

Assessment of student satisfaction with higher education: The case of RUFORUM- supported students in Member Universities in Africa

Waswa, M., Egeru, A. & Rukarwa, R.J.

Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture, Plot 151/155 Garden Hill,
Makerere University, P.O. Box 16811, Wandegaya, Kampala, Uganda

Corresponding author: m.waswa@ruforum.org

Abstract

RUFORUM (Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture) has continued to render educational programs more relevant to local, national, and regional labor market needs through supporting the development of new and revised programs at member universities in Africa. These training programs oriented towards human capital development are directly related to stakeholder satisfaction. This study was designed to investigate the satisfaction of RUFORUM-supported students with own performance as well as with RUFORUM and university services including supervision, support and enrichment services, and the training and curriculum delivery. A cross-sectional survey research design was used and data collected using the questionnaire survey method. Data collected from a sample of 100 continuing students was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis in Microsoft Excel to establish the satisfaction levels. Results indicated 85 % satisfaction with supervision; 84 % satisfaction with own performance; 73 % satisfaction with training and curriculum delivery; and, 72 % satisfaction with the support and enrichment services of RUFORUM. The study therefore established the key satisfaction levels for the parameters above for the RUFORUM Operational Plan 2018-2022. The study recommends strengthening timely feedback to the students by supervisors; improving the training and curriculum delivery of PhD programs by narrowing the span between undertaking coursework and commencing research to enable students link theory and practicals/research. Further, commitment towards the effective implementation of the RUFORUM Graduate Teaching Assistantship Program (GTA) by member Universities and scaling-up high impact enterprises initiated by students is highly recommended.

Key words: Own performance, RUFORUM, supervision, support and enrichment services, timely completion, training and curriculum delivery

Resume

Le Forum régional des universités pour le renforcement des capacités en agriculture (RUFORUM) a continué à rendre les programmes éducatifs plus adaptés aux besoins du marché du travail local, national et régional en soutenant le développement des nouveaux programmes et révisés dans les universités membres en Afrique. Ces programmes de formation orientés vers le développement du capital humain sont directement liés à la satisfaction des parties prenantes. Cette étude était conçue pour enquêter sur la satisfaction des étudiants soutenus par le réseau RUFORUM vis-à-vis de leurs propres performances ainsi que des services avec RUFORUM et université, y compris les services d'encadrement, de soutien et d'enrichissement, ainsi que la formation et la prestation du programme. Une enquête transversale était réalisée et les données étaient recueillies à l'aide de la méthode d'enquête par questionnaire. Les données recueillies auprès d'un échantillon de 100 étudiants en formation continue avaient fait l'objet d'une analyse statistique descriptive à

l'aide de Microsoft Excel afin d'établir les niveaux de satisfaction. Les résultats ont démontré 85 % de satisfaction en rapport avec la supervision ; 84 % de satisfaction vis-à-vis de ses propres performances ; 73 % de satisfaction à l'égard de la formation et de la prestation du curriculum ; et, 72 % de satisfaction des services de soutien et d'enrichissement de RUFORUM. L'étude a donc établi les principaux niveaux de satisfaction pour les paramètres ci-dessus pour le plan opérationnel du RUFORUM 2018-2022. L'étude recommande de renforcer la rétroaction des encadreurs en temps opportun aux étudiants ; améliorer la formation et la prestation des programmes de doctorat en réduisant l'intervalle entre la réalisation des cours et le début de la recherche pour permettre aux étudiants de connecter la théorie et les travaux pratiques/recherche. En outre, l'engagement à travers la mise en œuvre efficace du programme d'assistants de l'enseignement supérieur (GTA) du RUFORUM par les universités membres et la mise à l'échelle des entreprises à impact élevé initiées par les étudiants est fortement recommandé.

Mots clés : Propre performance, RUFORUM, encadrement, services de soutien et d'enrichissement, achèvement en temps opportun, formation et prestation de programmes

Introduction

Globally, knowledge is key in the revitalization of World economies through developing value-added technology-based services essential for economic prosperity, competitiveness, and adaptation to the challenges of globalization (Vanessa, 2017). It has high potential for removing the African continent out of poverty through the much needed investment opportunities and employment possibilities. Transition towards a knowledge-based economy from product-based economy typically involves undertaking several measures including developing human capital and long-term investment in education. This has partly been achieved by Universities through the delivery of training to equip students with several skills including research skills, problem-solving skills and creative thinking skills that are key facets for a knowledge-based economy. Since the quality of supervision amongst several other aspects has a demonstrable effect on the achievement of these postgraduate students' outcomes (Tinab, 2014), universities have to improve student supervision as this will enable students achieve their academic targets, which in turn, enhances student satisfaction. In the context of higher education institutions, student satisfactions play an important role in determining the originality and relevance of the education system. This is because the higher the level of satisfaction experienced by the students, the better the students' ability to prime their skill development, course knowledge and mentality. Student satisfaction is a key indicator for measuring the effectiveness of a university in governing itself as well as its educational system. If a university possesses essential support and enrichment services, effective supervision and, robust training and curriculum delivery approaches, students will most likely be motivated, loyal and exhibit good academic performance. Student support in the context of higher education has implications on how students experience the university and has been a topic of much concern in the literature on student affairs and student development. Although several academic and non-academic support services are provided by RUFORUM (Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture) and its member universities to the supported students, little is known about the effectiveness of these services in enabling the students succeed. Student supervision on the other hand enables students reflect on career plans by providing expertise in preparing the curriculum vitae, application processes and requirements (Passi, 2016). Apart from supervision and support services, the training and curriculum delivery in terms of infrastructure, educational techniques used, technologies employed, and, other specific elements related to curriculum delivery have a direct effect on the quality of training delivery extended to the students.

Hence, it is necessary to establish the satisfaction levels of students with own performance, supervision process, support and enrichment services and, training and curriculum delivery as this has a bearing on the completion time of the students as well as their future prospects.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for this study because it provides a systematic description that is as factual and as accurate as possible (Setia, 2016). Using this design, qualitative approaches of data collection were followed and included questionnaire survey aimed at obtaining in-depth understanding of student behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Sutton and Austin, 2015). Data were analyzed thematically using Microsoft Excel, version 2016 software.

Results and discussion

Gender of the students. Results indicated that most respondents were male (56 %) as compared to the females, with more students at Egerton University (33 %) as compared to the other universities (Fig.1). This could be attributed to the fact that more scholarships have recently been awarded to Egerton University and Gulu University with support from the Mastercard Foundation, as compared to the other universities during the financial year 2018/2019. Further, as indicated in Figure 2, more scholarships and grants have recently been awarded under the TAGDev Program of RUFORUM as well as under the community action research program (CARP) as compared to other granting portfolios/scholarships.

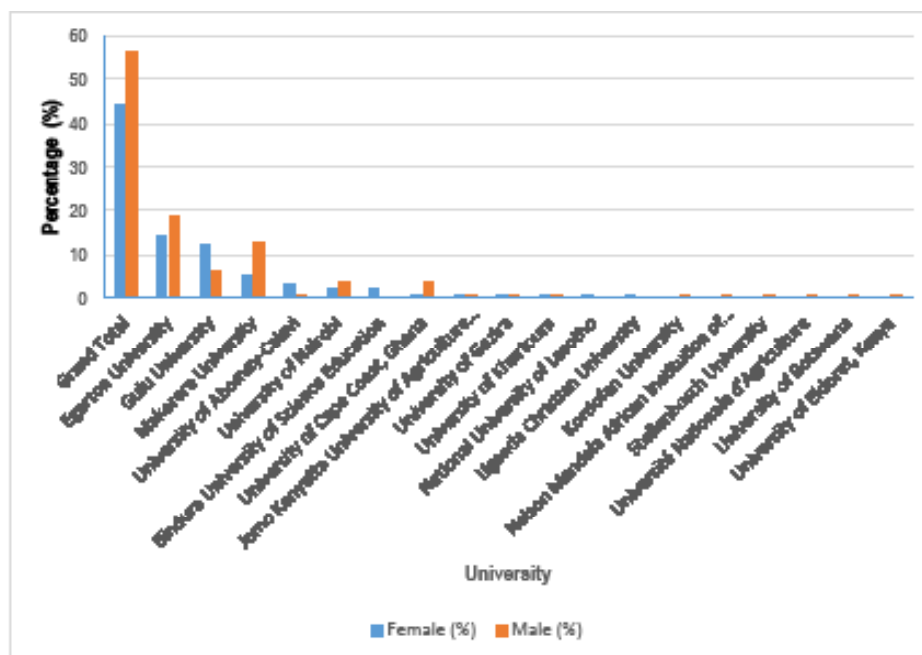


Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents at the various Universities

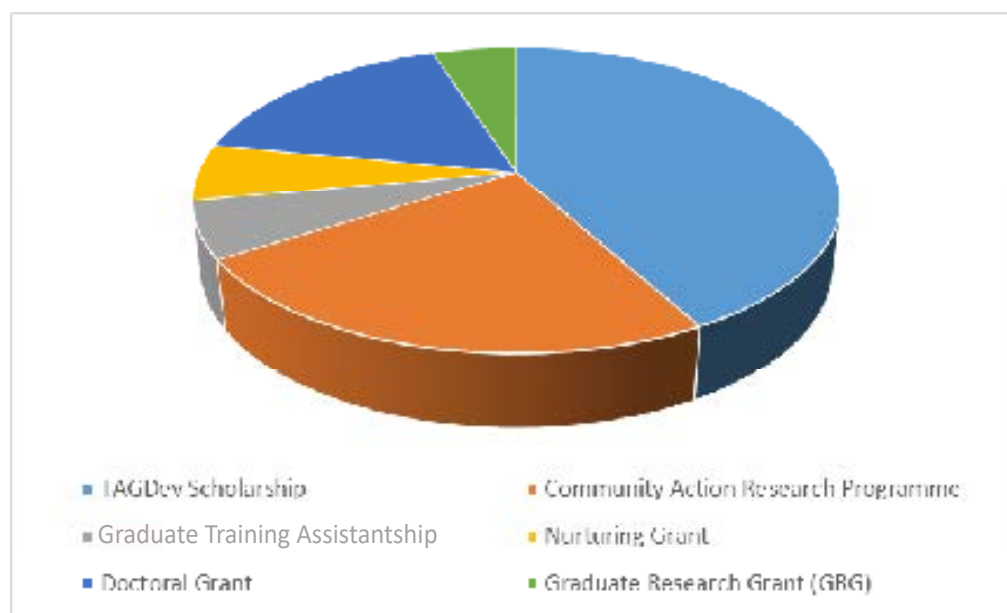


Figure 2. The various RUFORUM granting portfolios/scholarships under which the students are supported

Degree program undertaken by the students. Table 1 below indicates that majority of the respondents were Masters students (43 %) while the least were undergraduate students (24 %). This could be attributed to the higher cumulative numbers of Masters students that have been supported by RUFORUM than PhD and undergraduate students since 2004 (RUFORUM, 2018).

Table 1. Degree program undertaken by the students

Degree programme	Total
Masters	43
Doctorate	33
Undergraduate	24
Grand Total	100

Average number of supervisors per student. Table 2 indicates that majority of the students had two supervisors (59 %) particularly at Makerere University, Egerton University and Gulu University. Despite students having more than one supervisor, students reported some cases of conflicting guidance from the supervisors and indicated a relatively high quality of the supervision experience. For instance, they indicated that the major supervisory style employed was the attractive style (Fig. 3), characteristic of opportunities for undertaking consultations with the supervisors, field visits, and maximum technical support, thus creating an enabling environment for the student to undertake studies. It was against this that the students expressed their general satisfaction with the supervision process as 85 % (Table 3).

Table 2. Average number of supervisors per student at selected RUFORUM member universities

University	No. of supervisors		
	One	Two	More than two
Makerere University		14	4
Egerton University	10	12	5
Gulu University		10	1
University of Cape Coast, Ghana	1	4	
Bindura University of Science Education		2	
University of Gezira		2	
Kordofan University		1	
Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science & Technology		1	
Uganda Christian University		1	
University of Abomey-Calavi	3	1	
University of Botswana		1	
University of Eldoret, Kenya		1	
University of Nairobi		1	5
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology			2
National University of Lesotho			1
Stellenbosch University		1	
Université Nationale d'Agriculture		1	
University of Khartoum		1	1
Grand Total	16 (18 %)	51 (59 %)	20 (23 %)

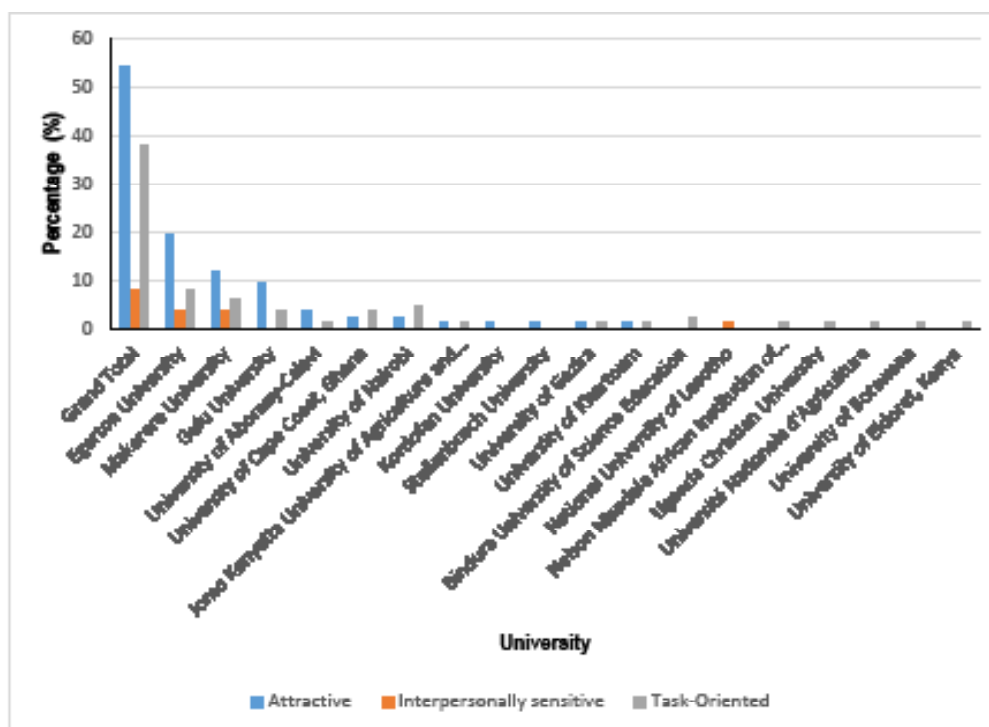


Figure 3. Supervisory styles employed at the RUFORUM member universities

Table 3. Overall satisfaction with students' supervision at RUFROUM member universities

University	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral
Egerton University	21	5	1
Makerere University	14	2	2
Gulu University	11	1	
University of Nairobi	6		
University of Cape Coast, Ghana	5		
University of Abomey-Calavi	3		
Bindura University of Science Education	2		
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2		
University of Gezira	2		
University of Khartoum	2		
Kordofan University	1		
National University of Lesotho	1		
Stellenbosch University	1		
Uganda Christian University	1		
Université Nationale d'Agriculture	1		
University of Eldoret, Kenya	1		
Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology	0	1	
University of Botswana	0	1	
Grand Total	74 (85 %)	9 (10 %)	4 (5 %)

The observed level of satisfaction with student supervision in Table 3 above is attributed to several attributes of the supervision process most especially constructive criticism, availability of the supervisor when needed by the student, and commitment by the supervisor. Students also appreciated the interest of the Supervisors in their research and tailoring guidance according to each student's strengths and weaknesses. This is expressed by a verbatim from the students; "Gulu University Lecturers especially from Faculty of Agriculture and Environment are more than a teacher, but they are as well parents. They are approachable, friendly, and keen to see you complete studies in time".

Student satisfaction with own performance. Table 4 below indicates students' rating of their own performance at the respective universities. The table indicates that majority of the students (84 %) were satisfied with own performance mainly attributed to attaining scores above the required average, relatively high performance in coursework, progress in undertaking research, timely thesis submission and defense and, timely completion of tasks under minimal supervision. This is indicated in the verbatim below from one of the students; "*I am really very satisfied with my work. I had an average MSc. grade of 14.33 in class and an average MSc defense grade of 17.66. The two averages give me the word VERY WELL. I am very satisfied because it allows me to register directly in doctoral thesis*".

Table 4. Students satisfaction with own performance

University	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
Egerton University	25	2	5
Makerere University	16	1	1
Gulu University	15	2	1
University of Nairobi	6		
University of Cape Coast, Ghana	5		
University of Abomey-Calavi	3	1	
Bindura University of Science Education	2		
University of Khartoum	2		
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	1	1	
Kordofan University	1		
National University of Lesotho	1		
Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology	1		
Stellenbosch University	1		
Uganda Christian University	1		
Université Nationale d'Agriculture, Benin	1		
University of Eldoret, Kenya	1		
University of Gezira	1	1	
University of Botswana	0	1	
Grand Total	83 (84 %)	9 (9 %)	7 (7%)

Satisfaction with training and curriculum delivery. Table 5 below indicates students' assessment of the training and curriculum delivery at the respective universities. The table indicates a satisfaction level of 73 %, with more students at Egerton University expressing high satisfaction levels. The observed level of satisfaction was attributed to the combination of diverse curriculum delivery approaches that spur thought, creativity and entrepreneurship mindsets. These approaches include practicals, e-learning, presentations, course work and seminar sessions. Students reported the course modules to be well structured with multidisciplinary delivery approaches that facilitate the development of self and technical skills required for the holistic re-engineering of the global Agricultural Sector. These render the training relevant to the current agricultural and rural innovation setting demands. In some member Universities especially in Sudan, the curriculum is delivered in both Arabic and in English, rendering it very participative and inclusive. The observed level of dissatisfaction (14 %) (Table 5) was attributed to the fewer aspects of practical curricular delivery and the span between coursework and undertaking research especially at the PhD level thereby rendering it difficult for the students to link coursework and research.

Satisfaction with support and enrichment services from RUFORUM. The major support and enrichment services provided by RUFORUM included facilitation for participation at Biennial conferences, scholarships, and skills enhancement opportunities (Table 6).

Table 5. Student satisfaction with the training and curriculum delivery

University	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Egerton University	23	4	5
Gulu University	14	2	2
Makerere University	13	3	2
University of Cape Coast, Ghana	5		
University of Nairobi	4	1	1
University of Abomey-Calavi	3	1	
Bindura University of Science Education	2		
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2		
Kordofan University	1		
National University of Lesotho	1		
Stellenbosch University	1		
Uganda Christian University	1		
University of Eldoret, Kenya	1		
University of Gezira	1		1
Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology			1
Université Nationale d'Agriculture		1	
University of Botswana		1	
University of Khartoum		1	1
Grand Total	72 (73 %)	13 (13 %)	14 (14 %)

Table 6. Major support and enrichment services received from RUFORUM to member universities and students

Support Service	Percentage
Biennial conference facilitation	27 (20 %)
Scholarship	26 (19 %)
Skills enhancement	22 (16 %)
Stipend	19 (14 %)
Research funds	13 (10 %)
Medical Insurance	8 (6 %)
Community engagement	7 (5 %)
English classes	5 (4 %)
Field tours	6 (4 %)
Accommodation support	4 (5 %)

For the support services above, an average satisfaction level of 72 % was reported during the financial year 2018/2019 (Table 7). This was partly attributed to the RUFORUM support towards student participation at the Biennial Conference which provided them opportunity to network and share experiences with Professionals and other students from across the African continent. The 2018 Biennial Conference was further concurrently exploited by students to obtain skills

enhancement to nurture them into better Professionals and change agents. The skills enhancement training included social media (Web 2.0 and Social Media for Education/Agriculture, basic and advanced searches on the Web, Geo referencing, blogging and micro-blogging, basic photography/videography, and creating and managing Communities of Practice (CoP); leadership, entrepreneurship and communication. One student noted; The Biennial conference I attended was very helpful for me because it was my first time to attend such kind of conference attended by whole Africa discussing on the problems of Africa and problems to be solved. I realized that Africa is in my hand as a future generation. *“I thank Carnegie for the support through RUFORUM. Though I have not completed yet (waiting for the defense), I would not have reached this stage if Carnegie had not awarded me the financial support. My heartfelt appreciation”*.

Scholarships and other forms of financial support enabled students successfully undertake analytical research and pay tuition in time, thereby enabling them focus on studies without need to engage in several forms of employment to secure tuition. The students however recommended more financial support and responsibility towards the RUFORUM Graduate Teaching Assistantship Programme (GTA) and, scaling-up high impact enterprises initiated by students while still at the university.

Table 7. Satisfaction with support and enrichment services of RUFORUM to universities and students

University	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Bindura University of Science Education	28	3	2
Egerton University	13	2	2
Gulu University	11	5	1
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	4		
Kordofan University	4	1	
Makerere University	2		
National University of Lesotho	2	2	1
Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology	1	1	
Stellenbosch University	1		
Uganda Christian University	1		
Université Nationale d’Agriculture	1		
University of Abomey-Calavi	1		
University of Botswana		1	
University of Cape Coast, Ghana		1	
University of Eldoret, Kenya			1
University of Gezira			1
University of Khartoum		1	1
University of Nairobi			1
Grand Total	69 (72 %)	17 (18 %)	10 (10 %)

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating satisfaction levels of RUFORUM-supported students with own performance as well as with RUFORUM and university services including supervision, support and enrichment services, and the training and curriculum delivery. The study established that students were highly satisfied with the supervision and their own performance. The study recommends retooling of students in technical, providing training to develop cross-cutting skills, principles, strengthening timely feedback to the students by supervisors, strengthening the training and curriculum delivery of PhD programs by linking coursework and research through narrowing the time-span between coursework and commencing research, intensifying monitoring of the RUFORUM Graduate Teaching Assistantship Program (GTA), and supporting the setting up and scaling-up high impact enterprises initiated by students. The students greatly appreciated participation in RUFORUM Biennial conferences, which provided international exposures as well as opportunities for networking and knowing more about development issues in the continent.

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