

The Employability Gap Isn't Even.

Fund Where the Evidence Says It's Worst.

Where Kenya should target higher-education reform



71

peer-reviewed studies
reviewed (2015–2025)

11 of 71

focus on Kenya; the rest cover
the region

5

recurring trends in graduate
job outcomes

Overview

Kenyan graduates do not all face the same job market. Graduates from applied and technical courses find work faster than those from humanities and social science courses, and employers are hiring for skills many courses still do not teach. Some courses and skills already work, so investment should follow the evidence. This brief sets out four targeted actions.

Background

Kenya has good employability policies, but they are not fully applied. This brief looks at five trends behind that gap: unemployment, underemployment, informal work, course differences, and changing employer demands.



Findings

• Course choice affects job prospects

Graduates from applied courses, engineering, health, IT, find jobs faster than graduates from humanities and social science courses. Hands-on teaching works better than theory-heavy teaching.

• Employers want skills many courses do not teach

7 of 71 studies show employers value communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and real work experience as much as grades. Many courses have not kept up.

• Unemployment and underemployment are different problems

More graduates enter the job market than there are jobs. 7 of 71 studies found graduates with no work at all. A further 5 found graduates working below their qualification.

• Informal work is often a last resort

5 of 71 studies found graduates take informal jobs because formal ones are unavailable, not by choice. Many also lack the money and skills self-employment needs.

• Course gaps and skills gaps make each other worse

Applied courses already teach many skills employers want. Humanities and social science courses often do not, leaving graduates facing two problems at once.

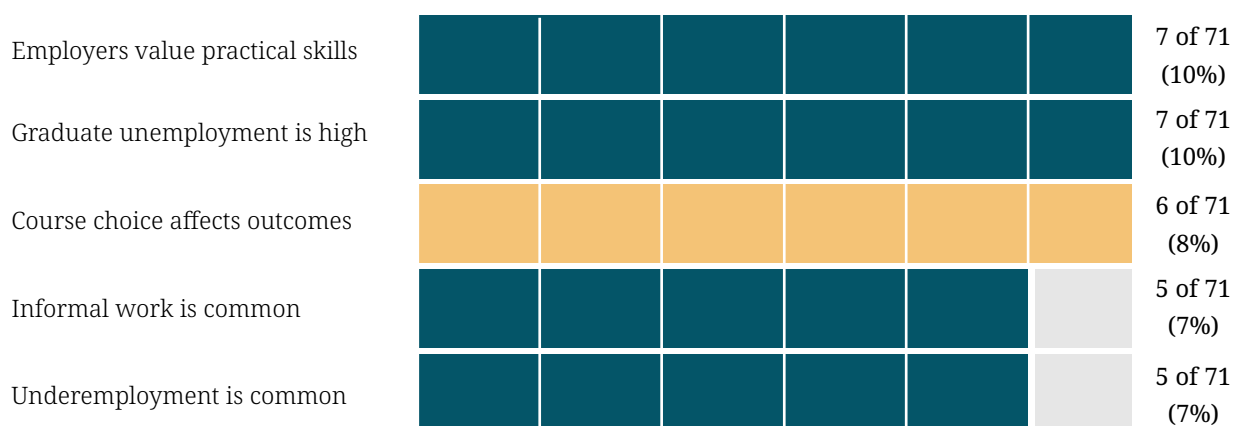


Figure 1. Studies reporting each trend.

Policy implications

These trends are not separate problems. They show where Kenya's implementation gap hurts graduates most, by course and by skill. Targeted reform beats spreading effort evenly.

Recommendations

- 1 **Add practical skills to humanities and social science courses first.** These courses show the biggest job-search and underemployment gap. Start hands-on training here.
RESPONSIBLE: Commission for University Education & TVET Authority
- 2 **Publish the skills employers want, by course.** Turn what employers want, communication, problem-solving, initiative, into a checklist for every course review.
RESPONSIBLE: Ministry of Education & Federation of Kenya Employers
- 3 **Track underemployment, not just unemployment.** Have a tracer system that also checks whether graduates work below their qualification, not just whether they have a job.
RESPONSIBLE: Institutions & Commission for University Education
- 4 **Give informal-sector graduates business skills too.** Since informal work is a fallback, pair career support with basic money and business training.
RESPONSIBLE: TVET Institutions & County Enterprise Development Offices

Concluding Statement

"Kenya does not need to close the employability gap everywhere at once. It needs to close it where the evidence says it is widest."

This brief shows where that gap costs graduates most: humanities and social science courses, the skills employers want, and underemployment simple tracking will miss. Targeting the biggest gaps costs less than fixing everything at once.

Audience: Ministry of Education, universities, TVET institutions, and employer bodies.

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Source: Mulonzi et al. (2026). Post-Secondary Education Knowledge and Skills Transition to Labour Market Needs in Kenya.