

CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION IN MANAGEMENT OF PRIVATELY SPONSORED STUDENT PROGRAMMES PSSP IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT: *Massification or the exponential growth experienced by universities in Kenya for the last one and a half decades has negatively impacted on the quality of education being offered by these universities. In their attempt to cater for the large increase in student numbers has come with many challenges caused by overcrowding, crumbling infrastructure, inadequate human and financial resources and declining quality of the professional courses on offer. This paper sought to identify the challenges faced in the management of Privately Sponsored Students Programmes (PSSP) especially given the continuing expansion in public universities in Kenya. The study was carried out at Moi University, situated in Eldoret, and six of its satellite campuses. Ex post facto design and a mixed method approach study design was used. The target population consisted of all the PSSP students (11,185) enrolled in the academic year 2009/2010 in all the schools that have these programmes and all staff. One hundred and forty (140) teaching and non-teaching staffs were interviewed while 460 students were had questionnaires administered for data collection. Data was analyzed qualitatively. Unclear university policy for PSSP administration, poor management shrouded by corruption and, inadequate and unqualified teaching staff were among others some of the challenges identified. Public universities need to be open and transparent in management of funds from PSSP Programmes while investing part of the earnings in relevant infrastructure that supports learning in the university.*

KEYWORDS: PSSP, Challenges, Public Universities, Management

LITERATURE REVIEW

African higher education is confronted by knowledge revolution. However, the rapid advancement in knowledge is mostly produced outside Africa (Nyaigotti-Chacha, 2001). Africa is the least developed continent in terms of higher education institutions and enrolments by international standards. African higher education system has suffered neglect because of scarce resources in most of the countries and low priority given to it by the African governments. As a result, African higher education has suffered from underfunding, deterioration of academic and research infrastructure and unsatisfactory service conditions for staff. Not only have these problems negatively affected the quality of higher education in Africa, but also the overall development of African countries (Nyaigotti-Chacha, 2001).

As long as funding is inadequate, and quality is substandard, African universities may have no place amongst world-class institutional ranking. Mutual exchange of students and academic staff, institutional collaboration and policies and curricula can assist Africa to improve her higher education institutions, and systems. To be competitive in the international education market, institutions must offer modern or even state of the art facilities and higher quality, relevant educational programmes taught by competent, motivated highly qualified staff utilizing innovative teaching methods that integrate local knowledge with international

perspectives. Countries and institutions that find way to respond to and overcome these challenges will have the competitive edge, and be on the path to becoming world-class in their status (Nyaigotti-Chacha, 2001).

Makerere for instance, has diversified its financial base and reduced its reliance on government by encouraging privatization and admitting fee paying students. The first step towards privatization occurred when the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education inaugurated a self-sponsored external degree programme in 1992. The faculties of Law and Commerce initiated privately sponsored evening courses the following year (Ssekama, 1998). In 1994, the University Council accepted the principle that faculties with places remaining after the prescribed government intake could fill them with private students. One year later, it sanctioned evening courses for all faculties. Within three years privately sponsored students exceeded the number supported by government in Makerere University. Similarly, eclecticism of courses offered and flexibility of timing are long established features of systems in the USA, but for Uganda and old Oxbridge practice, they represent departures from tradition, departures that, in an earlier era and until very recently, seemed impossible (Ssemaka, 1998).

Due to public demand and human capital theory, Higher Education (HE) in Kenya has undergone considerable expansion and as of 2010, there were a total of thirty (30) public and private universities serving a student population of 200,000. The enrolment rose from 571 students in 1963 to 91,541 students in 2006 and almost 90% are in public universities (UNESCO, 2006). Simiyu (2004) observes that this trend is due to several factors, including demographic growth, significant advances in the provision of primary and secondary education hence, more young people become eligible to seek admission in High Education. However, these rapid enrolments have not been matched by expansion in educational facilities and teaching staff thereby compromising quality of higher education (Kadenyi, 2009). In support, Abagi (2007) has observed that the expansion of university education has experienced a crisis – deteriorating quality and relevance, unsustainable financing, limited research, low staff morale and the struggle between regular and parallel degree programmes. The rapid expansion has also led to a rise in educational costs. The student's loan scheme, the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), has not been able to deal with the swiftly increasing student numbers. Otieno (2004) observes that low incomes, especially in rural parts of Kenya, have made it difficult for students to afford university education and therefore the expansion of HE has a direct impact on financing and utilization of physical resources.

Shortage of academic staff has also been an issue in financing High Education as well as the declining teacher- student ratio. The decrease in state funding has pushed the universities to fight shamelessly amongst themselves in an effort to attract more students who can afford to pay the fairly high fees. This has resulted in universities sidestepping the mandatory quality regulatory mechanisms as they focus on revenue generated from mounting these courses. Professional bodies in Kenya whose courses are offered at university level are not happy with the quality of graduates being channeled out and some of them like the Engineering Board of Kenya {EBK} have refused to issue practicing certificates to graduates from certain universities who have since gone to court to demand the same. Poor remuneration evidenced by constant strikes and salaries that often come late have demoralized lecturers. Many are decamping to foreign universities and research institutions thereby contributing to the much touted brain drain currently affecting many institutions of higher learning in Kenya (Coleman & Court, 1993; Musisi & Muwanga, 2003). The World Bank estimates that some 23,000 qualified academic staff are emigrating from Africa each year in search of better working

conditions (Blair & Jordan, 1994; Carrington & Detragiache, 1998). The massive brain drain experienced in universities is due to better remuneration packages offered by foreign and regional universities. In addition, some staff members go for further studies outside the country and do not come back upon completion of their studies (Moi University Strategic Plan, 2005-2015). This therefore has deprived the universities of the much needed academic strength especially in the fields of science and technology.

Kenyan public universities have therefore been forced to use part time lecturers and to hastily upgrade the Masters' staff they employ to fill the gap (Boit, 1998). On the same issue of brain drain, Abagi (2007) notes that universities do not have the capacity and ability to supervise the increasing numbers of campuses effectively and this compromises the quality of academic standards in these institutions. Both public and private universities are neither employing the teaching staff permanently nor on contract basis, casting uncertainty on their commitment to research and knowledge development. A survey carried out by the commission for Higher Education (CHE, 2010) reveals that although the seven public universities in Kenya have not been adversely affected by the issue of part-time staff, their constituent colleges recruiting lecturers with low qualifications teaching on part-time basis have been greatly affected. The same survey concluded that lecturers rob students of real university education in these campuses because they (lecturers) are always on the move teaching between campuses and come to class late and often exhausted:

Consider a lecturer who has been travelling all over the country teaching in other institutions, and he enters your class 30 minutes late. Not only will he lack time to research on the subject leading to repetition of content but he will also have shallow presentations (Kairu, 2011).

So although major public universities like Nairobi, Moi and Kenyatta do not have many part-time lecturers on staff, those on full-time basis in these institutions tend to be the ones employed on part-time by other institutions and therefore move between the satellite campuses, other universities and the universities' main campuses.

The fast and vibrant increase of both public and even private universities in Kenya has put the universities under siege caused by limited facilities, shortage of teaching and research expertise and poor governance in some cases. Some universities attempt to hire extra space outside the university as extension for classroom space but even this is yet to match the rising numbers of students being admitted into these universities. Some universities have stalled housing projects within the universities which they are unable to complete due to lack of funds from the government for development of capital projects (Moi University Strategic Plan, 2005-2015; Ransom *et al.*, 1993; CHE, 2001). Inadequate facilities including libraries, modern electronic and technological infrastructure and high student staff ratio hinder the universities' efforts to meet the demand for high quality services and the implication is that academic standards have been compromised in pursuit of the financial survival of the institution.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out at Moi University, situated in Eldoret, and six of its satellite campuses, namely Chepkoiel Campus, Kericho Campus, Coast Campus, Nairobi Campus, Central Kenya Campus, Yala and Southern Nyanza Campus – Rongo. The University is located

on the Western part of Kenya, in Eldoret Town, 300 Km northwest of Nairobi the capital city of Kenya.

The choice of Moi University was not intended to imply that the other public universities would not produce the same results. It is, however, important to note that, of the seven public universities, Moi University has been expanding most rapidly, acquiring satellite campuses in all the provinces of Kenya. It has also been at the forefront in creating constituent colleges some of which have become fully-fledged public universities such as Maseno, Masinde Muliro, Maasai Mara, Kabianga, Karatina Universities and the University of Eldoret.

The study used the ex post facto design to investigate the effect of expansion of the privately sponsored students programme on quality, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of higher education without manipulation. Kerlinger (1986) states that ex-post facto design is a systematic empirical enquiry where the researcher does not have direct control of the independent variables because their manipulations have already occurred.

The study embraced a mixed method approach as its methodology. This is a method where both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used to gather data. Metens (1968) says that quantitative approach refers to the study of populations and samples using numeric data and statistical analysis whereas qualitative research makes little use of statistics, but relies heavily on verbal data and subjective analysis.

The target population for the study was all the PSSP students (11,185) enrolled in the academic year 2009/2010 in all the schools that have these programmes in Moi University. All staff, teaching and non-teaching were also included.

Stratified, random sampling techniques were used to obtain a study sample of 460 students and 140 teaching and non teaching staff.

The data collected was coded and tabulated before using statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) for data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As depicted in table 1, the items for access to university learning/teaching material fall within a mean range of 1.81-3.4. PSSP students agreed that they had access to library (mean = 1.97), students further agreed that they accessed lecture halls (mean = 1.81), furniture were also reported to be accessible to PSSP students (mean = 2.13). However, Computers (mean = 3.4), recommended textbooks for their courses (mean = 3.2), textbooks for further reading (mean = 2.94), relevant journals and other periodicals (mean = 2.79) and internet facilities on campus (mean = 3.1) were not accessible to PSSP students. Generally, PSSP students were found to have very limited access to learning/teaching materials.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Accessing the University ELearning/teaching materials

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Library	1.97	0.845
Lectures halls	1.81	0.818
Furniture	2.13	0.896
Computer labs	2.97	0.941
Computer	3.4	3.796
Recommended textbooks for the course	3.2	2.734
Textbook for further reading	2.94	1.017
Relevant journal and other periodicals	2.79	0.986
Internet facilities on campus	3.1	0.89

Source: Survey Data, 2012

Table 2: Staff Responses on Quality Regulatory Mechanisms

		SA	A	U	D	SD
PSSP Libraries have adequate books	Freq.	6	12	6	77	25
	%	4.8	9.5	4.8	61.1	19.8
Teaching and learning materials are available for PSSP students in all libraries	Freq.	12	30	6	53	25
	%	9.5	23.8	4.8	42.1	19.8
The procurement process of teaching and learning materials is satisfactory.	Freq.	0	41	6	60	19
	%	0	32.5	4.8	47.6	15.1
There are regular workshops and seminars for lecturers for capacity building.	Freq.	12	18	0	58	38
	%	9.5	14.3	0	46	30.2
Supervision and invigilation of University examinations is adequate and thorough	Freq.	0	41	18	44	17
	%	0	32.5	14.3	34.9	13.5
PSSP administrators have ensured that lecture rooms have adequate furniture	Freq.	6	49	12	41	18
	%	4.8	38.9	9.5	32.5	14.3
University disciplinary committee is effective in dealing with disciplinary cases of PSSP students	Freq.	30	83	0	7	6
	%	23.8	65.9	0	5.6	4.8
Schools review and analyze examination results to plan instructional change	Freq.	6	78	12	23	7
	%	4.8	61.9	9.5	18.3	5.6
PSSP administrators have ensured that physical conditions of the PSSP campus is generally pleasant	Freq.	6	72	12	29	7
	%	4.8	57.1	9.5	23	5.6

Lack of adequate means of transportation for inter campus shuttling has led to lecturers missing or arriving late for lectures	Freq.	31	42	6	35	12
	%	24.6	33.3	4.8	27.8	9.5
Provision of examination materials transportation and supervision of examinations are pegged on PSSP funds.	Freq.	12	41	17	38	18
	%	9.5	32.5	13.5	30.2	14.3
Proportion of funds for research should be increased	Freq.	41	74	0	11	0
	%	32.5	58.7	0	8.7	0

Source: Survey Data, 2012

From table 2, 77(61.1%) of the staff disagree that PSSP libraries have adequate books and 25(19.8%) strong disagree. Fifty-three (42.1%) of staff disagree and 25(19.8%) strongly agreed that teaching and learning materials are available for PSSP students in all libraries. Fifty-three (42.1%) and 25(19.8%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that the procurement process of teaching and learning materials is satisfactory. More results revealed that 60(47.6%) of the staff disagreed that there are regular workshops and seminars for lecturers for capacity building.

Forty-four (34.9%) of the staff disagreed that supervision and invigilation of university examinations is adequate and thorough; 49(38.9%) of the staff agree that PSSP administration have ensured that lecture rooms have adequate furniture; however, 41(32.5%) of the staff disagree that PSSP administrators have ensured that lecture rooms have adequate furniture. Eighty-three (65.9%) of staff agreed that university disciplinary committee is effective in dealing with disciplinary cases of PSSP students. Schools reviewed and analyzed examination results to plan instructional change as reported by 78(61.9). Seventy-two (57.1%) of the staff who agreed that PSSP administrators have ensured that physical condition of the PSSP campus was generally encouraging. Further, 42(33.3%) of staff agreed that lack of adequate means of transportation for inter campus shuttling had led to lecturers missing or arriving late for lectures. Nevertheless, 35(27.8%) disagreed with it; 41(32.5%) agreed that provision of examination materials transportation and supervision of examinations are pegged on PSSP funds and 74(58.7%) agreed proportion of funds for research should be increased.

To emphasize more on the quality of education offered to PSSP students by their lecturers, the study investigated if lecturers taught PSSP students as part of their careers or for economic gains.

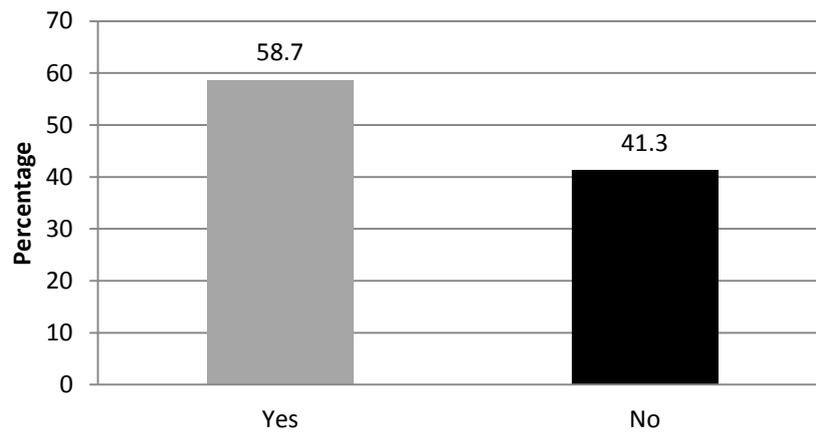


Figure 1: Lecturers Teach PSSP Students for Economic Gains

Source: Survey Data, 2012

Study results from Figure 1 reveal that majority, 74(58.7%), of the lecturers taught PSSP just for economic reasons, while only 52(41.3%) of the lecturers taught PSSP because it is their duty to transfer knowledge to their students.

Some of the challenges faced by PSSP students emerging from the study were the emphasis placed on the financial gain in deciding to teach PSSP, lack of commitment by lecturers, poor services and resource delivery, bureaucracy in fees payment, HELB loan being difficult to get and the application process being cumbersome, problems of discrimination of PSSP students by their colleagues in GSSP, favouritism of regular students by lecturers and examination irregularities.

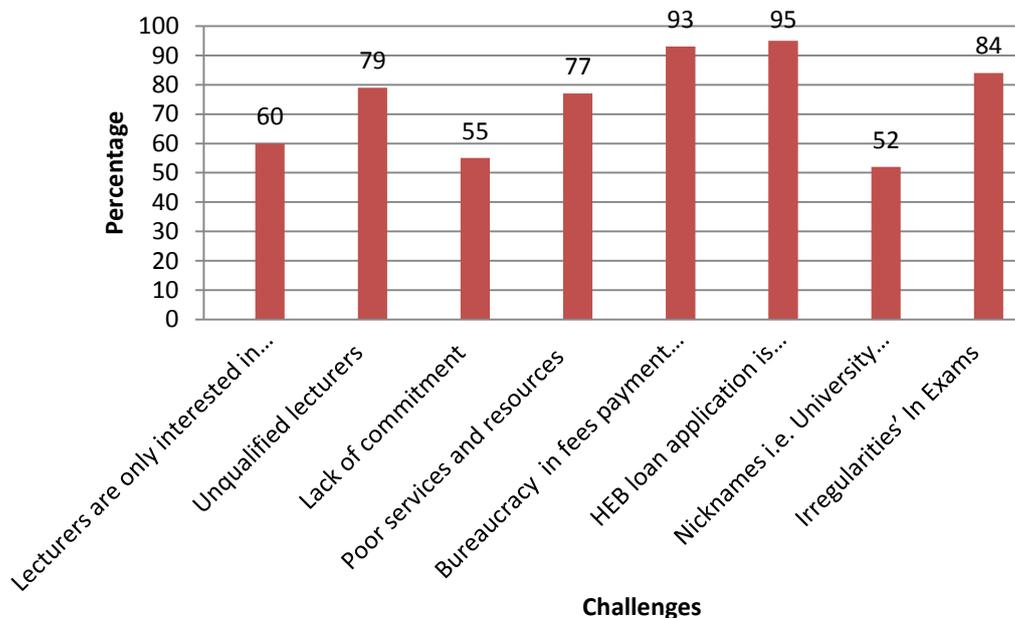


Figure 2: Challenges faced by PSSP students

Source: Survey Data, 2012

From figure 2, majority (95%) of the students stated that the major challenges they faced was the uncertainty of fee payment and the lack of support from Higher Education Loans Board (HELB). The loan application process is cumbersome and rarely successful. This frustrates PSSP students to the extent of many dropping out or even committing suicide. The second major challenge, as reported by 93% of the students, was bureaucracy in fees payment mode. Although the finance departments of Moi University are computerized, fees payments as pointed out by the respondents is characterized by delays and bureaucratic procedures that waste students' valuable learning time. Overall, 84% of the students reported that examinations were poorly administered, resulting in massive cheating and students copying from one another.

Other irregularities cited by the respondents were that lecturers enticed female students by promising to award them better marks in their examinations results. Similarly cited by the respondents was tribalism and nepotism in examinations where marks are awarded in relations to students' relationship with the lecturer. In all, 79%, 77%, 60%, 55% and 52% reported the challenges as caused by having unqualified part-time lecturers, poor service delivery, lecturers being driven by the economic benefits of teaching the PSSP programmes, lecturers' lack of commitment to the PSSP, illustrated by the little time they spend with the PSSP students before they travelled to the next campus, and PSSP students being given nick-names that tend to discriminate them from being university material, for instance, Poor Secondary School Performers to correspond with the PSSP acronym.

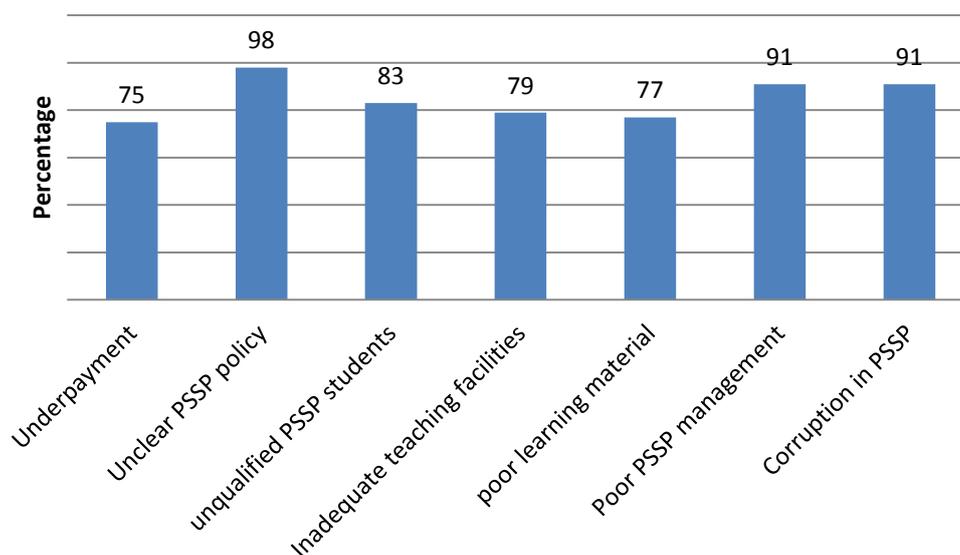


Figure 3: Challenges faced by PSSP Staff

Majority (98%) of PSSP staff in Figure 3 above indicated that having unclear PSSP policy on how the proceeds from PSSP was being used by the university was posing a problem to staff. The staff believed that having unclear distribution policy of PSSP was disturbing. As such, 91% of the university staff reported that poor management of PSSP and the programme being shrouded by corruption were the second major challenges faced by university staff. In the study, 83% of the university staff reported that most part-time lecturers were unqualified to teach in the university. They further stated that most of PSSP students needed to upgrade their qualifications in middle-level colleges before enrolling for any degree in any university. In addition, 79% and 75% of them revealed that inadequate teaching/learning materials and

lecturers being underpaid were some of the other challenges faced by staff who participated in the interview respectively.

These findings agree with what Abagi (2007) asserts, that universities do not have the capacities to supervise the increasing number of campuses under their administration. The security and transportation of examination materials from the main campus of Moi University to satellite campuses wherever they are located is an exercise that endangers the security of the examination papers. The respondents revealed that examination papers are e-mailed to private bureaus near University campuses to be collected and administered. This does not guarantee the security expected of an examination paper because confidentiality of the examination paper is lost through being handled by unauthorized personnel.

The pressure on lecturers to mark large numbers of scripts in a given short time also supports the findings that the quality regulatory mechanisms in place in Moi University do not ensure the quality of the programmes being offered.

It was further established that a significant number of the respondents reported that lack of computers and internet facilities in their campuses as well as inadequate informational materials affected their performance, and therefore the quality of education they receive. Moreover, most of the PSSP students agreed that PSSP funds have been used to improve the academic environment of the university including establishing new satellite campuses. Both students and staff were in agreement that PSSP programmes were an innovative means of expanding accessibility to University education. One of the beneficiaries of PSSP funds in Moi University are the libraries which, according to the study, many agreed that PSSP funds have been used to purchase books, journals and computers.

Implication to Research and Practice

The quality of higher education is coming under increasing scrutiny. If higher education is the engine of the economy, governments are looking for verifiable and measurable evidence of benefit and impact. Students, as consumers, are questioning the value-for-money of their study program relative to the tuition fee that they pay, or to the institution's status and reputation. Evidence of quality and the pursuit of excellence have become the key mantra dominating higher education, inside and outside the academy. To enhance the quality of total student experience, corrective measures by policy makers and management should be taken. This study thus will help them identify some of these challenges and set for continuous quality improvement especially in management of higher education given the rampant expansions.

CONCLUSION

Most of PSSP staff were concerned about the unclear PSSP policies and the general administration of programmes. Another huge percentage believed that corruption was rampant in PSSP and they had no clear knowledge on the distribution rates of funds accrued from the PSSP. The study also revealed that majority of the staff is uncomfortable and unsure about the qualifications of the part-time lecturers engaged to teach PSSP courses.

The percentage of staff who responded to part time lectures as a challenge was higher than that of the students. Nevertheless, the challenge posed by part-time lecturers teaching PSSP programmes from both students and staff is a pointer to one of the many challenges contributing

to the low quality of programmes in public universities. The author further established that most of the respondents identified lack of adequate teaching/learning materials as a challenge. The procurement process for learning/teaching materials was slow and frustrating.

RECOMMENDATION

The public universities need to be open and transparent in management of funds from PSSP. Making public the rates of distribution of the funds would assist in allaying any fears of misappropriation.

Public universities have an obligation to give all stakeholders and especially the students, parents, the exchequer and the professional bodies; value for their money. It is strongly recommended that the Standards and Guidelines for universities be followed strictly in establishing universities and accrediting the programmes to be taught therein. For Kenya to accelerate its development agenda and achieve the sustainable Development Goals the government needs to intervene in providing policy and strategic direction through improved funding and a categorical demand for prudent management of resources. The above, together with an established internal quality assurance policy can help in restoring trust and confidence in University education.

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