



# **STRATEGIZING ON COST**

## **Effect of part time lecturers on university education in Kenya**

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*Full Length Research Paper*

# Strategizing on cost: Effect of part time lecturers on university education in Kenya

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University education in Kenya has witnessed a common cost cutting strategy – the use of part time lecturers. This is due to reduced government funding (public universities), and the increasing size of student enrollment. Numerous satellite campuses have therefore been established to cope with the situation. In return, this has led to cut throat competition in the academic sector, where enrolment in some Universities is very low. To realize profitability, cost cutting strategies have been adopted, inclusive, the use of part time faculty. The same is replicated in private Universities. This study sought to assess the effectiveness of Part time lecturers as a cost cutting strategy. A survey design was adopted. The target population was part time faculty in Kenyan Universities with campuses located in Nairobi Kenya. A sample of 130 part time faculty was used. Primary data was collected through self administered questionnaires. The study found that most universities employed part time faculty as a cost cutting strategy. It was established that part timers were not satisfied with their jobs and therefore were not adequately motivated, and lacked commitment in their work. This negatively impacts on their service delivery, which leads to a client exodus, and therefore less profitability. The study recommends that part time positions should be well regulated and adopted on a need basis rather than as a cost cutting strategy. Similarly, the study recommends policies to be enacted by the Universities so that part time staff is better opted in the universities work force.

**Key words:** Cost cutting Strategy, Part time faculty.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background and research gap

World over, there has been a trend to embrace cost cutting strategies in higher education (Mageto, 2001). Most of the institutions of higher learning have embarked on solving the problem by the use of institutional strategies such as lowering the student enrolment, minimal members of support staff, minimal provision of bed space, and large ratios of student to facilities, and even the use of part time faculty (Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer, 2009). The trend in most Institutions of Higher learning has become the making use of part-time lecturers in order to reduce the cost of labour (Alston, 2010). Part-time lecturers have become a highly used cost cutting strategy in the academic environment (Allen - Collinson and Hockey, 1998).

Higher education in Kenya has witnessed a notable rise

in the number of part-time lecturers. This can be attributed to reduced government funding (especially to public universities), and the increasing size and diversity of student enrollment (Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2008). There has been an acute transformation in the academic environment and in particular the massification of higher education where student numbers have grown faster than staff size. Coupled with this are fiscal constraints in a higher education system which is no longer elitist (Altbach, 2000; Farnham, 1999).

Rapid expansion in student numbers, the establishment of numerous satellite campuses, and lack of human personnel commensurate with student enrollment characterize the academic landscape. In response, the institutions of higher learning have contracted a number of part-time lecturers who are probably as many if not

more than full-time faculty (Bryson, 1998). The same is replicated in private Universities. Most private universities tend to utilize more part-time teaching faculty than public universities (Mageto, 2001). Mwiria and Carey, (2007) notes that half of the teaching staff in the private universities is currently part-timers drawn from the public universities.

Interestingly, the large numbers being realized out of the education system at the graduate level are potential candidates for the education profession (Barnes and O'Hara, 1999). However, they are finding it hard to obtain full-time appointments due to the high supply that supersedes the demand. They become lucrative targets for part time faculty, since they are ready to take up lower pay perks (Altbach, 2000). Most Universities have therefore adopted this strategy: cheap labour. But the question in contention is; how cheap is the cheap labour. Is it the right strategy to deal with cost?

Part time faculty do not enjoy the same status as their full time counterparts. They are mistreated by their institutions. Lack of job security is a prominent feature due to the casualisation of their jobs (Bryson, 2004a). This has led to the division of the faculty labour whereby an inferior class has been created of part-time labour. The part timers serve as shock absorber to protect the permanent workforce from the consequences of massification. This also enables the management to achieve 'permanent flexibility' or a "disposable faculty" (Entin, 2005). Webster and Mosoetsa (2001) opine that tension in the academic workplace has been intensified by the introduction of the permanent and contracted workforces which creates icy relations between the staff. Part-time lecturers face the insecurity of their employment relationship and the possible dilemma between the need to earn an income while attending to their personal development (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 1998; Bryson, 1998; Hey, 2001).

Given their position in Universities, the Part timers do not have job satisfaction since they lack an organizational career path (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 1998; Bryson, 1998; Hey, 2001). Barnes and O'Hara (1999) identified hindrances, presented by the lack of promotion criteria for temporary employees, as being of fundamental importance to a review of part-time academic careers. Many part-time faculty are not given opportunities to develop professionally (Gappa, Austin, and Trice, 2005). Feldman and Turnley, 2001 note that poor financial rewards and lack of promotion opportunities is among critical dissatisfiers.

Bland, Center, Finstad, Risbey, and Staples, (2006) suggest that the paradigm shift in the faculty appointment system is occurring with little understanding of its impact on core outcomes of higher education. The literature questions the so-called 'false-economy' of part-time employment contracts as human resource management costs are not reckoned into this equation. Barnes and O'Hara (1999) highlight the management costs related to

recruitment, induction and replacement due to staff turnover and the related loss of skills (Bataille and Brown, 2006). Of more concern to this study is the suggestion that the appointment conditions of part-time faculty are such that institutions are not in a position to get the best value out of the intellectual capital of such staff in an environment where excellence facilitates institutional competitiveness (Gappa, Austin and Trice (2005).

The findings show that Colleges of Business must exercise prudence in the hiring of part-time faculty who probably have other means of employment, and thus may treat their course(s) as of secondary importance. This is to say that caution must be used in hiring decisions. Furthermore, part-time faculty by definition does not necessarily have the mission of the college or university at heart; it is likely they are gainfully employed elsewhere, and thus teaching one or two courses as a source of supplemental income (Gerlich and Sollosy, 2001).

There is also the possibility that contract teachers either have no effect on student learning or negatively impact student outcomes. This may happen for instance when the intended objective of reducing teacher shortages is met by hiring a lower quality pool of unqualified and untrained teachers. (Vegas and De Laat 2003).

David Leslie, writing in the American publication of Bataille and Brown (2006) points out an additional loss to the institution in that part-time faculty are less likely to engage in research (and hence publish infrequently) and generally do not perform the full array of faculty work. Barnes and Barnes and O'Hara (1999) appear to agree here in proposing that higher education institutions may not be getting optimum benefit from the skills and commitment their temporary employees have to offer. Allen-Collinson and Hockey (1998) are more specific in suggesting that using part time staff is an inefficient system for training and maintaining a skilled research workforce. Short-termism on the part of temporary employees hindered their undertaking of longer-term research projects which may have yielded greater benefits to the institution (Barnes and O'Hara, 1999).

Some studies indicate that full-time faculty members teach more effectively than part-time faculty (Pankin and Weiss, 2011). Bryson (2004) raises the point that employees on temporary contracts are more likely to be unable to apply the full range of their skills and work in positions that do not fully utilise their qualifications and experience. Allen-Collinson (2003) and Barnes and O'Hara (1999) who identify that temporary staff invest conscious energy into activities that would minimise the uncertainty of their position. This is of concern to this study given the competitive environment of education provision and that reliance on part-time contracts may affect a core output of the university, namely research. Ni Laoire and Shelton (2003) suggest that it is becoming apparent that an over-reliance on labour flexibility can

diminish staff productivity, morale and commitment.

Part timers have little contact with the wider university. The argument continues that they have limited contact with students outside class and may or may not hold office hours (Pankin and Weiss, 2011). They may also be less likely to know institutional policies and programs and thus cannot advise students about them. More challenging is the fact that part-time faculty are the faculty most apt to be teaching an institution's part-time students, as those students tend to take evening and weekend courses, which are most frequently assigned to part-time faculty (Allen-Collinson, 2003).

On the other hand, when part-time lecturers devote insufficient time to their involvement or lack adequate information about the courses they teach, the teaching programme suffers disruption and a lack of continuity. This is clearly confirmed by a research conducted by Mwiria and Carey (2007) among public and private universities in Kenya by observing that, Public and private universities in Kenya influence and complement each other in several ways. The scheduling of most teaching in self-sponsored academic programmes on weekday evenings and at weekends and holidays was an idea borrowed from the private university sector. Private universities on the other hand, have benefited from public universities utilizing their academic staff on a part-time basis to supplement their own shortfall.

Part-time academic staff has been perceived as most problematic has been labeled "freeway flyers," those who juggle several part-time jobs at more than one institution in order to make a living. Compared to other full-time faculty, part-time faculty is less educated, experience job instability due to changing conditions in academic labor markets rather than in the larger economy, and have marginal status among their colleagues although they command full status from students (Pankin and Weiss, 2011). A lot more time is spent in their administration and follow up on their working schedules.

A primary issue of concern here appears to be that of the availability of part-time lecturers to engage with their students outside of the classroom. While instructional quality was not a research question in this study it is a matter which warrants discussion as it is an integral output of the part-time academic career.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2003) suggests that the use of part-time faculty members reduces the quality of student learning. This occurs due to the nature of the employment contract which discourages additional hours spent with students outside of class. Furthermore, low wages encourage part-time lecturers to seek multiple teaching assignments on multiple campuses, further limiting their interaction with students. Such staff lack class preparation time and deliver courses according to a predetermined curriculum which makes them less likely to be informed about the latest developments in an academic discipline. The issue of part-time faculty and teaching effectiveness is also

explored by Scheutz (2002). Her study suggests that part-timers in American community colleges are more weakly linked to their students and colleges than full-timers and that part-timers were found to have less total teaching experience, teach less hours per week at the institution, use less innovative or collaborative teaching methods and interact less with their students and peers. They are also less connected than full-timers to professional organisations.

In writing about graduate employees, an American scholar (Bousquet, 2002) raises the point that graduate education accomplishes "...it's marvelous cheapness by allocating an ever larger section of the curriculum to flexible instructors who typically have between zero and four years of teaching experience". This would align with the early career respondents identified in this study. Bousquet (2002) continues to indicate that a reduced variety of course offerings and reduced access to faculty doing active scholarship in their field are synonymous with casualisation of academic labour. This once again raises questions about the quality of delivery. Despite this, Bataille and Brown (2006) suggest that while the issues raised regarding part-time lecturers' availability outside of the classroom may indirectly affect education quality, the evidence is as yet inconclusive.

### **Objective**

Research objective is to determine the effectiveness of using Part time lecturers as a cost cutting strategy

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study used descriptive survey research design. With descriptive research data and the characteristics of the population phenomenon being studied are described (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). A sample of 130 part time lecturers in Universities in the Nairobi CBD was selected. The study used primary data that was collected through self administered questionnaires. According to (Kothari, 2009) a questionnaire is a means of eliciting the feelings, beliefs, experiences, perceptions, or attitudes of some sample of individuals. The questionnaire was preferred because it is easier to administer, analyze and economical. It comprised both open and closed ended questions and statements. Data was analyzed by use of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Out of a sample size of 150 internal and external part timers, who were given questionnaires, 55 were returned by 42 external and 13 internal part timers. The majority, 77% were internal part timers while 23% were external part timers as shown in table 1.

Majority of the respondents, 53%, had the least experience in part time lecturing having worked as such for a period of up to 5 years, while 33% had worked as such for 6 to 10 years. Only 11% had more than eleven years of experience as indicated in table 2. This was

**Table 1:** Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
External part timers	42	77
Internal Part timers	13	23
Total	55	100

**Table 2:** Duration in years worked as a lecturer

Number of years worked as a lecturer	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 5	29	53
6 to 10	18	33
11 and above	8	14
Total	55	100

**Table 3:** Reasons for taking up part time teaching

Reasons for part-timing	Frequency	Percentage
Main source of income	14	25
To supplement regular income	33	60
To gain experience	8	15
Total	55	100

**Table 4:** Job satisfaction

Level of job satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
High	2	4
moderate	6	11
Low	47	85
Total	55	100

important to determine the quality of staff who are given opportunities to work on a part time basis. This indicated that majority of the part time faculty had relatively few years of service.

The reason behind lecturers taking up part time positions was also sought as illustrated in table 3. Majority of the respondents, 60% indicate that they took up part time positions to supplement their regular income, while 25% took up the positions since it was their main source of income. Only 15% took up the positions to gain more work experience. This showed that most part time lecturers already had other regular jobs.

Table 4 shows the level of satisfaction with their jobs for lecturers who part time. Only 4 % were highly motivated with their jobs while 11% were fairly motivated. The majority, 85% had very low satisfaction with their jobs. This indicates that despite lecturers taking up part time positions, the majority did not feel satisfied with their jobs.

In trying to establish the relationship between part time and full time faculty, it was noted that most part time faculty members, 75% experienced a lukewarm relationship with full time faculty members. Only 13% had

**Table 5:** Relationship with full time faculty

Nature of Relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Cordial	7	13
Lukeworm	41	75
Hostile	9	16
Total	55	100

**Table 6:** Knowledge of Institutions policies

Level of information	Frequency	Percentage
Well Informed	7	13
Informed	13	24
Not well Informed	35	63
Total	55	100

**Table 7:** Level of commitment to organization

Commitment	Frequency	Percentage
Very committed	11	20
Committed	16	29
Not committed	28	51
Total	55	100

**Table 8:** Adequacy in preparation for classes

Preparedness	Frequency	Percentage
Adequately prepared	10	18
Fairly prepared	23	42
Not prepared	22	40
Total	55	100

a cordial relationship with full time faculty, while 16% of the respondents considered the relationship hostile. This showed that the working relationship between full and part time faculty members was not good (table 5).

The study also sought to establish the extent to which part time faculty was knowledgeable of most of the institutions policies, procedures and programmes. Table 6 illustrates that only 13% of the respondents were well informed of the policies, procedures and programmes while 24% were informed about them. However, a whole 63% were not well informed of the policies and procedures. This shows that part time faculties are not inducted in organizational policies or that they did not show any interest in them.

Table 7 illustrates the extent to which part time faculty was committed to the organization. It was noted that only 20% of the respondents were very committed to the organizations they work for, while 29% fairly committed. However, a majority, 51 % were not committed at all.

The study also sought to establish whether the part time faculty members were adequately prepared for the lessons they were assigned to teach as illustrated on table 8. Only 18 %, a minority, admitted to being

**Table 9:** Availability out of class

Availability	Frequency	Percentage
Available	3	5
Occasionally available	11	20
Not available	41	75
Total	55	100

adequately prepared for the classes, while most of them, 42% said they were fairly prepared. The others, 22% were not prepared for classes they taught. This could be attributed to the fact that most part time lecturers were overwhelmed with work given most held regular jobs and those who did not were not regulated on the maximum load to take.

In order to determine the availability of part time lecturers' out of class interaction with students, the part time lecturers were asked to state the extent to which they made themselves available for students' further consultation as illustrated in table 9. A majority, 75% indicated that they were not available for the consultations, while 20% said they were occasionally available. Only the minority, 5% indicated that they were available for further consultations.

## CONCLUSIONS

The information obtained from study led to the conclusion that despite the fact that Universities in Kenya took part time lecturers as a cost cutting measure, the use of part timers had a negative effect on the learning process and therefore negate the benefits of cutting on cost. This can be attributed to the fact that majority of part time faculty had minimal work experience, they held other jobs, while most of them took were not satisfied with the job. They also had a poor working relationship with full time faculty members, and their level of commitment and their grasp of institutions policies was minimal. They were ill prepared for classes and their availability for further consultations was minimal. These factors were likely to affect the learning process negatively and lead to learner's exodus to other institutions given the cut throat competition in the Kenyan Higher education sector.

## Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, it is recommended that Universities in Kenya should not adopt the use of part time faculty as a cost cutting strategy. In an event they should be used to fill the gaps in expertise, the institutions should seek to accommodate them in the in their day to day programs by ensuring they are properly inducted. Lastly, there should be a regulation on the load part time faculty may take in a given institution to avoid them being overwhelmed with work.

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