

Benefits of University-Industry Partnerships: The Case of Kenyatta University and Equity Bank

Dr. Dinah W. Tumuti

Senior Lecturer

School of Applied Human Sciences

Director

Directorate of Community Outreach and Extension programmes

Kenyatta University

Kenya

Prof. Peter M. Wanderi

Associate Professor of Sports Anthropology

Kenyatta University

Kenya

Prof. Caroline Lang'at -Thoruwa

Associate Professor of Chemistry

Kenyatta University

P.O. Box 43844-0100

Abstract

University collaborations and industry partnerships are rapidly becoming a common practice the world over. Consequently, collaborations and partnerships are becoming a feature of lifelong learning in universities. Thus, this paper purposes on highlighting the importance of university-industry partnership between Kenyatta University and Equity Bank. The symbiotic relationships between universities and industry are very significant in fostering the economic development of a nation. Due to increased competition as a result of globalization and constant technological advancements, it is imperative for universities to collaborate with industry in order to enhance the diffusion of knowledge, increase research and development, patent innovations and build the nation's organizational capacity. For this reason, it is has become increasingly clear that there is need for close university-industry interactions as a means of national economic prosperity. Therefore, this paper examines the benefits of university-industry partnerships in promoting academic growth and community development with a specific focus on Kenyatta University. As its case study, the paper explores the partnership between Kenyatta University and Equity Bank. In our analyses, we examine the nature and role of collaboration between the two partnering institutions and illustrate how such partnerships promote academic and community economic development. In addition to the potential positive outcomes, this paper also discusses challenges and caveats of the partnership. Ultimately, the paper concludes that in the wake of growing economic challenges due to globalization, there is need for universities to forge working relationships with the industry in order to be relevant, progressive and to spur a nation's economic growth and development.

1.1 Introduction: Conceptualising University - Industry Collaborations and Partnerships

University is widely viewed as an economic engine that can positively contribute to a country's growth in addition to its primary role as a centre for knowledge. However, for university to maintain a competitive advantage in a knowledge society where creativity and innovations are at centre stage, Harley (2003) argues that the traditional pedagogy approaches are simply not enough. On their part and while emphasizing on the organizational context of pedagogy, Gumpert & Snyderman (2002) assert that institutions must modify academic structures to enable them to compete for stability and change. One of the many ways in which universities are responding to global competition and change is through the incorporation of university-industry collaborations and partnerships into their programs.

Ahmad and Junaid (2000) observe that university industry linkage is regarded as a major collaborative effort on the part of the two distinct entities, academia and industry, that share their resources in an effective and efficient way for attaining mutually compatible goals of technological innovation, enhancing global competitiveness and performing as engine for economic growth. On their part, Bramwell and Wolfe (2005) point out that universities have emerged as central actors in the knowledge-based economy since they are increasingly viewed as key drivers of innovation and “major agents of economic growth”. This is made possible through collaborations and partnerships between university and industry. It is worth noting that collaborations between industry and academia have increased as the universities strive to break the ivory tower mentality that exists between them and the community. However, evolving partnerships between university and industry is not only based on the need to establish closer ties with the community but also has been stimulated, primarily by social, political, economic and technological forces. For instance, government assistance for research related ventures has declined whereas the pressures from global competitiveness and realization of the significance of science-based knowledge to the innovation process has multiplied manifold (Feller, 1997).

University-industry linkages have significantly become one of the most important agenda of higher education policy-making, as well as in the economic environment of both the national and institutional levels. In the context of knowledge intensive economies, the importance of higher institutions of learning as strategic actors in both national and regional economic development cannot be underestimated given their potential to upgrade skills and knowledge of the labor force and contribute towards producing and processing innovation through technology transfer notes Esham (2008). It's through such linkages that universities have grown to become catalysts in the growth of a nation for their roles are not only confined to human capital development but also in technology transfer, research and development, and innovation. In this collaborative process, universities have three major roles to play. First, they undertake a general process of scientific research and thereby affect the technological frontier of industry over the long run. Secondly, they partly produce knowledge which is directly applicable to industrial production (prototypes, new processes etc.). Thirdly, universities provide major inputs for industrial innovation processes in terms of human capital, either through the education of graduates, who become industry researchers or through personnel mobility from universities to firms (Schartinger et al., 2002).

University-industry collaborations are instrumental in strengthening the ability of universities to conduct high quality and relevant research and enhancing the capability of industry to compete globally. Collaboration is generally regarded as a vehicle for the realization of some of these aims and promoting a higher level of competitiveness (Liyanage and Mitcheil, 1994). While emphasizing the need for university-industry collaborations, Davis (1996) observes:

The strength of universities lies in their science base; the strength of industry is technological development. Today the challenges facing both organizations have never been greater and both must adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Failure to do so will have significant and far-reaching consequences for all concerned.

In the above assertion, Davis implicitly points out that the collaborative undertakings transform the entire edifice of business firms by turning them into true learning organizations. Thus companies learn new ways of doing things, and this may ultimately alter the nature and direction of the entire business world.

Dodgson (1993) observed that collaboration encourages a higher-level of learning, learning about leading edge technologies, learning about methods of creating future technologies and learning of the ways new technologies might affect the existing business. For these reasons, University-Industry Partnerships are regarded as one of the widely used interactive best practices, a powerful tool for creating congenial environment for technological innovations and enhancing global competitiveness ultimately promoting the interests of the firms and academia across the world. According to Ali (1994) intense global competition, shorter product life cycle, rising demand for technological innovation unpredictable economic conditions, and escalating cost of research provide firm grounds for the organization to foster collaboration with institutions of advanced learning. On the other hand, the university graduates will have exposure and experience of the practical work life, which will act as a launching pad for their future professional careers. From the foregoing, it is clear that university-industry collaborations and partnerships have an impact on the collaborating institutions. It is against this backdrop and while capitalizing on the multi-dimensional facets of pedagogical practices that this paper examines the benefits of the partnership between Kenyatta University and Equity bank.

While focusing on the university's recognition of the need to collaborate with industrial entities to expand its traditional knowledge base and use the increased institutional capacity and capabilities to help expand student opportunities for greater success and economic growth, the paper shows how such university-industry interactions promote the community's economic growth and development.

1.2 Background to the Kenyatta University – Industry Partnerships

Besides providing quality education tailored towards creativity and self reliance and conducting research, service to humanity is one of the major components of Kenyatta University's mission statement. To ensure efficiency and satisfactory service delivery in its mission of service to humanity, the University management established the Directorate of Community Outreach and Extension Programs (COEP). The main goal of the Directorate of Community Outreach and Extension Programs is to reach out to communities and extend knowledge, skills, information and to further help communities identify, mobilize and utilize resources available to them to improve their quality of life.

As part of its programs tailored to reaching out to the community, Kenyatta University, through the Directorate of Community Outreach and Extension Programs, entered into a five year renewable collaboration with Equity Bank since 2008. This partnership is aimed at training and facilitating over 3,000 students annually to give service to communities nationwide based on their needs. Founded on the spirit of corporate social responsibility, the program is aimed at benefiting all the stakeholders involved and transforming the lives of the members of the communities served.

The students' benefits from the program are twofold. First, the students are expected to benefit through the training seminars on contemporary issues they are likely to encounter in the communities as they give their service. The seminars and through their real interaction with the communities they serve which makes what they learn during the training seminar a reality. The served communities are expected to gain knowledge and skills from their interaction with the University who are eager to serve the communities they come from. The interaction between the students and their communities help to reduce the gap that exist between them and further familiarize students with the real life in the community where they will live and work after they complete their studies.

For the two collaborating institutions, the program was expected to improve their working relationship and further break the Ivory Tower mentality that has always existed between the communities, institutions of higher learning and the banks as the two institutions reach down to the communities, identify with their needs and further help communities through students to identify, mobilize and utilize their resources to improve the quality of human life. To determine whether the program has been beneficial to the stakeholders involved since its inception in June 2008, an impact assessment was conducted and the findings constitute part of this paper.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. The Case Study Approach

Although a great deal of research on university-industry partnerships and interactions has been conducted, little critical analysis has been conducted in Kenya. Therefore, this paper is somewhat exploratory and relied on deep case study as one of its appropriate methods (Yin, 1989). The case study sought to highlight the importance of university-industry partnerships in Kenya and how these partnerships have impacted on communities involved in the context of their everyday life with a specific focus on Kenyatta University-Equity Bank partnership. The case study approach provided us with an opportunity to conduct an in-depth and incisive investigation into how the partnership has impacted on the lives of students who have participated in the exercise, members of the communities that have been served, Kenyatta University and Equity Bank.

1.3.2. The Survey

In order to establish the significance of the Kenyatta University and Equity bank partnership, as an example of university-industry relationships in Kenya, a field survey was conducted on 10% of the 3,000 students and their supervisors who participated on the program in 2010/2011 academic year using two sets of questionnaires. The two sets of questionnaires were developed for both the students and their supervisors, who were responding on behalf of the members of the communities served. The data gathered were analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software.

1.3.3. Data Analysis

This survey was intended to establish whether the partnership between Kenyatta University-Equity bank collaboration has been beneficial to the involved parties. We have engaged systematic thematic content analysis as a method for analyzing and interpreting the findings of this case study. In our analysis of the findings we engaged thematic content analysis. Thematic analysis moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). This paper gave primacy to the benefits that accrue from the collaboration to students in two fronts: training seminars and the actual community service while to the community members focus was on how the students' community service has benefited them. By considering existing literature relating to these themes, this paper has critically analyzed the role of university-industry partnerships in the university realm and to the community. Using systematic thematic content analysis, we organized responses from questionnaires into thematic strands and subsequently critically analyzed these thematic strands in relation to the existing literature and synthesized this body of information into the findings.

1.4 Results Analysis and Interpretation

Out of 300 questionnaires distributed, about 85% of the participants responded to this survey. The results of the analyses are discussed with a clear focus on:

- a) Students
- b) Community and
- c) Collaborating Institutions

1.4.1. Benefits of Kenyatta University-Equity Bank Partnership to Students

One of the key objectives of this research was to determine the benefit of training seminars and Experiential Learning (EL) to students. The findings were considered critical since they were to inform stakeholders of whether they are on the right track or not. Thus, this was to be achieved through examining the role of the partnership in two phases: Training seminars and at the community level.

a. Training Seminars

This study sought to establish whether the two-day training seminar that students undergo before embarking on community service was of any benefit to them as individuals. A fast majority of the respondents (99.61%) indicated that the training seminar was very useful while (0.39%) indicated that the seminar was not useful (table1).

Training Useful to Trainee	Frequency	Percent
Yes	254	99.61%
No	1	0.39%

n= 255

Table 1: Usefulness of Training Seminars to students as Individuals

When the respondents were further probed to indicate whether the training they received was of any use to the community they served, a majority of them (96.86%) affirmed that the seminars were useful to the communities served while (3.14%) indicated that the seminars were not useful (table 2).

Usefulness of Training seminars to Communities served	Frequency	Percent
Yes	247	96.86%
No	8	3.14%

n=255

Table 2: Usefulness of Training Seminars to communities served

The above findings underline the importance of conducting training seminars before students participate in community service.

The seminars are conceptualized in a manner that they not only prepare the students on the task ahead of them but to equip students with requisite knowledge on how to tackle issues that they are likely to encounter in the communities that they will serve. Therefore, the seminars were not only useful in empowering students to work with communities but also helped them in their own personal lives.

b. Helpfulness of the seminars to the students

In order to ascertain the helpfulness of the knowledge gained from training seminars, the student respondents were asked to state how helpful the seminars were to them. The question allowed for multiple answers and the responses have been summarized in table 3.

Benefits	Frequency	Percent
Able to serve the community	48	11.71%
Able to apply skills learnt to community service	42	10.24%
Gained new knowledge gained	35	8.54%
Able to mobilize and involve the community	35	8.54%
Able to assist HIV/Aids patients	23	5.61%
Enhanced relationship with the community	22	5.37%
Built networks	15	3.66%
Boosted my social status as a role model	14	3.41%
Appreciation	12	2.93%
Ability to answer questions regarding environment	23	5.61%
Ability to educate the community on poverty reduction	13	3.17%
Learnt skills on handling challenges	11	2.68%
Able to educate community on drug abuse and its effects	10	2.44%
Able to deal with community issues	10	2.44%
Able to educate community on financial skills	10	2.44%
Identify with community problems	9	2.20%
Others	8	1.95%

Table 3: Benefits Gained in Training Seminar by Students

A multiplicity of responses to this question shows the many ways in which the seminars have impacted on the students as individuals in terms of knowledge and skill acquisition. It is important to note that most of the responses in table 3 above were generally geared towards communities they served. In another survey question each student respondent was asked to identify three skills they learnt during their community service experience. They reported experiential learning as summarized in table 4.

Learnt Skills	Frequency	Percent
Developed networks	24	33.84%
Communication skills	77	12.32%
Social skills and ties	56	8.75%
Practical financial skills	54	8.64%
Interpersonal relations	36	5.76%
Project management skills	28	4.48%
Self realization	19	2.84%
Developed self confidence	15	2.25%

Table 4: Experiential Learning by Students during SCSP

From the results presented above, it is clear that the community service exercise benefitted students who participated in the exercise as service providers. As is evident, students who participated in the exercise reported to have acquired various skills such as financial skills, project management skills, interpersonal communication skills and networking skills. These skills could not have been easily acquired through book learning. These skills are critical and will go a long way in preparing and shaping the students' lives upon completion of their studies.

It is worth noting that as Kenya aims at attaining middle-level income economy as outlined in the Vision 2030 blueprint, university and industry must go hand in hand to meet the challenges of raising the innovative and creative capacity of human capital for the knowledge-based economy and enhancing the scientific and technological infrastructure to meet the needs of a competitive economy. The role of universities in local economic development goes far beyond the linear transfer of basic research into commercialization products (Bramwell and Wolfe 2005). Instead, universities should emerge as multifaceted economic entities that are embedded in regions, and not only produce codified and commodified knowledge and human capital, but also actively participate as important institutional actors in both building and sustaining local networks and flows of knowledge, and in linking them with global ones (Bramwell and Wolfe 2005).

Therefore, it is through collaborations like the Kenyatta university-Equity bank that students are given opportunity to interact with the communities that they will serve upon completion of studies. Through these interactions, students get first hand experiences on various issues affecting community and even seek to provide solutions to them based on knowledge attained in their training. Thus, students are prepared on the challenges that await them as they seek to contribute in the economic growth and development of the nation.

1.4.2. Benefits of the Community Service Exercise to the Communities Served

When the respondents were asked to indicate whether the Community service exercise was of benefit to the community where it was conducted, 67% of the respondents indicated that the exercise was very beneficial to the community, 30% said the program was beneficial to the community and only 3% indicated that the program was fairly beneficial (figure 1). In general, the community service program has been rated highly and being of great benefit to communities served as perceived by the community field supervisors.

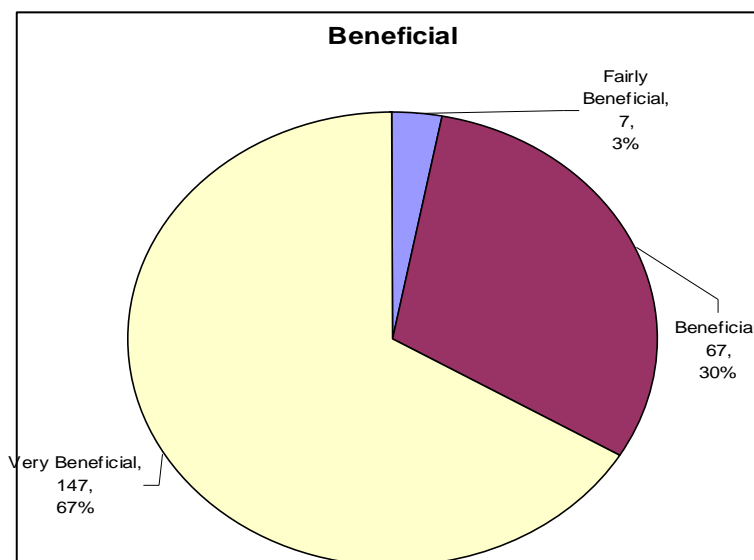


Figure 1: Benefits of SCSP to the Community

When the supervisors were further probed to identify specific benefits of the program to communities served, the supervisors indicated a number of areas such as staff support, HIV/AIDS awareness, peer counseling and motivation talks to schools among others. The multiple responses that were allowed in this question were summarized in table 5.

Benefits	Frequency	Percent
Staff support and increased efficiency	40	7.60%
Promoted HIV/Aids awareness	38	7.22%
Peer counseling/ motivational talks	28	5.32%
Served as a good role model	27	5.13%
Awareness on drug and substance abuse	24	4.56%
Improved academic performance for pupils	23	4.37%
Environmental conservation and tree planting	38	7.22%
Introduced new way of doing things-creativity	16	3.04%
Improved financial literacy	16	3.04%
Enhanced youth empowerment	18	3.42%
Improved organization performance	14	2.66%
Enhanced bond between Kenyatta University and community	14	2.66%
Improved student/teacher relationships	13	2.47%
Enhanced appreciation of self-worth	13	2.47%
Improved organization's image in the community	10	1.90%
Fostered positive behavior change	10	1.90%
Provided new skills and knowledge	9	1.90%

Table 5: Specific Benefits of SCSP to the Communities Served

The findings above show that community service is not an exercise in futility that Kenyatta University and Equity bank, through a partnership, embarked in but rather a program that has benefitted society. As is evident, the communities served benefitted from sound financial literacy and management skills from the program. This is further reflected as Equity bank recorded an increase in the number of bank accounts opened by members of the communities served. Implying that the members of the communities served realized the importance of saving their monies in banks as opposed to saving in their houses.

The fact that Equity bank witnessed an increase in the number of accounts opened by community members served during the program is testimony that industry also benefits from the program when its products are incorporated into the program which in turn provides access to not only new ideas and know-how about product packaging but also the industry's target customers. Thus, this collaboration has demonstrated that university and industry partnerships do play a crucial in unlocking the economic potential of a country. This observation concurs with Bramwell & Wolfe (2008) who propose a potential approach of knowledge transfer between university and industry and further suggest an "entrepreneurial research university" model, where universities not only generate new knowledge through primary research, but also provide technical support and specialized expertise and facilities for on-going firm-based research and development activities (Grossman et al. 2001; Bramwell & Wolfe 2008).

1.5. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Kenyatta University- Equity bank partnership has been of great benefit to the involved parties. The partnership has enabled Kenyatta University and Equity Bank to not only reach the community but also transform the lives of members in the same community. On the basis of this observation, we can argue that attaining high standards or living in society and realization of national goals in economic development would be possible when the space between academia and industry is bridged. Upcoming economies like Kenya need to realize that in the age of knowledge-based economy, the creation, diffusion and exploitation of new knowledge will smoothen the way for our economic, political and social development.

Therefore, both university and industry should seek to enhance graduate skills and ensure a smooth and effective transition between university and the business environments through collaborations such as joint community service programs among others. Through such ventures, students have opportunities to acquire hands own experiences and skills that will come in handy when they finally join the job market. With this, universities should also explore ideas to facilitate business matching, networking, knowledge transfer programmes, and community network among others with industry bring significant changes to the country's economic development.

It is through these programs that relevant skill development by universities will be realized in order to meet business needs. Finally, this paper has shown the benefits of the university and industry interaction when a university not only develops academic excellence in various disciplines but also sets an explicit priority to develop strong linkages with industry for the purposes of regional and national economic development by establishing a formal networking system so as to become a catalyst for further enhancement of multifaceted role in promoting economic development. Through partnerships of this nature, students are kept abreast of the latest trends in the job market and industrial needs hence imparting them with highly pragmatic professional training at the universities.

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