

Social Treatment of Graduate Students in Kenya: A Case of One University

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Abstract

There is intensive enrolment of postgraduate students in order to sustain national capacity for university teaching and research. However, this development is no challenge-free for the graduate students face a number of problems which varies from economic to social. This research investigated the social treatment of Graduate Students in one university in Kenya. The researcher used informal interviews and discussion to get the opinions of the respondents, that is, the graduate student at that university. The researcher also collected data through observation for she is one of the graduate students at that university. Data was analyzed qualitatively and findings revealed that graduate students were from different countries of Africa including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda. The respondents were happy with the library and classrooms services. However, they were staying in pairs in small rooms and facilities meant for one. They were also affected by noise from the undergraduate students for they shared the same premises. Again, the respondents complained of long queues at the single food outlet of the university and academic offices for they are given same treatment with the many undergraduate students on first-come-first serve basis. The study recommends separate residential places for graduate and undergraduate students; separate food collection points for graduate and undergraduate students and different student cards for undergraduate and graduate students so that graduate students are recognized and are given due respect. It also recommends adjustment on the part of the graduate students.

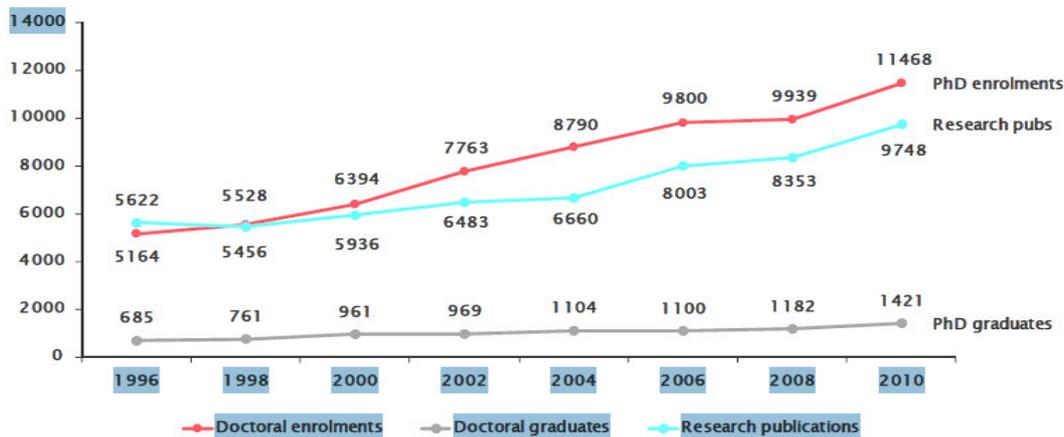
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Background Information

The demand for qualified personnel has influenced the development of higher education in Africa. The number of students enrolling for Post graduate studies (Masters and PhD) is also increasing. In South Africa, a report published by the Council on Higher Education (CHE January 2009) showed that the proportion of black postgraduate enrolments increased significantly for doctoral degrees, that is, from 47% in 2000 to 59% in 2005. However, the number of graduates produced by higher education is still fewer when compared to world standards, for instance, the Education Library News (15 November 2010) has reported that in South Africa, there are only 26 PhD graduates yearly per million as compared 569 per million in Portugal and 264 per million per annum in Australia. This means that there is room for graduate studies expansion in Africa as proposed by Dr Ebrima Sall at Africa Higher Education Summit (2015) in Tanzania.

Fig. 1 shows the three important aspects of PhD studies, namely: PhD enrolment, research publications and PhD graduates from 1996 to 2010 in South Africa. The fig. shows that although enrolment has increased steadily since 1996, PhD completion remained very low. This means that there are problems that are encountered by PhD students, for instance academic, cultural and social challenges that hinder completion of these degrees.

Fig. 1: PhD enrolment, research publications and PhD graduates in South Africa



Source: Bunting and Sheppard (2012)

High numbers of postgraduate and international students in a university are major requirements for successful evaluation and ranking (Oluwafemi 2012). This is why Kinyanjui (2007) argued that intensive and concurrent training of postgraduate students need to be done in order to sustain national capacity for university

teaching and research during the envisaged period of expansion and related university reforms.

Currently, there are a number of students from Africa that pursue their graduate studies abroad due to reasons beyond their control. Garwe (2015) said that about 565 academics from Zimbabwean universities were pursuing doctoral degrees at universities in the region for they cannot study in Zimbabwe due to stringent regulatory environment regarding doctoral study in Zimbabwe: shortage of supervisors due to brain drain, unavailability of doctoral programs at 60% of the local universities and inadequate funding and resources.

Graduate student go abroad not without challenges. Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) argued that there are many international students who encounter problems as they pursue higher education outside their home countries. They went on to elaborate these challenges which include, different food, unfamiliar living circumstances, financial problems, balancing work, studying schedules, learning styles, difficulties related to language, culture and personal barriers. Thus, a chain of transitional problems are the order of the day.

Another enormous challenge that is faced by African graduate students who go to other countries for studies is high fees. A Nigerian Oluwafemi (2012:2) explain his experience in a South African University as follows: *"I got the shock of my life when I was told to pay an international student fee of more than R16,000 (US\$2,000), over and above a tuition fee of almost R35,000 (US\$4,500). I was so stressed that I nearly developed psychological problems. I thought of returning to Nigeria, because at no point had anybody told me about the exorbitant international student fee"*

Oluwafemi, however, finally remained at the university because he eventually received an international scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) which paid all his fees.

Kenya is one of those countries in Africa that has seen the expansion of higher education in the recent decades. Ooro (2009) traced that history of higher education in Kenya from the set-up of Makerere Technical College in 1922 which served the education needs of Uganda, Tanganyika and Kenya. In 1949, Makerere became a university college of the University of London. In 1956, the Royal Technical College was established in Nairobi as Kenya's first higher education institution with the primary goal of providing students with an opportunity to enroll for engineering and commercial courses that were not offered by Makerere (Chacha, 2004).

In 1970 Nairobi University was established and as years went by, the number of Kenyans seeking university education exceeded the capacity of the University of Nairobi. This led to the establishment of Moi University in 1984 and Kenyatta University which had operated as a constituent college of the University of Nairobi since 1972 became a university the following year. A previous agricultural college also gave way to Egerton University in 1988.

The demand for higher education in Kenya by both the locals and foreign students kept on increasing and the Government then converted middle level colleges into constituent university colleges between 2007 and 2010 (Obwogi, 2011). The University of Eastern Africa Baraton founded in 1978 by the Seventh day Adventist Church later becoming the first chartered private university in Kenya in 1991 (Waweru, 2013). After that time, many more public and private universities were established in Kenya.

Today, they are more than 34 Universities in Kenya most of which have expanded both in enrolment and program offer. Currently, the University of Nairobi, a public university, has over 10,000 postgraduate students enrolled in various programs. The population of postgraduate students continues to increase due to the introduction of relevant and innovative programs which meet the needs of individual students (University of Nairobi: Graduate Education 2015). The University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, a private university has five schools that offer graduate studies, namely: School of Business, School of Education, School of Health Sciences and School of Science & Technology (University of Eastern Africa, Baraton 2015).

Many universities are trying to make life for graduate students easier. Darla, Han and Heyl (2012) traced that history of student affairs and they argued that although institutions of higher education have had to deal with student affairs in some way for as long as they have existed, student affairs as a distinct professional field emerged first in the Anglo-American context in the late 19th century. It developed from the originally distinct positions of dean of women and dean of men. Student affairs developed much later in continental Europe, where development first began in the 1950s and became prominent in the 1990s due to international students who needed student support. It then spread globally.

Elsewhere in the world, Ottawa University (2015) has a policy, Policy 110 - Policy on Treatment of Graduate Students on Non-Academic and Non-Employment Issues which states that:

"We will provide a safe and inviting intellectual, cultural and social environment, in which our students, faculty and staff are motivated and challenged to perform at their highest potential. We will continue protecting individual rights and safeguarding the principles of equal opportunity and equitable treatment."

Ottawa Universities also recognizes the many contributions of graduate students to the university and is committed to offering them protection from abuse in all aspects of their relationship with the university. The university authorities also value the fact that graduate students are not only learning for their own benefit, but many contribute to the research life of the university as a required part of their degree programs and others also function as employees, for example, teaching assistants, sessional lecturers, research assistants. This means that,

as employees, their rights and privileges are specified by collective agreements. As students, any academic evaluation may be appealed through procedures specified by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (FGPS).

Ottawa emphasizes that Graduate students have the right to be treated according to commonly accepted norms of fairness and ethical behavior. The rights and privileges of students as employees are governed by the APTPUO collective agreement in the case of part-time professors, and by the collective agreement with CUPE 2626 in the case of teaching assistants, research assistants, markers, proctors, laboratory monitors and demonstrators.

In Kenya, Kenyatta University gives orientation programs to post Graduate students (Kenyatta University Graduate School 2015) while Moi University provides guest house accommodation on campus to lecturers and graduate students.

Research was also carried out in line with graduate students. Bloom, Canning and Chan (2006) carried out a study that focused on the challenges to female black postgraduate students in South Africa. The purpose was to explore the social and emotional challenges that affect female black postgraduate students in South Africa and also to come up with guidelines on assisting them in coping with their studies at postgraduate level. Findings indicated that participants experienced serious challenges, socially and emotionally, including trauma. The study also exposed that the power relations between supervisor and students on academic issues prevented some of the participants from sharing their social challenges with their supervisors. Also, support was lacking from home, work and society.

Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) also made a study on problems faced by graduate international students in America. Participants were from diverse cultures, which differed from the American culture. They found that international students face difficulties both in the classroom and in their social life, for instance, when international students joined different social events, they stated they had to deal with different communication patterns. The study also revealed cultural barrier, for example, the gift-giving interaction is vastly different in the US from their home country. While in Western culture it is acceptable to open a gift immediately to show appreciation, people in the Eastern culture are not used to opening gifts in front of other people. These cultural differences affect the international student. Participants also stated that the communication patterns were very different, so they had to deal with some awkwardness in the social interaction. The study also exposed that some international students experience culture shock as a result of different types of beliefs and value systems. When the students enter into a new culture, they encountered many misconceptions that put them off.

The problem of this study can be therefore stated as follows: A Graduate study is a high level of education at a university which can be emulated by undergraduate students. However, graduate students are not receiving the expected social treatment that they deserve at the universities; some are disappointed and even traumatized while others drop out from the studies. This research wants to answer the following research question:

1. How are graduate students treated socially at the university?
2. Is there any relationship between academic level and social treatment at the university?

Many researches have been done on university education. However, such researches concentrate mainly on academic (Nakalema and Ssenyonga 2013; Kumar and Stracke 2007) and economic issues (Oluwafemi 2012). When reviewing literature, the researcher found very little research on social treatment of graduate students, hence the need to fill in this gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study has used Iser Mattias' Recognition Theory propounded in 2013, in order to address the social problems faced by graduate students in Kenya. Iser Mattias said that the theory was drawn from G. W. F. Hegel who was, in turn, heavily influenced by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, for their common roots in Jean-Jacques Rousseau see Neuhauser 2010. Hegel was concerned with the relationships and implicit norms of the three spheres, that is, love within the family; contractual respect within civil society and solidarity within the state. For him, these three were necessary in order to actualize individual autonomy, not in the sense of mere "negative" but of "social" freedom. These three spheres permit the subjects to feel at home within the ethical life of their community (which is organized as a state). This is so because the state provides the subjects with the meanings necessary for a fulfilling individual life that they can embrace.

Iser Mattias argued that recognition has both a normative and a psychological dimension, for instance, if you recognize a person with regard to a certain feature, as an autonomous agent, you do not only admit that the person has this feature but you embrace a positive attitude towards her/him for having this feature. Such recognition entails that you bear obligations to treat her/him in a certain way, thus, you recognize a specific normative status of that person. Such an act is of psychological importance because those who fail to experience adequate recognition, for example, those who are depicted by the societal norms and values in a negative way, find it much harder to embrace themselves and their projects as valuable. This gives rise to misrecognition

which according to Iser Mattias, hinders or even destroys persons' successful relationship with self. This explains how the victims of racism and colonialism have suffered severe psychological harm by being demeaned as inferior humans and have struggled for recognition. Recognition therefore constitutes a vital human need.

The concept of recognition can be differentiated according to the kind of features a person is recognized, *for instance*, honor. This honor, which is assigned to persons as members of a group within a hierarchical social structure, can be divided into two parts: the modern notion of equal respect awarded to all agents capable of autonomy and the idea of esteem due to one's achievements.

Iser Mattias warned that the struggles for recognition need not be fought by violent means but through peaceful means just as was the Indian liberation movement under Mahatma Gandhi.

It can be argued that recognition theory does not only illuminates the complexity of humanity's normative thinking but also provides a strong argument that such normative considerations are an ineradicable part of humanity's social world.

Research Methodology

This study used a case study qualitative method because of the nature of the data collected; it examined people's lives, behavior and organizational functions. A case study was a suitable approach in order to get holistic information pertaining social treatment of graduate students at that particular university. Willig (2008:74) asserted that case studies "are not characterized by the methods used to collect and analyze data, but rather its focus on a particular unit of analysis: a case". At the same time, as Duff and Anderson (2015) elaborated, a case study generally constitutes a qualitative, interpretive approach which is meant to understand the experiences, features, behaviors and processes of one bounded unit. The value of a case study lies in its typically holistic and in-depth characterization of individual entities in context, which makes it possible for researchers and readers to gain grounded new understandings of issues (Duff and Anderson 2015)

A qualitative research was also appropriate for this study; Dang (2012) pointed out that qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors and social contexts of particular populations. The advantage of qualitative research is therefore its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how respondents experience a given research issue. Wyse (2011) also emphasized that qualitative research is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations.

The researcher collected data from the respondents (Masters and PhD students) through informal interview, discussions and observations. This triangulation of data collection was done so that valid information is collected; Mathews (2015) argued that the goal of collecting data through a variety of means is both to enhance the theory generating capabilities of the case, and to provide additional validity to assertions made by either the researcher or the participants in the case itself.

After data collection, qualitative data analysis was applied, that is coding the data and finding trends. Madrigal and McClain (2012) highlighted that when it comes to identifying trends, researchers look for statements that are identical across different research participants. According to them, the rule of thumb is that hearing a statement from just one participant is an anecdote; from two, a coincidence; and hearing it from three makes it a trend. Finally, a coherent description and discussion of finding was done and conclusions as well as recommendations were written.

Findings

The respondents, that is, the graduate students were from different countries of Africa including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda. This is because these respondents cannot possibly do their studies in their countries due to limited doctoral study programs on offer. One of the respondents said:

Excerpt 1: I could have done it in my home country where I am working but my university has no graduate studies. Respondent 05

Lack of resources including supervisors mainly due to brain drain was also sighted as another hindrance. That confirmed observation by Garwe (2015) that about 565 academics from Zimbabwean universities were pursuing doctoral degrees at universities in the region.

The respondents were almost all employed, working as school head teachers, university lecturers, university bursars and teachers. The majority were advanced in years and were mainly interested in obtain their degrees and go back to their places of work. However, they were forced to notice some social challenges at the university. Generally, graduate students were not happy with the treatment that they received. This tallies what Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015) found in their study, that is, many international students encounter problems as they pursue higher education outside of their home countries.

Residing places: The University offers accommodation to the graduate students and the respondents were happy about it. The rooms allocated to them, specifically the ladies, were designed in a good faith and with standard in mind; they were small meant for one student, thus they had facilities for one student, like one

wardrobe for clothes. Unfortunately, maybe due to accommodation problems they were now assigned to two students. This means that the graduate student had to squeeze for resources and small space. This put the graduate students at a disadvantage than the undergraduate students who share bigger rooms but usually in the same number, which is two.

Graduate students shared the same residential places with undergraduates and sometimes they shared rooms with them. This did not mean that there were no residential rooms set aside for graduate students. There were there but at times the graduate students were too few that some of the rooms were unoccupied, hence they brought in undergraduate students to fill them up. Living in the same place and even sharing rooms with the undergraduate students was not the real problem; graduate female respondents complained of noise by undergraduate students. One of the female respondents said:

Excerpt 2: For the past two trimesters I was using university accommodation. However, this trimester I have found alternative accommodation where I can concentrate. The undergraduate students make a lot of noise.

Respondent 02

The excerpt above shows how serious the problem of noise was. Undergraduate students made noise mainly during evenings and at night in the hostels. They stayed in the hostels during these times when they had nothing to do (when they want to read, they went to the library) hence they made noise until they sleep, which was usually at around 10pm. Contrary, the graduate students wanted to work in the comfort of their rooms especially since there was internet in their rooms, hence the disturbance from the undergraduate.

This problem was worsened by the fact that undergraduate student usually finished their examinations when these school based graduate students still had one or two weeks to go. When undergraduate were over with their examinations they made more noise, and that became prominent for about a full week when they were finishing writing final examinations and going. Some also lingered around for a little while completing their assignments. Other undergraduate never went home at all especially when there were holiday courses for them on offer; they stayed and did those courses. Still others, especially the foreigners, remained at the university for they could not afford going home every holiday.

The responsible authorities needed to be notified of the problem so that it can be rectified.

Apart from the noise issue in the residential areas, some respondents complained of bad treatment by the authorities. One of the female respondents complained:

Excerpt 3: We are not respected in any way. You go to class and find your room, opened, painted and your belongings up-side-down without your knowledge and consent. *Respondent 08*

However, the accommodation issues seemed to be affecting the female graduate students only. The male graduate respondents echoed that they were happy with the accommodation provided to them. Although they also resided with undergraduate students, just like their female counterparts, they seemed to have no problems;

Excerpt 4. They are our children. They are growing and we love them. *Respondent 12* was the response by a male graduate student in a discussion on residential issues.

On the nature of the provided accommodation, the male graduate respondents were also comfortable. One respondent said:

Excerpt 5: Our accommodation at this pace is safe and secure. At ---University (name given) two PhD friends of mine left hardly after a week of admission because their belongings were always vandalized. *Respondent 01*

Although it is not certain whether quest for recognition is a female attitude, what is certain is that the female respondent behaved in a very normal way in line with Iser Mattias' (2013) Recognition Theory which was built on G. W. F. Hegel's ideas. Hegel was concerned with the relationships in his recognition theory. Hegel was concerned with implicit norms of the three spheres, one of which is contractual respect within civil society which is necessary in order to actualize individual autonomy, not in the sense of mere "negative" but of "social" freedom. This can also permit a subject to feel at home and have a fulfilling life within the ethical life of his/her community.

In line with Hegel's ideas, Iser Mattias argued that recognition has both a normative and a psychological dimension and such recognition entails that one bears obligations to treat someone in a certain way, thus, recognizing a specific normative status of that person. Such an act is of psychological importance because those who fail to experience adequate recognition find it much harder to embrace themselves and their projects as valuable.

Food services: Food services had failed to recognize the postgraduate students. They got same treatment with their undergraduate counterparts, hence they queued for food on the first come – first serve basis. This became an issue because academic schedule for undergraduates and graduate students were different; at times a graduate student had a lecture, he/she had to wait in the queue until served. The undergraduates were many in number (more than a thousand) so much that one could be in the queue for a good 30 minutes or more before served. The sentiments of the graduate respondents were that the eating points should be different from the undergraduates so that the graduate students, in their own queue, were not delayed.

The other arrangement that was unwelcomed by the graduate students was the signing of a book after every meal. This worsened the delaying eating system. When asked why it was done the kitchen workers said that they needed to have an account of whoever ate in the dining hall. The graduate student felt that this was unfair to them especially those who took all their meals from the university dining hall for all their stay on campus. The book system, the respondent proposed, could only be used for the irregular university dining hall users.

The other dining hall issue emanated from the university system of employing students as helpers in the dining hall. Although this was a very reasonable and human way of helping the needy students, this also caused some problems to graduate students. Generally these student helpers did not respect graduate students, not because they were rude but because the system did not respect them. They could occasionally pull a graduate student asking them about the signing of the dining hall record book. At times they were not available at the point of dining hall book signing for graduate students thus, queues could develop. By the end of the day, undergraduate got better treatment than the graduate students for they just came, queued, ate and went without any signing required.

There was also a remarkable change of kitchen staff behavior; Graduate and undergraduate student usually overlapped with two or three weeks. After this period the undergraduate were through with their final examinations and they left campus. When it was only the school based graduate students left (and few undergraduates) the kitchen staff relaxed in their routine, food was not served on time; it could be delayed by as much as 30minutes without notice and without any apologies.

Classrooms and library facilities: Graduate respondents were very happy with the classrooms allocated to them for their lectures and study time. They had good comfortable chairs as well as electricity facilities, for instance, plugs for their computers. These rooms were safe for they had keys which could be given to graduate students so that they could use the classrooms whenever they needed to do so.

The respondents also applauded the library facilities; there were spacious and well equipped individual rooms for PhD students in the library.

Other services: There was no difference in treatment between an undergraduate and a graduate student when receiving other services, for instance, at the registrar's offices and other offices. All students had to queue in the same lines.

What can be of great help to graduate students who face social challenges at the university is to take the advice which was given by Adeli (2013) that admission to a university marks the beginning of one's career and hence requires one to make mental, physical and emotional adjustments. She also argued that some external conditions, for instance, the upsurge of HIV/AIDS, psychologically related medical conditions, trauma, criminal behavior, marital and family dysfunctions may also negatively influence the students' life and bar him/her from seeing the good of a university.

Conclusion

Respondents were not happy with that treatment they got at the university in question and it seemed the responsible authority was unaware of this situation. According to the respondents, there should be a difference between undergraduate and graduate students social treatment; some privileges should be given to graduate student so that it can attract undergraduate students to reach graduate level of education in a bid to enjoy such privileges. If the treatment for graduate students is improved, this can also increase enrolment. This study, therefore, concurs with Neumann (2015) who recommended in his study that a university should be prepared to meet students not only academically but also socially and culturally.

This study therefore made the following recommendations:

- Separate residential places for graduate and undergraduate students
- Separate food collection points for graduate and undergraduate students.
- Issue different student cards for undergraduate and graduate students so that graduate students are recognized and are given due respect.
- Responsible university authorities, probably the faculty and staff, should recognize students' needs and effectively offer supportive campus resources and services.
- Some preparations need to be made by the university that will embrace international students upon their arrival.
- Monitoring of service providers, like the cafeteria personnel, should proceed throughout the stay of the graduate students on campus.
- Adjustment on the part of the graduate students since most of them, especially foreigners, are exposed to a new culture

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