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KENYA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY



Report

IMPACT OF ALIGNMENT AND VALIDATION OF QUALIFICATIONS TO THE KNQF ON LEARNER PROGRESSION AND EMPLOYMENT IN KENYA

APRIL 2026

**IMPACT OF ALIGNMENT AND
VALIDATION OF QUALIFICATIONS TO THE
KENYA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
FRAMEWORK ON LEARNER
PROGRESSION AND EMPLOYMENT IN
KENYA**

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	FULL MEANING
ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
CBET	Competency-Based Education and Training
CBC	Competency-Based Curriculum
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
ILO	International Labour Organization
KCATS	Kenya Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
KII	Key Informant Interview
KNQA	Kenya National Qualifications Authority
KNQF	Kenya National Qualifications Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QABs	Qualification Awarding Bodies
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

DEFINITION OF TERMS

TERM	DESCRIPTION
Alignment of Qualifications	The process undertaken by KNQA to compare and place qualifications within the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) for comparability, consistency, and recognition across education and training systems.
Application Outcomes	The results of qualification alignment or validation applications, including approval, rejection, deferment, or request for additional information.
Career Mobility	The ability of individuals to move within or across occupations, sectors, or levels of employment over time.
Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET)	An education and training approach that focuses on the acquisition and demonstration of competencies, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for specific occupations.
Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	A system established under the KNQF that enables accumulation, transfer, and recognition of credits across programmes and institutions.
Data Triangulation	The use of multiple data sources or methods in research to validate findings and enhance credibility.
Digital Qualification Systems	Online systems used by KNQA, such as the Qualification Alignment and Validation (QAV) Portal, to facilitate submission, processing, and management of qualifications.
Employability	The capacity of an individual to gain, maintain, and progress in employment based on relevant qualifications, competencies, and skills.
Foreign Qualifications	Qualifications obtained outside Kenya that require evaluation, alignment, or validation for recognition within the KNQF.
Horizontal Mobility	Movement of learners across institutions, programmes, or sectors at the same qualification level within the KNQF.
Human Capital	The knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes embodied in individuals that contribute to productivity and economic development.

TERM	DEFINITION
Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA)	The statutory body established in 2015 to develop and implement the KNQF and to coordinate, harmonize, and regulate qualifications in Kenya.
Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF)	A learning outcomes-based framework that classifies qualifications across all levels and types of learning, including formal, non-formal, and informal learning.
Labour Market Integration	The process through which individuals enter, participate, and sustain employment within the labour market.
Learner Progression	The movement of learners across different levels or pathways within the education and training system, including vertical and horizontal mobility.
National Qualifications Database	A centralized system maintained by KNQA for storing and providing information on recognized qualifications.
National Qualifications Management Information System (NAQMIS)	A digital system used by KNQA to manage qualification data, applications, and processes related to the KNQF.
Qualification Alignment Process	The procedural steps undertaken by KNQA to evaluate qualifications against KNQF level descriptors and assign them to appropriate levels.
Qualification Awarding Bodies (QABs)	Institutions accredited to design, assess, and award qualifications that are recognized within the KNQF.
Qualification Levels	Defined stages within the KNQF characterized by specific learning outcomes, competencies, and level descriptors.
Qualification Recognition	The formal acceptance of a qualification as valid and comparable within the KNQF for purposes of employment or further education.
Qualification Validation Process	The process of verifying the authenticity, credibility, and equivalence of qualifications before recognition within the KNQF.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	A process through which individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning are assessed and recognized for certification and progression.



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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	A process through which individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning are assessed and recognized for certification and progression.



TERM	DEFINITION
Stakeholder Perception	The views, attitudes, and experiences of stakeholders regarding qualification alignment, validation, and the KNQF.
Stakeholders	Individuals or institutions involved in or affected by KNQF processes, including applicants, employers, institutions, and regulators.
Thematic Analysis	A qualitative data analysis method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes within data.
Turnaround Time	The duration taken to process qualification alignment or validation applications within KNQA systems.
Validation of Qualifications	The formal process of confirming the authenticity and equivalence of qualifications, particularly foreign qualifications, within the KNQF.
Vertical Progression	Advancement of learners from a lower to a higher level of qualification within the KNQF.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kenya National Qualifications Authority undertook a study on the Impact of Alignment and Validation of Qualifications to the Kenya National Qualifications Framework on Learner Progression and Employment in Kenya to establish the extent to which qualification alignment and validation contribute to learner progression, employability, job placement and career advancement. The study also examined application and processing trends, user experiences and stakeholder perceptions, as well as challenges affecting the effectiveness of the processes. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative data from applicants and key institutional stakeholders with relevant KNQA administrative information. The findings demonstrated growing demand for qualification alignment and validation, with nearly 80 percent of applications recorded between 2024 and 2026 and 69.7 percent of applicants relying on digital channels to interact with the Authority. The study recorded a 50.6 percent validation success rate, while among respondents in full-time employment, 61 percent (11 out of 18) reported obtaining employment after their qualifications had been aligned or validated, suggesting a positive contribution of qualification recognition to employment outcomes. The KNQF was also perceived as contributing to the credibility, authenticity and standardisation of qualifications.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified important challenges requiring attention, particularly communication and feedback, digital system efficiency, turnaround time and employer awareness. About 30.3 percent of applicants rated communication as poor or very poor, 28.1 percent identified inefficiencies with the digital portal, while 39.4 percent felt that employers did not adequately understand or recognise KNQF designations. Communication and feedback also emerged as the leading area for improvement, accounting for 31.5 percent of applicant recommendations, followed by awareness and outreach, process efficiency and speed, and digital system optimisation. The study therefore recommends strengthening the digital alignment and validation system, improving communication and customer support, undertaking sustained sensitisation of learners, institutions and employers, improving adherence to processing timelines, simplifying administrative requirements, and strengthening collaboration with Qualification Awarding Bodies, regulators and professional bodies. These measures would enhance the accessibility, efficiency and recognition of aligned and validated qualifications and strengthen their contribution to learner mobility, employment and the development of Kenya's qualifications system.



»» 01 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Kenya National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) was established under the KNQF Act, (Cap. 214) to provide a harmonized and integrated system for the development, classification, registration, and recognition of qualifications across all levels and sectors of education and training in Kenya. The framework seeks to promote consistency, comparability, portability, quality assurance, and recognition of qualifications both nationally and internationally. With the enactment of the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (General) Regulations, 2025 (Gazette Notice No. 3456 of 2025), the alignment of qualifications to the KNQF has become a formal and strategic requirement for education and training institutions, including universities, TVET institutions, and professional bodies.

Qualification alignment refers to the process of verifying and formally positioning qualifications a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level based on defined learning outcomes, credit volumes, and competencies. The goal is to promote vertical progression (advancement to higher levels of learning) and horizontal mobility (movement across sectors and institutions at similar levels), while ensuring that qualifications are competency-based, relevant, and recognised by employers, regulators, and education providers.

Since the operationalization of the KNQF in 2015, Kenya has made commendable progress, with thousands of qualifications submitted for alignment across various sectors. However, most of the existing documentation on this process remains policy- or procedure-oriented, with limited empirical research evaluating its actual impact on learner progression, articulation, and employability. As a result, a critical knowledge gap persists regarding whether alignment has translated into improved access to further learning and enhanced labor market outcomes for graduates.

Kenya's ongoing reforms in education and training such as the roll-out of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), and the implementation of Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems (CATS), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and the Recognition of Qualifications from Foreign Institutions necessitate a robust qualifications framework that functions beyond administrative compliance. The KNQF is expected to support Vision 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063, by equipping learners with 21st-century skills, enabling inclusive lifelong learning, and fostering a dynamic workforce.

Globally, National Qualifications Frameworks have played a pivotal role in improving education and training systems. Countries such as South Africa, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Philippines have leveraged NQFs to enhance learner mobility, strengthen quality assurance, and improve employability outcomes. For example, South Africa's National Qualifications Framework has helped create transparent learning pathways and improve access for previously disadvantaged populations (SAQA, 2019). Similarly, New Zealand's Qualifications Framework (NZQF) emphasizes outcome-based learning and facilitate seamless progression and recognition across formal and non-formal learning pathways (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2020).

According to UNESCO (2019), effective NQFs are those that are outcomes-based, inclusive of all qualification types, and linked to clear progression routes, workforce development needs, and international comparability standards. However, challenges persist globally, including misalignment between qualifications and labor market demands, and limited tracking of learner progression and employment outcomes, even in well-established systems.

Kenya's KNQF is modelled along similar principles, but questions remain regarding its practical utility as to whether alignment and validation of qualifications enhances better progression into higher education or employment. This study seeks to generate empirical evidence on this critical question by assessing the impact of qualification alignment to the KNQF on learner progression and employment by 2025. The findings will support policymakers, institutions, and employers in refining the framework and ensuring that it serves its intended transformative purpose rather than functioning merely as a bureaucratic tool.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the formal adoption and operationalization of the Kenya National Qualifications Framework, a critical gap remains between policy intent and practical outcomes. While thousands of qualifications have been aligned and validated since 2015, it is unclear whether these efforts have translated into improved learner progression or meaningful employment gains. Many learners still face barriers when transitioning between qualification levels or sectors, and employers often question the relevance and credibility of certain credentials.

Moreover, existing literature on the KNQF is largely procedural, with limited empirical evidence assessing its real impact on education-to-employment pathways. Without robust data, it is difficult to determine whether qualification alignment and validation are effectively enhancing the quality, portability, and labor market value of Kenyan qualifications. This disconnect raises a fundamental question: Is the KNQF functioning as a transformative tool for learner mobility and employability, or is it merely a bureaucratic exercise? Until this question is answered through systematic research, Kenya risks investing in a framework that may not be fully achieving its intended purpose of promoting inclusive, competency-based, and outcome-driven education and training.



1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research was to assess the impact of alignment and validation of qualifications to the Kenya National Qualifications Framework on learner progression and employment outcomes in Kenya between 2018 and 2025. The specific objectives were:



To evaluate the extent to which qualifications have been aligned and validated to the KNQF across different education and training institutions in Kenya.



To examine the relationship between aligned qualifications and learner progression within and across education and training levels.



To determine the impact of validated qualifications on graduate employability, job placement, and career advancement.



To identify the key challenges and opportunities faced by institutions and stakeholders in implementing qualification alignment and validation processes under the KNQF.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS



To what extent have qualifications been aligned and validated to the Kenya National Qualifications Framework across various education and training institutions?



How does the alignment of qualifications to the KNQF influence learner progression within and across different levels of education and training?



What is the impact of validated qualifications on graduate employability, including job placement, career mobility, and labor market relevance?



What challenges and opportunities do institutions and stakeholders encounter in the implementation of qualification alignment and validation under the KNQF?

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focused specifically on individuals holding foreign-acquired academic or professional qualifications who sought alignment and recognition through the KNQA between 2018 and 2025, education & training institutions and employers. The primary aim was to assess how the alignment of these foreign qualifications to the KNQF influences: access to further education and training opportunities within Kenyan institutions (such as universities, TVET institutions, and professional bodies), and entry into employment in both the formal and informal sectors of Kenya's labor market.

The study adopted a data-driven approach, analyzing both quantitative administrative data and qualitative experiences to examine the following core dimensions:

i. Application and Processing Trends (2018–2025):

Analysis of application records submitted to KNQA by holders of foreign qualifications.

Comparison between the total number of applications received, those successfully processed and aligned, and those rejected, pending, or returned for revision.

Classification by:

- a. Type of qualification (academic or professional),
- b. Country/region of origin,
- c. Awarding body (foreign vs. local QAB),
- d. Qualification level as aligned to the KNQF.

ii. Educational and Employment Outcomes of Aligned Qualification Holders:

Tracking whether applicants whose qualifications were aligned successfully:

- a. Gained admission to a Kenyan university, TVET, or professional licensing body;
- b. Secured employment in the Kenyan labor market (formal or informal);
- c. Experienced career advancement or changes in occupational status after alignment.

iii. Stakeholder Perceptions and Institutional Reception:

Exploration of how Kenyan education and training institutions, as well as employers, perceive and use KNQF-aligned foreign qualifications in their admissions, hiring, and certification processes.

Assessment of the level of trust, usability, and comparability of aligned foreign qualifications across different sectors.

iv. Role of the KNQA in Facilitating Qualification Recognition and Mobility:

Examination of the institutional mechanisms and regulatory frameworks used by KNQA to assess, validate, and align foreign-acquired qualifications.

Review of how effectively KNQA promotes educational progression, professional mobility, and labor market integration for foreign qualification holders.

v. Analysis of KNQA's collaboration with:

- a. Foreign awarding bodies (QABs), and
- b. Local awarding bodies offering foreign-accredited programs (e.g., international universities or professional institutions operating in Kenya).

1.6 LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study provides valuable insights into the role of KNQF alignment for individuals with foreign qualifications, several limitations are acknowledged:

- i. Data Gaps and Inconsistencies:** KNQA's administrative records lacked comprehensive tracking of individuals after alignment particularly regarding whether they successfully accessed further education or employment. The study supplements KNQA administrative data with self-reported data from aligned individuals, as well as information obtained from partner institutions (e.g., universities, TVETs, employers) to help triangulate outcomes.

- ii. **Tracing Aligned Individuals:** It was difficult to trace and follow up with all individuals whose foreign qualifications were aligned, especially those who returned to their home countries, relocated within Kenya, or entered informal employment. The study worked closely with KNQA and institutions that received aligned applicants to obtain updated contact lists. It also leveraged digital tools (emails, mobile surveys, and LinkedIn) to increase response rates among past applicants.
- iii. **Institutional Participation Constraints:** Some educational institutions or employers may have been reluctant to share internal data or participate fully in interviews due to confidentiality concerns or lack of awareness about KNQF processes. The study engaged institutional stakeholders early by providing formal letters of introduction and consent, highlighting the relevance and benefits of the study, assuring confidentiality and ethical handling of their data.
- iv. **Generalizability:** The study focused on a sample of foreign qualification holders and may not have fully represented all qualification types, regions of origin, or sectors of employment in Kenya. Sampling ensured diversity across qualification levels, disciplines, and countries of origin. Where generalization is limited, the study provides context-specific recommendations and identifies areas for future research.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant for several key stakeholders in Kenya's education, training, and employment sectors, especially in the context of globalization and increasing cross-border mobility of skills and qualifications.

i. For Policymakers and the KNQA

The research provides empirical evidence on how the alignment of foreign qualifications contributes to access to education and employment in Kenya. It will help inform improvements in the qualification recognition and alignment process under the KNQF. The findings will support the KNQA in refining regulatory frameworks, service delivery models, and communication strategies to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accessibility for foreign-trained individuals.

ii. For Education and Training Institutions

The study helps universities, TVETs, and professional bodies better understand the value and credibility of KNQF-aligned foreign qualifications. It will offer guidance on how institutions can streamline admissions and recognition procedures, thereby enhance inclusivity and attract international learners.

iii. For Employers and Professional Bodies

Employers and regulatory bodies will benefit from insights on the employability and readiness of individuals with aligned foreign qualifications. The study will support efforts to ensure fair and consistent assessment of foreign qualifications in recruitment and professional registration processes.

iv. For Foreign-Trained Individuals

The study highlights success stories, challenges, and pathways experienced by individuals seeking alignment, helping future applicants navigate the process more effectively. It will also raise awareness about the importance of KNQF alignment as a gateway to further studies or employment in Kenya.

v. For Regional and Global Integration

The study will contribute to Kenya's position within regional frameworks (e.g., East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education – EAQFHE) and international best practices in qualifications recognition. The study findings will support the objectives of Africa's Agenda 2063 and SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting lifelong learning, skills mobility, and equitable access to education and employment opportunities.





LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews relevant theoretical and empirical literature related to the alignment of qualifications to National Frameworks, with a specific focus on foreign qualifications, learner progression, and employment outcomes. It also identifies knowledge gaps and presents the conceptual framework guiding the study.

2.1 REVIEW OF RELEVANT THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

This study was grounded in Human Capital Theory, originally developed by Gary Becker (1964), which asserts that individuals and societies derive both economic and social benefits from investments in education, training, and skills development. Much like physical or financial investments, human capital investments such as acquiring formal qualifications are believed to increase individual productivity, improve employability. They also raise earning potential, while simultaneously boosting national economic growth and innovation.

Becker's theory emphasizes that private returns, such as higher wages and improved employment prospects, and social returns, such as increased national productivity and reduced inequality, stem from enhanced educational attainment and skills acquisition (Becker, 1964; NBER, 2003). From this perspective, the alignment of qualifications to a national framework, such as the KNQF, plays a critical role in validating and optimizing the value of human capital.

In the Kenyan context, formal alignment of qualifications particularly foreign or non-traditional ones to the KNQF enhances learner progression by enabling individuals to move vertically (to higher levels of education or training) and horizontally (across institutions or disciplines at the same level). This structured recognition facilitates access to further education and training for individuals who may otherwise be excluded due to a lack of equivalency or transparency in their prior learning achievements.

Simultaneously, aligned qualifications also strengthen individuals' access to employment opportunities. Employers can better interpret and trust the value and relevance of qualifications that have been evaluated against a national framework with defined learning outcomes and competency standards. For instance, foreign-trained professionals who undergo

KNQF alignment can more easily demonstrate that their qualifications meet national occupational or industry expectations, thereby enhancing their employability and reducing underemployment.

Recent empirical evidence supports this connection. Studies in countries with mature qualifications frameworks such as South Africa, New Zealand, and the UK, have shown that frameworks which formally align qualifications improve learner mobility, graduate visibility, and labor market integration (SAQA, 2019; NZQA, 2020; UNESCO, 2019). These findings suggested that KNQF alignment in Kenya similarly helps unlock the economic value of human capital by translating prior learning and competencies into recognized credentials that support career advancement and lifelong learning.

Thus, by recognizing and aligning qualifications particularly foreign ones, the KNQF operationalizes the key tenets of Human Capital Theory. It ensures that human capital acquired outside formal systems or in other jurisdictions is not wasted but is instead harnessed to promote inclusive educational advancement and labor market participation. In doing so, the KNQF becomes not just a regulatory tool, but a strategic enabler of human development and national economic transformation.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the Human Capital Theory as its theoretical foundation and a conceptual framework that illustrates how the alignment of qualifications to the KNQF influences learner progression and employment outcomes.

2.2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

As discussed earlier, Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) posits that education and training are investments in human capital that yield returns in the form of increased productivity, higher earnings, and greater employability. The theory suggested that when individuals acquire recognized and relevant qualifications particularly those aligned to national standards, they are better positioned to access higher levels of learning and employment opportunities.

In the context of this study, the alignment of qualifications (including foreign ones) to the KNQF enhances the value, portability, and recognition of individual educational achievements. This, in turn, strengthens vertical progression (e.g., access to university or postgraduate studies), horizontal Mobility (e.g., transfer across institutions or sectors), and access to formal employment, particularly in regulated or professional sectors.

2.2.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework underpinning this study was based on the logic that qualification alignment to the KNQF acts as an enabler of educational mobility and employability. It does so by ensuring standardization of qualifications across sectors and providers; recognition of prior learning and foreign qualifications; transparency and trust among employers and education providers; and clear learning pathways and progression routes

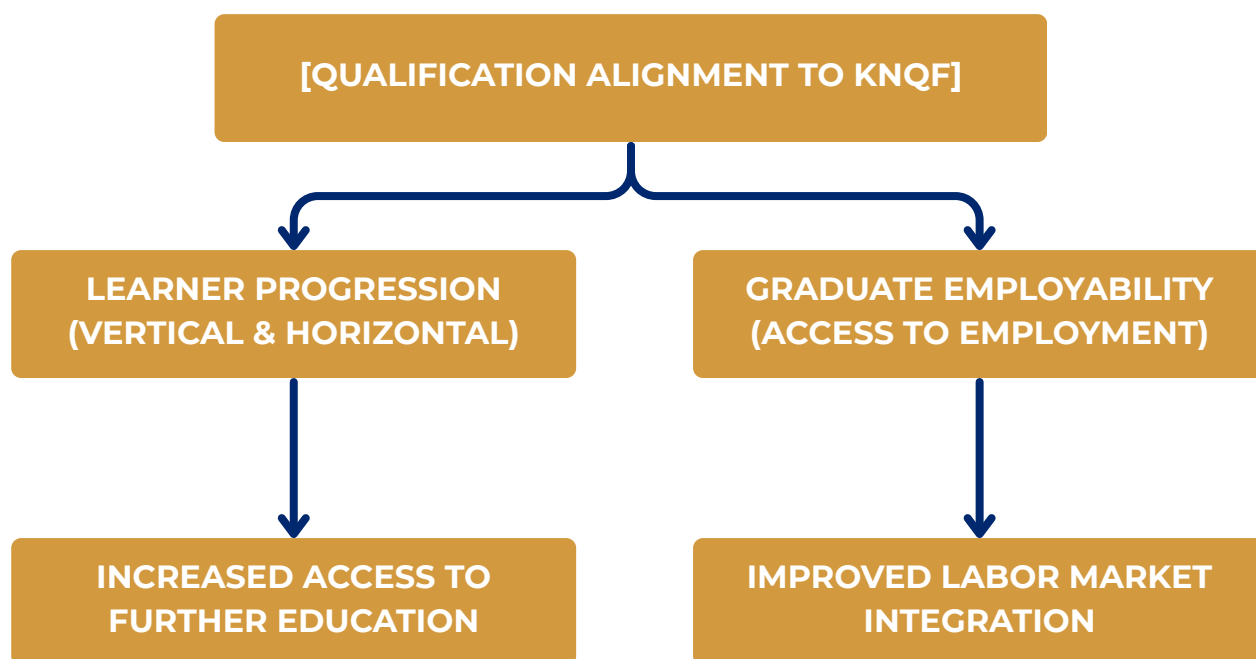


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

This framework guided the study's analysis by linking the process of qualification alignment to measurable outcomes in learner mobility and employment access.

2.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXISTING STUDIES AND CURRENT RESEARCH

Existing studies on NQFs globally and regionally have consistently highlighted the value of qualification alignment in enhancing transparency, learner mobility, and employability. Countries like South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom have well-documented cases where aligned qualifications support structured learning pathways, facilitate RPL, and improve employer confidence in hiring decisions (UNESCO, 2019; SAQA, 2019; NZQA, 2020).

However, most of these studies are situated in mature systems with long-established NQFs. While they provide theoretical and structural insights into how frameworks operate, many focus on policy design, implementation challenges, and institutional coordination, rather than empirical evaluation of outcomes such as learner progression or employment impact. In the Kenyan context, studies on the KNQF have primarily addressed the regulatory function, the alignment process, and the integration of CATS and RPL systems.

However, few if any studies have comprehensively examined whether aligned qualifications actually lead to tangible benefits for learners and graduates in terms of access to further education and training (vertical mobility), transferability across institutions or sectors (horizontal mobility), and improved access to relevant employment opportunities.

This research addresses a critical knowledge gap by moving beyond procedural evaluations to assess the real-world outcomes of qualification alignment. It provides empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the KNQF.

By doing so, the study contributes to both national and global discourse on NQFs by offering data-driven findings that can inform national policy reforms, institutional qualification design, labor market planning, and the operationalization of lifelong learning strategies. Thus, while building on foundational work in NQF literature, the current study introduces a practical impact lens that is currently missing in Kenyan and regional scholarship.

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

2.4.1 EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH QUALIFICATIONS HAVE BEEN ALIGNED AND VALIDATED TO THE KNQF ACROSS DIFFERENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA

NQFs worldwide have been designed to facilitate educational progression and mobility, making pathways clearer for learners to move vertically (advance to higher education levels) and horizontally (transfer between institutions or sectors) (UNESCO, 2019). In South Africa, the NQF has enabled previously disadvantaged populations to access further learning by clarifying equivalency across diverse credentials—aided by vertical articulation and credit transfer mechanisms (SAQA, 2019).

In New Zealand, the Qualifications Framework supports seamless progression, allowing learners to accumulate credits across institutions and progressing in both vocational and academic streams (NZQA, 2020). These international precedents underscore the potential of robust qualification alignment systems to enhance educational mobility and inclusion, making a case for similar gains in Kenya's context.

In Kenya, the KNQF, structured on a ten-level learning-outcomes approach, is intentionally designed to promote vertical and horizontal progression (KNQF (General) Regulations, 2025). The framework defines qualification levels and credit volumes for learning outcomes, supports Credit Accumulation and Transfer systems (KCATS) that allow learners to carry partly completed credits across institutions, enables Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), legitimizing competencies acquired through informal or non-formal learning, especially relevant to TVET and informal sector learners.

Institutional policy directives further reinforce the alignment's mobility agenda: universities are being urged to design competency-based curricula aligned to KNQF so graduates can meaningfully articulate into higher qualifications or technical training, promoting both vertical and horizontal transit.



2.4.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALIGNED QUALIFICATIONS AND LEARNER PROGRESSION WITHIN AND ACROSS EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEVELS

The KNQF was designed not only to standardize qualifications but also to enhance employability by ensuring that qualifications are relevant, credible, and aligned to labor market needs. By introducing a 10-level framework based on defined learning outcomes, competencies, and credit volumes, the KNQF aims to make qualifications more transparent and comparable across sectors, which is critical for employers seeking to identify suitable candidates for specific roles. With the Kenya National Qualifications Framework (General) Regulations, 2025 now fully operational, institutions are required to align their curricula and qualification structures accordingly. KNQA asserts that this alignment promotes the recognition of both academic and vocational skills, ultimately enhancing the employment prospects of graduates, especially in a job market increasingly demanding demonstrable competencies over mere paper qualifications (KNQA, 2025; People Daily, 2025).

One of the most significant strategies for improving employment outcomes under the KNQF is the institutionalization of RPL and the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS). These mechanisms offer pathways for informal sector workers, returning migrants, and non-traditional learners to validate their skills and competencies, thus becoming eligible for employment or progression within formal systems. According to KNQA's leadership, these tools are critical in reducing Kenya's widespread skills mismatch and underemployment, particularly among youth and TVET graduates (Capital FM, 2023; Scholar Media Africa, 2025).

Furthermore, universities and training institutions are revising their curricula to align with KNQF standards. This includes embedding industry-driven skills, competency-based assessments, and work-integrated learning (Switch TV News, 2023).

Despite these positive developments, there is limited empirical evidence on whether KNQF-aligned qualifications have tangibly improved employment rates or job quality for graduates across different sectors. While anecdotal reports suggest increased employer confidence in standardized qualifications and recognition processes, systematic tracking of employment outcomes among KNQF-aligned graduates is lacking. Additionally, sectoral variations such as differences in how the public, private, and informal sectors recognize or prioritize aligned qualifications, have not been fully explored. These gaps highlight the need for robust research to evaluate the real-world influence of qualification alignment on graduate employment, particularly in the post-alignment period between 2018 and 2025. This study, therefore, sought to provide data-driven insights into whether and how the KNQF has improved access to employment opportunities in Kenya's evolving labor market.



2.4.3 THE IMPACT OF VALIDATED QUALIFICATIONS ON GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY, JOB PLACEMENT, AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

A foundational strength of the qualification alignment process lies in KNQA's implementation of robust digital infrastructure, including the KNQA Qualifications Alignment Validation portal and the National Qualifications Database. These systems have significantly enhanced transparency, credibility, and efficiency in evaluating local and foreign qualifications, replaced cumbersome manual processes, and reduced instances of fraudulent credentials streamlining institutional credential verification and improving stakeholder trust.

Kenya's pioneering adoption of Recognition of Prior Learning illustrates a flexible and inclusive approach to qualification alignment. Through comprehensive RPL policies, implementation guidelines, quality assurance manuals, and pilot schemes supported by development partners like the ILO and Mastercard Foundation KNQA has enabled competency-based recognition for informal-sector workers, artisans, and young people. This approach has not only facilitated entry into formal education and employment but also supported lifelong learning, equity, and economic inclusion.

Strategic stakeholder collaboration and regional alignment have also emerged as notable best practices. KNQA has actively built partnerships with industry regulators, educational institutions, global bodies (e.g., ILO, ACQF), and regional NQF authorities enhancing qualification currency, policy coherence, and international comparability. These alliances have solidified KNQA's role as a regional leader and benchmark for qualifications frameworks, promoting learner and labor mobility across the African continent

2.4.4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY INSTITUTIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPLEMENTING QUALIFICATION ALIGNMENT AND VALIDATION PROCESSES UNDER THE KNQF

While KNQF provides a strong structural foundation for harmonizing qualifications and promoting lifelong learning, implementation across institutions and sectors remains uneven. Key challenges and opportunities include Capacity Constraints in Institutions

Many institutions, particularly smaller TVET colleges face limited technical and human capacity to effectively implement key components of the KNQF, such as credit transfer systems and curriculum alignment. This hinders learner mobility and progression, undermining the goals of flexible, inclusive education pathways. Awareness and understanding of the KCATs and RPL remain low among critical stakeholders, including learners, institutional staff, and employers. This reduces the uptake and practical use of available progression and recognition mechanisms.

There is often insufficient coordination and limited multi-stakeholder collaboration, especially between industry, training institutions, and regulatory bodies. This fragmentation weakens the validation process and the alignment of qualifications with labor market needs.



Despite these challenges, the KNQF presents an opportunity to leverage digital platforms for managing qualifications, credit transfer, and learner records. Enhanced use of technology can improve transparency, efficiency, and accessibility across the system.

Capacity constraints among institutions (especially smaller TVETs) to effectively implement credit transfer or to adopt KNQF-aligned curriculum, limiting learner progression. Awareness and familiarity with KCATS and RPL remain low among prospective learners, institutional staff, and employers, reducing effective use of progression pathways.

2.5 KNOWLEDGE GAP

Despite the progressive development of the KNQF and its associated mechanisms, there remains limited empirical evidence on the actual effectiveness of qualification alignment and validation processes in driving educational mobility, learner progression, and graduate employability across institutions in Kenya.

Existing literature highlights the potential of NQFs (globally and regionally) to enhance transparency, mobility, and labor market relevance of qualifications. For example, frameworks in South Africa and New Zealand have successfully enabled credit transfer, vertical articulation, and recognition of diverse learning pathways. Similarly, policy instruments in Kenya, including the 2025 KNQF regulations, emphasize curriculum alignment, stakeholder collaboration, and digital systems for qualification validation. However, these are primarily documented in policy papers, institutional reports, and anecdotal media sources, with little systematic evaluation of outcomes at the institutional or sectoral level.

While the KNQA has reported milestones in stakeholder engagement and system digitization, the impact of validated and aligned qualifications on actual learner trajectories including job placement, career advancement, and transitions across education levels has not been adequately quantified or analyzed. The extent to which institutions have fully aligned and validated qualifications across the different education and training levels remains unclear. There is insufficient tracking of learner progression data, especially in relation to the utilization of aligned qualifications. These gaps underscore the need for this study, which seeks to generate data-driven insights into how qualification alignment and validation under the KNQF are being implemented, the extent of their uptake, and their real-world impact on learners and institutions. By addressing these knowledge gaps, the research aims to inform policy and practice towards strengthening the KNQF as a tool for equitable and inclusive skills development in Kenya.



2.6 CONCLUSION OF THE GAP

Recognition and trust in qualifications are critical for learners' transition from education/training into employment, and for cross-institutional and sectoral mobility. Globally, nations with well-established qualification recognition and verification systems report that credible credentials improve employer confidence, reduce mismatches, and facilitate both vertical and horizontal mobility for learners (UNESCO, 2019; OECD, 2017). Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is also increasingly seen as essential for inclusive access to jobs, especially for marginalized and non-traditional learners.

In Kenya, recent evidence highlights significant challenges in maintaining credibility, due to the prevalence of fake or falsified academic credentials. These rates of fraudulent credentials undermine confidence in educational credentials, reduce the effectiveness of alignment and validation systems, and can deny genuinely qualified individuals' access to jobs or higher learning. Employers may also distrust qualifications broadly, potentially disadvantaging even those with genuine credentials.

On the other side, there are documented global practices and policy measures that successfully raise recognition and credibility. The European Union's procedures for recognizing third-country professional qualifications are aimed at simplifying and speeding recognition for migrants, improving fairness, and linking credentials clearly to job access. UNESCO's work emphasizes that recognition of informal learning, robust verification infrastructures, and transparent accreditation systems are strongly correlated with better employment outcomes and broader access to formal learning pathways (UNESCO, 2021).

2.7 LINKING TO STUDY OBJECTIVES

Given the study objectives, to examine the relationship between KNQF alignment/validation and learner progression / employment access, these findings suggested several gaps:

Extent of credential fraud:- With roughly 30% falsified credentials, there is a risk that many employers or institutions mistrust qualifications in general. This study sought to measure how this mistrust affects job access for properly certified graduates, how often genuine credentials are queried, and whether employers discriminate or require extra verification.

Recognition & credibility mechanisms: Although KNQF and its validation / alignment systems are designed to improve recognition (locally and internationally), there is limited evidence so far on how these systems are perceived by employers, whether they increase trust sufficiently to translate into improved hiring or better job terms.

The empirical linking to employment outcomes: - While alignment aims to make qualifications more relevant, transparent, and recognized, there is sparse quantitative data on how many aligned graduates find employment more quickly, or in higher-quality roles, compared with non-aligned or unvalidated cases.

2.8 CONCLUSION: SUMMATIVE INSIGHT

Putting this together, the literature shows that recognition and credibility of qualifications are foundational for access to jobs and further learning. High rates of credential fraud in Kenya erode confidence and act as a barrier both to learners who are truly qualified and to employers and institutions who must verify credentials. Meanwhile, global examples show that when recognition systems are robust, transparent, and trusted, they can improve job access, graduate employability, and learning opportunities.

By combining quantitative employment/progression data with qualitative insight, is well-positioned to fill critical gaps: demonstrating whether credentials aligned to the KNQF are actually recognized (by employers/institutions), trusted, and functioning in practice to improve access to jobs and further learning particularly for those who rely on alternative pathways or informal learning.



03 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was most suitable for evaluating the impact of qualification alignment and validation under the KNQF on learner progression and employment outcomes between 2018 and 2025. Quantitative data allowed for establishing statistical relationships between qualification alignment and access to education or employment, while qualitative insights explored deeper experiences, institutional perceptions, and systemic challenges. This triangulation provides a comprehensive evidence base to assess the effectiveness and utility of KNQF-aligned qualifications in real-world contexts

3.2 STUDY POPULATION

The study targeted key stakeholders who were directly involved in or affected by the qualification alignment and validation processes under the KNQF. These included applicants who had undergone alignment processes between 2018 and 2025, employers from both the public and private sectors, and education and training institutions, including Qualification Awarding Bodies . These groups were considered appropriate for the study as they represent the primary users and beneficiaries of alignment and validation services and are therefore best placed to provide insights on learner progression and employment outcomes.

3.3 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size for applicants was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95 percent confidence level and a margin of error of 5 percent. The formula expresses as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = margin of error

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{12087}{1 + 12087(0.05^2)}$$



$$n = \frac{12087}{1 + 12087(0.0025)}$$



$$n = \frac{12087}{1 + 30.2175}$$



$$n = \frac{12087}{31.2175}$$

$$n \approx 387$$

To account for non-response, a 20% adjustment was applied:



$$n_{\text{adjusted}} = 387 + (0.20 * 387)$$



$$n_{\text{adjusted}} = 387 + 77.4$$

$$n_{\text{adjusted}} \approx 465a:$$

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

A combination of sampling techniques was employed to ensure representation and relevance across the different respondent categories. For the applicants, stratified random sampling was used, whereby the population was first stratified by year of application. Proportional allocation was then applied to determine the number of respondents to be drawn from each stratum. The proportional allocation was guided by the formula:

$$n_h = \left(\frac{N_h}{N} \right) \times n$$

Where:

- n_h = sample size for each stratum
- N_h = population in each stratum
- N = total population
- n = total sample size

Where n_h represents the sample size for each stratum, N_h is the population within the stratum, N is the total population, and n is the overall sample size.

Following this allocation, random sampling was conducted within each stratum to select individual respondents.

For employers and education and training institutions, purposive sampling was applied to identify respondents with direct experience and interaction with aligned and validated qualifications. This approach ensured that the selected institutions and organizations were relevant to the objectives of the study and provided sectoral diversity. Snowball sampling was further used to identify additional respondents through referrals from initial participants.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data for the study was collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Structured questionnaires were developed for applicants, employers, and education and training institutions, while key informant interview guides were used to collect in-depth qualitative data from selected respondents. The applicant questionnaire was automated and administered digitally to facilitate wider reach and ease of response, while employer and institutional data were collected through a combination of interviews and guided questionnaire administration.

Prior to the main data collection exercise, a pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity, reliability, and sequencing of the tools, as well as the feasibility of the data collection process.

The pilot findings informed revisions to the instruments, including simplification of questions, refinement of response options, and improvement of overall structure. Following the pilot phase, a validation meeting was held to review and approve the revised data collection tools, ensuring that they were fit for purpose before full-scale deployment.

The full-scale data collection exercise was conducted between 9th and 20th March 2026. Applicants were primarily reached through digital platforms, including mobile messaging and email, through which the questionnaire links were shared alongside official request letters. Employers and institutions were engaged through scheduled interviews and formal communication facilitated by official letters issued by KNQA. Follow-up mechanisms, including phone calls and reminder messages, were used to enhance response rates and ensure adequate coverage of the sampled population.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

3.6.1 QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Data from surveys and KNQA records was analysed using SPSS. Techniques will include:

i. Descriptive Statistics:

Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to summarize alignment trends, employment rates, and education progression.

ii. Cross-tabulations:

To compare outcomes across variables such as qualification level, region of origin, or year of alignment.

iii. Correlation Analysis:

To examine the relationship between alignment status and:

- a. Access to higher education
- b. Job placement and career progression

iv. Regression Analysis:

To determine predictors of positive outcomes (e.g., alignment level, sector, institution type)

3.6.2 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs was analysed using thematic analysis with NVivo or manual coding. Steps include:

- i. Transcription and familiarization with the data
- ii. Open coding to identify initial themes
- iii. Categorization into overarching themes aligned with research objectives
- iv. Interpretation to derive insights into stakeholder experiences, system barriers, and perceptions of impact.

Themes will be triangulated across data sources to ensure validity and consistency.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study adhered to established ethical standards throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and all data collected was used strictly for research purposes. Appropriate measures were also taken to ensure secure handling and storage of data.

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Several measures were undertaken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. Data collection tools were pilot tested and refined prior to deployment to enhance clarity and consistency. Standardized instruments were used across all respondent categories to ensure uniformity in data collection. In addition, triangulation of data from multiple sources, including applicants, employers, and institutions, was applied to enhance the credibility of the findings. Consistent data collection procedures and regular monitoring during the fieldwork further contributed to the reliability of the study outcomes.



»»04 ANALYSIS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This report evaluates the alignment and validation of various qualifications within the KNQF. The analysis draws from a comprehensive survey of 118 respondents representing diverse professional disciplines and educational levels. By examining the distribution of qualifications across sectors, the status of pending validation applications, and success rates by academic level, this report provides a clear picture of the current landscape of qualification standards in Kenya.

The study utilized targeted questionnaires and structured interviews to gather insights from three primary stakeholder groups. The distribution of respondents is detailed below in table 1:

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Alignment & Validation Applicants	Targeted Questionnaire	89
Qualification Awarding Bodies (QABs) & Institutions	Institutional Questionnaire & Interviews	15
Employers	Employer-specific Questionnaire & Interviews	14
Total		118

Table 1– Respondents distribution

In addition to the survey data, structured interviews were conducted with key organizations including public sector bodies (KRA, KEPHIS, KBC), specialized agencies (ADAK, NITA), and academic institutions (Kenyatta University, Egerton University, KeMU) to identify recurring themes regarding the framework's implementation.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The demographic analysis of the 89 applicants involved in the alignment and validation process provides insights into the age and gender distribution of those seeking KNQF-certified qualifications.

4.1.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION

The survey revealed a predominantly young applicant pool, with the vast majority of respondents being under the age of 45 as represented in the figure below:

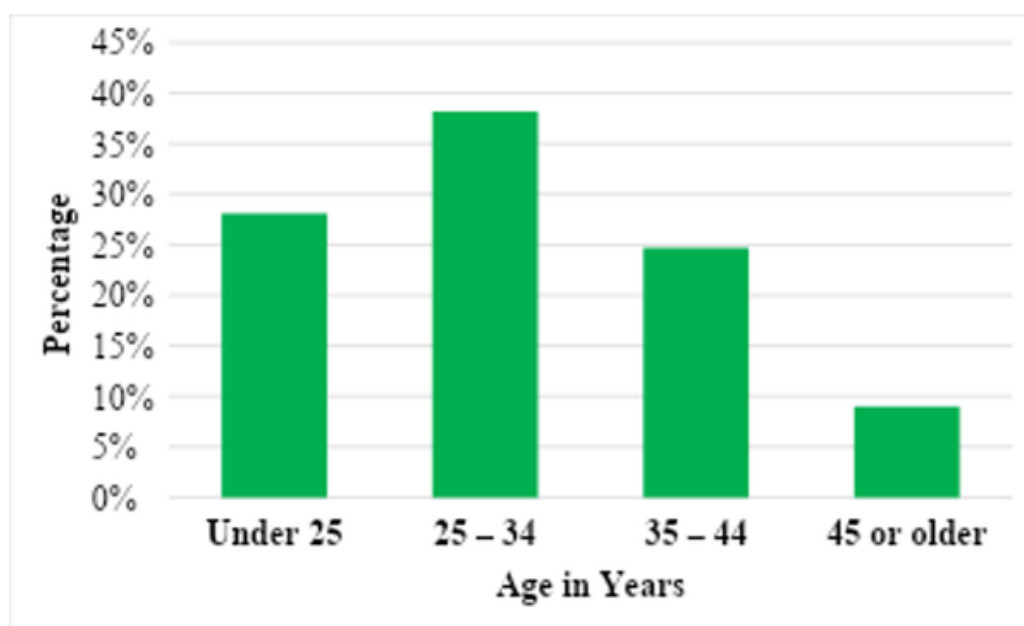


Figure 2 Age distribution

Youth Dominance: Approximately 66.3% of all applicants are under the age of 35, highlighting that early-career professionals and recent graduates are the primary drivers of validation requests.

Peak Engagement: The 25–34 age bracket represents the largest single group at 38.2%, suggesting that individuals in this stage of their career are most likely to seek alignment to enhance their mobility or secure promotion.

Late-Career Participation: Only 9% of respondents are aged 45 or older, indicating lower engagement with the framework among more senior professionals.

4.1.2 GENDER REPRESENTATION

The gender distribution indicates a higher level of participation among male applicants compared to female applicants and those who preferred not to disclose their gender.

Gender Gap: Male respondents constitute 56.2% of the sample, outnumbering female respondents (36%) by a significant margin.

Non-Disclosure: A small segment of the population (7.9%) chose not to disclose their gender, which is a factor to consider in inclusive reporting.

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Male	50	56.20%
Female	32	36.00%
Prefer not to say	7	7.90%
Total	89	100.00%

Table 2 – Gender distribution

4.1.3 SYNTHESIS OF DEMOGRAPHICS AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

The demographic data reflects the qualitative themes identified in the stakeholder interviews. The high concentration of young applicants (under 35) correlates with the frameworks perceived value in facilitating mobility and standardization.

Younger professionals, particularly those entering the workforce through TVET or universities rely on the framework to prove their trust and authenticity to employers like KRA or KEPHIS. The small percentage of older applicants (9%) may mirror the report's finding that established professionals often rely on internal career progression guidelines rather than newer framework designations.

4.2 PROFESSIONAL DISCIPLINES PRESENTED FOR VALIDATION

The following analysis categorizes respondents into eight primary professional themes, ranging from highly regulated sectors and emerging service industries. This thematic clustering allows for a clearer evaluation of how different disciplines perceive the trust and authenticity of the framework. It also highlights the broad utility of the KNQF in providing equivalence guidance for both traditional academic pathways and practical, TVET-based skill sets.

The table 3 below outlines the distribution of these disciplines, illustrating the framework's role as a cross-sectoral tool for professional recognition and career mobility in Kenya.

PROFESSIONAL THEME	INCLUDED DISCIPLINES
Education & Research	Teaching, Education Science, University, Science Teacher
Health & Medical Sciences	Medicine, Nursing, Nutrition, Lab Medicine, Dental Assistant, Perioperative Tech
Technical, Engineering & Trades	Engineering, Electrical/Audio, Welding, Plumbing, ICT, Computer Science, Software Engineering
Agriculture & Environment	Agriculture, Crop Production, Poultry Farming, Propagation, Wetland Management
Business, Finance & HR	Accounting, Finance, HR/Admin, Logistics, Hospitality, Secretarial
Social Sciences, Law & Security	Law, Psychology, Criminology, Social Work, Security, Community Development
Media & Communications	Journalism, Mass Communication, Audio Engineering
General/Other	Fruit Vendor, Office Assistant, General "Bachelor", None Specified

Table 3 Disciplines

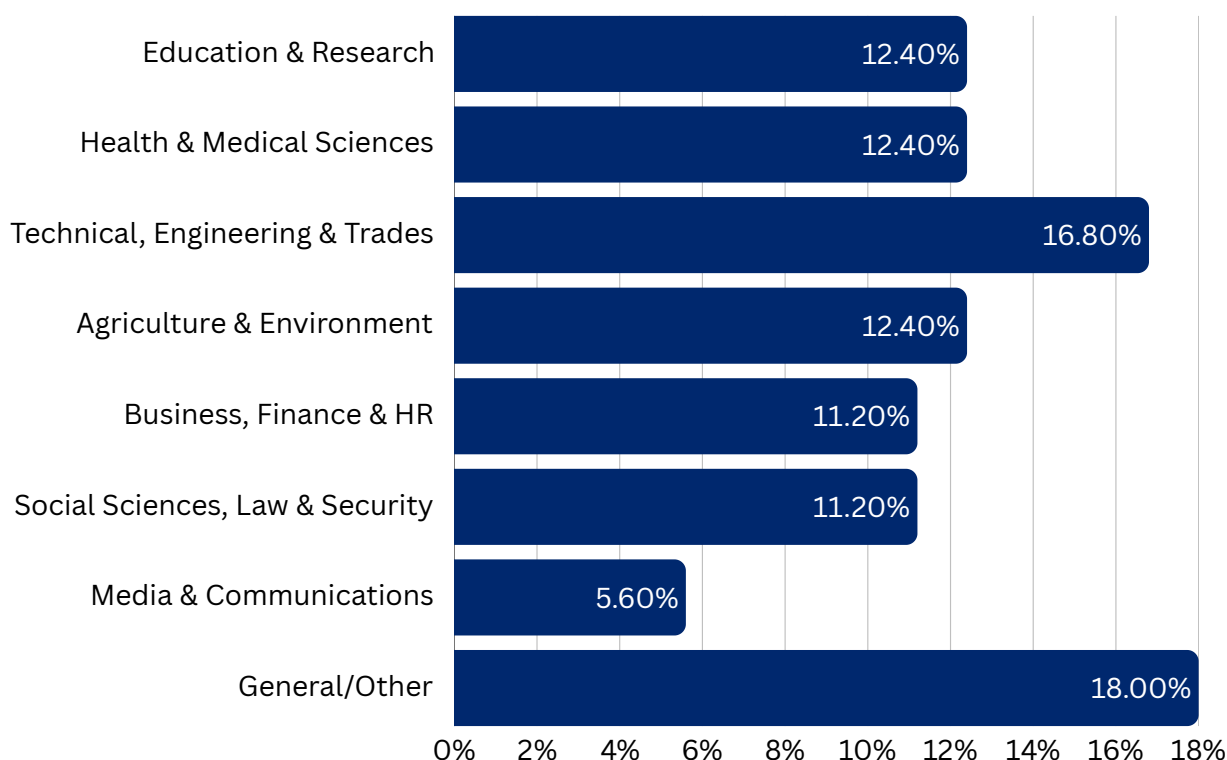


Figure 3 Disciplines

4.3 AGE DISTRIBUTION

The bar chart illustrates the percentage distribution of the 89 respondents across various professional thematic clusters. This visual representation highlights which sectors are most actively pursuing qualification alignment within the KNQF.

4.3.1 CORE FINDINGS FROM THE DATA

i. Dominant Sector (Excluding General):

The Technical, Engineering & Trades sector emerges as the most prominent specific professional group, accounting for 16.8% of all applications. This reflects a strong drive for standardization within TVET and technical fields.

ii. Uniform Engagement across Essential Services:

Three major sectors : Education & Research, Health & Medical Sciences, and Agriculture & Environment each show identical engagement levels at 12.4%. This parity suggests a broad-based adoption of the framework across Kenya's primary service and production industries.

iii. Supporting Corporate Functions:

The Business, Finance & HR and Social Sciences, Law & Security sectors both represent 11.2% of the applicant pool, indicating that administrative and legal professionals are equally seeking to validate their credentials for workforce parity.

iv. Media & Communications:

This sector represents the smallest specialized group at 5.6%, suggesting a potential area for increased outreach or sensitization.

v. General/Other Category:

At 18.0%, the "General/Other" category is the largest. This includes unclassified bachelor's degrees and niche roles like office assistants or vendors, highlighting the framework's broad appeal to the general workforce.

The graph confirms that the KNQF is being utilized across the entire spectrum of the Kenyan economy. However, the heavy concentration in technical and essential service sectors emphasizes that KNQA must prioritize efficiency in these high-volume areas to avoid the "operational bottlenecks" cited by respondents.

4.4 GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN OF PRIMARY QUALIFICATIONS

This section analyzes the geographic distribution of the countries where respondents obtained their primary qualifications. Understanding the origin of these credentials is vital for KNQA particularly in its role of aligning and verifying foreign qualifications to ensure they meet national standards as shown in figure 4 below.



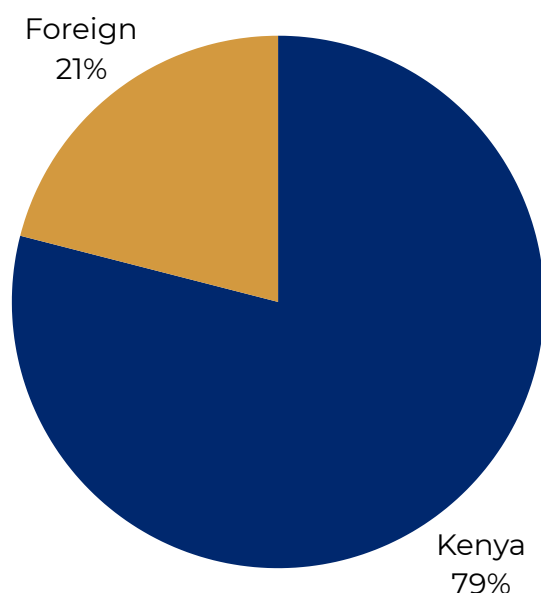


Figure 4 Geographic origin

4.4.1 COUNTRY OF QUALIFICATION AWARD

Most applicants held qualifications awarded within Kenya, though a significant portion sought validation for international credentials.

i. Dominance of Local Qualifications:

Approximately 77.5% of applicants are seeking alignment for qualifications obtained within Kenya. This high percentage suggests that even for local graduates, the KNQF is seen as a necessary tool for standardization and parity across different Kenyan examining bodies.

ii. International Credentialing:

One-fifth of the respondents (20.2%) are holders of foreign qualifications. This group represents a key functional area for the framework, as academic institutions like KeMU, Kenyatta University, and KCA explicitly reported using the KNQF for the alignment of foreign qualifications before student admission.

iii. Workforce Mobility:

The presence of foreign-trained professionals indicates that the framework is fulfilling its objective of facilitating mobility by providing a clear guidance for those entering the Kenyan job market from abroad.

The data reflects the operational reality described by major public sector employers. Organizations rely on these validation results to ensure that regardless of where a qualification was awarded locally or internationally it meets a specific baseline of standardization.

However, 20.2% of foreign qualification holders are the most likely to be affected by the slow turnaround times and delayed verification cited by stakeholders. To maintain Kenya's attractiveness as a professional hub, stakeholders emphasized that the KNQA must prioritize efficiency and meeting established timelines to prevent these individuals from being delayed during quick hiring situations.

4.5 APPLICATION TIMELINE

The distribution of application years shows a significant surge in recent years, particularly as the framework gained more institutional traction. This section evaluates the growth and adoption rate of the KNQF validation process over a ten-year period. The data tracks the progression of applications from the framework's early stages to its current state in 2026 as shown in figure 5 below:

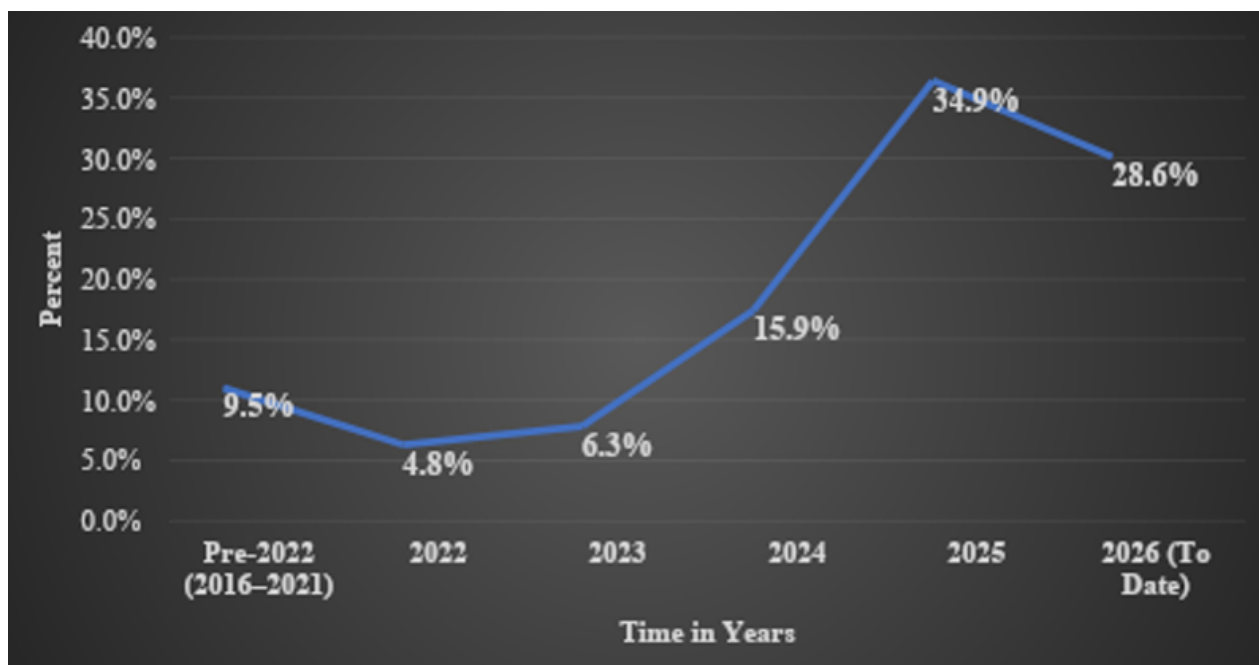


Figure 5 Applications trends across years

4.5.1 EXPONENTIAL GROWTH PHASE (2024–2026)

There has been a dramatic surge in applications in the last 28 months. Combined, the years 2024, 2025, and the beginning of 2026 account for 50 out of the 63 specified applications (approx. 79%). This indicates that the framework has reached a tipping point of public awareness and institutional requirement.

4.5.2 POST-PANDEMIC MOMENTUM

Applications remained relatively low and stagnant between 2016 and 2023. However, the numbers more than doubled between 2023 (4) and 2024 (10), and then doubled again in 2025 (22). This suggests that post-COVID-19 recovery and the digitalization of the KNQA systems may have lowered the barriers to entry for applicants.

4.5.3 2026 PROJECTIONS

With 18 applications already recorded in the early part of 2026, the current year is on track to surpass the record set in 2025. This reflects an accelerating demand for qualification alignment in the Kenyan labor market.

4.5.4 STRATEGIC INTERPRETATION & STAKEHOLDER CORRELATION

i. Impact of Sensitization:

The sharp rise in recent years directly correlates with the universal call for increased awareness noted in stakeholder interviews. The data suggests that recent outreach efforts are successfully driving candidates to formalize their credentials.

ii. Pressure on System Efficiency:

The consistent message from employers and institutions regarding the need for faster turnaround times and increased efficiency is critically relevant here. The large volume of active applications presents a significant demand for KNQA's current operational capacity, highlighting the need for system optimization.

iii. Addressing the "Unspecified" Gap:

A significant portion of the data (29.2%) falls under "Year Not Specified." This mirrors the technical and communication issues reported by stakeholders, specifically regarding document upload failures and the need for a stronger one-stop digital portal to ensure accurate data capture and tracking.

iv. Recruitment Timelines:

The 2025–2026 surge explains why employers like KIPI, and the Kiambu County Assembly have noted that delays in verification can slow down recruitment during 'quick hiring' situations. With more candidates applying than ever before, the speed of validation has become a primary bottleneck for national employment.

The data confirms a transition from a period of low awareness (2016–2023) to a period of high demand (2024–Present). While this demonstrates the success of the KNQF as a value-adding tool for quality improvement, it necessitates urgent investment in digital infrastructure to manage the rising volume of applicants.

4.6 ANALYSIS OF QUALIFICATION VALIDATION AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

The results highlight a significant correlation between the validation of qualifications and the attainment of professional roles. The following analysis evaluates how the validation status of 89 applicants relates to their current standing in the labor market.

4.6.1 DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND VALIDATION

The table below summarizes the employment landscape, providing both the frequency and the percentage (in brackets) relative to each specific employment category.



EMPLOYMENT STATUS	NOT ALIGNED/ VALIDATED	ALIGNED/ VALIDATED	TOTAL
Employed full-time	7 (39%)	11 (61%)	18 (100%)
Self-employed / Entrepreneur	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	10 (100%)
Employed part-time	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	4 (100%)
Student	30 (100%)	0 (0%)	30 (100%)
Unemployed (Actively seeking)	22 (100%)	0 (0%)	22 (100%)
Other / Not seeking work	5 (100%)	0 (0%)	5 (100%)
Total	72 (81%)	17 (19%)	89 (100%)*

Table 4 Employment landscape

Direct Impact on Career Placement

- i. Of the respondents currently in full-time employment, a clear majority of 61% (11 out of 18) obtained their roles after their qualifications were aligned or validated.
- ii. This high percentage suggests that KNQF validation is increasingly viewed as a critical credential for securing stable, full-time positions.
- iii. This aligns with interview themes where employers cited "skill assurance" and "trust and authenticity" as primary benefits of the framework.

The interview analysis reveals that stakeholders view KNQF as a vital instrument for institutional integrity and workforce planning. Key perspectives include:

i. **Trust and Authenticity:**

Respondents indicated that the primary benefit of the framework is the assurance of authenticity, noting that it serves as a tool to eliminate fraudulent certificates and establish a baseline for standardization.

ii. **Skill Assurance:**

Certain employers expressed the belief that KNQF-aligned qualifications signal superior practical skills, particularly among TVET graduates, and ensure a more precise match between job descriptions and personal specifications.

iii. **Verification:**

Employers highlighted a major benefit as the enhanced ability to verify academic credentials and effectively eliminate the use of fraudulent certificates.

iv. **Standardization and Parity:**

Organizations such as the KRA reported using these levels to maintain parity across their expansive workforces, ensuring that a Level 6 qualification in one department remains strictly comparable to a Level 6 in another.

4.6.2 THE VALIDATION BARRIER FOR JOB SEEKERS

- i. Notably, 0% of the respondents who are currently students or actively seeking work have completed the alignment/validation process.
- ii. This indicates a significant pre-validation bottleneck; individuals may be struggling to enter the workforce specifically because they lack these validated designations.
- iii. Qualitative data suggests this may be due to technical and communication issues, such as slow turnaround times and system failures during the upload process.

4.6.3 ENTREPRENEURIAL CREDIBILITY

- i. Among the self-employed, 40% (4 out of 10) have sought and obtained validation.
- ii. For entrepreneurs, this validation likely serves as a tool to ensure parity and standardization when competing for professional contracts or demonstrating competence in specialized fields.

4.6.4 SYSTEMIC EFFICIENCY CONCERNS

- i. While 81% (72 out of 89) of the total applicants are currently Not Aligned/Validated, the high volume of students and unemployed individuals in this category reinforces the stakeholder call for increased efficiency and faster turnaround times.
- ii. Stakeholders have emphasized that the framework must not be seen as just another administrative layer, but as a functional tool for rapid quality improvement and hiring.

The data demonstrates that while validation is a strong predictor of full-time employment success (61%), there is a massive backlog of unvalidated certificates currently in transition. Streamlining the operational challenges and improving system responsiveness will be essential to moving the 100% of skilled people and students into the formal, validated economy.

4.7 ANALYSIS OF QUALIFICATION LEVELS AND APPLICATION OUTCOMES

4.7.1 QUALIFICATION LEVELS

The data reveals that the majority of applicants are seeking validation for specific KNQF Levels credentials.

- i. **Core Academic Degrees:** Bachelor's degrees represent 5.6% of specified applications, followed by Certificates (6.7%) and Diplomas (3.4%).
- ii. **Advanced Research:** Postgraduate validation remains a niche area, with Master's and Doctorate levels combined representing only 2.2% of the pool.
- iii. **The General Gap:** A significant 79.8% of responses regarding specific levels were not categorized. This mirrors the qualitative finding that specialized agencies like KEMRI find generic KNQF levels too broad for scientific niches, potentially leading to ambiguity in how candidates classify their specific technical skills.

4.7.2 APPLICATION OUTCOMES

The success rate of applications provides a clear picture of the framework's current efficiency:

- i. **Success Rate:** Exactly 50.6% (45 respondents) have been successfully aligned or validated.
- ii. **Attrition and Revisions:** A combined 27% of applications were either rejected or returned for revisions. This high rate of Returned for Revisions (10.1%) correlates with the stakeholder feedback regarding the complexity and documentation required in the initial stages.
- iii. **Pending Status:** 22.5% of applications remain pending. This objective data supports the recurring grievance from institutions like KIPi and the Kiambu County Assembly that validation is time-consuming and can slow down recruitment.

4.8 ENGAGEMENT TRENDS AND INTERACTION MODES

4.8.1 INFORMATION SOURCES (DISCOVERY)

The way applicants learn about the KNQA highlights the power of social networks over formal institutional channels:

- i. **Peer Referrals:** Nearly half of all applicants (49.4%) first learned about the service through a referral from a friend or colleague.
- ii. **Digital and Social Media:** The KNQA Website (15.7%) and Social Media (11.2%) are significant drivers.
- iii. **Institutional Gap:** Interestingly, only 13.5% learned of the service through their educational institution and only 6.7% through their employer. This supports the universal call for increased awareness and suggests that Qualifications Awarding Bodies should more actively promote the framework to their student bodies.

4.8.2 INTERACTION MODES (ACCESS)

The data confirms a strong shift toward digital government services:

- i. **Digital Dominance:** Approximately 69.7% of respondents primarily interacted with the KNQA via the Online/Portal.
- ii. **Traditional Access:** Only 16.9% relied solely on in-person interactions.
- iii. **Strategic Insight:** While the digital portal is the primary mode of interaction, the 17th theme in the stakeholder report highlights technical and communication issues, such as system failures during document uploads. With nearly 70% of users relying on this portal, the demand for a one-stop digital portal or automated bulk processing is critical for maintaining current application volumes.



4.8.3 STRATEGIC INSIGHTS SUMMARY

- i. **The Awareness Paradox:** While applications have surged recently (reaching a peak of 20.2% in 2025), the discovery of the framework is largely informal (referrals) rather than institutional. There is a clear opportunity for the KNQA to formalize partnerships with the 20.2% of foreign qualification holders who may not have a local peer network to inform them of validation requirements.
- ii. **Operational Friction:** The fact that 1 out of every 5 applications is still pending and another 10% require revision explains why efficiency and turnaround times were the most critical messages conveyed by stakeholders.
- iii. **Digital Infrastructure:** Given that 69.7% of users are online, any system failure cited by institutions like Egerton University is not a minor inconvenience but a major barrier to the primary path of entry for the majority of the workforce.

The KNQF has successfully achieved a 50% validation success rate among its users. However, to move the remaining 49.4% of pending, rejected, or revised applications toward success, the Authority must address the digital bottlenecks and institutional awareness gaps identified by both the data and the stakeholders.

4.9 ANALYSIS OF USER EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS

This section evaluates the subjective experiences of the 89 applicants regarding the communication, efficiency, and perceived value of the KNQF. The data provides a balanced view of the Authority's operational performance and the framework's standing in the job market.

4.9.1 COMMUNICATION AND PROCESS CLARITY

The clarity of communication from the Authority is a critical factor in applicant success.

- i. **Communication Rating:** Approximately 46.1% of respondents rated communication as "Good" or "Excellent". However, a significant 30.3% described it as "Poor" or "Very Poor".
- ii. **Process Understanding:** Despite mixed communication ratings, nearly half of the applicants (49.4%) "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" that the alignment process was clear and easy to understand. Conversely, 32.6% expressed disagreement, indicating a complexity barrier for a third of the users.



CATEGORY	METRIC / STATEMENT	STRONGLY DISAGREE / VERY POOR	DISAGREE / POOR	NEUTRAL / ADEQUATE	AGREE / GOOD	STRONGLY AGREE / EXCELLENT
Communication	Clarity and effectiveness of KNQA communication	9.0% (8)	21.3% (19)	23.6% (21)	28.1% (25)	18.0% (16)
Digital Efficiency	Efficiency of the Online/Portal experience	11.2% (10)	16.9% (15)	28.1% (25)	27.0% (24)	16.9% (15)
Process Clarity	The alignment process was clear and easy to understand	20.2% (18)	12.4% (11)	18.0% (16)	19.1% (17)	30.3% (27)
Personal Value	Aligned qualifications better reflect my skills/competencies	18.0% (16)	13.5% (12)	21.3% (19)	20.2% (18)	27.0% (24)
Employer Awareness	The KNQF is well-understood by employers in my field	22.5% (20)	16.9% (15)	16.9% (15)	20.2% (18)	23.6% (21)
Recommendation	I would recommend others get their qualifications aligned	19.1% (17)	13.5% (12)	11.2% (10)	18.0% (16)	38.2% (34)

Table 5 Communication and Process Clarity

4.9.2 DIGITAL SERVICE EFFICIENCY

As previously noted, 69.7% of users interact with the KNQA via the online portal.

- i. **User Experience:** 43.9% of portal users found the experience Efficient or Very Efficient.
- ii. **Performance Gaps:** A notable 28.1% rated the digital experience as Inefficient or Very Inefficient. This empirical data correlates with stakeholder reports of "system failures during document uploads" and "lack of responsiveness".

4.9.3 PERCEIVED VALUE AND EMPLOYER AWARENESS

The data reveals a divide between the internal value of the qualification and its external recognition by industry.

- i. **Skill Reflection:** 47.2% of respondents felt that their aligned qualification better reflects their skills and competencies. This supports the stakeholder theme of skill assurance and the belief that KNQF-aligned credentials signal practical capabilities.
- ii. **Employer Awareness Gap:** Respondents were highly skeptical of employer awareness. While 43.8% believed the KNQF is well-understood by employers, a nearly equal 39.4% Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed.
- iii. **Advocacy and Recommendations:** Despite the operational hurdles, a majority of 56.2% would recommend that others get their qualifications aligned. This indicates that the long-term professional benefits are perceived to outweigh the short-term administrative challenges.

4.9.4 STRATEGIC INSIGHTS AND SYNTHESIS

- i. **The Recognition Barrier:** The data confirms a major challenge identified in the interviews: Varying Levels of Awareness among employers. While 47.2% of applicants value the framework personally, the 39.4% who feel employers don't understand it suggests that the reliance on internal guidelines by companies remains a significant hurdle.
- ii. **Operational Polarization:** The efficiency ratings are polarized. While a large segment is satisfied, 30.3% reported poor communication and the 28.1% who found the portal inefficient represent a substantial frustrated minority. This likely contributes to the slow turnaround times and operational bottlenecks cited as a critical message to the KNQA.
- iii. **Standardization as a Success Metric:** The fact that 30.3% of applicants Strongly Agree that the process is easy and 38.2% Strongly Agree they would recommend it suggests that for users who successfully navigate the system, the framework achieves its goal of providing a baseline of standardization and trust and authenticity.

The data reflects a framework that is highly valued by those who complete the process but is currently hampered by a 30% friction rate in both communication and digital efficiency. Bridging the gap between personal skill reflection and employer recognition through the requested increased sensitization will be essential for the framework's future success.

4.10 STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

This section analyzes the open-ended feedback regarding the single most important improvement needed for the KNQF process. By thematic clustering of these qualitative responses, we can identify the specific operational pain points that future applicants wish to see addressed.

4.10.1 THEMATIC CATEGORIZATION OF IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The various individual responses have been grouped into six primary thematic pillars to provide a clear roadmap for institutional reform.

IMPROVEMENT THEME	KEY ISSUES INCLUDED	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Communication & Feedback	Better communication, fast feedback, picking calls, portal updates, clear guidance.	28	31.50%
Awareness & Outreach	Public sensitization, mainstream media presence, campus outreach, clear mandate.	14	15.70%
Process Efficiency & Speed	Turnaround time, reduced duration, timely action, quick services, avoiding delays.	13	14.60%
Digital & System Optimization	System monitoring, user interface, digital portal efficiency, "system operation" issues.	10	11.20%
Cost & Financial Accessibility	Fee reduction, "favorable" costs, revising pricing structures.	6	6.70%
Administrative Simplification	Less paperwork, streamlined processes, clear document requirements, advocate validation.	6	6.70%
Other / Not Specified	N/A, Management, Research on foreign systems, Location pins.	12	13.60%
Total		89	100%

Table 6 Thematic Categorization

THE COMMUNICATION CRISIS (31.5%)

The overwhelming priority for applicants is Communication. Specific grievances such as unanswered phone calls and a lack of status updates on the portal highlight a feedback vacuum. Applicants noted that immediate response or somewhat may save applicants a lot of hustle. This confirms the stakeholder report theme regarding the lack of responsiveness from the KNQA.

4.10.2 AWARENESS, AWARENESS, AWARENESS (15.7%)

Mirroring the qualitative feedback from institutions like Bandari Maritime Academy and Egerton University, respondents emphasized that the framework must be well known out here. One respondent suggested that awareness should be so high that once a student finishes studies, they do the alignment or validation right away. This reinforces the universal call for increased sensitization identified in the stakeholder interviews.

4.10.3 OPERATIONAL SPEED AND QUICK HIRING NEEDS (14.6%)

The demand for quicker time and improved turnaround is critical. One respondent highlighted a personal crisis where an application was significantly delayed despite applying three months before intake, eventually requiring a physical visit to resolve a system issue. This is a direct empirical validation of the concern that delays in verification can slow down recruitment during 'quick hiring' situations.

4.10.4 THE DIGITAL PARADOX (11.2%)

While most users are online, the System Operation remains a hurdle. Feedback regarding the need for effective monitoring of the system and better user interface aligns with reports of system failures during document uploads. One applicant specifically requested a Google location pin and map for those who are forced to visit the office due to digital failures.

4.10.5 FINANCIAL AND BUREAUCRATIC BARRIERS (13.4%)

Combined, cost and paperwork represent a significant barrier for roughly 13% of applicants. Recommendations to reduce paperwork and revise cost suggest that for some, the KNQF process is perceived as an unnecessary administrative layer rather than a value-adding service.

The data paints a picture of a user base that sees the value of the KNQF but is frustrated by procedural friction. To move from being seen as an administrative hurdle to a value-adding tool, the Authority must prioritize automated feedback loops, mainstream media sensitization, and a digital portal that eliminates the need for physical visits.

4.11 ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES FACED BY APPLICANTS

This section evaluates the specific hurdles identified by respondents in their open-ended feedback. By categorizing these pain points, we can identify where the process currently diverges from the standardization and parity goals of the framework



THEME	KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED	FREQUENCY (APPROX.)	PERCENTAGE
Communication & Feedback	Response time, phone availability, portal updates, and status tracking.	35	39.30%
Public Awareness & Outreach	Visibility in mainstream media, sensitization, and early information.	13	14.60%
Efficiency & Turnaround Time	Reducing delays, system stability, and shortening the validation process.	13	14.60%
Process Clarity & Guidance	Clear instructions on documents, advocate validation, and UI improvements.	10	11.20%
Cost & Accessibility	Fee reduction and physical/digital accessibility.	6	6.70%

Table 7 Analysis of challenges

THE COMMUNICATION VACUUM (28.1%)

Communication remains the single largest obstacle. Respondents expressed frustration over having to follow up several times without being informed of the specific cause of delays. For instance, one respondent only learned much later that the delay was due to the "South African side" of the verification process.

4.11.1 FINANCIAL EXCLUSION AND HIGH COST (23.6%)

A significant portion of the applicant pool views the current fee structure as a barrier. Terms like it's expensive and financial/costs appear frequently. This suggests that for many job seekers, especially those currently unemployed the cost of validation may feel like an "unnecessary administrative layer" rather than an accessible public service.

4.11.2 BUREAUCRATIC FRICTION (10.1% PAPERWORK)

Despite the push for a digital-first approach (69.7% usage), many applicants still complain of too much paperwork. This aligns with the request from organizations like NDMA and KICC for a more robust one-stop digital portal that automates bulk processing and reduces the manual burden on the applicant.

4.11.3 THE INTAKE PRESSURE AND TIME DELAYS (12.4%)

The data shows that delays often conflict with university intake or job application deadlines. One respondent noted that the process requires significant patience because the KNQA must refer back to primary universities for verification. This reinforces the need for the faster turnaround times and timely delivery emphasized as a summary message in the stakeholder interviews.

4.11.4 SUCCESS STORIES (17.9%)

Nearly 18% of respondents reported no challenges, describing the process as easy and straightforward. This suggests that the current system works well for a subset of applicants, likely those with standard local qualifications but struggles with more complex foreign or non-traditional cases.

The challenges reported are largely procedural rather than conceptual. While applicants value the credibility of the KNQF, they are hindered by high costs, slow communication, and excessive paperwork.

To address these findings, the Authority should consider:

- i. Automated Status Notifications: To fill the communication gap.
- ii. Digitized Verification Partnerships: To reduce the time spent referring back to primary universities and secondary bodies like KNEC.

4.12 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF USER EXPERIENCES

This section examines the open-ended feedback provided by respondents regarding their overall experience with the KNQA. While nearly half of the respondents (48.3%) had no additional comments (answering "No," "None," or "N/A"), the remaining qualitative data provides a rich perspective on the framework's real-world impact and institutional integrity.

4.12.1 THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION OF USER FEEDBACK

To extract actionable insights, the responses have been categorized into five primary themes reflecting the diversity of the applicant journey.

THEME	KEY USER SENTIMENTS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Neutral / No Comment	"No," "None," "N/A," "Nothing else to share."	43	48.31%
Operational Friction & Delays	"Time frame," "Results took 2 months instead of weeks," "Server 500 errors," "Reduce processing time."	15	16.85%
Positive Feedback & Commendation	"Professionalism exercised by staff," "Mr. Joshua was very helpful," "Experience was good," "Efficiency and credibility."	11	12.36%
Awareness & Institutional Recognition	"Educate people on what KNQA offers," "Some universities refuse KNQA," "Mainstream media presence."	9	10.11%

Integrity & Fairness Concerns	"Foreigners overcharged by cyber personnel," "Employees susceptible to corruption," "Unofficial fees for speed."	4	4.49%
Other / Specific Requests	"Offer job opportunities," "Revalidate documents for academic progress," "Diversity."	7	7.87%
Total		89	100%

Table 8 User feedback classification

4.12.2 THE SERVICE DELIVERY GAP (16.85%)

A significant cluster of feedback highlights a disconnect between the promised vs. actual timelines. Users reported specific instances where results intended to take a few weeks extended to two months. Technical reliability remains a pain point, with reports of "Server 500" errors and a lack of email/phone responsiveness.

4.12.3 STAFF EXCELLENCE AS A MITIGATION STRATEGY (12.36%)

In contrast to the systemic digital failures, several applicants highlighted individual staff members and general staff professionalism as highlights of their experience. This suggests that the Authority's human capital is a major asset that currently compensates for its underperforming digital infrastructure.

4.12.4 INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT & RECOGNITION (10.11%)

A critical insight emerged regarding inter-institutional conflicts. One respondent noted that while some universities previously accepted KNQA validation for Credit Transfers, they have since stopped. This matches the interview data from 4 respondents who called for better alignment of curriculum and a dominant, unified sensitization strategy to ensure KNQF designations have universal currency.

4.12.5 GOVERNANCE AND VULNERABILITY (4.49%)

Small but significant reports regarding corruption and the exploitation of foreign nationals were noted. One foreign national reported being overcharged by cyber personnel due to a lack of clear, direct instructions. Another reported that unofficial fees were used by some to bypass delays. These insights highlight a need for the KNQA to simplify its User Interface and reduce complexity to protect vulnerable applicants from predatory third parties.

4.12.6 PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY AND GROWTH

Despite the friction, several users explicitly mentioned that the process was "helpful in ensuring my qualification is recognized in Kenya" and "valuable for career development." This reinforces the core theme of "skill assurance" and the framework's perceived value in providing a "baseline of standardization" for the Kenyan workforce.

The additional feedback underscores a system that is fundamentally valued for its credibility and role in career progression but is currently hindered by unreliable digital systems and inconsistent processing times.

The message to the KNQA is two-fold:

- i. Strengthen the Digital Gate: Fixing "Server 500" errors and creating a one-stop digital portal would prevent applicants from having to rely on expensive cyber intermediaries or unofficial channels.
- ii. Standardize Recognition: The Authority must resolve the reported instances of universities refusing KNQA validation to ensure that the time and cost invested by applicants translate into guaranteed academic and professional mobility.

4.12.7 COMMUNICATION & CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Feedback indicates a disconnect between the Authority and its applicants.

- i. Responsiveness: Multiple users reported a total lack of response to emails and phone calls.
- ii. Transparency: There is a recurring request for timely updates and clearer communication regarding application status.
- iii. Staff Performance: Interestingly, this is polarized. Some users praised specific staff (e.g., "Mr. Joshua was of very good help"), while others cited poor customer service and a need for better lead times for queries.

4.12.8 AWARENESS & ACCESSIBILITY

A strong theme emerged regarding the low public knowledge about KNQA's role and the complexity of its systems.

- i. New users, especially foreign nationals, find the platform complex and the procedures difficult to navigate.
- ii. Applicants are calling for KNQA to educate people and create more awareness regarding their services.
- iii. Due to procedural complexity, some applicants feel forced to use third-party cyber personnel who overcharge them.

4.12.9 POLICY & INTER-INSTITUTIONAL ALIGNMENT

Users expressed frustration over the lack of harmony between KNQA and other bodies.

- Some universities reportedly no longer accept KNQA validation, preferring KNEC or other bodies.
- A specific pain point was noted where the authority does not grade from foreign documents to Kenyan documents.
- Users who have progressed academically find it necessary to revalidate, suggesting a need for a smoother progression pathway.



4.12.10 INTEGRITY & PROFESSIONALISM

While many users noted professionalism, a serious allegation regarding unofficial fees for expedited processing by local cyber cafes was mentioned.

Summary Table: Sentiment and Frequency

THEME	SENTIMENT	KEY USER REQUIREMENT
Processing Speed	Negative/Mixed	Reduce lead times; meet promised deadlines.
Platform Usability	Negative	Simplify the UI; fix server 500 errors.
Institutional Harmony	Neutral/Concerned	Align with Universities and KNEC.
Customer Service	Mixed	Improved email/phone responsiveness.
Public Awareness	Negative	Aggressive dissemination of information.
Credibility	Positive/Mixed	Maintain high professional standards; curb unofficial fees.

Table 9 Sentiment and Frequency

4.13 SUMMARY

This research evaluated the implementation of the KNQF based on respondents. The findings revealed a framework that is highly valued for its credibility but currently hindered by operational and communication barriers.

Key Findings: The study identified a surge in demand, with nearly 80% of applications occurring between 2024 and 2026. While the framework has achieved a 50.6% validation success rate, significant friction remains. Approximately 30% of users reported poor communication and technical failures within the digital portal, which 69.7% of applicants rely on.

Demographically, the framework primarily serves a younger demographic; 66.3% of applicants are under 35, using validation to secure full-time employment a goal achieved by 61% of those successfully validated. However, a "recognition gap" persists, as 39.4% of respondents feel employers do not yet fully understand or prioritize KNQF designations over internal guidelines.

Strategic Recommendations: To transition from an administrative hurdle to a value-adding tool, the research recommends that the Kenya National Qualifications Authority:

- i. Improve the one-stop portal to eliminate errors and provide real-time tracking.
- ii. Execute mainstream media sensitization to move beyond informal peer referrals.
- iii. Adhere to strict timelines to support quick hiring and Education and Training institutions intake cycles.
- iv. Address high costs and paperwork to ensure financial and administrative accessibility for all graduates.

4.14 RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Improve the Alignment Portal

The research showed that 69.7% of users already interact with KNQA online, yet many face "Server 500" errors and upload failures. The Authority should invest in a robust, high-capacity digital portal that allows for real-time application tracking, automated document verification, and instant status notifications to eliminate the current feedback vacuum."

ii. Implement a Rapid Response Communication Strategy

With 30.3% of applicants rating communication as "Poor" or "Very Poor," there is an urgent need for a dedicated customer support desk. KNQA should implement a multi-channel support system (including Live Chat, WhatsApp, and a functional help-line) with a guaranteed 24-hour response time for inquiries and status updates.

iii. Execute a Sensitization Campaign

Stakeholders universally called for Awareness, Awareness, Awareness!. KNQA should move beyond informal referral-based growth (which currently accounts for 49.4% of discovery) and launch a nationwide campaign using TV, radio, and social media to educate both the public and private sector employers on the value of KNQF-aligned qualifications.

iv. Optimize Processing Turnaround Times

The data highlighted a service delivery gap where expected timelines of weeks stretch into months. This is particularly critical for the 20.2% of foreign qualification holders who face quick hiring situations and university admission deadlines.

v. Harmonize Inter-Institutional Recognition

The research identified instances where universities and employers reportedly refuse or ignore KNQF validation. KNQA should establish formal MoUs with the Commission for University Education (CUE) and professional bodies to ensure that once a qualification is aligned, its recognition is key across all Kenyan institutions.

vi. Simplify Administrative Documentation

Despite being a digital process, 10.1% of applicants complained of too much paperwork. KNQA should streamline the required document list, integrate digital signatures, and provide clearer, step-by-step video tutorials to prevent applicants from falling prey to overcharging cyber personnel.

vii. Strengthen Internal Integrity and Ethics Monitoring

To protect the credibility and trust of the framework, the Authority must address allegations of unofficial fees for expedited processing. Implementing an anonymous whistle-blowing portal and digitizing the entire payment trail through e-Citizen or M-Pesa will help eliminate opportunities for corruption.



viii. **Expand Institutional Partnerships for Early Alignment**

The Institutional Gap showed that only 6.7% of applicants learn about validation from their employers. KNQA should partner with HR departments and career offices at universities to ensure students align their qualifications immediately upon graduation, before they enter the job market.

ix. **Develop Niche-Specific Framework Descriptors**

Specialized agencies reported that generic KNQF levels can feel too broad for scientific or technical niches. The Authority should collaborate with sector-specific experts to create more granular descriptors that accurately reflect the competencies required in specialized fields like laboratory medicine, aeronautical engineering, and specialized agriculture.



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