Understanding The Causes And Consequences Of Missing Marks In Kenyan Universities: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT
Missing marks is a prevalent issue in Kenyan universities that has significant implications for both students and the institutions. Missing marks occur when grades or scores for a student's coursework or exam are not recorded or are lost, leading to confusion and frustration for both the student and the university. The consequences of missing marks are significant, including delays in graduation, academic penalties, financial implications, and damage to the university's reputation. Given the importance of accurate grading in ensuring academic integrity and fairness, it is essential to explore the causes and consequences of missing marks and to identify measures to prevent and address them effectively. This study aimed to investigate the causes and consequences of missing marks in Kenyan universities and to provide recommendations for policy and practice. The study used a qualitative research design and conducted focus group discussions with university students and examination officers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, and data was collected through audio recording and transcription of the Interviews and FGDs conducted. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, and ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. The findings revealed that common causes of missing marks include administrative errors, technical issues, and academic misconduct. The study recommends that universities should implement measures to prevent missing marks and adopt best practices for addressing missing marks when they occur. The findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge on missing marks in Kenyan universities and provide insights for policy and practice.
KeyWords: *Missing marks, Academic integrity, Academic misconduct, Administrative errors, Technical issues and Consequences.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Missing marks is a significant challenge that continues to affect the academic performance and motivation of students in Kenyan universities. Missing marks refer to the absence of recorded marks for a student in a particular course unit or examination. This problem has been reported in several Kenyan universities, including Kenyatta University, the University of Nairobi, and Moi University (Oborah, 2018). Despite efforts by university administrators and stakeholders to address the problem, it continues to persist, leading to frustration among students and a negative impact on their academic outcomes.

The problem of missing marks is multifaceted and can be attributed to several factors. For instance, a study conducted by Nyamwange (2018) identified factors such as poor record-keeping, inadequate supervision during examinations, and malpractices by lecturers as contributing to missing marks. Additionally, the use of manual record-keeping systems, as opposed to digital systems, has also been identified as a contributing factor (Moraa & Mirie, 2021, Kathambi, 2019).

The consequences of missing marks are far-reaching and can negatively impact students' academic performance and motivation. Studies have shown that missing marks can lead to a delay in graduation, academic probation, and even expulsion from university (Kamau, 2019; Owino, 2020). Moreover, missing marks can lead to a loss of confidence and motivation among students, leading to reduced academic performance in subsequent semesters (Oborah, 2018).

BACKGROUND

Missing marks have been a long-standing challenge in Kenyan universities. The problem has been reported in several universities across the country. Missing marks refer to the absence of recorded marks for a student in a particular course unit or examination. This problem has serious implications for students' academic

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performance, as it can lead to delays in graduation, academic probation, and even expulsion from university (Kamau, 2019; Owino, 2020).

There are several factors that contribute to missing marks in Kenyan universities. One of the main factors is poor record-keeping systems. Most universities in Kenya still use manual record-keeping systems, which are prone to errors and can easily be tampered with (Nyakeri & Njenga 2016, Kathambi, 2019). Additionally, the use of paper-based systems makes it difficult to retrieve and update records, leading to the loss of marks or even entire examination scripts (Kipkemoi, 2018).

Inadequate supervision during examinations is another factor that contributes to missing marks. Lecturers may fail to properly supervise examinations, leading to cases of exam cheating or misconduct, which can ultimately result in missing marks for affected students (Nyamwange, 2018).

Malpractices by lecturers have also been identified as a contributing factor to missing marks. Some lecturers may deliberately withhold marks for students who fail to bribe them or for personal reasons). Such malpractices undermine the integrity of the education system and can have serious implications for students' academic performance and motivation (Rono & Mutisya 2020, Oborah, 2018).

Malpractices by lecturers: Some lecturers may deliberately withhold marks for students who fail to bribe them or for personal reasons (Oborah, 2018). Such malpractices undermine the integrity of the education system and can have serious implications for students' academic performance and motivation. System glitches and technical errors: Computerized systems may malfunction, leading to the loss of data, or incomplete data entry leading to missing marks (Kamau, 2019).

The consequences of missing marks are far-reaching and can negatively impact students' academic performance and motivation. Studies have shown that missing marks can lead to a loss of confidence and motivation among students, leading to reduced academic performance in subsequent semesters (Kibet, 2021, Oborah, 2018). Moreover, missing marks can cause anxiety and stress among students, affecting their mental and emotional well-being.

The consequences of missing marks can negatively impact students' academic performance and motivation, leading to a loss of confidence and motivation, reduced academic performance in subsequent semesters, anxiety and stress among students, and affecting their mental and emotional well-being (Oborah, 2018).

Given the negative consequences of missing marks, it is important to identify effective strategies for addressing the problem. Some universities have already taken steps to address the problem by implementing digital record-keeping systems and providing training for lecturers and administrative staff (Kathambi, 2019). However, more needs to be done to ensure that students receive a fair and transparent assessment of their academic performance.

Efforts to address the problem of missing marks in Kenyan universities have been undertaken. These efforts include implementing digital record-keeping systems, providing training for lecturers and administrative staff, and strengthening supervision during examinations (Kathambi, 2019).

CONSEQUENCES OF MISSING MARKS

The consequences of missing marks in public universities in Kenya are far-reaching and can significantly impact students' academic performance, mental health, and career prospects. Some of the consequences include:

Delayed Graduation: Missing marks can lead to delayed graduation, as students have to repeat courses or semesters, which ultimately prolongs their stay in university (Kathambi, 2019).

Poor Academic Performance: Missing marks can lower students' overall academic performance, leading to a lower grade point average (GPA), which can affect their future career prospects (Rotich & Kipsang 2019, Nyamwange, 2018).

Reduced Confidence and Motivation: Missing marks can lead to reduced confidence and motivation among students, making them less likely to participate in academic activities and engage with their peers (Oborah, 2018).

Mental Health Implications: Missing marks can lead to increased anxiety, stress, and depression among affected students, which can affect their mental and emotional well-being (Kamau, 2019).

Negative Perception of the Education System: Missing marks can contribute to a negative perception of the education system, undermining its integrity and raising concerns about the quality of education provided in public universities.

Efforts to address the problem of missing marks in public universities in Kenya are crucial to improving the quality of education and ensuring that students receive the best possible academic experience. Implementing digital record-keeping systems, providing training for lecturers and administrative staff and strengthening supervision during examinations are some of the strategies that have been proposed to address the issue of missing marks in public universities.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design
A qualitative research design was used to explore the causes and consequences of missing marks in Kenyan universities. This involved conducting interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with university students and examination officers respectively.

Sampling
A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the interviews and FGDs. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, which was reached when no new information was obtained from the participants.

Data collection:
The Interviews and FGDs were conducted using semi-structured interview guides tailored to the target group. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis:
A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the data. The data was coded, categorized, and organized into themes and sub-themes. The themes and sub-themes were developed based on the research questions and emerging issues from the data.

Ethical considerations:
Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews and FGDs. Participants were assured of their confidentiality, and all data was kept secure and confidential.

III. FINDINGS

The questions sort to elicit responses on various aspects of missing marks, including their causes, impact on academic performance and future career prospects, challenges faced by universities in addressing them, and ways to prevent their occurrence in the future.

The answers generated highlight some of the most common causes of missing marks, including errors in recording or data entry, misplaced or lost exam records, and misplacement of answer scripts. These causes can be addressed by investing in better technologies and personnel, improving documentation and record-keeping procedures, and implementing clear and transparent procedures for addressing missing marks.

Have you ever experienced missing marks? If so, could you share your experience with us?

Yes, I have experienced missing marks before. It was really frustrating because I knew I had worked hard and deserved the marks, but they just weren't there. It made me doubt myself and my abilities (Second Year Student, 2023).

From your experience, what do you think are the common causes of missing marks in Kenyan universities?

- From what I have heard from my classmates and my own experience, the most common causes of missing marks are errors in recording or data entry, misplacement of answer scripts, and misplaced or lost exam records (Second Year Student, 2023).

The impact of missing marks on students was also discussed, with the students suggesting that missing marks can be demotivating and impact their overall academic performance and career prospects. Additionally, missing marks can lead to unfair treatment of students, especially if the missing marks are not addressed in a timely or transparent manner.

The consequences of missing marks for students were significant and included delayed graduation, additional academic penalties, financial implications such as paying for repeat examinations and damage to their academic records and future career prospects. Students expressed frustration and anxiety over missing marks, which could impact their mental health and academic performance.

How does missing marks affect students and their academic performance?

- Missing marks can be really demotivating for students. It makes them doubt their abilities and can lead to a decrease in confidence, which can impact their overall academic performance. It can also affect their career prospects if they need certain grades to pursue specific careers (Third Year Student, 2023).

In your opinion, what measures should universities take to prevent missing marks?

- Universities should have better systems in place to prevent missing marks. This includes having proper documentation and record-keeping procedures, investing in technologies that can reduce the likelihood of errors in data entry and recording, and ensuring that answer scripts are not misplaced or lost (Fourth Year Student, 2023).

The findings also indicated that Universities should have clear and transparent procedures for addressing missing marks, such as allowing students to request for re-marking or rechecking of their answer scripts, providing explanations for missing marks and ensuring timely and accurate communication with students.

The study found out that one of the biggest challenges that universities face in addressing missing marks is the lack of resources and funding. It can be expensive to invest in the technologies and personnel needed to prevent and address missing marks. Another challenge is the sheer volume of students and exams, which can make it difficult to keep track of all the records and answer scripts.

The opinion of students was also sort on the impact of missing marks in their future career, they indicated that Missing marks can have a significant impact on a student's future career prospects, especially if the grades are needed to pursue specific careers. It can limit their options and prevent them from pursuing certain paths.

- Missing marks can unnecessarily prolong our stay in this university. You will find that some of our colleagues we completed high school with have already graduated and some are working as we are busy moving up and down tracking our missing marks (FGDs, Second Years Students 2023).

Do you think that missing marks can lead to unfair treatment of students?

- Yes, I think that missing marks can lead to unfair treatment of students, especially if the missing marks are not addressed in a timely or transparent manner. Students may feel like they are being treated unfairly or that their efforts are not being acknowledge (FGDs, Second Years Students 2023).

Overall, the findings suggest that missing marks can have far-reaching consequences for both students and universities. To address this issue, universities should implement measures to prevent missing marks, such as improving communication and ensuring accuracy in grading systems. They should also adopt best practices for addressing missing marks when they occur, such as prompt and transparent communication with affected students and clear policies and procedures for addressing complaints.

How can universities improve their processes to ensure that missing marks do not occur in the future?

- Universities can improve their processes by investing in better technologies and personnel, improving documentation and record-keeping procedures, and implementing clear and transparent procedures for addressing missing marks(FGDs, Third Years Students 2023)

Another student indicated that:

- I think that missing marks are a serious issue that needs to be addressed by universities. It can be really demotivating for students, and it can impact their academic performance and career prospects. Universities need to take this issue seriously and invest in the resources needed to prevent and address missing marks (Interview Third Year Student, 2023).

The findings from the FGD questions posed to university examination officers in Kenya reveal some interesting insights into the causes and consequences of missing marks in universities.

Firstly, examination officers reported various causes of missing marks, including technical errors in the grading system, human error during data entry or record-keeping, lost or misplaced exam records, and delays in releasing exam results. These findings suggest that missing marks can arise from both technical and human factors and underscore the need for robust administrative and technical systems to prevent such occurrences.

Secondly, examination officers reported that missing marks occur relatively infrequently in their universities, but when they do occur, they can be challenging to address. This finding implies that universities need to have robust processes and systems in place to address missing marks effectively and in a timely manner to minimize the negative consequences for students and the university's reputation.

Thirdly, examination officers highlighted the negative consequences of missing marks, such as student demotivation, academic performance setbacks, and reputational damage to the university. These findings suggest that universities need to take missing marks seriously and implement measures to prevent their occurrence and address them promptly if they do occur.

Fourthly, examination officers identified challenges associated with addressing missing marks, such as the volume of records to be checked, technical difficulties, and the potential for human error. These findings suggest that universities need to invest in modern technology and training to ensure that personnel are well-equipped to manage grading systems and processes effectively.

Fifthly, examination officers reported that their universities are taking measures to prevent missing marks, such as investing in modern technology, ensuring that personnel are well-trained in data management

and administration, and conducting regular audits and reviews of grading systems. These findings suggest that universities are aware of the risks associated with missing marks and are taking proactive steps to address them.

Finally, examination officers indicated that collaboration with other stakeholders, such as faculty members and IT professionals, is crucial in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the grading system. These findings suggest that effective communication, regular training, and collaboration among stakeholders can help to minimize the risk of missing marks and ensure that all stakeholders are working towards the same goal.

Table 1. EXERPTS from FGDs WITH Examination Officers in Selected Universities on Causes and Consequences of Missing Marks.

Respondents' suggestion	Respondents Voice
Causes of Missing Marks	The causes of missing marks in this university technical errors in the grading system, human error during data entry or record-keeping, lost or misplaced exam records, and delays in releasing exam results. (FGD with exam officers in a selected university)
University Reputation	For a university to continue attracting students on the programmes it offers, it needs to have robust processes and systems in place to address missing marks effectively and in a timely manner to minimize the negative consequences for students and the university's reputation (FGD with exam officers in a selected university)
Negative consequences of missing marks	Some of the negative consequences of missing marks include demotivation, academic performance setbacks, and reputational damage to the university (FGD with exam officers in a selected university)
Challenges in addressing missing marks	So far the challenges we have noted in this university addressing missing marks include, the big volume of records to be checked, technical difficulties, and the potential for human error (FGD with examination officers in a selected university)
Measure to address missing.	I think some of the measures to address missing marks are, investing in modern technology, ensuring that personnel are well-trained in data management and administration, and conducting regular audits and reviews of grading systems (FGD with exam officers in a selected university)
Collaboration with other stakeholders	There are also very important stakeholders that we can collaborate with, such as faculty members and IT professionals. This is crucial in ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the grading system (FGD with Examination Officers in a Selected University).

Source (Author, 2023)

The findings from the FGD questions posed to University Examination Officers in Kenya highlighted the need for universities to have robust administrative and technical systems in place to prevent missing marks and address them promptly if they occur. Effective collaboration among stakeholders, investment in modern technology and training, and the implementation of best practices and policies can help to minimize the negative consequences of missing marks for both students and universities.

IV.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, missing marks in Kenyan universities are a significant issue that can have significant consequences for both students and the universities. This study has revealed that administrative errors, technical issues, and academic misconduct are common causes of missing marks. The consequences of missing marks for students include delayed graduation, additional academic penalties, financial implications, and damage to their academic records and future career prospects. The consequences for universities include damage to their reputation and potential legal challenges from students.

To prevent and address missing marks, universities should implement measures such as improving communication and ensuring accuracy in grading systems. They should also adopt best practices for addressing missing marks when they occur, such as prompt and transparent communication with affected students and clear policies and procedures for addressing complaints.

This study contributes to the existing knowledge on missing marks in Kenyan universities and provides insights for policy and practice. By addressing the issue of missing marks, universities can ensure academic integrity, fairness, and quality, and improve the overall student experience.

V.   Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to address the issue of missing marks in Kenyan universities:

i.   Improve communication between lecturers and examiners to ensure accuracy in grading and prevent missing marks.
ii.   Provide training and support to examiners and administrative staff to ensure they understand the grading system and procedures for recording grades.
iii. Enhance the technology infrastructure for grading and ensure that the systems are reliable and secure.

iv. Establish clear policies and procedures for addressing missing marks, including prompt communication with affected students and the provision of clear information on the steps that will be taken to address the issue.

v. Conduct regular audits of the grading system to identify and address any issues or errors.

vi. Provide support and counseling services for affected students to mitigate the negative impacts of missing marks on their mental health and academic performance.

vii. Increase awareness among students and faculty members about the importance of accurate grading and the consequences of academic misconduct.

viii. Foster a culture of academic integrity and ethical behavior among students and faculty members.

By implementing these recommendations, universities can prevent and effectively address the issue of missing marks, thereby improving the overall quality and fairness of the academic experience for students.

Declaration of Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author's Information

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