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Relevance of Master of Business Administration Programme to Selected Organisations in Kenya

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Abstract

The corporate world is continuously seeking to employ highly qualified Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduates from the best universities. The research on which this paper was based sought to establish relevance of the MBA programme in corporate Kenya. The research studied one hundred MBA students from five selected universities and forty employees from five selected companies. The research used descriptive design and purposive and systematic sampling. Data was collected through structured questionnaires. It was then analysed using SPSS and presented through charts, graphs and tables. The study found that the MBA programme was relevant to corporate organisations and equipped graduates with relevant leadership skills at places of work. However, some MBA programmes did not address specific industrial needs and some curricula lacked experiential learning. The study recommended introduction of experiential learning, mentorship, use of local case studies and addressing specific industrial needs.

Keywords: MBA, quality of MBA graduates, relevance of MBA programmes, impact to the corporate world

Introduction

Masters of Business Administration (MBA) is among the professional degree programmes that train students to enter the corporate world. With accrediting authorities focusing on the outcome of educational assessment, educational institutions are increasingly compelled to review their MBA curricula to suit market needs. This in turn raises concerns on whether business schools or universities train their students adequately enough to assume managerial positions in organisations. It is assumed that the quality of graduates, their confidence, leadership skills and competency depends on the approach used in teaching, curriculum applied and quality of the teaching staff.

Hoover et al. (2010) assert that questions have been raised recently as to the relevance and effectiveness of business education and MBA programmes in particular; about their ability to infuse students with the skills needed to function at the executive level in modern organisations. This deficiency is attributed to business schools' overemphasis on theory in their curricula. Business school curricula have not kept pace with the demand for more realistic education. These purported inadequacies in the MBA programmes have raised concerns as to whether business schools are producing graduates that have the attributes and skills desired by organisations. These so-called executive skills include communication, teamwork, decision-making, planning, organising and leadership.

To develop an understanding of this desired outcome, a study was designed and conducted to explore the expectations of Kenyan employers with relation to MBA graduates. The study examined the quality of MBA programmes offered at universities in Kenya and gave recommendations for improvement. The study covered areas such as approach used to train MBA students, content of the curriculum, teaching facilities and teaching staff and their qualifications.

Literature Review

Gupta et al. (2007) noted that, there was disconnect between what employers appeared to want and what business schools offered. Companies hire MBAs with narrow specialization and then complain that business schools are not producing individuals who could both lead and make practical decisions.

Farias et al. (2010) note that business education in general and MBA programmes in particular have been the subjects of increasing criticism in recent years. There have been complaints from employers that the competence of some of their employees is not as per their academic qualifications. According to Greiner et al. (2003), corporate recruiters increasingly seek business graduates who can both make good strategic business decisions and execute them effectively. Students are required to make analytical judgement calls on the spot in ambiguous situations and exhibit the necessary behavioural ability to transform strategic decisions into tangible results brought about by employees.

Windsor et al. (1982) note that, the MBA curriculum continues to face criticisms for a number of reasons. They argue that tomorrow's managers need wider education coupled with diverse dimensions. The

MBA curriculum could be divided in sections covering the general management knowledge as the foundation, then functional courses to train students on operations and finally integrate analysis and policy determination. All these areas are sensitive to environmental changes and effects. The MBA curriculum also incorporates international dimensions to maintain standards. A few electives could be incorporated to advance specialization. Windsor and Tuggle (1982, p.72) say, "A scrutiny of virtually any MBA curriculum will reveal this basic structure." The criticisms include a curriculum that is not relevant to many business problems of today, which are political, legal and social in nature. This also explains a problem of communication and interpersonal skills. Another criticism is that MBA degrees concentrate on analysis instead of decisions and focus on short-term rather than long-term growth.

According to Windsor and Tuggle (1982), the MBA curriculum is explicitly and deliberately a blend of the analytical, case and simulation approach. "Discussion of MBA courses in the business press tends to be critical of them for emphasizing on theoretical and analytical content at the expense of people management skills" (Murray & Morley 1995, p.176). Brewer and Brewer (2010) argue that higher business education plays an important role in preparing students to assume the knowledge management and human resource roles so necessary to organisations. They add that the management of knowledge has increasingly become a topic of interest in both business-industry and education circles.

Methodology

The research design for this study was descriptive. The target population was MBA students and corporate organisations in Kenya. Purposive sampling was used to select five universities and five corporate companies in Kenya. These include: University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Daystar University, Strathmore University and Africa Nazarene University; East Africa Breweries, Kenya Airports Authority, Kenya Civil Aviation Authority, Cooperative Bank, and Compassion International respectively. Systematic sampling was used to select twenty (20) MBA students from each of the selected universities, thus making one hundred (100) students. Purposive sampling was used to select three (3) managers and five (5) members of staff from each of the five companies thus making a total of (40) forty members of staff.

Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0. Presentation was done by use of tables, charts and graphs.

Results

The results obtained showed that out of the one hundred students interviewed in this study, seventy-five (75%) responded while out of the forty corporate employees interviewed, thirty (75%) responded.

Graduates' opinion on relevance of MBA programme

Students overwhelmingly reported that the MBA programme was positively influencing their job performance with fifty-four students (72%) indicating that the programme was relevant. Five students (7%) indicated that the programme was not relevant while sixteen students (21%) did not give their opinion (Fig. 1). The positive responses on the relevance of the MBA programme indicated that the programme had played a key role in career growth and had tremedously enhanced their performance. The relevance of MBA programmes was attributed to the vital skills acquired through constructive guidance and close interaction with lecturers and experts or mentors in the course of their learning.

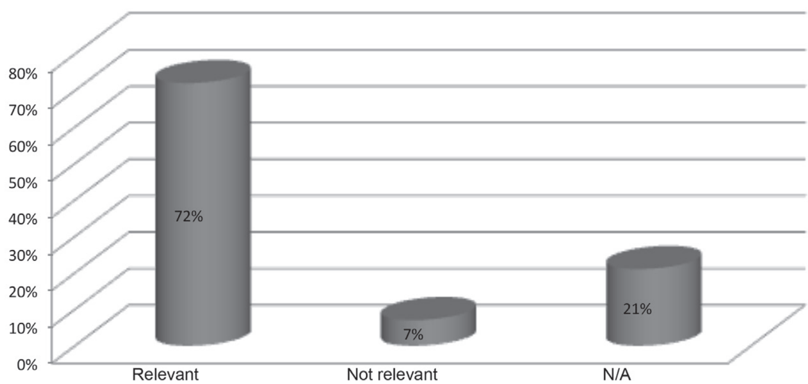

Figure 1: Influence of MBA programme on job performance

MBA graduates' competence

An evaluation was done on the potential of the MBA programme in enhancing graduates' competencies and managerial skills in decision making, interpersonal skills, team work, critical thinking in problem solving and planning. The results obtained showed that sixty students (80%) supported the MBA programme by indicating that it had equipped and enhanced their ability to make strategic business decisions as well as executing them effectively (Fig. 2). This was attributed to the programme's 'functional courses' that train students on business operations, analysis and policy determination. In addition, the students had been trained to become responsive to environmental changes and effects, and the curriculum was well structured to meet international standards.

On the other hand, thirteen students (17%) indicated that the programme had been commercialised and was more theoretical, producing less competent graduates with limited managerial skills and lacking innovation. In addition, the programme did not employ local market case studies approach in its delivery specifically.

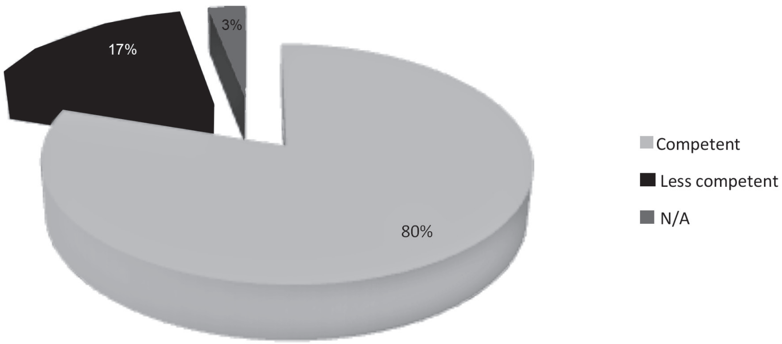

Figure 2: Competence of MBA graduates

Employers' perspective on MBA graduates competence

From the results obtained, twenty-five of the employers (83.3%) reported that the programme had proved to be relevant to corporate organisations in Kenya. They indicated that the graduates had proved to be knowledgeable in their jobs, were endowed with the relevant and competitive managerial skills coupled with innovation, entrepreneurship and global business strategy among others. The acquired skills had enhanced their job performance through applying innovative ideas and critical problem solving abilities thus providing solutions to the existing complex societal needs. However, 16.7% of the employers indicated that, the graduates were lacking some relevant skills for the industry such as analytical, interpersonal, proactiveness, predicting future market trends and hands on approach. They attributed this to limited universities' consultation with the industry in curriculum development, failure to engage experts or mentors during class sessions and lack an of experiential learning approach (Fig. 3).

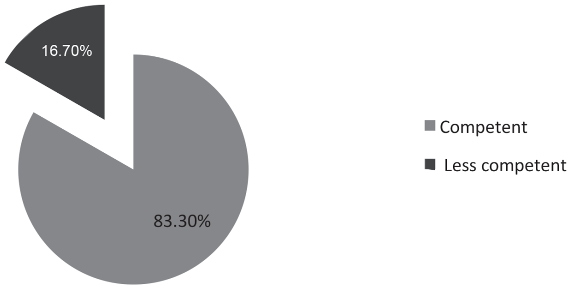

Figure 3: Employers' perspective on competence of MBA graduates

The employers, however, favoured private universities over public universities. Out of thirty employees, twenty-four preferred private universities over public universities (Tab. 1).

Table 1: Preference for private universities over public universities

University category	Frequency	Percentage
Private universities	24	80
Public public universities	6	20
Total	30	100

When asked why they preferred private universities or some university MBA graduates, the respondents had a number of reasons. The employers reported that, private universities had fully developed business schools, incorporated case studies in learning, had market-driven programmes thus, their MBA graduates were qualified, having been taught by competent lecturers with in-depth training, who equiped their students with the right managerial skills.

Discussion

Fundamentally, the development of any society is vested on its workforce. It is therefore worth noting that the call for transformational teaching or learning as stated by Anding (2005), is urgent to ensure graduates are best suited for the task ahead. Therefore, this calls for proper student nurturing and careful selection of courses taught. The world we live in today is radically dynamic, thus MBA programmes should equip graduates with life skills and virtues such as integrity, transparency, respect for humankind and stewardship, which would enable them to competitively coexist in today's dynamic corporate world (Kagame, 2011).

Results obtained from this study showed that the MBA programme had positively influenced students in their career growth by equipping them with the relevant skills and knowledge required by organisations towards strategy development and implementation. This finding is in agreement with Greiner et al. (2003), who indicated that corporates increasingly sought MBA graduates who can both make good strategic business decisions and execute them effectively. According to the study, skills acquired by the graduates had enabled them to positively impact organisations as well provide critical solutions to existing organisational challenges.

However, there were some concerns about the quality and level of competence of MBA graduates. This was attributed to the programme being theoretical, commercialised, over enrolled hence having overcrowded classes, lacking experiential learning, failing to engage experts or mentors from the industry or use the local case study approach during teaching, and having limited consultation with the industry during curriculum development. It was however noted that private universities had more consultation with the corporate world in developing and reviewing their curricula compared to the public universities.

Recommendations

From the findings obtained in this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Universities should regularly consult with the industry when developing or reviewing their MBA curricula in order to meet industry expectations.
2. MBA programmes should adopt the experiential learning approach and embrace a simulation style of teaching.
3. Programmes should engage experts or mentors from the industry in order to expose students to real industrial situations.
4. Kenyan case studies should be included in the studies alongside international ones.

Conclusion

The study established that the MBA programme was relevant for equipping graduates with the necessary skills required for effective delivery and quality input towards corporate growth and thus economic growth of the nation. Some gaps in the programme were identified which calls for universities to increase their efforts towards bridging the gaps and ensuring sustainable MBA programmes.

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