

# Factors Affecting the Performance of Post-Graduate Legal Practice Students at the Law Development Centre in Uganda

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The Law Development Centre (LDC) in Uganda is the sole institution mandated to provide vocational training leading, inter alia, to the award of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (PGD LP). Despite its centrality in the country's legal education, LDC has been brought to the limelight concerning the performance of the PGD LP students. This article seeks to identify and analyse the factors that influence the academic performance of PGD LP students, with a focus on student-, institution-, and instructor-related determinants. Using qualitative and quantitative research approaches involving secondary and primary data gathered from current and former students, as well as instructors at LDC, this study examines the systemic issues contributing to poor academic outcomes. The findings reveal that a combination of student-, institution-, and instructor-related (pedagogical) factors were responsible for students' performance. This study provides recommendations aimed at improving student performance, including enhancing resource allocation, restructuring the assessment process, and adopting innovative teaching methods.

*Keywords:* Law Development Centre, Post-Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice (PGD LP), legal education and training, performance, student-related factors, institution-related factors, instructor-related factors, higher education management, Uganda

## Introduction

The performance of students, particularly in vocational training programs such as PGD LP, is of concern to educators, lawyers, the judiciary, and policymakers globally. In Uganda, LDC is the exclusive institution responsible for equipping law graduates with the practical skills required to practice as an advocate. Over the years, however, the institution has come under scrutiny due to its persistently low pass rates, particularly in the first sitting of examinations. In 2021, only 10% of the students passed their final examinations at the first attempt, sparking public concern and prompting calls for reforms in both the institution's teaching methodologies and its infrastructure (Kirabo, 2021).

The purpose of this article is to explore the various factors affecting the performance of PGD LP students at LDC. By examining student-, institution-, and instructor-related factors, this study sought to identify the root-

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causes of the high failure rates and propose actionable recommendations to improve student outcomes. The Law Development Centre is tasked with producing advocates who are not only competent in legal theory but also proficient in the practical aspects of the law. Thus, ensuring that students successfully complete the PGD LP program is critical to maintaining the integrity of Uganda's legal profession.

### **Background to the Study**

The establishment of LDC in Uganda followed the recommendations of the Gower Committee in 1970, which called for the formalisation of legal education in the country. Under the LDC Act, the institution was given the mandate to provide vocational legal training for law graduates and to award PGD LP, a prerequisite for legal practice in Uganda (LDC Act, Cap. 251). Initially, the LDC operated in only one campus at Kampala, but due to the increasing demand, new campuses were opened in Mbarara in 2018 and Lira in 2021. While these expansions aimed to accommodate more students, the rapid growth in enrollment has placed enormous pressure on the institution's resources, with significant implications for the quality of the training (Chemonges, 2022).

The PGD LP program is designed to equip students with practical legal skills, focusing on areas such as civil and criminal procedure, advocacy, and legal drafting. The program runs for nine months and students are assessed through a combination of continuous assessment and final examinations. The success of the PGD LP program is critical, as it prepares students for legal practice and ensures that they meet the standards required for admission to the Ugandan Bar.

Despite the importance of this program, the academic performance of students at LDC has been a subject of concern for many years. Pass rates have fluctuated, with failure rates often exceeding 50%. In 2021, a particularly troubling year, failure rates reached 90% at the first sitting of the final examination (Wekesa, 2021). This trend has raised questions about the adequacy of student preparation, the effectiveness of the teaching methods employed, and the sufficiency of the institution's resources.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in Systems Theory, particularly the input-output model proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy. The Systems Theory framework provides a comprehensive view of educational institutions, where various inputs (students, resources, instructional methods) are processed through a system (teaching and learning environment), and the outputs (student academic performance) reflect the efficiency of the system as a whole (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). This model is particularly useful in understanding how the interaction of different components within an educational institution can affect student outcomes.

In the case of LDC, the inputs include student characteristics such as their prior academic preparation, socio-economic status, and study habits. The institutional factors, such as the availability of resources, the adequacy of teaching facilities, and the structure of the assessment process, represent the system through which students are processed. The outputs, in this case, are the academic performance of the students, measured by their pass rates, completion times, and final grades.

The Systems Theory emphasises the importance of feedback mechanisms in ensuring that educational institutions continuously improve their processes (Mesarovic & Takahara, 1975). At LDC, feedback is obtained through student evaluations, examination results, and external reviews by bodies such as the Law Council and

the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). This feedback is critical in identifying areas of weakness and implementing reforms that can enhance the institution's effectiveness in delivering legal education. However, the current feedback loops at LDC appear to be inadequate, as evidenced by the persistently high failure rates despite efforts to expand and diversify the institution's resources and campuses (Chemonges, 2022).

### **Student-Related Factors**

In analysing the academic performance of students at LDC, student-related factors remain a significant focus of this study. These factors include a wide range of personal and socio-economic attributes that affect how students engage with their studies and achieve success in the PGD LP program. In this section, the role of class attendance, study habits, socio-economic background, and commitment to studies is examined in detail, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these variables influence academic outcomes.

#### **Class Attendance**

Class attendance is one of the most direct indicators of student engagement. Regular attendance ensures that students are exposed to the content instructors deliver and have the opportunity to interact with their peers and ask questions. At LDC, class attendance has been a challenge for many students, with some struggling to attend regularly due to external commitments such as work and family responsibilities. Studies, such as those by Islam and Tasnim (2021), have demonstrated a strong correlation between regular class attendance and higher academic performance. Students who miss classes often struggle to catch up on course material and may not have sufficient time to fully grasp complex legal concepts.

The situation at LDC is further compounded by the fact that many students must balance their studies with part-time jobs to finance their education. As a result, some students prioritise financial opportunities they derive from work over attending classes, leading to inconsistent attendance. Rossi (2017) argues that students who are unable to attend class regularly due to financial constraints are at a distinct disadvantage, as they miss out on critical learning opportunities that can enhance their understanding of the subject matter.

#### **Study Habits**

Study habits play a pivotal role in determining a student's ability to succeed. Effective study habits, such as setting aside regular time for studying, organising materials, and managing time efficiently, are essential for mastering the content in rigorous programs as PGD LP. However, many students at LDC struggle to develop these habits, often due to the high demands the curriculum places on them and the competing pressures of work and family.

Kyauta, Shariff, and Garba (2017) emphasise that students who fail to establish structured study routines are more likely to underperform in examinations. At LDC, the intensive nature of the PGD LP program requires students to engage in self-directed learning outside of class hours. However, without proper guidance on time management and study techniques, many students find it difficult to allocate sufficient time for studies, resulting in poor performance (Mukiibi, 2024).

#### **Socio-Economic Background**

Socio-economic factors are crucial determinants of student success. Students from lower-income backgrounds often face significant challenges in financing their education, which can impact their ability to

studies. At LDC, many students are self-sponsored, meaning that they bear the full financial burden of tuition fees, accommodation, and other living expenses. This financial strain forces some students to seek part-time employment, which reduces the time they can dedicate to their studies (Banik & Kumar, 2019).

The socio-economic challenges faced by students at LDC are not limited to financial burdens alone. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may also lack access to critical learning resources, such as textbooks, study materials, and internet access. As Banik and Kumar (2019) have pointed out, students who cannot afford essential educational resources are less likely to perform well. This is particularly problematic at LDC, where students are required to undertake extensive research and independent study, often relying on digital resources that may be inaccessible to those with limited financial means.

### **Commitment to Studies**

A student's commitment to their studies is perhaps the most intrinsic factor influencing academic performance. Students who are highly motivated and dedicated to their work tend to perform better than those who are less committed. However, at LDC, many students face challenges that can undermine their commitment to their studies. These include external pressures such as employment, family responsibilities, and financial difficulties, all of which can detract them from the time and energy students should devote to their work (Putra, Agusti, & Hastuti, 2021).

Moreover, the demanding nature of the PGD LP program requires students to be fully engaged and be motivated throughout the academic year. This level of commitment is difficult to maintain, particularly for students who are juggling multiple responsibilities. As a result, some students may become disengaged from their studies, leading to poor performance in continuous assessments and final examinations (Mukiibi, 2024).

### **Institution-Related Factors**

Institution-related factors play a significant role in shaping the academic experiences and outcomes of students at LDC. These factors include the availability of resources, the quality of physical infrastructure, the effectiveness of the assessment system, and institutional policies. The growing student population, limited resources, and logistical challenges have all contributed to creating an environment that is less conducive to learning.

#### **Availability of Educational Materials and Resources**

Educational materials and resources are vital for student success, particularly in programs such as PGD LP, where extensive reading and research is required. Unfortunately, LDC has struggled to provide adequate resources for its students. The institution's library is often inadequately stocked, with many students reporting that they must rely on outdated textbooks and limited access to legal databases (Al Husaini & Shukor, 2022). This shortage of materials significantly hampers students' ability to engage in the level of independent study required for them to excel in the PGD LP program.

In addition to the lack of physical resources, the institution's infrastructure has been unable to keep pace with the rapid growth in student enrollment. The overcrowded classrooms and limited access to internet services create an environment that is not conducive to effective learning (Mukiibi, 2024). As Shammari, Saguban, Pasayan, and Al-Shammari (2017) point out, the availability of educational materials and resources is critical to

ensuring that students engage with their studies effectively. Without access to adequate learning materials, students at LDC are placed at a significant disadvantage.

### **Internet Access and E-Learning**

In today's digital world, access to the internet and online learning platforms is increasingly seen as a necessity for academic success. However, at LDC, many students face significant barriers to accessing the internet, either due to the limited availability of campus Wi-Fi or the high cost of mobile data (Al Husaini & Shukor, 2022). This lack of access to digital resources severely limits students' ability to conduct research, access online legal databases, and engage with e-learning platforms that are becoming increasingly important in modern education.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the need for robust e-learning systems, as many institutions around the world shifted to online learning. At LDC, however, the transition to e-learning has been slow and fraught with challenges. Zolochetskaya et al. (2021) note that the effectiveness of e-learning depends not only on the availability of technological resources but also on the institution's ability to provide adequate training and support to both students and instructors. At LDC, the lack of a comprehensive e-learning strategy has left many students struggling to adapt to the digital learning environment, further exacerbating the challenges they face.

### **Assessment Methods**

The assessment methods LDC uses have been a source of frustration for many students. Continuous assessments are meant to provide students with regular feedback on their progress, helping them to identify areas of strength and weakness before the final examinations. However, many students at LDC feel that the continuous assessments are overly difficult and do not accurately reflect their understanding of the course material (Nansamba & Nduhura, 2022). The high failure rates in final examinations suggest that the current assessment system is not adequately preparing students for the challenges they face in the PGD LP program.

In addition to concerns about the fairness of the assessments, students have also raised issues regarding the structure and timing of the assessments. The PGD LP program is highly intensive, and the heavy workload, combined with the pressures of continuous assessments, leaves many students feeling overwhelmed. This is particularly true for students who must balance their studies with other commitments, such as work or family responsibilities (Mukiibi, 2024).

### **Student Enrollment and Class Sizes**

One of the most pressing institutional challenges facing LDC is the rapid increase in student enrollment. Over the past decade, the number of students enrolled in the PGD LP program has grown significantly, placing enormous pressure on the institution's resources and infrastructure. While the opening of new campuses in Mbarara and Lira has helped to alleviate some of this pressure, the overall student population continues to outpace the institution's ability to provide adequate support services (Hartati et al., 2023).

The large class sizes at LDC make it difficult for instructors to provide individualised attention to students, which is critical for their academic development. Research suggests that smaller class sizes allow for more personalised instruction and greater student engagement, both of which are essential for students' successful performance (Hartati et al., 2023). At LDC, however, the overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional time have made it difficult for students to receive the level of support they need to succeed.

### **Instructor-Related Factors**

The role of instructors in shaping academic performance cannot be overstated. In vocational training programs like the PGD LP, where practical legal skills are emphasised, the quality of instruction is critical to student success. At LDC, several instructor-related factors have been identified as contributing to the high failure rates, including instructor qualifications, teaching methods, time management, and the instructor-student relationship.

#### **Instructor Qualifications and Experience**

Instructor qualifications and experience are among the most important factors influencing student performance. Instructors with extensive experience in the legal profession are better equipped to provide students with practical insights and guidance on how to apply legal principles in real-world scenarios (Abdi, 2017). However, at LDC, there have been concerns about the qualifications and experience of some instructors, particularly at the newer campuses in Mbarara and Lira. Mukiibi (2024) suggests that the institution has struggled to attract and retain highly qualified instructors, which has had a negative impact on the quality of education provided to students.

The lack of experienced instructors has been particularly problematic in courses that require practical skills, such as civil and criminal procedure. Students have reported that some instructors are unable to provide the level of guidance and feedback needed to master these complex subjects, leading to poor performance in assessments (Mukiibi, 2024).

#### **Teaching Methods**

The teaching methods employed by instructors at LDC have also come under scrutiny. In vocational programs such as PGD LP, traditional lecture-based teaching methods may not be the most effective way to impart practical legal skills. Research suggests that more interactive and student-centered teaching methods, such as case studies, simulations, and problem-based learning, are more effective in helping students develop the skills needed for legal practice (Mohammed & Jumare, 2020).

At LDC, however, many instructors continue to rely on traditional lectures, which often focus on the theoretical aspects of the law rather than the practical application of legal principles. This mismatch between teaching methods and course content has contributed to the high failure rates in the PGD LP program. As Djudin (2018) points out, students undertaking vocational programs require hands-on learning experiences that allow them to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. Without these opportunities, students instead struggle to grasp the practical skills needed for success in legal practice.

#### **Time Management and Punctuality**

Effective time management is crucial for both instructors and students. At LDC, however, some students have reported that instructors do not always make the best use of class time. There have been instances where instructors arrive late or rush through important content, leaving students with insufficient time to fully engage with the material (Siachifuwe, 2017). The lack of time management not only affects students' understanding of the content but also limits their ability to ask questions and seek clarification on complex topics.

Moreover, the demanding nature of the PGD LP program requires instructors to carefully manage the time allocated for each course. Instructors who are unable to cover the necessary material within the given

time frame may leave students unprepared for the assessments, further contributing to the high failure rates (Mukiibi, 2024).

### **Instructor-Student Interaction**

The relationship between instructors and students is another important factor influencing academic performance. Positive instructor-student interactions, where instructors are approachable and willing to provide support outside of class, have been shown to improve student outcomes (Nazish & Kang, 2024). However, at LDC, the large class sizes and limited instructors have made it difficult for students to receive the individualised attention they need to succeed.

Some students have reported that instructors are not always available for consultations outside of class hours, which limits their ability to seek additional support. The lack of interaction can leave students feeling isolated and unsupported, particularly when they are struggling with difficult concepts or need guidance on how to improve their performance (Mukiibi, 2024).

## **Research Design and Methodology**

This study adopts an explanatory mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors affecting academic performance at LDC. The target population for this study includes current and former PGD LP students, as well as instructors and administrators at the LDC campuses in Kampala, Mbarara, and Lira. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table, which suggests an appropriate sample size for a population of this size (Mukiibi, 2024).

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, which were administered to both students and instructors. The questionnaires were designed to capture a range of variables, including student demographics, socio-economic background, class attendance, study habits, and perceptions of the institutional environment. The data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics allowing the researcher to identify key trends and relationships between the variables (Creswell, 2017).

### **Primary Data Collection**

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected students and instructors. The interviews were designed to provide deeper insights into the personal experiences of the participants, allowing the researchers to explore the challenges faced by students in more detail. The qualitative data were coded and analysed thematically, with the key themes being used to inform the broader analysis of the factors affecting academic performance (Creswell, 2017).

## **Data Analysis and Presentation**

This section presents the data collected during the study and provides a comprehensive analysis of the findings. The data were gathered using a mixed-methods approach, which included both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns and relationships between the various factors affecting academic performance at the Law Development Centre (LDC), including student-, institution-, and instructor-related factors.

### Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 156 respondents, including current and former PGD LP students as well as instructors from LDC campuses in Kampala, Mbarara, and Lira. The survey questions covered a range of topics, such as student demographics, socio-economic background, class attendance, study habits, access to resources, and perceptions of instructional quality.

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while inferential statistics were used to explore the relationships between the variables. The following statistical tools were employed:

- **Frequency Distributions and Percentages:** These were used to summarise the demographic data and student responses regarding their study habits, attendance, and access to resources.
- **Correlation and Regression Analyses:** Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength and direction of relationships between continuous variables, such as class attendance and final examination scores. Regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which the independent variables affect student performance.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected students and instructors. The interviews aimed to capture personal experiences and insights into the challenges faced by students in the PGD LP program. The data were analysed thematically, with key themes emerging around issues such as financial constraints, lack of instructional support, and the adequacy of institutional resources.

The qualitative analysis provided deeper insights into the challenges that were not fully captured by the quantitative data. For instance, while the survey data indicated that many students struggled with class attendance, the interviews revealed that this was often due to financial pressures that forced students to work part-time, limiting their availability for classes.

### Presentation of Data

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses are presented in tables, charts, and thematic summaries. Quantitative data are presented in the form of bar charts and tables to illustrate the distribution of responses, while the qualitative findings are summarised in narrative form, highlighting key themes and quotes from the interview participants.

For example, Table 1 below shows the distribution of students based on their socio-economic background, with 65% of respondents identifying as self-sponsored and facing financial challenges, while 35% reported receiving some form of financial assistance.

Table 1

#### *Distribution of Students Based on Their Socio-economic Background*

Socio-economic background	Percentage (%)
Self-sponsored	65%
Sponsored/scholarship	35%

This combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a robust foundation for understanding the factors that affect academic performance at LDC and guides the discussion of key findings in the following sections.



### **Key Findings on Student-Related Factors**

The student-related factors identified in this study encompass several personal characteristics and socio-economic conditions that influence academic performance. These factors include class attendance, study habits, socio-economic background, and commitment to studies.

#### **Class Attendance**

The quantitative data revealed that students who attended classes regularly were more likely to perform well in their final examinations. Students who reported attending over 80% of their classes had significantly higher pass rates compared to those who attended less frequently. A chi-square test confirmed a strong relationship between class attendance and academic performance, with a  $p$ -value of less than 0.05 indicating statistical significance.

However, the qualitative data highlighted that many students faced difficulties in maintaining regular attendance due to financial constraints. One student from Kampala campus noted: “I had to work part-time to pay for my tuition, and that meant I missed several classes, especially during the week. This affected my performance because I couldn’t keep up with the weekly individual assessments”.

This finding underscores the impact of financial pressures on students’ ability to attend classes consistently, which in turn affects their academic performance.

#### **Study Habits**

Effective study habits were another key factor identified as influencing academic performance. Students who reported setting aside dedicated study time and organising their study materials had better academic outcomes. The correlation analysis showed a positive relationship between good study habits and higher final examination scores ( $r = 0.65$ ).

The interviews provided additional insights into the challenges students faced in developing effective study habits. Many students cited the intense workload of the PGD LP program and the lack of guidance on how to manage their time effectively. One respondent stated: “The program is very demanding, and without a proper study plan, it’s easy to fall behind. I struggled to balance my assignments, reading, and preparing for exams”.

This suggests that LDC could benefit from providing students with more structured support on time management and study techniques.

#### **Socio-Economic Background**

As expected, socio-economic background played a significant role in determining student success. The majority of respondents who came from lower-income backgrounds reported financial difficulties that affected their ability to purchase study materials, attend classes regularly, and focus on their studies. The quantitative analysis showed that self-sponsored students had a lower average final examination score compared to those who received financial assistance or scholarships.

The interviews reinforced these findings, with several students describing how their financial struggles impacted their academic performance. One student explained: “I couldn’t afford to buy all the recommended textbooks, so I had to rely on borrowed books, which weren’t always available when I needed them”.

This finding highlights the need for LDC to provide more financial aid and support services to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Commitment to Studies**

Student commitment to academic work was identified as a critical determinant of success. The survey data showed that students who expressed a strong personal commitment to their studies were more likely to perform well in their assessments. These students reported spending more time preparing for their exams and seeking help from instructors when needed.

However, some students indicated that their commitment to studies was compromised by external factors, such as work and family responsibilities. One respondent noted: “I was determined to do well, but balancing work, family, and school was overwhelming. I often found myself sacrificing study time to meet other obligations”.

This suggests that while personal commitment is important, external pressures can undermine even the most dedicated students.

**Key Findings on Institution-Related Factors**

Institutional factors, including resource availability, infrastructure, and the assessment system, were found to significantly influence academic performance at LDC.

**Availability of Resources**

The lack of adequate educational resources was a recurring theme in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Approximately 70% of survey respondents reported that they did not have sufficient access to textbooks, legal databases, or internet services, which hindered their ability to conduct research and prepare for exams.

The interviews provided further evidence of the resource challenges faced by students. One student from the Mbarara campus noted: “The library was always crowded, and there weren’t enough books to go around. Sometimes I had to wait weeks just to borrow a single textbook”.

This lack of access to resources was particularly problematic for students who were unable to afford their own study materials, highlighting the need for LDC to invest in expanding its library and digital resources.

**Internet Access and E-Learning**

Internet access was identified as a major institutional challenge, particularly for students at Mbarara and Lira campuses. Over 60% of respondents reported difficulty in accessing reliable internet, which limited their ability to use online learning platforms and legal research databases.

One student explained: “Without a reliable internet connection, it’s almost impossible to keep up with the weekly workshops, especially when you need to do legal research”.

The lack of internet access also hampered LDC’s efforts to implement e-learning solutions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding suggests that LDC must prioritise improving internet access across all campuses to support digital learning initiatives.

**Assessment System**

The assessment system at LDC was a key area of concern for many students. Survey respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current system, which they felt placed too much emphasis on rote memorisation rather than practical skills. Approximately 55% of students reported that the continuous assessments did not provide adequate feedback to help them improve before the final exams.

One student described their frustration with the assessments: “The exams seemed to focus on memorising laws and procedures rather than applying them in real-life scenarios, which is what we should be learning”.

This finding indicates that LDC should consider revising its assessment methods to focus more on practical application and provide students with timely and constructive feedback.

### **Key Findings on Instructor-Related Factors**

Instructor-related factors, such as the quality of instruction, teaching methods, and instructor availability, were also found to influence student performance at LDC.

#### **Quality of Instruction**

The quality of instruction varied across the different campuses, with students at the Kampala campus generally reporting higher satisfaction levels compared to those at Mbarara and Lira. Approximately 65% of respondents from Mbarara and Lira felt that their instructors were not adequately prepared or experienced enough to teach the practical aspects of the PGD LP program.

One student from Lira commented: “Some of the instructors lacked the practical experience to guide us through the more complex legal procedures. It was hard to understand how the theory applied to real-life practice”.

This finding highlights the need for LDC to ensure that all instructors, regardless of the campus, have the necessary qualifications and experience to teach practical legal skills.

#### **Teaching Methods**

Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the traditional lecture-based teaching methods employed by most instructors. Approximately 60% of respondents indicated that they would prefer more interactive teaching methods, such as case studies, simulations, and group discussions.

One student explained: “The lectures were too theoretical. We need more hands-on activities to really understand how to apply the law”.

This suggests that LDC should encourage instructors to adopt more student-centered teaching methods that focus on practical skills development.

#### **Instructor Availability**

Instructor availability was another key issue identified in the study. Many students reported difficulty accessing their instructors outside of class, with 50% of respondents stating that their instructors were not available for consultations when needed.

One student noted: “It was hard to get time with the instructors. They were often too busy, and there wasn’t a formal system for scheduling consultations”.

This finding indicates that LDC should implement a more structured system for instructor-student consultations, ensuring that students have the opportunity to seek additional support outside of class.

### **Discussion and Interpretation of Results**

The findings of this study provide important insights into the factors affecting academic performance at LDC and suggest several areas where improvements can be made. The following discussion interprets these results in the context of existing literature and offers explanations for the trends observed.

**Impact of Socio-Economic Background on Academic Performance**

The finding that socio-economic background plays a significant role in determining academic performance is consistent with existing research on higher education. Students from lower-income backgrounds often face additional challenges, such as financial constraints and limited access to resources, which can hinder their academic success (Banik & Kumar, 2019). At LDC, self-sponsored students were more likely to struggle with class attendance, study habits, and access to learning materials, all of which contributed to lower examination scores.

This finding highlights the importance of providing financial support and resources to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. By offering scholarships, loans, and other forms of assistance, LDC can help level the playing field and ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.

**Challenges With Institutional Resources and Infrastructure**

The lack of adequate resources and infrastructure at LDC, particularly in the Mbarara and Lira campuses, is another major factor contributing to poor academic performance. The findings suggest that students who do not have access to textbooks, legal databases, and internet services are at a significant disadvantage. This aligns with previous research that emphasises the importance of educational resources in supporting student learning (Shammari et al., 2017).

The results also point to the need for LDC to invest in expanding its library collections and improving internet access across all campuses. These improvements are essential for supporting both traditional and digital learning and ensuring that students have the tools they need to succeed.

**Instructor-Related Challenges**

The quality of instruction and the availability of instructors were found to be critical factors influencing student performance. Students who felt that their instructors were qualified and experienced in legal practice were more likely to perform well in their assessments. However, the findings also revealed significant disparities between the different campuses, with students at the Mbarara and Lira campuses reporting lower satisfaction levels.

The challenges with instructor availability also point to a need for better systems of support. By implementing more structured office hours and providing additional teaching assistants, LDC can ensure that students have the opportunity to seek help when needed, which is particularly important in a demanding program like the PGD LP.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings and analysis of the factors influencing academic performance at the Law Development Centre (LDC), several recommendations are proposed to address the systemic issues identified. These recommendations focus on improving student outcomes by tackling the key challenges related to student preparedness, institutional capacity, and instructional quality.

**Enhance Student Support Services**

The socio-economic background of many LDC students presents a significant challenge to their academic success. To mitigate this, the institution should introduce enhanced student support services, such as financial aid

programs, scholarships, and student loans, to alleviate the financial burden on self-sponsored students. By offering these services, LDC can reduce the need for students to work part-time while pursuing their studies, thus enabling them to devote more time to their academic commitments.

Additionally, the creation of mentorship programs, where experienced legal professionals provide guidance and support to students, could help bridge the gap between theory and practice. These mentors can assist students in understanding the practical applications of their legal training and provide advice on managing the demands of the PGD LP program.

### **Improve Access to Educational Resources**

One of the most pressing challenges facing students at LDC is the lack of adequate educational materials, particularly access to up-to-date textbooks, legal databases, and online learning platforms. To address this, LDC should invest in expanding its library resources, both physically and digitally. This could include partnerships with international publishers and legal databases to provide students with access to the latest legal research and case law.

Moreover, the institution should work to improve internet connectivity and access to e-learning platforms across all campuses, especially in Mbarara and Lira. Providing students with reliable internet access will enhance their ability to conduct research, participate in online discussions, and access digital resources, all of which are essential for success in the PGD LP program.

### **Redesign the Assessment System**

The current assessment methods at LDC have been criticised for their emphasis on rote memorisation and their failure to accurately measure students' practical skills. To address these concerns, the institution should undertake a comprehensive review of its assessment processes and explore alternative methods that focus on critical thinking and the practical application of legal principles.

One possible approach is to integrate more formative assessments, such as case studies, simulations, and problem-based learning tasks, into the curriculum. These types of assessments allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the material in a practical context, which is more reflective of the skills required in legal practice. Additionally, continuous assessments should be restructured to provide timely and constructive feedback, enabling students to improve their performance before the final examinations.

### **Reduce Class Sizes and Increase Instructor Availability**

The large class sizes at LDC have been identified as a significant barrier to student success, as they limit the amount of individual attention that students receive from instructors. To address this, LDC should consider capping enrollment numbers based on the institution's capacity to provide quality instruction and support services. Alternatively, LDC could employ additional part-time instructors or teaching assistants to help manage the large student population and ensure that each student receives the attention and guidance they need.

Increasing instructor availability is also crucial. Instructors should have regular office hours and be accessible to students outside of class for consultations and additional support. This could be facilitated through the establishment of a formal system for scheduling one-on-one meetings between students and instructors, ensuring that students have opportunities to seek clarification on difficult topics and receive guidance on how to improve their performance.

**Adopt Innovative Teaching Methods**

Traditional lecture-based teaching methods may not be sufficient to equip students with the practical legal skills they need to succeed in the PGD LP program. To address this, LDC should encourage instructors to adopt more interactive and student-centered teaching methods, such as group discussions, role-playing exercises, and simulations of real-world legal scenarios.

Instructors should also be trained in the use of digital tools and e-learning platforms, allowing them to incorporate technology into their teaching methods. For example, the use of virtual court simulations or online discussion forums could enhance students' understanding of legal practice and foster greater engagement with the material. Furthermore, LDC should provide instructors with ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure they are equipped with the latest pedagogical techniques.

**Strengthen Feedback Mechanisms**

Effective feedback is essential for both students and instructors to identify areas for improvement. LDC should implement a more structured system for gathering feedback from students on their learning experiences, including their perceptions of the quality of instruction, the availability of resources, and the fairness of assessments. This feedback should be collected regularly, and the results should be used to inform decision-making and drive continuous improvement in the quality of education at the institution.

Additionally, LDC should provide instructors with more comprehensive feedback on their teaching performance. This could include peer reviews, student evaluations, and self-assessment tools, all of which can help instructors identify areas where they can improve their teaching methods and better support their students.

**Policy Implications**

The findings of this study have significant implications for both institutional and national education policy. Addressing the challenges facing students at LDC will require concerted efforts from policymakers, educational institutions, and regulatory bodies to ensure that legal education in Uganda meets the highest standards.

**Institutional Policy Reform**

The leadership at LDC must recognise that improving academic performance requires institutional reforms that go beyond surface-level changes. The issues of large class sizes, inadequate resources, and outdated assessment methods must be addressed through comprehensive policy reforms. Specifically, LDC should:

- **Implement Enrollment Controls:** LDC should introduce policies that limit the number of students admitted to the PGD LP program based on the institution's capacity to provide quality education. By capping enrollment numbers, the institution can reduce the strain on resources and ensure that each student receives the support they need to succeed.
- **Improve Resource Allocation:** The allocation of resources within LDC should be prioritised to ensure that all students have access to the materials and support services necessary for academic success. This may require reallocating funds from non-essential areas to invest in library resources, internet access, and additional instructional staff.
- **Strengthen Student Support Services:** LDC should introduce policies that provide greater financial and academic support to students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This could include expanding

scholarship programs, offering academic counseling services, and providing financial literacy training to help students manage the costs of their education more effectively.

### **National Policy and Regulatory Oversight**

At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Sports, along with the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), the Law Council, must play a more active role in regulating and supporting legal education institutions like LDC. To ensure that LDC and similar institutions meet the required standards, the following policy measures are recommended:

- **Establish Minimum Standards for Legal Education:** The NCHE should work with legal education institutions to establish minimum standards for infrastructure, instructor qualifications, and student support services. These standards should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the changing needs of the legal profession.
- **Introduce National Benchmarking for Legal Education:** A national benchmarking system should be introduced to compare the performance of LDC with other legal education institutions in Uganda and across the East African region. This would help identify best practices and areas for improvement, fostering a culture of continuous improvement in legal education.
- **Develop a National Framework for E-Learning:** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for robust e-learning systems in higher education. The Ministry of Education should develop a national framework for e-learning that provides guidelines for the implementation of digital learning platforms in legal education. This framework should include provisions for training instructors in the use of e-learning tools and ensuring that all students have access to the necessary technology.

### **Policy Recommendations for Instructor Development**

The quality of instructors is a key determinant of student success. National policies should be introduced to improve the recruitment, training, and retention of instructors in legal education. Specifically, the following policy measures are recommended:

- **Incentivise Professional Development for Instructors:** The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Uganda Law Society, should establish incentives for instructors to engage in continuous professional development. This could include financial incentives, professional recognition, and opportunities for career advancement.
- **Ensure Competitive Compensation for Legal Educators:** To attract and retain highly qualified legal educators, institutions like LDC must offer competitive salaries and benefits. National policies should encourage institutions to prioritise instructor compensation to ensure that they can attract the best talent from the legal profession.
- **Promote Collaboration between Legal Practitioners and Educators:** To ensure that legal education remains relevant to the needs of the profession, policies should be introduced to promote greater collaboration between practicing lawyers and legal educators. This could include establishing visiting lecturer programs, where experienced legal practitioners teach specialised courses, and fostering partnerships between legal firms and education institutions for internships and practical training opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The academic challenges facing students at the Law Development Centre are multi-faceted, involving student-, institution-, and instructor-related factors. To address these challenges, it is essential that both institutional leaders

and policymakers take a proactive approach to reforming legal education in Uganda. By enhancing student support services, improving access to resources, adopting innovative teaching methods, and strengthening assessment systems, LDC can create a more conducive learning environment that supports academic excellence. At the national level, regulatory bodies must establish clear standards for legal education and provide institutions with the guidance and resources needed to meet these standards. Through these efforts, Uganda can ensure that its future legal practitioners are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to uphold the rule of law and contribute to the country's development.

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**Appendix I: Questionnaire**

This questionnaire will be used by the researcher to obtain information from Students lecturers.

**A. Background information (please tick appropriate box in each case)**

Name/Unique identification number \_\_\_\_\_

LDC campus \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent category (lecturer/ student) \_\_\_\_\_

Years in service of LDC in case of lecturer \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Participant response**

This questionnaire is designed according to the objectives of the study. Please indicate your level of agreement to each of the following statements specifically with respect to performance of healthcare (using 1 = strongly disagree, (S.D.); 2 = disagree (D); 3 = not sure (N.S.); 4 = agree (A); 5 = strongly agree (S.A.)). Please tick ONLY ONE BOX in each case as appropriate.

A. Students' academic performance (dependent variable)	S.D. = 1	D = 2	N.S. = 3	A = 4	S.A. = 5
I completed my studies in time					
It was not difficult for me to complete in time					
My grade score was high					
I am satisfied with my academic performance					
I feel I performed well					
Students generally perform well					
B. Student-related factors (independent variable)	S.D. = 1	D = 2	N.S. = 3	A = 4	S.A. = 5
Students regularly attend class					
Students had sufficient time to					
Students were committed to their studies					
Socio-econ factors did not affect studies					
Students often afforded the requirements					
Work did not affect studies					
Students are committed to academic work					
Students study habits allow them to do their work on time					
Students are not impeded in their work					
C. Institution-related factors (independent variable)	S.D. = 1	D = 2	N.S. = 3	A = 4	S.A. = 5
Educational materials were available					
Access to the internet is good					
Online learning facilities exist					
Online learning is effective					
Student enrollment size did not affect studies					
The assessment process at LDC was fair					
Assessment method is fair					
The library is well stocked					
Reading materials students need are available					
D. Instructor-related factors (independent variable)	S.D. = 1	D = 2	N.S. = 3	A = 4	S.A. = 5
The quality of lecturers is good					
The lecturers are qualified					
Lecturers are experienced					
Lecturers arrive on time					
Lecturers do not waste time					
Lecturers utilize time well					
Time management was good					
Delivery modes are effective					
Appropriate materials are provided					
Lecturers use innovative means					
Delivery methods were good					

## Appendix II: Interview Guide-Students

Key informant interviews with selected students are based on the following thematic areas.

### 1. Student-related factors

#### 1.1 How often do you attend lectures?

(a) How often do you attend scheduled lectures? (*Probe for whether affects performance, cause of absenteeism, whether there are sanctions, whether for reasons beyond control*).

#### 1.2 How do you ensure you give sufficient time to studies?

#### 1.3 How are you committed to your studies?

#### 1.4 Socio-economic factors

(a) What do you consider to be your socioeconomic status? (*Who pays your tuition, what is the source of income, can you afford requirements for study, any sources of financial or material support*).

#### 1.2 Employment status

(a) What are you engaged in in terms of employment? (*Probe for public service, parastatal, private company, self-employed and which kind e.g., trading business, whether a student was on leave with or without pay, to what extent it affects attendance, or academic work, or as a means to pay tuition which a student cannot leave*).

#### 1.3 Study habits

(a) How appropriate is your study habit? (*Probe whether study is mostly in library or home etc., any inconveniences encountered such as distracted noise etc., whether mostly alone or with colleagues, whether transportation to and from takes away significant time, find time to read daily*).

#### 1.4 Commitment

(a) How committed are you to your studies? (*Probe for whether given priority over other things, attempt to attend all academic activities, gave up job or took leave without pay*).

### 2. Institution-related factor

#### 2.1 Educational materials

(a) What is your opinion about availability and access to educational materials at LDC? (*Probe for in libraries and internet sources, adequacy and ease of access, cost if any and affordability, any fines for loss and the magnitude and whether they discourage use by students, whether there is competition for some*).

#### 2.2 Student enrollment

(a) What is your comment about student population? (*Probe for whether they put strain on available lecturers, the effect of backlog of students that did not complete, lecture-student ratio*).

#### 2.3 Assessment process

(a) What is your opinion about the assessment process? (*Probe for description of method(s), level of satisfaction with it/them, whether any improvements can be suggested*).

#### 2.4 Infrastructure

(a) Please comment on education infrastructure. (*appropriateness of e.g. space in library, class room, parking, transport, and other facilities for students*).

### 3. Instructor-related factor

#### 3.1 Quality of lecturers

(a) Could you please comment on the quality of lecturers at LDC? (*Probe for academic qualification, experience in practice, academics, whether they are conversant with the areas they handle*).

### 3.2 Utilisation of time allocated

(a) Please comment on the utilisation of time allocated to a lecturer. (*Probe whether they arrive in time, use all the time allocated, whether the time is effectively utilised, whether you feel they need additional or less time for their task, and why*).

### 3.3 Delivery methods

(a) In your view how do you feel delivery of knowledge and skills is done? (*Ask how class is conducted, whether satisfactory or not and the reasons for the choice of answer, how he wishes delivery of knowledge and skill would better be done. Is there a difference between lecturers' mode of delivery?*).

### 3.4 Time management

(a) How effectively is time managed? (*Probe whether work is deferred to be done at home to provide more time for interactive class, whether late coming was experienced, procrastination if any?*).

### 3.5 Commitment

(a) How in your opinion is lecturers' commitment to their work? (*Probe if they are reachable when you need them, to what extent do they provide student support, do they innovate, avail students time when required, do they carry out adequate research?*).

## 4. Student academic performance

### 4.1 Completed my studies in time

(a) In your view what can you comment about timely completion of PGDLP? (*Probe for any grace period in case of delay, circumstances where they are provided, what other previous students say*).

### 4.2 It was not difficult to complete in time

(a) What made it easy for you to complete in time? (*Probe for circumstances, any facilitation obtained, and the kind of facilitation. Is it available to all, do others feel they equally obtain them?*).

### 4.3 Grade score was high

(a) What can you say about your performance? (*Probe for perception about grade score, whether it is satisfactory. How other students feel about the general performance? etc.*).

**Appendix III: Interview Guide-Lecturers**

Key informant interviews with selected lecturers will be based on the following thematic areas:

**3. Student-related factors****3.1** How often do your students generally attend lectures?

(a) How often do you attend scheduled lectures? (*Probe for whether affects performance, cause of absenteeism, whether there are sanctions, whether for reasons beyond control*).

**3.2** Employment status

(a) What are students generally engaged in, in terms of employment? (*Probe for public service, parastatal, private company, self-employed and which kind e.g., trading business, whether a student was on leave with or without pay, to what extent it affects attendance, or academic work, or as a means to pay tuition which a student cannot leave*).

**3.3** Study habits

(a) How appropriate are students study habit? (*Probe whether study is mostly in library or home etc., any inconveniences encountered such as distracted noise etc., whether mostly alone or with colleagues, whether transportation to and from takes away significant time, find time to read daily*).

**3.4** Commitment

(a) How committed are students to their studies? (*Probe for whether given priority over other things, attempt to attend all academic activities, gave up job or took leave without pay*).

**3.5** Socio-economic factors

(a) What do you consider students' socioeconomic status to generally be? (*Who pays tuition, source of income, whether can afford requirements for study, any sources of financial or material support*).

**4. Institution-related factor****4.1** Educational materials

(a) What is your opinion about availability and access to educational materials at LDC? (*Probe for in libraries and internet sources, adequacy and ease of access, cost if any and affordability, any fines for loss and the magnitude and whether they discourage use by students, whether there is competition for some*).

**4.2** Student enrollment

(a) What is your comment about student population? (*Probe for whether they put strain on available lecturers, the effect of backlog of students that did not complete, lecture-student ratio*).

**4.3** Assessment process

(a) What is your opinion about the assessment process? (*Probe for description of method(s), level of satisfaction with it/them, whether any improvements can be suggested*).

**4.4** Infrastructure

(a) Please comment on education infrastructure. (*Appropriateness of e.g., space in library, class room, parking, transport, and other facilities for students*).

**5. Tutor-related factor****5.1** Quality of lecturers

(a) Could you please comment on the quality of lecturers at LDC? (*Probe for academic qualification, experience in practice, academics, whether they are conversant with the areas they handle*).

### 5.2 Utilisation of time allocated

(b) Please comment on the utilisation of time allocated to a lecturer. (*Probe whether they arrive in time, use all the time allocated, whether the time is effectively utilised, whether you feel they need additional or less time for their task, and why*).

### 5.3 Delivery methods

(a) In your view how do you feel delivery of knowledge and skills is done? (*Ask how class is conducted, whether satisfactory or not and the reasons for the choice of answer, how he wishes delivery of knowledge and skill would better be done. Is there a difference between lecturers' mode of delivery?*)

### 5.4 Time management

(a) How effectively is time managed? (*Probe whether work is deferred to be done at home to provide more time for interactive class, whether late coming was experienced, procrastination if any?*).

### 5.5 Commitment

(a) How in your opinion is lecturers' commitment to their work? (*Probe if they are reachable when you need them, to what extent do they provide student support, do they innovate, avail students time when required, do they carry out adequate research?*).

## 6. Student academic performance

### 6.1 Completed studies in time

(a) In your view what can you comment about timely completion of PGDLP? (*Probe for any grace period in case of delay, circumstances where they are provided, what other previous students say*).

### 6.2 It was not difficult to complete in time

(a) What made it easy for students to complete in time? (*Probe for circumstances, any facilitation obtained and the kind of facilitation. Is it available to all, do others feel they equally obtain them?*)

### 6.3 Grade score was high

(a) What can you say about students' general performance? (*Probe for perception about grade score, whether it is satisfactory. How other students feel about the general performance? etc.*)