

The White-Collar Hustle: Academic Writing & The Kenyan Digital Labour
Economy



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VOLUME I

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, except where otherwise stated.

Dedication

For my mother; may I inherit half her strength¹.

¹ Taken from Lorna Goodison's poem, 'For My Mother'

Abstract

This study seeks to understand the experiences of young academic writers² in Kenya, within the context of the new digital economy of educated-youth labour and global microwork exchanges. It situates academic writing in their wider lives and career trajectories; exploring the nature of their work, and the types of knowledge, skills and capital (if any) being developed through writing. The research design featured a case study of 27 current and former academic writers, and employed several methods, including; semi-structured interviews using WhatsApp, non-participant observation, Facebook data ‘scraping’, and document analysis of written samples.

Drawing on Thieme (2013), the thesis argues that academic writing acts as a ‘white-collar hustle’ for current undergraduate students and recent graduates in Kenya. It is an informal and precarious form of employment- facilitated through the digital economy- which affords Kenyan youth an avenue for developing academic and professional skills, while earning an income. Academic writing is primarily used as a part-time job alongside full-time studies, as a ‘place-holder’ during periods of would-be unemployment, and as a supplement to formal employment. Moreover, the writers have created an informal ‘community’ and ‘marketplace’ to their collective benefit, by leveraging existing personal and professional networks.

As such, the thesis challenges dominant narratives of youth (un)employment by suggesting that periods of transition are characterized by very active ‘making do’. Therefore, the study contends that the academic writing industry offers insights into the present and future of educated-youth work in Africa, and globally. In so doing, the study connects the global economy to local politics through the lens of contemporary experiences of youth; navigating assumptions and realities about Kenya’s place in a globalized world, and the young writers’ place in a newly-formed knowledge economy.

Keywords: youth, unemployment, informal economy, digital economy, hustle, academic writing, higher education, Kenya, contract cheating, WhatsApp, internet-mediated research

² Academic writing is the local term for online contract cheating in higher education

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	12
Academic writing in Kenya	12
Rationale.....	17
Africa’s Place in the Global	20
The Space of Place	21
Thesis Overview	24
Chapter One: Literature Review	28
Introduction	28
Neoliberalism & Commodification in Higher Education	28
Youth and Employment in Africa.....	32
African Informal Economies	55
The Shadow Academy	68
Conclusion	82
Chapter Two: Methodology	84
Research Questions	84
Research Design	85
Theoretical Framework: Theory from the South	88
Positionality	91
Methodological Approach	92
The Field: Researching Online in Kenya	101
Sampling & Access	108
The Participants	114
Research Methods	133
Ethics, Limitations & Challenges	145
The Ethics of the Hustle	150

Data Analysis	156
Chapter Three: Youth Transitions	161
Tracing the Place of Writing in the Youths' Career Trajectories ...	161
Types of 'Work' Arrangements	178
Academic Writing and ICT for Youth Unemployment Policy	186
The Hustle Does Not Wait: Separating Waitthood from Youth.....	194
Chapter Four: Alternative Economies	199
The Discourse of Hustle	199
The Demands of Academic Writing	205
Pay Rates and Digital Money.....	213
Personal and Social Networks among Academic Writers	219
Writing in the Wider Digital Economy	237
Ajira Digital	243
Hustle at the Crossroads	245
Chapter Five: Shadow Academies	250
Writing & Research Processes in Academic Writing	250
The Subversive Use of Turnitin & other Plagiarism Checkers	265
The Division of Writers into Specialists and Generalists	272
The Use of Academic and Professional Competencies	276
The Shadow Academy of Academic Writing	288
Chapter Six: Discussion	292
Duplicities, Ambiguities & Contradictions of Academic Writing ...	292
The Ubiquity of the Hustle	297
Chapter Seven: Conclusions & Recommendations	301
Conclusions	301
Theory in Practice	305

Policy Recommendations 307

References 309

Appendices 323

Appendix 1- Writing Sample 1323

Appendix 2- Writing Sample 2.....328

Appendix 3- Writing Sample 3.....346

Appendix 4- Screenshots of Academic Writing advertisements.... 352

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1. Research Design Diagram	89
Figure 2. The county distribution of online workers from the survey.....	108
Figure 3. Selected screenshots of the Facebook and Instagram Ads	113
Figure 4. The gender distribution of survey respondents	127
Figure 5. The age distribution of survey respondents	128
Figure 6. The County distribution of survey respondents	128
Figure 7. The university status of the respondents	129
Figure 8. The gender distribution of online workers from the survey	130
Figure 9. The age distribution of the online workers from the survey.....	130
Figure 10. The county distribution of online workers from the survey	131
Figure 11. The university status of online workers from the survey	131
Figure 12. Percentage of writers who considered the ‘ethics of writing.....	156
Figure 13. Percentage of interviewees who considered the ‘ethics of writing	156
Figure 14. The typical career trajectories among writers	167
Figure 15. The career plans of writers in the survey	167
Figure 16. The career plans of interviewees only	168
Figure 17. Typical writing duration for writers in the entire survey	169
Figure 18. Typical writing duration for interviewees only	169
Figure 19. The distribution of employment routes for writers in entire survey.....	179
Figure 20. The distribution of writers employing others in the entire survey	185
Figure 21. The distribution of writers employing others among interviewees	185
Figure 22. The writers’ main motivating factors	202
Figure 23. The interviewees’ main motivating factors	202
Figure 24. The most common working spaces (entire survey)	203
Figure 25. The most common working spaces among interviewees only	203
Figure 26. The average time spent weekly on academic writing	204
Figure 27. The average time spent weekly on academic writing (survey)	204
Figure 28. Main payment mediums among current writers	213

Figure 29. Main payment mediums among past writers.....	214
Figure 30. Writers' average earnings per week (entire survey)	215
Figure 31. Writers' average earnings per week (interviewees)	215
Figure 32. How writers were introduced to academic writing	220
Figure 33. The most popular websites used by academic writers	238
Figure 34. The types of online work in which writers engaged	239
Figure 35. One of Joseph's writing aides	253
Figure 36. One of Joseph's writing aides	255
Figure 37. The Turnitin reports for 10 writing samples	271

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1. Internal Migration among Writers	22
Table 2. Interviewees' Basic Information	131
Table 3. The coding framework of the study	157

Introduction

Academic Writing in Kenya

A search of ‘academic writing’ in the Kenyan Star newspaper’s online classifieds³ reveals 591 live job listings. Titles include: ‘Freelance Academic Writers are Required’, ‘Academic Writing’, ‘Need Academic Writing Job?’ ‘Online Academic Writer’, and ‘Academic Writing Jobs’. One advertisement reads:

Hi, Freelance academic writers are urgently required in the field of English, Literature. Mathematics, Business, Accounting, Finance, Civil Engineering, Physics, Finance, Forensic Science & Statistics etc. If you are one of these, please reply this by mentioning your field in the Subject...We have a good opportunity for you. Please attach the sample of previous writing of your field with a copy of your CV” Salary Range: KES 15,000-25,000 kes.

Similarly, the advertisement entitled, ‘Academic Writing’, reads:

We are looking for experienced academic writers who are familiar with APA, MLA, Harvard and Chicago referencing styles. Applicants must be college graduates who can work for long hours without supervision. All payments are made on the 5th and 20th of every month. If interested, please reach me.

A similar search on Kenya’s Craigslist⁴ yields 9 pages of results. One of the advertisements, entitled, ‘Online Academic Writers Wanted Urgently’, states:

Are you jobless and need a flexible job? We are an academic writing company with clients from UK, US and Australia. We are looking for Kenyan writers who can work

³ <http://www.the-star.co.ke/classifieds/jobs/academic-writing.html>. June 8, 2016

⁴ See <https://kenya.craigslist.org/search/wri?query=academic+writing>. June 8 2016

with us. We have openings for experienced writers willing to write essays, academic work and articles. We pay from 500.00 per page every 15th day of the month and this is why we need only experienced writers. People who have done online jobs before and who can write in APA, MLA and Harvard styles and submit non- plagiarized work. We have a lot for work and so your speed will be essential. Apply with your CV. Include your mobile number and the subjects that you can write on.

While conducting fieldwork for my MSc in African Studies during the Easter break in 2015, I met Simon, a Kenyan man in his early thirties. For the better part of 6 months, he had made a temporary home of the guesthouse where I was staying, having moved to Kampala from Nairobi to take up a job in Tourism. I remember being immediately drawn to his easy-going nature, and the frankness of his speech. Over the course of the month I spent at the guesthouse, Simon and I quickly struck up a friendship. I told him about my life and my studies, while he told me about his. We shared very many conversations about tourism, as I was from a country for which tourism was its lifeline, just as it was for him.

Simon studied Tourism Management at a Kenyan university from 2001-2005. It was obviously his passion, as he spoke at length about his job and plans for starting his own business. In fact, he promised to take me on safari while in Nairobi (and later followed through with that promise). However, he was also quite conscious of the challenges of working within the industry and in finding steady work given the unpredictability of the market. During one of our conversations, Simon mentioned that for about seven months he had worked as an ‘academic writer’. I later learnt that academic writing is the term used in Kenya to describe the job of writing essays, theses, dissertations, and other assignments online for remotely located students. In higher education, this practice is known as ‘contract

cheating’; “a basic relationship between three actors; a student, their university, and a third party who completes assessments for the former to be submitted to the latter, but whose input is not permitted” (Newton 2018, p.2.).

Intrigued, I implored him to talk more about it. Simon explained that the job paid well, hence its appeal, but it involved extremely long hours and difficult demands. He explained how he would often have to research topics related to a wide variety of fields to produce papers for his customers. As I listened to him, I was fascinated by the work he described- not least because it seemed to me that quite paradoxically, Simon was gaining a type of education by helping others to cheat through theirs. In those 6 months, he had gathered bits and pieces from various disciplines and subjects; an experience which reminded me of my own multi and inter-disciplinary course in African Studies. And so, Simon’s story became the catalyst for the present study.

Although the exact number of Kenyan academic writers is unknown, recent studies place the estimate at 20,000⁵. Currently⁶, there are 20,694 registered freelancers based in Kenya on Upwork (formerly Elance-Odesk); 2,671 of whom specialize in ‘academic writing’. Similarly, of the 12,194 Kenyans registered on Freelancer.com, there are 2,790 ‘academic writers. Therefore, academic writing is popularly regarded as a viable form of employment ‘in’ Kenya. As such, there are several blogs and Facebook groups offering tips on navigating the industry, as well as numerous advertisements for academic writers in local newspapers. Academic writing exists as one part of a larger landscape of digital work, including content writing⁷, transcription, web design, search engine optimization and translation, which acts as

⁵ See <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Contract-Cheating-s-African/237586>

⁶ As of March 2nd 2019

⁷ Article writing and Content writing are synonyms; they both refer to the practice of writing general (non-academic) pieces as part of the gig economy. Article or content writing typically includes; blog articles, op-eds, and general informational content.

a key source of income - especially for youth. In fact, the Kenyan government has formally recognized the proliferation and potential of the digital economy, through the launch of the Ajira Digital platform in 2016. Under the slogan, “online work is work” and “the future works online”, Ajira “...seeks to position Kenya as a choice labour destination for multi-national companies...to empower over one million young people to access digital job opportunities...to raise the profile of digital work”⁸.

Attempts to situate the popularity of academic writing as a form of work, may best be understood within the paradox of increased access to higher education without a requisite increase in knowledge-based jobs, thereby contributing to high rates of educated-youth unemployment. Kenya’s nascent knowledge economy has found great difficulty in absorbing the increasingly large graduate population. As such, recent governmental efforts (Vision 2030, National ICT Masterplan) have focussed on opportunities within the digital economy; particularly in the Business Processing Outsourcing Sector (BPO).

Therefore, this study contributes to scholarship by weaving together three seemingly disparate themes; contract cheating in higher education, micro-work in the digital economy, and youth unemployment in Africa, through the singular lens of academic writing in Kenya. In the process, the study makes three poignant claims about academic writing as a source of labour for Kenyan youth. Firstly, it demands a re-thinking of the conceptual linking of youth unemployment with waithood; ‘waiting’ (Honwana 2012); ‘time passing’ (Peter 2010); ‘hoping’ (Mains 2011); ‘time-killing’ (Ralph 2008), and ‘becoming’ (Mac-Ikemenjima 2015). It contends that youth transitioning from higher education to formal employment and/or ‘adulthood’ are actively seeking strategies to meet their financial needs. As such, they may be more appropriately described as ‘hustling’, rather than ‘waiting’ through their transitions.

⁸ See <https://ajiradigital.go.ke/home>

Secondly, the study connects youth employment in the digital economy, with that of work in local informal sectors, arguing that the former is a 21st century extension of the latter. Consequently, many of the traits and characteristics of informality and casual employment present in the informal economy are replicated in the digital gig economy. Thirdly, the study contends that academic writing represents both a ‘cannibalism’ and ‘calibanism’ of higher education. That is, Kenyan youth used some of the knowledge and academic skills gained from higher education to facilitate a form of commercial plagiarism. Additionally, through academic writing they have sought financial gain, notably, at the expense of the integrity of the very university system which promised to provide stable pathways to financial security. Furthermore, the study argues that academic writing acts as a subversive extension of neoliberalism in higher education. Academic writing may therefore be viewed as a part of the increased commodification in, and of, higher education where students have ‘contracted out’ assignments to third parties.

We are still largely unaware of the size, scope, economy, structure and localities within which academic writing is produced. Little is known about the writers who facilitate this trade, and even less about those in sub-Saharan Africa. The 27 writers in this study are all young people born, raised, and living in Kenya, either currently in university or graduated within the last 5 years. Beyond that, there is great variety in the reasons for working, the amount of time spent as writers, their views on writing, the estimation of the quality of their writing, how they were introduced, when they worked, and the ways in which they are employed. Each of their lives tells a distinct but similar story of individual and collective agency in response to limited opportunities for formal employment, and by extension, financial security. Their stories provide a glimpse into the diversity of experiences in the lives of academic writers in Kenya and help to illuminate the major themes of the study,

particularly those relating to the place of writing within their broader personal and professional lives, and within Kenya's new political knowledge economy.

Rationale

The academic writing industry offers a 21st century manifestation of the old phenomenon of essay mills. It combines the practice of commercial plagiarism (Stavisky 1973), with the new digital gig economy (Newton & Lang 2016), and the global interconnectedness of the internet. As such, the industry impacts multiple spheres of contemporary society, including higher education, youth employment and digital labour. However, perhaps due to the threat which academic writing poses to academic integrity in higher education, research into the industry has been dominated by concerns for the university (Draper & Newton 2017, Newton & Lang 2016, Bretag et.al. 2017, Clarke & Lancaster 2007).

Notwithstanding, higher education is undoubtedly a very big business (Barnett 1990, p. 1). Barnett notes that the massive increase in enrolment numbers has sparked a requisite increase in the number of persons employed and the amount of money generated. But the business of higher education has been propelled, not only by 'legitimate' subsidiaries such as the publishing and software industries, but also by 'less licit' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) enterprises like academic writing. Moreover, as a form of digital labour, academic writing lends itself to questions about transnational internet networks, the globalization of higher education and virtual knowledge economies. The industry constitutes a form of digital labour which carries with it a barrage of challenges and possibilities, rapidly evolving with the exponential progression of digital technologies.

Much of the inquiry into contract cheating has come from journalistic reports in popular media, where interest has been dominated by concerns about its impact on higher education, its ethical implications, and the motivations of the students who participate. Most recently, Kenya's Daily Nation covered a story describing the country as, "a hot bed of academic dishonesty where jobless graduates are minting millions of shillings writing theses and term papers for students in the United Kingdom".⁹ Other recent headlines include; 'Cheating epidemic at Britain's universities'¹⁰ as reported in The Telegraph in March 2011; 'Essay Mills continue to proliferate'¹¹ by the Guardian in 2012¹², and 'Who writes your essays?', a story covered by the University World News in 2013.

Similarly, in a story carried by BBC Magazine in May 2016 entitled, 'The man who helps students to cheat', Brian Bomford reports on Marek Jezek¹³, an academic writer. Jezek is a Congolese academic with a PhD from a 'leading British University', but he argues that he has been a victim of racial discrimination and is therefore unable to find work in universities. Jezek claims that students are often satisfied with his work, as many have received grades in the region of 70%. According to the report, Jezek gains his clients from word of mouth and works as an independent writer (rather than through a website), unlike many of the writers in Kenya. He also blames higher education for the growth of the contract cheating industry, contending that it has a role in the 'shared guilt' as administrators and lecturers overlook suspected cases out of fear of damaged institutional reputations.

Overall, the academic writing industry is shrouded in mystery and assumptions over its size, scope, operations, structures, as well as the points of entry into universities worldwide.

⁹ https://www.nation.co.ke/news/education/cheating-at-Kenyan-universities-worrying-/2643604-5052212-gjwcr4/index.html?fbclid=IwAR0_fBb-B02IMJBK9T09-PeNxxh6X_3ptorfDwdBbUa0R0zmlD41829OvqaQ

¹⁰ <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20110312085849459&query=essay-writing>

¹¹ <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20130319165921649&query=essay-writing>

¹² <http://www.theguardian.com/education/mortarboard/2012/feb/06/essay-writing-for-students>

¹³ Marek Jezek is a pseudonym used to hide his identity

However, there is an immediate need for an understanding of the ways in which the industry is conceptualized and managed by those who supply the products. Their meaning-making patterns, theories about the work, and ideas about the ethics of the trade are valuable as they are important players in the world of higher education. Such knowledge is extremely useful from an educational standpoint as it could inform policy makers in higher education in their efforts to maintain academic integrity. Additionally, investigating the industry is important from an economic perspective as it encompasses digital economies of microwork, financial exchanges, networks and cash flows.

Therefore, this study is vital for two major reasons. Firstly, it is useful in its illumination of the ‘contract cheating’ industry from the ‘supply’ end. As a relatively new field within education research, much of the previous studies on contract cheating have focussed on student experiences (Bretag et. al. 2017) and/or providing quantitative data on website traffic (Newton 2018). As such, the study helps to illuminate the industry from the perspective of the ‘contractors. Since cases of contract cheating seem to be increasing (Curtis & Clare 2017), this study is beneficial in highlighting the kinds of strategies used by the writers, which may in turn be useful for university faculty and administration in recognizing third party contracted papers.

Secondly, the study is needed because youth un(der)employment is an acute problem in much of the world (Fox & Thomas 2012; Anyanwu 2013; Honwana 2012), particularly among youth with university degrees. As a result, educated youth have become increasingly disillusioned as they are denied the white-collar careers, job security and financial stability they hoped a university degree would guarantee. In fact, in sub-Saharan Africa, more educated youth are employed in non-formal sectors than in the formal sectors (Fox & Thomas 2012). Notwithstanding, African youth (and adults) continue to find ways to generate incomes for themselves and their families. This study helps to uncover some of the digitally-

mediated employment strategies and methods of socio-economic experimentation of young people in Kenya, thereby adding to the collective understanding of youth un(der)employment in Kenya, and the developing world. The study is particularly useful in highlighting the challenges and activities of highly educated youth in the Africa; a subset of youth which is usually ignored in development discourses. Furthermore, the study offers valuable insight into new and emerging 21st century ‘work’, with its emphasis on labour in the digital gig economy.

Africa’s place in the Global

One of the most topical debates in the past century of ‘African studies’ has surrounded questions about African’s place in the ‘global’; at the intersection of discourses about globalization and modernity. Often, such conversations are foregrounded with queries about the role of the local in materializing the global, or, put simply; the local/global dialectic. In *Global Shadows*, Ferguson (2012) argues that Africa’s place in the global is often tenuous- providing only selective links to limited spots around the world- rather than *covering* the globe (p.14). Africa’s participation in the ‘global’ produces “highly selective spatially encapsulated forms of global connection combined with widespread disconnection and exclusion” (p.14). Ferguson further contends that:

This leaves most Africans with only a tenuous and indirect connection to ‘the global economy’... that a purportedly universalizing movement of ‘globalization; should have the effect of rendering Africa once again ‘dark’ in the eyes of the wider world suggests the intimate link, in this respect, between the question of economic marginalization in a global economy and that of membership in a global society (p.14)

Ferguson’s concerns about a dotted and selective ‘globe’ are well-founded. Although data on the clients’ geographic locations and university attendance are limited, anecdotal evidence

from the writers suggest that they are primarily located in the English-speaking Global North (Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand). As such, the writers' 'global' reach may, in fact, be limited to a few economically powerful, anglophone countries.

Consequently, Ferguson's call for a "new reframing of discussions of the global" (p.23); one which is more concerned with social relation and obligations, rather than transactional flows, seems especially poignant for academic writing as a deeply networked and socially bound industry.

Ferguson also raises issues of inequality which are often overlooked in discussions of global and local participation, contending, "the re-emergent question of the supranational membership- of Africans as... 'citizens of the world' puts the question of the unequal relation between Africa and the West back on the table in a radical way" (p.23). Within the transactions of academic writing, inequality emerges in the very character of writing where the 'Southern' workers are generally, much less likely to become 'clients' or buyers on the very platforms where they sell their labour, due to global economic and social inequalities between the geographies of their respective regions.

The Space of Place

This study is about Kenya and Kenyans and takes place in "Kenya"; but the *place* in/of/that is Kenya is complex. 'Place' proved to be a nebulous concept in the study, both methodologically and theoretically. I was in Nairobi for 5 months, researching an exclusively online and digital form of labour, and having met only 3 of the 27 writers face-to-face. Yet, we shared a space; yet, we inhabited the same place, the same city, Nairobi. We walked the same streets and were frustrated by the same traffic jams. We negotiated in the same markets, we drank at the same coffee shops, we shopped in the same malls, the same supermarkets.

We texted, we chatted, we called, we spoke in the same place; divided and united by technology. Consequently, the thesis explicitly grapples with ideas of space and place as they are fundamental to its Research Design, Methodology and by extension, the findings and analysis. Readings and experiences of space and place define the study.

The writers' experience of place was also interesting; an obvious microcosm of the Kenyan (and generally, African) negotiation of space and place. Even as each of them was Kenyan, born in Kenya, studied in Kenya, and had lived in Kenya all their lives. Still, there was a high degree of internal migration; many had been born in one city, but moved to another for university, and then to another city for work. Their relationship to the place of Kenya was therefore generally multi-dimensional, thereby creating a complex notion of 'the field' within the study (see table 1). As such, the 'field' of Kenya was enacted across digital and physical spaces, simultaneously, with a large degree of fluidity and flexibility. The places and spaces where the participants' writing occurred were equally fluid and flexible- spanning their homes, offices, school libraries, and internet cafes; connecting them to each other, to me, and to clients around the world.

Table 1

Internal Migration among Writers

Birth Location	University Location	Work Location
Nairobi	Zetech University, Nairobi	Nairobi
West Kenya	Masinde Muliro University of Science & Technology, Kakamega, West Kenya	Mombasa, Coastal Kenya

Nairobi	Dedan Kimathi university, Nyeri, Central Kenya	Nyeri, Central Kenya
Central Kenya	Jomo Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Mombasa, Coastal Kenya
West Kenya	Masinde Muliro University of Science & Technology, Kakamega, West Kenya	Kakamega, West Kenya
East Kenya	Meru University, East Kenya	Nakuru, Rift Valley
Nairobi	Moi University, Mombasa	Nairobi
Central Kenya	University of Nairobi, Nairobi	Nairobi
Nairobi	Jomo Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Nairobi
East Kenya	Embu University, East Kenya	Embu, East Kenya
Nyanza	Meru University, East Kenya	Chuka, East Kenya
Nairobi	Pwani University, Coastal Kenya	Kilifi, Coastal Kenya
Nairobi	Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Nairobi
Nairobi	Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Nairobi
West Kenya		
Rift Valley	Moi University, Mombasa	Mombasa, Coastal Kenya

Coastal Kenya	Chuka University, East Kenya	Mombasa, Coastal Kenya
Nairobi	Jomo Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Nairobi
Rift Valley	Egerton University, Rift Valley	Rift Valley
Nairobi	Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Nairobi
Rift Valley	Moi University, Mombasa	Mombasa, Coastal Kenya
Rift Valley		
Nairobi	Kenyatta University, Nairobi	Nairobi
Nairobi	Maseno University, Nyanza	Nairobi
Nairobi	University of Nairobi, Nairobi	Nairobi
Nairobi	University of Nairobi, Nairobi	Nairobi

Thesis Overview

This study is concerned with understanding the place(s) and use(s) of academic writing in the lives of Kenyan youth, and the place of academic writing within Kenya's digital labour economy. Situated within the context of youth (un)employment in the Africa, the study explores the writers' career trajectories, their 'work' arrangements and conditions, their academic and professional development, their personal and professional networks, and their sharing and trading practices. Using the conceptual frameworks of Comaroff & Comaroff's (2012) 'African vantage point', and later, Thieme's (2013) 'Kenyan hustle', the

study grapples with the ways in which young people navigate local socio-economic conditions and leverage global trends to simultaneously ‘make do’ and create their own professional opportunities. The study responded to three research questions:

1. How does academic writing fit into the wider lives of university-educated youth in Kenya?
2. What is the role of academic writing within the new forms of labour in Kenya’s digital economy?
3. How do academic writers experience the ‘work’ of academic writing?
 - a) What are the processes of production involved in academic writing?
 - b) What kinds of knowledge, skills, and capital (if any), are they gaining in the process?

The study’s methodology is informed by a keen attention to the participants’ practices, perspectives and insights, which serve as the starting point for inquiry and analysis. As such, the research design includes ethnographic methods such as in-depth, recurrent, unstructured interviews and non-participant observation. Moreover, it incorporates digital methods and tools, such as an online survey, Facebook and Instagram advertisements, online article writing (as ‘near participant observation’), and online (WhatsApp) interviews, to reflect the highly digital nature of academic writing. The ethics of academic writing, both as researcher and as writer, are also thoroughly considered.

The study’s key findings suggest that two multi-dimensional themes are particularly important when understanding the role(s) of academic writing in Kenya’s digital economy and the lives of its university-educated youth; these are ‘white-collar’, and ‘hustle’. Therefore, the first findings chapter centres on the sense of ‘*activity*’ which defines the period between schooling and formal employment for these writers, by capturing the myriad of

socio-economic experimentations in which the youth engage, both offline and online, as well as the centrality of ICT and digital money systems in facilitating their participation in the digital economy. It tracks the various roles which writing plays in their long-term career plans, while interrogating the usefulness of the notion of youth ‘in-transition’.

The second findings chapter underlines the positioning of academic writing as an alternative, informal economy. It demonstrates the ‘hustle’ of writing by highlighting the ways in which youth use creativity and ingenuity to navigate the uncertainty and insecurity of ‘work’ in this context. The chapter also underscores the importance of ‘community’, showing how writers utilize and expand on existing personal and professional networks, both in their offline lives (friends, family, colleagues) and online lives (Facebook, WhatsApp).

Finally, the third findings chapter explores the ‘white-collar’ component of writing, particularly the use and development of professional and academic competencies. It outlines the processes and procedures which inform the ‘shadow academy’ of academic writing, which simultaneously mimics and undermines the ‘real’ Academe.

These themes combine to create the notion of academic writing as a ‘white-collar hustle’. The thesis therefore describes and analyses the ‘white-collar hustle’ as it relates to youth transitions, graduate destinations, youth entrepreneurship, youth livelihoods, digital economies, shadow academies, and political economies in Africa. Consequently, the thesis argues that the ‘white-collar hustle’ challenges dominant narratives of youth in-transition in which young people are portrayed as existing in prolonged periods of waiting, punctuated by aimlessness, hopelessness, and widespread inactivity. By contrast, Kenyan academic writers have shown ingenuity and agency by skilfully using the availability of ICT, the low barriers to the digital economy, and the inter-connectivity of community networking, thereby

epitomizing an experience of transition, which is best described as ‘hustling’; moving, bustling, making do, getting by, inventiveness.

Thus, the study posits that the industry gives us ‘privileged insight’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) into the present and quickly unravelling future of work for educated youth in the North and South, as it relates to the ubiquity of the digital economy as a main source of employment. This, of course, poses significant implications for the social and political composition of society in shaping the meaning and experience of work in more casual and precarious terms, and by extension, a re-defining of traditional social categories such as ‘youth’, and ‘adulthood’.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter converges themes of digital labour, contract cheating and youth unemployment through the lens of commodification in higher education. By exploring the philosophical underpinnings and recent massification of the global university system, the chapter examines possible links between knowledge production, neo-liberalisation and educated-youth unemployment, particularly against the background of Africa's changing political economy of higher education. The chapter explores various forms of production, commodification and neo-liberalism in the economies (both legitimate and illegitimate) within the 'business' of higher education.

Neoliberalism & Commodification in Higher Education

Contemporary observations about the expansion of higher education are usually discussed within the notion of 'neoliberalism in higher education'; the idea that education has become increasingly marked by 'a specific mode of government rooted in economic discourses of competition' (Rapper & Olsen, 2016, p.147) which gives rise to various pressures in both academics and students. For academics, it is best articulated as the pressure to 'publish or perish,' accompanied by complex systems of monitoring, measurement, evaluation, quality assurance and audits (Rapper & Olsen 2016). Accordingly, the assertion is that 'students-as-producers' (Cole & Maisuria, 2017, p. 2) may have adopted this larger systematic outlook, viewing their studies in similarly economic and transactional terms. As a result, contract cheating may, in some cases, be viewed as a type of academic 'outsourcing'

and a justifiable approach to achieving success within the system. Kleinman et al. (2012) quotes Harvey (2005) in defining neoliberalism as:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an industrial framework characterized by strong private property, free markets, and free trade (p.2)

In the context of tertiary education, neoliberal ideologies are thought to lead to the commodification of knowledge, privatization in, and of, university, and the marketization of stake-holder relationships.

Kleinman et.al. (2012) notes that one of the major consequences of neoliberalism in education is privatization- which involves, not just the ‘retreat of the state’, but also ‘the expansion or proliferation of private solutions to broadly social or public problem’ (p.2387). This has been termed elsewhere as privatization *in* education (Ball 2010). Furthermore, Kleinman cites the emphasis on measuring educational outcomes “solely through instrumental market indicators” (p.2387). Giroux (2000) further adds that neoliberalism has led to the ‘widespread adoption’ of ‘bare pedagogy’; a practice which emphasizes competitiveness, market-driven rationality and individualism, at the expense of civic responsibilities, public values and ethics. He argues that neoliberalism has produced both a ‘bare pedagogy’ university, and a ‘bare pedagogy’ individual within the university. Giroux posits:

Bare pedagogy strips education of its public values, critical contents, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to the logic of privatization, efficiency, flexibility, the accumulation of capital, and the destruction of the social state... Shaping the neoliberal framing of public and higher education is

a corporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, supporting top-down management, and reducing all levels of education to job-training sites (p.14).

As such, Giroux contends that the university has shifted from a cultural and intellectual site of democracy, to one with corporate mandates and values. He lists the confusion of education with training; the replacement of tenured-faculty with contract labour; the treatment of knowledge as products; the treatment of students as customers; and the defining of knowledge in instrumental terms, as some of the major indicators of bare pedagogy, and neoliberalism more broadly.

Similarly, Urciuoli (2018) argues that the current phase of higher education is marked by the interpretation of all problems as ‘technical problems’ with ‘measurable solutions. She stresses the ways in which neoliberalism has commodified university ‘experiences’, and shaped relationships between students and faculty. Urciuoli contends that it has re-configured the very essence of what it means to be a student, faculty member or administrator, such that “one must also have a brand” (p.8). She explains:

Such neoliberal shaping of how one ideally imagines oneself and others of similar subjectivity also governs one’s relation to the institutions within which one operates. In these ways, student imagery linked to specific institutions can become central to institutional branding. Not only do students and their experiences become part of an institution’s brand, but also students are encouraged to define themselves in ways that function much as worker self-branding should... Packaging undergraduate education as individual cultural capital conveys the illusion that student-consumers are in control, masking the inequalities of social and symbolic capital. (p.9)

Urciuoli stresses the ways in which this model masks the structural inequalities and systematic injustices within higher education and wider society, by perpetuating an unquestioning belief in ‘rational meritocracy’.

Similarly, Shrivastava & Shrivastava (2014) use the example of South Africa to illustrate the restructuring of higher education in neoliberalist terms which, they argue, “has led to a redefinition of the core social purposes and functions of universities to serve purely utilitarian ends and become instruments of the economy, and industry” (p.810). Overall, they contend that the 21st century must go beyond ‘short term neoliberal priorities’. Shrivastava & Shrivastava track the changes in university since the 1970s, contending that due to the wide spread view that higher education did not deliver large-scale public benefits, many African countries (encouraged by international lending agencies) reduced public investment in tertiary institutions. Coupled with global economic recessions and raising inequalities, Shrivastava & Shrivastava posit that “education has become a positional good in a highly inegalitarian neoliberal knowledge economy. The Post-Secondary Education (PSE) sector has been transformed from a service to the public, to serving the market with the latter as a source of revenues” (p. 815).

Furthermore, Innis (2006) argues that African countries experienced a paradigmatic shift in the perceived role of higher education between the 1960s and 1990s, where tertiary education transformed from being conceptualized as a public good intended to “produce competent, literate citizens and thereby contribute to the development of civil society and democracy” (p.127), to that of a ‘private good’ and “a means to achieve individual social mobility” (p.127). Innis (2006) poignantly argues that education in Africa has now become a tool for individual social mobility and increased private economic security. He contends:

The primary beneficiaries of formal education in Africa tend to be private individuals...The system of formal education is now being understood for what it really is- a mechanism for providing private individuals with a cultural commodity that gives a competitive advantage in pursuit of social position. (p.122)

However, the demand for higher education has outgrown the demand for workers with higher education degrees in their local economies. As a result, competition for 'white-collar' jobs has become fierce, as jobs are scarce and so having a university degree is no longer a guarantee of a secure, prestigious job. As a result, most educated African youth are un or underemployed (Fox and Thomas 2012). Whether consciously or unconsciously, African governments and societies promised young people a better life through higher education, and it has failed to deliver that promise.

Youth and Employment in Africa

The widespread phenomenon of youth unemployment is an important consideration in discourses of youth transitions, due to the centrality of employment as a marker of adulthood. The dominant narrative is that since many young people in the 'South' are unable to find well-paying, secure jobs, their youth-hood is necessarily delayed, as they wait for employment, and by extension, adulthood. As such, Honwana (2012) argues that youth is a time of protracted liminality, prolonged adolescence, and delayed adulthood. Thieme (2014) similarly delineates notions of 'protracted liminality'. Much work has therefore been done in mapping these experiences of youth unemployment and liminality. Typically, youth unemployment is presented both as a period of activity (Honwana 2012), Peter (2010), Thieme (2013), McGowan (2017); and as one of passive, hopeless time-killing (Mains 2011), Ralph (2008), (Seernels 2014).

Particularly among educated youth, notions of ‘reservation prestige’ emerge (Seernels 2014), as some youth prefer to be unemployed, rather than *under-employed*- having to engage in low status, casual work. Despite this, several studies on youth in the Global South continue to confirm that precarious work; micro-entrepreneurship (Burchell, Dolan & Rajak (2016), informal jobs (Anyanwu 2013), and household farms (Fox & Thomas 2016) remain the major sources of income for youth- regardless of their education levels. Moreover, regarding the Kenyan context, McCowan et.al (2017) found that absolute unemployment levels were much lower than expected, but graduate youth were mainly involved in self-employment, provisional and part-time employment, which helped to form ‘piecemeal careers and ‘stepping stones’ to formal jobs.

Questioning the usefulness of ‘Youth’

Recent literature on youth-hood in Africa and elsewhere has started to reject traditional teleological concepts of youth. Johnson-Banks (2002) and Burgess (2005) both stress the fluidity and dynamism of ‘youth’, in rejecting dominant linear frameworks which promote the universality, linearity, and coherence of life stages. Moreover, Honwana & DeBoeck (2005) & Honwana (2012) each historicize the notion of youth-hood and its use in Africa, noting that the concept is a modern one, and has only recently gained in relevance for African societies. These studies on youth have teased out the nuances and contradictions there within, particularly as it relates to conditions of un(der)employment. As steady employment is viewed as one of the key factors in transitioning to adulthood, employment becomes *the* key component of adulthood, on which other markers; marriage, children, ownership of property firmly rests.

Honwana (2012) describes ‘youth’ as “a time of growth” and “a process of constructing and reconfiguring identities” (p.11). She notes, however, that age categories are ‘not natural’, but are deliberately constructed in relation to other people, institutions, practices and laws. Honwana argues that the category of youth “is the historical offspring of modernity” (p.11), which has resulted in an industrial stratification of life into three distinct stages; childhood (characterized by education and dependence); adulthood (characterized by work and independence) and rest (characterized by retirement and old age). Youth therefore occupies the space between childhood and adulthood; a time of transition. Ultimately, the concept of ‘youth-hood’ or ‘youth-in-transition’ is based on a life-cycle model of understanding human existence, which places ‘youth’ as a transitory stage between childhood and adulthood. The idea of youth, then, is necessarily one of ‘becoming’.

However, Johnson-Hanks (2002) challenges this teleological ‘life-cycle’ framework, arguing that the indicators on which it is based are often fluid, incoherent and reversible. She therefore argues for ‘a new anthropology of the life course’. Johnson-Hanks uses the example of ‘motherhood’ among the Beti women in Cameroon to illustrate the fluidity and status instability of this seemingly fixed indicator of adulthood. She further contended that though it is heavily critiqued, this approach continues to dominate anthropological thought. The life cycle model is based on three core assumptions, which Johnson-Hanks challenges (p.866):

First, stages are universal: All members of society go through them, and all societies have them. Second, stages are strictly ordered: Everyone goes through them in the same sequence and never reverts to an earlier stage. Finally, stages are coherent: People in the same stage share a consistent and meaningful set of attributes, and transition events constitute changes across all different domains of life.

She argues against this model, suggesting that stages are often missed, reversed, and diversely experienced among people of the same age.

Similarly, Burgess (2005) interrogates the notion of ‘generation’ as it applies to Africa, contending that the concept of youth carries an ‘essentially fluid and liminal quality’; “youth consists of a constantly shifting population moving in and out of locally determined notions of youthfulness” (p.23). He analyses the history of generational analysis by highlighting the impact of historical events such as colonialism, Christianity, capitalism, urbanization, nationalism, modernity and independence, which shifted conceptualizations and realities of youth in Africa. Burgess calls for a need to historicize the study of youth:

In the history of youth in East Africa in the twentieth century, young people seeking inclusion, citizenship and social promotion responded to and asserted new standards of conduct derived from increasingly diverse and disparate origins.... And so, it may be said that youth at the beginning of a new century occupy a transient position somewhere between subjects and citizens (p.25).

As such, ‘youth’, both as an analytical category and ‘stage’ of life, has undergone paradigmatic shifts within the last century, particularly in the world’s most youthful continent. In fact, Honwana & De Boeck (2005) argue that due to societal and historical forces, the category of ‘youth’ only recently became relevant for African societies.

Youth as Protracted Liminality

An important association of ‘youth’ in modern sociological and anthropological imagination is, not only transition, but, more importantly, waiting. Youth in the Global South are reported to be in a constant state of protracted wait-hood. Thus, not only are they

transitioning from childhood to adulthood, from school to work, from dependence to independence and from living at home to heading a household; but, due to wider socio-economic and political challenges, this transition is much longer than in previous generations, and much more uncertain. Youthhood has therefore become associated with precariousness-in work and in general life. In many ways, 'adulthood' has become unattainable for many young people well into their twenties and thirties. Honwana (2012) argues poignantly:

These attributes of adulthood are becoming increasingly unattainable by the majority of young people in Africa. They are forced to live in a liminal, neither-here-nor-there state; they are no longer children who require care, yet they are not yet considered mature social adults. They lead a precarious existence; their efforts are centered on trying to survive each and every day (p.5).

The notion of 'waitthood' therefore expresses this now dominant feature of an already transient stage. Honwana further explains:

Waitthood, a portmanteau term of "wait" and "-hood," is the best way to describe this period of suspension between childhood and adulthood. It represents a prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their own families (p.5).

However, Honwana warns that despite its prima facie appearance of 'passive lingering', youth are very rarely 'inactively' waiting for their situation to change. Rather, they are "... using their creativity to invent new forms of being and interacting with society..." (p.6).

Honwana further argues that modernity, and particularly, technology, acts as a duplicitous platform which enlarges their world view through its global connections. She contends this global connection allows African youth to find ways to 'close the gap' between their limited local opportunities and 'endless' global possibilities. Indeed, academic writing appears to be

one such ‘gap filler’; by allowing writers to connect with clients and platforms around the world and generate income by way of their computers through the digital economy.

Critically, Honwana points to the multiplicity and heterogeneity in experiences of youth and waithood, while simultaneously remaining a ubiquitous force across geographical and cultural boundaries. Honwana makes several arguments which are highly relevant for academic writing among educated youth in Kenya. Namely; that waithood is gaining in permanence and may soon replace conventional ‘adulthood’; that waithood transcends geography; that African youth’s experiences are critical for understanding youth globally; and that periods of waithood are both creative and transformative. Further, of great importance is Honwana & DeBoeck’s claim that “youth are major players in new informal economies and processes of globalization, as well as in the delineation of alternative local forms of modernity” (p.1). They further highlight the ‘creativity’ which contemporary young Africans employ in response to their external constraints. Additionally, they point to the roles which youth play in the socio-economic and political fabric of their society, through active involvement in the labour markets, and often, the political sphere.

Portraits of Educated Youth Unemployment

Within literature on youth in the ‘developing world’, periods of transition are presented as those of waiting and of contemplating distant more prosperous futures, which stand in direct contrast to their present, comparatively bleak, realities. Jeffrey’s (2010) work on young students’ ‘just waiting’ in India, links their lives to politics, class and social change through the lens of ‘cultures of limbo’ among unemployed young men. He connects the study with literature on time, middle class unemployed youth, and everyday politics in India. Jeffrey proffers the idea of ‘waiting as a key dimension of modernity’ (p. 3), referencing Bayart in analysing experiences of waiting among the subaltern, and Ferguson on the notion

of large populations in 'wait' for a better future. In these narratives, waiting is associated with boredom, lost time, loitering and aimlessness (Mbembe 2000 p.4). Notwithstanding, Jeffrey suggests that periods of waiting may not be totally purposeless but may be an opportunity for youth to acquire new skills (p. 4). He delineates two forms of waiting: aimless or purposeless waiting, which he terms 'time pass', and strategic investment waiting. Jeffrey references the 'anxieties of educated unemployed men' (Masquiertier 2005) and their widespread failure to obtain white collar jobs (Silberschmidt 2001), noting that in many ways "waiting has become an act and may become a profession for the majority of India's youth" (Heuze 1996).

Similarly, Mains (2011) examines unemployment among young men in Jimma, Ethiopia, through the lens of 'cut hopes' (p. 2). Like Jeffrey, he makes the link between unemployed youth and politics. Mains interrogates the struggles of young men in finding work and starting families, particularly underscoring their unfulfilled expectations of white-collar employment, "when these jobs are unavailable, young people often choose to remain unemployed rather than take on low-status and low-paying positions" (p.4). Critically, Mains references Jeffrey's (2008) 3 categories of youth in the global south; youth with high levels of education and who are well-positioned to find desirable jobs; youth who do not have secondary education and work low-paying jobs; and those with at least a secondary education but with no job or security, which tends to be the category of many university-educated youth in Africa. Mains argues, "the heightened aspirations associated with increased access to formal education and global media coupled with severe economic decline causes many young people to be unsatisfied with their day-to-day lives and unable to construct progressive narratives for the future" (p.10).

In 'Killing Time', Ralph (2008) analyzes Senegalese young men, locally accused of being unwilling to secure work. Ralph situates their tea drinking experiences during periods of unemployment within the country's severe economic crisis. Like Mains and Jeffrey, he

delineates two distinct classes of young people, as classified by the Senegalese government; ‘encombremens humains’, who are thought to have an affinity for loitering; and, the student population with no guarantee of employment. However, the student population is increasingly less able to secure employment post-graduation, “ a marker of class status, degrees have nevertheless become redundant in the quest for public sector employment as those who have never worked are now more educated than those who do...” (p.9). Ralph links this redundancy to the political landscape, arguing that both groups are heavily involved with political violence, thereby solidifying the link between youth, social disorder, and social progress.

Despite these narratives of youthhood as necessarily a state of waithood and inactivity, the writers in this present study are neither ‘killing’ nor ‘passing’ time. In fact, somewhat contrary to overall trends, the majority of those who had finished their studies, managed to find ‘formal’ jobs within 6 months of leaving university. These young people are undeniably faced with difficult socio-economic realities within a country with high unemployment, however, their relationship to *time* and *space* seems to be markedly different from that of dominant youth-in-transition narratives (Mains, Jeffrey, Craig, Thieme). Not only are they transcending the local and physical boundaries of Kenya in accessing digital money-making ventures, but also, and perhaps more poignantly, their period of transition and liminality is characterized by ‘hustling’ through time. Hustling is an alternative mode to waithood; hustlers may be in transition, but they are not waiters. As a job, academic writing is characterized by insecurity, uncertainty, precarity and informality, but through academic writing these young men and women are not waiting for an imagined future; they are hustling into it.

The findings of this study show that the dominant approach which many university-educated young people take, is that of piecing together various modes of work and

employment during their time in, and immediately after university. The practice of taking up various types of ‘jobs’ in one’s twenties, ranging from printing for other students, baking, web design, article writing, and of course, academic writing, was quite widespread. This study demonstrates several examples of hustling, particularly in the use of online gig jobs, in the typical employment portfolio of highly-educated youth. It stresses the conceptualization of youth as a period of ‘finding ways to get by’, rather than one of passiveness. None of the writers expressed a sense of explicit waiting for the next stage of life. To a large extent, they were focused on getting by and making do in the present, as they worked towards better financial and life opportunities in the future. As such, there was a definite focus on the future; however, the urgency and necessity of the present was equally (and perhaps even more so) dominant in their life perceptions.

In addition to its emphasis on *time*, literature on youth unemployment often presents the experience, perhaps inadvertently so, as a physically embodied, and predominantly shared *space*. This shared, physical experience is then enacted spatially through ritual and/or group activities on street corners (Mains 2011), in living rooms (Ralph 2008), and in internet cafes (Burrell 2012). Youth, then, are imagined as a group of individuals (usually men) perennially occupying space around their cities, towns and villages- where their presence is felt and seen by others around them (often to their displeasure). By experiencing their unemployment simultaneously, the individuals spend their time together, engaging in various activities and rituals designed to pass and kill the time. In each case, youth is presented in the plural tense, and there is a latent assumption within the discourse, that their shared unemployment as rendered them a group, while their shared activities have unwittingly created a community, of sorts. Thus, despite its *prima facie* appearance as an individual state of being, youth unemployment is presented as a shared, physical, spatial activity. As such, issues around

space and community are especially pertinent when seeking to understand un(der)employment strategies and practices among young people.

Mains (2011) highlights the ‘spaces’ in which young unemployed men gather in Jimma, Ethiopia, meeting on the street corners and the house of one of the young men Mains studied. He argues that the differences in meeting spaces are based on those in the class and wealth of the men, noting that, “spaces within the city where young men gather to pass the time illustrates the diverse backgrounds” (p.9). He further suggests that within their narratives of the future, “temporal problems are often conceived in spatial terms” (p.10), underscoring the significant relationship between *space* and *time* in the context of youth unemployment. Similarly, Ralph (2008) stresses the importance of collective tea drinking as part of the urban aesthetic and local ritual in Senegalese cities, particularly among unemployed young men. In his study, this shared ritual formed a core component of their time outside of formal employment.

Additionally, in analysing ‘yahoo boys’ in Nigeria, Doppelmayr (2013) explores the ways in which community, imitation-turned-innovation, and shared knowledge plays a critical role in their success. She argues, “yahoo boys organized themselves into tightly knit communities of practice where mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of stories, jargons and discourses are key characteristics...Although most of the Yahoo boys’ innovations would be labelled imitations...they adapted new technologies to their local context and rapidly exploited new markets and sources of supply in order to warrant the term innovation being applied...” (p.1). Like those in Ralph (Senegal), Jeffrey (India) and Mains (Ethiopia), Nigerian yahoo boys are mainly young men with limited opportunities for employment in Nigeria. Doppelmayr examines internet café use among youth in Accra, and both their individual practices and “formal and informal, collective and everyday rituals such as story-telling, religious practices, and play and socializing...” (p.1).

These examples illustrate the centrality of notions of sharing, community, space and physicality within youth unemployment experiences in Africa and the Global South. In the context of academic writing in Kenya, each of these themes carries an importance significance, particularly as the writers have used Facebook as a community and shared space for providing tips, guidance, resources and trade to help with their writing. As a result, a sense of community is built around the shared experience, although theirs is a digitally mediated community.

Passive & Active Unemployment

Seernels (2004) investigates the 'nature' of unemployment in Addis, a city where half of young men under 30 are unemployed. He argues that unemployment is particularly concentrated among educated, middle class first-time job-seekers, and is protracted for an average of three to four years. Interestingly, Seernels argues that many unemployed youths do not take up 'work' while they are seeking formal employment, a phenomenon which he contends is due to a lack of business start-up capital, the low status of casual jobs, and because social networks tend only to lead to job opportunities when one is unemployed, rather than underemployed. Furthermore, among those who are employed, about one-third work in the public sector, another third is self-employed, and the final third work within the private and NGO sectors. Not surprisingly, Seernels highlights the distinction between the 'relatively high' earnings of those in international organizations, the civil service and private firms; while those in self-employment and casual work record 'low earnings'.

These factors may also partly help to explain the reluctance to engage in entrepreneurship and informal work during periods of formal unemployment. Groh et. al. (2014) refers to this practice as 'reservation prestige'. He argues, 'educated youth are unwilling to take jobs they

consider beneath them, even for a temporary amount of time' (p.19) out of fear of the 'negative social costs' of those jobs. Seernels also stresses the importance of social networks in helping youth to find work, noting that the two most common channels were social networks and advertisements. As such, the Ethiopian context is strikingly similar to that of other developing contexts. However, it differs from the Kenyan case in that Kenyan unemployed youth are much more likely to seek casual, short-term employment while they 'wait' (McGowan et.al. 2017).

Regarding the link between unemployment and education, Seernels observes that "up to senior secondary education, one is more likely to be unemployed the higher one's level of education" (p.10). However, having a university education does not impact on one's employment prospects. He argues, "tertiary education is insignificant, which indicates that having a university degree no longer ensures one will get a job" (p.11). Primary education has also become insignificant. In fact, household background is a more significant indicator, as unemployed youth tend to come from 'households with lower household welfare" (p.13). The impact of education is further complicated as junior secondary education tends to lessen the duration of unemployment, while senior secondary education has a negative effect on employment rates. Overall, Seernels contends that unemployment is a middle class and educated phenomenon (p.18).

Within the Indian context, Majumer (2013) notes that India "suffers from remarkably high educated unemployment" (p. 48), citing low demand, excess supply, and a mismatch between the youth's training and skills and employers' needs as the main causes. Like Craig and Mains, Mukherjee contends that high youth unemployment is likely to lead to social and political unrest. Like the Ethiopian and Kenyan contexts, unemployment is pronounced among educated (senior secondary) young people, currently standing at 12.1%, as compared to the average of 6.8%. He notes that about two-thirds of unemployed young people in India

have attained secondary education. Mukherjee remarks, "...the employment situation of educated youth in India is much worse than the others." (p.4) Furthermore, it is important to note that among those who are employed, the majority are either self-employed (micro-business) or casual workers. Therefore, underemployment and entrepreneurship are crucial considerations in the analysis of youth unemployment.

In Africa, the youth employment to population ratio stands at about 37%, although there is inter-country variation (Anyanwu p.109). In analysing the characteristics of youth employment and unemployment on the continent, Anyanwu (2013) suggests that there are 5 major macro-economic determinants which impact on employment: domestic investment, government consumption expenditure, inflation rate, real per capita GDP, and real GDP growth. He notes the labour market 'bias' against young people, mainly due to the comparative ease in dismissing them, as well as strong barriers to entry, which leads to unanimously higher youth unemployment rates relative to the 'adult' population. As a result, Anyanwu argues that, "the unemployment problem is more of a youth one on the continent" (p.112).

Anyanwu's data suggests that there are high levels of informal employment among young people in Africa, accounting for most of the non-agricultural work. Nonetheless, he warns that informal jobs are often viewed as 'fall-back' options or 'survival strategies'. He argues that those employed in this sector are often self-employed micro-entrepreneurs, and those engaged in "casual, short-term and seasonal work, lacking rights and freedom of association, legal status, social protection, and health benefits" (p.112). As such, youth unemployment not only poses challenges for social cohesion and political stability, but also impacts on personal and social welfare. Furthermore, he notes that youth unemployment has a gendered dimension, as it is 'more overwhelming for females' (p.112); total unemployment stands at 53% for women, compared to 43% for men.

In contrast, Fox and Thomas (2016) argue that ‘the youth employment problem is just a subset of the overall employment challenges in SSA’ (p.16). They point to a slow-moving demographic transition which fails to account for Africa’s young population, and a slow-developing modern enterprise sector which fails to create job opportunities. Therefore, they contend that the prospects for most youth are quite bleak, as they are unlikely to find employment outside of household firms and farms. Agriculture and non-farm household enterprises (HEs) remain the largest employers for African youth in low and middle-income countries. According to Fox and Thomas, HEs, which essentially make up the ‘informal sector’, account for about 85% of employment in Africa. As such, only 15% of African youth are engaged in what may be termed ‘wage employment’, whether formal (i.e. fixed contract and ‘social benefits’) or informal. Arguably, then, it may be necessary to re-think concepts of ‘work’, ‘employment’ and ‘labour’ in Africa, since most of the work being done is non-wage and/or casual in nature.

Further, they note that much of the economic growth outside of agriculture has been in HEs, rather than in industrial or service sectors. Fox and Thomas therefore predict that HEs will create more jobs than the ‘wage sector’, accounting for nearly half of new jobs. They summarize African youth’s employment prospects in these sobering terms, “at best one in four of Africa’s youth will find a wage job, and only a small fraction of such jobs will be ‘formal’ jobs in modern enterprises” (p.27). Thus, there will need to be an uncoupling of the notion of ‘work’ from that of the ‘wage job’, particularly for educated youth, as agriculture and household enterprises will likely be the best (and only) options for most school-leavers.

Consequently, the authors suggest that policy efforts should be concerned with improving productivity in the agricultural and service sectors; in addition to creating ‘a more labour-intensive industrial sector’ (p.29). They further argue that the policy focus on the ‘informal’ sector is justified (notwithstanding high educated youth unemployment in Africa)

since university graduates only account for less than 5% of the working population. Furthermore, they contend that the ‘reality’ is that African countries are unlikely to transition to large formal wage economies, even with extraordinary private-sector investment. Notwithstanding, they maintain that their outlook is neither pessimistic, nor ‘denying workers the hope of emerging from informal employment’, rather, they argue that the formal sector will expand only through structural transformation of agriculture and HEs through increased productivity and an expanded internal economy.

Echoing the observations of Seernels in Ethiopia, and Mukherjee in India, Fox and Thomas report a rather protracted state of unemployment for youth in Africa. In their study, the average period of unemployment was two years, and even those who left unemployment were largely employed in HEs. In Tanzania, a more extreme case, the average length of unemployment was 4.5 years. The problem is further compounded since even the minority who *do* secure wage employment are still comparatively ‘less happy’ with their situation than their peers in other countries. Overall, the authors argue that for African youth, school to ‘stable livelihood’ transitions are painfully slow, frustrating and disappointing. Furthermore, many youths spend their adolescence ‘trying to find funds and finish up school’, or getting married, rather than acquiring job-related skills, which then puts them at an additional disadvantage when searching for the ‘holy grail’ of a wage job. They contend that ‘youth in SSA are suffering through a more difficult transition than in other regions’ (p.34), not only because of macro-economic and structural restrictions, but also because of a misalignment between aspirations and opportunities. Fox and Thomas caution:

Given where SSA starts today and the sheer numbers of projected new entrants to the labour force, the employment transition will be slow. All stakeholders, especially youth and their families, need to recognise this. Most of the new jobs will be in the so-called informal sector- household farms and firms (p.32).

The implication of their study, therefore, is a necessary paradigm shift in the way in which university-educated young people approach their employment trajectories, particularly in the immediate post-graduation period. Micro-entrepreneurship, farming and casual work are still likely to be their best options, even if (technically) they are more likely to receive formal wage jobs than their lesser educated counterparts.

Educated Youth (Un)Employment in Kenya

At present, Kenya has 25 universities; 7 public and 18 private¹⁴, as well as several other middle colleges. These institutions house approximately 443,785 students¹⁵ as of 2014; a 50% increase since 2012. Kenya follows the 8-4-4 system of education; 8 years of primary school, 4 years of secondary and 4 years of tertiary education. Since the opening of the first university, Royal College Nairobi, in 1961, “Kenya’s higher education has remained the fastest-growing segment of the education system over the past 20 years with enrolments increasing on average by 6.2 % per year” (Mutala 2002 p. 110). In fact, in the three years between 1988 and 1991, the population increased from 10000 to 20,000 students, which Owuor (2012) refers to as the ‘massification’ of higher education in Kenya. Education accounts for a significant portion of government expenditure, about 30% in 2007, or approximately 6.2% of Kenya’s GDP¹⁶.

The Kenyan government spends about 15% of its \$106 billion ksh education budget on higher education. However, this figure represents a decrease in spending since the 1990s due to continued economic difficulties and austerity measures (Chevalier 2007).

Paradoxically, enrolment in higher education has increased along with the decrease in public

¹⁴ See Education.go.ke

¹⁵ See <http://wenr.wes.org/2015/06/education-kenya/>

¹⁶ Chevalier 2007

investment. Government spending per student decreased steadily from \$6,300 USD per student in 1980, to \$1,200 USD in 1995 (Mutala 2006). As a result, students were required to cover university tuition and living costs, which led to the establishment of a Bursary and Loan Scheme; however, the scheme was disbanded due to high default rates, estimated up to 80% (Chevalier 2007). Related financial difficulty led to the creation of a Dual Track policy for students; Module 1 for government sponsored, merit-based students, who pay approximately 71000Ksh per year for tuition and living costs, and Module 2 for self-sponsored students paying 271000 ksh (Chevalier 2007). Moreover, several other challenges have plagued higher education in the country, including; gender inequality, limited participation, HIV/AIDS, violent protests and strikes, poor living conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of teaching staff, contributing to what Jowi (2003) describes as a 'crisis' in Kenyan higher education.

Moreover, labour market trends for recent university graduates have not responded to the increased demand as an estimated 80% of the total unemployed population is under 35.¹⁷ Youth unemployment stands at 35%¹⁸ with an almost equal split of men and women. It is especially pronounced for young people between 18 and 25¹⁹- the typical age group of university students and recent graduates. Moreover, Mungu&Onsomu (n.d.) warn that these unemployment figures only reflect a small part of the bigger problem, since underemployment is an equally pressing concern:

The estimated unemployment rates underestimate the enormity of the labour market challenge because a large number of individuals are inactive rather than unemployed, and most of the individuals in employment are engaged in informal jobs. It is thus

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/mar/02/tackling-youth-unemployment-in-kenya-through-public-private-collaboration>

¹⁹[http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Kenya_YEC_web\(jan13\).pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Poverty%20Reduction/Inclusive%20development/Kenya_YEC_web(jan13).pdf)

important to look at other related challenges, such as inactivity and informal employment, for a fuller appreciation of the labour market challenge facing youth (Boateng, 2000, p.34)²⁰

Furthermore, based on a recent study of graduate students' post-university destinations, McCowan et.al (2017) suggest that absolute unemployment among Kenyan educated youth is 'lower than expected' (1), and that many youths are engaged in part-time, provisional and internship-based employment while transitioning to formal employment. They note that in 2009, 84% of those employed were in the informal sector and are therefore classified as 'vulnerable jobs. As such, underemployment is as much of a concern as unemployment, as both quantity and quality of employment remain pressing issues for youth. In this context, therefore, one can understand the appeal of the digital economy as a form of labour which can utilize higher order skills such as academic writing and analysis, while providing payment in a foreign and stronger currency.

In investigating graduate destinations among Kenyan university leavers, McCowan et.al (2017) confirm that although 'absolute' unemployment levels are relatively low, "...many graduates are transitioning between provisional or part-time employment and internships and have not yet obtained the graduate level jobs aspired to" (p.1). There is also an additional challenge of an alleged skills mismatch between graduates and potential employers. As such, unemployment, underemployment, and employability are of equal concern. McCowan et.al note that about half of all university graduates are not projected to secure formal jobs post-graduation, poignantly contending, "the white-collar work that was practically guaranteed for university graduates in the post-independence years is now far from universal, and young people increasingly have no option but to enter self-employment."

²⁰ <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/africa-in-focus/posts/2014/08/21-state-of-youth-unemployment-kenya-munga>

(p.2) The study explored the post-graduation activities of youth in the 6-12 months after leaving school, as well as the connections between those activities and their background characteristics and university experiences. The study found that absolute unemployment stood at 14%, a figure which McCowan et.al argue is significantly less than common rhetoric predicts. According to the authors, the sample also runs contrary to discourses of acutely protracted periods of unemployment of between 3 and 5 years. Notwithstanding, about half of the respondents were working fulltime, while part-time work, internships, self-employment and other studies accounted for the remaining respondents. Most importantly, the study also found that those graduates who had worked before university were much more likely to find a job (60% versus 30%).

Moreover, McCowan et.al suggest, like Fox and Thomas (2013), that there are high levels of dissatisfaction even among those who are ‘fully’ employed. They note that many respondents reported that their current positions were ‘stepping stones’. That is, they had accepted the job ‘to gain and broaden [their] experience in order to get the type of job [they] really want” (p.14). They further note that 65% of graduates were sure they wanted to change their job, while only 17% wanted to continue. The authors argue that despite relatively low unemployment, most graduates are underemployed, poorly paid, engaging in provisional work, and actively seeking a ‘real career’. They point to the prevalence of ‘piecemeal careers’, where graduates are ‘piecing together different opportunities and combining them with further studies in order to achieve a permanent graduate level job” (p.17).

Overall, McCowan et. al highlight the myriad of economic activities in which graduates engage, contending that “graduates are not spending years languishing in open unemployment, but are actively engaging in a range of pursuits to manoeuvre themselves into a better position to compete in the labour market” (p.17). As such, this study suggests a complexity of youth (un)employment which much of the statistics and figures often obscure.

Factors such as; type and duration of employment, earnings, type and subject of degree, and work done before and during university, impact heavily on the employment outcomes of job-seekers immediately after graduation. In Kenya, the importance of ‘informal’, ‘piecemeal’, and ‘stepping stone’ jobs cannot be overlooked when analysing trends and characteristics of educated youth (un)employment.

Micro-Entrepreneurship as a corrective?

In a Cambridge University article, entitled ‘The Boss in Me’, Fred Lewsey analysed the ‘myths and truths of self-employment’. Lewsey cites Burchell et. al (2015) in examining the differences between entrepreneurship patterns in the developing and developed world. They argue that there is a clear distinction in the perceptions associated with self-employment. Burchell contends:

Self-employment in the developing world isn’t the bold decision it’s framed as in Western economies- for many people there simply isn’t any other choice. Formal sector jobs are scarce and almost all are located in cities, so everyone else sells tasks or finite stock as individuals, with limited success” (p.35).

Burchell therefore highlights a key aspect of youth entrepreneurship which is often missing from policy-level discourses on unemployment. In Kenya and other developing countries, youth entrepreneurship is typically a necessary response to the absence of formal wage opportunities. In many cases, it is a necessity, rather than a ‘choice’. Lewsey further quotes Burchell in cautioning against entrepreneurship as the panacea for Africa’s youth unemployment, and wider development challenges. He warns:

Media and politicians cherry-pick aspirational accounts of self-employed people building businesses and making fortunes. Yet the available evidence from a number of economic contexts suggests that, particularly for young people, self-employment is often a highly vulnerable labour market status in terms of the levels of pay and job security it offers... These are not scalable businesses that will, for example, help get Africa on the digital economy bandwagon. But many governments continue to take cues from the West, and push the idea of self-employment as a route to economic success.²¹

Burchell et.al. further stresses the importance of family ties as many youth entrepreneurs emerge from families and communities with strong entrepreneurial histories. They conclude that, “young people’s self-employment is often embedded in a family where parents or other family members are self-employed” (p.36). In a study of over 100,000 15-29-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, Burchell et. al investigated the nature and prevalence of self-employment among youth in developing contexts. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the highest rates of self-employment, with 43% running their own businesses, and a further 29% working in family businesses. They also found that about 40% cited independence as the primary reason for being self-employed; while 25% noted that it was due to not finding salaried employment. The authors also found a relationship between educational attainment and self-employment. That is, educational level and self-employment were inversely correlated; those with high educational levels were less likely to be self-employed, while those with ‘low’ educational levels were more likely to run their own enterprises. Therefore, the study confirms the importance of the contextual political

²¹ <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/the-boss-of-me-myths-and-tFaiths-of-self-employment>

economy of employment and higher education, and the significance of family relations in understanding youth entrepreneurship, particularly on the African continent.

Additionally, Burchell et.al highlighted the work trajectories of the participants. According to their study, unpaid family workers were most 'at risk' of becoming self-employed, followed by those doing 'home duties'. Interestingly, those least likely to become self-employed were those currently employed, and currently unemployed. Furthermore, the study showed that the average duration of 'transition' between different types of 'economic activity' was 13 months . The most 'stable' activity was unpaid work with a family member, followed by 'home duties', while self-employment usually lasted for about 17 months, and wage employment for about 13 months. Burchell et.al. assert that:

Rather than breaking into employment in the formal sector, many career trajectories seem to be stuck in a cycle of self-employment and unpaid family work, which is itself seen as a far more negative state by those currently in that position. And there is a clearer upward trajectory in income for employees and employers; those who stay self-employed are likely also to remain on a low income.” (p.36).

The study confirmed that non-wage employment is the most popular grouping of economic activity among young people in the Global South (p.33).

Critically, Burchell et.al. caution against a romanticized view of self-employment and other non-wage economic activity among youth, while acknowledging that quality and income levels vary widely. Nevertheless, they stress that self-employment is often the 'only feasible option' and a 'coping mechanism' in the absence of formal opportunities, somewhat reminiscent of Thieme's notion of 'hustle' as a survival strategy. Burchell et.al. conclude:

A significant finding of the research presented within this paper is that self-employment is not necessarily a favourable employment status for young people in terms of the economic and social impacts it generates. The analysis of the SWTS

survey shows that encouraging self-employment is probably not a particularly effective policy mechanism by which to promote upward social mobility or reduce poverty. In many contexts self-employment can be seen as the only feasible way young people in low employment or economically depressed areas can generate an income where no formal opportunities exist, such as in the already overloaded public sectors of many LMICs. Entry into self-employment can be seen as a coping mechanism both by the individual and the family (p.35).

In their analysis of bottom of the pyramid (BOP) schemes in Africa, Dolan & Rajak (2016) argue that recent development goals have placed youth at the top of the policy agenda, with an eye toward entrepreneurship, such that governments have offered up “entrepreneurship in place of employment” (p.514), seeking to convert youth from ‘job-seekers’ to ‘job-creators’. Dolan & Rajak reference the trinity of ‘despair and hope’; urbanisation, unemployment and youth enterprise. From a policy perspective, BOP and other similar initiatives seek, not only to convert youth from ‘liability to opportunity’ (quoting Obnyo 2013, p.517), but also act as a corrective against the potential unrest created through large scale youth unemployment, ‘transforming idle street youth into productive citizens’ (p.527). Gough & Langevang (2017) offer similar analyses, highlighting the ways in which entrepreneurship is being heralded as ‘a key tool to combat the youth unemployment crisis’ (p.1) in Africa. They further analyse the conceptual bases of both ‘youth’ and ‘entrepreneurship, pointing to the contentions associated with both. Consequently, youth micro-entrepreneurship was marketed as the antidote to a precarious and uncertain future; a promise that, by all indicators, it has failed to meet.

Therefore, notions of self-employment and all its variants; ‘hustle’, ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘making do’, must be understood within the overarching context of necessity and strained

socio-economic conditions, especially for youth. This is not to deny the existence of innovation, creativity, or ingenuity, as these are integral elements; however, oftentimes these positive characteristics are built in response to a starting point of survival in the context of youth (un)employment choices in Kenya, Africa, and other similar environments. As such, this study is concerned with the varying ways in which the time of (formal) unemployment is spent and conceptualized among this subsection of global youth. In so doing, it hopes to add to the body of literature portraying educated youth un/employment in the South, through the lens of academic writing in Kenya.

African Informal Economies

“Any discussion of the informal sector as an analytical concept must begin in Africa” (Allen 1998 p.357)

Contemporary literature on informal labour highlights the oft overlooked complexity of ‘alternative economies’, especially in Africa. Notably, Allen (1998) argues that policy discourse on informality has failed to acknowledge their sophistication. Allen further notes that the discourse has incorrectly conceptualized the informal economy as ‘marginal’ or ‘peripheral’ to the ‘real economy’. To that end, several studies have emphasized the ever-growing popularity of non-state regulated economies among large sections, particularly as ‘official’ economies worsen. For example, in Zimbabwe, Gwande (2017) notes how the kukiya-kiya economy of informal strategies has expanded to constitute the ‘real economy’ as their economic situation intensifies. Similarly, Lindell (2010) explains the changes and growth which the informal economy has experienced; a phenomenon which he partially attributes to the inclusion of large firms. He therefore argues that the informal economy now includes both the poor and non-poor; small and large enterprises. As a result, Lindell posits

that the informal economy should be understood as ‘any type of work lacking in social protection’ (p.7).

Informal economies provide vital sources of income for significant portions of the population, especially in contexts (such as those in most of Africa) where there is extreme competition for limited wage opportunities. In similar vein, the new digital economy has transcended locally-defined boundaries to create much needed sources of labour in both urban and rural spaces in the Global South. Horton (2015), Mill (2011), Agrawal et.al. (2015) and Vanham (2012) each delineate some of the advantages of digitalized forms of work, particularly in generating income for those in high unemployment countries. Most importantly, Agrawal et.al also note how employee-employer patterns tend to mimic those on wider global platforms such that employers are located in high income countries, and the employees are situated in low income countries. Furthermore, like informal economies, scholars have noted the ‘dark side’ of the digital economy. As such, Graham et.al (2014,2015,2017) and Horton (2015) highlight the common realities of inadequate workers’ rights within digital labour. Thus, both the informal economy and the digital economy offer a duplicitous relationship to labour for workers in developing contexts. That is, on the one hand they provide access to ‘jobs’ and ‘income generation’; however, quite crucially, the quality of work, the experience of work and the compensation is often very low.

Since Hart’s 1973 coining of the term, the notion of ‘informal economy’ (then informal sector) has been widely used to describe much of the economic activity which takes place in Africa. It refers to the various forms of employment, work, and labour, which exist outside of the purview of government-controlled regulations. Most typically, the informal economy comprises small-scale vendors and traders in urban streets, and family-run enterprises and/or farms in rural settings. Emanating from economic informality are various

types of precariousness, known in different contexts as: ‘making do’, ‘getting by’, ‘kukiya-kiya’, and ‘hustle’.

The informal economy is varied and complex in its composition and comprises an extremely wide range of activities and actors with various motives (both survival and accumulation) for participating. However, several scholars have warned that ‘non-state’ does not necessarily mean ‘unregulated’, although most policy discourses have been created out of this assumption. Due to the large numbers of Africans involved in the informal economy (sometimes alongside work in the formal economy), the informal sectors are likely to continue as important considerations in any discourse on work and employment in Africa.

Africa’s informal economy has added a new component which has thus far been absent from the broader discourse on informality. The digital economy, itself in many ways, a large, global informal economy, provides a 21st century manifestation of non-government regulated work opportunities. These work arrangements are typically casual, short-term, non-contractual and without social protection or benefits. Given Kenya and Africa’s familiarity with informal employment arrangements, high rates of formal unemployment among educated youth, and the widespread availability of ICT in the last decade, it seems hardly surprising that Kenyan youth would look to the digital economy for money-making opportunities. Therefore, the popularity of academic writing among Kenyan youth may be understood within the wider popularity of the informal economy, in response to limited opportunities within the country’s formal knowledge economy.

This section examines the nature and reaches of the informal economy, including the digital ‘gig’ economy. In so doing, it positions academic writing within the conversation on informality, by highlighting the various work arrangements which the writers use to organize themselves, the rates and modes of payment (particularly digital methods) which they

negotiate, and the intimate relationships between academic writing and other types of casual digital work. In so doing, the section weaves together existing literature on informal economies in Africa, debates within the digital economy, and conceptual frameworks of precariousness, particularly the 'Kenyan hustle'. It concludes with an analysis of the writers' work and hustle, considering discourses on the varied modes of arrangement and organization within the informal economies.

Allen (1998) argues that due to the origins and spread of the term, 'informal economy' in two African countries; Ghana and Kenya, analytical discussions on the informal sector must begin on the continent. Allen references Hart who is credited with coining the term in analysing urban unemployment in Ghana in the 1970s. The informal economy refers to 'economic activity which was not regulated by normal state institutions' (p.358). It is also commonly known as the 'second', 'irregular', 'unofficial', 'underground', 'illegitimate' or 'shadow' economy. These activities include; 'petty enterprises and services', micro-businesses, and sometimes, 'more or less licit' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) practices. Arguably, online 'gig' jobs may also be included in the range of Africa's informal economy as they also largely exist outside state controls.

Allen further contends that both Hart, and later the International Labour Organization, used the term to categorize the 'observed livelihood strategies of poor Africans....as part of a kind of second economy...' (p.360), which often includes both formal and informal employment strategies. In fact, Allen argues that this was one of the main problems associated with the term 'informal sector'; it often failed to recognise the complexity of the people involved in these activities, noting that actors are commonly both formally and informally employed, both living in urban and rural areas, and both engaged in farming and non-farming enterprises.

A second challenge relates to policy responses to informal economies. Allen warns against viewing the sector as a ‘transitional stage’ where people are waiting to be converted into the formal economy. Furthermore, he contends that dominant discourse wrongly treats the informal sector as ‘relatively marginal’, in comparison to the ‘real’ economy. Indeed, a more appropriate and culturally reflective approach is to prioritize the informal economy into any discourse or policy decision about employment and work in Africa.

According to Thieme (2013), “...as informal economies absorb and generate diverse (albeit tenuous) income opportunities amongst a growing urban labour force, unlike normative assumptions that the informal sector is a transient state of economic liminality moving towards the formal market economy, informality is the fastest growing part of today’s global economy” (p.230). In similar vein, Lindell (2010) contends that formal and informal economies are highly interconnected, such that the boundaries between them are often blurred. Although Thieme (2013) refers to spatially-bound urban street hustlers in Nairobi’s slums, her sentiments may be viewed in the context of all non-state controlled economic activities, including academic writing and the broader digital economy. As such, the Kenyan government’s recently launched Ajira Digital Portal, may be viewed as a policy initiative intended to formalize one of the newest extensions of informality operating through Kenya. Ajira Digital aimed to “introduce Kenyan youth to online work and provide the tools, training and mentorship needed to earn an income online”²².

Further south in Zimbabwe, the ‘hustle’ takes the name of ‘kukiya-kiya’; ‘survival strategies’ within the informal economy, including vegetable stall owners, taxi-drivers, unlicensed commuter bus drivers, and resellers of second-hand clothes (Gwande, 2017 p.94). These activities form a large part of the employment opportunities for many Zimbabweans, as

²² <https://ajiradigital.go.ke/faq/training>

the economic situation worsens, and formal unemployment rises. However, Gwande warns that their relationship with government officials is usually tenuous and contentious, “owners and participants in these activities are always at risk of apprehension and persecution by the authorities” (p.95). Similarly, Jones (2010) describes the kukiya-kiya economy in Zimbabwe as one comprising ‘multiple forms of making do’ (p.285). Critically, he argues that post-2000, there has been a ‘spatio-temporal shift’ which shifted ‘making do’ from urban margins to the mainstream. As a result, ‘straight’ transactions have given way to ‘zigzag’ deals. As such, he argues that the economy is driven by ‘a discourse of necessity’, where ‘survival’ justifies economic acts. Jones (2010) explicates the historical shift that has resulted in kukiya-kiya’s recent defining of the economy, such that it has constituted most of the ‘real economy’. Much like notions of ‘hustle’ and ‘debrouillier’, kukiya-kiya, suggests ‘cleverness, dodging, and the exploitation of whatever resources are at hand, all with an eye to self-sustenance (p.286). He explains that ‘making do’ comprises a pawnshop mentality where ‘everything has a price’, and personal connections and verbal skill are paramount.

Similarly, Di Nunzio (2012) highlights the typology of the ‘street economy’ in Arada, Ethiopia, which moves away from the normative focus on youth unemployment. Di Nunzio therefore prioritizes ‘networks, interactions’ and ‘social activities’, in making sense of their socio-economic experiences. He further describes the actors’ conceptualization of their activities as more than unemployment, but rather, ‘half employed and half unemployed’ street labour (p.435). Di Nunzio links their activities to marginality and social exclusion, arguing that the street economy was a way of positioning themselves in the wider society. Thus, he argues, like kukiya-kiya, that the street economy should be understood within the broader economy. Like the Kenyan hustle, DiNunzio describes the Araban hustle in terms of ‘running for life’ and ‘getting by’, thus illustrating the youngsters’ daily navigation of meeting immediate needs and carving future aspirations. Questions surrounding the centrality of

social networks in navigating un/employment are highlighted in notions of 'hustle' and its variants throughout youth activities in Africa.

Furthermore, Lindell (2010) argues that despite being decades old, the informal economy has seen important changes over the last decade, such that more types and numbers of people are involved in non-state regulated work. According to her, one key factor has been the increase in competition within the formal economy, which she argues was spurred by a decrease in formal employment opportunities. Additionally, Lindell contends that some large firms have also contributed to the spread of the informality by 'making use of casual work, reportedly contributing to an increase in the precariousness of work' (p.3). Indeed, the digital economy has been accused of contributing to both an increase in opportunities and precariousness on a global scale, "the above trends have created new opportunities for some groups, but vulnerability has increased for many" (Lindell p.3). Another important development is its expansion beyond 'small scale and survivalist activities of the poor', to include activities aimed at accumulation for the 'non-poor'. Lindell further notes that the ILO's new definition of 'informal economy', is understood as 'any type of employment lacking secure contracts, social protection or worker benefits' (p.6), including work arrangements in registered and large firms.

There has been a great deal of academic literature on the conceptual frameworks and policy discourses around the informal economy. For example, Bernards (2017) argues that policy responses by the ILO in East Africa and elsewhere have largely been inadequate because of a 'problematic' approach to the sector, namely one that overlooks the 'structural roots' of poverty and tends toward a homogenous view of the various arrangements and relationships within the economy. Similarly, Banik (2011) highlights its 'heterogenous composition', arguing that the shift in terminology from 'informal sector' to 'informal economy', signals a recognition of this complexity. He further argues that it may now be

prudent to move beyond debates around definitions and instead turn our focus to the underlying processes and relationships which belie it. This, he contends, “would require a fundamental shift in the manner in which workers in the informal economy are perceived by influential actors in society” (p.216). The argument, then, is for existing and forthcoming policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to acknowledge and respond appropriately to the informal economy and its actors, considering the significance and centrality of the informal economy, on the African continent. Moreover, in highlighting the importance of women in African informal economies, Kinyanjui (2014) stresses the idea that governments ‘have tried to address economic informality without understanding how it functions’ (p.1).

The Digital Economy

Academic writing triggers interesting questions about digital labour, particularly for writers in Kenya and Africa. The issue has sparked heavy debates on whether, and to what extent it is advantageous to those at ‘the bottom’ (Graham 2015). Horton defines an online labour market as, “a market where (1) labour is exchanged for money (2) the product of that labour is delivered ‘over a wire’ and (3) the allocation of labour and money is determined by a collection of buyers and sellers operating within a price system” (p. 516). Horton further posits that there are two types of online labour markets; spot markets where prices are fixed and agreed upon for a certain time, and contest markets where buyers propose contests for informational goods and the buyer selects from among them. He makes two important distinctions between labour, and other types of markets. Firstly, that with labour markets there is no single commodity of labour, and secondly, that labour is a service delivered over time with investments in human capitals. These distinctions then make it difficult to find a good match between workers and firms, and difficult to incentivize workers, respectively.

Horton (2010) argues, however, that one of the major economic features of online labour markets is its ‘welfare effects’, that is, the “ability of these markets to give workers in developing countries access to buyers in rich countries” (p.516). He argues that online labour markets represent a significant shift in macro-economics as hitherto labour markets were geographically situated. Horton estimates that by 2009, there were over 2 million online worker accounts, totalling about 700m in gross wages. Most importantly, Horton cites several ‘advantages’ which the online labour market contributes to the welfare of its employees, including: reduced congestion due to telecommuting, increased flexibility, greater specialization, lower barriers to migration, and fewer of the formalities of regular jobs. Similarly, Mill (2011) gives a somewhat optimistic view of the digital labour market. She remarks that it “...allows individuals to take advantage of the large wage gaps across countries, generating a single labour market defined by occupation and free of location considerations...online platforms allow developing countries to export labour services, but the ability to penetrate foreign markets depends on the perception of the quality of these services in the important economies” (p.5).

Despite these advantages, however, Horton highlights some of the disadvantages of digital labour, particularly those relating to workers’ rights, rules and contracts. Furthermore, there have been criticisms of the digital labour market for being a ‘digital sweatshop’ with very little regulation, and frequent exploitation of workers. Graham (2014) similarly describes this as the ‘dark side of microwork’.²³ In a study conducted on digital workers in several countries across Africa and Asia, Graham notes that many of the workers felt ‘extremely replaceable’ and were therefore reluctant to demand greater security or seek union representation²⁴, highlighting the need for unions and co-ops in the digital workplace

²³ <http://www.scidev.net/global/icts/opinion/digital-work-signals-global-race-bottom.html>

²⁴ <http://geonet.oii.ox.ac.uk/blog/digital-work-marketplaces-impose-a-new-balance-of-power/>

(Graham & Wood 2017). Graham et al. (2015) also highlight the structural changes which the internet has brought to outsourcing jobs, such that workers are now required to 'bid'²⁵ for work. As a result, they found that the marketplace was extremely competitive, and workers tended to underbid each other to decrease costs to the employers, thereby causing a 'downward pressure' on wages. They paint a picture of a 'race to the bottom' for digital workers in a largely unregulated digital system of labour. Vanham (2012) also argues that digital labour has often been used for 'dubious tasks' such as liking on Facebook.

As digital workers, academic writers are exposed to very precarious and uncertain conditions of employment. For some, academic writing acts as a last resort (Thieme 2013); a temporary placeholder until formal employment is secured. For others, it is a deliberate component of a long-term employment strategy (Thieme 2013). For others still, it represents something in-between; a supplementary source of income, a part-time job alongside full-time studies, or something to build their CV and gain experience. However, in all cases, academic writing is a highly precarious, uncertain and time-sensitive form of work. In the absence of formality and security, and existing outside of the country's economy, academic writing may be classified as underemployment. Furthermore, for the estimated thousands of Kenyan youth who write regularly, and over the course of several months and years, this period of (under)employment brings distinct experiences and challenges.

Delineating Digital Economies.

Agrawal et al. (2015) posit that the impact of digital technology has considerable implications for our understanding of economics. However, they insist that digital economics

²⁵ <http://geonet.oii.ox.ac.uk/blog/organising-in-the-digital-wild-west-can-strategic-bottlenecks-help-prevent-a-race-to-the-bottom-for-online-workers/>

is not a ‘new field’, but rather, one which draws on other existing fields, such as; economic history, labour economics, applied economics, international economics and industrial organization. They maintain that digital economics is concerned with the ways in which technology and data interact with market outcomes. They are interested by the idea that, “...economic settings transformed by digital data tend to have very low marginal costs of production and distribution, as well as lower transaction costs and market frictions, thereby raising numerous questions and issues” (p.1). Similarly, Peitz & Waldfogel (2012) note the tremendous success of digital businesses such as Facebook, Google, Microsoft and eBay, stressing that digital economies have moved from the periphery to the centre of modern economic activity. These developments have important implications for higher education. As the academic writing industry links higher education, youth employment, and digital economies, it is imperative that we consider the points of convergence.

Agrawal et al (2015)’s study examines oDesk (now Upwork), an online platform which raises several important issues around digital contract labour and online labour markets, many of which are especially pertinent for the academic writing industry. They report that the most salient feature of online labour markets is the potential for many transactions to be performed by people who are far away. Furthermore, the authors contend that online labour ‘globalizes traditionally local labour markets’, and as such, this virtual movement from the local to the global with increased access to global markets is seen as the most beneficial component of the digital labour pool.

Agrawal et. al also explore the question of how digitization of the market influences economic activity, making three main observations. Firstly, that the digital labour market is rapidly expanding to an estimated \$1bn US by the end of 2012 (Vanham 2012). Secondly, that the market is characterized by north-south trade, typically with employers in the north and contractors in the south. Thirdly, that small frictions within the digital platforms tend to

have very significant market effects. Additionally, Agrawal et. al pose several important questions; (1) How will digitization of the market influence the distribution of economic activity? And, (2) How will the digitization of this market affect social welfare, particularly of workers in LIC? In so doing, they consider the distribution of work across various geographic locations, the distribution of income within and across countries, as well as shifts in the distributions of work over firm boundaries.

Agrawal et. al also examine the ways in which the digitization of the market influences the distribution of work regarding; geography, contractor income and firm boundaries. As such, many of the global patterns of inequalities in international trade are reflected within these markets. Further, they note that income acts as a huge incentive for contractors since opportunities are often constrained in their own countries. In many cases, the contractors may receive higher income earnings, oftentimes more than their countries' minimum wage. Finally, Agrawal et. al.'s findings suggest that digitization may affect distribution of income across workers, but that the direction of the effect (i.e. whether negative or positive) is uncertain. Their research indicated that digitization may both increase and reduce inequality depending on the circumstance of the skill or duty being performed. For example, high quality or highly skilled duties were beneficial to the contractors, while low quality and high cost skills were not beneficial. Additionally, regarding the effect of digitization on boundaries, they argue that boundaries tend to contract with digitization, since digitization lowers transaction costs. The authors also posit that digital labour has two main welfare implications; better matching of employers and contractors due to reduction in costs associated with distance, and a broadening of the pool workers; and improved efficiency due to lower coordination costs.

Similarly, Mill (2011) analyzes data collected from freelancer.com, a website which connects workers with various types of jobs. Mill examines the effect of the freelancer's

country of origin on their likelihood to be hired. Her findings indicate that employers use country of origin to infer service quality, such that freelancers from developing countries are less likely to be hired when they have no individual reputation. Mills gives a somewhat optimistic view of the digital labour market and the role of online labour in international trade and services. She remarks that it "...allows individuals to take advantage of the large wage gaps across countries, generating a single labour market defined by occupation and free of location considerations...online platforms allow developing countries to export labor services, but the ability to penetrate foreign markets depends on the perception of the quality of these services in the important economies" (5)

Mill further outlines four main patterns of the digital economy; (a) most popular jobs are easily tradable, and do not require major involvement by the employer, (b) services flow mainly from developing to developed countries; (c) thick (easy to enter) markets, and thin markets; and, (d) employers do not view freelancers as perfect substitutes for more traditional labour. Mill also delineates important patterns within the freelance.com website, particularly that countries with larger proportions of English speakers are more active and that some types of projects are not given to freelancers from developing countries. Quite importantly, she notes that writing and content jobs usually have more projects and are given to freelancers from developing countries.

Thus, several opportunities exist for further research into informal economies in, and on, the African continent. Insight is needed into detailed accounts of informality, especially among research-neglected social and demographic groups, such as highly-educated youth. Thus far, much of the research of informality has focussed on groups from low-educational backgrounds, and those residing in poor, urban spaces. Therefore, informality has been inextricably coloured along educational and class lines. As such, further research is needed to uncover and explore instances of informality among the 'non-poor', (Lindell) 'highly-

educated' sections of society. Moreover, there is a need for more studies which transcend the spatial dimension of informality. Presently, most narratives of youth unemployment and informal labour usually concentrate on clearly defined physical spaces, but, have largely ignored the practices of informal economies within digital realms.

Consequently, the key findings of this study suggest a direct relationship between the place of the digital economy, and the wider space of informality, such that work in the digital economy is intimately connected with other city-bound expressions of the informal economy. To assert that university-educated youth share a common experience of precarity with waste-haulers in Kenyan slums (Thieme 2013) is not an oversimplification; rather, it is a deeply rooted analysis of Kenyan modes of work, which confirms the idea that precarity, informality, and casual labour are constituent and quintessential tenets of the sociology of employment in Kenya. The physical space where such precarity unfolds- while not inconsequential- is certainly not determinate. Informality permeates place and space so that transferring, or extending the approach of informality into digital realms, and indeed, into the gig economy which is already characterized by precarity, seemed an organic fit for Kenyan youth battling local crises in employment. As such, the physical 'place' where work takes place is fluid and flexible and, arguably, tangential to wider observations about the nature, meaning and experience of work for contemporary youth.

The Shadow Academy

Despite its appropriateness as a hustle, academic writing is equally a complex system of production, with requisite processes and procedures. Academic Writing exists within what may be considered the 'Shadow Academy'; various institutions, companies and bodies which produce materials which are treated as 'knowledge', but which are produced through

unethical (or ethically questionable), low-quality and/or fraudulent mechanisms. These products are then processed into the ‘legitimate’ academy either through students, researchers or academics. Three of the most common components of the shadow academy are; medical ghost-writing, predatory journals and paid third-party cheating (including academic writing). Together these practices form networks of pseudo-knowledge production which raise several ethical and quality concerns for the integrity of academic output. However, the binary lines of the ‘real’ and ‘shadow’ academy are sometimes blurred.

Barnett (1990) notes that the increase in the number of students enrolled in higher education has sparked a requisite increase in the number of staff employed, and the amount of money financed and generated. Indeed, higher education is a very big business (p. 1). Moreover, the business of higher education has been propelled, not only by ‘legitimate’ subsidiaries such as; the publishing and software industries, but also by ‘less licit’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) enterprises like the academic writing industry. And, as Bartlett (2009) notes, those involved in higher education seem unaware of the sophistication, prevalence and profitability of these companies.

Firstly, Bosch and Ross (2012) define ghost-writing as “the practice whereby individuals make significant contributions to writing a manuscript but are not named as authors” (p.324). Similarly, they note that guest authorship “...names authors who have not contributed sufficiently to a manuscript to merit authorship” (p.324). Bosch and Ross argue that these practices are pervasive both in academic collaborations, as well as those which involve industry companies and practitioners. They describe the typical scenario as one where a medical writer prepares a full draft of a paper, an academic is asked to review it, and the paper is subsequently published under the academic’s name (without mention of the medical writer). In this exchange, each party stands to benefit as the writers are compensated

financially, the academics gain professional prestige which is increasingly necessary in the ‘publish or perish’ culture, and the industry sponsors can promote their products.

Secondly, predatory journals are those which produce low quality and/or non-peer reviewed articles, usually at a fee to the author. Beall (2016) criticizes the journals as ‘bad science’; “[predatory journals] allow low-quality, unvetted research to become a part of the scholarly record” (p.473). Gasaparyan et. al (2015) offer a similar view arguing that predatory journals exploit open access publishing. They link the rise of journals to the movement of open access journals; “...these journals paved the way for low-quality articles that threatened to change the landscape of evidence-based science” (p.1010). Moreover, Clark and Smith (2015) note that the problem is further compounded as articles in predatory journals are sometimes discoverable through standard searches or library systems. Drugas also frames the rise of predatory journals within the ‘push to publish’, where quantity seems to count as much (or more) than quality. He explores the ‘psychology’ behind predatory publishing, contending that authors are disillusioned with the lengthy processes of traditional publishing and angered by the rejection of ‘serious’ journals.

These components of the ‘Shadow Academy’ raise several important questions about the nature of authorship, the ethics of knowledge production, the role of finances, and transparency within science and research. More importantly, ghost-writing, predatory journals and academic writing each illustrate the difficulty in separating the ‘shadow academy’, from the ‘real academy’ as one mode becomes entangled in the other. This section investigates contract cheating and other forms of commercialized plagiarism within the ‘Shadow Academy’ which ‘mimics’ higher education. Additionally, the chapter outlines the most prominent features of the academic writing industry in Kenya. Under the conceptual framework of the ‘white-collar hustle’, it demonstrates how Kenyan writers have been able to keep up with the demands of contractual plagiarism, consistently meet the requirements of

their customers, and ‘pass’ the detection of text-matching software (such as Turnitin), and the lecturers who grade them. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the writers’ main strategies, such as; writing within their own disciplines, the creation of pseudo ‘editors’, patchworking and paraphrasing techniques and the use of Turnitin, Grammarly and other writing aides.

Contract Cheating in Higher Education

Within the context of the modern university, academic writing is examined, not from the perspective of ‘work’ for Kenyan youth, but as a potentially significant threat to the integrity of higher education. Contract cheating, a form of plagiarism in which an estimated 7% (Newton& Lang 2015) engage, involves the buying of bespoke content online (Clarke &Lancaster 2006). A modern extension of the essay mill industry, the term is credited to Clarke& Lancaster (2006). It refers to “... the process through which students can have original work produced for them, which they can then submit as if this were their own work. Often this involves the payment of a fee and this can be facilitated using online auction sites.”²⁶ Newton& Lang (2015) describes the practice as ‘paid third party contract cheating’. The third parties include; academic custom writing, online labour markets, prewritten essay banks, file-sharing sites, and paid essay-takers. Each of these forms of paid cheating, they argue, pose a significant threat for higher education globally. They lament the difficulty in determining and detecting the scope of their use but maintain that the triangulation of the limited data suggests that the practices are ‘widespread’.

Newton& Lang cite an unpublished paper by Turnitin which estimates that up to 19% of ‘unoriginal texts’ submitted to their website were derived from prewritten essay mills, while another survey suggested that as many as 7% of students self-reported purchasing

²⁶ <http://thomaslancaster.co.uk/contract-cheating/>

papers at least once. Contract cheating therefore exists within the category of commercial plagiarism, and under the broader umbrella of academic dishonesty. Newton & Lang (2015) also highlight the difficulty in generating data on the extent of commercial plagiarism due to the very nature of the trade. However, they contend that paid cheating is extremely easy for students and that the 'limited evidence' suggests that the practice is quite widespread in higher education. They posit that, "it is extremely difficult to obtain, or even generate, accurate data on the use of paid third parties in higher education...Despite these caveats, triangulation of the limited data that are available indicates that the use of paid third parties is likely to be widespread" (Newton & Lang p.4). A more recent study of self-reported contract cheating estimates that 3.52% (Curtis & Clare 2017) students engage in contract cheating, an increase from previous years (Newton 2018). Although this represents a relatively small percentage of students, the majority (62.5%) of those who hire contract cheaters are likely to do so on multiple occasions (Curtis & Clare 2017). Moreover, Newton (2014) suggests that in cases of contract cheating, there may be up to 10 writing offers for every job contracted; pointing to the immense capacity and popularity of the market.

In Kenya, contract cheating is employment. In an article entitled, "A close encounter with ghost-writers: an initial exploration study on background, strategies and attitudes of independent essay providers", Sivasubramaniam et. al. (2016) analyse the experiences of academic writers from non-Western countries who studied abroad in Western countries and returned to their countries of origin. As such, Sivasubramaniam et.al organize academic writers into three broad categories; "(a) established Western country-based providers, (b) Western country-based providers who outsource their contracts and (c) those based and run by former students of Western education who are now based in their native, non-Western countries" (p.7). However, the academic writers in Kenya help to reveal a fourth category; graduates in non-Western countries who have been educated in and have never left their

home countries. For example, a recent article entitled, ‘Contract Cheating’s African Labour’, details the business of academic writing from a young Kenyan couple who took to the industry after unemployment and inadequate pay. Similarly, another entitled, ‘Cheating Goes Global as Essay Mills Multiply’, chronicles the essay writing industry across the world. Of interest are the writers based in the Global South, including the Philippines and Nigeria. Although little is known about the Kenyan hub, Bu²⁷ (2016) estimates that 20,000 academic writers are based there.

Thus far, the most comprehensive ‘insider’s account’ of contract cheating has come from Dave Tomar, writing under the pseudonym, Ed Dante. Tomar first gained popularity in 2010 when he wrote a piece for *The Chronicle*, entitled, *The Shadow Scholar: The man who writes your students’ papers tell his story*. Tomar later published a book with a similar title, ‘The Shadow Scholar: How I Made a Living Helping Students Cheat’, in 2012. In these pieces, he delineates his experiences of over 10 years as a ghost-writer, detailing his motivations, the backgrounds of his students, and his views on academia more generally. Quite importantly, Tomar shares some of the ‘tricks’ and ‘secrets’ of the contract cheating. Among them, he reveals his typical customer profiles; weak student, ESL student, and ‘lazy, rich’ student. Tomar harshly criticizes the current state of Academia, arguing that there are unrealistic demands on students, a lack of resources to properly support them, and deliberate ignorance by academics and administrators about the scale on which contract cheating occurs.

Critically, these observations point to legitimate challenges within the wider system of higher education. In a subsequent correspondence, Tomar published a review entitled, ‘The Ghost-writing Business: Trade Standards, Practices and Secrets’. There, he further details the economic exchanges and logistical guidelines which govern the industry. Tomar notes during

²⁷ Contract Cheating’s African Labour

his 10-year stint, he received a dual education; an education about the field of education itself, and an education about contract cheating. According to Tomar, his secondary education, that is, knowledge about the politics, economics, logistics and structures of the industry, was much more valuable and poignant. However, it is the first type of education which is especially important for the present study; education in the sense of acquiring skills and knowledge. Tomar states:

I wrote for students at every level of education and in nearly every subject imaginable. I learned quite a bit over 10 years of total immersion in research and composition. I learned about military strategy. I learned about tire manufacturing. I learned that managing an airport is extremely complicated. I learned that I don't much enjoy studying state budgetary law. Everyday I learned about something new. Usually based on the number of deadlines I had on my calendar at any given time, I might learn three or four or five new things in a day. I was like the student-equivalent of a substitute teacher, bouncing manically from subject to subject without ever learning enough to be an expert in any one area.

Divorced from its context, these observations are reminiscent of a typical undergraduate student at any university. Furthermore, when divorced from its ethical quandaries, Tomar's experiences seem to constitute a makeshift educational and labour process, particularly when sustained over 10 years. Contract cheating is, therefore, not only a problem for higher education, but an industry, and a source of employment which brings various opportunities and challenges for those involved.

Commercial Plagiarism: From Essay Mills to Contract Cheating.

Stavisky (1973) traces the history of the essay mill industry from the explosion of writing companies in the 1960s, particularly in New York and Washington DC. He links the emergence of the industry to the paradigm shift in higher education from elite to mass status. Stavisky contends that academic ‘assistance’ from friends and family has always been a component of students’ university life. However, with the expansion of universities and the intensification of the types of essays and projects required, came the birth of commercial enterprises offering to ‘help’ students with their writing- for a fee. And so, the essay mill industry was formed. However, the growth of essay mills was swiftly met with antagonisms both from academic and legal authorities. Stavisky cites a 1972 litigation suit resulting in the legal banning of the sale of essays in New York, while similar legislation was to be developed in Maryland and California. Despite these legal developments, even now the legal status of essay mills remains opaque in most states and countries.

In the UK, Lord Storey has recently called on the British Parliament to criminalize the practice, “...we’re also now seeing an increasing number of British students buying these essays. We have to go after the companies that are doing this, but we also have to disincentivize students from using these services.”²⁸. Furthermore, scholars and administrators have reopened the call for contract cheating to be listed as a criminal issue, with statutory offences for the service providers. Steel (2017) argues that offenders could be tried for one or more offences, including; forgery, fraud, conspiracy to defraud, and false statements. Steel also suggests that there is scope for prosecuting students under these offences. However, using the example of Lithuania, Tauginienė and Jurkevičius (2017) cast doubts on the legal possibilities, arguing that while an agreement for contract cheating

²⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/01/13/20000-university-students-buying-essays-dissertations-lords/>

services can be criticized in terms of ethics, “the courts either do not regard this type of agreement as a violation of legal norms” (p.1). Similarly, Draper and Newton (2017) argue that there is little scope within existing laws; however, they propose a new framework which targets contract cheating providers, rather than students.

A considerable part of the difficulty in curbing contract cheating is due to the near impossibility in proving this type of dishonesty. Klein (2011) speaks to a lack of faculty support in tackling the problem, suggesting that changes in university education from an emphasis on exams to coursework may have contributed to its increase. Similarly, Bartlett and others have offered practical suggestions for educators to tackle contract cheating, ranging from mini-vivas, increased in-class assignments, assignments based on in-class discussions, and personal reflections or journals. The problem is further compounded as plagiarism detection software programs such as Turnitin.com are largely unable to detect this type of dishonesty, since Turnitin analyses ‘originality’; the extent to which the words written were produced by another document. It tests for the similarity of content between documents and can give an indication of whether copying has taken place. However, the central concern with academic writing is not whether the writing has been copied, but whether the student has written the work. In such a case, Turnitin is ineffective because it cannot comment on the author of the piece, but only to its content originality. In many cases, the essay in question is ‘original’ in the sense that it has been produced credibly, acknowledging all sources; however, the ‘offence’ is that the student is not the author.

Understanding Academic Dishonesty.

Quite interestingly, Klein (2011) reports that many students in higher education have a casual attitude towards the impact of their cheating. She examines the theory of cultural

relativism and the role which cultural differences may play in influencing perceptions of plagiarism. Moreover, Klein argues that recent emphases on group work rather than individualized learning may impact students' perceptions of what constitutes plagiarism and notes a similar degree of ambiguity in notions of plagiarism within higher education. Similarly, Ritter (2005) postulates that the popularity of essay mills is largely due to students' cultural and ideological disconnection from the university system. Focusing on first year composition students, she deconstructs the concept of authorship as it relates to ownership. Ritter explores the distinction between ownership and authorship, referencing Horner's binary of author vs. student²⁹ in university settings. Rigby et.al. (2014) note that in their study of 3 UK universities- men, EAL students, and weak students were less risk-averse and therefore more likely to purchase essays. Similarly, Bretag et.al. (2017) found that 'dissatisfaction with teaching and learning', having a home language other than English and having a perception that cheating is widespread were positively linked to the likelihood of contract cheating.

Moore Howard (1995) examines historical and contemporary notions of authorship and plagiarism, particularly highlighting the concepts of 'autonomous authorship' and 'collaboration of ideas' considering the plagiarism debate. She offers food for thought on how ideas of plagiarism may be scrutinized in consideration of shared knowledge and collaboration, perhaps moving toward a discourse of plagiarism outside of ethical and judicial notions, and into 'positive terms'. Overall, Howard advocates for an even broader understanding of academic integrity and plagiarism. Further, she argues that it is imperative to move beyond the misconception that students cheat purely due to a lack of knowledge on

²⁹ According to Ritter, many students see authorship as writing something which will become famous, and as such, did not see themselves as 'authors'.

plagiarism policy, or a lack of ethics. She argues that students' motives for using essay mills are largely anti-academic and pro-economic.

Furthermore, Howard (1995) delineates a plagiarism policy which suggests an expanded view of what constitutes plagiarism, and what motivates students toward plagiarism. There, she deconstructs both concepts of 'authorship' and 'plagiarism', revealing some of the debates which exist in between these spaces. Howard argues against the historical narrative of authorship, consisting of a mimetic system of authorship in the middle ages where the author as an individual creator of work was non-existent, textual collaboration was the default mode of composition and the writer therefore did not need to cite his sources (p.789). She cites Rose who traces a shift from mimetic authorship to individual authorship in the early 18th century with the advent of the printing press and related technologies, which allowed for the economic profitability of individual writing, later protected by copyright laws. Rose notes that the shift was also met by a subsequent increase in mass literacy, which further underscored the value and demand for individual authorship and composition of texts. However, she cautions that despite this historical analysis, contemporary notions of plagiarism can be traced back to an early time in the ancient period.

Notions of Authorship and Ownership.

Howard (1995) argues that the notion of the author may not be a recent conceptual phenomenon, though a shift in emphasis on the individual may have taken place from the middle ages to the modern period. To this end, one may also argue that the critical shift came not only in espousing the notion of the 'author' but in the meaning of author, the understanding of the individual author, and even more importantly, the economic gains to be realized through the assertion of one's individual authorship. Howard predicts a shift in some

of the values related to authorship, with the advent of computer technologies. She uses the example of hypertext; the enabling of people to edit and re-edit text sometimes anonymously, “as one of the ways in which digital technology destabilizes the normative individual author” (referencing Holland p.730). She further quotes Holland in making this seminal point about authorship in the digital age:

Hyper-text enables us to reconsider the whole notion of the individual status authorship confers, not least since it creates two types of author/editors, refusing to distinguish between the two: those who write sentences and those who restructure materials (p.21 in Howard p.781).

Plagiarism, as Howard, Slavitsky and others note, has its etymological origins in notions of theft. Subsequently, Howard points to its resting assumption of literary property, such that without originality there is no literary property and without literary property there is no plagiarism. This argument is much too simplistic, as these notions are more nuanced and complex. Quite rightly, Howard acknowledges this, arguing that; “neither diachronically nor synchronically, then, can authorship be bounded into stable, antipodal categories of mimetic, autonomous or collaborative authorship. The heterogeneity of theories of authorship, the contradictory definitions that exist simultaneously, render impossible any sort of unitary representation” (784). Such is the crux of the current discourse; plagiarism policies rest on problematic and complex conceptual fragments which have largely been left examined. Fragments which then implicate authorship, originality, creativity and several other fundamental components of academia, knowledge production, and higher education more broadly.

Howard highlights this disparity between the heterogeneity in the history and conceptualization of plagiarism, and the homogeneity of academic policies on the issue. She

references the ways in which plagiarism policies invoke a ‘punitive’ and ‘moral’ notion of the ‘true’ autonomous author against which plagiarism is judged. Howard outlines a few textual strategies used particularly within composition studies, where strategies such as ‘patch-working’ have been labelled as plagiarism. She cites thinkers such as; Lunsford & Ede, and Bruffee who (in different ways) engage with ideas around collaboration and have criticized collaboration models for not sufficiently challenging concepts of individual authorship. Howard therefore calls for a re-definition and re-examination of plagiarism within higher education, noting that re-definitions are currently being undertaken in various fields of pedagogy and scholarship.

Much of what is considered ‘dishonest’, or ‘wrong’ about plagiarism lies in our understanding of authorship and originality. An essay is considered original when it has been researched and written in its entirety by the named authors. Furthermore, if any use is made of another person’s work or ideas, they must be explicitly acknowledged as such. Though these requirements of integrity may appear to be clear-cut, there are quite contentious underpinnings. Many of the terms, ‘research’, ‘written’ ‘entirely’, and ‘authorship’ need to be thoroughly operationalized. Moreover, many of these concepts adopt individualistic notions of authorship and originality; they presume that work can, and should be attributed to individuals, and that the body of work upon which the creators build can also be attributed to individual authors. In that way, for example, I can pin point an idea as mine, and another as theirs, and in turn we can acknowledge that the process was helped by persons A, B and C. However, these assertions are not universally agreed; there are some systems of thought which challenge individualistic notions of authorship, originality, and creativity- not just in non-Western philosophies, but also in more recent late 20th century and early 21st century Western developments, particularly in the digital and technological realms.

Peters et. al. (2013) refer to a paradigmatic shift in education from an industrial mode of production to a post-industrial mode of consumption as use, re-use and modification (15). Critically, they argue that; “the basic unit of analysis is no longer the individual, the author, the scientist, but rather the network that is embedded in new ecologies of knowledge” (15). They argue for the existence of a movement toward ‘open education’ and ‘openness in education’, one which is characterized by collaboration and cooperative management, despite there being a multi-faceted notion of openness. The idea of openness and collaboration is also clearly made manifest in digital technologies, for example in app creation and coding, where re-fixing (i.e. rearranging and altering another’s code configuration) is encouraged and celebrated. Similarly, Gnosh et.al (2014) note the paradoxical return to collaboration within information and knowledge systems, such that, “collaboratively creating knowledge has come to be seen as novelty” (2). They argue for the ‘non-rival’ nature of information and the difficulties of guaranteeing ‘ownership’ of information even after publication. Gnosh et al examine the new and recent types of online collaboration, by analysing some of the ways in which collaboration has worked, and how its new forms are being reconfigured in the 21st century.

Thus, even within what are regarded as cutting-edge industries, ideas about what counts as originality, ownership and creativity are much less individualistic in nature and are converging toward much older views of collaboration and creative ‘commons’. Klein also presents a review of plagiarism in light of some of the philosophical theories upon which it draws, namely; ethical theory; cultural relativity, utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, social desirability, perceptions of plagiarism and demographics. Specifically, she provides a theoretical foundation to help account for the motivations behind student plagiarism. In briefly delineating each of these theories, Klein hints at the robustness of the philosophy of plagiarism. Even where its ethics seem linear and unanimous, her quick survey highlights the

ways in which plagiarism may be deconstructed, such that the ethics of ‘cheating’ seem much less obvious when we consider the cultural, social and economic situations in which a typical student exists. These philosophical inquiries challenge us to confront, not only the ethical questions within plagiarism, but also to imagine an understanding of plagiarism beyond the boundaries of ethics.

Conclusion

Production is inextricably linked to concepts of work, and by extension, employment. Within the production of essays, theses, projects and dissertations in the academic writing industry, work and employment is affected, predominantly by the casual nature of the digital ‘gig’ economy, the demands of each client, and the widespread precarity of employment in Kenya, but surprisingly under-affected by the ‘less licitness’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) of the trade itself. Although the full impact of neoliberalist tendencies in higher education is debatable, it is undeniable that universities have undergone important changes in the last half century. Within the context of neoliberalism in education, academic writing takes on a curious significance. From this perspective, the popularity of contract cheating among university students (an estimated 3-10% Bretag et.al. 2017) may be interpreted as an extension of the neoliberalist attitude in higher education. The hypothesis, therefore, is that students are increasingly viewing their education as a commodity or private asset which is being acquired to better compete in the labour market. As such, the implication is that students may have developed a different relationship to their university courses, such that ‘ownership’ of work takes on a different connotation than that of previous generations.

In many ways, academic writing appears to be a somewhat subversive extension of the commodification and increasing neoliberalism of higher education. Such a perspective

may help to explain how and why ethical questions are by-passed by the writers, since they are able to see it as 'just a job'. It may also help to explain its increased popularity among students, who may view assignments as products which may be outsourced for maximum efficiency. At the heart of these assertions is a critique of the modern relationship between commodification, production and higher education. Undeniably, neoliberalism has had an important impact on the political economy of higher education in Kenya. Whether directly or indirectly, changing attitudes toward higher education have contributed to increase demand for university degrees, and white-collar jobs. Meanwhile, increased neoliberalism has arguably contributed to increased demand for academic writing and other commercialized forms of cheating. Thus, the popularity of academic writing as an employment choice in Kenya is reflective of the widespread commodification and production in higher education in helping to feed both the supply and the demand for contract cheating globally. Academic writing may therefore be viewed as both a cause and effect of the modern neoliberalist university system.

Chapter Two

Methodology

This study is best described as an ethnographically-informed, qualitative case study of academic writing in Kenya. It was focussed on capturing an insider's view; a deeply personal account of academic writing from a Kenyan youth perspective. Kenya was chosen as the site for the case study based on the popularity of academic writing among youth, its high youth unemployment rates, and its increasing higher education enrolment rates. The study encompassed several data sources, many of which were digitally-mediated, including; an online survey, WhatsApp interviews, as well as, in-depth interviews, [near]participant and non-participant observation, document analysis, policy analysis and the 'scraping' of Facebook and Twitter data. Data was collected over 18 months, with 5 months spent resident in Kenya, chatting both formally and informally with young Kenyans. As such, the study adopts some of the important principles of digital ethnography, including; openness, unorthodoxy, reflexivity, the researcher's agency, the fluidity of the 'field' and mutual visibility.

The study sought to understand the role of academic writing within the wider lives of young, university educated writers in Kenya and Kenya's emerging knowledge economy. It was particularly interested in the place of academic writing within their career trajectories; in the types of knowledge, skills and capital (if any) being developed through writing; and the nature of their 'work'.

Research Questions

The study responded to three research questions:

1. How does academic writing fit into the wider lives of university-educated youth in Kenya?

2. What is the role of academic writing within the new forms of labour in Kenya's digital economy?
3. How do academic writers experience the 'work' of academic writing?
 - a) What are the processes of production involved in academic writing?
 - b) What kinds of knowledge, skills, and capital (if any), are they gaining in the process?

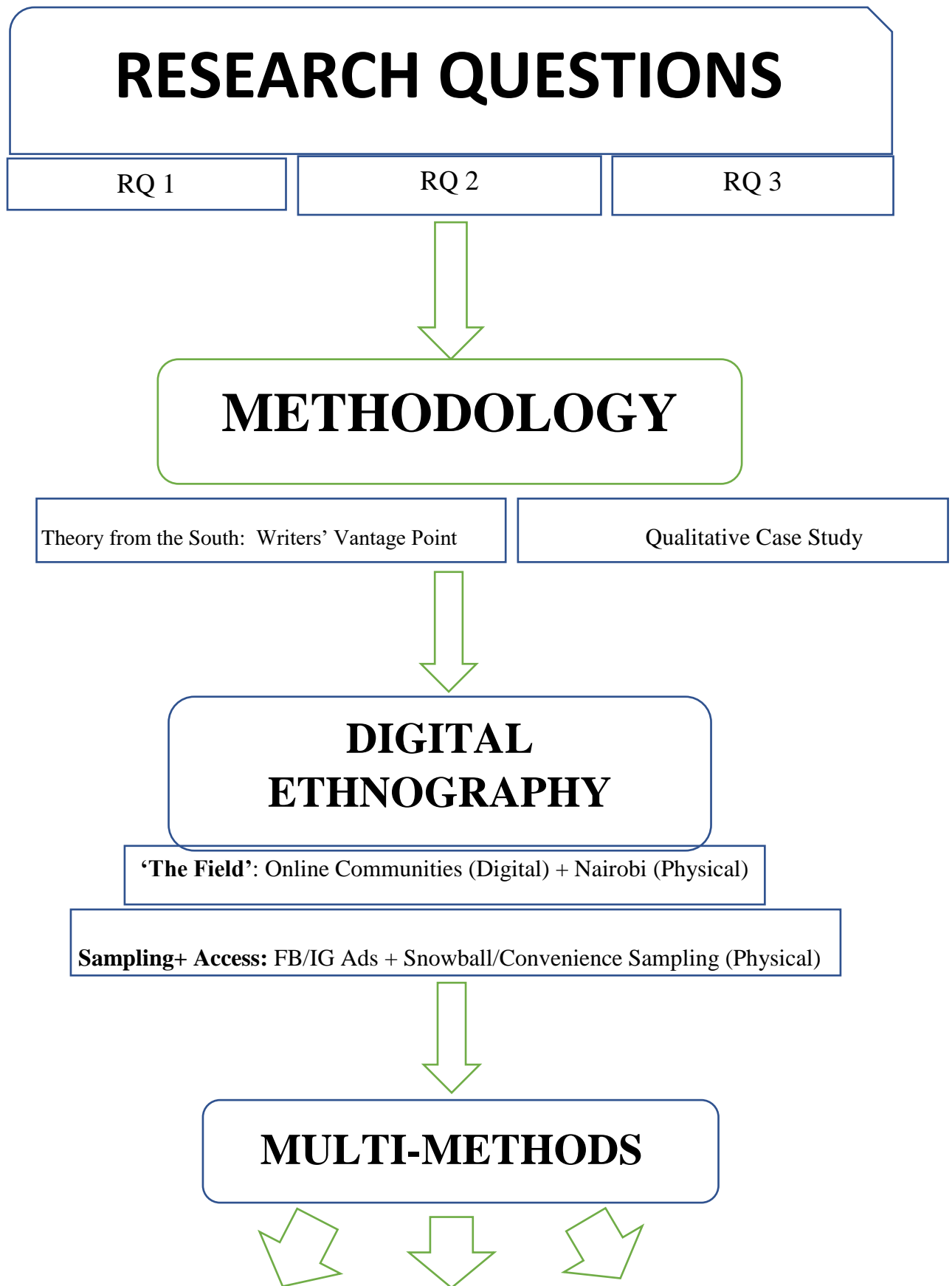
This chapter delineates the methodological approach to the research questions. It details the use of both traditional and digital ethnographies, particularly the use of digital platforms, such as; Facebook and Instagram for recruitment, Google surveys as research tools, and WhatsApp as an interview instrument. Furthermore, the chapter grapples with the peculiarities of online interviews, whether asynchronous or synchronous. It also examines the use of in-depth, re-current, informal interviews with some of the participants, including observations of two writers' processes. Additionally, the chapter analyses the opportunities and ethical issues surrounding the use of social media research, incentives, and working with writers involved in acts of academic dishonesty. The present chapter also considers the limitations of the project as a case study, as well as the limits of using self-reported data. It examines the methodological trade-offs that were made in forming the research design, particularly in response to the significant initial challenges of negotiating access and recruiting participants. It also discusses the limitations of asynchronous and synchronous online interviews.

Research Design

The study's research design (see fig.1) was guided by its multi-disciplinary nature. Drawing from multiple, seemingly distinct fields, such as; the digital economy, youth

employment, ICT for development in Africa, and academic integrity in higher education, the methodological framework of the study is similarly multi-faceted in its approach. As such, elements of ‘traditional’ ethnography were employed along with digital data scraping on Facebook and other social media sites. In order to reflect the centrality of social media (Ali et.al 2016, Goodyear et.al. 2017) within the community of academic writers in Kenya, Facebook was used as the main recruitment tool.

Similarly, document analysis was examined with field notes from my (near) participant observation as an article writer. These varied data sources reflect a multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach which guides the thesis. Ultimately, the breadth of instruments allowed for deep insight into the writers’ experience; the qualitative approach allowed for rich data; the digitally-mediated methods allowed for theoretical and methodological cohesion; and the case study allowed for critical analysis into the Kenyan context. The distinct blending of insider/outsider, local/global, researcher/participant, traditional/modern, physical/digital allowed for nuanced but thorough insights, analyses and arguments.



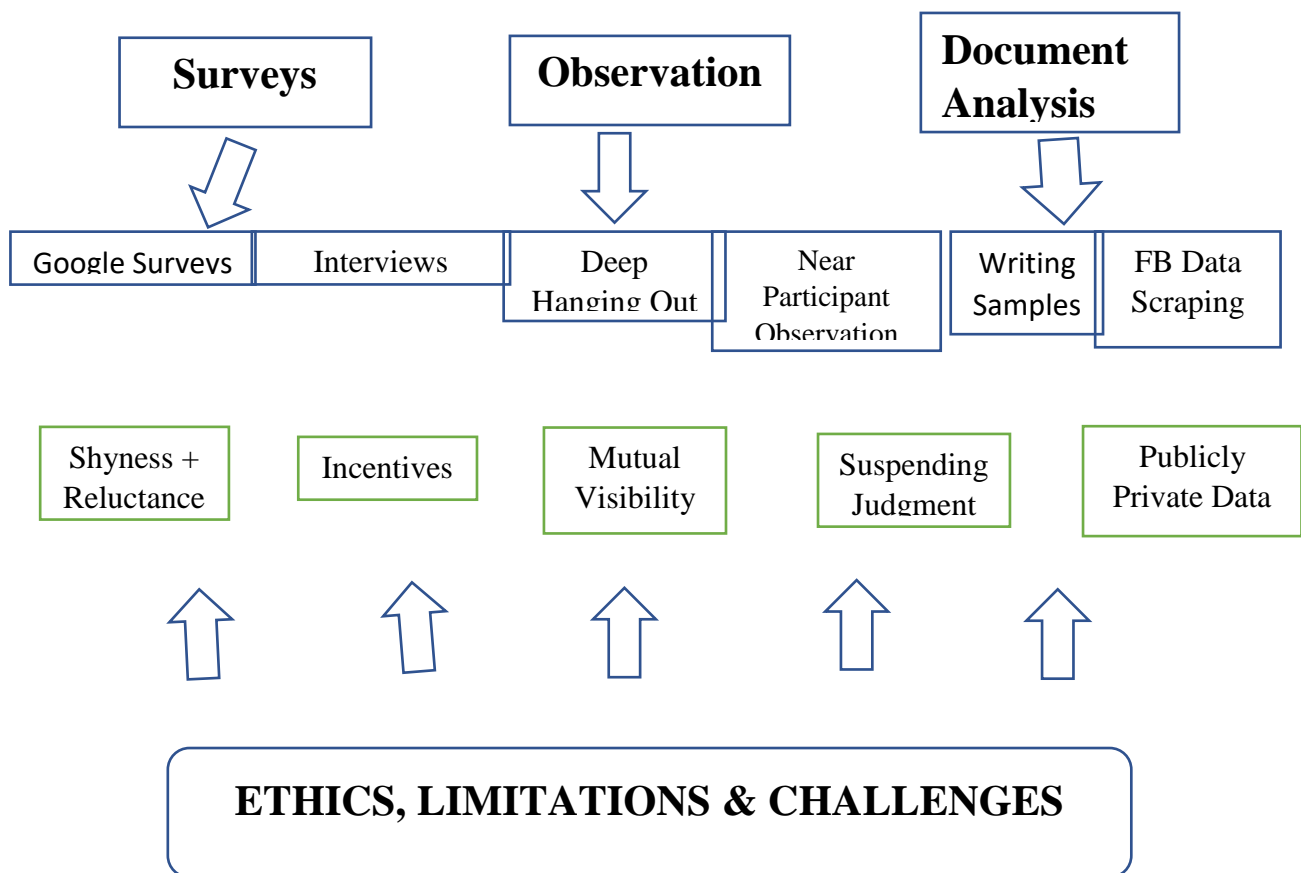


Figure 1. Research Design Diagram

Theoretical Framework: Theory from the South

In *Theory from the South*, Comaroff & Comaroff (2012) postulate a bold claim about modernity, globalization and the ‘position’ of Africa in relation to Euro-America. They argue that in many ways the West is in fact ‘playing catch up’ to Africa, in the sense that the South “...is often the first to feel the effects of world-historical forces, the South in which radically new assemblages of capital and labour are taking shape, thus to prefigure the future of the global north” (p.12). Comaroff & Comaroff contend that Africa, Asia and other non-Western

societies afford the West ‘privileged insight into the working of the world at large’ (p.1). They illuminate the idea of the ‘African vantage point’; the potential of African perspectives to help us see familiar things in different ways, arguing that the narratives of the Global South are usually bypassed in dominant discourses. Using that hypothesis, the thesis is concerned with the Kenyan youth’s vantage point; with understanding the familiar industry of contract cheating, from the inside out.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) challenge us to ‘make sense’ of the present from a Southern, and particularly, African vantage point because it is there that “...the history of the present reveals itself more starkly” (p.18). Critically, they further argue, “just as it has been in the past, the continent is also a source of inventive responses to the contingencies of our times, responses driven by a volatile mix of necessity, possibility, deregulation, and space-time compression” (p.33). The authors posit that Africa has seen significant economic growth in its informal sectors, sectors which are usually constructed around ‘more or less licit’ (p.18) practices, which result in “ingenious, highly imaginative modes of survival and more” (p.18).

As such, Comaroff & Comaroff (2012) offers the opportunity to view contract cheating from a highly unfamiliar perspective; one where its ethical implications and its impact on higher education are secondary, and where it is viewed primarily as an employment strategy in furtherance of economic and professional goals. By adopting such a lens, we can seek to understand the familiar notion of ‘contract cheating’ from the writers’ perspectives, through the highly unfamiliar lens of academic writing. Thus, Comaroff & Comaroff (2012) is used here, not as an all-encompassing framework, but as a theoretical and methodological springboard from which the writers’ experiences and practices may be viewed as ‘a response to local contingencies’ (p.18), and the industry more broadly as a ‘site of modernity and globalization’ (p.18). These claims are not unproblematic, but there are useful starting points for discussion.

Comaroff & Comaroff (2012)'s theory is not without its limitations or critiques. It is particularly vulnerable in its over-generalized and vague notions of the 'South' and 'Africa'. The text also tends towards the 'romanticisation' of past and contemporary everyday lives of Africans (Allsobrook 2014). Furthermore, they seem unable to escape the Western lens which they reject; as the African vantage point still conceptually exists for those in the West to learn from. Wilkins (2015) also criticizes the text for its over-reliance of Hegelian ideals, particularly regarding its relational unity in the binary notions of North and South; the centrality of 'capital' which Wilkins links to the Hegelian 'geist', and, 'the singularity of its historical time' (391). Moreover, Comaroff & Comaroff (2012b) themselves highlight some of the major critiques levelled at *Theory from the South*, namely: the opaque meaning behind 'South' as analytical frame; the retention of the telos of modernity and globalisation, and their emphasis on 'Africa' as the quintessential constituent of the 'South'.

Notwithstanding, the study is primarily interested in the 'simple' idea- which has been articulated in other forms- that the 'non-West' is, and has long been, in the practice of understanding global phenomena from a perspective vastly different from that of the West. Moreover, the study is interested in the intellectual and practical value of such a perspective. Essentially, the thesis examines the extent to which this 'privileged insight' may hold meaning in the case of academic writing in Kenya.

It is not coincidental that my entry-point into the study was not out of concern for academic integrity, but amid conversation with a new friend and former academic writer in a youth hostel in Kampala. The use of Comaroff & Comaroff (2012) is to acknowledge this positionality and preface the impact it is likely to have on the interpretation and analysis of findings. As a result, the specific claims contained there within act as a hypothesis which is tested through my analysis. I am interrogating the extent to which it is an appropriate lens for

interpreting the lives, experiences and challenges of academic writers and academic writing in Kenya.

Theory from the South emerges against the backdrop of Anthropology and other academic traditions where Africans were initially viewed as inferior to Western cultures; lacking in history, politics, economy, culture and society. Furthermore, Africa was perpetuated as monolithic and trailing behind Europe and North America, particularly regarding notions of ‘modernity’ and ‘development’. As such, Comaroff & Comaroff’s assertion that Africa (and the Global South) may, in fact, be the telescopic forerunners and predictors of major global events which will subsequently unfold in the West, is important. The study endeavoured to position Kenya as the subject, rather than the object of study. Further, while necessarily framing the study within ‘African studies’, it carefully acknowledges the limits of a single case study of one country on the continent. Consequently, the study will shy away from broad generalizations about ‘Africa’, except where trying to connect with larger theories within the discipline. The study also particularly heeds Mama (2007)’s call for moral sensitivity when studying African contexts, in light of the racist and prejudicial modes of inquiry which have traditionally examined the continent, particularly in the fields of history and anthropology. Much of what has come to be accepted as ‘knowledge’ and ‘facts’ about Africa has emerged from disciplines with problematic colonial histories and discourses, such that the very topic of academic writing in Kenya must be treated with especial sensitivity.

Positionality

This positionality influenced my ethical stance before, during and after collecting primary research. I was very wary of the narrative I told through my findings, and the ways in which I portrayed these young men and women, given the ways in which Africa and Africans

have been treated within Western academic discourses. I consciously tried to ensure that they were not demonized or vilified through my writing. While not discounting the obvious ethical problems of academic writing, I felt it critical to humanize and contextualize their choice of work. By the same token, I was conscious of not inviting a moral relativist narrative or one which glorified academic writing, nor one which ascribed victimhood to their existence or denied their agency. This required a delicate balance in my role as a researcher and social scientist. On that note, I was reluctant to accept requests from the media, including Times Higher Education and BBC, out of concern of how the study and its participants would be portrayed especially given the tone of media coverage on contract cheating over the past decade. The general tone has been one of outrage over the industry's threat to educational integrity, and the underlying question seems to be about how to end the industry. As a researcher, and given the positionality I outlined, I felt that this constituted a conflict of interest and therefore declined media interviews.

Methodological Approach: Digitally- Informed Qualitative Case Study

Salmons (2013) stresses the importance of aligning the theoretical and epistemological frameworks, methods and methodology of a study. This study's methodological approach is reflective of its emphasis on the writers' vantage point in incorporating methods which highlight the depth and breadth of writers' perspectives. Methods include in-depth interviews, informal interviews, non-participant observation, 'near participant observation' and Facebook 'data scraping'³⁰. Overall, a qualitative case study

³⁰ Data Scraping is defined as, "Extracting large amounts of data from an online source (often using an automated tool), especially where it is then reproduced somewhere else." (Chandler & Munday, 2016)

design was thought to be most appropriate given these research and methodological objectives.

Although case studies have endured a long history of scepticism and antagonism as legitimate methods of investigating research questions, some of the most widely used and respected texts in the social sciences are derived from case study research. George and Bennett (2005) present a strong argument for the value of the case study approach, stating; “case studies are generally strong where statistical methods and formal models are weak.” (p.19). Consequently, the depth of the case study; its detail, thoroughness and richness, is seen to provide a perfect complement to the breadth and scope of other methods. Moreover, George and Bennet argue that the strength of case studies lie in their potential for achieving high conceptual validity, fostering new hypotheses, examining causal relationships in individual cases, and addressing causal complexity. As such, the thesis’ case study design allowed for an in-depth examination of academic writing in the Kenyan context. It also allowed for great attention to detail in understanding the writers’ personal histories, writing processes, and career trajectories. The case study therefore served as a poignant tool for fully understanding the place(s) of academic writing within the wider lives of young, university-educated Kenyans.

The study is concerned with academic writing as a form of employment for university educated youth. In doing so, it will investigate stories of modern digital labour; of young people finding modes of survival in the face of high unemployment. In this context, the application of Comaroff& Comaroff’s assertion becomes, “What can these academic writers tell us about digital work and youth (un)employment in Kenya?” Thus, the study’s methodology explores these big questions from the vantage point of 27 young writers in Kenya, whose individual lives are intimately linked to several important global trends. The research plan therefore places the Kenyan writers at the core of the study, in order to

privilege their role(s) within this growing industry, the global higher education system, the twin crises of youth unemployment and higher education in Kenya, and microwork within the global digital economy. Thus, the writers' lives are the common denominators which coalesce these seemingly dissimilar themes. This focus, reflected in the methods and tools (interviews, lurking, document analysis, participant observation), examines the ways in which their lives were both impacted by, and in turn made an impact on these local and global processes. Thus, the study takes an empathic approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation in order to elaborate and amplify meaning, by making connections and patterns within the data (Willig 2015).

Originally, 5 research methods were envisioned; a mini-ethnography of interviews and non-participant observation with 10 writers over 5 months, interviews with university lecturers and officials from the Ministry of Education, document analysis of 10 writing samples each from the writers, 'lurking' on social media sites such as; Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and other websites such as; blogs, forums, and chatrooms. I planned to spend one week interviewing and observing each writer. The interviews were to centre on the details of their work, their personal histories, educational experiences, their employment trajectories, their plans and their thoughts about their work. The plan had also envisioned that the writers would be largely based in internet cafes around the city, so that the ethnography would be very physically situated within those cafes, making it logistically easier to organize. The cafes would also have facilitated snowball recruitment. However, when I arrived in Nairobi, I learnt that internet cafes had lost popularity among university students and recent graduates, with the availability of Wi-Fi and mobile internet packages, as it worked out to be equally or more expensive to use a café and was obviously less convenient.

I had also planned to conduct a more traditional ethnography while working as an academic writer for a few months. I felt that the experience would lend for a deeply enriching

ethnographic account of academic writing, from a truly insider's perspective. However, based on a review of the University's ethical guidelines, it seemed unlikely that the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) would grant permission for a Doctoral student to engage in a form of academic dishonesty and commercial plagiarism for several months. As such, I decided to use article writing (writing blogs, op-eds etc.) as a proxy and more ethically-acceptable alternative to participant observation as an academic writer.

Digital Ethnography?

As the study comprised a qualitative case study of a digital phenomenon (i.e. online academic writing), it lent itself to a natural adoption of the 'digital ethnography' methodological framework. The study adopts some of the important principles of digital ethnography, including; openness, unorthodoxy, reflexivity, the researcher's agency, the fluidity of the 'field' and mutual visibility. The theoretical landscape of 'digital/virtual ethnography/anthropology' is quite varied and often divergent in its approaches. At present, the discourse is dominated by Hine, Pink et.al, Horst and Miller, Kozinets, and, Boellstroff- each with their own perspectives on the conceptual and practical strategies for conducting ethnography through digitally-mediated or virtual means. Digital ethnography as both a conceptual and a practical tool is highly contested.

Horst and Miller.

In deconstructing and rethinking digital anthropology, Horst and Miller (2013) make several salient points, arguing that it is valuable as an approach to research that addresses the object of study in its own terms. They highlight the differences between the 'digital' and the 'virtual' as theoretical frames of reference as they argue we can no longer treat the virtual and

the physical as distinct or separate (46). They theorize that there is need for the role of the gap between virtual and actual, and digital anthropology fills this gap, we need to "theorize traffic across the gaps" (47), and that the gap between offline and online is culturally constitutive; not a suspect intellectual artefact to be blurred or erased (56). They proffer a theoretical and methodological framework for digital anthropology with 'indexicality' as the core theory, and participant observation as the main methodology. Indexicality consists of strong links to context and grapples with multiple contexts/worlds/bodies within the realm of "human reality".

Hine.

Hine (2015) argues that the value of ethnography is participation as it ; "allows the ethnographer to observe in minute detail exactly how activities happen, rather than relying only on selective retrospective accounts from participants." (55) She contends that another benefit of ethnography is that owing to participation, there is 'mutual visibility' between the researcher and participants. Further, ethnography also allows themes and interpretations to be discussed with participants, over an extended period of fieldwork. Hine highlights three of the most defining features of ethnography; participant observation as methodology, narrative interpretation as presentation, and time in the field as immersion. Hine contends that ethnographies of the internet (which feature both face to face and mediated interactions) are in some ways like traditional ethnographies. However, in some cases it is necessary to revise terms and concepts e.g. prolonged immersion, and 'the field'.

Hine outlines the principles of ethnography for the internet; the agency of the ethnographer in constructing the field, the significance of a reflexive and autoethnographic insight, the active role of the ethnographer in deciding what is the 'field', the importance of

recognizing the Internet as culture and cultural artefact, forms of field-sites and connections for the ethnographers have increased dramatically. Further, she lists what she has deemed 'key components of an adaptive approach for internet research', which includes; a holistic approach, openness to unanticipated events, the fluidity of 'the field'; and the internet as embedded, embodied and everyday multiply embedded.

Boellstroff.

Boellstroff et. al (2012) presents a rather prescriptive view about what constitutes 'ethnography', highlighting the centrality of participant observation. He also defends his reluctance to use the term 'digital/virtual ethnography':

Like many scholars, on occasion we conversationally use phrases like "digital ethnography," "virtual ethnography," or "internet ethnography." However, we find these labels misleading overall because ethnographic methodology translates elegantly and fluidly to virtual worlds. We see ourselves as ethnographers conducting research in virtual worlds, not as "virtual ethnographers." While the specificities of these spaces prompt their own set of considerations, the ethnographic research paradigm does not undergo fundamental transformation or distortion in its journey to virtual arenas because ethnographic approaches are always modified for each fieldsite, and in real time as the research progresses (p.4)

He further contends in Horst and Miller (2012) that there has been an analytical imbalance between the 'digital' and the 'ethnography'. He argues that if digital simply means internet-mediated then "all anthropology is now digital ethnography in some way, shape or form", thereby challenging theorists to carefully map out the distinction. He also argues that the 'digital' is not itself an object or study but is a methodological approach or technique.

Pink et.al.

Pink et. al (2015) offer a more generous interpretation of digital ethnography which in many ways stands in stark contrast to Boellstroff's views. In so doing they set out to explore "...the consequences of the presence of digital media in shaping the techniques and processes through which we practice ethnography..." (10). And, endeavour to set out "... a particular type of digital ethnography practice that takes as its starting point the idea that digital media and technologies are part of the everyday and more spectacular worlds that people inhabit" (11). In a sense, they heed the call of Boellstroff in trying to delineate a 'theory of digital ethnography'. Consequently, they list five principles of digital ethnography, many of which complement Hine and Horst & Miller's principles; multiplicity, non-digital-centric-ness, reflexivity, and unorthodoxy.

Kozinets.

Kozinets (2010) presents a sometimes cryptic explanation of 'netnography', as distinct-but related to digital ethnography. In his words:

Netnography provides participative guidelines, including an advocacy of the research web-page, the inclusion of Skype interviews, and in-person participative fieldwork, in order to migrate the refined perceptivity of ethnography to online media. With methodological rigour, care and humility, netnography becomes a dance of possibilities for human understanding of social technological interaction. (p.2)

He lists four main types of netnography; symbolic, digital, auto and humanist. Other important elements of netnography, include; significant use of internet data, research introspection, voyeurism, quest for intimacy and engagement. It also outlines several ethical guidelines including; informed consent, using existing social media profiles, and using one's real name.

Internet-Mediated Research.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) defines internet-mediated research (IMR) as; “any research involving the remote acquisition of data from, or about human participants using the internet and its associated technologies.” BPS sites two important distinctions between IMR and traditional research, specifically; a lack of face-to face presence, and automated collection of data (6). Similarly, the Association of Internet Researchers' (AoIR) recommendations on ‘ethical decision-making and internet research’, sets out several defining characteristics of internet research, including that which; utilizes the internet to collect information, studies how people use and access the internet; utilizes or engages in data processing, analysis, or storage of datasets, databanks and/or repositories; studies software, code, and internet technologies; examines the design of structures of systems, interfaces, pages and elements; employs visual and textual analysis, semiotic analysis, content analysis (etc.) to study the web and/or internet-facilitated images, writings and media forms; and studies large scale production, use, and regulation of the internet by governments, industries, corporations and military forces (3).

As such, this description represents a broad interpretation of internet research. Quite notably, the terms ‘internet-based’ research, and ‘internet-mediated research’ are used interchangeably although they may carry slightly different connotations and associations. As

an internet-mediated study, this project was very sensitive to the ways in which the internet needed to be incorporated at every stage, from design planning, through decisions about recruitment, data collection tools and interviewing mediums. In fact, the internet was integral to every stage in the methodology of the study.

Hewson and Laurent (2016) explore the advantages and challenges of constructing research designs for internet-mediated research. The advantages include; cost and time efficiency, ready access to vast, geographically diverse participants, large sample sizes, and rich communication even with anonymity and privacy. Contrastingly, some of the disadvantages of IMR designs include; concerns about reliability and validity especially in quantitative studies, levels of bias, reduced levels of control (e.g. knowledge of variations in behaviours, intentions, contexts), lack of researchers, and a lack of interpersonal communication. They further outline some of the major design issues in both qualitative and quantitative internet-mediated research. For qualitative research, a major challenge is in conducting asynchronous interviews (e.g. email, web forums) which often suffer from a lack of 'flow', an increased possibility for ambiguity absence of extra-linguistic cues, more difficulty in establishing rapport with interviewees for example. This study did encounter many of these challenges, as is discussed further in the chapter.

Similarly, it is well-documented that qualitative methods are useful for in-depth examination of a phenomenon or subject (Caru et.al. 2014). Thus, several qualitative methods were employed in the study, each allowing for the writers to give detailed accounts of their writing and other experiences. A qualitative approach was adopted to allow for flexible and adaptable modes of inquiry (Gerring 2017). Generally, qualitative studies lend themselves to open-ended processes and methods, which were much needed in this study since the field was relatively uncharted and access to participants was difficult. Therefore, the flexibility and

fluidity characteristic of qualitative methodologies was thought to be the best approach for the study.

Furthermore, multi-methods research allows for convergent validation or triangulation (Fielding 2012), which in turn helps to insure internal and external validity and adds to data richness and complexity. Three (or more) methods help researchers to ‘triple checking’ of data from multiple sources to confirm their validity. Therefore, the study made liberal use of triangulation through multiple methods, including; surveys, interviews, and various forms of observation.

The Field: Researching *Online* in Kenya

Hine (2015) contends that there are significant difficulties with 'the field site' as an ethnographic concept, as it was traditionally bound to a geographic or cultural unit. However, present day ethnographies, generally, and internet ethnographies, particularly, require an understanding of group boundaries as fluid and situated. She writes, "[t]he Internet, and particularly social media, therefore offer means of establishing co-presence with research participants and extending a field site in time and space beyond a notion of a specific bounded online or offline site" (73). For this study, I travelled to Nairobi to conduct ‘fieldwork’. I was there for about 5 months ‘carrying out research’ for my thesis. However, because the interviewees were geographically dispersed across Nairobi and Kenya (see table 1), most of the data collection was done through digital platforms and sources; Facebook, Instagram, Google Surveys and WhatsApp. In fact, of the 229 writers surveyed in the study- 10 were from the Coastal province, 3 from the North Eastern Province, 16 from the Eastern province, 22 from the Central province, 42 from the Rift Valley; 10 from the Western province, 33 from Nyanza, and 118 from Nairobi (see figure 2). I spoke face-to-face with

only 3 of the writers; this meant that even though I was physically situated in Nairobi, to a large extent, much of the research was done online.

Notwithstanding, I had formed close relationships with many of the writers- not just the 3 whom I had met in person and who had now become my friends, but also with a few others who I met through the study. Our interactions were punctuated between the formal interviews and even after the second and final round of interviews. Since I had made the decision to fully disclose my social media profiles (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn), a few of the writers added me on those platforms and engaged with my posts. Furthermore, due to the WhatsApp interviews and my decision to use my regular phone number and WhatsApp account, the participants had ready entry into my personal life, even after the study. Many of them viewed my WhatsApp statuses; I also viewed theirs. They commented on my photos, I did the same. As such, even after I 'left the field', 'the field' followed me throughout my life. In many ways, the 'field' was my phone, so that as long as I was connected to the phone, I was connected to my participants, and to the study.

Essentially, it took several months to feel as though I had left the field. In fact, it was relatively easy to coordinate the second round of interviews more than 14 months after the first, since I had kept close contact with the writers as I had had informal chats with at least half of them. Therefore, in many ways, I still have not 'left the field'. My positionality allowed for a view of the participants as my contemporaries and in some cases, my friends. We shared several commonalities, despite some obvious differences. Like them, I was a young, Black, working-class, university graduate from the Global South. I felt at home with the participants, and to a large extent, I saw myself as one of them. Of course, I was not from Kenya, and I attend a very prestigious Western University, so that there could not be true parity. However, our wider demographic convergences meant that the lines between

researcher and acquaintance needed to be continually enforced, even and perhaps especially, in digital contexts.

Nairobi, Home of Hustle.

While in Kenya, I stayed in the outskirts of Western Nairobi, in an up and coming suburb on Ngong Road, near to Karen. On my very first morning (a Monday) in Nairobi, my roommate, George, picked me up from my overnight flight from Cairo. The flight had been scheduled to arrive at 5:30 a.m., but had been delayed by 3 hours, placing us directly in the fire of Monday morning rush hour traffic. He had borrowed his boss' car to pick me up- insisting that I should not take an Uber on my first day. The journey from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport to our home was 30 km, but it took us about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Several times during the journey, George apologized for the traffic, as he tried desperately to maneuver the jams, multiple lanes, honking cars and prolonged moments of stillness. Cognizant of the staggering number of road fatalities which Kenya records each year- an alarming 27.8 per 100,000³¹- compared to the global average of 18.2, I mentioned to George that my biggest safety concern was being in a serious car accident. George shared my fears, mentioning that he had lost his dad to a car crash when he was a child. Furthermore, during my five months in Kenya, George had been in two car accidents; one of them causing serious damage to the vehicle, although, luckily, he escaped injury.

We arrived at our apartment about 10 a.m. By that time, I was exhausted having started my journey from Oxford almost 48 hours earlier. The apartment was beautiful; large, modern, decorated with Bohemian accents. Despite being single, George had rented the

³¹ <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/economy/UN-s-Kenya-road-death-figures-far-higher-than-government-s/3946234-4894488-op6h9a/index.html>

three-bedroom flat so that he could host friends and family with ease. He was not interested in having a long-term roommate, he didn't want the inconvenience, but he was happy to share the space with me for a short time. Our apartment would become a hive of activity; almost every weekend we held get-togethers and parties for George's work friends, extended family, and occasionally, my Kenyan friends from Oxford. Many of George's friends and cousins were young professionals in their late twenties and early thirties. Like the writers in the study, most had recently completed university, and a few were still studying. His workmates were four young men with backgrounds in graphic design and web development. Like George, each of them worked online part-time on KuHustle, Fiverr and/or Upwork, to supplement their income, and like George, they expressed mixed feelings about their experiences.

Soon after we arrived at the apartment, George offered to take me to the newly opened mall nearby. The Hub at Karen was a sprawling, swanky, up-scale shopping mall complete with posh and international restaurants, expensive jewelry and branded clothing stores, a kid's entertainment complex, banks, clinics, supermarkets, telecommunications stores, and pretty much anything you might need. It is the home to several events like farmer's markets and exhibitions during the weekends and holidays. Due to its proximity and convenience, The Hub was my primary shopping, leisure and working space while in Nairobi. I spent many Sundays in the mall with George and his many friends and cousins who visited with us over the months. The Hub was decidedly cosmopolitan and 'Afro-modern'; it was reminiscent of the spaces which I had known in Oxford, and previously in Toronto. The mall stood in direct contrast to the street on which it stood. Several times, I observed with some amusement that I had never seen such an opulent structure preceded by such a turbulent, unpaved road. The drive into Karen was invariably a slow, cautious, dusty one, spent mostly navigating mud tracs and potholes. George has since informed me that the road has been paved and is now more fitting for the 'palace' that is The Hub.

Sometimes when we would take the matatu (privately-owned mini-buses) to Karen, the contrast between our journey and the destination would be even more startling. Matatus in Kenya and Nairobi carry a culture of their own. Often decorated outside and inside, adorned with stickers, spray painted symbols and images, plastered with slogans, sayings and proverbs, blasted with music and speakers, and outfitted with high Wi-Fi internet, matatus are notoriously reputed for their careless and reckless driving. Notwithstanding, there are the cheapest- and sometimes fastest way to traverse the chaos of Nairobi's streets. A typical matatu ride from Karen to Nairobi city centre takes about an hour and cost 100 ksh (\$1 US). During my first month in Nairobi, I would use matatus for all my journeys- whether to the Hub, the city centre, or to yoga. A few times I fell while climbing into the bus, as the driver performed a 'rolling stop' to let me in. The falls, combined with the overcrowding, and the reckless driving soon forced me to take up Uber as my primary mode of transportation. This move was obviously much more costly, but ultimately, I felt safer for it.

For me, Nairobi was bedlam. Once or twice a week, I'd go into the city, mostly to explore or meet up with friends. Nairobi was by far the busiest city I'd visited thus far. The streets were lined with what seemed to be thousands of people. Most corners were lined with hawkers and hustlers selling just about every household item, clothing and food stuff imaginable. Traffic was always jammed- requiring pedestrians to cross with quickened haste. Nairobi means loud noises, competing smells, and bumper to bumper traffic. Yet, I lavished in some of the city's iconic spaces; Uhuru National Park, Nairobi National Park, the Giraffe Centre, the Elephant Sanctuary, as well as its many coffee shops, including; Java House and Art Caffe. But, undoubtedly, my favourite part of Nairobi was the Massai Market on Slip Road. There, I spent several Saturday afternoons bartering with the vendors. I bought a few dozen pieces of jewelry for myself, and as souvenirs for my friends and family back home.

Once, while in downtown Nairobi, I met with lecturers from the University of Nairobi to discuss preliminary ideas for the study. I had been introduced to the lecturers through a Kenyan professor based at the University of the West Indies in Barbados, where I'm from. The lecturers spoke about the widespread prevalence of academic dishonesty in Kenya, although they were largely unaware of the online academic writing industry. They spoke about the demands of academia in Kenya; battling low pay, large teaching loads, and difficult conditions. One of the lectures mentioned his own inadequacies in being able to detect various forms of cheating, due to the challenges. They described the landscape of higher education in Kenya as a difficult one, fraught with obstacles for the students, administrators and academics. Interestingly, each of them mentioned the need for additional streams of income to supplement their pay. It occurred to me that the Nairobi hustle had permeated each of its spaces and places; the streets, the homes, the schools.

Space and Place

Concepts of 'space and place' were also particularly relevant for the present study, most notably in navigating Kenya as a field site. Marcus (1995) examines the movement from single-sited to multi-sited 'fields' within ethnography, which is often necessary for inter-disciplinary studies. As he describes, "[t]his mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation (p.98)." He advises researchers to 'follow people, objects and stories', underscoring the ways in which the 'local' and the local-global dichotomies are challenged and disrupted within such methodologies. In similar vein, Burrell (2009) sketches some of the ways in which field-sites may be constructed through network mapping in both virtual and physical spaces. Burrell advises the researcher to; 'seek entry points rather than sites' and to 'consider multiple types of networks' (p.191). These methodological considerations are

especially pertinent for the present study as the ‘multi-sited field site’ emerged almost inadvertently from the logistical difficulties in gaining access, and in intuitively ‘following’ the writers where they were in Kenya (see figure 2); in Facebook groups and among the personal networks of my friends. Furthermore, the blurred dichotomy of global-local is at the core of the study to the extent that the writers are at once part of a large, global digital economy of microwork, and still very embedded within Kenyan society and impacted by the local Kenyan reality of high youth unemployment.

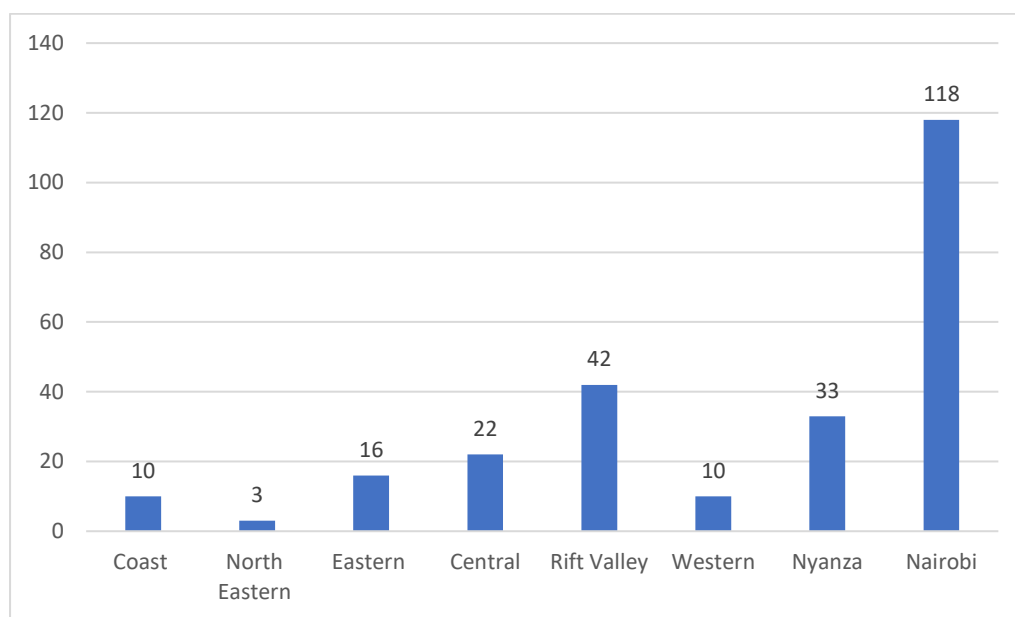


Figure 2. The county distribution of online workers from the survey

Notwithstanding, there was a very tangible benefit to being physically present in the context in which the writers lived and worked, even if I did not see many of them face-to-face. By living in Kenya, and spending time with George, Joseph, Simon, and dozens of other young Kenyan men and women- all of whom were concerned about their careers and future lives, I was given invaluable insight into the context of youth (un)employment and university life in Kenya. Many of the young people I met had either considered working online or had worked online for varying periods of time. This in turn gave me an appreciation of the

ubiquity of digital work as a viable option for university-educated youth in present-day Kenya.

The value of living in context was also underscored when I attended the British Institute in Eastern Africa's 'Harnessing the Hustle' Workshop in March 2017. Using the analytical framework of the 'hustle', the workshop interrogated the usefulness of this concept to describe the prevalence of precariousness, informality and casual work among Kenyan youth, particularly men, across all spheres of work and labour from garbage haulers and 'thugs for hire' to performing artists' and 'tech engineers'. What united these seemingly disparate labour modes was the use of the term 'hustle' by the workers to describe their relationship to labour, payment and the lack of security around work. These conversations significantly illuminated the larger higher education context from which the writers came.

Sampling & Access

The exact size of the Kenyan academic writer population is unknown, although a 2016 estimate³² placed it at 20,000 writers. Furthermore, provisional evidence through frequent advertisements for writers and media reports about academic writing suggests that it is widespread. Currently³³, there are 2,671 registered 'academic writers' in Kenya on Upwork.com, and 2,790 registered on Freelancer.com. These figures suggest the extent of its popularity, although they do not reveal the full picture since many academic writers work as 'employees' for other writers.

The study employed mainly convenience sampling, primarily due to the difficulty in gaining access to the participants. As a result, an open recruitment call was made using

³² See <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Contract-Cheating-s-African/237586>

³³ As of March 2, 2019

Facebook and Instagram advertisements, which invited all Kenyan writers to take part in the study. There were several advantages to this form of sampling, including increased participation, saving time, and saving money (Saumure & Given 2012). However, key disadvantages included; the possibility of volunteer bias (Saumure & Givens 2012), as well as, participant ineligibility (respondents who were not actually writers). There were also concerns about the generalizability of convenience sampling (Jacobucci et.al. 2015) and the chance that the sample was not representative of the whole population regarding race, gender, age and other important factors (Sapsford 2011 p.6). To counteract the effects of volunteer ineligibility, those who answered 'no' to the question, 'Are you or have you ever been a writer?', were excluded from the results and were not contacted for interview.

Some snowball sampling was also used, which was similarly advantageous in gaining access to writers as it was difficult to estimate the entire population (Morgan 2012). As such, some of the writers suggested friends and family who were also writers. However, one major disadvantage of snowball sampling was that it may have further compounded volunteer bias (Morgan 2012).

Access.

Murhall (2003) reminds us that there are often ethical issues involved in gaining access, in addition to the process of presenting one's self in the 'correct' way (p.6). Johl & Renganathan (2010) examine strategies for gaining and negotiating access at four main stages: pre-entry, during fieldwork, after fieldwork, and getting back. Within the present study, each stage of access posed significant difficulties, particularly during the fieldwork segment. The first month in the field was quite difficult, as access proved to be even more challenging than originally anticipated.

One of my friends and former writer, Simon, kindly agreed to introduce me to some of his friends and colleagues who worked as writers; however, as he previously warned, it had been more than 5 years since his writing and so his contacts did not yield any new participants. By good fortune, my Kenyan housemate, George, was currently working as an article and content writer, and had worked as an occasional academic writer for more than 5 years. As such, he also agreed to put me in contact with his friends, family and colleagues who were engaged in various forms of digital labour- including, but not limited to academic writing. It was there that he told me about the full landscape of online work in Kenya which included academic writing, article writing, translation, graphic design, and virtual assisting. He reiterated that academic writing was a popular choice among young people, but it was not the only one. Nevertheless, he offered to introduce me to other workers, many of whom were willing to talk about their experiences informally but were reluctant to be part of an official study. One person expressed shame about the work and was now in a high-level position at a respected international organization and did not want to be formally tied to academic writing. Consequently, I needed to find another mode of recruitment since snowball sampling was not effective. I also felt that the study needed a tool which would help encourage the writers to participate in a less intrusive and time-consuming manner. As such, an online survey seemed more appropriate, both as a data instrument and as a recruitment tool.

In an attempt to recruit participants for both the survey and the wider study I incorporated social media, since there were several Facebook groups for Kenyan academic writing already in existence. First, I posted on Facebook groups relating to ‘Academic Writing’ or ‘Freelancing’ in Kenya, namely; Kenya Academic Writers Forum (later changed to Freelancers Marketing Domain); Freelance Academic Writing Jobs in Kenya, and The Standard for Academic and Article Accounts. My recruitment posts consisted of the following text, “Please spare 5 minutes to fill out this survey on academic writing. You could

win 1000 KSH in M-Pesa credit!” accompanied by a link to the survey. I was very conscious of the need to ‘announce my presence’ in the Facebook groups and pages. That is, even though they were public, I felt it necessary to let the participants know that I was conducting scholarly research, and so I posted the links to my survey several times. I also kept my profile public so that members of the group could find out more about me and could freely ask about the study and my interests in academic writing.

However, responses to my Facebook calls were also limited, as only 3 writers responded in the first week. I also asked Simon and George to share the link to their friends and family via WhatsApp, which resulted in another 4 respondents. Consequently, I decided to use Facebook advertisements as a way of promoting the survey, which would in turn increase the number of interviewees. The Facebook advertisements provided a link to the survey which provided an option to be contacted for an interview.

The survey ran for one month from September 3 to October 3, 2016. It received a total of 371 responses. Since the survey was initially intended as a recruitment method for gaining interviewees, the final question on the survey was whether they would be interested in participating in a follow up interview, in which case they were invited to leave an email address; 304 responded positively to this request. Those participants were then contacted via the email address provided, confirming their interest in being interviewed. Since some of the participants were located far outside of Nairobi, I thought it may be a good idea to give them a choice of the mode of communication for the interview. I also thought this would be appropriate as I was unable to offer financial compensation for their time. The participants were given the option of in-person, telephone, Skype, Facebook messenger or WhatsApp. Each of the participants chose WhatsApp as their preferred medium.

The choice of WhatsApp as the preferred interview medium created an unexpected challenge as the project was designed to feature face to face interviews. As a result, the project became methodologically different from what I had originally intended. The research design was therefore re-framed from the face-to-face, small 'n' ethnography which was envisioned, into a much larger 'n' and highly digitally-mediated project. The survey data was useful as it helped to inform the types of questions, I later asked the interviewees. Additionally, with the participant's permission, I was able to construct a 'profile' where I used their responses in the survey as the basis for the specific questions I asked in the interview. This saved time and helped to eliminate repetition, since at the interview stage I already knew their background information about school, family history, biographical information, amount of time writing, average pay, and motivations for writing.

Facebook and Instagram Advertisements.

Goodyear et. al (2018) have highlighted the usefulness of social media within academic research. Therefore, questions around my own social media presence were especially pertinent, as were issues related to privacy/publicness in social media. Although the use of social media within academic research is relatively new, several studies have been conducted which incorporate social media at various stages of the research. The Facebook advertisements (see figure 3) were made according to the Facebook Ad Manager Template; two separate advertisements were created. The first ad ran on Facebook for 10 days from September 8th to September 18th, 2016, at a daily budget of 150 ksh (£1) for total budget of 1500ksh (£10). The target audience was set at location; 'Kenya', with interests; 'university, 'freelancer', 'academic writing' or 'freelance writer/editor' and age; between 18 and 35. The demographics were set according to those parameters to specifically target young online

writers. The ad reached 24, 887 people, and was clicked 489 times. Of the 489 clicks, 30% or 147 were women, and 70% or 342 were men. Of those who were reached, 31% or 7,616 were women, while 69% or 17, 223 were men. The second ad ran on both Facebook and Instagram for 7 days from September 19 to September 25th, at a higher daily budget of 253 ksh for a total spending of 1641.61 ksh. The ad reached 33,473 and resulted in 1,205 clicks. Of those reached, 38% or 456 were women, while 62% or 747 were men. Of those who clicked on the ad, 45% or 15,056 were women, and 55% or 18,345 were men.

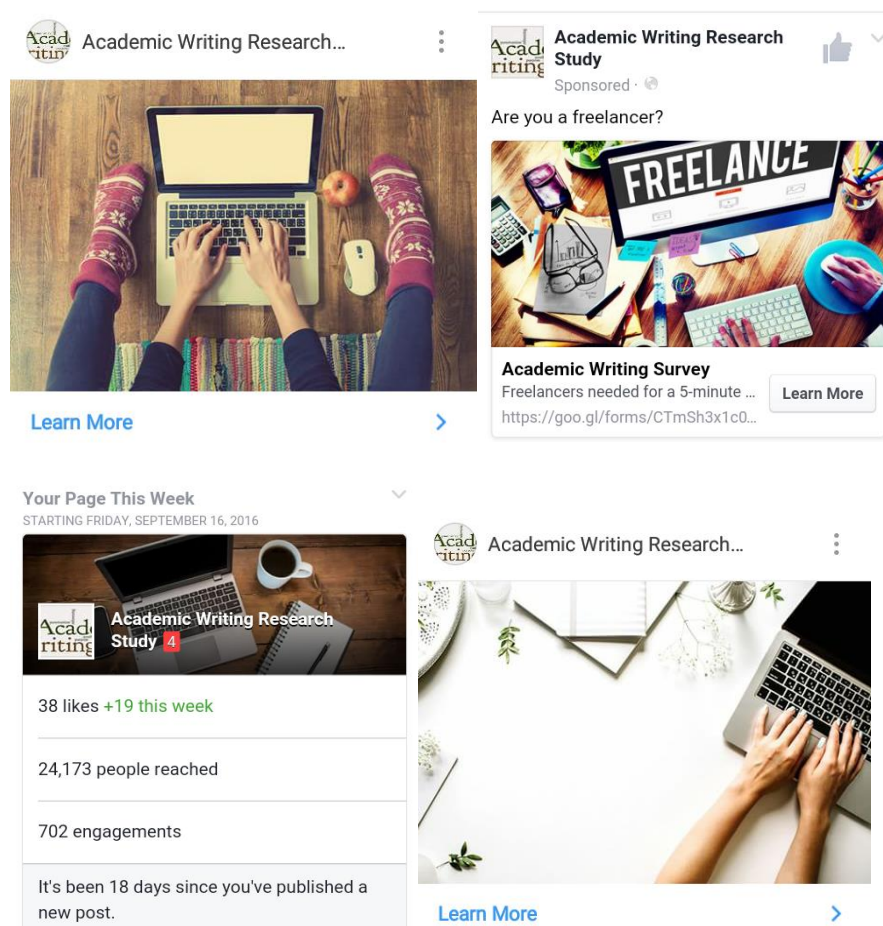


Figure 3. Selected screenshots of the Facebook and Instagram Ads

To run the Facebook ads, I was required to set up a Facebook page which would be connected to the ad. The page was entitled ‘*Academic Writing Research Study*’. The page’s

description stated that, “This survey is part of a PhD research project on Academic Writing in Kenya. Please spare 5 minutes to complete the survey using the link below”, with a link to the online survey;

https://docs.google.com/a/aiesec.net/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc2Se2RJOBQLIKhT_qefNjzicuyG2cCWl7oh9Jfw7SRpmByg/closedform. I also used the page to post announcements, including a thank you note to the participants which read, “Many thanks to all who participated! The survey is now closed. The 10 M-Pesa winners will receive their 1000 kes credit during the weekend.” I originally intended for the page to be a means of communication between the participants and I, however, I found that most questions and queries were directed to the email address provided on the survey. The questions asked mainly related to the purpose of the research, and inquiries about employment opportunities. I therefore reiterated both via email and just before the interviews later in the process that I was not offering any academic writing jobs, rather I was a PhD student studying academic writing, therefore, there was no financial reward available. The use of Facebook advertisements was effective as I was able to recruit 340 respondents- 220 of whom were current or former writers- in 3 weeks.

The Participants

The ethnographic vignettes below are of six former and current academic writers. These writers were essentially the chief ‘informants’ of the study; it was with them that I conducted ethnographic inquiry and spent many hours over the course of 6 months chatting both formally and informally about academic writing and other forms of digital labour in Kenya. Simon, George, Joseph, Ken, John, and Mark have become my friends, much more than study participants, and as such, these portraits allow for a presentation of their stories- not just as writers and digital workers- but as interesting young men.

Though brief, the vignettes provide a glimpse into the diversity of how Kenyan youth have taken advantage of the ICT for youth development frameworks, in ways which are different from what government policies envisaged. Kenyan young people have been actively involved in the digital economy, facilitated by the availability of broadband internet connectivity, however they have largely done so through freelance or micro-entrepreneurial ventures- often bypassing governmental involvement. Their personal experiences of ICT for youth employment and the digital economy stands in stark contrast to the discourse of government policies such as; ICT Authority Strategic Plan, Kenya Vision 2030, Kenya National Youth Policy (2006), National Youth Policy (2016), ICT Ministerial Strategic Plan (2013-2017), National Broadband Strategy, National ICT Masterplan, and Silicon Kenya: Harnessing ICT Innovations for Economic Development, as it is individualized, location-independent and de-centralized.

Simon: Early Academic Writer

Simon is a tour operator and safari-business owner in his mid-thirties. He came to academic writing after suddenly quitting his tourism job and worked as a freelance writer for one year. He describes the experience as being extremely stressful and intense. Simon wrote from 2009-2010, making him one of the earlier pioneers of independent digital workers in Kenya. After our first meeting in 2015, I maintained contact with Simon, who had moved back to Nairobi, and was running his own tourism business. We spoke often via Facebook, about life in general, but very rarely about his previous stint as a custom writer. However, in May 2016, in preparation for my fieldwork in Nairobi, I asked Simon to conduct a formal interview so that he could expand on our conversations in Kampala. He readily agreed but warned that he had not written for over 5 years ago, and so some of the details were fuzzy.

After having worked in tourism industry for 5 years, Simon became frustrated with tourism, and without notice he quit his job. He described that time as a period of “burn out”, and notes that he “wanted something fresh”. He soon after met with a friend who was doing essay writing, and so Simon asked to see what was involved. Simon describes this friend as a ‘complex guy’, who was extremely skilled at writing papers, especially theses. The friend explained that he wrote academic papers for people who ‘didn’t have the time’. He notes that at that time essaywriters.com and [UVOcorp](http://UVOcorp.com) were the popular sites for writers from Kenya, Nigeria and India, and so the competition was particularly keen. He therefore opened an account on writerbay.com, where the basic requirement for writers was a college diploma or university degree. The application process consisted of a half hour interview, where they tested his command of English, proper use of grammar, and knowledge of citation styles, particularly APA. From there, Simon started as a junior writer where he was given an account from which he logged in to receive his assignments.

I asked Simon about his contact with the customers, to which he replied that there were no opportunities to speak with the students. Instead, the company (in his case writerbay.com) reached out to the students to take their requests. The requests were then categorized based on subject, and the writers logged in and applied to work on the assignments. The administrators of the company then decided who got which papers. When the writer completed the assignment, he submitted it, the administrator passed it on to the student, and there was a seven-day ‘wait period’ for the student to approve the submission. If the customer was pleased, payment was received. If not, the necessary adjustments were made. Simon explains that pay depended both on the season (e.g. exam season is more expensive) and on the subject (engineering and architecture are more expensive). On average, pay ranged from \$5-\$25 USD per page.

Simon's writing was mostly a 'solo' act. He explained that he did not spend a lot of time in communication with other writers. However, he mentioned that he had consulted a few times, and had taken "2 fresh graduates from local universities". I asked him to elaborate, and he explained that sometimes writers would open multiple accounts with different websites and then they would choose some assignments and email them to university students (mainly from the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University). The writers would pay the university students \$2-\$4 USD per page. He advises that this practice was quite popular and a 'big business', and that he knew of one guy who had employed up to 20 writers under him. He also explained that there were both offline and online writers who wrote assignments for Kenyan students, usually advertising on notice boards around the university campuses. He speculates that this is common practice since many Kenyan students work alongside their studies and therefore struggle to find the time to complete their assignments.

George: Moving Beyond the Side Hustle

I met George through a classmate at Oxford. George is an old school friend of his, and so when he heard I was moving to Nairobi for fieldwork, he put us in contact so that George could help with my housing search. As it turns out, George had recently moved into a new apartment and had room for a temporary housemate. When he picked me up from the airport, we started talking in greater detail about our lives and our work. After I mentioned to him that I was researching academic writers, he seemed especially intrigued and confirmed its popularity in Nairobi (which was, of course, reassuring for me, as I had travelled 5,000 miles to find out more). In fact, as luck would have it, not only did he know several writers, but he had spent a few years during his undergraduate studies and immediately after as an academic

writer. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity and asked whether I could use him as a key participant for my study, to which he readily agreed.

George and I became very close friends over the course of my time in Kenya. We not only lived together but travelled together all over the country. He also invited me to family parties and events (including a Kikuyu wedding), where I met his close family and friends. He also became my window into the world of youth employment and digital labour in Kenya. Through him, his friend, Joseph (who is a current medical student and academic writer) and Simon, I was able to conduct deep ethnographic inquiry, which then informed the types of questions and themes I raised in the survey and interviews with other writers. Over the course of our friendship, George and I had many informal conversations about his writing and his life, and we also conducted one formal interview.

George is a 27-year-old man with a deep, husky voice that stands in stark contrast to his petite frame. At present, he works in communications at a small NGO, and moonlights as an article writer. He grew up in a relatively well-to-do family as his mother is an astute businesswoman, and his father worked in the military. His father passed away in a car accident when he was a small child, leaving his mother to raise him, his 2 brothers and sister on her own. He is a Nairobi-an through and through, having been born, raised and educated in the city up until secondary school. From there, he went to university in Kisumu, a city in Western Kenya- near Lake Victoria, where he studied Political Science and IT. His long-term plan during university, and now, is to work in Government administration or in the NGO sector. In the short to medium term, he attends to apply for graduate school in the next year and complete a Master's in Governance or Public Policy before returning to Kenya.

George still dabbles in academic writing but has shifted mainly to article/content writing. He also started around 2010/2011 as an employee of a Kenyan academic writing

company where he went to work 5 days a week, in an office with other writers. He later switched to independent freelance writing, focusing primarily on non-academic writing. He's been writing for more than 6 years and has become quite adept, as uses his earnings almost exclusively to support himself- more than 4 years after graduation, despite having 2 formal jobs.

Joseph: Dreams of Oxford

Joseph is George's friend; they went to a prestigious boarding school together, and George was classmates with Joseph's elder brother. I found out he was an academic writer, incidentally, when he spent a weekend at our home. I woke up early at 6am to find him in our living room, working away on his laptop. It was obvious he had not yet gone to bed. When I asked him about it, he confirmed that he was working on a Philosophy paper which he knew nothing about, so he had stayed up all night working on it. Joseph is a third-year medical student at the University of Nairobi; very outgoing and somewhat eccentric. At the time of our meeting, he had started writing just 3 months prior. Joseph is interested in becoming a Rhodes scholar. In fact, every time I see him, he asks more about the process, the requirements, and about Oxford in general. While waiting to start our final interview, we spent about 30 minutes reviewing the specifications for the Kenyan Rhodes Scholarship on the website, while I detailed the various steps for the application process. I also give him advice on what he could do now to prepare for the scholarship-which was still about 3 or 4 years away. Joseph's keen interest surprised me somewhat. Of course, I knew he was a medical student and he seemed very intelligent, but perhaps I had met him in such informal and casual settings (often at my home with his friends chatting about girls and work and general life), I didn't think he would have such a strong and unwavering interest in the Rhodes Scholarship. But he did. And he promised to follow up with me in the coming years.

He anticipates that his writing will continue for a few more years until he has completed his studies, after which he intends to attend Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

Ken: Writing for a Living & Life Beyond Writing

Ken is 26 years old. He was born and raised in Nairobi to two university-educated teachers. However, unlike most of the other participants in the study, when asked to describe his family's socio-economic status, Ken referred to his family as 'comfortable'. At the time of our interview, he was in his fourth year at the University of Nairobi, studying Education and IT, a happy coincidence. Also, unlike most other respondents, Dennis was funding his studies through his personal savings, an obvious talking point for me. He notes that he has, "ventured into the academic writing... And have been doing it solely as my source of income and at the same time assisting students to get quality grades". Immediately after starting the interview, I noticed that he was much more talkative and engaging than most of the other participants. For one thing, he asked me several questions about my background- my country of origin, my university, my course, the purpose of my study, my gender, my age, my knowledge of Kenya, my competence in Swahili, and so on. By the end of our first conversation he remarked, "You are going to be a great friend indeed".

In the six months following our official interview, Ken and I had several conversations on various topics. He often remarked on my WhatsApp photos, inquiring about my family and friends. Once, he asked me to loan him 2,000 ksh via MPesa, to help with a small emergency- to which I politely declined. He also invited me to attend his graduation ceremony in December-by which time I had already left Nairobi and was travelling in India.

Another time, we chatted whilst I was in Kampala, and he asked about my visit to the neighbouring city. Once he also emailed to ask about scholarship opportunities to study for a Master's in Europe and the US. As such, I compiled a comprehensive list of the scholarships which may be available to him as a Kenyan student, including; Rhodes, Commonwealth, Fulbright, Mastercard, and Weidenfeld. I could sense from very early on that Ken perceived my Oxford and other international connections as an excellent way from him to expand his own opportunities.

In April 2017, Ken wrote to me about a message he had received from 'Jenny Hyde' claiming to be from the University of Portsmouth, advising him that he had been awarded a scholarship, but that correspondence would be directed through one of their student ambassadors. Ken called asking what I thought about the message and asked whether I thought the email could be true. I replied stating that it may be a scam. However, though he shared my scepticism, Ken was not convinced so he asked that I visit the University of Portsmouth, in person, to enquire about the email and verify the contents. I explained that the University was quite some distance away so I could not go in person. However, I advised him to find out the email address of the admission office and email them directly about his query. I further offered to help him with drafting the email, if necessary. To which he responded, "Thank you very much...you are a nice friend of whom I can count on...wish you well in whatever you pursue".

What was also unique about Ken was that he thought of writing as a long-term career and planned to train other people to become writers, as well. He now has three writing accounts through proficientwriters.com, essaywriters.net, and studybay.com. He notes the main appeal about writing is, "...because it is good paying and you do it at your own convenience". Ken currently employs 5 other writers; three of whom are current university students, and the other two are recent graduates waiting for formal employment. He takes the

orders from the clients and sends them to his employees who then send the work back to him for proofreading before final submission. He pays them \$5 per page via M-Pesa- a wage which is relatively high compared to many of the prices I've encountered.

John: Balancing a 9-5 with writing

John started our interview by asking questions about me, my PhD thesis and the interview. After a somewhat 'gruelling' ten minutes of questioning, he then responded, "Ok glad to help in whatever way I can". He's a recent graduate of Chuka University, a private rural university located near to Mt. Kenya, where he completed a Bachelor's degree in Life Sciences, funded by the government. Unlike many of the others, John has a formal job in sales at a local bank. He started writing after seeing an advertisement online, via a job advertisement website. As such, for the past two years he's been writing for an agency which sends him assignments daily. He estimates that he spends about 40 hours a week writing, mostly on evenings and weekends-which he balances with his banking day job. In the future, he plans to manage a major firm.

When I asked why he writes online, even though he has a formal job, he noted that in addition to the extra income, academic writing was more fun. His response surprised me. Comparatively, his banking job was more lucrative, although he felt he could earn more as a writer if he had his own account and was able to write directly for clients. He said it was something he had considered and was interested in doing but had not created 'the networks' to enable him to do so. John works online for a company called TopNotch. He recalls that the interview consisted of writing sample papers on different topics, as well as producing his CV and degree certification. He estimates that he makes between 2000 and 5000 ksh per week.

John rates himself as an excellent writer and opines that his writing has improved as a result of his work, and that he has improved his communication skills.

Mark: Finding a Writing Niche

Mark is from Nairobi. Both his parents are university educated; his mother is a nurse, and his father is a consultant. He's a risk management and insurance graduate of Moi University, a public university in Eldoret in Western Kenyan. Despite attending a public university, his studies were funded by his parents. Mark does a variety of online work, including; article writing, academic writing, sports writing and transcription. At the time of the interview, he had been writing for about a year-as a freelance writer for a few hours a week. He got started through a university classmate and started writing articles mostly on innovation, ICT and entrepreneurship in Africa. In fact, all the writing samples he sent me were on those topics. He notes that he specifically wrote about topics which interested him, hence, ICT and sports, and those which were "easy" because of his existing knowledge and expertise. The academic articles he received through the colleague, while the sports and other articles he receives as a freelance writer via essaywriters.com.

When he first started his earnings were quite low. For the basketball articles, he was paid about 350ksh per article for one article a day, while for the academic papers he charged \$1 US per page. As such, he was able to earn more from academic writing because of the one article a day restriction on the sports writing. He also notes that while he was a student, he found it difficult to balance the writing and other online jobs with his studies and his basketball practice. Mark plans to continue writing in the long term. In fact, he has started a writing blog on Medium.com. For him, the appeal is that, "...most of it is on people's experiences and stories. I haven't restricted myself to a particular form". Mark also writes as a

UN online volunteer. As I had never heard on UN online volunteers, I asked him to explain.

He elaborated:

I am an online UN volunteer. So sometimes I translate documents from English to Swahili. Help in writing articles for social media sensitization on the youth. Women and on marginalized communities. I also volunteer for SOPA International as a youth life skills coach.... I have always wanted to volunteer. I went to their Nairobi offices and they told me to register. It's on unv.com...My basketball coach introduced me to the organization.”

These six young writers give us glimpses into the lives of a growing educated, middle or aspiring middle class of youth in contemporary Kenya. Their vignettes, when placed in the wider contexts of high youth unemployment in Kenya and the rise of digital work in the South, help to paint a full picture of the emerging characteristics of labour and life, and many the ways in which people continue to innovatively make a living in strained circumstances. Among them, there were differences in the way they perceived writing in relation to their long-term career plans. Some writers felt that they would continue indefinitely, while others saw it as a short-term solution until formal employment was found. There was also a mix of freelance writers, those who wrote for an agency, those who wrote for other writers, and those who employed others. A few of the writers also noted having a specialty area of expertise. Further, many of them reported doing other forms of digital work, such as; illustrations, transcriptions, article writing and sports writing. The number of hours spent per week and earnings recorded also varied widely.

The main participants in the study were all either current or former academic writers, and either current undergraduate students, or had graduated within the last 5 years. The writers had come from all over Kenya, and had attended various universities across the

country, although a significant number of them had attended Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). The initial survey yielded 370 responses, 229 of which had been academic writers. Of those 229 writers, 24 were interviewed, in addition to 3 writers who were recruited through personal connections. The demographic profile of the writers was common across the general survey, academic writers in the survey, and the interviewees. Typically, the participants were male, between the ages of 22-25 from Nairobi, and currently in university.

Survey Participants.

A total of 370 participants responded to the survey, from across Kenya, spanning both genders and aged between 18 and 35. Most of the participants were university-educated, and had been writing for at least 3 months. Of those 370 participants, 60.5% or 224 were male, and 39.5% or 146 were female. Further, 209 or 55.7% were between 22 and 25, 111 or 30.1% between 18 and 21, and 44 or 11.9% between 26 and 39. The remaining 2% were between 30 and 35. About 36.3% or 134 respondents were from Nairobi, 20.3% or 75 from the Rift Valley Province (e.g. Kabarnet, Kericho, Nakuru, Kapsabet, Lodwar, Eldoret), 13.3% (49) from the Nyanza Province (e.g. Kisumu, Kisii, Migori, Homa Bay_ and 10.8% or 40 respondents from the Central Province (e.g. Kiambu, Nyeri, Nyahururu, Kerugoya). The remaining participants were divided among the Western Province (e.g. Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega), Eastern Province (Embu, Isiolo, Makueni, Marsabit, Meru), North Eastern Province (e.g. Garissa, Wajir, Mandera). Most of the respondents, 62.2% or 230 were currently attending university, 32.7% (121) had already graduated, while 5.1% (19) had never attended university.

Academic Writers.

Of the 370 respondents, 229 had worked online and 172 been or were currently academic writers. Of that total, 162 were male, and 67 were female (see figure 4). 67 of the writers were between 18 and 22, 139 between 22 and 25, 32 between 26 and 29, and 4 were between 30 and 35 (see figure 5). Moreover, 10 of the writers were from the Coastal province, 3 from the North Eastern Province, 16 from the Eastern province, 22 from the Central province, 42 from the Rift Valley; 10 from the Western province, 33 from Nyanza, and 118 from Nairobi (see figure 6). Finally, 122 of the 229 online workers were currently in university, 104 had already graduated, and 3 had never been to university (see figure 7).

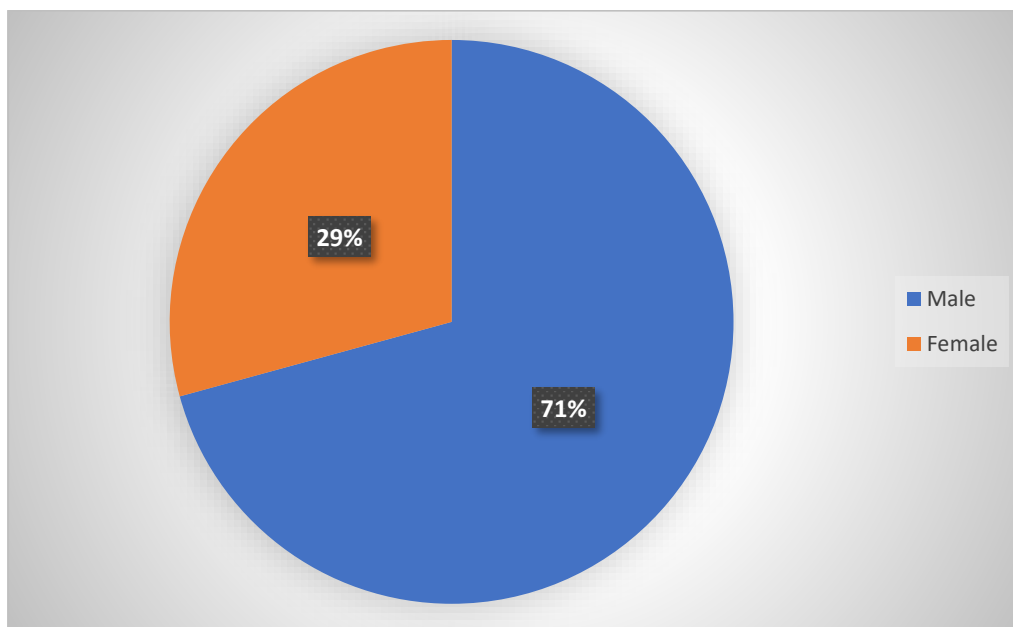


Figure 4. The gender distribution of online workers from the survey

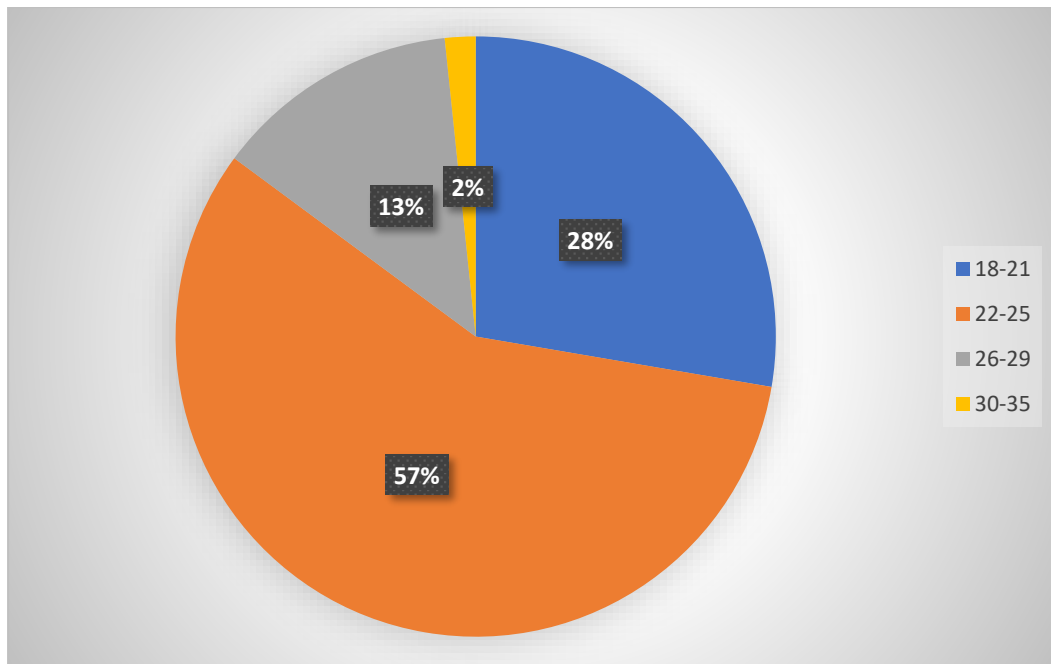


Figure 5. The age distribution of the online workers from the survey

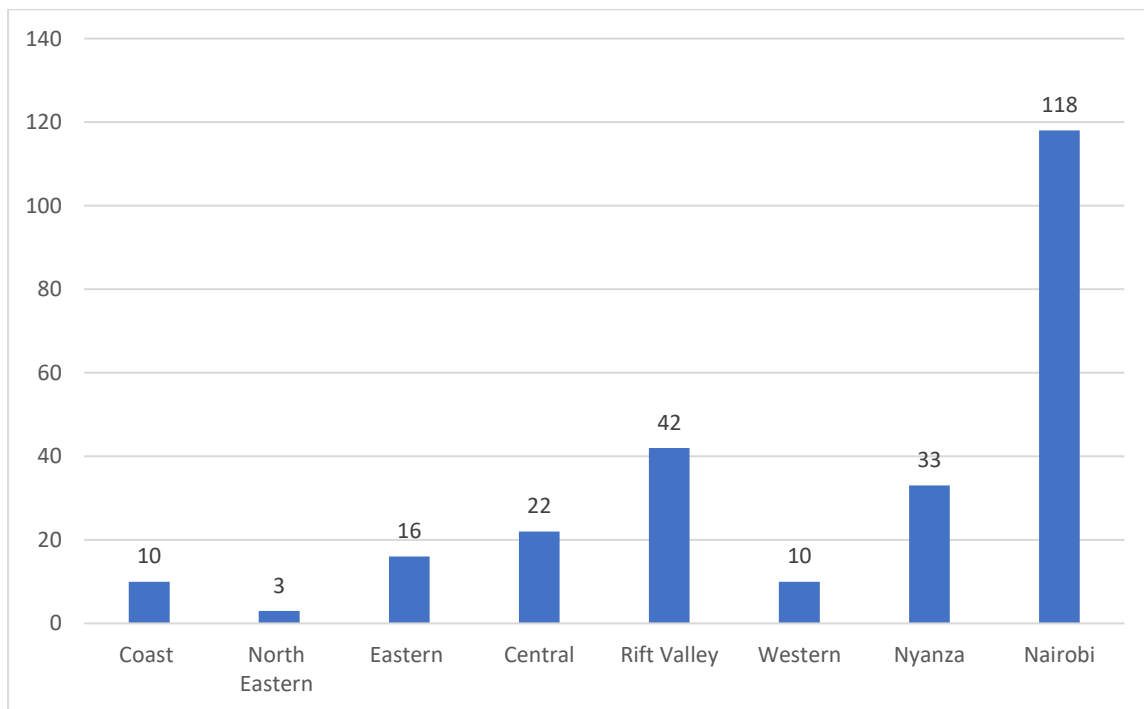


Figure 6. The county distribution of online workers from the survey

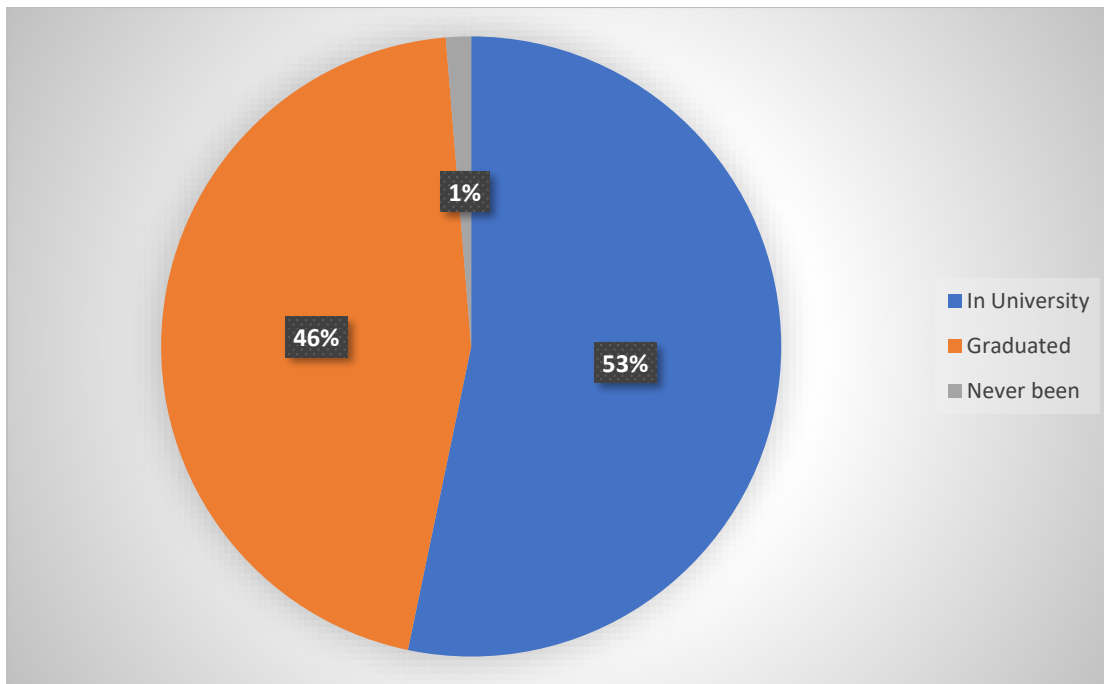


Figure 7. The university status of online workers from the survey

Interviewees.

Using convenience sampling, interview participants were chosen from ‘eligible’ survey respondents; those who had been academic writers (see table 2). From the total pool of 172 eligible respondents, 24 responded positively and were interviewed via WhatsApp. Of those 24, 20 were men and 4 were women (see figure 8). Their ages ranged from 19 to 33 (see figure 9); 14 were still in university and 10 had already graduated and 1 had never attended (see figure 11). Further, 1 was from the Coastal Region, 0 from the North Eastern Region, 2 each from the Eastern and Central regions, 5 from the Rift Valley, 3 from the Western province, 1 from Nyanza, and 13 from Nairobi (see figure 10).

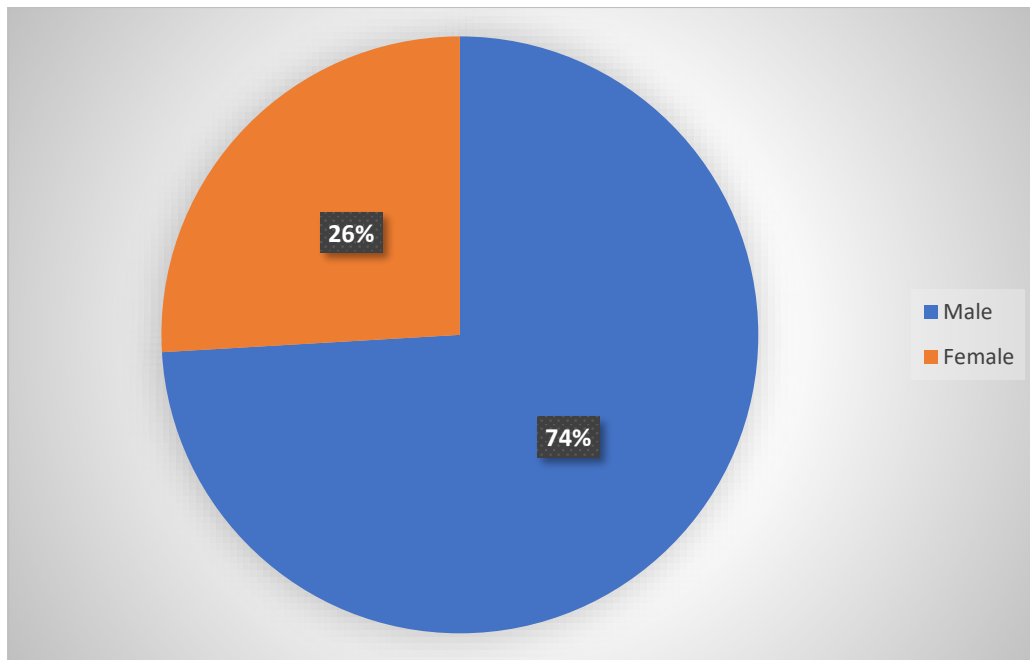


Figure 8. The gender distribution of the interviewees

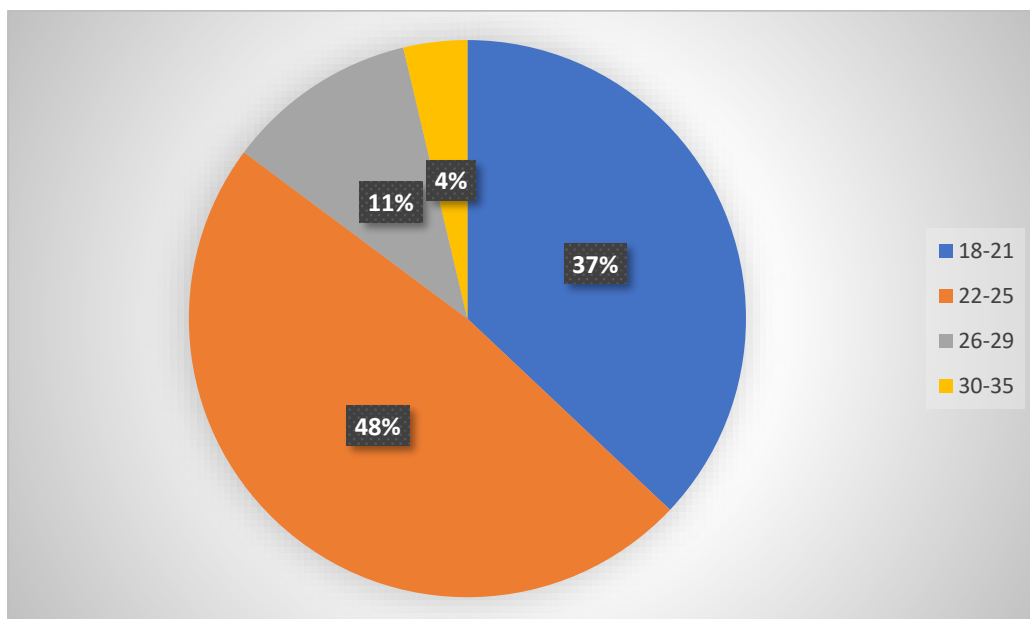


Figure 9. The age distribution of the interviewees.

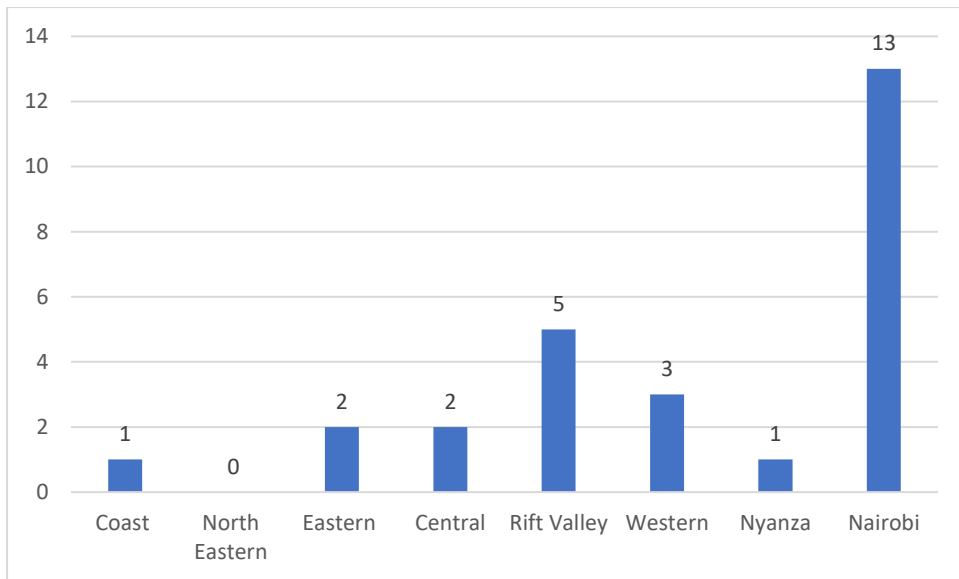


Figure 10. The county distribution of the interviewees.

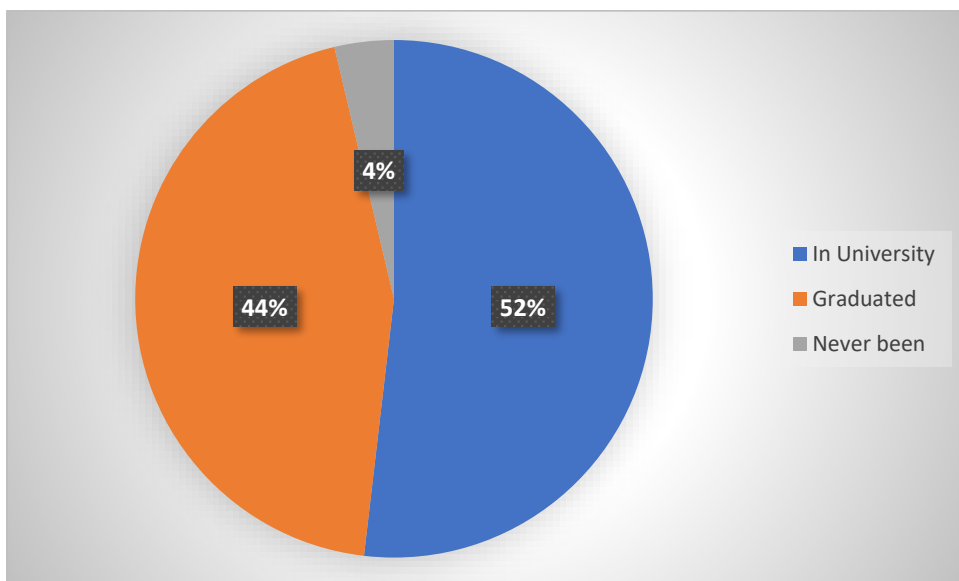


Figure 11. The university status of the interviewees

Table 2

Interviewees' Basic Information

Name	Gender	Age	County	University Status	Duration of Writing	Work Arrangement
Victor	M	18-21	Nairobi	Current	3-6 months	Freelancer, Micro-Employee
Patrick	M	22-25	Western Province	Graduate	Past- 3-6 months	Freelancer
Mercy	F	18-21	Nairobi	Current	1-3 months	Freelancer
Sharon	F	22-25	Central Province	Graduate	6 months-1 year	Freelancer
Daniel	M	22-25	Western Province	Current	Past- 3-6 month	Freelancer
Ken M.	M	18-21	Eastern Province	Current	Less than 1 month	Micro-employee
Mark	M	22-25	Nairobi	Graduate	6-12 months	Freelancer
Markline	M	22-25	Nairobi	Current	1-2 years	Freelancer, Micro-employee
Benard	M	18-21	Nairobi	Current	1-2 years	Freelancer
Fredrick	M	22-25	Eastern Province	Current	Past- less than 1 month	Micro-employee
Anne	F	22-25	Western Province	Graduate	1-2 years	Freelancer, Micro-employer
Edwin	M	18-21	Nairobi	Current	Past- 3-6 months	Freelancer
Olive	M	26-29	Nairobi	Graduate	3-5 years	Freelancer
Moses	M	22-25	Nairobi	Graduate	3-6 months	Company Employee
Faith	F	22-25	Western Province	Graduate	6-12 months	Freelancer
Mary	F	22-25	Rift Valley Province	Current	1-2 years	Freelancer

Joan	F	18-21	Coast Province	Current	1-2 years	Company Employee, Freelancer
David	M	18-21	Nairobi	Current	6-12 months	Company Employee, Freelancer
Brian	M	22-25	Rift Valley Province	Current	1-2 years	Company Employee
John	M	18-21	Nairobi	Graduate	1-2 years	Company Employee
Robert.	M	22-25	Rift Valley Province	Graduate	6-12 months	Micro Employee
Martin	M	22-25	Nairobi	Current	6-12 months	Company Employee
Peter	M	22-25	Western Province	Current	2-5 years	Freelancer
Emmanuel	M	18-21	Western Province	Current	3-6 months	Freelancer, Micro-Employee
Sam	M	30-35	Nairobi	Graduate	Past- 6-12 months	Freelancer, Micro-Employer
George	M	26-29	Nairobi	Graduate	Past 2-5 years	Freelancer, Company Employee
Joseph	M	22-25	Nairobi	Current	1-2 years	Micro-employee

Research Methods

The study employed multiple qualitative methods which allowed for depth, flexibility, richness, and reliability. It employed three broad methods; surveying (survey, interviews), and observations (non-participant, near participant) and text analysis (social media data ‘scraping’, document analysis).

Survey Research.

Survey research may include systematic observation (commonly called surveys, aimed at standardization) or interviewing; (Sapsford 2018, p.6). It is also concerned with recording individuals’ perspectives, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes, and best suited for descriptive, exploratory and explanatory research (Aldeerman & Salem 2010, p.1). There are several advantages of survey research, including large research, time efficiency, remote access and (can be) low-cost to the researcher. However, survey research also presents key disadvantages, including the possible inaccuracies in responses due to self-reporting and limited generalization of findings depending on the sample, as well as issues with internal validity (Smith 2011 p.2). Smith (2011) notes that several important questions should be considered when designing surveys, including; the distribution channels, the research questions, the response categories, the sequence of questions and the survey layout.

The Survey.

According to Sue& Ritter (2012) some of the advantages of online surveys include low costs, quick responses, direct data entry, and wide geographic reach (p.5). In the present study, the online survey

(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc2Se2RJOBQLIKhT_qefNjzicuyG2cCWI7oh9Jfw7SRpmByg/viewform) was initially intended as a recruitment strategy for gaining access to the writers in a less invasive and time-consuming way. As such, the survey was designed to be very short and to gather easily quantifiable information, which would then be explored in greater detail during the interviews. The questions centred on major themes and topics emerging from the research questions, including basic biographical information, education history, employment history, information about their academic writing and online work, and follow-up information. In that way, I felt I could capture as many responses as possible and could later choose which respondents may be most appropriate for the study, at the interview stage. The survey therefore received responses from writers and non-writers, as well as current and former university students who had never worked online at all. These responses were all captured, but later disaggregated from the digital workers and writers in the subsequent chapters.

The survey focussed on gathering basic information about the respondents, their socio-economic and educational background and their experiences with digital labour generally, and academic writing specifically. The survey questions were mainly close-ended to help with uniformity in the responses and simpler analysis (Alderman & Salem 2010, p.1384).

The first section asked about their; age, gender, county of origin, parents' occupation, parents' level of education, and self-declared socio-economic status. The second section asked about their educational background: whether they currently attend or have attended university, university attended, year of studies, highest degree completed, subject area, and sources of funding. The third section was concerned with their employment history and projections: their current employment status, whether they had worked online, the types of jobs done online, reasons for working online, average weekly earnings, and future career

plans. The fourth section focussed specifically on academic writing; it asked the length of time they had been writing, the method of employment, how they were introduced, their average weekly working hours, their method of payment, whether they thought their writing had improved, whether and what skills they think they had gained, how they rated themselves as writers, the writing sites used, number of accounts owned, whether they employed other writers, usual places for writing, overall satisfaction with writing as a job, whether they had another job, whether they considered the ethics of academic writing, and what their thoughts were. The fifth and final section was the 'Follow Up' section which asked respondents whether they were interested in being entered in the M-PESA draw and/or being contacted for a follow-up interview, in which case they were to enter their contact details.

The Interviews.

Gubrium et.al (2012) caution that despite their 'straightforward' appearance, conducting interviews poses several complex challenges and considerations for the interviewer. As such, interviews are not 'neutral exchanges' (Frey 2005) but are processes of knowledge production (p.1), which therefore demand scrutiny and deliberate construction. Conducting interviews online brings an added dimension of complexity as the interviewer must consider not just the validity and biases embedded in their questions, but also about the impact of digital technologies on their 'research design, conduct, conclusions and generalizations' (Salmons 2012 p.6).

Initial Interviews.

The interviews were conducted as follow-ups to the survey, to get a more in-depth understanding of the writers' and their working processes. As such, I emailed each of the 304

respondents who indicated they were interested in a follow-up interview to confirm their willingness. Of that 304, about 40 responded positively, and 24³⁴ were subsequently interviewed. We set a date and time for the interview and I reminded each participant that there was no financial reward to be gained from the interview, and that it was completely voluntary such that they could discontinue participation at any time. I also reiterated the point that it was not a job interview, but rather an interview for a PhD study, since George warned that the word ‘interview’ may give the impression of employment opportunities. His suggestion was further validated, as some of the participants specifically asked about job opportunities during the pre-interview correspondence. I also took the time before the interview to answer any additional questions or addressed any concerns that arose.

Each of the 24 participants recruited from the survey were interviewed via WhatsApp. The interviews expanded on each of the participants’ individual responses in the survey. I therefore used each of their responses as a basis for asking in-depth questions about; how and why they got started writing, their working conditions, their writing processes, their educational and employment histories and trajectories, and their general thoughts of the ethics and practicalities of academic writing. The interviews lasted for between 30 minutes and 2 hours, depending on how quickly they responded, and their level of engagement and interest in the conversation.

Follow-Up Interviews.

Of the original 24 writers who took part in the WhatsApp interviews, 17 were available for the follow-up interviews. These interviews were intended to map the participants’ professional and personal developments in the 15 months since the first round of

³⁴ The 3 remaining interviewees; George, Simon and Joseph, were recruited through personal connections

interviews, particularly as it related to the role of writing in their lives. As I was now away from Kenya, unable to physically return to ‘the field’, and therefore even more geographically displaced from the participants, online interviews were necessary. Initially, I asked for the interviews to be conducted via Skype video conferencing, to allow for synchronous and ‘virtual’ face-to face communication. However, this proved problematic since many of the writers had ICT connectivity issues which made video calls impossible, or they did not have enough data bundles to support the large amount of data needed for a video call. Furthermore, many of the participants preferred to communicate on their mobile phones and did not have the Skype app downloaded or did not have Skype accounts at all. Therefore, I felt that the participants’ comfort and considerations warranted the trade-off which would result from not being able to read their non-verbal clues and body language. Thus, the follow-up interviews were conducted via WhatsApp audio call, allowing for synchronous, but not face to face communication. Particularly during the second round of interviews, it was easier to build on the rapport from the first round. Further, there were several preliminary exchanges via WhatsApp chat before the formal interviews. I had kept in contact with several of the writers, during the 15-month break, mostly comprising casual greetings, and in response to WhatsApp display photos and statuses. As such, some of the writers began to feel more like friends, and began to see me in that way, as well, making for less formal interview experiences.

Observation Research.

Methods of observation in research often involve procedures and processes which systematically record specific occurrences, with fixed categories based on timing and frequency (Jersild & Meigs 1939 p.472). The decision is typically made based on the

researcher's objectives and research design. For example, fluid observations which involve 'running accounts' of events which allows for a wide range of observations to emerge, are best suited for qualitative studies. However, the lack of structure within fluid observations can sometimes lead to inconclusive results. Similarly, methods of recording range from predetermined items in a checklist, to 'a pad and paper' where notes are written. In either case, the researcher must predetermine the scope of observations since, "... he cannot see and record everything" (Jersild & Meigs p. 474). Furthermore, the period for observation relies on several factors, such as the activity being observed, convenience of parties involved, and the number and type of persons being observed. In this study, observation took the form of non-participant observation with George and Joseph, over the course of 5 months, as well as, my experience with 'near-participant' observation as an article/content writer with Iwriter.com for 2 weeks.

Non-Participant Observation ('Deep Hanging Out' with George and Joseph).

Observation is generally of two types; structured and unstructured (Mulhall 2003). Unstructured observation is typically associated with interpretivist studies, used to understand behaviour (p.1). Mulhall notes that unstructured does not imply unsystematic, but rather, researchers are often open to what may be significant in their observations and are willing to be fluid and dynamic. The researcher's role may also range from participant to observer. Key advantages of unstructured observation are that they give insight into the 'full picture', they can account for process and, they may include information about the physical environment or context (p.5).

Arguably, the most revealing aspect of the study was the time spent with Joseph, and especially time spent with my housemate, George. By 'deep hanging out' (Walmsley 2016)

with George, I was able to have a bird's eye view of a writers' life, and the ways in which one's work may be integrated into their lives. To that end, I asked George whether I could take notes in our everyday life together, particularly regarding the moments in which he was writing; I reminded him of this several times during my 5-month visit. I also conducted two formal interviews with George. Similarly, I spent a considerable amount of time with Joseph, George's friend and current medical student and academic writer, during the weekends which he spent at our home. During both those visits, Joseph worked on his writing jobs, and agreed to let me observe and take notes on his activities. I also conducted two formal interviews with Joseph. These ethnographic inquiries were at times challenging, since the lines between friendship and participant were often blurred.

I also conducted an in-depth 'writing process' interview with Joseph, where I closely followed his writing process over a 3-hour period. During the interview, I asked him questions about each stage of his writing from the moment he read the request, to the moment he returned it to his boss for vetting. This process helped to provide a much-needed contextual framework of the types of essays and assignments produced through the industry. These processes are further detailed in the third findings chapters.

[Near]Participant Observation.

To gain a better understanding of digital labour, and to better inform the types of questions and themes I posed to participants, I decided to do a small amount of 'near' participant observation by becoming a content/article writer on Iwriter.com from August 13-29, 2016. At the time, the Iwriter registration process involved creating an account, which consisted of basic information about the writers' name, age, and background. It also comprised a basic English Language Test which focussed on grammar, punctuation and

spelling, and which required a grade of 80% or more to complete the account set up process. Finally, the writer was invited to connect or set up a PayPal account to receive payment, with a choice of when and how often payment would be received.

I worked as a writer for two weeks, taking a total of 7 assignments, each one between 150-600 words. With Iwriter, a writer is only allowed to choose an article that is available in their category; whether Standard, Premium, Elite or Elite Plus. To move from Standard to Premium, one must have completed 25 articles accepted with a rating of 4.1 or more. To upgrade from Premium to Elite, one must have successfully completed 30 articles with a rating of 4.6 or more, and finally, to move from Elite to Elite Plus, one must have completed 40 articles at a rating of 4.86 or more. From there, writers sign on to the website where there is a list of all the jobs available, in each category. As a rule, the higher the category, the more the job pays per 100 words. For example, articles in the Standard category pay around \$1.02 per 100 words, while Elite Plus articles pay about \$1.80. A writer can click on any of the available jobs in their category or lower, then there is a choice to either read the description for further instructions or accept the job and start writing immediately. Each job comes with a time limit, usually between 3 and 6 hours, after which time the article goes back into the pool for other writers. When the article is completed, it is submitted to the client who has 72 hours to either approve or reject the article. They then rate your article on a scale from 1 and 5.

During my two weeks as I writer, I worked on weekday evenings. My articles ranged from tweets about lingerie and exotic products, to a rewrite of an article of the 'Ghosts of Windsor Castle'. Of the articles I wrote, 4 were accepted, and 3 rejected, earning me a modest total of US \$11.37. Overall, I found the experience quite arduous. Firstly, because I was often unfamiliar with the topics, I needed to do a fair level of basic research before I could write. Additionally, because of the strict time limits, I had very little time to edit my pieces. More importantly, it was difficult to reconcile 4 hours of work, with \$1.02 pay. It was

also difficult dealing with the rejections, as it meant those hours of work were not rewarded at all.

My main motivation for engaging in ‘near-participant’ observation by working as a content/article writer with Iwriter.com was an attempt to gain a better ‘insider’s perspective’ on academic writing. Salmons (2013) describes the insider/outsider perspective through the lens of emic/etic researchers, and the metaphor miner/traveller interviews. At one end of the continuum, the emic/miner research maintains distance from the interviewee and their experiences, and therefore mirrors that of an ‘outsider’ looking in. On the other hand, the traveller/emic researcher has more of an ‘insiders’ perspective, being privy to the phenomenon and/or experience being investigated. Through my brief, but productive time as an article writer (as well as living with an occasional academic writer, and deep hanging out with a current writer), I was able to bridge some of the distance between insider/outsider, emic/etic, thereby adopting a role closer to that of the traveller.

Document Analysis.

Document analysis has been underutilized in social research (Prior 2012 p. 2). It may include general content analysis-particularly, numerical measures of textual expression, speech analysis, and discourse analysis. Document analysis is also concerned with the ‘use’ and ‘function’ of texts. It also focusses as much on what is said, as what is not said; how the elements create meaning (p.2). As a method, it is often used in addition to other methods to support triangulation (Bowen 2009, p.30). Major advantages of document analysis include; time-efficiency, availability, cost-effectiveness, lack of obtrusiveness, stability, exactness, and coverage. However, it is also susceptible to significant weakness, such as; insufficient details, low retrievability, and biased selectivity (Bowen, p.31). This study made limited use

of document analysis by analysing 22 academic writing assignments from 7 of the writers. The documents comprised; 6 essays on Health and Medicine by Joseph; 2 Mathematics assignments by Mary, 4 Graphic Design sketches by Victor; 6 essays on ICT and Entrepreneurship by Ken; 2 essays on Health by Mark; 1 essay on Health by Olive, and 1 essay on Management by John. The graphic design sketches and Mathematics assignments were excluded from the analysis, thereby leaving 16 essays on Health, ICT and Entrepreneurship and Management by 5 writers.

Writing Samples.

At the end of the writers' interviews, I asked whether they would be willing to send samples of their writing so that I could get a first-hand look at some of the material being produced. The samples therefore allowed for a document and textual analysis of the key characteristics of essays produced via contract cheating. Positive response to this request was very low, as about 7 or 25% of the writers agreed. I advised them that the samples could be of any length and on any subject matter. As a result, the samples were on a wide range of topics and ranged from 5 to 20 pages long. The samples were analysed using an exploratory approach for key features relating to the quality of content and integration of research, language and grammar, and structure and organisation of ideas.

Policy Documents.

Policy documents from the Kenyan government related to ICT for development and youth employment were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis focussed primarily on the policies' intended aims regarding reducing youth unemployment through ICT-related strategies. These policies included; Vision 2030, ICT Authority Strategic Plan, Kenya 2006

National Youth Policy, National ICT Masterplan, Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology Ministerial Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Services 2004 and 2014, the National ICT Policy 2006 and 2016, and The National Broadband Strategy.

Social Media Research.

Goodyear et. al (2018) interrogate the usefulness of social media in the context of sport practitioners. Using the example of a long-term professional development programme, Goodyear et.al argue that social media contributes to meaningful debate among practitioners. Similarly, Ali et.al. (2016) contend that social media platforms are important for ‘academic purposes’. As such, they point to the potential for integrating social media into academic research. As part of this study, data was taken from Facebook using NVivo’s NCapture add-on extension. This involved downloading thousands of blog posts, ads and comments from three Facebook pages and groups relating to academic writing, namely; Kenya Academic Writers Forum (Public Group) which has now been renamed ‘Freelancers Marketing Domain’; Freelance Academic Writing (Page), and The Standard Price for Academic and Articles Accounts’ (Public Group). These groups were chosen as they are ‘public’³⁵, and administered and used by Kenyan writers.

Additionally, media articles from two of the largest media companies in Kenya, namely; the Daily Nation and the Standard were reviewed, using a search for ‘academic writing in Kenya’ in their online search engines. Titles from the Standard include:

‘How Kenyans make money through online writing’ (May 8, 2017)

‘Jobless youth fall prey to web of exploitation’ (June 5, 2018)

³⁵ The ethics of ‘public-private’ data are discussed later in the chapter.

- ‘Five reasons why you should think twice before pursuing online academic writing’ (May 13, 2018)
- ’Looking for a job? There are legitimate online jobs in Kenya’ (Jan 16, 2018)
- ‘How campus students make money online’ (October 15, 2016)
- Plagiarism: the rising threat to academic integrity’ (October 21, 2017)
- ‘Uni students hiring academic mercenaries’ (n.d.)
- ‘Top freelance sites that will find you work’ (Nov 1, 2017)
- ‘The new age jobs your career advisor left out’ (Aug 10, 2017)
- ‘I rarely leave home- but I make money’ (Jan 29, 2017)
- ‘Four side gigs you can start right now’ (May 17, 2017)
- ‘The rise of online jobs and how to be part of the movement’ (June 21, 2017)
- ‘7 things campus students can do over long holiday breaks’ (July 15, 2017)
- ‘Simple ways to make money on campus’ (May 18, 2016)
- ‘Research for hire’ a threat to varsity education (Sep 21, 2011)

Moreover, articles from the Daily Nation included, ‘This is where the money is’ (June 29, 2017), and ‘Class can wait; I am still busy ‘hustling’ (July 1, 2013). These articles point to the significance of academic writing within Kenya’s socio-economic landscape, particularly among youth. They were analysed using thematic analysis for the key themes and ideas emerging from their content, most notably, the key advantages and disadvantages of academic writing as a source of employment and income.

A Note on the Political Economy of Kenyan Media.

Kenya’s media landscape is complex. As Ogola (2011) argues, “Kenya’s media are implicated political, social, and economic dynamics from which it cannot be disaggregated” (p.77). Kenya’s media is deeply entangled in its wider socio-economic, and particularly, its political systems. Ogola maps the history of Kenya media’s development, noting how the media acted as a key nation-building tool in the immediate post-independence period, such

that mainstream media has been ‘coopted’ by the state. Such ideological associations remain true to the present day. For example, in 2016, Denis Galava, a popular Kenyan journalist was fired³⁶ from his job as Senior Editor of the Daily Nation, over an editorial where he criticized President Uhuru Kenyatta. It is well known that both the Daily Nation and its main competitor, the Standard, are owned by Kenya’s top political parties; Kenyatta and Moi, respectively. As such, it is important to consider the implications of the media’s representation of the gig economy, and of academic writing more generally. Certainly, the Kenyatta government’s recent launch of Ajira Digital signals their interest in, and promotion of digital work as an attractive form of labour for young people such that their coverage of gig labour stories is hardly surprising.

Ethics, Limitations & Challenges

As a general principle, the ethics of internet research are governed by the larger guidelines concerning social science research involving human beings. Of course, the notion of ‘human being’ becomes more contentious within the scope of internet research; however, the basic sentiments still apply. BPS’ (2013) guidelines state that, “[t]he normal principles of ethical research with human participants apply to internet-mediated research, and the basics of ethical practice are not changed. However, the implications of these principles for practice may differ in IMR contexts, and aspects of online environments may make some issues “salient in ways they have not been in traditional research” (23). AoIR’s policy document delineates several guiding principles for internet research, including; the principle of greater vulnerability, greater obligation to protect; the idea that harm is context-dependent and specific, the consideration of human subjects as a necessary component of all digital

³⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/27/blow-to-kenyas-media-after-editor-sacked-for-criticising-president>

information, the balancing the rights of subjects with the social benefits of research, and addressing ethics at each step of the research process.

In similar vein, the BPS outlines four major principles taken from the Code of Human Research Ethics (2011) which they apply to the specificities of the IMR context, namely; respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons; scientific value; social responsibility; and maximising harm and minimising risk. There was an obvious need to seek repeated consent at various points of the study, owing to two major elements. Firstly, due to the use of 10, 1000ksh (£8) M-Pesa credit top-ups as an incentive for participating in the online survey, and secondly, the use of the word 'interview' which may have given the impression that there was a job opportunity connected with the study. To that end, I reminded each participant in our email correspondence that there would be no financial compensation of any kind given for participating in the interview, and that the interview was for a PhD study and not for employment. I further reiterated this at the start of each interview, reminding the participants that they were free to decline the interview or to withdraw their consent at any point. One participant consequently declined the interview.

Incentives.

During the second round of interviews, each of the 17 participants was paid 500 ksh (£5) as an incentive. I thought that this was an appropriate gesture since they had already completed a questionnaire, a first round of interviews, and were now participating in the study for the third time. It therefore seemed fitting to be able to compensate them for their time and participation over the 15 months of the study. Moreover, as several of them had reached out in the time between the two stages of interviews, asking for small financial donations and loans for various reasons, and having lived in Kenya for almost 6 months, I

was intensely aware of the challenges of youth unemployment. Therefore, I felt that compensation was necessary.

Using my Real Name & Social Media Profiles.

Another important ethical decision I had to navigate was to decide whether to reveal or conceal my full identity and social media presence during the study. Ultimately, I decided to be very open about my identity, as I left my full name and email address on the survey. I also requested to join the Facebook groups and posted in the groups using my personal Facebook account. Subsequently, some of the participants requested to add me on Facebook and on LinkedIn. In each of these cases, I accepted because I felt it was important to have ‘mutual visibility’, to be accessible to the participants, and to extend to them the courtesy of being a part of my personal life as they had shared theirs.

Pseudonyms.

Pseudonyms are used for each of the participants in the study, in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity as was promised in the Google survey and interview. Some of the participants specifically requested that pseudonyms be used for fear that their identity would be revealed to current and potential employers and would negatively impact their careers. Others agreed to having their first name only due to similar concerns. However, I felt it best to use pseudonyms for every participant to best protect their identities, and by extension, reputations, and by extension, livelihoods. This is especially important given the positionality of the study and its emphasis on youth perspectives and interests.

Suspending Judgement about their Work.

Another personal challenge was in confronting and dealing with the ethically-questionable nature of the writers' work. As a researcher, it was important for me to be able to suspend judgment during (and after) the study- especially since the study was meant to reflect their perspectives and lives. As such, I tried wherever possible to 'normalize' their work in my mind and my approach. I was largely able to do this in part by adopting the discourse of the writers, that is, to refer to practice as 'work' with 'clients' and 'bosses' and to them as 'academic writers' or 'writers'. To that end, I was able to move away from the ethically-charged discourse of 'cheaters' and 'plagiarism' which permeates academic discussion on the issue.

A related ethical issue concerns the impact of my research on the writers' livelihood. I am very cognizant that- notwithstanding my decision to suspend ethical judgment, academic writing is viewed negatively within higher education, and the industry has negative implications for academic integrity. Therefore, when sharing the findings of my study within academia, I am very aware that the underlying atmosphere is one which views the writers as a key part of a 'problem' that 'needed to be solved', and that my findings may be used as evidence or input to help eliminate the 'problem'. I was therefore very wary of being used as a 'detective' for the academic integrity community. This is not because I do not believe that preserving academic integrity and limiting plagiarism is important- because I do. Rather, it is because I believe there is a conflicting ethical consideration here; that of the livelihoods of the participants who have graciously given of their time and shared their life stories to make this study possible. It is also not inconsequential that these writers are in sub-Saharan Africa, a region which has been exploited both by the West and particularly Western academia. As such, I am consciously resisting efforts which may directly or indirectly threatened the livelihoods of my participants, even as I recognize that some of this may be out of my

control, and while respectfully observing the principles of neutrality of the researcher. I believe that this project requires a delicate and thoughtful balance of ethical considerations.

Shyness and Reluctance in the Field.

I experienced a significant level of shyness and reluctance (Scott et.al. 2012) while in the field. The large amount of social media presence presented a different level of exposure from that of one-to-one interviews, primarily because people were free to publicly state their displeasure by replying to posts in the Facebook groups, or by posting on the Facebook page. I therefore became reluctant about what I posted and was very concerned about the types of comments and remarks that may be made on Facebook. In reality, a few negative comments were left on the page, one which chided me on the lack of compensation for participation in the survey; the commenter felt that more money was needed considering the types of questions that were being asked. Another commenter seemed to be more of a 'troll', stating that the survey was illegitimate, and implying that it was fraudulent or some type of 'scam'. To the former comment, I stated my gratitude and asked whether he could suggest a more appropriate form of compensation, to which he responded that he did not have any suggestions. To the second comment, I thought initially that I would engage with him, reiterating the legitimacy of the study, but I decided in the end to delete the comment as I felt this exercise may be futile and distract from the study.

Navigating 'Publicly-Private' Facebook Data.

The study made liberal use of Facebook data, using NVIVO'S NCapture plug-in as a data tool. This involved downloading thousands of blog posts, ads and comments from three Facebook pages and groups relating to academic writing, namely; Kenya Academic Writers

Forum (Public Group), Freelance Academic Writing (Page). BPS (2013) contends that the internet poses a peculiar ethical situation since participants and researchers often find great difficulty in distinguishing between what is ‘public’ and ‘private’. Oftentimes internet users may post or publish something to a website, assuming a degree of privacy even though it constitutes a public space. Moreover, the technical or legal definitions of the boundaries of public consumption may differ significantly from the average person’s understanding and normative practices. In that way, posts in blog forums, sites such as Facebook may straddle the lines of public and private or may indeed be ‘publicly private’. Similarly, Gleibs’ (2014) best practice guidelines for consent in internet research advises that currently there exists a divide between those who argue that materials posted online are in the public domain, and those who contend that private and public is constantly ‘in flux’ and being negotiated. The choice to include social media data reflects this challenge, and I think the decision to treat the information as ‘public’ is justified since; it was taken only from ‘Public Groups’ and ‘Pages; the information; and, steps have been taken within the study to maximize the privacy of the members by using pseudonyms where applicable, and by avoiding direct quotes and easily identifiable markers where possible.

The Ethics of the Hustle

Wherever possible, I asked each of the participants about their views on the ethical issues which academic writing posed. Most responses were brief and dismissive, although many acknowledged that it was more or less ‘wrong’, but that it was nonetheless a good way for them to make money. Simon, George, and Joseph’s responses succinctly capture the general tone of the ‘ethics question’. I have included their thoughts in this section because I think it also influenced my perception of academic writing during and after my time in the ‘field’, and as such, it informs my subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data.

When I interviewed Simon, my final question related to how he viewed the ethics of academic writing. As my first participant, I was naturally curious about how he was able to reconcile the ethical challenges. His response was brief, humorous and somewhat flippant, another sentiment which was echoed throughout the study, although Simon's was one of the more dismissive opinions:

Well, I gave it a little thought at some point. It was more of demand vs supply and yes, I had a demand to supply a needed service. At some point I thought well, If I don't stock cigarettes in my shop, does that mean that smokers won't find cigarettes?³⁷

Similarly, George's response was very interesting for two reasons. Firstly, he argued that the questions of ethics do not readily arise because academic writing is just one part of a much wider freelance economy. The implication then is that the ethics of academic writing as commercial plagiarism gets subsumed by the other forms of freelancing which carry much less ethical baggage. Secondly, earlier in the interview George invoked the concept of 'shared guilt', in response to a question about the students' (lacking) fear of getting caught. George suggested that part of the problem was that the lecturers did not thoroughly check the students' assignments. Nevertheless, he did express discomfort in facilitating cheating and acknowledged the role academic writing played in threatening the academic integrity of university graduates.

Joseph had a somewhat pragmatic attitude towards the ethical problems of academic writing. That is, he admitted that he is 'a retrogressive force' and partially responsible for the existence of incompetent university graduates, but also expressed some contempt toward the

students, contending that if he can write a paper having not attended the course, the students must be 'dumb'. Like George and Dave Tomar, Joseph highlighted the 'negligence' of the lecturers, noting that he sometimes duplicated content within a single paper and this was rarely picked up by the lecturer. In his words:

We hate them, but they help us...I'm a retrogressive force. When you meet illiterate people with degrees, we are the cause. They probably have the capacity...people forward simple assignments. If I can write in a few hours and I've never even done the course...people are dumb...I don't think lecturers read the essays cause sometimes I run out of content and repeat the same content later in the paper, and it is still accepted³⁸.

By contrast, Markline, a final year student completing a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, expressed uneasiness and tension with academic writing's ethical issues. He explained that although he was an avid writer and was quite passionate about writing in general, he felt that academic writing was 'morally wrong'. He continued to write only for financial reasons. Markline explained his stance in the context of the professional and academic benefits of academic writing:

I think to some extent academic writing is actually morally wrong because we are helping other students with their assignments...So when you go to an employer and you're trying to explain to them what kind of academic writing that is...it actually brings a lot of moral issues, so you better leave it out and battle on your own when it comes to experience.

Similarly, Benard, 4th Year Telecommunications Engineering student, who is somewhat disillusioned by his choice of study and career prospects, expressed some

reservations about writing. That is, he felt that it was dishonest for students to earn their degrees through the work of others:

I didn't really like it because the assignments, you're paying me so little money for me to do your assignments....so yeah that's another thing. I didn't feel like it was a very ethical thing to be doing...So for me....you want to get a degree ama (or) a PhD but you don't have the...or is it that you don't have the capability to do the assignment that you're paying someone to do the assignment for you ...or have a degree after many years of study, what was the point then for you going to school if you could've just paid someone to do your work for you....you'll not be a true graduate, you'll not be a true doctor if you couldn't handle all that work yourself...so to me it's not really ethical for someone to be paying someone else to do their work...

Benard also opined that much of the popularity of academic writing among youth was due to 'peer pressure' and the pressure of needing to meet their financial needs during university. Furthermore, in our first interview, Benard referred to academic writing as 'exploitation' on both sides, arguing, "...it is exploitation both ways.... We exploit the fact that they are lazy and offer to do their work for money...They exploit our need for money to give us their workloads." These responses are notably different from those recorded in Medway et.al.'s 2018 study of website providers, where many of them denied that their services were to be used for plagiarism purposes. By contrast, in the present study, the writers seemed largely to accept that they were facilitating plagiarism but continued to work because of the financial gains.

Of the 187 writers who responded to the question of whether they had considered the ethics of writing, 119 or 64% said that they did, while 68 or 36% indicated that they had not (see figure 12). Similarly, 10 of the 13 interviewees who responded had considered the ethics

of writing (see figure 13). Some of the explanations focussed on the effects of academic writing on academic integrity. For example, one writer remarked, “it's a platform for encouraging laziness to students in the US who should work as hard as we African students do... it is not fair at all. Ethically it's a miss, but we have to make ends meet”. Another contended, “I am earning money at the expense of another individual's education.”, and also, “I encourage the laxity of other students elsewhere.” Another writer noted that writing was, “...enabling a workforce that is not really qualified to do their job”. As such, some of the writers seem aware of the ethical complexities inherent in the industry. However, some writers felt that academic writing was justified. One argued, “I believe there is a wide range of circumstances in which having someone else assist in one's work is a perfectly acceptable course of action.”

Furthermore, most of the writers interpreted the question in terms of the need for ethics in academic writing and Academia. Some responses included, “I think it is very important not to plagiarize, people put in so much effort in their work”, “Referencing and respect to other people writing when quoting. So as to avoid plagiarism”, “Ethics are very essential in academic writings as it helps in curbing issues like plagiarism”, “Producing quality and original paper is of great importance”, “It's mandatory not to provide plagiarized work”, and “They are valid as they are meant to help people write quality, informative and original works”. The irony of their responses is obvious; however, the wider significance is that they point to the importance of academic integrity within academic writing. As an industry of commercialized plagiarism, duplicitously concerned with ensuring that the papers produced adhere to the rules and norms of higher education.

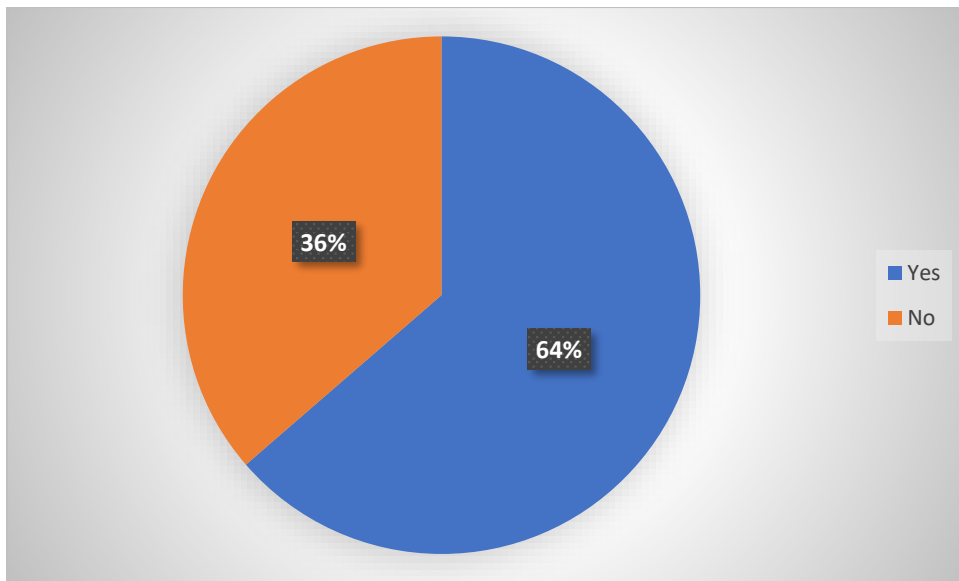


Figure 12. Percentage of writers who considered the ‘ethics of writing’ (entire survey)

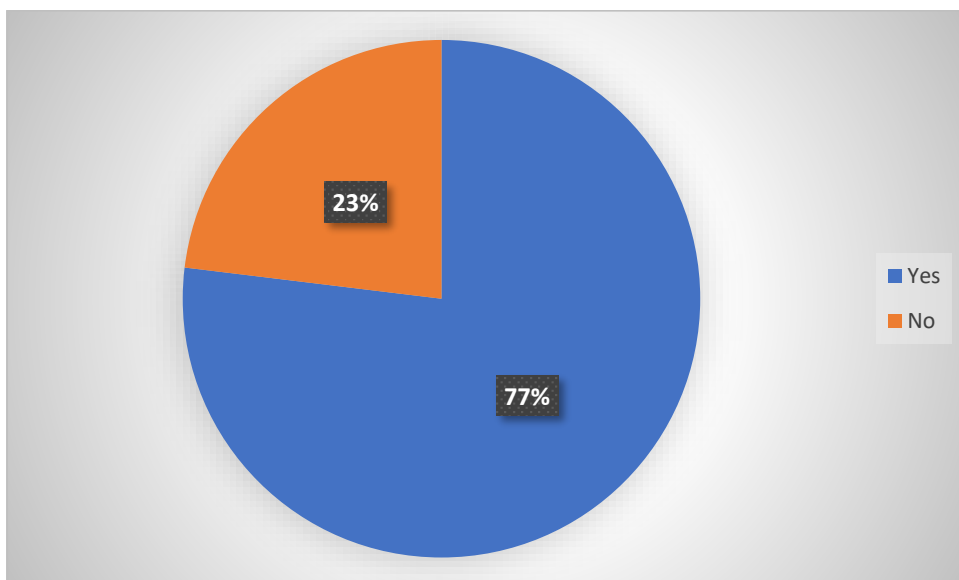


Figure 13. Percentage of interviewees who considered the ‘ethics of writing’

Data Analysis

The study took an empathic approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation. As a result, it sought to elaborate and amplify meaning, by making connections and patterns within the data (Willig 2015). Empathic interpretation analyzes materials from many angles to ‘understand from within’ and is largely grounded in the data. Maxwell and Chimiel (2015) also stress the importance of paying attention to relationships. They distinguish between two types of relationships; those based on similarity and those based on contiguity. Relationships based on similarity are analysed by identifying resemblances or common features within the data, and by making comparisons which are outside of time and place. Some examples of categorizing strategies are; coding, matrices, thematic analysis and case study analysis. On the other hand, contiguity features analysis based on connections, rather than similarities and differences. Some examples of connecting strategies are; narrative analysis, networks and ethnographic microanalysis. This research project involved both categorizing (thematic analysis) and contiguity strategies (narrative analysis). The data was used to develop themes around livelihoods, employment opportunities, and higher education in Kenya and globally.

Fielding et. al. (2012) explores the challenges of data integration in multi-methods research projects, noting its importance for illustration, triangulation and ‘richness’. As such, care was taken in combining data from multiple sources in the study. The data from the interviews, media articles and Facebook NCapture were coded by themes, primarily under the three major research questions and themes, ‘work and career trajectories’, ‘professional and academic benefits’, and ‘shared experience’. Data was analysed, both with manual coding (see table 3) and using NVIVO. Furthermore, preliminary data analysis was conducted through the creation of writer portraits and vignettes, which helped to illuminate some of the

key themes of the study. As such, ‘mini-vignettes’ are scattered throughout the thesis where a major element of the writers’ experience helps to portray the theme being discussed. The follow-up interviews also served as a form as data analysis as I was able to charge my initial thoughts and findings with the with the writers, some of whom offered criticism or feedback on my analysis.

Table 3

The coding framework of the study

Research Question	Tools	Key Findings
1. What is the role of academic writing within the new forms of labour in Kenya’s digital economy?	Policy Analysis Interviews Social Media Research	Reminiscent of informal economies; necessary alternative in context of high formal youth unemployment <u>White Collar</u> Online/Digital Uses intellectual/academic skills University-educated youth Competitive pay <u>Hustle</u> Precarious/uncertain conditions of work Popularized by ‘force’ i.e. high unemployment, lack of knowledge-based jobs Generally perceived as a temporary or short-term remedy <u>Use of global digital money systems</u>

		<p>PayPal/M-Pesa/Skrill</p> <p><u>Writing as part of the broader digital work landscape</u></p> <p>Including; virtual assistant/transcriber/content writing/ graphic design</p>
<p>2. How does academic writing fit into wider lives of university-educated youth in Kenya?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Observation</p> <p>Survey</p>	<p><u>Work trajectories:</u></p> <p>Part-time job while on campus</p> <p>Place holder in transition from university to ‘9 to 5’</p> <p>Supplement to formal employment, preferable long-term career</p>
<p>3. How do academic writers experience the ‘work’ of academic writing?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Survey</p> <p>Observation</p>	<p><u>Work arrangements:</u></p> <p>Freelancer</p> <p>Micro-entrepreneurial ventures/personal network sharing</p> <p>Micro entrepreneur</p> <p>Micro-employee</p> <p>Working for a company</p> <p><u>Writers’ Community:</u></p> <p>Use of personal networks, friends, family, colleagues for sharing advice</p> <p>Use of Facebook groups and pages for tips, advice</p>

		Internal Marketplace within the wider economy to share orders/accounts and trade accounts
a) What are the processes of production involved in academic writing?	Interviews Survey Observation Social Media Research	Some division into generalists and specialists, and individual ‘specialties’ Google searches, Google scholar, sometimes books Focus on presentation, paraphrasing and patchwork techniques Micro-entrepreneurs often double as ‘editors’ & review assignments
b) What kinds of knowledge, skills, and capital (if any), are they gaining in the process?	Interviews Survey Observation Social Media Research	Mixed views on the professional and academic benefits: practice writing, knowledge of PayPal, writing in Standard English, time management, customer service Mixed perspectives on the ethical issues

Conclusion

Thus, the study comprised a qualitative, multi-methods, ethnographically-informed, digitally-mediated case study design, guided by a flexible, open-ended methodological approach aimed at capturing the writers’ perspectives and experiences. As such, methods were varied, allowing for exploratory research, and included; a survey, in-depth semi-structured interviews with 27 writers, non-participant observation with 2 writers, near participant observation, document analysis of writing samples and Facebook ‘data scraping’. Participants were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, aided by Facebook and Instagram advertisements. As such social media and the ‘digital’ were

core components of the study's methodology. The data was thematically analysed using manual coding and NVIVO coding.

Critically, the study differs methodologically from much of the literature on youth unemployment, informal economies, and contract cheating. Its focus on digital spaces and digital work, as well as its focus on university-educated youth distinguishes it from studies on youth unemployment and informality. Furthermore, unlike many studies on contract cheating, the main participants were the writers, rather than students or website providers.

Chapter Three

Youth Transitions

Tracing the Place of Writing in the Youths' Career Trajectories

“I’ve already given 5 years to it, it’s been fun but at some point, I need to, like, grow...do something else. Then...writing is all about the money, it’s not going to lead to what I really want to do in the future.” -George

All work is not created equally, nor does it serve the same purpose. Academic writing is undoubtedly ‘work’; it is a system by which labour is extracted in return for financial compensation. However, the relationships which characterize academic writing are marked by casual exchanges and little guarantee of further employment. Moreover, the relationships to, and expectations of, the ‘work’, and the roles which it plays in each writer’s overall employment path and wider life are different. These differences impact the writers’ perceptions, expectations and experiences of their work. At one end of the spectrum, writing is seen as a temporary, transient ‘gig’ which serves as a place-holder until formal employment is secured. It is also seen as a source of extra income or supplement to other forms of employment. At the other end of the spectrum, some writers view it as a long-term career option and viable alternative to traditional ‘9-5’ employment. This suggests that work is understood in varying ways in Kenya, underlined by the proliferation of the informal economy. Beyond academic writing, Kenya’s economy is punctuated with patterns of informality, across demographic, gender and other socio-economic lines. Academic writing forms but one of many types of casual and informal work and employment systems of which Kenyans are actively involved. It seems only logical, therefore, that Kenyan youth would so readily adapt to the demands and risks of academic writing.

The work of academic writing carries with it several important risks. Chief among them are; the risk of not being paid, and the risk of getting caught. Obviously, to continually engage in academic writing is to consider the potential rewards as worth the risks. Firstly, the risk of not being paid, although real, was rarely realized. Some writers, like Owenga, mentioned being deceived by scammers who disappeared after the work was complement. Similarly, Joshua recalled how a few of his clients had deliberately rejected his papers so that they could access them without payment. These complaints were uncommon; however, both the writers and the website administrators had developed mitigation strategies to combat the threat of being paid. Strategies included; publishing the papers on internet blog posts after they were rejected to ensure that Turnitin and other software programs could access them; posting on Facebook groups about scammers; allowing writers up to 2 revisions before being rejected; and in some cases, websites offering partial payment before the job is attempted. As such, it was uncommon for the risk of not being paid to be materialized.

Secondly, the risk is being caught was rarely conceived since most of the fallout was likely to be placed on the student at their university, rather than on the writer. That is, as legal frameworks have not yet been developed which would lead to legal prosecution for writers, the 'risk' of getting caught is the contracting student's, since they are likely to face disciplinary action and even expulsion from their academic institution. The biggest risk to the writers was that of reputation- in the case where they were revealed to their own university or employer as being academic writers. However, this seemed like an unlikely occurrence as none of the writers suggested that this had ever happened. Even so, it is unclear how much of a tarnishing effect this would have, especially as some writers had included academic writing on their C.Vs. and had been very upfront up their writing. Although others felt that it would harm their professional reputation and held reservations about being associated with it, the likelihood of being caught seemed to be negligible as it was unlikely that the student would

reveal the identity of the writer, and even if they did, it seemed even more unlikely that their lecturer or university administrator would follow through to ‘punish’ the writer. The balance may be reconsidered if there were legal repercussions. Therefore, the risks of academic writing seemed to be outweighed by the benefits- particularly since the pay is comparatively competitive.

Furthermore, the role of academic writing is influenced by the structure and patterns of their work. Writers work in differing ways, oftentimes dependent on their level of experience, financial situation, time availability, and general interest. The writers’ work arrangements tended to take one of 5 types; freelancer, micro-employee, micro-employer, company employee, and company employer. In most cases, these arrangements are built through close personal and professional networks which typically include, friends, friends of friends, classmates, colleagues, and family members.

Writing as Transient, Long Term, and Somewhere In-between

Mary has been writing for about 2 years. She employs other writers on an occasional basis, recruiting them via advertisements on her university’s campus, noting, “...when I am busy with school work, and the clients wants me to submit the work before the said deadline... just within the university, I post a note saying ‘I need someone who can do academic writing if interested contact me’ and I am sure to get someone.” Mary pays them a flat rate, which increases for tight deadlines, recruiting writers based on their areas of expertise and quality of writing. She also retains writers for further jobs. As such, her employment arrangements are extremely casual and occasional. She is paid via PayPal and pays her writers via M-Pesa. Mary intends to continue writing in the long term after she’s finished university and to make a small business out of it, “...because first in our country its -

sometimes hectic to find a well-paying job, then as I said I can do the work from home”. She lists reading and writing skills as the main skills she’s developed from academic writing.

Similarly, George started academic writing in 2010 in the summer holiday after his second year at a small agency for online writing. In fact, not only did he know several writers, but he had spent a few years during his undergraduate studies and immediately after as an academic writer. He found the opportunity while he was bored in the long holiday, so he Googled ‘Jobs in Kenya’. He was one of about 20 writers employed by a Kenyan man, housed in an office in a Nairobi suburb. Each writer was given a set of assignments which were then passed to one of the editors before going on to the client. As such, he was never directly in contact with any of the clients.

George notes that ultimately his main reason for leaving academic writing was the pay. He was being paid 50 shillings (50cents US) per article. Even though it was comparatively lucrative for a 2nd year university student, he discovered that more money could be made if he worked as a freelancer. He also lamented the daily commute, which consisted of two matatu rides each way. Further, because the area in which the office was situated was upper middle class, the price of food from the restaurants was quite high and cut into his earnings. On average, he worked 10 hours a day, from 8am to 6pm, writing about 20 articles per day. He estimates that most other writers at the office averaged about 6-15 articles per day.

He therefore started writing on his own as a freelancer, to increase his earnings and gain greater flexibility. However, initially his earnings were low, as he found difficulty in getting clients, and in improving his standard of writing. But over time as his marketing and writing skills improved, he was able to make a living. Presently, he has switched to article writing from academic writing because of the heavy work load and the level of meticulousness required; “it is a lot of work and then the returns are not as good as with

[article] writing.” He elaborates, “you know this is somebody’s paper, so you can’t afford to fake your way through it. You really have to research, you have to give citations, read books. And when you compare that to the returns, it’s not, it’s not really worth it...”

Academic writing tends to occupy four main roles within the employment trajectories and career futures of the writers: as a part-time job during university; a ‘placeholder’ between graduation and formal employment; a short to medium term supplement to formal employment; and, an alternative long-term career option (see figure 14). As such, academic writing is seen as both a temporary last resort, and long-term career strategy (Thieme 2013), and everything in between. Most of the writers (191) in the survey stated that they intended to start their professional lives in the near future. The common professions included; I.T. professional, Medical Doctor and Engineer. However, a significant number (91) also mentioned self-employment as their preferred career, while 11 writers indicated that they plan to be involved in charitable and humanitarian efforts. Quite notably, 36 of the writers included academic writing in their career plans, suggesting that a significant minority of current writers perceive it as having long-term employment potential (see figure 15). Similar distribution was also recorded among the writers interviewed, where 12 planned to work in a formal job, 6 intended to be self-employed, 2 each plan to work in charitable sectors and further their studies, while 3 writers mentioned academic writing as part of their career goals (see figure 16).

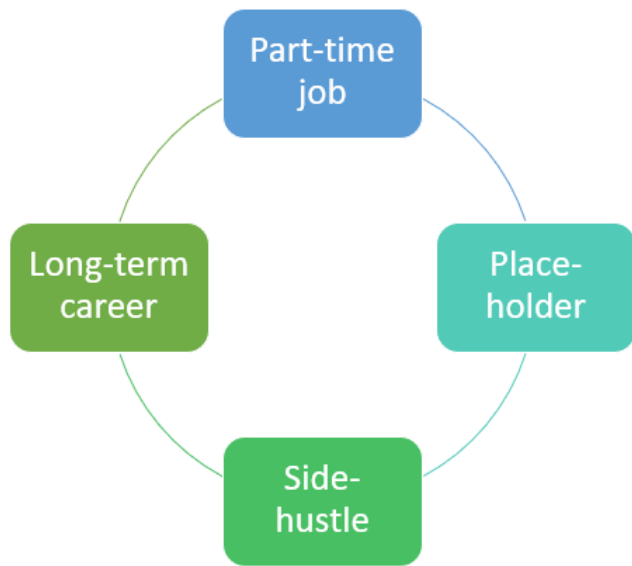


Figure 14. The typical career trajectories among writers

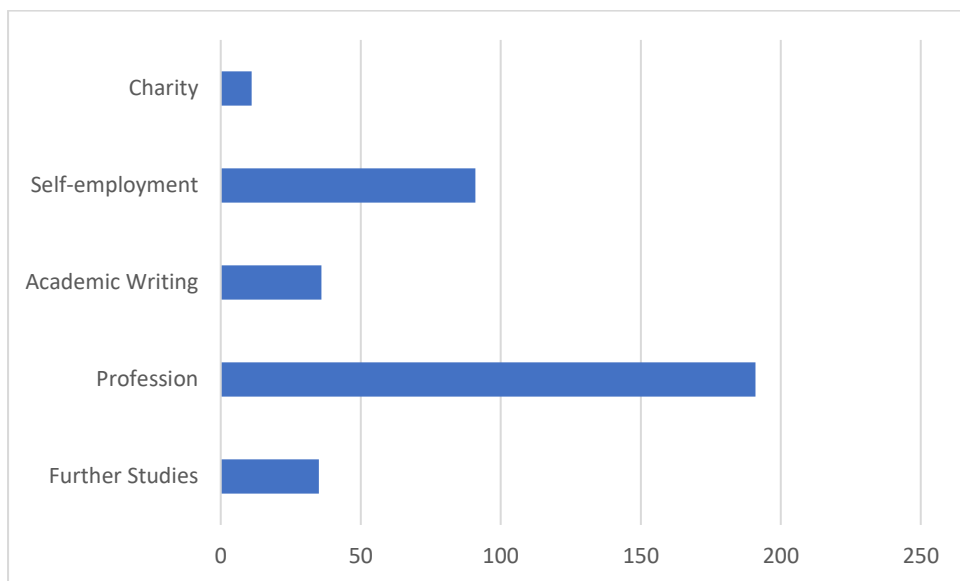


Figure 15. The career plans of writers in the survey

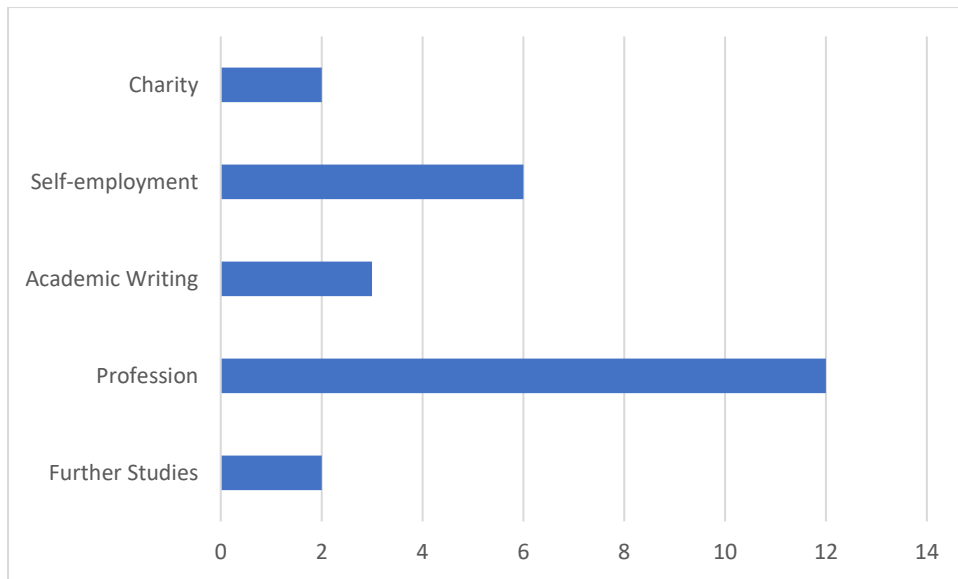


Figure 16. The career plans of interviewees only

It is also important to examine the common ‘life-cycle’ of writing among Kenyan youth. Typically, academic writing lasts either for 1-3 months (48 writers, 28% of respondents) or 1-2 years (26 writers, 27 % of respondents). Another 30 writers, accounting for 17% of total respondents had been writing for 3 to 6 months, while 22 or 13% of writers had been writing for 3-6 months. Further, 18 respondents (10%) had been working as writers for more than 3 years, and 8 (4%) had only been writing for less than a month (see figure 17). Among those who were interviewed, the most common duration of academic writing was 1-2 years (8 writers) (see figure 18).

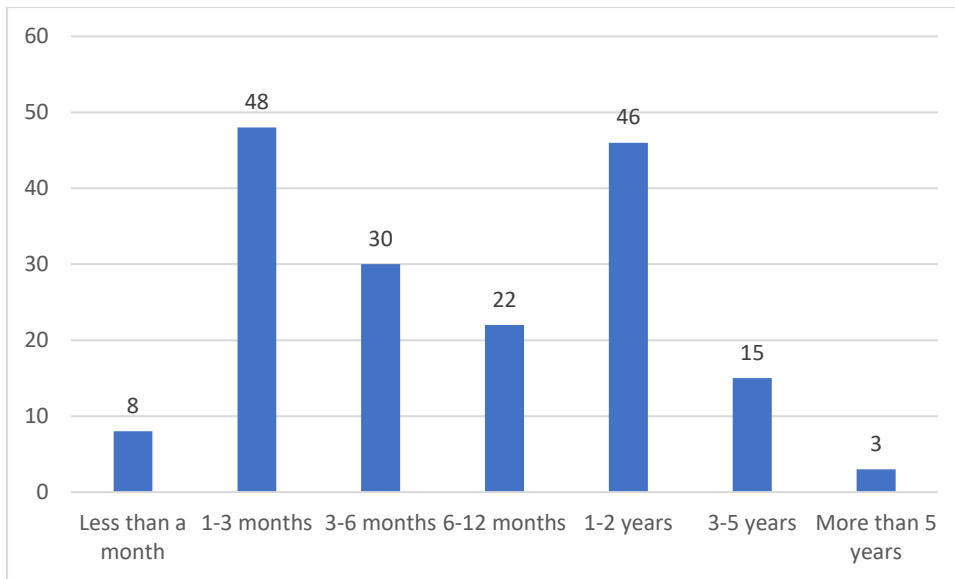


Figure 17. Typical writing duration for writers in the entire survey

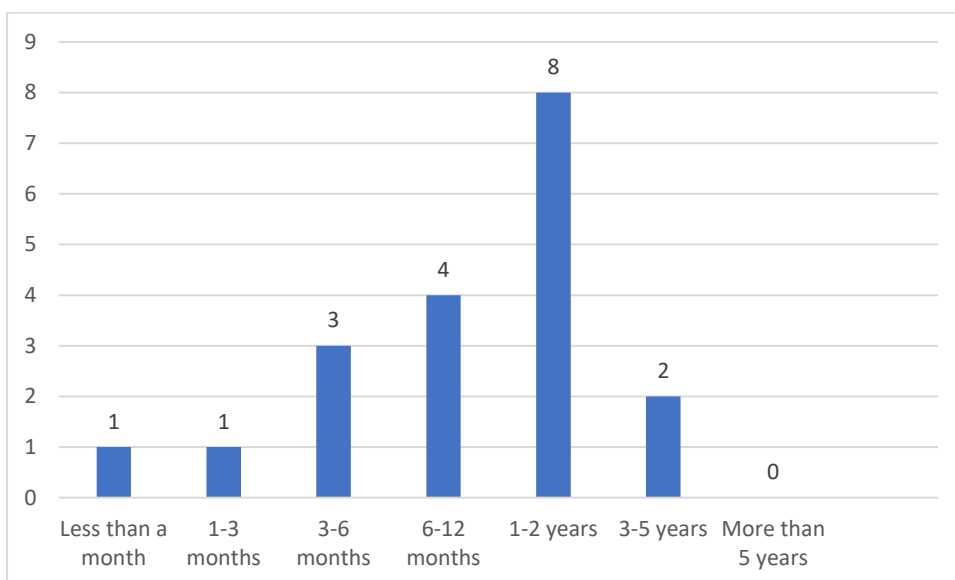


Figure 18. Typical writing duration for interviewees only

Writing as a Part-time job during university

Several of the writers in the study are current students who started academic writing as a part-time job while on campus. In fact, each of the writers in the study got their start while they were in university. However, there is great variation in the role which academic

writing plays after they leave university. For some writers, writing only ever remains a part-time university job, most typically because they found the pay inadequate, did not enjoy the work, and/or because they found formal employment which met their financial needs.

Ultimately, academic writing is well-suited as a part-time option for many writers. Its flexible hours mean that academic writing can be adapted around school, initially, and later around formal work, if necessary.

For example, Benard explains that the intellectual and time demands of academic writing were too overwhelming. He also felt that the pay was inadequate considering the amount of work required. As such, after he finished school, he stopped writing:

I just didn't think it was for me. The first thing about why I wanted to start writing was to earn extra cash, but once I saw it was a lot of work to begin with for so little pay, that's number 1. And number 2, I don't like working for someone. Being employed is not bad but working for someone...you're supposed to be doing your work, but the work that you're saying that's too much for you...I didn't really like it because the assignments, you're paying me so little money for me to do your assignments.

Similarly, Fredrick laments the working hours required from academic writing, especially in having to attend classes and finish his own assignments:

I don't think I'll be writing in the next few years because writing...in our country, when you write you wait for the work in the middle of the night so sometimes it's hectic. You know you get some work around 2 in the night, 3 in the night and that's so hectic. After school I don't think I'll have the time...

Fredrick therefore plans to stop writing as soon he is finished his degree in the summer, hoping to complete his CPA exams and secure a job in Banking, Finance or Economics. His medium-term plan is to become self-employed in the IT industry.

Additionally, as a recent Community Development graduate, who hopes to start a Master's in project management, Victor is now a part-time graphic designer while on a gap year from his studies. He contends that academic writing was not a good fit for his interests and talents, and notes that overtime it became increasingly challenging to secure writing jobs:

It reached to a point where the number of jobs you get with academic writing was so unreliable, and it wasn't worth it doing a lot of work and not receiving an equal amount of share of the effort that you put in the work, so I started doing another passion which I had which was designing. That's where I mainly put my time and effort; it's more rewarding and it makes more sense doing graphic design. It doesn't have that much effort compared to academic writing because with academic writing you have to do some kind of research, bring some sort of evidence and it might not be right, might not be according to the standard. But with design it's much more easier for me... The only problem with writing is that it takes time and it's exhausting at times. I grew up drawing, so venturing into design is much more natural. Academic writing is where I have to do some research. Then. I have to go through Grammarly to check if my punctuation is correct, if my choice of grammar is correct...I can't go back to academic writing.

In the long term, Victor hopes to be self-employed and will continue to work as a part-time graphic designer. Similarly, Edwin decided to quit writing when he finished school, in order to focus on a career in teaching, as he recently completed a bachelor's in education. He explains, "currently I'm not writing. I used to do it back at college to sustain me, but right

now I've graduated so I'm looking forward to majoring to my career". Presently, he is sending applications to various institutions and schools, and volunteering with the Kenyan Red Cross. In the next few years, Edwin hopes to complete a Master's and PhD.

Moreover, Mark, a Digital Manager for a UK Development agency in Nairobi, started writing during his undergraduate studies. He's a Risk Management and Insurance graduate of a public university in Western Kenyan. While at university, Mark did a variety of online work, including; article writing, academic writing, sports writing and transcription. However, in the 6 months since he graduated, he has focussed on journalism and creative writing, rather than academic writing. In fact, Mark has since taken courses on Creative writing online and has published a children's book based on Kenyan traditional folklore. On the other hand, for Moses, writing is likely to continue to serve as a part-time job while he pursues a Diploma of Clinical Medicine for the next 3 years. Moses's motivation for writing stems from its intellectual and academic benefits:

At the same time, I will still be doing the academic writing as a part time job. I'm proceeding with writing because it enhances my capabilities in terms of gesticulation with language and expansion of knowledge. It also helps me with discovering the new research methods, especially those which are evidence based...

Moses will start his career as a Clinical Officer and continue as an academic writer upon completion of his Diploma.

Writing as a 'Placeholder' until formal employment is secured

Secondly, for a few of the writers, academic writing is best described as a 'placeholder'; a temporary and transitory source of income, usually immediately following

university graduation, and until a '9 to 5' or higher education degree is found. For example, Sharon graduated with a Bachelor of Mass Communication in 2015. She recalls that she graduated later than she should have because she ran into financial difficulties during her second year; difficulties which continued after she graduated, as she has yet to secure formal employment. Sharon has done a few brief stints in the hospitality industry and as a babysitter, however, writing is her main source of income during this transitory period. Due to the flexibility of writing, Sharon hopes to continue even after she moves to Mombasa and hopefully starts a career in Tourism and Hospitality. She outlines her plans:

...It's something I'll continue doing you know but right now I need to get something stable, so you know after I'm stable and everything you know I can purchase a laptop and be doing that. but you know sometimes in a hotel you don't have people coming, flowing, each and every minute. Sometimes it's not busy, so they don't deny you using the computer or laptop. I'm hoping that as time goes by and I can actually get back to it cause it's something which I really want to stay with. It doesn't hurt getting an extra thing here and there, and plus it keeps you busy.

Similarly, Robert. is presently searching for jobs within the Teaching force and has "been doing it solely as [his] source of income and at the same time assisting students to get quality grades". Robert. is a 26-year-old Education graduate, who hails from a family of educators as both his parents are university-educated teachers. Furthermore, Mercy, another final year Finance and Accounting student, details the amount of time she spends writing and predicts the balance will be equally difficult when she starts to work. She therefore intends to keep writing only until she lands a permanent job:

Writing requires a lot of dedication and a lot of time which may be a bit tricky.

Especially for us in Kenya, they're available starting from 3 am, so being able to

actually secure a job will be a bit tricky. So, I do not intend to continue writing once I land a permanent job but for now yes, I can still continue with my writing until then...

Anne shares her sentiments, noting that despite its demands, writing "...it is the only source I have right now and am not assured of getting any employment."

Writing as a Short to medium term 'Supplement' to formal employment

The most common role which writing plays in the writers' lives is that of a short to medium term supplement to their formal jobs. For several writers, the money earned from their '9 to 5' job is not enough to cover their economic needs, so they use writing as a financial supplement. In most cases, the writers planned to continue writing only for a limited amount of time- usually a few years. Notwithstanding, for a few writers, writing served more as a paid hobby for which they had a genuine passion and interest, beyond its financial rewards.

For example, Faith is currently half-way through the 15 examinations required for CPA certification, having graduated last year. As such, she is quite busy balancing her work, her writing and preparing the professional papers. Faith plans to write for up to 3 additional years, alongside her Insurance underwriting job, after which she intends to hire a few writers to work for her. She outlines her plans:

I'll like to have done like more or less half of the professional papers because there are 15 of them. I'm planning to have done like 8 of them, because they are 15, and like join a big or proper insurance company in Kenya that is recognized... In terms of writing, I would like to stop writing but employ persons for me, so that I can just learn

from it...But I'd like to stop writing maybe in the next 2 or 3 years. I just stop writing completely then I employ persons to do it on my behalf.

In similar vein, Joan, who, coincidentally is Faith's friend, intends to continue writing for the foreseeable future, along with her job as an Insurance agent. Like George, Faith's writing pays more than her formal job, so she fits her writing around her work schedule:

I write from time to time, but not as much as I used to, maybe twice a week, cause I got a job, a permanent job. So, I only do it when I'm off, when I have flexible hours...I think maybe for the next 2 years, I think it would be good to keep it up cause it actually makes better money than my job, so I don't think I would give it up.

Moreover, Patrick intended to pursue a Master's degree, but had to postpone his plans due to a lack of funding. Patrick writes after work on evenings, however, he limits his writing to once a week or bi-weekly so that it doesn't interfere with his work duties. Further, he has switched to bidding on assignments rather than working for another writer, so that he has greater control over his timelines. At present, Patrick works online with 'Ku-Hustle', a Kenyan digital platform for online jobs, and with Wonderlabs, an international service. In the long term, Patrick's ultimate career goal is to set up a research consultancy firm. For now, he is a Research & Knowledge Management officer at a children's organization, having finished his degree in Peace Studies 3 years ago

For Mary, the financial rewards of writing are worth the time demands. She has therefore chosen to continue writing even after securing an internship in her field of Accounting. After the internship is finished, she hopes to land a job in Finance- but will continue to write as a supplement:

...Because writing earns me good money and for the internship it's just that...because of the courses that I've done and the experience. That's why I'm still doing the writing at the same time will be doing the internship, because I want to gain experience in the internship field and also to gain a lot of money, because the online writing is really paying well here...I'll still be doing the writing [after I get the permanent job]...because the working hours for the internship are the same as the permanent job...so I'll still be doing it.

Similarly, John has a formal job in sales at a local bank. He started writing after seeing an advertisement online, via a job advertisement website. As such, for the past two years he's been writing for an agency which sends him assignments daily. He estimates that he spends about 40 hours a week writing, mostly on evenings and weekends, which he balances with his banking day job. In the future, he plans to manage a major firm. John notes that in addition to the extra income, "It's much more fun. I like learning new things or new ideas and each day I write..." John is a recent graduate of a private rural university located near to Mt. Kenya, where he completed a bachelor's degree in Life Sciences. Additionally, according to Anne, a final year student in Investment Banking, making the decision to continue writing after she finishes school this summer was an obvious one. This decision stems from her genuine interest in writing as she describes it as her 'passion'. Anne explains:

What I'm planning to do after school is, obviously, I'll continue writing, that's the first bit. I'll look for a job to do, and maybe engage in some investments... I'll continue writing because that's my passion and that's what I love doing most of the time; when I'm bored, I feel like writing, when I'm tired, I feel like writing.... I just, I like writing.

Moreover, Ken, who set up a Cybercafé in his hometown, also continues to write because he finds it, “more fulfilling than most of the jobs in the country”. Meanwhile, Fredrick hopes to work within the banking sector because of the desire for multiple sources of income. He explains, “[writing] is also included in the plans because I’ll need the money from different angles ... Because research doesn’t have to be rigid, I can work from any place.”

Writing as an Alternative long-term career option

At the other end of the spectrum, for some of the writers in the study academic writing is viewed as a viable and preferable alternative to traditional employment. These writers planned to write- not as a side hustle, placeholder or supplement- but as a long-term career strategy. Olive is perhaps the best example of this; on two occasions she detailed her dislike of formal employment and her preference for being an academic writer:

...Since I graduated, I’ve had 2 jobs, but I quit to focus on my writing...I quit because I find it more comfortable working from home, and writing gives me the chance to do that. I was not comfortable with ‘8 to 5’ work, and, I think the income from writing is higher.

Olive got started with writing after seeing an advertisement on a friend’s Facebook page about two years ago. He trained her, and she began writing for him. Now, she has her own account and works both as a freelance article and academic writer. A recent graduate, Olive did a bachelor’s degree in the social sciences. Now, she works full-time, between 30 and 40 hours a week writing online, and plans to continue doing so until she has saved enough to start her own business. Olive writes for a site called writers.ph, which is based in the

Philippines. She makes an average of 5000-10000 ksh per week, paid via PayPal, Skrill and M-Pesa. Olive rates herself as an 'average writer' and feels that writing has helped her to improve research skills and introduced her to different styles of writing, although she is unsure whether her writing has improved over the past 2 years. Like some of the others, she currently employs 3 writers: "I give the writers the order and pay them a certain amount per page depending on the complexity of the work to be done". She pays them a flat rate of between 200 and 300 ksh per page. Her employees are a current university student and two other recent graduates- each of them recruited digitally via a Facebook group for writers. She details the process, "there is a Facebook group for academic writers where we put up an ad for new writers. Then they send samples of previous works to be used for recruitment". Olive plans to continue writing in the long term as she finds it to be a better alternative to a traditional job. She contends, "...I am comfortable working from home. I recently tried the normal 8-5 job and it just wasn't for me".

Therefore, it is apparent that Kenyan youth have used academic writing in a myriad of ways to support their personal and professional goals. By underscoring the complexity of the hustle, their experiences and trajectories warn against a singular interpretation of the place(s) of academic writing in youth transitions. Indeed, many of the young people in the study plan to use academic writing as a transitory, 'stepping stone' form of employment; however, some have crafted entire careers out of the trade, while others view it in a long-term and simultaneously part-time light. Academic writing occupies highly variable spaces within the labour paths of youth in Kenya, in ways which may only be fully revealed over time.

Types of ‘Work’ Arrangements

Because of the informal nature of academic writing in Kenya, there are several types of working arrangements and conditions of payment, although each is marked by casual terms of labour; no contracts, no benefits, or guaranteed wages. Despite the popularity of academic writing as a form of employment among young people in Kenya, it is ubiquitously informal and unregulated. Even its descriptor as ‘work’ is tenuous, given the widespread lack of contracts and benefits, such that ‘hustle’ (Thieme 2013) may be a more accurate linguistic and conceptual frame. Of course, it is work in that they receive payment for their labour; however, there is very little formality or security in the work. Furthermore, the very nature of academic writing, as per the larger ‘gig economy’ is such that final payment is rarely guaranteed but is dependent on the client’s satisfaction. This informality is further reflected in the varying types of ‘working arrangements’ which academic writing takes (see figure 19).

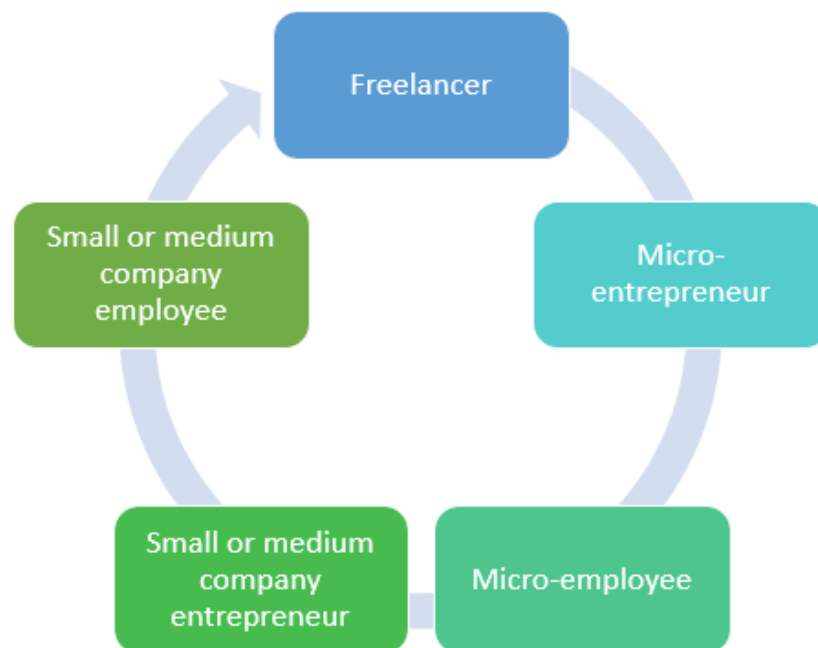


Figure 19. Graph showing the typical working arrangements for academic writers

Freelance Writers

One of the common types of employment arrangements is the freelancer. Freelance writing, as the title suggests, occurs when the writer sets up an account with a writing platform such as; writerbay.com, ivoryresearch.com, nerdyturtlez, uvocorp, essaywriters, homeworkmarket, writerdom, Upwork or writer.ph. Typically, writers sign on to one of the websites. They then start the application process which usually involves submitting a CV, university diplomas and writing samples, followed by English proficiency tests. Furthermore, prospective writers are often asked to complete writing tasks. Freelance writers have a higher level of independence than other work arrangements since they access the orders directly from the client via the website, and are paid directly from the client, usually using PayPal or Skrill. Freelance writers are therefore responsible for the quality of their writing and for meeting deadlines.

Critically, freelancers own their accounts, which adds an extra layer of responsibility and privilege. Firstly, because owning an account means that you have already completed your university degree. This is because most potential employers request university and college transcripts to complete the application. As such, freelancers tend to be writers who have already graduated; current students often work for other writers. Secondly, owning an account has a cost attached to it. For some websites, there is a charge associated with accessing an account, sometimes in excess of £200. As such, this represents a substantial financial investment for most writers, which underscores the risk involved with owning an account, particularly if it is later banned or blocked. As Anne laments, “to work as a writer one needs to set up an account worth ksh70 000 (£700) which I could not afford”.

Some websites also require ‘Western’ (US/UK/European) IP addresses to purchase an account, such that some writers pay extra to have someone in one of those countries, usually a friend of a friend, to set up the account on their behalf by using their name, address and basic information. Again, this increases the level of risk associated with owning and managing an account. This may help to explain its perceived significance among the writers. Thirdly, there is a risk involved in owning an account as it may be closed or banned for quality and/or plagiarism issues. Owning an account is inherently risky since the owner is ultimately responsible for the overall quality of the work submitted. There is also the question of earning clients’ trust as a new writer. Moses highlights this challenge using his own recent experience, “...at the moment, am working hard to have my own account. I have up to next year May to start any other thing so at the moment I want to fully engage in writing.” Most websites enforce strict penalties for poor quality writing (as determined by the client) and plagiarism (as determined by the client and/or the website). Writers therefore need to make sure that their writing is of ‘passable quality’, an issue that is further exacerbated when account owners employ or contract assignments out to other writers.

In the survey, distribution was evenly split between writers owning no accounts (33%), those owning one account (35%), and those in possession of between two and five accounts (30%). Similarly, among the writers who were interviewed, nearly half (47%) owned one account, while 31% owned none, and 11% owned 2-5 writing accounts.

Micro-Entrepreneurial or Personal Network Sharing Ventures

By far, the most popular type of working arrangement among the writers was what may be termed ‘micro-entrepreneurial ventures. These usually involve account sharing and/or outsourcing assignments to family, friends and colleagues within their personal networks.

Writers tend to fall into one of two categories; either there are the ‘micro-entrepreneurs or micro-employees’. Both categories are represented within the study.

Micro-Entrepreneurs.

Micro-entrepreneurs typically purchase an account on one or more of the academic writing websites. They then hire a few academic writers, often on an ad-hoc or casual basis. Less often, writers are recruited via Facebook or advertisements on campus. Since they own the accounts, the entrepreneurs pay the writers a fraction of the cost of the job, thereby making a profit. They also act as editors; providing advice and reviews of the assignments before they are passed on to the clients for approval. One of the main types of academic writing arrangements may be described as ‘micro-entrepreneurial’ ventures. This occurs when experienced writers who own one or more accounts, sub-contract writing assignments out to other writers. These writers are often recruited either through existing personal networks, or via advertisements on university campuses or on Facebook. Within these arrangements, the ‘entrepreneur’ becomes an editor, acting as a conduit between the client and the junior writer. Typically, the account owner accesses the article, passes on the requirements and any other aids to the junior writer with a deadline at least a few hours before the client’s deadline, in order that any corrections may be made. The participants in the study reported two main types of payment agreements; a percentage of about 10-25% of the client’s price, or a flat rate, usually of about 200ksh per assignment.

For example, Joan started academic writing by working for another writer during the summer holidays. Her employer had rented a 3-bedroom apartment, and hired 3 female students and 3 male students, provided free accommodation and food for 3 months in the summer, in exchange for reduced payment for academic writing. However, when Joan

returned to school, she realized that she could receive better pay by working directly for other writers. After a few months, she was able to open her own account, along with another writer with more experience. Now, the pair manages the account and employs 4 other writers. Joan focuses on the finances, while her partner oversees day to day operations.

Similarly, Faith occasionally hires one other person to write for her, whom she pays \$2 per order, usually when she is busy with the demands of her other job. Faith hopes to be able to hire 3 additional writers within the next few years, to free up her schedule. She explains:

In the near future, I'd like to employ some more because I wouldn't like to continue writing the whole of my life. I'd like to stop writing maybe in the next 2 or 3 years. I just stop writing completely then I employ persons to do it on my behalf. So maybe I'll have the one who distributes situations from persons and then the one who distributes. I'll find persons to assist if the workload is not much higher and also ask some others to assist because you have to meet the deadlines.

Mary is also a casual 'micro-entrepreneur', although much of her outsourcing is seasonal. She advised that when her workload is high, usually toward the end of the semester, she takes on more writers, and then works alone during the low season, "... cause they're not permanent employees, they're just temporary." Mary recruits her employees through university posters on her campus. Similarly, Brian employs other writers, particularly when jobs are plentiful, issuing the orders monthly or weekly as the jobs demand, and setting his deadlines well in advance of the clients so that he has time to edit their work. Brian recruits Kenyan and international online, and sometimes through professional networks. As Brian notes:

When the online job is plenty, I outsource to professional guys I have networked with depending on their field, so I can retain my online clients, but I have to do some by myself. I also have specific virtual team players internationally who are from other countries, from all over China, Uganda, Portugal, France, Egypt, India just to name a few... But they are somehow more of pen pals. I do recruit them for short term projects, I recruit through giant freelancing sites where I also have a professional profile.

Other writers also act as ‘micro-entrepreneurs’, like Daniel who employs other writers through close friends and pays about 500 ksh per day; and Peter, who outsources work mainly through his friends. Peter pays about \$3 US per page after training his writers. Similarly, Olive currently employs 3 writers. However, her rates are based on the difficulty of the assignment, “I give the writers the order and pay them a certain amount per page depending on the complexity of the work to be done”. She usually pays them between 200 and 300 ksh per page. Olive’s employees are a current university student and two other recent graduates- each of them recruited digitally via a Facebook group for writers. Simon and Ken also report hiring 2 others each during their time as writers.

In the survey, 139 of the 172 respondents (81%) employed other writers. Among them, 10 each had employed 2 or 3 writers (see figure 20), while 4 had employed 1 writer and 2 employed more than 5 writers (see figure 21). Contrastingly, about half (53%) of the writers who were interviewed had employed other writers to work for them, with 4 writers employing 3 others, 2 each employing 1 and 2 writers, and 1 writer had employed more than 5 writers. Across the board, this question received a low response rate.

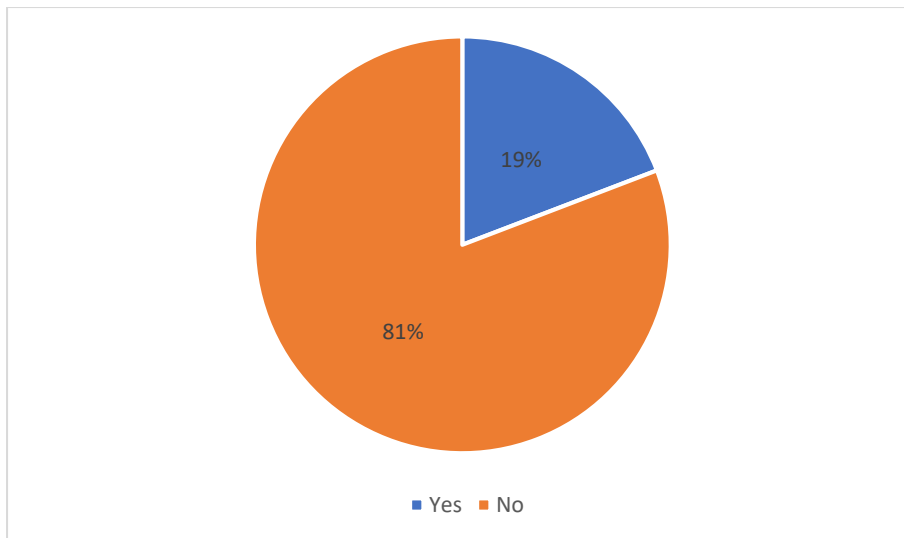


Figure 20. The distribution of writers employing others in the entire survey

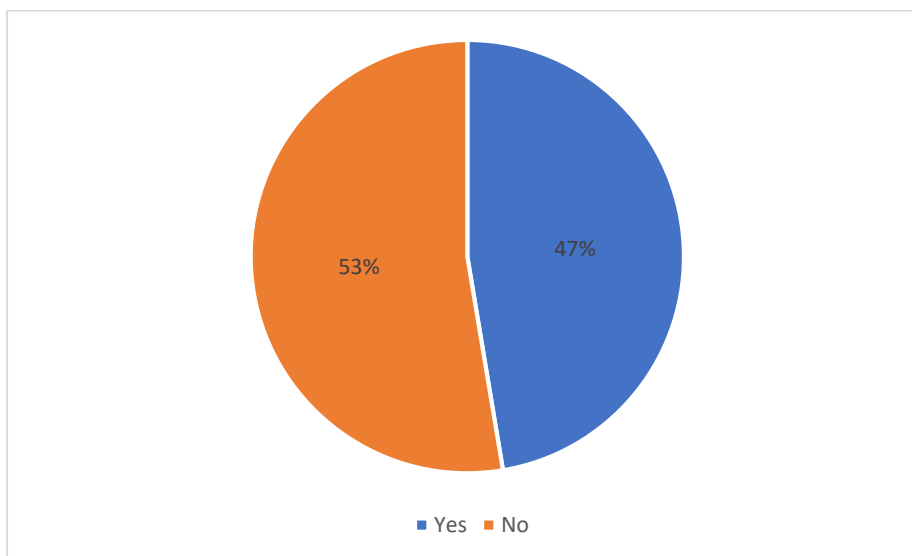


Figure 21. The distribution of writers employing others among interviewees only

Micro-Employees.

On the other side of this arrangement are the employees; the writers who access their work through other writers-usually friends, family or colleagues who own academic writing accounts. In most cases, employees are undergraduate students who are unable to open their own accounts due to a lack of certification, insufficient funds, or lack of experience within the industry. As Anne describes, “I’m at my preliminary stages. I’m under someone...they

are my friends, and it's hard to have a personal account for now". Typically, employees are paid per page or per order, with casual terms of agreement, and with the condition that editing and/or proofreading is likely to be necessary. Markline explains his arrangement:

My current employer has a number of students that they communicate with, so my current employer just gives me the details for the students and all that so that I can be able to be direct with the students, but he gets all the payments and then he deducts what I'm supposed to be paid and we operate like that.

In similar vein, Joseph was introduced to writing through a friend, "I was broke...a friend told me he had an account and I could work for him". His employer, who is also a colleague in Medical school, sends him assignments daily. He is given a deadline and instructions for completing the assignment. When he is finished, and then he sends the assignment back to the employer who then edits it, or they discuss it and he makes corrections before it goes to the client for approval. Joseph is paid a flat rate of 250-300 ksh per paper, which is usually around 5 pages, every two weeks via M-Pesa. This rate is notably higher than George's 2011 rate of 50ksh per page, but less than Simon's \$5-\$25USD per page as a freelancer during the same period. Joseph uses the money for upkeep, although he still gets money from his parents. However, his goal is to be able to raise enough money to pay his fees (86,000 ksh), so that he can remove the burden from his parents. Moreover, Fredrick, Moses and Mark each also reported working for other writers.

Company Employers& Employees.

The third type of work arrangement commonly found among academic writers is that of working for a company. This model is a bigger, more formalized extension of the smaller scale micro-entrepreneurial ventures previously discussed. These companies usually involve

a fleet of junior writers, as well as more senior writers, and an editor/sourcer. In the earlier days of academic writing, George and Simon recall that these ‘companies’ were housed in physical offices around Nairobi. For example, George noted that for his first job he was housed in a Nairobi suburb. However, based on the more recent advertisement for academic writers, many companies seem to have switched to predominantly ‘work from home’ models, where workers are required to have their own personal laptops and access to the internet. As such, even companies seem to have moved away from an emphasis on physical locations. Only one of the writers in the study, John, reported writing for an agency which sent him 1-2 papers daily.

For most of the youth in the study, writing was initially conceptualized in temporary terms, primarily as a part-time gig on campus, or a stepping stone to formal employment, or as a ‘side-hustle’ for law-paying wage labour. A minority of writers expected academic writing to be a long-term strategy; rather, they expected it to last for 1-3 more years. Overall, then, the study suggests that youth’s aspirations for employment still largely rests inside the formal economy, even when they are actively involved in the informal sector- and despite fierce competition for white-collar jobs. These aspirations may be caused by a combination of socio-economic factors, including; the prevailing social status of formal jobs, the social protection (health benefits, paid vacation etc.) offered by wage labour, as well as the economic security which may enable an easier transition to ‘full adulthood’, if desired.

Academic Writing and ICT for Youth Unemployment Policy

After a late start to widespread broadband connectivity and public internet access in 2006, the Kenyan government envisioned the ICT sector as a panacea for many of its economic and developmental woes. The government especially viewed ICT as a corrective

for high rates of youth unemployment, as a catalyst for its participation in the global digital economy, and as a route to a successful knowledge economy. According to the ICT

Ministerial Strategic Plan:

ICT will be instrumental in enhancing good governance and efficiency across all sectors of the economy leading to improved public service delivery. Among other considerations, this Strategic Plan aims to deepen and strengthen the foundation aimed at transforming Kenya into a knowledge-based and a globally competitive nation. This transformation will be done in line with the Vision 2030, by encouraging and stimulating investments in the sector through rapid expansion of ICT networks and services that are affordable and accessible to all... The ministry acknowledges the great potential of ICT as an enabler for the society's socio-economic empowerment (p.vi).

The plan further outlines the Ministry's hopes for prosperity and economic growth through ICT; "The vision of the policy is a prosperous ICT driven Kenyan society, while its mission is to improve the livelihoods of Kenyans by ensuring the availability of accessible, efficient, reliable and affordable ICT services" (p.7). Kenya's policy plans for ICT employment were predominantly concerned with Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). BPO as a strategy for government-led efforts in the digital and knowledge economy, was highlighted across several frameworks, including; the ICT Ministerial Strategic Plan, Vision 2030 and the National ICT Policy 2006. For example, BPO is listed as one of the six key sectors for economic growth in the Vision 2030 policy, where BPO is also conceptualized as a core constituent of youth employment. Vision 2030 explains:

Kenya aims to become the top off-shoring destination in Africa. BPO will, therefore, become the sector of choice for employment for youth and young professionals. The country will move quickly to establish the necessary capacity in the sector through: (i)

attracting at least five major leading information technology (IT) suppliers, and at least ten large multinational companies and global BPO players to the country; and (ii) strengthening at least five local players to become local champions through stand-alone operations or joint ventures (p. xi).

Similarly, the ICT Ministerial Strategic Plan highlights Vision 2030's hopes for the BPO sector to mitigate widespread unemployment, noting "The BPO sub-sector alone is projected to generate over 20,000 job opportunities and contribute more than 10 percent to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the Plan period (p.vi).

The BPO sector was conceptualized as a key platform for Kenyan youth, "The BPO sector is also expected to become the sector of choice for employment among youth and young professionals. (Vision 2030 p.81). To some extent, Kenya's BPO and ICT for youth employment goals have been moderately successful; however, not in the ways originally envisioned or articulated in the policy framework. Kenya's entry into the global digital economy has *not* been propelled by centralized, governmental efforts and physically-bound to 'seats' in digital hub or integrated within the formal economy's tax system. Rather, it has been driven by young university-educated Kenyans who have taken advantage of the availability of the internet, and whose experiences of BPO and ICT for employment have been individual and community-based, decentralized, remote, and informal (tax-free). Furthermore, contrary to the government's hope that youth would be the creators and innovators of new technologies within ICT, youth have largely used internet connectivity to participate in small-scale gig labour. However, Kenyan youth have succeeded in realizing the government's plans for generating a knowledge economy as they have helped to create a burgeoning knowledge economy (albeit informal and sometimes, less licit) through the digital

economy. Kenyan youth have taken their interpretation of ‘BPO’ into their home, hands, and personal networks.

Building a Knowledge Economy through ICT.

Overall, Kenya’s ICT Policy framework aimed to harness innovation and creativity through the digital and knowledge economies in order to improve socio-economic development. The Kenya National Innovation System (KNIS) laments the country’s current state of innovation, contending, “Kenya’s current innovation system lacks coordination among the actors, is linear and fragmented, has limited linkages between academia, industry and government; the academic curricula and graduate skill sets are not well-aligned to industry needs and, has inadequate funding and support for innovations” (p.19). The policy addresses deficiencies in higher education, the public sector and private sector in seeking to improve both ICT and employment services since a vibrant knowledge economy must necessarily rely on institutions and organizations, networks and individuals with adequate resources (whether financial, educational, human or otherwise).

Naturally, the Kenyan government envisioned the ICT knowledge economy as an income-generator for Kenya’s formal knowledge economy. It intended to “leverage ICT to create employment and facilitate growth of other sectors in the economy.” (ICT Ministerial Strategic Plan, p. 2). Furthermore, the National ICT Masterplan cites a 2013 McKinsey report which showed that the “...internet sector contributed 2.9% of Kenya’s GDP” (p.36).

According to Vision 2030, the government aimed to create 7,500 direct jobs through the BPO sector. The policy hoped that the BPO would be instrumental in building the foundation for Kenya’s digital and knowledge economies through the internet sector which had contributed 2.9% of Kenya’s GDP in 2008, noting that “successful implementation of this plan will

provide the necessary tool to manage our knowledge for development in order to transform Kenya into a Digital Economy” (p.ix).

Another important component of the government’s ICT for development plan was for Kenyan youth to become ICT creators, software engineers, systems managers and other high-level IT career professionals. According to Silicon Kenya, “for Kenya to have a fully ICT induced economy, the ICT users must be literate enough rather than only having ICT systems and content alone. Education and training curricular reviews have not been carried out to ensure this is done” (p.6). Similarly, the Ministerial ICT plan advised that it intended to “promote local software development and hardware manufacturing and make them affordable and accessible through the existing fiscal concessions by the Government; and facilitate incubation of youth start-ups at ICT labs for commercialisation” (p.22). However, several policies have blamed Kenya’s underdeveloped IT sector at least partially, on an inadequate supply of trained specialists; lamenting the lack of adequately skilled human resources to match the government’s ideals. For example, the National ICT Masterplan notes that:

While the Government and the private sector have been investing heavily in ICT infrastructure...there has been comparatively little investment in the human resources required to design, develop and operate this infrastructure and the associated e-applications. With the increasing sophistication of ICT and its application, high-end skill sets are increasingly required, and availability presents a challenge to growth and to achieving the vision of this Master Plan...The local universities and tertiary colleges continue to develop ICT human capital and workforce that is neither guided by a human resource development policy are well-aligned to the industry needs, especially at the high end. This Master Plan suggests mechanisms for developing and sustaining high-end talent by removing the skills gap between industry requirements

and the capabilities of the local workforce. This includes reducing the need for foreign expertise in ICT projects re-training current high-end talent and creating a mechanism for effective skills transfer and training” (p.35).

The National Broadband Strategy echoes a similar sentiment, contending that Kenya’s ICT and Broadband use must extend beyond ‘watching television; and ‘surfing the internet’; rather “it shall be about new forms of communication and mass collaboration through the virtually unlimited potential for sharing information, storage capacity, processing power and software made possible through high-capacity bandwidth connections” (p.10). The Broadband Strategy promotes a more creative and hands-on use of technology:

The ability of the end-user to leverage digital content for enhanced social or economic value requires that they have the capacity to understand and apply the knowledge contained therein. While the end-user’s capacity is a function of the individual’s knowledge level and reasoning capability, widespread broadband uptake and utilisation requires citizens empowered with ICT to access and use broadband services in a knowledge-based society. Programmes should particularly target women who tend to have much lower levels of digital literacy and thus less motivation and capacity to utilize broadband technologies (p. 31).

Moreover, the National Broadband strategy highlights the importance of local content, knowledge (including e-learning), heritage, culture and linguistic expression, which it hopes will spur growth in local development, productivity, and efficiency (p.10) by leveraging IT policies as ‘empowerment tools’ for addressing gender, youth, disability, and rural inequalities.

Fixed Locations.

Quite notably, the government's vision of ICT and BPO was based on an expectation of a physically-situated digital knowledge sector. Through the establishment of the Kenzo Techno City Phase I which aimed to create 20,000 direct jobs, the Ministry planned to set up digital villages which would provide 30,000 opportunities by 2017, "*Konza Techno Park* is expected to create 80,000 jobs in the first four years, with more than 250 investors lined up including IT innovation centres, banking, real estate, and hospitality interests, local hospitals, and local and international universities, both public and private" (Silicon Kenya, p. 18). As of 2010, the BPO sector had furnished only 500 seats accounting for 1000 employees, or about 0.01% of Kenya's GDP. Additionally, the policy hoped to create 6,500 more jobs, and add 10 billion ksh to the GDP through the BPO park for 5,000 workers directly and indirectly for 2,500 other workers. The BPO plan intended to attract international English-speaking markets such as Canada, the UK and the US and planned to attract at least 10 major international IT suppliers, along with 5 local BPO 'champions'.

The Kenyan government has officially attributed the 'limited success' of the BPO sector to several internal and external forces, including a premature focus on international market before 'developing local clients'; the country's lack of competition against bigger economies of scale such as India and the Philippines; and, changes in the global BPO market demands. Citing a recent study by Graham and Waema (2014), the ICT Ministerial Strategic plan notes that despite its moderate success, Kenya has still managed to build a good reputation in the industry, contending, "the focus on international BPO work has not succeeded as originally envisioned and Kenya has not been able to build a positive and successful brand around the BPO sub-sector" (12).

Undoubtedly, Kenya has quite a long way to go before it reaches its goal of a knowledge-driven ICT economy propelled by highly skilled ICT professionals and digital labour. However, the youth involved in academic writing offer a close proxy to many of the government's lofty goals, though in ways which are markedly different. These youth are often highly educated- either currently in university or recently graduated, although not necessarily highly skilled in ICT services. Furthermore, the youth are certainly interested in working within the formal knowledge economy but considering limited opportunities they have turned to the next best thing; a pseudo-knowledge economy in the digital realm. Moreover, rather than relying on governmental access to opportunities, they have accessed the digital economy through their individual and network channels, thereby creating an informal, tax-free realization of the government's vision. Consequently, the 10,000 seats imagined by the government may have been filled and surpassed, but they are currently occupied in the homes, offices, libraries and cafes around Kenya, rather than in Kenzo City. As such, the academic writing industry and the wider digital economy in Kenya offers a brilliant example of grass-roots, bottom-up, youth-led realization of ambitious policies-which may have officially 'failed' but have practically been executed in a community-based and micro-entrepreneurial reimagination.

Consequently, much of Kenya's involvement in the digital economy has been through the individual and collective efforts of private citizens, rather than through governmental initiatives. In the mid-2000s, the Kenyan government (much like many others), planned to position Kenya as a hub of BPO activity in Eastern Africa. They therefore implemented underground wires and proposed a Kenzo park with 30,000 BPO work stations. They intended for these initiatives to propel Kenya's ICT for (youth) development as part of their Vision 2030 policies. However, the policy has been slow-moving as the park has yet to be completed; as Graham et.al (2016) note, the BPO has failed to take off. At the same time,

Kenyan youth were actively signing up for academic writing websites, and starting entrepreneurial ventures, first out of physical offices, and later with fully digitized divisions of labour. Therefore, Kenyan youth have forged their way directly into the global economy, by passing the state-run 'middle man'. While BPO initiatives have shown only moderate success, the underlying motive of ICT for youth unemployment has been much more successful- albeit through the efforts and resourcefulness of young people, rather than via the state.

The Hustle Does Not Wait: Separating Waithood from Discourses of Youth

Therefore, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that university-educated youth are neither inactive nor waiting, during their transition into 'adulthood'. Although many aspire to traditional jobs within the formal economy, the dearth of formal jobs in the recent past and its likely continuation into the foreseeable future, suggests that most Africans have claimed their adulthood without the security of a '9 to 5', and most youth (despite their hopes) will be forced to do the same. Notwithstanding the view that formal wage labour is a prerequisite for adulthood in the minds of many young people, the reality of contemporary society is that most Africans have and will continue to become adults without formal jobs. Moreover, somewhat ironically, due to current local and global economic configurations, even those who have managed to secure jobs, often struggle to attain, or have deliberately rejected the traditional markers of adulthood. New generations have altered what it means to be an 'adult', therefore challenging what it means to be 'a youth'. If adulthood is not necessarily signalled by a formal job, marriage, children, or ownership of property, then how does it differ from our current understanding of 'youth'. If there is no distinct phase of 'adulthood', then what is it that youth are transitioning to? If youthhood is a protracted state lasting well

into one's twenties, thirties, and even forties, does this mean that youth is the new adulthood? In challenging teleological narratives of age and stage, and by acknowledging current world social, economic, and political forces, we may even challenge the very conceptualization of youth as a transitory state.

Over the past three decades, much of the literature on youth in the Global South has interpreted their experiences in terms of two major concepts: transition and waiting. These terms are often used simultaneously and interchangeably, exemplified by notions such as; 'protracted liminality' (Thieme 2013). As a result, there has been an inadvertent assumption that youth, as a period of transition between 'childhood' and 'adulthood', consists of young people (particularly those in developing countries) waiting to assimilate into full adulthood, and to acquire its signifiers (formal job, property, marriage, children). Paradoxically, however, there is a simultaneous assertion that in contexts where formal job opportunities are scarce, youth are largely socio-economically inactive, while waiting for 'a job', and by extension, 'adulthood' to manifest. Notions of youth in transition commonly rest on several pertinent assumptions; firstly, that a formal job is the first and most crucial prerequisite for 'adulthood'; secondly, that a state of transition necessarily involves waiting; and finally, that waiting itself is synonymous with a large degree of inactivity.

However, this study challenges each of those assumptions by arguing for a conceptual uncoupling of 'inactivity' from 'waithood', 'waithood' from 'transition', and 'formal job' from 'adulthood' particularly in the context of educated-youth in contemporary Kenyan society. There is a need to explore differing or alternative readings of 'youth-hood', which may not rest prominently on notions of liminality and transitioning, but which create space for accounts of youth-hood beyond expectations of anxieties and frustrations about the future, in favour of processes fixed on the present. Ultimately, 21st century narratives of youthhood

must necessarily include stories of unemployment outside discourses of waiting, passivity and hopelessness.

Unwittingly, scholars analysing youth experiences in Africa have accepted that the idea of 'in-betweenness' suggests that one is liminal and waiting for the next stage. However, this is not always true. Even for those who are hoping and expecting to enter 'adulthood', many are not waiting for adulthood to emerge, nor are they necessarily stuck in-between. Rather, for the young people in the study, the time in between is better described as one of working, making do, hustling, bustling, migration, studying, negotiating. Kenyan youth are very rarely waiting. For those who aspire, adulthood is created, carved, sculpted and put together. There is very little passivity, and very little waiting. If the transition occurs, it is through a series of trials and errors, usually over the course of several years, but waiting is a luxury which most Kenyan youth cannot afford. They may not be able to acquire the things they want, but they are more likely to be *hustling* towards them, rather than waiting for them.

Secondly, as Johnson-Hanks (2002) and others have argued, it is important to reject narrow notions of 'adulthood' which define the 'stage' by socio-economic markers, such as; parenthood, marriage and ownership of property. These markers often overshadow the idea of maturity which adulthood ultimately signifies. Moreover, due to barriers to entry, and sometimes deliberate avoidance, it may be prudent to conceptualize adulthood in much broader, perhaps, more abstract terms. Within the context of post-colonial Kenya, tying formal jobs to the notion of adulthood is especially problematic, as many Kenyans are active participants in the informal or secondary economy and may never join the formal economy. Nonetheless, they are 'adults' in their fullest sense, having obtained most other signifiers, and more importantly, being socially recognised as such by those in their communities. In Kenya, as elsewhere in Africa, formal jobs are scarce, but adults abound. Using this observation, we

can challenge the notion of adulthood as being marked by participation in the formal wage economy, and other overly simplistic external signifiers.

Finally, the findings push us to further interrogate conceptualizations of adulthood. There is an oft overlooked subsection of youth who do not aspire to 'adulthood' in the future. These young people are essential to our understanding of life stages since in the coming decades, it may become less appropriate to refer to 'youth' as a period of transition. Many young people in Kenya (and elsewhere) are consciously ignoring, deliberately delaying and/or purposely avoiding traditional elements of 'adulthood'. Many will never reach 'adulthood', whether by choice or constraints. As such, the teleological model of life stages will bear less and less relevance for Kenyan youth, if current trends persist. It is therefore inappropriate to refer to those youth as 'in transition', since they are not, and may never 'transition' into adulthood. Youth may therefore be understood as an extended life stage, which may or may not lead to adulthood. For many, it will extend well into the decades of life which are typically associated with 'adulthood', and perhaps even into 'old age'. This requires a further divorcing of 'age' from the notion of 'stage', and a separation of 'stage' from ideas of 'life path'.

The academic writers in the study are all youth under the age of 35, predominantly unmarried, childless and without property. Thus, by virtually all categorisations, they are properly classified as youth in both 'age' and 'stage'. As university students and recent grads, the writers are ostensibly in periods of transition between adolescence and adulthood. Having not yet secured the key signifiers of adulthood, by most accounts they are 'waiting'. However, their lives and experiences rarely indicate the kind of 'waiting' (Peter 2010, Mains 2011, Ralph 2008) or 'protracted liminality' which Thieme (2013) suggests. By contrast, their lives- both while in university, and in the years immediately after are generally filled

with economic activity, various types of informal, casual, zig-zagging, making do, or more aptly for the Kenyan context, 'hustling' during their 'transitions'.

Chapter Four

Alternative Economies: Academic Writing, Digital Labour & the Informal Economy

This chapter examines ‘the hustle’ of academic writing, under the lens of alternative and informal economies in Kenya. As such, it delineates the ways in which writing manifests as a ‘hustle’, both in theory and in practice. The chapter weaves Africa’s history of employment precarity and agency in non-state spaces, with the writers’ current labour conditions, drawing parallels between the digital economy and Kenya’s characteristic informal economy. Thus, the chapter highlights the common thread of informality which belies the hustle of academic writing and illustrates the various modes through which work is accessed. The chapter analyses these findings under the analytical lens of the ‘hustle’ (Thieme 2013, Mwaura 2017) which is usually associated with Kenyan youth, especially men. Furthermore, the chapter is also concerned with the ‘shared experience’ of academic writing in Kenya. Specifically, it analyses the use personal networks in creating work opportunities, and the use of Facebook as a Marketplace and Community, where tips and advice are shared, and writing accounts, writing aides and jobs are traded. Finally, the chapter reports on the ways in which academic functions within the wider digital economy and the recently launched ‘Ajira’ Initiative.

The Discourse of Hustle.

The discourse of ‘writing as hustle’ is prevalent both among the writers and in the wider popular media. For many of the writers, academic writing is conceptualized primarily as a ‘hustle’; a temporary, uncertain ‘making do’, mainly born out of economic force and financial need. The notion of ‘writing as hustle’ first emerged out of conversations with

George, my roommate and former writer. During my first few days in Kenya, when George started talking about his work and his life, I was very interested to hear him refer to writing as his ‘side hustle’ and to learn of the role that writing played in George’s socio-economic life. George clarified, “actually, writing is my side hustle...I have two main jobs and one side hustle. Writing is...I’m not even supposed to be doing it but because these other ones are not paying as well, I do it.” Apart from writing, George has two formal jobs; one as a Communications Officer and another as a Digital Marketer for a small agency; the two companies share an office space. George tells me that he does writing because his formal jobs do not pay well. In fact, during our interview in August, he had not been paid since November. Furthermore, even when he is paid, he earns more from the ‘side hustle’ than from both of his jobs, combined. In a typical week, George makes between \$400 and \$500 US.

Several writers also make reference-either directly or indirectly to the ‘hustle-ness’ of writing. That is, they express the idea that academic writing is a piecemeal means by which money is paid, rather than framing it as formal or ‘real’ employment. For example, in response to her not referring to writing as a job in the survey, Anne, one of the writers, explained, “I don't consider it as a job because am not restricted to do it, I do it when I feel like, and then in that question I looked at it with my current thing that am doing, am currently a student”. This pattern of thinking was repeated among many of the writers in the survey, many of whom stated that they were currently unemployed, even though they were presently academic writers. This suggests a distinct perception of writing as being separate from a ‘job’. A ‘job’ within the perceptions of many young Kenyans is associated with a physical workplace, formal rules and conditions, strict working hours, and an agreed upon wage. Writing does not fit any of these necessary criteria. Rather, its remote nature (which allows writers to work from home, school, the office or the library), its marked informality across all

the types of work arrangements, its make-your-own hours, and its policy of conditional and un-uniformed pay, means that its perceived as being far outside the purview of a job.

The main motivating factors for academic writing were listed as; attractive pay and flexibility. In the survey, 200 writers indicated that the pay was an important motivator, while 138 writers mention the flexibility of writing (see figure 22). Similarly, 115 writers highlighted the advantage of being able to work from home, and 117 listed the acquisition of skills as a major consideration. Furthermore, among those interviewed, pay was the most commonly listed motivator with 17 writers, while 16 writers listed the flexibility of writing. (see figure 23). A further 12 writers mentioned the acquisition of skills, and 14 listed the ability to work from home as being important.

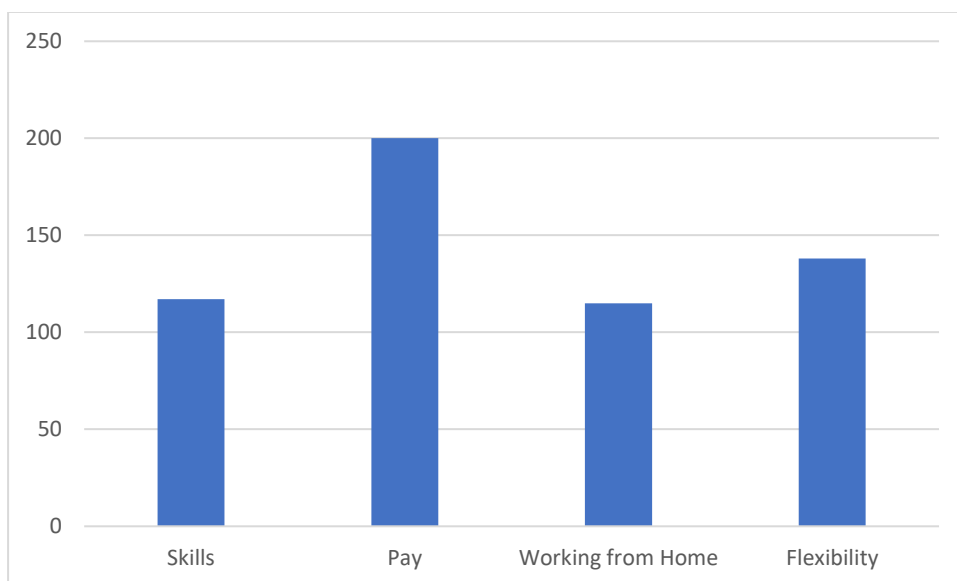


Figure 22. The writers' main motivating factors (entire survey)

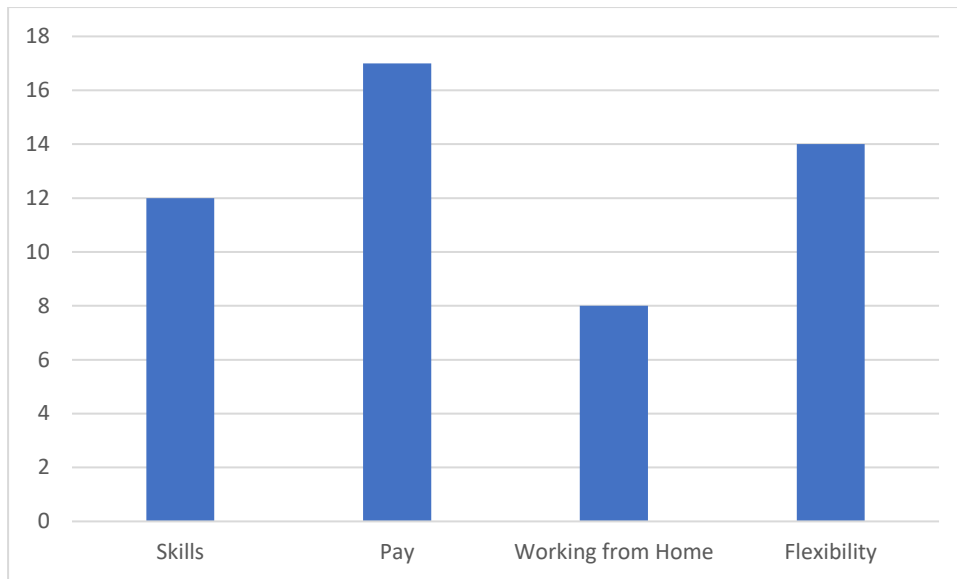


Figure 23. The interviewees' main motivating factors

Most writers reported working in various places, mostly at home and at school (see figure 24). In fact, 136 of the writers usually write from home, while 81 often write from school. Less common options were work (8), internet café (34), library (27), and friend or relative's home (9). Similarly, most (13) of the writers interviewed typically write from home and school (6). However, another common (12 writers) working space was a friend or relative's home. Three (3) writers reported writing from their workplace, and 1 each usually write from an internet café or library (see figure 25). Thus, current practices in academic writing highlight the importance and ubiquity of home ICT connectivity, even more so than publicly available internet sources.

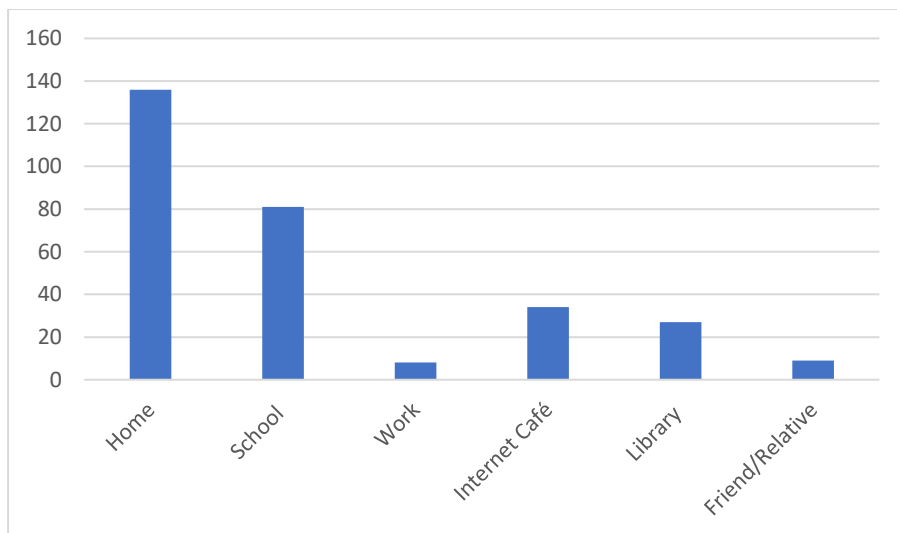


Figure 24. The most common working spaces (entire survey)

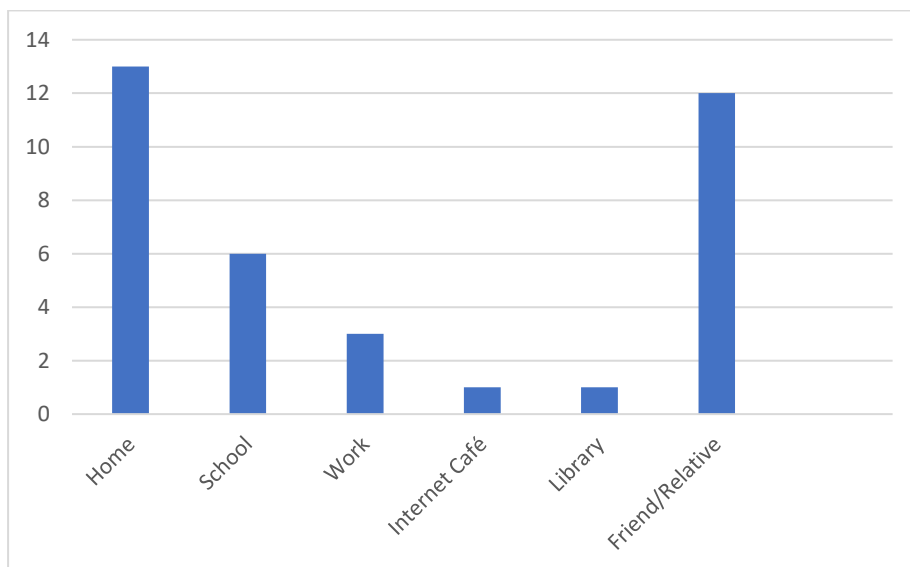


Figure 25. The most common working spaces among interviewees

Understanding the Hustle.

Despite, or perhaps, due to its reputation as a ‘hustle’, academic writing typically occupies a considerable amount of time in the writers’ week. There was an even distribution across the time ranges, with 57 or 28% of the survey respondents indicating they spent between 1 and 10 hours per week writing, while 52 (25%) of the writers worked between 10

and 20 hours each week. By contrast, only 24 (11%) of the writers reported writing between 20 and 30 hours; however, 69 writers (34%) worked a ‘full-time’ load of 30 hours or more. This suggests that academic writing functions most commonly as either a part-time (less than 20 hours), or full-time job (more than 30 hours), as the ‘in-between’ work structure was the least popular (see figure 26, 27).

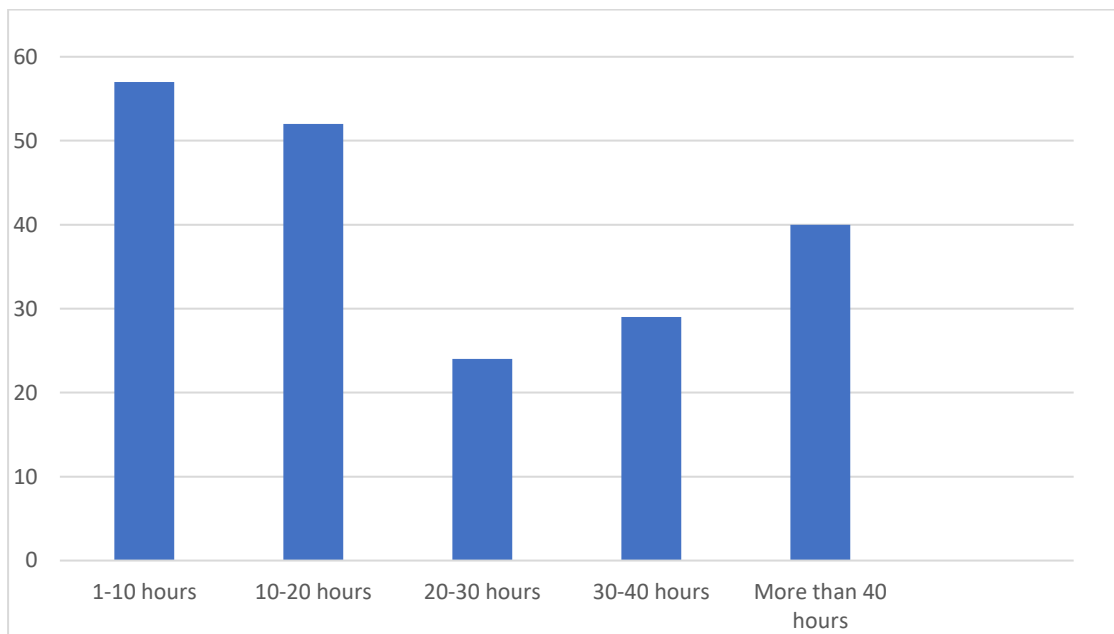


Figure 26. The average time spent weekly on academic writing among writers in the survey

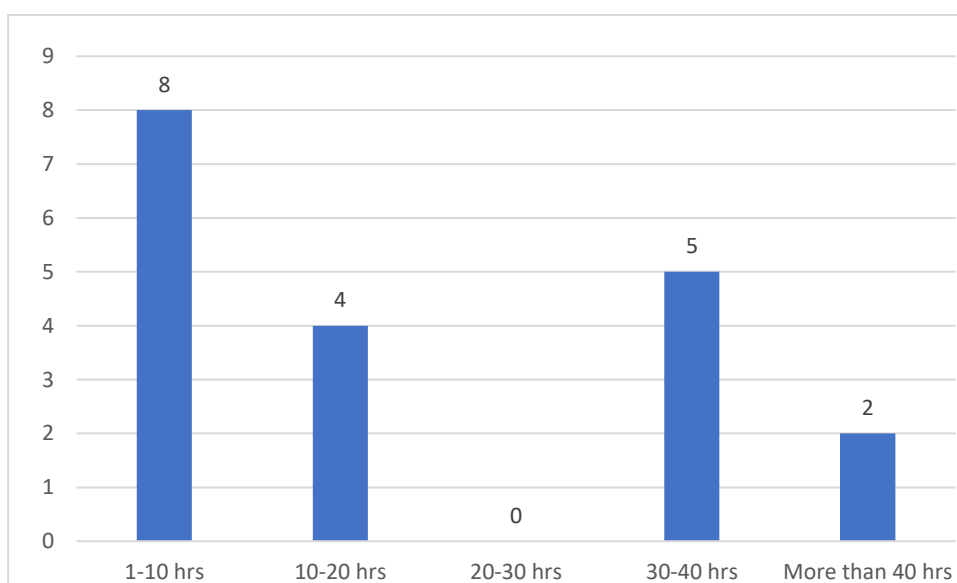


Figure 27. The average time spent weekly on academic writing among writers in the survey

Among the writers interviewed, similar trends were observed. Although response to this question was low, about 60% (12) of the interviewed writers indicated ‘part-time’ hours of less than 20 hours for academic writing, while 40% (7) of the writers wrote ‘full-time’ for more than 30 hours (see figure 46).

The Demands of Academic Writing

Born and raised in Nairobi, Mary is a 24-year-old BSc Accounting graduate of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. She is the daughter of two teachers. Like most others, Mary lists the flexibility of online work as one of the major factors contributing to its appeal, as she usually works from home or school. She was introduced and trained by a friend a few years ago; now she works as a freelancer, mainly on Upwork.com. Mary’s reference to academic writing as her ‘side hustle’ is a common sentiment expressed among several of the writers in the study. According to many of the writers, it is exactly this flexibility in time and location which makes writing appealing as a side hustle; it fits around any schedule-especially a ‘9 to 5 job’ or a day-time class schedule.

Similarly, Victor, a graphic designer and recent graduate, recalls how he managed to spend over 40 hours per week between academic writing and graphic designing, his two part-time jobs, “...well it’s fair to say I don’t have a proper social life...It’s always school then home where I start working. So I sleep late at night and wake up early morning to complete whatever work that is unfinished...It is hectic but at the end of the day, I don’t have any option really...I have to pay my bills.” Moreover, Moses explains how he is able to fit approximately 30 hours of writing into his full-time university life as a Clinical Applied Biology diploma student:

I write throughout the week at night (11pm-4:30), then sleep for 3 hours then start another day for classes. After classes I check if I have any assignments and I normally ensure I'm clear with it because in our system of learning we're not given long papers or term papers; it's normally like a 2 or 3-page paper which I can do in one hour and then I'm done with it. Then I normally slot time for my studies before I begin writing—that's 2 hours per day.

Joseph, George's friend and 3rd year Medical student, similarly balances his writing with his studies and personal life. Joseph does his writing from around 5 to 9 pm each day (and oftentimes much later), after his classes and before his homework. Likewise, Sharon is a recent graduate who plans to migrate from Nairobi to Mombasa to begin a career in the hospitality and tourism industry. She intends to integrate writing into her daily life, even after she starts working full-time. Sharon strategizes, "I would do it even if I was in a hotel or something cause it's something you can do in your free time, part time. I can go on writing cause it's not something that is...it doesn't tie you down, you can do it just about anywhere and it's easy and you make an extra coin and such".

Furthermore, even writers who had found traditional jobs within the formal economy indicated that they would continue writing in the short to medium term future, and that it would function as a side job. Faith explains how writing acted as a supplementary form of income—both during university, and now that she had graduated and was working a '9 to 5'. Faith, now an Insurance Underwriter who recently completed an Accounting degree, notes:

I kept writing because it was paying, first of all, cause while I was in campus I used to earn from freelancing from writing, so I never used to ask my parents for that much money cause ...when I write they pay me, and I get some money from there. So, for

now, I'm just doing it as a side hustle like besides work, being paid monthly I still do online writing, like to get a side hustle thing.

Similarly, Edwin, a recent graduate in Education, remarks on his expected plans for the next few years, "What I'm planning to do...I just want to secure some stable employment and then writing will be my side hustle job...because I really love it, it just has to be part-time." Edwin is currently searching for positions within the teaching profession.

However, the balance of writing with other duties brings several challenges. The writers cite issues related to the differences in time-zones with the clients, which typically demand that they are up in the early hours of the morning trying to complete assignments and make the necessary adjustments. For example, Mercy, a 3rd year Social Science student at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Nairobi, carefully describes the ways in which she navigates writing with her homework and school assignments, especially now that she is in the hectic 4th year of a BSc in Accounting and Finance:

I do my writing at home. For these jobs you have to be up around 2am...once I get the job I schedule for during the day now and I align it according to my timetable, together with my schoolwork so that anytime I'm free, I'd squeeze in some time to do my writing... because I'm in my final year, my classes are kind of spaced out so it gives me enough time to squeeze in some time in between. At first it was really difficult because considering some of my friends are not in writing, so it was difficult...but with time I was able to balance between the writing, my studies, as well as my social life so with time it becomes easier.

For Mercy, 'fitting it all' suggests a delicate balancing of competing duties, coupled with strict adherence to schedules. At its core, such a balancing of school, work and life responsibilities lends itself to the development of time management skills. It is worth noting that Simon, the first Kenyan academic writer whom I met, was the first to comment on the demanding nature of academic writing. In fact, the demands eventually led him to give up

writing less than a year after he had started. Simon was quick to emphasize how time-consuming and stressful academic writing proved to be as he remarked slyly, “My dear, with this work there is no such thing as part-time”. He further explained:

...Because of 2 things! 1, the fact that most of the courses / papers I had to do were not based on subjects I had trained in. I did religious studies, political science, black history, tourism etc. yet I am only trained in Tourism. That means that I had to do a lot of reading and research so that I would do a great job for my clients. 2, All assignments were deadline-based so you had very little time to do so much.

Sometimes I could take 2 or 3 assignments at a go, and in the middle of them, a client would return a paper for revision. It was quite time intense... [I worked for] about 18 hours [a day], if I was not writing, then I was reading and researching. Sometimes, I would have to wake up at 0300 hrs after a call from the customer for urgent revision or to select the best/easier assignments to take before other guys picked them.

Basically, one was required to be available on phone 24/7.

Simon’s comments were echoed to various degrees by other writers. Across the board, the writers suggested that academic writing, more so than some of the other forms of digital labour, was intellectually and sometimes physically demanding.

Benard, final year Engineering student at JKUAT, also echoed Simon and Mercy’s sentiments, and highlighted the extent to which the demands of writing negatively impacted his own academic performance:

At first, when you’re earning money you really don’t see the challenges that you’re going through but when it comes to your exams and submission deadlines for assignments...Yeah you find yourself running late for assignments cause you find

yourself writing for someone else... so, at the end of the semester you're saying, "oh, I wasted myself", but you were enjoying the money.

Markline, a final year I.T. student, also makes a similar point, noting how his grades suffered because of academic writing. He opines:

I think, for the past 3 years, I think comparing how the performance between my semester results since I started writing, I think there's a big disconnect. There's a debate we were having with a couple friends of mine, we were talking about their performance since they started writing. They are experiencing very poor performance since they started writing

Markline is in his final year of a BSc in Information technology, hoping to graduate in April 2019.

Hustle in the Media.

Markline's concerns about the impact of writing on school performance are echoed by some academics in the country. For example, a recent article from the Daily Nation entitled, 'Class can wait; I am still busy 'hustling'³⁹, explores this modern-day phenomenon on campuses throughout Kenya, arguing that students often miss classes and assignments throughout the semester to complete various side jobs, including writing term papers for other students.

Similarly, a Standard article titled, 'Five reasons why you should think twice before pursuing online academic jobs', lists: initial low pay, significant time demands, 'mental slavery', exploitation, and career stagnation, as the major disadvantages of academic writing. Another article, 'Jobless youth fall prey to web of exploitation', tells the story of George

³⁹ Daily Nation, July 1, 2013

Muya, a 29-year-old writer and self-proclaimed ‘real hustler’, who is a Human Resources graduate, but is formally employed. Like many of the writers in the study, George was introduced to writing through a friend from university. The article explains that George eventually bought his own account on Writer Hub, Uvocorp and Grammarly through a trade on Facebook. However, George fell victim to several ‘scams’ along his journey, both from his former academic writing employer, and from the Facebook trades. These losses forced him to sell his laptop, and almost cost him his apartment. As such, the social and economic reality of the ‘hustle’ of writing is clear; although writing can be a welcome avenue for earning ‘quick’ money, its subtext of precarity is always present.

Nonetheless, Kenyan media corroborates the prevalence of the discourse of ‘academic writing (and online work) as hustle. Articles from both the Daily Nation and The Standard, the two largest media houses in Kenya, feature numerous stories where writing is labelled as a ‘hustle’, ‘gig’ or other terms which connote temporariness, uncertainty and/or ‘rushing’ through time. Titles such as: ‘Four Side Gigs Can Start Right Now’ (of which writing is listed as number 2), ‘Get a side hustle, being broke in campus isn’t funny’, ‘Class Can Wait; I’m busy hustling’, and ‘Academic Writing: How to Survive the Hustle’, all make direct reference to academic writing as a prime example of ‘hustling’, particularly among university students, and young people more generally. The latter article warns:

Here’s the thing; most campus students rely on their parents and relatives for money. You go broke – or you need a new book or a laptop or money for a class trip or just new shoes – you call your mum or dad and they send you a couple thousand shillings. And this is the worst mistake one can ever do in campus. Campus is bustling with opportunities, get yourself a side hustle.

A recent article, entitled ‘This is Where the Money Is’, notes how young Kenyans are increasingly looking to non-traditional forms of employment to support themselves:

While a significant number of young Kenyans are freelancers for lack of ‘proper’ jobs, there are those who choose this route due to the flexibility, the freedom and the wide range of opportunities that come with this option. This discerning group of young professionals we have interviewed work exclusively on the cyberspace, capitalising on the ever-increasing opportunities online. They tell us just how ‘cosy’ it is to work from the couch, in the comfort of their homes.

Additionally, another article, entitled, ‘Who Says You Need to be Employed’, chronicles a recent graduate’s journey from scoffing at the idea of online work, and particularly academic writing, to eventually embracing its flexibility and freedom:

But I did not see online academic writing as a job worth my time, having gone to university for four years in pursuit of a well-paying career. After all, I was a university graduate with good papers who deserved an eight-to-five white collar job.

Moreover, even where it is not explicitly listed as a hustle, writing is uniformly referenced as a temporary option for youth to ‘survive’ or ‘get by’. Critically, there is a sense in which writing, and these other hustles provide an avenue for students to support themselves where parents and governments are unable to do so:

Gone are the days when students in institutions of higher learning would depend entirely on their parents and guardians for financial upkeep. Government sponsored students, for instance, are entitled to stipends from the government.

With the ever – rising cost of living in Kenya today, self – sponsored and government – sponsored students alike, would definitely wish for an extra coin in the pocket during their time in college. Here is a look at some common side hustles to help you make money while in the campus.

Hustle as Making-Do.

Thus, among the writers and in the wider media, it is clear that ‘hustle’ connotes less of ‘illicit-ness’ and more of ‘making do’ in the context of uncertainty and informality. Like other casual income-generating ideas in the physical world (e.g. advertising, printing, baking) and online (e.g. translation, web design, virtual assistant), academic writing functions as a ‘hustle’ by its nature as an insecure form of labour, and its flexibility which makes it possible to work around, and alongside obligations such as school, work and family. Academic writing is a hustle because it is used to ‘make do’; and in that regard, it is no more remarkable than any of the many other ‘income generating’ activities with which Kenyan youth engage. The morally dubious and ‘less licit’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) nature of academic writing is perhaps an inadvertent (albeit serendipitous) feature which only further underscores the appropriateness of the label.

The nomenclature of academic writing to describe the work of young Kenyan writers is very important; that it is called ‘academic writing’ serves to do several important things. Firstly, it subverts the formal academy by appropriating a term commonly used to refer to formal writing within higher education. Secondly, it masks the ethical problems associated with it in referring to it in neutral, and almost prestigious terminology. Ethics and academic integrity are sometimes considered, but these issues are generally subordinate concerns to the pragmatics of income generation. On a metacognitive level, young writers conceptualize their work from their own perspective, highlighting the pseudo-legitimacy, mundaneness and neutrality of academic writing as a form of employment and a tool for personal and professional development.

Pay Rates and Digital Money

Another key component of the hustle of academic writing is the money; pay rates and conditions of pay. Academic writing is predominantly facilitated through digital money payment systems, both locally via M-Pesa, and internationally through PayPal and Skrill (see figure 28). Interestingly, PayPal recently announced plans to withdraw its services from academic writing, after calls from Damian Hinds, the UK's Education Secretary, and other policy makers and administrators in higher education⁴⁰. Although this move is likely to negatively impact websites which exclusively deal in academic writing, it is unlikely to curb the writers who operate on general digital platforms, such as Upwork and Fiverr. Based on the findings of the survey, the most common form of payment for current writers was M-Pesa, with close to 60%, or 63 writers being paid through that method (see figures 28, 29). A close second was PayPal, with 52 or 49% of respondents being paid in that way. Other forms of payment included; Skrill (7 writers), and Cash (5 writers).

How are you paid?

106 responses

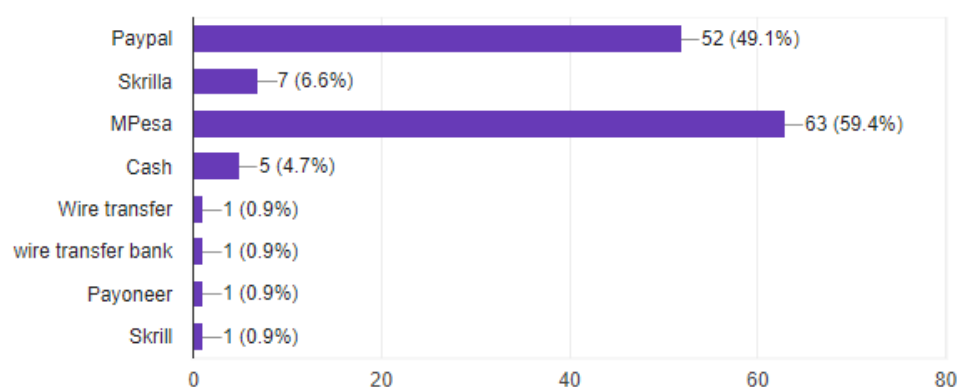


Figure 28. Main payment mediums among current writers

⁴⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-47800531?fbclid=IwAR0zs2RfKcOgrqB4ASUu5ciVXEN7v9aOceCVcUqr7aXqJldllbRo2UjTqC0>

Among past writers, the vast majority (49 writers) were paid through M-Pesa, while 21 were paid via PayPal, 7 through Cash, and 4 through Skrill (see figure 30).

How were you paid? (Tick all that apply)

66 responses

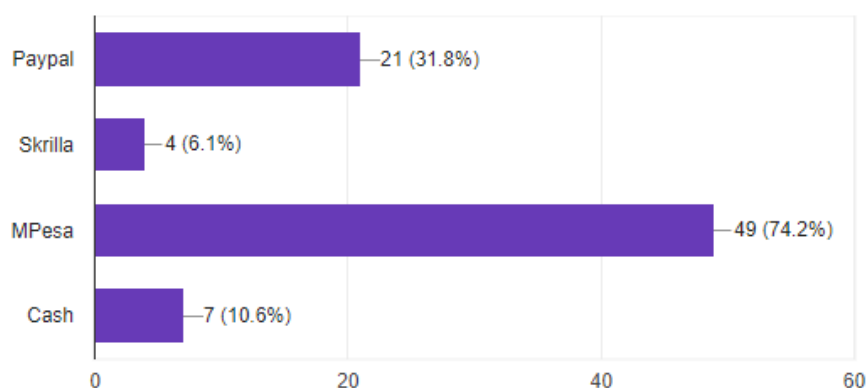


Figure 29. Main payment mediums among past writers

Generally, most academic writers make between 500 ksh (£5) and 5000ksh (£50) per week from their writing. The range in earnings is often influenced by the number of hours worked, the type of ‘work arrangement’ in which the writer is engaged, and the type of assignment being completed (see figure 49). Some writers are paid a flat fee for each assignment, while others are paid per page, or per word. On average, about 5% or 11 respondents reported weekly earnings of less than 500 ksh while 20% (45) earned between 500 and 1000 ksh, while 62 (27%) earn between 1000 and 2000 ksh and another 30% (66) between 2000 and 5000 ksh a week. Further, 29 writers (13%) reported earnings of between 5000 and 10000 ksh while 10 writers (4%) earned in excess of 10000 ksh per week. Therefore, the majority of writers earn between 1000 and 5000 ksh per week through writing, equivalent to about \$10-\$50 USD; decent earnings for a young person.

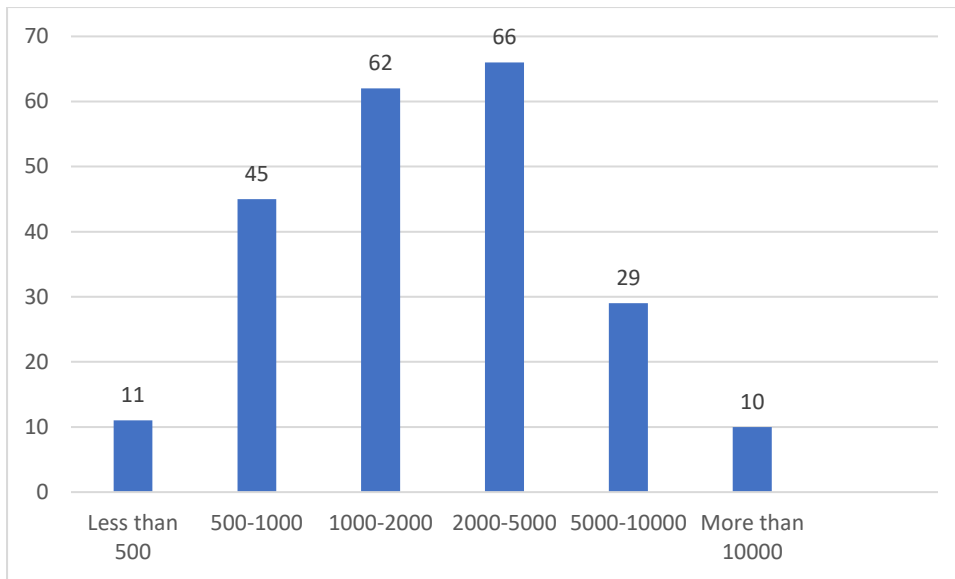


Figure 30. Writers' average earnings per week (entire survey)

Among the writers interviewed, similar earnings were reported. Of the 26 who responded, 3 made less than 500ksh per week from writing, 6 made between 500 and 1000 ksh, 7 between 1000 and 2000ksh, and 5 each between 2000 and 5000ksh, and 5000 and 10000 ksh. As such, a little less than half of the interviewees made between 1000 and 5000ksh per week (\$10-50 US) from academic writing (see figure 31).

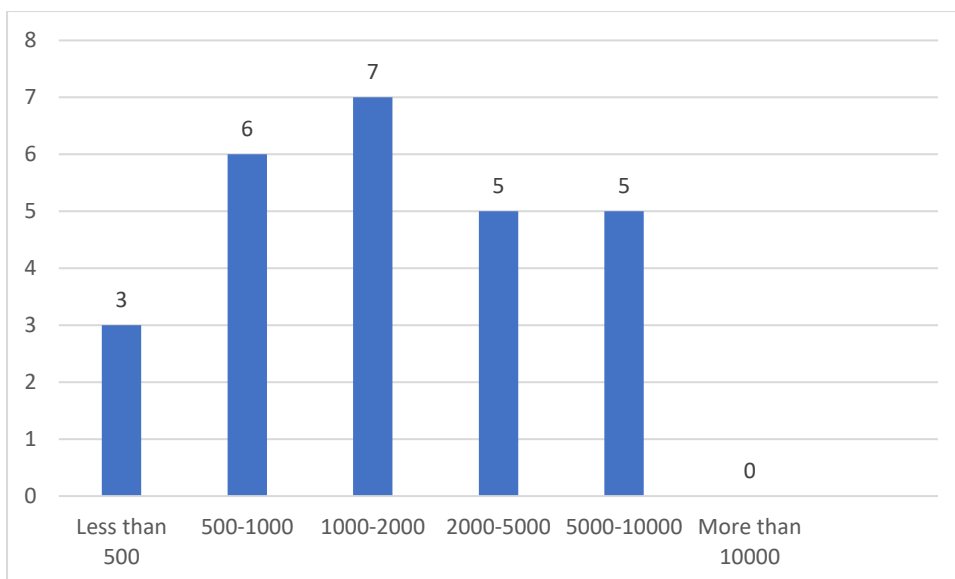


Figure 31. Writers' average earnings per week (interviewees)

Another common approach to payment is by paying a set rate per assignment. For example, Benard, who is usually paid via MPesa or PayPal, estimates that he earns between 5000 and 10000 ksh per week, or about 700 ksh (\$ 9US) per assignment, since he is usually paid in the region of \$3-5 US per page. He explains:

There were some guys who had big accounts...people who had a lot of clients and they couldn't do all the work for themselves so what they did was to hire some guys to do their work and they were paying an average of \$3 per page of work... I have some friends who delegate their extra workload to me... They actually pay a flat fee depending on the number of pages I write... It depends. But mostly it ranges from an equivalent of 3 to 5 dollars per page.

Joseph, a medical student, is also paid a rate of 250-300 ksh per paper by his boss and medical school colleague. Similarly, Fredrick, a final year student at Kenyatta University, is paid 500 ksh per assignment, usually through MPesa.

Moreover, Markline makes about 10,000 ksh per week, a figure which is comparatively high. He explains that he completes about 10 assignments per week when the workload is high, and 5 when it is low. He attributes his high earnings to the fact that he has several employers who regularly send him work and mainly pay through M-Pesa. Similarly, Ken M. is paid a standard rate of \$3 US per assignment, from his employer who sends him jobs once or twice a day, for about 1500 ksh per week. However, Ken argues that this rate is 'peanuts' compared to what he could be making as a freelancer but has been unable to overcome the related challenges. He contends:

There is a lot of competition for the few jobs in the country...again they pay peanuts for students ... I have actually tried to open since last year...just that I find the process of opening it almost impossible.

Further, Mary, a 'micro-entrepreneur' who makes between 2000 and 5000 ksh per week. She pays her employees a flat rate based on their areas of expertise and the time they take to complete the assignment. Faith also pays her employees about \$2 US per assignment for which she receives around \$10 US, she explains that this pay ratio is important for sustaining her business:

Right now, I only have one person who does it like when I'm busy and there's some work to be done...she just chips in and assists me and I pay her some dollars. I pay her like \$2.... cause if you charge somebody like \$10, and you pay the person to assist you...there's no way you can pay them \$5, like you're the one who gave them the work...you have to remain with the most throughout...

Some writers are paid per page, often between \$2 and \$5 US. For example, Olive pays her writers between \$2 US and \$3US per page, and Simon and Robert. both reported paying their writers an average of \$4 US per page, through MPesa. Peter also pays his writers in the range of \$2 US per page (about 300 words). Similarly, Edwin makes about 1000ksh per week, mainly through Skrill, at a rate of about \$2 per page (400 words). Finally, one of the writers reported paying his workers a percentage of what he makes for each order, rather than a flat rate. Brian pays his writers between 70 and 90%, usually via MPesa and Skrill, while he makes an average of 5000 ksh per week. He explains:

I pay on a percentage basis. They take most of the gains...It's a two-way thing... 10 percent is what I part with, but in some special cases like hourly payment by clients. I

take more percentage of up to 30 % ...by PayPal mostly, Skrill and even in some cases direct payment to bank account or MPesa mobile.

Conditions of Pay

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the precarity of academic writing is the general pattern of conditional pay. Quintessentially a gig industry, academic writing assignments are paid for, only when the client is satisfied. Thus, power is located almost completely in the customer's hands. Except in rare cases of appeal, the customer decides whether they are 'satisfied' with the work, and ultimately, whether they will pay. As a result, if a client is unhappy with a product, even after a request for revision, he or she reserves the right to reject the work and withhold payment. Even in cases where a writer works as an 'employee' for another writer, the lack of payment extends to them. New and inexperienced writers are particularly susceptible to unpaid labour due to unsatisfactory work. For example, George recalls becoming very frustrated for the first few months of writing, as many of his assignments were returned without payment.

Various 'conditional' payment arrangements exist across academic writing and freelance websites, although some offer more worker protection. For example, Mercy works freelance on homeworkmarket.com, where she searches for work, makes an offer and is subsequently paid a down payment, followed by the final payment (upon approval), using PayPal. Therefore, she is guaranteed some payment even if the final product is not approved. Additionally, some websites offer 'bidding' arrangements, where works vie for assignments, either by under-pricing, or over-qualifying their competitors. For example, David owns accounts on freelancer and e-lancer.com, where he bids for projects and is paid directly to his bank account through PayPal, while Victor works on 99designs, a similar bidding-based website for graphic designers.

Satisfaction Rates

Despite its precarity and difficult demands, writers reported high satisfaction with writing. In fact, out of the 130 writers who responded, 56 (43%) were moderately satisfied, rating their experience as '3' out of 5 (see figure 45). Similarly, 61 (47%) writers rated their satisfaction as '4' out of '5'. In similar vein, among the 18 interviewees who responded, 13 (72%) rated writing between 3 and 4 out of 5 (see figure 46). This satisfaction may be due to several factors, including pay and flexibility.

Community: The Centrality of Personal and Social Networks among Academic Writers

Underlying the 'hustle' of academic writing is the centrality of both personal and social networks to the functioning of the industry. The data suggests that writing is a highly 'shared' experience, such that the writers have formed a community and internal marketplace, by combining friends, friends of friends, family members, classmates, WhatsApp and Facebook. Academic Writing is deeply embedded in their 'offline' and 'online' lives. Most writers reported being introduced to writing through an existing personal network, and many 'micro-entrepreneurs' employ friends, family or colleagues. Further, some writers regularly use Facebook groups and pages to recruit employees, share advice, trade accounts and post work orders. As such, in Kenya, academic writing functions as a highly inter-connected network of knowledge sharing and support, which intricately weaves together their 'personal', 'professional' and 'digital' lives.

Leveraging Personal Networks.

Introductions.

According to the survey data, 77% of the current writers were introduced through a friend or relative, pointing to the importance of social connections and networks in relation to digital labour in Kenya (see figure 32). Even though the work is online, the connections are largely local and personal. Similarly, among former writers, about half (38), reported being introduced to academic writing through a friend or relative. Some of the popularity of friend-based introductions to academic writing can be traced to the prevalence of ‘scams’ on the internet, such that young people are reluctant to take jobs without a referral from someone they trust.

How were introduced to academic writing?

106 responses

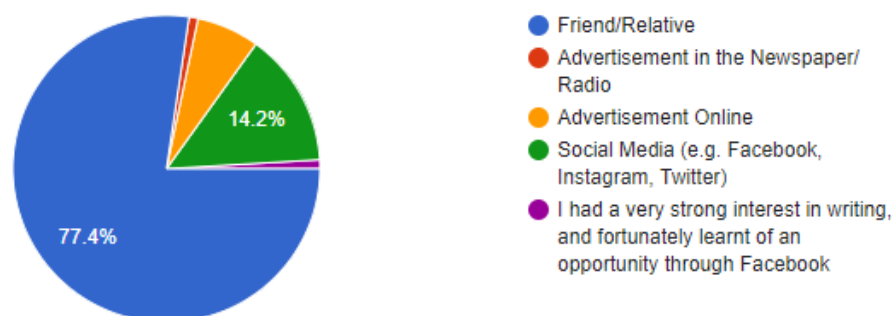


Figure 32. How writers were introduced to academic writing (entire survey)

In fact, Edwin, who recently completed a Bachelor’s in Education, contends that he had long had a passion for online work but was wary of their legitimacy until a friend introduced him to freelancer.com.

Moreover, Victor, now a part-time freelance graphic designer, has been introduced to writing through his mother, who was also a part-time writer. While he was in university,

Victor wrote for a few hours a week, but quit after he graduated because he did not enjoy writing, and much preferred graphic design. Similarly, Mercy was introduced to writing through her brother, who also trained her for a few months. Mercy has recently completed a Bachelor's in Business Administration, Finance and Accounting at a university in Nyerere. She is hoping to secure a job in Accounting within the NGO sector. My roommate, George, also spoke of having introduced two of cousins to academic writing- one of whom had written for two years before he got a job for the UN in Nairobi.

By far, the most common means through which writers got involved with academic writing was through friends. In fact, Edwin, David, Faith, Fredrick, Moses, and Sharon each spoke at length about hearing about writing through a friend on campus. Sharon recalls, "I have this friend from school, she's the one who introduced me to writing...she said you can make something extra... so she used to connect me to people who wanted to do it and some articles and all that. In most cases, like in Olive's case, that friend also trains them for a few weeks or months, helping them to overcome the initial challenges associated with writing. Moses notes how he was trained by friends and through online resources, "...my friends were doing it...so they trained me on it and I also got some online training and then I started writing from there."

Benard is a 4th year Telecommunications Engineering student, who is somewhat disillusioned with his choice of study. He worked as a part-time writer for about a year and a half but left because he 'didn't feel like it was for him'. Like many others, he heard about writing from a university classmate and friend. Benard explains how friends at university often 'influence' each other into writing and other part-time jobs:

In terms of how I've started writing...definitely influenced by friends, especially the ones who have been exposed to writing. So that's the beginning to writing...what they

could do is that they could form for you some networks, or maybe introduce you to someone who knows something so that you can be confident in your writing... What you mainly see is young people influencing other young people...from your peers, your friends because you're looking for extra income, so you ask a guy, 'how do you do it?', 'how do you get extra income?' 'For me, I bake', another person says, 'I write'. 'So how to get it, what sites do you use?'

Similarly, Faith started writing- partially out of boredom- as a friend in her 2nd year suggested that she start writing to help pass the time. She recalls:

I got into academic writing when I was on campus; a friend introduced me to it. So, while we were in 2nd year, we never had a lot of work to do, so most of the times we were just...after we finished classwork we had not much to do, so a friend of mine told me that he'd give me something to keep me busy. So, he introduced me to it, then I just got up from there.

Joan also shared an interesting story about how she got started on the advice of a friend, mainly to avoid going home over the long summer holidays. Instead, she spent the holiday living with several other writers and working for a 'micro-entrepreneur'. She describes the experience:

I heard of writing through a friend of a friend of a friend, friend of a friend. We heard people talking about writing and how it's good money for students, so we followed up. When one of our friends got into it, he brought us along when we went for holidays. He told us that this guy had a lot of extra work and [would] accommodate us, so he thought we'd check it out...So, we had gone for the long holiday, you know when you have to go for 3 or 4 months with nothing to do. My friends and I didn't want to go home so we came across a guy who was offering

accommodation, food, everything- your basic necessities. So, all you had to do...he had academic writing accounts, but he didn't have...he can't do the work himself...so he offered to train us and accommodate us for the long holiday, so we thought it was a good deal.

As such, in a very real sense, friendship is the cornerstone of academic writing in Kenya, and may help to explain its popularity among youth in university. Furthermore, Joan advises that interested students often approach her after finding out that she writes. Academic writing spreads mainly from word of mouth connections. Joan explains:

It will always come up in a conversation, and even people that don't do it, if they hear that you're doing it, they've definitely heard that it's lucrative, so they'll want you to tell them cause they don't understand what it is. You tell them most of the time they won't pick it up immediately, but down the line they'll come tell you, "I have a friend who wants to get writing, can you tell them how to get started?", or, they decide they want to buy an account and they don't know anything about it- they just want to invest. So, you'll have people coming back to you... Therefore, the personal connections also work in the other direction, where potential writers actively seek out current writers to help them get started.

Work and Knowledge Sharing.

In addition to family and friend introductions, young writers often train and employ those personal connections on a casual basis. Many of the micro-entrepreneurial working arrangements comprise friends and colleagues who are sent assignments on a casual and/or ad-hoc basis. For example, Fredrick notes how after being introduced by a friend, he worked for him for a few months, then starting writing for several other writers, before branching out

on his own as a freelancer. Edwin also recalls that he would often ‘co-operate’ with the friend who introduced him to writing, and the two would share orders when the other was ‘jobless’.

Edwin notes:

I was introduced to writing by a friend from college. This guy introduced me to freelancer.com, we used to cooperate with him so at times when we used to be jobless. When he used to have no project, I would help him out with a project and at times when I had no project, he used to assist me, work on my projects.

Similarly, Mercy initially worked for a university colleague who had introduced her to writing, noting that she was able to capitalize on the ‘better connections’ he had formed during several years of writing. Meanwhile, Faith recalls a similar experience, noting, “I worked for him [my friend] while he was teaching me, but after that after I learnt more or less, more skills, I started my own.” Thus, the common pattern appears to be that a writer introduces another friend to writing, trains him or her for a few weeks, then employs them, then that person may in turn start the cycle over again with another friend. And so, writer by writer the network expands.

Help & Advice from friends and family.

Another important element within the networks of academic writing is the knowledge and information sharing which occurs between writers. Many writers turn to family, friends and other writers for help with assignments, to gain advice when they are stuck and for general and specific tips related to writing. For Victor, writing is a family affair; his mother edits and proofreads his assignments, and vice-versa. Victor’s uncle also helps them both from time to time. Further, Faith notes how she often ‘consults’ her friends if she is having

difficulty with the demands of an order. Interestingly, Faith sometimes solicits help from her lecturers. She explains:

If I get an order and I can't work on it, mostly I consult my friends who do freelancing also, who can assist. But then if I am stuck completely, I can as well Google search, or consult even my campus lecturers for assistance. Cause you see I can't let \$10 to go for waste, and I can consult.

Like Faith, Fredrick spoke at length about his interactions with other writers and how they've helped with his writing, particularly in introducing him to Grammarly, an editing and proofreading website. He also highlighted the value of getting to know 'other people's approaches' to writing, in order to improve on his own. Fredrick explains:

I have to engage other writers so that I gain all of the knowledge in the field of writing. You know, some people have different ways of approaching things in the writing field and so I have to engage other things, so they can teach me maybe how to use...you see like before I didn't know how to use Grammarly, so I had to ask someone to come and teach me how to use Grammarly...

Mary concurs, noting that brief 'consultations' are quite common within the writing fraternity, "... sometimes a client can give you maybe a hard question or something that is difficult. You're not sure how to tackle, so most of the times you consult with them, you ask them if they've ever come across such a question, how it is done, something like that..."

Moreover, Patrick details instances where other writers outsourced assignments to him when they were overwhelmed with orders, or reached out for help with topics that 'Google' did not adequately cover:

Other writers can approach you when they know you have a lot of work on your table and they know your capabilities. So, they'll hire you as a third party, so they can also trust your capabilities... When you have a lot on your table and you want to deliver to the clients on time, you can always look for assistance. Also, you can share on topics which you don't understand. There are writers in various professions, so you can get someone...you get a research paper on medicine and you are not a specialty in medicine.... Google might not do you any good because you don't understand what you are really writing about, so you outsource that work to someone in that profession...

Particularly in the second round of interviews, I was interested to know whether the writers' perceived this notion of 'community' among academic writers. Each of them agreed and illustrated with examples from their own experiences. Joan spoke at length about her engagements with other writers, specifically about sitting in coffee shops on Fridays with several other writers. She notes that since everyone is working online, they will often spontaneously ask questions and respond to queries from those present. She describes the typical Friday evening coffee shop scene:

In Kenya, we have come to identify the hotspots in a place like where I reside, my home residence. We have...where I can confidently say that 50% of the people that live here do academic writing... one of the people who used to write... he opened...it's a coffee place, copy place, they have food, they have biting so you find that you go there like on Friday evening, you go, and you just know everybody that is there doing online work. So, if you've ever had a query you can just go bring up a query. Everybody there is doing online work, you see people talking about the same thing. They are sharing tips...

Leveraging Social Networks.

Almost as important as the personal networks, are the professional networks which writers form primarily through Facebook and WhatsApp. One of the most notable characteristics of academic writing in the Kenyan context, is its social media presence. There are several websites, blogs, web pages, Facebook groups and pages dedicated to Academic and other Freelance Writing in Kenya. Social networks are used in much the same way as personal networks; to facilitate new introductions, to share work and orders, and to seek out advice on specific topics or about writing in general. From the online survey I conducted, about 14% or 15 of the current writers stated that they were introduced through social media, and another 7% or 7 writers were recruited through an online advertisement. Among past writers, 13 each were introduced an advertisement online and social media. Facebook groups had always been a common source of networking for several years; however, the popularity of WhatsApp had grown exponentially in the 18 months between the start of my field work and the follow-up interviews.

Joan spoke about her frequent use of both Facebook and WhatsApp groups; 2 of the former and 3 of the latter- which she uses to outsource assignments when she has “an urgent order and doesn’t have time to work on it”. In similar vein, Robert. advised that he often uses a group called ‘Academic Research Writers’, a closed group on Facebook, as well as a WhatsApp group entitled ‘Freelancers’. Robert. notes that the groups usually discuss ‘common issues that writers face’, such as ‘con-men’, ‘account sales’, and ‘some clarification on a certain question’.

WhatsApp.

For Markline, WhatsApp is best used for reaching out to potential clients- especially those who have not yet expressed an interest- to let them know that he is an academic writer. He explains this ‘marketing strategy’:

There are [WhatsApp] groups that are specifically for academic writing. Really if you want to get more clients or more persons who are interested, you can post in other areas, even if they are not for academic writing. You can just inform them you are doing academic writing, in case you have a question or anything...

Similarly, Faith contends that social media, and particularly WhatsApp, makes it easier to get clients and employees:

You see when you open a WhatsApp group or Facebook or Instagram, those social media sites, it’s easier for you to get those...you might be having interested persons who never knew about it, who are ready to learn and then they can assist you. You know it’s better to teach someone. He or she can assist you then later on they can help themselves, so they can be earning, so you might find someone who is interested, and he comes from a humble background so he or she can start earning from it...

Moreover, Benard often receives texts from WhatsApp groups. He advises that many people ‘advertise’ their work through WhatsApp, and often get follow-up orders as a result. He further explains:

If someone who has a large base of clientele...they ask for workers for writers, so they tell you you’re interested in writing, contact me. Then you contact them, and they give you jobs individually.

Furthermore, Moses detailed his participation in a WhatsApp group of writer-friends who usually choose writing jobs posted in the group, according their 'abilities'. Meanwhile, Fredrick noted that he often uses WhatsApp to upload essays and writing materials as a 'backup' when he has connectivity issues on his laptop.

Facebook.

Facebook has been instrumental in facilitating exchanges among academic writers. Having analysed data from three public groups and pages: Kenya Academic Writers Forum (later changed to Freelancers Marketing Domain); Freelance Academic Writing Jobs in Kenya, and The Standard for Academic and Article Accounts), it was clear that Facebook was being used by writers to trade writing accounts; trade Grammarly, Turnitin, Course Hero and other 'writing aide' accounts; advertise individual orders; advertise vacancies; gain and give advice; warn about 'scammers', and generally serve as a central meeting or market place for writers based in Kenya. Notably, however, among the writers who were interviewed, feelings about Facebook for academic writing were quite mixed, with some writers expressing serious concerns about its security. Nonetheless, several of them found it to be a useful tool in getting work and learning the 'tricks' of the trade.

Trading Accounts.

The most common way in which Facebook is used is to facilitate the buying and selling of freelance writing accounts on websites such as: Writerbay, Writerdom, Writerlabs, Uvocorp, Essayshark and Edusson. For example, the Facebook group and page posts below illustrate the variety of accounts which are regularly traded. Notably, the seller specifies the status of the account, whether 'new', 'original', 'junior', 'freshman', or 'slightly used'. Other

accounts also referred to the accounts as ‘clean’, implying that they have never been reported or warned for plagiarism or low-quality issues. For example, the post below features accounts for ‘quick sale’ from 6 different writers’ websites. Meanwhile, the author in the second post is both buying and selling accounts from several websites, with specifications on the type of account being sought or sold. The posts read:

Best Accounts on Quick sale

Call for prompt response

- ✓ WritersHub Junior freshly graduated
- ✓ Writedom regular (origi)
Writedom probation (origi)
- ✓ New Quality writers
- ✓ New Writerweb
- 4writers College and University level
- ✓ Acemyhomework level 2⁴¹

Accounts!!!!Best Sales!!!

- # Simpletense acc
- # writershub probation
- # Writershub junior newly promoted
- # Writedom probation /regular orig
- # Uvocorp group graduated 51%
- # Tsm group 2 takes
- # Writerslabs freshman
- # Brandnew quality writers
- # Iwriter premium rated 4.3

Needed;

- New studypool
- New/slightly used Studybay
- New/slightly used Edusson
- Writerlabs female profile⁴²

Similarly, Markline, who has been writing for about 3 years, explained that although he does not use Facebook to get jobs, due to the risk of scamming, he regularly used the groups when he first started writing, primarily to get feedback and help with references. He

⁴¹ All About Academic Writing

⁴² All About Academic Writing

contends that ‘writing is not that easy’ so that now he is happy to “help those brothers and sisters who are just starting writing to tell them the rules of the game”. Overall, Markline was perhaps the most optimistic about Facebook, commenting that it is ‘a great tool for writers’.

He argues:

For this I can say Facebook has been a very great tool for writers. I think one of the most active groups for Facebook, I think it’s called Academic Research Writers for Kenyans, that is where I even got my first job. My first employer for that time, I think around 3 years ago. But from that time up until today it’s been a very great channel that we can be able to trade accounts, can be able to ask for help, we can even look for other jobs because sometimes those who are actually owning the account, they can actually be able to get a lot of jobs, but they have a limited number of writers so they come to those Facebook groups... Facebook has been a very great tool for us.

Work Orders.

Another important use for Facebook is the posting of specific work-assignment orders, or to advertise for employees. More rarely, potential writers looking for work will also signal their availability. In the example below, headlined, ‘Writers Needed for Several Similar Tasks’, the person posting specifies the type of work order, the level of English Language proficiency required, the price, and deadline for submission. Interestingly, he notes that the essays must be accompanied by Grammarly and Turnitin reports.

WRITERS NEEDED FOR SEVERAL SIMILAR TASKS
=====

Work Type: Descriptive essay

Word Count: 400 Words

Language Proficiency: Near Native/Expert Level

Cost Per 400 Words: \$4 (Ksh. 400/=)

Terms of Payment: Pay on Delivery

DEADLINE: 9 AM (In 2 Hours)

N/B: Every Submission MUST Be Accompanied By A Grammarly and Turnitin Report

DISCLAIMER: Poor Work WON'T BE PAID!!!

Call Only 0704 455 599⁴³

Similarly, the post below ‘urgently’ requests ‘serious’ part-time Kenyan writers based in Nairobi, while another is looking for academic writers from ‘all disciplines’, boasting that it is an ‘academic service solution’ serving students for over 2 years:

URGENTLY looking for serious individuals located in Nairobi to work our business part time and earn Ksh 20,000-45,000 weekly

Qualifications

MUST be 23years and above

MUST be a Kenyan

MUST be within Nairobi.

SEND your full names and current location to

0720152108 via WhatsApp/text. Start with word job⁴⁴

Dear Academic Writers and Professionals,

We are academic service solution provide serving the students community for last 2 years.

⁴³ All About Academic Writing

⁴⁴ All About Academic Writing

Currently we need some technical experts for engineering as well as programming jobs. We are also looking for academic writers of different disciplines.

Recruiting for this session is going on and if you are eligible please apply.

Details:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3idTuGtPylHcEVzZWZyTGxYUnM/view?pli=1>⁴⁵

Moreover, the person writing in the post below notes that he has over 20 pages of assignments to be completed by writers who come ‘highly recommended’ by a reputable person. The post reads:

I need a tried and trusted POA writer just for today. I have over 20 pages worth of assignments that need completed fast, while observing quality. Paying 300 a page.

You must come highly recommended by someone reputable. Only contact me if you meet the above criteria. 0723769617⁴⁶

Olive, one of the writers whom I interviewed, notes that she specifically uses Academia Research Writers, a page on Facebook where ‘you can get an employer or an employee or anything just related to online’. Through this page, she met one of the contacts from whom she regularly gets work assignments, which she uses to supplement her freelance orders. Olive also mentioned that from her perspective, Facebook is useful as she is able “to learn more things about the industry and things that I should do and things that I shouldn’t do”. She also uses the group to advertise jobs for new writers when she is looking to recruit. In similar vein, Patrick got started with writing through a Facebook advertisement he saw while he was still a student.

⁴⁵ All About Academic Writing

⁴⁶ All About Academic Writing

Tips and Advice.

Facebook groups are also regularly used to solicit general advice and tips related to various aspects of academic writing. For example, Fredrick uses Facebook groups to “communicate with other writers and see what are the best sites that people like to open accounts with, and things like that”. Additionally, Mary occasionally uses Facebook groups when she is having difficulty with a specific assignment. She recalls having to reach out to other writers about a graphic design project:

I sometimes do [use Facebook], cause there is this one particular time a client sent me a question- something to do with graphic design cause I was not able to do that. And my friends didn't have any idea how to do that, so I had to go to Facebook, look for the graphic design writers so that I can at least be able to assist these clients...

Further, in the two posts below, prospective writers have expressed their interests in academic writing, and in owning an account, and are directly soliciting help from the writers in the group:

Hi all,

Am Jay Thuci. I have interest in academic writing but don't have anyone to guide me.

Anyone here who can help me please?

Asap

Another post reads:

Hi, i am interested in an academic account known as Writer's Lab...how is it, are their rates good, how are the returns and the status of job availability? please help with information. Thanks in advance⁴⁷

⁴⁷ All About Academic Writing

As such, these examples illustrate that Facebook groups may be viewed as an extension of the personal networks which writers regularly employ to help ensure their success within the industry.

Concerns About Social Media.

Despite these benefits, several of the writers expressed serious concerns about the privacy and security risks of using Facebook and WhatsApp for academic writing. With regard to Facebook, the main reservations surrounded the possibility of ‘scams’ and ‘spam’. Victor notes that he never used Facebook to search for jobs because of ‘personal reasons’, explaining that, “I felt like it would be a rip off that’s why I never really did search for jobs or sought out help through Facebook because it...it’s much more of trust, if you don’t feel comfortable you can’t do it”. Edwin recalls his experience of suffering two scams by the same individual whom he met through Facebook. He contends that he completed two assignments, without being paid, and each time his ‘employer’ disappeared. He recalls the experience:

Yes, I used it [Facebook] but I had one of the worst experiences on it. The thing that happened is, I got scammed. Somebody was coming from the Eastern part of Kenya, so this guy, he told me that he got a lot of projects and he’d wish to send with me the projects and then by the end of the week he sends me some money. So, I used to work for this guy and maybe the 5th day of the week or the 6th day of the week, this guy could just go missing that way....so I didn’t really have the best experiences sharing writing via Facebook...I met him through a Facebook group. I worked for him for 2 weeks, so the first week the guy got lost on the 5th day and the second week on the 6th day, so I just decided to give up cause I was seeing no future in working with him.

Similarly, Patrick and Benard both mentioned the excessive and random ‘marketing’ which some writers do on Facebook groups, which caused them to stay away. Olive was similarly sceptical of using Facebook for getting jobs because of the security issues. She contends, “I personally don’t use Facebook a lot to get jobs, but I interact with writers from Facebook and from them I get... but most of the time I try not to connect with them because there’s a lot of con men on that page so some of them are not genuine”.

Somewhat ironically, Facebook groups also feature warnings about scammers and con men who are posting within the groups. For example, the post below titled, ‘Crime Alert!’ claims to provide a system through which writers can report cons. Further, the second post lists an alleged ‘scammer’ by name and warns writers to remain vigilant:

CRIME ALERT!!!! CRIME ALERT!!!!

We have received reports that cons have thrived in the Kenyan academic writing industry for years. This is the time to take them down. If you have ever been conned even a penny kindly make a formal report through the email cbrimeoffice@gmail.com. Investigation, subsequent arrest and the process of prosecution will be initiated once you have been contacted for clarification and you have booked in the Occurrence Book and received an O. B number.⁴⁸

JASON MUIRUI- 0707376188 -- This is a corn man. He has corned me a lot of cash pretending that he can help restore my PayPal account. He says That a lady by the name Monica is his friend who works with the PayPal company and can help resolve issues related to PayPal. with a lot of confidence, I advice you to keep off this man. I

⁴⁸All About Academic Writing

have acquired all the information about him, and I have it at hand. necessary action follows. JOSON MUIRUI I cant shade tears because of you. God will reward you accordingly.

JOSON MUIRUI IS A THIEF!!!!!!

Concerning WhatsApp, common reservations related to the intimate and private nature of WhatsApp, such that some writers felt it was too ‘personal’ for academic writing. Markline explains, “...the problem with WhatsApp is that someone can be able to get your phone number so that introduces some elements of privacy”. Olive expressed similar sentiments about WhatsApp, noting that she mainly used it for friends and family (some of which are also writers), “I understand there’s a lot of people who use WhatsApp, but personally I don’t use it.” Sharon concurred, also noting that WhatsApp groups often ‘go off topic’ and end up being filled with ‘spam’. She laments, “...the people I have on my WhatsApp, I know them personally, they are my friends. When you are trying to start a group, you know, other people bring people, they advertise their own things...I don’t feel like there’s coordination...”

Writing in the Wider Digital Economy

When I arrived in Nairobi for fieldwork, one of the first observations which George, my housemate, made was that academic writing was just one of the many digital jobs available to young Kenyans. George informed me that the landscape of digital work extended far beyond academic writing, as many people worked both as academic writers, and as content/article writers; writing blog articles, reviews, tweets, Facebook posts, for clients, usually through a website. George also explained that there were several other digital jobs,

outside of writing, including; graphic design, translation, and virtual assistant- essentially any skill which could be transmitted digitally- for which young Kenyans were employed. Other writers in the study hinted at a similar conceptualization of academic writing, particularly in the ways in which they regularly reference academic writing alongside other digital ‘gigs’. It is often subsumed into the wider landscape of digital labour, where all ‘gig’ services are accessed. As such, some of the ethical questions associated with writing are (partially) overlooked because it is viewed from the lens of the digital economy.

Popular Websites.

Among the survey participants, Essaywriters.com was the most popular website with 87 writers reporting having used it. Moreover, 65 of the writers had used writerbay.com, 49 used UVOcorp.com, and 20 had used the well-known freelance websites; Freelancer.com, Upwork.com. Some of the writers also listed other websites, such as; writerdom.com, writers.ph, fiverr.com, customwriters.com, 7upwork.com, bluecorp.com, iwriter.com, homeworkmarket.com. studybay.com, and studypool.com (see figure 33).

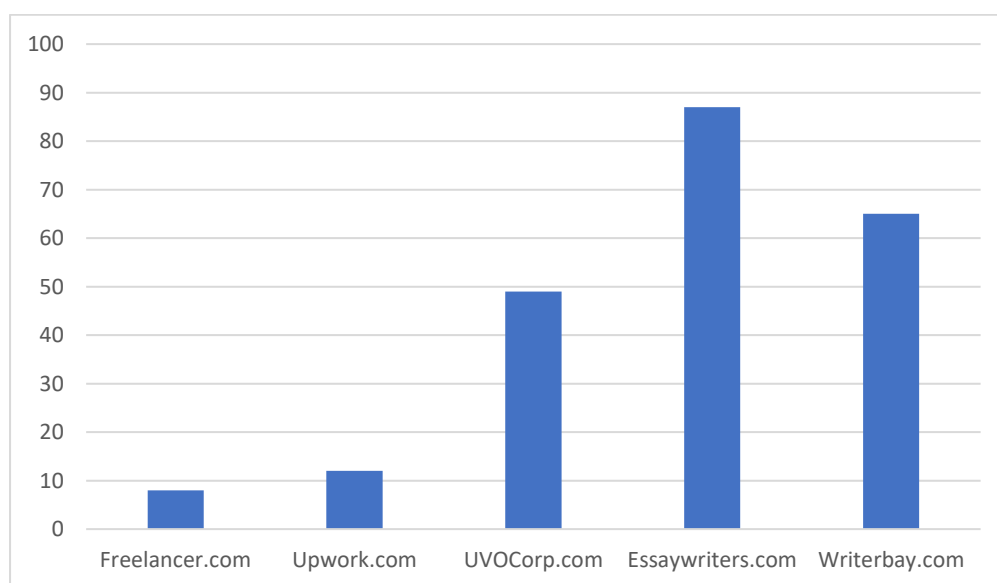


Figure 33. The most popular websites used by academic writers

In the online survey, just over 60% of the total respondents had worked online or were currently working online. The respondents were then asked to state the types of digital work they had done (see figure 34). About 41% (151) of them had done academic writing, about 31% (115) had done article writing, another 5% (17) had done Web Design, 4 % (14) had done Graphic Design, and about 6% (21) respondents had done graphic design online. Among the jobs listed in ‘Other’ were; World Literature, Data Entry, Sales, Social Media Presence, Research, Branding, Marketing, Net Services, Survey Completion, Blogging, Programming, Illustration, and Sound Transcription. Moreover, a little more than 20% of the current writers had another job beside academic writing, these included; Programming, Entrepreneur, Data Analyst, Banker, Chairman of a NGO, Photographer, Insurance Salesman, Accountant, Digital Marketing, Poultry Farmer, Computer Technician, and Computer repairman. Similarly, about 30% of the former writers (19) had another job, which included; ‘Animal specialist’, Office assistant, research, digital marketing, teaching, M&E officer, artist, web design, news correspondent, software engineer, radio presenter, IT support and farmer.

If yes, what kind of work have you done? (Tick all that apply) (370 responses)

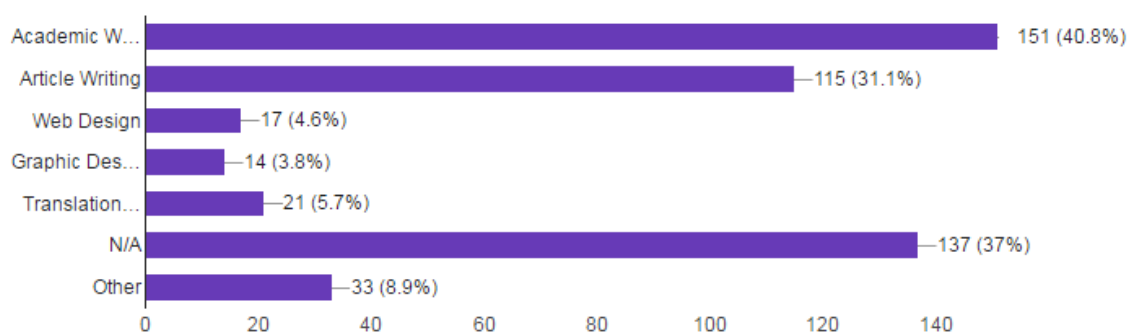


Figure 34. The types of online work in which writers engaged

Among the interviewees, similar patterns emerge. Of the 27 writers, 15 had engaged in another form of digital work; 9 as content writers; 2 had done data entry; 4 had done translation or transcription services; 3 worked as researchers; 2 as web or graphic designers, and 2 as traffic creators. Some of the writers had worked in multiple forms of online work, often simultaneously. For example, Victor worked as a graphic designer, illustrator and academic writer during his final years in university. Victor was one of the younger participants in the study at 20 years old. Victor is a second-year student at Zetech University, a private university in Nairobi, studying project management. His studies are funded by his parents; his mother a retired air hostess and his father, a retired army officer. Interestingly, Victor was introduced to writing through his mother who also writes part-time. He recalls, “my mum told me about it and saw it as a way I could make some pocket money”. In addition to writing, he also does graphics and illustrations online. At the time of the interview, Victor had been writing for 5 months and doing graphics for a little more than 2 months. When I asked how the two compared, Victor said that he felt graphics was a better deal overall because, “it’s far easier and is paying well for sure”. He continued:

Writing can earn you like between 10\$-50\$ per topic. That is depending on the client and subject...Illustration however can earn you between 100\$-1000\$ depending on the project...Those are mostly story book illustrations....and that can take about a 1-2 weeks...This is depending on the artist's skills and availability.

Mark is another good example of the varieties of online work among academic writers. For example, he has also worked online as an article writer, sports writer, and translator. At present, he works full-time for a British development organization in Nairobi,

mainly focusing on their digital campaigns. He does not do much academic writing anymore, but has switched focus to ‘solutions journalism’, also online. He explains his role:

Yeah, so, I create content for them on their website. I run the social media sites, do interviews for them. And also, yeah photography as well...I try and do much more solutions journalism right now. It’s a new thing I’m trying so I stopped doing most of the academic writing for a bit, but I still do the sports writing once in a while but it’s a personal project, but I don’t focus much on academic writing.

Similarly, Sharon does academic writing, article writing, and translation. She also often creates advertisements, marketing products, and insurance materials. Sharon stressed the fact that she loved writing, and therefore took any opportunity to engage in various types and modes of writing.

Likewise, Ken M. is an academic and article writer. At the time of the first interview, Ken had just started article writing in order to “compliment academic writing especially on off peak seasons”. Further, he has cemented his career in the digital world, by opening a cybercafé in his neighbourhood. He plans to expand the business which has been in operation for about a year and will continue with writing because he finds it “more fulfilling than most of the jobs in the country.” Similarly, Olive does both article and academic writing, having started with the former. Nevertheless, Olive prefers academic writing because, despite its complexities and demands, academic writing is more lucrative. Moreover, Mercy, who is also a final year Commerce student, had switched from article to academic writing because of the difference in pay. She also concurs that academic writing is more difficult but advises that “once you get the hang of it, it becomes easier”. Meanwhile, Edwin reported that he prefers article writing to academic writing, mainly because the former requires less time and effort. In his words:

In article writing, we used to work on the basis of what comes... so for example, somebody gives you some project on what you can do for them...article writing was kind of saving a lot of time cause it used to take me less than an hour or 1 hour 30 minutes to type a 500 word article, that's why I liked it more than academic writing... Academic writing is kinda involving in terms of referencing and such like stuff.

Anne, a final year Commerce student, does both academic writing and website traffic creation online. She explains the traffic creation process:

OK to create traffic for example a company selling sanitary towels, let us use this company in Japan or is it China called Hongsway you just have to have there links and send it to any social network, if someone likes it, he or she could like and that is how you get your commission

Patrick, a Peace Studies graduate, engages in academic writing, data entry and sound transcription work. He has a particular interest in research, data entry and data analysis.

Patrick explains:

I find it helps because nowadays you can do a specific writing according to your kind of profession...there are sites that are offering jobs just for researchers, data entry and such things...and then you can find sites that are purely academic and you can write on a variety of subjects...as you get older, as you mature in academic writing you find that you are more interested in sites which develop you career wise that you even report in a CV or in applying for work...So nowadays I find that most people divulge into specific areas that are suited to their profession so in a way writing means that you are writing offsite, you are able to deliver in a way to your profession without being employed by a certain company.

Patrick learned data entry as part of his degree in Peace studies, which was a part of a research unit, hence his affinity for research and data. Like Ken M., he plans to start a cyber business in his hometown. David also does data entry on elancer, to complement his academic writing. Similarly, Brian works as an academic writer, article writer, web designer and translator. Emmanuel promotes motivational e-books, in addition to his academic writing.

As such, in the Kenyan context, academic writing clearly forms a significant, but singular part of a wide array of online services which young Kenyans provide. Therefore, writing may be viewed as one component of the broader digital employment landscape (graphics, translation, article writing, presentations, website development) in Kenya, and the entire ‘gig economy’, more broadly. Overall, university-educated youth are well integrated into the global ‘gig’ economy, engaging in digital work across the spectrum of opportunities. The popularity of digital work is reflected- not only in the media- but more importantly, in the government’s recent attempts to influence digital work policy through the Ajira Digital Platform, one which provides training and advice to Kenyan youth, under the slogan of ‘online work is work’

Ajira Digital

In November 2016, the Kenyan Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology launched the Ajira Digital Initiative. Initially, Ajira was conceptualized as an attempt to capitalize on Kenyan youth’s interest in the digital economy by acting as a middle-man between workers and opportunities. As such, the government intended to charge a 5% tax on each transaction and aimed to employ 1 million youth. However, after popular outcry and low interest, the Ministry’s strategy changed to one of information and training for young

Kenyans. To that end, the government opened digital training hubs across the country and ran several free workshops and seminars, as well as Ajira clubs at the University of Nairobi and Kisii University.

According to the official website, Ajira “seeks to position Kenya as a choice labour destination for multinational companies as well as encourage local companies and the public sector to create digital work. Thus, Ajira is both a global, outward facing and a local, inward generation programme. Furthermore, Ajira aims to “raise the profile of digital work; promote a mentorship and collaborative learning approach to finding digital work; provide Kenyans with access to digital work, and finally, promote Kenya as a destination for online workers.” Under the slogans ‘online work is work’, and ‘the future works online’, the Ajira platform positions itself as a portal to enhancing the country’s middle class and ‘building wealth’. Ajira recommends, among many others, Freelancer, Upwork, Iwriter, 99 Designs, as well as local websites, such as; Niko job, Tuko Works, and KuHustle.

Interestingly, the platform is also cognizant of the global infrastructure which supports digital work, noting that most online work is ‘created by companies based in the largest economies of the world...but most of the work is completed by people living in developing countries. Upwork’s (formerly E-lance O-desk) 2014’s Annual Impact report showed that the top client countries were primarily from developed countries in the ‘North’, with U.S., Australia, and the U.K. as the top spenders. However, there were notable exceptions in the top 10, such as; UAE (#5), Israel (#9), and Singapore (#10). By contrast, most of the top 10 countries by spending were those from the ‘Global South’, including; India (#1), Philippines (#3), Pakistan (#5), Bangladesh (#7), and China (#10). However, ‘Northern’ countries also feature in the list, for example the US features at #2, Canada at #8 and the UK at #10. Therefore, although some traditional patterns of core and periphery still exists, there is evidence of a more nuanced and dynamic exchange.

In a formal interview, Vincent Wangombe, senior program officer and advisor for the Ministry of ICT in Kenya notes that Ajira was created as part of a strategy to address Kenya's high youth unemployment problem. Wangombe delineates Ajira's aims as awareness, infrastructure, and training. He contends that the initiative was driven by concerns for job creation for young people. Serendipitously, he "came across Kenyans working online" and decided to get involved in order to 'assist' youth. He therefore met with freelancers to discuss their experiences and challenges, specifically regarding connectivity and payment. Wangombe outlined the governments since-realized plans to create 1 million jobs using constituency innovation hubs, free internet connectivity and training in every community.

Wangombe stresses the importance of training to the success of Ajira, as he opines, "youth fall by the wayside because they don't understand the process". As such, initially no jobs were posted on Ajira due to the risk of scams and fraudulent job offers. Thus, he explains the main component of Ajira's curriculum will emphasize soft skills and training in the demands of digital work. Training is set to be conducted by the Kenyan Private sector alliance through funding by the Rockefeller foundation. Regarding the resistance by freelancers in popular media, Wangombe warned that it was caused by suspicion about the government, misunderstanding of Ajira's purpose, and misreporting in the media. He contended that Ajira would not be offering jobs, and so, would not be competing with current freelancers.

Hustle at the Crossroads: Situating the White-Collar Hustle at the Intersection of Informal and Digital Economies

Academic Writing in Kenya is particularly intriguing as it raises important questions about two major 'economies'; the informal economy and the digital economy. The hustle

framework allows for an analysis of academic writing through this dual lens, and further allows us to link these two, usually separately discussed economies. However, the study makes an argument for the digital economy to be understood as a modern, globalized extension of the informal economy. Academic writing and other types of digital work, especially when used in place of formal employment, give young people in the global South a platform by which they can by-pass government restrictions and earn an income to meet their financial needs. However, it differs from locally-bound informal economies in its global integrations and transnational boundaries. Nonetheless, much like the ‘traditional’ informal economy, payment and work conditions are marked by informality and precarity. Hustling has therefore moved from the streets, into the laptops and computers of Kenyan youth. This thesis contends the digital economy in its current configuration, represents a 21st century, global manifestation of previously localized informal economies. Thus, in the Kenyan context, it must be viewed within the country’s historic socio-economic make-up, where informality largely defined its economic activity.

By-Passing Government.

A key component of the informal economy is that it by-passes government controls and regulations. Currently, this is also one of the defining features of the digital economy. This has led Wood, Lehdonvirta & Graham (2018) and others to lobby for increased regulations, primarily to increase worker rights, pay and work conditions. However, this lack of formal regulation is exactly what makes the digital economy a transnational informal economy. Through the digital economy and via academic writing, Kenyan youth have become involved in a digitalized form of informality which has permeated the economic patterns of their countrymen since the 1960s. By-passing government controls may be rightly

interpreted as an example of agency; however, more poignantly, it is often an unavoidable necessity. In contexts where the formal economy cannot accommodate most available workers, extra-formal economic avenues become the only option for money making. For example, Gidwe (2014) notes that Zimbabwe's 'zig-zag' or 'kukiya-kiya' economy has expanded from the margins into the mainstream, as their economic crisis worsened. Bypassing the state-run economy is therefore a typical characteristic of post-independence African societies. It is on this point that we encounter the delicate balance of ascribing agency and recognising necessity in our analysis of educated-youth unemployment in Kenya.

Personal Connections.

Moreover, one of the main ways in which the writers have been able to survive without the government's control or support, has been through the use of personal connections and networks. These networks serve to 'self-regulate' the processes associated with academic writing. There are also the primary means by which writers are introduced to the industry, by which they are trained in the methods, and where they find employers and employees. The networks also serve a security function by helping to reduce the number of scams (since most of one's colleagues are friends, friends of friends, or family). Within the extended networks on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, the connections further alert writers of external scammers and fraudulent accounts. Personal networking is at the heart of academic writing in Kenya and helps to further explain its increasing popularity and continued growth among youth in the country. Much like physically-bound informal economies, academic writing thrives on the off-line relationships, such that the people-rather than the state- contribute to its overall functioning, regulation and growth. In that sense, academic writing is as much off-line as it is online. It is the marriage of

the two, and the subsequent marriage of informality across digital lines, that makes the white-collar hustle particularly intriguing.

The Digital Economy as an Enabler

Undeniably, the emergence of ICT technology enables young people to access work across previously locally-bound geographic boundaries. This has often been heralded as one of the key advantages of the digital economy (Mill 2011, Horton 2010). On the other hand, others (Graham) have criticized this view for being overly naïve and optimistic about the advantages of the digital economy, by overlooking issues surrounding compensation and work conditions. This thesis argues for a nuanced reading of the digital economy, one which acknowledges both sides of the debate. Specifically, the findings of this study suggest that the digital economy has increased the quantity of work for those in the Kenya and Africa but has not increased (and may have decreased) the quality of work. This distinction is important in weighing the advantages and disadvantages of online labour. While it is true that Kenyan youth have access to work opportunities which would not have been available outside of the internet, this is only one half of the picture. The full picture demonstrates that much of the disadvantages of the informal economy are replicated in the digital form. As such, the hustle has not been eliminated, it has simply been digitized. By combining the informal economy and the digital economy, the white-collar hustle transfers the informality of secondary economies into the digitization of online work systems. This ‘old’ meets ‘new’, ‘physical’ meets ‘digital’, ‘local’ meets ‘global’ integration poses interesting implications not only within the digital economy, but also within the global higher education system which it most directly impacts.

Thus, academic writing is clearly a manifestation of work and labour, greatly influenced by the global and locally-Kenyan trends of the 21st century. Uniformly informal, academic writing is nonetheless organized around certain payment processes and work arrangements. Academic writing is best interpreted as a digital re-imagination of ‘hustle’. Although the writers are university educated and working online in their homes or offices, the ‘hustle’ is real. Working conditions are precarious, there are no contracts or benefits for their work, and payment is not guaranteed. As such, there are white collar hustlers- adapting to the hustle phenomenon which characterizes young people in Kenya. Nonetheless, this hustle is especially significant because it shows ingenuity on the part of the writers in that they have been able to take the government’s ICT and entrepreneurship for youth employment policies into their own fingertips through their personal networks and entrepreneurial spirit.

For some, academic writing is a temporary livelihood strategy (Thieme 2013); a stepping stone (McCowan et.al 2017) for formal employment. For others, it is a deliberate component of a long-term career strategy. For others still, it represents something in-between. However, in all cases, academic writing is a highly precarious, uncertain and time-sensitive form of work; there are no contracts or benefits for their work, and payment is not guaranteed. It is, above all else, a hustle. But, critically, as the writers utilize intellectual skills in a digitally-mediated environment, it is better conceptualized as a white-collar re-imagination of the hustle. It is, then, a ‘white-collar hustle’.

Chapter Five

Shadow Academies: The Processes and Production of Academic Writing

Writing & Research Processes in Academic Writing

This chapter seeks to address a gap in contract cheating research, by investigating the processes and procedures involved in producing essays and assignments for academic writing. It analyses the ‘quality measures’ which currently exists among writers, companies, and web platforms to improve the ‘pass-ability’ of the assignments. The chapter also examines the writing and research practices of Kenyan academic writers, as well as the extent to which writing offers ‘capital’ in the form of academic and professional skills development. In so doing, the chapter challenges the perception of the academic writing industry solely as a collection of low-quality, plagiarised content which is devoid of professional currency for the thousands of young Kenyan writers who are employed through the industry.

The Writing Process

The end goal of academic writing is always the same; to produce a well-written assignment in a fixed time which satisfies the instructors’ requirements, pleases the client, and is devoid of plagiarism. Although the individual processes of each academic writer vary based on the writers’ strengths, weaknesses and demands, a few common steps can be observed. Typically, writers receive the assignment either directly from the client or their boss, they then carefully review the instructions, conduct research using Google sources, write the paper, and finally, return the finished product either to the client, or to their boss. As such, the common process is not unlike the typical writing process of an undergraduate

student. This is hardly surprising since most academic writers are currently undergraduate students or recently graduated. In many cases they are simply transferring skills and processes employed for their own studies, which pay help to explain their relative success. However, a key difference is the time limit for assignments, which ranges from a few hours to a few weeks. Another important and obvious difference is that the writer has not attended any of the classes and is not privy to the intricate expectations of the assignments (although sometimes the client will advise on specifications).

During my second formal interview with Joseph, I closely observed his 'writing process'. This 'ball by ball' coverage gave me a bird's eye view into academic writing as a process, as I was able to ask questions and make comments along the way. As soon as he agreed, Joseph remarked that this would slow the process considerably, and in some ways change his process. Nevertheless, I felt it would give the most in-depth and robust insight into his writing as I could possibly gain. It was considerably difficult to get through the interview as it took place late in the night and into the early morning. Besides Joseph's natural preference for working at night, there was also a very practical reason for the late-night working sessions. Owing to the time difference, most of the jobs from European and North American clients came in later in the day, usually to be completed in the night or early morning Kenyan time. Staying up late to observe Joseph meant having to endure cigarette smoke, and loud music which seemed to help him concentrate, but had the opposite effect on me. I struggled to stay awake and to concentrate especially during the final interview with Joseph, which went from 9pm to 1am on a Friday night. The set up proved difficult for him as well.

While Joseph was writing the paper, he used several aides (see figures 35, 36) to help with its completion. Some of the aides were given by the client himself; for example, the guide from the lecturer with detailed questions for each section of the paper. However, some

of them were his own- aides which he had collected over the months he had been writing. These included; a worldwide web thesaurus, and various articles about writing literature reviews, completing research, and other related topics. During the interview, Joseph asked for my help with the assignment and I pointed him to Google Scholar, a resource which, to my surprise, he had never used.

CRITIQUING RESEARCH OUTLINE
A Guide to a Focused Critique of Evidence Quality in a Quantitative Study

The SHADED topics are to be covered in CRITIQUE 1; UNSHADED topics are to be covered in CRITIQUE 2

Aspect of the Report	Critiquing Questions	Detailed Critiquing Guidelines
A. Problem and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the problem statement clearly stated? • Was the purpose of the research clearly supported? • Was the relationship between the independent and dependent variables clearly stated? • Does the purpose of the research have significance for Nursing? • Did research meet the criteria of ethical consideration when conducting a research studies? 	
Method B. Research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the most rigorous possible design used, given the purpose of the research? • Were appropriate comparisons made to enhance interpretability of the findings? • Was the number of data collection points appropriate? • Did the design minimize biases and threats to the internal and external validity of the study (e.g., was blinding used, was attrition minimized)? • What kind of design was utilized? Be precise. 	Box 9.1, page 170

<p>C. Population and sample</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the population identified and described? Was the sample described in sufficient detail? Was the best possible sampling design used to enhance the sample's representativeness? Were sample biases minimized? Was the sample size adequate? Was a power analysis used to estimate sample size needs? 	<p>Box 10.1, page 183</p>
<p>D. Data collection and measurement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were key variables operationalized using the best possible method (e.g., interviews, observations, and so on)? Are the specific instruments adequately described and were they good choices, given the study purpose and study population? Does the report provide evidence that the data collection methods yielded data that were high on reliability and validity? 	<p>Box 10.2, pages 193–94 Box 11.1, page 209</p>
<p>E. Procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If there was an intervention, is it adequately described, and was it properly implemented? Did most participants allocated to the intervention group actually receive it? Was there evidence of intervention fidelity? Were data collected in a manner that minimized bias? Was the staff who collected data appropriately trained? 	<p>Box 9.1, page 170 Box 10.2, pages 193–94</p>
<p>Results F. Data analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were appropriate statistical methods used? 	<p>Box 12.1, page 243</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the most powerful analytic method used? (e.g., did the analysis control for confounding variables)? Was it clear whether or not the hypotheses were supported? 	
<p>G. Findings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was information about statistical significance presented? Was information about effect size and precision of estimates (probability statistics) presented? 	<p>Box 13.1, page 261</p>
<p>H. Summary assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite any limitations, do the study findings appear to be valid—do you have confidence in the <i>truth</i> value of the results? Does the study contribute any meaningful evidence that can be used in nursing practice or that is useful to the nursing discipline? 	

Part two – 3 pages – 3 references different from first part and one is the study (4 references all together)

Paragraph should be no less than 5 sentences!
Do not start sentence with 'This'!
Do not start sentence with number!

Figure 35. One of Joseph's writing aides

Each assignment Joseph receives comes with a detailed order form which outlines every aspect of the assignment, namely; ‘type of service’, ‘work type’, ‘deadline’, ‘academic level’, ‘subject’, ‘title’, ‘digital source used’, ‘number of pages’, ‘spacing’, ‘number of words’, ‘number of slides’, ‘number of charts’, and ‘comments from support team’. His boss is one of his classmates from med school who had been writing from form 4 and had recently acquired 3 writing accounts of his own. He was currently managing 10 other writers to service these accounts. For this assignment, Joseph was to critique a nursing paper entitled “Making the Right Decision for My Child with Cancer-The Parental Imperative”. According to the instructions, he was required to thoroughly read the paper, and give his critiques based on several guiding questions, particularly relating to the research problem, method, research design, sample, data collection and measurement, procedures, results, findings and summary assessment. The guide also gave stylistic and content-based instructions. Quite notably, Joseph did a quick scan of the eight-page article, one that lasted about 15 minutes, to which he remarked, “I barely read the entire thing”. He also consulted similar past papers that he had written to help with the new assignment.

Guidelines for Scholarly Research Critique: QUALITATIVE ARTICLE	
Title	Was the title a good one, suggesting the key phenomenon and the group or community under study?
Abstract	Does the abstract clearly and concisely summarize the main features of the report?
Introduction	Is the phenomenon of interest clearly identified? Is the problem stated unambiguously?
Literature Review	Does the report summarize the existing body of knowledge related to the problem or phenomenon of interest? Is the literature review adequate? Does the literature review lay a solid basis for the new study?
Research Questions	Are research questions explicitly stated? If not, is their absence justified?
Method Research design and research tradition	Is the identified research tradition (if any) congruent with the methods used to collect and analyze data?
Sample and setting	Was the group or population of interest adequately described? Were the setting and sample described in sufficient detail? Was the best possible method of sampling used to enhance information richness and address the needs of the study? Was the sample size adequate? Was saturation achieved?
Data collection and measure	Were the methods of gathering data appropriate? Were data gathered through two or more methods to achieve triangulation? Was a sufficient amount of data gathered? Was the data of sufficient depth and richness?
Procedures	Were data collection and recording procedures adequately described and do they appear appropriate? Were data collected in a manner that minimized bias or behavioral distortions? Were data collection staff appropriately trained? Were appropriate procedures used to safeguard the rights of study participants?
Enhancement of rigor	Did the researcher document research procedures and decision processes sufficiently that findings are auditable and confirmable?
Results Data Analysis	Were the data management (e.g., coding) and data analysis methods sufficiently described? Was the data analysis strategy compatible with the research tradition and with the nature and type of data gathered? Did the analysis yield an appropriate product (e.g., theory, taxonomy, thematic pattern, etc.)? Did the analytic procedure suggest the possibility of biases?
Findings	Were the findings effectively summarized, with good use of experts? Do the themes adequately capture the meaning of the data? Does it appear that the researcher satisfactorily conceptualized the themes or patterns in the data? Did the analysis yield an insightful, provocative, and meaningful picture of the phenomenon under investigation?
Theoretical Integration	Are the themes or patterns logically connected to each other to form a convincing and integrated whole? Were figures, maps, or models used effectively to summarize conceptualizations?
Discussion	Are the findings interpreted within an appropriate social or cultural context? Are major findings interpreted and discussed within the context of prior studies? Are the implications consistent with the study's limitations? Does the report address the issue of transferability of the findings?
Implications/Recommendations	Do the researchers discuss the implications of the study for clinical practice or future inquiry-and are those implications reasonable?
Global Issue	Was the report well-written, well-organized, and sufficiently detailed for critical analysis? Was the description of the methods, findings, and interpretations sufficiently rich and vivid?
Summary Assessment	Do the study findings appear to be trustworthy-do you have confidence in the truth value of the results? Does the study contribute any meaningful evidence that can be used in nursing practice or that is useful to the nursing discipline?

Figure 36. One of Joseph's writing aides

Joseph started the assignment at 9p.m. He spent the first 10 minutes or so chatting to me about his boss, about the assignment itself and generally about his process. By 10 p.m., he had written about 300 words, having skimmed over the paper and ‘rewritten’ the introduction of the piece he was critiquing. At 10:30, his word count had doubled to 600 words as he had started to get into the rhythm. It was at that point that he took a break to smoke a few cigarettes and read a bit from his medicine textbook in order to ‘get his mind off the paper’. An hour later, by 11:30 Joseph had amassed 1000 words, although by then he had started to run into difficulty trying to critique the data analysis section. He enlisted my help with analysing the research design and asked specifically about the meaning of coding and triangulation.

About midnight, Joseph retreated to the bedroom as the deadline was an hour away and he still had a considerable amount of writing left to do. During that time, I was falling in and out of sleep, as George fervently worked on an assignment he too had to complete in the early morning. Sometime just before 1 am, Joseph woke me up to inform me that he had finished the assignment a few minutes before the deadline and was about to send it off to his boss. The next day he sent me the aides which were used and the final draft of the paper. A short time after he reported that the paper was received favourably by the client.

George’s research process was similarly simple and was done entirely on his computer using the internet. In the five months I spent with him, I did not once witness George reading from a physical text, nor did he have access to e-books. His research collection consisted entirely of articles and texts which could be retrieved from basic Google searches related to their topics. George did not visit his university library nor consult digital libraries when preparing his assignments. He explained:

You have to know how to research online. So you...let's say it's about optimizing websites you have to know how...you get the request from the client, and then you use certain words, like three, four words...key words and then you search for them... Yeah on Google, you Google it and you get...it returns a lot of results, then you pick a couple, you read them, you get an idea of what it's about then you write about it in your own words... 100% of the time, Google.

Other writers reported a similar research process, and not surprisingly, Google searches for general internet sources were the main source of information for the writers. As Edwin, a writer from Nairobi states, "100% of my research was from the internet". Similarly, Robert, a fourth year IT student at Moi University remarks that he writes his essays by "opening lots of tabs and using a lot of online sources". A few writers, however, did mention using books during their writing and research process.

These processes are expected given the prevalence of the internet, but it does suggest the widespread availability of academic sources outside of digitized university libraries or journal collections. That these writers have been able to survive academically, writing essays and papers without access to online (or physical) libraries, and certainly without subscriptions to journals and academic databases is remarkable. Without overstating its significance, it is perhaps most strongly a testament to the movement toward open access within Academia- not only regarding journals, but to academic research more generally. A simple Google search on any given topic is likely to return at least a handful of research papers, often in PDF. This movement has therefore inadvertently made academic writing even more viable since the democratization of knowledge has meant that those who are using it to 'undermine' Academia can easily access it.

Quality of Writing

The question of quality is important, as one of the major deterrents which administrators use against academic writing is the perceived poor quality of the essays produced. It is interesting to note the ways in which the writers assess their own efficacy. Of course, it is a self-assessment rather than an objective measure, but it does speak to their perceptions of themselves and their work. When asked to rate themselves as writers in the online survey, about 30 of the 106 current writers rated themselves at the highest level of '5', about half (5) rated themselves as '4', and 22 writers rated themselves as '3' or 'average' (see figure 52). Similarly, among past writers, 10 out of 66 rated themselves at the highest level, 38 rated themselves as '4', and 18 as 'average'. Similarly, among the writers interviewed, the majority (10) rated themselves as '4' or '5'.

Notwithstanding, it is difficult to assess the quality of academic writing, not only because quality depends on the writer, the client and the instructions, but also because notions of 'quality' are highly subjective. Rogerson (2017) examines key patterns, cues, techniques, and irregularities which suggest contract cheating has occurred, including; "misrepresented bibliographic data, inappropriate references, irrelevant material and generalised text that did not address the assessment question or grading criteria" (p.1). The papers produced via academic writing are likely to include some or all of Rogerson's patterns, particularly where time limits are short and where the writer has limited background knowledge in the subject area. Rogerson argues that by paying attention to these 'irregularities', university lecturers can help in identifying cases of contract cheating. Moreover, after a training intervention, Dawson and Sutherland-Smith (2018) reported that marker detection rates improved to 82% from 58% by developing a list of 'contract cheating' indicators. The main indicators include; failure to address key questions, poor structure, missing sections (tables, figures, reflection), and lack of psychological theory, or poor conceptualisation.

For example, Joseph's 'writing process' paper comprises several vague statements which, although grammatically correct, give very little specific insights about the paper. For example, he states in the opening sentence of the essay, "The title of the article, *Making the Right Decision for My Child with Cancer* by Stewart, Pyke-Grimm, and Kelly (2012), manages to clearly articulate the content of the article." He later remarks, "The phenomenon of interest is identified plainly in the article's introduction", and, "and intricate background of the problem is provided, including the factors which compound to the complex nature of the decision". Nonetheless, some of the vague statements are supported by more specific references from the article. For example, the former is followed by, "By employing a first-person stance, the authors adopt the difficult situation that parents and caretakers often find themselves when faced with a compulsory treatment decision for a child with cancer", and the latter is succeeded by, "The authors begin the article by identifying the problem faced by parents of children with cancer". As such, the excessive generalization of the article's analysis may be difficult to uncover upon first observation.

Overall, the article is impressive in its length given the time he was given to prepare it. However, as previously mentioned, Joseph did have an advantage in this assignment over many of the others as it was a Nursing assignment, and he is a 3rd year medical student. By following the suggestions of the lecturer, the client, and his boss, Joseph received a template of the sub-sections required for the article, as well as guiding questions. This may help to explain how he was able to 'fill' the paragraphs, in addition to using general statements to 'gas' the essay. However, recent attempts at contract cheating detection have zeroed in on precisely these 'techniques' (Rogerson 2017).

The Use of Patchwork and Paraphrasing

While the papers written as part of the academic writing industry are of varying quality, common writing and research processes often show evidence of patchwork, paraphrasing, quick research techniques (e.g. Google searches) and shallow analysis. Nonetheless, much like the ‘persuasive’ websites offering their services (Rowland et. al. 2018), the papers written are often quite persuasive. The writing processes are often masked by attention to presentation (e.g. referencing styles, organization, grammar, punctuation). For example, Joseph, George and Simon, each reported employing these tricks and techniques. When coupled with an emphasis on providing content through information, these techniques help to create a ‘passable paper’ which is more likely to satisfy the client and is likely to meet the examiner’s basic requirements. As a result of these techniques, writers can pull together ‘research and writing’ in quick time, often less than 3 days; sometimes in a day or less. This helps to explain the quick turnaround time (Newton& Lang 2016) often attributed to contracted academic writing.

The papers written often have the ‘appearance of competence’ through attention to style, and presentation, and an abundance of information or ‘content’. However, upon closer inspection one realizes that they often lack evidence of deep and thorough analysis. For example, John, a writer from Mombasa, provided one of his papers entitled, ‘Operations Management Case Study: Nissan Study’⁴⁹. The paper is written in full APA format, including a running head and title page with ‘Student’s Name and Institution’ outlined. John’s paper contains minor grammar and syntax errors, such as, ‘first the company ensures effective communication and information sharing...’ Additionally, it contains vague statements, such as, "Quality products and better services can thus enhance reputation of an organization. Differences start from the offerings" Furthermore, the paper lacks a clear introduction and conclusion, and although it is separated by subheadings, the links between the sub-headings

⁴⁹ See Appendix 1 for full paper

are not made explicit, nor are they explained. For example, the subheading 'Comparison and Contrast of CPM and PERT Methods' is followed by 'Priority Rules for Job Sequencing' without any transition words or explanation of how they are connected. Nonetheless, the paper features 'good content'; valid points and lots of information, including fairly detailed charts and diagrams. Further, the organization is clear and each section appears to respond to specific prompts in detailing the ways in which Nissan has used operations management to its competitive advantage. Therefore, it is likely to receive a passing grade, even though thorough analysis is lacking, since its content is strong and its organization is clear.

Moreover, the paper on 'Medicinal Marijuana'⁵⁰, written by Ken, a recent ICT and Education graduate, shows similar types of issues and features. There are a few grammar, capitalization and syntax errors, such as, "Marijuana despite its many addiction cases and behavioral implications, is still being championed for legalization as far as its medical benefits are a concern". His word choice is also inappropriate in some places. For example, he writes, "...shade intensive light on perception conveyed by the Medicinal Marijuana Association on the fundamentality of legalization of marijuana for boosting the efficiency of healthcare services". This sentence is both poorly structured, and unclear in its meaning. Additionally, the introduction of the essay lacks a thesis statement, and the essay lacks specific references and instead contains several broad, unsupported statements such as, "Moreover, according to the organization, the benefits of legalization of cannabis far outweigh the shortcoming that would surface from the same" , and , "Hence, marijuana is safer than pharmaceuticals." Overall, although the article has some strong content, it contains very few references, its structure is weak, and there is little analysis. Nonetheless, Ken confirms that it was accepted by the client and the lecturer.

⁵⁰ See Appendix 2 for full paper

Additionally, Joseph provided several papers (apart from the one below which I observed), and many of them contained strong ‘content and information’ and some useful critique, but overall shallow analysis and excessively obvious statements. For example, one of his essays was a critique of a lecture entitled, “Support for Regional Aviation and General Aviation Overview for 2016 and Beyond”⁵¹ by Adrian Fitzgerald. Throughout the essay, Joseph used unnecessary and obvious statements, such as, "...This qualified him to present on the chosen topic", and "He used powerpoint to deliver a presentation...". The diction of his essay was also quite weak as he used simple sentences which created a ‘choppy’ effect to his writing. For instance, he wrote, "The presentation depicted the clear role of Airservices as the service provider. It also depicted the senior position held by the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport in this relationship". Further, much of the analysis was also quite descriptive in nature, with statements like, ""The lecture familiarized Airservices by giving it a few introductory notes." Nevertheless, the paper did reference specific content from the presentation, and offer edsome useful and thoughtful critique on the lecture by highlighting the effectiveness of the speaker’s simple language and minimalistic presentation. Moreover, like many of the others, Olive’s paper was formatted using APA guidelines, and contained information about pre-natal testing. Also like the other papers, Olive’s essay was highly structured (almost excessively so) by sub-headings, suggesting that the headings may be in response to specific prompts. However, the paper lacked references and ended abruptly with the literature review.

It is important to note that each of these papers was analysed without context; I am unaware of the specific instructions they were given, the exact writing and research processes they used, and the time frame and conditions under which the paper was written. Knowledge of the context is obviously very important in assessing the overall quality of the paper;

⁵¹ See Appendix 3 for full paper

however, this information was difficult to obtain since the writers had already completed the papers, I had never had face-to face meetings with most of them, and the writers could not remember many of the specific details of how the paper was created. Luckily, I was able to track the entire process with Joseph, by following the development of the paper from his receiving the order to the point of submission to his boss.

Client Dissatisfaction and Revisions

As a more concrete assessment of their writing, I asked the writers about client reports and overall satisfaction with their work- both in the online survey and the interviews. I also asked the writers about the types of grades the clients reported. Generally, the writers noted that clients were usually satisfied, but some mentioned a few examples where clients had rejected their work. They further explained that more common request seemed to be that the client asked for corrections or revisions; either on their own recommendations or on the recommendation of the lecturer. Markline, one of the writers interviewed, remarked, “Since I started writing, checking the grades of those I have worked with then I can say most of them getting above 90%. I have never done any revision and plagiarism is always 0%”. Some of the writers also detailed the correction process with clients, expressing dissatisfaction and often pointing to a failure of the client, either in miscommunicating the requirements, or in omitting important information from the lecturer. For example, in explaining one instance where the client was dissatisfied, Markline contends:

It is somehow difficult. It requires some deep analysis and thoughts...She [the client] complained of the 14/20. The paper was about SCADA systems...The question I missed had been discussed in class by the professor...I think she just submitted the work without proofreading...Negligence on her part I guess.

He continued, “Sometimes you do a paper and the client complains that he/she does not understand a thing. You are forced to redo the paper to match their level of understanding.” His sentiments are shared by Benard, another Nairobi-based writer, who reflected on his challenges with quality writing in the 9 months since he had been writing, “Am still working on it... But being a self-made writer who has begun being serious, just last year December then it is excusable...But all these nitty gritty things that students insist on so as to score perfectly are just tedious”.

Similarly, although George does not do much academic writing anymore, he still takes projects if a client is paying well and they have developed a good rapport. Towards the end of my initial fieldwork visit, George had started writing for a Seychellois client who was reading for a Master’s degree. He recalls that she initially asked him to write a ‘B’ paper but chastised him for the 70% she ultimately received. This client was peculiar. Unlike most of the others, he had met her in person, had been to her house and had even met her young son and husband. She had confided in her about issues in her marriage and about her plans to return home as she was not enjoying her time in Nairobi. By the time I returned in March, George was now writing the third of her Master’s papers. The current assignment was an analysis of Uber’s Marketing Strategy. He ran the idea by me, mostly because she had asked him to re-write the assignment as the client was not satisfied. However, George felt that the paper was a good one. Further, he thought the changes she was suggesting constituted an entirely new paper, such that she was being dishonest in trying to get two papers for the price of one.

Thus, these research and writing techniques help to explain how Kenyan writers can produce ‘passable’ papers at such rapid rates. Through an examination of Joseph’s processes and the essays of some of the other writers, we are able to better answer the anecdotal

question of ‘How are undergraduate Kenyan students from ordinary Kenyan universities able to produce papers of a passable quality- sometimes outside their area of expertise, using only readily available internet resources, in a day or less, without ever having attended a lecture or read a text?’ Or, more critically, ‘How are resource-strapped, time-restraint, non-specialists, with no insider-knowledge of the university- able to produce essays of a passable quality?’”

Unlike contract cheaters in other settings (i.e. writers from elite universities) or paper mills in the past, these papers are being produced by non-specialist, ordinary students and graduates of non-prestigious universities, at a very high turn around rate, with no inside knowledge of the specific university or college, and with very few academic resources. That these writers have been able to ‘hack’ the education system is a testament to the development of the industry itself in terms of its internal systems and processes. Based on close analysis of their papers, the answer seems to rest on an emphasis on content and presentation, which often helps to conceal shallowness in analysis. These findings confirm the studies of both Lines (2016) and Medway et.al. (2018) which point to the general ‘pass-ability’ and ‘Turnitin-friendliness’ of contract cheating essays.

The Subversive Use of Turnitin & other Plagiarism Checkers

One of the main tools in the arsenal of academic integrity over the last decade has been the use of Turnitin. Turnitin is a text-matching software program which compares the written text of two documents to determine the level of similarity in the texts. As a result, it has been widely used in universities around the world as a deterrent and anti-plagiarism tool. Because of its text-matching, Turnitin is particularly useful in uncovering instances of ‘copy and paste’ plagiarism where students have copied large chunks of information from a source, without credit. It is also useful against traditional ‘paper mill’ essays, where students

purchase an essay from a huge repository of previously written papers, which have already been used by other students for their courses.

However, Turnitin is notoriously ineffective against academic writing or contract cheating. According to Oxford University's plagiarism policy, plagiarism is defined as, "presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own, with or without their consent, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement."⁵² Turnitin is effective in identifying work which is copied 'without' consent, and that which is 'incorporated into your work without full acknowledgement'. However, with academic writing, the type of plagiarism rests on 'presenting someone's work...with their consent'. Furthermore, as these essays are bespoke, and custom-written, there is no 'text' with which to compare them. Turnitin only becomes effective within academic writing if the writer has himself 'copied and pasted' large chunks of text from an existing source without acknowledgement. That is, if the writer has himself plagiarised the essay. Popular perceptions of academic writing suggest that this 'double plagiarism' is quite widespread so that students are deterred from engaging in contract cheating, partially on the basis that work will also be plagiarised and likely be 'caught' by Turnitin.

However, the writers in Kenya have found many ways around this challenge. Firstly, they make extensive and effective use of 'patchwork' and 'paraphrasing' techniques which may often border on plagiarism, but which are skilful enough to 'beat' Turnitin, and possibly, the client's examiner. Secondly, and more poignantly, writers have subverted Turnitin, specifically, by using it on their assignments before submission in order to assure themselves and their clients that the assignment will pass the 'Turnitin test'. Evidence of this is shown by

⁵² <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/skills/plagiarism?wssl=1>

the trading of Turnitin accounts on Facebook groups for Kenyan academic and freelance writers.

For example, Freelance Marketing Domain is a public group, which provides a forum by which Kenyan writers can share information relating to their writing. This usually involves the trading of accounts and writing aides and posting tips and tricks of relevance to the industry. Some of the recent posts, featuring the sale of Turnitin accounts show writers seeking to both buy and sell Turnitin accounts. Some of the advertisements are featured below:

“Looking for a turnitin acc. Kindly get back to me ASAP kama uko nayo”⁵³

“Course hero unlocks available @40. Turnitin, Instructor version available@200
All eBook’s and journals also available.”⁵⁴

“Turnitin plagiarism checker on sale... Bei ya soda (ksh 200)”⁵⁵

“Turnitin instructor versions, chegg and chero unlocks KSh200”⁵⁶

“Turnitin plagiarism checker 2. Coursehero answers Available cheaply”⁵⁷

Note also the trading of Coursehero; a huge library of study resources and guides, and Chegg, a digital textbook rental company which provides tutor support. Here, Turnitin is being traded as a cheap commodity, at an average sale price of about £2 per account.

⁵³ September 22, 2016

⁵⁴ July 27

⁵⁵ August 14

⁵⁶ July 14

⁵⁷ September 1

Additionally, there are similar ‘Turnitin’ advertisements found in ‘The Standard Price for Academic and Article Accounts’, another public Facebook group for academic writers in Kenya. One interesting advertisement reads:

Turnitin Plagiarism Checker:

Turnitin and Ithenticate are the best plagiarism checkers. However, these are not the free version, but you don't need to worry because these three we can provide you with low price. Turnitin Plagiarism Checker is the best Plagiarism checker. There are two types of settings in Turnitin, One is known as repository setting, and another one is known as no repository. The institute's use repository setting, and they keep the files in the Turnitin database while we are using no repository setting, none of your files and data will not be stored in the Turnitin database. Moreover, we always keep all the work of each writer as a confidential and we never share it with anyone. So, In that case, your document will always be secure and confidential. We will register a personal Turnitin account on your personal email and you will be able to check your paper anytime you want. As for the Ithenticate, we can't give you Ithenticate account, but we can give you ithenticate Plagiarism report.

Contact me:⁵⁸

This advertisement goes even further than most of the others, as it boasts the effectiveness of Turnitin as the ‘best plagiarism checker’. It also gives the potential buyer important information about how to navigate Turnitin, using the ‘repository’ or ‘no repository setting’. Further, the ad assures buyers of the security and confidentiality of their account, as well as the convenience of having the account registered with their personal email address so that

⁵⁸ July 31

they can ‘check’ the paper at any time. Note also that the advertisement specifies that they are selling the ‘Instructor’ version of Turnitin. As such, this suggests that academic writers not only have access to the student’s version of Turnitin, but have managed to secure instructors’ accounts, as well. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that academic writers have also started to penetrate higher education at the lecturers’ or administrative levels since Instructor accounts are only available to academic staff affiliated with a registered educational institution. According to Turnitin’s website, an instructor account is only available if an administrator adds the instructor to the account or if the instructor provides an account ID and join key.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this suggests that academic writers potentially have access to a wide range of ‘authentic’ student papers through Turnitin. Through student Turnitin accounts, writers are only given access to, and able to verify the papers which they have submitted. However, with an Instructor account, writers can see each of the papers which various students from the class have submitted, therefore increasing their exposure to the type and quality of papers being accepted into Turnitin, and by extension, into universities and colleges around the world.

Another advertisement on ‘The Standard Price for Academic and Article Accounts’ reads:

The following are now available:

1. Turnitin instructor account
2. Premium grammarly account
3. Article writing guide
4. Academic writing guide

Inbox, text, whatsapp or call ⁵⁹

⁵⁹ October 11

This advertisement also references ‘Grammarly’, an online grammar checker and plagiarism tool, in addition to writing guides. When I read Olive’s paper on ‘Non-Invasive Pre-natal Testing’⁶⁰, it had been edited by Grammarly, exemplifying another way in which writers utilize resources intended for ‘legitimate’ writing to improve the quality of their assignments. Grammarly had made 59 revisions, mostly related to spelling, punctuation and sentence structure.

Facebook provides an avenue through which writers can trade Turnitin accounts. Additionally, some writing websites have developed their own text-matching ‘plagiarism detection’ software. George noted that some websites use built-in text-matching software similar to Turnitin. Similarly, while working as a content writer on Iwriter.com, an online writing-for-hire platform, I found that they had built in their own plagiarism detection software, Copyscape, which flagged one of my articles as I had used a direct reference from an article on the web. Like Turnitin, the software was unable to read the enclosed quotation marks so that it appeared that 3 sentences were copied. Thus, I was given a few hours to correct the article, and had used 1 of my 3 plagiarism errors, after which my account would be permanently blocked as part of their ‘zero tolerance’ policy on plagiarism.

Quite interestingly, I ran the writers’ writing samples through Turnitin using my Instructors’ account (see figure 37). The plagiarism reports varied widely, with one essay achieving ‘0%’ plagiarism, and another recording 95% plagiarism. In total, 6 out of the 10 samples had achieved good plagiarism scores, and 4 out of the 10 would have been flagged as containing too much plagiarized content. Although we are unsure of the representativeness of

⁶⁰ See Appendix 3 for full paper

the sample, it does confirm the limitations of Turnitin in recognising contract academic writing.

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Submit File			
<input type="checkbox"/>	AUTHOR	TITLE	SIMILARITY
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 5	0% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 10	4% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 6	5% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 8	5% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 9	9% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 1	12% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 2	37% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 4	52% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 3	65% 
<input type="checkbox"/>	C W	Writing Sample 7	95% 

Figure 37. The Turnitin reports for 10 writing samples

The emphasis on plagiarism is not only ironic given the nature of academic writing, but it is one of the key ways in which the industry subversively mimics the formal Academy within higher education. Individuals and companies are taking great care to ensure that the content submitted to students is itself plagiarism-free, and they are utilizing many of the same measures used in universities, and particularly, Turnitin. This observation further underscores the ineffectiveness of Turnitin in detecting assignments which are contracted through academic writers. Further, it should be stated that enforcement of anti-plagiarism policies is taken very seriously such that writers are immediately suspended and/or permanently blocked if they are caught repeatedly plagiarising. Despite this, however, a recent study by Dawson and Sunderland-Smith (2018) suggested that markers are able to distinguish contract cheating papers from students' 'real work' with 62% accuracy.

Thus, plagiarism appears to be a very serious offence within the academic writing industry, perhaps even more so than within global higher education. Critically, the writers take significant steps to mask ‘borderline’ plagiarism practices through patchwork and paraphrasing. Some writers also purchase Turnitin accounts as an additional quality assurance and anti-plagiarism measure to make sure that the assignment will ‘pass’ inspection. In that way, academic writing becomes an academically subversive act such that tools created to curb one type of plagiarism are being used to enable another. Furthermore, ‘administrators’ in writing web platforms have taken care to guard against it and have imposed strict penalties for those engaging in dishonest practices.

The Division of Writers into Specialists and Generalists

Another way in which the academic writing industry in Kenya has developed in order to maximise the quality of the work produced, is through the division of writers into categories. Writers are sometimes assigned assignments based on their writing strengths and/or areas of expertise. It is worth noting that these divisions are not uniformed across the industry. Joseph was the first writer to directly explain the concept, using the terms ‘technical writers’ and ‘gassers’. However, several of the other writers indirectly pointed to the strategy of writing within fields related to their studies, or those for which they had a strength in high school, or a special interest. As such, although they had not developed a linguistic or conceptual framework for the division, their own practices suggested a movement toward this trend.

Moreover, although George and Simon never mentioned this notion of sub-division of writers, their omission may be explained in two ways. Firstly, George and Simon both started their academic writing careers in the late 2000s. As such, they were both writing

in the relatively early stages of academic writing in Kenya. The industry has evolved in the almost-decade since they began, so that this sub-division may have emerged out of necessity, or strategy (or both) in the years after they stopped writing. At present, Simon has stopped academic writing completely, while George now writes only periodically. The second factor which may explain their omission of the sub-divisions, is that based on their descriptions of their work and processes, both George and Simon were likely to be ‘generalists’ or ‘gassers’ even if the discourse had not yet been formally articulated among the writing community.

Joseph introduced the concept of technical writers and generalists or ‘gassers’ as differentiated types of writers depending on the type of assignment given. As he explained, within his company, technical writers were those with specialist knowledge, usually in one of the ‘hard disciplines’, such as law, engineering and medicine, who were thought to be especially skilled at producing assignments in those fields. By the end of the study I had not meet anyone who had labelled themselves as technical writers. Based on Joseph’s explanation, technical writers were less common than ‘gassers’. Furthermore, both Simon and George alluded to the fact that these ‘hard’, ‘technical’ fields tended to command a higher rate of pay per page than generalist areas (Simon’s rough estimates places the upper limit at \$25 per page during peak season for a quick turnaround for a freelance writer, ‘general’ subjects usually demand about \$5 per page).

Generalists or gassers tend to write on Humanities, Social Sciences, General Knowledge topics, and are “sensible bull-shitters”⁶¹. Although the label and his subsequent explanation suggests that this form of writing is less serious or important than the former, Joseph contends this is not the case. He insists that ‘gassing’ is not necessarily easier than technical writing; it simply requires a different set of skills. Unlike the technical subjects

⁶¹ Interview with Joseph, March 30th 2017

which require definite responses and exact answers, gassing relies more heavily on subjective interpretation, inferences, and meaning making. As such, although it requires less prior knowledge, it demands a certain level of prima facie analysis which is deep enough to give the appearance of close reading and deep thinking-without extracting such time and effort from the writer. Joseph's 4 hour 5-page paper is an excellent example of his gassing in action.

He explained:

So, we're like 10 writers. And then everyone has their specialty cause you know obviously I can't write about everything, it's too much. So, there's the simple jobs, you know the really simple jobs which everyone can do.... high schoolers' assignments, stuff like that. I hardly get those anymore. And then there's the.... okay I just divided into two categories...there's the 'technical stuff'... Medicine, things with like a lot of intricate terms and knowledge. So like medicine, sometimes engineering, law...other countries' law, you know...those things. I hardly do that kinds of jobs, I suck at technical jobs. There are guys who do the technical jobs. And then there's the...the guys like us.... I'm trying to look for a good term to put it in English...we call it 'gassing'.

Some of the writers noted that they tried wherever possible to choose topics related to their studies, or for which they had a special interest. Several of the other writers also stated that they tried to concentrate on topics related to their field. For instance, Mark, a risk Management and Insurance graduate of Moi University, noted that he specifically wrote about topics which interested him, particularly ICT and sports, and those which were "easy" because of his existing knowledge and expertise. He started writing articles mostly on innovation, ICT and entrepreneurship in Africa. In fact, all the writing samples he sent to me

were related to those subject areas. He remarked, “I studied risk management and insurance. Most of it was about business. So, it was easy for me to get around it.” Mark is also an avid basketball player and sports fan, so he does sports article writing in addition to his academic writing.

Additionally, Mary, a recent graduate with a BSc in Accounting, and the first writer to introduce me to the idea of mathematical ‘writing’, notes that she often completes mathematics and accounts assignments, usually via Upwork. She advised, “...mostly I do the technical writing that’s something in mathematics say calculus. I also do accounts and proofreading”. Brian, another writer, also outlined his preferences, although they were a mixture of his academic speciality and his general interests. He noted, “There are specific topics I take-computer science, English literature, and even medicine.” Similarly, Moses, who studies Biology and writes about related topics, such as; Environment, Ecology, Project Management, English literature, History. He remarked, “Most of them are within my course but the ones ‘off’ are actually areas I loved studying in high school, so I find them simple to handle. You know our system of education here trains one to be diverse and then narrow you down to a specialty”. George also echoed many of the others’ sentiments, noting his preference for articles in his field, or those which aided in his being ‘paid to learn’; he said, “most of the times you know, you get to pick articles, I pick something that I know is going to challenge me or something that is related to my other two jobs....So I write a lot about marketing websites, about how to optimize search engines, and all of that I’ve learnt through writing”.

Thus, much like the formal academy, Kenya’s academic writing has taken steps towards broadly organizing itself into specialist fields, depending on the writers’ area of expertise. It must be noted, however, that many writers continue to write outside their fields. The industry still operates as a ‘learn as you write’ system, however, some writers can carve

out niche areas related to their academic and personal backgrounds. The academic writing industry in Kenya shows evidence of evolution from independent and junior writers completing all types of assignments across all disciplines, to one which shows signs of differentiation and specialization based on writer preferences and strengths. This feature is a way, not only to make the task more manageable for the writer, but ultimately, to maximise the chances of a higher quality paper for the client. Technical writers respond to specific questions within professional and ‘hard’ disciplines such as law, engineering and medicine, which require specialized prior knowledge of the subject area, while ‘gassers’ can apply general knowledge and quick analysis, primarily to social science and humanities fields. This sub-division is an example of the organizational measures the industry has developed internally to ensure its survival, by increasing the number of papers which are accepted by clients, and into universities.

The Use & Development of Academic and Professional Competencies through Academic Writing

“Personally, I don’t think it develops me professionally. But I get to learn a lot of things from this.” -Olive

One of the most striking ways in which the industry personifies itself as ‘academic writing’, is in the range of academically-related skills and knowledge which some of the writers develop and contribute through their work. Writers are inadvertently exposed to knowledge across several academic disciplines, sometimes well outside of their original field of study. In fact, this simple, almost ironic observation was what piqued my interest in the topic. Simon, a young Kenyan writer whom I met in Uganda, described at length the bits and pieces of knowledge which he had accumulated over his year as a writer. Through his

writing, he was forced to conduct research on several topics to prepare essays for his clients. As such, more than being ‘paid to learn’ (as George remarked), Simon, and the other writers, appeared to be receiving an informal ‘education’, ironically by helping other students to plagiarise some element of theirs. This seems to suggest that academic writing may have led to the development of key academic competencies related to research, different types of writing, writing in Standard English, editing; knowledge across the disciplines (being ‘paid to learn’, an ‘alternative education’) and professional competencies (time management, customer service, global clientele, global hours).

In the online survey, I asked the respondents whether they felt that their writing had improved since they started academic writing (see figure 55). About 91% (156) stated ‘yes’, 1% (3) stated ‘no’, and another 8% (13) stated ‘somewhat’. Similarly, among the writers interviewed 12 of the 16 who responded felt their writing had improved, while 2 said it did not, 1 each responded ‘somewhat’ and ‘unsure’ (see figure 56).

Furthermore, 88% (156) of the survey respondents felt that they had gained skills because of their writing (see figures 57, 58). Some of these skills included; ‘report writing, formatting, communication, improved typing, research, formatting, analytical skills, reasoning, critical thinking, time management, a better command of English, referencing and presentation. Similar sentiments were expressed in the interviews, particularly related to the notion of ‘being paid to learn’. Further, close observation of George and Joseph leads to a similar conclusion. For example, George had developed an entirely new skillset of ‘Search Engine Optimisation’ from the requests of writing. Moreover, he often remarked in our conversations that his knowledge of a seemingly obscure topic could be traced to an essay he had written for a client, which spurred further interest in the subject area.

Writing as Learning.

During my three weeks as a content writer, I researched a piece on ‘The Ghosts of Windsor Castle’, where I learnt of the famous figures who had lived in the house at some point in their lives. I also researched ‘The Nutritional Benefits of the Aloe Vera Plant’, ‘Tips for Studying Online’, and ‘Tweets about Adult Toys’. For each of these topics, I needed to learn before I could write the article, making the task doubly taxing. It was also made difficult since each article carried a deadline of 4-5 hours. Therefore, like Joseph and George, I spent the first hour or so on Google, ‘researching’ the topic, and trying to find out as much as I could before I started to write.

Simon also recalled his experience of ‘learning’ through academic writing as a freelance academic writer in 2010. He contended, “most of the courses and papers I had to do were not based on subjects I had trained in. I did religious studies, political science, black history, tourism...yet I am only trained in Tourism. That means that I had to do a lot of reading and research so that I would do a great job for my clients.” Similarly, in a paper entitled, ‘The Ghost-writing Business: Trade Standards, Practices and Secrets’, Dave Tomar, an infamous academic writer notes that during his 10-year stint as a writer, he received a dual education; an education about the field of education itself, and an education about the industry. Tomar states:

I wrote for students at every level of education and in nearly every subject imaginable. I learned quite a bit over 10 years of total immersion in research and composition. I learned about military strategy. I learned about tire manufacturing. I learned that managing an airport is extremely complicated. I learned that I don’t much enjoy studying state budgetary law. Every day I learned about something new.

Usually based on the number of deadlines I had on my calendar at any given time, I

might learn three or four or five new things in a day. I was like the student-equivalent of a substitute teacher, bouncing manically from subject to subject without ever learning enough to be an expert in any one area.” (p.11)

Furthermore, there is a very material way in which the Kenyan academic writing industry exists as a pseudo-legitimate ‘profession’ in Kenya. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than by its prevalence in the local newspapers’ classified sections, where academic writing is advertised alongside, and often in conjunction with formal jobs. For example, a recent advertisement stated:

Freelance Academic Writers Wanted⁶²

We are an established academic writing company is in search of freelance academic writers to join our team.

We are currently hiring both full-time and part-time writers.

Weekend and night-shift writers are welcome to apply too.

Please send us an email if you meet the following requirements:

1. Excellent command of the English language
2. Capable of writing well-researched papers with flawless grammar
3. Fast typing skills
4. Able to work on orders with short deadlines
5. Past writing experience, either creatively or academically
6. Basic knowledge of Referencing types e.g. APA, MLA
7. Able to work on at least 5 pages a day

⁶² <https://www.jobsinkenya.co.ke/2017/09/freelance-academic-writers-jobs-in-kenya/> (September 22, 2017)

8. Own a personal computer/laptop
9. Fast internet connectivity
10. Dedication and strong work ethic

We pay twice a month via M-Pesa at 200/page.

Please send an application to graduatefreelancers@gmail.com if interested

The tone and format of this advertisement are much the same as any other ‘legitimate job’. Additionally, the skills and qualifications required, which include: ‘typing skills’, ‘excellent command of English, and ‘knowledge of referencing types’ appear to be in keeping with any other job involving writing or research. Note also the emphasis on meeting short deadlines, the ability to produce at least 5 pages of academic writing a day, as well as the requirement for the prospective writer to have access ‘fast internet connectivity’.

Similarly, the advertisement below aims to recruit freelance writers, stressing the ‘high quality’ research and writing of the company. It also stresses the benefits of ‘flexible’ work around the writers’ schedules, prompting them to “make good on all those years of study.” The company boasts competitive rates, with up to \$30 per page, a figure which is substantially higher than the \$2-3 which several of the writers quoted. The advertisement reads:

Skylink Research is a Trading name for Metro-Corp Global, UK. Founded in 2008, the company has so far gone from strength to strength to become one of the industry leaders in both Business and Academic research. We pride ourselves on producing high quality work which results in excellent customer satisfaction and repeat custom, but to maintain this we need eager graduates to join our team. As this is a freelance position, you will be

self-employed...

At Skylink Research we believe that the freedom to work where and when you want is key to success when it comes to academic writing. You'll work your own schedule. Some of our writers live and work abroad – in the mountains, on the beach, on the road. But it's up to you entirely. You can simply stay at home and enjoy the flexibility of working around family commitments or personal interests. With Skylink Research, you can make good on all those years of study...

At Skylink Research, we pay the highest rates in the industry, with most of our writers earning upwards of \$30 PP depending on the subject.

Apply for this job if academic excellence and a First or 2:1 degree, knowledge of APA, MLA, HARVARD, OXFORD, TURABIAN and CHICAGO.

We will require three samples, a writers profile, proof of qualifications and proof of ID.⁶³

Professionally, academic writing appears to offer many advantages beyond the soft skills such as: time management, customer service and organization. Rather, for young Kenyan students and recent graduates, academic writing is a gateway to global clientele and global working hours. In that way, academic writers are digitally-global 'young professionals'; there is certainly an argument to be made for the extent to which academic writing is helping to develop a new professional class of young Kenyans with globally-relevant competencies.

Simon particularly recalled working at all hours of the night and day to meet deadlines to accommodate his clients who were all over the world, and often in varying time-zones, and George made a habit of working from late in the night until early morning as that

63

corresponded to day time in North America, and that was when most of the articles were posted (by then he was primarily doing content writing). During my time in Nairobi, I observed George working at odd times of the day at night, depending on when clients sent requests or suggestions for editing. For him, the work day was determined by the needs and deadlines of the client- rather than the position of the sun in Kenya. Several writers also spoke of clients as far as in Germany, the UK, the US, and the Seychelles

It is through this informal ‘education’ and ‘professionalization’ of the writers, that academic writing inadvertently provides an avenue through which students can absorb the knowledge and skills which their clients are pretending to develop. As a professional service, the industry helps also, somewhat unintentionally, to contribute to the professional development of its young writers. However, the question of how significant this development proves to be in practice, varies from writer to writer. Some felt that the ‘capital’ derived from writing spread across school and work life was extremely beneficial, while others perceived no non-financial gains, and some offered a more nuanced view, suggesting that writing helps academically, but may hinder their professional progress.

Developing Knowledge and Professional Capital.

Some writers felt that there were significant academic and professional benefits to be gained from academic writing, particularly in increasing their knowledge of subject areas, and as a useful skill which could be highlighted in professional settings. One such writer was Joan, who contended that academic writing helped with her current job in the banking industry, based on her experience with PayPal. Joan recalls:

When I was going for the interview for the current job that I have...our bank has gotten into a partnership with PayPal...and the people that work in the bank currently they don't know

what that is, but that is what we use to get paid. So, you know the ropes around it...so the minute I included that I've done academic writing. You know the first thing they asked me, do you know what PayPal is?...and I go like yeah, and they're like tell us about PayPal and they're saying 'yeah, the reason we ask is cause you are one of our target customer base that we're trying to reach...so they asked me to tell them about the PayPal payments and I did, and I got the job so...I think I'll always include in my CV.

She also argues that academic writing helps to expand her knowledge base so that she is well-versed in several topics which is advantageous for potential employers. For Joan, writing acts as an intellectual supplement to what she covers in university:

You know when you're writing you get to research on so many things, you find yourself...you know what they teach you in school is not what you apply to the workplace eventually, but when you're knowledgeable about everything you find yourself, you know things ...you find yourself...you're the only person who knows it. You can have intelligent conversations with your employers. Basically, people end up thinking you're very smart, they think you're very well read and actually it opens up in more opportunities. Actually, I think that's how I got my job..."

Moreover, when referencing academic writing in professional settings, Moses calls it 'academic consultancy' and lists it under his 'professional experiences'. He explains:

I sometimes quote it as an academic consultant. I normally place it under 'other experiences' and other professional experiences that I've handled. I've been asked about it before and I normally explain what it entails...Actually, the instances I've been asked about, they've just been interested in knowing what it entails, which they got to know just a little bit from it, so they just wanted to know what academic consultancy is- which I explained it's about helping other students in their assignments and in research work.

Other writers also highlighted the knowledge ‘gains’ and related benefits like improved grammar, spelling and typing speed. For example, Daniel opines, “writing to me increases the level of thinking of an individual so to me I believe through writing I can expand my knowledge widely...” Additionally, Victor felt that it helped with his grammar which improved his report writing abilities, contending, “... the main part of writing that it helped me was that my grammar improved, and I was much more better in terms of using words...through the writing I became a very good report writer, so while I’m working most times I am the one who writes reports because I’m much more experienced in writing reports so it did help me a little.” Further, Patrick felt that writing helps most with the presentations and skills and in understanding client needs. Patrick also noted that he once mentioned to his employer that he used to do academic writing and as a result they were able to assign to him work that they previously outsourced.

Edwin had a somewhat similar experience to Patrick, as he was able to use the writing skills gained to help with creating blog posts for his new job. He therefore includes it in his CV because he views it as a ‘previous skill’. Edwin contends:

[Academic Writing] really helped me. First, I developed a lot of speed when it comes to computer usage. And also, writing broadened my vocabulary, my grammar...it just made me become, at least, a greater man within myself. Like right now we are just working on coming up with some blog for our club, so with the knowledge I can as I was doing writing will enable me to make our blog become one of the best and it will enable us as well to generate more traffic...I include academic writing in my CV because it’s like an employment, it requires skills. And you know your CV you have to mention your previous skills...And then the other way it’s helped me, we have an organization called African Kiempo so we’re just launching our blog post so I am the one who will be in charge of the blog post and I’ll use the knowledge I gained from

academic writing to generate traffic through using the SEO keywords as I produce articles that will be posted to our blogs and such like.

Limited Academic and Professional Benefits.

On the other hand, some writers expressed mixed or nuanced feelings about the non-financial benefits of academic writing. For example, Anne felt that writing offered academic benefits in helping with research skills but has never considered highlighting it in professional settings. She explains, "...it does help, because it eases on my research areas when given an assignment with our lecturers, my research proposals at least will be made easier because I know the areas to search on". Similarly, Mercy felt that there was capital to be gained academically in making her 'knowledgeable', but professionally she did not see the relevance between writing and her prospective career in finance:

It has expanded my knowledge, I'm more knowledgeable...there was also an instance where I went through a topic beforehand so that was really helpful in terms of my academics, but it may not be as relevant for example for someone like me who is focussed in accounting and finance. It may irrelevant to some companies as to why I'm including it in my CV so sometimes I just decide to remove it.

Moreover, Faith felt that there was a link between her Actuarial career and her Mathematical writing, as it helped her to revise for her CPA exams by refreshing her memory on the material she covered while in university. However, she noted that she never mentioned academic writing while applying for jobs since she did not feel that Kenyan employers would accept it as legitimate experience:

For my course, I did Actuarial and we did Mathematics things, so it keeps on reminding me of things I used to do like when I was in campus, putting it into real

life. And for Actuarial, I also hope to do some professional papers and so it keeps me busy, it's like I'm revising before...but the thing is, in Kenya, academic writing is not recognized as work or as an achievement so we don't put it down in here...we wouldn't talk about it, that one can at least...that one can be given in skills or co-curricular but it isn't an achievement when you're applying for a job.

Fredrick expressed a similar distinction between academic and professional benefits, arguing that he gained general knowledge in areas outside of his field of Economics, but never thought to include it professionally since it was just 'a side hustle'. Furthermore, for Olive, writing has clear benefits in the things she's learned outside of Economics, but the lack of certifications and 'credentials' limits the professional contribution of writing. She explains:

I think writing helps me academically because since I've started writing, there's so much I've learnt in different subjects, and I think I wouldn't have learnt all these things if I wasn't writing. I'm more aware of things that are going on in the world and I know more about more subjects than I would have known if I had just gone in the Economics line of work. But, in career development, I don't think this work develops me professionally because I don't get any certificates or anything. Like, I can't go to a company to find a job and tell them that I learnt things through writing, there's no credentials from the work that I do. Personally, I don't think it develops me professionally, but I get to learn a lot of things from this.

Professionally and Academically Inconsequential.

There was one writer who did not perceive any benefits, whether academic or professional, to be gained from writing. In fact, Markline felt that his academic performance

had declined significantly after he started writing, that it discouraged genuine research, and that due to its moral issues it was not fit to be included in one's CV or resume. He argued:

I think, for the past 3 years, I think comparing how the performance between my semester results since I started writing, I think there's a big disconnect. I think it does not really lead to any...it does not help in terms of your career advancement...One problem with academic writing is that it does not promote any kind of research. The kind of questions you normally get, you can actually do a quick Google search and get the answers right there so that the only thing you need to do is maybe paraphrase, just to remove plagiarism and all that, but any in-depth research? There's none of that. Academic writing does not qualify to be part of any work that can be included in any one's CV because I think to some extent academic writing is actually morally wrong because we are helping other students with their assignments so when you go to an employer and you're trying to explain to them what kind of academic writing is that...It actually brings a lot of moral issues so you better leave it out and battle on your own when it comes to experience.

Thus, for many of the writers, academic writing may unwittingly contribute to the development of academic knowledge across several disciplines, and the development of academic literacies, namely; research, formal writing, writing in Standard English, meeting deadlines, editing, in addition to professional skills such as: customer service, time management, working with global partners and working with 'global hours' - despite its reality as a hustle. Therefore, the notion of 'academic writing' is apt to describe the Kenyan industry as it highlights the possibility for development of knowledge and skills in the writers, and the development of quality assurance measures. The industry is also

inadvertently contributing to a growing class of university-educated ‘digital’ young professionals in Kenya, with global clients and ‘global’ working hours. Notwithstanding, this assertion does not deny the existence and prevalence of precarious working conditions, nor does it intend to suggest that there is high professional capital to be gained with each writing task. Rather, the claim is a nuanced one; academic writing is at once a platform for career development, and a highly insecure form of work.

From the outside, notions of ‘white-collar’ and ‘hustle’ may seem contradictory, but for academic writers in Kenya, white-collar (i.e. digital, professional, client-based, deadlines, intellectual) and hustle (i.e. making do, getting by, precarity, uncertainty) are normal, expected and mutually inclusive working conditions. Academic writing demands an acceptance of both the casualness of the ‘employment’, and the seriousness of the ‘work’. In academic writing, the entrepreneur is as much a hustler as his employee, and no less a professional than any other type of writer. It is precisely the peaceful co-existence of these ‘contradictions’ that defines this genre of the Kenyan hustle.

The Shadow Academy of Academic Writing

This thesis suggests that the academic writing industry as it operates from Kenya constitutes a ‘Shadow Academy’ which simultaneously mimics and undermines the formal Academy. The Shadow Academy is managed and serviced by young Kenyan undergraduates and recent graduates, who operate either as freelance writers for websites, micro-entrepreneurs, casual workers for micro-entrepreneurs, or full-time workers for small companies. Collectively, these young Kenyans are contracted to produce thousands of essays, assignments and presentations which are then ‘illegitimately’ fed into the global education system through student-clients from around the world. Additionally, the Academy has

established norms and practices, as well as, procedures for quality monitoring and plagiarism detection. The notion of 'The Shadow Academy' is apt to describe the Kenyan academic writing industry, as it highlights the development of knowledge and skills in the writers, the development of quality assurance measures and the 'passable' papers which are produced by mimicking the processes of 'legitimate' papers. The study therefore echoes the findings of Line (2016) which suggests that many of the papers produced via contract cheating are of passing quality. Furthermore, like Rowland et.al. 2018, it stresses the importance of notions of 'credibility', 'informativeness' and 'involvement' in stressing quality assurance as a means of persuasion. Similarly, Medway et.al (2018) further confirm that contract cheating websites are often 'professional' in their presentation and employ several assurance cues, such as subject expertise, high quality standards, timeliness, and plagiarism detection.

The Shadow Academy not only subverts some of the antiplagiarism mechanisms like Turnitin, but some websites have developed their own software for ensuring that the 'zero-tolerance' policy around plagiarism is enforced as widely as possible. The academic writing industry provides an avenue through which knowledge across the academic disciplines, skills such as; writing, analysis, research and editing, and capital, such as; payment in US dollars and links to a global clientele may be traded and developed, while earning an income which is comparable to local jobs. This is especially important within a local context where knowledge-based employment opportunities are limited.

Ironically, therefore, some youth have cannibalized higher education for their financial gains, to meet the needs that higher education promised to satisfy. Most African youth with university degrees are not employed in formal wage labour jobs but are struggling to gain financial security (Fox & Thomas 2012). That is, academic writers have (subversively) used higher education to make a living- not through legitimate means such as teaching and

research, but by threatening the integrity of the institution. Interestingly, they can do so with moderate success while using some of the same skills and knowledge they earned from their own studies. There is a complete cannibalization of higher education; higher education is being undermined by a symptom of its own success. Those educated by universities are undermining one of the core values of universities by cheating, facilitated by the skills earned in universities – driven by the failure of the global university system to provide the kinds of economic and labour opportunities it promised.

Critically, it was due to the ‘promise’ of prosperity that higher education was able to exponentially expand its numbers and profitability. As such, the student/writers have not only cannibalized higher education, but they have also ‘calibanized’ it. In Act 1, Scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the native, Caliban, says to his masters, Miranda and Prospero, “You taught me language, and my profit on ’t/Is I know how to curse”. In similar vein, higher education has taught academic writers how to quickly analyse and synthesize information, and they have used this knowledge to plagiarise, and to extract financial gains in the process.

For those working in higher education, contract cheating is unequivocally unethical. Initial responses typically range from outraged to shock; many are in disbelief and struggle to understand how or why someone would threaten the integrity of academia in such blatant terms. Oftentimes academics will stress not just the immorality, but also the illegality of the practice. Yet, the writers are otherwise normal, ethical, law-abiding citizens. One common explanation for this ethical relativity is the necessity for survival. The argument goes that Kenyan youth can overlook the ethics of their work because of their need to find work and make money for themselves and their families. However, this only paints part of the picture. Behind that ‘moral pragmatism’, is another important underlying principle; commodification. The writers are very far removed from ‘cheating’ and often receive generic orders from clients on generic questions and topics.

Moreover, the writers in the study approached their work assignments without any great sense of 'licitness', but in much the same way one would expect of a regular job. They had bosses, editors, colleagues, well-detailed 'assignments' with carefully outlined instructions, deadlines, research, writing, editing, revisions and payments. From a short distance, it would seem as if they were freelance writers for a small publishing company. Academic writing in Kenya is largely devoid of any sense of immorality, from the advertisements in the newspaper, to the Facebook groups in their honour. Save for the concerns of a few writers, ethics never came up in the study. In fact, when asked whether they consider the ethics of academic writing, most of those surveyed said that they did not. As such, academic writing in Kenya represents a somewhat ironic 'cannibalisation' and 'calibanisation' of higher education, whereby students and graduates compromise academic integrity by using the skills and knowledge they acquired in university. Similarly, they 'turn' on the very institution which promised them economic stability and social mobility, in search of those goals.

Chapter Six

Discussion

The Duplicities, Ambiguities and Contradictions of Academic Writing

Kenyan youth's participation in the academic writing industry raises complex questions about knowledge and money exchanges in global informal economies. It is at once familiar and different; both shadow and original; both exploitation and agency; both asymmetry and exchange; both raw material and value added; both core and periphery; both global and local; both professionalism and subversion; both integrity and cheating; both knowledge and plagiarism; both white-collar and hustle. The industry is perplexing and intriguing precisely because it is decidedly difficult to pin-down. In that way, academic writing is eerily reflective of Africa's role in the global economy, and of the contemporary graduate's role in the new and emerging knowledge economy. Undeniably, academic writing consists of money and information flows (Graham et. al 2018), as well as elements of shadows and mimicry (Ferguson 2006). However, the North-South dialectic re-enacted through academic writing offers a much more nuanced and complex exchange than traditional discourses reveal. That is, traditional North/South economic configurations are sometimes inverted as it is unclear whether the products of writing constitute raw materials for extraction, or 'sites of value added', or both, or neither. It is also unclear where and how issues of ownership are resolved.

Essentially, academic writing is both Graham's marginality and Comaroff & Comaroff's predictor; both Ferguson's shadow and Thieme's experimentation. Academic writing is filled with ambiguities, duplicities and contradictions which cannot be easily reconciled precisely because it was built in response to a neoliberal education system which is inherently contradictory. Neoliberalism in education necessarily navigates the tensions

between the values of public benefits and those of profit maximization, and the barrage of contradictions which follows shareholders' attempts to reconcile dual bottom lines. Similarly, the second pillar on which academic writing is built, namely, the digital economy straddles equally duplicitous ideals. On the one hand, the digital economy aims to democratize job opportunities for workers across seas and localities, while simultaneously trying to undercut the traditional economy by guaranteeing cheaper labour and easier conditions for 'employers'. These competing interests ensure that the digital economy battles increased access with fairness and equality. As a result, academic writing may be viewed as a mirrored reflection of the duplicities, ambiguities and contradictions of both the modern neoliberal higher education system, and the modern digital economy.

If, as Graham et.al. (2014) argue, knowledge is the raw material for much of the work in the contemporary global economy, then, it is not only important to know who produces knowledge and where it is represented in the knowledge economy, but also, what is represented and how much. Graham et.al. further contends that "rather than democratizing platforms of knowledge sharing, the Internet seems to be enabling a digital division of labour in which the visibility, voice and power of the North is reinforced rather than diminished" (p.23). Knowledge-sharing platforms have largely been democratized for those in the South, but economic power has neither been democratized, shared, nor equalized, resulting in the *prima facie* appearance of a lack of democracy in knowledge sharing. In this shadow academic economy, knowledge creation is bought and sold, and treated as a cheap good made by cheap labour. Authorship and ownership of products are valued by neither the sellers or the buyers. These young women and men are selling valuable intellectual labour cheaply because they are in desperate need of income and because the formal market is not available to them- locally or globally. Comparatively, their labour is worth much more in the very

countries of their buyers. This changing view of knowledge may have significant implications for higher education in the not too distant future.

Contrary to Graham et.al. (2014), this study argues that, particularly since the advent of BPO in 2006, the Internet *has* democratized platforms of knowledge sharing in Kenya. However, unequal systems of economic and social factors between the North and the South have made it such that digital gig labour is one of the best options for young workers in the face of very limited employment opportunities. And, for those in the West, digital labour provides a cost-effective method of producing knowledge and academic content. As such, the production of academic output is being cheaply outsourced to workers in the Global South. Yet, critically, ownership of the product is controlled by those in the North thereby rendering the creations of academic writers in the South invisible, voiceless and authorless. It is also important to note that many writers lack enough economic power to ‘buy’ the same services on the platforms where they sell their labour.

Directions and Patterns of Exchange

Unlike ‘traditional’ models of North-South economic exchange where the South provides raw materials which are then exported to the North, added with value, and then resold to both the North and South, academic writing offers a slightly different model of exchange. With academic writing, information flows from client to writer and back to client again. Typically, Northern clients provide the raw materials, in the form of writing aids, notes from the course and instructions from the lecturer; these raw materials are then converted to products (essays, theses, dissertations, worksheets) using instruments of value added- research, analysis and writing. Critically, however, unlike broader global exchanges where the creator of the final product (i.e. the North) usually receives the acknowledgement, credit

and financial gain, due to the nature of academic writing, acknowledgement credit and long-term financial gain (in the form of earning a degree) is given to the producer of the raw materials. Thus, although the direction of exchange is re-arranged, the pattern of power is ultimately maintained.

Graham et.al (2014)'s examination of core-periphery patterns in information generation on Wikipedia is important for this discussion. They highlight the importance of 'global voice representation' in demonstrating 'global disparities' of power, citing the link between economic exclusion and information production. Poignantly, Graham et.al. argue that, "despite many hopes that a democratization of connectivity will spur a concomitant democratization of information production, internet connectivity is not a panacea and can only ever be one part of a broader strategy to deepen the information layers of places" (p.46). The authors' observations are poignant here as they underscore the notion that democracy of access may not necessarily lead to equal patterns, or equal roles of power. In similar vein, equal access to both buying and selling work on digital labour and academic writing platforms, young Kenyans can typically only afford to sell their work and are rarely buyers or clients in international spaces. As such, writing too allows an examination, albeit nuanced, of global disparities of power.

Shadows, Mimicry and Likeness

Academic writing functions as a 'shadow' to the 'real' Academy in the sense that it produces academic output, and it relies on research, critical thinking and formal writing. As a shadow, it copies some of the processes and measures from higher education (emphasis on editing, divisions based on subject area, use of Turnitin), and relies on the Academy for its existence. Much like a shadow, the darkness (academic writing) could not exist without the

‘original’ (higher education), just like the original necessarily forms a shadow in the right conditions (in this case, massification and neoliberalism of higher education). Yet, academic writing goes beyond a mere mimicry of higher education. Writers have engineered their own tools and systems (editors, sub-contracting work, Facebook groups and trading accounts) which transcend the likeness of the formal academy. Therefore, the academic writing industry may be a shadow of the modern university; but it is not *merely* a mimicry or mockery. Academic writing is, on its own, a complex and highly resourceful industry, whose very survival relies on trial, error, monitoring, information, dynamism, professionalism and hard-work.

Furthermore, Ferguson’s (2006) reading of the metaphor of the shadow in Africa’s global relations provides useful contextual grounding for the Shadow Academy of academic writing. He underscores the complexity of Africa’s alleged ‘shadowiness’ in relation to the West, highlighting the links between mimicry and inequality. Ferguson argues, “...A shadow is not only a dim or empty likeness. It also implies a bond and a relationship...the shadows of an Africa-in-the world keep creeping in insisting on an ongoing relationship between Africa and the West” (p.17). A Kenyan (and Southern, African) Shadow Academy to a global (and Northern, Western) higher education system personifies not simply a copying, darkness or negative space, but also, and more importantly, “a connection, a proximity, an equivalence, even an identity” (p.17).

Academic writing is interesting in its confrontation of both local political economies and global sources of labour. It is at once global and local, relying on deeply locally-embedded connections and networks, and propelled by local circumstances; yet, global in its clientele and financial exchanges. Nonetheless, the nature and direction of the exchanges takes on a similar, yet distinct character since the benefits and ‘exploitations’ (as Markline opines) seem to go both ways. Undeniably, academic writers work under poor conditions

with no job security. Academic writing does not carry the benefits, status or formality which is likely to make it first choice for highly-educated university graduates. Furthermore, it is most definitely a source of cheap labour for students, largely in the West, who are deliberately committing acts of academic fraud. In that way, academic writing mirrors the asymmetrical exchanges of most global economic systems; the North profits while the South works cheaply and under difficult conditions. This is an accurate reading of the academic writing industry. Yet, at the same time, academic writing can and often does, offer competitive pay, white-collar work, and flexible arrangements. It is paradoxical and contradictory; exploitation and agency in a single exchange. Moreover, academic writing proffers both a 'darkness' for its facilitation of plagiarism, and a marginalization in the global economy in providing only precarious and uncertain work for its workers.

The Ubiquity of the Hustle

As an employment strategy, academic writing is uniquely interesting in its paradoxical and simultaneous less-licitness, and professionalism. It is also particularly noteworthy due to its threats to academic integrity- ironic in that those 'hacking' higher education are often themselves its beneficiaries. To appreciate the nature and impact of academic writing, one must integrate seemingly disparate issues of informal labour, youth unemployment and academic labour. The study therefore exemplifies the ways in which youth (particularly in Africa) seek livelihood strategies in often peculiar and unorthodox spaces- across levels of licitness, difficulty and even across hemispheres. Like most alternative employment strategies for young people in developing contexts, academic writing is initially viewed in supplementary or temporary terms; a way of making do, and most often as a 'hustle'. However, in many cases, academic writing becomes a medium to long term

supplement, sometimes substitute, and in rare cases, a preferable alternative form of employment.

Though many youths wish for jobs in the formal sector, current and future predictions suggest the majority will be forced to adopt academic writing and similar hustles as central components of their employment portfolios. Despite their well-intentioned plans to ‘escape’ informality, the writers in the study continued to write even after they worked in formal wage jobs- often to supplement inadequate salaries. In other cases, writing and other digital jobs filled the extended gap between university graduation and economic stability. In a notable few cases, writers expressed a preference exactly because of the informality and flexibility of academic writing. In that way, these writers have embraced the non-formal economy as a legitimate and preferable source of livelihood.

However, the hustle of academic writing carries added dimensions which makes it distinct from other forms of hustle, and other experiences of un(der) employment in Kenya. Namely; that their work is intellectual, rather than manual; digital, rather than physical, and that the hustlers are university-educated. Therefore, a more nuanced representation of their time and experiences is that of a ‘white-collar hustle’. For the writers, the period between university and formal employment is experienced as a hustle; a making do in the absence of formal employment opportunities. Like other forms of hustle, it is largely temporary, uncertain and catalysed by circumstances of force. However, its distinction is in their high educational levels, and in their transcendence of the ‘physical’, both in terms of the type of tasks, and the type of ‘space’. Thus, the ‘white collar hustle’ represents a distinct experience of (under)employment.

Are We All White-Collar Hustlers?

One of the defining characteristics of higher education in the present era is the prevalence of underemployment among highly educated young people. Particularly in the developing world, having a tertiary level education no longer guarantees a wage job in the formal economy. However, student enrolment rates continue to increase, thereby increasing the demand for ‘white-collar jobs, although the number of available positions has not increased proportionately. As a result, many youths have sought alternative, often precarious forms of employment in the informal and digital economies. In short, university-educated youth in Kenya

have become hustlers. The notion of the ‘hustle’ has expanded its associations within poor urban spaces to transcend geographical, spatial and educational boundaries to adequately describe the economic experiences of highly educated young people in Kenya and globally. Thus, the thesis links the experiences of recent graduates in the Global South with those in the North, through the reality of widespread educated-youth employment through precarity. It also connects the experiences of ‘white-collar’ youth, with those in urban cities; suggesting the similarities are stronger than assumed, as economic insecurity and poverty are prevalent threats even among those who are highly educated.

Further, and most poignantly, the white-collar hustle does not only exist among university-educated youth or recent graduates in the developing world. Nor does the white-collar hustle apply only to academic writing and other ‘dubious’ money-making strategies within higher education. Rather, the white-collar hustle aptly describes the current and future prospects of young academics within the formal Academe, as well. As such, academic writers in Kenya are curiously connected- not only hustlers in Nairobi ghettos- but to academics in

the North and South, through the precarity of work, the proliferation of contract and casual work, and the prevalence of stepping stone and piecemeal careers.

The now commonplace association of unemployment with higher education is indicative of the increasing instrumentalist view of higher education as a means of providing graduates with highly paid, economically secure, formal employment. It also highlights the paradoxical failure of university education to provide socio-economic certainty and social mobility- especially in countries with widespread poverty and financial decline. In such circumstances where demand for white-collar jobs far surpasses the availability of jobs in both the local public and private sectors, young people continue to find and create employment opportunities from various non-formal sources in their domestic informal economies and more recently, within global digital economies. These activities range in levels of dubiousness, creativity, complexity, and licitness.

The findings of this study underscore the growing reality of widespread underemployment and ‘stepping stone’ careers among a previously secure subsection of society; the highly educated class. Despite this reality, however, the study also highlights the resilience and agency of youth in Kenya, by demonstrating one of the ways in which they have been able to ‘hustle’ their unemployment and higher education in the process. The notion of the ‘white-collar hustle’ represents the ways in which educated youth in developing contexts are making the most of their un/der employment by finding income generating activities in the digital economy and beyond. Unlike the ‘blue-collar’ hustle which typically takes place on the streets of urban ghettos among youth with low-levels of education, the white-collar hustle transcends localities and navigates digital spaces, often via libraries, coffee shops, and living rooms.

The White-Collar Hustle: Academic Writing & The Kenyan Digital Labour
Economy



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VOLUME II

Chapter Seven

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study makes three important claims about academic writing among university-educated youth in Kenya. Firstly, it challenges dominant narratives of youth (un)employment by suggesting that periods of transition are characterized-not only by waithood, time passing, killing time, and protracted liminality, but also by active ‘making do’ and ‘hustling’. Young, educated, Kenyan academic writers are finding and creating opportunities whereby they can use their professional and academic competencies, while generating income for themselves and their families. For these young people, the period between adolescence and ‘adulthood’; university and ‘real life’ *is* transitory, but more importantly, it is rife with productive socio-economic activity. Through academic writing, youth have leveraged their personal networks, the ubiquity of ICT, and the convenience of the digital economy; asserting their agency, hacking global higher education systems and ‘hustling’ through their transitions.

Furthermore, the notion of academic writing forces us to challenge and confront major assumptions about youth, unemployment, informal economies, and contract cheating. Overall, it highlights the hidden complexity and sophistication which belie seemingly hopeless or illegitimate phenomenon. In particular, the study argues that, rather than a time of hopelessness and protracted liminality, youth transition can be a time of immense activity and experimentation. Similarly, the thesis contends that informal economies, including the digital economy, are sophisticated and complex (rather than disorganized and unregulated); and, that academic writing is an efficient system and process of production. Therefore, three key concepts arise from the thesis; youth unemployment as activity; (digital) informality as complexity; and, contract cheating as production.

Youth Unemployment as a Period of Activity

The findings suggest several important claims in relation to literature on youth transitions and unemployment. Firstly, contra Seernels (2014), Majumer (2013), Mains (2011) and Ralph (2008), the study found that ‘activity’ was the defining feature of periods of unemployment; the participants were actively involved in a myriad of income generating activities- often simultaneously- both online and locally. Like Jeffrey (2010) and Honwana (2012) note, their waiting was far from purposeless. These activities were predominantly casual and informal in nature; however, many of the participants had found work and income from at least one source. As such, the study echoes the work of McCowan et.al (2017) and Fox and Thomas (2016) in confirming low levels of absolute unemployment, and high levels of informal, digital gig, and self-employed work among Kenyan graduates. Overall, their portrait of unemployment carried a radically different narrative from the street-side tea drinking and loitering described in Jeffrey (2010) and Ralph (2008).

Furthermore, these youth signal very little employment prestige, unlike those in Seernels (2014) and Mains (2011), the writers were willing to accept ‘low status’ jobs as they worked toward formal employment, often viewing them as ‘hustles’, ‘survival strategies’ (Anyanwu 2013), and ‘stepping stones’ (McCowan et.al. 2017) in their overall career trajectories. Although academic writing occupied four main roles within their long-term career plans, the most common role was that of the ‘placeholder’ during the transition between university and wage employment; suggesting that equivalent periods of would-be waiting are actively converted to piecemeal work. Additionally, rather than expressing hopelessness (Mains 2011), the youth in the study communicated great enthusiasm and optimism about their futures, and realistic planning for their present lives. There was little reference to waiting, but rather, to ‘working towards’ employment. There was also very little mention of other traditional markers of ‘adulthood’; marriage, children and ownership of

property. This does not suggest that the participants are disinterested in ‘adulthood’; however, it points to a possible distinction in their conceptualizations of youth and adulthood, and by extension, how they view the ‘transition’ while it occurs. This study suggests that youth are not experiencing ‘painful,’ or particularly protracted liminality during their transitions to adulthood, largely because they expect youth-hood to last well into their 20s, and possibly their 30s. The critical distinction lies in the conceptualization of transition as a necessary time of activity, hustle, survival, and making do- and, the spending of time in furtherance of those ends.

Informality as a Site of Complexity

The study also demonstrates the striking parallels between the digital economy and more traditional informal economies. It illustrates the similarities in terms of poor working conditions, precarity and uncertainty in employment and varying rates of pay. At the same time, the findings show how many of the writers were able to earn much needed supplemental and primary cash through the digital economy- especially where formal wage labour proved difficult to obtain after university. Consequently, the study further reinforces the contradiction of ‘increased access, but lower conditions’ (Graham et.al. 2014, Horton (2015, Mill 2011) of the digital economy, or, the high quantity/ low quality paradox. In so doing, the study reaffirms both the advantageous and disadvantageous components of the digital economy. Furthermore, the data confirms the North/South configuration of the digital economy, where employers (clients) are mainly concentrated in the Global North, and writers (employees) in the Global South. Money therefore flows digitally from high income blocs to low income blocs (Agrawal et. al 2015, Vanham (2012).

The study also confirms the inner complexities of informal economies (Allen 1998, Lindell 2010). Despite its external appearance of chaos and lack of structure, academic writing in Kenya contains a clearly discernible internal logic, with 5 main types of working arrangements; freelancer, micro-employee, micro-employer, company employee, and company employer. Each work type carries a set of responsibilities and procedures. In addition, the findings show the role of networks in maintaining the complexity of academic writing and digital sectors. It shows the use of social and personal connections to help construct, support and regulate informal sectors. For example, writers widely used existing relationships with colleagues, friends and family as an entry point, and later, support system for their work. Further evidence of the internal sophistication and complexity of informal and digital economies is seen in the widespread use of international and domestic digital money systems, PayPal and M-Pesa, respectively. These systems have, not only facilitated digital transactions, and by extension, the participation of localized, emerging markets in global online trade (Agrawal et.al.2015, Vanham 2012), but they have contributed significantly to moving digital employment from the periphery to the core (Peitz & Waldfogel 2012, Agrawal et.al.2015).

Contract Cheating as a Form of Production

Finally, the thesis confirms the centrality of ‘production’ in the ‘supply’ side of academic writing. Like other forms of production in higher education, including knowledge and research production, there are complex, sophisticated processes which belie the construction of essays, often accompanied by systems for monitoring and evaluation. As a result, the products of contract cheating are of varying quality; high, low, and medium, contrary to Newton & Lang, Clarke and Ellis which suggest that much of the assignments produced are low quality. Furthermore, the study adds to Sivasubramanian et. al. (2016) in

confirming a 4th category of academic writers, which includes those writers who have been educated in their home countries and have never studied abroad. In so doing, the study underscores the ‘industry’ and ‘professionalism’ present in contract cheating; which in turn suggests a level of sophistication well beyond the common assumptions and discourses of policy makers. Thus, relevant authorities with higher education are unlikely to curb the growing and widespread use (Newton 2015) of third-party contract cheating, without concerted and targeted efforts.

Theory in Practice

Therefore, the Kenyan academic writing industry offers useful insights (as per Comaroff & Comaroff 2012) into the present and future of work for highly educated youth in Africa, and globally. Three insights stand out as particularly pertinent for the future of work among educated youth, the future of the digital economy, and the future of academic labour within the neoliberal university framework. Specifically, the industry suggests informality of work for those with university degrees- in the North and the South- as the ‘rule’, rather than the exception- thereby linking the experiences of educated and uneducated youth through the ubiquity of informality.

Secondly, it points to a simultaneous and paradoxical increase in the informality and complexity of the digital economy. As a result, the next decade is likely to witness a sharp increase in the variety and sophistication of work available online, which will coincide and may be negatively impacted by an increase in state controls and regulations. Thirdly, the industry signals the future commodification of academic labour within the legitimate academy. As such, contra to Graham et.al. (2014) the thesis recommends that the Kenyan government continues to focus on increasing access to digital jobs rather than attempting to

regulate through taxation. Furthermore, it recommends that international bodies focus on improving the quality and variety of digitally-available jobs.

Comaroff & Comaroff allow us to; see contract cheating as academic writing via the African vantage point⁶⁴; to view academic writing as an ingenious response to the ‘contingencies’ of high youth unemployment in Kenya⁶⁵; and, to examine academic writing as a ‘site of innovation, modernity and globalization’⁶⁶ typified by the innovative use of Facebook as a marketplace which feeds the wider economy of writing, and the widespread use of local and global digital money systems such as PayPal, Skrill and MPesa. Therefore, the thesis argues that one of the most poignant ways in which Africa and the Global South offers a vantage point into the present and future is in the area of work, particularly for highly educated young people.

Thus, Comaroff & Comaroff’s *Theory from the South* is applicable to the contract cheating industry in Kenya in the very conceptualization of contract cheating as ‘academic writing’. To a significant extent, the theory is already applied in practice. On a meta level, the *Theory* is being lived and applied every day in Kenya, as young writers conceptualize their work from their own perspective, highlighting the pseudo-legitimacy, mundaneness and neutrality of ‘contract cheating’ as a form of employment and a tool for personal and professional development. Through the writers, we have, in fact, gained a *Theory [of Contract Cheating] from the South*. It is the theory of contract cheating as academic writing; it is the *Theory of Academic Writing from Kenya*.

⁶⁴ See Findings Chapter 1

⁶⁵ See Findings Chapter 2

⁶⁶ See Findings Chapter 3

Policy Recommendations

The study offers several key recommendations for relevant policy makers on youth unemployment in Kenya and similar contexts, particularly those interested in the potential of digital and informal economies, as well as administrators within higher education, concerned both with academic integrity and academic labour.

For Youth Unemployment

Firstly, the study supports Fox and Thomas' (2012) call for a commitment to more realistic goals and expectations for educated youth in the developing world. Based on the findings, university-educated young people are likely to encounter long periods of formal unemployment or underemployment after they've graduated. Young people need to be aware of this likelihood and probable eventuality; it should not come as a surprise to them nor their parents. Popular discourse should encourage educated young people to embrace 'piecemeal' and stepping stone careers, which should lead to more permanent opportunities in a few years. Public awareness campaigns should stress that university degrees are no longer automatic pathways to stable jobs and prestigious careers. They should also stress that young people are not 'failures' for not having attained formal jobs within a few months of graduation. By contrast, governments and policy makers need to be upfront about the much wider local and global micro and macro -economic, and social forces which have given rise to the current mismatch between expectations and realities.

Consequently, the study recommends that governments encourage and seek to facilitate (rather than regulate) alternative forms of employment, such as digital work, micro-entrepreneurship and agribusiness. Kenya's modified 'Ajira digital' initiative is a good example of such an approach. However, these avenues should also be portrayed in realistic

terms, highlighting their role as survival strategies, rather than prestigious, high-paying options.

For Digital & Informal Economies

Moreover, policy makers should proceed with caution when attempting to curb, control or regulate informal spaces, as informality is precisely what allows for survival where formal opportunities are scarce. Nonetheless, efforts should focus on increasing the sophistication, quality and quantity of informality to create opportunities. Efforts to increase the sophistication of informal and online work (as opposed to rigid formality and regulation) are likely to pay high social, economic and political dividends. In other words, young people need greater opportunities to create their own agency through entrepreneurship and informal sectors, in addition to formal employment.

For Higher Education

For administrators and policy makers in higher education, key recommendations focus on a preventive, rather than punitive approach to curbing contract cheating. Specifically, the study cautions against a criminal framework due to the potential repercussions for writers in the Global South. Rather, administrators should encourage techniques and training which helps to spot the tell-tale signs of contract cheating. Administrators should also invest in better technology, due to the immense limitations of Turnitin and other text-matching software. Finally, the study echoes the call of Bretag et. al. (2017) and others, in urging lecturers to provide greater support for weak students and better course and assessment design which should invalidate contract cheating.

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Appendix 1
Writing Sample 1

Non-invasive Prenatal Testing

Name

Institution

Date

Non-invasive Prenatal Testing

Introduction

Non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) is a screening and diagnosis done on a fetus before it is born. The chief purpose of this testing is to detect any abnormalities, genetic conditions or the causes of any congenital disabilities. The testing procedures involved in NIPT may include ultrasonography, or serum screening (Manegold-Brauer et al., 2015). This form of testing has increased its demand since it became commercially available in Australia.

Clinical Conditions Primarily screened using NIPT

The most common clinical condition tested using NIPT is Down's Syndrome. The current screening program takes between 11 and 13 weeks and has a detection rate of 90% (Gekas et al., 2016). However, there is a 3% chance that the screening may lead to a false positive result. The screening for Down's Syndrome involves a blood test for Papp-A, a placental protein, and hCG (Human Chorionic Gonadotropin) (Woolcock & Grivell, 2014). The patient will also be required to undergo an ultrasound.

Other Clinical Conditions Detected when the Test is Performed

Other clinical conditions that can be tested in a fetus using NIPT include Edward Syndrome and Patau Syndrome (Gekas et al., 2016). The test has a 99% and between 79% and 92% chance of success on the two syndromes respectively. Both of these conditions are both aneuploidies, which are conditions caused by abnormalities in the number of chromosomes (Woolcock & Grivell, 2014).

Literature Review Supporting the Validity of NIPT

Not a lot of documentation has been done on non-invasive prenatal tests to determine its validity for detection of genetic disorders. However, the few researchers who have studied

the NIPT screening methods have recorded a relatively high rate of success when using this method of screening for aneuploidies. Nicolaides et al. (2012) and Norton et al. (2012) have validated the use of NIPT for the detection of trisomies 13, 18, and 21 and monosomy X. The test is reliable in high-risk pregnancies, but with further experience, the test may be done on average-risk pregnancies (Norton et al., 2012). A study, done by Bianchi et al. (2012), also examined the use of NIPT. From this research, trisomy 21 was detected with 100% sensitivity. Trisomy 1 and 13 were also detected by this study but at 97% and 78.6% sensitivity respectively. This study suggested that NIPT will be able to detect more chromosomal abnormalities when more researchers study the procedure. Even though only a few professional societies have given their statements on the use of NIPT, the procedure has already been introduced to clinical practice, and it is highly likely that it will shift the prenatal diagnosis paradigm (Devers et al., 2013)

Information that should be provided to Women before NIPT to assist in their Decision Making

There are some facts about NIPT that pregnant women need to be given to facilitate their decision-making process and make sure that they make the right choice for their safety and that of the baby. The counseling is necessary due to the high connection of NIPT and abortion rates (Woolcock & Grivell, 2014). The first thing that the mother needs to know is the chances of success and failure if they take the test. This information will help them to determine if they are willing to take the chance. They must also understand that, although it is unlikely that one might get a false positive result, a positive result will mean that they have to undergo an invasive test to confirm the first result rates (Woolcock & Grivell, 2014). The patients must also know that the failure of the screening is highly affected by body mass index. For a person who is over 160kg, the failure rate might be as high as 50% rates (Woolcock & Grivell, 2014). They should also know that the ultrasound is critical as it will

detect structural abnormalities in the fetus. It is also important to prepare them by letting them know that the test might lead to the detection of other abnormalities that were not being tested.

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Appendix 2
Writing Sample 2

Operations Management Case Study: Nissan Company

Student's Name

Institution

Operations Management Case Study: Nissan Company

Operations Management and Customer Value

Nissan Company has used operations management to ensure that they deliver on their promises to the customers thus generating value for the customers even in times of disasters. First the company ensures effective communication and information sharing between different divisions. This serves to ensure that all divisions have accurate information on all elements of production such as availability of parts, customer orders, and lead times to ensure that they process all customer orders. For example, the company ensured that all divisions that were served by the various plants that got destroyed in the earthquake were sent to the scene to ensure that their divisions received accurate and reliable information to certify that each division managed its operations successfully. Second is allocation of parts among their most immediate uses. The company ensures that available parts are allocated among products whose orders have been received. Following the earthquake, the company chose to assess the material needs to determine which materials were to be allocated to which cars to ensure that consumer needs for specific cars such as deciding which cars to install the GPS on were met (Schmidt & Simchi-Levi, 2013). Also, the company slows down upstream and downstream operations thus increasing their lead time. This gives the company the opportunity to use the extra time generated by the delays to obtain parts for the tight deadline orders.

Competitive Advantage

To achieve competitive advantage over its competitors, Nissan has used operations management in the following ways. First is the formation of strategic partnerships to ensure a constant supply of parts used in assembling of products. There are strategic partnerships such as with Renault and Daimler AG through which the company gains important technologies

that enable better products delivered to consumers (Nissan Motor Corporation, n.d). In 2012 Nissan-Renault partnership sold 8, 264, 821 units of cars while Toyota sold 7, 352, 000 units.

Second is supply chain decentralization. The company has been able to respond effectively to their supply chain needs such that after the 2011 earthquake the company recorded an increase in revenues unlike its competitors, Toyota and Honda who reported drops in earnings with Honda reporting a 38% drop in earnings. After the earthquake Nissan registered 9.3% increase in production while the industry registered a drop in output of 9.3% (Tysiac, 2013).

Service versus Manufacturing Operations

Service and manufacturing operations have various similarities and differences. The two operations are both important in creating a vision and mission on where an organization is expected to be as well as the perception it creates on its customers. Quality products and better services can thus enhance reputation of an organization. Differences start from the offerings. Manufacturing operations result in creation of tangible products such as cars for Nissan Company whereas service operations result in creation of intangible services such as advertising and consultancy for Nissan products. Also manufacturing operations are standardized according to Nissan's quality purposes while service operations are customized to meet the unique needs of the clients, for example advertising may be different for different target markets while vehicle would remain similar as long as one model is being sold in various markets. Further, manufacturing operations for Nissan ensure allocation of resources and parts among different vehicles to meet client needs while service operations would involve scheduling of workers to handle various client demands. Lastly, the work environment for manufacturing operations is built to ensure effective and efficient workforce

performance and maximum total output. Service operations on the other hand shape the work environment depending on the effect it has on the customers thus more flexible.

Gross-to-Net Calculation

Gross to net calculation is the process that determines material requirements for various processes taking into consideration the existing inventories and scheduled receipts. The gross requirement is the quantity demanded for completion of a production phase. The net requirement is calculated by taking the difference between total requirement and total supply.

Net Requirements = Total Demand – Total Supply

Where;

Total demand= [Gross requirement + Allocation]

Total Supply = [on-hand inventory + Scheduled receipts]

The data to be included in gross-to-net calculations include total process requirement, safe inventory requirements, lead times, due dates, scheduled receipts and in-store inventory data. As the operations manager, gross-to-net calculations can be used to determine reorder quantities and reorder dates to ensure that inventory is available when it is required.

Comparison and Contrast of CPM and PERT Methods

The Critical Path Method (CPM) and the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) are methods used by project managers to plan, schedule, and control various activities in a project resulting in better management of the project. The two methods result in listing of the activities that need to be undertaken to complete a project and a precedence diagram to enable managers have a pictorial sequence of activities in a project from start to

completion. They also enable managers estimate the duration of each activity in a project. In addition, the two techniques help project planners determine the critical path of a project which is the longest path in the project network diagram.

Contrastingly, the CPM method is deterministic and does not account for any variations in time whereas the PERT method is probabilistic and includes measures such as time variance in calculation of activity durations (Simmons, 2002). Further, the CPM method allows for estimation of time and resources required to complete an activity, the PERT method cannot be used to approximate the resources required to complete an activity.

Nissan Company can use the CPM technique to estimate projects such as the manufacture of the cars. This is because the estimates for production of cars can be effectively determined from previous past production data. The PERT method can be used for projects that involve a lot of probabilities such as research and development on customer needs and product development projects.

Priority Rules for Job Sequencing

The first rule is the First Come, First Served rule. In this rule, jobs are handled as they come in. the first to arrive becomes the first to be handled. The method allows for fast and fair treatment of customer orders but could be disadvantageous where long jobs come in first taking most of the time to complete resulting in idle capacity in the downstream.

The second rule is the Shortest Processing Time. In this rule, the job that requires shortest operational time are prioritized and started with. This method results in less shop congestion as short jobs are handled first thereby freeing space. The method ignores due date information thus tight deadline long jobs might be ignored resulting in less customer satisfaction.

The third rule is the Earliest Due Date. By this rule, the jobs with the shortest due dates enter the service first. This method is advantageous where tight deadlines for jobs need to be met. It however does not take into account the remaining work thus might be able to delay other jobs especially where jobs with long work remaining have the shortest deadlines.

Last is the Critical Ratio. This rule prioritizes jobs based the quotient between the remaining time until due date and the remaining processing time. Those jobs with the lowest quotient are then given priority and attended to first. The method is thus advantageous where the jobs' due dates are shorter thus ensure that those jobs whose due dates are shortest are attended to first. However, the method can be disadvantageous where the due dates are short but remaining operations are high as this would imply taking too long on certain jobs that require too many operations while ignoring other due jobs with less number of operations.

Theory of Constraints

The TOC provides a methodology for identifying the limiting factors to a project's success and provides mechanism through which the constraint can be improved o ensure it does not hinder the project's success. The focusing steps of the TOC process are discussed below.

First is identification of the constraint. This involves examination of the flow of work to determine those factors that hinder the project from achieving its goals. The second step involves exploiting the constraint. This involves using the available resources to strengthen the constraint to ensure that the organization is able to get more out of the constraints. The third step involves subordinating other processes to the constraint. This involves a review of all the activities in the process to ensure that the activities support the unique requirements of the constraint. The fourth step involves elevation of the constraints. In this step alternative courses of action are pursued to ensure that the constraint is effectively eliminated. The last

step in the TOC process is the repeat step. Since one constraint has been eliminated from step one to four, the project is expected to improve. The identification and elimination of constraints in a project should therefore be cyclical to ensure that no room is allowed for bottlenecks that might hinder the project from achieving its goals.

The TOC would be useful in identification and elimination of these constraints to ensure projects achieve their goals. The TOC can be applied on suppliers, markets, policies, finances and resources at Nissan to ensure that constraints within these processes are identified and eliminated before they can impact on the organization's chances of operational success.

Forecasting System

Forecasting starts with problem definition. This is a very important part, and involves understanding what is to be forecast as well as how the forecast information would be used. The second step involves collection of data. Historical data is gathered to enable development of a statistical model to be used in making the forecast. The third step involves preliminary analysis of data to determine relationships as well as outliers in the data set. This is followed by fitting a model based on the relationships between the forecast variable and any other independent variables. Once the model is drafted, the model is used and evaluated, which is the last step in the development of a forecast system. The forecasting steps can be used to develop models for various aspects of the business such as material needs and expected sales. These models would be essential in resource ordering and allocation as well as sales predictions. For a top selling product at Nissan, fitting a forecast would enable the company to predict future expectations of the market, and modify the product to be able to serve the changing needs of customers in future. This would ensure that the product continue to meet the needs of customers in future, enhancing the product's sales.

Supply Chain Risks

Supply chain risks associated with the Nissan Company include failed delivery of parts used for assembling of the cars or delays in delivery of these parts thus inability to meet timely resource needs. Also, there is risk of information failing to reach the intended users within the supply chain in their most accurate and reliable form. These risks have been mitigated by slowing down upstream and downstream production processes to give the company time to acquire different suppliers of the same parts to ensure continuity of production. Further, the company has established partnerships with such companies as Renault and Daimler AG to ensure they are able to obtain the needed parts. Information risks have been mitigated by allowing divisions to access information from supplying divisions by installing their personnel in the supply division.

Summary of theories

i. Just in Time

Just-in-time is a production theory developed in Japan to reduce waste by only supplying parts only when and as they are required by the production process. The JIT philosophy was developed to eliminate the need for various production stages holding stocks. This method can be advantageous to Nissan as it reduces inventory holding costs and probabilities of in-house damage to inventory, reduces the risks of inventory obsolescence as no items are left in stock and the method allows the company to halt production of one product type and shift to another to enable Nissan meet the changes in consumer demands because production runs are short in the JIT system.

However, several disadvantages also come from using this system. First, variations in supply either through natural disasters or supplier lead times could seriously hamper the production process as required inventory would not be available as and when needed. Also, the

system reduces the ability of the company to process big and unexpected orders as the company does not hold any stocks of finished goods. In addition, suppliers may also not be able to meet short run demand for high inventory to meet the unexpected orders.

ii. Toyota Production System

The TPS is a production system that seeks to eliminate wastes in the production process while ensuring that customer orders are processed in the quickest and most efficient way possible (Shingo, 1989). The system is designed such that only required parts are delivered as and when they are required. Further, the system is automated such that when a problem occurs the equipment stop thus ensuring no production of faulty products. By using this system Nissan will be able to create high quality products as TPS is a value driven system and every production step is checked for errors. Also, the system serves to reduce waste by availing inventory as and when they are needed.

The disadvantages of TPS include high implementation costs as Nissan would need to train current staff, set up new systems that support this system as well as employ other staff to help in successful implementation of the system. This makes TPS difficult to implement at Nissan. Also, interruptions in supply can cause a total system failure as the TPS holds no inventory in stores.

iii. Lean

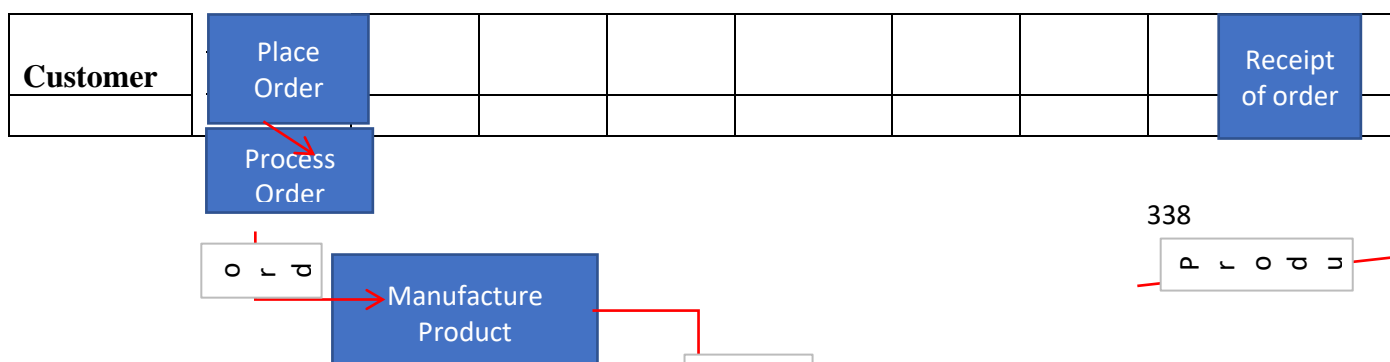
Lean is a business model that seeks to minimize wastes, improving product quality and production efficiency as well as minimizing costs (Shah & Ward, 2007). The model promotes a culture that continually seeks to improve every aspect of the production process emphasizing on doing more with less resources. The advantages of this system of production include reduced costs of production, high quality products and minimized inventory wastes throughout the production process.

The disadvantages of lean manufacturing include high cost of implementation brought about by need to setup new systems, train employees and acquire experienced leaders on the system. Also, supply concerns are raised especially where interruptions of the supplier business since this can disrupt the production process. Further, inability to get enough supplies could lead to forfeiting of deadlines thus customer dissatisfaction.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM is a management philosophy that seeks to integrate all organizational processes and functions to focus them towards achieving organizational objectives and customer demands. Key principles of TQM are management commitment, customer focus, fact based decision making, employee empowerment, and continuous improvement. These principles by be used by Nissan in a latest line of product in the following ways. First is to ensure cross-functional process management to enhance coordination of all processes, both manufacturing and service operations. Second is to ensure management commitment such that every decision involving this new product is planned, directed, communicated, reviewed and supported to ensure high standards of quality are attained. Third, employ statistical data in all decisions pertaining to the product to ensure that all customer needs are incorporated in the final output. Forth is to ensure that employees are well trained and experienced in production of the product as well as building effective teams to enhance creativity and innovation in the product development process. Lastly, ensuring that special relationships with suppliers are built to facilitate delivery of required materials for production as well as basing the quality standards on customer expectations.

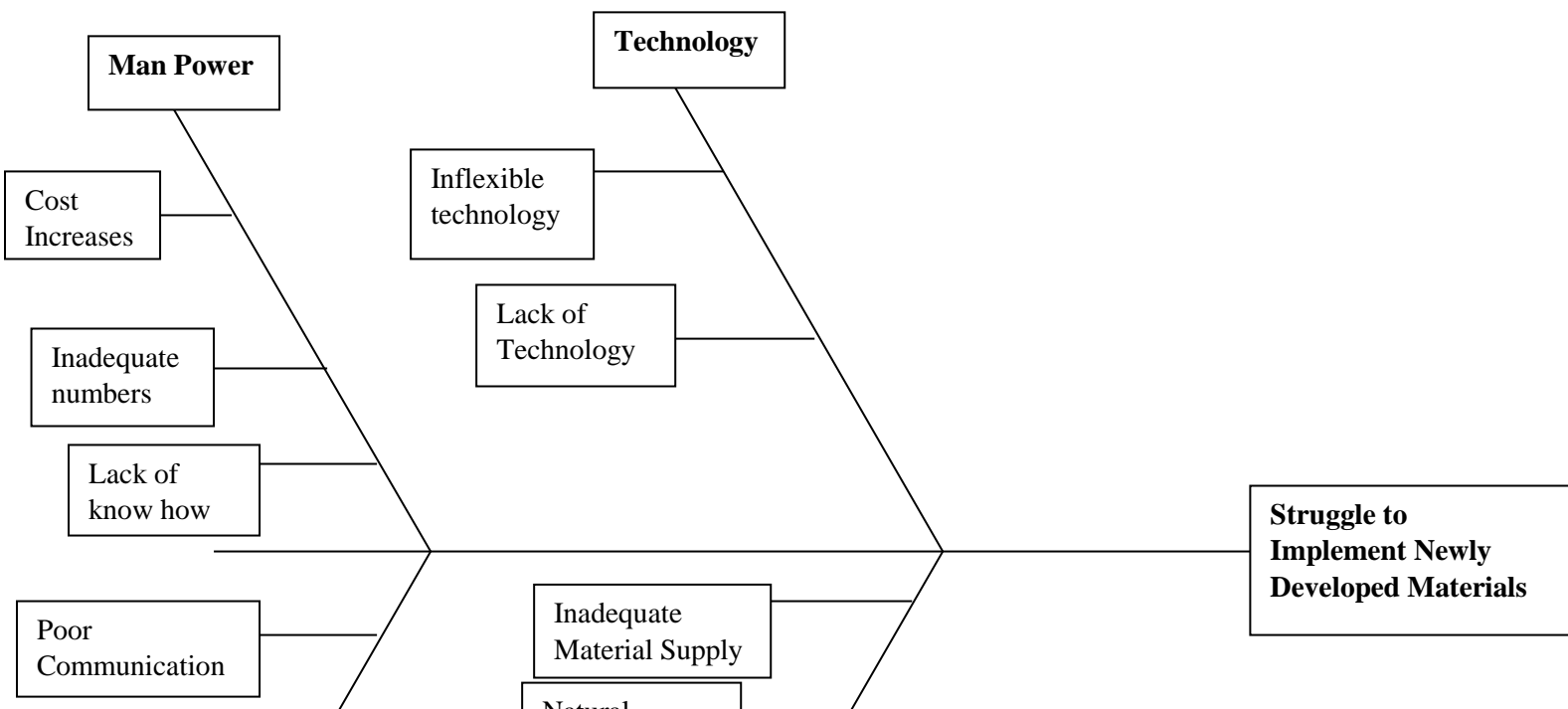
Time-Function Map for Nissan Leaf



Sales										
Plant										
Warehouse										
Transport										
	1 week	7 weeks				1 week				1 week
	← 10 Weeks →									

This process map is important for an operations manager to identify the actual flow of work from order placement to delivery thus allow the operations manager to design work as well as create teams that would ensure success of the delivery together with their coordination. This is also helpful in reflecting on efficiency, speed and accuracy of the process thus ability to meet customer demands.

Cause-and-Effect Diagram



There are four basic factors that could influence the ability of the supplier to implement the demand for newly developed material at Nissan. These are the environment, capacity, manpower and technology. According to the environment, natural disasters such as the earthquake in Japan, inadequate material supply and geopolitical instability in the supplier's immediate environment can hinder the supplier from meeting Nissan's needs for the new material. According to capacity, longer lead times, inadequate communication between the company and the supplier as well as logistics complexity in procuring the material can cause delays. In the manpower factor, inadequate number of workers, cost increases with need to hire new employees as well as lack of technical know-how can influence the supplier's ability to struggle in implementing the new materials. According to technology, inflexible current technology or lack of technology required to implement the new material requirement can all lead to supplier struggles to implement new materials.

Location Selection

Factor	Weight	Mexico City	Weighted score (Mexico City)	Columbia, SC	Weighted Score (Columbia, SC)
Political Risk	0.25	70	17.5	80	20
Transportation Costs	0.2	40	8	90	18
Rental Costs	0.15	90	13.5	55	8.25
Labor Costs	0.1	80	8	50	5
Taxes	0.1	90	9	50	5
Total Weighted Value			56		56.25

Labor Productivity	0.2	85	17	75	15
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The weighted total costs of doing business in the two locations are slightly higher for Columbia, SC thus making Mexico City the most favorable location for a manufacturing plant. Mexico has a total weighted value of 56 while Columbia SC has a total weighted value of 56.25. Further, labor productivity is higher in Mexico City, with a weighted score of 17 compared to 15 for Columbia, SC, thus more chances of efficient production.

ABC Classification

Item	Annual Demand	Cost/Unit	Total Cost	Class
I5	1750	10	17500	C
D1	6000	10	60000	C
A2	3000	50	150000	A
E9	1000	20	20000	B
J8	2500	5	12500	C
C7	1500	45	67500	B
B8	4000	12	48000	C
G2	300	1500	450000	A
H2	600	20	12000	B
F3	500	500	250000	A
Totals	21150		1087500	

ABC classification groups raw material into three classes, A, B and C according to the total budget and material requirement.

Class A: Items composing of 10% -20% material requirements with a total budget of between 70-80% of total material costs. Tight inventory control should be exercised for these items.

Class B: Items making 15-25% of total material count and 10-20% total budget. Nominal inventory control should be practiced for these items.

Class C: items making 65-80% of total item count and 5-15% of total budget allocation.

Minimal inventory control should be exercised for these items.

Triple Bottom Line Concept

Triple Bottom Line is an accounting concept that seeks to measure the performance of a company on three fronts; economic, social and environmental fronts (Slaper and Hall, 2011). Companies need to measure their performance from a broader perspective which financial performance alone cannot provide thus the introduction of the triple bottom line concept. Nissan can use the concept to enhance operations management in the following ways. First is the social component. This component relates to the fairness to and development of Patrickeficial relationships with various stakeholders, suppliers, employees and the community at large. This involves fair remuneration, good working conditions, ethical labor practices and appropriate involvement of the community. By apportioning some of the company's finances towards development of the social component, a company ensures good working relations with these stakeholders thus ability to succeed in operations management.

Second is the environment. By carefully managing its impact on the environment, Nissan would be able to ensure that future resource needs are well availed for continuity of operations. Careful management of the environment includes use of alternative sources of energy to carbon, reducing waste by recycling of manufacturing wastes, treating and legally disposing of non-recyclable wastes, and efficient use of non-renewable resources. This would leave the environment protected for future generations and make the company able to meet future material demands.

Last is the economic component. The economic component deals with the economic impact of the company in the host society. A company that is able to have a positive economic impact on the community empowers members of the society thus creating nominal income that can eventually improve demand of the community for the company's products thus enhance its operations management.

ISO 14000 Standards

ISO 14000 family of standards are basically environmental management standards that corporate family and various governments have made a priority to reduce the effects of their activities on the environment. At Nissan, the ISO 14000 standards have been incorporated into the operations of the company to minimize the effects of the company's products and activities on the environment. First, the company developed the Nissan Green Program 2016 that aims to ensure that by 2016 there is minimal impact of the company's activities on the environment (Nissan Motor Corporation, n.d). This program aims at zero emission vehicle penetration, minimizing the company's carbon footprint, new natural resource use and general environmental management. To this far the company is in the process of developing electric cars to minimize carbon emission from their cars, a closed loop recycling process has been developed to reduce steel and aluminum waste from the manufacturing process by using any wastes as part of inputs for new products as well as ensuring recovery of all end-of-life vehicles from consumers. In-house carbon emissions are also being controlled. Further, through the PDCA (plan, do, check, and act) the company implements and monitors the performance of various environmental management programs. The company has employed an environmental manager to oversee its environment activities and coordinate all parts of the organization to enhance environmental management.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Principles

There are several principles of CSR; legal compliance, respecting related stakeholders, transparency, adherence to international customary laws, and respect for human rights. Nissan can incorporate the legal compliance principle into its operations by ensuring that cars manufactured are of specified standards and meet various safety requirements. Respecting stakeholders entails respect for suppliers, financiers and fair treatment of employees. Transparency involves clearly communicating its policies, activities and decisions as well as the impact of these instruments on the environment within which it operates. Adherence to customary international law would require Nissan to adhere to all treaties or pacts by the governments pertaining to CSR activities. The company must therefore include these laws in its operations to ensure compliance. Lastly, the company can put in place and execute policies that ensure every human stakeholder is treated with respect that they deserve.

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Appendix 3
Writing Sample 3

Article Critique
Name
Institution

Article Critique

Title

The title of the article, "*Making the Right Decision for My Child with Cancer*" by Stewart, Pyke,-Grimm, and Kelly (2012), manages to clearly articulate the content of the article. By employing a first person stance, the authors adopt the difficult situation that parents and caretakers often find themselves when faced with a compulsory treatment decision for a child with cancer. It also succeeds in expressing the authors' empathy, which increases the article's appeal, particularly to readers who are potentially faced with the decision.

Abstract

The abstract of the article is divided into subsections, each summarizing the major sections of the paper thus enhancing its clarity.

Introduction

The phenomenon of interest is identified plainly in the article's introduction. The authors begin the article by identifying the problem faced by parents of children with cancer. The difficulty of making this decision is exemplified by a description of the emotional tension that accompanies the process. Cancer is a debilitating illness whose treatment and prognosis are as unpleasant as the disease itself. Most treatment options cannot ascertain remission of the disease while others may predispose the child to further complications. The authors appreciate this by stating the relevance of the parents' decision to the child's future. An intricate background of the problem is provided, including the factors which compound to the complex nature of the decision. However, the authors focus deeply on the social aspects relevant to the decision-making process such as the stress on financial resources, subsequent emotional pressure, and the disruption of family activities. Nonetheless, the authors only vaguely state the necessity of having to understand the medical interventions that are needed for the treatment of the cancer. It would have been useful to include the most common cancers among young children, the common treatment against these peculiar malignancies and their specific effects. Although this would have considerably increased the length of the introduction thus eliminating the effect achieved by using a concise introduction, it would have clarified the depth of the phenomenon, especially to individuals who have not encountered a similar experience.

Literature Review

The authors do not provide a literature review to the research; hence, failing to provide a stable foundation to the research. The article ought to have mentioned previous scientific investigations related to the research. A study about the general preferences among parents faced with the decision or the extent to which the children are often actively involved in the decision-making process would have been invaluable to grounding the article. Even so, the authors compensate for this by mentioning eminent theories, which describe the treatment decision making (TDM) construct. These theories are not described profoundly giving the reader only a shallow understanding of the authors' orientation towards parental TDM.

Research Questions

In addition, the authors fail to state the research question explicitly. Their failure of this usually significant inclusion is, nonetheless, justified by the broad nature of the phenomenon of interest. One cannot describe a static procedure applicable to all TDM situations. The reader is expected to understand from the aforementioned information that the research is aimed at understanding nature of the TDM process in parents with cancer patients. Furthermore, the objective of the research is clearly stated in the abstract, which eliminates the need for explicating it within the paper.

Research Design and Tradition

The research used the most suitable design to the investigation owing to the nature of the information sought. The level of difficulty faced by each family when encountered with such a situation varies from one family to another, notwithstanding that the perception of the severity of a problem would vary among different families. Consequently, the qualitative approach used by the investigators served to expose these differences as accurately as possible.

Sample and Setting

The population used in the research is also described precisely, which entailed fifteen parents (of both sexes) of thirteen affected children. The setting of this population is also identified. These parents originate from different locations in the world, thus accounting for the variation of the cultural influence on the TDM process. These parents were obtained from pediatric oncological clinical practices, which simplified the identification process. The exclusion criteria used to choose the most relevant population to the investigation are also adequately described. These criteria minimize the influence of bias in the research and aid in improving the eligibility of the findings. The expansion of the time frame of the treatment decision was perhaps a most useful step since it ensured that the participants were subjected to the chronic impacts of the TDM process. Nonetheless, despite the usage of a qualitative design, the sample size is still too small; a larger sample size would strengthen the research findings more effectively.

Data Collection and Measurement

The utilization of the semi-structured interview was an appropriate method of data collection since the research involved obtaining the differential perception of the sample population towards TDM. It ensured that the researcher obtained the necessary pieces of information to draw correct conclusions while allowing for deviation of the respondent to expound on their experience thus acquiring a more accurate representation of the impact of TDM on their personal lives. Since this was used as the sole source of data, triangulation was not achieved. Nonetheless, the employed method managed to gather sufficient data. The fixed questions drew a sketch of the parents' thoughts and feelings during and subsequent to the decision. The allowance for the provision of additional information served to refine the responses, hence, ascertaining their sufficiency and depth.

Procedures

The article includes a detailed explanation of the methods of data collection used in the research. A semi-structured interview was designed and revised severally by the investigators to guarantee its relevance to the research question. The included questions in the interview encompass the pertinent issues to the research question, such as the feelings prior to, during, and after the decision, the manner of thinking adopted by the decision makers during and after the making of the decision, the extent of external involvement in the making of the decision, and the psychological and emotional impact of the final decision on the parent. The time allocated for every interview was long enough to gather enough information from the involved parties. The investigators also ensured to seek institutional approval for the research and involved medical staff in the clinics in the identification of the most appropriate individuals for the research. The research further managed to respect ethical considerations by providing informed consent to its participants. Appropriate steps were taken to minimize bias during the investigation, such as interviewing the participants separately and recording them to expose them to the entire research team during data analysis and in facilitating unbiased interpretation.

Enhancement of Rigor

Although the explanation of the research findings and primary decisions guiding the investigation are quite succinct, they are sufficient to support the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

The data management procedures were described in detail. This entailed a description of the sources of data used and the methods employed to code the data. The coding methods were appropriate to the research since they comprehensively included the main themes of the research. The methods used in data analysis were appropriate to the research design and the nature of data collected, the allocation of codes simplified the comprehension of the qualitative information; hence, facilitating interpretation. The analytic procedure adopted several measures to minimize the possibility of bias – the researchers coded the data independently. Subsequent collaborative coding secured the realization of the most evident relationships within the data.

Findings

The investigators, all clinical experts, were qualified for the summarizing of the findings, which are grouped systematically according to the process of TDM. The themes of the findings effectively exposed the perception of the respondents. The grouping of the findings into different sections enabled the reader to understand the interpretation of the responses by the researchers. The researchers bring out the factors that influence TDM including the parental obligations and the impact of the child's personality. The author explicitly states and expounds on the challenges to making a right decision before describing a most proper process of making the right treatment decision. The overall product is clear and provocative.

Theoretical Integration

The themes are arranged coherently and interact with each other to produce a convincing argument. The authors further manage this by the inclusion of an image depicting the flow of the process guiding TDM.

Discussion

The study findings are interpreted with inadequate cultural and social context. They are interpreted from a general angle, simply considering the influence of different factors on the TDM process. This is justified since the disparities due to cultural and social differences are covered by the usage of a sufficiently diverse sample population. The findings of previous studies are included in the interpretation of the research findings. These relations support some of the arguments and justifications advanced in the discussion of the findings. The discussion is founded on fixed constructs, such as the role of the physician in TDM and the influence of the afflicted child in making their treatment decisions; hence, elaborating the deduced relationships and giving them a universal view. The discussion acknowledges the limitations of the research, which appear to have a huge implication on the research. The implications of the research are, nevertheless, consistent with the limitations of the research. The report addresses transferability of findings, mentioning that the finding may be largely applicable within the Hispanic community but limited in other settings.

Implications

The authors clearly explain the implications of the research for clinical practice, which is sensible since it will help clinicians understand the TDM process and design appropriate means of intervention in aiding these parents to make the best decisions for their children.

Global Issue

Tout ensemble, the research was written expertly and organized in a comprehensible manner, which greatly facilitated its critique. The usage of subheadings served this purpose significantly. The methods and findings of the research were described adequately. This attention to appropriate procedure imparted the study findings with credibility, therefore, enhancing their perception as trustworthy.

Summary Assessment

I have confidence in the research results and believe that they can be employed in several situations. The study contributes relevant information to the nursing practice since nurses interact closely with the parents faced with such decisions and is useful in assisting them during this period.

Knowledge of the inherent thought mechanisms of the parent would be invaluable to the practicing nurse.

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Appendix 4 Selected screenshots of Academic Writing advertisements

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The screenshot shows the STAR Classifieds website interface. At the top, there is a blue header with the 'STAR Classifieds' logo. Below the header, a white box contains the text '2 new classifieds for: [Academic writing jobs in Kenya](#)'. Two identical job listings are displayed, each with a blue title 'Freelance academic writers urgently wanted in...', a description 'Description: skylink research is a trading name...', and a blue 'More info' button. At the bottom of the listings, there is a large red button with the text 'See more results »'. Below the button, a grey footer contains the text 'We hope that you're satisfied with the results. If not, you can:'.

 The Star Classifieds logo

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