

Challenges Faced by Leaders of Institutions of Higher Learning in Uganda: Case Study of Mbale Public and Private Universities

Article by Henri Buregea Bin Rwakenda
School Of Education, Texila American University
Email:- henry.buregea@texilaconnect.com

Introduction

After spending 30 years in the education sector, I have realized that there are issues that most of the time cause schools to not operate or function as planned. Each school has its own vision and mission, goal and for well-organized schools strategic plans to attain those goals are developed. Issues arise frequently during the implementation phase of strategic plans. These issues are many and vary with schools. Some are caused by people involved in the education and others are related to situations that sometimes those people can or cannot control.

Education is facing many issues in the world today and following are the top ten issues that need to be considered. According to DeWitt (2014), there are 10 critical issues that need to be examined. These include Common Core Standards, Student learning, technology, social media, politics, high stakes tests, school leadership, pre-service teaching programmes, school climate and poverty. All these are crucial to the field of education and need to be critically looked at in order to gauge education systems and find a way to address those issues and find a way to solve each one of them for the betterment of the education system.

From the courses, I have studied; technology is at the center of every subject matter. Technology advancement has affected teaching and learning and classes have moved from traditional ways of teaching to modern ways of transmission and acquisition of knowledge. Teachers worldwide are moving from blackboard to whiteboard, from chalks to whiteboard markers. Most teaching is using multiple devices in order to facilitate teaching and learning. The use of whiteboards and whiteboard markers combined with a computer and a projector. Others use mobile phones, Kindles and iPods, the internet, etc.

The other change in the teaching system is the move from classroom teaching to E-learning. The use of both computer and the internet has enabled to move from a physical presence to the online learning using electronic devices. This move has its own challenges. As much as technology is needed, there is also the fact that leaders must have financial ability.

In fact, technology has changed education methods and is becoming a big problem for those schools that cannot afford buying all those devices that are needed for quality education during this 21st century. The reality is that there is a gap between the poor and the rich and this brings in the dimension of economics and social statuses as far as education is concerned. There is a lot of effort to develop Core Common States Standards in the US in order to improve education. However these standards do not come without challenges. The authors stress the advantage of the integration of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and 21st century skills in the curriculum (Alismail & McGuire, 2015). They point out that the benefit is not only for students and teachers but also the integration enables students to be well prepared for their future careers. There is also emphasis on the necessity to help students be more creative and use the power of technology to use their skills in a very special way and this later on in the future. Through creative thinking, students can retain knowledge and also produce evident outcomes.

Also it is worth to note that Hanna (2003) says that, "Higher education institutions around the world face the growing problem of relevance as they enter the 21st century." The aspect of relevance, the content of curricula must be relevant to current trends in politics, economics, society, culture and all other domains of life. This without doubt will enable student-teacher interactions that meet the expectations of the 21st century.

A part from technology and relevance of curricula, another critical issue is the gap between Student learning and teaching. Lisa Nielsen cited by DeWitt (2014) points out that, "Student learning is everything from different pathways to graduation, encouraging student voice in student learning, and

encouraging them have a place at the table for larger conversations about their education.” In fact, in most traditional methods, the focus has been often putting attention on teaching rather than focusing both teaching and learning. This is another problem. Education should have learners at its center for more effectiveness.

Politics also is another area that has both positive and negative impact on education. There seems to be conflict of interest between the government and leaders of Institutions of higher Learning. On one hand, most governments have educational philosophies to suit their agenda. In order to realize this, they establish public schools but sometimes the government does not address all educational needs of its population. On the other hand, private organizations and individuals come to the rescue of the population by establishing alternative schools as a solution. Most of the time, when private institutions establish schools, they construct and import in learning equipment. Sometimes taxation is imposed on them which may cripple financially educational institutions. Besides taxation, any misunderstanding between the ruling party and opposition parties also affects the day-to-day operation of educational institutions.

Social Media also is a challenge. As much as social media is needed for people to network, it is also a tool that can be used for education this can be quite challenging since it can also be a tool that can distract learners. In relation to this Baran (2001) speaks about the double edge of technology. Social media is a new way to communicate and could be used for both good and bad in the education system. Texila University encourages its students to use this platform so that both Students and Professors can use it for very fast communication (Skype, WhatsApp, Emails, etc.). In relation to this, William (2012) indicates,

The online presence for many schools has moved beyond the school website. It now includes a Facebook page(www.facebook.com), a Twitter account (www.twitter.com), blogs by teachers, principals or the superintendent, and YouTube (www.youtube.com)and Flickr (www.flickr.com) for sharing videos and photos about school.(www.educationpartnerships.org).

School leadership style can also be a source of challenge for the leader especially when the leader does not realize how his or her style is affecting his followers or when he does not consider the school climate. Hughes *et al* (2015) points out that, “good leadership...involves touching other’s feelings; emotions play an important role in leadership too. Pre-service teaching programme is also another area of teaching that can hinder or improve the quality of education. Those who undergo this programme are well prepared to face leadership challenges when they happen. School climate is another issue that can hinder or boost education efforts. In line with this, Zakrzewski (2013) says,

If you’re a school leader, you have problems to solve: bullying, teacher burnout, disengaged students, casual vandalism and litter, and cultural and socio-economic differences, among others. Researchers have found that a positive school climate can help solve a lot of those problems. Studies find that it decreases absenteeism, suspensions, substance abuse, and bullying, and increases students’ academic achievement, motivation to learn, and psychological well-being. It can even mitigate the negative effects of self-criticism and socioeconomic status on academic success. In addition, working in this kind of climate lessens teacher burnout while increasing retention.

In Africa, among other challenges, there is also lack of willingness to face challenges. University World News (2013) points out that,

There appears to be growing willingness in Africa to provide better oversight to higher education institutions. But academics, including vice-chancellors, are “not taking up the challenge to domesticate and harness the spaces they are given”. This was one of the lessons learned at a convening of higher education leaders and researchers from across the continent.

Does this have a connection with colonial legacies? Cut right (2010) points out that the colonial legacies for higher education in Uganda are similar to those in other colonial settings in sub-Saharan Africa, whether British or not. The higher education sectors were substantially underdeveloped, intentionally kept small, and open to a very small percentage of the population. This is the time to

think big and change traditional ways of educating and we must face demands and expectations of this century.

Research Problem

This project proposes to evaluate areas of leadership that hinder the smooth running of institutions of higher learning and find out possible solutions that can aid leaders of institutions of higher learning alleviate regular challenges that affect their leadership.

Hypothesis

A hypothesis is an anticipated solution or response to an existing problem or challenge. According to the dictionary, a hypothesis is a proposition, or set of propositions, set forth as an explanation for the occurrence of some specified group of phenomena, either asserted merely as a provisional conjecture to guide investigation (working hypothesis) or accepted as highly probable in the light of established facts (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hypothesis>). For the sake of this project, the following hypothesis was formulated is: "The challenges Leader of Institutions of Higher Learning in Uganda face depends on the leadership styles in practice."

Leadership Theories

In order to address challenges, it is worth to understand existing leadership theories and styles that will give a broad picture of what leadership is. Different leadership theories have been developed since. A theory provides an explanatory framework for some observation and from the assumptions of the explanation follows a number of possible hypotheses that can be tested in order to provide support for, or challenge, the theory (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory>).

For this capstone project, it was found useful to enumerate some leadership theories and these include: Great Man Theory, Trait Theory, Behavioral Theories, Role Theory, Participative Leadership, Lewin's leadership styles, Situational Leadership, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership, Contingency Theories, Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership. Many other leadership theories and styles do exist and will be focused on more latter at dissertation phase.

Objectives of the project

- 1.5.1 Identify challenges faced by leaders in Institutions of Higher Learning in Uganda
- 1.5.2 Determine their causes
- 1.5.3 Propose ways to overcome them.

Scope of the project

This project was conducted during the months of May and June 2015 in Mbale District, Republic of Uganda. It was limited to Educational Professionals who have more than 10 years of teaching experience and who have also held leadership positions. The focus of the project is educational leadership and related challenges.

Related Literature Review

In his book on Practical Research, Leedy, P. (1992) indicates that, the nature of research is academically global. Research leads the investigator into new and unfamiliar territory that must comprise a part of the journey in pursuit of the resolution of a specific problem and of the advancement of knowledge. It is for this reason that this project has been undertaken. It is worth to look into issues and or challenges that affect Institutions of Higher Learning and especially leadership. The approach is therefore to check into what educational scholars

Challenges of leadership development are a reality in institutions of Higher Education globally. In United States of America, Hill (2005) points out that developing leaders is an especially daunting task for higher education institutions. Like individuals working in professional service firms, academics are often ambivalent about assuming leadership roles. Their professional identity and sense of satisfaction from work are derived principally from their professional expertise and accomplishments. They are not recruited for their leadership potential, but rather are selected and rewarded for their research, course development and or teaching.

Those leading institutions of higher education need leadership training in order to prepare them to address issues and or challenges that can happen in the course of their work especially when assuming leadership roles in academia. In line with this, Hill believes that there is a crisis in leadership in many sectors of society today and Higher Education is not immune to these concerns. There is need to build communities of leader-scholars, willing and able to learn and tackle together the challenges of contemporary academic life (Op. cit.).

Different other authors have written a lot on the challenges that leaders face in Institutions of Higher learning. In Europe, Trivella, Ipsilantis, Papadopoulos, and Kantas (2012) wrote the article 'Challenges for Quality Management in Higher Education – Investigating Institutional Leadership, Culture and Performance. 'This article shows that quality remains a critical issue in Institutions of higher learning and must be ensured.

The EAIE BAROMETER did its first study to map international Higher Education, there appears to be growing willingness in Africa to provide better oversight to higher education institutions. But academics, including vice-chancellors, are "not taking up the challenge to domesticate and harness the spaces they are given". This was one of the lessons learned at a convening of higher education leaders and researchers from across the continent (EAIE Barometer, 2013). This calls for opportunity grasping. In Uganda, this was also echoed in a meeting with the 44th Vice Chancellor's Forum held at Makerere University. Higher education leaders were advised to be proactive in addressing challenges (UVCF, June 2015).

In the introduction section, we spoke about ten issues affecting leaders in education system. One of these addressed technology. In fact, Sife, Lwoga, and Sanga discuss the challenge related to the integration of technologies in higher learning with examples from Tanzania, and give at the same time best approaches for addressing each one of them Sife, *et al* (2007). Another challenge has to do with funding. Professor Okebukola (2008) points out another important challenge, the lack of adequate funding. Ogunraku (20012) presented a paper in Vice Chancellors' Forum. His interest was on "leadership and Governance in Higher Education-Challenges and Prospects of developing the Next Generation of University leaders, academics and researchers, the Management levels."

Here and there scholars are showing interest in tackling or addressing the challenges that Leaders of Institutions of Higher Learning face. It is for this interest, that this Capstone Project has been developed. For them to be able to address these challenges, it is must that these challenges be identified up to the root.

Methodology

Kothari (2012) writing on research methodology stresses that, "Some people consider research as a movement, a movement from the known to the unknown. It is actually a voyage of discovery." He further states that, "Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them."

It is in this perspective that this project is written. In fact, the purpose as indicated earlier was to find out challenges that leaders of Institutions of Higher Learning face. To realize that purpose, a descriptive survey was conducted. Thus, the project was done with the effort of respecting the rules of scientific inquiry.

Population, Sample size, Inclusion criteria

This survey had as population 15 lecturers and leaders in institutions of Higher Learning and the sampling technique was purposive. For each individual of the population of the study, the inclusive criteria were: first, to be an active educational professional in one of the accredited Institutions of higher learning in Mbale District (Republic of Uganda); second, the individual should have been in service for a period of at least 10 years. There was no gender discrimination.

Data Collection Technique

To collect data a questionnaire was used with open-ended questions and for the sake of verification this questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

Presentation of Findings

The population that was targeted for this project was 15 individuals. For the sake of reliability, our findings are data collected from only those individuals who actually accepted to fill and returned the questionnaire on time. Below are the findings per question:

- 1 Could you please enumerate the challenges affecting Institutions of Higher Learning in Uganda?
Challenges:
 - 1.1 Poor Policy implementation approaches
 - 1.2 Wrong people doing the right job
 - 1.3 Poor leadership: e.g. lack of efficient leaders
 - 1.4 Shortage of qualified staff
 - 1.5 Limited land (space challenges)
 - 1.6 Administrative challenges leading to strikes
 - 1.7 Under funding for government institutions and the little fund allocated come late
 - 1.8 Theoretical courses are taught. Little or no value added for job market
 - 1.9 The education system at both primary and secondary make students very lazy and not creative
 - 1.10 Poor remuneration
 - 1.11 Absenteeism of both students and lecturers
 - 1.12 Syllabi not completed on time
 - 1.13 Use of mobile phones disturbs classes
 - 1.14 Students unable to pay tuition fees
 - 1.15 URA Taxation to Private Institutions
 - 1.16 Training students to seek of jobs instead of enabling them be job creators
 - 1.17 High cost of lab equipment
 - 1.18 Peer pressure from friends and parents in course selection
 - 1.19 Sex for marks in some universities (Though at small scale)
 - 1.20 Big ratio of learners to instructors in public universities
 - 1.21 Moral decay/ethical dilemmas
 - 1.22 Education technology not adequate
 - 1.23 Lack of systematic mentoring
 - 1.24 Staff development is hard to accomplish and expensive
 - 1.25 Corruption
- 2 Do you think that leaders of Institutions of Higher Learning face specific challenges? If yes, list them.
 - 2.1 Pressure from students and stakeholders
 - 2.2 Competition
 - 2.3 Bandwagon among leader
 - 2.4 Budgeting challenges
 - 2.5 Developing curriculum/lack of innovations
 - 2.6 Enforcing new technologies to arts students
 - 2.7 Regulations and disciplinary actions
 - 2.8 Failure to meet education for all
 - 2.9 Social responsibilities
 - 2.10 Leadership Crises between students and administration
 - 2.11 Assessment of a number of issues
 - 2.12 Shortage of administrative skills, leading to strike
 - 2.13 Inability to create and maintain teams
 - 2.14 Short of lobbying skills
 - 2.15 Inefficient facilitation

- 2.16 Large classes especially in public Universities
 - 2.17 Education politics as a result of competition among the institutions
 - 2.18 Many students demands
 - 2.19 The responsibility of managing workers from different disciplines
 - 2.20 Little support for research activities
 - 2.21 Over dependence on tuition paid by students
 - 2.22 Disagreements among leaders and this hinder progress
 - 2.23 Low technology integration in teaching and learning
 - 2.24 Pressure from politicians
 - 2.25 Students scholarships not equally distributed in the country (Income differences)
 - 2.26 Students indiscipline especially from Public Institutions
 - 2.27 Managing students from rich families who have more money than the salaries of lecturers
 - 2.28 Role conflicts
 - 2.29 Managing Multicultural students and staff
 - 2.30 Lack of guidance and counseling of staff
- 3 According to you, what are the most crucial challenges of these leaders that need to be addressed with urgency and indicate why?
- Yes
- 3.1 Develop ethical values
 - 3.2 Develop strategies for implementation
 - 3.3 Handling social issues especially relationships
 - 3.4 Quality Assurance to meet required standards
 - 3.5 Code of conduct
 - 3.6 Regulating disciplinary actions
 - 3.7 Full time presence at the institution
 - 3.8 Shortage of administrative skills
 - 3.9 Lack of sensitivity to the needs of subordinates
 - 3.10 Lobbying skills needs to be urgently addressed. Because it lacks has caused Institutions to go into financial deficit
 - 3.11 Offering good administration to the Institutions
 - 3.12 Facilities and infrastructure because most of the time
 - 3.13 Students number outweighs schools infrastructure
 - 3.14 Research funding so that teaching staff can be more active in knowledge creation
 - 3.15 Ending strikes
 - 3.16 Changing management styles because the world is also changing fast
 - 3.17 Resistance to change e.g. parents
 - 3.18 Involvement of critical stakeholders
 - 3.19 Lack of ongoing professional building
 - 3.20 Accreditation of programmes by National Council for Higher Education
- 4 What solutions do you propose in order to alleviate each one of the challenges you have listed so that Uganda can develop more?
- 4.1 Job should match qualification
 - 4.2 Suppress bandwagon mentality
 - 4.3 Growth and development come in stages hence be slow but sure
 - 4.4 Enforcing regulations and disciplinary actions
 - 4.5 Recognition of students' leadership
 - 4.6 Recruit more staff
 - 4.7 Quality office prioritize the needs
 - 4.8 Security enforcement
 - 4.9 Organize refresher courses in Administration to deal the ever changing behavior of learners
 - 4.10 Sufficient funding from the education agency to provide timely service
 - 4.11 Need to offer additional administrative courses for administrative staff
 - 4.12 Research fund

- 4.13 Organize income generating projects
- 4.14 Promote Universities collaborations with foreign Institution to enhance staff development
- 4.15 Pay well lecturers
- 4.16 Not allow mobile phones during class sessions
- 4.17 Family planning and offer financial literacy
- 4.18 Campaign for tax reduction for private institutions
- 4.19 Offer career days in most schools so that students choose courses according to employability
- 4.20 Exempt tax for science equipment
- 4.21 Counseling to students and parents to stop pressure to students who want to choose their courses
- 4.22 Proper planning is needed
- 4.23 Power rotation/Term system

Discussions

This survey has described challenges faced by leaders of Institutions of Higher learning. Although the survey was done in a short period of time, the outcomes have shown that challenges really do exist and there is an urgent need to address them in order to better the education system in Mbale. In fact, what respondents have mentioned as challenges has been also addressed elsewhere. Hill (2005) says that some people are given position without being trained for this role. 90 % of Respondents pointed out the need of proper training for effective leadership. However the findings have indicated challenges of different types that affect more than one sector. This corroborates the writings of Hanna (2003) who says that, "Higher education institutions around the world face the growing problem of relevance as they enter the 21st century." The aspect of relevance, the content of curricula must be relevant to current trends in politics, economics, society, culture and all other domains of life." Unfortunately, in reality this is not true in Mbale. It is therefore crucial and indispensable to improve the situation in Mbale and make sure that the aspect of relevance complies with current trends in politics, economy, culture, and other domains of life. Thus, a thorough research is needed whose results could lead to a rich source of strategies to alleviate discovered challenges.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Summary

Looking at chapter 4 above, it is obvious that Institutions of Higher Learning do face a lot of challenges. Participants have poured out their minds to express all that they have experienced throughout their many years of service as professional lecturers and leaders in Ugandan Education systems. Apart from answers to questions, they also have shared face-to-face about what needs to be done in order to improve work in the education sector. So it is true that critical issues and or challenges must be addressed if the education system needs to improve and actually actions should target primary, secondary, and higher education (Universities, colleges as well as other Institutions of tertiary level). However, it is important to indicate that the focus for this project was on Institutions of Higher learning in Mbale District (Republic of Uganda).

Conclusion

Institutions of higher Education globally, regionally, and local levels face challenges that affect different aspects of the education system. The list of challenges as the survey has shown challenges at all levels of the teaching-learning process. Some challenges have to do with Pedagogy and Curriculum Development, Administration and Management, Educational Equipment, Leadership and Budget, Technology and Quality, Ethics and Human Resources Management. Participants have shown their concerns that need to be critically looked at and then develop ways to overcome those challenges. They actually proposed different measures that could help address them in order to better the education system. It was great to see how these challenges can be overcome using insights gained from the three courses that we have gone through during this initial part of my first academic year

(Advanced Educational Technology, Curriculum Studies and Teachers' Education as well as Educational Leadership and Management).

Recommendation

For this project, the purpose was to identify main challenges that educational professionals experience here in Uganda. After reading extensively, literature has shown that challenges remain realities here in Uganda, Africa and beyond. It is therefore very useful to find a way to address them and enable professionals to overcome them for the betterment of the education system in Uganda in general and Mbale in particular. From this project, there is a need to organize workshops to address systematically these challenges. The workshops should be well planned and through them establish priorities. After defining priorities, related strategies should be set and implemented and these will vary with the aspects of education that are seriously affected.

Further Research

Following this project, a further and systematic research that will use both qualitative and quantitative methods be done especially in the area of leadership and policy in order to explore the extent to which they are involved in the occurrence of challenges in the education sector and hopefully through this suggest appropriate remedies.

The student has a passion for Educational Leadership and would like to address these challenges through his dissertation later on when he is allow to his research.

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