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KAMPALA. A section of students who graduated with Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees yesterday attributed the small number attaining the qualification to the high cost of pursuing it.

A PhD is the highest academic award, typically requiring between three and seven years of original, independent research culminating in a thesis that advances knowledge in a specific field. It also prepares graduates for careers in academia, research and other specialised professions.

Dr Patrick Etiang, a lecturer at Busitema University, who graduated with a PhD in Veterinary Medicine during the second day of Makerere University's 76th graduation ceremony, said undertaking doctoral studies is costly, with overall expenses exceeding Shs200 million.

"My tuition was about Shs8.7 million per year. If you complete it successfully, a PhD takes four years. The most expensive part was the research. We spent between Shs150 and Shs200 million. I was sponsored by USAID and the German Academic Exchange Service, but the challenge with sponsorship is that one is tied to the interests of sponsors," Dr Etiang said.

Dr Etiang argued that increased government sponsorship would significantly raise the number of PhD graduates across Ugandan universities. He noted that Busitema University produced its first PhD graduates only in December 2025, more than a decade after its establishment.

Dr Allen Namaala, one of the 62 PhD graduates on Wednesday, described the

High cost of PhD studies choking research students



Some of the PhD students graduating from Makerere University. PHOTO/
GEOFFREY MUTUMBA

journey as demanding.

"It has been a hustle that requires finances, commitment, resilience and being faithful to yourself. I'm lucky I was sponsored, but some students dropped out due to financial challenges," Dr Namaala said.

A Makerere University staff member, who requested anonymity, said a PhD in Arts costs about Shs20 million, while programmes in the sciences are significantly more expensive. She added that most doctoral candidates rely on support from university partners.

Dr Christopher Kintu, who earned a

PhD in Bioinformatics, acknowledged that the cost of doctoral education remains prohibitive, with many candidates depending on external funding. He welcomed the government's plan to establish a dedicated PhD fund.

Mr Timothy Ssejjoba, the acting Commissioner for University Education at the Ministry of Education and Sports, said government has introduced a PhD Fund to support more candidates.

"Government has planned resources for PhDs in the National Development Plan IV and we await the availability of funds for it to be operationalised," Mr

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Graduation statistics. The number of students who received PhDs out of the 9,295 who graduated during the 76th Makerere University graduation ceremony.

Ssejjoba said.

He noted that doctoral candidates face multiple challenges, particularly financial constraints.

"PhD programmes are very intensive in terms of time and resources. This affects a number of learners," he added.

Government has also urged universities and other higher institutions to expand doctoral admissions, describing this as vital for strengthening research, innovation and national development.

Ms Joyce Kaducu, the Minister of State for Primary Education, made the appeal during the second day of the 76th graduation ceremony at Makerere University on Tuesday. She said Uganda's transformation agenda depends heavily on strong research capacity built through advanced academic training.

"For higher education to contribute to the growth and development of the country, universities must produce more PhDs to boost the research agenda and propel national development," Ms Kaducu said.

"Keep the numbers growing, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. More PhDs mean stronger academic leadership and steady growth in research output," she added.

Ms Kaducu further urged universities to strengthen quality assurance systems and maintain high academic standards to ensure graduates meet societal and industry expectations.

"Higher education is a crucial aspect of our education system that transforms knowledge, skills and values to produce goods and services essential for the welfare of our community," she said.

She revealed that government has in recent years increased investment in research, infrastructure and innovation to transform universities into centres of solution-driven knowledge production.

Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University, reaffirmed the institution's commitment to research and innovation. "To fulfil that promise, Makerere is steadily becoming a truly research-led university, generating knowledge that drives communities, strengthens industries and advances national transformation."

He commended government support for more than 1,400 high-impact projects under the Makerere University Research and Innovation Fund, which has generated practical solutions to everyday challenges.

Prof Nawangwe encouraged them to apply their expertise to community development.