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ABSTRACT

Globally, and Kenya in particular, economic growth has been and will be negatively impacted by COVID-19 shocks with direct consequences to the poor, vulnerable and marginalized households who rely on informal employment and businesses to fend for their children. The education sector in particular has been on the worrying side since the schools were closed from March 2020. Nonetheless, a number of private universities in Kenya have adopted some strategies to ensure that learning continues which was the gist in this reflective paper. The specific objectives of this study was to assess the impact of digital Education and financing strategies on online learning in Private Universities in Kenya. The study was guided by online collaborative learning theory and theory of change. Both descriptive research design and a case study approach were adopted. The target population of this study was 1460 students from Kiriri University. The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis while quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Digital education had a significant influence on learning efficiency. Financial strategies adopted to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 had a significant influence on learning efficiency. There is need for universities to ensure that all the students have access to the digital education. The government could also provide incentives for the private universities.

Key words; *Digital Education, Financing Strategies, Learning Efficiency*

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INTRODUCTION

Since December 2019, COVID-19, a highly infectious disease caused by a new virus, has had an increasing impact on countries and regions around the world. Schools have been closed and economies affected. Education, training and research is a major platform for national socio-economic transformation globally (UNESCO, 2020a). In light of this, the Kenyan Government like other governments world-wide appreciates that education and training of all citizens is vital for the attainment of the Kenya's Vision twenty thirty and a springboard to the 'Big 4 agenda. Therefore, despite the closure of schools in Kenya due to covid 19 pandemic, the Kenyan government has developed a three-pronged approach to aid the continuation of learning remotely, adhering to the international and national guidance for social distancing, quarantine and self-isolation. The Education Ministry has developed online content that some school going children are accessing through various channels to ensure uninterrupted learning for learners in the country while they are at home. However this method is not effective as there is no student assessments and follow up (MOE, 2020).

Most of Private Universities in Kenya have come up with a more comprehensive way of delivering knowledge to their students. After understanding that the COVID-19 epidemic and quarantine measures would last for months, the learning process has continued in a distance mode using online technologies. The aspects of learning that have been incorporated to the online learning include; daily lessons, cat administration, exam administration and graduations. Institutions such as Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology (KWUST) and Riara University have succeeded in passing examination to the students and conducting virtual graduation. KWUST has embraced video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, Hangouts and Class. Plans are underway to integrate it with the University Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) once an assessment is completed (KWUST, 2020). This has been beneficial especially to the students who were in their last semester before the covid 19 struck and to the performance of the University at large.

Statement of the Problem

The education sector is seriously affected as millions of learners stay at home for unspecified period of time following the closure of learning institutions in Kenya. The disruptions touch citizens across countries, but their effect is mainly severe for underprivileged girls and boys and their households especially in hard to reach areas, urban informal settlements, pockets of poverty in rural areas, IDPs and refugees hence there is need to underpin these challenges and mitigate them for delivery of inclusive, equitable, quality and relevant education, training and research that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (Ngwacho, 2020).

A survey conducted by Usawa Agenda, a lobby championing equitable access to quality education, indicated only 22 per cent of students interviewed in forty-two counties were accessing online learning resources with those enrolled in private schools being twice as likely to take part in digital learning compared to their counterparts in public schools. Nine out of ten school heads officials interviewed estimated less than 30 per cent of their schools to have any measures in place to reach children with learning materials while six out of ten School Heads Association officials interviewed estimated less than 10 per cent of public schools have measures in place to reach children with learning materials (Uwezo, 2020). It is against this backdrop that this study aimed to find the covid 19 mitigation strategies and online learning of Private Universities in Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

- To determine the impact of digital education on learning efficiency in private universities in Kenya.
- To establish the impact of financing strategies on learning efficiency in Private Universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Collaborative Learning Theory

OCL is a theory that was proposed by Linda Harasim (Harasim, 2017). The theory focuses on the internet as a source of learning through fostering collaboration and building of knowledge. The reason behind using Online Collaborative Learning (OCL) is to help understand how students and educational institutions accept and use technology for teaching and learning. Harasim describes the new theory of acquiring knowledge as one that is focused on collaborative learning, internet use, and knowledge building. (Harasim, 2017), points out that many benefits are associated with moving to teach and learning to the internet and predict a large scale network of education being created from the concept of e-learning.

OCL is also based on social constructivism. This is because the learners are encouraged to solve problems collaboratively by way of discourse. The major aspect of OCL is that the work of a teacher is to facilitate the process of learning. In other constructivism theories, the teacher is an active facilitator of knowledge acquisition. Due to the significance of the duties of the teacher, online collaborative learning is not easy to scale up (Picciano, 2017). OCL is mainly suited for smaller instructional environments, unlike connectivism, which is mainly large-scale based. Therefore, when seeking commonality among online education theories, OCL becomes significantly important. Several theories are closely related to online education. However, instead of coming up with many theories and trying to keep up with the major aim of the research, it is essential to determine whether an integrated or unified theory of online education is something that can be adopted and successfully implemented (Shlossberg & Cunningham, 2016).

Theory of Change

A theory of change is a purposeful model of how an initiative such as a policy, a strategy, a program, or a project contributes through a chain of early and intermediate outcomes to the intended result. Theories of change help navigate the complexity of social change. Social change is the process whereby individuals and communities adjust or abandon customs and associated leading ideas, values, and purposes to act differently in response to random (unique) or systemic factors. An effective theory of change helps to guide the development of evidence-based programme strategies, informs project monitoring and management and provides a framework for evaluation and impact assessment (Funnell & Rogers, 2015).

Three types of changes are associated with the theory of change; intermediate outcomes, long term outcomes and impacts. Intermediate outcomes are the desired changes that can be directly attributed to the change strategies put in place. Long term outcomes are the changes to policy, practice, voice and agency generated by the combined effects of intermediate outcomes and impacts relate to the sustained changes produced either directly or indirectly by the combination of several change interventions (Reeler, 2017).

The theory is important in this study has it highlights the need to come up with change strategies for continued learning amidst the covid 19 pandemic. Most of the universities do not have access to finances due to covid 19 but implementing intermediate change strategies such as minimization of paper work, scenario planning and institutional endowments will enable them navigate the complexity of the covid 19 pandemic (IIED, 2020). These intermediate outcome areas are the means by which we address the global challenges such as the prevailing covid 19 pandemic and will contribute to the achievement of longer-term outcomes and impacts.

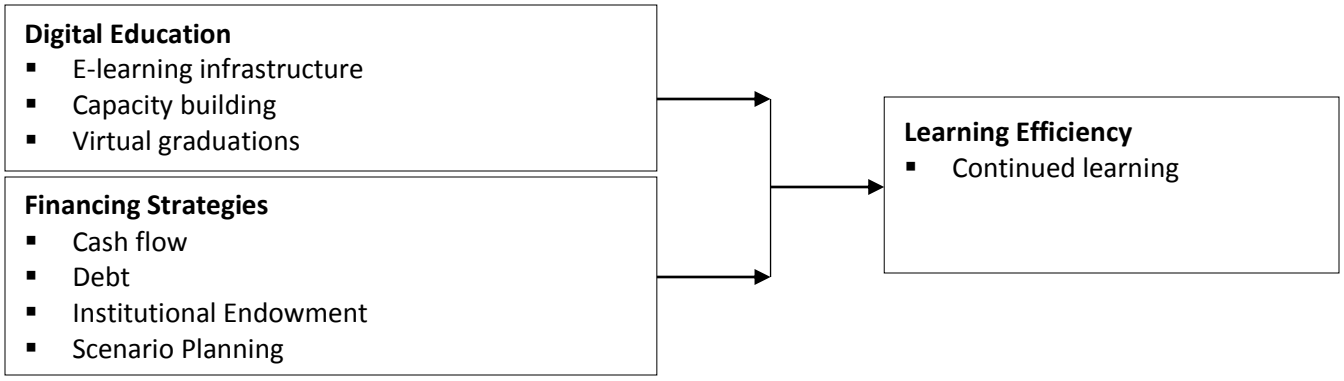

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Empirical Review

Digital education is the innovative use of digital tools and technologies during teaching and learning, and is often referred to as Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) or e-Learning. Exploring the use of digital technologies gives educators the opportunity to design engaging learning opportunities in the courses they teach, and these can take the form of blended or fully online courses and programmes (McLaughlin, 2020). There are two kinds of online learning and teaching that schools will need to balance based on their circumstances: synchronous (happening collaboratively and at the same time with a group of online learners and usually a teacher) and asynchronous (happening at any time, not necessarily in a group, but with teacher feedback) (IBO, 2020).

Digital Learning can be conducted through; the development of e-learning infrastructure, capacity buildings, conductiong virtual graduations, among others. Information Communication Technology (ICT) is critical in transforming education and addressing important challenges of quality, relevance access and equity encountered by the education sector (Hoover, 2020). However this requires sufficient capacity to incorporate ICT in education, training and research. Assistance should also be provided to lecturers, students and parents on the utilization of digital tools.

Financing strategies are the mechanisms used by different organizations to boost their finances amidst the covid 19 pandemic. The most immediate challenge for most institutions involves cash flow. As institutions lose parking fees, dining outlet sales, and other auxiliary revenues, they also face unexpected expenses, including partial refunds on fees, room, and board, and the need to scale virtual engagement modalities. To ensure continuity in the short term, some institutions will likely need to rapidly restructure their operations so as to increase cash flow to the institutions (Capatides, 2020).

As institutions evaluate their expected cash flow, they may also look for ways to modify their debt obligations—the key here is to reach out to the bank proactively. When an institution seeks an extension of credit, it should bring its cash flow projections and response plan. Doing so will demonstrate that the institution has thought through its financial situation and has a realistic strategy for meeting its commitments (Hoover, 2020). Endowments are another potential source of funding that institutions may be able to tap to shore up their liquidity. Institutions may also consider reaching out to donors who have made restricted gifts in the past and

seeking their permission to unrestrict funds to shore up the institution's operating budget to help deal with the current crisis.

Scenario planning is also an effective financial strategy in most institutions. Any institution that anticipates a bump in enrollment needs a plan for how it will scale up student services, without significantly more revenue, to maintain retention and graduation rates (Enos, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted both descriptive research design and a case study approach. Descriptive research provides clear defined information and its findings are conclusive. It also determines the frequency with which the variables are conveyed (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). A case study research design is the investigation of one or more specific instances of something that comprises a group or an individual, or something more abstract such as in event or a management decision (Yin, 2013).

The target population of this study was 1460 students from Kiriri Womens University. In this study structured questionnaires were used. This technique was used to collect data whereby the questions were in a likert scale and the respondents were expected to choose their appropriate answer. The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis while quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics included frequency distribution tables and measures of central tendency (the mean) and measures of variability (standard deviation). The inferential statistics included a multiple linear regression model which established the relationship between variables.

FINDINGS

Digital education

Table 1: Digital education

Item	mean	Standard deviation
Exploring the use of digital technologies gives educators the opportunity to design engaging learning opportunities	4.18	0.217
Capacity building of students, educators and leaders aids in digital education	4.26	0.224
Information Communication Technology (ICT) is critical in transforming education	3.95	0.226
Sufficient capacity is required to incorporate ICT in Education	4.01	0.233
Digital Education is more as efficient as the face to face classes	4.20	0.199

The majority of the respondents agreed that capacity building of students, educators and leaders aids in digital education (mean=4.26, standard deviation=0.224) and that digital education is more as efficient as the face to face classes (mean=4.20, standard deviation= 0.199). They further agreed that exploring the use of digital technologies gives educators the opportunity to design engaging learning opportunities (mean=4.18, standard deviation=0.217) and that sufficient capacity is required to incorporate ICT in Education (mean=4.01, standard deviation=0.233) and finally that information Communication Technology (ICT) is critical in transforming education (mean=3.95, standard deviation=0.226).

Financing Strategies

Table 2: Financing Strategies

Item	mean	Standard deviation
Financial strategies help in boosting finances amidst a crisis	4.14	0.140
Institutional Endowments help institutions to increase their liquidity	3.98	0.219
Any institution that anticipates a bump in enrollment needs a plan for how it will scale up student services	4.06	0.178
Institutions may reach out to donors/sponsors who have made restricted gifts in the past and seek their permission to unrestricted funds to help deal with crisis	3.94	0.125
When an institution seeks an extension of credit, it should take its cash flow projections and response plan to the bank	3.84	0.161

Majority of the respondents agreed that financial strategies help in boosting finances amidst a crisis (mean=4.14, standard deviation=0.140) and that any institution that anticipates a bump in enrollment needs a plan for how it will scale up student services (mean=4.06, standard deviation=0.178). The respondents further agreed that institutional endowments help institutions to increase their liquidity (mean=3.98, standard deviation= 0.219). The respondents also agreed that institutions may reach out to donors/sponsors who have made restricted gifts in the past and seek their permission to unrestricted funds to help deal with crisis (mean=3.94, standard deviation=0.125) and that when an institution seeks an extension of credit, it should take its cash flow projections and response plan to the bank (mean=3.84, standard deviation=0.161).

Learning efficiency

Table 3: Learning efficiency

Item	mean	Standard deviation
Reallocation of the existing financial resources has enhanced continuity of learning	4.06	0.146
Acquisition of digital tools has facilitated teaching and learning	4.12	0.169
Online education enables the lecturer and the student to set their own learning pace	3.98	0.159
Online educational platform allows for a better balance of work and studies	4.08	0.171
The flexible nature of online study has made it more financially practical	3.76	0.146

Majority of the respondents agreed that acquisition of digital tools has facilitated teaching and learning (mean=4.12, standard deviation=0.169), online educational platform allows for a better balance of work and studies(mean=4.08, standard deviation=0.171), reallocation of the existing financial resources has enhanced continuity of learning (mean=4.06, standard deviation= 0.146), online education enables the lecturer and the student to set their own learning pace (mean= 3.98standard deviation=0.159) and that the flexible nature of online study has made it more financially practical (mean=3.76, standard deviation=0.146).

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the significance of the relationship between the dependent variable and all the independent variables pooled together. From the findings in the model summary table, the value of adjusted R squared was 0.425 indicating that there was variation of 42.5 percent on learning efficiency due to variations in the Covid 19 impact mitigation strategies (digital education and financing strategies) at the 95 percent confidence level. This show that 66.8 percent deviation in learning efficiency could be ascribable to digital education and financing strategies.

Table 4: Combined Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1.000	.668a	0.446	0.425	1.029

a Predictors: (Constant), digital education and financing strategies

ANOVA

From the ANOVA statistics in table above, the processed data, which is the population parameters, had a significance level of 0.000 which shows that the data is ideal for making a conclusion on the population's parameter as the value of significance (p-value) is less than 5%. It also indicates that the model was statistically significant.

Table 5: Results for Test of Significance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	26.322	2	13.161	11.7509	.002
	Residual	325.92	291	1.12		
	Total	352.242	293			

a. Predictors: (Constant), digital education and financing strategies

b. Dependent Variable: learning efficiency

Regression coefficients

The collective comparative impact of the independent variables on learning efficiency was examined using multiple linear regression.

$Yi=1.704+ 0.657 X1+ 0.532X2 + \varepsilon$

From the regression equation above it was found that holding digital education and financing strategies to a constant zero, learning efficiency would be 1.704. A unit rise in digital education would lead to an increase in learning efficiency by 0.657 units. A unit increase in financing strategies would lead to an increase in learning efficiency by 0.532. At 5% level of significance and 95% level of confidence, all the variables were significant ($p<0.05$).

Table 6: Regression coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.704	0.249		6.843	0.002
Digital education	0.657	0.132	0.626	4.977	0.004
Financing strategies	0.532	0.126	0.502	4.222	0.014

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Digital education had a significant influence on learning efficiency. The use of digital technologies gives educators the opportunity to design engaging learning opportunities. Capacity building of students, educators and leaders aids in digital education. Digital education is more as efficient as the face to face classes.

Financial strategies adopted to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 had a significant influence on learning efficiency. The financial strategies help in boosting finances amidst the crisis. Institutional endowments help institutions to increase their liquidity. The institutions seek an extension of credit, by taking its cash flow projections and response plan to the bank.

The study recommended that there is need for universities to ensure that all the students have access to the digital education. The well-produced learning content such as recorded lectures can enhance the ease of learning particularly for students who, for whatever reason, may find it difficult to pick up new information in real time from one-off lectures.

A variety of sources of grant funding should be made available to support educational initiatives at the universities. The government could also provide incentives for the private universities in support of the continuity of teaching and learning in the institutions.

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