

The Relevance of Master Degree Programs in Enhancing Performance of Workers in the Local Government Councils in Tanzania: A case of Mbeya District

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Abstract: Education is critical for the development of any country the world over. Countries have been striving at improving what is considered quality education for the purpose of realizing the benefits of such education. In Tanzania it is a prerequisite for the heads of department to have a master degree. This paper therefore expounds the relevance of master degree program in local government council of Tanzania with a focus on Mbeya city and Mbeya district councils. It is a mixed methods study, which utilizes interview, documentation, experiential and observation as the major information collection tools. The analysis of information has observed descriptive strategy, which apprehends logical reasoning through systemic thinking. It is a multi-case study which includes the two districts which are Mbeya city and Mbeya district council. Thirty workers have been subjected in the study. 15 workers from each council who hold a master degree participated in the study. Hence, the total sample was 30. This was 100 percent of the workers with master degree at the headquarters of each council. Percentiles and relevant analytical tools have been used to provide required information for consumption of the entire continent through analysis. The paper concludes that 96% of the interviewed indicated that the programs they studied could not help them in improving their work at the councils. The findings further reveal that what they have gained is the status quo of being seen educated and thus being able to maintain the positions as heads of department and or candidates for being nominated as heads of department. We therefore suggest that it is imperative for the turnaround on the programs we teach at university levels for the purpose of providing relevant knowledge which provides answers to the problems we face in our societies.

Keywords: Education, development, master degree, relevance

INTRODUCTION

Education is crucial for the development of our countries. Several authors have put in place literatures regarding the importance of education. Norman and Mdegella [1] indicate that education must provide answers to the problems we face in our daily activities. What is evident is that at times our education as revealed through our graduates does not provide answers to the challenges we face in our societies [12]. Therefore we need to think critically to find out what is the cause of the situation. We have over 100 thematic of bachelor's degree in East Africa. And of course more than that number as we reflect African context. The issue of concern is, to what extent the types of programs in terms of degrees do provide answers to the readily available challenges of the society? We have taught several years in universities all over the world, and we have continued to ask ourselves one paramount question. Are we in the right track in the way we recruit lecturers, and thus the value of what we offer to the students? Can we claim the validity of contribution of master degree to the performance of the councils and or even the central government?

Is what we offer to the students sufficient to provide them with competencies required on job or other jobs that would be created for the sake of transforming the societies? If not, what should we do to improve the situation? This paper provides findings on the study that was meant to realize the relevance of Master program to the workers of district council of Mbeya city and Mbeya district councils. We wanted to know if they were relevant and were helpful in enhancing the works of the local government council. We ultimately wanted to realize what would have happened if the programs pursued would not have been pursued.

Generally, a postgraduate qualification is an important commitment that requires discipline and dedication. It is often the next step on the professional ladder after studying a bachelor's degree, and can be a worthwhile investment for future if tailored to mitigate the challenges we face in our societies [14].

Postgraduate studies will generally help to develop important transferable life skills – such as public speaking, research skills, presentation and report writing. It is therefore important that one choose a master's degree carefully, and select a course that benefits and is relevant to the desired career path. There is several dimensions regarding the role of degrees to the majority people in the world and probably the education career. Some look at education, especially degrees as a course to provide an enlighten for one to be able to realize the problems and thus acquire necessary skills to solve the same. Some consider bachelor degree as general course of study which does not provide mastery skills but general knowledge on the thematic area. However, whether the degree is general or specific, it has to provide solutions to the problems of the required environmental setting. That is why improving the quality education of the programs we offer is very important [2]. Although McQuillen seem to make an emphasis on the military training, but the essentials for training remain to be valid to all societies. Hence a need to study on the relevance of master programs to our societies, and in the near future justify if what we spend in the study renders value for money or not.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to find out the relevance of master degree in improving performance in the local government councils in Tanzania with a focus on two councils of Mbeya city and Mbeya district. Hence, the minor objectives are:

- a) To find out if the acquisition of master degree contributed to the enhancement of performance of work of the recipient of master degree? This objective entails to capture self-assessment of the employees on the contribution of master degree to the performance of the work before and after acquisition of the master degree.
- b) To find out weaknesses if any of the master degree program, which once tackled would lead to positive contribution to the work of recipient. This objective entails to assess perception of the interviewees on what is required for improving the master degree program if any.
- c) To assess areas of which the program has contributed to the improvement in the work place. This objective entails to assess the areas which the employees perceive that have been improved after the attainment of the master degree.

Questions for the study

The study came up with several questions which entailed to provide answers. The questions were many but the key questions for the purpose of reporting in the manuscript such as this are three.

- a. What is the relevance of the master degree in improving the performance of work at your work

and on your career? This was an open question; hence each of the respondent had to answer.

- b. What do your think is the extent of relevance of master degree program you pursued? This was a ranking question and therefore each respondent had to rank out of five points. The higher the rank the higher the relevance.
- c. What do you think are the areas that master degree has contributed if any, in the enhancement of work?
- d. What do you consider to be the weakness of master degree you pursued that lead into not contributing to the enhancement of the work?

Importance of the study

The study is important in setting an agenda for improving educational system all over the world, and specifically in developing countries such as Tanzania. It will further provide the wastage of resources or the proper utilization of resources depending on what is true in the facets. This study will shape the courses and indicate the levels that are pertinent in the enhancement of the organizations performance. Merits realized in the master program will provide necessary information of the types of degree, which could be nurtured for improving organizational performance.

Methodological assumptions

The following methodological assumptions were considered implicit in this investigation: 1. The sample of respondents was sufficiently representative of the population to permit a reasonable degree of generalization of findings. 2. The participants answered accurately and honestly the items on the questionnaire. 3. The reliability and validity of the instrument used were sufficient to permit an accurate description and analysis of the resulting data. 4. The data collected were interpreted fairly and accurately. 5. The design and sampling procedures were appropriate to the intent of the investigation. The rest of the paper is divided into literature review, materials and methods, findings, analysis of the findings, conclusion and recommendation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

No doubt many authors have researched on education. However, the researches on the relevance of master degree program or even bachelor's degree program are limited. Education refers to the set of knowledge that is accrued through various means of learning for the purpose of providing answers to the challenges that face our environment in ever changing world [3]. Master degree emanates from competence based character as opposed to bachelors. Master program simply means champion of the named thematic area. The programs were designed to provide ability of personnel to master their works as opposed to first

degree which entailed to provide general knowledge on the theme.

In this regard, Karodia [4] provide that MBA programs were created in the 1920s because large corporations felt that new employees lacked general management skills, and as a result, many talented recruits had to be taught on the job, the basics of business such as accounting, finance, market research and so on. With developments of management of various activities the world over, master programs have continued being designed to provide master knowledge to the students on how best could they articulate the challenges of the work and provide answers to it. Norman and Mdegella [1] provide that education is a key to development if it responds positively to the challenges that we face in our societies.

In this view, it can be realized that education irrespective of what is articulated in the courses, it should indeed provide answers to the needs of the societies [14]. Otherwise we could be investing huge amount of money without having the corresponding benefits of the same.

There are several types of master degree. However, in this study we concentrate on two types of master degrees. A taught course, which comprise of lectures and seminars that are divided by modules. They include master's courses and MBAs. Students tend to be assessed by exams, coursework and a dissertation. Beside all these efforts and certainly types of master degree, one would need to realize that needs assessment is crucial prior to the establishment of any master degree program [5]. In the same line we notice that human resource training is imperative in the enhancement of organizational success if and only if it responds to the needs of the society [6].

A research course will involve a lot more independent learning than a taught course. Doctorates are an example whereby students typically spend three to six years investigating a research project. Postgraduate studies allow you to learn alongside positive like-minded people. It is important that you have a mature attitude and take responsibility for your studies; employing independent thinking and decision making [15, 16, 17]. Employers look favorably on candidates that can demonstrate skills and knowledge gained on a postgraduate course because it demonstrates your ability to think independently and develop a clear insight into an industry [6].

Whatever your interpretation one may have regarding education, one thing is certain education is a vital and essential commodity, in developing countries of the world in particular, irrespective of how and why one acquires this education [4]. Higher education

matters are essential because it transforms the lives of individuals, graduates are more likely to enjoy higher wages and better job satisfaction, and more likely to find it easier to move from one job to another [7].

Several authors have made vital contributions on the linkages between awards versus performance. Davies [8] provides some important techniques of linking educational awards and the performance from the same. The emphasis on the literature is to quantify the need for an award, which is fruitful. Bedwell [9] in his popular book effective teaching indicates the importance for effective teaching by evaluating what we teach and the performance of those who graduate from what we have taught. The purpose is to emphasize on the importance of teaching with the view to ripe what we teach. Larson [10] provides that military training and education are imperative if they come up to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. McCord [11] in his great book Methods and theories of instruction, reveals that there should be congruence between what we teach and term it theories versus instruction for the purpose of attaining optimal goals. Generally, we ought to come up with prudent documents known as books and thus worthy for teaching when we give value to the needs assessment prior to launching any program. In this view Rossett [5] indicate clearly on the importance of doing needs assessment in designing and formulating course of all types for the purpose of getting a clear picture on what should be included in the courses.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used mixed methods of data collection and analysis. It was mainly qualitative, with some sentiments of quantitative hence mixed methods. The sample of study was 30 employees from the two councils of Mbeya city and Mbeya district council. Each of the council was represented by 15 employees who hold a master degree. The study was a malty case study, where two cases were united to form one case study and the analysis and interpretation of the information and data has treated the two councils as one case. The varieties of the master degree holders are Master of Business Administration (14), Master Arts with education (8), and Master of Arts in community development (3). Other interviewee[were holding Master of Science in engineering (2), and Master of economics in rural development (3).

The sample from the two council included both sex males and females. The male were 18 while females were 12.

The data collection strategies used were the interviews, questionnaires, observation and documentation. However, the dominant data collections strategy was questionnaire. The analysis of the

information has used Nova 8, which does an analysis on contents.

We have coded respondents as RM1, to indicate respondents one from Municipal, and RM2 to indicate respondents two from Municipal. In addition, we have coded RD1 to indicate the Respondents from District Council. Similar responses have been quantified to represent the entire pictorial expression of either percentiles and or charts of exemplary. Where

unique response is availed, we have noted as R with the respective number and letter such as M for Municipal and D for District.

Findings of the study

The study has come up with some interesting findings which we could not predict before even if we wanted to. The total response of the workers indicated some diversified responses summarized in the table 1 below.

Table-1: Responses of males and females on validity of master degree

| Ranking | Very irrelevant | Irrelevant | average | relevant | very relevant |
|---------|-----------------|------------|---------|----------|---------------|
| Males | 10 | 5 | 2 | 1 | |
| Females | 8 | 3 | 1 | | 1 |
| Total | 18 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

Source: Field data, 2017. Responses by sex on the relevance of master degree program in Mbeya. The findings indicate that 18 interviewee found that the master degree was very irrelevant. 8 interviewee noted that master degree was irrelevant. 3 noted that the master degree program was average. One respondent realized that master degree was relevant, and another found that was most relevant.

Responses of interviewee

On enumerating on the open questions, RMI provides that “master degree could not help me on tackling the problems that I faced prior to attending the course. Earlier I thought it could make something especially in improving the work, but it could not”.

When RM2 was asked to respond on the open question he had this to say “I first applied for the university that has reputable perception in Tanzania. After I had graduated, I noted that I wasted time for the entire one half year, because I became a holder of certificate in the name of master degree but it did not impart knowledge worthy to help me pursue better my work”.

Responses from RD7 indicate that “master degree has helped me broaden my knowledge. I feel more confident compared to before, though it is not very much related with what I am doing here at the district council”.

RD9 had this to say, “Master degree of business administration has not been of importance to me. It does not answer the needs of my career. Certainly, I will pursue another degree to realize the worthiness”.

RM11 had this to say, “I have attained my MBA and am proud because now can protect my virtue of being a head of department. ... Really I cannot quantify the benefits of MBA because I am yet to cognize the benefits may be in future”.

RD8 had this to say, “I have seen the benefits of Master degree of economics and rural development, especially on some concepts regarding my work and the society am working with. I feel proud of new level of education.”

Figure 1, provides a summary on the respondents and their responses on the relevance of master degree program in local government authorities in Tanzania.

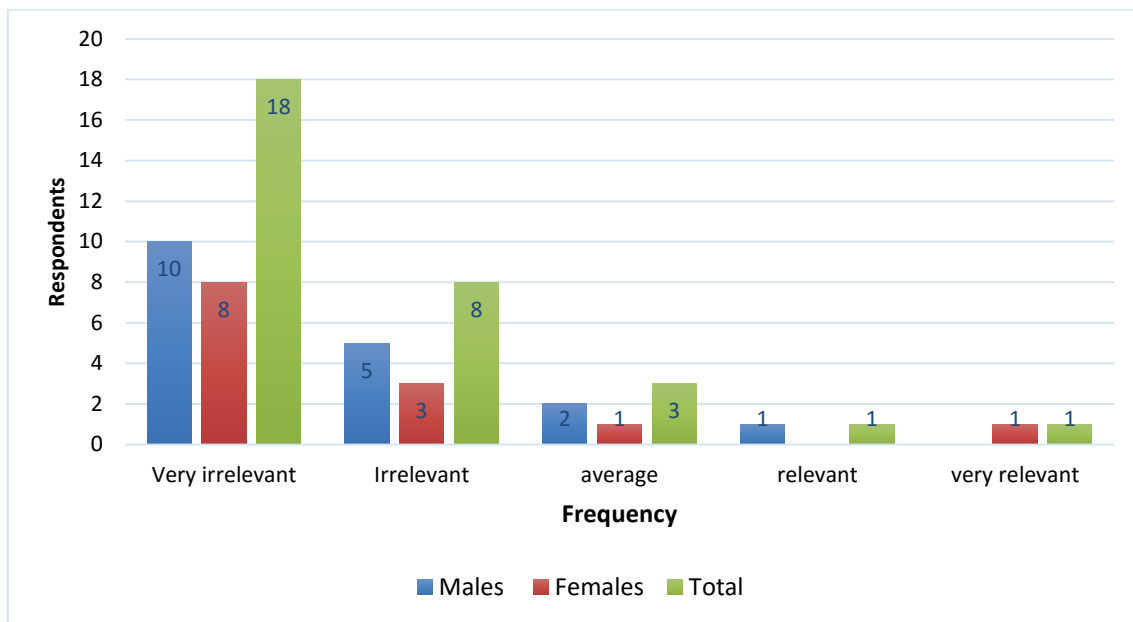


Fig-1: The relevance of master degree program in Local government authorities in Tanzania

Source: field data, 2016. The responses indicate that most interviewee opined that the master degree programs are irrelevant and that could not contribute to the enhancement of performance of the local government councils in Mbeya District.

Analysis of the findings

The responses above pave a way to look in-depth on the interpretive meaning of each segment of responses. Table 1.1 sums up responses on the key question. What is the relevance of master degree in improving the performance of the councils in Tanzania?

The ranks were made on the basis of five points. With 1 indicating very irrelevant, 2 Irrelevant, 3 satisfactory, 4 relevant and 5 indicating very relevant.

Generally coding 1 and 2 indicates irrelevance, while coding 4 and 5 indicate relevance. Coding 3 indicates satisfactory. Summing up the responses, we notice that 18 respondents indicate that the master degree was very irrelevant to the improvement of the performance of the council. This is about 60 percent of the total population sample. In addition, 8 percent indicates that the master degree was irrelevant to the improvement of the performance of the council, which is 26.7 percent of the total respondents. Moreover, 1 female indicated that the master program was relevant to the improvement of performance of the council, while 1 male indicated that the program was very relevant. Each of the two respondents account to 3.3 percent of the total responses.

Based on the interpretive nature, the 18 respondents (very irrelevant) and the 8 respondents (irrelevant) account to 26 (irrelevant) in total out of 30 respondents, which is 86.6 percent.

The satisfactory account to 10 percent of the total respondents, which is 3 persons.

We realize that generally the graduates of master degree who are working with the council indicate that master degree program could not avail what could be termed contribution to the performance of the council.

This could further bring forth three other propositions: 1) that the master degree program were not structured to suit the council, 2) that the students might have been enrolled on programs that are irrelevant to the activities performed in the council, 3) that there is no well-structured master degree program to suit the council.

The named propositions need an in-depth study to articulate major master degree programs pursued by most students in Tanzania. The pertinence of the study is due to the fact that programs pursued in the local governments authorities are actually also pursued in the central government. Implementation of development programs depends on the qualities of the personnel of this local government.

CONCLUSION

Generally, one would expect that a master degree student will be a person who think independently and assume responsibility with high altitude of keen. The study indicates that most master degree students opine that master degree programs are irrelevant to the improvement of performance of the

local government councils. 86.6% of the respondents disfavored the master degree program in relation to the improvement of the work at councils. The pertinence of the master degree program seem to rely on status of the graduates, credential for attaining promotion, and provide protection to heads of department on maintaining the positions they hold. We challenge the relevance of master degree and we appeal for programs that respond positively to the problems that we face in our societies. The study further appeals for studies in details. 1) is there none structured master degree program to suit the local government councils? If yes, why? If not, why do graduates fail to choose proper programs that suit the councils? Hence an in-depth study is required, which will cover more councils, and which will provide more questions to avail things that have not been covered in this study. Certainly a PhD study such as this, will be of paramount to elude the society and academician on the importance of proper designing of programs if development is of concern.

Acknowledgements

I would like to appreciate the enlightenment of my colleagues: Prof. Victor Pitsoe and Prof. Kaeleboga Maphunye of the University of South Africa for the contribution they made when I presented the matter as worthy for the study of a PhD. The author is a Professor in business management in Tanzania, and lecturers at University of Iringa and Teofilo Kisanji University.

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