

Students' Perspectives on Postgraduate Diploma Training in Monitoring and Evaluation at Uganda Management Institute

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ABSTRACT

Globally, training in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has been a key aspect for development work mainly in form of short-term capacity building training for development practitioners. Of recent, some universities and other institutions of higher education have developed short-term and long-term training programmes in M&E. The long-term training programmes have been developed up to the level of Master's and PhD, illustrating professionalization of the M&E discipline. Uganda Management Institute (UMI) offers a Post graduate Diploma in Monitoring and Evaluation that continues to attract a huge number of practitioners looking for skills and knowledge in M&E. Based on the experiential learning theory by Kolb & Fry (1975), researchers were interested in gaining insights into the diverse perspectives, experiences and challenges facing the postgraduate diploma in M&E students during their training programmes at the Uganda Management Institute. These insights would support the UMI management as well as other practitioners in M&E capacity building programmes with information to effectively design and deliver relevant and customer-focused training programmes. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach. Data was collected using focus group discussions. The collected data was then analysed using thematic analysis method. The findings indicate the passion for M&E and the need for M&E qualification as key motivators for many participants to join the training programme. The practical modules delivered, assessment modalities and flexible delivery modes were seen as positive experiences during the programme. The students, however, reported poor internet connection, limited facilities, and e-learning resources on M&E as key challenges. They generally appreciated the content and flexible delivery modalities of the programme and were passionate about the structured training.

Keywords: Students' perspectives; M&E training; Capacity building; professionalization of M&E

Introduction

Globally, training in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has been a key aspect for development work mainly in form of short-term capacity building training for development practitioners. Of recent, some universities and other institutions of higher education have developed short-term and long-term training programmes in M&E. The long-term training programmes have been developed up to Master's and PhD levels, illustrating professionalization of the M&E discipline. This is because Monitoring and Evaluation as a discipline has emerged as a critical aspect in the development world. It is incorporated throughout the entire project management cycle to provide a unique practical opportunity for learning and corrective action.

Therefore, the uptake of M&E within institutions has steered demand for practitioners and non-practitioners to acquire the best practices in this field. The selected universities

providing this programme run both part-time and full-time. The part-time programmes are for the public other organizational workers. This gives room for a learning and sharing platform between the trainers and trainees – experiential learning. Hence, trainers are often expected to possess greater skills in recognizing the work, family and life constraints on postgraduate students (Brain, 2002).

Students enrol for M&E courses within institutions of higher education at postgraduate level. Postgraduate students are those that are building an academic career path after their Bachelor's degree. Training and preparation at this level is of vital importance and it culminates into writing a thesis or dissertation (Oredein, 2008). The postgraduate training grounds students with knowledge, skills, and practices to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, as well as performance of public and private projects in communities.

However, a student's experience at this level depends on good supervisor-student relationship. This serves as a key factor in the success or failure of the student's scholarship or research work. It draws more inclusion and sense of ownership within the course; and may build a student's need to professionalize in that field. But despite the increased uptake of M&E at postgraduate level, students experience a number of challenges that constrain their ability to perform effectively or complete the course.

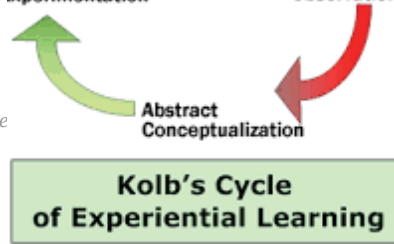
These challenges include: cross-cutting purposes with supervisors, the existence of limited supporting structures for research, lack of access to ICT services, and the international exposure that can shape the students for the current debates and discourse in their disciplines. This can be a motivating factor for students to embrace innovation within research. Besides, the low level of national funding of universities has led to the low uptake of postgraduate research, training, and capacity building. Therefore, much work needs to be done on the postgraduate programmes to ensure that there is a shift in administering them in institutions of higher learning.

This article explores students' perspectives and views and regarding their motivation for joining the postgraduate diploma in Monitoring and Evaluation at Uganda Management Institute, experiences (positive and negative) and challenges while undertaking the course. It begins with the review of literature on motivation for students joining the postgraduate course, positive and negative experiences while on the postgraduate programme, and the challenges they face, and the methodology used by the researchers. It also presents the key findings per theme, as well as discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review

Theoretical framing of the study

The study was informed by the Experiential Learning theory by David Allen Kolb and Fry (1975). Experiential learning, the model UMI uses to empower students in management and administration development in Uganda, has been used in several ways across learning processes especially for adults and professional training institutions (David A. Kolb, 2015b). Kolb provides a cycle of experiential learning as below;



The cycle depicts the two ways of gaining experience namely; abstract conceptualization and concrete experience. According to Kolb, the concrete experience involves acquisition of information that support reflection that leads to the formation of abstract concepts. The cycle also presents the two ways of transforming the experience namely; active experimentation and reflective observation. Kolb argues that learners will experiment or use the concepts formed from the experience to develop new theories or ideas about the world which they actively test, and the process leads them to go back to the beginning. The cycle, however, does not depict a linear process. The learner may start from any of the stages depending on the experience mode that is convenient or preferred to him or her. This implies that preference of the learner plays a very vital role in experiential learning (David A. Kolb, 2015a). Experiential learning theory was handy in supporting the researchers to explore participants perspectives regarding their learning experience while undertaking their post graduate diploma programme in M&E

Motivators for students joining postgraduate school

The concept of motivation is a key factor towards enticing students to pursue their academic career. It plays a key role towards acquiring additional knowledge for them to achieve their aspirations in life. Motivation of students to join postgraduate-level positions is mainly the demand to learn and enhance their skills. However, joining postgraduate requires persistence to learn, effort to devote oneself to hard work, and cope with obstacles one may encounter in the learning process. Student motivation is often viewed in two forms; intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

With intrinsic motivation, a student is self-motivated. Students keenly engage themselves in learning out of interest and enjoyment, in order to achieve their own scholarly or personal goals. So an intrinsically-motivated student will not need any form of incentive or reward to complete a task (Dev, 1997). On the other hand, with extrinsic motivation, a student engages in learning so as to attain a reward or avoid any form of punishment. It may also mean the need to attain some form of reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself such as grades, or teacher approval. Thus, intrinsic motivation is self-driven, challenging, and more enthusiastic; students feel pleasure in their studies. This is unlike extrinsic motivation where students have to drag themselves to do academic assignments, feel compelled to learn and always put minimal effort to achieve maximum appreciation.

Therefore, for a student to engage in any learning situation, motivation is triggered by answering three fundamental questions: 'Can I do this activity?', 'Do I want to do this activity and why?', and 'What do I need to do to succeed?' (Wigfield & Eccles, 2001). Students that respond to the question "Can I do this activity?" have expectations relating to their capability to perform a certain activity in different areas; that is, individuals judge their ability to execute a particular course or assignment – self-efficacy.

Then, the question: "Do I want to do this activity and why?" is an intrinsic end extrinsic motivation aspect. Intrinsically-motivated students engage in an assignment so that they can

attain an opportunity to learn and enrich their knowledge in aspects unknown to them. On the other hand, extrinsically motivated students engage in an activity with an intention of attaining a desirable outcome (for example, reward, good grade, parents' and teachers' approval, avoidance of punishment). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation fulfil the passion to acquire more cognitive engagement with an end goal of attaining a reward. However, the relationships between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, engagement and achievement are complex. It is better to think about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as two separate dimensions than extreme ends of one, because students can be low in one and high in the other, low in both or high in both (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Then the question, "What do I need to be successful in an activity?" positions the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in a learning activity. Cognitive strategies are in response to rehearsal, elaboration, organization, while metacognitive strategies respond to planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Therefore, student motivation is the element that leads students' attitude towards learning process. In academic institutions, the role of a teacher is very vital to help students develop attitude towards learning. It is ascertained that beliefs of teachers about themselves, and their style of teaching students have powerful influence on their behaviour towards learning. So, teachers need to view themselves as 'active socialization agents capable of stimulating students' motivation to learn.

Therefore, to keep students motivated, they should be encouraged to explore interests outside their usual routine of work. For instance, students are highly motivated by opportunities to travel to meetings or sit in workshops to meet others in their field, particularly the experts. Such opportunities can greatly increase the student's enthusiasm and self-esteem; allow the development of research and social contacts; and reduce the awe that the student may have of the subject. In general, it would seem that students who perform well should be rewarded with greater opportunities to accomplish their dreams. The normal method of rewarding excellence is a complex scenario in relation to postgraduates. Nevertheless, it is clear that even for highly motivated individuals, there is need to create a framework which will awaken the flame of their enthusiasm (O'Kennedy, 1990).

Positive and negative experiences while on postgraduate programmes

Exploring the experience of students varies from individual to individual. This can be based on a practical occurrence of an event or incident. These experiences could be positive or negative based on one's attitude and knowledge about a circumstance. Therefore, positive experiences include the following: opportunities to meet and develop relationships with other students; broadened understanding and improved skills in independent thinking; and improved language skills (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014).

In addition, the blended learning, that is, combining the strength of face-to-face and eLearning (video conferencing, and learning management systems) to create an efficient and effective learning environment has greatly evolved within learning institutions (Joel & Raphael, 2013). This has taken practice in both instructional worlds; hence instructors use a variety of instructional techniques to achieve effective learning outcomes.

However, despite the fact that positive experiences have contributed to the uptake of

post graduate programmes, there are difficulties faced by students. These difficulties include: difficulty in adapting to academic conventions (for example, poor understanding of plagiarism) (Emma, 2017); stress relating to alternative teaching and learning styles; language difficulties; and, financial struggles, among others. Furthermore, an individual's prior learning experience and personal background have a great influence on the lived experience under postgraduate.

Challenges faced by students on postgraduate programmes

Students on postgraduate programmes are faced with several challenges that have been influenced by a number of social, political, and environmental factors. For instance, inadequate funding greatly affects tertiary education, especially studies beyond undergraduate level. Most public institutions of learning in Africa are poorly funded by their national governments. This translates into low research uptake, and low research capacity development; unlike their counterparts in the United States, Australia government and several countries in Europe and Asia that extensively provide research funding in academic institutions. Poor or low funding may delay the completion of research work (Adebisi, 2014). Another major challenge is the failure to compete effectively for international research. There is a stagnant placement for a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy; therefore, there tend to be limited avenues for higher education. This could be as a result of inadequately organized programmes for higher learning in developing countries that fail to compete with developed countries (Salako, 2014). Some countries and institutions have realized this gap and tried to solve it by introducing collaborative research.

Furthermore, another well-known challenge is failure to know how to write good proposals to access grants. Although research is individual-based, successful research is team-based, blended with other factors such as the nature and quality of the research environment, mentored supervision, facilities at the disposal of the researcher, and access to prior work by other researchers in a related field are also contributory (Mutala, 2009).

An additional challenge is the learning style. For instance, a learning style that is focused on surface learning is more concerned with memorization and reproduction with need the to achieve results. This trait of education puts forward a teacher-centred approach vis-à-vis a student-centred approach. The teacher-centred approach is a traditional teaching and learning process where knowledge is transmitted to students by a 'spoon-feeding' method. This can result in students being too dependent on teachers to provide all the information to them. This style has merit to enable students to outperform others academically in a traditional classroom setting. However, a purely student-centred approach builds a need to learn and explore new findings. Therefore, it takes a process for students to transition from teacher-centred to student-centred learning (Wei Yeoh & Terry, 2013). They need to become more self-directed and more critical; thus, research students need time to change and adapt to an independent learning style in a new environment.

Research Design and Methodology

Research design

Phenomenology research design was used during the study. It describes experiences as they were lived by participants in DME class. It further examines individuals' lived situations and their own reality about the postgraduate course (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). In this study, purposive sampling was used to select the available postgraduate DME students. Focus group discussions were conducted to obtain information from respondents. The focus group discussion guide contained questions on seeking responses on students' perspectives on postgraduate training in M&E such as motivation towards joining the course, positive and negative experiences and challenges they faced.

Sampling and recruitment

For the current group, researchers announced in M&E classes (DME Evening and DME Weekend) inviting students to participate in the study. The announcement was also circulated through online platforms of students, calling for students who are enrolled on the postgraduate diploma in M&E at UMI. For the students who graduated from the programme, invitations were sent through the alumni platforms and online what's-App and Google groups including brief information about the study. Purposive sampling was used to select interested participants for the study. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on the researchers' knowledge and judgement about the participants and their ability to provide data for the study (Yin, 2011). For the current group who participated in focus group discussions, the researchers purposively selected eight (8) participants from the evening class and eight (8) participants from the weekend class -- making a total of sixteen (16) participants. For the graduated group, twelve (12) participants were purposively selected to participate in the focus group discussions to inform the study. The focus group participants were provided with detailed information about the study and asked to sign consent forms.

Data collection

The researchers collected qualitative data using focus group discussions among the participants. Two focus groups (one from evening class and the other from the weekend class) were conducted for a period of an hour after their classes at the institute. The researchers secured convenient rooms at the institute from which focus groups were conducted. Each group had a facilitator and a note-taker and all discussions were recorded using a tape recorder to enable effective capture of the data (Wilkinson, 2009). The facilitators ensured a free environment for discussion and encouraged each member of the group to share their views. For the graduates of the programme, the researchers asked the selected participants to come to the institute on a weekend for an hour to participate. From the twelve (12) participants that were selected, eight (8) turned up for the focus group discussions. These were given detailed information sheets about the study and consent forms. They were later briefed about the methodology.

Data analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data. According to the authors, audio recordings have to be transcribed and checked before thematic analysis. The researchers therefore did transcription of all recordings and scanned all the drawings and organized them for analysis. The analysts then read through all transcripts to immerse themselves into the material as recommended by the authors. Initial coding was done,

followed by categorization of the codes. The analysts then developed candidate themes from the categories which were discussed, and quotations captured through the lived experiences within the course. Memos were developed and reports generated from the interviews and focus group discussions.

Presentation of Key Findings

Participant characteristics

A total of 28 postgraduate diploma students at Uganda Management Institute (n=28) participated in this qualitative study. Of these, 16 students were purposively selected from the current evening and weekend intakes for the academic year 2017/2018. Eight (8) students were selected from the evening study intake, while eight (8) were from the weekend study intake. These were engaged in two focus group discussions. Of these, ten (10) were females while the six (6) were males. About 60% of these were working as M&E officers in both government and NGOs in Uganda. The 30% of the current group were employed in other roles other than M&E; a few were self-employed, while the remaining 10% were unemployed. The researchers also purposively selected 12 students who had already completed their postgraduate diploma in M&E and graduated. These were contacted through the alumni structures since they had already left the institute. Ten (10) of these had work experience as M&E officers and managers while two were self-employed.

Thematic Analysis

The findings of the study revealed three major themes. These are shown in the box below:

Theme 1: The motivators for students joining the programme

- Having passion for M&E
- The need for a qualification in M&E
- Preparation for promotions at the place of work
- Influence from friends and relatives
- Preparation to explore new job opportunities on M&E related work

Theme 2: The experiences of students during the programme

- Positive and negative experiences while on the postgraduate programme

Theme 3: The challenges faced by students while on the programme

Theme 1: The motivators for students joining the programme

This theme explores the students' views, opinions and perspectives regarding the key factors that motivated them to join the postgraduate diploma in M&E at the Uganda Management Institute. Participants from both focus group discussions and drawings reported various motivators including: having passion for M&E, the need for a qualification in M&E, preparation for promotions at the place of work, influence from friends and relatives and preparation to explore new job opportunities on M&E-related work.

Having passion for M&E

Participants reported that one of the key motivators for their joining the programme was having

passion for M&E. One of them said:

I don't think there were any other factors apart from the fact that I am an environment analyst who is inclined to Environment Impact assessment. Environment Impact assessment is also monitoring so I just wanted to build it a little. (Participant A in DME, Evening).

Some reported that they fell in love with some of the modules taught on the programme and therefore decided to enrol for the programme. One of them said:

I am someone in love with impact evaluations - Public Administration. But the new phenomenon has come into the system; so, I have this idea that I will understand about impact evaluation better than I do. (Participant K in DME, Weekend).

In the above excerpt, both participants were passionate about M&E given their previous and current engagements. One of them was passionate about environmental impact assessment while the other adored impact evaluations generally; of which, both areas were covered in the post graduate diploma in M&E at the institute. This implies that some of the participants who applied to join M&E training were not necessarily engaged in M&E work but had a passion for learning and acquiring knowledge and skills in the discipline.

The need for a qualification in M&E

Participants revealed that the other motivator for joining the programme was the need for a qualification in M&E. One of them said:

I have been doing M&E for the last four years and suddenly the need for a paper arose so am at UMI" (Participant G in DME, Weekend).

In the above quote, the participant realized the need for the paper due to the increasing job competition. Despite the fact that the participants had the skills, they realised the significance for an academic qualification to back up their existing knowledge and skills in M&E. This implies that there is need for career advancement and knowledge gain, and skills to fit into the current competitive job market.

Preparation for promotions at the place of work

Participants further revealed that the need to be promoted at their workplaces was a key motivator for pursuing the course. One of them argued:

I have been working as an M&E officer for about 2 years and for me to be promoted, I need to have a qualification in M&E. This prompted me to come and enrol for the course so that I am able to qualify when promotions come (Participant I in DME, Weekend).

This implies that participants often enrol for courses in preparation for promotions at their places of work since additional qualifications are a requirement for the promotion.

Influence from friends and relatives

Parents and relatives were viewed as a key influence in motivating the participants to pursue M&E. One of the participants indicated:

I actually didn't know about it. My aim was to come and do a Master's course in Management Sciences. But, when I reached, I got the papers and asked colleagues that I had been looking for employment, and everywhere I go, colleagues are like add something to your qualifications, go back to school (...) so on. Getting the paper from here, I asked them what course I go for. So, I was advised that M&E is a good course. (Weekend DME).

In the above citation, a participant made a decision to pursue M&E based on advice from friends and relatives. In life, we are normally influenced by people who have experienced similar circumstances or observed similar scenarios. Therefore, this implies that participants should be handled appropriately and given the best practices, so that they can recommend other individuals to pursue this course.

Preparation to explore new job opportunities on M&E-related work

Participants reported that one of the motivations behind joining the programme was preparation to explore new job opportunities on M&E-related work. They reported that often there were job adverts in the newspapers calling for M&E officers, experts and specialists and the requirement was that one ought to have a postgraduate qualification in M&E. One of them said:

Every time I read papers, I see job opportunities in the area of M&E. therefore even when am currently working as an administer with a logistics company, I see myself being able to apply for an M&E job given that I will have a qualification in M&E. This is why I applied for the course to prepare myself for that (**Participant L in DME Weekend**).

Theme 2: The experiences of students during the programme

This theme explores participants' experiences from the time they applied for the course to the time they sat for their examinations. During their time at postgraduate level, participants from focus groups encountered positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences included strictness; good exam setting and management; practical modules; a routine classroom register; regular cleaning of classes, among others. The negative experiences included: poor Wi-Fi connection; ever-locked classrooms and toilets; poor working condition of the computers in the resource centre; opening hours for the classrooms not being convenient for evening participants; and, unclear administrative communication channels to students. Other negative experiences were: a mixed-up timetable; less practical sessions; lack of a medical facility; disorganised note; poor hygiene in the toilets; closed classrooms especially during examination time; and, outdated literature in the libraries.

Positive experiences of participants

Strictness by the facilitators and the system at UMI

When asked about their positive experiences, participants were quick to mention strictness. Participants indicated that strictness made them attend every class. They noted that strictness applied to both participants and facilitators.

Yeah and when I came, I found they walked the talk. You have to attend. They are strict, the facilitators come. There is nothing like; *“it’s the first time they are not around let’s go home”*. At 7:00, we shall not study. No... someone will come and fill in **(Participant L in DME, evening)**.

UMI students and lecturers cannot skip class, facilitated by a 70% attendance rule effected by a daily register. “I think am one of those people who think they should maintain the register. It is really good because it monitors people”. Students who fail to meet the 70% attendance rule are not allowed to sit exams. While this strictness may inconvenience some students, it is considered as proof of value for money and ensures that UMI delivers high quality graduates as it promises.

Exam setting and management

Participants revealed that one of the positive aspects they have experienced at UMI is good exam setting and management. One of them said:

For me, I appreciate the way they manage exams. You cannot hear of any cases of malpractices that I got this, or so and so got this paper before the actual day. That is so sweet, I am going to get my clean first class. **(Participant F in M&E Weekend)**.

In this citation, we realize that participants have confidence in the way the exams are managed. This is viewed in two perspectives which are integrity and quality. Integrity in a way that there is not a sign of examination malpractice. This implies that grades attained by the graduates are genuine and therefore employers can rely on UMI for producing quality graduates.

Practical modules taught at UMI

Participants further revealed that UMI modules are practical and that the institution offers practical lectures. Some participants pointed out that:

It is not really about my job because am not working; but to be honest, I have been given much more than I received even with my masters. There is a way they do not give you too much notes but then they give you practical things. So, I think, by the time am ready to work, I will be a different person **(Participant K in DME, Weekend)**.

“Two things, the MSI module was I think my best module. I do not know whether it will be my best module in the exam but. It communicated a lot. Then, the whole management module that is PPM has helped me to appreciate. I have been through a number of projects and I can now see that that one might fail because of xyz so there is a lot of thinking going on in my mind especially, yeah it has impacted on my life” **(Participant E in DME, Weekend)**.

From the quotations above, we realized that participants preferred practical sessions. Having practical sessions helps students acquire skills that help them become better professionals.

This, therefore, means UMI facilitators ought to embrace a theory-and-practical approach to teaching.

Modules that have impacted on them before completion of the course

Participants indicated that the course had already impacted on them before they could even complete the modules. One noted:

I control my emotions. I am good at getting angry, but I can now control myself. I can give a smile even when I am angry. Before I would just (.....) but now. **(Participant A in DME, Weekend).**

In the quote above, we point out a testimony of how a module like Management Skills Improvement has impacted on the participants. The impact has not only been felt at work but even in the way they interact with people outside work.

Regular cleaning of classes

The findings further reveal cleaning of classes as one of the positive experiences by the participants. Studying under a clean environment guarantees good health of both the participants and the facilitators.

To have the classes cleaned in time literary in some institutions like Makerere, cleaning your class is hard, they are really different. So, they should have the cleaning on time so that people can use the facility **(Participant D in DME, Weekend).**

In the excerpt above, the participant appreciates the fact that classes are regularly cleaned which is a rare trait in institutions of learning. This, therefore, implies that class hygiene should be maintained at all times.

The class notes are availed on time

Another key experience is that the module notes are availed on time and with expected detail as one participant noted:

“I think UMI is doing that very well. The notes are available everything is there. Everything to do with academics is there and I really appreciate. When I was coming, I looked at the 4 million as a lot, but they have given me value for money” **(Participant B in DME Weekend).**

In the excerpt above, the participant appreciates class notes that are normally availed on time. Availing class notes on time helps the participant to review and compare notes for easy comprehension. The participant further appreciates the detail of the notes which to them means value for money, which should be maintained by UMI.

Negative experiences

Poor working condition of the computers in the Resource Centre

One of the negative experiences reported by participants was the poor working conditions of

the computers in the Resource Centre. One of them reported:

The other one is concerning the resource centre. I like using that place but sometimes internet goes down. That is not a big deal but most of the computers are not working. They are just there you go sit on it but it is not working. So that is the other issue **(Participant F in DME, Evening)**.

From the above quotation, a participant is complaining about computers that are in a poor working state. Having computers in good working condition means the students are able to put them to use whenever need arises. It is therefore important that computers are well maintained.

Opening hours are not convenient for Evening Participants

Another negative experience that the participants raised was the opening hours that do not favour Evening Participants. One of them said:

It gives us hard time to say that by 5 we shall be closing. As an evening student at least, there should be adjustment of time, say, when it comes to the time of examination cards, they should go up to 7 or even 8:00 for people to be able to pick their cards. Here comes a point you go to pick your card it's not there they are telling you to come the next day. That inconvenience should be streamlined **(Participant A in DME, Evening)**.

From the above quotation, a participant was complaining about the working hours which do not favor the evening participants since offices have to be closed at 5:00 pm when participants are just leaving their workplaces. This means that they have to leave their workstations early to make it to UMI before the offices close at 5:00 or attain services over the weekend. UMI management therefore needs to extend the working hours to favor Evening students.

Poor hygiene especially during examination time

Another key negative experience that the participants raised was poor hygiene -- this was said to worsen during examination time, as one participant noted:

You must have noticed that during examinations there was an overwhelming number of people and toilets were terrible, so, perhaps, we need to have more. Not only more, the first day we did exams, when we came to the toilets had they closed the ladies side. On the day of exams and the ladies were coming to the men's side. And toilets are a public right why do you lock them? **(Participant F in DME, Weekend)**.

From the above excerpt, a participant is complaining about the poor hygiene of the toilets. In addition, the toilets are closed. Furthermore, having unhygienic toilets might lead to contraction of UTI by the participants, and more so, female participants since they have to cross over to the men's side. It is therefore important that UMI leaves the toilets open and makes sure they are cleaned.

Lack of a medical facility

Participants further raised lack of a medical facility as a key negative experience. One

participant said:

A hospital first aid. One time my student, I am a vice president, collapsed from class you guys remember (...) He was sweating so I thought they had poured on him water. What is wrong with him and he is actually dripping sweat and looking around we did not have like a first aid place. It is really key. **(Participant E in DME, Weekend).**

From the above quotation, the participant is raising the fact that UMI as an institution does not have a health facility where participants can be rushed to in case of an emergency. UMI should therefore consider setting up a healthy facility to guarantee safety of the participants.

Some sessions are not practical

While it is true that Weekend participants are exposed to more practical sessions, this was rare with the Evening students. One participant noted:

Me too, I expected Monitoring and evaluation to be more practical, bringing engagement like not coming with slides. I expected it to be more practical; someone comes and gives you a real thing. Like you fully participate. That one is missed out. **(Participant L in DME, Evening).**

From the above quotation, the participant is of the view that practical sessions are lacking. This implies that participants will not acquire and develop more practical skills that will help them do work better. Both evening and weekend programs should be exposed to practical sessions.

Poor communication channels

Among the negative experiences raised was lack of clear communication channels as one participant said:

They pinned it on the side of the library. Some people do not use that library because it is in most cases full and packed you do not find space. So, when my colleagues were like the timetable for exams is out, I was like where? Because I had not seen it anywhere. In most cases am in Madhvan, I do use this section of the library there was nothing. In my class there was nothing. So, I was like where do you process everything from. Me, I have not seen, so the person tells me it is the other side of the library. Now you go to look for the timetable and fail to read it. It is mixed up” **(Participant B in DME, Evening).**

The participant is complaining about information that is passed on without using clear and well-defined channels of communication. This means that some participants are likely to miss out on the information or receive information that has been altered. Having clearly defined channels of communication would help to solve such a challenge.

Sometimes the notes are not well organized and have outdated references

Participants decry the challenge of having some notes that are not well organized and having outdated references. One of them said:

We have some notes, is it research methods or what, I spent the whole time reorganizing the notes and I still have not understood them. May be to add on the notes there is a time we were doing, I don't know which module it was and they told us to give references for the last ten or five years but then the facilitator was referencing 1987, but the references were way, way outdated. **(Participant C in DME, Weekend).**

In the above excerpt, a participant is complaining about unorganized notes with outdated references. Having unorganized notes makes it very hard for the participants to comprehend notes that are not well organized. Facilitators therefore have to ensure that their notes are well organized for easy comprehension by the participants.

Theme 3: The challenges faced by students while on the programme

Setting things that were not taught in class

Participants noted that one of the challenges they faced during the course of their programme in M&E at UMI was a few instances when some examination questions were set when they were not taught. One of them noted:

Because you find that in a paper, I have been given to design a work plan but actually in the lecture I was not taught how to design it **(Participant A in DME, Evening).**

In the excerpt above, the participant reports that sometimes examiners require them to apply concepts with illustrations when they were not practically taught on how to apply them. One example in point is being required to design a work plan in an examination when they were not taught how to design it during class. This implies that examiners should ensure that areas being examined have been taught and practically illustrated in class, though being a post graduate course, it is expected that not all is covered in class. The participant is expected to do some personal reading and learning outside the classroom.

Another participant called for practical teaching in class and said:

It should be taught to me practically and I also go and do it practically to see whether what I was taught is what I did because am here to learn am not hear to look for what I don't know. Then, in the long run, you say you wanted me to teach myself and learn. Meaning to teach myself which is not valid **(Participant C in DME, Evening).**

Giving practical course work assignment without showing participants how to do it

The other challenge reported by the participants was being given practical course work assignments without telling them how to do it. One of them said:

In addition, like the presentations we get. It's also a challenge. Reason being, you are not involving me to do practical things and you have not fully engaged me to do it with you practically. Then, you are giving me to do it practically without your engagement.

But you are giving it to me as a coursework to go and do it; that you would do with me. Practically, I do not know what am doing and then I go and look for a better (.....) to see how you have done it better and how you have involved me. Don't give me course work for me to go and look for it when I don't know what am going to look for. **(Participant D in DME, Evening).**

In the above excerpt, the participant expressed displeasure over being given a practical course work assignment, without showing him how to do it. The participant expected that any practical course work assignment should be on what they practically did in class and where they were involved in doing rather than expecting them to find out by themselves how to do it during the assessment.

Limited preparation time for exams

The other challenge highlighted by participants was the limited time to prepare for examinations. One of them said:

Yes time and what he has said. You work from 8 to 5:00 sometimes you can even leave at 6:00pm. You come to class tired. We have families, you are a married woman or married man and you have responsibilities like parents and now, in all that, it is hard for me to say that during the day, I will sneak and read a certain module. So, if the semester ends and you give me only two weeks bearing in mind that I also have work to do. It is really challenging. **(Participant B in DME, Evening).**

The participant in the excerpt above decries the limited time given to them to prepare for the examinations at the end of the semester. She argues that for the Evening group, they often come to class after a hectic day and are therefore tired. They also have family responsibilities and therefore during the semester it is difficult for them to read and prepare for the examinations. Hence, the limited time of usually one to two weeks given to them between the last module and examinations is too short for them to adequately prepare for examinations. This is challenging to them.

Crossing the road on the side of Jinja Road is hard

The other challenge mentioned by the participants was that of crossing the road to come to UMI especially by those who do not have vehicles. One of them noted:

Am always so scared of crossing Jinja road to enter UMI because there is no zebra crossing and vehicles are so fast. One has to wait for several minutes until there are no vehicles moving very fast. Even when the number of vehicles reduces, you have to run very fast as you cross the road. This is a very serious challenge and needs to be addressed. **(Participant C in DME, Weekend).**

In the excerpt above, the participant decries the unsafe passage for them while crossing the Jinja Road to enter UMI. Currently, there is no zebra crossing or a fly-over to connect to UMI Jinja Road main gate which makes it difficult for participants who move by public means to cross to UMI for classes. The participant calls for management action to address this issue.

Discussion and Conclusions

Findings presented here serve as evidence regarding students' perspectives on postgraduate training in Monitoring and Evaluation. The study considered the views and experiences of students. The findings noted the importance of utilizing practical methodologies while training. This is related to critical thinking as a determinant to deep rather than superficial learning. However, critical self-evaluation is a gradual process with different learning curves. In addition, giving coursework to participants without guiding them on an appropriate approach to responding to it was challenging to the participants. However, coursework feedback can be considered as a trigger event for participants to appraise and develop critical thinking. Therefore, the need to further research and investigate builds interaction in class (Fakunle, Allison, & Fordyce, 2016).

Participants echoed that examinations set did not align to the content in the notes. This stands true, as research students face a challenge in research methodology at different levels; as a way to advance their capacity in advanced research. Therefore, there is a need to mainstream research skills across modules, come up with capacity building and mentoring programmes to support students. Furthermore, there is a need to expose them to basic research infrastructure to enhance their ability towards competitive proposal and institutional research (Desmennu & Owoa, 2017).

Furthermore, participants, particularly in DME Evening noted the need for facilitators to expose them to several practical sessions and to enhance the practice of M&E in the real world. For example, placing students to interactively work in small groups broadly enhances their personal and social experiences to learn from one another (Emma, 2017). The study also showed that participants were motivated to further the need to seek educational research skills. In the long run, this has contributed to the uptake of research studies at postgraduate, Master's and PhD (Omar & Aburezeq, 2018)2018.

The researchers conclude that there is need to expose postgraduate students to practical or experiential learning. This will develop their ability to inculcate similar learning to their workspaces. The study identifies the need to expose students to workshops, capacity building, mentorship, and coaching programmes. This aspect of learning will motivate (intrinsic motivation) participants to research and adapt new ideas or innovations. Findings are also important for postgraduate students, their trainers and or supervisors as well as academic institutions. Academic institutions need to strengthen the ability to mentor postgraduate students so as to encourage self-efficacy and develop a strong research culture toward preparation for Master's and PhD studies. For the successful completion of postgraduate studies, postgraduate research students have to depend more on their academic self-efficacy to enhance their performance (Noor & Muhammad, 2019)2019.

Limitations and Potential Further Research

The research was a qualitative study and therefore the findings cannot be generalized but could be transferable to institutions of similar context. Future research needs to expound on the contribution of mentorship, capacity building, and seminars towards improving postgraduate

students' M&E competences. Finally, it is strongly suggested to consider the moderating and mediating role of other factors in future studies.

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