**The Students Issues of Post Graduate Studies at Mbarara University of Science and Technology.**

 **By John Baptist Kamushaga (PhD Student 2017) Must.**

**A Humanistic Perspective.**

**Introduction.**

As Naisbitt (1984) declared in his Megatrends, “we must learn to balance the material wonders of technology with the spiritual demands of our human nature”. His challenge awaits modern and aspiring managers of universities.

The feelings and expectations of Post Graduate Students at University world over are always exciting.

First, it is a rare opportunity for prepared students to reach this level of educational background and secondly hoping to make a difference in policy issues that affect the social wellbeing of humanity.

As Post graduate students progress, the issues or realities through which they pursue their studies bring a lot of challenges. Some of the larger questions are traditional and religious whereas a bulk of them differ from one institution to another, one programme to another and even from one student to another depending on institutional factors such as the choice of one’s Supervisor, research topic, supporting resources as well as personal differences

Modern and aspiring managers of universities must find measures to these issues and try to balance education needs of the 21st century.

 In this article I explore from a humanity perspective the Issues Postgraduate students at MUST raise as they interact with University climate. Considering my personal experience at MUST as a PhD student, there is need to honestly discuss issues that affect students stay so as not to kill their personal initiative to serve society.

**Contemporary Post Graduate Issues at MUST**

**Funding Higher Education**

 One of the pressing issues facing post graduate students at MUST is that of funding their education. MUST is a Public University. Most students here are self-sponsored except a few who are being sponsored by government (EPRC, 1989) and other partners in development.

Honestly most students are finding it difficult to meet the full cost of Higher Education in form of tuition fees, research funding, travel expenses etc.

There is a lot of pressure placed upon Students who have not fully paid fees balances denying them registration, access to public facilities like libraries and computer labs. They are being denied entry into examination rooms or entry into lecture halls.

In our PhD class, there is a continuing student who had to suspend his programs to go and look for money to enable him go through the course. The funding issue puts a lot of strain on the students and creates unwarranted anxieties which impacts on their performance in examination.

As an attempt to overcome this, students especially the doctoral prepared in their academic engagement to stimulate research and practice have questioned grants and scholarship funding as to who should control this fund and who should access it. If access to education is a right to all, inequality of access denies this right to some thus inequality of access becomes an ethical issue which I may not have space to discuss now. .

True, control and access to higher education funds is universally determined in Uganda but if Consumer Organizations can demonstrate their education management competencies and demand for transparency, fairness and equality (Ralph, Nader’s 1965) they are ethically right to have this management designed as part of their role to shape edudation policy for the benefit of all. The Consumer Organizations, if present would encourage the Human Resource Office at MUST to be clear in handling Scholarship issues for example in the 2018/19 DAAD call for applications for Postgraduate Scholarships, Makerere University is clear on the Number of Scholarships to offer per area of study say, 13 PhD’s of which 3 are in Public Health and 10 in other fields, 30 Masters of which 6 are in Public Health, 4 in Integrated Watershed Management and 20 in eligible programs .

No such information is provided on a similar advert that was issued by MUST/web writer on the 6th Jan 2018, even about the proceedings and outcome of the whole process remains conspicuously absent in the eyes of some applicants. It is them in the best interests of consumers to ensure that standards are set and followed in the whole process so as to ensure quality. Alternatively, University Management needs to develop the idea of a student work Scheme on Compass to encourage those who are able to apply for part-time employment as a way to cover other fees requirements. Opportunity to enjoy government Scholarship for embarking on doctoral studies can also be extended to them and in this process no discrimination should be made between teaching and no-teaching staff.

**Emphasis on Graduates rather than Education Promotion**

The other pressing issue is that the University emphasizes on producing graduates rather than quality staff to meet the education needs of the nation. Even with this adequate supply of graduates, standards may continue to drop below the needs of the nation because certain geographical areas are oversupplied whereas other areas may be lacking. The example to illustrate this point is pay of university staff. They always complain of cut allowances and low Salaries to affect their work. The University cannot demand for quality in an era of diminishing recourses.

Although historical influences have got a strong hand in this, Education management promoters can advocate and design relevant education programs that reflect the values and beliefs of the nation which develop positive attitude towards education, give skills, provide counseling so as to identify and overcome risk factors for certain education challenges and lay strategies for remaining relevant. All this requires a participatory and collaborative approach.

**Insufficient Standards to ensure Quality**

This issue is not unique for MUST only. There is lack of Masters and Doctoral prepared managers, administrators, educators, researchers and leaders in all Education areas of the University to produce balanced and Standard work. For example, the quality of teaching and supervising of Post graduate students is below the required standard. The Department of Foundations of education and Psychology in the faculty of Science for example has had only one Professor. Most of the lecturers are part-timers against many Masters and a few PhD students. Such staff has got an effect on the quality of teaching and supervision of students. It also becomes increasingly difficult for university workers to be peers with other education professionals who have more advanced education. This presents both challenges and opportunities for the present and future managers of the university to provide full time staff and retain it.

Post graduate students should be provided with a conducive academic learning climate to develop independently, freely participate in faculty activities, formulate and stimulate research and practice. This requires up-to-date and well-equipped facilities like libraries and computer labs which are lacking. Some workers here are holiday makers whether intended or not.

There is always uneven distribution of students with fewer ladies attending to their personal phones. But even with advanced services such as inter-library loaning books, journal articles from other libraries, electronic journal and other information services through the internet, their usage is still small. In fact, many of the students are not even aware of such services.

**Multiple Responsibilities**

Although full-time study may be educationally preferable, most Post graduate students at MUST find part-time study necessary because of multiple responsibilities. Almost all masters of education students in the department to foundations of Education and Psychology have 24 hours of study per week. Most of them are employees, Parents and have other responsibilities which conflicts with their study program. As a result, late coming and absenteeism have been noticed as some of the challenges facing the department. In fact, it is rare to find a constituted class in attendance. Many times, one or none of the students attends and this makes assignments postponed which affect the syllabus coverage. This denies the students and the department the opportunity to perform to their best.

**Cultural orientations**

The other issue is cultural differences between postgraduates and MUST. PhD students for example should be constantly interacting, each changing and being changed by the other. This cannot happen at MUST since most students are foreign and share a different status, different academic purposes, cultural background from those of the local students. Given the nature of PhD study by research, it becomes difficult to have face to face study sessions even with local students. So, with these differences in educational systems, languages or ways of life, they face difficulties in settling down to their studies.

The Education Management Staff needs to apply its knowledge skills and help students retain their cultural values, accommodate and reparttern with them and this requires flexibility, open-mindedness, willingness to learn and the ability to establish trust.

**Supervisor-Supervisee relationship**

There are also issues surrounding the relationship between the Supervisor and Supervisee at MUST. Bernard Goodyear (1998) defines Supervision as the interaction that is provided by a senior member of a profession (a Supervisor) and a junior member or members of that profession(Supervisee). The purpose is to help a Supervisee to produce quality work and graduate in time. For this one to happen both the Supervisor and the Supervisee ought to fulfill their tasks appropriately. It is difficult for the roles to be met and this is the source of most problems which almost all universities world over face, MUST inclusive. For example, MUST has issues related with identifying best Partners to work with and difficult demands like sexual relationships which I have personally not fallen victim. In a situation like that, management at all levels needs to make sure there is Appropriate Judgment in helping students proceed with their work.

**Autonomy**

Knowing why, where and how students are taught and doing it so skillfully makes one’s function autonomous. If Post graduate students have the knowledge and skill to initiate and carry out actions and answer for the results, then they have grown more independently. This is what responsibility entails at this level as they are getting prepared to take leading positions in management practice. At MUST the management needs to ensure a free but also challenging academic environment for the students to develop Independently and initiate relevant skills which will take the university forward.

However, the situation on the student’s side is difficult since the study program me is like they are part-timers and the workload cannot allow them contribute meaningfully. Even at MUST the formal Communication networks like books, journals and Organization Newspapers are in a dysfunctional state. In fact, lecturers always complain that a lot of their work remains being shelved instead of being published in referred journals and so on. So, in this academic Climate it becomes so tricky for professionals to advance their Career development.

**Continue Professionalization of Higher Education**

Despite MUST’s name and the nurturance of its Clients, Faculties and Departments have been remarkably slow to nurture their profession. When education conditions in the University begin to deteriorate, faculty and department members as 24-hour Care-givers should be the first Professionals to recognize this and propose early interventions with management. This means that the challenge to continue professionalization of education is a function and operation of Professional Educationists not Doctors. For example, in the Faculty of Science there is a shortage of Manpower with qualifications in Applied Science, Engineering and Technology and this should not be blamed on Recruitment and Retention challenges by management but there is lack of effective programs of induction and in-service training of novice by mentors, and lack of up-to-date and reliable data. In these circumstances, employment and career opportunities are likely to be made on the basis of such factors as personal preferences, hearsay and perceived occupational stereotypes rather than a realistic and informed appraisal of the possibilities. `So, to continue professionalization of Higher education, the university among other considerations needs to generate “strong systems’’ but this will require the concerted and collective efforts of both new and established professionals who are convinced of education value, and these must also be comfortable with their own self-worth so that they can be assertive with a purpose.

**Conclusion**

Since its inception MUST has made tremendous contributions against all odds in meeting education needs of Ugandans. Being the first ever public University of Science and technology in the country, many more science graduates, especially pure science graduates have graduated, got employment and earned income for the country.

The quality of teaching to a large extent has been good. I have had time and shared study moments with master’s students in the department of Foundations of education and Psychology with their lecturers and there is always free interaction, methods and tools used are generally up-to-date.

On supervision, yes challenges are still there on my side like any other beginning post-graduate student since we come from different social-cultural backgrounds but on average I can say that our relationships have been cordial and this I must commend MUST.

Like I started in this article its very exciting for one to be a graduate student at MUST given the human care, the treatment the University has for students and the very excellent peer review and contribution the products have made for the country.

Succeed We Must.