Lecturers' Professional Competencies that Enhance University Students' Expectations about the Quality of University Education in Uganda

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Abstract

This study examines university students' expectations of their lecturers' professional competencies, which influence the quality of learning. The key professional competencies of university lecturers evaluated in this study included lecturers' mastery of the subject content, teaching methods, professional guidance and support given to students, and methods of assessment. The study followed a cross-sectional survey research design to collect data from 300 university students and 12 heads of departments in three public and three private universities. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Spearman rank-order correlation and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data was grouped into themes and analyzed descriptively according to the study objectives. The study revealed a positive and significant correlation between the four professional competencies and the influence of quality learning outcomes in the university. However, the correlation coefficients for professional guidance and support, and methods of assessment and feedback were stronger than content mastery and methods of teaching. The study recommends that university lecturers should not focus only on the pedagogical professional competencies to influence students' outcomes but also on how they handle students' professional needs and assessment outcomes.

Keywords: *University Quality; Professional Competencies; Students' Expectations; Labour Markets.*

Introduction

University lecturers are central to any consideration of universities, and a majority of education policy discussions in universities focus directly or indirectly on the role of lecturers. There is a *prima facie* case for the concentration on lecturers in universities because they are the largest single budgetary element in the university and they influence students' outcomes more than other inputs (Hanushek & Machin, 2023). Moreover, parents, teachers, and administrators repeatedly emphasize the fundamental role that lecturers play in the determination of university quality. There remains little consensus among researchers on the characteristics of a good lecturer, let alone on the importance of lecturers in comparison to other determinants of university quality.

Whereas studies have highlighted active listening, adaptability, collaboration, creativity, empathy, engagement, focus on growth, lifelong learning, patience, preparedness and respect as the key professional competencies of a good teacher (Dolton et al., 2011; Cockburn & Haydn, 2014; Clement & Rencewigg, 2020), this study focused on lecturer-student interaction, professional competencies including mastery of subject content, the methods used to teach, professional guidance to students, and methods of assessment and feedback. The interest was to find out how these four professional competencies were related to students' satisfaction with their university experiences and their labour market expectations.

The problem of quality in Ugandan university education dates back to the founding of Makerere University in 1922 (Hayward, 2006). Makerere University was established as a technical college to serve students from the British East African territories of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (Cloet, Maasen & Bailey, 2018). In the initial stages of university education, quality was measured on the training of graduates in the practical skills of carpentry, building and mechanics. When the university expanded, other courses, in medical care, agriculture, veterinary sciences and teacher training, were introduced, which demanded more advanced models of quality assurance (Kasozi, 2003). With such curricula of university education in place, training was oriented towards employment and contribution to national development. These first endeavors for ensuring quality in university education were guided by the Phelps-Stokes Commission of (1924–1925), which suggested that the educational policies of missionaries were inadequate because they emphasized reading, writing and numeracy (Ssempebwa, Mulumba & Edopu, 2017) and that there was a need to teach agriculture and technical skills.

With the growing demand for university education in Uganda, in the second half of the 20th century, more students enrolled in Ugandan universities, as more public and private universities were established. Given this development in the higher education sector, the issue of quality of graduates gained traction, with the government and parents wondering whether there was value for the cost that they incurred on education. Lecturers' competencies in terms of subject content mastery, methods of teaching, engagement in students' professional guidance, and assessing students and giving feedback are increasingly being seen as important inputs in determining the quality of graduates (Kasozi, 2016; NCHE, 2018). This is because lecturers influence students' persistence in their course of study and students' labour market expectations.

Objectives of the Study

1. To establish the relationship between lecturer mastery of subject content and students' expectations about/of the quality of university graduates in Uganda.
2. To find out how the teaching methods used by lecturers are related to students' expectations about/of the quality of university education in Uganda.
3. To establish how the professional guidance given by lecturers is related to students' expectations about/of the quality of university education in Uganda.
4. To examine how lecturers' methods of assessing students are related to students' expectations about/of the quality of university graduates.

The Theoretical Perspective

This study was guided by the human capital theory advanced by Theodore Schultz in 1961, which suggests that individuals and nations invest in education to take advantage of better job opportunities and higher earnings (Gillies, 2015). Studies further suggest that individual decisions to pursue higher education involve an informal analysis of the costs of education as measured against the expected value of the returns to that education (Dolton, Tremayne & Chung, 2011). It is further suggested that the human capital theory assumes that education determines the marginal productivity of labour, which also determines earnings, and that intellectual formation constitutes a form of economic capital (Frazis, 2015).

The motivation for private and public investment in education is to increase the productivity of individuals, enhance employment prospects and increase earnings prospects. Therefore, university lecturers need to identify those professional competencies that improve learning among students and enhance skills for better employment and financial returns for these students when they join the world of work.

Literature on Lecturer Quality and Graduate Quality

Studies suggest that universities with highly-rated lecturers, highly-rated facilities, and top-rated courses signify customer satisfaction and increase the probability of students' retention and persistence in the course of study. For example, Chevalier and Dolton (2015), Cockburn and Haydn (2014) and Hanushek and Welch (2016) suggest that high-quality professors promote better educational outcomes compared to low-quality lecturers, who increase the probability of their students staying on their courses longer. Other studies, for example by Sultan and Wong. (2013) and Nadiri, Kandampully, and Hussain (2019) describe high-quality lecturers as those who:

- are knowledgeable and provide accurate and up-to-date information.
- use a range of teaching methods to stimulate learning and improve the quality of the lecture, such as podcasts, case studies, field visits, new links, and other initiatives, including providing lecture notes only after the lecture is finished.
- apply the knowledge taught in class to practical situations in some employment settings.
- give individualized attention to every student and extensive feedback to individual students for all the assessed work.

However, other researchers have evaluated university students' outcomes based on other lecturer characteristics such as years of experience, highest degree qualification, professional certification, verbal ability ((Darling-Hammond, 2012), ability to work with culturally diverse classes (Kaweesi et al., 2023) and professional conduct (Odden & Wallace, 2016). There is overwhelming evidence in the literature to suggest that when the differences in students' socio-economic status (SES), university environment and facilities, and the quality of academic programs are controlled for, lecturers are the most important determinants of university students' satisfaction and outcomes (Gore, 2017; Brennan & Shah, 2020).

In the context of Uganda, the available literature suggests that some higher education institutions lack adequate financial resources to attract and retain the qualified academic

staff needed to deliver quality higher education (Kasozi 2016). Whereas the number of students in both private and public universities is estimated to be growing at a rate of 15% annually, for instance, from 108,295 in 2004 to 124,314 in 2005, the number of lecturers is growing at a rate of 1%, i.e. from 5,249 in 2004 to 5,258 in 2005 (NCHE, 2018). This indicates that universities in Uganda are operating below the required staff capacity, which affects the quality of university outcomes in terms of student satisfaction. This study, therefore, establishes students' assessment of the most important professional competencies of their lecturers, which satisfies their expectations of the quality of university education in Uganda.

Methodology

The research design, population, sample size and selection

This study leans more on the pragmatist research paradigm, which is rooted in the ontological principle and doctrine which suggest that truth and reality are free and independent of the viewer and observer (Muwagga, 2006; Genza, 2012). The study followed a correlational cross-sectional survey research design, which mainly allows quantitative approaches that enable the sampling of a large number of 'units of analysis' in a relatively short time and enabled the generalization of findings to many universities in Uganda. To a small extent, the qualitative approach was used to corroborate findings from the quantitative approach.

The target population for this study included all students enrolled in private and public universities as well as academic heads of departments in the same institutions. The accessible population was the university students selected from six universities (three private and three public) and they were the principal subjects for the study. Students from the graduating class were selected because they had spent enough time with their lecturers and could adequately evaluate those professional competencies that are important for the student's university experiences. To complement the findings from the students, interviews were conducted with 12 heads of departments selected from the six universities. The heads of departments were selected from different disciplines, which naturally do not face the same contexts. Therefore, most responses from these heads of departments differed in context. Besides, they also came from different universities, both private and public, and so they would certainly have differing opinions. The sample size for heads of departments was based on the principle of data saturation, in that after the 12 interviews, no new themes emerged, and therefore the 12 interviews were considered adequate for this study.

A sample of 300 students was selected for this study using the stratified random sampling methodology to include 50 students from each of the six sampled universities. The sample of 300 subjects was appropriate for this study because, following the Krejcie and Morgan table of sample size determination (Chuan, 2016), a minimum sample of 300 elements for a population of 100,000 and above is representative enough.

Data collection and analysis

A structured questionnaire was used as an empirical method to collect data from 300 university students as principal subjects of the study. A structured questionnaire was

preferred for this study because the study required standardized data on facts and opinions to be provided by respondents, and the respondents would give answers to identical items. To ensure that the main instrument for data collection (the questionnaire for students) was valid, the questionnaire was validated through expert rating of the question items by 10 lecturers during the pre-test phase and a content validly test was done on all the variables of the study. This was meant to ensure that the questionnaire items were clear. All variables registered a content validity index of greater than .80. The overall content validity index for knowledge competence was 0.81, methods of instruction was 0.86, career and professional support was 0.80, and methods of assessing examinations were 0.82. The CVI above 0.7 was good enough for the instrument to generate accurate data.

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire administered to students. This reliability test method was appropriate for this study because it worked with multiple Likert scale variables (Warner, 2013). For each of the research variables, when alpha is equal to or greater than 0.7 (Muganda & Muganda, 2003), it indicates that the instrument is reliable in measuring what it was meant to measure. The knowledge competence alpha (α) was 0.9720, the methods of instruction alpha (α) was 0.8462, the career and professional support alpha (α) was 0.8339, and the methods of assessing examinations alpha (α) was 0.8254. Therefore, this instrument was reliable in collecting the data that it was meant to collect.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview guide, relevant interviewees who were heads of departments and knowledgeable about how lecturers' competence affected university students' satisfaction with university quantity were used. At the same time, the interview guide was given to five lecturers to review for clarity of language and dependability. This method of quality control was considered essential in ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings in terms of truthiness, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Cresswell, 2014).

The Spearman rank-order correlation (*rho*-coefficient) was conducted in IBM SPSS 24 to measure the strength and direction of the correlation between the predictor variables of lecturers' professional competencies and those of the quality of university education. The Spearman rank-order correlation was preferred for this analysis because the data selected was ordinal, which justifies the choice of method of analysis. A multiple regression analysis was then run to establish which lecturer professional competencies were most important in determining the quality of university graduates in Uganda.

Findings of the Study

The correlation between lecturers' professional competencies and their students' expectations of the quality of university education

The key professional competencies measuring the quality of lecturers were mastery of subject knowledge, use of appropriate methods of teaching, giving professional and career guidance to students, and use of objective methods to assess students' examinations. On the other hand, the quality of university education was measured by students' confidence to complete their program of study (retention), students' employment expectations as influenced by the lecturers, and students earning expectations as influenced by their lecturers. The hypothesis for these variables was:

There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between lecturers' professional competencies and their students' expectations about the quality of university education.

The Spearman rank-order correlation analysis on these hypotheses revealed the following results in Table 1:

Table 1: Correlation between lecturer competence and quality of university education

Lecturers' professional competencies	Indicators of the Quality of University Education					
	Retention and Completion		Employment Prospects		Earnings Prospects	
	Rho	P-Value	Rho	P-Value	Rho	P-Value
Knowledge Competence	0.106	0.095	0.195	0.002	0.185	0.003
Methods of Instruction	0.213	0.001	0.264	0.000	0.345	0.000
Career and Professional Support	0.295	0.000	0.524	0.000	0.397	0.000
Methods of Assessing Examinations	0.176	0.005	0.354	0.000	0.327	0.000

Source: Primary data. ***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 shows that the correlation between students' responses on lecturer knowledge competence and retention or completion of programme rho = 0.106 with a P-value of 0.095; employment expectations rho = 0.195 with a P-value of 0.002; their earning expectations rho = 0.185 with the P-value of 0.003. These results suggest a positive and statistically significant correlation at the 0.01 level of significance, but the figures are small, meaning that the lecturers' mastery of subject content may not be a very important factor in determining students' satisfaction with the quality of university education.

The correlation between students' responses on methods of instruction used by their lecturers and retention and completion of study programme rho = 0.213 with a P-value of 0.001; employment expectations rho = 0.264 with a P-value of 0.000; and earning expectations rho = 0.345 with a P-value of 0.000. These results suggest a strong, positive and statistically significant correlation both at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.

The correlation between career and professional support given by the lecturers to students and course completion or retention is rho = 0.255 with a P-value of 0.000; employment expectation is rho = 0.524 with a P-value of 0.000; and earning expectations is rho = 0.345 with a P-value of 0.000. These findings also suggest a strong positive correlation which is significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

Finally, the correlation between students' responses on the variable methods of assessing students' examinations and students' retention and course completion has rho=0.176 with a P-value of 0.005; employment prospects has rho=0.354 with a P-value of

0.000; and influence on earnings prospects has rho=0.327 with a P-value of 0.000. These results also suggest a strong, positive, and significant correlation both at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.

From the above findings, there is evidence to suggest that the given professional competencies of university lecturers are positively correlated with the quality of university education in terms of students' labour market outcomes. However, the findings also suggest that students believe that the methods university lecturers use to deliver their courses, the professional and career support that they give to students, and the methods that they use to assess students' examinations determine students' university outcomes and labour market expectations more than how much mastery of the content these lecturers have.

Findings from the students' responses were also confirmed during the interviews with one of the heads of departments, who noted:

> Lecturers should be specialized in the fields which they teach. They should use interactive methods and, where possible, field placements for practical learning. They should be fair in handling students and guide students on professional conduct. Lecturers should be professional while assessing students' tests, coursework and examinations. *(Head of Department, 16 November 2023)*

These findings suggest that lecturers' professional competencies will enable students to be confident at the university and also give them confidence about the world of work. The students also emphasized that those lecturers who gave them advice about work opportunities motivated them to stay in their programmes of study because they saw them as valuable in the field.

Multiple regression analysis to determine lecturer professional competencies that are more predictive of the quality of university education

Multiple regression analysis was conducted in SPSS to establish which professional competencies of lecturers were more important to determine students' expectations about the quality of university education. These professional competencies included mastery of subject content, methods of teaching, professional conduct, and career guidance to students, as well as methods of assessing coursework and examinations. The indicators for the quality of university education in this study included students' ability to complete their programs of study (retention) and students' labour market expectations in terms of employment prospects and earning prospects.

Table 2 contains a model summary and ANOVA results for the three dependent factors of the quality of university education, namely retention, employment prospects, and earning prospects.

Table 2: Model summary and ANOVA results for the model

IV: Lecturer Professional Competencies	DV: Indicators of Quality of University Education			
	Retention	Employment Prospects	Earning Prospects	
R	0.325	0.544	0.455	
R-Square	0.106	0.2282	0.207	
Adjusted R-Square	0.088	0.282	0.191	
F-Statistic	5.777	20.473	12.721	
P-Value	0.000	0.000	0.000	

Source: Primary data

The SPSS model summary and the ANOVA results in Table 2 indicate that the value of R=0.325 for retention, R=0.544 for employment prospects, and 0.455 for earning prospects. These findings suggest that whereas lecturer professional competencies may be good predictors of students' employment expectations and earning expectations, they may not be a good predictor of their persistence in their programmes of study (retention). The R-square value indicates that the predictors of the variable '*lecturer professional competencies*' in the models explain 10.6% of the variability in retention, but 22.8% of employment prospects, and 20.7% of earnings prospects.

On the other hand, the F-ratios of the ANOVA results indicate that the overall regression models are a good fit for the data. In Table 2, F (5,244) = 5.777 with a P-value = 0.000 for retention and programme completion; employment prospects have F (5,243) = 20.473 with a P-value = 0.000; and earnings prospects have F (5,244) = 12.721 a P-value = 0.000. These findings suggest that the independent factors for the variable lecturer competence statistically and significantly predict the dependent variables in the model.

However, the results in the coefficients table suggest that the variable professional conduct and guidance from lecturers is the better predictor of the quality of university education compared to the other variables in the models. Evidence of this is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Coefficient results for the models

IV: Lecturer Competence	DV: Indicators of Quality of University Education								
	Retention			Employment Prospects			Earning Prospects		
	Beta	T	Sig.	Beta	T	Sig	Beta	T	Sig.
Knowledge Competence	-0.036	-0.534	0.596	0.020	0.337	0.737	0.023	-0.361	0.718
Methods Competence	0.118	1.542	0.124	-0.012	0.176	0.861	0.195	2.702	0.007
Professional Conduct	0.249	3.166	0.002	0.438	6.235	0.000	0.259	3.489	0.001
Assessment of Exams	-0.007	-0.924	0.924	0.125	1.891	0.060	0.131	1.881	0.061

Source: Primary data

When the standardized *'beta'* in Table 3 is evaluated, the findings indicate that methods competence with *beta=0.118* and professional conduct and guidance with *beta=0.249* indicate a better prediction of retention compared to knowledge competence and assessment of examinations. Only professional conduct and guidance with *beta=0.438* are significantly predictive of employment prospects, and methods competence with *beta=0.195* and professional conduct and guidance with *beta= 0.259* are better predictors of earning prospects. These findings mean that professional guidance given to students at university and the methods of teaching and assessment used by lecturers are more related to labour market expectations compared to mastery of content by the lecturers.

When the t-test values are analyzed, the findings in Table 3 suggest that only the dependent factor professional conduct and guidance is statistically and significantly different from 0 (zero) with t= 3.166 and p=0.002 for retention, t=6.235 and p=0.000 for employment prospects, and t=3.489 and p=0.001 for earning prospects. These findings are logical because whereas mastery of subject content by the lecturers, the methods that lecturers use to deliver their lectures, and the methods that lecturers use in the assessment of examinations are important factors in determining students' performance, they may not necessarily affect students' ability to complete their programmes of study and their labour market expectations. On the other hand, the professional conduct of the lecturers and how they professionally guide their students in a particular programme may encourage students to complete their programmes of study and may affect labour market expectations in terms of employment and earnings.

The heads of departments who were interviewed agreed that good and competent lecturers were those who planned for their lectures, knew the subject content of the courses that they taught, used appropriate methods of teaching, professionally guided their students, and used fair and objective methods of assessment. These qualities were considered by heads of departments to be important in keeping students interested in their courses of study and they instilled in students' confidence about their labour market expectations.

However, some of the interviewed heads of departments also indicated that there was no clear-cut link between some of the above factors and retention and labour market effects. For instance, one of the heads of departments argued:

> Lecturers mastering their subject content and using good methods to deliver their lectures may affect how students perform in examinations at university. Much as they are important factors in determining the competence of the lecturer, it may be hard to determine their effect on students' willingness to complete their programmes of study and what they expect in the world of work for employment and earnings. (*Head of Department, 20 November 2023*)

These observations suggest that lecturer competence is an important factor in university education. The findings also suggest that whereas in some courses teaching for employment and earnings may be a direct objective and the lecturer orients content and methods to that, other courses may not directly focus on employment. Such courses provide general knowledge that students should put together to get employment.

The interviewed heads of academic departments also pointed out that poor staffing, increasing numbers of students, and inadequate funding of mainly public universities have affected the efficiency of lecturers. For instance, one head of department observed:

> In my department, the lecturer-to-student ratio is high, and therefore lecturers will rarely concentrate on the individual needs of the students, which certainly affects the quality of our graduates, who find it a challenge to get better-paying jobs. Underfunding of universities has also affected the morale of lecturers and made it hard for departments to procure teaching resources mainly for practical subjects. This certainly affects students' competence and affects their expectations in the world of work. (*Head of Department, 22 November 2023*)

Another head of department noted:

> Students like it when their lecturers know what they are teaching when they use good methods of teaching when they professionally guide students on career options. This keeps students committed to their programme of study, but students may also not be sure whether these aspects will benefit them when we join the world of work. (*Head of Department, 24 November 2023*)

As a way forward, most participants suggested that lecturers should plan their lessons, use appropriate methods to teach, organize practical activities for their students, and guide their students to careers that are relevant to their study programmes. They also suggested that universities should be allocated adequate funding to pay lecturers well and on time and to procure the needed teaching facilities. It was also emphasized that universities should address the matter of staffing as a top priority, and that if these are achieved then the quality of university education will be enhanced. On the whole, the findings suggest that the quality of lecturers in terms of their competency is significantly related to the quality of university education in Uganda.

Discussion of Results

Lecturers' mastery of subject content and the quality of university graduates

Lecturer knowledge competence is correlated to retention or completion of the programme with rho = 0.106 and a P-value of 0.095; to employment expectations with rho = 0.195 with a P-value of 0.002; and earning expectations with rho = 0.185 with a P-value of 0.003. These findings agree with the human capital theory in the sense that students' positive expectation of the labour market prospects results from lecturers' competence and individuals invest in education expecting to acquire attributes that will increase their productivity and secure them employment and higher lifetime earnings in the labour market (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012; Gillies, 2015). When students' validation of the lecturers' competence is positive, they feel satisfied that their investment in education will similarly give them competences to make them successful in the labour market. Therefore, university lecturers should cultivate those competences which help students to develop skills to benefit from the world of work. In literature, the findings also agree with Ní Ríordáin, Paolucci, and Lyons (2019) who, in a related study, found that competencies such as knowledge of the subject, clarity of presentation, interaction with students, teaching creativity, clarifying of learning outcomes, class activity, and lecture notes are positively and significantly related to students' satisfaction. In a related way, other studies

by Obwogi (2011) and Fazile and Hasana (2015) have suggested that subject knowledge, teaching skills, lecturer attendance and lecturer attitude have a significant and positive effect on students' academic achievement. Carrell and West (2008) contend that students consider the specialist competencies of lecturers in the disciplines they teach as essential in influencing students' labour market expectations in terms of employment and earnings. Therefore, mastery of content that is taught by lecturers is an important component of students' satisfaction with what they benefit from the university.

Lecturer methods of instruction and the quality of university graduates

The second predictor of lecturer competence considered in this study were the methods of instruction used by the lecturers and the quality of university graduates. The results revealed that retention and completion of the study programme had rho = 0.213 with a P-value of 0.001; employment expectations rho = 0.264 with a P-value of 0.000; and earning expectations rho = 0.345 with a P-value of 0.000. These results suggest a strong, positive and significant correlation between methods of instruction and the quality of university education signified by students' retention, employment expectations and earning expectations. The link between extra qualification and development is guided by the human capital theory which suggests that education leads to the acquisition of productive skills, knowledge and other attributes which are of economic value not only to individuals who get high life-time earnings, but also to nations which benefit in terms of growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Shultz, 1972; Becker, 1993; Gonzalez & Oyelere, 2011). This is in line with the contention by Doyle (2008) and Monk, Walberg and Wang (2001), who contend that a lecturer has to do several activities, such as planning classroom activity properly, providing effective instruction, and evaluating the learning using appropriate methods and techniques. Other studies (Azikuru, Ezati & Onen, 2016; Hijazi & Naqvi, 2006) have suggested that effective planning of the teaching function and utilisation of appropriate methods of teaching have a strong effect on students' outcomes in terms of learning, satisfaction and confidence in the world of work. These findings agree with suggestions by Gonzalez and Oyelere (2013), Mutula (2001) and Mwaria (2007) that lecturer-student interactive methods were the most effective teaching methods, followed by student-centred methods, while lecturer-centred approaches were the least effective methods in influencing university students' learning outcomes. In a related manner, Usmani and Dawani (2013) agree that interactive methods which involve students in practical exercises are more effective in improving the academic performance and retention rate of university students. With regard to labour market expectations, studies suggest that graduates are moderately satisfied with the quality of higher education that they received, but that many perceive that their job prospects would have been improved by better teaching methods, a more relevant curriculum, and by having better qualified professors (Bartlet, Uvalic & Durazzi, 2016; Hijazi & Naqvi, 2006). These findings, therefore, suggest that effective methods of teaching by university lecturers have a strong effect on university students' satisfaction and on students' labour market expectations.

Career and professional support and the quality of university graduates

This current study found that the effect of career and professional support given by the lecturers to students is stronger in influencing retention and students' labour market expectations than content knowledge and methods competencies. The correlation between

career and professional support given by the lecturers to students and course completion or retention rho = 0.255 with a P-value of 0.000; employment expectation rho = 0.524 with a P-value of 0.000; and earning expectations rho = 0.345 with a P-value of 0.000. The findings on professional support agree with studies that suggest that individual decisions to pursue higher education involve an informal analysis of the costs of education as measured against the expected value of the returns to that education (Chevalier & Dalton, 2004; Groot & Oosterbeek, 1994). Kjelland (2008) notes that the human capital theory is based on the idea that education endows individuals with productivity-enhancing human capital and that this productivity results in increased earnings in the labour market. These findings, which suggest a strong positive correlation that is significant at the 0.01 level of significance, concur with those of Bettinger and Long (2004) and Carrell and West (2008) that lecturers who professionally guide their students and objectively assess students' work are highly rated by students. Thune and Storen (2015) also suggest that students who are guided by their lecturers and have participated in either project-based interactions or practice periods have better labour market situations after graduation than their peers who have not. Other studies agree that the lecturer's professional and pedagogical competencies are important factors in determining university students' learning outcomes (Sirait, 2016; Joensen, 2009). This suggests that the lecturer is an important factor in determining students' achievements and also labour market prospects.

Lecturers' methods of assessment and the quality of university graduates

The correlation between the variable methods of assessing students' examinations and students' retention and course completion has rho=0.176 with a P-value of 0.005; employment prospects has rho=0.354 with a P-value of 0.000; and influence on earnings prospects has rho=0.327 with a P-value of 0.000. These results also suggest a strong, positive and significant correlation both at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance. Other studies agree that the lecturers' methods of assessing students are important in determining university students' learning outcomes (Sirait, 2016; Joensen, 2009). These studies also contend that a student's decision to drop out or continue with education until a degree is acquired depends on the student's academic achievement and the labour market opportunities, and these factors are also influenced greatly by the quality of practical and theoretical assessment methods (Joensen, 2009). This suggests that a lecturer is an important factor in determining students' achievements and their labour market prospects.

From these findings, there is evidence to suggest that lecturer knowledge competence, methods of instruction, professional guidance and support given to students, and methods of assessment are important factors in influencing students' satisfaction to complete their programmes of study and labour market expectations in terms of employment and earnings.

Conclusions

Lecturers are an important input in determining the quality of university education. All the predictors of lecturer quality are positively and significantly correlated with the predictors of quality of university education. However, multiple regression analysis indicated that some professional competencies of lecturer quality, mainly professional

guidance of students and methods of assessment, are better predictors of retention, employment and earnings compared to mastery of subject content and teaching methods.

Recommendations

Both private and public universities in Uganda need to improve their human resources by recruiting more qualified lecturers and enhancing staff development programmes, which should improve on the mastery of content and teaching methods that cater to the labour market needs of the country. Increasing the number of staff with higher qualifications and better competencies will improve efficiency not only in teaching but also in research and supervision of graduate programmes which, in the long run, should improve the quality of university education.

Limitations of the Study

The principal subjects for this study were mainly university students of the graduating class who gave their opinions on how lecturer professional competencies were affecting their course completion and their labour market expectations. However, these informants only gave their opinions mainly of what they expected from the labour market. A tracer study of graduates of various courses where they were employed and what they earned would have been ideal but this was limited by both time and resource constraints.

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