

# **THE FIRST GRADUATES OF THE MAKERERE UNIVERSITY EXTERNAL DEGREE PROGRAMME IN UGANDA**

## **A CASE STUDY**

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## **A PAPER TO BE PRESENTED AT THE PAN COMMONWEALTH FORUM**

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### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

Makerere University, the oldest university in Uganda, is state owned. It was established in 1922 as a Technical School, became a University College linked to University of London in 1949, and in 1963 became a constituent college of the University of East Africa. In 1970 it gained full university status and was until recently, the only university in the country.

Makerere has 9 faculties and 11 schools and institutes. The Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) offers adult and continuing education. IACE's mandate is to:

promote the study and practice of Adult Education  
and Community Development and provide university  
based learning opportunities to adults (IACE 1993:1 ).

IACE's history dates back to 1953 when the Department of Extra Mural Studies was set up to '*cater for the education of adults who were not in formal learning institutions*' (About Distance Education 1981:3)

In 1980, efforts were made to reintroduce correspondence courses or distance education courses, as they came to be known. This was contained in the university's plan for 1980-1986 which included starting External Degrees as one of its long term objectives (CCE, 1990). In the IACE Five Year Development Plan of 1993/94 -1997/98, IACE sets out its objectives and one of them is to '*...provide External Degrees to adults*' (IACE, 1993:1). The External Degree Programme (EDP) was launched in 1991 with two four year courses; Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) and Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com). Both courses are run on similar course outlines and regulations as those governing full time internal

programmes. The Institute now runs these courses in collaboration with the School of Education for B.Ed; and the Faculty of Commerce for B.Com.

## 1.1 Objectives of the Programme

According to the proposal for the External Degree Programme (CCE, 1990), the main aims of the programme are summarised as follows:

- increase access to university education;
- contribute towards the production of high and middle level human resources;
- develop a flexible mode of study; and
- develop the Department of Distance Education.

## 1.2 Target Group

The External Degree Programme was designed partly as a means of trying to find alternatives that would not necessarily have to depend heavily on government funding. As a result of economic decline, the government contribution to education reduced greatly. For example, in 1983/84 education received 17.2% of the total budget. However, by 1989/90 this had dropped to 10.3% (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1992:47). Government could clearly no longer afford to fully support education, especially higher education. The External Degree Programme was designed on the understanding that students would pay tuition fees. In contrast, students on similar internal programmes do not pay tuition fees unless admitted as private students.

Another major problem especially since the mid-1980s was the escalating numbers of secondary school students. Whereas this was a good sign of increased access to secondary education, many of these students were completing their secondary education and competing for the very few places in Makerere the only university available at the time. For example, in 1970 there were 40,700 students in secondary schools but by 1989 this had risen to 238,500 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1992:50). Places available at Makerere University could not cope with this enormous increase. Table 1 gives admission figures from 1989.

Academic Year	Number qualified (A Level)	Number Admitted**
1988/89	4,480	1,747
1993/94	9,220	1947
1994/95	8,655	1,947
1995/96	9,332	2,162
1998/99	15,000	2,000*

**Table 1: Makerere University Admission Figures (1989-99)**

(Sources: 1989 figures Chick, 1990:10; 1993-96 figures Makerere University Admissions Records)

\* Number admitted under government sponsorship. Another 8,000 were admitted as private students.

\*\* Number admitted includes those admitted under Mature Age Entry (about 5%) and under Diploma Entry (about 3%)

It is clear that a large pool of frustrated demand for higher education has been building up. The External Degree Programme was therefore seen as one way in which the university would open its doors to more people thus increasing access.



[Source: Aguti 1996:77]

The recommendations of Professor Chick, a former Director at the University of New England, played a key role in determining how the EDP was to be run. Chick (1990) recommended that the Programme be started with the Department of Distance Education carrying mainly an administrative role while the other faculties 'teach'.

### 3.0 CHALLENGES

Distance Education is relatively new in Uganda. Although Makerere did run certificate courses by distance in the 70s and 80s, these stopped in 19- as a result of the problems associated with the Amin era of government.

Distance Education programmes have only been revived and now there are a total of –different programmes run in the country. Many of these are for non formal education and still at pilot levels. Beginning the EDP in these circumstances meant facing up to many challenges.

#### 3.1 Attitude

Many of the initial challenges faced had to do with attitude. Attitudes about

- Distance education as a mode
- The target group
- Study materials

##### *Distance Education as a Study Mode*

For many years, all popular degree courses run in the country were run as full time courses. The populace therefore had no knowledge whatsoever of degree courses run by distance. There was as such no faith in the ability of distance education as a study mode to deliver.

This kind of attitude was not limited to people outside the University. Some academic and administrative staff of the University also felt likewise.

Dealing with this kind of attitude has not been easy. The Department did try sensitization through meetings with district officials who are policy and decision makers at the district level. This has now paid off and some districts are today offering bursaries to their students admitted on the EDP.

Another challenge related to attitude had to do with the EDP target group.

##### *The Target Group*

The EDP was initiated to open access to university education especially for the disadvantaged. The initial response to this was two edged. Some felt that Makerere had finally opened up its gates and stopped being an 'ivory tower'. In this way the EDP was applauded. However, others saw this as attempts to lower standards in Makerere.

Majority admitted to both the B.Ed and the B.Com are either diploma holders, recent 'A' leavers or Mature Age entrants. Diploma holders are professionals with diploma certificates in education, for B.Ed, and business related courses for the B.Com. Many of the students admitted for diploma courses are those who do not pass well enough to join universities.

The 'A' level leavers on the other hand are people who have the minimum requirements of 2 principal passes but did not gain entry into university. Places available at the universities are limited and so the entry point is normally very high. Many who qualify are left out.

Mature entrants are adults who have been out of school for a minimum of two years. To gain entry into Makerere University, they sit the Mature Age Entry Examination.

All the students admitted under these three categories were viewed as 'academic failures' or 'academic dwarfs'. There were fears therefore that since the EDP was admitting such candidates, standards were being lowered or compromised. This attitude has only changed after the EDP students proved in their performance that they could pass highly.

### **3.2 Lack of Study Materials**

The EDP was started without study materials that had been specifically been developed for the EDP. Instead through the support of the Commonwealth of Learning, Makerere acquired materials from Nairobi University and from the Open College UK.

This lack of materials caused a number of academicians especially to be hesitant about a distance education programme which has no materials of its own. It was feared that such a programme was likely to be mediocre. There was also reluctance to accept materials that were developed by another university. The study materials acquired did meet some of the requirements of Makerere but there were gaps and this was partly the reason for the reluctance to accept the materials.

The other challenge that the EDP continues face in relation to study materials is that not all the required units have been developed. There are therefore units that are being taken but the study materials are not yet developed. This is especially the case with the B.Com. Even in cases where the units have been published, the students can only borrow a copy. For students who are studying by distance, this lack of materials is a real handicap.

To deal with this problem, the department has allocated a little more, 7% of the 1998/99 academic year budget to materials development as opposed to 6% in 1997/98. Also to supplement, the department:

- Encourages tutors to identify book extracts that students can be given to students
- Purchases handouts developed by lecturers, and relevant textbooks.

### **3.3 Finance**

The EDP is self-financing. In other word, the programme does not receive funds from the University/government for virtually all its costs with the exception of salaries for a few staff that is paid by government.

The students on the EDP pay tuition fees and during the residential sessions, pay for their accommodation and meals. However, the tuition fees by these students are low compared to the fees paid by students on similar courses. This is because the Department of Distance Education desires to serve those who are disadvantaged many of who can not afford high fees. For example, External B.Com students pay the equivalent of US\$400 each year, while the Internal students pay nearly twice that amount.

The effect of this is two-fold, the Department does not earn sufficient money to provide the students all the support they need while on the other hand, the External students find difficulties meeting this fee and at the same time pay for their accommodation and food during the residential sessions. Each year, a number of students defer their studies for lack of tuition fees.

### **3.4 Student Support**

Student support is vital in any distance education programme (Friedman, 1981; Robinson, 1994). However, student support in Makerere is not well developed and the few services available are still centralized. For example, counseling and library services are all centralized. Although the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education has 9 centres scattered all around the country. These are run down and cannot therefore offer these services to the students.

The Department is now moving towards decentralized support services. Students are now encouraged to form study groups in their localities. And to serve these students where they are, the Department is establishing student study centres in already existing Institutions of learning. Through these centres students have access to relevant literature, and hold discussions with or without the help of a tutor. Students are now very keen on this and 9 study groups have so far been started.

#### 4.0 PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

As mentioned earlier, when the programme was launched there were many fears so altogether very little was expected of the External Degree students. However, as the Vice Chancellor said in his address to the 1994/95 graduands: *'The demand for this programme is steadily rising and the performance of the first batch of students has been more than expected'* (Ssebuwufu, 1996:17).

Although there was no exceptionally good performance, it was much better than had been expected. Of those who graduated with the B.Ed, 66.7% had attained Second Class [Lower] Honours degree while 33.3% passed without honours. In the case of B.Com, 53% attained Second class [Lower] while 43% passed without honours. This was much poorer than the B.Com internal students performance but considering the challenges that had been faced by the External students, this performance was encouraging.

In the subsequent years, the students' performance did improve slightly. In the case of B.Ed, in the second lot of students admitted, of those who sat the final examination, 3 [3.5%] passed with Second Class [Upper] Honours, 66.8% with Second Class [Lower] Honours, and 30.2% without honours. The B.Com performance also registered some improvement. Although the External programme still registers a big percentage of those who pass without honours, the programme has had some passing with Second Class [Upper], for example, in the 1993/94 lot, 4 students out of 89 (4.5%) passed at this level. In the 1994/95 cohort, of those who sat the final examination, 1.5% passed with Second Class [Upper] Honours, 40.9% with Second Class [Lower] Honours, and 57.6% without honours.

Tables 2 and 3 give the performance of the students.

CLASS	1991/92			1993/94		
	Female	Male	%	Female	Male	%
1 <sup>st</sup> Class	00	00	00	00	00	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Upper	00	00	00	00	03	3.0
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Lower	17	30	66.7	18	46	66.8
Pass	07	18	33.3	11	18	30.2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 : Performance of the B.Ed External Students 1991/92, & 1993/94  
[Source: Department of Distance Education Records]

CLASS	1991/92				1994/95			
	INT	%	EXT	%	INT	%	EXT	%
1 <sup>st</sup> Class	00	00			00	00	00	00
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Upper	05	4.8	00	00	14	13.6	02	1.5
2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Lower	84	80.0	26	53	71	68.8	56	40.9
Pass	16	15.2	23	47	18	17.6	79	57.6
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3: Performance of B.Com Internal and External Students 1991/92, & 1994/95  
[Source: Department of Distance Education Records]

The performance of the External Degree Programme has been encouraging. Five of the pioneer B.Ed students enrolled for Masters of Education (M.Ed) and another 15 have enrolled for the same. Two of the women became members of parliament, one of them now a Minister. While with the B.Com, three of the graduates who had passed with Second Class [Upper] Honours were appointed as Assistant Lecturers in the Department of Distance Education; though they also assist Makerere University Business School. This has particularly been very encouraging to other External students. The rise of some these graduates has helped establish the EDP. Some attitudes have now changed and the programme is no longer regarded as mediocre.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

The External Degree Programme has come a long way. It started with only 246 students for programmes, B.Com and B.Ed. Today the programme has a total of –students enrolled. This is a tremendous increase in the enrolment. At the time of launching, there were a lot of challenges, some of these, like the problem of attitudes has been overcome, many are slowly being addressed while a few continue to be a challenge. However, in spite of all this, the External Degree Programme has been able to graduate a total of – for B.Ed and –for B.Com. Some of these are today holding enviable positions in government and other places. This is a testament that Distance Education can be effectively used to offer higher education. Makerere needs to do a lot more to ensure the [potential in its distance education programmes is realised.

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