The State of Doctoral Education in Social Sciences in Uganda: Experiences and Challenges of Doctoral Training at Mbarara University of Science and Technology 2003 - 2010[i]

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Abstract
This paper discusses the challenges and experiences which social science students in Africa undergo to complete the PhD program. Focusing on Mbarara University of Science and Technology, the paper present that many students who register on the PhD program in Africa, are unable to complete the program in the stipulated time. The paper identifies that the challenges which students face can be divided into two categories; institutional and individual students and the supervisors. At the institutional level it involves the nature and the context of the program. This involves lack of resources to support an overall learning environment. At the individual level, the challenges include student and supervisor challenges which they face at individual levels and how they affect completion. To get to discuss these issues, I held one focus group discussion with 7 students enrolled for the PhD program and 1 fresh graduate of PhD at the Faculty of development studies Mbarara University of science and Technology, critical literature review and a review of some of the external supervisors reports for the PhD students who have made an attempt to submit their final dissertations. Basing on the data from the sources identified above, the paper concludes that for students to complete the PhD program, the above challenges need to be addressed especially by establishing training programs in the region and creation of a better learning environment for the PhD students. The issues discussed in this paper and solutions provided provides a basis for improving the training programs in Universities. It is argued in this paper that solutions to completing PhD programs especially in the social sciences will depend on strengthening foundational courses especially in Methodology and theories and most importantly critical thinking.
Keywords: Research, University, Post graduate Training, Research University

1. Introduction
Research is fundamental to the university. The PhD degree is a key part of the university's research activity and research training and is the highest degree awarded by the University for research-work carried out under the immediate supervision. Post graduate degrees especially at PhD level define research universities and in the current situation of survival strategies of universities[ii] (Muriisa 2010), "the research university continue to be a research university more due to its formal obligation and public monopoly of awarding PhD degrees" (Halvorsen 2010, vii). For this, therefore, universities need to focus more effort to ensuring that those who register for the degree graduate. But in the present situation this is not the case. There are increasing numbers of students registering and who do not complete on time. This is a general trend globally (see for example, Moulton 2011 and Elgar 2003), but for the purpose of discussion I focus on Uganda.

This paper explores the experiences of doing a doctoral degree at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. It discusses the key challenges and experiences of doctoral training. While the paper is focused at one university, the challenges identified in this paper are symbolic of the whole doctoral program in Ugandan universities. From a lack of resources, supervisors, isolation and loneliness during the doctoral journey, to lack of proper guidelines, doctoral students have terrible experiences, which affect their abilities to complete the program.   It is envisaged that by discussing such challenges and experiences, this will help to inform the development of programs that would enable students complete the doctoral training.

The methodology for this paper is critical literature review and one focus group discussion with doctoral students who are registered at Mbarara University of Science and technology, faculty of development studies. In addition, I critically analysed recent external supervisors' reports on three submissions by doctoral students to identify key challenges identified in the candidates' PhD submission. Ethically, the external examiners reports are confidential. Therefore, for confidentiality, I use a different wording in place of examiners words and use italics for emphasis.

2.0 PhD Training is a General challenge
The demand for PhD graduates has recently been increasing. This is especially with the widening private and the public sector. For the academic sector, the increase is alarming since the number of universities have increased. Unlike other sectors, universities are distinguished by their monopoly on awarding PhD degrees but

by the distinct characteristic of employing PhD graduates. The strength and rating of universities largely depends on the PhD graduates they are able to produce and the number of professors they employ. Moreover scholarly output a major determinant of the university performance may depend on these two factors.

There is a global increase in the number of universities both public and private requiring PhD qualification. In Uganda alone there are well over 30 universities from one university in the 1980s. In Universities, the demand for quality training requires that universities employ PhD graduates. In some universities, the number of PhD candidates has increased as well as an indirect response to the widening "market" for PhD degrees. But completing the PhD program has become a concern of many countries and universities. Many students who register on a PhD program are not able to graduate on time and or drop out of the program before the completion of the program. It is noted that it takes longer to complete a PhD and even the dropout rates from the program has increased over the last decades. In Canada, it is said that it take longer than it used to take 30 years ago to complete a PhD and that only half of the students who enter the program are able to finish (Elgar 2003).

In Africa, available information indicates that African share of world scientific output has been declining in the last decade. The doctoral output at many universities in Sub-Saharan Africa has declined. A study done by South African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) in the South African region indicated that out of 1.7million students registered in the SADC region universities, only 1% of the total were enrolled on the PhD, most of them registered in South Africa. If South African share is taken off, the figure dropped to around 0.2% for the rest of the universities. The number of students graduating with their doctoral degrees follows the same trend. About 1,274 students graduated with PhDs from South African region, and 143 were produced from other state funded universities in the region (Mouton 2011). In the rest of Africa, there is limited data on the enrolment, completion and the experiences of doing a PhD program. In Uganda, there is limited data that has synthesized information regarding the number of students registering at different universities for the PhD program. At Mbarara university of Science and technology I did not find one single record which synthesises PhD registration, completion and follow-up on those who have overstayed on training.

In spite of the limited data, it is common knowledge that there are many students who are registered on PhD program and for a long time, who have not completed the program. It should be noted that the PhD training emphasises research and reporting results, but getting the research done in the right way, reporting results using the right language and in proper way remains challenging for many students. In the next section of the paper, PhD training at Mbarara University of science and technology, the subject of the paper is highlighted.

3.0 The State of Doctoral Training Program at Mbarara University

Mbarara University is a young university. It is the second public university in Uganda, having been established in 1989. Despite increasing student numbers at universities in recent times, the university remains relatively small compared to other universities. The university is composed of three faculties (Medicine, Science and Development Studies) and two institutes (institute of Computer Science and Institute of Tropical Forestry and Conservation). Majority of students are at undergraduate level.

In terms of PhD training, the arrangement is still at faculty level; there is no postgraduate school. The first PhD graduate was in 2002. The PhD raining at the university is by research and Thesis, which means that the students does research and writes a dissertation. There is no mandatory foundational training for the PhD candidate. A look at the records of the university indicated that since 2002, 19 students have registered for the doctoral program in development studies and education psychology (13 for development studies and 6 for psychology).

From the records it is indicated that only 2 (10.5%) student had completed the program in the maximum time required.   4 (22.2%) have already gone beyond the maximum time, and 5 (27.7%) have already used the minimum time required to complete and the 39.3% are either half way through the minimum time or they are fresh students on the program (Mbarara University, Academic registrar's records). This data is summarised in the table 1.

Table 1 PhD Students in Arts and Social Sciences (Development Studies and Psychology) at Mbarara university of Science and technology 2002-2011

Year of Registration	No. Of Students registering each year	Completing students and their reg. year	Students still on Program by year-cumulative total	Years spent on the program by 2011
2002	1	-	1	-(candidate graduated in 2005
2003	1	-	2	8 (candidate still on program)
2004	-	-	2	-
2005	4	1(Reg. 2002)	5	6
2006	1	-	6	5
2007	2	-	8	4
2008	3	-	11	3
2009	-	-	11	
2010	3	1(Reg. 2005)	13	1
2011	4	-	17	1
Total	**19**	**2**	**17**	

From table 1, the number of students on the PhD program in arts and social sciences at Mbarara University of Science and Technology has been increasing, but the number completing is stagnant or reducing. A look at records of the university for example indicated that graduation of first candidate with a PhD in development studies was in 2005 and two more candidates graduated in 2010 and 2011 respectively (MUST graduation year book 2010 and 2011).

Source: Mbarara University Academic Registrar's Office

4.0 Failure to Complete the Program- What are the Reasons?

Failure to complete the doctoral program in this paper is considered to be either dropout of the program or going beyond the stipulated time of completion. Currently, records at Mbarara University do not have any candidate who has dropped out of the doctoral program, but most of the PhD candidates have taken longer on the program than allowed. At Mbarara university of Science and technology, the stipulated time for the completion of the program is minimum of three years and maximum of five years. As the presentation in the previous section show, many students who register for the PhD program often go beyond the five years (see table 1). The reasons for failure to complete are discussed below.

4.1 Lack of Supervisors

Writing and completing a doctoral degree requires resources and commitment both by the students and supervisors. It is also important that students interested in PhD training posses self discipline in relation to work habits, endurance and persistence in the face of setbacks, self evaluation of ones work, willingness to respond to advice and criticisms, willingness to work independently, desire to enquire and team spirit. Mentoring and supervision are essential to foster these qualities into students (Wadee et al 2011a). Academic supervisors and mentors undertake to guide the candidate through the academic, administrative and developing the intellectual abilities of a student required for the completion of the PhD. According to Samara (2008) writing is a central activity in the process of transition from novice to expertise. The PhD students enter the program as novices who eventually become experts in their field. Becoming experts means appropriating the discipline's discourse and culture a process where writing is a key. The supervisors represent the disciplinary culture and their feedback reflects the disciplines' thinking and writing practice. The PhD qualification is generally considered to be the first real entry point into the rigorous world of research (Wadee, Et al. 2011). The entry point takes place in a particular discipline and the PhD training emphasises freedom of thought, intensive research and reporting of results (Elgar 2003) within this discipline. The conferral of the PhD degree is public acknowledgement that the recipient has successfully pursued and captured academy's highest award, the terminal degree in a particular field of study (Hawlery 2003, 3). Supervisors are supposed to walk students through the path of mastering the disciplinary culture, the thinking and intellectual growth within the discipline to enable the students to grow into independent thinkers. Thus, the main role of supervisors is to facilitate the students' development of a research identity through mastering the oral and written discourse of the discipline (Dysthe 2002).   But, supervisors cannot guarantee the success of the project, which is up to the candidate, but they should have a close interest in the project and a commitment to facilitating its completion.

Good communication and mutual trust and respect are essential for a productive working relationship with a satisfactory outcome. Supervisors need to have a sympathetic ear and sufficient time and energy to devote to the task of guiding candidates through the process of PhD, while mentors are supposed to take into account the complexity of a large research project. But as noted above it is the responsibility of the student to determine

their path. The PhD candidate is supposed to be advised and guided on how to succeed but not directed, he or she is supposed to be guided on how to complete the PhD. In the African context and Uganda in particular however, there is a lack of qualified supervisors for the PhD.

Universities are handicapped in terms of personnel. There are few qualified personnel at Mbarara University to carry out meaningful PhD supervision.   In the field of development studies and psychology there are few supervisors who are employed by Mbarara University of Science and Technology. As a result many of the PhD candidates get supervisors from friends of the faculties but with difficulty, and in most cases they depend on remote supervision. In a focus group discussion with PhD students at the faculty of development studies, one of them explained his ordeal which he went through to get a supervisor after registering as a PhD student;

> I went to Makerere university faculty of social sciences but could not get a supervisor from there. I went to Egerton University in Kenya where I had learnt that there is one professor who had written a lot on rangelands. I managed to talk to him and he agreed to supervise me. When I returned to Uganda, he sent me an email enquiring the terms of his service. I wrote back and told him that he will be appointed honorary lecturer and be paid an honorarium of about Uganda shilling 240,000 (less than US$100) upon my successful completion. I have never heard from him despite several emails which I sent him. After failing to get a supervisor on my field of study, I talked to one visiting professor at the faculty of development studies, although not well written on rangelands, he had widely written on Ankore region and the culture. That is how I ended up in the Netherlands. Throughout my PhD training, except recently when I got some support to travel and stay in the Netherlands, I depended on email supervision, because my supervisors tenor as visiting professor ended four years a go (PhD candidate – focus group discussion).

The description above indicates several challenges; there are limited experts to supervise the students and also the supervisors are not having the required knowledge and expertise in the field where students are writing their thesis. In addition it shows that supervision is largely by remote. As we shall see later, this is a challenge; while remote supervision is permissible especially with the current ICT developments, one-on-one meeting is necessary to sort out issues such as building confidence and encouragement and a stronger relationship between the student and the supervisor. The above experience is not unique for Mbarara University only but is a problem cutting across many universities. Table 2 shows the staff of the universities and their qualifications.

Table 2 Universities, Staff and their Qualifications in Uganda by end of 2006

Name of Institution	PhD	Masters	Bachelor
Makerere University	363	585	118
Mbarara University of Science & Technology	12 (one – in Faculty of Developments studies, and no one in Psychology and management studies)	98	60
Kyambogo University	31	251	74
Gulu University	19	89	80
Uganda Martyrs University	24	73	29
Uganda Christian University	10	81	19
Islamic University in Uganda	18	94	30
Kampala International University	88	266	86
Aga Khan University Uganda	1	6	6
Bugema University	4	48	15
Nkumba University	35	88	126
Ndejje University	1	30	16
Busoga University	6	28	72
Kabale University	3	15	15
Kampala University	18	42	6
Kumi University	3	3	36
Mountains of Moon University	5	33	15
Bishop Stuart University	1	27	19
Uganda Pentecostal University	2	42	13
Central Buganda University	5	13	9
Fairland University	2	14	12
Luwero University	1	2	11
Nile University	8	26	6
Makerere University Business School	35	159	95
Bishop Barham University College	1	27	19

Source: NCHE (2006:77)

From Table 2 above, an observation is made that there are few PhD holders as composing the staff of

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the university. From the table above, it can be observed that the number of academic staff in all universities with PhD qualification totalled 684 and more than half (363) of these were employed at Makerere University leaving the rest of the universities with a handful. Mbarara University had only 12% of this share

Mbarara University of Science and Technology had 12 (1.7%) as the share of staff with PhDs who were employed in universities. The Faculty of Development studies had 1 (0.1%) of the total share, while Faculty of Science department of Psychology had no staff with PhD). Until 2010, the psychology department at Mbarara University of science and Technology had no staff member with PhD qualification although having five PhD registered candidates (Personal Experience). By 2015 March, the department had graduated two PhDs but one had resigned the job to join another university. The education management department had graduated an additional two members of staff. In the former faculty of development studies, currently the Institute of Interdisciplinary Training and Research, an additional 5 PhDs but these have little research experience.

It should also be noted that as highlighted above, the few academic staff with PhDs do not have the required research skills to supervise the PhD. In the first instance, some of the supervisors have had little experience in research methodologies; they were trained in the same system with poor supervision and therefore may not adequately supervise a PhD to its completion. It is taken for granted that anyone with a PhD may supervise a PhD, but this not the case. There is a need for mentorship into supervision skills before anyone can qualify to be supervisor for a PhD.

4.2 The Role of the Student
The PhD research is entirely independent and largely depends on the work and efforts of the candidate. It is important therefore to point out that the role of the student in completing the project is considered critical. From the focus group discussion held with prospective and PhD students in the Faculty of development studies, one student who has spent over five years on the program indicated that the role of student on the completion of the program is important. He indicated that it is not the work of the supervisor to remind the student that he has not submitted work for review. He said that, "I cannot blame my supervisor for not completing my work or finishing on time. Since I last met him three months ago, I had kept quite and had not indicated what I have been doing. He sent me an email copied to the Dean, I had to immediately respond. This challenge is one which many students undergo and they become silent actors on the program. In some instances it is not clear whether students are still working on their projects or whether they abandoned the program. Many students work alone, there is limited communication with their peers and their supervisors, there is limited social interaction and students cannot compare their work with yardsticks by which they can measure their progress. Ali and Kohum (2006) provide that this is a form of isolation which the students face when working on their projects. This isolation is however compounded by lack of basic knowledge that is required to pursue a PhD program. Students lack the required methodological skills and theoretical grounding in the areas of their study. Therefore, provision of training programs is likely to help students in completing their programs. While this is not a situation unique for Mbarara University alone, the European universities, have tried to bridge the gap by staring summer programs from which PhD students benefit.

4.3 The Context of Research
Until recently, productive individual supervision was considered the main factor for the completion of a PhD. There was constant question of what the responsibilities of the students and the supervisors were how often they should meet (Grant 2005) and the delays in completing the PhD completion attributed to failure in the supervision system. At one gathering, after spending about 10 years on a PhD and finally defending his dissertation one Ugandan cried out that in Uganda education system there are "academic terrorists" who terrorise students and they fail to finish their degrees. By implication this was an allusion to challenges of supervision. The role of supervision in completing the PhD is recognised; indeed Wadee et al 2011) notes that while the number of students enrolling for the PhD program in South Africa has increased recently, a large number do not complete their studies and attribute the failure to complete on "the relationship between supervisors and their students and the overall quality of supervision" among other factors (http://rozenbergquarterly.com/?p=1855 accessed on 11/08/2011). Other studies point out that students have a role to play in the delay of completion of the PhD program. The argument is that the background of students and the amount of effort put in by students during the program have a lot to do with the failure to complete the program (Ali and Kohun 2006).

It has to be noted however, that developments in the challenges of doctoral studies indicate that completing a PhD requires more than supervision and students.   The PhD research project exists within the context of the university system; a system having limited resources such as equipment, library and laboratory equipment. In relation to this, the doctoral student also is in a particular context of life, work, family, age, colleagues, interests and limitations. Although it seems obvious, experience also shows that candidates should have enough time to complete their doctoral research, they should also have enough finances to enable them to travel and also support their families. However good the students who enrol on the program are, the context of

the program, therefore, play a role in affecting the completion rate of the PhD degree.

A large number of students who enrol for the PhD programs in Africa are working and therefore, they often find little time for their projects. Experience shows that many students who enrol on the PhD are full time employees and often lack enough time to do the PhD. It is no wonder that doctoral studies in Sub-Saharan-Africa are taken as a part time activity (a form of casual labour). It is estimated that between 65% and 70% of all doctoral students work while they study (Mouton 2011). Consequently the completion rate of doctoral studies is low registered at 15% for South Africa and 5% for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. In comparison, the completion rate in Latin America is about 31% while in North America and Western Europe is 70%.

4.4 Nature of the Doctoral Program at Mbarara University of Science and Technology
The nature of the doctoral program at Mbarara University is described as doctoral program by research and dissertation. The implication is that students are to do research and write a dissertation. The PhD in most disciplines is considered as a research degree which means that the primary purpose is not to prepare practitioners, clinicians and teachers but to produce scholars. This calls for a major transition from how one thinks and what one does (Hawlery 2003). This distinguishes the PhD program from other degrees at the lower level.   To change the way of thinking and what the PhD students do and how they do it, there is a need for students to be oriented. And this can be done through training. But the arrangement of research and dissertation limits students from getting the required training. Students register for the program and it is taken for granted that they do not need training; that they have the required knowledge to pursue PhD program since they have already undertaken the postgraduate training at Masters level, the end result is that they lack basic skills in writing, critical analysis and thinking. All these factors limit the completion of the doctoral training. The impact of lack of training and orientation is discussed below.

4.5 Lack of Training in Foundational Courses
The failure of many students to complete the PhD program is attributed to the failure of the student, institutional structures and lack of support training in basic skills to enable the student to complete the training. There is silence over the challenges and experiences of the students. Most PhD programs in Uganda are by thesis, ideally there is no formal requirement that students undergo basic training programs to enrich their skills in research and critical thinking. Therefore, many students especially those at Mbarara university lack exposure and grounding into research methodologies and theoretical foundations that would allow them to advance on their PhD writing. The students lack basic skills in academic writing and analysis. An analysis of reports from the external supervisors who evaluated three doctoral dissertations for the Award of PhD at the faculty revealed that the students lack basic skills in writing, grounding in theoretical and methodological issues and overall analytical skills. The following extracts from external examiners who examined the PhD dissertations of our students are attestation to this claim.
Candidate 1:
   Overall the dissertation is inconsistent and lacks a clear theoretical and conceptual focus- there is a total lack of understanding of the theoretical debates (examiner 1). On the whole the thesis does not constitute a text enjoyable to read, it is full of repetitions regarding preconceived notions and opinions (examiner 2).
On methodology and scholarly writing, the report goes on,
   Questionnaires administration is not just for convenience, it has a purpose as a research tool. Similarly, focus group discussions have more value than merely for comparison, validity and reliability (examiner 1). The author must have collected impressive empirical material, namely the claimed in-depth-interviews of *key respondents* should contain a wealth of information worth documenting and interpreting. Unfortunately, the author does not do this – neither on an individual nor on a collective level. …the perspectives and meanings communicated by the respondents and *the candidates* own analysis based on the combination of both, *does not come out* (emphasis added). …the dimension of reconstructing the views of the respondents is severely underdeveloped in this thesis (examiner 2).
On literature and sources, the report goes on
   Scholarly texts published since 2000 should constitute the majority of the references in a PhD thesis dealing with contemporary issues and finalized in *the current year*. In the text submitted such sources constitute around 15%. …my impression is also that *the candidate* is also not using major parts of recent Ugandan and African scholarship. The use of such texts would have improved the quality of the work considerably
Candidate 2.
   Theoretical debates are important part of the thesis, but the candidate simply gives narratives of what theory is about, its main authors (examiner 1).
On methodology;
   there should be a strong justification of selecting the area of study, how different or similar is this area of study from others (examiner 1), the reason for *choosing the area of study and the units of data collection*

and analysis is to show whether there are differences among *areas of study* and what explains differences. …Data was collected on many variables but this data was not systematically used for further analysis (examiner 2).

The candidate misses much of the local literature, especially literature on *the subject of debate* (examiner 1).

My impression is that the candidate does not utilise current literature in the field of study (examiner 2).

Candidate 3:

The candidate should resort to objective writing here, rather than reporting or citing what other researchers have done

The candidate need to have given a strong justification for collecting data on *certain data collection units since there is no analysis made on these units[iii]*.

From the presentation here, it is clear that most PhD students lack the basic skills in scholarly writing, they are not aware of the existing methodologies and why they are used. The above presentations are a snapshot of the challenge of lack of training and skills and how it affects PhD completion in Uganda and Mbarara University of Science and Technology in particular.

While there is no formal structure of PhD training at Mbarara University, it is not that students do not go through some form of training at all. Students are encouraged to have training on their own to get to families themselves with PhD program. In addition, there are some methodology workshops which are usually arranged by the university although not routinely. From focus group discussions with PhD students, they indicated that they have all been exposed to some methodological training, but the manner in which the trainings were arranged leave a lot to be desired. They expressed that "the trainings are not focussed, they are not regular, they do not target a particular category of PhD students, they are hurriedly arranged and try to cover everything in a very short time". The training programs often leave the students more confused than before. One candidate indicated that he had attended research training in Rwanda, another one in Uganda, but all left him more confuse than before.

4.6 Isolation-PhD the Lonely Journey

Isolation is considered as one the many factors contributing to PhD student dropout rates and failure to complete the program. Doing a PhD in social sciences is a lonely walk; it is like being placed in the middle of the jungle and be told to find your way out. Talking to a renown professor at centre for international health, university of Bergen in 2008, he described the PhD degree in the social sciences at the same university as "Cardboard Degrees". He explained;

"when a student registers for a PhD program at the social science faculty, he works alone, the supervisor occasionally checking on him. It is like being locked up in a cardboard and being checked upon to make sure your still breathing. That is why I call them cardboard degrees, soon we may refer to them as coffin degrees as people may never finish them before they die" he added. "Here at our centre, PhDs are group-based, no one can claim that this is my PhD, we work together, with some data and a member gets a PhD which we have all contributed to" (Informal Discussion with Prof. Torkild – centre for international health University of Bergen 2008).

The implication of the discussion presented above shows that in the physical sciences people work together on the PhD but in the social sciences, it a lonely journey. Indeed, a look at some of the PhD dissertations produced at science schools finds that four - five papers constituting the PhD dissertation had been written by between three to five people jointly. This is not common with the social sciences where candidates work individually on either the monograph or the papers. Indeed, Samara (2008, 11) notes that, "being a researcher in the humanities is traditionally an isolated activity". Working together helps the student not only to share thoughts but also as a peer review mechanism which shapes the candidates intellectual growth, quickens the process and shortens the PhD time of completion.

The loneliness which the students undergo by working alone puts them in a state of isolation and sometimes frustrations which hinder them from completing. The manifestations of isolation include; confusion over the program and the requirements of the program itself; lack of communication either between students or between the faculty (Ali and Kohun 2006). Many times students enrol on the PhD without knowing and orientation into what it takes to do a PhD. Many students are not prepared and there is little information available for students to plan on how to enrol and complete a PhD. Experience shows that students who want to enrol for a doctoral program are only concerned with the availability of the supervisor. An interaction with one of the student who was aspiring to register for a PhD asked, "I want to register for a PhD at your faculty, I wonder whether you have someone who can supervise me on human resource". Other students come and they want to register and the first thing they ask is to get them supervisors.

One of the challenges of doing a PhD is getting the PhD done in the right time. For this reason, both the student and the supervisor must be committed to their work. In most cases there is an unwritten requirement that those to be recruited for PhD program must be those who can demonstrate that they are able to walk the

lonely journey or withstand the pressure of doing a PhD (Ali and Kohun 2006 citing Lovitts 2001). Other than looking at the prior qualifications of the students e.g. at masters, supervisors would wish to have students they interacted with before – those whom they have experience working with and are aware they can "competently" do a postgraduate program at that level.

5.0 Dealing with Challenges

Lack of supervisors can be dealt with by improving the overall motivational environment. True, there are few supervisors in the region, but the region is not totally short of people who would be willing to offer supervisory services for PhD students. But the motivation to do it is the biggest challenge. Institutions should go an extra mile to recognise the role of supervisors. There is no adequate remuneration for it yet it takes a lot of time. Supervision is considered part of the job of professors and lecturers, but there is no follow up to motivate them to do it. Paying more to supervisors would motivate lecturers and professors who are PhD supervisors to do their job right. In addition, universities need to cultivate more friends and invite more professors to take their sabbatical leaves at the institutions. This can be done by availing more support and provision of good working environment, through establishment of infrastructure; working space and increasing the library resources to enable research.

Focusing on improving the academic experience at this level through improved training in basic skills and foundational programs will go along way towards increasing the overall numbers of PhD graduates in the region. Taking up of such courses strengthens the student's methodological, analytical and writing skills. And the outcome of such skills is quality work and reduction in the completion time.

Training programs may as well address the challenge of isolation and loneliness. Training programs can be in form of regular training series arranged as an annual event and or establishment of research schools. Staring PhD training programs and research schools would bring students together for some time. During these schools students would share their experiences and they would learn how to do things relating to completion of the program. According to Ali and Kohun (2006), isolation may manifest during the pre-registration and after registration due to failure to know what to do. By establishing training programs, students would be able to understand what they are supposed to do and how to do it.

To deal with the challenge of lack of analytical skills, in countries in north America, western Europe, Australia and Newzeland the component of specialised training with a minimum of residency of one year was emphasised to enable students get grounded into the thinking and orientation of the PhD program. In Norway at the Faculty of social science - University of Bergen emphasis on the training in the philosophy of social science was a mandatory requirement for anyone to graduate with a PhD degree. The purpose of the course was to orient students into critical thinking and analysis. Additional training in methodology and theoretical issues in ones subject of research was also emphasised although there was no formal structure of doing it.

According to Samara (2008), the establishment of a research school at the University of Bergen, facilitated a learning mechanisms through informal and formal meetings. The informal meetings in form of lunch meetings facilitated sharing experiences and therefore to deal with isolation; "the schools functioned as social arena" (Samara 2008,11). The formal meetings arranged weekly in form of research seminars provided a means through which students could get a feedback on their work. In addition feedbacks helped students to develop a critical mind. At Mbarara University of Science and Technology we have been running PhD seminars every fortnight since June this year[iv]. The arrangement of the seminars is that one student sends his/her research paper or proposal to other candidates, a commenter is identified and on the day of the meeting the candidate is given time to present and others comment after the main commenter. A feedback from students who have participated indicate that students are getting variable comments and like the idea. The arrangement however is still informal and not formalised and or regularised in the training program. Such arrangement therefore would improve confidence of the students and get feedback from other students. This is in agreement with what Samara (2008) finds out as the main outcome of establishing a research school at the University of Bergen faculty of Arts.

Universities need to change the nature of training. The description of PhD training at Mbarara university of science and technology as by "research and Thesis" in a way leads students to believe that they do not need training, or they suffer silently. The university need to formally make it mandatory that students need to have some training which must be reflected by doing some course works. This can improve the research skills of the candidates. These course works may be taken at any stage during the course of the PhD so that students are given chance to identify what may be appropriate along the way. Experience shows that packing all the trainings in one period like in the first year of enrolment makes students get on track in the first year, but eventually loosing it in subsequent years especially after collecting their data. There is therefore a need to spread the trainings so that students keep on getting refreshed.

The context of research can be improved by allocating more resources financial and physical to the PhD training program. Students doing PhDs may be given more time off their jobs so that they can concentrate. This can be done by considering replacements in form of employing contract staff to enable the PhD candidates

dedicate more time on their PhD. However, this needs to go with binding the PhD students to complete the doctoral degree in a given time short of which they loose their jobs.

In addition, the context can be improved by increasing library resources. Most of the libraries have on basic books in research methods but lack major texts on critical thinking. Increasing library resources and subscription to data bases and electronic resources would attract researchers to the institutions. These would contribute to supporting the PhD training programs existing in our institutions. Future research in this direction should investigate the amount of investment in training PhD students especially investment in foundation courses. In addition, research should focus on the nature of staff training to equip them with PhD supervision skills, moreover I have discussed that PhD supervision and completion is limited by lack of skilled supervisors arguing that the available graduates at PhD level have limited skills in supervising a PhD.

6.0 Conclusions

This paper aimed at exploring the challenges and experiences of doing a PhD in the social sciences in Uganda. The paper focussed on Mbarara University of Science and technology. The paper identified key challenges as, isolation, nature of the program and the overall learning environment. The learning environment includes, lack supervisors, resources and motivation of supervisors. In consideration of these challenges, the paper concludes that the challenges which students face can be divided into two categories; those at institutional level and those at level. At the institutional level it involves the nature and the context of the program. This involves lack of resources to support an overall learning environment. At the individual level, the challenges include student and supervisor challenges which they face and how these interlink and affect PhD completion. The paper has argued that Ugandan PhD training environment is not short of training in methodology, but the manner in which training is arranged leaves a lot to be desired. The paper thus concludes that training programs need to better be arranged and more formalised or regularised. Finally, the paper proposes that solutions to the challenges of PhD training in Uganda need may be addressed by starting of training programs to offer students basic skills in writing, critical thinking and analysis; that this will go along way with reducing the PhD completion time in Africa in general and Uganda in particular. For completion of training, investments should be made in strengthening foundation courses to enable students complete their training.

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NOTEs

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[i] Earlier version of the paper was presented at a workshop: *Status of Research Methodology, Foundation Courses and Supervision of PhD. Students in higher learning institutions of eastern and southern Africa,* Lenana Mount Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya 22nd – 26th August, 2011, but has since been revised and updated to cater for comments received by various reviewers and the passage of time and current training challenges. I have included some data regarding current staffing at Mbarara University especially in the social science related fields.

[ii] Universities are facing challenges of funding and for them to survive, they have devised survival strategies; including privatizing programs (see Mamdan 2007), consulting services all of which continue to erode the roles universities are supposed to play.

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