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## **An Examination of the Master Degree Programmes at University of Nairobi: Department of Educational Foundations, 1993-2014**

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### **Abstract:**

*Analysis of departments is central in identifying progress made in various tasks planned for. Master's degree studies are designed to prepare the graduates with higher skills needed for economic growth and social stability. Many studies have been carried on University of Nairobi with none addressing the Master's degree programmes in the Department of Educational Foundations from 1993 to 2014. The research made use of historical approach. The 7 academic staff member's responses, 26 documents and interview were utilized to collect data in line with the research objectives. The department existed as a Department of Educational Foundations that offered Master Degree courses in History of Education, Philosophy of Education, Sociology of Education and Comparative Education. A total of 174 students had enrolled in Master's degree programme and 77 % of students had been conferred with the Master Degree between 1993 and 2014 in department. Key recommendations include granting student's scholarships to pursue Master's Degree in the Department of Educational Foundations, offload scheme be initiates to relieve the overloaded academic staff compliment and Teachers Service Commission be advised to grant study leave with pay to teachers interested in furthering their studies.*

**Keywords:** *Teaching staff levels, Master's degree courses, and completion rates of master degree student*

### **1. Introduction**

Students who hope to become teachers in Kenya must take studies in core units of Education Foundations course comprising of History of Education, Comparative Education, Philosophy of Education, Adult Education, and Sociology of Education. For the learners to acquire an insight into purpose, theory and practice of education with the hope that the concepts and theories will equip the teachers to be with capacity to reason and comprehensively evaluate issues and relate them to prevailing situations, they have to learn Philosophy of education [10]. Historical perspective on the past educational events and their effects on trends in education is achieved through the study of History of education. In doing so, the trainee would be able to deeply analyze and find different educational theories and practice thereby expanding their academic mystique for personal and professional growth. Education being dynamic in nature selective borrowing of good elements is important to any nation developing their educational systems. This makes comparative Education ideal unit of study for educationist in the University of Nairobi and any learning institutions to acquire skills on methods used in improving the education system through borrowing from other systems all over the world [2].

Global economy has been on the arena for more than two decades now which has exerted pressure on the need for Masters' degree education and training in order to assist in revitalizing the economy, research work and community stability of different countries. In response to the global economy ideology, many reforms have taken place in the Kenyan higher education sector. The Kenyan state has realized arise in the number of universities distributed as follows; 22 public accredited universities, 10 public university constituent colleges, 17 private chartered universities, 5 private constituent universities, 13 institutions with letters of interim authority and one registered private institution university [14]. The rise in number of Universities offering degree courses in Bachelors degree in education need enough teaching staff levels in the department of Educational Foundations.

To understand the progress made by the Department of Educational Foundations internationally, one has to consider the teaching staff levels, students enrolling in the Master's degree programmes and the rate of completion. The number of students admitted in the undergraduate programmes and those for higher studies is growing rapidly throughout universities but the human resource capitals for Masters Degree programme has remained the same over a long period of time leaving them strained. According Rumbley et al [18], Masters' degree classes encounter many obstacles that include as inadequate teaching staff levels, limited textbook, lack of financial support and harsh working environment for academic staffs.

In the Kenya scenario, University of Nairobi has been experiencing increase in enrolment of students in various degree programmes. The University experiences an influx of enrolments of students which has strained the existing facilities and adversely affected the teaching staff levels in various faculties [15]. The University envisaged ways of addressing the challenges that could constrain access, equity, quality and relevance in the university education [16]. These modalities were in line with the University Council and the Commission for University Education by offering an expanded education programme of study and training in line with population and the need for university places and research.

Oanda, [11] asserted, the university expansion had contributed to gradual rise in the student enrolment in University of Nairobi leading to inadequate teaching staffs among them is the department of Educational Foundations studies. Most challenging experience is relying on the employment of part-time staff to alleviate the shortage of academic staffs resulting from the expanded workloads. Heavy workload caused by the double intake and incompetent members to instruct advanced learning programmes by some teaching staffs could be influencing the delivery of quality education in master's degree programmes in Kenyan Public Universities [10]. It is this concern that led to the need in identifying the teaching staff levels, enrolment of students and the completion rates of the masters' degree programmes in the department of Educational Foundations at University of Nairobi, Kenya.

### *1.1. Statement of the Problem*

Globally, Universities are meant to produce human resources capitals at professional level and research programmes necessary for the economic development of the country. Due to this, Kenyan university system has realized gradual development amid the growing high need for Masters' Degree Education that is far beyond the supply. The success of the Masters Degree programmes relies on the teaching staff's levels, student enrolment, and good completion rates. Anecdote is that the development of the Departments of Educational Foundations in public universities is not only challenge to Universities but also its influence on the establishment of reliable Department of Educational Foundations in public universities. High student enrolments in both undergraduate and advanced studies, inadequate lecturer's staff positions and low completion rates of the Masters Degree programmes are some of the extra ordinary factors impacting negatively on the development of the Master's Degree programmes in Kenyan public universities. These conditions hinder achievement of lecturer –student ratio of 1: 18 as a condition for the social sciences related courses for the last 30 years in Kenyan public universities. The low numbers of lecturer's staff positions of Master's Degree programmes in the Department of Educational Foundations has had great impact on Master's degree students and universities not only psychologically but also economically and socially. An action plan is necessary to mitigate these negative effects could be achieved through the research work on teaching staff levels against the enrolment of students of Master's Degree programmes in the Department of Educational Foundations at University of Nairobi. Key to the research work on the Department of Educational Foundations at University of Nairobi in respect to the Master's Degree programmes was the lecturer's staff levels, student's enrolment and their completion rates.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Department of Educational Foundations in Kenyan Public Universities*

In Kenya various universities have their own guidelines on how to organize their teaching faculties and departments to manage the Educational Foundations studies. University of Nairobi became a casualty in 1978 when it lost its original Department of Educational Foundations to Kenyatta University [17]. The department used to offer undergraduate and graduate academic programmes in the following core areas: History of Education, Philosophy of Education, Sociology of Education and policy Studies, and Comparative Education and international Studies. With need to be competitive resulting from expansion of student enrolment in Kenya, University of Nairobi re-launched the department in 1988[20]. Hiring of new teaching staff was inevitable. Furthermore, the public demand for advancement at the University formed a spring board for new Master's Degree programmes being re-introduced in 2004 to cater for the post-graduate level. Master's degree students take different study units depending on the area of their interest. However, at the University of Nairobi, student must study core units in the Department of Educational Foundation comprising of research methods in education, educational statistics, and contemporary themes in education and research work which can either be a project or thesis. History of education course has the following units developed; evolution of western education systems, selected themes in the history of education systems, pre-colonial education in Africa, education in Africa, Education in Kenya in the colonial period and contemporary history of education in Kenya. On top of these units, Master's degree students have other units scheduled as elective units such as education and pastoralism in Africa, technical education in Africa, politics and education in Africa, Teacher education in Africa, history of educational ideas and higher education in Africa, Africanism and development mainly for those specializing in History of Education [4].

Conversely for students pursuing Master's degree in sociology of education, they have to study the following units: social sciences and education, African social structures, motivation and the socialization process, society, development and education, sociology of education and social policy. Additionally, elective units are important such as sociology of professions, gender and education, social work and education, education, democracy and schooling, adult, continuity and lifelong education, family life education and social development [4]. The study in Master's degree in Philosophy of education incorporates study units in: epistemology and education, metaphysics and education, ethics and education, philosophical psychology, logic and education, education and philosophical thought in Africa. The curriculum also has education and democracy, knowledge and curriculum, philosophy, gender and education, philosophy of teaching and learning, indigenous knowledge and education, medical ethics and education and education for human liberation being

offered as elective units. Students specializing in comparative education undertake units in: introduction to comparative education, comparative study of systems of education, basic concept in economic and education, education for resourcefulness for rural regions, politics, citizenship and education and education law and policy analysis being mandatory units. The field offers education for leadership, comparative perceptiveness, and teacher education in a comparative perspective, adult education and lifelong learning, comparative perceptiveness of indigenous education, educational management for disadvantaged groups, education for governance, education for conflict management, education, market, issues in vocational and technical education, and globalization and education for sustainable development as elective units for learners [4]. Lastly, the University of Nairobi is the only one offering master's degree in Adult education. The Department of Educational Foundations has designed its curriculum such that master's degree students take the following units: foundations and development of adult and continuing education, philosophy of adult and continuing education, principles of organization and management of adult and continuing education programme; theory and practice in lifelong education [20].

### *2.2. Student Enrolment in Masters Degree Programmes*

Master's Degree students form a vital component in a University as input. This is due the fact they are the assimilators of the new knowledge, skills and determinant of the university need for recruiting the teaching staff levels. According to the council, [3] the Masters Degree education is special since it is guided by the nature of its outputs and their prices. Talbot, Maier and Rushlau (1996) [19] identified elements that played central role for a prospective student enrolling in a given university. These elements comprised of the core philosophy, reputation of university, reputation of the study discipline; the reputation of the department in which the programmes. Importantly on key element identified was the financial support through either assistantship work scholarship or the fellowship financial support. Kenyan public universities student's enrolment in the universities grew by 44.7 % from 122,847 students in 2008/2009 to 177,735 students in 2009/2010 academic years. The private universities students' enrolment grew from 100,649 students in the 2008/2009 academic year to 142,556 students in 2009/10 [3]. For the University of Nairobi, enrolment of Masters and PhD students has grown up, though gradually than that of undergraduates. Graduate enrolment in the University of Nairobi rose from 1,000 students in 1990 to 1,500 in 2001. The introduction of the second study module at the university contributed to the student's enrolment growth up to an estimation of 800 students which swelled the population up to 2,300 students by 2001. According Mweria & Ng'ethe (2000) [9] the module II programme led to the number of Masters Degree students against the undergraduate enrolment of 14,415, to being pegged at 1:6 by 2001. This research work, sought to examine the department of Educational Foundations student enrolment into the Masters Degree programme in relation to the field of speciality to offer a deeper insight of the enrolment trends from 1993 to 2014.

### *2.3. Teaching Staff Levels at the Department; University of Nairobi*

Global shift in their economies have affected the way universities are financed by the governments which had reduced their funding for University education. The situation had worsened by the fact that limited funding is taking place at a time when university education was projected to expand and grant access to a larger portion of the citizens. Due this shift, not only was there greater need of human resource personnel to the Educational Foundations but also, accreditation of Masters Degree programmes that had to meet certain threshold levels. According to Odour [13] some academic studies fields, one lecturer instructs an estimated of up to 200 students, against the global recommendation ratio of 1 to 30. Kinyanjui [5] observed, national lecturer- student ratio be capped at 1 to 15 for the next 5 years for quality university education delivery. For example, 160,000 students were absorbed by universities during the academic year 2011/2012 in the old-established seven public universities with about 5,186 lecturers, translated to 1 lecturer to 70 students. This lecturer -student ratio was above the global standards ratio of 1:30 in humanities and 1:25 for sciences. In fact, Odebero [12] established that faculties of which Educational Foundations is inclusive, teaching staff positions was an obstacle to quality education because heavy workload were a normal norm in Universities. The effect of heavy workloads was the assigning of graduate assistants and tutorial fellows full teaching responsibilities to teach both the undergraduates and postgraduates programmes. Since the School of Education admits the largest number of students in Universities, survival of departments was heavy workload given to lectures or at least assigning part-timers full teaching responsibilities such that they even handle both the undergraduates and master's degree courses. The research anticipates for a developed department of Educational Foundations that is self-refurbishing body through recruitment of new staff from Masters Degree programmes in their departments [10]. This formed the basis of examining the masters' degree programme, the teaching staff levels in the department of Educational Foundations at University of Nairobi [8].

### *2.4. Graduates in Masters Degree programmes*

The success of a programme was not only pegged on high student enrolments but also the numbers of students completing the studies in a given programme as a measure of the departmental output. The knowledge and skills developed in the Masters Education system was essential in maintaining and building on outstanding research outputs, especially, the marketing of the Educational programmes. University of Nairobi as an institution of higher learning has not been left out in establishing a policy framework on human resource capitals, education and training of skilled manpower. The University acknowledges its position as the outstanding institutions in East Africa that advanced education was the basic foundations of development process [14]. The Kenyan University data of the number of students' graduates in each discipline is critical in informing the department on the time Master's degree students took to graduate. Therefore, documenting the completion rates of Master's degree graduates per discipline in the period 1993 to 2014 in the

department of Educational Foundations was inevitable. Such data would benefit the stakeholders and other employers in identifying the threshold in which they could recruit their new teaching staff from hence making staff planning easy

### 3. Methodology

This study was historical in nature. The study examined the Department of Educational Foundations by analyzing the institutional factors that influenced the development of Master's Degree programmes in Kenyan public universities. This opened the ground for analysis and interpretation relevant to the current situation and drew conclusions and predictions about future events. The study examined university of Nairobi which has 18 lecturers in the department of Educational Foundations. Being the oldest university with functional department it was purposively sampled out for deep insight regarding Public Universities. This approach was used because master's degree courses in Educational Foundations have been offered in this university for a long period of time [15]. Census sampling method was used in selecting all the lecturers who had the information regarding the master's degree programmes in the department of Educational Foundations.

The study used a several open and closed ended interview guidelines in gathering data. Interview guidelines applied securing information basically about lecturers' views on teaching staff levels in different Master's Degree disciplines in the departments of Educational Foundations. The study employed triangulation in addressing the validity and reliability of the data collected. These Interview guidelines were used in generating the qualitative information from the lecturers in the departments. Verification of the data collected, table analysis schedule was used in examining and analyzing various historical tables such as lecturers staff levels record, hiring records and university bulletins collected from the registrars-academic affairs and the dean's school of education. Since the study was historical, primary sources and complementing it with secondary sources data was ideal. Primary data is described as "the testimony of any eyewitness, or a witness by any other of the senses, or a mechanical device like Dictaphone-that is, of one whom... was present at the events he tells." The study analyzed the primary sources such as letters, laws, recordings, university public diaries, oral testimonies and verbal accounts from respondents [7]. Additionally, departmental minutes, memoranda, files, manuscripts, catalogues, research reports and record of transcripts were sought as primary source of data. Secondary source of data does not have a direct physical relationship with the event being studied. The researcher hence made use of textbooks, biographies, encyclopaedias and reference books [6].

### 4. Results and Discussions

| Document Selected                            | Document analyzed   | Total number of Lecturers |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| University of Nairobi: Teaching Staff levels | Number of Lecturers in the department of Educational Foundation who are:<br>Professor two (2)<br>PhD holders Five (5)<br>Masters degree holders eleven (11)<br>Number of Lecturers teaching master's degree programmes seven (7)                        | 18                        |
|  | Number of Lecturers in the department of Administration, management & policy who are:<br>Professor three (3)<br>PhD holders sixteen (16)<br>Masters degree holders four (4)<br>Number of Lecturers teaching master's degree programmes in nineteen (19) | 23                        |

Table 1: On Teaching Staff Levels

The capture data sheet 1 was utilized in addressing the research question; - What has been the trend in lecturers' staff positions in the department of Educational Foundations at the University of Nairobi from 1993 to 2014? Being the first University in Kenya, the university has set up strong academic tradition in the department of Educational Foundations in relation to other Kenyan Public Universities. Bearing in mind the rich history, the data on its teaching' staff levels were vital in gaining an insight in its delivery of services to the Master's Degree students. The results reflect that department has teaching staff levels needed to instruct the five units offered in the department of Educational Foundations. The research work notes that with lecturer- student ratio of one (1) lecturer against 198 students, then UON faces challenges which includes; inadequate teaching staff position necessary for effective and efficient management of the affairs of a growing undergraduate and postgraduate student population which stands at 13,000 students (UON, 2017). The study attributed this low lecturer staff levels to have been the precursor for recommending Master's degree students to undertake research by project work rather than by thesis as the case of Kenyatta University and Moi University. This in itself points to other hidden factors that need to be interrogated to unearth these disparities. Such observation was echoed by a respondent lecturer L who said:

| Year/Field  | History of Education | Philosophy of Education | Comparative Education | Sociology of Education | Total |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------|
| 2014        | 0                    | 2                       | 4                     | 5                      | 11    |
| 2013        | 2                    | 3                       | 5                     | 6                      | 16    |
| 2012        | 2                    | 4                       | 9                     | 10                     | 25    |
| 2011        | 2                    | 2                       | 7                     | 7                      | 18    |
| 2010        | 2                    | 0                       | 6                     | 8                      | 16    |
| 2009        | 0                    | 3                       | 8                     | 12                     | 23    |
| 2008        | 2                    | 4                       | 11                    | 6                      | 23    |
| 2007        | 0                    | 3                       | 7                     | 9                      | 19    |
| 2006        | 2                    | 2                       | 4                     | 2                      | 10    |
| 2005        | 0                    | 0                       | 2                     | 4                      | 6     |
| 2004        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 2003        | 0                    | 0                       | 3                     | 3                      | 6     |
| 2002        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 1                      | 1     |
| 2001        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 2000        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1999        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1998        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1997        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1996        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1995        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1994        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| 1993        | 0                    | 0                       | 0                     | 0                      | 0     |
| Grand total | 12                   | 23                      | 66                    | 73                     | 174   |

*Table 2: Student Enrolment in Masters Degree Programme: 1993 to 2014*

The department has seven lecturers who were involved in the supervision of the Masters Degree courses. This number was dismal when you compare with the number of lecturers at Kenyatta University. However, the department had learnt to cope up with such situation, (Lecturer L, personal communication)

The study established that the department was making use of Part-time lecturers from other institutions to teach some of the units in the Masters Degree programmes. Furthermore, it was revealed, the lecturer's staff levels of 7 members in the department was due to the university policy of dealing with limited financial resources on wage bill hence the need to control in employing new staff members.

The Table schedule 2 was used in answering the research question: What has been the enrolment of students in the Masters' Degree in Educational Foundations programmes at the University of Nairobi from 1993 to 2014? The results in Table schedule 2 reveal that a total number of 174 students had been enrolled in the Masters Degree programme between 1993 and 2014. The results indicate that the enrolment attained its peak in 2012 before it began declining in 2013. Results from respondents indicate that change in the mode of application for admission at the University of Nairobi was likely the cause of many potential students being locked out. On top of this, the results reveal that between the year 2004 and 2014, Sociology of education admitted 73 students, followed by comparative education with 66 students while History of education had 12 students. These reflect that sociology of education had higher enrolment accounting for 73(41%) per cent of the enrolment at the department. The results revealed that History of education in the department attracted the least number of students which accounted for 7 per cent of the total enrolment. The research work noted that students failed to identify costs and benefits of pursuing Masters Degree studies hence creating uncertainty about the returns they expected per given area of specialization. The study captures that the government policies with special reference to Teachers Service Commission policies have had a negative effect on the enrolment of students in Masters Degree programmes. The study underscores that only students with intrinsic motivation to develop their skills enrolled for Masters Degree studies.

| Year  | History of Educ. | Philosophy of Educ. | Comparative Educ. | Sociology of Educ. | Totals |
|-------|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------|
| 2014  | 1                | 2                   | 8                 | 10                 | 21     |
| 2013  | 1                | 3                   | 1                 | 15                 | 20     |
| 2012  | 0                | 0                   | 10                | 8                  | 18     |
| 2011  | 4                | 1                   | 5                 | 13                 | 23     |
| 2010  | 1                | 0                   | 3                 | 12                 | 16     |
| 2009  | 1                | 0                   | 1                 | 7                  | 9      |
| 2008  | 0                | 1                   | 3                 | 6                  | 10     |
| 2007  | 0                | 0                   | 2                 | 0                  | 2      |
| 2006  | 0                | 0                   | 1                 | 4                  | 5      |
| 2005  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 3                  | 3      |
| 2004  | 0                | 0                   | 2                 | 5                  | 7      |
| 2003  | NO graduates     |                     |                   |                    |        |
| 2002  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 2001  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 2000  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1999  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1998  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1997  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1996  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1995  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1994  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| 1993  | 0                | 0                   | 0                 | 0                  | 0      |
| Total | 8                | 7                   | 36                | 83                 | 134    |

*Table 3: Graduates of Masters Degree Programmes: 1993 To 2014*

The Table data schedule 3 sought to examine the research question; what has been the number of Master's degree graduates in the department of Educational Foundations from 1993 to 2014 at University of Nairobi? The results in Table Schedule 3 indicate that department had a total of 134 students graduating with Master's degree in educational foundations studies. The results of table analysis schedule reveal that it had the high number of students graduating with Master's degree in educational foundations yet in comparison with the teaching staff levels it has less. The results indicated that the highest number of graduates pursued Sociology of Education followed by Comparative Education with a total of 83 and 36 students respectively. The findings reveal the department experienced a period of dry spell between the years 2004 to 2008 in the discipline of History of Education and Philosophy of Education. The information from the findings indicated that since the year 2008, the number of students graduating with Masters Degree in UON has been rising steadily. The highest number of graduates was between the year 2009 and 2011. In these three years the students who graduated increased by seven and nine candidates respectively. This represented 41 percent growth and 52 percent of the total number who graduated in the Department of Educational Foundations. The study interpreted that out of the 174 students who had enrolled, 134 had graduated with master's degree in education representing 77 (77%) per cent while 40 students were yet to graduate accounting for 22 (22%) per cent. Information from the data in table 32 showed that between the year 1993 and 2003, no student had graduated in the department. The study interpreted that the department did not utilize part-time lecturers to handle its courses. The 77 per cent of the student who had graduated was a high percentage. The study interpreted that the mode of using project for research had given the department the success in the number of students graduating.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to table teaching staff levels, student enrolments and the completion rates of the master's degree programme in the department of Educational Foundations at the University of Nairobi. The study opines that the department has one of the highest rates of students completing their Master Degree studies in Kenya. Additionally, the success of Master's Degree programme is pegged a department having teaching staff levels in different fields of specialization and the students undertaking project work during the research work time. Inadequate teaching staff positions led the Universities to hire part-time lecturer to fill the gaps in the Department of Educational Foundations. Student enrolment rate was higher in disciplines that had high number of lectures. Student's completion rates were pegged on the availability of the enough supervisors in the department. Another serious study discipline concern was the few students graduating in certain field of Educational Foundations. Most students preferred to enrol in the discipline that offered wide range of employment outside the University setting. The study observes that the country is soon going to experience acute shortage of teaching staff levels which in the long run would compromise the quality of university education in those fields.

## 6. Implication of the Study

This research was conducted to highlight the state of the Department of Educational Foundations in terms of: teaching staff levels and their effects on student enrolment in Master's degree at University of Nairobi. Furthermore, study brought to light the student completion rates for the last 22 years and its effect on the establishing a self-sustaining department of Educational Foundations in Universities. This may form the basis through which urgent mitigation measures that would be taken by the University management and senate in addressing the acute shortage of teaching staff levels and the dwindling student enrolment in some disciplines of Educational Foundations courses. The study further sought to address the need for the teaching staff that has Master's degree to speed up their studies for PhD in to enable establishment of independent department of Educational Foundations elsewhere.

## 7. Recommendations

In addressing teaching staff levels in the department of Educational Foundations, the university should initiate the scholarship scheme for interested students to pursue Master's degree in Educational Foundation courses. High motivation of the teaching staff in terms of promotions department is a recipe for higher achievement. Finally, the University managements should enhance marketing strategy to encourage more teaching staff and the Master's degree students joining the department of Educational Foundations.

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