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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FISHING STUDENTS INTO SAFETY NETS: A CASE OF WORK STUDY PROGRAMME AT MASINDE MULIRO UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Work study programme has been put in place by many institutions of higher learning to help needy students cope with daily financial needs. However, very little information exists about its effectiveness as an intervention programme. This study sought to determine its efficacy at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Descriptive research design was used. Purposive and Simple random sampling was employed to select a sample of 70 students on the programme, and 8 departmental heads. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed descriptively. Though 60% of the respondents reportedly met their personal needs from work study programme, a series of challenges including its limited opportunities, low pay rates, delay in pay processing and stigma. Policy makers at the university should increase slots to accommodate more needy students and increase pay rates commensurate to the local standards of living.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education systems in developing countries and more so in Kenya are under great financial strain. They are chronically underfunded, but face escalating demand (World Bank, 2000). Though allocation to education sector take up to Ksh 193.3 billion of the 2011/12 national budget (KNBS, 2012), higher education remain underfunded. The enrolment rate in higher education has, however, increased from 24,000 students in 2010 to 32,611 in 2011(Daily Nation June 21, 2011). Access to higher education has become a challenge especially to students from low income households in Kenya. Nevertheless, Malcolm Gillis, (1999) asserts that "today, more than ever before in human history, the wealth - or -poverty of nations depends on the quality of higher education. Those with a larger repertoire of skills and a greater capacity for learning can look forward to lifetime of unprecedented economic fulfillment. But in the coming decades the poorly educated face little better than the dreary prospects of lives of quiet desperation". The scarcity of resources in many government funded sectors including education was first felt after the implementation of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). SAPs subscribed reduction of government expenditures and privatization of parastatals (GoK, 1999). This necessitated the introduction of cost sharing in all social services provided for by the government, especially in health and education (Kiirt, 2004).

Cost sharing reduced the demand for education as poor children who could not pay for their education were left out. In order to counter this, the Kenyan government through an Act of Parliament No.3 of 1995 formed Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), whose mandate is to offer credit facilities to students who can not afford university fee. This loan is to be repaid on interest by the students after graduating and securing jobs. In 1998, the government also encouraged public universities to admit privately sponsored students to deal with increasing number of students who meet university admission requirements but are unable to be admitted into public universities due to lack of space (Caleb *et al.*, 2011).

This open policy further worsened the disequilibrium in higher education. Parents continue to take their children to universities even without enough resources hoping that one day they would somehow graduate. They do not provide sufficient financial support to match the needs of their children (Mwinzi, 2002). Subsequently, students have become increasingly involved in small scale enterprises which are time consuming and at times immoral and anti-social (*ibid.*).

World-over, institutions of higher learning embrace some sort of part-time work their needy students. In the USA, for instance, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 created the Jobs Corps whose mandate was to stimulate and promote the part-time employment of students in institutions of higher education. These were especially those from low income families who were in need of the earnings from such

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employment to pursue courses of study at such institutions (Campus Compact, 2012). In Kenya, some institutions of higher learning offer work study programme to bright but needy students to help them raise part of their tuition fee and upkeep by providing services to the university (<http://www.cuea.edu>; <http://www.kemu.ac.ke>, [accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012]. The students work for a maximum of between 2-4 hours a day when in session and full day when on academic leave or during long holidays. Other universities in Kenya offer this opportunity to just needy students (<http://www.deanstudents@uonbi.ac.ke>; <http://www.egerton.ac.ke> [accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012]. The nature of work varies from department to department. At Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), work study attachment is based on student's degree programme, but when the relevant departments are full, they can be attached anywhere.

### Statement of the problem

Work study programme (WSP) refers to an educational plan in which students alternate between paid part-time employment and formal study. Studies have shown that WSP has colossal benefits. Such benefits include income and marketable skills from such employment opportunities while pursuing college education. It also enables student beneficiaries to acquire necessary academic related work experience, which may have vocational value in post collage years. As much as this programme may be important, challenges abound. Preliminary discussions with Dean of students' office of MMUST revealed that it lacks policy guidelines making its implementation difficult. Moreover, needy students who had been thoroughly vetted and enlisted in the programme often dropped out. They, instead go for other sources of income including illicit ones in or outside the university, often with die consequences to their academic progress and general welfare. This study, therefore, sought to explore opportunities and challenges of WSP as experienced by both students and management of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.

### Objectives of the study

Specifically the study sought to:

- Establish the benefits of WSP to students and university.
- Find out the major challenges that students and the university face in embracing WSP.
- Explore ways of improving the implementation of WSP at MMUST.

### Significance and justification of the study

The Kenya Vision 2030 aims at transforming Kenya into a globally competitive and prosperous middle income country by 2030 (GoK, 2007). This can only be possible if the citizenry can access quality education. Inadequate financing to higher education has contributed to many academic and non academic challenges at institutions of higher learning. This has resulted into students engaging in unlawful and immoral dealings that hamper their education progress, health including spread of human immune-deficiency virus (HIV). MMUST started engaging students on WSP in 2006. Interestingly, no study has been done to establish the opportunities and challenges of this

programme at MMUST. Moreover, this study particularly focused on MMUST due to mass dropout of students on WSP at the institution. The study would contribute to knowledge and recommend ways of enhancing WSP at MMUST and in other institutions of higher learning.

### Research design and methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design where both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gather data. Sambili (2000) asserts that combination of the two approaches enables revelation of several dimensions of a phenomenon. Qualitative approaches help validate quantitative findings. The student respondents were selected using simple random sampling. This gave every student an equal chance of being selected as part of the study (Gupta, 2008). Out of 250 students enlisted on WSP by the university in the 2011/12 academic year, a sample of 75 students was selected randomly. This was 30% of the students who were on WSP (Kerlinger, 1983; Kothari, 2009). Heads of department respondents, on the other hand, were purposively selected from departments where students were attached on WSP. Eight (8) departments were selected.

Data was successfully collected using questionnaires among the selected 70 (out of 75) students for this study. Five (5) students who had been sampled for interview had actually dropped and therefore ineligible for interview. This gave a response rate of 93%. In-depth interviews with eight departmental heads were conducted. Data was analyzed descriptively. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer package and presented using tables, graphs and charts. Qualitative data was summarized thematically and exposed to content analysis. For validity purposes, both data were triangulated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section gives results and discussions from descriptive analysis of data. The findings are represented in the following order; Respondent's characteristics which capture data on age, gender, year of study, module of study, birth order, family set up and occupation of respondent's parents. It also dealt with family resources which captures family's source of income, range of monthly income, family expenditure and family assets. Further, it touched on issues that relate to student survival at the university including who paid fees and other expenses, source of information for WSP, current and preferred department of attachment and number of semesters a student had been on WSP. It concludes by looking at the benefits and challenges of WSP, and suggested ways of overcoming the challenges with a view to helping improve WSP at MMUST.

### Characteristics of the respondents

The respondents academic years were; 28.3% were reportedly in second year, third year (36.5%); fourth year (25.7%) and 9.5% were in their fifth year. All respondents in fifth year were male students pursuing engineering related courses. The study also revealed that majority of students (63.2%) on WSP was on privately self-sponsored programme (PSSP) while 36.8% were

Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS), (formerly Joint Admission Board (JAB)) students. This high number of student enrolment in WSP indicates that the government through higher education loans board should spread its net wide to adequately meet the financial needs of students at universities.

Male respondents constituted 58.4% while female students were 41.6% of the respondents. Generally more male students are admitted in Kenyan universities compared to female students. Therefore, this is not a deviation from the norm. A majority of respondents (90.4%) were in the age bracket 21-26 years. This is expectedly the age bracket when most of the students are at undergraduate studies in most Kenyan universities. The sample respondents were drawn from varied family backgrounds. 53.6% of the student respondents were from monogamous families while 46.4% were from polygamous ones. On survival status of parents, 62.4% had both parents alive while 37.6% had none or one parent alive. From those who had one or none parent alive, 38% had only mother alive; 40% had father alive while 25.5% were total orphans. Six (6) out of the 12 total orphan respondents were reportedly staying with their uncles/aunt, 3 with their siblings and 3 with their grandparents. When someone loses both parents, the burden of parental care often shifts to older siblings and if none is there, immediate member of the extended family. Students from single parents and orphans are normally needy and require full financial support for their tuition and up keep (Mwinzi, 2002). 48% of the respondents were first born in their family while only 4% were last born. In most communities in Kenya, families will always struggle to take their children to school, especially first born ones. Investing in first born ensures that in future they support younger siblings and even parents at old age (Kienlen, 2007).

The respondent's parents/guardians had varied sources of income. The majority (75.2%) were in self-employment including agriculture (48.8%) and business (26.4%). Only 12.9% of respondents had their parents/guardians on formal employment, mainly as teachers. Other sources of income accounted for 12.8%. MMUST is located in Kakamega, a largely agricultural rural town. Further, at national level, Kenya is an agriculture-oriented country, so are most people in western Kenya where MMUST is located. This could explain the higher level of student respondents from agriculture-based households. Majority of respondents' parents/guardians (72%) earned monthly income of between Ksh. 10,000 - 30,000 while only 28% earned Ksh 10,000 and below. The main household expenditure item was school fees that took almost 80% of their income. This was followed by clothing 16% while food took only 4%. Higher expenditure on education shows the extent to which many households in Kenyan value education. Education brings with it enlightenment, good and better life (Currie, *et al*, 2003). A convincing majority of households experienced budgetary shortfall. About 76% of the respondents indicated that their parents/ guardians income was not enough. Asked how they bridged the shortfall, 69.6% relied on donations from friends and relatives. Support from sponsors had only 12% while other sources accounted for 18.4%. In fact most families borrow to smooth consumption (bridge the gap) between income intervals.

The study also sought to find out where the respondent students got information WSP. It was established that an equal proportion of students (36%) got information from the Dean of student's office as well as from their colleagues. Only 22.4% got information during orientation while 5.6% got information from other university staff. It could be hypothesized that needy students did not report on the first week probably because their parents/guardians were still trying to source for funds. This could explain a relatively low number of students who get the information on WSP during orientation of fresh students.

Majority of the respondents (57.6%) had been on WSP for one (1) academic year, 32% for 2 academic years, 6.4% for 1 semester and only 4% were reported to have been on the programme for 3 academic years. This could be explained by financial relief that WSP has on a student. That is, as academic years advanced a student became more financially stable. Alternatively as students matured on campus, they could discover better sources of income within and even outside the university. Such students might opt out of WSP. The majority (43.2%) of the respondents reportedly worked in the university library, 20.8% in the laboratories, and 13.6% were attached in the kitchen, 8.8% percent in MMUST FM radio station, 4.8% in the clinic, 4% in the farm and 4% in the finance department.

When the study sought to find out the preferred department of attachment by student respondents, 47.2% would prefer to work in the library. This was because it was convenient for them as they could acquire reading materials easily and read while working. At the same time working at the university library reportedly involved less work, and the staff there were reportedly friendly. 16% said that they would prefer to work in the laboratory because they were able to interact and get familiar with lab equipment and gain more of practical experience since they had passion for science and computing skills. They could also read as they worked hence flexible, and that university staff there were cheerful. 13.6% would rather work in the kitchen mainly because there was free food. 10.4% preferred working in MMUST FM mainly because it was relevant to their pursued degree programme. They were pursuing a bachelor degree in journalism and mass communication. 7.2 % would prefer working in the clinic so that they can learn how to handle people and that there was less work there. 4% liked working in procurement department because they were taking courses related to their work and that the staffs were friendly. Only 1.6% preferred working in the farm because of the flexibility of their schedule.

Findings from in depth interview revealed that attachment on WSP was utterly a university decision and was to some extent based on student's degree programme. However, when all the departments were full they would be assigned work in other departments. Likewise when particular departments had a lot of work, more students would be placed there to fill the gap with very little attention to their preference or relevance to their pursued degree programmes. The Dean's office also encouraged multi-tasking and so would post a student anywhere whenever there was need to do so. It was of the view that by doing so, students were hardened and better prepared for future employment in different fields.

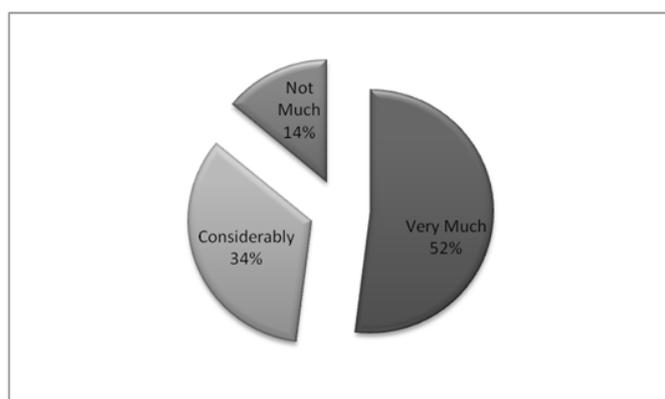
## Objective 1

### Benefits of WSP

The study sought to establish the benefits of WSP to students and university.

#### Benefits to Students

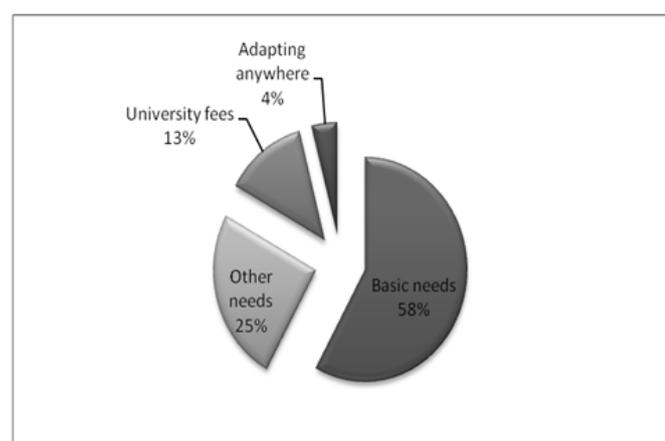
Figure 1 shows the levels of benefit students attached to WSP. From the chart, 52% of the respondents indicated that WSP had helped them very much, considerably (34%) while 14% had not quite experienced meaningful impact of the WSP.



Source: Ngala and Ong'anyi, 2015.

**Figure 1. Level of Benefit from WSP by students**

While the majority of student respondents (91.2%) indicated that their income from WSP ranged from Ksh 1000-2000, only 8.8% earned between Ksh 2001-3000. Students on WSP in MMUST were expected to work for a maximum of 10 hours a week at the rate of paid Ksh 50 per hour. It was logical therefore for the majority to earn up to Ksh 2000. Those that earned between Ksh 2001-3000 had perhaps other sources of income. WSP was introduced in MMUST to enable needy students meet their daily needs at the university. Figure 2 shows the specific needs students reportedly using proceeds from WSP.

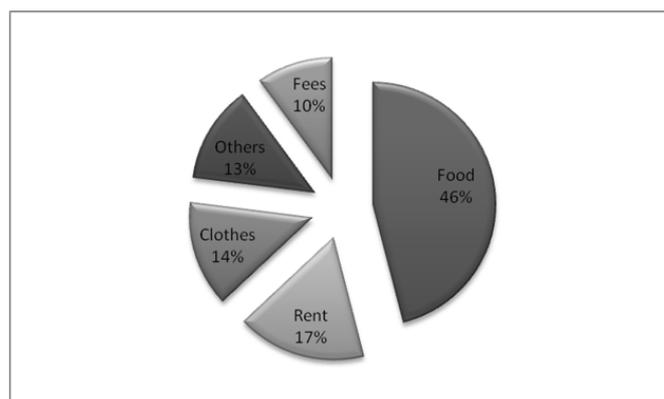


Source: Ngala and Ong'anyi, 2015.

**Figure 2. Needs Met from Proceeds of WSP**

Findings showed that 57.6% of the students were able to meet their basic and personal needs from WSP income. Laudably, 12.8% of the student respondents had actually paid their

university fee with proceeds from WSP. Figure 2, while 25% were able to meet other needs, only 4% had reportedly acquired the much needed experience and skills including adaptation skills from WSP that would help them work in different environments in future. Findings from in-depth interview revealed that some very needy students on the WSP had written to the university's finance department asking that their earnings be channelled to their university fees account. According to the university management, students whose families were affected by the post election violence of 2007/2008 were a special case to mention. They were able to meet their needs at the university and assist their families by sending them monies for subsistence.



Source: Ngala and Ong'anyi, 2015.

**Figure 3. Areas of Expenditure**

The study found out that the majority (45%) of the respondents were spending between Ksh 500-1000 of their total income on food, 17% were spending between Ksh 500-1000 of their total income on rent while 14% spent between Ksh 500-1000 of their total income on clothes. 10% spent between Ksh 500-1000 of their total income on fees while 13% spent between Ksh 500-1000 of their total income on other expenses. Very few student respondents were spending on entertainment in fact less than Ksh 200.

#### Benefits to MMUST

The university had equally benefited from WSP. It reportedly helped the university fill vacancies in various departments hence saving finances that would have been spent on salary payments for casual and/or permanent workers every month. The programme has, therefore, been instrumental in ensuring that the university functioned efficiently while saving a lot of money for other developmental needs. Additionally, the university would, through the WSP, identify and recruit students with special skills in various areas to join the university workforce upon graduation.

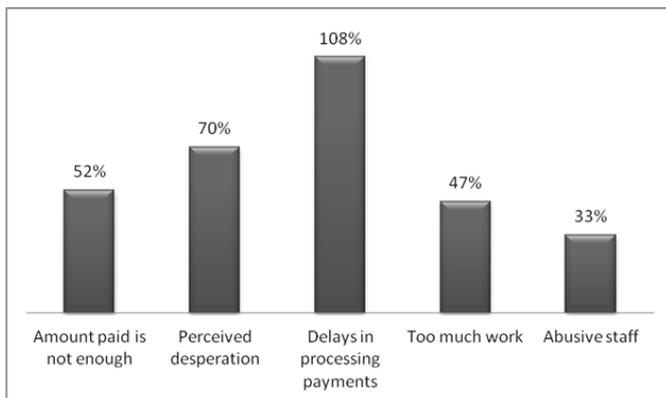
## Objective 2

### Challenges of WSP

The study sought to investigate the challenges faced by students and MMUST management in embracing WSP at the university.

### Challenges to students

On the part of the students under WSP at MMUST, Figure 4 shows the multiple challenge responses that students mentioned. About 108% of the cases identified delays in processing their payment as a challenge. The supervisors reportedly took too long to sign and forward their claims, and/or the finance department often delayed to pay them. The dean of students' office often intervened when payments were delayed. 70% of the cases reported that other students perceived students under WSP as desperate and coming from very poor background. Misconception of this nature often stigmatized student beneficiaries leading to high rates of absenteeism and drop out from WSP. 52% of the cases mentioned that the rate of Ksh. 50 per hour worked under WSP was very low and therefore needs to be increased.



Source: Ngala and Ong'anyi, 2015.

**Figure 4. Challenges Facing Work Study Programme**

While 47% of the cases reported that WSP involved too much work, 33% of the cases reported that university's casual workers often abused them at the shared payment point. The students on WSP cited that abuse was a common feature at the cash office where all payments for casual staff and students on WSP are made. Ostensibly, the university casual workers expect the students, who are equally busy, to show "respect" and allow them to be attended to first. When this does not happen, the casuals resort to all manner of abuse to scare students away.

### Challenges to MMUST

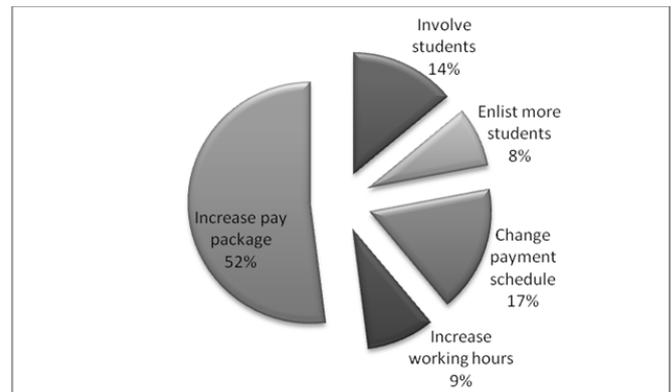
On challenges that MMUST management was facing in the implementation of WSP, in-depth interview with university management revealed the number of students seeking WSP was overwhelmingly high. The university could not cope hence only a few got the opportunity to be enlisted on the WSP. A number of those enrolled in the programme reportedly did not, however, work adequately and often shied-off from work. They apparently did not want their fellow students to see them work, especially those who were in relationships. Some of the students reported to their work stations late and a number were reportedly lazy in their work. These could be explained by challenges of high levels of stigma attached to working on WSP, delays in payment, and low pay as identified by students. All these could be de-motivating factors to students under WSP. Interestingly, the university management

reported that some students claimed payment for more hours than they actually worked. This raises the issue of sincerity and integrity particularly among the programme beneficiaries and by extension, the student fraternity.

### Objective 3

#### Ways of improving WSP

The study also sought to explore ways of improving WSP at MMUST. A slim majority (52%) of student respondents asserted that the pay package should be improved while 9% and 8% wanted working hours increased and more students enlisted on WSP respectively. The university should consider increasing the share of funds that is allocated to WSP. This would help improve pay package and at the same time offer more opportunities for the many needy students on campus.



Source: Ngala and Ong'anyi, 2015.

**Figure 5. Ways of Improving Work Study Programme**

About 17% reported that payment point and schedule should be changed; in fact, the entire payment structure should be addressed. Rate per man-hour worked, delays in payment and paying point should be looked into as a way to motivate students on WSP. 14% of study respondents indicated that the management, in consultation with the students, should discuss the issue of student placement. At the moment the decision on student placement is a preserve of the university management and a student does not have any say. A consultative approach would give the programme a more sense of legitimacy, acceptance and ownership which are critical for its success. On the part of the university management, the government does not offer enough loaning facilities to students. The government should expand loan facilities in order to reach more students. Agencies like higher education loans board (HELB) should capture more needy students and give them loans to help relieve the high demand for WSP at the university.

### Summary and Recommendations

The financial and infrastructural constraints at the university are severely felt by the students. The problems of inadequate infrastructure and other service utilities are borne more by the students. They have to seek for funds for accommodation, clothing and food, even after their fees have been paid for. The government does not offer enough loaning facilities to students that they sponsor and that there are very many needy students

especially those from single parents and orphans who require full financial support for school fees and upkeep. This calls for policy makers in the university to look into ways of increasing slots to accommodate more needy students and to increase their pay to a level that is commensurate to the local standards of living. The government through higher education loans board (HELB) should also review the loan needs assessment testing instrument. In this way, they will be able to capture more needy students and give them loans. Loans should also be granted based on the needs of the student.

Findings showed that the WSP slots at the university are few but needy students are many. The university should consider encouraging rich locals with business enterprises in and around Kakamega (dubbed friends of MMUST) to set up foundations associated with research and other academic activities that could assist poor students. Such business enterprises could also be encouraged to absorb extra needy students in their establishments on similar terms to WSP at the university. This would not only expose students to the needed skills and work experience, but also instill the culture of learning and research which is the core business of the university. Students have gained a lot from WSP and have been able to meet a number of their needs while at the university with food and accommodation taking largest share. Indeed WSP has been able to meet its objective. However, there is still need for improvement. A discussion with Dean of students' office at MMUST revealed that it lacks policy guidelines on WSP making its implementation difficult. This is an issue that the university management needs to take up seriously for WSP to be successful. Again, MMUST has an income generating unit whose activities should be expanded to accommodate more students in order to generate more income for the university.

Students feel embarrassed and shy-off from work study. This is linked to stigma associated with a perception that those in WSP come from very poor backgrounds. The office of the Dean of Students should organize regular sensitization and counselling sessions with students to demystify WSP and educate them on the benefits of the programme beyond money. This will help students develop a positive attitude towards work and should not feel embarrassed to seek for such an opportunity. The entire payment structure should equally be addressed. Rate per man-hour worked, delays in payment and paying point should be looked into. The university should increase the share of funds that is allocated to WSP at the same time remove unnecessary delays in payment. To achieve this, the university could, for instance, consider establishing a kitty where donors and well wishers can contribute to enhance the continuity of WSP and increase participation. To address acrimony between students and casual staff at the common pay point, the university could consider using other innovative services mobile money transfer (like M-pesa) to pay students on WSP.

Many families struggle to meet financial needs of their children's education in Kenya. Some have to borrow from friends and relatives, and even increasingly rely on sponsors to pay school fees. Consequently, needy students do not usually report promptly on the first week as required because their parents take time sourcing for funds to pay for their school

fees. They, therefore, do not attend student orientation during which information on WSP is disseminated. To increase WSP information access rate, other innovative avenues of disseminating information on WSP should be sought by the university management. This could include integrating such information on student handbook. Higher awareness levels would hence be created and the level of participation enhanced particularly among needy students.

Students prefer to work in departments that are relevant to their courses. As much as multi-tasking/multi-skilling is important and necessary, students should be attached in departments relevant to their degree programmes. Moreover, students should be consulted on departments where they would wish to be placed. Such a consultative approach would give the programme a sense of legitimacy, acceptance and ownership which are critical for its success.

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