NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY COMMON COURSES (UCCs) IN EQUIPPING STUDENTS WITH SKILLS FOR GLOBAL WORKPLACE

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AI	-	Artificial Intelligence
AIDS	-	Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome
AHRCF	-	Australian Human Resource Capacity Framework
APA	-	American Psychological Association
BECF	-	Basic Education Curriculum Framework
CAT	-	Continuous Assessment Test
CBE	-	Competency Based Education
CUE	-	Commission for University Education
CV	-	Curriculum Vitae
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	-	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technology
KICD	-	Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development
MDA	-	Ministerial Departments and Agencies
OECD	-	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
STEAM	-	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
UCC	-	University Common Courses
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VR	-	Virtual Reality

Abstract

The global workplace is dynamic and undergoing rapid transformation due to technological advances, globalization and demographic shifts. Consequently, the skills and competencies demanded of graduates are also evolving. Universities must adapt their curricula to effectively prepare students for this dynamic environment. One promising approach is the integration of University Common Courses (UCCs), which are mandatory for all students. However, many UCCs are not aligned with the emerging global workplace's requirements. Many of these courses still focus on traditional academic disciplines, forgetting the current demands of both the local and global context. Further, they are limited in their ability to adequately prepare students for the global workplace. This research seeks to address these issues and the relevance to the needs of the emerging global workplace.

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Quantitative data was gathered through an on-line tool administered to students and faculty. Qualitative data was obtained through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with faculty members and students who have been taught these courses.

The findings have revealed that University Common Courses are important in empowering them with requisite skills, knowledge and competence to not only succeed professionally but also become responsible global citizens. First is the acknowledgement that the University Common Courses (UCCs) offered are relevant in the training of graduates. However, they need to be reviewed and enhanced to align to the global workplace demands. Secondly, there was consensus that the scope of the current UCCs is narrow and needs to expand to cover emerging areas that a graduate of the 21st century must possess. These include **Problem-Solving Abilities, Analytical Skills**, **Competence in Using Technology, Collaboration, Creativity, Innovation, Intercultural Understanding** and **Self-Directed Learning**. With this understanding, a framework could now be developed to guide the review and broadening of the UCCs in universities in Kenya. A review of university curricula initiated with the guidance of CUE will find this study's findings useful. This report will be quite handy in designing and implementing the curricula in universities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The world of work is undergoing rapid transformation due to emerging trends such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, globalization, and the gig economy. These developments necessitate innovative approaches to university education to prepare students for the future workplace. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), automation is poised to transform one-third of all jobs worldwide in the next decade (Simoes, 2020). This demands reskilling efforts, particularly in universities, to focus on the professions that are expected to grow the fastest. From engineering and cloud computing to data and AI, as well as sales, marketing, and project management, these professional areas will become increasingly sought-after.

The World Economic Forum highlights the importance of social or soft skills in the face of automation. These skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, and emotional intelligence, form the foundation for career success. As the workplace becomes more global, proficiency in foreign languages and cultural competency are crucial for effective international collaboration. Understanding how international stakeholders think, work, and express themselves through their attitudes and behaviors is essential for navigating diverse environments (ibid.).

University Common Courses (UCCs) are mandatory courses or modules for all students at a university, regardless of their major. They aim to provide a broad foundation in knowledge and skills essential for success across all academic disciplines. Universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of UCCs in preparing students for 21st-century challenges. However, many universities struggle to align their UCCs with emerging trends and 21st-century skills.

This study examined the potential of UCCs in Kenya to develop a more holistic approach to preparing graduates for the global workplace, focusing on emerging trends shaping the future of work. It investigated the university common courses offered by Kenyan universities and identifies the key capabilities and competencies. The study also examined the extent to which these units were aligned with emerging trends and the needs of the 21st-century workplace.

The study aimed to provide Kenyan universities with a lens for evaluating their existing UCCs and their response to emerging trends and 21st-century skills. It drew on the findings of related studies to enrich the design of UCCs that are interdisciplinary, experiential, and relevant to the needs of students in the emerging global workplace.

In the East and Southern Africa region, the World Bank has supported initiatives to equip students with in-demand skills that make them attractive to potential employers (both in the country and abroad). Significant project investments have been made in developing curricula and programs

around sectors deemed critical to their national agenda. For instance, a new Institute of Digital Transformation at the University of Burundi is expected to train at least 1,000 university graduates over next five years (World Bank, 2023). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also been at the forefront in facilitating the signing of regional conventions for the East African region, like others in regions of the world, with the objective of facilitating greater mobility of students and professionals.

Kenya is in the middle of instituting reforms in the education system to align it with current and emerging global trends. Among the reforms is the need to incorporate 21st-century skills that will equip students with the skills and competencies to function efficiently in the rapidly changing world arena. The Competency Based Curriculum was rolled out in 2017, with the first cohort expected to join universities in 2029. Thus, it requires that universities review the UCCs to align to CBC.

1.1 Research Problem

The rapid transformation of the global workplace, driven by technological advancements, globalization, and demographic shifts, necessitates a re-evaluation of undergraduate education to prepare students for the emerging job market. Despite the potential of University Common Courses (UCCs) to address this need, a significant gap exists between the current design and implementation of UCCs, and the skills and competencies required for success in the globalized world. This study sought to address the identified gaps by investigating the key characteristics and emerging trends in designing innovative and globally oriented UCCs. It explored strategies for integrating global perspectives into existing UCCs to address current gaps and areas for improvement. Additionally, findings from this study informs the development of a **comprehensive framework for a holistic approach to the design and implementation of innovative and globally oriented UCCs** in the Kenyan university context.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assess the **needs of general undergraduate university common courses (UCCs) in equipping students with skills for global workplace. This was done against the backdrop** of emerging global perspectives with the goal of producing graduates who are holistic and versatile to work in a global market.

Specific Objectives

The study had the following specific objectives.

1: Identify the emerging trends critical in designing innovative and globally oriented University Common Courses (UCCs).

2: Conduct an in-depth review of existing UCCs in universities in Kenya with a focus on global perspectives integration.

3: Develop a framework for a holistic approach in the design and implementation of innovative and globally oriented UCCs.

1.3 Research Questions

The study explored some specific research questions to achieve each of the research objectives:

1. What are the key characteristics and emerging trends in designing innovative and globally oriented University Common Courses (UCCs)?
2. How can global perspectives be effectively integrated into existing UCCs in Kenyan universities to address current gaps and areas for improvement?
3. What is a comprehensive framework for a holistic approach to the design and implementation of innovative and globally oriented UCCs in the Kenyan university context?

1.4 Significance

This study is significant as it provides valuable insights on the opportunities inherent in leveraging University Common Courses (UCCs) to develop a holistic approach in preparing graduates for the global workplace. This is particularly crucial in the context of Kenya, where the government is dedicated to expanding access to university education and ensuring graduates are equipped with the required skills and competencies to succeed in the global economy. By aligning UCCs with emerging trends and needs of the 21st-century workplace, the study findings will contribute to the development of an evaluation framework for UCCs that supports universities in enhancing students' preparedness for the global workplace (Anabela, 2020).

1.5 Justification

This research is justified by several factors. Firstly, limited research exists on the potential of UCCs in adequately preparing graduates for the global workplace, especially within the context of Kenya Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF, KICD, 2017). Secondly, there is a growing need to adopt a holistic approach in graduate preparation that considers emerging trends shaping the future of work. Lastly, the research has potential implications for policy and practice, directly impacting institutions offering UCCs in Kenya.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study explored the emerging trends that are reshaping the global workplace and investigates their influence on the skills and competencies required of graduates. A sample representing 25% of the universities participated in the study. This the size that the time and resources available could permit for the study. So there definitely need to cover universities to capture their views on the university common courses and how they could be revamped. Additionally, it assessed the current state of UCCs in Kenya, identifying gaps in preparing students for the emerging trends and challenges in the future workplace. Lastly, the study proposes a holistic approach to graduate preparation, utilizing UCCs and addressing the identified gaps, to better equip graduates for success in the global workplace.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review delves into the realm of relevant research and theoretical frameworks that illuminate the potential of university common courses in holistically preparing graduates for the global workplace. Our quest was to peer into the future and envision the human resource profile that will be indispensable for success in the years to come. A clear understanding of this future is crucial to inform faculty and curriculum developers in universities on the essential elements to incorporate into their programs to produce graduates who are fit for purpose. Accordingly, this chapter is structured around various thematic areas, including the (i) Global Workplace, (ii) Emerging Trends and the 21st Century Skills, (iii) Competency Based Education (CBE), (iv) Human Resources (HR), (v) Capability Framework, (vi) graduate preparedness, and (vii) University Common Courses.

2.2 Global Workplace

The emerging global workplace is rapidly changing, driven by technological advancements, globalization, and demographic shifts. These changes are transforming the skills and competencies that graduates need to succeed (Batra & Ahmad, 2021; Heijink, Heijden Winnink,, 2021). Universities need to adapt their curricula to prepare students for the emerging global workplace, but many are struggling to do so.

Global workforce refers to the total number of an international pool of workers working for a particular organization, connected through a global system of network and production, foreign workers, transient migrant workers, remote workers, those in export-oriented employment, contingent workforce or other precarious work. The growing pool of global labor is accessed by employers in more advanced economies through various methods, including imports of goods, offshoring of production, and immigration. From 1980 to 2010, the global workforce grew from 1.2 to 2.9 billion people. According to a 2012 report by the McKinsey Global Institute, this was caused mostly by developing nations. Movement of people across national borders is becoming increasingly common. Traditionally, this has been described in terms of push and pull forces that drive migrant workers and immigrant laborers toward more developed countries. However, not all labor mobility is outward movement toward more advanced economies. An increasing number of individuals move to less developed countries to provide new expertise or return their expertise to their country of origin.

The movement of labour described in the foregoing clearly illustrates that graduates with the right skills are more likely to fit into the opportunities available across the borders. Though with technological advances, one may not necessarily need to cross borders to render services. Most of them are now available on-line. It is from these reports that the need to produce a more versatile graduate who can work anywhere in the world becomes more apparent.

2.3 Emerging trends and 21st Century skills

2.3.1 21st Century Skills

The 21st century has brought about many changes in the world, including in the way we live, work, and learn. These changes have created new challenges and opportunities for individuals and societies alike. To succeed in the 21st century, individuals need to be equipped with skills different from those needed in the past. These skills, often referred to as "21st Century Skills" (McComas, 2014) include the following:

i. Critical thinking and problem solving.
ii. Communication and collaboration.
iii. Creativity and innovation.
iv. Information literacy and digital literacy.
v. Personal and social skills.

Aabla (2017) posits that 21st century skills are important because they are essential for success in the 21st century world. The workplace is becoming increasingly complex and globalized, and individuals need to think critically, solve problems effectively, communicate and collaborate with others, and be creative and innovative to succeed. 21st century skills can be developed through a variety of educational experiences, including formal education, informal education, and non-formal education.

One of the key skills of the 21st century is problem-solving skills, which are intricately connected with the skill of collaboration. The increasing complexity of technologies in all areas of economy requires interaction of individual specialists, teamwork **(**Malashenkova, 2021). Teamwork is characterized by certain team features that distinguish it from a group, a team has its advantages and limitations.

The idea of 21st Century Skills has been the mainstream in recent educational research, curriculum development, pre-service and in-service education. Given the fact that today's world is drastically changing, our education must also undergo continual development. It is certainly true that there is no educational development without providing learners with quality education which is the key to unlocking their potential. There is a growing need for action at both regional and national levels

to bring about the prerequisite changes required for a global modern world based on the training and preparation of learners. This reveals the bottom-up orientation which calls first for analyzing students' needs and 21st century demands before carrying out any further research that targets curriculum change or educational reform. Research has demonstrated that the 21st centuries skill application has more measurable benefits in some sections of life, such as critical thinking and problem solving, initiative, creativity, and entrepreneurship, communication, teamwork, meta cognition (change of mindset), digital literature (Wrahatnolo &, M. (2018).

Further research findings show that the 21st century education specifies that implementation can be applied in the curriculum of the required subject that is addressed to achieve learning and innovation skills competence and technology as well as information media skills competence. While supporting subject group directed to achieve life and career skills competence. All subjects are derived from core subject 3R, which are reading, writing, and arithmetic. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that 21st centuries skill needs; (1) a life planning; (2) flexibility and adaptability; (3) initiative and self-management (4) entrepreneurship; (5) social and cultural interaction; (6) productivity and accountability; (7) leadership; (8) critical thinking, (9) problem solving; (10) communication; (11) collaboration and teamwork; (12) lifelong learning; and (13) digital iteration.

Vu (2017) emphasizes the evolving nature of the HR profession and the need for HR professionals to develop new skills and capabilities to meet the demands of the 21st-century workplace. The study highlights competencies such as strategic thinking, business acumen, change management, and technological literacy as essential for HR professionals. Building on this discussion, Nankervis, and Cameron (2023) focus on the capabilities and competencies required for digitized human resource management (HRM) in Australia. Their study identifies digital literacy, data analytics, and change management as crucial capabilities for success in the digital age.

In the context of preparing global managers, Townsend, and Cairns (2003) propose a capability framework encompassing strategic thinking, cultural intelligence, relationship management, and communication skills. Their framework provides insights into the competencies necessary for managers operating in a global setting. Turning to the information technology (IT) workforce, Ho and Frampton (2010) develop a competency model that examines technical skills, business skills, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving skills. This model highlights the diverse range of competencies required within the IT industry.

Furthermore, Prikshat et al. (2018) developed a competency model specific to Indian HR professionals. Their study identified six key competency clusters: technical skills, business skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, strategic thinking skills, and ethical behavior, shedding light on the specific competencies relevant to the Indian context.

To complement and expand upon the existing literature, additional studies focused on the potential of university common courses in preparing graduates for the global workplace should be considered. These may include research on cross-cultural competencies, team collaboration, global leadership, intercultural communication, adaptability, and resilience. By examining the studies and broadening the scope to incorporate related literature, a more comprehensive understanding can be gained regarding how common curriculum units university common courses implemented to equip graduates with the holistic capabilities and competencies needed for success in the global workplace.

2.3.2 Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Drawing from the principles of competency-based education, this framework will emphasize a learner-centered approach that focuses on the development and mastery of specific skills and competencies. By aligning UCCs with a competency-based approach, the research examined how students can acquire and demonstrate desired knowledge, capabilities, and behaviors more effectively.

2.4 Graduate Preparedness for the Future

UCCs can be designed to develop the key knowledge, capabilities, and behaviors that graduates need to succeed in the global workplace (Batra & Ahmad, 2021; Heijink et al., 2021). UCCs can also be designed to be interdisciplinary, experiential, and relevant to the needs of students in the emerging global workplace (Batra & Ahmad, 2021; Heijink et al., 2021)

Universities may strengthen academic, emotional, and social competencies in student cohorts by:

- Prioritizing skills-building by setting time for advisory meetings where teachers connect with students to not just provide academic and social-emotional support, but a long-lasting relationship with a trusted adult.
- Implementing grade-level meetings for quality planning among teachers and counselors to discuss common and specific student needs as four-year plans are prepared and developed that would include master scheduling, as well as academic, emotional, and social competency considerations.
- Normalizing practical social and emotional competencies through student-teacher interactions beyond classrooms, including cafeterias, hallways, and transportation.
- Providing work-based learning opportunities for students throughout the community that would streamline the academic, emotional, and social competencies with the soft skills necessary for a specific place of employment.

2.5 University Common Courses (UCCs)

The UCCs framework will be essential in understanding the design and implementation of units of learning that are pre-designed and customizable to suit the needs of students in the emerging global workplace. This framework will guide the development, evaluation, and alignment of UCCs with the desired knowledge areas and competencies required for graduates.

University Common Courses (UCCs) offer a promising approach to preparing students for the emerging global workplace (Batra & Ahmad, 2021). *UCCs are courses or modules required for all students, regardless of their major. This makes them an ideal platform for developing the key knowledge, capabilities, and behaviors that all students need to succeed in the global workplace* (Batra & Ahmad, 2021; Heijink et al., 2021).

2.6 Towards developing a UCC Framework

Universities can evaluate their existing UCCs and respond to emerging trends and 21st century skills by following these steps:

1. **Review the university's mission and values.** What are the university's goals for its students? What skills and knowledge does it want students to have when they graduate?
2. **Identify the emerging trends and 21st century skills that are relevant to the university's students and employers.** This information can be gathered through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with students, employers, and other stakeholders.
3. **Assess how well the university's existing UCCs align with the university's mission and values, as well as with the emerging trends and 21st century skills.**
4. **Identify any gaps in the university's UCCs.** This could involve identifying new skills that need to be developed or updating existing skills to reflect the latest trends.
5. **Develop a plan to address any gaps in the university's UCCs.** This could involve developing new courses or modules, updating existing courses or modules, or integrating new skills into existing courses or modules.
6. **Implement the plan and evaluate its effectiveness.** This could involve collecting feedback from students and employers, and monitoring student learning outcomes.

2.8 Conceptual Framework:

The conceptual framework for this research is illustrated in the Figure 1:

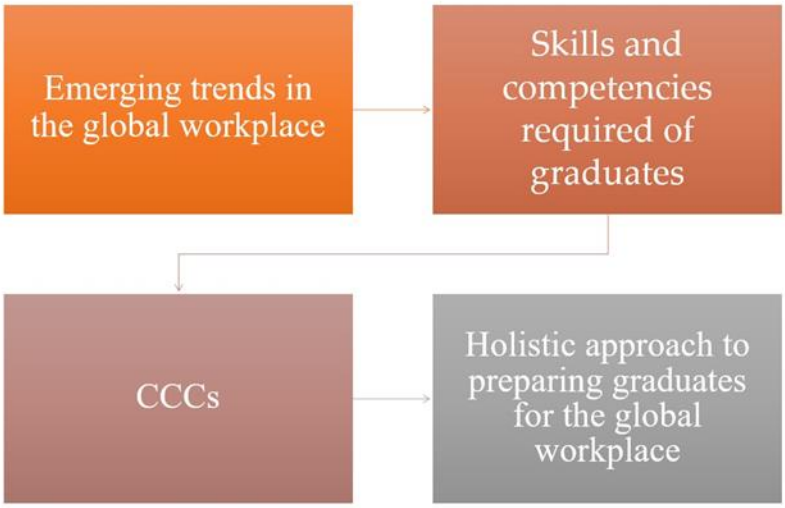

Figure1: Conceptual Framework

This framework highlights the role of UCCs in helping graduates develop the skills and competencies needed to succeed in the global workplace, considering the emerging trends shaping the future of work.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1Introduction

This section presents the research design, Sampling procedures, research instruments, interview protocol, data analysis and ethical considerations. This approach is in line with Saunders et al. (2009), who posit that research is the systematic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose to find things out.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the preparedness of UCCs in universities in Kenya for the global workplace, the effectiveness of UCCs in developing key capabilities and competencies, and the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the use of UCCs.

3.3 Study Sample

The target population for the study were students and Faculty (Lecturers from both public and private universities. Thus, stratified random sampling was used to select 17 universities (9 public and 8 private), which participated in the study. From this sample, 532 students and 176 staff (Faculty) participated in the study.

The responses were obtained from 532 university students comprising 297 male and 235 female students. Based on the year of study, most responses were from 3rd year students (247). This was followed by 4th year students (221). The least number of responses were from 1st year students (11).

Table 1: Number of students who Participated

Year of study	Gender		Sum
	Male	Female	
1	2	9	11
2	27	21	48
3	132	115	247

4	131	90	221
Unspecified	5		5
Total	297	235	532

The number of staff (Faculty) who participated in the study were 176. This comprised 102 male and 74 female representatives. Most of the staff were Lecturers (127).

Table 2: Number of staff who Participated

University staff			
Designation	**Gender**		**Sum**
	Male	**Female**	
Professor	0	2	2
Senior Lecturer	20	12	32
Lecturer	71	56	127
Unspecified	11	4	15
Total	102	74	176

3.4 Pilot Study

To ensure the clarity, conciseness, and comprehensibility of the online tools and interview guide, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of students and faculty members. The feedback gathered from this pilot testing was utilized to refine the data collection tools before employing them for the main data collection phase.

3.5 Research Instruments

To gain a rich and comprehensive understanding of the research topic, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

3.5.1 Quantitative Data Collection

An online survey tool was administered to students and faculty members at institutions offering UCCs in Kenya. This tool measured respondents' attitudes and beliefs through a combination of Likert-scale questions (allowing for scaled responses) and open-ended questions, enabling them to elaborate on their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2016). This quantitative data provided valuable insights into the overall perceptions of preparedness and UCC effectiveness.

3.5.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in Kenyan UCCs, including industry experts, education policymakers, and faculty members. A comprehensive interview guide, outlining key themes and questions, served as a framework for the interviews while allowing flexibility to explore emerging insights and nuances (Gillham, 2000). This qualitative approach yielded in-depth and nuanced data regarding participants' experiences, perspectives, and recommendations concerning UCCs' role in preparing graduates for the globalized workplace.

The interview guide covered various topics including:

- The perceived role and significance of UCCs in Kenyan higher education.
- Key capabilities and competencies UCCs should develop in students.
- Effective strategies for implementing and integrating UCCs into university curricula.
- The challenges and opportunities associated with UCCs in Kenya.
- Proposals for an integrated approach, leveraging UCCs, to prepare graduates for the global workplace, considering emerging trends and future workplace challenges.

By employing quantitative and qualitative methods, the research captured a broader and more nuanced picture of UCCs' effectiveness in preparing graduates for the global workplace. The quantitative data provided a general sense of student and faculty perceptions, while the qualitative data offered deeper insights into the reasoning behind these perceptions and allowed for the exploration of specific experiences and recommendations. This multifaceted approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

3.5.3 Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a comprehensive interview guide that outlines key themes and questions to be explored. The guide served as a framework for the interviews while allowing for flexibility and adaptation to address emerging insights and nuances (Gillham, 2000). The interview guide covered topics such as:

a) Perceptions of the role and importance of UCCs in Kenyan higher education
b) Key capabilities and competencies that UCCs should develop in students
c) Effective strategies for implementing and integrating UCCs into university curricula
d) Challenges and opportunities associated with UCCs in Kenya

The interview protocol was objective based and explored the following by objective:

Objective 1: Identify the emerging trends critical in designing innovative and globally oriented University Common Courses (UCCs)

- Assess the current state of UCCs in Kenyan universities with respect to global perspectives integration.
- Analyze the evolving needs and expectations of employers and stakeholders regarding global competency development in undergraduate students.
- Identify emerging pedagogical approaches, technologies, and assessment strategies that can effectively foster global perspectives in UCCs.
- Examine successful case studies of innovative and globally oriented UCCs from around the world.

Objective 2: Conduct an in-depth review of existing UCCs in universities in Kenya with a focus on global perspectives integration

- Map the existing UCCs across Kenyan universities and categorize them based on their level of global perspectives integration.
- Evaluate the content, learning outcomes, and pedagogical approaches of existing UCCs in terms of their global orientation.
- Assess the effectiveness of existing UCCs in fostering global perspectives among undergraduate students.
- Identify gaps and areas for improvement in the integration of global perspectives into existing UCCs.

Objective 3: Develop a framework for an integrated approach in the design and implementation of innovative and globally oriented UCCs

- Establish a comprehensive definition and set of guiding principles for globally oriented UCCs.
- Articulate a framework for designing UCCs that effectively integrate global perspectives across different disciplines and learning experiences.
- Develop guidelines for selecting appropriate pedagogical approaches, technologies, and assessment strategies for globally oriented UCCs.
- Propose strategies for implementing and evaluating innovative and globally oriented UCCs in Kenyan universities.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process that combines various methods and techniques to provide insights into phenomena (Aki-Hiro Sato, 2019, Mohaiminul Islam2020), by examining, cleansing, transforming, and modeling data (Bahman Zohuri, Masoud Moghaddam, 2017). Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive, while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The

findings from both data sources were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of UCCs in preparing Kenyan university graduates for the global workplace.

The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a rigorous method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The researcher employed a systematic approach to coding the interview transcripts, carefully identifying recurring themes and subthemes that emerge from the participants' narratives. This in-depth examination of the data allows the researcher to uncover the overarching perspectives and experiences shared by the participants, providing valuable insights into the research topic.

The mixed-methods data analysis involved an integrative approach that combined the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This integration allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic. The researcher employed triangulation to validate the findings from the two data collection methods, ensuring that the results were consistent and credible (Morse, 2008).

Additionally, the researcher explored convergence and divergence in the findings from the two data collection methods, seeking to identify patterns and themes that emerge across both quantitative and qualitative data sets. This holistic analysis provides a deeper understanding of the research questions and contributed to a richer understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study upheld the following ethical principles to safeguard participant well- being and ensure responsible research practices:

a) **Informed Consent**: All participants were provided with a comprehensive informed consent form that clearly outlines the study's objectives, the procedures involved, and the potential risks and benefits of participation. Participants had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions. This adherence to informed consent principles ensured that participants were fully aware of the study's implications and made informed decisions regarding their involvement (Munafò et al., 2018).

b) **Confidentiality:** Participant data was treated with the utmost confidentiality. The researcher implemented stringent measures to protect participant privacy, such as storing data securely and using pseudonyms to identify participants. This commitment to confidentiality safeguarded sensitive information and upheld participants' privacy rights (Simons, 2015).

c) **Anonymity:** The data collection instruments were designed to preserve participant anonymity. The interview guide refrained from collecting any identifying information about participants. This emphasis on anonymity protected participants from potential

repercussions and allowed them to express their views freely without fear of being identified (Couper et al., 2008).

d) **Respect:** The researcher treated all participants with respect and consideration. The researcher demonstrated sensitivity to participants' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ensuring that the research process was inclusive and respectful of diverse perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

CHAPTER 4: STUDY FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter embarks on a multifaceted exploration of the design, delivery, and overall efficacy of University Common Courses (UCCs) within universities in Kenya. To achieve a holistic understanding, the research leveraged a multi-method research approach that utilized data garnered from diverse sources. This blended methodology facilitated triangulation, which bolsters the validity and dependability of the findings. The subsequent analysis, meticulously integrating data sources, addresses the overarching objective of the research: to capitalize on emerging global paradigms in university education to recast UCCs in universities in Kenya. By employing a multi-method approach and aligning with the study objectives, the chapter aspires to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of UCCs in universities in Kenya. Our endeavor is to inform the development of a UCC framework that fosters well-rounded graduates, meticulously prepared to thrive in the ever-evolving global landscape

4.2 Towards a common understanding of University Common Courses

The Kenyan job market is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by globalization and technological advancements. Employers increasingly seek graduates who possess a well-rounded skillset beyond their specific academic disciplines. UCCs address this need by ensuring all graduates develop standardized core skills, fostering a more level playing field for job placement.

It is important to acknowledge that not all universities in Kenya have embraced UCCs with full commitment. A recent example involves a university that discontinued offering UCCs, raising questions about the programme's overall effectiveness and implementation strategies. This case underscores the need for continuous evaluation and improvement of UCCs to ensure their continued relevance and student buy-in.

While the benefits of UCCs for graduates are undeniable, a debate exists regarding them: Perceived value by students. Some students, particularly in their early years of study, might not fully appreciate the relevance of UCCs to their chosen disciplines. This delayed recognition of the importance of UCCs up to when one is in the final years of study or even after graduation when students encounter real-world work challenges happens. This highlights a potential need to re-evaluate the placement of UCCs within the academic calendar, potentially integrating them throughout the programme duration for a more sustained impact.

4.2.1 History of University Common Courses

The transcripts offer valuable insight into the historical context surrounding the emergence of University Common Courses (UCCs) in universities in Kenya. The discussions with respondents point towards a potential link between UCCs and the national curriculum reform that saw the transition from the 7-4-3 to the 8-4-4 system in the late 1980s and 1990s (Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Education, 1981).

One possible explanation for the introduction of UCCs lies in the removal of the "General Paper" previously offered at the A-Level (equivalent to the final year of high school). This assessment served to evaluate general knowledge across various disciplines (Respondent Interviews, 2024). With the implementation of the 8-4-4 system, this A-Level component was discontinued, creating a potential gap in students' foundational knowledge (Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Education, 1999). University Common Courses were introduced by universities to address this gap by equipping incoming students with a base in essential skills and broad knowledge applicable across different disciplines.

The discussions with respondents also suggest an additional purpose for UCCs. They might serve to familiarize students with the unique history, philosophy, and niche areas of their chosen university (Respondent Interviews, 2024). This focus on university-specific knowledge could serve to foster a stronger institutional identity and a sense of belonging among students. In conclusion, the transcripts suggest that UCCs emerged in response to the educational reforms lamented in Kenya, address the gap in general knowledge left by the discontinued A-Level general paper and served the purpose of familiarizing students with their chosen university's unique identity.

4.3. Rationale and Benefits of UCCs

While the concept of UCCs appears to be widely embraced within Universities in Kenya, the analysis of FGD transcripts and online responses revealed an interesting paradox. Most respondents, both faculty and students, expressed strong support for the continued existence of UCCs. They highlighted the crucial role UCCs play in equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in the "global world". Communication skills were frequently cited as a cornerstone UCC, providing a foundation for all subsequent coursework. One faculty member emphasized the importance of advanced reading and writing:

> "*...advanced reading is very important because it helps students to know how to read, comprehend, and read big chunks of information with speed. It is the foundation to do everything else " (Staff, FGD).*

Information literacy was another frequently mentioned UCC, lauded for its role in empowering students to navigate the complexities of the academic journey. A faculty member stressed the importance of critical thinking and academic writing skills as she stated below

> "We *must learn where do you go looking for the information that you need? And how, even after you get that information, do you critically appraise it to find if it is relevant to you and to whatever situation you are in? So that is why the aspect of critical thinking and academic writing became very important for us" (Staff, FGD).”*

The issue of varying student preparedness in core areas like IT literacy was also addressed. Faculty members acknowledged that students arrive at university with a spectrum of technological skills. As one faculty member noted, "*it would be ignorant of an institution not to consider that"* (Staff, FGD). This underscores the rationale behind foundational computer literacy UCCs, ensuring all students possess a baseline understanding before progressing to more advanced coursework.

Beyond essential academic skills, UCCs were also viewed as instrumental in fostering well-rounded graduates who can excel in various professional settings. A recurring theme in the discussions was the importance of courses like HIV/AIDS education, Human Rights, and Entrepreneurship. These UCCs equip students with vital knowledge on critical social issues, preparing them to be responsible and engaged citizens. As one staff member stated,

> "*It is important to implore the institutions on the necessity and the urgency of general courses and the role that they play in the formative structure of the institution. It is necessary that Institutions produce students who are all-rounded and can fit in different spaces" (Staff, FGD).”*

This analysis examines student responses on a Likert scale regarding the importance of various future workplace skills. The scale ranged from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Table 3: Likert scale regarding the importance of various future workplace skills

Skill	Average Score	Inference
Automation and AI	3.30	Students are somewhat **neutral** about the importance of Automation and AI in the future workplace.
Gig Economy	3.00	Students are somewhat **neutral** about the importance of the Gig Economy in the future workplace.
Continuous Learning	4.70	Students **agree** that Continuous Learning will be an important future workplace skill.
Global Collaboration	3.90	Students are **valued** the importance of Global Collaboration in the future workplace.

Remote Work	3.30	Students are somewhat **neutral** about the importance of Remote Work in the future workplace.
Soft Skills	4.60	Students agree that Soft Skills will be an important future workplace skill.

The analysis reveals that university students view continuous learning and soft skills as the most important skills for future workplaces. These skills are essential for adaptability, critical thinking, and effective communication in an evolving work environment. On the other hand, the responses regarding automation and AI, the gig economy, remote work, and global collaboration were more neutral. This suggests that students may not be entirely convinced about the prevalence or significance of these trends in shaping future workplaces.

Several factors might explain the neutral responses towards automation, gig economy, remote work, and global collaboration. Students might lack awareness about the potential growth of these trends. Additionally, the specific industries or job markets students envision themselves entering might influence their perception of these skills' importance. Universities could consider incorporating workshops or seminars to address these emerging trends and their potential impact on future job markets. This could help students develop a more informed perspective on the skills they will need to thrive in the evolving workplace landscape.

While the overwhelming sentiment across FGDs and online tools supported UCCs, it is important to acknowledge a dissenting voice from one institution. This university questioned the continued need for UCCs, hinting at a preference for a more specialized curriculum from the outset.

4.4. Curriculum Content

4.4.1 Range of UCCs offered in universities

Based on the analysis of FGD transcripts and online tools responses, a diverse range of UCCs are offered across Universities in Kenya. Here is a breakdown of the identified UCCs categorized by frequency and thematic areas:

- **Communication skills:** Communication Skills, Critical and Creative writing: Communication Fundamentals, Academic writing
- **Health related:** Health Education, HIV/AIDS, Maisha Programme, Life Skills, Counselling.
- **Information Technology and Computer Science:** Computer Applications, Information Technology Fundamentals, Information Literacy, Digital Literacy.
- **Business and Management:** Principles of Ethics, Entrepreneurship, Business Ethics.
- **Social Sciences and Humanities:** Development Studies, World Civilization, East African Societies, Human Rights, Great Books.

- **Community/work-based learning:** Service-based Learning, Work-based Learning, Community Service.
- **Languages:** French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic.
- **Religious Studies and Philosophy:** Biblical Principles of Leadership, Church Response, Biblical Studies, Principles of Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, Theology of Work and Development; Philosophical Anthropology, Ethics and Integrity, Islamic Studies.
- **Others:** Research Methodology, Statistical Analysis, Quantitative analysis, Multimedia and Graphics Systems, E-Commerce.

Universities in Kenya offer a diverse range of UCCs, with a focus on core skills, information technology, ethics, and society, and (in some cases) Religious studies. The lack of a standardized set of UCCs suggests a high degree of institutional autonomy in UCC design and delivery. An analysis of the data unveils two crucial aspects concerning UCCs within Kenyan universities. First, Kenyan universities boast a rich tapestry of UCC offerings, encompassing a wide spectrum of thematic areas. These include social sciences, information technology, languages, business administration, and religion.

This expansive range caters to a diverse student body, accommodating individuals with variegated academic interests and career aspirations. Secondly, findings gleaned from the FGD transcripts suggest the absence of a rigidly standardized set of UCCs implemented across all universities. While core offerings like communication skills and critical thinking are likely to be ubiquitous, universities appear to retain a degree of flexibility in designing and delivering UCCs that align with their distinctive strengths and the specific needs of their student population. This phenomenon may be particularly pronounced in former constituent colleges that have transitioned to university status, potentially retaining some UCCs from their parent institutions, The findings suggest that a standardized set of UCCs is not uniformly adopted across Universities in Kenya.

4.4.2 Structure and Sequencing of UCCs

The analysis of data from FGDs and online tools reveals a distinct structure and sequencing pattern for UCCs within Universities in Kenya. Here is a breakdown of the key findings:

(i) University Common Courses and when they are offered

A majority of UCCs are offered in the first year of study, typically starting in the first semester. Examples include ***communication skills, philosophy, computer literacy, and HIV/AIDS education***. The rationale behind this structure, as explained by one lecturer, is to equip students with fundamental skills they can utilize throughout their academic journey.

> *"So, we believe that it's supposed to come basically at the beginning because of the skills they need to use as they progress along. So that is the rationale of having them"* (Lecturer, FGD).

Another faculty member emphasized the long-term benefits:

> "*We introduce University common courses, like communication skills taught in the first year. Because we believe if they get the skills then, they will use them both here and outside the university" (Lecturer, FGD).”*

While the focus on foundational skills is appreciated, some students expressed a desire to revisit these skills throughout their studies. A student noted the need for reinforcement, particularly for courses like HIV/AIDS education:

> *"HIV/AIDS. You know, this is a unit where it is in the first year. ..... So, me that it started in the first year, you know, sometimes it started in the first semester. Then after that, we forgot about it. ..... If at all, if it can be taught frequently" (Student, Online Survey).”*

(ii) Discipline-Specific UCCs in Later Years

While some core UCCs are offered in the first year, some universities also provide discipline-specific UCCs in later years. For instance, computer courses beyond the second year may delve into specialized areas like e-commerce or telemedicine. As explained by a lecturer,

> *"...we've gone further to having the first and second-year courses remain common. Then for each school, like for education, we are now looking at the UNESCO education professional competencies for a teacher, a professional teacher. And then we are now looking at what they have been given and how we can now make this more relevant, even more specific to you as a professional teacher" (Lecturer, FGD)."*

Student feedback suggests a desire for reinforcement and the option to revisit core UCC skills in later years. A student commented on the value of communication skills but highlighted the need for potential revisiting:

> *"I may talk based on communication skills. You see, this is a unit which is being taught in the first years. ..... But it should be taught in the third year or fourth year, when you are ready to go for an outside job. Because, you know sometimes you may forget what you are taught back. " (Student, Online Survey).”*

These sentiments highlighted the potential benefits of a spiral curriculum approach for UCCs, where core skills are revisited and built upon throughout the university experience. The structure and sequencing of UCCs in Universities in Kenya appear to prioritize equipping students with foundational skills during their first year. However, student feedback suggests a desire to revisit these skills and potentially pursue more advanced applications in later years. This points towards the potential value of incorporating a spiral curriculum approach for UCCs, allowing for continual learning and skill development throughout a student's academic journey.

4.4.3 Expected learning outcomes and skills graduates gain from UCCs

University Common Courses (UCCs) are designed to equip graduates with a foundational set of transferable skills essential for success in their chosen careers and beyond. Analysis of FGD transcripts and online tools responses revealed a strong emphasis on the following key learning outcomes and skills developed through UCCs:

1. Communication: Written and Oral Communication

Effective communication skills are paramount for professional success. UCCs emphasize the development of both written and oral communication skills, preparing students to articulate ideas clearly, concisely, and persuasively in various contexts as stated by one student and faculty member below respectively.

> *"The UCC on communication skills really helped me improve my writing. Now I feel confident in writing professional emails and reports."* (Student, Online Survey)

> *"One of the core objectives of our communication UCC is to equip students with the ability to present themselves effectively in both written and oral formats. This is crucial for success in any career path."* (Faculty Member, FGD)

2. Critical Thinking: Problem-Solving Abilities, Analytical Skills, and the Ability to Evaluate Information

The ability to think critically and solve problems effectively is a cornerstone of lifelong learning and career readiness. UCCs cultivate these skills through various methods, including case studies, group projects, and research assignments that require students to analyze information, identify solutions, and make sound judgments, as noted below by one student and faculty

> *"The critical thinking skills I developed in the UCC on research methods have been invaluable in my other courses. I feel more confident in evaluating sources and identifying credible information." (Student, Online Survey)*

> *"Our UCC on problem-solving emphasizes critical thinking and analytical skills. We encourage students to approach challenges from multiple perspectives and develop well-reasoned solutions."* (Faculty Member, FGD)

3. Digital Literacy: Competence in Using Technology for Research, Communication, and Professional Tasks

In today's digital world, fluency in technology is essential. UCCs integrate technology throughout the curriculum, providing students with opportunities to develop proficiency in using digital tools for research, communication, and professional tasks.

> *"The UCC on digital literacy introduced me to new software and online resources that I can leverage for my studies and future career."* (Student, FGD)

> *"We've incorporated technology heavily into our UCCs. Students use online platforms for collaboration, research databases for information retrieval, and presentation software to showcase their findings."* (Faculty Member, Online Survey).

4. Understanding Cultural Diversity: Appreciation for Diverse Cultures and the Ability to Work Effectively in a Globalized Environment

The ability to understand and appreciate diverse cultures is increasingly important in our interconnected world. UCCs often incorporate content and activities that promote intercultural understanding, preparing students to work effectively in a globalized environment as explained below.

> *"The UCC on global citizenship opened my eyes to the importance of cultural sensitivity. I feel more prepared to interact with people from different backgrounds."* (Student, Online Survey)

> *"Our UCC on intercultural communication explores different cultural values and communication styles. This equips students with the skills to navigate diverse work environments and build successful relationships with people from all over the world."* (Faculty Member, FGD)

5. Life skills (survival skills due to training obtained from health education and HIV and AIDs

Beyond the core skills mentioned above, FGDs transcripts and online tools responses highlighted the importance of developing the following skills through UCCs:

- **Self-Directed Learning:** The ability to take initiative and manage one's own learning is crucial for lifelong success. UCCs often incorporate elements of self-paced learning and encourage students to take ownership of their learning journeys.
- **Collaboration and Teamwork:** The ability to work effectively with others is essential in many professional settings. UCCs often involve group projects and activities that foster collaboration and teamwork skills.

- **Creativity and Innovation:** The ability to think creatively and generate innovative solutions is increasingly valued in the workplace. UCCs can encourage these skills through problem-solving activities and open-ended projects.

By focusing on these core and supplementary skills, UCCs play a vital role in preparing graduates to thrive in the dynamic and ever-evolving world of work.

4.4.4 Skill Gaps in University Common Courses

This section analyzes the potential gaps between the skills offered in UCCs at Kenyan universities and the competencies required for success in the evolving global workplace. The analysis is informed by scholarly literature on 21st-century skills and the demands of the globalized job market.

1. Limited Focus on 21st Century Skills

While UCCs in Kenya emphasize core transferable skills like communication and critical thinking, they appear to lack a strong focus on the development of other crucial 21st-century skills. The literature highlights the importance of creativity and innovation, which are increasingly sought-after qualities in the workplace (Batra & Ahmad, 2021). Additionally, skills like self-directed learning, collaboration and teamwork, and digital literacy are identified as essential for navigating the complexities of the 21st century (McComas, 2014). Although the text mentions these skills briefly, a deeper integration of these competencies within UCCs could be beneficial.

2. Potential Gap in Global Skills Development

The analysis of UCC descriptions suggests a potential gap in preparing graduates for the demands of the globalized workplace. While intercultural understanding is mentioned as a learning outcome, a broader range of global competencies could be explored. Studies emphasize the significance of "cultural intelligence," "global leadership," and "adaptability" for success in international settings (Townsend & Cairns, 2003). The inclusion of UCCs specifically designed to cultivate these skills would strengthen the program's alignment with the global job market.

UCCs offered in Kenyan universities provide a strong foundation for graduates. However, incorporating a wider range of 21st-century skills, such as creativity, innovation, self-directed learning, and digital literacy, could further enhance their offerings. Additionally, developing UCCs focused on global competencies like cultural intelligence, global leadership, and adaptability would better prepare graduates for the demands of the interconnected world.

4.4.5 Aligning UCCs with the Evolving Global Landscape

The 21st century is characterized by rapid change, globalization, and interconnectedness. This dynamic environment necessitates a well-educated workforce equipped with the skills and

knowledge to navigate its complexities. University Continuing Courses (UCCs) play a critical role in this equation. However, to remain relevant and effective, UCCs must adapt and evolve alongside the changing landscape. This section explores the challenges and opportunities associated with aligning UCCs with emerging global trends and industry demands.

i. The Need for Dynamism and Continuous Improvement

The research participants acknowledged the dynamic nature of the globalized workplace, emphasizing the need for graduates with adaptable skillsets. One respondent, a participant in a focus group discussion (FGD), highlighted the critical role of digital literacy and coding proficiency, stating, "One unit is not enough to put someone in a competitive global market... There is need to incorporate coding, which is a language which is understood worldwide. Digital literacy is the most important thing that currently I can say any student...must have" (FGD Participant). This sentiment underscores the need for UCCs to move beyond a static curriculum and embrace a more dynamic approach that can integrate evolving technologies and in-demand skills.

ii. Equipping Well-Rounded Graduates for a Globalized World

The research emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach that fosters well-rounded graduates who can thrive in diverse global environments. While acknowledging the benefits of existing UCCs, participants advocated for continuous review and improvement. A student voice captured this sentiment during an FGD: "UCCs that we have I can't say they are bad, but they need to be reviewed...because first they have helped us to be the persons that we are today but I think there is something that we need to add on to the UCC...so that at the end of the day the content should be something that is helping students in the limited time they are in the institution, but should prepare them for the global world" (FGD Participant). This highlights the need for UCCs to go beyond disciplinary boundaries and consider the broader skills and knowledge required for success in the globalized workplace.

iii. Incorporating Emerging Issues: Reflecting the Evolving Social Landscape

The study emphasizes the importance of integrating contemporary social issues into UCCs. Sexuality, sex orientation, and ethics were identified as potential areas for inclusion, reflecting the rapidly changing social landscape. A participant noted during an FGD, "...emerging issues that come to mind sometimes is these issues of human sexuality issues of same sex marriages they are really coming up and yes they come up in our common courses in development studies, in communication, in ethics, in philosophical anthropology" (FGD Participant). By incorporating these discussions, UCCs can foster critical thinking skills and prepare students to navigate complex social issues in a diverse global context.

iv. Alignment with Industry Demands: Equipping Graduates for Career Success

The research underscores the need for UCCs to align with current industry demands. Areas like counseling, ICT (Information and Communication Technology), and critical thinking were identified as crucial skill sets for graduates in the global job market. One respondent emphasized during an FGD, "...which as you can see from the future of jobs, those are the ones globally defined as what the world needs" (FGD Participant). This focus on industry relevance highlights the importance of UCCs in preparing students for successful careers.

v. Addressing the Pace of Change: A Flexible Curriculum for a Dynamic World

A key concern emerged regarding the traditional nature of UCCs and their inability to keep pace with rapid technological advancements. Participants emphasized the need for continuous review and updates to reflect these ongoing developments (FGD Participant). This highlights the importance of a flexible curriculum that can be adapted to the changing landscape. Universities might consider establishing advisory boards comprised of industry professionals to provide input on the most relevant skills and knowledge required for graduates to succeed.

The findings suggest that UCCs play a vital role in preparing graduates for the global job market. However, to remain relevant and effective, UCCs must embrace continuous improvement and incorporate emerging trends and industry demands. This focus on dynamism will ensure UCCs equip graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the dynamic and ever-evolving global landscape of the 21st century.

4.5 Curriculum Delivery of UCCs

4.5.1 Delivery Methods Used for UCCs

The delivery methods employed for UCCs in Universities in Kenya encompass a range of approaches, each with its own strengths and limitations. This section explores these delivery methods, incorporating the perspectives of students and faculty gleaned from FGD transcripts and online tools responses.

Traditional Methods: Face-to-Face Lectures and Discussions

A cornerstone of UCC delivery remains the face-to-face lecture. This method allows for direct interaction between faculty and students, facilitating clarification of complex concepts and fostering opportunities for student questions. However, the effectiveness of lectures hinges on the quality of instruction. Student dissatisfaction emerged as a theme in the research, with some participants criticizing instructors providing PDF notes as a substitute for engaging lectures. A student voice captured this frustration:

> *"We just sit in class and are given notes by the lecturer...it's not interactive and doesn't encourage critical thinking" (Online Survey Response*).

The Rise of Online Learning

The landscape of UCC delivery is evolving with the growing prominence of online learning modules and resources. This approach offers flexibility for students, allowing them to access course materials and complete assignments at their own pace. However, concerns regarding student engagement and the potential for feelings of isolation in online environments were raised by some participants. A faculty member noted,

> *"The challenge with online learning is keeping students motivated, especially in large UCC classes. It requires a deliberate effort to create interactive elements and foster a sense of community" (FGD Participant).*

Blended Learning: Harnessing the Synergy of Online and Face-to-Face

Blended learning approaches represent a promising strategy for UCC delivery. This method combines the benefits of face-to-face interaction with the flexibility and self-paced nature of online learning. For instance, online modules could be used to introduce key concepts, followed by in-class sessions focused on discussion, application, and practical exercises. A student expressed enthusiasm for this approach:

> *"I think blended learning is a good idea. Online modules allow us to learn the basics at our own pace, and then in class, we can delve deeper and ask questions" (FGD Participant).*

Active Learning Strategies: Beyond Passive Lectures

The research underscores the importance of incorporating active learning strategies into UCC delivery. This includes methods such as case studies, simulations, group projects, and problem-solving activities. These approaches encourage students to engage critically with course material, develop essential skills like collaboration and communication, and apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios. A faculty member highlighted the value of active learning:

> *"By moving beyond traditional lectures and incorporating activities like case studies and simulations, we can make UCCs more engaging and help students develop the skills they need to succeed beyond the classroom" (FGD Participant).*

Addressing the Challenge of Large Class Sizes

Large class sizes, a common reality in UCCs, can pose challenges for effective delivery methods. It can limit opportunities for student-faculty interaction and hinder the implementation of active learning strategies. The research suggests exploring innovative approaches to address this issue, such as the use of teaching assistants, flipped classrooms (where students learn concepts online and use class time for application), and technology-aided interactive platforms. A student perspective shed light on this challenge: *"Large class sizes make it difficult for professors to know us individually. This can make it intimidating to ask questions or participate in discussions" (Online Survey Response)*.

By employing a variety of delivery methods, including traditional lectures, online modules, blended learning approaches, and active learning strategies, Universities in Kenya can create a more engaging and effective learning experience for UCC students. It is crucial to address the limitations of each method, such

as the potential passivity of lectures and the isolation of online learning environments. Furthermore, strategies to address large class sizes are essential to ensure all students have opportunities for participation and interaction.

The concerns regarding large class sizes can be addressed by incorporating the following strategies:

(i) Implement a **blended learning approach** that seamlessly integrates online and face-to-face components, incorporating virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and other emerging technologies to create immersive and interactive learning experiences.

(ii) Issue **micro-credentials** for successful completion of UCC modules, allowing students to showcase their acquired skills and knowledge to potential employers. Facilitate stackable learning pathways where UCCs can be combined with other credentials or degrees to create customized qualifications tailored to specific career goals.

(iii) Integrate **design thinking and problem-solving frameworks** into UCCs, nurturing innovation, creativity, and the ability to develop effective solutions to complex challenges. Encourage students to think critically, analyze information from various perspectives, and adapt to unforeseen situations.

(iv) Equip students with the skills to navigate the digital landscape critically and ethically. Develop their information literacy skills to become discerning consumers of information, adept at evaluating online sources and identifying credible knowledge.

(v) Move beyond traditional exams. Use a **multifaceted assessment approach** that incorporates presentations, portfolios, simulations, self-reflection exercises, peer evaluations, and employer feedback to provide a holistic picture of student learning and identify areas for continuous improvement.

4.6. Challenges on UCC Implementation in Kenya

While the previous section explored the curriculum content and delivery of UCCS, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges that can hinder their optimal implementation. This section analyzes key obstacles identified through the analysis of FGD transcripts and online tools responses. By understanding these challenges, universities can develop strategies to ensure UCCs continue to deliver on their intended learning outcomes.

4.6.1 Cost Considerations: Balancing Resource Investment with UCC Effectiveness

One of the key challenges identified in the analysis of FGD transcripts and online tool responses is the cost associated with effective UCC implementation. Technological equipment requires substantial capital investment to acquire. This is a challenge for various institutions considering the current tough economic environment and their need to also fund other projects in institutions. A participant identified this noting, the unavailability of technological tools to support learning. He explained that the institution lacked the whiteboards and the blackboards to facilitate enhanced learning experience. He urged the institution to review this. He reported as follows:

> "*This is a big problem that we are having in our institution...we start from the physical resources that we have... actually there is a big challenge."*

The cost per unit of programmes is a challenge for students in universities. Concerns were raised about the delivery of the units and their costs. A participant noted that in some cases online courses costing was almost the same as that for those offered face to face.

4.6.2 Student Motivation and Engagement: Encouraging Active Participation in UCCs

Another challenge identified pertains to student motivation and engagement with UCCs. Improved focus and initiative through technology was common across the cases. This was facilitated through online boards and online learning resources (e-learning) across the institutions surveyed. The use of such resources enabled interactive learning and delivery of content. Among the institutions it was noted that students would access materials and read online. This motivated them to follow-up and review such resources and content.

Plagiarism among the students is another issue identified. It was established that this was common where students provided the same kind of answers/feed-back in examinations and assignments. It was reported that, "you *have to understand that if you instruct ChatGPT to do your paper or something, there is a trace of one that you will find it using all the time."*

There are various factors that affect learning. Multiple exposures greatly improve learner retention of new knowledge. The strategy works effectively when the exposures of UCC overtime. The lack of exposure of the students made it difficult for staff to teach. A participant reported that he found it harder to interact because he was not well-versed in various areas such as in the corporate setting. He explained that trying to interact proved challenging.

The lecturer is the focal point and guides the learning process. His input and approach are critical for the learning process. Respondents felt that in some cases in undertaking online learning, lecturers were not interactive. A respondent communicated that, "*some of the lecturers are also very rigid when you say go and teach online*." However, this affects learning as a critical aspect is that the lecturer should be flexible and accommodative.

There was a feeling that there was a need to make the programmes more practically oriented to improve the learning experience. Participants noted that teaching was too theoretical. This was noted,

> "*Now you know when you are taught on how the church is helping those people who are suffering from hunger it is more of a theory than if we can be taken there practically then it sticks in your mind what you observe."*

Other participants advocated for more lab-based sessions and academic trips for more practical oriented learning.

4.6.3 Academic Staff expertise on UCCs.

It is important for a Lecturer to have relevant expertise in his area of specialization if he is to effectively deliver. However, this was found not to be the case as there are instances where some members of the faculty were found to be wanting. This finding was aptly expressed by this participant;

> "One *of the biggest challenges when it comes to human resources, is when a Lecturer is allocated a unit that, honestly, they cannot handle well. This is a big problem that we are having in our institution.... that we have to the human resource, but there is a big challenge."*

Adequate staffing in institutions reduces the workload of the faculty, enabling them to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of their teaching and grading. The low staff-to-student ratio, however, overburdens staff, impacting the quality of teaching in universities. This is a key challenge in institutions. A participant noted,

> "*You get, like, first year we were around 2,000, and then maybe I just divided it into two groups. So, one Lecturer is supposed to handle us, like, half, 500-plus students or 600-plus students at a go.*"

Affirming this issue, another participant noted, "*you have huge classes, and it becomes a little bit difficult to interact with the students at that person level.*"

4.6.4 UCCs Content relevance

The participants reported the need to align programmes to industry requirements. They felt that there was a gap between what the industry needed and what was being offered in institutions. A participant noted that:

> "There *is a gap between the academy and the industry. That is why after you graduate with a particular degree in economics, you still need a professional training*."

Often in adhering to regulatory standards institutions carry out periodic reviews of curricula. This is undertaken to ensure the curricula is current considering the changes in the respective disciplines and dynamics in the global set up. However, there was rigidity on the part of institutions to review or update their curricula. A participant noted,

> "*Some universities make these courses to be so sacred to a point even when you are reviewing a curriculum, you don't need to touch it*."

Of interest there is a need to review the content of curriculum and manner of delivery to make it more tolerant and receptive to a diverse audience. According to respondents there was a need to avoid too much religiosity and focus on the content and teaching approach. It was felt that this tended to be discriminatory. It was also felt that this took a lot of time and focus from the core content of learning. A respondent suggested, "But *more seriously, I think they should be taught to remove this issue of reverend teaching, reverend teaching, pastor teaching*."

Another issue identified was the lack of cultural identity. It was noticed that students did not know or identify with their culture. Therefore, it was difficult to draw examples from culture. A participant notes, "*Another challenge I would just add to that there is an observation for communication and culture. Many of our current students have minimal attachment to their culture. So, when you are telling them and you require them to give their own experience from their cultural background or experience, understanding, they have no idea."*

4.6.5 Assessment of UCCs

Regarding assessment of University Common Courses (UCCs), the participants suggested more exposure and more practical work. Besides the standard practice of the formative assessment (CAT) carrying 30% of the final score and 70% of the end of term assessment (Summative), the academic staff favoured more formative assessments.

They noted that to improve competencies a review of the curriculum must be initiated and once they get to the competence-based curricula, some of these competencies would be on their own because the assessment tools would have to be developed for each unit. A portfolio of evidence for each student would be required. Blend of sit in and remote examinations is also being administered. CATs are also being administered online while final examinations are physical.

4.6.6 Student Perspectives on Assessment Practices in UCCs

This section delves into students' experiences regarding assessment practices within University Common Courses (UCCs), drawing on insights from focus group discussions (FGDs) and online survey responses. We explored student perspectives on the three key assessment types: assessment of learning (summative), assessment for learning (formative), and assessment as learning (self-assessment).

(i) Assessment of Learning (Summative): Does the Final Exam Capture It All?

While traditional exams, a common form of assessment of learning, are frequently mentioned in the transcripts, student comments paint a mixed picture regarding their effectiveness in evaluating the skills and knowledge emphasized within UCCs. Some students expressed concerns that final exams primarily assess rote memorization and may not fully capture the development of critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. One student participant stated, *"Final exams in UCCs often feel like a test of memory, not a true reflection of our understanding or ability to apply the concepts."*

"I feel more confident in my ability to analyze information and solve problems after working on group projects in my Communication UCC. However, the final exam was mostly multiple-choice questions focused on memorizing definitions." (Student FGD)

Online sitting of examinations is taking shape where students access examinations using the ip address of the University It was suggested that assessment is now focusing more on practical work than paperwork. It was felt that some of the UCCs should not be examined.

(ii) Assessment for Learning (Formative)

The goal of formative assessment is to monitor student learning to provide feedback continuously. It was observed that most universities administered term papers, presentations and group work as part of the formative assessment.

Industrial attachment connected students with the world of work. University courses were designed to provide for at least one attachment before a student graduates. This is mandatory and a student must endeavor to find placement. Together with work-based learning and internship they are part of the formative learning.

4.7 Perspectives on Sustainable and Globally Relevant UCCs

This section explores the "ideal future" of University Common Courses (UCCs). We delve into proposals put forward by the institutions interviewed, examining staff and student perspectives on how UCCs can be further optimized to meet the demands of the 21st century. Following this

exploration, we will identify the emerging trends critical in designing innovative and globally oriented UCCs.

4.7.1 Staff Perspectives on Future UCCs

Focus group discussions with faculty members revealed a strong emphasis on maintaining the **self-paced nature** of UCCs. As one faculty member remarked,

> *"They should continue to be self-paced where a student can learn at their own pace, provide a buffet of courses where a student can choose from before they graduate, more of a self-paced learning"* (Staff Member, FGD).

This sentiment highlights the importance of catering to diverse learning styles and allowing students to progress at their own speed. Additionally, staff emphasized the need for continuous curriculum updates to reflect current trends. Another faculty member stressed,

> *"So, we encourage ourselves to be current, to be aware of what is happening. So, you integrate what you are teaching into what is happening"* (Staff Member, FGD).

This underscores the crucial role of integrating contemporary issues and real-world applications into UCC content.

4.7.2 Student Aspirations for Future UCCs: A Focus on Relevance and Employability

The analysis of FGD transcripts reveals a clear vision among students for the future of UCCs in Universities in Kenya. This vision emphasizes dynamism, adaptability, and a stronger focus on employability skills. Specifically, the findings identify the following characteristics of future UCCs. Students expressed a desire for UCCs that can be revisited and built upon throughout their academic journey. One student proposed a tiered approach:

> *"I don't know what you guys would say about it, that we could have, like, com [communication] skills one in first year as I join, and later in my years of study, say, third, fourth, fifth year, I'm also able to take in a now tailored unit that will now prepare me to these things of CV writing, report writing, research methodology. I do not know what you think about that"* (Student, FGD).

This highlights a preference for UCCs that evolve alongside students' needs, providing increasingly specialized content as they progress through their degree programs. Students also emphasized the importance of UCCs that equip them with skills relevant to the contemporary job market. A student made this comment to underscore this desire;

> *"While the general skills taught in UCCs are valuable, I'd like to see more emphasis on practical skills like data analysis or digital communication that are highly sought after by employers"* (Student, FGD)

In addition, students expressed a need for UCCs that foster global competence, enabling them to collaborate effectively in diverse environments:

> *"The future of work is global. UCCs should equip us with the skills to collaborate effectively with people from diverse backgrounds and navigate the complexities of the global marketplace*" (Student, FGD).

The focus group discussions also revealed student preferences for more engaging and interactive UCC delivery methods. A student noted;

> *"Lectures are okay, but I learn best by doing. If UCCs incorporated more hands-on activities, simulations, and projects, it would make the learning more engaging and help us retain information better*" (Student, FGD).

This suggests a preference for experiential learning approaches that go beyond traditional lecture formats. In conclusion, student perspectives on the future of UCCs highlight the need for:

- **Curriculum Alignment:** Regular reviews to ensure UCC content aligns with current industry needs and student career aspirations.
- **Experiential Learning:** Integration of active learning methods like simulations, projects, and guest lectures to enhance practical skill development.
- **Interactive Learning Environments:** Encouragement of student participation through discussions, presentations, and group work to foster critical thinking and collaboration skills.
- **Global Competence Development:** Incorporation of modules on intercultural communication and collaboration to prepare students for the globalized workplace.
- **Technology Integration:** Utilization of online learning platforms, virtual reality simulations, and collaborative tools to enhance the learning experience and facilitate geographically dispersed teamwork.

By incorporating these elements and prioritizing student aspirations, Universities in Kenya can transform UCCs into dynamic and future-oriented learning experiences that empower graduates to thrive in the ever-evolving global landscape.

4.8 Envisioning the Future: Shaping the Next Generation of UCCs

4.8.1 Futureproofing UCCs: Equipping Students for a Technology-Driven World

The analysis of FGD transcripts and online tools responses reveals student concerns regarding the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation on future job prospects. These concerns highlight the need for UCCs to evolve and equip students with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing technological landscape. As one student participant remarked, *"Many students expressed concerns about the impact of AI and technology on future job prospects and saw the need for future UCCs to incorporate content that would help students integrate and adapt to technological advancements in their respective fields"* (Student, FGD). This sentiment underscores the importance of UCCs in fostering technological fluency and adaptability.

Shifting the Narrative: From Fear to Integration

By incorporating content on emerging technologies and their applications within relevant fields, UCCs can help dispel student anxieties about job displacement and instead reframe technology as a tool for career advancement. This shift in perspective can be achieved by equipping students with the skills to leverage these technologies effectively. Students themselves alluded to this point, suggesting that UCCs should;

> *"Change the narrative in the minds of the students regarding the importance of integrating technology into their professions rather than instill the fear of job displacement*" (Student, FGD).

Addressing the Need for Competency-Based Learning

The analysis also revealed student interest in a competency-based approach to UCC delivery. This approach focuses on the development of specific skills and knowledge sets required for success in various professions. One student suggested the possibility of "talent-based UCCs" that could guide students in co-curricular activities, contributing to talent identification and purposeful education (Student, FGD). This aligns with the growing emphasis on competency-based learning models that equip students with the specific skills employers seek.

Beyond Financial Gain: Aligning Careers with Passions

Another key student aspiration relates to moving beyond a purely job-focused approach to career planning. Students expressed a desire for UCCs to help them identify their talents, passions, and personal strengths to make informed decisions about their education and career trajectories. This sentiment highlights the value of UCCs in fostering self-awareness and a deeper understanding of one's purpose within the professional landscape. A student noted the potential of UCCs in this regard:

"This would emphasize the need for students to move beyond simply seeking for jobs for financial gain and instead focus on aligning their career paths with their talents, passions and personal strengths leading to informed decisions on their education and career trajectories fostering as sense of purpose and direction in their academic pursuits" (Student, FGD).

Mentorship

The inclusion of mentorship programs within UCCs emerged as another potential strategy for enhancing student engagement and development. Students acknowledged a tendency to be more receptive to information when it comes from a practicing professional:

"With students acknowledging the initial skepticism they attend their UCCs with, they noted that when information is coming from a practicing individual, they tend to engage more with the aim of identifying personal development opportunities thus highlighting mentorship as being a fundamental aspect of student development" (Student, FGD).

This suggests that incorporating mentorship opportunities within UCCs can foster deeper engagement and provide students with valuable insights from experienced professionals in their fields. By integrating these student aspirations into UCC design and delivery, Universities in Kenya can ensure that UCCs remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the 21st-century workforce. A focus on technological fluency, competency-based learning, career guidance aligned with passions, and the incorporation of mentorship programs can empower students to navigate the complexities of the contemporary job market and build fulfilling careers in an era of technological transformation.

4.8.2 Towards Sustainable and Globally Relevant UCCs in Kenya

This section outlines a roadmap for sustainable and globally relevant UCCs in Kenya. This roadmap emphasizes three key components. By implementing these strategies, Universities in Kenya can ensure their UCCs remain effective in preparing graduates for success in the 21st century job market.

(i) Ongoing Collaboration with Industry Stakeholders

The transcripts from the focus group discussions (FGDs) and the online tools data resoundingly emphasized the critical need for **closer collaboration between universities and industry stakeholders**. As one student participant aptly stated,

"The skills we learn in UCCs feel theoretical. If we had more interaction with industry professionals, we would understand how these skills are applied in the workplace."

This sentiment highlights the importance of forging strong industry partnerships to ensure that UCC content remains relevant and equips graduates with the skills employers actively seek. By fostering ongoing collaboration with industry stakeholders, universities in Kenya can bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application by implementing the following potential strategies:

- **Establish Industry Advisory Boards:** Create formal advisory boards comprised of industry leaders to provide ongoing input on UCC curriculum development and content. These boards can offer valuable insights into current industry trends, skill requirements, and emerging job markets.
- **Facilitate Internship and Mentorship Programme:** Develop internship and mentorship programmes that connect students with industry professionals. These programmes provide students with real-world experience, allowing them to apply their UCC skills in practical settings. Additionally, mentorship opportunities can offer invaluable guidance and career advice.
- **Encourage Guest Lectures from Industry Leaders:** Invite industry leaders to deliver guest lectures within UCC courses. This exposes students to diverse perspectives and showcases the practical applications of the skills they are developing. Hearing from industry professionals firsthand can motivate students and enhance their understanding of career opportunities.

By implementing these collaborative strategies, universities in Kenya can ensure that UCCs remain aligned with industry needs, preparing graduates with the skills and knowledge for success in the ever-evolving global job market.

(ii) Investment in Academic Staff Development Programmes

Analysis of both the focus group discussions (FGDs) and the online tools data revealed a consistent theme: the perceived need for faculty development programmes focused on effective delivery methods for learner-centered and experiential learning approaches. A student participant echoed this sentiment, stating,

> *"The lectures in UCCs can be quite traditional. Interactive activities and real-world case studies would make the learning more engaging and help us connect the dots between theory and practice."*

While another student participant echoed this sentiment, stating,

> "*Many of our UCC classes feel like traditional lectures. If professors used more interactive methods, like group projects or simulations, we'd be more engaged and learn the material better."*

Similarly, an academic staff member highlighted the importance of faculty development, noting,

> "*While we understand the value of learner-centered approaches, some faculty lack the training and support to effectively implement these methods within UCCs*."

Another academic staff member echoed the importance of faculty development, noting,

"*Many faculty are accustomed to traditional lecture-based teaching. Investing in training programmes on innovative pedagogies would equip us to deliver UCCs in a way that maximizes student engagement and skill development*."

These insights underscore the critical role of faculty development in ensuring the successful implementation of learner-centered and experiential UCCs.

Empowering Faculty for Optimal UCC Delivery:

Investing in faculty development programmes focused on innovative teaching methodologies is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of UCCs in universities in Kenya. Here are some potential strategies to achieve this goal:

- Develop and deliver workshops and training programmes that equip faculty with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement learner-centered and experiential learning approaches in their UCC courses. These programmes can focus on innovative pedagogies such as problem-based learning, simulations, collaborative learning activities, and technology integration in the classroom.
- Establish faculty exchange programmes with universities renowned for their successful UCC implementation. These programmes would allow faculty members to observe best practices in UCC design and delivery firsthand, fostering the exchange of knowledge and innovative teaching strategies.
- Encourage and support faculty research on best practices in UCC design and assessment. This research can contribute to the development of a robust body of knowledge on effective UCC implementation within the Kenyan university context.

(iii) Regular Monitoring and Evaluation of the UCC Programmes

The importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation for UCCs was a recurring theme in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and online tools data. As one faculty member noted,

"Without regular evaluation, it's difficult to assess the effectiveness of UCCs and identify areas where improvements can be made."

A student participant echoed this sentiment, stating,

We need to know if the skills we are learning in UCCs are preparing us for the workplace. Regular feedback would be helpful."

Similarly, a student participant highlighted the value of evaluation, noting,

"Regular feedback on our learning is essential. It allows us to understand our strengths and weaknesses and identify areas where we need to focus more effort."

Regular evaluation is an indispensable tool for ensuring that UCCs achieve their intended learning outcomes and remain effective in preparing graduates for the workplace's demands. By

establishing a robust framework for monitoring and evaluation, universities in Kenya can cultivate a culture of continuous improvement for their UCC programmes by:

- **Developing Clear Learning Outcomes:** The foundation for effective evaluation lies in clearly defined learning outcomes for each UCC. These outcomes should be aligned with national frameworks and industry standards, ensuring that graduates possess the requisite knowledge and skills for success.
- **Implementing Diverse Assessment Methods:** Moving beyond traditional exams, a multifaceted approach to assessment is crucial. This could involve incorporating methods such as presentations, group projects, portfolios, simulations, and self-reflection exercises. These methods allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of student learning, encompassing critical thinking, communication, problem-solving skills, and other essential competencies.
- **Utilizing Data for Informed Decisions:** Regularly gather and analyze data from various sources, including student feedback, employer surveys, and graduate employability data. By utilizing this data, universities can identify areas where UCCs are excelling or require adjustments. This data-driven approach allows for continuous improvement of UCCs, ensuring their continued effectiveness in preparing graduates for the ever-evolving global job market.

Through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, universities in Kenya can ensure that their UCC programmes remain relevant, effective, and responsive to the needs of students, employers, and the dynamic global landscape.

4.9 Limitations of the study

This study offers valuable insights into University Continuing Courses (UCCs) in Kenya, but it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may influence the generalizability of the findings. The research focused solely on the Kenyan context. UCC implementation and effectiveness may vary significantly across different countries due to factors like educational systems, cultural norms, and industry demands. Further research in other geographical contexts is necessary to determine the broader applicability of the findings. The study relied on self-reported information from students and faculty, which can be susceptible to bias. Participants' perceptions and experiences may not always be entirely accurate due to factors like memory limitations, social desirability bias (desire to present oneself favorably), or personal interpretations. Future studies could incorporate triangulation methods, using multiple data collection techniques (e.g., observations, document analysis) to corroborate self-reported information.

The purposive sampling method used to recruit faculty participants may have introduced bias. Faculty with expertise in specific areas of emerging trends were targeted, potentially excluding valuable insights from faculty members with different specializations. Future research might benefit from a more randomized sampling approach to capture a broader range of perspectives within the faculty population. The findings may not be generalizable to other contexts beyond the Kenyan university system. Cultural factors can

significantly influence student and faculty experiences with UCCs. Further research that explores UCCs in various cultural contexts is needed for a more comprehensive understanding of their global impact.

While these limitations exist, the research employed several strategies to enhance the credibility of the finding. First, the research instruments (surveys and interview guides) were pilot tested with a small sample group to ensure clarity and effectiveness in capturing relevant data. Key stakeholders were given a chance to review findings to ensure accurate representation of their perspectives. ThFese strategies helped to minimize potential biases and strengthen the overall reliability of the research. In conclusion, acknowledging these limitations highlights the need for further research to explore the effectiveness of UCCs across diverse contexts. Future studies employing multicultural samples and multi-modal data collection strategies can provide a more comprehensive picture of UCCs' role in preparing graduates for the globalized workplace.

Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 has explored the multifaceted landscape of University Common Courses (UCCs) in Universities in Kenya. Through analysis of FGD transcripts and online tools responses, the chapter has highlighted the strong justifications for UCCs in equipping students with foundational academic skills, fostering well-rounded graduates, and preparing them for success in the globalized workplace. However, the chapter also acknowledged the challenges associated with UCC implementation, including resource constraints and ensuring student motivation. Furthermore, student perspectives provided valuable insights into the desired future state of UCCs, emphasizing a focus on dynamism, adaptability, and a stronger emphasis on employability skills. The chapter concluded by exploring strategies to address these challenges and incorporate student aspirations, paving the way for a future where UCCs remain relevant and empower Kenyan graduates to thrive in the ever-evolving world of work. Chapter 5 will build upon these findings by presenting a comprehensive summary of the research, outlining key recommendations for moving forward, and proposing a roadmap and framework for the continued development and optimization of UCCs within Universities in Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

Data obtained from the research study through FGD, and on-line tools has provided a compelling trajectory on how to proceed. First is the acknowledgement that the University Common Courses (UCCs) offered are relevant in the training of graduates. However, they need to be reviewed and enhanced to align to the global workplace demands. Secondly, there was consensus that the scope of the current UCCs is narrow and needs to expand to cover emerging areas that a graduate of the 21st century must possess. These include Problem-Solving Abilities, Analytical Skills, Competence in Using Technology, Collaboration, Creativity, Innovation, Intercultural Understanding and Self-Directed Learning. With this understanding, a framework could now be developed to guide the review and broadening of the UCCs in universities in Kenya. A review of university curricula initiated with the guidance of CUE will find this study's findings useful. This report will be quite handy in designing and implementing the curricula in universities.

University Common Courses are important in preparing graduates that will thrive in the global workplace by empowering them with requisite competencies - skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes to not only succeed professionally but also become responsible global citizens. The research study brought forward pertinent information on common courses offered in universities in Kenya as relates to how they are developed, delivered, assessed, and reviewed as well as proposals on how to enhance them for relevance and applicability globally.

5.2 Recommendations and Future Directions

The findings of this study illuminate the potential of University Common Courses (UCCs) to empower graduates in the dynamic global workplace. However, to maximize their impact, continuous improvement is essential. This section explores recommendations for enhancing UCCs and proposes avenues for future research to ensure they remain relevant and effective in preparing students for the ever-evolving demands of the 21st century job market.

1. Addressing Global Trends

- **Core Skills at the Forefront:** UCCs should prioritize essential skills like critical thinking, communication, digital literacy, and research skills, preparing graduates for any career path. Also Integrate topics like Artificial Intelligence (AI), design thinking, mental health, and substance abuse awareness into UCC content, reflecting the evolving global landscape.
- **Practical Applications:** Move beyond theory by incorporating real-world projects, case studies, and service-learning opportunities, allowing students to apply their knowledge in practical settings.
- **A Global Perspective:** Ensure UCC content prepares graduates for the international job market by incorporating diverse perspectives and global challenges.

- **Maintaining Relevance:** Regularly review and update UCCs based on industry needs and stakeholder feedback through ongoing action research cycles.

2. **Course Options: A Strategic Selection**
    - Retain core courses with proven success, such as Communication and Culture, Information Technology, and Critical Thinking.
    - Introduce new courses like Entrepreneurship and Digital Literacy, ensuring adequate resources and faculty expertise.
    - Revise or consider offering electives to promote diversification and interdisciplinarity.
3. **Faculty Expertise: Equipping Educators**
    - Conduct a faculty skills audit to identify gaps in expertise related to UCCs.
    - Develop targeted faculty development programs to address identified skill gaps and foster innovative pedagogy.
    - Implement faculty mentorship programs to support knowledge sharing and expertise transfer among faculty members.
4. **Delivery Methods: Engaging Students for Deeper Learning**
    - Implement a blended learning approach with online components for flexibility and wider reach.
    - Integrate interactive activities like discussions, case studies, simulations, and practical applications to enhance student engagement.
    - Encourage student participation through project-based learning and the establishment of UCC-related clubs.
    - Cater to diverse learning styles by offering a variety of delivery methods (e.g., face-to-face, online).

4. Assessment: Measuring Learning and Impact

- **Moving Beyond Exams:** Introduce a variety of assessment methods alongside traditional exams.
- **Skills-Based Evaluation:** Utilize methods that evaluate practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge (e.g., presentations, portfolios, practical demonstrations).
- **Tailored Rubrics:** Develop rubrics tailored to specific UCC learning outcomes to ensure effective and consistent evaluation.

5. A Holistic Approach

- **Student Support:** Address negative student attitudes by clearly communicating the value and career relevance of UCCs. Provide opportunities for student feedback to inform continuous improvement through surveys and focus groups.

- **Industry Partnerships:** Develop strong partnerships with industry leaders to ensure curriculum aligns with current job market needs. Explore internship and research opportunities for students through these partnerships.

5.3 Conclusion

This study has been conducted at a critical juncture for Kenyan universities, as they embark on curriculum revisions to embrace the Competency Based Education (CBE) framework. The arrival of the first CBE cohort in 2029 necessitates a five-year window for universities to adapt their programs. The findings presented here offer timely insights to inform the Commission's development of guidelines for universities during this transformative period.

This research goes beyond simply documenting the current state of UCCs. It exposes their potential to empower graduates in the dynamic globalized workplace. By analyzing how UCCs are developed, delivered, assessed, and reviewed, the study identifies areas for improvement. Furthermore, it proposes concrete strategies to enhance UCCs for increased global relevance and applicability. This knowledge equips faculty with the tools to develop UCC programs that meet the evolving needs of both employers and graduates.

The findings presented here are not merely an endpoint, but rather a catalyst for transformation. The roadmap and framework outlined in this research serve as a blueprint for the future – a future where UCCs transcend mandatory requirements and evolve into dynamic and engaging learning experiences. These experiences will empower Kenyan graduates to flourish in the interconnected global landscape that awaits them.

The journey towards this transformed future has begun, and its success hinges on the collective efforts of students, faculty, administrators, and industry leaders. As we move forward, this research serves as a testament to the unwavering commitment to nurturing a generation of graduates equipped to navigate the complexities of the 21st century and beyond. The legacy of UCCs in Kenya is still being written, and this study represents a significant step towards ensuring their continued relevance and impact in preparing graduates for the globalized workplace.

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