pursue university education. The result is a rapid rise in student enrolment and diverse entry behavior of university students. Thus, understanding individual disposition of the students from diverse background is a major step towards meeting their needs and the national goals of university education. It is possible that University management has relevant records about each student; however, this study intends to collate student information and generate a report that can inform management policies and decisions aimed at achieving quality university education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to consider the extent to which Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology offered quality education in an environment of diverse learners.

Objectives of the study

i) Establish the extent to which the selected diversity variables affect quality of education at the University.
ii) Extract opinion of students on major student attractions to the University.
iii) Bring forth the major problems students consider as facing them in the University.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized descriptive survey design. A survey design involves asking a large group of respondents' questions about a particular issue (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Kombo and Tromp (2007) further observe that descriptive approach is designed to obtain information concerning the current phenomenon and wherever possible to draw valid conclusions from facts discussed. The descriptive survey was suitable as the researcher intended to obtain information from students as at the time of study and to draw conclusions from the collected information.

Area of Study

Information was collected from Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST). The University is located in Siaya County which is part of the former Nyanza province. It is one of the youngest Universities in Kenya. It started as a constituent college of Maseno University in 2008 and obtained a charter becoming a fully fledged university in February 2013.

Target Population

The target student population enrolled in undergraduate courses in JOOUST was 5,142.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Stratified random sampling was used to identify second year Bachelor of Education students. They were considered appropriate because they had longer experience with the University. It was assumed that they had developed stable thoughts and opinions concerning learning experiences in the University. According to Israel (2009), the formula below can be used to determine sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \qquad = \frac{5{,}142}{1+5{,}142(0.05)^2}$$

$$371 \text{ students}$$

Where n = sample size

N = Population size

e = confidence level (.05)

The anticipated sample size was 371 of the JOOUST students. However, the second year students who had reported by third week of January to April, 2014 semester were only 207. All the 207 students were given questionnaires to fill. The number of respondents was considered adequate in this study. In social science, a minimum of 30 respondents is considered adequate (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

Data Collection Instruments

The variables of diversity tested in the study included gender, age, tribe (ethnicity), geographical region, preferences and opinions of the students. The researcher used a

questionnaire which sought to obtain information about personal characteristics and opinion on problems they faced at the University. The questionnaire had ten closed ended questions and two open ended questions. The open ended questionnaire sought to obtain the factors that attracted them to the University and the problems they faced. Closed ended questions sought to obtain general information such as age, gender, county of origin, nationality and preferences about the respondents.

Instruments' Validity and Reliability
Before the research instrument was used, they were subjected to validity and reliability tests as described in the sections that follow.

Validity of Research Instrument: The researcher established validity of the instrument by adopting a questionnaire that had been tested and successfully used in a similar environment by the researcher.

Reliability of Research Instruments: Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results after repeated trials (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The researcher established reliability by piloting the questionnaire to 100 respondents from first year students in the University. The 100 students in the pilot study were not involved in the actual study. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha (α) reliability test. A result above 0.5 was considered acceptable (Fairchild, 2002). The result of Cronbach's alpha measure for the instrument was 0.617. The coefficient was above 0.5. This was interpreted to imply that the items in the scales correlated highly among themselves and consistently measured the constructs of interest. The Cronbach's alpha test measures how well a set of items (or variables) measures a single unidimensionality (i.e. fit to the one-factor model) of a latent construct. The Cronbach's alpha score generally increases when the correlations between the items increase (Sultan & Wong, 2010).

Methods of Data Analysis
Data obtained from the administration of the questionnaire were coded before being entered in Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics Data Editor Version 21. SPSS was used as a tool to generate frequencies and percentages from the responses obtained.

Results and Discussions

(i) <u>Gender of Respondents</u>

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender. The response was as shown in table 1.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	113	54.6	54.9	54.9
Valid	Female	93	44.9	45.1	100.0
	Total	206	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		207	100.0		

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

From the table it is evident that the male and female respondents were 54.9% and 45.1% respectively. The results were assumed to represent the total population of undergraduate students in the University. This finding indicates that there is a move towards gender parity in University education. An earlier study found out that that less than 39.5% of students admitted in public universities were female students (Gudo & Olel, 2011). This has since improved.

(ii) Education Course Options

The respondents were asked to indicate the education options they were pursuing at the University. The results were as shown in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Bachelor of Education options

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Arts	122	58.9	59.5	59.5
Valid	Science	75	36.2	36.6	96.1
	Special Needs	8	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	205	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.0		
Total		207	100.0		

The table shows that Arts (58.9%) is the most preferred option followed by Science (36.2%) and Special Needs (3.9%) in that that order. The researcher interrogated influence of gender in choosing these options. The results are shown in table 3 below.

90

Table 3: Gender of Respondent and Bachelor of Education options studied

| | | Bachelor of Education options | | | Total |
		Arts	Science	Special Needs	
Gender of Respondent	Male	53 (43.44%)	58 (77.33%)	2 (25%)	113 (54.6%)
	Female	69 (56.56%)	17 (22.67%)	6(75%)	92 (44.9%)
Total		122 (100%)	75 (100%)	8 (100%)	205 (100%)

The table shows that there is clear gender bias with regard to what they chose to study at the University. Male students preferred Science subjects (77.33%) while female students prefer Arts subjects (56.56%). Results indicated that Special Needs option was not popular with the students. Out of the 3.9% of education students taking Special Needs, 75% of the students were female.

(iii) Marital Status of Respondents
Respondents were asked to indicate their marital status. The response was as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Marital Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	191	92.3	94.1	94.1
	Married	4	1.9	2.0	96.1
	Divorced	4	1.9	2.0	98.0
	Separated	2	1.0	1.0	99.0
	Widowed	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	203	98.1	100.1	
Missing	System	4	1.9		
Total		207	100.0		

The table above shows that 94.1% of respondents were single. However, a few of the students had experience of marriage. The researcher analysed relationship between mode of study and marital status and obtained the results shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Relationship between Marital Status and Mode of Study

		Mode of Study		Total
		Regular (JAB)	Self Sponsored (Parallel)	
Marital Status	Single	158	32	190
	Married	2	2	4
	Divorced	2	2	4
	Separated	1	1	2
	Widowed	2	0	2
Total		165	37	202

The table above shows that both regular and self sponsored students have experienced married life. This finding goes against the expectation that regular students are not yet married. The results indicate that 4.24% and 13.514% of regular and self sponsored students respectively had been in marriage. It is possible that economic challenges of students and the waiting period before regular students get admitted to Universities for registration are among factors responsible for this number of students in the regular programme who have been married.

(iv) <u>Age Composition of Respondents</u>

Respondents were asked to indicate their date of birth. The response was as shown below.

Table 6: Date of Birth

Year of birth		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1977 and below	4	1.9	2.0	2.0
	1978	1	.5	.5	2.5
	1980	1	.5	.5	3.0
	1987	1	.5	.5	3.5
	1988	1	.5	.5	4.0
	1989	7	3.4	3.5	7.6
	1990	15	7.2	7.6	15.2
	1991	14	6.8	7.1	22.2
	1992	43	20.8	21.7	43.9
	1993	68	32.9	34.3	78.3
	1994	40	19.3	20.2	98.5
	1995	3	1.4	1.5	100.0
	Total	198	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	9	4.3		
Total		207	100.0		

The table above shows that 87% of the students were born from 1990 to 1994. Thus, most of the respondents were 20 to 24 years old. The implication is that this group of students will graduate two years away at the age of 22 to 26 years. This is a youthful age group to whom the University provides good preparation environment for career, employment and lifelong family partners. Guidance and counselling would be most useful for this group if it focuses on the areas mentioned above. Unfortunately several studies in the past found out that guidance and counseling services in public universities were ineffective (Standa, 2000; K'okul, 2010 & Gudo, 2012).

(v) The Nationality of Respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate the nationality. The results are as follows.

Table 7: Nationality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Kenyan	204	98.6	99.0	99.0
	Foreign Student	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	206	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		207	100.0		

The results show that 99% of the students were Kenyans while 1% are foreign (international) students. The finding is consistent with other studies on the same. A study conducted in 2010, showed that at University of Nairobi, Masinde Muliro, USIU and University of Eastern Africa (Baraton) respectively had 0.669%, 0.16%, 12.59% and 9.906% of the students being international (Gudo, 2012). Lack of national diversity of students negatively affects the quality of university students in the public universities. Top ranked universities are associated with attracting students and faculty who are not exclusively from the country where the university operates. This enables them to attract most talented people and open themselves to new ideas and approaches (Salmi & Altbach, 2011).

In view of increased mobility of students across national borders, this negligible number of foreign students in public universities shows that they have not positioned themselves as centers of excellence to attract student admissions from other countries. It consequently negatively affected the quality of education offered in the universities.

(vi) County of Origin

Respondents were asked to state their county of origin. This was important in understanding national diversity among the students. The results are shown in the table below.

Table 8: County of Origin

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Mombasa	1	.5	.5	.5
	Kwale	2	1.0	1.1	1.6
	Kilifi	1	.5	.5	2.1
	Marsabit	1	.5	.5	2.7
	Meru	7	3.4	3.7	6.4
	Embu	1	.5	.5	6.9
	Kitui	5	2.4	2.7	9.6
	Machakos	7	3.4	3.7	13.3
	Makueni	9	4.3	4.8	18.1
	Nyandarua	2	1.0	1.1	19.1
	Kirinyaga	2	1.0	1.1	20.2
	Murang'a	1	.5	.5	20.7
	Kiambu	5	2.4	2.7	23.4
	West Pokot	1	.5	.5	23.9
	Trans Nzoia	3	1.4	1.6	25.5
	Uasin Gishu	2	1.0	1.1	26.6
Valid	Elgeyo/Marakwet	2	1.0	1.1	27.7
	Nandi	4	1.9	2.1	29.8
	Laikipia	1	.5	.5	30.3
	Nakuru	4	1.9	2.1	32.4
	Kericho	5	2.4	2.7	35.1
	Bomet	4	1.9	2.1	37.2
	Kakamega	5	2.4	2.7	39.9
	Vihiga	4	1.9	2.1	42.0
	Bung'oma	8	3.9	4.3	46.3
	Busia	9	4.3	4.8	51.1
	Siaya	32	15.5	17.0	68.1
	Kisumu	15	7.2	8.0	76.1
	Homa Bay	20	9.7	10.6	86.7
	Migori	6	2.9	3.2	89.9
	Kisii	13	6.3	6.9	96.8
	Nyamira	6	2.9	3.2	100.0
	Total	188	90.8	100.0	
Missing	System	19	9.2		
Total		207	100.0		

Results indicate that the University attracts students from 32 out of 47 Counties of Kenya. 44.5% of the students came from the larger former Nyanza Province, which now consists of Siaya, Kisumu, Homa Bay, Migori, Kisii and Nyamira counties. If students drawn from the neighbouring former Western province now consisting of Kakamega, Vihiga, Bungoma and Busia counties are factored in, then the University attracts 62.8% of its students from regions which constitute its immediate environment. In terms of local context, this is good representation of counties in the University. The finding corroborates earlier study which found out that 62.5% to 67.5% of students in universities outside Nairobi come from their immediate environment (Gudo & Olel, 2011). However, the number attracted from the counties outside former Nyanza and Western provinces is not large enough to provide a critical mass for fostering nationalism, patriotism and promotion of national unity in short or medium term.

Student interactions in the University have chances of producing stereotype ethnic champions rather than nationalists as it denies students skills to cope with cultural dimensions in the society, at work and career enhancement. Kenya's diversity in culture and ethnic heritage is perhaps best demonstrated by her wealth of 42 indigenous tribes, in addition to other multi-racial, multi-lingual and numerous religious groups. Escape from ethnic tragedies that have bedeviled Kenya in election years underscores the importance of concerted efforts to ensure that social cohesion is maintained as the basis of national unity. As Kenya embraces devolved county governance, there is urgency for concrete efforts to instill the spirit of national cohesion through the education system. This calls for deliberate policies that guarantee sufficient student diversity in private and public universities.

(vii)   Level of Preference for Bachelor of Education Course

Respondents were asked to state whether Bachelor of Education course was the preferred course they wanted to study at University level. Results are as shown in table 9 below.

Table 9: Preferred University Course according to gender.

Count

		Preferred University Course		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender of Respondent	Male	92 (82.14%)	20 (17.86%)	112 (100%)
	Female	79 (85.87%)	13 (14.13%)	92 (100%)
Total		171 (83.82%)	33 (16.18%)	204 (100%)

The table shows that 83.82% of the Bachelor of Education students are taking the course they preferred. This finding may have been occasioned by opportunities for students to revise preferred university courses to be studied and the significant number of self sponsored

students. The high number of students taking preferred courses provides good foundation for production of high quality teacher graduates. According to UNESCO (1995), the quality of students in higher education depends in the first place on the aptitudes and motivations of those leaving secondary education and wishing to pursue studies at higher level.

(viii)   Level of Confidence in the University.

The researcher wanted to establish the level of confidence students had in the University as a preferred institution for university education. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they would recommend the University to other students who want to pursue university education. The results are shown in table 10 below.

Table 10: Level of Confidence in the University by Gender

		Recommending JOOUST		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender of Respondent	Male	88 (78.57%)	24 (21.43%)	112 (100%)
	Female	88 (94.62%)	5 (5.38%)	93 (100%)
Total		176 (85.85%)	29 (14.15%)	205 (100%)

As presented in the table, 85.85% of the students are likely to recommend the University to their acquaintances. Results also indicate that more female than male students were willing to recommend the University. This is a vote of confidence in the University services. However, 14.15% of the students would not recommend the University to anyone. It is possible that this is due to dissatisfaction with University services. The results were a striking similarity with Nganga, Kitainge, Wanjiku & Gathuthi (2010) which found out 85.4% and 14.6% of students in public universities in Kenya indicated that quality was high and low respectively.

(ix) Major Student attractions to the University

The researcher wanted to find out major student attractions to the University. The results are shown in table 11 below.

Table 11: Major Attractions of students to the University

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
i) Quality of education offered	62	30.84577
ii) Course is offered with Information Technology	55	27.36318
iii) Conducive Learning environment	37	18.40796
iv) Easy to access or near home	20	9.950249
v) JAB Placement	9	4.477612
vi) I did not have much information, so no influence	5	2.487562
vii) To explore Nyanza	5	2.487562
viii) Home of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Prime Minister	3	1.492537
ix) Discipline of students and good moral values	2	0.995025
x) The fees was cheap and affordable	2	0.995025
xi) Influence of my Parents	1	0.497512
	201	100

The results indicate that four major factors contributed most significantly to students' attraction to the University. The major attractions were quality of education offered, course was offered with Information Technology, existence of Conducive Learning environment and the University is easy to access or near home. JAB placement came a distant fifth as a second tier factor for consideration by students. It also meant that students did not consider JAB placement as having final say on where they should pursue University education.

The third tier factors which influenced students to take up studies at the University included geographical location in Nyanza, being associated with renowned politicians Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, discipline of students, good moral values, affordable fees and influence of parents. Importance of the findings is indication of areas of interest to students for quality education.

(x) Problems facing students at the University

The respondents were asked to indicate one major problem faced while studying at the University. A number of students gave more than one answer. Consequently, there were more responses above the number of respondents. Results are shown in table 12 below.

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Table 12: Problems faced by students at the University

Problem faced at the University	Frequency	Percentage
i) Inadequate accommodation facilities	91	28.61635
ii) Inadequate library space and text books	65	20.44025
iii) Inadequate services in the mess/cafeteria	21	6.603774
iv) Lack of quality services	18	5.660377
v) Poor sanitation in bathrooms and toilets	18	5.660377
vi) Lack of enough computers	17	5.345912
vii) Inadequate lecture rooms	16	5.031447
viii) Student personal financial challenges	15	4.716981
ix) Inadequate internet facility	10	3.144654
x) Overcrowding in the university facilities	10	3.144654
xi) Insufficient student entertainment	6	1.886792
xii) Peer Pressure	5	1.572327
xiii) Lack of enough chairs for students	4	1.257862
xiv) Poor communication between students and administration	4	1.257862
xv) Lack of/ slow response to issues by Janitors	4	1.257862
xvi) Tribalism	3	0.943396
xvii) Long and Poor registration process	3	0.943396
xviii) Poor medical services	2	0.628931
xix) So many first year students	2	0.628931
xx) Lack of sporting activities	2	0.628931
xxi) Timetable clashes	1	0.314465
xxii) Delayed student results	1	0.314465
	318	100

Results in the table above show that the problems are in three categories. Problems related to student accommodation and inadequate library facilities rank top in their own category as the most serious problems faced by students at the University. Inadequate services in the students' mess/cafeteria, poor sanitation in bathrooms and toilets and slow response to student issues by janitors although presented as a separate problems compound student accommodation problem. Some janitors are reported as rude, especially one female janitor.

Lack of adequate teaching and learning resources form the second category of problems faced by students. These include inadequate computers, lecture rooms, internet facility and chairs in lecture rooms. It is the shortage of facilities that perhaps lead to overcrowding of University facilities and so many first year students as problems stated by students. Another problem stated in this category was student personal financial challenges. This problem was an outcome of economic backgrounds of the students with regard to cost sharing policy enforced by the government since 1991.

The third category comprises administrative problems. These include insufficient student entertainment, poor communication between students and administration, long and tiresome registration process for course units and examinations, poor medical services, lack of sporting activities, timetable clashes and delayed student results. Students also felt that there were favours given on tribal consideration especially with regard to allocation of hostels.

The problems cited by students as shown in the table pose real threat to provision of quality education at the University. Failure to attend to the problems are not attended to may cause disruption of learning process through occurrences such as student demonstration or any other industrial actions taken by students. Such actions have a high likelihood of causing loss of learning time. It is important to note that university learning is measured in terms of time allocated for each course and unit.

The problems, however, are not unique to Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology; other public universities face problems closely related to what is cited above (Gudo, 2012). However, that is not enough reason to ignore them. Universities are centres of excellence. The goal of the University should be to excel in production of high quality students and generation of new frontiers of knowledge. This goal will be a mirage in the face of student problems as discovered.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Facts and figures presented showed areas of quality gaps that require attention of University leadership. Learners in the University had many different experiences, different interpretations of their experiences, different learning needs and challenges. Provision of quality education in such an environment can be challenging. In order for the University to facilitate quality learning process of the students with a variety of backgrounds and needs, then it should make constant effort to understand the students; their needs, experiences and challenges. These require consultative forums individually, in groups, through representation or a combination of these consultative approaches. Use of a variety of teaching styles to respond to the needs of diverse learners and reality of University experiences are critical quality ingredients that the University may need to revaluate for purposes of improvements.

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