

# Postgraduate in Educational Studies in African Public Universities

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**Abstract:** *The paper examines the current position of postgraduate education in educational oriented courses in African Universities. There was a rational need to increase the quality of graduate education to cater for development in education based studies. Most African universities encountered different challenges which include the need to rehabilitate much of the physical facilities, the inadequate lecturers with PhD qualification, student's admissions to programmes and the dismal number of graduates from different disciplines. The paper has a number of recommendations that could be taken, including capitalizing on excellent postgraduate centre's, expanding master's and PhD training, opening up of faculty research opportunities and enhancing university independence, all of which would require substantial financial investment.*

**Keywords:** Masters and PhD programmes, Quality and independence of University

## 1. Introduction

During the 1980s and early 2000s, African higher education's was thriving. The academic staffs were especially productive and creative and lecturing was given high priority, with tutorials classes dominating the environment and discussion forums at most universities (Sawyer, 2004). Unfortunately during the 2000s, the circumstances changed dramatically in most of African Universities due to a combination of expanded student intake in undergraduate's studies, financial allocation challenges, heavy workloads for lecturers and great need for learning opportunities. Around the same time, the World Bank was of the opinion that development efforts in Africa should be directed towards primary education through its 'Education for All' programme. Surprisingly in one of the come together discussion with the African university vice chancellors in 1986, Bank experts posited that higher education in Africa was mere luxury and there was need to close some institutions or to send those graduates who needed employment abroad (Brock-Utne, 2002: 8). The negative impact of these adjustments was budget cuts, salary stagnations, inadequate lecturers and limited recruitment of qualified staff. In the most African public universities, this era was symbolized by significant deterioration of facilities, reduced research funds and other challenges. This had an adverse effect on the postgraduate studies in education oriented courses at a time when the demands on these universities had sky rocketed and the student numbers had been raised greatly by the 1990s. On top of this, a number of universities faced another huddle in terms of academic staffing worsened by the 'brain drain' – for greener pastures abroad. The standards of teaching declined arising from a number of reasons such as, ballooning of student enrolment, the reduced tutorials and the dependency on many part time lecturers. The standards of research work were affected as well as the number of publications reduced significantly during this era, almost universally, due to reduced financial support for research (Mugenda, 2009: 25), high teaching

loads and poor pay for lecturers. As a result, many researchers had been turned into paupers who tended to secure second jobs to meet their daily needs and inevitably led to diverting of the faculty time to other activities. The great need for postgraduates to take pivotal role in national economic growth and to serve as centres of innovation and training for business, industry, governmental educational centers, entrepreneurship and the well-being of citizens subjected Universities to immense pressure. While the well to do countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom and Canada had invested enormously in the expansion of higher education because they had realized their central role in development, the African countries were looking into modalities of reducing the financial allocations resulting into a huge gap between the third world Africa states and the rest of the world widened (Gerritsen, 2009). This hell boo conditions had negative effects on provision of both postgraduate training and its quality.

## 2. Postgraduate Studies in Africa

Successful masters and PhDs studies provide the critical pivotal role between research and teaching and expand the opportunities for postgraduate research. The acknowledgement of the fact that masters and PhD education was a major root to enhancing the African region's intellectual capability and human capacity building mechanisms had enhanced the progress achieved in the regional training centre's. The World Bank examined a total of 23 regional postgraduate programmes in 2009. The data analysis from 16 African states, which collectively accounted for 2.4 (60%) million students in the countries south of the Sahara in Africa with an estimated total student population of 4 million (World Bank, 2009: xxvi). Out of these, more than 169,000 were in masters and PhD studies in 14 of the nations for which enrolment data were available. All 16 states analyzed had Masters Programmes and 12 nations were offering PhD courses. There were some strength in postgraduate studies in Africa, specifically in

South Africa in terms of both the number and the size of programmes. Elsewhere the most common postgraduate programmes for human resource development centered on enhancing education programmes. For instance, according to Mwiria et al (2007), Kenyan Universities they did set up departments of educational foundations with an aim of providing human resource personnel to meet the needs of the society at large and preparatory future PhD scholars. Masters and PhDs programmes were considered channels through which these Universities would propagate research capacity and generate high end skills essential for a functional economy. Toncich (2006) posited that the purpose of postgraduate research was not to make dramatic discoveries ... rather it was a mechanism by which masters students acquire skills needed in systematic investigation based on work done by their counterparts in the field, and then to expand or add to the current state of knowledge. In line with these facts, the African Universities found it viable in establishing the Educational Foundations programmes for the education sector. Unfortunately in most African states postgraduate programmes were not only hindered by budgetary challenges, but were also often hampered by changes in the country's political philosophies of parties in power and a lack of political good will on the part of those in power. In most circumstances, both masters and PhD studies were maligned with the large student enrolment in the undergraduate training programmes that outstretched the human and physical capacities of Universities. The adverse effects were explained through the analysis of Makerere University programmes. A critical analysis of the programmes at Makerere University found that a total of 295 students had been admitted in the doctoral programmes from the years 2000 to 2005, as by November 2010, only a dismal number of 89 (39.7 %) students had successfully graduated (Wamala, Oonyo and Acaya, 2011). Bunting and Sheppard (2012) observed, doctoral completion rates in many South African universities had stagnated to below 20 per cent even though in the year 2004 some growth had been realized. The gradual rise was achieved through interventions aimed at enhancing the completion rates to about 75 per cent. Contrary to their expectations, from the years 2005 to 2010, the rate of completion remained dismally at between 45-50 per cent. This was a replica of the graduation rates experienced by the Kenyan public universities. For instance, between the years 1993 and 2014, a total of 191 out of the total enrolment of 460 students had completed their master's degree in educational foundations in the three universities analyzed. That meant that only 42 per cent of students had realized completion of their studies while 58 per cent of the students were yet to. In the Kenyan scenario, low completion rates were linked to unplanned establishment of new universities and expansion of the existing ones which had constrained the meager resources, overworked lecturers who became vulnerable to 'faculty flight' (lecturers relocating elsewhere) and impacting negatively on the overall quality (Sogoni et al, 2016). Bearing in mind the importance research occupies in masters and PhD studies, their success hanged in the balance due to too few lecturers in the departments of educational foundations. In part, this was the reality of the state of the postgraduate education in African universities. In terms of the dreams the individual independent African state envisaged, economically and politically underdevelopment of the viable masters and PhD

programmes was the cancer that had affected many African countries, the struggle against racial segregation in Southern Africa, the over reliance on the World Bank and most other donors (with some remarkable exceptions) for more than two twenty years, the exorbitant cost of information and other technologies and lack of political goodwill to promote higher education as priority it required. African way out of the current conditions was to prioritize postgraduate education with special emphasis on human resource development and capacity building to mitigate the inadequacy in faculty members in education. Unfortunately for most African nations, the governments had a successful tendency towards certain courses which purposely lay foundation of the prospective teachers needed in primary schools, secondary schools and junior tertiary organizations.

### 3. Prospects in Education Studies

The importance of masters and PhD education in enhancing development was well articulated by Akilagpa (2004: 215): who asserted, what remained clear was the significance of Africa's educational systems and post primary learning centre's for knowledge acquisition, synthesis, adaptation and application had to play in insuring the advancement of the state ideals on all fronts, economic and social- political prospects were in existence. According to Bushe (2012, p. 279), growth in global mobility and shifting demographic profiles means employing and retaining talented and knowledgeable lecturers and researchers was an ever-increasing challenge. This called for a high degree of competency and proven scholarship from the university academic employees in particular; hence, universities serve as a storehouse of knowledge for cultivating worker needs of the nation and meeting the needs of the community for a good and caring society. The basic background for these knowledge systems was the university education, research work, Masters and PhDs programmes. Unlike with the developed countries in world, Africa's universities in most cases tend to offer the huge chunk of its programmes based on research and training to all its researchers'. The challenge faced by these universities in enhancing their postgraduate programmes had been retaining qualified teachers to handle the studies. The development of these masters and PhD studies eminently calls for staff stabilization pegged on human resource development of the local faculty members. According to Dockel, Basson, and Coetzee (cited in Mubarak, Wahab, & Khan, 2013, p. 69) compensation, capacity building and human resource development, and arise in ranks were the most essential retention factors for experienced employees. Naturally this would inculcate the spirit of enhancing the native cultural and historical component which is an integral element of the instructional mission. Additionally, successful postgraduate programmes in the African universities would be progressive in the presence of environment conducive for lively intellectual discussions in which African scholars were residence. The practicability of this was to provide academic mystique that enable them to critique and challenge external knowledge from their own social-cultural point of view, to rebuild their ideologies and to develop their own African theories, and analytical instruments that could be incorporated and contest supposedly globally (Szanton and Manyika, 2001: 17).

There were socio-economic and functionality reasons that necessitate to the development of the regional masters and PhDs programmes as well. Contrary to other nations elsewhere, African masters and PhD studies attracted a cost that was one-tenth of overseas training. Regional higher education studies also encouraged brilliant young intellectuals to undertake postgraduate studies while as they continued with their daily productive work with advantage of operating in the comfort of their home and family environment. The philosophy behind this arrangement would be, the reduced number of postgraduate programmes in African countries resulting from the tough conditions at many universities, limited funds and the inadequate teaching force vital for supervision of the postgraduate students. Thus, a regional way of finding solution relies probably in enhancing cost effective masters and PhD programmes. This mean unmatched degree within the labour market would only prolong the difficulties of quality improvement. The success of the postgraduate studies was pegged on financiers and governments if they at all would appreciate the importance of supporting postgraduate students at the African universities.

A critical examination on the success of masters and PhD programmes invite for a comprehensive decision making process on which universities would offer good programmes, the teaching and research support systems and willingness to support students from other African states. The foundation of excellence largely depended on committed lecturers, researchers and administrators, as well as brilliant and resilient departmental lecturers dedicated to serious academic and advanced postgraduate training (Szanton and Manyika, 2001: 42). Surprisingly this had remained majorly in African universities and in most cases, for the most part, been overburden and low salaried group. These category of people required good conditions for advanced learning, facilities and assistance to boost the programmes required. Peer models with developed universities could be initiated with assistance of the governments, donor organizations and other stakeholders. As a matter of urgency, this intervention would be ideal. However, for the long term measures, this could help in expansion of student's admissions and the rate of completions of their studies in most African public universities. Additionally, more opportunities would be available to potential African students to pursue their studies in African environments hence broadening their cultural experiences. The advantage accruing from such organization to African students was having access to unique intellectual opportunities and interacting with the best minds in the academic cycle.

#### **4. Hindrances of Postgraduate Education in Africa**

The challenges faced by public universities seeking to establish or expand postgraduate programmes in education Africa were many, as examined below. This part discusses some of the major obstacles encountered by postgraduate studies.

#### **Human resource development**

Universities in Africa had been curtailed by a number of challenges of which among them how to resolve the lectures staff establishments. There was some feeling that lectures were poorly remunerated and over-burdened professionals and that the things, which once made lectureship attractive, no longer exist; lectures were burdened by increasing workload and bureaucratic conditions (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999). Additionally, the problem of mature academic faculty members could be solved by temporarily raising the retirement age, as a number of public universities had done. However, the inadequate number of lecturers with PhD qualification was making both the replacement of losses and the sustainability of teaching staff difficult. Heavy teaching loads, poor salaries, few capacity building prospects and reduced budgetary allocations highly needed for research caused academic positions much less valuable in comparison to splendor enjoyed by the political class. The after effect of this was congested lecture rooms, brain drain of lecturers, eminent transfers by lecturers to private universities or research-only contracts (Szanton and Manyika, 2001: 19). Worse still some faculty members opted for political careers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or had immigrated to foreign countries. Rosser (2004) argues that deprived of efforts in human resource development, capacity building of the intellectual capital could stagnate and the relevance of universities to society may dwindle.

Analysis of the Obafemi Awolowo University (2016) in Nigeria revealed that in the department of educational foundations there were only 5 professors and 10 PhD holders who were qualified to supervise the master's degree students which was inadequate for a vibrant education studies. According to Adeyemi and Uko- Aviomah (2003), Public Universities in Nigeria did not have adequate teaching staff and the ability to hire more qualified lecturers. For instance, the teaching staff between 1997 and 1999 reduced by 12% while the growth of staffs in the 2000's had not deviated greatly from the previous one. The report by University of Malawi (2001) found that, the academic staff in five constituent colleges of the University of Malawi had 21% of the lecturers being female. This implied that, when it comes to recruitment of academic staff the male gender were the majority over the few female gender.

In Kenya, Waihenya (2016) posited; while student's enrolment had increased gradually to 539,749 students by the year 2014 from 440, 840 last year's 2013; the number of lecturers had remained almost the same. Additionally, the proportion of the lecturers with doctorate qualifications stood at 5,604 which was worse standing at a dismal ratio of 1:98. According to Oduor (2016), "Rapid expansion in student's enrolment was increasingly putting pressure on institutions in the absence of a corresponding increase in academic staff capacity and space." This was in coherence with statistics which indicated that Students-staff ratio across the universities sampled (as per October 2010) was as follows; students-staff ratio of University of Nairobi was 36:1, Kenyatta University was 35:1 and at Egerton was 28:1. However, in the Departments of Educational Foundations these statistics were not reflecting a true picture on the ground. A lecturer at the Department of Educational



Foundations at Moi University amplified the results by stating that: the situation was desperate. At times they had to handle classes with an enrolment of about 900 students on top of other classes scheduled at the satellite campuses. The report on Kenyan Universities by Oduor (2016) pointed that "in all categories of universities, there were very few faculty staff at senior lecturer or professor levels. The bulk of staffs were at lecturer and lower levels. As a matter of fact over the last 20 years, the output of academicians especially in the school of education in most Africa has declined as measured by international journal publications (Tijssen, 2007). This was a cause for worry as it meant that there were very few academic leaders to mentor scholars in the sector." Imperatively, this condition affected greatly the time to seriously supervise the research work of the master's and PhD degree programmes hence having enormous impact on the rate at which students completed their studies. The challenge of academic staffing in both public and private universities complicated both masters and doctoral education in the way of postgraduate programmes in Africa. It is therefore imperative to conclude that the rate of investment on human capital and budgetary requirement be committed to this significant aspect of academic engagement and replenishment in African universities.

#### **University administration and management**

Political intrigues in many African countries had negatively hampered the success of public education. Student enrolment was normally a political issue that did not take into account the basic assessment needs in line with the available physical infrastructure or number of lecturers per faculty. As a matter of fact the appointment of public university chancellors and vice chancellors inclined on the political affiliation of the appointee for political gain and not based academic integrity. This quite evident in Kenya education arena where most chancellors were appointed by the president aligned to their political ideologies. The situation had worsened with five Vice chancellors serving in acting capacity for more than six months while their appointment to full vice chancellorship hanging in the balance.

Across board, most African governments kept university budgets lean without being considerate of their actual demand. The sorry state of African education condition would find a solution when a new brand of political leaders with academic ideology takes the helm of leadership. Frequent strikes by both academic staffs and the student fraternity attest to lack of political will to support higher education in Africa. These strikes were noticeable in Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria and currently in Kenya. The turmoil experienced by the higher education sector need a leader who could be fore-trucked if only and if one understood the changed learning environment of public universities (Makoni, 2015; Adedigba, 2017 and the messenger, 2017). Anecdote to this was the imagination that promotion of lecturers from one rank to another such as from lecturer to professor was enough to enable even the most talented lecturers to serve better in senior managerial jobs.

In view of this, especially in the university setting, senior managers and administrators ought to be both seasoned

scholar and with a sense of being an entrepreneur to enable them raise funds, not only from government, but also from various donor communities. According Rong'uno (2016), the quality education was more certain in universities where academic and financial control was well managed by the university councils. Stern et al., (2000) and Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, (2006) suggested that, in cases where university authority was centralized in a ministry or a commission, decentralization inevitable. Absence of this degree of autonomy, universities would not be able to offer innovative environment, knowledge responses for alleviating the present development problems, nor would they be in position to offer the kind of masters and PhD graduates consumerate with the competitive global labour market. This called for the robust faculties and department chairs in charge of the academic programmes of the universities that integrate consultative governance structure, adequate number of teaching staff, research and service without external interference necessary for academic liberty.

### **5. Revitalizing Postgraduate Programmes**

Masters and PhD programmes in Africa encountered major challenges in pulling more students in their programmes, improvement in the number completing their studies and those hired into the university careers. The financial support needed in most African universities up to where they should be will be huge.

#### **Financial Obligation**

The challenge of financial support was most critical. As noted earlier, the funds released by the African government to support higher education programmes had declined greatly in real terms and per capital at most higher learning institutions. The current allocations were below the minimum needed for proper functioning and delivery of sound learning and far below what was needed to produce excellent undergraduates and sustainable postgraduate programmes. In some cases, governments were reluctant offering sustainable financial assistance to higher education. For instance, Kenyan postgraduate students in educational foundations hardly receive government sponsorship. The consequence of this was the shrinking enrolments in both the master's degree and doctoral programmes in educational foundations departments (Sogoni, 2017). The sad issue was that several African governments had placed restrictions on non-government support that served as disincentives to university entrepreneur studies. Nganga report (2014) by the ministry of planning in Kenya highlighted the upgrading of middle level colleges to full universities as a contributor to high student enrolment which rose up from 240,551 in 2012 to 324,560 in 2013 (34.9% )nationally. Contrary to the high student enrolment in undergraduate courses in the Universities, the slow pace of recruiting more lecturers by the departments and the dwindling numbers of students enrolling for postgraduate courses was of great concern.

#### **Completion rates**

Critical to the development of successful masters and PhD programmes was the number of students graduating on time. The high rates of students successfully completing their thesis development and writing within the stipulated time was a reflector of commitment and dedication not only by

the student but also by the lecturers involved (Luwel and Moel 2007). Additionally, the rate at which students graduate and time taken in completing both master's and doctoral training programmes were vital in taking the stock and flow of students in postgraduate studies in a given University (Wright & Cochrane 2000). These were real challenges faced by the African Universities. For instance data in Table 1 showed students who graduated from Kenya.

**Table 1:** Master's degree graduates: KU, UON & Moi University, 2004 - 2014

Year	History of Educ.	Philosophy of Educ.	Comparative Educ.	Sociology of Educ.	Total
2014	1	2	10	14	27
2013	6	4	1	22	33
2012	2	0	10	9	21
2011	4	1	5	13	23
2010	2	2	3	12	19
2009	1	1	1	10	13
2008	0	2	3	8	13
2007	0	0	2	0	2
2006	0	0	1	5	6
2005	0	0	0	3	3
2004	0	2	2	5	9
Total	16	14	38	101	169

Source: Sogoni, 2017

The findings showed about 169 (44%) of students out of the 386 enrolled completed their studies in the departments of educational foundations. This meant 217(56%) students had exceeded the expected time to complete their studies, were likely to drop out or pay emotional price and personal lots as suggested by Lovitts & Nelson (2000). According to Goble (2000) and Green and Kluever (2000), inability to complete a doctoral studies, was not only stressful and costly for a student, but it further discouraged the school improvement, brought about negative impact to the institution's reputation and resulted in loss of human resource. It was therefore true to conclude that the failure to complete both masters and a doctoral programme within the time frame expected, was not the result of one single factor, but rather, an interaction of multiple factors generally categorized as student related factors or institutional factors (Wao, 2010., Gardner, 2009., Ivan kova & Stick, 2007).

## 6. Recommendations

There are a number of substantial actions that could be taken to spur growth of the graduate education in East Africa. The basic focus on the growth of post graduate education in East Africa must be on the fundamental and expansion of quality, state-of-the- education oriented programmes. Absence of quality, the postgraduate programmes would be of less value to both the learners and the region. In the short term, this meant that the number of postgraduate programmes would need to be reduced and in most cases would have to be localized rather than national in focus of the individual nation.

### Financial Support

- Nganga report (2014) on the ministry of planning in Kenya identified the transformation of colleges to full universities as one of the cause high student enrolment that rose up by 34.9% nationally reaching to 324,560

compared to that of 240,551 in 2012. Contrary to the high student enrolment in the Universities, the slow pace of hiring the teaching staff in the departments and the dwindling numbers of students. The African universities hence need high capitation to carter for additional academic staff in line with the increased student enrolment.

- The merge financial resources should be used on those universities that currently have the greatest potential to offer quality masters and PhD studies within East Africa. Financing such programmes would be applicable with a combination of national funds, donor money, tuition fees (or grants and loans) for higher graduate students and the entire public support.
- Decisive suggestion of establishing new masters and PhD programmes that were consumerate with the nationalistic reasons without adequate lectures must be resisted.
- Urgent concerted efforts were needed in organizing regional graduate programmes. The first phase was in identifying one or two potential regional centres for graduate study and plan to develop or expand their programmes. The key hindrance to such organization would be obtaining the required support of the African governments and universities.

### Hiring of new staff

- With the large numbers of faculty members being above 50 years, expanding PhD training was mandatory if universities were to sustain their undergraduate programmes, enhance the quality and expand master's programmes.
- The hiring and retention of the lecturers per faculty in the long run demand better salaries and environment that was conducive for academic mystique. It was vital to appreciate that this was a highly competitive market nationally and internationally engagement.

**Student's enrolment and completions** Agboola and Adeyemi (2010:2) posited:

Students enrolment at any level was important to the success of the nation overall goals through education. There was need to enhance students enrolment in educational system because other school characteristics such as human, facilities and funds were directly depend on it. Subsequent student enrolment changes every year because of population dynamics. Population explosion or reduction had direct impact on enrolment.

- As part of the expansion process, it remains essential for the best students to attend universities abroad in order to broaden their horizons, offer academic refreshment to the expansion of graduate programmes and to grant these young scholars access to the best training and best minds.
- In dire need to high-quality masters and PhD programmes was the need to strengthen faculty research. That would invite additional huge sums of money for research. Government and private research scholarships that were competitive could be floated to carter for students in both private and public universities.
- Funding for masters and PhD students should be a priority with students allowed to carry that financial support to any high-quality graduate programme among the African Universities.

### University independence

- Intellectual liberty for African universities must be the first priority. It was a requisite for effective teaching/learning process and research that was important to successful graduate programmes.
- Developed postgraduate education and research were governed by high levels of university independence from government. Intellectual and financial self determination needs to be enhanced in both public and private education.
- Donors should be encouraged to finance and have co-joint research projects for academics from both inside and outside Africa.
- Sustenance and enhancement of the quality of the academic environment, inclusive of Physical facilities, postgraduate student needs to be a priority at all higher education institutions, in order to enhance quality, attract and retain outstanding faculty members and foster high teaching standards and research. Governments ought to appreciate the critical value of this investment.
- To further enhance the quality of research, it was critical that seminars and workshops be enshrined into postgraduate programmes to impart knowledge and skills in such areas as time management, project management,... oral examination, thesis writing, responsible conduct during research, formatting research essays, citing and referencing techniques, using archival sources, content analysis, critical discourse analysis, quantitative/qualitative research, literature reviews, and basic and applied research.

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