

Factors Motivating Graduate Students to Enrol for Post Graduate Studies at the University of Eldoret, Kenya

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Abstract

In Kenya, potential students have the opportunity to acquire tertiary education through several avenues including; diploma, bachelors, masters and doctorate degree programs. Presently, undergraduates comprise the largest number of students at the University of Eldoret, (UoE). Little is known about the factors motivating some students to pursue post graduate studies. This study sought to establish factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies at the UoE. The study analyzed personal, environmental, and institutional factors as determinants of the academic self-efficacy. This study was conducted using ninety four participants at the UoE. Survey research design was used with instruments that measure the extent to which various factors influenced one's motivation to enroll for postgraduate studies. The study found that predictable time of course completion, favorable learning conditions and affordability of programs acted as motivators for masters students. Friendly and qualified teaching staff and affordability of the program appeared to be the most important institutional motivating factor for doctoral students. However, the findings reveal that doctoral students expect to gain more respect than master degree students. Master students expect to acquire new jobs and cope with the current work place demands. The study recommends that the UoE should not only consider programs that are geared specifically to income, job, or career enhancement but also programs that offer personal motivation to the students. Additionally, the university should roll out a scholarship program for qualified and deserving students. Lastly, the study recommends that UoE should design programs that meet work place demands.

Keywords : Motivation, Self-efficacy, Social Cognitive Theory

Introduction

According to Maslow (1943), human needs are arranged in hierarchies. Subsequent psychologists suggested that these needs could be put in form of a pyramid in order of potency. The basic needs are placed at the bottom while the less pressing needs are placed at the top of the pyramid. Maslow lists five basic needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization. He described 'higher' needs as those that emerge after basic needs are satisfied. An individual may seek to acquire a new house, new clothes or higher education if physiological needs are satisfied, but not before, because the 'thirst' for these needs would become the primary importance if not satisfied. This order of needs is the hierarchy of basic human needs, according to Maslow.

Albert Bandura, on the other hand, put forward the social cognitive theory which provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior. This theory identifies human behavior as an interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura's theory, a student acquires knowledge as his or her environment converges with personal characteristics and experiences. In other words, interactive learning allows students to gain confidence by developing skills learned in classes. According to Bandura (1986), People are self-reactors with a capacity to motivate, guide and regulate their activities.

Review of Literature

The term motivation is defined by Marshall as —the meaningfulness, value, and benefits of academic tasks to the learner—regardless of whether or not they are intrinsically interesting (Marshall, 2007). Motivation is also considered as a complex concept, closely aligned with —the will to learn, and encompassing self-esteem, self-efficacy, effort, and goal orientation (Harlen & Crick, 2003).

This paper borrows largely from the concept of self-efficacy that lies in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, which postulates that human achievement depends on interaction between one's personal behaviors, personal factors (e.g., thoughts, beliefs), and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1986). In the context of this study, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy maintains that students are more likely to attempt, to persevere, and to succeed at tasks they pursue, if, from the start, they possess a —can-

doll sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura further describes his theory as determinant measures of how people think, behave, and feel (Bandura, 1994).

According to Ryan et al. (2000) people possess different degrees of motivation , and operate from different kinds of motivation. Students with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to be internally motivated, challenging themselves with difficult tasks. These students will put more effort to meet their academic challenges to attain success. However, motivation is also influenced by external factors, such as the environment (extrinsic). When motivation is external, it is imposed on the student from the outside, such as from family members or teachers.

Personal Factors

Maslow (1943) described man as a being always in need, and that his physiological needs are the starting point for his needs. Of the physiological needs, food is the most important. An individual who lacks food would look for food much more strongly than for safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Everything else in life, goals, desires, and many more, would be defined as unimportant if the need for food is not being satisfied but once satisfied, one would move into the next level of needs. After a person satisfies his/her basic needs, then the other needs become of potency.

According to Maslow these ‘other needs’ are called esteem needs and include, improving one’s job performance, to make more friends, to develop one’s potential among others. For these in individuals, education can be viewed as a hobby, by taking classes for fun or just to gain additional knowledge. Some students may also wish to pursue a career that has always interested them, as well as improve the overall quality of life for themselves and their family.

Environmental Factor

Environmental factors of motivation refer to tangible rewards such as compensation, fringe benefits, work environment, work conditions, and job security. Environmental factors fall under the ‘Esteem’ and ‘Belonging’ category in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The environmental factors include: respect from others, love, affection, and being a part of group. Environmental motivation cannot be satisfied by the work itself, which means external rewards such as food, money, p raise, and others are the main reason for a person to engage in activities (Deci, 2005). A student might pursue an advanced degree in order to fulfill the esteem need from his/her family, thus the student receives satisfaction, love, and affection from family members in return. Another reason could be to comply with peer pressure in one’s extended or professional family, or to follow peers in order to be part of the group. Individuals may differ in their preferences. Some individuals may prefer economic rewards, while other individuals will favor intrinsic satisfaction and social relationships. Because preferences change over time, motivation needs to be sustained and developed as individual and organizational factors change (Mullins, 1999).

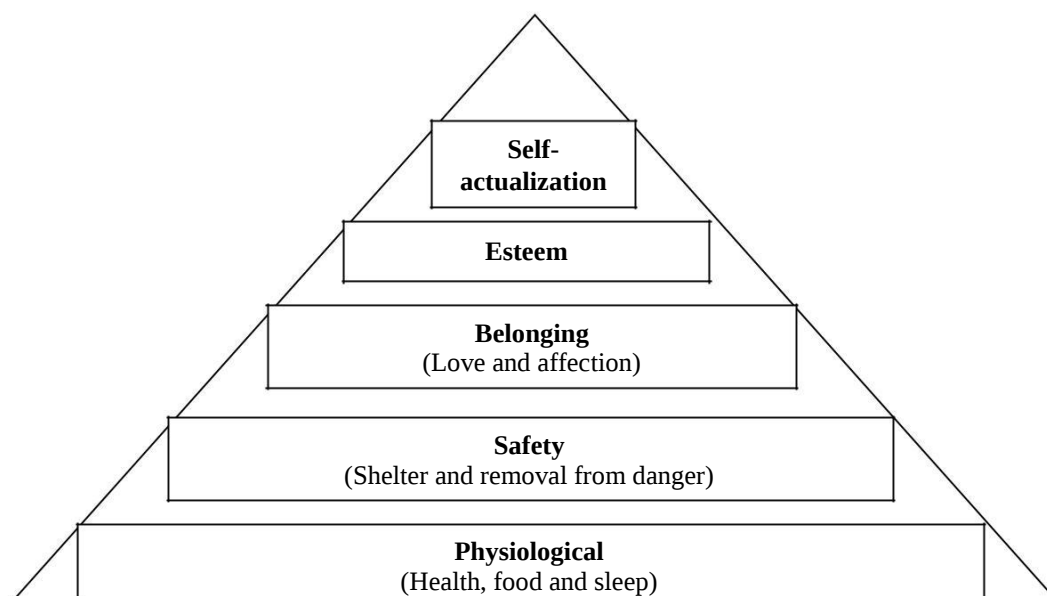


Figure 1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs model (Maslow, 1943; Gawel, 2008)

Statement of the Problem

Pursuing post graduate studies is both time consuming and expensive. Most decisions involve some form of costs and benefits considerations. Thus, people end up deciding to take an action only if the benefit is greater than the costs and the same holds true when deciding upon whether or not one has to enroll for postgraduate studies. With regards to this, the costs are not just those that are paid out in the form of tuition and books. The biggest cost in deciding whether or not to pursue such studies is the earnings a person could earn from a full-time job while still studying at the university. In addition to the costs, there is a lot of time commitment since most students pursuing such programs have other responsibilities such as part-time or full-time employment and family duties. In spite of the costs involved and the tremendous time commitment, students still enroll for postgraduate studies. Little is however known of the factors that motivate them to further their studies. The study at hand sought to establish the different motivating factors that make graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies at the University of Eldoret. The following questions were used as a guide to the paper.

- i. What are the personal factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies?
- ii. What are the environmental factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies?
- iii. What are the institutional factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies?

By establishing the factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies, university administrators and curriculum planners may be able to develop programs that will promote an environment that supports education advancement.

Methodology

A survey research design was used to carry out the research. This is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2003). Cohen and Manion (2005) argue that the attractions of a survey lie in its appeal to generalisability or universality within given parameters, its ability to make statements, which are supported by large data banks, and its ability to establish the degree of confidence, which can be placed in a set of findings.

The study population consisted of all Masters and Doctorate (Ph.D.) students of The University of Eldoret. The population was stratified into Ph.D. and Master's degree participants. Participants were drawn from the different schools in the university. From these strata, ninety four participants were randomly selected and participated in the study. Structured and unstructured questionnaires were used to collect data. Additionally, interviews were conducted to respondents to obtain further information. The study had both dependent and independent variables. The independent variable was academic self efficacy while the dependent variables were personal, environmental and institutional factors.

Findings and Discussions

Personal Factors that Motivate Graduates to Enroll for Post Graduate Studies

The study sought to establish the personal factors that motivate graduates to enroll postgraduate studies. The findings of the study are summarized in the table 1.0 below:

Table 1.0. Group Mean for Personal Motivating Factors

Survey item	Doctoral students	Masters students	Overall
To develop my potential	5.91	6.40	6.20
To perform my job better	6.33	5.10	5.80
To be respected by peers	5.05	6.00	5.53
To gain more self confidence	5.24	5.61	5.40
To fulfill my personal objectives	6.50	6.42	6.53
To take the challenge of being in a postgraduate class	4.01	5.24	4.73

For purposes of this study, personal motivating factors refers to the acts of doing an activity for itself and the pleasure and satisfaction derived from participation (Deci & Ryan, 2001). An analysis of the means among the personal factors presented in table 1.0 shows that for both the doctoral and masters students, 'to fulfill my personal objectives' had the highest mean of 6.50 and 6.42 respectively. 'To take the challenge of being in post graduate class' had the lowest mean for the doctoral group scoring a mean of 4.01.

It appears that the doctoral students were motivated to pursue Ph.D. studies to fulfill their own egos rather than for acceptance from their peers. This could be attributed to the fact that most doctoral

students have already acquired acceptance from their peers by virtue of being in possession a master's degree. Table 1.0 shows that 'to be respected by peers' had a mean of 5.05 way below 'to perform my job better' which had a mean of 6.33. This may be due to a possibility that doctoral students have already achieved their basic needs and are at the top of Maslow's pyramid where they need esteem needs.

Masters students however had 'to perform my job better' scoring the lowest mean at 5.10. This may be attributed to the thought that most masters' students had not been employed and thus had no jobs to improve on. Interestingly, most of the masters' students had 'to be respected by peers' as being among the major motivating factors. It may be explained by looking at masters students as still trying to achieve the belonging needs as put in Maslow's pyramid.

In general, the participants had differing opinions on personal motivating factors to pursue postgraduate studies.

Environmental Factors that Motivate Graduates to Enroll for Postgraduate Studies

The study also sought to establish the environmental factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies. The findings were recorded and summarized in a tabular form and are presented in table 2.0.

Table 2.0. Group Mean for Environmental Factors

Survey item	Doctoral students	Masters students	Overall
To get a job promotion	6.00	6.67	6.40
To acquire job security	5.27	5.59	5.53
To increase my income	5.22	4.63	5.00
Availability of a scholarship	4.42	1.42	3.12
To attain a higher social status	7.69	3.87	5.83
To acquire new job opportunities	3.12	7.23	5.31
To cope with work place demands	4.00	7.90	5.54
To obtain better working conditions	6.23	4.30	5.46
To work in an improved environment	6.15	5.47	5.80

This study looked at environmental factors as motivators that lead to tangible rewards such as compensation, fringe benefits, work environment, work conditions, and job security. These factors cannot be satisfied by the work itself, which means external rewards such as food, money, praise, and others are the main reason for a person to engage in activities.

An interesting survey item was 'to obtain better working conditions' for the doctoral students. This item scored a mean of 6.23 being the topmost ranked mean among other items. The reason for this may be perhaps majority of doctoral students already have jobs which they are not satisfied with making them advance their education and would therefore want to obtain better working conditions. When replying to 'to acquire new job opportunities', majority of the doctoral students did not find this as being one of their motivators. Perhaps this is because most doctoral respondents are in employment and thus are pursuing higher education for other purposes. Majority of the doctoral students however were of the opinion that 'to attain a higher social status' was an important motivating factor. Maybe, this could be attributed to Maslow's theory of needs which opines that after an individual satisfies the basic needs, he may continue up the pyramid to achieve self actualization.

Majority of the masters' students thought that 'to cope with work place demands' acted as a motivator for advancing their degrees. This had a high mean of 7.90. Perhaps this may be attributed to the ever increasing number of first degree graduates churned out of universities each year putting a lot of pressure on the limited jobs available in the market. Additionally, a significant number of masters' students thought that 'to acquire new job opportunities' acted as a motivator. This had a mean of 7.23. It may have been due to the limited job opportunities that a first degree holder could get and therefore they had to make themselves competitive in the job market. 'Availability of scholarship' scored the least mean among this group of students. Apparently, the harsh economic situation in the country has lead to considerable drop in the scholarships being offered. Therefore, very few students have access to this and may be the reason to the low mean mark posted in the table 2.0.

Overall, the respondents had differing opinions on the environmental factors that motivated them to enroll for postgraduate studies.

Institutional Factors that Motivate Graduates to Enroll for Postgraduate Studies

The study finally sought to establish the institutional factors that motivate graduates to enroll for postgraduate studies. A summary of the findings is presented in table 3.0.

Table 3.0. Group Mean Statistics for Institutional Factors

Survey item	Doctorate students	Masters students	Overall
Awarded a scholarship	1.30	0.00	1.30
Proximity to Eldoret town	5.49	5.00	5.49
Favorable learning conditions	6.10	4.47	5.31
Affordability of their programs	7.79	7.42	6.61
Advice from friends/parents etc.	4.22	5.23	4.80
Availability of the desired program	6.57	6.43	6.50
Predictable time of course completion	4.23	6.63	5.47
Competent and friendly teaching staff	3.79	5.55	6.53

Institutional factors for this study were taken to mean the variables that uniquely described the University of Eldoret. These were thought as a comparison of the university to the rest of the universities. For this particular factor, it was assumed that the respondents had adequate knowledge of other universities within the North Rift region. _Affordability of their programs_ emerged as the most important motivating factor for both doctorate and masters students. This had a mean of 7.79 and 7.42 respectively. In pursuit of education, the question of tuition fees acts a major hindrance to potential students. When the fees are high, generally the number of registered students is significantly reduced and vice versa. This may have been the reason of the mean posted in the table 3.0.

Most doctoral students thought that _availability of the desired programs_ acted as a major motivating factor, scoring a mean of 6.57. This may be as a result of the university rolling out several postgraduate programs for its potential students. However, _award of scholarship_ scored the least mean for the doctorate students, posting a mark of 1.30. Perhaps the university has not had a scholarship program for its students. It may be thought that since the university was recently a university college, maybe the program was restricted by the mother university.

Masters students additionally thought that _predictable course completion time_ acted as a major motivating factor. This scored a mean of 6.63. It may be thought that most master's students tend to inquire a lot before taking a course. Therefore, the possibility of advice from past students from the university could have been the reason of the mean scored by the respondents. Of the surveyed respondents, none had been offered a scholarship by the university. It is possible that none may have applied for a scholarship consideration by the university or the scholarship program is unavailable in the university or that none of those who applied qualified for the scholarships hence the score posted in the table 3.0. Generally, both doctorate and masters students seem to hold a common motivating factor in _affordability of their programs_.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the research results, it has been revealed that both doctorate and masters students have different motivating factors as pertains to personal and environmental factors. However, both groups of students appear to agree on one major institutional motivating factor- affordability of the university's postgraduate programs.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that;

- i. The university should not only consider programs that are geared specifically to income, job, or career enhancement but also programs that offer intrinsic motivation to the students.
- ii. To increase enrolment in postgraduate programs, the university should roll out a scholarship program to qualified and deserving students.
- iii. The university should design programs that cope with the market place demands of its graduates.

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