

Stakeholder's Perception on the Foundation Year: Case Study Somalia Higher Education

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Abstract

The study seeks to identify and understand the stakeholders' perceptions of the foundation year in Mogadishu, Somalia, with special reference to the first-year students in higher learning institutions. The data collection tool used was a structured questionnaire administered between September 2023 and June 2024 to ensure enough time was granted to gather information as students moved from semester to semester. To this aim, the survey deliberately aimed for as wide a coverage of responses as possible and collected basic demographic information alongside the nature of respondents (students, lecturers, administrators, parents) and their detailed qualitative responses for multiple facets of the foundation year. Data collected was analysed descriptively to reveal tendencies, relationships and possible areas of improvement using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Some measures to validate data include: the study's data was reviewed by experts, and data collectors underwent intensive training to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data. The outcomes showed that 63,75% of participants described their attitude towards the foundation year negatively; they negatively noted how much it undermines students' knowledge and contributes to the complaints about its complexity or inefficiency. Nevertheless, 37.25% of respondents benefited from the cutting-edge development of the teaching environment. The key issues of concern include the credit hour issue, the issue of the foundation year structure relative to the course structure, language major problems, teaching materials problems, and the fee issues. On the question of finance, 85.6% of participants opined that foundation year students rarely received a waiver for fees, while 74.4 % opined that the reform is not necessary for the effective delivery of the programme to the students. Moreover,

there is a greater percentage response of 63.6% of the respondents who believed that the foundation year would not impact students culturally and academically, but with a caveat that this program's duration should run for only one semester, if the government is unable to dismiss. Therefore, the following reform strategies are suggested to improve the foundation year based on the conclusion. These are to include initiating greater correlation strategies between the courses offered and the students' disciplines of major concentration, the quality of course content, language instruction, the foundation year fees amendments, and the shortening of the program to a semester format. These improvements are aimed at enhancing the learning environment that assists the students in the preparation of their university education and improves the performance of university students in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Keywords: Foundation year, higher education, stakeholder perspectives, learning environment, university students, Mogadishu, curriculum alignment.

INTRODUCTION

University learning environment is a central determinant to the learning process and accomplishment of university students. Given the de-established education system in Mogadishu, Somalia, there is the need to explore the perception of stakeholders towards enhancing favorable learning environment given the years of conflict and lack of development (Mohamed, 2020). A very few Universities in Mogadishu, have been trying hard to overcome these limitations and to provide education at par with international standards in terms of buildings structure academic calibre of instructors. in addition to Somali students' welfare since the establishment of Somali National University in the

year 1954 and after the civil conflict in early 1990s, all the educational systems in Somalia most especially in Mogadishu have left a long way behind. The trend has been realized by the establishment of numerous private universities, and the consequent expansion of the higher learning institute enrollment, making it pertinent to enhance the learning environment.

Students, lecturers, university administrators, and parents, to mention but a few, all have something to offer regarding improving the learning environment. For example, students fear there are not enough teaching resources to go around and too many students per teacher, besides, there is little access to technology to help them excel academically (Botha, 2022). On the other hand, lecturers often centralise the issues they experience such as inadequate professional development, inadequate teaching resources, inadequate implementation of national curriculum aligned to modern teaching methodologies (Dauden, 2023). University officials may explain their inability to meet clientele needs by the increasing numbers of students, the negative financial position and poor quality education demands in the face of an expanding student body, qualified staff shortages or inadequate facilities.

The Somali government has realized this challenge especially with the onset of the foundation year program in 2023 to try reduce the shortcomings of the students and the quality of higher learning education (OHirsi, 2024). However, all these efforts can only be successful if the input, observations and experiences of the direct stakeholders in the process of education are considered. However, the foundation year program which is a good start must be put in the right atmosphere for it to thrive, with new curricula, skilled staff, improved infrastructure, and technological tools (Hassan-Kadle et al., 2023). This research shall examine the perception of these stakeholders towards enhancing learning environment in Mogadishu in order to enhance the performance of university students.

In addition, insights and lessons can be gotten from other countries educational reforms, however; the socio-economic and political conditions of Somali are vastly different, and any reform attempting to be implemented in the education sector must consider these factors as some of the obstacles that need to be overcome locally (Hussein, 2024). Since the majority of students in Somalia comes from low-income families (Rodriguez-Planas, 2022), there is a need to assess the characteristics of the learning environment and how the different constituents that make up learning environment can be reformulated to foster access, equity and quality. The purpose of this study is to make a synthesis of these outlooks and adduce useful information to the debate with regard to the future of higher learning institutions in Mogadishu and other similar institutions.

Aims

The aim of this research is to explore the perspectives of various stakeholders—students, lecturers, administrators, and parents—on the foundation year.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory from 1978, which underlines the role of social cognition. According to Vygotsky, learning is always collaborative and always takes place within cultural communities of a student. This theory when applied within the learning context of university education in Mogadishu helps to understand how the physical and the social environment within which students find themselves influences their learning experience. Using Vygotsky's theory of social development, it can be deduced that such cases encourage learners to learn concepts at higher levels than what they could have achieved on their own through direct instruction from knowledgeable others like lecturers or senior students, which can in one way or the other affect the quality of learning outcomes. This theoretical lens can be useful in analysing how change in learning environment in Mogadishu can improve context of learning.

In using the above mentioned theory in the context of university education in Somalia, it is important to focus on the Zone of proximal Development (ZPD). According to Abikar, ZPD deals with the tasks a learner needs the help of a more developed person in regard to execution (2021). This study employs the use of past and present students, lecturer, parents and University administration as stakeholders of the Somali Universities in an attempt to understand the existing gaps within the current educational environment and how these gaps, can be closed to enhance learning as proposed by Urbach et al.2023. For example, students need special heavy instructions or formal instructions to cope with difficulties that are caused by a lack of resources, language, or cultural differences (Vygotsky, 1978). Each of these stakeholders' views can then be used to determine particular learning environment aspects in which the learning environment can be optimised to better scaffold the students' education.

In addition, the Ecological Systems Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 is also helpful to look at the factors involved in learning environment of Somali universities. In the context of Somali study, therefore, the learning environment at university level may be considered in the terms of ecological system which is embedded with Societal, economic and Politics. For instance, the conflicts in Somali society in recent years, the difficulties involved in post-war recovery and resurgence of local practices impact the learning of the students (Bentley et al 2022). According to Bronfenbrenner, the external processes can be understood in how they interact with a set of internal process at the university level (or plausible mesosystem processes such as curriculum development or classroom climate) to influence the quality of education when there is societal instability or a lack of government support for higher learning institutions.

Taking from this theoretical paradigms, this study seeks to explain how the current higher educational foundation year in Mogadishu affects the learning climate for university students, and how enhancements may be pioneered. Through

stakeholders' views the research will only capture dimensions of various factors favouring or disparaging students' academic performance and consequently recommend feasible interventions aimed at enhancing the learning atmosphere, course and materials at Somali universities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

The current study employs an analytical cross-sectional study design that enables the researcher to capture the views of FY stakeholders at one time including the students, lecturers, university administrators and parents of the students. This design is suitable when aimed at having a cross-sectional study in terms of attitudinal, opinion, and viewpoints of the different stakeholders to the foundation year policy in the universities of Mogadishu. The rationale for this design is to be able to distinguish and contrast the range of positive and negative opinions from different form-fillers so as to determine some factors which affected their impressions. In this way, by employing the descriptive study, the goals of this research are to describe the initial nature of the students' interaction with the foundation year, their staking and response towards the foundation year and how they influenced by different factors including institutional context, socio-economic status and other factors. It also enables the association between the students' attitudes and the foundation year policy formulated by MOE,CH, and E.

With regards to the sampling process, this study uses a simple random sampling technique that will allow any participant to be selected randomly. This method is helpful in minimizing bias when generalizing the results and findings of the research to the total average population students within more affiliates universities across Mogadishu. The survey targeted various students of universities; Daba International University, Somali National University, Simad University, Plasma University, Salaam University, and Adan Adde International University. With students from different institutions responded through WhatsApp groups, more information is therefore generated for analysis.

Inclusion Criteria:

The students who formed the population of the study included any student currently enrolled in any of the listed universities, regardless of the level of study, and willingness to participate in the survey. It is important because it allowed to get as many views as possible, especially from the participants of the foundation year, including first-year students, and from those who were able to assess the results of the foundation year – the senior students. Enlisting parents, lecturers and university administrators as other participants helped to score the data in a way that offered a broad perspective on whether the foundation year was effective or not.

Exclusion Criteria:

The exclusion criteria were enrollment in an institution of higher learning, graduates, and those who refused the study. This allowed that the collected data were specific to the target community which included the active students, university staff, and parents to the students.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

This study adopted survey as the primary means of data collection in order to concomitously ascertain the perceptions of students, lecturers, parents and university administrators on the foundation year. This method was preferred for it enabled collection of a large number of responses within a short period thus informing an assessment of the different perspectives from the different stakeholders. The questionnaires were shared through the university's WhatsApp groups, circulated by the university committees, team leaders and class monitors which helped in covering almost all the universities of Mogadishu. Despite invitations for 600 students, 50 university admins, 100 lecturers and 50 parents, technical factors recurred and there was a marginal error of 7.7 %, but the survey was sufficiently large enough for analysis.

Data was collected from September, 2023 to February 2024 because students' views were to be captured over the different semesters of the

academic year. Any student in the universities that participated in the surveys was free to respond, so the views of first-year students can be compared to those of their more advanced peers. Besides, the participants were asked to provide feedback from parents, lecturers and university administrators in order to have a balanced view of the foundation year policy. Data was then accumulated and, using tools such as SPSS and excel, descriptive analytical studies were conducted; findings presented in tabular form, graphs and histograms for enhanced understanding.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Description analysis was used to gather information for this study to determine patterns, prevalence rates, and relations between different stakeholders' perceptions of the foundation year policy. In the data analysis, the two commonly used software, SPSS and Excel were used in the data analysis and data breakdown to help extract meaningful conclusions of the perception of students, lecturers, parents and university administrators. Globally, experienced survey evaluators such as university lecturers and researchers scrutinized the survey design and analysis process to validate the outcomes of the research. This input contributed to enhancing the study through following a solid and efficient procedure involving data analysis interpretation. All data collectors received their training to minimise errors in survey implementation, entry and coding of collected data.

In this research, ethical issues were paramount. Much as it is a requirement in research studies, the study followed standard ethical procedures where prior permission was sought from the different universities planning to take part in the study in addition to seeing to it that all respondents agreed to take part in the study. To ensure respondents' anonymity, their responses were not disclosed and due to the sensitive nature of the topic, strictly confidentiality was upheld through the entire process. Ethical rules of procedure regarding data collection were followed during the process, and all collectors that participated in data gathering were briefed on the issue of participant

anonymity. By randomized cross-sectional survey, strict ethical considerations, and high quality of quantitative analysis, this study helps to understand the potential of the foundation year to enhance university learning situation for students in Mogadishu.

RESULTS

The study reveals propositions that provide useful knowledge of the thoughts of the stakeholders on the foundation year policy on universities in Mogadishu, Somalia. The survey questionnaire filled by students, lecturers, parents, and other university administrators provide information concerning different aspects of learning environment, the impact of the foundation year and area that needs enhancement.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Category	Response	Percentage
Gender	Male	56.5%
	Female	43.5%
Age	Less than 20	37.8%
	21–30 years	32.5%
	31–40 years	16.7%
	41–50 years	8.0%
	Over 51 years	5.0%
Marital Status	Single	69.4%
	Married	28.0%
	Divorced	2.0%
	Widowed	0.6%
Type of Institution	Private	62.8%
	Public	37.2%
Stakeholder Type	Student	75.0%
	Lecturer	12.4%
	University Administrator	6.9%
	Parent	5.7%
	Complicated	37.25%

The demographic data of the study's respondents is presented in Table 1 and offers

important information about the nature of the sample. The penetrated respondents included 56.5% males while the female respondents constituted 43.5% of the respondents. By the age distribution it can be seen that the largest group comprised of People under the age of 20 forming 37.8% of the total respondents while 32.5% of people fell in the age bracket of 21- 30 years. Data on the marital status showed that all the respondents were single accounted for 69.4%, the others 28% were married and 2% of them were divorced. For the type of institution (62.8%) were in private universities while (37.2%) were in public universities. The major respondent category was student 75.0%, followed by lecturers 12.4%, university administrators 6.9% and parents with 5.7%. This distribution reveals a more emphasis given to the student sample in the survey in regard to the assessment of the foundation year policy.

Table 2: Exploring Stakeholders' Perspectives on Foundation Year

Category	Response	Frequency (%)
General Attitudes Toward the Foundation Year	Complicated Outlook	62.75%
	Positive Outlook	37.25%
Issues Identified in the Foundation Year	Credit Hours Adequate	56.25%
	Credit Hours Not Adequate	43.75%
	Teaching Materials Not Adequate	69.375%
	Teaching Materials Adequate	30.625%
	Lecturers Well-Matched	64.25%
	Lecturers Not Well-Matched	35.75%

	Need for Reform in Foundation Year, Yes (Beneficial)	74.4%	(Arabic & Somali)
	No (not Beneficial)	25.6%	
Perceived Benefits of the Foundation Year	No Need for Reform	63.6%	
	No (Not Beneficial)	34.4%	
Key Course Recommendations	English Courses More Credit	54.3%	
	University Courses More Credit	26.1%	
	Technology Courses More Credit	19.6%	
Concerns on Financial Support and Inequality	Financial Support (Scholarships)	14.4%	
	No Financial Support (Scholarships)	85.6%	
	Paid Less than Others	19.25%	
	Paid the Same as Others	80.75%	
Suggestions for Improvement	Language Courses Improvement	46.9%	
	Fee Structure Improvement	25.5%	
	Teaching Materials Improvement	27.6%	
Language Improvement	English Course need Standards Improvement	78.7%	
	Other languages	21.3%	

Table 2 synthesizes the data gathered from the study as it captured the various aspects of the foundation year as envisaged and experienced in Mogadishu's universities by the various stakeholders. It comprises ideas and concerns of the respondents regarding the relevancy of the course, the perceived benefits, recommendations on the course, perceived financial impact, and suggestions about areas that require improvement: all essential details which help to elucidate the areas that in need of enhancements and the aspects popular among the respondents. These ideas expose the ballpark strengths and weaknesses of the foundations year and will suggest that a strategic modification can easily make an important and positive difference for student learning.

General Attitudes Toward the Foundation Year:

Self-perceived negative feelings towards the foundation year were expressed by 62.75% of respondents, while 37.25% of respondents had positive feelings toward the foundation year, which means that there are lots of dissatisfied stakeholders. These may be due to organizational factors such as structure and content or the vagueness of objective stating a need for further enhancement to reduce such concerns. However, it is also necessary to state the points of potential failures among students who turned to the value of the foundation year thinking that some difficulties are more important and inevitable for their success.

Issues Identified in the Foundation Year:

On the overall aspects concerning the problem areas of the foundation year, some participants agreed while others disagreed with the credit hours as a form of variety. More particularly, 56.25% of the participants strongly agreed in better acceptance on the credit hours in the foundation year while 43.75% weakly agreed which could be an indication that while a few participants may be content with the foundation course load, a majority felt that the course was too light. While all the respondents perceived the teaching materials as not

satisfactory, being above average, 69.375%, the rest of the 30.625% had a different opinion in positive, which suggests that there might be some issues, which hinders the potential for development in this aspect. Further, 64.25% of respondents stated that their lecturers are well-matched with their respective courses, but 35.75% stated the opposite hence existence of mismatches in terms of the courses taught by the instructors. The pro-reform view is also discernible, as 74.4% respondents hold that the foundation year requires change: While 25.6% merely are of the opposite opinion. This implies that despite the aspects within the teaching of the foundation year, it is not addressing many areas needed by students and faculty.

Perceived Benefits of the Foundation Year:

Regarding the effectiveness of the foundation year, 63.6% supported it with the prospect of enhancing cultural adaptation and the learning environment, while 34.4% were opposed to this concept. This implies that It is believed that the foundation year may help raise students' readiness for university life a potentially valuable tool although the effectiveness of this approach is not wholly endorsed by all stakeholders. The positive attitudes regarding cultural and environmental effects for the foundation year indicate a stark interest in modes through which the foundation year can positively aid student wellness while the aspect of academic readiness still sparks debate. Future studies can look at how the benefits flow down to the day to day student experience and academic performance.

Key Course Recommendations:

As for the orientation of the certain courses in the framework of the studied foundation year, 54.3 % of the respondents would like to increase the number of credit hours per the English courses, considering language is the key to success for learners. Also, 26.1% of the participants wished that university-specific courses should have more credits hours, and 19.6% wished that institution should focus more on the technology courses, which pointed to the variety of concerns in the process of

skills development. This large set of recommendations is rooted in the multiplicity of tasks that students are supposed to solve both in class and in their future careers. This pressure to learn English and program rooted courses in line with changes happening all over the world in education strategies, and they stress the paramount significance of these areas to students.

Concerns on Financial Support and Inequality:

This lead to financial considerations as a major problem. With reference to the idea of offering financial scholarships to foundation year students, only 14.4% of the respondents were in support, while 85.6% of the respondents were in the negative category. Lack of these forums has been noted to lack provisions for financial support; this may deny students coming from financially challenged background a shot. About the salary inequality, 80.75% of respondents presumed that the foundation year students are paid the similar amount of money like the other students, 19.25% believed that the foundation year students are paid less and it points to the issue of unequal payment for students. Concerning the money troubles, there is no given financial support options which may perhaps deepen the divisions of poor and the wealthy students and, therefore, these financial aid should serve to make each student equal in learning.

Suggestions for Improvement:

When questioned on what could be done to make the foundation year better, the largest response stayed on the aspect concerning languages, 46.9%. This tallies with the previous finding that more attention needs to be given to English course since 78.7% of the respondents complained and need that the English course did not achieve the general standard expected. The others were; needed adjustment of the fees charged to students (25.5%) and modification of the learning/reference items (27.6%) indicating the improvement of teaching materials also need oter languages improvements like Arabic and somali counted 21.3%. These recommendations draw attention to the issue of how the appropriateness of the content and structure of the program is periodically checked in order to meet

the students' and faculties' needs. Ways in which these areas of concern could be addressed might include; enhancing the foundation year experience and creating a more solidified foundation.

In conclusion, the lack of enthusiasm, together with the presence of positive ideas about the foundation year indicates that, although, the majority of respondents expressed their support to the foundation year, many of them see the great potential to enhance the foundation year experience by providing the language courses effectiveness, focus on the program courses offered, quality teaching, sufficient funding and structure of the programme. Almost every alteration mentioned, including language courses, skills and the foundation year duration, has been driven by the need to improve the programme. Solving these problems might then result in a higher effectiveness of the foundation year and academic preparedness of the students in the future.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Considering the results of the present study, it can be stated that most of the respondents have negative views toward the foundation year program with 62.75% of the respondents found foundation year as complicated or problematic; meaning some students may not find the program to be well-suited to their needs. Goldberg et al., (2021). 37.25% of the respondents agreed positive, this is in agreement with a number of past works where authors claim that when well managed, foundation years are overall regarded as constructive approaches to transition from high school to university education. Foundation years are aimed at improving students' learning achievement and equipping them with personal disability, which is needed, for further study have confirmed some positive and ambivalent feelings but pointed to the difficulties of educational students especially in the problem of getting used to academic demands, which leads to the conclusion that although there are rich possibilities in the foundation years their success is the function of approaches that meet student needs and demands.

Based on the views on the foundation year, 56.25% of the data pointed out credit hour inadequacies, teaching and learning resources, and the match between foundation courses and curriculum. In more detail, 43.75% of respondents did not agree with the credit hours as sufficient while 69.375% considered the teaching materials as insufficient. Earlier researches have also pointed out that lack of required credit hours or time-table mismatch might create a gap in the students' abilities towards university level (Fawcett, 2023). This is in contrast with the observations that a considerable number of respondents perceived the teaching material as insufficient, which is in line with observation from other studies pointing that improved and accessible teaching resources are crucial, especially for foundation programs in developing countries (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021). This may be generated by the void in teaching learning materials and the poor selection of credits, thus provoking frustrations among students, while any structural weakness in the foundation year requires a much more careful design to fit the educational bridge between secondary and university education.

When asked about their perception of advantages of having foundation year, 62.75% of the respondents agreed that the foundation year would be of advantage to students with special reference to the experiences given to the students in dealing with the culture, learning materials, languages, fees, and life in the foundation year of the universities. Nonetheless, when 34.3% of respondents are in agreed, this means that all students may benefit from the foundation year science programs needed to facilitate their transition into higher learning. This finding concurs with prior evidence on foundation years suggesting that these programmes may offer essential skill development and/ or cultural socialisation, but the success is predicated on how the programme is implemented and designed (King & Vaiman, 2019). There is the need to add a note of caution that the effects of the foundation year may be insignificant in some institutions while some learners may have the perception that the program misses the mark on fulfilling specific requirements

for some student group. Such combined-developmental feedback show that foundation year programs as educational intervention must be proactive and adaptive to student development needs in language, academic skills, and acculturation.

Regarding the need for course suggestions, respondents claimed a desire for additional credit hours in English classes with 54.3% of the survey participants. This is in tandem with research conducted globally, which attribute the importance of English language particularly to students in non-English speaking learning institutions (Kithinji & OHirsi, 2022). The demand for emphasising on the English courses also reflects the world practice of increasing the focus on language assistance offered in the framework of the foundation year to develop students' language proficiency to study in the university (Avni & Finn, 2021). Moreover, 26.1% of the respondents insisted on credit hours for university-specific courses to be increased and 19.6% for technology course to suggest the growing significance of technology and specific subject knowledge in our current world. Recommendations by the students from this study reveal a dynamic nature of requirements in education, and propose that integration of improved language and computational literacy into FYE curriculum may be useful in more effectively preparing students for modern university learning.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the stakeholders' different perceptions of the foundation year in the universities of Mogadishu. Regarding the nature of the program the majority of respondents have a positive attitude and indicated the program has a positive impact by enhancing the level of student knowledge and the quality of the learning atmosphere. However, some issues were raised concerning a number of facets of this program such as the credit hour inadequacy, instructional, and teaching materials, and course relevance to students' future course endeavors. Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that though the concept of foundation year has its possibilities they

are yet to be enhanced, especially on how the Year can better adapt to the general curriculum offered by the students' major courses as well as other demands in their further studies. Finally, many of the respondents pointed to issues of concern and possible solutions such as proper organization of the program, more support in the English and technology subjects and thus better provision of the learning resources.

It was also found that financial issues were another big factor; the respondents were clearly unhappy about the fact that there is not enough foundation year scholarships or bursaries. This problem, as well as the range of problems starting from the financial for many students, including the presumed inequality in remuneration between FY and regular students, implies that financial constraints are still unfathomable. However, the study also established that the foundation year has potential support from the public in areas of cultural assimilation and preparation for university programmes. In the next step the results imply that the Foundation Year needs to be redesigned to be more relevant, skillful and useful for the learners, to be better aligned with their further learning and to tackle the issue of financial disadvantage. Thus, the program can contribute more actively to changes in the general learning paradigm in the universities of Mogadishu.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness of the foundation year program, comprehensive reforms should focus on increasing credit hours for English and technological courses, ensuring these subjects meet international standards to better prepare students for global academic and professional environments. Concurrently, allocating more funding for teaching materials, syllabus reforms and infrastructure is essential to address resource gaps that hinder quality learning. It is equally important to foster greater stakeholder engagement by actively involving diverse voices—including parents and lecturers—in the reform process to ensure initiatives are inclusive and contextually relevant. Additionally, developing targeted scholarship programs

especially foundation year students can help reduce financial barriers, promoting equity and access for underprivileged students. Finally, promoting courses aligned with the program should implement establishing clear standards for language courses, particularly English, will help standardize instruction and improve overall language proficiency, aligning the foundation year with international benchmarks and contributing to the broader goals of Somali higher education. The foundation year should also propose shortening its length of the year at most, as the majority of the respondents chose that option unless technical skills and targeted language should fill that gap.

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