

Delayed Completion of Graduate Studies: An Assessment of the Growing Academic Demands

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ABSTRACT

Graduate programmes are necessary in training and equipping graduate students with skills relevant to the current and emerging demands of life. As much as a number of students enroll for graduate studies, graduation rates in these programmes are generally lower than expected. This study used survey research design to establish reasons behind the delayed completion of graduate studies amongst graduate students, at Masters and PhD levels, enrolled in Kenya's universities. The study established the average fee to be Ksh. 412,456 and Ksh. 771,031 for Masters and PhD studies, respectively. Some students: were not assigned supervisors; could not submit their theses for examination; and differed coursework due to inability to raise school fees, all contributing to a stall in their academic journeys. About 34.5% of the respondents reported that completion of their graduate studies was affected by work-related demands. Some students opined that they took unpaid leaves so as to create time for studies; others indicated that they had little time for data collection and theses writing; while others found it a tall order to obtain study leaves from their employers. About 52% and 32% of the respondents met their academic supervisors on rare and irregular basis, respectively, thus delaying their graduation. Majority of students with multiple supervisors indicated that they met them separately (72%), with the rest meeting them jointly. Attempts to jointly meet supervisors escalated the cost of study to some students. Some students delayed their graduation because of: supervisors wanting them to take up topics of the supervisor, and not student, interest; helping supervisors with their errands as their academic work stayed on halt; supervisors not responding to their communication; and disagreements between the supervisors. Clearly, completion of graduate studies is, to an extent, affected by financial constraints, work-related obligations, and academic supervisor demands. There is need to lay down support mechanism for students who are in dire need for academic funding, conduct refresher courses on the role of academic supervisors, invest in hybrid academic supervision, and stick to supervision guidelines in case of disagreement between supervisors.

Keywords: Graduate studies' completion; Financial constraints; Work-related demands; Academic supervisor(s) demands

INTRODUCTION

The field of academic is characterized by students who enroll for various certificate, diploma, and degree courses based on various reasons. Such reasons are determined by an individual, family, peer-influence, career aspiration, corporate market demand, and practical considerations, including location of an institution and cost and funding of a given academic programme. Styliano (2024) advised students to consider the following factors when choosing a degree course: course content and structure; teaching and assessment; length of the course and qualifications gained; professional accreditation and recognition; entry requirements and suitability; cost and funding; and research. There are, generally, stipulated time periods in which one is expected to complete their postgraduate studies: 2 years at Master level and 3 years at PhD level. However, a substantial proportion of students miss on these timelines for various reasons. Data from Kenya's Commission for University Education (CUE) indicate that, in the 2022/2023 Academic Year, there were 520767, 30075, and 7581 students enrolled for Bachelors, Masters and PhD academic programmes in Kenya's universities. This

translated to a Bachelor: Master: PhD enrolment ratio of 78:4:1. However, the graduation rates in the graduate programmes (Masters and PhD) were lower than expected. Of the total 73625 graduands in that academic year, 3320 and 741 were at Master and PhD levels, respectively.

Various studies have been conducted to expose reasons for the delayed completion of graduate studies. On the global scale, Begum et al. (2024) found out that the slow rate of postgraduate degree completion was significantly explained by personal factors, funding constraints, the student-supervisor relationship and institutional factors. In the East African region, Mkhai (2023) established that students' failure to comprehend comments from supervisors; poor relationships between students and supervisors; multiple roles; poor research environments; incompetence in research skills; and financial constraints to significantly contribute to delayed completion of graduate studies at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Locally, Muthiani (2022) found research skills, supervision and institutional factors as the major determinants of completion time among regular postgraduate students at Kenyatta University's School of Education. These studies however failed to examine if there existed any relationship between work-related issues and completion of graduate studies, given that a majority of graduate students are likely to be engaged in the job market. Further, Muthiani (2022) did not assess the influence of financial stability on completion rates of graduate studies.

Evidently, studies exist on the factors behind the slow completion rate of graduate academic programmes (Begum et al., 2024; Rop & Mibei, 2024; Mkhai, 2023; Muthiani, 2022). However, most of these studies were based on a single institution and/or school, making results generalization difficult. Further, limited studies have been able to assess the contribution of financial constraints, work-related demands, and academic supervisor demands on the completion of graduate studies, both at Master and PhD levels. It is at this backdrop that the current study set out to establish reasons behind the delayed completion of graduate studies amongst graduate students at Masters and PhD levels enrolled in Kenya's universities. Specifically, the study sought to: (1) find out the influence of financial constraints on completion of graduate studies; (2) examine the influence of work-related demands on completion of graduate studies; (3) assess the influence of academic supervisor demands on completion of graduate studies. Further, the study considered the effect of institutional administration and family-related issues on completion of graduate studies; support needed to fast-track completion of graduate studies; and whether one would recommend the course programme and institution to other people. An understanding of the interplay of these factors on graduate academic journeys communicates to the relevant quarters on possible mitigation measures to avert the stall in graduate studies. For universities, the success of their degree programmes, the quality of their students, and their reputation depends on their students' ability to complete their degrees on time (Sverdlik et al., 2018; Vidak et al., 2017).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Pursuing graduate studies and degree is a significant and crucial stage in an individual's academic journey, representing an in-depth expertise of the subject matter and a gateway to numerous career opportunities (Begum et al., 2024). Completion of graduate studies is the desire of every potential candidate who sets out to enroll for a graduate studies' course. However, completion rates vary from an individual candidate to the other, based on a catalogue of factors. Existing literature documents various pathways through which financial (in)stability, job-related demands, and academic supervisor demands work directly or indirectly to determine the ability of a candidate to complete their graduate studies.

Studies have found funding constraints to contribute to the slow rate of graduate degree completion (Begum et al., 2024; Mkhai, 2023; Mosanya et al., 2022). A study by Mugendi & Githae (2021) found financial issues to be the leading factor in the non-completion of students' graduate degrees in public universities in Kenya. This points out that delayed completion of graduate studies can lead to some students opting to drop out of the programme.

Generally, majority of graduate students are employed: self, public, private. A study by Begum et al. (2024) reported that about 6 out of every 10 graduate students were employed, with their salaries the leading source of academic financing. Muthiani (2022) found out that about 76 percent of the respondents were employed despite pursuing their graduate studies on a regular/full-time basis. The study further noted that some of the students that were unemployed had lost their jobs after their study leaves expired before completion of their

graduate studies. Studies have found a significant relationship between work-related duties and completion of graduate studies (Rop & Mibei, 2024). Inability to balance between work and project/thesis/dissertation research leaves one with less time available for research leading to slow rate of completion of graduate studies (Begum et al., 2024; Sulandari et al., 2020).

Research-based graduate studies require that a student completes a research project/thesis/dissertation under the supervision of a research supervisor(s) (Begum et al., 2024). Supervisor role includes mentoring, coaching, guiding and advising students (Nulty et al., 2009). According to Mosanya et al. (2022), supervisor-student relationship and the commitment of the supervisor to the research topic are the main factors that can support timely completion of postgraduate studies. Elsewhere, Gill and Burnard (2009) documented the primary determinant of student success to be the effectiveness of the working relationship between the student and the supervisor(s). This is worsened in cases of co-supervision and more so when supervisors disagree on some issues or when they provide conflicting advice (Chiappetta & Watt, 2011). On their side, Emilsson and Johnsson (2002) identified inadequate supervision as the main factor behind untimely completion of graduate studies. Poor supervision, delayed feedback from supervisors on student's work, and inadequate technical guidance from supervisors negatively influences completion of graduate studies (Ndayambaje, 2018; de Valero, 2001). Negative feedback from supervisors can create negative relationship between students and their supervisors leading to loss of student's self-esteem (Netshitangani & Machaisa, 2021) which ultimately influences the success of their academic journeys.

METHODOLOGY

Data source

The study data were obtained from both Master and PhD graduates and on-going graduate studies' students enrolled at either Master or PhD level in universities in Kenya. Students at both public and private universities were involved in this study. Data were collected from March through to May 2025.

Research design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. According to Oso and Onen (2009), such a design describes and explains events as they are, as they were, and as they will be. Further, survey research design enables a researcher to describe data, explain data, and explore ideas and insights about the subject under study (Russell, 1996). On their side, Haslam and McGarty (2014) hypothesized that the design enables one to obtain information about different variables in which the researcher is interested to identify existing relationships between them.

Method of data collection

Structured, google-form questionnaire was used to gather information. A link to the digital questionnaire was shared with the targeted respondents electronically who, after filling the responses, automatically transmitted the data into a google drive database. This study employed snowball sampling to access participants especially post graduates who would ordinarily be on campus.

Data captured on the questionnaires included date of enrolment, expected date of completion, programme fee, type of funding, employment status, regularity of meeting academic supervisors, presence of university administrative and family issues on one's academic journey, and whether one would recommend the course and institution to someone else. These data were relevant in answering the objectives of the study.

Validity and reliability tests

Validity was ensured by conducting a pilot study that ascertained the suitability, and guided the amendment, of the data collection tool. The respondents, sourced from the target population, that were engaged in the pilot study were excluded from the final sample.

Internal consistency reliability test was done, yielding a Cronbach's alpha mean value of 0.7486 with a

Cochran's Q value of 15.937 at $p = 0.001$. The inter-item correlation matrix considered the following study variables: delayed graduation; financial constraints affected completion of studies; work-related demands affected completion of studies; and academic supervisor demands affected completion of studies.

Table 1 ANOVA with Cochran reliability test

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cochran's Q	Sig
Between People		98.763	56	1.764		
Within People	Between Items	26.702	3	8.901	15.937	0.001
	Residual	259.798	168	1.546		
	Total	286.500	171	1.675		
Total		385.263	227	1.697		
Grand Mean = .7486						

Data analysis

Data were analysed on the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive analysis involved frequencies, mean, standard deviation and cross-tabulation while inferential analysis involved t-test statistic. Qualitative data were analysed by creating relevant themes and patterns in relation to the study objectives.

FINDINGS

Background information

Data were obtained from respondents as pertained to their sex, age, type of graduate degree programme, whether they had completed their graduate studies, and whether they were employed at the time of their graduate studies. Findings on these background characteristics were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondent's demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Respondent's sex	Male	238	62.07
	Female	146	37.93
Respondent's age in years*	25-29	54	14.04
	30-34	115	29.82
	35-39	67	17.54
	40-44	101	26.32
	45+	47	12.28
Graduate degree programme	Masters	278	72.41
	PhD	106	27.59
If completed graduate degree programme	Yes	205	53.39
	No	179	46.61
If employed at the time of graduate studies	Yes	291	75.86

	No	93	24.14
TOTAL		384	100

* Values not adding up to 384 because of missing response

Results in Table 2 showed that majority of the respondents were male (62.07%), aged 30-34 years (29.82%), pursuing master degree programme (72.41%), had completed their graduate studies (53.39%), and employed at the time of graduate studies (75.86%). Generally, majority of graduate students are male and below the age of 45 years. As age increases, people tend not to see the need of spending time doing classwork but instead concentrate on building up families and preparing for retirement. Transition from undergraduate to master level of studies generally outweighs transition from master level to PhD level. As much as about 53.39 percent of the respondents had completed their graduate studies, some reported having completed beyond the expected timelines. It is not abnormal that majority of the respondents were working at the time of their graduate studies. Beyond undergraduate level, majority of people work to not only fend for themselves and their dependents but also to be in a position to finance their further studies.

Effect of financial constraints on completion of graduate studies

The first objective of the study was to find out the influence of financial constraints on completion of graduate studies. To answer this, the respondents gave information on various data point; *fee charged for graduate studies*; *source of financing for graduate studies*; *effect of graduate studies' fee on completion time*. Findings on the cost of graduate studies were as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Cost of graduate studies in universities in Kenya

	Level	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Masters	865,000	150,000	412,456	170,597
2	PhD	1,500,000	507,000	771,031	285,115

As shown in Table 3, average fee for master's degree was Ksh. 412,456, with the highest and lowest charging institutions at Ksh. 865,000 and Ksh.150,000, respectively. The standard deviation of Ksh. 170,597 meant that the variation in the average fee charged outweighed the amount charged at the lowest-charging institution. The reported average fee for a PhD programme was Ksh. 771,031, the highest reported fee being Ksh. 1,500,000 and the lowest being Ksh. 507,000. The standard deviation of Ksh. 285,115 pointed to the wide gap in the amount of fee charged between the highest- and the lowest-charging institutions yet in the same country.

Findings on the source of finances for the graduate studies were as shown in Figure 1.

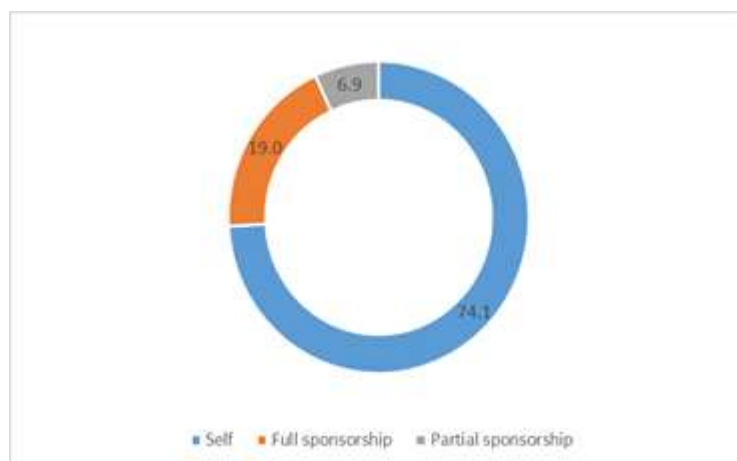


Figure 1 Source of funding for graduate studies

As show in Figure 1, almost 74.1 percent of the respondents did not enjoy external funding - they paid fees from their own savings or was paid for by their parents/guardians. About 19 percent of the respondents were on full sponsorship while another 6.9 percent were on partial sponsorship. The main source of funding for those who reported as having had a sponsorship was by the institution/ university of study. Some universities offer sponsorships/scholarships to students who graduate with first class honors at undergraduate level and to their staffs' nuclear families who enroll for studies in the affected universities.

Respondents were asked if the cost of graduate studies affected completion time of their graduate studies. The findings were presented in Figure 2.

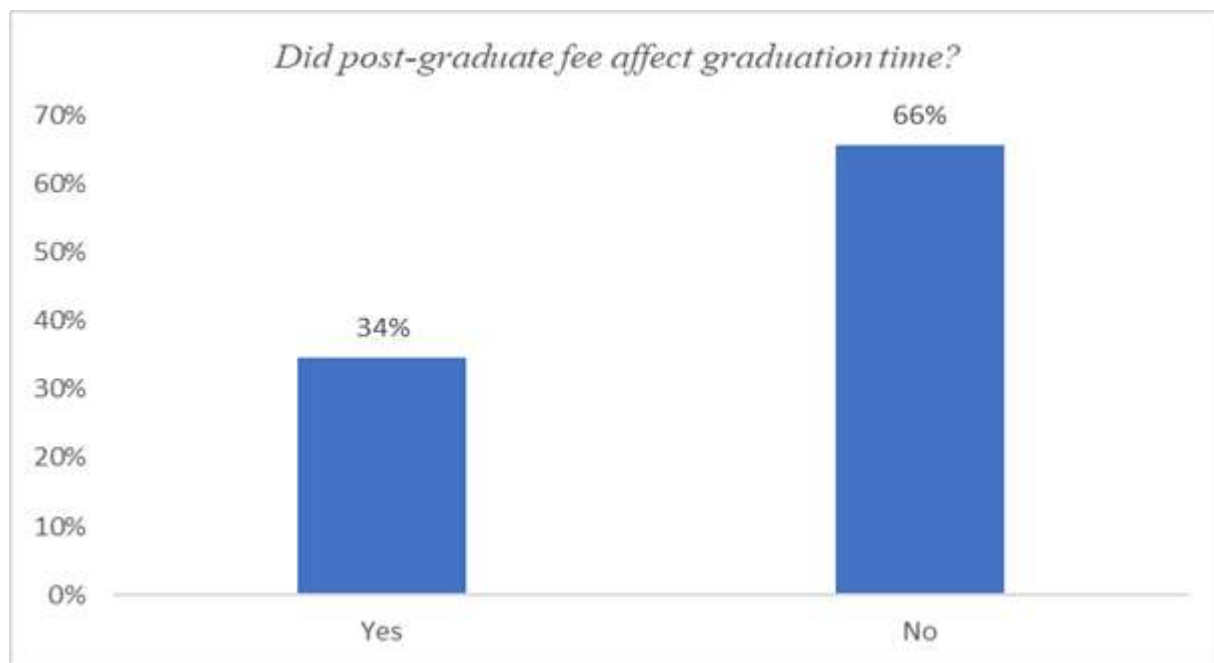


Figure 2 Effect of fee charged on completion time of graduate studies

Results in Figure 2 indicated that about two-thirds (66%) of the respondents reported that the cost of graduate studies was not a reason for the delayed completion. The 34 percent of the respondents who reported that graduate studies' fee was a reason for delayed completion stated that insufficient funds led to delayed milestones like being barred from taking examinations and challenges in financing research project/thesis/dissertation and industrial attachment. Qualitative data on this subject included: *"I could not submit thesis for examination before clearance of fee"* - PhD student; *"I have no money to carry out research"* - PhD student; *"The fee is a lot, many unnecessary charges like attachment fee.... I was required to pay Ksh. 30,000 attachment fee"* - Master Student; *"I was to graduate last year but I submitted my thesis late because I lacked fees"* - PhD student.

In some instances, the students had to take a break from school to garner funds to pay fee required in order to progress to the next level. Part of the responses related to this were: *"I deferred whenever fee was inadequate. I stalled for five years since I could not manage to raise the required amount"* - PhD student; *"Inability to pay a given percentage of fee would amount to differing certain units and thus prolonging the duration of study"* - Master student; *"Because of lack of enough funds, I was not assigned a supervisor thus I delayed in project work"* - Master student. Even where the graduate studies were sponsored, an interruption in the funding program was tantamount to delayed completion of the studies: *"I had funding from USAID, which has now been terminated"* - PhD student.

Effect of work-related demands on completion of graduate studies

To assess the effect of work-related demands on completion of graduate studies, the respondents responded to question on various data points as follows: *employment status during graduate studies; if employed, effect of employment on graduate studies, and the reasons thereof*. Findings were as presented in Figures 3 and 4.

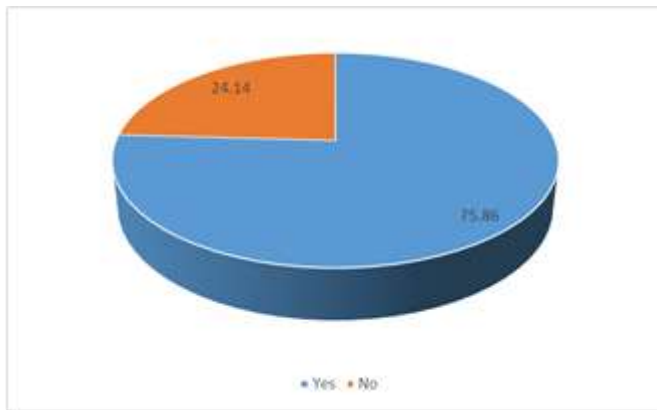


Figure 3 If employment affected completion

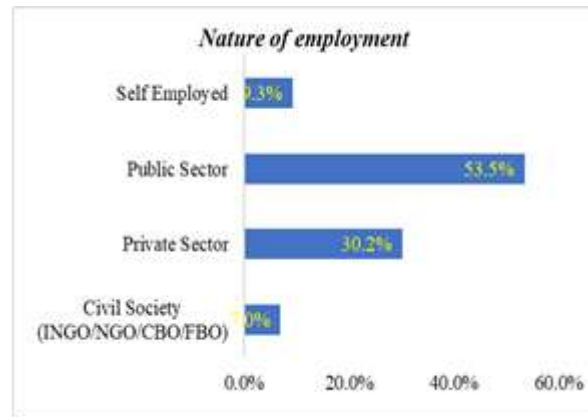


Figure 4 Nature of employment during graduate studies

Results in Figure 3 showed that about 75.86 percent of the respondents reported that their employment contributed to delayed completion of their graduate studies. Of them that were employed, about 9.3 percent were self-employed, another 7 percent, 53.5 percent and 30.2 percent were employed in civil society, public and private sectors, respectively (Figure 4).

Time for work-related demands was in high competition with time to study, and especially time dedicated to dissertation/project/thesis work. Verbatim responses on this issue included: *“I had to take an unpaid leave from work due to insufficient time for studies and thesis”* - Masters student; *“My working time was from 6.00 am to 6.00 pm, very demanding, leaving me with little time to collect data and write the thesis”* - Masters student. Some of the respondents opted for a study leave, while some of them had the same denied, forcing them to take an unpaid leave: *“Getting permission or a study leave is a tall order....Juggling between work and study is not easy....it was not possible to get a paid leave for PhD studies”* - PhD student.

Effect of academic supervisor(s) demands on completion of graduate studies

Respondents were asked on the number of supervisors assigned to them, how often they met with their supervisors, and whether they met their supervisors separately or as a team, for them that had multiple supervisors. Findings on the number of supervisors assigned to a graduate student were as presented in Figure 5.

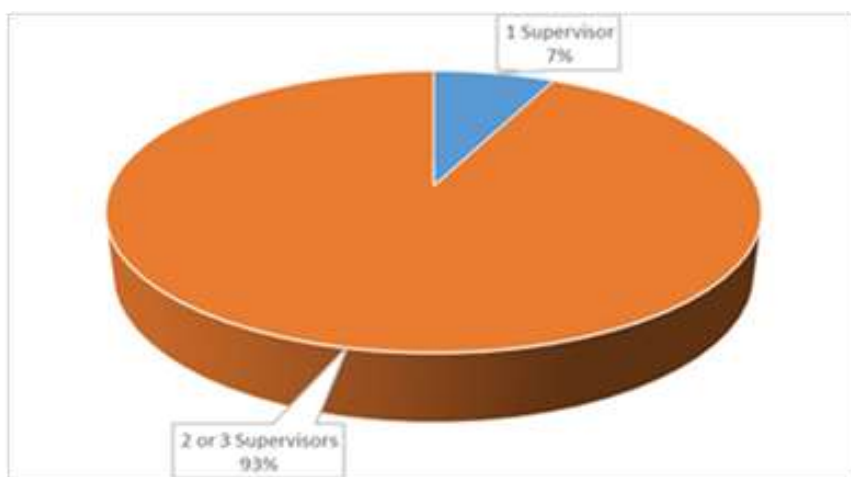


Figure 5 Number of supervisors assigned to a graduate student

Results in Figure 5 indicated that about 93 out of every 100 graduate students had multiple (2 to 3) supervisors who guided them through Dissertation/Project/Thesis work. Generally, it is preferred to have multiple supervisors assigned to a graduate student where one supervisor is supposed to be a specialist in the study area

while the other supervisor is supposed to be an authority in research skills especially data collection, analysis, presentation and dissemination.

Results on student-supervisor engagement versus graduation time were as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Student-supervisor(s) engagement versus graduation time

Frequency of meeting with supervisor(s)	Graduated on time		Delayed in graduation	
	(n = 205)		(n = 133)	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Irregularly	60	29.03	47	35.00
Rarely	46	22.58	13	10.00
Regularly	99	48.39	73	55.00
Supervisors' meeting arrangement (in case of multiple supervisors)	Graduated on time		Delayed in graduation	
	(n = 192)		(n = 119)	
Meet all as a Team	33	17.24	53	44.44
Meet them separately	159	82.76	66	55.56

As shown in Table 4, among the respondents who reported having experience delayed completion of graduate studies, about 45 percent reported that they either rarely or irregularly met with their academic supervisors. Over half of the respondents who delayed completing their graduate studies (about 55.56%) reported that they separately met their academic supervisors.

Further, chi-square test analysis was carried out to ascertain the magnitude of the effect of academic supervisor demands on completion of graduate studies. The results were as presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Results of chi-square test analysis on the effect of supervisor demands on completion of graduate studies

Variable name	%	χ^2	p
Number of academic supervisors			
1	5.26	1.664	0.797
At least 2	94.74		
Frequency of meeting with supervisors			
Irregular	35.00	5.725	0.021
Rarely	10.00		
Regular	55.00		
Supervisor meeting arrangement			
Met as a team	44.44	6.639	0.036
Met separately	55.56		

Results in Table 5 indicated that, of the three factors under academic supervisor demands, both frequency of meeting with supervisors ($\chi^2 = 5.725$; $p = 0.021$) and supervisor meeting arrangement were significantly related to delayed completion of graduate studies ($\chi^2 = 6.639$; $p = 0.036$).

Challenges emanating from engagement with the academic supervisors were many and diverse. Respondents reported that where more than one supervisor was involved, having one meeting amongst all the supervisors was a challenge. Further, each supervisor acted independent of the other, with the learner caught up in between multiple academic giants with diverse ideas, especially for the supervision of the Dissertation/Project/Thesis work. The students thus suffered the struggle of harmonizing diverse feedbacks for the same topic tantamount to waste of study time. Also reported was delayed response from some of the supervisors: *“I share my work with supervisors as a team but they share their corrections and comments separately. I end up with three documents to read, with some of the comments/corrections contradicting. It is difficult to meet with them physically”* - Masters student; *“I suffered irregular assessment of the proposal because of lack of cooperation between the two supervisors”* - Masters student; *“I was assigned two supervisors and only one of them is responding to my emails and texts”* - Masters student.

Some of the student could not bring their supervisors to a round table – either virtually or physically – thus, they had to incur costs of travelling to meet the supervisors for consultation. This resulted in both time and cost implications on the progress in graduate studies: *“Inability to meet the supervisors in one pool escalate the cost of study; differing opinions on a concept prolongs duration of study and at times challenge of consensus on progress of the study”* - Masters student.

Also reported was delay due to student deviation from the core business of graduate studies, into other assignments as given by the supervisors: *“I get involved in helping my supervisors with other academic and non-academic errands, causing delay in my work”* - PhD student. It is amazing to note that some of the delays were because of supervisors imposing research topics on the students, thus causing a push-pull tag of war: *“Thesis supervisor wanting me to take a topic of his own interest delayed my topic alignment”* - Masters student.

Key factors affecting completion of graduate studies

Regression analysis was done to assess the net effect of the exposure variables on completion of graduate studies. Results were as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6 Results of regression analysis on the effect of exposure variables on the outcome variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	β	S.E.	β	t-statistic	p
If university fee affected completion time	0.208	0.761	0.041	0.273	0.786
If employment affected completion time	1.253	0.745	0.250	1.683	0.009
If academic supervisors affected completion time	-0.940	0.890	-0.165	-1.056	0.296
Model summary	R = 0.322; R ² = 0.103; Adjusted R ² = 0.033				

From Table 6, the study learnt that work demands significantly affected completion of graduate studies, net of university fee and academic supervisor demands. The study found out that employment positively affected completion of graduate studies (t = 1.683; p = 0.009). Despite being insignificant, university fee positively affected (t = 0.273; p = 0.786) while academic supervisors negatively affected (t = -1.056; p = 0.296) completion of graduate studies. Generally, about 10.3% of delayed completion of graduate studies was explained by university fee, work-related demands, and academic supervisor demands.

Effect of institutional administration and family-related issues on completion of graduate studies

On a five Likert scale, the study respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on how university administrative and family issues contributed to delayed completion of their graduate studies. The findings were as presented in Table 7.

Table 7 University administration and family issues contributed to delay in completion of graduate studies

	University admin. cause delay	Family issues cause delay
	Percent	Percent
Strongly Agree or Agree	36.96	47.83
Neutral	19.57	19.57
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	43.48	32.61
TOTAL	100	100

From Table 7, the study realized that about 36.96 percent of the respondents had some level of agreement that the university administration contributed to the delay in completion of graduate studies. On the other hand, about 43.48 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the university administration contributed to the delay of completion of graduate studies. When asked to comment about the effect of family-related issues on completion of graduate studies, about 47.83 of the respondents agreed, while another 32.61 percent disagreed, to some extent, that family-related issues contributed to the delay in the completion of graduate studies. About a fifth of the respondents were impartial on the same.

Support needed to fast-track completion of graduate studies

The respondents were asked to give suggestions on how a timely graduate degree programme completion may be achieved. Some respondents observed that the board of graduate studies checks on the supervisors' participation to ensure that students receive feedback on a timely manner. Where more than one supervisor is involved, there is need to have a lead supervisor or encouraging a meeting around the table to ensure that comments from the entire team are consolidated before they are passed on to the student. A verbatim response from a respondent was: *"Fast track Project/Thesis supervisors' cooperation and dedication; an opportunity to present my thesis to the Board of Postgraduate Studies has delayed by over a month"* - Masters student.

Study participants also suggested arrangement for financial support to benefit students who have a challenge of raising the required fee. While this was more pronounced among self-sponsored students, those who enjoyed funding were of similar opinion especially where the enjoyed funding was terminated. Termination of funding simply meant that an affected student digs deeper in their pockets to finance their graduate studies or drops out of the graduate programme.

Study participants also emphasized the importance of guidance and counseling, addressing matters academia, financial and mental well-being. Institutions of graduate studies are well-positioned to not only offer academic services but also ensure a holistic development of the students. Some respondents opined that: *"Counselling on how to balance family issues and personal interests would really help us stay on academic course"* - Masters student; *"Organize workshops for enhanced research skills training, give time for personal development, review pay upwards"* - Masters student.

Often, students enroll for graduate studies while engaged in economic activities – either formally employed or self-employed. Among the challenges mentioned was time constraint and increased cost of transport where the students have to commute from work to attend classes or meet their academic supervisors. Participants suggested a hybrid of both physical and virtual classes, as well as considering evening and weekend classes so as to ensure full participation for all the students: *"Consider a hybrid of on-line and physical classes to cater for all kinds of students"* - Masters student.

Students who felt that the institution administration did not clearly communicate what was expected of them felt inconvenienced. This more so touched on communication on the fee charges, including additional charges incurred during research work, industrial attachment, timelines and other information about the course taken in general. They further suggested more engagement in feedback fora between students and the administration

and university research activities to sharpen their research skills. They respondent: *"We need prompt issuance of the information especially in the line with the area of study"* – Masters student; *"Doing postgraduate meet-ups with departments' staffs.....electronic messaging as reminders; involving students in research works and scholarly workshops"* - Masters student.

Would you recommend the course and institution to other people?

When asked if they would recommend their graduate studies' institutions to others, about 77 out of every 100 participants said that they would recommend. Reasons for the positive response being reputation of the institution, competence of lecturers who were applauded for thorough coursework coverage and support during research work, availability of required facilities and ease of getting funding. Some of the verbatim responses were: *"An epicenter for excellence in computing and modelling current IT industry domain requirements"*; *"It is a well-known institution and the program is quite marketable"*; *"Lecturer to student ratio at the university is manageable making it easier to be in touch with the lecturers thus enhancing learning"*; *"Presence of world-leading researchers, details notes, and book availability, good digital learning"*.

Reasons for recommendation of the graduate course programme mainly touched on the ease of getting jobs after graduation. They included: *"With a growing concern of food safety and agricultural production, my institution is at the forefront leading innovations and solution to agriculture and food safety/security"*; *"It is a marketable course with hands-on skills and solving real geographical problems in the society"*; *"Horticulture is the future of Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa and even if I personally don't have a job yet I believe opportunities for work and entrepreneurship are numerous in this sector"*.

DISCUSSION

This was a survey research study that sought to establish reasons behind delayed completion of graduate studies amongst graduate students at Masters and PhD levels enrolled in Kenya's universities. On the influence of financial constraints on completion of graduate studies, the study learned that the mean amount of fee charged was Ksh. 412,456 and Ksh. 771,031 at masters and PhD levels, respectively. Majority of the students were self-sponsored (74.1%) while the rest (25.9%) were on any kind of sponsorship. About 34 in every 100 students reported that the schooling fee was the reason behind the delayed completion of their graduate studies as it acted as a barrier against taking examinations, funding research work and industrial attachment. These findings are consistent to findings of other studies (Begum et al., 2024; Mkhai, 2023; Mosanya et al., 2022; Mugendi & Githae, 2021) which documented that funding constraints contributed to the slow rate of graduate degree completion. Further, Mugendi and Githae (2021) attributed non-completion of graduate degrees to financial challenges. The finding that majority of the respondents were self-sponsored explained why they were in dire need of the money to meet their academic financial demands.

As pertained to the influence of work-related demands on completion of graduate studies, the study learned that all graduate students were in some sort of employment: 53.5% in public sector; 30.2% in private sector; 9.3% in self-employment; and 7% in civil society. Over three-quarters of the graduate students reported work-related demands as a player in the delayed completion of their graduate studies. Indeed, net of all other factors, employment status was found to be a significant explainer of delayed completion of graduate studies ($t = 1.683$; $r^2 = 0.103$; $p = 0.009$). Previous studies found a significant relationship between work-related duties and completion of graduate studies in that the slow rate of completion of graduate studies was related to inability to balance between employment and studies (Begum et al., 2024; Rop & Mibei, 2024; Sulandari et al., 2020).

Most graduate students had multiple supervisors (93%). Of them that delayed to graduate, about 52 in every 100 met their supervisors regularly, while another 56 percent met them separately. Frequency of meeting academic supervisors ($\chi^2 = 5.725$; $p = 0.021$) and supervisor meeting arrangements ($\chi^2 = 6.639$; $p = 0.036$) significantly contributed to delayed completion of graduate studies. Irregular and separate meeting of academic supervisors bred challenges: delayed responses; conflicting advises; and increased costs of study. This was in agreement with findings of a study by Chiappetta and Watt (2011) that conflicting advice from co-supervisors delayed completion of graduate studies. Poor and inadequate supervision has been reported elsewhere (Ndayambaje, 2018; Emilsson & Johnsson, 2002; de Valero, 2001) as reasons behind untimely completion of

graduate studies.

Further, about 43.48 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the university administration contributed to the delay of completion of graduate studies. Another 47.83 of the respondents agreed, to some extent, that family-related issues contributed to the delay in the completion of graduate studies. Most of the graduate students indicated that, despite the existing challenges, they would still recommend their study programmes and institutions to other people. Reasons for such recommendation included: reputation of the institution, competence of lecturers who were applauded for thorough coursework coverage and support during research work, availability of required facilities and ease of getting funding while studying in these institutions.

The study was however faced with some limitations. While efficient for recruitment, snowballing is a non-probability method that can introduce selection bias through network-based referrals. Inclusion probabilities are unknown and coverage is likely skewed toward well-connected individuals. Consequently, results should be interpreted as applicable to the study sample and similar contexts rather than the broader population. The study mitigated these risks by initiating multiple diverse seeds, limiting recruits per participant, and reporting recruitment chains and sample characteristics to enhance transparency. The snowballing however allowed the researchers to attain responses from a sample size of 384 as guided by Fisher (1983) formula. Secondly, the survey nature of the study could not capture experiences of a cohort of graduate students, from enrolment to graduation. Such experiences could be better eye-openers to pathways through which financial needs, work-related obligations, and academic supervisor demands influence completion of graduate studies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of the study agreed that completion of graduate studies was, to an extent, affected by financial constraints, work-related obligations, and demands of academic supervisors. Majority of the respondents were working as they pursued their studies so as to meet the financial needs of the institution and their academic programmes. Work-related demands delayed about 34.5 percent of the respondents' graduation, while another 52 percent and 32 percent of the respondents could not graduate on time because of meeting their academic supervisors either rarely or irregularly. Net of all other factors, the study established that employment significantly affected completion of graduate studies ($t = 1.683$; $p = 0.009$).

The study recommends the following: initiation of support mechanism for students who are in dire need for academic funding at graduate level; conducting refresher courses on the role of academic supervisors as some forget with time; reminding academic supervisors to stick to the supervision guidelines; and investing in hybrid academic supervision – physical, virtual, concurrent supervision. To strengthen generalizability of findings, future studies should employ probability-based sampling techniques. A longitudinal study tracking cohort of graduate students right away from admission through to graduation could unearth determinants of delayed graduation that this study might have missed out on them. Moreover, there is need for a qualitative study probing deeper into the power dynamics in the student-supervisor relationship.

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