



Determinants of the quality of academic staff in the process of teaching and learning in private universities in Uganda

**Authors:**

Jimmy Alemiga¹ 
Martha Kibukamusoke² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Management and Administration, Uganda Management Institute, Kampala, Uganda

²Department of Governance and Public Administration, Uganda Technology and Management University, Kampala, Uganda

Corresponding author:

Martha Kibukamusoke,
cfmdirector@gmail.com

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Background: Private Universities (PUs) have existed in Uganda since the 1990s during the time when higher education was privatised due to the high demand for higher education. However, this undermined the quality of higher education in many ways because issues like enrolling students who do not qualify to join universities and recruiting academic staff that do not qualify among others hinder the quality of the teaching and learning in these PUs. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), an institute established under Act of Parliament No. 15 of 2011 to implement the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of Parliament 2001, is the regulator body of higher education in Uganda. The mandate of the NCHE includes among others: to regulate, to accredit and to ensure that higher education institutions effectively deliver quality, relevant and standard education to the society. This is through the drafting of the quality assurance framework composed of two core components: the regulatory component at the NCHE level and the institutional component at each individual university level.

Aim: The general objective of the study was to investigate determinants of the quality of the academic staff specifically focusing on the academic staff recruitment, development, promotion and dismissal.

Setting: The study used the total quality management theory to explain the quality of teaching and learning processes in PUs in Uganda.

Methods: The study adopted descriptive and case study designs where data was collected through interviews and observation methods.

Results: The study found that PUs have the academic recruitment, promotion, dismissal and development policies that govern their management.

Conclusion: Although the policies exist, their enforcement, monitoring and evaluation are weak thus affecting the quality and output of education.

Keywords: Quality of academic staff; academic staff recruitment; academic staff promotion; academic staff development; academic staff dismissal; teaching and learning.

Introduction and background

This study concerns the determinants of the quality of the academic staff in teaching and learning in private universities (PUs) and other higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uganda. These determinants include: academic staff recruitment (hiring), promotion, development and dismissal policy which are key aspects in teaching and learning processes at universities (Wachira 2014). However, with the increase of student numbers, competition and poor regulation by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), a number of problems cropped up. The methods used in the process of recruitment of the academic staff, staff development, promotion and dismissal became a non-existent system of fairness. This has gradually impacted the traditional functions of a university including: teaching, learning, research and publication. These factors highly contribute to the quality of a lecturer (Mamdani 2007). In addition, Mamdani (2017) says that the recruitment process has continued to destroy some of the contemporary functions of a university. The functions of a university include but are not limited to: development of interpersonal knowledge and skills, and training the staff in both public and private sectors (Boulton & Colin 2008). The type of education offered at PUs aims at stimulating human development (often socio-economic), for example poverty eradication (Sivakumar & Sarvalingam 2010). Ssekamwa (2007) highlights that poor-quality

teaching of academic staff greatly donates to graduating of half-baked students who lack practical, analytical, problem-solving and job-creating skills. These skills are required in today's competitive world (Materu 2007; Ssekamwa 2007). According to the National Development Plan (NDP) Report in Uganda (2010), most of those who have completed graduate school and have gone through the limited opportunities have limited ability to spur socio-economic growth and development in their society (NDP 2010).

The study aims at exploring the determinants of the quality of academic staff in the process of teaching and learning in PUs in Uganda. The specific objectives include:

- To identify the existence of a policy used for academic staff recruitment, promotion and development in private universities.
- To find out the effect of the policy on academic staff recruitment, promotion and development in private universities.

The article is divided into a number of sections which include: the problem statement, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, general finding, conclusions and managerial implications.

Problem statement

All faculties of universities have a quality assurance policy and a quality assurance committee to enforce all the standards of NCHE on the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs of Uganda. This is a key issue for ensuring learning outcomes and transformation of students (The National Council for Higher Education [NCHE] 2011). Despite the above, the quality of academic staff of some universities are below the standards as required by the regulatory body, the NCHE. In some of these universities, the recruitment, promotion and firing (termination) of staff is known to be at any time. This has caused the academic staff to be poorly committed to work. It has also attracted inexperienced staff in related subjects as a required qualification to teach. Such staff lack research and publication skills as supported by Ahimbisibwe (2013). Some of these universities lack a properly established and a known appeals committee to handle conflicts that arise from promotional disagreements and dissatisfactions (González, Liu & Shu 2012).

As a result, the staff develop poor methods of content delivery where they fail to develop course guides, do not keep time for lectures and lack the mastery of content. It has been highlighted that this results in poor communication among stakeholders (Goe & Leslie 2008). In addition, the lack of a syllabus also results in not delivering the intended course content as well as teaching the same topic over time. In some instances, universities with such a history have had lecturers exchanging grades for students, for sex, money or other favours. A lot of discrimination has been encountered among staff members and students. This has caused the production of low-quality graduates who lack practical,

analytical, problem-solving, job-creating and required self-survival skills. These graduates cannot stimulate economic growth and development of a nation (Materu 2007; NDP 2010; Ssekamwa 2007). This gap has been created by the inadequate monitoring and evaluation of PUs in Uganda for compliance (Bunoti 2010).

Literature review

A private university is a non-government university offering higher education as an optional final stage of the formal learning process that occurs at post-secondary levels in universities and tertiary institutions. Many PUs sprung up to absorb the surging demand for higher education after public universities reached their limit of admitting students because of underfunding and the need for liberation of higher education. This reality marked the beginning of defects in the quality of higher education mainly in PUs (Briggs et al. 2012). Among the immediate defects is the deterioration of the quality of academic staff which has become highly questionable because of problems associated with research and publications, minimum required qualification to teach at a university, professionalism and experience. If NCHE does not carry out its mandate of monitoring and supervision of HEIs, damage will be felt in teaching and learning processes. The major concern of PUs in Uganda is profit maximisation which compels them to become unethical by selling degree certificates and admission of poor-quality students who lack the minimum entry requirements (Basheka et al. 2009). This becomes disastrous to any society (Bunoti 2010; Magara 2009; Materu 2007; Sawyerr 2004).

The theoretical underpinnings for this study are based on the total quality management (TQM) theory by W. Edwards Deming (1982). The theory focuses on providing principles on how to continuously improve quality of people, processes, control, goods and services across an organisation to increase efficiency, effectiveness and improve competences for long term-success for customer satisfaction (Ishikawa 1985; Juran 1974; Martínez-Lorente, Dewhurst & Dale 1998). The key assumptions of the TQM include: consumer focus; total employee involvement; focus on process thinking; integrated system; continuous improvement; fact-based decision making; effective communication; strategic and systematic approach to achieving an organisation's vision, mission and goals. The theory helps higher education managers to encourage competition, focus on customer satisfaction, improved performance, image building and improves employee relations (Esin & Hilal 2014). However, one limitation of the theory is it takes a lot of time, cost and effort; yet the organisation may still not attain the desired quality. Its application and success differs from organisation to organisation due to changes in methods, processes, changes in attitude and behaviour of people. This may affect the accomplishment of the organisational goals and objectives (Juran 1995; Shin, Kalinowski & El-Enein 1998).

The TQM theory also helps to understand the quality of teaching and learning processes in PUs in Uganda. According to NCHE (2012) and NCHE (2014) the quality of the teaching

and learning is measured by such factors like: how best the university implemented the NCHE regulatory standards, continuous adherence to improvement of study courses focused on: the design, content, duration, contact hours and assessment of what is taught; relevance of subject matter being taught; methods of student assessment; quality of graduates measured against the quality of admitted students; existent and operational appeals committee for students; protection of unique and professional programmes against general policies that may not apply to all disciplines and ensuring access of information to all students through library, laboratory, computer and internet access, space and books in both hard and soft copies. These factors also highly contribute to poor quality of academic staff (Ajit & Jayanta 2012).

In Uganda, there are over 30 PUs offering different post-secondary qualifications. The NCHE is mandated by the Act to regulate, to accredit and to ensure that the PUs effectively deliver quality, relevant and standard higher education to the society. The NCHE is composed of two core components: the regulatory component at the NCHE level and the institutional component at each individual university level (Bunoti 2010; NCHE 2008, 2011, 2014). According to NCHE (2011; 2014), quality assurance framework key issues concern the quality of academic staff and students' assessment of the academic staff. Other equally important issues are institutional accreditation, accreditation of individual programmes, merit-based admissions in HEIs, examination regulation and standardisation of academic awards, institutional infrastructure, partnership (collaborations) with professional bodies and generally regulating cross border higher education.

Furthermore, The University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001) Section 119 clearly states that 'a university or tertiary institution shall not employ a lecturer, instructor or other person recruited for the purpose of teaching (instruction) whose qualifications do not conform to the NCHE standards'. It authoritatively commands that all universities in Uganda shall employ staff that meet the standards set by the NCHE. This is a mandate for all universities.

These standards have been set in Statutory Instrument No. 50 of 2010 for academic and research positions targeted at ensuring effective university teaching and learning process in Uganda. Teaching Assistant and Assistant Research Fellow must have First Class Degree or Upper Second or Lower Second Class Degree (in Special Circumstances), Assistant Lecturer and Research Fellow must have Master's degree; Lecturer and Assistant Research Fellow must have Master's degree but studying a Doctoral degree which is known as a PhD; Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow must have PhD along with original contribution to knowledge through research & publication track; Associate Professor and Associate Research Professor must have PhD, teaching experience of at least 7 years and publications; and Professor and Research Professor must have PhD, teaching experience of at least 7 years and publications. Besides, each university

must have clearly known the rules and regulations for recruiting (hiring), promotion, development and firing (dismissal) of the academic staff which must all be included in the annual reports of the HEIs which are submitted to the NCHE as part of compliance and regulation which many PUs have not effectively adhered to hence affecting the quality of higher education (NCHE 2014).

In 2013, the NCHE rejected the 66 PhD degrees that were awarded by a PU, Kampala International University (KIU). The reasons for cancellation (disqualification) of these degrees ranged from requiring minor corrections and serious conceptual, philosophical, theoretical, methodological and new knowledge deficiencies with obvious instances of plagiarism that rendered them irredeemable (Lule 2013). There were also flaws in the admission processes coupled with low-quality examination processes, recruitment of some non-qualified supervisors and examiners. There were seven supervisors without PhDs while others had fake ones from non-accredited universities. There was no separation of roles for supervisors of Master's students, teaching and administrative roles which all fell below standards of NCHE (Wanambwa 2013).

Supervision overload (where two supervisors had 14 and 12 PhD students, respectively), and non-adherence to the four-year approved duration for the completion of the approved PhD programme were contrary to the university's policy. The duration of the PhDs did not match The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2011) which mandates that a PhD degree can only take between three years to five years. The disqualification of the fake PhDs at KIU came at a time when the World Bank was calling for the African continent to train 10 000 PhDs as soon as possible by both public and private universities. This could not improve the quality of academic staff, research, teaching and learning. It only produced poor-quality students who could not spur socio-economic development for the continent (Nakkazi n.d). Following this case (fake PhDs), the NCHE and other stakeholders including the government were sued and dragged to court by KIU seeking legal redress over the disqualification of fake PhD graduates with claims that this had badly dented the image of the institution (Amanya 2016).

In another case, the NCHE issued a notice to revoke a provisional license in 2009 when Fairland University failed to comply with the body's standards. This PU had defied a warning not to admit students to unaccredited courses. The university had continued to breach The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2011) which does not permit any institution to offer courses which are not recognised by the NCHE. The university also had opened illegal centres offering distance learning courses, awarded postgraduate degrees and honorary degrees (without a charter) among others. Fairland University had also continued to breach several provisions of the law. But upon closure, the University sued the NCHE although three years later in 2012; the

High Court in Jinja Town ruled in favour of the NCHE. In the ruling, Judge Irene Mulyagonja Kakooza said:

The applicant (Fairland University) cannot continue to sustain its operations by court orders for there is due process under which she can obtain the necessary license and finally a charter to operate lawfully. As reported by Ahimbisibwe (2013:1).

The NCHE also revoked the Busoga University's license (another PU) in December 2016 when the institution fraudulently awarded degrees and other certificates to more than 1 000 South Sudanese and about 50 Nigerians who had been admitted and went on to be graduated in a period of just two months from the date of admission. These students had been reportedly transferred from Starlight International College (Juba) which had shortly obtained a 'temporary approval for operation' from the South Sudan's National Council for Higher Education on July 21, 2016 (Ahimbisibwe 2016).

But the NCHE annulled all the suspected degree certificates because all of them were fraudulently awarded. For the two-month course and academic papers, sources indicate that Busoga University bagged more than \$1 million as each student paid over the odds (\$1000) in tuition fees which was also way higher than the average of \$300 per semester for most programmes in Ugandan universities. Painfully, the Busoga University removed genuine students from the graduation list and interchanged them with the fake ones (unqualified ones). With the beneficiaries of the mischief reportedly having paid Uganda Shillings 60 million. Many of these students were generals in the South Sudan army who occupied high offices (positions) in government and hence wanted a 'quick fix' of academic papers to maintain these positions (The EastAfrican 2017).

Most of these students who were affected lacked the minimum entry requirements (two principal passes) and other criteria for admission (an advanced level certificate or its equivalent). These students had only presented foreign qualifications, not verified by NCHE/UNEB (Uganda National Examinations Board). This meant that the university had awarded degrees to half-baked students. The NCHE authorities, therefore, ordered that the graduation of September 30, 2016 be halted but the university management paid a deaf ear and proceeded with the ceremony (Kirunda & Katabulawo 2017). Nonetheless, the Speaker of Parliament of Uganda Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, who doubles as the vice chairperson of Busoga University Council, intervened by referring to the breach of the Diplomatic Privileges Act by Mr Lual Akol Nhial (the Education Attaché) attempting to block his countrymen from graduating in ceremonies held on September 29 and 30, 2016. In a protest note to the South Sudan's ambassador to Uganda, Ms Kadaga demanded to know if the action of Mr Lual was 'the official position of the Government of South Sudan'; if so 'why it was not routed through the Uganda Ministry of Foreign Affairs'. On November 02, the Speaker added:

I would also like to know why you, the officially accredited envoy of the South Sudan Government did not address the

Uganda Government. I am considering writing to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lift the diplomatic immunity of the Education Attaché for the above breach.

According to the Speaker, NCHE was acting on false allegations.

The NCHE had earlier cancelled the license of Busoga University and ordered it to close over these allegations (irregularities) but court put an injunction on its closure which continues to dent the quality of higher education in Uganda. Another scenario was in September (2012) where Busoga University had also been involved in almost a similar case where it suspended four of its senior staff for issuing 'fake' degrees to students.

Kampala University in Uganda was accused of irregularly conferring a Bachelors degree of Business Administration (Human Resource Management option) upon the Governor of Kenya's Mombasa County Mr Hassan Joho. In April 2013, the NCHE resolved that Mr Joho's degree was awarded fraudulently and should be recalled. The university did not present clear evidence that it followed the stipulated procedure in admitting Mr Hassan Joho to the programme. In October 2014, however, the Ugandan High Court upheld the validity of the certificate, defeating the council's earlier on decision (Kirunda & Katabulawo 2017).

One of the major gaps seems to be the quality standards in Uganda's higher education system of some universities. These have not been categorised based on the threshold of international standards but characterised as: below standards, exceeding minimum standards and above standards (World Bank 2004). Therefore, higher education in Uganda has become a 'commodity' for those who can afford it at a certain cost regardless of the minimum academic entry requirements (Basheka 2013).

The rationale of this study was based on the fact that the quality of academic staff in HEIs is wanting despite the fact that the NCHE has had its powers evoked by courts in several cases and other unnecessary political factors meddling into the affairs of the council in regulating the running of HEIs. Some of these factors have made the NCHE 'toothless' hence PUs continue to hire unqualified academic staff. According to Goe, Bell and Little (2007), Goe and Leslie (2008) and NCHE (2010), the quality of academic staff in any university can greatly impact on the delivery of any form of education. The study investigated the factors affecting the quality of academic staff in PUs focusing on examining the policy of academic staff recruitment, development, promotion and dismissal as key determinates in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education both in Uganda and elsewhere.

Methodology

The study adopted both the descriptive and case study research designs as well as the mixed methods research approach that involved the use of both qualitative and

quantitative methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell 2012). In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues under investigation, the study adopted both primary and secondary data collection methods. These methods included interview and observation. Respondents of the study were purposively selected as supported by Jackson (2009) who highlighted that a purposive sampling technique is a non-probability technique of establishing a sample space for a given study. The respondents provided the desired opinions and experiences about the subject matter. The participants were selected from PUs in Uganda.

The study collected data from a population of 12 PUs whose response rate was approximately 90%. This response rate was considered sufficient to represent opinions of the wider university community. The primary data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions and observation. The interviews were used to gain opinions from the selected respondents who included the academic staff, faculty deans, the quality assurance officers and heads of departments of selected private universities. While the focus group discussions were used as a validation step among staff, the interview method made it easier and convenient for respondents to participate. Firstly, the data were cleaned for clarity and completeness then they were coded before analysis. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The meanings and implications arising from study as well as participants' responses were then explored and synthesised for presentation.

Ethical consideration

Consent from all the respondents who took part in the study was carried out and confidentiality was realised.

Findings and discussions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- Is there a policy used for academic staff recruitment, promotion and development in private universities?
- What is the effect of the policy on academic staff recruitment, promotion and development in private universities?

Academic staff recruitment policy

The study found out that PUs have clear and operational human resource policies on academic staff recruitment and appointment. As stipulated by NCHE, one should have been engaged in research and published articles to qualify to teach at university level, especially for the postgraduate courses. However, some of the PUs lack an operational or standing committee to search and vet academic staff. There was no position announcement to encourage competition and quality selection for the best and brightest academic staff; there were no formal interviews or formal examinations that were conducted at recruitment coupled with no reference or

academic background checks made. Other respondents added that some PUs had no strategic plans which reflected poor planning, coordination and budgets thus hindering the recruitment of quality academic staff to enhance quality teaching and learning.

Further, the findings revealed that one of the causes of poor academic promotion was founded on irregularities including: the absence of a clear and operational promotion policy at both the faculty and the university levels. There was no application for promotions and no internal communication of new positions within the university to allow academic staff to apply for such positions in some PUs. The academic staff reported that promotions were based on factors like loyalty (allegiance) to the top university or faculty management and not on recommended factors like: academic qualification, number of academic research articles and publications and experience in university teaching among others. This, according, to some respondents, caused panic and fear of being dismissed thus limiting co-operation and interaction among colleagues at different PUs. Respondents added that any newly appointed staff was considered as a spy for the management by other colleagues. This further limited openness and transparency in the promotion policy causing psychological discomfort among the academic staff.

The findings were contrary to the NCHE (2014) recruitment policy of the academic staff at HEIs and the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001). According to Section 119 of the Act, 'a university or tertiary institution shall not employ a lecturer, instructor or other person recruited for the purpose of teaching (instruction) whose qualifications do not conform to the NCHE by regulation'. These standards (see introduction) have been set in Statutory Instrument No. 50 of 2010 for academic and research positions targeted at ensuring effective university teaching and learning process. In addition, other studies showed that a poor-quality academic staff cannot deliver the content to students because they have no confidence in themselves which affects the teaching and learning process as well as lack commitment, competence, experience, diligence and thoroughness in the subjects they taught (lacked mastery of the content they taught). Some did not even know how to organise their teaching notes and had poor communication skills; some read notes more in class rather than explaining them with examples to students and worse still the faculty Dean or Department Heads had no power to identify or recruit any academic staff with all the required NCHE teaching standards (Mamdani 2007; Mpaata 2010). The Deputy Minister of Education of Mozambique at the Ministerial conference that was held on 16 November 2010 in Kampala, Uganda, in Bunoti (2010) highly recommended that African Governments should set up PhD and Master's degree centres to enable Africans to get home-based professionals who can appropriately deal with African problems (Basheka et al. 2009; Mamdani 2007). This was also supported by Wachira (2014) who stressed that it was important for universities to make new partnerships to support 10 000 new PhDs in Africa.

The implication is that PUs in Uganda have assumed the autonomy of recruiting academic staff against the NCHE policy is hence taking advantage of the council's weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation. This may in the near future make academic jobs (white collar jobs) become less attractive and undesirable hence rendering higher education useless. The implication means that the NCHE as the regulator of higher education finds it is hard to adequately oversee the operations of PUs to guarantee higher education standards particularly when it comes to recruitment (hire) of their academic staff and research fellows.

Academic staff promotion policy at the faculty

The respondents stated that although the staff promotion policy differed from university to university, the central characteristic is that they are all bound by the NCHE to have a rigorous peer review process of any academic staff wishing to be promoted. However, with some PUs, promotions were not based on merit (research and publication, minimum academic standards) but based on royalty, age, seniority and number of years in the institution/faculty. Other respondents added that the faculty/university as a whole lacked well-known operational appeals committee for addressing grievances that arose out of what they called unfair (unprofessional) promotions that always caused deep disagreements and dissatisfaction among the academic staff. The respondents further highlighted that irregularities in such promotions were mainly as a result of universities overlooking NCHE policies and assuming autonomy power to promote hence negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning.

This study findings are similar to the ones reported by NCHE (2014) and NCHE (2012) which agreed that the issue of an operational and well-known promotional policy is key in higher education. Stakeholders in HEIs have to enforce open and transparent promotion policies to be able to promote a good culture of institutional professionalism and quality to encourage quality teaching and learning at PUs. The current trend of promotion in PUs does not follow any principle, schedule, title, criteria, operational framework, promotional decisions and feedback; no appeals committee is in existence to address any dissatisfaction and disagreements arising from the unfair promotions. This implies that it may be difficult for HEIs, especially PUs, to merge transparency with flexibility in carrying out promotions. This means that promotions in PUs were irregular and unclearly conducted. This was due to the fact that there was lack of an in-house job evaluation structure as set by the NCHE policy for recognition and rewarding excellence of the academic staff to avoid all kinds of irregularities that could be committed by the academic staff which could further affect the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs.

Academic staff development policy at the faculty/university

At the time of the study, selected respondents from various PUs reported that although there was existence of an

academic staff development (ASD) policy, it was not well utilised. According to the respondents, this resulted in academic staff deficiencies measured by: poor excellence in academic practice, no professional development, no research and publication, poor teaching and learning, and lack of personal responsibility to develop their own skills which would help them assume further academic and non-academic responsibilities in the future. They claimed that they had lost all hope of being academically developed by this PU and also did not have funds to do it on their own.

These findings are supported by the NCHE (2014) that argued that knowledge and wisdom are acquired through observation, experimentation, research and learning. Therefore, every university academic staff must be given all the possible chances to improve academically to enhance professionalism in their respective disciplines. It was the obligation of each individual institution to notify the NCHE about the policy in place for ASD and also notify the council of the number of members who have benefited from the arrangement in each discipline or programme. This stance is further reinforced by Barnes et al. (1994) who reported that ASD helps to promote co-operative and innovative actions aimed at consolidation of quality and relevance of higher education, in both the present and the future which also matched the findings of Goe and Leslie (2008). This same finding was reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2014) which also stressed the importance and benefits of ASD in any HEI, especially for PUs.

The implication of the findings supports that all participants of HEIs, particularly NCHE and the PUs, have not sufficiently enforced a concrete institutional policy to promote academic and pedagogical capability in order to serve the needs of all stakeholders in compulsory ASD to attain better research, teaching and learning abilities. This in return motivates the academic staff in promoting a culture of professionalism and quality teaching and learning which is key for socio-economic development. This means that academic staff will have job security and career development hence they will be committed to upgrading their level of training and research in the process and become experts in their areas of domain, and automatically promote a culture of quality teaching and learning academic staff as opposed to PUs that do engage in ASD.

Dismissal policy at the faculty/university of law

Respondents from most of the PUs that took part in the study highlighted that termination of staff is at times untimely and there is no known notification for individual staff. For some PUs, respondents were not clear on the amount to be paid to them in case they are dismissed, lacked provisions on socio security funds and had vague positions (non-existent) in the structures of either the faculty of university at large. It was also stated that for some PUs, there was an absence of a committee or policy empowered to review dismissals.

Some staff claimed to be fired based on unclear rumours and a few of them on grounds based on discrimination. A few respondents who requested to remain anonymous highlighted that their benefits were not all remitted. These benefits included National Socio Security Fund.

Respondents also added that most PUs lacked an operational Professional Academic Staff Association (PASA) which could help them with things like: bargaining for better pay and other benefits, job security, academic freedom, accountability, transparency, handling grievances, unity, create awareness and welfare of academic staff which are central to the improvement of the quality of the academic staff. Others argued that although there was no such association, the majority of the academic staff did not want to be fired or leave the university (feared dismissal) because of good and timely pay despite many hours of teaching.

The findings relate to a study conducted by González et al. (2012) which confirmed that many PUs did not have a well-known dismissal policy coupled with absence of an appeals committee to hear out grievances of the dismissed academic staff contrary to the NCHE policy. Although the NCHE allows dismissals on such grounds like: bad conduct, poor performance, redundancy, queries on academic qualification, lack of research and publication. This finding was supported by Sawyerr (2002). The finding was also similar to those of Makerere University (2007) which reported that there was lack of information about the rights and privileges of the academic staff in many PUs which resulted in poor attitude to work and fear (job insecurity). The study added that PUs did not issue academic staff with oral or written communication thus they were not given an opportunity to defend themselves of any accusation before they could be finally dismissed in good faith and fairness.

Additionally, the findings on the dismissal policy were supported by a Quality Assurance Policy of Lead University (2010) which states that an academic staff member who has behaved in any way against his or her job description will normally be given an oral warning as the first stage in a disciplinary process. The second stage deals with serious offences. The sanction of any misconduct in this category of offences is a written warning given to an accused member of the academic staff by the Dean of Faculty/Department or the equivalent officer detailing the complaint, the improvement required and the time-scale. The third stage is that a member of the academic staff who wishes to appeal against a disciplinary warning shall inform the Secretary to the University within two weeks of his or her intention to do so. The appropriate Pro-Vice-Chancellor shall hear all such appeals and his or her decision shall be final (Leads University 2010). According to Makerere University (2007), it was pointed that the lack of a professional staff academic association meant that academic staff will continue to suffer unfair dismissals.

This implies that the absence of an operational legal policy against unfair dismissals faced by academic staff in PUs was

perpetuated by a lack of PASA. This reflects the lack of accountability with government institutions that protect and promote workers' rights and privileges (labour laws) in Uganda. Although the Employment Act (The Republic of Uganda 2006) states that in case a dispute arises as a result of undermining the rights and reliability of either party (employer and employee), the aggrieved party shall report the matter to the labour officer who shall then resolve the matter between the parties amicable which many times is marred by corruption and unfair judicial systems which frustrate many academic staff to fight for their labour rights. This means the academic staff in PUs continue to suffer from unjust dismissals. The NCHE has been weakened by court battles and political interferences from top politicians. PUs have to create a permanent operational and well-known independent committee to institute and investigate academic staff before the final decision to fire them. This has to be in line with the NCHE's general procedures which include: identification of unacceptable conduct or performance and advice of such to the staff member, an informed opportunity for the staff member to explain the alleged conduct or performance, specific time is given to the member to correct the conduct (given opportunity) with the assistance of an employer (in this case the university) except in cases of serious misconduct and failure of the academic staff to charge to better after a final written warning is key before dismissal.

Conclusions and recommendations of the findings

Conclusion

The study concluded that on average, PUs have the following: an academic staff recruitment policy, staff promotion policy, staff development policy and dismissal policy. However, the enforcement of these policies may not be adequate enough to cause significant change in teaching and learning process. The NCHE as the regulator of HEIs has simply relied on the two components of the regulatory component at the NCHE level and the institutional component at each individual university level. This quality assurance policy framework exists but is weakly enforced. Furthermore, each university has not clearly put in place publicly known rules and regulations for recruiting (hiring), promotion and firing (dismissal) of academic staff. These are some of the requirements universities have to submit in their annual reports to the NCHE as part of compliance for easy regulation. This policy is not operational hence PUs in Uganda continue to employ academic staff outside the scope of the policies of NCHE because of poor monitoring and evaluation by the council authorities creating quality defects (decay) in the higher education system as a whole.

Recommendations and/or suggestions

Recruitment policy of the academic staff

A clear and well-known operational recruitment and appointment policy coupled with an independent selection committee must be put in place immediately to ensure that

all the academic staff in PUs fulfil this. It is part of compliance to the NCHE policies regarding quality of academic staff among others as specified in the Statutory Instrument No. 50 of 2010 for effective university teaching and learning. Among them the key issues to be considered include: highest academic qualification, number of articles published, teaching and learning abilities, and experience that match the position of teaching at a university; and reference checks are key. This will help PUs to avoid irregularities in the current methods being used to recruit (hire) their academic staff. All positions must be well advertised in the media to attract a pool of candidates. A standard score list should be used in the process of interviews so as to be able to select the best and brightest academic staff using a more transparent, accountable and inclusive method.

Promotion policy of the academic staff

All PUs in Uganda must urgently establish a permanent promotions committee with a legal mandate (powers) to recommend or receive and review applications for those who have applied for academic staff promotions. PUs must also commit to developing a policy of equal opportunities of the academic staff for purposes of transparency and accountability. The NCHE must encourage all universities in Uganda to have rigorous peer review of the academic staff using the bodies and channels in each university to ensure merit-based promotion of the academic staff which encourages a culture of professionalism, commitment and communication among others. Any academic promotions in the faculty must not be based on age, seniority and long service in the institution/faculty but on merit (PhD, research and publication) among others and must be openly announced for purposes of rewarding excellence. This in turn promotes quality teaching and learning at PUs hence will help to produce graduates with high levels of knowledge and skills to spur socio-economic development and growth.

Academic staff development policy

An effective, efficient and well-known operational ASD policy must be put in place by each individual PU in Uganda as mandated by the NCHE. PUs must partner with the government of Uganda and public universities so that they set up PhD and Master's degree centres to enable many Ugandans get home-based professionals so that they can appropriately deal with African/Ugandan socio-economic problems. Such a partnership will also help prepare academic staff members for future positions and responsibility in the relevant fields and develop lifelong teaching and learning techniques. Therefore, every PU must be given all the possible chances to improve the quality of their academic staff. Such staff development reports must be handed over to the NCHE periodically specifying the number of those who have benefited from the arrangement in each discipline or programme. These records should be referred to during decision-making and staff motivation (encourage a natural career progression) which helps them to exceedingly concentrate on their areas of specialisation. This will breed a

culture of professionalism, job security, co-operation and innovative action all relevant for quality in higher education.

Dismissal policy of the academic staff

The NCHE must protect the academic staff, especially in PUs, who lack an operational PASA so as to be more secure at their workplaces. If any academic staff is found to have behaved contrary to the rules and regulations (unethically) in anyway against his or her job description, they must be given an oral warning as the first stage taken by the disciplinary procedure but bearing in mind that such an academic staff also has a right to appeal against any such accusations in case of a dismissal. They will need to be given a chance to prove their case (innocence) except in cases of serious misconduct or after a final written warning is issued before dismissal. The second stage should be dealing with serious offences: here a written warning must be given to a member of the academic staff by the Dean of Faculty/Department (unit) or the equivalent officer detailing the complaint, stipulating the improvement required and the time-scale. The third stage should be that a member of the academic staff who wishes to appeal against a disciplinary warning should be allowed to inform the Secretary to the University within two weeks. The appropriate Pro-Vice-Chancellor must hear all such appeals and his or her decision shall be final but keeping in mind the rule of acting in good faith and in fairness to the academic staff in question. All such information must be made available and well-known to all the academic staff.

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