LECTURER-RELATED FACTORS IN THE TIMELY COMPLETION OF UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN KENYA

Patrick Kibet Riwong'ole[1] *, Robert Kati[2], Sarah Naliaka Likoko[3]

[1] PhD Student, Kibabii University, Kenya

[2] Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Kibabii University, Kenya

[3] Senior Lecturer, Department of Educational Planning and Management, Kibabii University, Kenya.

Abstract

Delayed graduation and rising attrition rates among undergraduate students present persistent challenges for higher education systems globally, and particularly within massified public universities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Grounded in Tinto's Theory of Student Departure and Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Model, this study examined the relationship between lecturer-related factors specifically teaching quality, lecturer-student relationships, feedback practices, and assessment schedules and the timely completion of undergraduate degrees in public universities in the Western region of Kenya. Adopting a pragmatic research philosophy and an ex post facto (causal-comparative) mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected from n = 705 participants, comprising recent graduates (n = 341) and final-year undergraduate students (n = 364), while qualitative insights were sourced from four academic deans who participated exclusively in qualitative interviews. Survey instruments demonstrated robust construct validity, with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure ranging from 0.72 to 0.87, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielding significant results ($p < .001$). Simple linear regression analysis revealed that lecturer-related factors explained 73.4% of the variance in timely program completion ($\beta = .863$, 95% CI [.808, .918], $p < .001$), displaying a large effect size ($f^2 = 2.76$), while the scale demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$). Descriptive statistics revealed a strongly positive perception of institutional support mechanisms, with an aggregate mean score of 3.81 (SD = 1.06) for recent graduates and up to 4.38 (SD = 0.78) for final-year students. Specifically, 86.8% of graduates confirmed that structured pedagogical standards were associated with timely degree attainment, while 90.1% highlighted predictable assessment schedules as vital for maintaining academic momentum. Qualitative thematic triangulation corroborated these patterns, identifying lecturer accessibility, proactive mentorship, and constructive feedback as key institutional enablers for reducing course repetition. The study concludes that lecturer-related practices are critical institutional determinants of timely degree completion and recommends strengthening faculty development, mentorship systems, and staffing levels to enhance student progression.

Keywords: Higher Education; Timely Graduation; Lecturer-Student Relationships; Teaching Quality; Kenya.

1. Introduction

On-time graduation from undergraduate programs has emerged as a crucial metric for institutional efficiency, accountability, and student success in modern higher education systems. Globally, prolonged completion timelines impose severe financial burdens on families, strain state resources, and limit the socioeconomic mobility of youth (OECD, 2025). Within the African subcontinent, and specifically in Kenya, these dynamics are exacerbated by rapid enrollment growth, commonly referred to as the "massification" of higher education. While massification has democratized access to university education, it has simultaneously introduced severe structural bottlenecks. Public universities face increasing student populations without a corresponding expansion in fiscal allocations, infrastructure, or instructional staff (KIPPRA, 2022). Consequently, delayed graduation rates and escalating student attrition have become systemic vulnerabilities.

While scholars have heavily scrutinized student-centric attributes (such as socio-economic background, personal motivation, and peer environments) as the primary drivers of academic persistence, contemporary educational research points toward the classroom micro-environment as a critical determinant. Within this institutional domain, lecturers serve as the primary conduit through which academic integration occurs. Beyond their foundational role as content distributors, lecturers function as mentors, evaluators, and key facilitators of the institutional climate. Empirical evidence suggests that pedagogical competence, emotional availability, and the transparency of evaluation frameworks significantly dictate whether a student maintains satisfactory academic progress or falls into a cycle of remediation and eventual dropout (Tight, 2020; Schmidt & Schaefer, 2021).

In the European Union, where the OECD (2025) reports that only 43% of students complete a bachelor’s degree on time, researchers have consistently identified institutional conditions such as staffing levels and teaching standards as key predictors of student progression. Vitally, lecturer-related institutional structures act as stabilizing mechanisms that reduce uncertainty in student academic trajectories. Despite the consensus on faculty engagement, there remains a critical gap in context-specific literature analyzing how lecturer-related variables operate within the structurally constrained environments of Kenyan public universities. Many state institutions in peripheral regions, such as the Western region of Kenya, contend with distinct socio-economic realities, high student-to-lecturer ratios, and uneven digital learning capacities (Mwangi et al., 2023). Therefore, this study addresses this empirical gap by focusing on this objective: to examine the relationship

between lecturer-related factors and students' timely completion of undergraduate programs in public universities in the Western region of Kenya.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This inquiry is anchored on two foundational pillars of retention theory: Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993) and the Student Attrition Model proposed by Bean and Metzner (1985). Tinto argues that student persistence is a function of the level of academic and social integration an individual achieves within an institution. In this study, lecturer-student interactions and classroom experiences represent the primary mechanisms of academic integration. When these interactions are positive and supportive, they strengthen the student's psychological commitment to the institution, driving persistence.

Complementing Tinto's framework, Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Model recognises that non-traditional and environmentally constrained students are highly susceptible to external and institutional support structures. The model highlights how institutional factors, including the quality of instruction and faculty accessibility, act as direct counterweights to external stressors. When institutional structures offer predictable assessment timelines and constructive feedback, they reduce the student's cognitive and logistical friction, thereby mitigating blocks to time-to-completion.

2. Literature Review

The connection between lecturers and student graduation timelines is a well-documented phenomenon across diverse global higher education contexts. In Western systems, studies highlight instructional clarity and faculty support as essential pillars of student retention. For instance, Johnson et al. (2022) established that student-centered pedagogical approaches and well-structured course designs noticeably improve engagement and lower dropout risks in the United States. Gigliotti (2020) reported that academic and emotional support from lecturers builds student resilience, allowing them to navigate rigorous academic tracking without delaying graduation. In Europe, researchers like Schmidt et al. (2022) and Lefevre et al. (2023) have consistently identified institutional conditions such as staffing levels, teaching standards, and early academic advising as key predictors of student progression.

However, international literature also emphasizes that the positive effects of lecturer engagement are frequently constrained by broader systemic issues. In massified systems like China, Chen et al.

(2025) observed that while strong teacher-student bonds positively influence graduation rates, excessively high student-to-teacher ratios limit the depth and availability of individual mentorship. This institutional strain is echoed in various global monitoring reports (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2023), which point out that when lecturers are bogged down by administrative duties and overcrowded classrooms, their capacity to provide timely feedback and customized support decreases significantly.

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, these structural constraints are particularly pronounced. The rapid expansion of university enrollment has outpaced state funding and infrastructural capacity. Despite these hurdles, regional empirical studies confirm that faculty dedication remains a vital driver of student success. In West Africa, Arubuola (2020) demonstrated that lecturer professionalism and the delivery of high-quality, actionable feedback are significantly associated with reduced time-to-completion among undergraduate students in Nigeria. Similarly, in East Africa, Mwinuka and Kirmayo (2025) in Tanzania, and Tesfaye et al. (2023) in Ethiopia, found that lecturer accessibility serves as a primary driver of academic persistence.

In Kenya, structural shifts and resource challenges continue to alter the educational landscape. Policy evaluations by KIPPRA (2022) have raised concerns over worsening student-lecturer ratios and inadequate digital teaching resources across public universities. These vulnerabilities were further laid bare during the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which altered instructional schedules and extended graduation timelines across the nation (Mwangi et al., 2023). While local scholars such as Otieno and Nyamboga (2020) and Ndayi et al. (2024) have verified that effective academic advising minimizes course repetition, there is still a clear need for localized, empirically grounded mixed-methods research. This paper addresses that gap by exploring how lecturer behaviors link to completion timelines within the public universities of Western Kenya.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy, Design, and Ethics

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, which justifies the systematic deployment of mixed-methods research to unpack complex institutional issues. By merging quantitative patterns with qualitative insights, pragmatism offers a comprehensive view of the operational factors influencing undergraduate completion timelines. The underlying framework used was a causal-comparative (ex post facto) research design. This design was chosen because the phenomena under

study had already occurred; the independent variables (lecturer-related factors) and the dependent variable (timely completion) were evaluated retrospectively without artificial manipulation (Kothari, 2011; Sekaran, 2016).

A research permit was officially granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) under License No. NACOSTI/P/25/4182098. Additionally, institutional authorization to conduct the study was secured from the respective review boards at Kibabii University. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. To ensure confidentiality, strict data anonymization protocols were maintained throughout the study, and participation was entirely voluntary with the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Data analysis was executed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26.0).

3.2 Target Population and Sampling Framework

The target population spanned four accredited public universities in the Western region of Kenya: Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kibabii University, Alupe University and Kaimosi Friends University. The overall sampling frame consisted of 6,765 individuals. Following the sample determination principles of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a multi-stage sampling approach was implemented.

First, a census approach was applied at the institutional level to integrate all four public universities within the geographical region. Second, stratified random sampling was utilized to segment the student population into two distinct analytical groups:
Recent Graduates: Individuals who completed their Bachelor of Education programs on time within the 2024–2025 academic cycles (N1 = 3,140, yielding a sample size of s1 = 341).
Final-Year Students: Undergraduates currently enrolled in their final year of study (N2 = 3,621, yielding a sample size of s2 = 364).

The universities served as separate strata, ensuring proportional representation across institutions. Finally, purposive sampling was used to select four academic deans from the respective Schools of Education (one per university) to capture institutional and administrative perspectives. Deans participated in qualitative interviews only and were completely excluded from the quantitative survey analysis, establishing a final quantitative sample of n = 705 students and graduates, alongside a distinct qualitative cohort of 4 deans.

Table 1: Sampling Frame

Category	Target Population (N)	Sample Size (n)	Sampling Technique
Recent Graduates (B.Ed, 2024–2025)	3,140	341	Stratified Random
Final-Year Students (Enrolled 2025)	3,621	364	Stratified Random
Academic Deans (Qualitative Only)	4	4	Purposive
Total	**6,765**	**709**	

Source: Author, based on CUE (2025) documentation

3.3 Construct Validity and Reliability Testing

To confirm the suitability of the data structures for factor analysis and establish construct validity, data from both survey groups were subjected to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The independent construct, Lecturer-Related Factors, was operationalized using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), comprising 16 survey items measuring instruction quality, relationship health, feedback turnaround, and assessment rigidity.

Table 2: Instrument Validity Metrics

Analytical Group Variable	Variable	KMO	Approx. χ^2	df	Sig (p)
Recent Graduates (n=341)	Lecturer-related factors	0.87	529.87	6	< .001
Final-Year Undergraduates (n=364)	Lecturer-related factors	0.72	1,075.18	6	< .001

Source: Field Data (2025)

The KMO values for the lecturer-related factors construct exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.72 to 0.87 across the sub-groups. This indicates a high concentration of common variance and confirms that the items were well-suited for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded highly significant results ($p < .001$) across both samples, confirming that the underlying correlation matrices were fundamentally different from an identity matrix. To establish internal consistency, the instrument was subjected to reliability analysis; the overall scale showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Regression Analysis of Lecturer-Related Factors and Timely Degree Completion

To test the predictive strength of the independent variable, a simple linear regression analysis was with lecturer-related factors acting as the predictor and timely undergraduate program completion acting as the dependent variable. Prior to running the model, linear diagnostic assumptions were assessed and found to be satisfied; normality was confirmed via P-P plots of regression standardized residuals, while homoscedasticity and linearity were verified via residual scatterplots showing no distinct structural configurations. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 703) = 1934.52$, $p < .001$, explaining 73.4% of the variance in timely degree completion ($R^2 = .734$). Lecturer-related factors significantly predicted timely degree completion ($\beta = .863$, $p < .001$).

Under Cohen's (1988) baseline criteria, this represents an exceptionally large effect size ($f^2 = 2.76$). Lecturer factors emerged as a statistically significant, dominant predictor of completion speeds ($\beta = .863$, 95% CI [.808, .918], $p < .001$). These findings suggest that lecturer-related support structures are strongly associated with timely degree completion.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis of Graduates' perceptions

Data gathered from recent graduates provided retrospective accounts of how lecturer practices influenced their academic progressions. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for this cohort.

Table 3: Lecturer Factors and Completion (Graduates, n=341)

Evaluation Item	SD n(%)	D n(%)	N n(%)	A n(%)	SA n(%)	Mean	SD
Teaching standards help students achieve their degree on time.	32 (9.4)	13 (3.8)	0 (0.0)	212 (62.2)	84 (24.6)	3.89	1.11
Positive lecturer relationships reduced procrastination.	14 (4.1)	40 (11.7)	44 (12.9)	194 (56.9)	49 (14.4)	3.66	1.00
Lecturer feedback enhanced academic performance.	39 (11.4)	6 (1.8)	62 (18.2)	153 (44.9)	81 (23.8)	3.68	1.19
Assessment schedules helped maintain study progress.	18 (5.3)	16 (4.7)	0 (0.0)	228 (66.9)	79 (23.2)	3.98	0.95
Aggregate Index						**3.81**	**1.06**

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree. Decimals standardized to 2dp.
Source: Field Data (2025)

The aggregate mean index of 3.81 (SD = 1.06) indicates that graduates strongly agree that lecturer interventions play an important role in enabling timely completion. The structural organization of assessments emerged as the highest-rated driver within this cohort, achieving a mean score of 3.98 (SD = 0.95), with 90.1% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that well-designed assessment schedules kept them on track. Notably, there were zero neutral responses on this item, emphasizing that predictable deadlines are essential for helping students manage their academic workloads effectively. This alignment matches the perspective shared by Dean A, who noted:

> *"One of the most critical lecturer-related variables influencing students' ability to complete their studies on time is the nature and timeliness of feedback... assessment practices should be reasonable, clear, and consistent with learning outcomes."*
> *(Dean, University A)*

Furthermore, 86.8% of the graduates affirmed that pedagogical excellence and high teaching standards supported their timely graduation (Mean = 3.89, SD = 1.11). This finding indicates that clear instructional delivery and well-mapped course objectives remove ambiguity, allowing students to navigate program requirements efficiently. In terms of interpersonal dynamics, 71.3% of respondents noted that positive, approachable relationships with lecturers reduced academic procrastination (Mean = 3.66, SD = 1.00), validating Tinto's core thesis that social and academic integration work together to promote persistence.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Final-Year students' perceptions

The feedback from current final-year undergraduates matched the patterns observed in the graduate cohort, showing high scores across all four key areas of lecturer engagement.

Table 4: Lecturer Factors and Completion (Final-Year Students, n=364)

Evaluation Item	SD n(%)	D n(%)	N n(%)	A n(%)	SA n(%)	Mean	SD
Courses are taught clearly and effectively.	2 (0.5)	9 (2.5)	29 (8.0)	132 (36.3)	192 (52.7)	4.38	0.78
Lecturer interaction supports completion.	12 (3.3)	8 (2.2)	29 (8.0)	150 (41.2)	165 (45.3)	4.23	0.93
Timely feedback supports academic progress.	5 (1.4)	9 (2.5)	51 (14.0)	106 (29.1)	193 (53.0)	4.30	0.90
Assessment schedules helped maintain study progress.	5 (1.4)	12 (3.3)	57 (15.7)	123 (33.8)	167 (45.9)	4.20	0.88

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.
Decimals standardized to 2dp.
Source: Field Data (2025)

For active final-year students, instructional clarity emerged as the single most critical factor, yielding a high mean score of 4.38 (SD = 0.78), with 89.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that engaging, well-planned lectures improved their learning experience. This finding

aligns with Friedman et al. (2019), who demonstrated that clear, interactive instruction prevents students from falling behind. This quantitative observation was strongly reinforced by administrative narratives; as the Dean of University A observed:

> *"Lecturers are the key players in ensuring that students graduate their undergraduate programs on time. Lecturer commitment to quality teaching, course delivery on schedule and being available for consultation by the students affect their academic progress directly." (Dean, University A)*

The value of responsive feedback was also rated highly, with 82.1% of the undergraduates stating that receiving timely feedback supported their academic progress (Mean = 4.30, SD = 0.90). Prompt evaluation helps students identify academic weak spots early, preventing failures that could require re-taking courses and delay graduation. Additionally, 86.5% of students noted that approachable lecturers and structured mentorship programs were key pillars of their academic persistence (Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.93), which directly mirrors administrative strategies targeted at student retention. As Dean B explained:

> *"Student persistence is highly influenced by lecturer accessibility, whereby students with free access to lecturers to seek clarification and academic guidance are confident and will not tend to re-engage or take the same courses again." (Dean, University B)*

4.4 Integrated Discussion of Findings

By integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings, this study demonstrates strong methodological triangulation. The survey results from both recent graduates and final-year undergraduates confirm that structured teaching, open communication, quick feedback, and clear assessment schedules are vital to student success. The qualitative interviews with academic deans validate these findings, explaining that effective lecturer-student interactions help prevent course failure and subsequent delays.

When evaluated through the lenses of Tinto (1993) and Bean and Metzner (1985), these findings show that within public universities in Western Kenya, the lecturer is the primary catalyst for academic integration. However, it is vital to balance these highly positive perceptions with local structural realities. Faculty factors are a necessary but not entirely sufficient component of timely completion; they operate within highly volatile structural constraints. Despite positive global

indices, Chen et al. (2025) caution that excessively high student-lecturer ratios severely constrain individualized mentorship. This systemic strain explains why "positive lecturer relationships" (M = 3.66) emerged as the lowest mean score among the graduate cohort in Table 3. Under the pressures of institutional massification highlighted by KIPPRA (2022), lecturers are frequently overwhelmed by massive class sizes, making intimate social integration exceptionally difficult to maintain.

5. Conclusions, Contributions, and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Rather than simply mirroring descriptive outputs, this study concludes that lecturer factors emerge as foundational, structural enablers of timely completion within public universities in Western Kenya. The empirical results extend Tinto's classic model of student retention by demonstrating that within highly massified, resource-constrained higher education contexts, the predictability of institutional assessment structures and procedural clarity carry significantly more weight than the sheer frequency or depth of informal social contact. While individual student determination and financial backing are necessary baseline requirements, it is the deliberate, organized behaviors of the instructional faculty manifested through transparent evaluation paces, explicit syllabi roadmaps, and reliable timelines that transform student entry potential into formal, on-time graduation milestones.

5.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a distinct three-fold contribution to higher education research: It provides empirical data on undergraduate completion dynamics specifically within the unique socio-economic landscape of peripheral public universities in Western Kenya. It also extends Tinto's (1993) model to massified African higher education ecosystems, proving that under structural resource constraints, organized, predictable institutional processes (schedules, clear pedagogy) matter significantly more to timing than the depth of informal social contact. It also offers actionable metrics for university management boards to design targeted faculty capacity-building frameworks that can directly de-bottleneck graduation pipelines.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

This study contains some limitations that require acknowledgement: Self-Report Bias: Utilizing Likert-scale questionnaire instruments introduces the possibility of subjective self-report bias from students and graduates regarding their personal academic speeds and perceptions of faculty performance. While efforts were made to enhance credibility through methodological triangulation, combining survey data with qualitative interviews, this does not fully eliminate the inherent limitations of self-reported.

Recommendations

i. Institutionalize Faculty Pedagogical and Mentorship Training: Public universities should establish mandatory professional development programs focused on student-centered learning, mentoring techniques, and effective classroom management to enhance teaching quality.

ii. Enforce Strict Timelines for Feedback and Assessment: University management should implement automated academic tracking systems to guide the continuous assessments and final exam grades are processed and shared within designated periods, preventing graduation delays caused by missing marks.

iii. Formalize Peer-Lecturer Mentorship Initiatives**:** Institutions should set up structured academic advising and mentorship hours, ensuring that faculty workloads accommodate direct, small-group student consultations.

iv. Optimize Student-to-Lecturer Ratios**:** The Ministry of Education and university councils must prioritize hiring more instructional staff to ease the burdens of massification, allowing lecturers the time needed to provide high-quality feedback and personalized support.

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