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Effectiveness of Experiential Learning Strategy on Graduate Students' Retention in Selected Universities in Kenya

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Abstract:

Higher education has been identified as a veritable vehicle for the growth of economies and fostering development internationally. Experiential marketing entails customer recognition in purchasing goods and services from an entity after the stimulation accruing from an emotional interaction. The study sought to carry out an analysis of the effectiveness of experiential marketing strategy on graduate student retention in Kenya. The study employed a descriptive design, and the stratified random sampling method was used for sampling purposes. Data was collected by using questionnaires and it was analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics. The ability of the institutions to carry out practical learning with a view to enabling the students to acquire the requisite skills was confirmed by most of the respondents. Universities should put in place provisions for practical learning and instruction as a medium of knowledge impartation to enhance the student's skill levels.

Keywords: *Experiential marketing, graduate students' retention, Kenyan universities, experiential learning*

1. Introduction

Higher education has been identified as a veritable vehicle for the growth of economies and fostering development internationally. No country can develop without appreciating the significance of higher education (Shabban, 2013). Developing and developed countries are working hard to obtain the highest possible quality standards of higher education. This has forced them to enforce strict measures as regards licensing and according charters to the institutions of higher learning (Steinner, 2012). The need for the exercise of the requisite standards notwithstanding calls for optimal marketing as a measure of ensuring the realization of adequate student numbers. The marketing approaches involved have gradually evolved over the years. The use of print media was the predominant approach in the early years, but this has gradually been overtaken by contemporary approaches that involve online marketing (Ball, 2010).

Online marketing has gradually enforced a change of tact in terms of seeking to appeal to the youth and markets which were previously reached via traditional mediums. Online marketing has entailed a more direct and highly targeted approach in terms of using personal communication tools (Phillip & Ochs, 2011). The tools have the ability to reach the smallest niches or individuals. This has seen universities moving away from the mass media and traditional advertising to a more direct consumer and trade promotion. This has, in turn, positively affected the student enrollment levels in comparison to the previous years. The correlation between increased enrollment and targeted marketing can be linked to the situation of having a more personalized approach as opposed to the mass media, which is not segmented into specific niches (Phillip & Ochs, 2011).

Experiential marketing entails customer recognition in purchasing goods and services from an entity after the stimulation accruing from an emotional interaction (Schmit, 2011). Experiential marketing inspires potential client by way of having them register a memorable experience at the back of their minds. The experience triggers them to seek an interaction with the product by way of consuming it, thus allowing them to act in terms of the actual purchase. Experiential marketing thus places emphasis on the entire experience that the client anticipates in the wake of the interaction with the goods and services (Schmit, 2011). The heightened experience that the clients expect triggers a psychological connection, thus expressing feelings and emotions that lead to an ingrained attachment to the products and services at the advent of purchase.

The experiential marketing approach has been described by Sullivan (2012) as a systematic way that companies use to achieve a competitive advantage towards their competitors by way of producing experiences about the product or service that the organization is about to offer. User involvement in terms of ensuring physical, emotional, spiritual and social interaction with the product or service can equally ensure the capacity to have a potential client appreciate it (Zarantonello, 2012). Users' co-participation of the products and services offered equally enhances the experiential capacity in terms of availing the ability for interaction and product usage to the extent of aiding in decision-making as regards the choice of purchase (Todorovic, 2011).

The higher education sector is very sensitive in terms of having unique selling points which make the institutions attractive to the target audience. The institutions have to give a compelling value proposition to the prospective clients and convince them to take the academic programs (Mulhere, 2014). Different institutions internationally are identified with specific programs which make them unique and identified to them. Universities have to demonstrate and translate this into action when it comes to giving value propositions to potential clients and ensuring that goodwill generates results in terms of assured prospects for students after the completion of academic programs (Tudor, 2014). This ensures that the requisite loyalty is assured and clients continuously identify the institutions with success.

Ultimate loyalty to the academic programs offered by the institutions can be created by way of reducing the burden on the students when it comes to mitigating the cost of education. This is because the cost of undertaking an academic program is very integral to decision-making on enrollment (Fend, 2014). Guidance on the way to providing personalized attention to students is a measure of reinforcing the value of the brand. This is attributed to the fact that many students are young adults under the care of parents, and the need to ensure utmost care gives comfort to their guardians. This thus builds the requisite loyalty from the parents and enhances student retention levels (DeBrey, 2012).

Marketing of the institutions of higher learning has gone a notch higher in comparison to the previous years. This is occasioned by the intense competition that is present in the sector (Sewe, 2014). The need to have the institutions stamp their authority in the growing markets is the defining factor behind the pursuits. The essence of having quality in terms of the services offered being the driving factor behind the uptake of academic programs is also a defining factor (Obwatho, Thuo and Mwiti 2015). This is associated with the growing assertiveness of the target markets in the higher education sector, thus requiring strong brand positioning to be the defining factor behind the marketing initiatives.

The higher education sector has gradually experienced some exponential growth. This has been occasioned by the rapid population growth and the presence of a more assertive populace which needs to acquire knowledge as a medium of personal development and social transformation. The uptake of education programs has thus been more sustained, necessitating the need to open up new institutions and satellite colleges for higher education. This has equally set the pace for competition between the existing institutions in the quest to attract, enroll and retain new students. The need to carry out aggressive marketing cannot thus be underscored. The evolution of the marketing scene demands greater innovation and fortitude in the wake of getting more students.

The marketing pursuits for universities and other institutions of higher learning have gradually evolved with time. This is attributed to the rapidly changing landscape with regard to technology, upgrade of programmes and the need to conform to emerging best practices. This has made many universities change their tactics with the aim of ensuring that they get a greater number of students in the highly competitive business scene (Tudor, 2014). This, notwithstanding the need to ensure that the pitches made by the universities are in consonance with the reality on the ground with regard to the delivery of programs, cannot be over-emphasized. In many cases, universities do not meet the stakeholders' expectations, and the marketing pursuits that are carried out end up in vain (Tudor, 2014).

The current best practices place an emphasis on the need for universities to employ patience in the efforts carried out in marketing the institutions. They also demand consistency in terms of the need to adhere to the expected standards in terms of market positioning, identity, quality and stated goals (Quinn, 2015). The essence of having the best practices as the driving factor behind the aspirations of the institutions is to ensure leverage and realization of the expected fruits from the marketing activities. This is due to the fact that, with the advent of delivering on the promises made to potential clients, universities are bound to experience sustained growth attributed to repeat buying and client retention (Mave & Hayes, 2015). Magutu, Mbeche, Nyaoga and Onger (2010) were of the view that the prevailing trends in the higher education sector demanded explicit changes in the marketing approaches employed. This was the only way out to ensure that the public universities achieved the envisaged ideals in terms of quality management practices (Magutu et al., 2010). The study focused on quality management practices as a factor affecting the creation of goodwill and retention of students in public universities. This occasioned a gap in the other marketing activities devoid of the program of events as a goodwill generation requisite.

Obwatho, Thuo and Mwiti (2015) focused on the effects of economic trends on the adoption of digital marketing among public universities in Kenya. The study deduced that the niche markets targeted by the institutions and the costs expended played a significant role in the marketing activities. The emphasis of the study was on the digital marketing approach regardless of the fact that many other approaches still suffice. The policy framework dictating the economic growth and development trends equally came out as a factor affecting the ability of public universities to attract and retain clients (Oanda & Jowi, 2013). The study observed that social development was a factor which affected the growth of the student population, accruing from the ability to have government subsidies for education programs and the capacity to pay for the academic programs. The study focused on the social and economic factors affecting the growth and retention of students in public universities. However, it did not delve into marketing activities carried out to attract self-sponsored students. The ongoing discourse presented a vivid knowledge gap in the experiential marketing strategy as a forum which can be employed by universities to ensure graduate student retention in the universities.

Despite the numerous approaches used by universities to market their academic programs, the sector has been fluid, with most of them experiencing frequent fluctuations in student numbers. The fluctuations may be attributed to the trends in the marketing activities carried out by the universities (Sewe, 2014). These are a pointer to the marketing activities directly impacting the institution's ability to attract and retain students. The marketing trends point to a profound growth of the online presence as a tool for marketing but a slow uptake of the experiential approach (Nyachoti, 2013). The study, thus, sought to examine the effectiveness of experiential marketing strategy on graduate students' retention in Kenya.

2. Theoretical and Empirical Review of the Study

This study reviews the theoretical underpinning of the study and empirical study relating to the area of study.

2.1. Theoretical Literature

The study was anchored on experiential learning theory by Kolbs (1984). The capacity of the knowledge dissemination programs to give students actual practical exposure was heavily advocated for by the theory. The theory calls for live simulations in the learning process and real planning in terms of idea dissemination before practical exposure of the students. The experiential learning theory equally posits that learning is a process whereby knowledge dissemination is not just an outcome but the experiences that the learner is exposed to count the more (Deane, 2011).

The experiential learning theory, however, has the risk of creating a clash in the minds of the students who were previously exposed to rote learning in high schools (Herbert & Hauf, 2015). This reduces the potential of the students appreciating experiences accruing from the process owing to the fact that the students attach a great premium to the continuous assessment in the periodic tests and marks awarded in comparison to the experiences acquired.

Experiential learning is imperative to enhance the students' prospects from the experiences accrued in the learning process. It also draws from the premise that the students' learning builds on common ideas, which can be integrated with new concepts, thus releasing new concepts and topics that enhance the re-learning capacity (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The experiential learning theory also has the premise that knowledge dissemination engages in conflict resolution which enhances the adaption of new ideas by the students. This facilitates them to engage in new thinking and express their feelings while reflecting on the learning experience (Kolb et al., 2005).

The convergence of the experiences accrued from the experiential learning approach thus enhances the capacity of the students to adapt to the world. This is with regard to the development of feelings, cognitive capacity, behavior and the ability to perceive issues in a new dimension. These result from the synergetic transactions between the students and the college environment in which the knowledge is disseminated (Qualters, 2010). This experience creates well-rounded graduates who are able to adapt to the competitive world of work and, thus, easily assimilated into the industry upon graduation. It is a veritable yardstick through which universities and colleges offering academic programs are able to market themselves based on the success of the graduates from the institutions. This gives the institutions a unique selling position, which makes them a must-buy in the competitive higher education sector, thus translating into assured student population growth and retention (Pink, 2015).

2.2. Empirical Review

Hoyt and Winn (2010) were of the view that experiential learning is built upon a foundation of interdisciplinary and constructionist learning. Varied approaches have been used to ensure that the learners acquire the requisite experiences in the quest for knowledge acquisition (Hoyt et al., 2010). Situations of learners being placed on attachment to gain the requisite industrial exposure have always guaranteed them the ability to acquire the skills before the completion of academic programs. This is occasioned by the fact that compartmentalized learning is not reflective of the real world. This offers theoretical knowledge to the students and raises the risk of failing to acquire practical skills, thus disadvantaging the learner with the advent of job placement (Hagedon, 2005).

Berger and Lyons (2009) opined that experiential learning is compared to the ideal environment for practical exposure and the capacity to have predictable outcomes from the experiences accrued. Engagement in purposeful endeavors geared towards providing the learner with known and assured outcomes from the process creates the essence of actual skills impartation. These were considered as integral requisites for experiential learning (Berger et al, 2009). This calls for relevance in terms of the programs used in learning activities carried out. It, thus, places an emphasis on the congruence between academia and industry.

Experiential learning emphasizes the mixture of content and processes used in equipping the learner with information (Braxton & Hindy, 2010). Engagement in periodical evaluations to gauge the capacity of the processes in terms of guaranteeing the learner the requisite skills is equally imperative to the experiential learning process. This can only be actualized at the advent of subjecting the learner to constant checks to determine their ability to grasp and effectively carry out tasks in line with the theoretical knowledge acquired from the learning process (Braxton et al, 2010). Whitt and Kenzie (2012) considered constant evaluation as a means of determining consonance between theory and practice as encouraging acknowledgement of the bigger perspective. This is with regard to the ability of the learner to conceptualize issues. It also encourages the fusion of reflection by the instructor to confirm the capacity of the teaching methodologies to impact the requisite skills (Whitt et al., 2012). This enhances the creation of an emotional connection between the learner and the instruction process, thus guaranteeing the relevance of the knowledge dissemination process. It enhances the ability of the instruction process to draw the learners from their perceived comfort zones and provoke them to experiment with the knowledge acquired (Whitt et al., 2012).

Pink (2015) premised that the ability of ongoing students to appreciate experiential learning as a medium of practical skills impartation enhances the stature and profile of the institutions. This plays an integral role in encouraging the students to be retained in the faculties until the completion of the academic programs (Qualters, 2010). It also extends the goodwill and standing of the institutions to the wider communities, encouraging them to enroll new students in the institutions. This ultimately translates to the growth of student populations and the sustainable continuity of programs (Qualters, 2010).

Pullins (2010) argued that experiential marketing strategy is the medium of using experiences accruing from the expected satisfaction of a product or service offered by an entity. The marketing approach has been used by universities and other institutions of higher learning to seek out new clients for the academic programs on offer (Berger & Walingford,

2008). The institutions have always employed approaches that ensure that the potential students are involved in their emotional interaction with the programs before they enroll for them (Wangenge, 2008). This is by way of having them given a sneak preview of what the programs entail to encourage their participation in informed decision making before enrolling for them (Brunson, 2010).

Mweria (2007) was of the view that in the higher education segment experiential marketing seeks to create a relationship between the potential student and the institution. The need to implore the students to gain confidence in the programs being offered forms the core basis of the interaction (Bowen et al., 2014). It motivates the potential students to yearn to understand the institution in a better manner in terms of the programs offered and their quality. This motivates potential students to seek prior interaction with the systems in place before making a decision to enrol in the programs (Chapleo, 2010).

Oanda and Jowi (2013) were of the view that the Kenyan situation mirrors the low uptake of marketing activities by public universities. This is occasioned by the situation of assured student placement via the joint admissions board. The need to generate additional revenue for the institutions, especially after the advent of the structural adjustment programs, has necessitated putting in place module two programs in most of the universities (Onsongo, 2007). Universities, however, use rudimentary marketing approaches that are not in consonance with present-day demands regarding the evolution of digital marketing approaches (Aduda, 2014). This makes them handicapped as it pertains to their capacity to reach out to the target niches of potential students who are technologically savvy. Many public universities end up losing out to private institutions because of the failure to style up and meet the dictates of the business scene (Mweria, 2007).

Mutiga (2015) was of the view that the traditional approaches whereby particular institutions are synonymous with certain programs have equally seen some public universities in the higher education sector within the Republic of Kenya greatly lose out to the emerging competition. The tradition of having programs like law, medicine, and architecture, which was identified with the University of Nairobi, has gradually waned with time (Ombamba, 2009). Most of the public universities have taken cognizance of the demand for the said programs and started offering them within the institutions (Oanda et al., 2013). This has greatly tilted the scales, many at times in favour of the emerging competition. This is attributed to the fact that the rigid approaches that greatly restrict students' willingness to take up the programs still hold. Instances of the growth of the middle class and high-end economic cadres with high disposable income have motivated many members of the said social status to pay high fees for similar programs in institutions which guarantee them quality (Magutu et al., 2010).

Private universities are mainly modeled from commercial angles with the core objective of their founders being realization of revenue from the activities after providing quality services to the clientele (Bowen, et al, 2014). The business model forces private institutions of higher learning to go out of their way and engage in multiple marketing pursuits in the quest of getting new clients. This has led institutions to invest heavily in online presence to enhance their potential to reach out to new clients (Oanda, 2013). The engagement of qualified faculty members who give personalized attention to individual students in some institutions ensures that they identify with the pertinent needs of the learners. This has the potential of giving some private universities that are keen on growing their fortunes a head start in comparison to public institutions that seldom carry out these activities.

The need to have universities seeking to carry out continuous needs assessment before rolling out new programs and expanding the existing ones cannot be over-emphasized (Berger et al, 2008). The element of cost also plays a critical role in determining the pricing of the university academic programs. Instances whereby failure to resonate with the market in terms of the cost of programs and the potential of the target market have always exposed some institutions to jeopardy (Ombamba, 2009). This is occasioned by the fact that, in some cases, the programs are overpriced and some competitors fill in the gaps by way of offering quality and cheaper alternatives in terms of pricing. This has seen some public universities stagnate without any tangible expansion, especially for the module two programs, while the private counterparts open new campuses nationally and regionally (Chapleo, 2010). The need to have the programs offered to identify with the demands of the market and engage in market surveys to seize the competition is the only way out for serious players in the highly competitive higher education sector (Wangenge, 2008).

2.3. Conceptual Framework



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant relationship between experiential learning and graduate student retention. Experiential learning is a critical component encountered between the client and the organization, thus bringing forth the ability to determine the merits and demerits of the overall experience. The experience plays an integral role in the determination of the ability of the client to engage in mutual association with the service provider in future business endeavors, going by the satisfaction accrued, thus fostering the retention of graduates.

3. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to carry out a comparative analysis of how experiential marketing in public and private universities affects graduate students' retention. Orodho (2005) postulated that a descriptive survey design is a method of collecting information by administration of questionnaires on selected samples or the conduct of interviews. The method is appropriate for collecting information about people's opinions, habits, attitudes, or any variety of social issues. The research design was considered appropriate for the studies because the researcher sought to collect, analyze and report information as it existed in the field without any undue manipulation of the variables.

All people under consideration in any field of inquiry constitute a universe or targeted population (Kombo & Trump, 2006). The study considered all the public universities and the chartered private universities as the target population. According to the Commission for University Education the public universities were 22 in number while the private universities were 17 in number. The study used the members of staff of the marketing departments in each university as the target respondents.

The study was picked from the University of Nairobi, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and Kenyatta University. The private universities were Daystar University, Strathmore University and United States University of Africa. These universities were picked because they had the highest student population and were most proximate to the researcher. The motivating parameter for sampling was the size of the marketing departments in terms of staffing and proficiency concerning the exposure. The stratified random sampling was used to reach the individual members of the marketing departments in the different universities. The different institutions served as the stratum. Kombo (2006) posited that a representative sample of 10% and above is adequate to provide the requisite information in large populations. The researcher picked 50% of the members of staff in the marketing departments in all six institutions. The researcher picked members of staff in the respective institutions randomly from a list to ensure that all members had an equal chance of participation in the study.

The study employed questionnaires as the instruments for the study. The questionnaires were deemed suitable in that they could serve a large group of respondents; they had the benefit of self-administrability, anonymity and the standardization of questions for the purpose of easing the data analysis procedures (Orodho, 2005). The questionnaires encompassed the social demographics section and questions derived from the research objectives. The questionnaires had both closed and open-ended questions.

Validity is the degree to which a test measures what it purports to be measuring. Validity can also be said to be the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of data actually represent the phenomenon under investigation (Orodho, 2005). The researcher tested the face validity of the questionnaire. Face validity is in relation to the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the question. This was checked by way of employing the pre-testing method. Prior to embarking on data collection, the researcher pre-tested the questionnaires using Murang'a University of College. This was done to improve the validity of the instruments. Changes were made to the questions deemed appropriate after the pre-test.

Reliability is a measure of the extent to which an instrument will consistently yield similar results after being administered several times to the same respondents (Orodho, 2005). To establish the reliability of the research instruments, the test-retest method was used, whereby the pre-test respondents were issued questionnaires to fill out, and the same questionnaires were subjected to a re-test to see how the response was. The reliability coefficient was computed using the Cronbach Alpha method. The procedure was deemed appropriate owing to the fact that it used a polychloric matrix for calculating alpha, thus taking due charge of the underlying continuous variables in observed items like the Likert scale. A coefficient of 0.7 or more is considered adequate (Tavakol, 2011).

4. Results

This section presented findings and the relationship between the discussion variables.

4.1. Graduate Students' Retention

Pullins (2010) argued that experiential marketing strategy is the medium of using experiences accruing from the expected satisfaction of a product or service offered by an entity. The marketing approach has been used by universities and other institutions of higher learning to seek out new clients for the academic programs on offer (Berger & Walingford, 2008). The institutions have always employed approaches that ensure that the potential students are involved in their emotional interaction with the programs before they enroll for them (Wangenge, 2008). This is by way of having them given a sneak preview of what the programs entail to encourage their participation in informed decision making before enrolling for them (Brunson, 2010). The study sought to enumerate the graduate student retention levels in Kenyan universities.

The responses on the ability of the universities to make concerted efforts and ensure that students who enroll for academic programs complete them were as captured in table 1. 55% of respondents confirmed that the universities had earmarked activities in place to ensure that the learners who enrolled for academic program in the universities completed them. This was confirmation that the universities had put in place measures to ensure that they retained the graduate students who undertook the academic programs from enrollment to completion. The responses vindicated the universities with regard to the ability to follow up on the students enrolling on academic programs to reduce the risks of dropout from them. It can be interpreted to mean that the universities not only focused on enrolling students in academic programs but equally strived to ensure that the students enrolled completed the programs.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very highly	17	30.4
Highly	31	55.4
Undecided	5	8.9
Not at all	3	5.4
Total	56	100.0

Table 1: Concerted Activities to Ensure Students Complete Academic Programs

Cross tabulation was done between consideration of the universities' ability to retain students from enrollment to completion and attributes on graduate students' retention. The responses were ranked on a scale of 5, with 1 being the least and 5 being the highest value. The responses are shown in table 2.

The responses showed that 86% of the respondents confirmed that their institutions ensured all students derived satisfaction, and this showed that they completed academic programs without shifting to other colleges. The responses indicated that the universities placed a premium on the essence of the students completing the academic programs enrolled and thus not interested in only the numbers of new students without program completion. The situation of undecided respondents and others who had a contrary opinion was, however, significant at 14%. This was, however, an indication that some of the universities did not make follow up to ensure program completion by ongoing students. The responses can be interpreted to mean that the institutions understood the essence of program completion by the students in totality as a measure of enhancing their profiles and statures, thus ensuring that the learners effectively completed their academic programs.

The findings showed that 79% of the respondents were of the view that the presence of strong brands that students liked to associate with motivated them to complete the academic programs without shifting to other colleges, which was a unique selling proposition to their universities. This was a factor that brought to the fore the essence of known and strong brands in particular lines of academia, thus elevating the positions of the universities in the mindsets of the target markets. It indicated that the universities had capitalized on their unique positions as marketing avenues. It can thus be interpreted to mean that unique and strong brands were a great medium of focus that enabled universities to tap into their markets. The element of strong and unique brands, however, did not apply to all the universities, as evidenced by 21% of the respondents, thus an indication that, in some cases, the brands did not tally with the market expectations.

The findings were in contrast to the position taken by Mutiga (2015), who was of the view that the traditional approaches whereby particular institutions are synonymous with certain programs have equally seen some public universities in the higher education sector within the Republic of Kenya greatly lose out to the emerging competition. The tradition of having programs like law, medicine, and architecture, which was identified with the University of Nairobi, has gradually waned with time (Ombamba, 2009). Most of the public universities have taken cognizance of the demand for the said programs and started offering them within the institutions (Oanda et al., 2013). This has greatly tilted the scales, many at times in favour of the emerging competition. This is attributed to the fact that the rigid approaches that greatly restrict students' willingness to take up the programs still hold. Instances of the growth of the middle class and high-end economic cadres with high disposable income have motivated many members of the said social status to pay high fees for similar programs in institutions that guarantee their quality (Magutu et al., 2010).

The ability to have fairly priced academic programs allowing the students to complete the courses enrolled for was equally confirmed by 79% of the respondents as a factor motivating the students not to switch to other universities. The prospective students were attracted to the schools based on the costs of the programs undertaken. It can thus be interpreted to mean that the costs of the studies carried out determined the ability of the students to take up academic programs. 21% of the respondents, however, dissented from the premise of the costs expended in taking up academic programs as a medium of retention of the students. This was a reflection of the ability to have factors other than costs play greater roles in the attraction and retention of graduate students in universities.

The study findings reflected the position taken by Bowen et al. (2014), who was of the view that private universities are mainly modelled from commercial angles, with the core objective of their founders being the realization of revenue from the activities after providing quality services to the clientele. The business model forces private institutions of higher learning to go out of their way and engage in multiple marketing pursuits in the quest of getting new clients. This has led institutions to invest heavily in online presence to enhance their potential to reach out to new clients (Oanda, 2013). The engagement of qualified faculty members who give personalized attention to individual students in some institutions ensures that they identify with the pertinent needs of the learners. This has the potential of giving some private universities that are keen on growing their fortunes a head start in comparison to public institutions that seldom carry out these activities.

The goodwill built over the years allowed continuous referrals and ensured students did drop out of the academic programs enrolled for as evidenced from 75% of the respondents. This indicated that the element of goodwill held a major sway on the ability to attract students to the university occasioned by the good names and images that the institutions had cultivated over the years. It can thus be interpreted to mean that in the event of goodwill occasioned by the heritage and history of the institution, the universities were bound to attract and retain graduate students. The goodwill on its own was, however, confirmed not enough to ensure that the students enrolled and completed their academic programs by 25% of the respondents. This indicated that in the event of goodwill and rich legacies, the students still expected value from the institutions with regard to satisfaction with the ideals of the academic programs taken.

The position of enhancing goodwill as a premise of attracting graduate students was the same as that of Mweria (2007), who was of the view that in the higher education segment, experiential marketing seeks to create a relationship

between the potential student and the institution. The need to implore the student to gain confidence in the programs being offered forms the core basis of the interaction (Bowen et al., 2014). It motivates the potential students to yearn to understand the institution in a better manner in terms of the programs offered and their quality. This motivates potential students to seek prior interaction with the systems in place before making a decision to enroll in the programs (Chapleo, 2010).

All the respondents affirmed that the colleges had unique academic courses, and this limited the students from shifting to others because they did not have a choice of similar programs. This confirmed that, in some cases, the way universities tailored and structured their academic programs prevented students from joining other colleges. This was associated with the way the programs were structured and the market position of the institutions in the mindsets of the target clientele. It can thus be interpreted to mean that in the event of unique academic programs from particular universities, there was bound to be a limited choice in terms of options for the students, thus their ultimate retention in the universities that they have enrolled in.

The findings confirmed the position taken by Berger et al. (2008), who attested that the need to have universities seeking to carry out continuous needs assessment before rolling out new programs and expanding the existing ones could not be over-emphasized. The element of cost also plays a critical role in determining the pricing of the university academic programs. Instances whereby failure to resonate with the market in terms of the cost of programs and the potential of the target market have always exposed some institutions to jeopardy (Ombamba, 2009). This is occasioned by the fact that, in some cases, the programs are overpriced and some competitors fill in the gaps by way of offering quality and cheaper alternatives in terms of pricing. This has seen some public universities stagnate without any tangible expansion, especially for the module two programs, while the private counterparts open new campuses nationally and regionally (Chapleo, 2010). The need to have the programs offered to identify with the demands of the market and engage in market surveys to seize the competition is the only way out for serious players in the highly competitive higher education sector (Wangenge, 2008).

		Frequency	Percentage
The institution ensures all students derive satisfaction, and this sees to it that they complete academic programs without shifting to other colleges	Strongly Agree	17	30
	Agree	31	55
	Undecided	5	10
	Disagree	3	5
Total		56	100
Our college has a very strong brand that students like to associate with, motivating them to complete the academic programs without shifting to other colleges	Strongly Agree	20	36
	Agree	24	43
	Undecided	12	21
Total		56	100
The academic programs are fairly priced, and the costs motivate students to complete the academic programs enrolled for	Strongly Agree	16	29
	Agree	28	50
	Undecided	3	5
	Disagree	9	16
Total		56	100
The goodwill built over the years allows continuous referrals and ensures students don't drop out of the academic programs enrolled for	Strongly Agree	14	25
	Agree	28	50
	Undecided	6	11
	Disagree	8	14
Total		56	100
The college has unique academic courses, and this limits the students from shifting to other colleges because they don't have a choice of similar programs	Strongly Agree	13	23
	Agree	28	50
	Undecided	6	11
	Disagree	9	16
Total		56	100
The institution has concerted activities in place geared towards ensuring that all students who enroll finish up the academic programs	Strongly Agree	29	52
	Agree	17	30
	Undecided	0	
	Disagree	10	18
Total		56	100
The experiential marketing activities in your institution have affected its ability to retain graduate students	Strongly Agree	29	52
	Agree	19	30
	Undecided	0	0
	Disagree	10	18
Total		56	

Table 2: Responses on Graduate Students' Retention

4.2. Experiential Learning and Graduate Students' Retention

Hoyt and Winn (2010) were of the view that experiential learning is built upon a foundation of inter-disciplinary and constructionist learning. Varied approaches have been used to ensure that the learners acquire the requisite experiences in the quest for knowledge acquisition (Hoyt et al., 2010). Situations of learners being placed on attachment to gain the requisite industrial exposure have always guaranteed them the ability to acquire the skills before the completion

of academic programs. This is occasioned by the fact that compartmentalized learning is not reflective of the real world. This offers theoretical knowledge to the students and raises the risk of failing to acquire practical skills, thus disadvantaging the learner with the advent of job placement (Hagedon, 2005). The study sought to relate the ability to undertake experiential learning and graduate students' retention. The responses on the attributes were rated on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least and 5 the highest. The responses are shown in table 3.

The ability of the institutions to carry out practical learning with a view of enabling the students to acquire the requisite skills was confirmed by 93% of the respondents. This indicated that the institutions had gone beyond the spectrums of theoretical and abstract knowledge impartation in the learning activities with a view to ensuring that the students gained actual practical exposure. It can thus be interpreted to mean that the institutions had strived to ensure practical exposure as a basis for skills acquisition in the course of knowledge impartation for the learners. The percentage of respondents who felt that adequate measures had not been put in place to ensure knowledge impartation versus practical exposure was 7%. This was an indication of the fact that the institutions had keenly placed emphasis on practical learning as a basis of skills acquisition, and it was a measure that attracted and retained students to the universities.

The responses confirmed previous works by Berger and Lyons (2009), who opined that experiential learning is compared to the ideal environment in terms of practical exposure and the capacity to have outcomes that are predictable from the experiences accrued. Engagement in purposeful endeavors geared towards providing the learner with known and assured outcomes from the process creates the essence of actual skills impartation. These were considered integral requisites for experiential learning (Berger et al., 2009). This calls for relevance in terms of the programs used in learning activities carried out. It thus places an emphasis on the congruence between academia and industry.

Constant interaction between the institutions and industry was confirmed as a premise that the institutions employed to ensure that the academic programs offered were in line with the market demands of 84% of the respondents. The responses confirmed that there was a synergy between academia and industry as a measure of ensuring that the products of the learning programs fit well in the job market. This can be interpreted to mean that most universities were constantly exploring ways to align their academic programs with the dictates of the job markets. This was a basis for attracting and retaining graduate students owing to the relevance of the academic programs offered. 16% of the respondents, however, had a contrary view. This was an indication that in some institutions, the ability to ensure that their academic programs were aligned with the dynamics of industry was not taken into account. This exposed the learners to the risk of taking academic programs which were irrelevant to the emerging trends.

The ability to carry out continuous assessment of the student skills levels as a basis of ensuring that the demands of the academic processes were met was confirmed by 55% of the respondents. This was an indication that the institutions went out of their way to not only test the knowledge of the learners with regard to theoretical exposure and understanding but equally confirm the ability to use practical skills. It can thus be interpreted to mean that most universities have put in place measures to ensure that the skills acquired in the course of undertaking experiential learning are positively utilized for their individual benefit. The levels of indecision and dissent to the ability of the institutions to put in place measures for continuous assessment of the acquired skills were, however, significantly high at 45%. This was an indication that in some of the academic programs undertaken, very little emphasis was placed on confirming the students' skill levels after going through the experiential learning program. This negated the essence of the program owing to the fact that there was a need to confirm the ability of the learners to assimilate the skills imparted for posterity.

The study findings confirmed the position taken by Whitt and Kenzie (2012), who considered constant evaluation as a means of determining the consonance between theory and practice and as encouraging acknowledgement of the bigger perspective. This is with regard to the ability of the learner to conceptualize issues. It also encourages the fusion of reflection by the instructor to confirm the capacity of the teaching methodologies to impact the requisite skills (Whitt et al., 2012). This enhances the creation of an emotional connection between the learner and the instruction process, thus guaranteeing the relevance of the knowledge dissemination process. It enhances the ability of the instruction process to draw the learners from their perceived comfort zones and provoke them to experiment with the knowledge acquired (Whitt et al., 2012).

The emotional connection between the learning processes and the learners was confirmed by 66%. This was a measure that ensured that the requisite academic achievement was realized. This ingrained a feeling of ownership of the programs carried out and enhanced the level of interaction between the learner and the process of knowledge acquisition. It can be interpreted to mean that in the event of well-structured learning programs eliciting an emotional connection of the learner to the academic activities undertaken, the institutions were bound to attract and retain graduate students. 20% of the respondents were undecided, while others disagreed with the premise of the institutions managing to elicit emotional connection between them and the learners in the course of the instruction. The responses thus denoted the presence of abstract mediums of knowledge impartation in some of the institutions. This was a factor that made the learning process routine, thus not attracting the requisite levels of appeal from the students. It had the potential of occasioning non-retention of graduate students.

The responses affirmed the works of Qualters (2010), who argued that experiential learning also extends the goodwill and standing of the institutions to the wider communities, encouraging them to enroll new students in the institutions. This ultimately translates to the growth of student populations and the sustainable continuity of programs (Qualters, 2010).

Online tutorials and simulations were confirmed to have enhanced the ability of the institution to reach the students effectively in an interactive manner by 77% of the respondents. This was indicative of the ability to have online tutorials and practical simulations geared towards enhancing the delivery mediums of the academic programs and equally exploiting emerging technology as an avenue of instruction. It can be interpreted to mean that the universities appreciated

changing technology and adopted it in the quest of making learning convenient and easily taken up by students who had limited time to be physically present in class. There were, however, instances of dissent pertaining to the ability of the universities to exploit online tutorials and simulations as a measure of enhancing the ability of the universities to reach students effectively in an interactive manner 19% of the respondents. It can thus be a pointer to a low level of adoption of technology as a medium of instruction in some of the universities.

The efforts geared towards actual skills impartation impacting positively on the generation of referrals is a measure which many of the respondents confirmed by 79% of the respondents. This affirmed that the students undertaking academic programs valued the skills acquired; thus, they went out of their way and referred others to take similar programs. It can thus be interpreted to mean that at the advent of facilitating the students to earn the best levels of satisfaction possible, sustained growth of student numbers may accrue based on the referrals generated. The ability to have satisfied students positively generate referrals was, however, dissented to by 13% of the respondents, while 8% were undecided. This was a measure that showed that, in some instances, the students were not very satisfied with the extent of pitching for the programs offered to other potential students.

The ability of experiential learning to enhance retention of graduate students was confirmed by 79% of the respondents. This was reflective of a situation whereby the medium of practical exposure had a positive impact on the activities carried out in the universities. This was reflective of a situation whereby the respondents felt that the practical learning activities, which entailed creating a positive experience for the learners, directly impacted the ability to retain graduate students. It can thus be interpreted to mean that experiential learning had the potential to enhance the market positions of the universities in relation to their capacity to attract and retain graduate students. Dissent was, however, evident on the premise of experiential learning aiding the attraction and retention of graduate students by 21% of the respondents. This indicated that despite experiential learning taking place, there was a need to equally satisfy the other parameters, which enhanced the student's satisfaction levels with the services offered. The responses affirmed the position of Braxton and Hindy (2010), who were of the view that experiential learning emphasizes the mixture of content and processes used in equipping the learner with information. Engagement in periodical evaluations to gauge the capacity of the processes in terms of guaranteeing the learner the requisite skills is equally imperative to the experiential learning process. This can only be actualized at the advent of subjecting the learner to constant checks to determine their ability to grasp and effectively carry out tasks in line with the theoretical knowledge acquired from the learning process (Braxton et al, 2010).

		Frequency	Percentage
Our institution has provisions for practical learning, enabling the students to acquire the requisite skills.	Disagree		
	Undecided	2	3
	Agree	34	61
	Strongly Agree	18	33
Total		56	100
Constant interaction between the institution and industry ensures that the academic programs offered are in line with market demands	Disagree	4	7
	Undecided	5	9
	Agree	31	55
	Strongly Agree	16	29
Total		56	100
Continuous assessment to confirm the students' skill levels ensures that the demands of the academic programs are met.	Disagree	17	30
	Undecided	8	14
	Agree	19	34
	Strongly Agree	12	22
Total		56	100
Emotional connection between the learners and the learning process ensures that the requisite academic achievement is realized	Disagree	8	14
	Undecided	11	20
	Agree	23	41
	Strongly Agree	14	25
Total		56	100
Online tutorials and simulations enhance the ability of the institution to reach clients effectively in an interactive manner	Disagree	11	20
	Undecided	2	3
	Agree	25	45
	Strongly Agree	18	32
Total		56	100
Efforts towards students' skills impartation have impacted positively on the ability of the institution to generate referrals from beneficiary students	Disagree	7	13
	Undecided	5	9
	Agree	23	41
	Strongly Agree	21	37
Total		56	100
Experiential learning has affected the ability of the institution to retain graduate students	Disagree	7	13
	Undecided	5	9
	Agree	23	41
	Strongly Agree	21	37
Total		56	100

Table 3: Responses on Experiential Learning and Graduate Students' Retention

The mean statistics showed that the attribute of experiential learning with the highest mean difference was the provisions for practical learning in the universities. This was evidence that the practical learning activities had ensured enhanced attraction and retention of graduate students more in comparison to the other indicators looked at.

		Graduate Student s' Retention	Provisions for Practical-Learning	Constant Interaction between Institution and Industry	Continuous Assessment To Confirm Students' Skills	Emotional Connection Between the Learners	Online Tutorials and Simulations	Efforts Towards Students' Skills Impartation	Experiential Learning Effects
Graduate student retention	Pearson Correlation	1	.856**	.954**	.875**	.952**	.957**	.943**	.957**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Provisions for practical-learning	Pearson Correlation	.856**	1	.894**	.711**	.777**	.779**	.855**	.799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Constant interaction between institution and industry	Pearson Correlation	.954**	.894**	1	.769**	.890**	.876**	.945**	.895**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Continuous assessment to confirm student skills	Pearson Correlation	.875**	.711**	.769**	1	.915**	.841**	.770**	.820**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Emotional connection between the learners	Pearson Correlation	.952**	.777**	.890**	.915**	1	.900**	.884**	.898**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Online tutorials and simulations	Pearson Correlation	.957**	.779**	.876**	.841**	.900**	1	.900**	.945**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Efforts towards students' skills impartation	Pearson Correlation	.943**	.855**	.945**	.770**	.884**	.900**	1	.944**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56
Experiential learning effects	Pearson Correlation	.957**	.799**	.895**	.820**	.898**	.945**	.944**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	56	56	56	56	56	56	56	56

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Correlation Results

A Pearson moment correlation was run to find out if there was any significant influence by the attributes that the study used to determine the effects of experiential learning on graduate student retention. Graduate student retention was primed as the dependent indicator, while the indicators for effects of experiential learning were the presence of practical learning in the institutions, the interaction between the institutions and industry, continuous assessment of students' skills levels, emotional connection between the learners and the learning process, presence of online tutorials and simulations, generation of referrals from beneficiary students and experiential learning provisions. All the indicators of experiential learning had a positive correlation with the presence of a service charter, owing to the fact that they had a value of less than one. It can, thus, be deduced that the conduct of experiential learning had enhanced graduate student retention levels.

The regression equation was based on the assumption of a linear relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. It was also based on the assumption of homoscedasticity as pertains to the variances along the line of best fit remaining similar.

4.3. Model Fit for the Experiential Marketing Regression Equation

The hypothesized model took the form of equation two below:

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon_0 \quad \text{equation (2)}$$

From the equation (2),

Y = Graduate student retention,

α_0 = constant showing graduate student retention in the absence of experiential learning,

β_1 = Coefficient of the independent variables

X_1 = Role of experiential learning,

ε_0 = error term associated with the regression model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.881 ^a	.777	.759	.173	.777	44.349	4	51	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant) experiential learning									

Table 5: Model Summary of Experiential Marketing Strategy

The R squared value was 0.777, which indicated that the model provided a good fit attributed to the fact that it had a slope of 77%, indicating a good gradient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.316	.153		15.106	.000		
	Experiential learning	.513	.136	.987	3.775	.000	.064	15.627
a. Dependent Variable: capacity to retain graduate students								

Table 6: Coefficients of Experiential Marketing Strategy

The regression equation was Graduate student retention=2.316 + 0.513*experiential on graduate student retention. The dependent variable was graduate student retention, and the experiential learning activities had a significant influence at 0.513. This denoted the essence of experiential learning as a premise for graduate student retention.

5. Conclusion and Implication

The sampled institutions went beyond the spectrums of theoretical and abstract knowledge impartation in the learning activities to ensure that the students gained actual practical exposure. There was synergy between academia and industry as a measure of ensuring that the products of the learning programs fit well in the job market. The institutions went out of their way not only to test the knowledge of the learners with regard to theoretical exposure and understanding but also to confirm their ability to use practical skills. Online tutorials and practical simulations geared towards enhancing the delivery mediums of the academic programs were equally exploited as an avenue of instruction.

The study recommends that universities should have provisions for practical learning and instruction as a medium of knowledge impartation to enhance students' skill levels. Universities should forge linkages with industry as a measure of reviewing their curriculums to ensure they are in line with emerging changes and trends. This will ensure that the content delivered captures the expectations of the market. Measures should equally be put in place to ensure that the students are proficient and technically sound by conducting continuous evaluations of their skill levels. This may enhance the potential of the universities to attract and retain graduate students.

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