

MPs of the ruling NRM party unanimously agreed to introduce a private members Bill scraping presidential age limits

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Corrupt students, officials meet at Makerere

Makerere University is in the spotlight for students altering results. Some who had failed exams changed their results and graduated. Others had their marks increased, improving their grades to either upper second or first class degrees.

In February some 380 students were removed from the university's graduation list after it was discovered they had pending exams, commonly known as retakes. These are exams that students who fail in a semester have to sit for in the next one. Also students who wish to improve the grade of their degree are allowed to re-sit exams.

Findings by an audit have revealed that some students alter their marks with the help of officials in the academic registrar's office. Certainly money must have exchanged hands.

It is the students with money who can afford to bribe officials to get better marks after performing poorly in exams. Such students are either the working class who missed university education years ago or children of rich parents.

With the opening up of the university to privately sponsored students, the rich have come in droves, mostly dominating evening classes. These allow them to balance work or leisure and classes. As a result, the working class and the rich children have introduced money at the university. Not only are they using it to pay fees, but also to corrupt university officials to get good marks.

Gone are the days when a university education wasn't a requirement for one to get a job. Today it is important. Even if an employer was to favour someone, the right qualifications are required. This has driven many to seek university education, but are in haste and also busy with non-university business. They are thus tempted to employ short cuts to get degrees.

It will not be shocking if it is discovered that some individuals in top positions in government had their results altered for a better result or even to dodge sitting exams. There have been some cases of politicians using forged academic qualifications to run for office and some prominent politicians cheating exams at the Law Development Centre.

The university has swiftly responded to the finding by setting up a committee to probe individuals who obtained degrees based on forged or altered results. More than 100 students including finalists who were on the 2015 graduation list have been summoned to appear before the committee.

According to the newly installed Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, a committee has been instituted to probe those suspected of having changed their marks in 2015. It will recommend "outright dismissal, suspension, cancellation of results and exoneration where there is lack of evidence."

The alteration of results comes at a time when Makerere University is determined to regain her past glory as the 'Harvard of Africa'. The university gained fame for its high scholarship in the 1960s and early 1970s before it took a shameful decline due to political and economic turmoil.

With the dons fleeing the country for their lives and poor funding, the university inevitably could not maintain the high standards. But during the chaotic time, it managed to keep some of its core values, which sustained it. There were no cases of alteration of results. Instead there were several students and lectures investigated for participation in subversion.

Besides the attack on the students by the army to avert a planned strike and coup in August 1976 the only bizarre thing similar to forging results was the admission of President Idi Amin's son, a school dropout. Amin's son had no qualifications to be enrolled at the Ivory Tower.

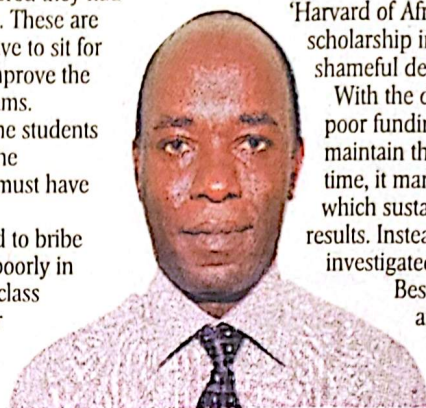
Problems at the university persisted through post-Idi Amin era. Then the only university in Uganda, it became a hotbed for partisan politics. But it still retained the credibility of its examinations. There were no reports of alteration of results even when there were suspicions of some favouritism in admissions.

In the last 20 years, the university has been steadily developing. It is on track and listed among Africa's best. But along its path to recovery, problems including managerial, financial and congestion started cropping up. The latest trouble of falsifying results undermines the integrity of the university. It first manifested in sex-for-marks as the lecturers freely gave away marks as personal relationship favours. Now it is a fully blown business, marks are altered for money.

It goes back to the big number of students. Here both corrupt students and officials meet. They plot to alter results

hoping they will not be found. But the university without external help discovered the scheme, which in a way restores hope in the problem ridden institution.

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