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Effect of Monitoring and Evaluation processes on student course completion in Universities

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Abstract

This paper investigated the relationship between Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) processes and the student course completion at Makerere University Business School. The reduction in the completion rate among post graduate students triggered the study. The study aimed at; examining the extent to which M&E Planning processes affect student course completion in universities; examining the extent to which M&E implementing processes affect student course completion in universities and examining the extent to which the M&E information disseminating processes affect student course completion in universities. The paper explains what was carried out at MUBS focusing on the post graduate School. A mixed research approach for information dissemination was low in providing feedback to students. M&E Planning processes were ranked highly with a mean of 4.03 as having the greatest impact on student course completion. All the statements were agreed to with means in the range of 3.82 to 4.39. Implementing processes were noted as having the least impact on student course completion. M&E information disseminating processes had a mean of 3.30. M&E planning is an important aspect towards student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning. Its Implementation process encompassed with information dissemination; based on a good plan leads to better results

Key words: *Monitoring and evaluation processes; course completion*

Introduction

According to Wamala, Ocaya, & Oonyu, (2012), issues related to completion and reduction in graduate studies are increasingly becoming important in describing the quality of educational services. Relatedly, programme completion and timely graduation have become increasingly important policy issues for many universities and governments (Murphy & Welch, 1993).

Generally, M&E is recognised as having the capacity to ensure high levels of performance and quality assurance in organisational efforts to achieve goals. Monitoring as an activity involves continuous and systematic checking and observing of a program or a project, (Ndungu, Gathu, & Bomett, 2015). Evaluation on the other hand is judging, appraising or determining the worth, the value and quality of a program. In higher education, the role of M&E is recognized by NCHE (2014) it argues that "in higher education, quality assurance is necessitated by both internal and external factors including funding, availability of adequate staff and infrastructure. The M&E processes aim at ensuring the accountability among stakeholders". Additionally, Ballard (2013) states that the goal of M&E in institutions of learning is to infuse continuous improvement and quality in the culture of higher education.

The wealth of nations is increasingly becoming dependent on possession of knowledge by tertiary educated citizens and their preparation for the 21st century challenges (The Strategic Plan for higher education 2003-2015). Indeed, over the last three decades, the development of higher educational institutions and systems has grown into unprecedented pre-eminence in many parts of the world and subsequently, societies are spending more and more money on the development of higher education.

However, as society is investing more and more resources into higher education, it is also demanding greater levels of effectiveness and accountability from the institutions. Increasingly, stakeholders (parents, responsible ministries, guardians of students, sponsors and students, lecturers and university staff) are subjecting investment in higher education institutions to cost-benefit analyses with the view of ensuring the highest return on investment.

In Uganda, Eyangu and Kibrai (2014) report that post graduate students completion rate at MUBS is low (Table 1). The students' completion rate at MUBS is not any different from that in other higher educational institutions in the country.

Table 1: Admission and Completion rates for two selected programs at MUBS

Progamme	Masters of Business Administration (MBA)			Ms.AF		
Academic Year (AY)	Admitted	Graduated	Completion rate (%)	Admitted	Graduated	Completion rate (%)
2001/02	86	15	17.4	38	6	15.8
2002/03	71	13	18.3	33	3	19.1
2003/04	126	14	11.1	43	5	11.6
2004/05	122	12	9.8	67	4	6.0
2005/06	117	16	13.7	56	5	8.9
2006/07	128	15	11.7	53	7	13.2
2007/08	68	10	14.7	46	0	0

In Ugandan higher education, the contribution of M&E or lack thereof, to student course completion in universities has not attracted scholarly attention. Although several authors (Phillips & Pugh, 2010; Bentley,

2006) have cited a number of reasons for low completion rates at postgraduate level, rarely do they discuss their link with M&E processes. There are a number of cases in Uganda's higher institutions of learning where their laid down Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) processes have been violated that led to queries in the quality of graduates.

Relatedly, in 2012, Kampala International University (KIU) lined up a total of 66 PhD students for graduation in one batch over a period of 2 years. Their PhDs were immediately declared invalid by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), (Spaull, 2013). According to the Executive Director of NCHE then, it was not a lack of capacity but rather a failure to follow procedures that KIU itself had established that led to the substandard PhDs (NCHE, 2014). According to Obore (2013), the questionable award of 66 PhDs at KIU resulted from failure by the university to adhere to good governance principles, which points to possible laxity in the area of M&E.

Whereas studies have been undertaken to examine the issues related to students' course completion in various postgraduate programs, there are hardly any studies that relate M&E processes to students' course completion yet the students' course completion rates remain low. This study aimed at establishing the extent to which M&E planning, implementation and information dissemination processes influence student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning in Uganda. The literature reviewed provides evidence from past studies related to the effect of M&E processes on the academic performance of higher institutions in Uganda.

Theoretical Literature Review

The main of this section is to develop insights into the problem of how M&E processes affect student course completion at postgraduate level. It is guided by two theories which include; the theory of change and the open systems theory among others.

The Theory of Change (ToC)

Theory of Change (ToC) emerged from the field of program theory and program evaluation in the mid-1990s as a new way of analysing the theories motivating programs and initiatives working for social and political change. ToC is focused not just on generating knowledge about whether an intervention is effective, but also on explaining what methods it uses to be effective and how the intervention will lead to expected intended outcomes (Vogel, 2012).

According to Mutinda & Kiruja (2015), ToC is a specific type of methodology for planning, participation, and evaluation that is used in the philanthropy, not-for-profit and government sectors to promote social change. ToC defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary preconditions. ToC can begin at any stage of an initiative, depending on the intended use. However, a theory developed at the outset is best at informing the planning of an initiative.

ToC also provides the outcomes framework which provides the basis for identifying what type of activity or intervention will lead to the outcomes identified as preconditions for achieving the long-term goal. Through this approach, the precise link between activities and the achievement of the long-term goals are more fully understood. This leads to better planning, in that activities are linked to a detailed understanding of how change actually happens. It also leads to better evaluation, as it is possible to measure progress towards the achievement of longer-term goals that goes beyond the identification of program outputs, (Vogel, 2012).

The Open System's Theory (OST)

For the Open System's Theory (OST), an open system is a flexible system that can adapt and change by interacting with its external environment. The OST states that there is interaction between the body and the outside environment (Chikere & Nwoka 2015). As organizations and communities conduct their business, they influence and change their external environments while at the same time being influenced by external changes in local and global environments. This two-way influential change is known as active adaptive change. Organizations and communities are open systems; changing and influencing each other over time. To ensure viability, an open system must have an open and active adaptive relationship with its external environment. The open system has a direct correlation with respect to changing values and expectations over time with its external environment.

Empirical literature review

The Monitoring and Evaluation(M&E) process

Hobson, Mayn, & Jo (2014) found out that the Monitoring and Evaluation process involves 12 steps; (1) be clear about why you want to do M&E and the benefits it can offer; (2) develop some guiding principles to ensure that your M&E is relevant, useful, timely and credible; (3) deciding on what you want to evaluate. It is important that you prioritise as it is unlikely that you may have resources to monitor all the interventions at the same time; (4) decide who to involve at the different stages of your M&E; (5) deciding the key issues and the questions you will want to investigate; (6) clarifying your aims, objectives, activities and pathways to change; (7) identifying what information you will need to collect; (8) deciding how you will collect the information; (9) assessing your contribution; (10) analysing and using the information; (11) communicating the data; depending on the purpose of the M&E and the stakeholders involved and lastly the (12) it is very important to gain informed consent from your respondents. The 12 steps in this study have been summarised under three processes; M&E planning, M&E implementation and M&E Information Dissemination.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) planning

M&E planning should be part of the overall planning process (The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2009). It concerns setting up the systems and processes necessary to ensure the intended results are achieved as planned. These systems and processes include preliminary assessments, organising the work plans against which the monitoring will be made, budgeting and setting up of Performance Indicators (PIs) for the M&E process. PIs together with monitoring data, among other things, determine how best an evaluation will be done, (UNDP, 2009). According to Rowe (2004), Performance Indicators (PIs) are data indices of information by which the functional quality of institutional service providers and systems may be measured and evaluated. PIs serve various purposes, the most notable of which are monitoring, policy determination, target setting, evaluating and reforming. In Uganda, NCHE in a way of executing its M&E mandate uses a number of PIs for quality assurance. Which include the following; Institutional Governance, quality of teaching staff Quality of teaching and learning, sufficient education facilities, Research and publication, the quality of outputs, Institutional financial management, staff satisfaction and the University service to the community (NCHE, 2016). All these are aimed at improving performance. The rationale behind performance models and indicators in higher education is to ensure the education provided to students equips them for employment and provides the nation with a highly skilled workforce that supports economic growth (Chalmers, 2009 and Chalmers 2007).

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) implementation

M&E implementation involves a series of steps which are directed by the M&E plan made. The implementation phase includes identifying, engaging and organising stakeholders, coordinating the data/evidence gathering and analysis process. This is followed by interpreting the results and making

conclusions after which reports are made ready for dissemination. Eyangu *et al* (2014) argues that reporting is a very important aspect of Information dissemination. Reporting is the process of recording data. The need for such recording is consistent with the responsibility of fund accounting. It is concerned with performance in terms of authority to act and the action itself.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) information dissemination

Rwejuna (2014) points out that the role of dissemination is to share with others the knowledge that the evaluation has produced. Sharing includes reporting. For example, Tsui *et al*. (2014), notes that M&E often generates reports that contribute to transparency and accountability, and allows for lessons to be shared more easily. Rwejuna (2014) further observes three main goals of dissemination include awareness, understanding and action.

Effect of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) processes on performance

Porter & Goldman (2013) argue that M&E have a function beyond mere accountability and resource allocation which also uses baseline data and more complicated and contested terrain of explanation. This function is performance. For this to happen, M&E systems need to be deeply embedded in the socio-political dynamics of the societies in which they operate both at the conceptual and the design level. This will enable societies realise the change an undertaking has caused measured by the level of change in performance. However, Wagna *et al* (2005) argue that M&E procedures should not impose a punitive management structure that seeks to use monitoring and evaluation as a way of negatively criticizing performance. M&E managers should nevertheless make it clear from the outset that they are not using monitoring and evaluation processes to criticize institutional performances, but rather as part of a package of activities designed to achieve an overall increase in educational attainment at several levels.

Empirical studies

Vossensteyn *et al* (2015) in their study about dropout and completion rate in Europe suggest that there is great variety in the funding, information and organisational measures facilitating study success in Europe. Funding and financial incentives, financial rewards or sanctions tend to change the behaviour of students and/or institutions towards study success. The provision of information and any other kinds of (non-financial) support to (prospective) students by national organisations or higher education institutions help to improve their decision- making and study behaviour.

Methodology

This paper used a cross sectional survey design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data was collected at Makerere University Business School (MUBS) focussing on two courses; Master of Business Administration and Master of Science, Accounting and Finance over a period of 7 years. These two courses had challenges of low completion rates. A sample of 204 respondents comprising of Head of Graduate School, Lecturers and students was chosen from a population of 353 using statistical tables of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Sampling methods included purposive and simple random sampling. Both primary and secondary data were collected through survey, interviews and document review using questionnaires, interview guides and document review checklist. Qualitative data analysis was accomplished using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Descriptive analyses of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used while qualitative data was categorized under themes and analysed manually by matching content with themes of interest for the study.

Result

Course Completion

Three courses were considered in this study which included Masters of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Science Accounting and Finance (MsAF) and others with a distribution of 48.6%, 34.7% and 16.7% respectively as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Masters 'courses offered to completion

Course offered	Frequency	Percent
MBA	70	48.6
MsAF	50	34.7
Others	24	16.7
Total	**144**	**100.0**

Source: Primary data (2017).

On the completion rates of courses undertaken, only 44 (30.6%) of the alumni/students contacted had completed their courses on time compared to 100 (69.4%) who had not. Of all the 30.6% who had completed on time, Masters of Business Administration (MBA) had 22 (50%), Master of Science Accounting and Finance (MsAF) had 8(18.2%) while other courses had 14 (31.8%).

Other courses which included Masters in; Human Resource Management, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Procurement and Supply Chain Management had the highest completion rate of 58.3% compared to others. This was followed by Masters of Business Administration (MBA) with a completion rate of 31.4% and the least was Master of Science Accounting and Finance (MsAF) with a completion rate of 16.0%.

Students who completed their courses within the stipulated time were motivated by various factors with varying ratings.

Inspiring supervisors was a highly ranked contributor to course completion with a response rate of 27.3%. As shown in the table below

Table 3: Student motivation factors to complete the course

Motivating factor	Frequency	Percent (n=44)
Inspiring Supervisors	12	27.3
My commitment to complete the course in time	14	13.6
Promise of promotion after the course	8	18.2
Sponsorship requirements	6	13.6
Need for employment opportunity	4	9.1
Team work and consultations from different fields	4	9.1
Was sponsoring myself and never wanted to spend more money	4	9.1
Regular class attendance.	4	9.1
Competent and qualified lecturers	2	4.5
School fees was available	2	4.5

Source: Primary data (2017).

One lecturer shared his student experience as follows:

> *"A supervisor can ruin your success during the research period of the course once you are not careful. Supervisors have a lot of powers which are at times abused. They decide when to meet you, can instruct you to make changes without guiding you and many other things. It should be better to put up channels through which students can forward their complaints to higher authorities",* Male Lecturer of Master of Business Administration students (personal communication, October 21, 2017).

Factors like regular class attendance, competent and qualified lecturers and lack of school fees were least contributing factors to low completion rates. This was mainly because the class work is always done in time and it's on research where delays set in.

For the respondents who did not complete on time, the average completion time was 4 years with only 8% taking more than 4 years.

Students who didn't complete on time raised a number of challenges at different levels of the course. The main challenge was research with 68.1% of respondents. Other challenges included course work and exams.

Coursework was not a big challenge due to the convenience in which it was conducted. According to the lecturers, coursework is in form of tests, assignments and group works which are administered several times and the best score is taken.

Effect of M&E Planning processes on student course completion

Results in Table 4 below show that each of the statements had mean of > 3 (average 4.03) which implied that respondents were in agreement with all the statements about the effect of the M&E planning process on course completion though with varying measures. Therefore there was evidence to show that M&E Planning processes at MUBS were in existence and their existance pose a strong effect on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning. The comparison of each of the statements under this objective were made by the use of the T-values. The higher the T-value, the higher the rank of the statement.

Table 4: Respondents views on M&E planning process

No	Statement	Mean	SD	T-Value
B1	Clear research guidelines help students to complete their research component in time	4.39	0.777	67.8
B2	Guidelines for class work are clear	3.94	0.851	55.6
B3	Guidelines for research are clear	3.82	0.790	58.0
B4	Adhering to research guidelines helps students complete their research in time.	4.17	0.885	56.5
B5	Convenience of class time table enables assignments to be completed in time	3.83	0.989	46.5
B6	Convenience of class time table gives room for revising for tests and exams	3.85	0.970	47.6
B7	Appropriate budgeting for the course in important to enable one to complete the course	4.08	0.865	56.6
B8	The course has a lot of costs in addition to tuition fees which are not always foreseen	3.99	1.077	44.4
B9	Lecturers who are prepared for teaching help students master concepts easily.	4.24	0.793	64.1
	Average	**4.03**	**0.889**	**55.23**

Source: Primary data (2017).

T-values in Table 2 show that statement with code B1 was most agreed to with a T-value of 67.8 (mean=4.39). This can be explained by the fact that most alumni/students had a lot of challenges in their course due to unclear research guidelines. Whereas respondents agreed with the statement that "Clear research guidelines help students to complete their research component in time" to a bigger extent (mean = 4.39), their level of agreement with the fact that "Guidelines for research are clear at MUBS" was lower with a mean of 3.82. Therefore, research guidelines are not as clear as expected. This implies that failure to have clear research guidelines at planning stage gives rise to students' and supervisors having varying expectations which may lead to unnecessary disagreements and delays during the research process.

This result is supported by the interview responses from supervisors who agreed with the fact that university research guidelines are clear to supervisors. However, supervisors said that they needed refresher courses in research supervision skills since they studied from different universities with different guidelines. This provide clarity on the guidelines so as to meet the expectations of the students. One supervisor who did his Master's degree from the United Kingdom (UK) had this to say;

> *"I studied my Masters from UK and when I came back, I realized that the research guidelines and expectations at MUBS were different. I was guided by my co-supervisor with conflicting ideas along the way. The head of Graduate School met all of us and we had to harmonize our positions. It was not an easy experience",* I. Okot, Male lecturer for Master of Business Administration students (personal communication, October 11, 2017).

The supervisors also confirmed that refresher courses in research are currently no being given to them.

Also, a significant number of respondents (mean = 4.24, T-value=64.1), agreed with the fact that lecturers who are prepared for teaching help students master concepts easily.

The least agreed to variable was B8: the course has a lot of costs in addition to tuition fees which are not always foreseen with a T value of 44.4 and a mean of 3.99. This is mainly because the university usually clarifies on the required fees and other materials when the courses are being advertised. This helps the students to plan accordingly. However, there are some cases of students who fail to graduate due to non-completion of the university fees. On whether students found challenges during their research part of the course, 76.4% (110) agreed compared to 23.6% (34) who disagreed. This gives a justification as to why more than 50% of students in a given intake were not completing in time. Research being the last component of the course of study, any difficulties and delays in completing research leads to delays in course completion.

On the other hand, having good M&E processes in place may not necessarily guarantee quality; in this case, high levels of course completion. In this regard, other resources like funds and human resource should be considered. Brignall & Modell (2010) assert that consideration for resources should critically look at how much money and time will be needed to conduct the activities. With the human resource, the guiding question should be; does the project have internal capacity to carry out the proposed monitoring and evaluation of activities; including analysis of data collected?

Effect of M& E implementing processes on student course completion

Unlike in objective 1, some statements under objective 2 were agreed to while others were disagreed to.

T-values show that variable "Student attendance of classes regularly has a positive impact on completing the course in time" was most agreed to with a T-value of 80.7 (mean=4.50). This is mainly because a lot happens in the lecture room in addition to the notes and handouts given. In most cases, students take their own notes

in a way they understand the lecturer's explanations. This implies that students who miss lecturers miss a lot and this affects their performance.

It was established from lecturers that some students were not attending classes regularly. Lecturers' interview responses on the effect of student attendance on course completion were in line with the findings that most students who attended regularly completed their courses on time or within one extra year beyond the normal time. Additionally, findings from students indicated that lecturers always attended to students as scheduled though with a low level of agreement (mean = 3.25, T = 34.9). This matches with supervisors' complaint that they are not facilitated financially during the process of supervision and therefore don't supervise as expected. According to Brignall & Modell (2010), it is very important for M&E planners to ensure that the required resources such as funds, time and capacity are in place before the implementation process can be embarked on. Else, there is a possibility of a crisis.

It was also established that "Monitoring attendance of lecturers and students improves student performance" with a mean of 3.89 (T = 53.2). However, lecturers said that they were not monitoring students' attendance due to big numbers.

On the issue of course works, it was established that course works given help students in passing their exams with a mean of 3.93 (T=49.6). However, respondents disagreed to the fact that passing of semester exams guarantees one to complete the course in time with a mean of 2.83 (24.0). Similarly, supervisors said that passing of exams does not guarantee one to complete the course. The main reason is that the whole course comprises of course work, exams and research which should all be completed for one to successfully complete the course.

One lecturer had this to say, "*Course works help students to prepare for and pass the final exams*", Female Lecturer for the Master of Science in Accounting and Finance (personal communication, September 13, 2017).

It was also established that course works given are always in line with what is taught and the number of course works given are appropriate for one to understand the concepts with means of 4.07 and 3.56 respectively. This implies that the course works given are adequate, appropriate and not a major reason why students don't complete their courses.

Research findings on student research supervision indicated that there was a low-level agreement to the fact "Supervisors are skilled and experienced as far as giving supervisory support to students is concerned" with a mean of 3.28 (T=31.4). Additionally, the respondents disagreed to the facts that supervisors have uniformity in techniques and procedures while supervising students with a mean of 2.62 (T=27.9) and supervisors are readily available on agreed schedules to give assistance to students with a mean of 2.72 (T=26.8). This contradicted supervisors' responses who said that there was uniformity in techniques and procedures while supervising students though with some unique elements in some cases.

The fact that supervisors' guidance is always in line with the graduate school research panel's expectations had a low level of agreement with a mean of 3.29 (T=32.9). Interestingly, respondents agreed with the fact that supervisors needed continuous refresher courses in handling research supervision with a mean of 3.89 (T=40.9). This suggests that students don't have confidence in their research supervisors and this may de-motivate them.

Findings on student-supervisor interaction revealed that respondents disagreed with the facts that student and supervisor meetings are always formal and having a coordinator at the faculty to manage student-supervisor meetings and scheduling with respective means of 2.64 (T=26.4) and 2.56 (T=25.7). This is supported by supervisors who confirmed that there was no coordinator to manage student-supervisor meetings and scheduling. Most supervisors agreed that most students keep the appointments while supervisors don't. This implies that sometimes, supervisors attend to their students at their convenience which inconveniences students.

During research supervision, multiple supervisors are assigned to students. Respondents agreed, though to a low level, with the fact multiple supervisors per student lead to better quality work with a mean of 3.26 (T=29.7). Supervisors were also in agreement with this fact which is realized when supervisors supplement each other positively. However, there was disagreement to the fact that multiple supervisors per student enable research to be completed in the shortest time possible with the mean of 2.88 (25.2). Supervisors said that the main cause of this problem is when supervisors disagree or are not compatible. This implies that whereas multiple supervisors improve on the quality of the work, it takes long to complete because at times they take long to harmonize their positions.

The respondents disagreed to the fact that the research methods course unit taught is practical enough to enable a student develop the required research skills with a mean of 2.79 (27.3). On the contrary, the supervisors said that research methods course unit is taught and is practical enough but the only problem was that the course is not examined and students don't take it seriously.

Effect of M&E information disseminating processes on student course completion

Generally, respondents agreed with M&E information disseminating processes though to a low level with an overall mean of 3.33. This was close to the score of 3.30 for objective 2 and far away from the score of 4.03 for objective 1. Findings on the M&E information disseminating processes are summarized below;

Research findings indicated that the statement "feedback given by academic panels is comprehensive enough to help a student improve on his/her work" had the highest level of agreement under objective 3 with a mean of 3.79 (T=50.6). This is in line with the assertion by Rwejuna (2014) stating that the role of dissemination is to share with others the knowledge that the evaluation has produced so as to improve on quality.

However, the feedback given by academic panels was perceived to be timely but to a lesser extent with a mean of 3.32 (T=36.0). On a negative note, respondents disagreed with the fact that "supervisor comments are always returned on time" with a mean of 2.74 (T=26.5). This assertion agreed with students' concern that most times supervisor comments delay. This implies that students would have to wait longer before they could proceed to another level of their research. With delays in giving feedback, the expected quality improvement maybe overtaken by events.

Table 5: Respondents views on M&E information disseminating processes on student course completion

No	Statement	Mean	SD	T-Value
D1	Supervisor comments are always returned on time.	2.74	1.240	26.5
D2	Examination panels give timely feedback which improves on learning	3.32	1.107	36.0
D3	Feedback given by academic panels is comprehensive enough to help a student improve on his/her work	3.79	0.900	50.6
D5	Academic products (reports, assignments, past papers) are availed	3.47	1.338	31.1

	to students for reference to improve on their learning			
-	**Average**	**3.33**	**1.146**	**36.1**

Source: Primary data (2017).

It was also established that past papers, reports and assignments of former students are availed to students to enhance their revision and improve on their learning. The level of agreement to this fact was at a level of 3.47.

Table 6: Effect of M&E processes and information dissemination on course completion

Objective	Mean	SD	T-Value
Effect of M&E Planning processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning.	4.03	0.889	55.2
Effect of M& E implementing processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning	3.30	1.115	37.9
Effect of M&E information disseminating processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning	3.33	1.146	36.1

Source: Primary data (2017)
M&E, monitoring and evaluation

Objective 1 ranked highly compared to objectives 2 and 3. The findings in table 6 indicate that the effect of M&E Planning processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning ranked highest at MUBS compared to M&E dissemination and M&E implementation processes with means of 3.33 and 3.30 on a scale of 5.00 respectively.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings was made in line with the objectives of the study.

Effect of M&E Planning processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning

The study revealed that MUBS has an established M&E planning process which has put in place research guidelines, programme timetables and students' guidance on required finances for the course. These have been proven to give confidence to both students and supervisors that once implemented as planned, student's completion rates would improve. This is supported by Hobson, Mayn, & Jo (2014) who argue that M&E process involves 12 steps which among others includes a step of developing guiding principles to ensure that M&E is relevant, useful, timely and credible. They argue that the guidelines help in achieving their objective because they include what is to be done, when it should be done, how it should be done and who should do it.

In a university setting, M&E planning process gives clear roles of students, lecturers, supervisors and management. The findings were also consistent with Patton (2008) who argued that the use of evaluation results is not something that can be hoped or wished for but must be planned, directed, and intentional. Relatedly, UNDP (2009) suggests that M&E planning should be part of the overall planning process because it involves setting up the systems and processes necessary to ensure that the intended results are achieved as planned.

However, a fundamental question is whether M&E planning alone is sufficient for ensuring an improvement in the course completion rates since other M&E processes did not perform well in this study. MUBS

therefore requires a more comprehensive application of M&E to be able to achieve good results in student completion rates.

Effect of M&E implementing processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning

Research findings indicated that M&E implementing processes were not being done well at MUBS compared to M&E planning. Class attendance by both students and lecturers was being adhered to at MUBS and most students who attend classes regularly complete their courses on time. This agrees with Miners & Pascopella (2007) who argues that attendance in school is important because students are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school consistently. This argument is emphasised by Ahmed *et. al* (2013) who argue that it is difficult for teachers and students to build skills and progress if large numbers of students are frequently absent.

Research findings further revealed that research seminars help students understand research better, thus completing in time. According to Agora (2009) seminar method is one of the most modern and advanced teaching methods.

Research findings indicated negative results for student-supervisor relationship. Whereas majority of supervision experiences are very positive, it is rare to find a supervisor providing high quality supervision the first-time s/he takes on a student, (UoR, 2013). This is when guidance should be enhanced on the side of supervisors. Once guidance is not continuously given, some supervisors may not improve. According to UoR (2013), most universities are getting into a system whereby staff who have not supervised previously act as co-supervisors until they have supervised a student successfully to completion.

Effect of M&E information disseminating processes on student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning

Information dissemination is an important aspect in Monitoring and Evaluation. Uganda Technology and Management University (UTAMU) has put up measures to ensure that there is appropriate feedback to students. However, the feedback levels are still low and the feedback channels are limited. Researchers assert that feedback is an important aspect in research. Brennan & Williams (2004) argue that feedback to students is just as important as feedback from students. An effective feedback should include feedback both on results and on actions. It also includes information on when actions cannot be taken, in which case the reasons should be conveyed to students and, if possible, their further reactions obtained.

The challenge of delayed feedback from supervisors and limited channels through which communications were made can make the whole research process complicated. According to Bucholz, (2017) in research guidelines of Stellenbosch University, a student and a supervisor must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to guide them during the supervision period. The aim of the MoU is to give the postgraduate student and supervisor an opportunity to develop a sound and productive working relationship.

Limited communication channels limit the flow of information in one way or another. Bucholz, (2017) argues that a variety of communication channels between supervisors and students should be used for efficient flow of information. This could be in form of reports or minutes posted on departmental notice boards or on the intranet/email or through posters in addition to other methods.

Conclusion

M&E planning is an important aspect towards student course completion in Higher Institutions of learning. The planning process ensures that research guidelines, programme timetables and students' guidance on required finances among others are put in place. Inadequate planning hinders the implementation process. As the saying goes, failure to plan is planning to fail.

Good implementation process of a good plan leads to better results. Implementation process which include monitoring class attendance by both students and lecturers, organising research seminars, monitoring student-supervisor relationship among others need critical attention for student completion rates to improve.

M&E findings are meant to improve on performance if used appropriately. Therefore, information dissemination is an important aspect in M&E. It makes the cycle of M&E complete. Information to be disseminated needs to have the required details, should be conveyed through the right channels and should be timely. Otherwise, it may not have the impact as expected.

Recommendations

As M&E planning contributes positively towards student course completion in higher institutions of learning, the planning process needs to be perfectly conducted because it forms the basis for other M&E processes. Makerere University Business School should therefore ensure that M&E planning process is conducted in consultation with all stakeholders

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