



Original Article

Curriculum Alignment and Graduate Employability: A Comprehensive Exploration at Makerere University

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This study aimed to investigate the alignment of Makerere University's curriculum with the explicit objective of improving graduate employability, prompted by stakeholders' concerns regarding the perceived lack of employable skills in many Ugandan university graduates. Using a multiple-case study design, the research focused on four out of 107 undergraduate programs at the University. Data were collected through document analysis and individual interviews with thirteen key informants purposefully selected for their insights. The findings indicate that the University's programs primarily emphasize career development, subject-specific skills, and understanding, incorporating essential workplace skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information, media, technology, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills. Moreover, science disciplines prioritize experiential elements, including work and life experiences. While the study underscores the alignment of Makerere University's curricula to enhance graduate employability, it highlights the neglect of vital components such as emotional intelligence and work experience. The conclusion emphasizes the need for a collaborative approach involving stakeholders to develop a well-rounded curriculum and recommends continuous efforts to integrate diverse learning methods for holistic development and increased readiness for the dynamic professional landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global job market faces a significant challenge as the influx of university graduates outpaces available employment opportunities, leading to concerns among educators and policymakers (Romgens et al., 2019). This challenge is exacerbated by a persistent mismatch between the skills and knowledge produced by universities and those sought by employers, indicating a deficiency in graduates' overall employability (Sato et al., 2021; Anyidoho, 2020). An alternative perspective suggests that the imbalance results from economies' limited capacity to absorb the surge of skilled workers generated by universities. This issue is particularly pronounced in Uganda, reflecting a global challenge and prompting an examination of Makerere University's curricula alignment with the imperative of promoting graduate employability. Thus, this study explored the extent to which Makerere University's curricula address the critical issue of graduate employability.

Historically, the relationship between higher education (HE) and the labor market underwent a significant transformation during the late 1950s and 60s in Europe and America and the 1970s and 80s in Africa (Al-Samarrai & Bennell, 2007). The traditional smooth transition of skilled individuals into well-compensated positions gave way to complexities within the labor market, prompting critiques of higher education for producing graduates lacking employable skills and contributing to unemployment (Amamukiror, 2020; Clarke, 2018). Disagreements persist, with some attributing the disconnect to the demand side of the labor market rather than the supply side (Al-Samarrai & Bennell, 2007). This lack of consensus necessitates further investigation into integrating employability within HE institution curricula (Romgens et al., 2019).

Exploring the Ugandan context, the formalization of education disrupted indigenous apprenticeship-based learning, leading to a perception of traditional training as inferior (Musisi & Sessanga, 2016). Makerere University, established in 1922, was crucial in supplying a skilled workforce during the colonial and post-independence periods. However, the 1980s saw a deepening shortage of employment opportunities for graduates in Uganda, sparking

concerns highlighted by scholars and institutions (Mayanja et al., 2001; Kirumira & Bateganya, 2003). Despite subsequent efforts to address the challenge, graduate employability remains a pressing issue, necessitating ongoing initiatives and policies to mitigate youth unemployment (Kwesiga et al., 2019).

Within higher education studies, scholars have critiqued the role of curricula in contributing to youth unemployment, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive study on the link between higher education curricula and graduate employability in Uganda (Ndungutse, 2015; Ntale et al., 2020; Pettersen, 2017; Sembatya & Ngobi, 2015; Wild & Omingo, 2020). To address this gap, the study drew on curriculum design and evaluation models and Pool and Sewell's (2007) Career Edge Model of Employability. Specifically, the study employed Biggs's constructive alignment model, which underscores the importance of aligning HE study programs' objectives, content, teaching methods, and assessments to enhance graduate employability.

This study focused on three key concepts: graduate employability, curriculum, and alignment. Graduate employability is defined as attributes that enhance graduates' potential for employment success, encompassing knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes (Tumpa et al., 2023). The curriculum is viewed as the collective experiences offered to students during their educational journey. For this study, it pertained to the courses constituting a study program. Curriculum alignment involves harmonizing learning objectives, teaching content, methods, and assessments to promote graduate employability in Uganda.

The study centered on Makerere University, established in 1922, which has played a vital role in Uganda's higher education landscape. Despite its achievements, concerns persist about graduates' challenges in securing meaningful employment. This prompts questions about the effectiveness of the education provided by Makerere University, with debates on whether the current curriculum adequately aligns with the demands of the labor market. This study sought to investigate the extent to which Makerere University's curriculum effectively promotes graduate employability.

Statement of the Research Problem

In higher education, there is a persistent expectation among education stakeholders that university students should undergo a comprehensive curriculum, instilling the requisite knowledge, skills, and values vital for success in the fiercely competitive labor market (Sembatya & Ngobi, 2015). However, the realization of this aspiration confronts substantial challenges in practice. Recent observations by Kiranda et al. (2017) emphasize the harsh reality that numerous university graduates in Uganda are grappling with significant difficulties in securing suitable employment or launching their ventures. With its multifaceted roots, this graduate unemployment predicament is often attributed by various individuals, including certain employers, to a deficiency in employable skills in the curricula students are exposed. Notably, the curriculum shaping these graduates is formulated with the approval of relevant stakeholders, including the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE), the oversight body for all higher education institutions in the country. The evident gap between the curriculum and the practical demands of the labor market raises a crucial question about the alignment of Makerere University's curriculum with the explicit goal of fostering graduate employability. If left unaddressed, the current situation threatens the prospects of university students, potentially hindering the University's capacity to effectively contribute to the goals outlined in the National Development Plan III (NDP III) and the broader Agenda 2040. Consequently, it became imperative to conduct a comprehensive exploration to discern the precise extent to which Makerere University's curriculum is designed to promote the employability of its graduates.

Objectives of the study

The study aimed to achieve the following research objectives:

- Evaluate the alignment between the stipulated objectives of the selected curricula at Makerere University and their impact on fostering graduate employability.

- Assess the prevalence of employability-related topics, skills, and competencies within the course content and syllabi of the selected curricula at Makerere University.
- Investigate the contributions of teaching and learning methods in the selected curricula at Makerere University to the practical development of employability skills and knowledge among students.
- Examine the effectiveness of assessment strategies employed in the selected curricula at Makerere University in promoting and developing employability skills and competencies among students.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent are the stipulated objectives of the selected curricula at Makerere University aligned to foster graduate employability?
- How prevalent are employability-related topics, skills, and competencies in the course content and syllabi of the selected curricula?
- How do teaching and learning methods in the selected curricula contribute to the practical development of employability skills and knowledge among students?
- Do the assessment strategies employed in the selected curricula effectively correspond with the promotion and development of employability skills and competencies?

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to investigate the alignment of Makerere University's curriculum to enhance graduate employability, a crucial aspect of the current educational landscape. The choice of a multiple-case study design was deliberate, focusing on four distinct undergraduate programs to provide a comprehensive understanding of the University's approach. A qualitative research approach was employed using document analysis and interviews to gather rich and nuanced insights. Thirteen key informants, selected purposively, played a pivotal

role in elucidating the extent to which the curriculum aligns to foster graduate employability. The research methodology adhered to established criteria for qualitative research, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The data collection process involved a systematic document analysis utilizing a comprehensive checklist and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, ensuring a holistic examination of the subject matter. Subsequently, the collected data underwent thorough analysis using the content analysis method to derive meaningful patterns and insights. The research process was conducted with a strict adherence to ethical considerations, prioritizing the well-being and confidentiality of participants. This study employed a robust and methodologically rigorous approach to contribute

valuable insights into the alignment of Makerere University's curriculum with the imperative of enhancing graduate employability, offering a foundation for informed educational policy and practice.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

The initial research inquiry posed was: "To what extent are the stipulated objectives of the selected curricula at Makerere University aligned to foster graduate employability?" A combination of document analysis and interviews was undertaken to address this question. The findings gleaned from the document analysis are succinctly summarized and presented in Table 1 for clarity and reference.

Table 1: Nature of Programs, Their Objectives and Alignment with Employability

S/N	Programs	Objectives	Employability Elements
1	Bachelor of Science in Medicine and Surgery	Promotion of health and prevention of disease Patient Management Medical Legal duties Research Management & Administration Teaching and learning Understanding the Role of Traditional Medicine Community Leadership.	Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills Generic Skills Career Development Learning Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations
2	Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering	To develop the intellectual capacity of young students/scientists and equip them with practical knowledge. Skills. Moreover, attitudes to positively influence sustainable agricultural development, nature, conservation, and judicious utilization of environmental resources.	Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills. Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations
3	Bachelor of Arts with Education (Ba/Ed)	Acquiring knowledge helps develop a critical awareness of educational problems and processes. To acquire skills to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the relationship between education and society and apply these to real educational issues; To acquire a favorable disposition in applying the knowledge and skills learned. To acquaint the student teachers with the ever-changing activities and roles of professional teachers. To equip the student teachers with the necessary cognitive knowledge and practical skills to execute their professional roles effectively.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills. 2. Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations. 3. Generic Skills. 4. Reflection and Evaluation 5. Knowledge, understanding, emotional intelligence Career development, experience Skills, Understanding, Emotional Intelligence, Generic skills

S/N	Programs	Objectives	Employability Elements
4	Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (Bass)	<p>To provide high quality and relevant education and training, undertake high-quality and relevant research, and disseminate the findings.</p> <p>To provide an education that caters for the employers' needs as well as the aspirations of the students</p> <p>To provide opportunities for students and staff development and generation of knowledge for professional growth</p> <p>To improve the curriculum of the Social Sciences degrees by increasing the number of courses which are relevant to the country's contemporary needs</p> <p>To participate in community outreach and forge strong links with the private sector.</p> <p>To achieve and maintain high calibre and well-motivated staff</p> <p>To achieve equity and gender inclusiveness in all Faculty activities</p>	<p>Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills</p> <p>Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations</p> <p>Career Development Learning Experience (Work and Life)</p> <p>Career development</p>

In the analysis and interpretation of the Bachelor of Science in Medicine and Surgery program in Table 1, its objectives center on promoting health and preventing disease through comprehensive medical education. The curriculum includes patient management, medical and legal duties, research, administration, teaching and learning, traditional medicine, and community leadership. The program notably emphasizes developing degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills, integrating generic skills, career development learning, personal qualities, values, and motivations. This approach ensures graduates are well-versed in medical expertise and possess a broader skill set crucial for professional and personal growth.

Similarly, the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering program, as shown in Table 1, is designed to enhance students' intellectual capacity in agricultural engineering. The objectives focus on imparting knowledge and practical skills to influence sustainable agricultural development and environmental resource utilization positively. The program emphasizes degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills, with consideration of personal qualities, values, and motivations. This approach aligns closely with the specific demands of agricultural engineering, ensuring graduates possess

the technical expertise and personal attributes required for successful professional engagement.

Moving on to the Bachelor of Arts with Education (BA/ED) program, its objectives aim to cultivate a critical awareness of educational issues and processes, analytical skills to interpret the relationship between education and society, and a favorable disposition in applying acquired knowledge and skills. Additionally, the program seeks to acquaint student teachers with evolving roles in the field and equip them for the effective execution of professional responsibilities. Employability elements within this program encompass degree-specific knowledge, understanding, skills, personal qualities, values, motivations, generic skills, reflection, evaluation, career development, experience, and the cultivation of emotional intelligence. This comprehensive approach aligns with the multifaceted demands of the education sector.

In the analysis of the Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (BASS) program, the outlined objectives include providing high-quality education, meeting employers' needs and students' aspirations, fostering opportunities for development and knowledge generation, improving the curriculum, engaging in community outreach, and maintaining a high-caliber

and well-motivated staff with gender inclusiveness. Employability elements span degree-specific knowledge, understanding and skills, personal qualities, values, and motivations, career development learning, and work and life experience. This holistic perspective caters to the diverse requirements of the social sciences, encompassing both academic and practical dimensions.

The overall implications drawn from these program analyses reveal a shared commitment to developing subject-specific knowledge and skills and a range of personal qualities, values, and motivations crucial for professional success. Integrating career development, generic skills, and practical experience aligns with broader employability goals. This indicates a holistic approach to preparing graduates for diverse professional landscapes. These findings suggest that these programs are intentionally designed to nurture well-rounded individuals with academic expertise and practical attributes, enhancing their employability across various fields.

During the interviews, study participants included deans, heads of departments, and lecturers. They expressed opinions and views closely related to the information gathered from the documents. Generally, the assessment of Makerere University's curricula's alignment with graduate employability and career readiness emerged as a central focus. Participants expressed an optimistic view, with one highlighting “the consistent excellence of Makerere graduates upon entering the job market.” The “proactive role played by lecturers and administrators in nurturing career readiness” was emphasized by one interviewee, reflecting the University's commitment to equipping students with essential competencies. However, some participants acknowledged potential biases influencing perceptions of Makerere graduates, urging a comprehensive understanding.

The “cyclical nature of curriculum design and review at Makerere University” was revealed by a study participant, “involving collaboration among faculty members and adherence to regulatory

requirements”. According to another interviewee, “external stakeholder engagement, especially with employers, played a pivotal role in curriculum revisions, incorporating practical components and real-world experiences”. The importance of soft skills, adaptability, and future readiness was also underscored, aligning the curriculum with the evolving demands of the job market.

Despite the institution's commitment to continuous improvement, challenges in translating curriculum intent into practice were acknowledged by most interviewees. One interviewee observed that “funding constraints, outdated infrastructure in certain departments, and the autonomy granted to lecturers in course unit delivery posed hurdles”. The need for “infrastructural rejuvenation, especially in disciplines requiring hands-on experiences” was highlighted by another interviewee. At the same time, concerns were raised by another interviewee “about the resistance to change among educators and the impact of limited resources on curriculum delivery”.

Overall, the multifaceted nature of graduate employability was explored, emphasizing the University's role in providing foundational knowledge and students' responsibility for further growth. Distinctions between professional and non-professional courses were drawn, emphasizing adaptability and foundational knowledge for the latter. The alignment of various programs with the ever-evolving professional landscape demonstrated a meticulous approach to curriculum design and relevance at the University.

Research Question 2

The second research query was: “How prevalent are employability-related topics, skills, and competencies in the course content and syllabi of the selected curricula?” Document analysis and key informant interviews were employed to address this inquiry. The condensed findings derived from the document analysis are systematically outlined and presented in Table 2 for ease of reference and comprehension.

Table 2: Programs, Content and Their Alignment with Employability

S/N	Programs	Contents	Employability Elements
1	Bsc in Medicine and Surgery	The curriculum encompasses various medical subjects, from body systems and reproduction to metabolism and hormones. Students delve into neurological health, respiratory/cardiovascular disorders, infectious diseases, community health, clinical skills, paediatrics, surgery, mental health, and women's health. Additionally, the program incorporates soft skills development, psychology, community engagement, and research. This all-encompassing approach ensures that graduates gain a thorough understanding of healthcare.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills 2. Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations 3. Career Development Learning 4. Experience (Work and Life)
2	Bsc in Agricultural Engineering	A comprehensive exploration of designing machinery tailored for agricultural contexts. It encompasses engineering principles, machine elements design, agricultural system interactions, power and energy systems, mechanical design, fluid mechanics, innovative technologies, practical application through projects, safety considerations, sustainability aspects, entrepreneurship, land use policies, organizational leadership, and operations research. Students develop skills to design efficient and sustainable agricultural machinery components, integrating knowledge from various disciplines to create solutions that align with modern agricultural needs and environmental considerations.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills 2. Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations 3. Career Development Learning 4. Experience (Work and Life) 5. Generic Skills 6. Emotional Intelligence
3	Bachelor of Arts with Education (Ba/Ed)	The curriculum comprises courses in Comparative Education, providing insights into various education systems. It covers foundational topics such as the General Theory of Comparative Education and the Sociology of Education Theories and Practice. Advanced subjects include Educational Administration and Management, Social Psychology, and Philosophy of Education. Specialized areas encompass Education Policy Studies, Educational Planning, and Teachers' Professional Ethics. There are also course units for Educational Psychology, covering Introductory Psychology, Human Learning and Instruction, Human Growth and Development, Educational Research, Measurement and Evaluation, Special Needs Education, and Guidance and Counseling. This array of courses equips students with a comprehensive grasp of education theories, administration, psychology, and social aspects, suitable for diverse roles in the education sector.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills 2. Generic Skills 3. Emotional Intelligence 4. Career Development Learning
4	Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (BASS)	The course encompasses various subjects, including Economics, Political Sciences and Public Administration, Psychology, Social Administration, Sociology, and Gender and Development. It emphasizes honing writing and communication skills, delving into organization management, imparting essential computer skills, and fostering research capabilities.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills 2. Generic Skills 3. Career Development Learning

The findings in Table 2 show that the Bachelor of Science in Medicine and Surgery provides a comprehensive range of medical subjects, incorporating not only medical-focused areas but also integrating soft skills development, psychology, community engagement, and research. This approach ensures that graduates gain a profound understanding of healthcare and acquire diverse skills for professional success.

Similarly, Table 2 also shows that the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering emphasizes the design of machinery tailored for agricultural contexts, covering various engineering principles, sustainable practices, and entrepreneurial aspects. Graduates are equipped with technical expertise and a broad skill set aligned with modern agricultural needs. The Bachelor of Arts with Education program, focusing on Comparative Education, ensures graduates are well-prepared for diverse roles in the education sector, covering theories, administration, psychology, and social aspects. With its broad spectrum of subjects, the Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences hones graduates' writing and communication skills, organizational management, and research capabilities.

Overall, the analysis indicates a deliberate effort to design each program's curriculum meticulously, aligning with the respective field's demands and emphasizing a holistic preparation of graduates for successful professional engagement. Integrating employability elements, including generic skills, emotional intelligence, and exposure to real-world experiences, underscores the commitment to ensuring graduates possess academic proficiency and the practical and personal attributes necessary for a seamless transition into their chosen careers.

During the interviews, Makerere University emerged as a beacon of excellence, as highlighted by the testimonials of almost all faculty members who participated in the study. According to one of the interviewees, "The institution's pedagogic approach is characterized by a unique blend of rigor and contemporaneity, ensuring a deep and updated curriculum". This strategy, according to the interviewee, "positions students not only as knowledgeable in their fields but as agile thinkers prepared for the multifaceted demands of the modern

job market. Makerere's commitment to a competence-based curriculum reflects a global shift towards more interactive, problem-solving approaches in education".

The advantages of a competence-based approach are emphasized, focusing on tangible skills and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world scenarios. The commitment to continual innovation and relevance is particularly evident in fields like health sciences, where rapid changes necessitate constant curricular updates. The institution's dedication to aligning its curriculum with global and national developments ensures its students' robust and future-oriented education.

The interview results delve into the meticulous course content design, highlighting its integral role in shaping the educational experience. The emphasis on amalgamating foundational knowledge with essential soft skills across the curriculum is underscored. This holistic approach, incorporating competencies like communication skills and digital proficiency, aligns with the evolving needs of the job market.

Moreover, the symbiotic collaboration between educational institutions and external stakeholders, especially employers, is emphasized. The feedback loop between these entities ensures that curricula align with industry needs. However, a significant challenge identified is the misalignment between university program content and actual job requirements, contributing to heightened unemployment rates in sub-Saharan Africa. The disparity poses a considerable hurdle to graduate employability.

While broad-based educational programs offer flexibility, the need to align program contents more closely with dynamic job market requirements is evident. A symbiotic relationship between educational institutions and industry stakeholders is proposed to pave the way for academically enriching and professionally relevant curricula, ultimately enhancing graduate employability. In conclusion, Makerere University's proactive approach and commitment to innovation position it as a key player in shaping graduates for success in the contemporary professional landscape.

Research Question 3

The third research question posed: "How do teaching and learning methods in the selected curricula contribute to the practical development of employability skills and knowledge among

students?" To address this question, a thorough examination involving documentary analysis was conducted. The summarised outcomes of this analysis are succinctly presented in Table 3, offering a consolidated overview of the key findings for clarity and reference.

Table 3: Nature of Programs, Teaching/Learning Methods and Their Alignment with Employability

S/N	Programs	Teaching And Learning Methods	Employability Elements
1	Bsc in Medicine and Surgery	1. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Tutorials: Hands-on exploration using real-world clinical scenarios. 2. Clinical Clerkships: Direct patient interaction with emphasis on specified conditions. 3. Bedside Clinical Sessions: Real-world clinical exposure across diverse healthcare settings. 4. Expert Resource Seminars: Bi-weekly deep dives into predetermined medical topics. 5. Inter-disciplinary Discussions: Integration of clinical and biomedical insights through case-centric discussions. 6. Practical Procedures: Supervised hands-on practice of essential medical techniques. 7. Clinical Immersion: Experiences from daily ward rounds to in-depth patient care quality reviews. 8. Research Engagement: Active engagement with current medical research and literature. 9. Holistic Subject Integration: Incorporation of non-traditional medical subjects for a well-rounded education.	1 Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills 2 Generic Skills 3 Career Development Learning 4 Experience (Work and Life)
2	Bsc in Agricultural Engineering	1. Interactive lectures. 2. Collaborative group projects. 3. Hands-on fieldwork.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills 2. Generic Skills 3. Experience (Work and Life)
3	Bachelor of Arts with Education (Ba/Ed)	Engaging in interactive lectures, Team-based collaborative projects, Hands-on teaching practice.	Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills Generic Skills Experience (Work and Life)
4	Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (Bass)	Interactive lectures. Collaborative group projects. Hands-on fieldwork.	Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills Generic Skills Experience (Work and Life)

The findings in Table 3 show that in the Bachelor of Science in Medicine and Surgery program, a diverse array of teaching and learning methods is implemented to foster hands-on exploration and exposure to real-world clinical scenarios. The

curriculum integrates Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Tutorials, Clinical Clerkships, Bedside Clinical Sessions, Expert Resource Seminars, interdisciplinary discussions, Practical Procedures, Clinical Immersion, Research Engagement, and

Holistic Subject Integration. This comprehensive approach emphasizes acquiring degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills. It prioritizes the development of generic skills, career development learning, and exposure to diverse experiences, both in work and life. Integrating these elements ensures that graduates are not only academically proficient but also possess a well-rounded skill set and practical experience crucial for success in the medical field.

Similarly, in the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering program, teaching and learning methods include interactive lectures, collaborative group projects, and hands-on fieldwork. These methods cultivate degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills while fostering generic skills and exposing real-world experiences. The program aims to equip graduates with technical expertise, collaborative skills, and practical experience, aligning with the dynamic demands of the agricultural engineering field.

Meanwhile, the Bachelor of Arts with Education (BA/ED) program adopts engaging interactive lectures, team-based collaborative projects, and hands-on teaching practice as teaching and learning methods. These approaches aim to nurture degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills alongside the development of generic skills and real-world experience. The program strives to comprehensively prepare graduates for diverse roles in the education sector by balancing theoretical knowledge and practical teaching experience.

Likewise, the Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (BASS) incorporates interactive lectures, collaborative group projects, and hands-on fieldwork as teaching and learning methods. These methods prioritize the development of degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills, as well as generic skills and exposure to real-world experiences. The program ensures that graduates possess a well-rounded understanding of social sciences and practical skills essential for success in various professional domains.

During the interviews, key informants shared views and opinions that corroborated the findings from the documentary analysis. The emphasis on interactive

approaches, collaborative projects, and hands-on experiences emerged as a reflection of commitment to providing students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills. One interviewee observed that “the integration of employability elements within these methods ensures that graduates are well-prepared for the multifaceted demands of the professional landscape, highlighting a holistic approach to education that transcends academic learning”. Another interviewee emphasized that “Makerere University's commitment to aligning its curriculum with the prerequisites of graduate employability is evident through proactive measures and support for academic departments”. In contrast, another participant observed that “the University's curriculum, subject to rigorous checks, evolves dynamically to meet the demands of a constantly changing job market. However, the true value of a well-crafted curriculum lies in its effective implementation, a sentiment echoed by educators who emphasize the crucial role of teaching methodologies in shaping graduate employability”.

The challenges of implementing curricula, especially in the face of budgetary constraints, highlight the resilience and innovation of dedicated educators. That is why an interviewee observed that “creativity in resource application is emphasized, showcasing those optimal resources, while desirable, can be complemented by innovative teaching approaches. The value of industry alliances is underscored, with practical experiences and field trips bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world application”. The teaching methods in focus include a transition from lecture-based to problem-based learning, exemplified in the Food Science program's three-tiered approach. This structured yet varied method emphasizes practical skills, ensuring students understand industry processes holistically. However, an interviewee observed that “challenges arise in the divide between academic theory and practical work, especially in fields like medicine, and the institution addresses this through industry collaborations, hands-on experiences, and involving professionals in student seminars”.

According to most study participants, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a paradigm

shift in teaching methodologies, with a blend of physical and online learning. The multi-sensory approach to pedagogy accommodates diverse student cohorts. In evaluating the observed teaching methods, one interviewee observed that three critical elements were identified:

1. Integrating theoretical lectures with industry immersion enhances students' understanding and application of knowledge in real-world settings, preparing them as adept practitioners.
2. Industry expert seminars, hands-on experiences, and problem-based learning contribute to a rich tapestry of experiences that shape graduates' character, instilling attributes vital in the job market.
3. Real-world immersion and competence-based teaching methodologies boost students' self-confidence and foster continuous reflection, preparing graduates for sustained professional growth and adaptability.

Makerere University's commitment to evolving its curriculum and adopting innovative teaching strategies positions it as a trailblazer in shaping graduates for success in the dynamic professional landscape. Integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experiences and focusing on personal attributes ensures that graduates are academically prepared and equipped with the skills and mindset for lifelong success in their chosen careers.

Research Question 4

The final research inquiry was framed as follows: "Do the assessment strategies employed in the selected curricula effectively correspond with the promotion and development of employability skills and competencies?" To unravel this question, a meticulous examination through documentary analysis was undertaken. The abridged findings derived from this analysis are concisely outlined. They can be found in Table 4, providing a synthesized overview for convenient reference and comprehension.

Table 4: Nature of Programs, Assessment Strategies and Their Alignment with Employability

S/N	Programs	Assessment Methods	Employability Elements
1	Bsc in Medicine and Surgery	Coursework, contributing 40%, involves methods like tutorial assessments, continuous observation, feedback, assignments, tests, logbooks, and case write-ups. This percentage may increase. End-of-semester exams account for 60%. They include written tests (MCQs, essays, short answers), OSCE, OSPE, project reports, and Viva voce exams.	Career Development Learning Experience (Work and Life) Emotional Intelligence. Self-efficacy Reflection and Evaluation Personal Qualities, Values, and Motivations
2	Bsc in Agricultural Engineering	Coursework (One test (for most course units): 15%, Group assignments: 10%, Individual assignments: 15%) End of semester exams: 60%.	Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills. 1. Emotional Intelligence
3	Bachelor of Arts with Education (Ba/Ed)	Coursework Assessment End-of-Semester Evaluation Teaching Practice Evaluation	Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills. Emotional Intelligence. Experience (Work and Life)
4	Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (Bass)	Coursework (One test: 15%, Group assignments: 15%) End of semester exams: 70%.	1. Degree Subject Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills. 2. Emotional Intelligence

The findings in Table 4 show that in the realm of the Bachelor of Science in Medicine and Surgery, the assessment framework stands out for its multifaceted

nature. Here, coursework constitutes 40%, incorporating diverse evaluation methods such as tutorial assessments, continuous observation,

feedback, assignments, tests, logbooks, and case write-ups. The remaining 60% is allocated to end-of-semester exams, showcasing a variety of formats like written tests, OSCE, OSPE, project reports, and Viva-voce exams. This comprehensive structure gauges medical expertise and integrates employability elements, fostering career development learning, real-world experience, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, reflection and evaluation, and personal qualities. Consequently, graduates emerge as proficient medical professionals and individuals with a spectrum of attributes vital for success.

Turning to the Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering, the assessment methods present a balanced combination of coursework and end-of-semester exams. Coursework evaluation encompasses one test for most course units (15%), group assignments (10%), and individual assignments (15%), while end-of-semester exams contribute 60%. This assessment structure emphasizes degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills and focuses on emotional intelligence. By assessing both technical knowledge and collaborative skills, the program ensures that graduates are well-prepared to navigate challenges in the dynamic field of agricultural engineering.

In the context of the Bachelor of Arts with Education (BA/ED), the assessment methods are thoughtfully designed to evaluate student progress comprehensively. The framework includes coursework assessment, end-of-semester evaluation, and teaching practice evaluation. The coursework assessment, comprising various activities, aligns with the program's goal of offering a holistic evaluation, covering degree-specific knowledge, understanding, skills, emotional intelligence, and work and life experiences. This multifaceted approach reflects the program's commitment to preparing graduates for diverse roles in the education sector.

Similarly, the Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (BASS) adopts a balanced assessment strategy, incorporating coursework and end-of-semester exams. Coursework assessment, accounting for 30%, involves one test (15%) and group assignments (15%), while end-of-semester exams constitute

70%. This approach thoroughly evaluates degree-specific knowledge, understanding, and skills, emphasizing emotional intelligence. Graduates from this program are academically proficient in social sciences and possess the emotional intelligence necessary for success in the diverse professional landscape.

During the interviews, the traditional methods, described as the "conventional one," emerged as the fundamental teaching methods at the University. This method emphasizes theoretical knowledge and has stood the test of time. However, recognizing the evolving demands of the modern workplace, a participant observed that "the institution has integrated project-based assessments, particularly in research, to foster practical application and the generation of knowledge. This holistic approach ensures that students not only grasp theoretical concepts but also learn to apply them in real-world scenarios". Another interviewee stated that "these internships play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academia and the professional realm, offering students experiential learning opportunities. Even during the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the institution's adaptability shone through, leveraging online platforms for continuous learning".

The alignment of assessment strategies with the Career Edge Model is evident at the University, as an interviewee observed:

Traditional exams and coursework likely contribute to developing core skills such as numeracy and literacy. At the same time, project-based assessments challenge students' drive and resilience. Real-world internships inherently develop business awareness, and the emphasis on placements within hospitals for nutrition students aligns with the model's focus on personal attributes and core skills.

However, another participant remarked that there are potential areas for enhancement, including "adaptability and integrity, highlighted in the Career Edge Model, are not explicitly addressed in the described assessments". Additionally, the explicit assessment of communication skills, especially verbal communication, is not overtly mentioned.

However, it may be embedded in the learning process.

Overall, Makerere University's assessment strategies exhibit a robust alignment with several elements of the Career Edge Model, positioning graduates for success in the workforce. To further refine its approach, the institution could consider addressing the identified gaps, ensuring a more comprehensive development of graduates for the dynamic demands of the modern professional landscape.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study aimed to assess the extent to which Makerere University's curricula objectives incorporate goals related to promoting graduate employability. Most programs emphasize career development, subject knowledge, and understanding, neglecting crucial aspects such as emotional intelligence and work experience, essential for effective performance in the labor market. This oversight aligns with Lovren et al.'s (2020) assertion that graduates need a comprehensive skill set to compete favorably in the labor market. The study supports interview reports emphasizing the importance of engaging stakeholders, including lecturers, donors, parents, students, communities, school heads, government bodies, and employers, in shaping the curriculum, in agreement with Jorre and Oliver (2017), Bennet et al. (2020), Groves et al. (2018), and Healy et al. (2020). The consensus is that collaborative efforts between stakeholders and universities foster greater awareness of learning's roles and purpose, ultimately enhancing efficiency in knowledge acquisition. Therefore, the discussion concludes that curricular objectives should be geared towards promoting graduate employability.

The investigation focused on discerning the presence of employability-related topics, skills, and competencies within the course content and syllabi of the selected curricula. Both document review and interviews underscore the necessity for course content to incorporate essential skills crucial in the professional sphere, encompassing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills. These skills often

considered 21st-century skills, are deemed indispensable for success in the contemporary workplace (Zulkifli et al., 2022). Furthermore, Romgens et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of tailoring content to learners' experiences and fostering interactive ideas that enhance academic motivation, effort, and achievement, a sentiment in line with Seidman et al.'s (2018) perspective. This discussion highlights the significance of incorporating diverse skills in curricula, ensuring alignment with the dynamic demands of the evolving job market.

Examining teaching and learning methods within the selected curricula reveals distinct approaches in science and arts disciplines. In science programs such as the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Environmental Science and Bachelor of Science in Medicine and Surgery, experiential learning is evident, focusing on practical skills acquisition through fieldwork, hands-on experiences, and specialized medical skills, including clinical skills and counseling. However, a notable gap exists in the attention to emotional intelligence, a vital component in effective professional delivery within medical fields. Conversely, arts disciplines like BA with Education and Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences concentrate on imparting degree-specific knowledge, career development, and skills, including emotional intelligence, but initially overlook experiential learning in the first semesters (Zulkifli et al., 2022). This oversight may contribute to a trend where graduates from these arts programs lean toward job seeking rather than job creation. Interviews highlight diverse learning methods, incorporating internships to enhance employability. Participants describe hands-on experiences, such as utilizing machinery plants for processing and industry exposure through internships and collaborations with different organizations. Moreover, adapting to digital trends and implementing blended learning mechanisms contribute to an enriched pedagogical environment, enhancing staff expertise and student performance (Romgens et al., 2019).

Examining assessment strategies within the selected curricula underscores a focus on developing knowledge, skills, understanding, and emotional

intelligence. The document review aligns with traditional assessment practices, such as coursework and exams, commonly utilized to gauge students' abilities. However, interview findings emphasize the need for flexibility in assessment methods to ensure quality feedback. This resonates with Uoshima et al.'s assertion that there is no singular method for achieving validity, advocating for interactive and well-designed assessment mechanisms that retain valuable content applicable beyond the classroom (Uoshima et al., 2021; Musisi & Ssesanga, 2016). The literature underscores the bidirectional nature of assessment, serving as a platform for teachers and students to engage in continuous learning and improvement. It is highlighted that assessors should possess the expertise and high intellectual capacity to tailor assessment methods to the diverse learning levels of students, ensuring just and informative feedback (Husam & Abraham, 2019; Meijer et al., 2020). The overall implication is that assessments should be thoughtfully designed to encourage interactive learning, enabling students to apply acquired knowledge in various contexts and enhance their overall performance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study sheds light on aligning Makerere University's curriculum objectives with the imperative of promoting graduate employability. The identified emphasis on career development and subject knowledge resonates with Lovren et al.'s assertion that a comprehensive skill set is pivotal for competitive success in the labor market. However, the study underscores the neglect of essential components such as emotional intelligence and work experience. The recommendation is clear: a collaborative approach involving stakeholders, as proposed by several scholars, including Jorre and Oliver (2017), Bennett et al. (2020), Groves et al. (2020), and Healy et al. (2020), is crucial for a well-rounded curriculum that not only imparts knowledge but also addresses the dynamic demands of the job market, ultimately fostering graduate employability. Moreover, the discussion on teaching and learning methods highlights the distinct approaches in science and arts disciplines, emphasizing the need for a balanced and comprehensive educational experience. The incorporation of experiential learning, internships, and exposure to industry

practices enhances students' employability. Adapting to digital trends and blended learning mechanisms further enriches the pedagogical environment.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, the study recommends a continuous effort to integrate diverse learning methods, ensuring that curricula not only impart theoretical knowledge but also nurture practical skills, fostering a holistic development that aligns with the evolving needs of the professional landscape.

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