# Building Resilient Graduates: Moi University's Model for Enhancing Employability and Lifelong Learning in a Dynamic Labour Market

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**Abstract:** This comprehensive tracer study of alumni from Moi University, Kenya, highlights critical insights into graduate employability, revealing a 6% unemployment rate among its graduates, aligning with national averages. The paper underscores the importance of lifelong learning and open education in fostering sustainable economic development and personal growth. It advocates for continuous curriculum updates in collaboration with industry, expanded university-industry linkages through internships and collaborative projects, and the development of transferable skills like critical thinking and the much-needed digital literacy as students progress from campus to their chosen career paths. These strategies aim to enhance graduates' resilience in a rapidly evolving global economy. The study, employing a mixed-methods approach, identified key areas for improvement: enhancing practical skills, integrating technology into education, and strengthening university-industry partnerships. Employability-focused interventions, such as real-world simulations, role-playing, and mentorship programs, proved effective in bridging the gap between academic knowledge and industry expectations. Moi University's model offers actionable recommendations for policymakers and educators, emphasising the alignment of educational systems with labour market needs. By drawing on the Commonwealth of Learning's employability model and through fostering resilient, employable graduates, the university demonstrates the transformative potential of flexible education systems in addressing unemployment, supporting lifelong learning, and driving economic progress in Kenya and beyond.

**Keywords:** employability, graduate employability skills, lifelong learning, tracer study, mentorship

## Introduction

The demographic trajectory of Kenya, as projected by the United Nations (UN), indicates that the population will nearly double within the next three decades (UN, 2024). This rapid growth is likely to exert mounting pressure on higher education institutions to ensure a seamless and efficient transition of graduates into the workforce, thereby mitigating the long-term risks of unemployment. Furthermore, it is clear that graduating from university does not necessarily ensure employability in the context of Kenya (Njeru, 2025). Siringi (2025) found that "over 64% of Kenyan university graduates are reported to lack the job skills set needed by employers". In response to these challenges, Moi University has adopted a proactive model aimed at strengthening the employability and lifelong learning capacity of its students and alumni. Central to this model is the cultivation of robust employer relationships that inform the development of relevant skills aligned with dynamic labour market demands through the various academic programs the university offers.

This paper presents a study with two primary objectives. First, we sought to develop a structured approach to engaging employers, to translate insights from these interactions into a targeted employability skills course. Second, we explored the experiences of Moi University alumni as they navigate their entry into the labour market, thereby identifying essential competencies that support successful transitions. The findings should inform the design of responsive employability

interventions and contribute to the establishment of a sustainable framework that fosters resilience, adaptability, and lifelong learning among graduates in an ever-evolving employment landscape fostered by emerging new technologies.

The research was driven by the following questions:

a. What are the key employability skills demanded by employers, and how effectively are these skills developed through Moi University's academic programmes?
b. How do Moi University alumni perceive the relevance of their qualifications and the adequacy of their preparation for the current labour market?
c. What are the specific gaps that exist between the skills provided by Moi University and those demanded by the labour market, and how can these be effectively bridged through interventions such as internships, industry simulations, and structured mentorships programmes?
d. In what ways can Moi Universityenhance its contribution to lifelong learning and graduate resilience resilience in response to emerging demands of the labour market?

**Theoretical and conceptual framework**

Young people entering the world of work must deal with the challenges of creating a career in a world with decreased employment opportunities and diminished job security, fast-paced changing technologies, and increasing personal responsibility for constant up-skilling, employability, and lifelong learning (Beukes & Coetzee, 2010; Scheuring & Thompson, 2025). These challenges, coupled with global economic downturns and significant population growth, is the current reality facing Moi University students.

The concept of employability has evolved to encompass a broad set of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and attributes that allow individuals to gain, maintain, and move between employment opportunities (Agbu, Olivier & Shadrach, 2025; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) propose the CareerEDGE model of graduate employability, which emphasises emotional intelligence, self-management, career development learning, and generic skills. Coetzee (2008) highlights the role of career meta-competencies, including adaptability, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and proactive career management. Furthermore, research on graduate employability skills are increasing worldwide (cf. Amarathunga et al., 2024).

This paper adopts a broad perspective of employability (McQuaid, Green & Danson, 2005; Mohee, 2019), recognising that it includes not only individual attributes but also external factors such as labour market conditions, social capital, and institutional support. The framework is informed by social constructivist theory, which places premium on collaborative knowledge-building between learners, educators, and the broader society (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Literature Review**

Employability can be described as having a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Beukes, 2009; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Scheuring & Thompson, 2025). For Mohee (2019), employability refers to the combination of "attributes, competencies and skills needed to increase the likelihood of an individual securing gainful employment after completing

a programme of study or training". Coetzee (2008) suggests that in the context of the 21st century, people are regarded as competency traders and their employability depends on their knowledge, transferable skills, experience and attitudes. Employability, therefore, refers not only to a person's ability to secure employment but also their ability to create employment when necessary. Moi University students must transition as quickly as possible into employment, as research indicates that long unemployment experiences at labour force entry may have persistent negative effects on employment probabilities and wages later in life (Neumark, 2007). The longer one is unemployed, the harder it is to reverse the negative psychological effects (Altman, 2007).

Rigopoulou and Kehagias (2008) propose that the current perspectives towards employability are narrow in terms of their goals, in the sense that they focus on the student as an employee- to-be, emphasising those skills that will make the student more competitive when applying for a job, without considering that these skills will not necessarily contribute to their success and happiness in life. Hillage and Pollard (1998) caution that the term employability is used in a variety of contexts with a range of meanings, and can lack clarity and precision as an operational concept. McQuaid, Green and Danson (2005) propose that some researchers and policymakers adopt a narrowly defined supply-side focus, while others adopt a broader perspective on employability.

According to McQuaid et.al. (2005), the broader view focuses upon individuals' employability in terms of their capability to move into new employment within the labour market (such as moving from unemployment into a sustainable job or moving from one job into another) upon completion of their studies. The broad approach incorporates factors such as job search and labour demand conditions, which affect whether a person can find or change employment, as well as the set of employability skills and attributes that are the focus of the narrow supply-side concepts of employability.

**Research Design and Methodology**

This study was grounded in the social constructivist paradigm, aiming to capture a snapshot of key employability skills through collaboration with both the labour market and alumni. It adopted an exploratory approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative element involved collecting and analysing numerical data, or data that can be meaningfully quantified, to provide insights that support the research objectives. This approach enables a deeper understanding of graduate preparedness by drawing on measurable trends and stakeholder perspectives to inform strategies for enhancing employability and lifelong learning. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000).

In addition to the quantitative part of the research, a qualitative approach was employed to gather more open-ended and detailed insights into the importance of key employability skills and the ways in which they could be effectively developed. The study was non-experimental in nature, relying on the collection and analysis of primary data. This meant that the researcher generated new data directly, rather than using pre-existing or secondary sources, allowing for a richer understanding of the subject matter from multiple stakeholder perspectives. (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Non-experimental research methods do not test the causal relationships between variables (Salkind, 2006).

This study was conducted as a cross-sectional survey, in which data collection took place at a single point in time. Participants only completed questionnaires and interviews on one occasion, resulting in a data set that captured a specific moment and perspective, often described as a "snapshot" in time. The decision to adopt a cross-sectional survey design offered several benefits, including relatively low data collection costs, high response rates, and the ability to generate findings and draw conclusions within a short timeframe.

A random sample of 300 Moi University alumni was drawn from three schools across the institution, with representation from both Social Sciences and Natural Sciences disciplines. In addition, convenience sampling was employed to select at least 10 prominent employers or trade associations located in proximity to Moi University campuses. The research questions were formulated to identify the most in-demand employability skills from the labour market perspective and assess the gaps that alumni perceived within their academic training.

Data collection involved two primary methods: online surveys were distributed to the selected alumni, facilitated by the Moi University Institute for Open and Distance E-Learning (IODEL), which managed the distribution of survey links to the alumni sample; and semi-structured interviews were arranged with key employer representatives, and these were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

All responses from alumni and employers were entered into an electronic spreadsheet to prepare for analysis. A thematic analysis approach was employed to interpret the data. The triangulated results were presented through a range of visual and tabular formats, including diagrams, tables, and graphs. The discussion of these findings was structured to provide clarity and coherence, ensuring the analysis effectively conveyed emerging patterns and insights.

The study also considered its limitations and offered recommendations for future research, particularly regarding the need for Moi University to remain agile in updating its employability training offerings in response to changing labour market requirements. The findings were further compared with those of a recent tracer study of Moi University alumni to identify recurring themes and enhance the validity.

The data collection tool was developed in collaboration with the IODEL to ensure its relevance and quality. Once the alumni sample had been identified, IODEL facilitated the survey distribution process. Research questions specifically aimed to explore the employability skills expected of graduates, and how these could be better incorporated into academic programmes to enhance students' readiness for employment.

To ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards, a detailed research plan was submitted to the Moi University Research Office, requesting access to alumni contact information. This process adhered to the stipulations of the Data Protection Act. Following institutional approval, a further application was made to the National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The research was launched upon receiving formal approval from both bodies.

A total of 218 responses were received from the randomly selected sample of 300 participants. This equates to a 73% response rate. A total of 62.5% of students were male, with 37.5% being

female. The year of graduation varied significantly, with respondents graduating from 1988 through to 2022. Graduate alumni from each year between those dates were represented in the responses, except for 1989 and 2006.

## Discussion

### *Employment Outcomes among Alumni*

The analysis of Moi University graduate alumni data reveals encouraging patterns in employment status. Of those surveyed, approximately 83.5% indicated they were currently employed in various sectors, while 8.7% reported being self-employed. A further 6% were unemployed, and 1% were pursuing further academic qualifications. These figures highlight a commendable level of employment integration for the university's graduates, with the unemployment rate closely reflecting the national average of 5.85% recorded in 2023. This suggests that Moi University's academic programmes are, to a large extent, aligned with the general needs of the labour market. However, the presence of even a small percentage of unemployed graduates underscores the necessity of continuous improvement in aligning educational outcomes with labour market demands.

### *Salary Expectations Compared to Actual Earnings*

Respondents were asked to reflect on their salary expectations and how these compared with their current earnings. Only 14.3% of graduates reported earning more than they had anticipated upon graduation. The majority, 59.2%, felt their earnings matched their expectations, whereas 26.5% found their salaries below what they envisaged. These statistics point to a moderate level of alignment between graduate expectations and the realities of the job market. However, the considerable proportion of graduates receiving less than expected suggests a gap in either market readiness or career orientation, which could be addressed through enhanced career guidance, labour market exposure, or income expectation management embedded in employability training.

### *Levels of Job Satisfaction*

The survey explored how satisfied alumni were with their current employment. Of the respondents, 10.9% expressed that they were extremely satisfied with their jobs, while a further 56.3% reported general satisfaction. A neutral stance was taken by 13.5%, whereas 12.5% were somewhat dissatisfied, and 5.7% were least satisfied. Overall, 67.2% of alumni combined expressed satisfaction, which is markedly higher than the national employee satisfaction rate of 42% cited in Kenya's Employee Satisfaction Report 2021. This indicates that Moi University graduates, despite certain salary disparities, find their work generally fulfilling. This outcome could be attributed to the relevance of their skills or the adaptability fostered during their studies.

### *Relevance of Academic Qualifications to Current Occupations*

When assessing the alignment between graduates' fields of study and their current occupations, 62% of respondents stated they were employed in industries directly related to their academic qualifications. In contrast, 38% acknowledged working in fields either unrelated or only partially related to their area of study. This significant percentage suggests a labour market characterised by volatility and unpredictability, compelling graduates to apply transferrable skills across sectors. It underlines the necessity for Moi University to continue strengthening its approach to embedding broad-based employability competencies in its curricula.

***Preparedness for the Job Market***
The alumni were also asked to assess how effectively their courses prepared them for employment. Only 12.5% felt that the university was highly effective in preparing them for the labour market, while 54.1% found the preparation generally effective. Neutral responses were given by 11.9%, and a combined 21.6% expressed various levels of dissatisfaction. The reasons for dissatisfaction included the predominance of theoretical over practical learning, limited attachment and internship opportunities, insufficient focus on global job markets, and inadequate collaboration with employers for job placement. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating work-integrated learning opportunities and industry partnerships in all academic programmes.

***Skills Acquired and Those Perceived as Missing***
Graduates identified key skills they believed were effectively developed during their time at Moi University. These included communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability. These core competencies are essential across professional domains and indicate some success in the development of transversal skills. However, a number of areas were flagged as insufficiently covered. Skills such as emotional intelligence, financial literacy, entrepreneurial acumen, public speaking, networking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and self-motivation were consistently mentioned as lacking. These gaps point to a need for more holistic education models that extend beyond discipline-specific knowledge to include soft and life skills.

***Employer Expectations for Graduate Competencies***
Interviews with employers yielded valuable insights into their expectations for new entrants into the workforce. Employers strongly emphasised the need for job-specific skills developed through practical exposure. This expectation is driven by the fast-paced operational environments most organisations face, which offer little room for prolonged onboarding or training periods. Employers expect graduates to be ready to contribute from day one and to articulate, during interviews, how they have prepared for the role.

Additionally, employers noted that graduates often lack confidence and competence in self-presentation, both verbally and in writing. Many applicants fail to tailor their curriculum vitae and cover letters effectively, diminishing their chances at the application stage. These observations highlight a pressing need for structured employability workshops or modules that incorporate mock interviews, CV writing, and presentation skills, thereby enabling students to practice and refine their employability profiles.

***Critical Employability Skills According to Employers***
Key skills that employers reiterated as essential for graduate success included professionalism, strong work ethic, effective communication (written and verbal), team collaboration, time management, leadership, and self-motivation. One employer articulated the importance of trustworthiness, ethical conduct, and the capacity for independent planning. Others highlighted that effective communication and teamwork are not merely desirable but indispensable in today's collaborative workplaces. Leadership was interpreted broadly, encompassing the ability to inspire peers and take initiative regardless of formal rank. The expectation for graduates to be self-driven and proactive in their roles was also frequently underscored.

***Development Strategies for Employability Skills at Moi University***

Feedback gathered from both employers and alumni suggested several strategies for more effectively embedding employability skills into university education. First, there is a clear need for systematic and regular mapping of curriculum content against market demands. Such analysis would help identify current and emerging gaps, allowing for timely curriculum revision. Building stronger linkages between academia and industry was seen as essential. These linkages should not only involve students through internships and attachments but also include lecturers. Teaching staff could greatly benefit from direct exposure to industry practices and trends through affiliations and active participation in professional associations. Regular industry engagement would enable lecturers to contextualise classroom content and deliver more practically relevant instruction.

Practical learning methodologies, such as simulations, case studies, and role-plays, were recommended to cultivate job-relevant skills. For example, communication and teamwork could be enhanced through group presentations and scenario-based tasks. Moreover, incorporating entrepreneurship education would help address economic volatility and promote self-employment as a viable pathway for graduates. Another innovative suggestion involved the use of pre-recorded sessions with industry professionals. These recordings could form a growing multimedia resource bank, offering students consistent exposure to real-world expectations and guidance throughout their academic journey.

**Recommendations**

Feedback from Moi University graduate alumni highlights the evolving nature of the world of work and a pressing need to emphasise practical skill development within university programmes coupled with entrepreneurial and technological skills. Alumni have noted a persistent misalignment between academic training and labour market demands. To effectively address this challenge, the university should prioritise the development of stronger connections between academic schools and relevant industry players, particularly those that employ the graduates thereof.

These institutional partnerships would serve as critical platforms for enhancing curriculum relevance, providing students with practical exposure to job roles, and facilitating pathways into employment. Therefore, each school should identify key industry stakeholders and establish a structured relationship management framework. Such a framework should promote open dialogue and cooperation in areas including curriculum review, student attachments, and graduate placement initiatives.

Mentorship has also been identified as a valuable component in enhancing graduate preparedness (Lumala, 2024). Alumni have proposed that each student be paired with a mentor, either from the university community or from the professional sector. The mentorship model used by Strathmore University was cited as a strong example.

In addition, alumni emphasised the importance of digital competency in today's job market. A compulsory computer literacy course for all first-year students is recommended. Finally, alumni expressed interest in maintaining lifelong learning connections with the university through access to short courses focused on emerging industry trends and skill requirements.

Further research could explore longitudinal trends in graduate employability, comparing multiple cohorts over time. Additionally, future studies might investigate the impact of specific interventions, such as curriculum updates, digital training modules, or employer-mentorship programmes, on student and graduate outcomes.

**Recommended Employability Interventions**

To maximise graduate readiness, Moi University should implement structured and holistic employability interventions. These should span the entire student lifecycle and culminate in demonstrable competencies by the time a student graduates. A tiered training approach could be adopted to cover essential employment processes, from CV development and interview skills to workplace conduct and industry networking.

For instance, students in media studies could manage a publicly accessible digital platform showcasing their work across various media formats. This would simulate real job scenarios and enhance both technical and collaborative capabilities. The use of role-playing was also championed as a practical approach to situational learning. One suggestion involved converting classroom sessions into workplace simulations where students assume the roles of employees and supervisors, fostering realistic experiences and constructive feedback.

Finally, it is essential that Moi University formalise and deepen its partnerships with strategic employers. Such partnerships should benefit all stakeholders—students, lecturers, and employers alike. Employers could contribute to student research agendas by identifying industry-relevant challenges, while lecturers could use these partnerships to ensure course content remains aligned with professional realities.

A biannual employer engagement model was recommended to coincide with the university's attachment cycles. These meetings would facilitate feedback on student performance, highlight areas requiring improvement, and reinforce accountability on both sides. Continuous and structured employer involvement will support a sustainable model for nurturing resilient, employable graduates.

The study provides compelling evidence that a more integrated approach to curriculum development, university-industry collaboration, and employability training is essential. By embedding practical learning methods and fostering lifelong learning pathways, Moi University is well-positioned to build resilient graduates who can navigate and contribute meaningfully to an increasingly dynamic labour market. The findings offer a valuable foundation for institutional reform and national policymaking in higher education.

- The following specific high-impact actions are recommended to higher education institutions towards building resilient graduates and promoting graduate employability:
- Institutions can embed practical learning activities by incorporating authentic assessments, simulations, role-playing, and real-world projects across programmes, thereby bridging the gap between theory and workplace demands.
- Furthermore, they can strengthen industry partnerships by establishing structured collaborations with industry and employers for internships, attachments, and curriculum co-design.

- The digital competencies of students need to be addressed through introducing compulsory information technology and generative artificial intelligence literacy modules in the first year to build foundational digital skills for all students.
- Mentorship programmes also have potential as students can be paired with industry professionals or alumni mentors to support career orientation and self-development.
- An essential aspect is the development of soft skills through the integration of training on emotional intelligence, public speaking, negotiation, and conflict resolution into core curricula.
- Institutions can also offer career readiness workshops and host regular sessions on CV writing, interviews, self-presentation, and workplace conduct.
- Alumni can be provided with access to continuing education through short courses and upskilling opportunities.
- Finally, university-industry dialogue is essential in order to institutionalise biannual employer feedback cycles to align educational delivery with labour market shifts.

**Conclusion**

This study explored how Moi University could enhance its graduates' employability and lifelong learning capacity through a strategic, evidence-based model. Drawing on a comprehensive tracer study involving alumni and employer input, the research addressed four critical questions: the employability skills most valued by employers, how effectively those skills are cultivated within academic programmes, alumni perceptions of qualification relevance and job preparedness, and ways the university can support lifelong learning in an ever-changing labour market.

The findings affirmed that while Moi University graduates demonstrate relatively strong employment integration, with unemployment figures consistent with national averages, there remains a significant gap between academic training and labour market expectations. Employers consistently emphasised the need for job-specific and soft skills that are developed through experiential learning, while graduates highlighted areas such as financial literacy, emotional intelligence, and self-motivation as inadequately addressed. Alumni also expressed the need for stronger mentorship, expanded digital literacy, and structured opportunities for industry engagement.

A key strength of the study was its mixed-methods design, which combined quantitative data with rich qualitative insights. However, the study's cross-sectional nature meant that it captured perspectives at a single point in time, limiting the ability to assess changes or trends. Moreover, although the study achieved a strong response rate, it was limited to graduates from three academic schools, which may affect the generalisability of the findings.

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