

## AN ASSESSMENT OF DETERMINANTS OF STUDENTS' RETENTION IN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL AFRICA

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### Abstract

The study intends to assess the determinants of students' retention towards commitment to Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) through their perceptions in terms of behavior of staff; teaching process; learning process; students' environment; social-economic life and commitment. This study was inspired in the mind of the researcher because since October 15, 1984 (its beginning), AUCA has so far registered 11,557 students, but those who obtained degrees (who graduated from AUCA) are 3,847 and 4,895 were dismissed because of failure and others deserted/dropped out. In this descriptive and correlation research design, respondents were students of Adventist University of Central Africa who are on probation and those who are not on probation. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews and observation. In data analysis, mean, standard deviation and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed, analyzed and interpreted. Findings show that all respondents (those on probation and those not on probation) perceive strongly behavior of staff, teaching process, learning process, students' environment, and students commitment but with heterogeneous perception around the mean. Social-economic life of students was perceived by respondents as weak. The researcher recommends to AUCA to elaborate a good system of teaching English and inspire among students the spirit of loving English language and to monitor how assignments and quizzes are given in order to give time to students to work on their assignments and quizzes. Strategies that will help students to study and pass well are also recommended.

**Keywords:** Students' retention, commitment

### Introduction and Literature Review

The Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) was founded in 1978, but the official opening was held on October 15, 1984. The University was located at Mudende (rural area), former Mutura Commune, Gisenyi Prefecture, North-East of Rwanda and it had seven (7) faculties: Faculty of Business Administration (Accounting and Information Management); Faculty of Sciences (Mathematics and Physics, Biology and Chemistry, Human Biology and Public Health); Faculty of Education (Educational Psychology); Faculty of Technology; Faculty of Agriculture; Faculty of Languages (French and English) and Faculty of Theology (AUCA bulletin, 2012-2015)

Following the genocide of 1994, AUCA temporarily suspended its activities until May 7, 1996, during which time the University re-opened a transition Campus in Kigali city and since that time the University has only run four faculties (AUCA bulletin, 2012-2015).

AUCA has currently the following faculties: Faculty of Business Administration, with four departments (Accounting, Management, Finance and Market-

ing); Faculty of Science in Information Technology, with three departments (Information Management, Networking & Communication Systems and Software Engineering); Faculty of Education, with seven departments (Educational Psychology, Languages, Business Accounting, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics and Geography, Faculty of Theology and Faculty of nursing.

The Adventist University of Central Africa vision is to be a center of excellence in undergraduate and graduate programs. Quality shall be the hallmark of all its undertakings including research and service delivery to its students, faculty, staff and the community at large. While its mission is to provide Christ-centered quality education founded on a holistic approach that prepares people for the service of this life and the life to come (AUCA bulletin, 2012-2015).

AUCA has currently 2,815 students. Since October 15, 1984 (its beginning), AUCA has so far registered 11,557 students, but those who obtained degrees (who graduated from AUCA) are 3,847 and 4,895 were dismissed because of failure and others deserted/dropped out. Currently AUCA has 641 students



who are on probation: 360 are in the first probation; 122 are in the second probation; 81 are in the third probation and 78 are in the fourth probation. After the fourth probation if a student doesn't get the required marks his dismissed (AUCA report, 2016).

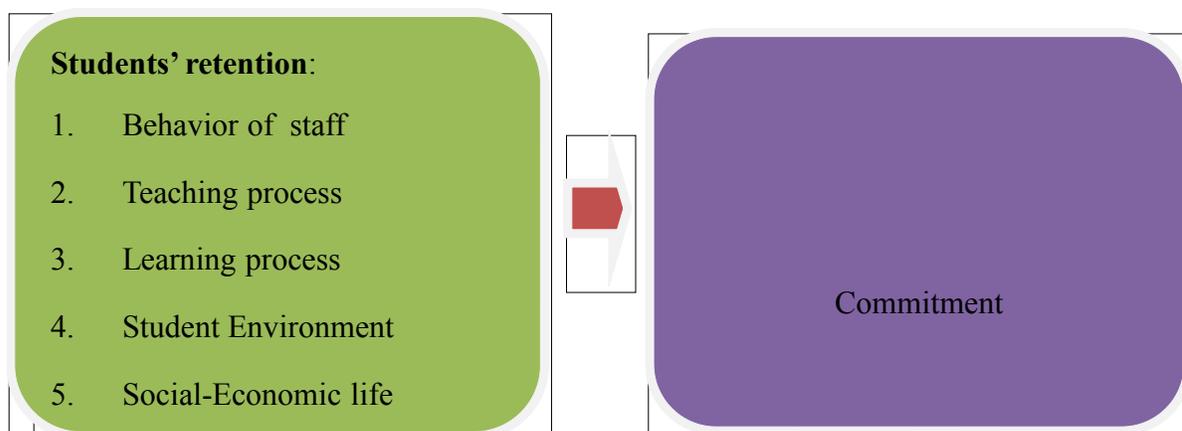
A student who leaves college increases the rate of incompetent individuals that enter the workforce or perform civic duties. Retaining a student is necessary in order to carry out institutional mission. A high rate of attrition (the opposite of retention) is not only a fiscal problem for schools, but a symbolic failure of an institution to achieve its purpose (Leone & Tian, 2009).

White (1923) says that no work every undertaken by man requires greater care and skill than the proper

training and education of youth and children. The greatest care should be taken in the education of youth to so vary the manner of instruction as to call forth the high and noble powers of the mind.

This study assessed the determinants of retention and commitment and found out factors that contribute to the failure and desertion of AUCA students. It also assessed the relationship between determinants of retention and commitment. And then the researcher gave recommendations to Adventist University of Central Africa in order to retain and have students who are committed, the researcher gave also recommendations to AUCA students.

### Conceptual Framework



School commitment indicates that student stays a member of the school (is retained) or leaves to pursue another school (student turns over). Turnover may be voluntarily or involuntarily.

### Research Methodology

This is qualitative and quantitative research. It used descriptive and correlation design. Population of the study was all students who registered in AUCA since its foundation (11,557). The researcher used convenient sampling techniques and randomly gave questionnaires to 32 out of 81 students who are now in third probation and 100 students out of 2,565 students who are not on probation. The instrument consisted of perception of respondents on students' retention and commitment.

The researcher used a self-constructed structured questionnaire to gather all the relevant data that was used in this research. The reviewed literature played an important role because it informed and influenced the construction of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was checked for both validity and reliability

before being administered for data collection.

The questionnaire used a Likert scale. The five-point scale required the respondents to indicate the selected option for a given statement from strongly agreed point to strongly disagreed point and the interval between each point on the scale were assumed to be equal. The scaling was composed of the following: 1, strongly disagree; 2, disagree; 3, neutral; 4, agree and 5, strongly agree points.

The researcher solicited the opinion of various teachers from the Adventist University of Central Africa AUCA. With their expertise and experiences, they gave various objective advices on the contents and judgment for the suitability and relevance of the instrument for this study. Data was gathered by the researcher from January 2, 2016 to January 31, 2016.

The results obtained were organized and presented in form of tables. Descriptive statistics like Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), Standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ), and Inferential Statistics like Pearson Correlation were used as procedures to analyze data and interpret the results.

A standard deviation less than 0.5 was interpreted as homogenous perception of respondents around

the mean while a standard deviation greater than 0.5 was interpreted as heterogeneous perception of respondents around the mean. An item which had a mean between 1 to 2.49 was interpreted as weak; an item which had a mean between 2.5 to 3.49 was interpreted as a moderate one while an item which had a mean between 3.5 to 5 was interpreted as strongly perceived.

## Results and Discussion

The first variable assessed the behavior of staff to students. Table 1 shows its findings:

Table 1 that assesses the behavior of staff to students shows that all respondents (students who are

on probation and students who are not on probation) perceived being passionate, charismatic, having good communication and listening to students as moderate, while meaning what you say, having trustable staff and technical competency of teachers was strongly perceived by respondents. Standard deviation shows an heterogeneous perception of respondents in all items assessed under behavior of staff. According to the interview, the staff in AUCA does not give enough attention to students. Weak students are not given any extra time for more explanation. In AUCA, around 56% of all teaching-staff are visiting teachers whom after teaching they immediately leave the campus and do not give enough extra time for being consulted by students.

### *Behavior of Staff to Students*

Items Assessed	Not on probation		On probation	
	☒	☒	☒	☒
Passionate of staff to students	3.2	0.7	3.1	1.0
Charisma of staff to students	3.3	0.8	3.4	1.0
Communication between teachers and staff	3.4	1.1	3.3	0.9
Listening to students	3.2	0.9	3.4	0.9
Staff mean what they say	3.6	1.1	3.5	1.1
Having trustable staff	3.6	1.0	3.7	0.9
Technical competency of staff	3.9	0.8	3.9	0.9
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.5</b>		<b>3.5</b>	

(Source: Primary data, 2016)

Table 2 assessed teaching process.

Table 2

### *Teaching Process*

Items Assessed	Not on probation		on probation	
	☒	☒	☒	☒
Having relevant facilities of teaching	3.5	1.2	4.3	1.1
Explaining lessons well	3.5	0.8	3.7	0.9
Organization and equipment in the library	3.7	1.0	3.6	1.3
Fairness of library	4.0	1.4	4.1	0.9
Appreciating studying in English (as medium of instruction)	3.3	1.1	2.7	0.9
Capacity of hearing 100% of what the teacher says in English while teaching	3.2	1.1	2.5	1.1
School assignments well given	3.5	1.0	3.4	1.0
Set Exams and CATs well	3.6	1.3	3.5	0.9
Coverage of Exam and CATs	2.6	1.1	2.9	0.8
Schedule of Exams and CATs	3.9	1.1	4.4	0.5
School environment that facilitates students to study	3.8	1.0	4.1	0.9
Challenges of having a required GPA (12/20)	3.5	1.0	3.6	1.2
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.5</b>		<b>3.6</b>	

(Source: Primary data, 2016)



Items assessed were: Having relevant facilities of teaching; explaining lessons well; organization and equipment in the library; Fairness of library, appreciating studying in English (as medium of instruction); capacity of hearing 100% of what the teacher says in English while he/she is teaching; well given school assignments; setting Exams and CATs well; coverage of Exam and CATs; schedule of Exams and CATs; school environment that facilitates students to study and challenges of having a required GPA (12/20).

White (1923) says that everyone who has to do with educating the younger class of students, should consider that these children are affected by, and feel the impressions of, the atmosphere, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant. White (1923) says again that there should not be a teacher employed, unless you have evidence by test and trial, that he loves, and fears to offend God. If a teacher cannot be made to feel the responsibility and the carefulness he should ever reveal in dealing with human minds, his education has in some cases been very defective.

Having relevant facilities of teaching; explaining lessons well; having organization and good equipment in the library, setting exams and CATs well, having school environment that facilitates students to study and challenges in having a required GPA (12/20) were strongly perceived by respondents but this strength is not approved by all respondents. Standard deviation shows heterogeneity among perception of respondents.

During the interview the researcher realized that teaching through observation, field trips and practices are not enough. All subjects are taught in classrooms face to face (between teacher and students). Students would like to have enough field trips and practices in order to understand well what they are taught.

The researcher also found out that students of AUCA who were assessed do not appreciate studying in English (as medium of instruction) and have low capacity of hearing what the teacher says in English while he/she is teaching. Students assessed who on probation can only hear in average 57% of what the teacher says in English while students who are not on probation can only hear 61% of what the teacher says in English while teaching.

Students interviewed confirm that teachers give many assignments that are beyond their capacity, and then instead of doing assignments by themselves, they copy from other classmates. Observation shows that AUCA has no system of monitoring workload of

students. It is possible for lecturers to give assignments that should be submitted at the same time.

Observation and inspection show that AUCA staff moderates exams before being given to students. But standard deviations (1.3 for those are not on probation and 0.9 for those who are on probation) shows that some students are not happy of how exams are set. Coverage of exams and CATs were perceived as weak (2.6 for those who are not on probation and 2.9 for those who are on probation). Interview revealed that sometimes some exams do not cover enough part of what was taught.

Table 3 assessed learning process. In learning process, the following were assessed: understanding all necessary requirements that are explained during the orientation time in order to study and be retained in AUCA; understanding well during orientation how a student can fail to study in AUCA; have enough time of revising class notes and having no any other activity that takes time for students; being free in asking questions in all my classes (without any intimidation); not naturally being afraid/fearful of asking questions in all my classes; having classmates who explain well and regularly to each other what others did not understand in the class; attending classes regularly; having no any other activity that takes time of students and a need of having more time to revise class notes.

Table 3

*Learning Process*

Item Assessed	Not on probation		on probation	
	☒	☒☒	☒	☒☒
Understanding all orientation speeches	3.1	1.3	3.1	1.3
Understanding well during orientation how a student can fail to study in AUCA	2.8	1.3	2.9	1.1
Have enough time of revising class notes	3.3	1.1	3.4	1.1
Being free in asking questions in all my classes (without any intimidation)	4.2	0.9	3.5	1.0
Not naturally being afraid/fearful of asking questions in all my classes	3.7	1.2	2.9	1.1
Not naturally being afraid/fearful in asking questions my classmates	4.1	0.8	4.1	1.1
Classmates explaining well and regularly to each other what they did not understand in a class	3.8	1.1	4.3	0.7
Attending classes regularly	4.7	0.6	4.4	0.5
Having no any other activity that takes time of students	2.8	1.1	2.9	1.2
Knowing English more than how It is now known, could increase the GPA	4.0	1.1	4.1	0.9
Having more time to revise class notes, could increase the GPA	3.8	1.0	4.2	0.7
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.6</b>		<b>3.6</b>	

(Source: Primary data, 2016)

Table 3 shows that understanding all orientation speeches; understanding well during orientation how a student can fail to study in AUCA; having enough time of revising class notes and having no any other activity that takes time of students were all perceived as weak by all respondents. Interview and observation revealed that during orientation not all students are present. Even those who are present do not understand well what they are told because apart from English language which is not well known by students, what they are told seems to be new to everyone as it seems to be a new system of learning. Since 2008, the time the researcher has started teaching in AUCA, no new student has asked a question during orientation. As it is well known students ask questions when they have a certain level of understanding.

The researcher found out that apart from studying, students assessed have some other work with a mean of 2.8 for those who are not on probation and 2.9 for those who are on probation. Inspection shows that AUCA registers evening students (those are students who have other jobs) with less credits per semester (maximum 15 credit), but interview revealed that not all students having other jobs declare that they have another job then they are to be given 15 credits maximum. Note that a regular student in AUCA registers 19 credits

maximum per semester.

Some students especially those who are on probation confirm that they get afraid/fearful of asking questions in the classrooms. Not being free in asking questions in the classes (without any intimidation), not being afraid of asking classmates questions; having classmates that explain well and regularly to each other what is not understood from class; attending classes regularly and a need of having more time to revise class notes were all perceived as strong. Thus, learning process has some weaknesses and there is a need of having more time to revise class notes.

Table 4 assessed students' environment: Students' environment were assessed by: Regular availability of all necessary utilities at our homes; having roommates that encourage and facilitate each other to revise well their class notes; having neighbors who encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes; having friends that encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes; having parents/Sponsors who encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes; being comfortable with the travel students who come to study and then, living in a quietly place that facilitate students to revise well their class notes.



Table 4

*Student Environment*

Items Assessed	Not on probation		on probation	
	☒	☒☒	☒	☒☒
Regular availability of all necessary utilities at our homes	3.8	1.5	4.2	1.0
Having roommates who encourage and facilitate each other to revise well their class notes	3.2	1.2	2.9	0.9
Having neighbors who encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes	3.6	1.3	3.8	0.9
Having friends who encourage and facilitate students to well revise their class notes	2.8	1.0	2.8	0.7
Having parents/Sponsors who encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes	4.1	1.4	3.8	1.2
Being comfortable with the travel performed by students in order to study	3.4	1.3	3.3	1.1
Living in a quietly place that facilitates students to revise well their class notes	3.8	1.1	3.3	1.0
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.5</b>		<b>3.4</b>	

(Source: Primary data, 2016)

Regular availability of all necessary utilities at our homes; having neighbors who encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes; having parents/Sponsors who encourage and facilitate students to revise well their class notes were all strongly perceived by all respondents but with heterogeneity of perception of respondents. Mean that some respondents do not have necessary utilities; some neighbors of students do not facilitate them in revising their notes. Through interview the researcher found out that some students live in places where there's too much noise of vehicles, radios, people etc...Some parents/sponsors do not facilitate or encourage students to revise school notes. Some students are given many jobs to perform at home and others are owners of their families who have full responsibility of their homes and then have little time to revise.

Having roommates who encourage and facilitate each other to revise well their class notes; having friends who encourage and facilitate students to well revise their class notes and being comfortable with the travel performed by students every day in order to study were all perceived by all respondents as moderate. Interview revealed that in some ghettos students live together but having some conflicts among themselves and they don't separate because they have nowhere else to go. Some students have also friends who do not really encourage them to read. Some other students walk around 15 km every day in order to study.

In assessing social economic life that facilitates studies of AUCA students, the following items were assessed: having conducive house that facilitates my studies, sleeping on a conducive bed; having conducive materials for learning; having enough breakfast every morning; having enough lunch every day; having enough supper every day, having medical insurance, having a conducive means of transportation from home to school; having enough utilities to support studies and having enough support for studies.

White (1923) says that students should feel their responsibility in the matter of making their school life a success. They should bend every effort in the right direction, so that they may not disappoint their parents or guardians who work hard to keep them in school. White (1923) says again that life is a problem which we must individually work out for ourselves. No one can form a character for another; we each have a part to act in deciding our own destiny.

White (1923) declares our young people need to be helped, uplifted, and encouraged, but in the right manner, not perhaps, as they would desire it, but in a way that will help them have sanctified minds.

Table 5

*Social-economic Life*

Items Assessed	Not in probation		on probation	
	☒	☒	☒	☒
Living in a conducive house that facilitate my studies	3.0	1.5	2.9	1.4
Sleeping on a conducive bed	3.2	1.5	3.1	1.4
Having conducive materials for learning	2.7	1.3	2.6	1.2
Having enough breakfast every morning	2.1	1.3	2.0	1.2
Having enough lunch every day	2.2	1	2.0	0.9
Having enough supper every day	2.6	1.3	2.6	1.2
Having regularly medical insurance	3.0	1.6	2.9	1.5
Having conducive means transportation from home to school	2.4	1.3	2.3	1.2
Having enough utilities to support my studies	2.8	1.2	2.8	1.2
I have enough support for my studies	2.6	1.4	2.5	1.4
<b>Overall mean</b>	<b>2.6</b>		<b>2.6</b>	

(Source: Primary data, 2016)

In assessing social economic life that facilitates studies of AUCA students, the following items were assessed: having conducive house that facilitate studies, sleeping on a conducive bed; having conducive materials for learning; having enough breakfast every day; having enough lunch every day; having enough supper every day, having medical insurance, having conducive means of transportation from home to school; having enough utilities to support studies and having enough support for studies were all perceived by respondents as weak.

Interviews revealed that many students in AUCA live in ghettos where you find many people in one room. Students organize themselves to have order. Some students in some ghettos elect their leaders, and set themselves rules of how they should live together in that ghetto. But there are some other ghettos where there is no any rule or any order. The researcher found out through interview again that in ghettos where there no any rule students use dirty latrines and bathrooms. They have no beds rather they only put mattresses down to the floor and sleep. A majority do not have even a table or a chair in their rooms.

Interview revealed also that students of AUCA eat once in a day. Many students do not live in a conducive place for learning. Some have their ghettos near bars or near groups of drug users and some live in places of insecurity. This is because many students do not have enough support for their studies, if they had,

they would have gone to live in conducive places.

AUCA is a Seventh Day Adventist institution that delivers quality education. In the speech of Rwanda Minister of education on 12th May 2016 at Masoro, he confirmed its distinguished quality education. Unfortunately interview revealed that because of its strictness in quality education many people do not like to study in AUCA. They rather choose to study where passing is easy.

Table 6 assessed if students of AUCA are committed. To assess the commitment of students, the researcher used the following items: friendship among all classmates; appreciating the atmosphere of AUCA; enjoying coming to study every day; appreciating AUCA system of teaching; appreciating the degree that will be obtained from AUCA; investment of AUCA staff in time of mentoring, training and educating students and then the advocacy of AUCA student association for failure of students.



Table 6

*Student Commitment*

Items Assessed	Not on probation		on probation	
	☒	☒☒	☒	☒☒
Friendship among all classmates	4.2	0.7	4.0	0.7
I really like/appreciating the atmosphere of AUCA	4.1	1.0	4.2	0.9
Enjoying coming to study every Day	4.4	0.6	4.2	0.9
Appreciating AUCA system of teaching	3.4	1.1	3.4	1.1
Appreciating the degree that will be obtained from AUCA	4.5	0.6	4.8	0.4
Investment of AUCA staff in time of mentoring, training and educating students	3.8	0.9	3.8	0.7
Advocacy of AUCA student association for failure of students	3.0	1.5	2.9	1.3
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.9</b>		<b>3.9</b>	

(Source: Primary data, 2016)

All items assessed under commitment of students to AUCA prove that AUCA students are still committed to the University. Though some of them are on probation, they are still committed. Interview revealed that students registered in AUCA appreciate its system of teaching and mission which cannot be found anywhere else in Rwanda. Thus causes of failure or dropping out of registered students of AUCA should be solved. Once these causes are solved number of grand-aunts in AUCA will increase.

Interviews revealed that, students who are on probation are also still motivated. They believe that if

they put more effort they will perform better and then have required marks for a degree. They believe that the degree from AUCA is more valuable and appreciated by employers than other similar degrees from the region. They are also more committed because in order to encourage them to study, AUCA has set a new policy for them where, when you are in 3rd probation you are required to have at least a cumulative mean 13/20 of marks and then you are deliberated.

Table 7 assessed the correlation between retention and commitment among students who are on probation and students who are not on probation.

Table 7

*Correlation between Retention and Commitment*

Correlations <sup>a</sup>		Not probation		Probation	
		Commitment	Retention	Commitment	Retention
Commitment	Pearson Correlation	1	.399*	1	.827**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.024		.000
	N	32	32	32	32
Retention	Pearson Correlation	.399*	1	.827**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024		.000	
	N	32	32	32	32

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

a. Probation = Not probation

Pearson correlation coefficient shows that there is a weak correlation between students' retention and commitment as perceived by students who are not on probation and a positive high correlation between retention and commitment as perceived by students who are on probation.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study assessed the determinants of students' retention in Adventist University of Central Africa. Elements assessed are: behavior of staff; teaching process; learning process; students' environment and social-economic life of students.

In assessing behavior of staff, it was found out that the staff in AUCA is moderately passionate and charismatic. Communication between students and teachers is not good as such. And all respondents (those who are on probation and those who are not on probation) showed heterogeneity of responses. This means respondents perceived the behavior of staff differently.

In assessing teaching process, it found out that students do not understand enough English which is used as medium of instructions. And all respondents (those who are on probation and those who are not on probation) showed heterogeneity of responses in teaching process. This means respondents perceived it differently.

In assessing learning process, it was found out that orientation of new students is regularly done. But it doesn't achieve its intended goals. The purpose of orientation is to inform students everything about the University and how they can perform and be retained at AUCA. But because of how it is done and language used students do not understand what they are told. It was also found out that some students of AUCA have some other jobs, and then they proclaim not to have enough time to revise their class notes.

In assessing students' environment, it was found out that some students have some disturbance in their ghettos. Places where they live are not enough safe. Some students live near noisy areas like bars, and some of them are not encouraged enough by friends, parents or sponsors to study.

In assessing social economic life of students, it was found out that students of AUCA do not have enough support for their studies. It was seen that a majority of students of AUCA eat once per day. They live in unconformable places where latrines and bathrooms are dirty.

### Recommendations to AUCA

1. Communication between teachers and students should be improved.
2. AUCA staff should listen to students and help as much as possible weak students. If possible give them extra time.
3. AUCA should elaborate a good system of teaching English. And inspire among students the spirit of loving English Language.
4. AUCA should monitor how assignments and quizzes are given in order to give time to students to work on their assignments and quizzes.
5. AUCA should improve the way exams are moderated. And make sure exams cover all necessary parts of the course.
6. AUCA should improve the way students register courses, and make sure that courses are taken when it is time to be taken (according to semesters). This will reduce complains of those who say that schedules of exams are not usually well set.
7. AUCA should have dormitories, in order to take care of students.
8. Students themselves should choose conducive places and ghettos where they can live.
9. Students should not be afraid of asking teachers or colleagues what they don't understand.
10. Students should be trained by parents/guardians how individually they can work out by themselves in eradicating all causes of failure and dropout.

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