

## DOES COURSE COMPLETION TIME AFFECT STUDENT INTER-UNIVERSITY TRANSFER? AN INVESTIGATION FROM SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

### Authors

Mercy Igoki Samuel<sup>(1)</sup>; Kibaara Tarsilla<sup>(2)</sup>; Paul Maku Gichohi<sup>(3)</sup>

Main author email: [mercyigoki@gmail.com](mailto:mercyigoki@gmail.com)

(1) Aga Khan University, Kenya; (2,3) Kenya Methodist University, Kenya

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### Abstract

The objective of this study was to establish the relationship between the course completion time and student mobility. This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design. This study targeted 26 registered private universities (including private university constituents where mobility rate records are too high) in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research sample size was 180 private university students and nine registrars. Version 22.0 of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in the analyses of quantitative data. Descriptive analysis, inferential statistics, and regression analysis were used to analyse the findings. Descriptive statistics such as standard deviation, mean scores and percentages were computed appropriately. The Binary logistic regression analysis was employed to find out the extent of the effect on the dependent variables of independent variables. This study found that the mobility of students in Nairobi County, Kenya, is greatly influenced by course completion times. This study concluded that course completion time significantly influences students' mobility in private universities in Nairobi County in Kenya. Students who enrol in an academic institution of higher learning are determined to complete the whole course. It is, therefore, the role of any such institution to ensure that all possible controls are made to avoid delays in completion rates. The study recommended that private universities make deliberate efforts to ensure that course completion time improves in their study programmes.

**Key terms:** Lecturers, mobility, private universities, registrars, student.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Students entering college are determined to take the whole course to completion. Apart from issues of diversity, many mobile students encounter challenges that sometimes threaten their ability to complete their studies in time (Parker-Jenkins, 2016). Progressively, these challenges increase students' time to complete academic programmes (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013). Mwebi and Simatwa (2013) found that the rate of student registration in private universities was low, and the completion rate was perceived to be too high. In addition, the likelihood of transferring from privately owned higher learning institutions was minimal, and the completion rate was not high. Universities highly affected by transfers are those without the necessary resources for quality learning in higher institutions. These facilities include study libraries, sports grounds, hostels, teaching halls and study laboratories. According to Shah et al. (2013), their investigation of factors that influence Australian students' choice of private universities revealed that interest in the institution, opportunity for admission, learning situations, quality of faculty, course content, and ability to graduate influenced mobility to another institution. In this case, the ability of the institution to meet students' needs will either make them settle or move to another institution. In that respect, this study was carried out to examine the effect of course completion on students' mobility to private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Students entering college are determined to take the whole course to completion. Apart from issues of diversity, many mobile students encounter challenges that sometimes threaten their ability to complete their studies in time (Parker-Jenkins, 2016). Progressively, these challenges increase the time it takes students to complete academic programmes (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013). Massyn (2018) suggests the need for programmes designed to implement the strategies that would enable more students to complete their studies within the allocated time.

Reports have shown that Denmark ranks highest in Europe with regard to student completion rates (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). Findings from a report by the European Commission (2011) indicated that there was a significant gap in completion between bachelor's students and master's students. The higher completion rate among master's students, therefore, acted as an incentive to international students (OECD, 2011). Similarly, there was an increase in the completion rate in universities in the UK, which showed a significant increase of 8 per cent between 2005 and 2011. This growth may be attributed to fee concessions instituted in 2012 that were meant to ensure that all enrolled international students were included. The motivation for using this strategy was to develop institutions' ability to retain and improve completion rates among students, with a specific focus on those from disadvantaged family backgrounds.

Various studies have examined the issue of completion of studies in relation to student factors as well as institutional factors. In this regard, retention, graduation, and transfer rates have been used to determine student completion time. However, these measures are limited in the extent to which they evaluate student progress and degree course completion. According to Styger et al. (2014), the graduation students' graduation frequency, which was computed according to the percentage of

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students completing their studies on time, seemed to decrease among undergraduate students and increase among graduate students at universities in South Africa. Moreover, Letseka (2009) affirm that seasonal factors may lead to feigned decreases in graduation rates.

Bengesai and Paideya (2018) examined the nexus between timely graduation and institutional and academic factors for a group of students in the engineering department at a South African University. The study used a sample of 1595 students for the period from entry into the course to completion eight years later. The study findings demonstrated that non-African students had a high propensity to finish their courses on time among students graduating from the Engineering programme. The results also indicated that in 2005, 59 per cent of doctoral students and 37 per cent of master's students in South Africa were ongoing students without authentic records of when they were to complete their studies. These results of the study further suggested the need for universities to consider academic support and financial aid provision.

Locally, Kenya has established the graduation standard of 20 per cent completion rate for doctoral students, which means that every group of doctoral students should have at least 20 per cent graduate within the three years recommended (Barasa & Omulando, 2018). In their study on the completion rate of doctoral studies in Kenyan universities, Barasa and Omulando (2018) indicate that the current national average for students graduating with doctoral degrees is 11 per cent, who completed their studies in six years instead of three. In addition to funding, other challenges related to the students' life circumstances included the family responsibilities they had as employees and as parents. This constrained their time as well as resources that could be positioned for their PhD training.

Ng'ethe et al. (2012) investigated the influence of leadership style, remuneration, training, promotion and the regulating effect of individual characteristics on academic staff retention in public universities. Using a survey design, the study ascribed the problems of completion to factors such as student funding, insufficient support facilities and programmes for graduate students. Moreover, the students felt that the lack of flexibility in academic programmes did not provide for their needs. Though relevant to the present study, the review of regional and local literature reveals the lack of attention to issues regarding student mobility and completion rate. While the completion rate has been identified as being affected by several personal and institutional factors, the studies fall short of indicating how the completion rate affects student mobility between universities in Kenya.

Mwebi and Simatwa (2013) examined the growth of non-governmental higher learning institutions in Kenya. The effect of the quality of education on the rate of completion was studied (and vice versa). It was discovered that the rate of student registration in private universities was low, and the completion rate was perceived to be too high. In addition, the likelihood of transferring from privately owned higher learning institutions was minimal, and the completion rate was not high. Universities that are highly affected by transfers are those without the necessary resources for quality learning in higher institutions. These facilities include libraries, playgrounds, hostels, lecture halls, health facilities and laboratories.

Many studies have explored several factors that affect students' university selection choices and their decision-making process. Many factors have been documented and explored to evaluate their contribution to students' choice of universities and colleges. Abdijabbar (2018) demonstrated that course completion time is a key factor that influences student university choices, among other factors such as personal aspiration, performance at universities and external factors (marketing efforts by the university). Course completion time is positively related to university attendance choice.

The review made in this sub-section has proven inadequate in providing direction on how to improve student progress and degree completion. The issues cited have only examined full-time students and only investigated retention as well as graduation within the institution in which a student first enrolled. The issues regarding transfer students are not dealt with, leaving a gap that the present study seeks to fill. The intent of this study will be to investigate the influence of course completion time on student mobility in private universities in Kenya.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Nairobi County, which is the most populous of the 47 Kenyan counties. This study employed a positivist research philosophy as postulated by Creswell (2014). The study employed the mixed methods design as the framework of the current study. Specifically, the research pursued the triangulation design of mixed methods: The triangulation method is normally adopted to prove the reliability of a specified research tool and to verify the validity of the obtained data (Simons, 2009). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were considered for application. The study's target population consisted of all 26 private university students in Nairobi County, Kenya. The accessible population comprised all registered students who were currently enrolled at and registered to take courses offered by the private universities (in their main location or through their partner. This study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure to arrive at a representative sample of private university student respondents.

This research gathered both primary and secondary data. Primary data was sourced from self-administered questionnaires (distributed to students). The university registrars were interviewed. Secondary data was sourced from documents and artefacts on transfer student statuses, as well as on various variables considered as explanatory variables in this study. The researcher used a face-to-face interview guide for the registrar. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25.0) aided in the computation and analysis of data. The data assembled was sorted according to the variables considered in the study. This study made use of an independent samples t-test. In this study, the qualitative data were sought from the interviews. The data was transcribed and coded. The data collected through interviews, observation, and researcher journal notes were summarised after interpretation to evolving themes reflecting the study participants' voices.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Influence of Course Completion Time on Students' Choice of Mobility from one University to Another in Private Universities in Nairobi County in Kenya

The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that the course completion rate is higher in their university. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 83.6 per cent, with 49.7 per cent agreeing and an additional 33.9 per cent strongly agreeing. The percentage of those who disagreed with the statement was a cumulative of 6 per cent. About 10.3 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, the average student rating of the statement that the course completion rate is higher in their university was 4.08, with a standard deviation of 0.91.

**Table 1: Course Completion Time**

	S D	D	N	A	SA	To tal	Me an	St d. D ev
1. The completion rate of courses is higher in the university	5 (3. 0)	5 (3. 0)	17 (10 .3)	82 (49 .7)	56 (33 .9)	16 5 (1 00 )	4.0 8	0. 91
2. There are minimal chances that I can drop out of the university	1 (0. 6)	13 (7. 9)	13 (7. 9)	81 (49 .1)	57 (34 .5)	16 5 (1 00 )	4.0 9	0. 89
3. The university is keen on following up on course completion progress	1 (0. 6)	5 (3. 0)	20 (12 .1)	80 (48 .5)	59 (35 .8)	16 5 (1 00 )	4.1 6	0. 80
4. Credit transfers are easily processed in the university	5 (3. 0)	13 (7. 9)	29 (17 .6)	80 (48 .5)	38 (23 .0)	16 5 (1 00 )	3.8 1	0. 98
5. The workload per semester is adequate to help me complete my course on time	5 (3. 0)	5 (3. 0)	9 (5. 5)	79 (47 .9)	67 (40 .6)	16 5 (1 00 )	4.2 0	0. 91
6. There is a good balance between the University's common courses and departmental courses	1 (0.	5 (3.	9 (5.	88 (53	62 (37	16 5	4.2 4	0. 74

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	6)	0)	5)	.3)	.6)	(1 00 )		
7. The university adheres to strict timelines for coursework	1 (0. 6)	4 (2. 4)	13 (7. 9)	93 (56 .4)	54 (32 .7)	16 5 (1 00 )	4.1 8	0. 73
Overall							4.1 1	0. 64

The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that there are minimal chances that they can drop out of their university. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 83.6 per cent, with 49.1 per cent agreeing and an additional 34.5 per cent strongly agreeing. A cumulative of 8.5 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. About 7.9 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, the average student rating of the statement that there are minimal chances that they can drop out of their university was 4.09, with a standard deviation of 0.89.

The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that the university is keen on following up on course completion progress. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 84.3 per cent, with 48.5 per cent agreeing and an additional 35.8 per cent strongly agreeing. A cumulative of 3.6 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. About 12.1 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, the average student rating of the statement that the university is keen on following up on course completion progress was 4.16, with a standard deviation of 0.8.

The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that credit transfers are easily processed in the university. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 71.5 per cent, with 48.5 per cent agreeing and an additional 23 per cent strongly agreeing. The proportion of respondents who did not agree with the statement was a cumulative of 10.9 per cent. About 17.6 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, the average student rating of the statement that credit transfers are easily processed in the university was 3.81, with a standard deviation of 0.98.

The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that the workload per semester is adequate to help them complete their courses on time. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 88.5 per cent, with 47.9 per cent agreeing and an additional 40.6 per cent strongly agreeing. The proportion of respondents who disagreed with the statement was a cumulative of 6 per cent. About 5.5 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, an average student rating of the statement that the workload per semester is adequate to help them complete their course on time was 4.2, with a standard deviation of 0.91.

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The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that there is a good balance between the university's common courses and departmental courses. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 90.9 per cent, with 53.3 per cent agreeing and an additional 37.6 per cent strongly agreeing. The proportion of respondents who disagreed with the statement was a cumulative of 3.6 per cent. About 5.5 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, an average student rating of the statement that there is a good balance between the university's common courses versus departmental courses was 4.24 with a standard deviation of 0.74.

The majority of the student respondents agreed with the statement that the university adheres to strict timelines for coursework. Those who agreed with the statement comprised a cumulative of 89.1 per cent, with 56.4 per cent agreeing and an additional 32.7 per cent strongly agreeing. A cumulative of 3 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. About 7.9 per cent were neutral. On a scale of 1-5, the average student rating of the statement that the university adheres to strict timelines for coursework was 4.18, with a standard deviation of 0.73.

Most of the students' ratings of their university's effectiveness in course completion time ranged between 4-5(69.1%) and 3–3.99(27.3%), as summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Students' Rating of their University Effectiveness in Course Completion Time**

Scores	Frequency	Percentage
1-1.99	1	0.6%
2-2.99	5	3.0%
3-3.99	45	27.3%
4-5.00	114	69.1%
Total	165	100.0%

The overall students' rating of their university's effectiveness in course completion time (on a scale of 1 – 5) was a mean of 4.11 with a standard deviation of 0.64.

## **Influence of Course Completion Time and Student Mobility**

This study sought to assess the influence of course completion time on students' mobility in private universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. To achieve this objective, a null hypothesis, "Course completion time does not significantly influence students' mobility in private universities in Nairobi County in Kenya," was formulated and tested using binary logistic regression. The choice of binary logistic regression was justified because the dependent variable (willingness and non-willingness to transfer from one institution to another) was binary. Table 3 shows the influence of course completion time on students' mobility in private universities.

**Table 3: Influence of Course Completion Time on Students' Mobility in Private Universities**

Willingness to transfer	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Course completion time	-3.099	0.610	-5.080	0.000	-4.295	-1.903
_cons	10.800	2.362	4.570	0.000	6.169	15.430

Note: Log likelihood = -57.28; LR chi2 (1) = 53.30; Prob > chi2 = 0.000; Pseudo R2 = 0.318  
 The log-likelihood for the fitted model (-57.28) and the likelihood ratio chi-square value of 53.30 (Prob> chi2 = 0.000) indicate that the model parameters (the independent variable and the constant) are jointly significant at 5 per cent. The Pseudo R2 of 0.318 imply that about 31.8 per cent of the students' willingness to transfer from one private university to another could be attributed to course completion time (the independent variable). Pseudo R2 of 0.318 meet the statistical threshold, confirming that the willingness to transfer from one private university to another among the sampled students was well attributed to students' rating of their university's effectiveness in course completion time. The coefficient of course completion time (-3.099) was statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. This implies that "Course completion time does not significantly influence students' mobility in private universities in Nairobi County in Kenya" was rejected. Therefore, course completion time significantly influences students' mobility in private universities in Nairobi County in Kenya.

One registrar from a faith-based private university in Nairobi explained:

*It is the aspiration of every student that after partaking in the course that they are enrolled in, they will finally graduate and get an opportunity to practice their career either through self-employment or through formal employment. Most students endeavour to be in institutions whose course completion time is shorter. The student will most likely seek transfer whenever they feel that they could be in another institution that is able to shorten their course completion.*

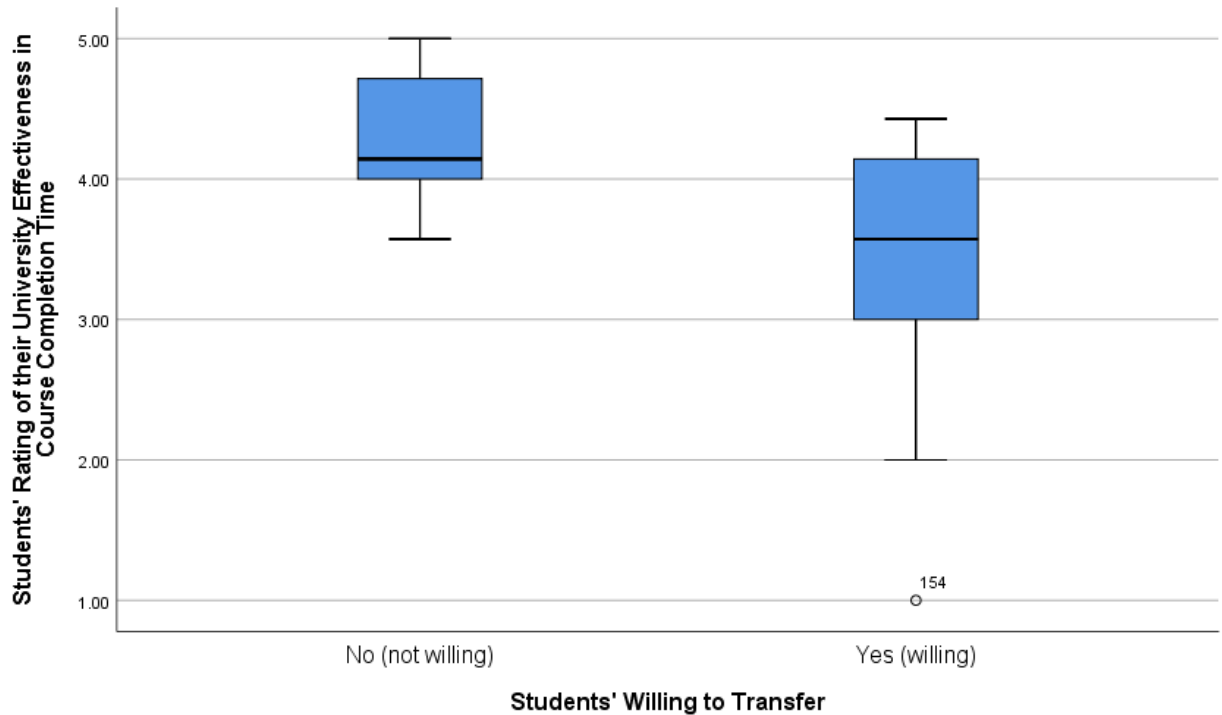
This study aimed to find out if there was a significant difference in the students' rating of their university's effectiveness in course completion time, and an analysis was done using an independent samples t-test. The results are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: T-test Results for the Comparison of Students' Rating of their University Effectiveness in Course Completion Time between those Willing and those not Willing to Transfer**

Group	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
No	131	4.284	0.040	0.456	4.205	4.362
Yes	34	3.437	0.135	0.785	3.163	3.711
Combined	165	4.109	0.050	0.638	4.011	4.207

Note: Mean difference = 0.847; Standard error = 0.104; P-value = 0.000; t = 8.161; df = 163

The mean difference in the scores on students' rating of their university effectiveness in course completion time (between those willing to transfer and those not willing) was computed as 0.847. The mean difference is depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Comparison of Students' Rating of their University Effectiveness in Course Completion Time between those Willing and those not Willing to Transfer**

The calculated t-value of 8.161 at 163 degrees of freedom indicates that the mean difference was statistically significant at a 5 per cent level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that course completion time significantly influences student mobility in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

The findings of this study agree with Parker-Jenkins (2016), who asserted that students entering college and universities are very conscious of the possible course completion duration. Most students are determined to take the whole course to completion. Students avoid being in institutions where they perceive they may not complete their studies in time.

This study agrees with Massyn (2018), who observed that strategies of shortening the course completion time among students are a possible avenue to increasing enrolment among universities. Students prefer to be in institutions where they can complete their studies in good time. There is a need for university programmes that are designed and implemented in a way that enables more students to complete their studies within the allocated time.

The findings of this study agree with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2011), which studied the reasons why most students preferred to study in Denmark. In its findings, the investigation showed that Denmark ranks highest in Europe with regard to student completion rates, something that was associated with student preference.

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The results of this study agree with the findings from a report by the European Commission (2011) that indicated that a higher completion rate was a reason for high enrolment in many institutions of higher learning. In their findings, the European Commission (2011) found that the high completion rate among master's students attracted more students to enrol. This incentive was especially high among the international students.

The findings of this study agree with Styger et al. (2014), who, according to their study, found that completion rate (as measured by graduation frequency) significantly influenced student mobility (more inward transfers in favour of institutions that had a higher completion rate). According to Styger et al. (2014), student numbers were rising as a result of an increase in the graduation frequency, which was computed according to the percentage of students completing their studies on time and seemed to increase among graduate students at universities in South Africa.

The findings of this study agree with Bengesai and Paideya (2018), who examined the nexus between academic and institutional factors and timely graduation for a group of students in the engineering department at a South African University. The study findings demonstrated that non-African students had a high propensity to finish their courses on time among students graduating from the Engineering programme.

The findings of this study agree with Barasa and Omulando (2018), who found that students often transfer away from institutions where the graduation rate is low and join those whose graduation rate is higher. Though Kenya has established the graduation standard of a 20 per cent completion rate for doctoral students, this is far from being realised in most institutions. Though a number of factors (especially lack of funding and family responsibilities) are known to affect completion rates among students, many times, the institutions are blamed for not having control over completion rates.

This study agrees with Ng'ethe et al. (2012), who found that the completion rate is viewed negatively by students who aspire to join academic institutions to partake in courses. In their findings, Ng'ethe et al. (2012) ascribed the problems of completion among students to factors such as funding, insufficient support facilities and programmes for graduate students, factors that they recommended to be addressed since they negatively affect the institutions' perception by the potential students.

## Discussion

Most of the students' ratings of their university's effectiveness in course completion time ranged from 4 to 5(69.1%) and from 3 to 3.99(27.3%). The overall students' rating of their university's effectiveness in course completion time (on a scale of 1–5) was a mean of 4.11 with a standard deviation of 0.64. The mean difference in the scores on students' rating of their university effectiveness in course completion time (between those willing to transfer and those not willing) was computed as 0.847. The calculated t-value of 8.161 at 163 degrees of freedom indicates that the mean difference was statistically significant at a 5 per cent level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that course completion time significantly influences student mobility in private universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Similarly, the binary logistic regression results confirmed that the coefficient of course completion time (-3.099) was statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** Course completion time significantly influences students' mobility in private universities in Nairobi County in Kenya. Students who enrol in an academic institution of higher learning are determined to take the whole course to completion. It is, therefore, the role of any such institution to ensure that all possible controls are made to avoid delays in completion rates.

**Recommendation:** Private universities should make deliberate efforts to ensure that there is an improvement in course completion time in their study programmes. Most students are keen on undertaking their studies in places where they can complete them in a good time. Some of the factors that hinder timely completion, which university institutions have control over, should be addressed.

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