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## **A Case for Financial Assistance to Needy Students of the University of Education, Winneba**

**Osei-Bediako Appau**

Assistant Registrar, Department in Charge of Academic Affairs,  
College of Agriculture Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

**Francis Kwantwi-Barima**

Assistant Registrar, Department in Charge of Operations, College of Agriculture Education,  
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

### **Abstract:**

*The plight of needy students in the tertiary education environment, particularly, the College of Agriculture Education of the University of Education, Winneba is very deplorable. This is so because such students are unable to cater for their basic needs such as paying for a decent accommodation, paying fees on time and getting money to feed on regular basis. In the light of this, one can only suggest that the University authorities have to set up a fund, purposely for the upkeep of identified needy students within its ranks. On this score, it should be noted that the University of Education, Winneba is not oblivious of the disadvantaged nature of some of its students since a few have been assisted in the past through the Vodafone, MasterCard and Carnegie scholarships. However, something concrete needs to be done in that direction.*

*In this paper, an argument has been made to detach the word 'brilliant' from the phrase 'needy but brilliant', since, it is no more tenable to hold on to that cliché. Rather, right from the word go, the University should make conscious efforts to identify needy students who obviously possess the basic competences to study in a tertiary education environment and more importantly, one's brilliance would only be sustained if the required atmosphere is available. Reasons had been assigned and it is prudent that students who are found to be needy should be given financial assistance from the proposed Needy Students' Fund, as is being done in sister tertiary institutions.*

**Keywords:** Brilliant, needy, students, financial, education

### **1. Introduction**

The issue about needy students at every level of our educational institutions is not in doubt, especially at the tertiary levels. Who then is a needy student? In our opinion, a needy student is a student who is unable to cater for his/her basic needs in the University, Polytechnic or any other tertiary institution. In other words, such a student does not have the financial means to pay for his/her academic facility user fees, residential facility user fees, to procure books and handouts which are necessary prerequisites to remain as a successful student. Simply put, a needy student does not have the financial wherewithal (pocket money) to feed himself/herself to survive in the school. These viewpoints about needy students or pupils are shared by Chesed Foundation Ghana (2012), which states, among others that about 800,000 children of school going age in Ghana are out of school. This has come about because almost all these children come from financially challenged families. It emphasized that the majority of these children are brilliant and talented but unfortunately they have been excluded from the formal educational system for a variety of reasons, which include non-availability of funds to pay fees, lack of educational materials, the remote nature of their communities, as well as unfavourable socio-economic and cultural factors. It is in view of this that a case has to be made for needy students because, it is evidently clear that such category of students or pupils cannot survive in an academic environment where academic excellence is a hallmark.

### **2. Observations about Needy Students at the College of Agriculture Education of the University of Education, Winneba**

One has to hesitate to say that it would not be difficult to determine who a needy student is from the standpoint of a university administrator and academic counsellors. Many a university administrator and academic counselors would agree that we come across needy students every day with complaints such as: "I have not registered because I cannot pay my school fees", "I do not have money to buy books, no pocket money" and so many other things that demand financial support in one way or the other. This means that needy students require some form of financial assistance to be able to sustain their academic work.

Before, an individual becomes a student of the University of Education, Winneba that person is informed beforehand, in paragraph 10 of the admission letter that the institution does not offer financial assistance to students, it is therefore the responsibility of students to look for their own source of sponsorship. In spite of this, the academic affairs office, accounts offices, students' affairs office, offices

of individual lecturers and administrators are always inundated with complaints of students' financial challenges that require attention. In such situations, what should be done? Should the administrators, lecturers and academic counsellors simply refer such financially challenged students to University regulations and leave the students to their fate? These and many questions need to be addressed to ensure that needy students are not left out in the cold.

As was stated earlier, society is not oblivious of the plight of needy students but the debate has always been with "needy but brilliant students". Sincerely, it is imprudent at this point in time to link the term "brilliant" to the core issue of "needy students or pupils" as explained earlier. A main reason that is being adduced to disagreeing with this old cliché of 'needy but brilliant' is that anyone who has made it to the University level or tertiary education level is brilliant or intelligent but that person's brilliance cannot continue to be sustained unless and until certain factors are present. For instance, a university student who is unable to pay his/her academic facility user fees and had not registered for courses would not be in the right frame of mind to sustain academic performance. Certainly, such a student does not also have any decent place to live, which is also a prerequisite for sustained good academic performance. How then, can anyone offer financial assistance based on the notion of 'brilliant but needy students'. Offering scholarship or financial assistance based on the brilliant but needy student reason is no more tenable because of the conditions on which some of these students live and learn. In support of this line of thought, Umutesi (2015) in an article in scholarship for needy students stressed that providing scholarships based on merit entirely can be compared to providing financial assistance to the rich while arguing that they are the only ones who can provide value for money or impact society than giving it to poor. But that is not the essence of offering scholarship since in the conviction of Umutesi, scholarships should be awarded to the neediest students because without this financial aid, they may never have a chance to attend school at all. She explained that most often people from financially challenged backgrounds are likely to get fewer opportunities to excel academically. For instance, she said that "there are children who end up completing primary education, but due to financial restraints cannot afford to transition to secondary schools, yet if they were to be provided with a full scholarship, they would turn around and possibly elevate their families from the cycle of poverty". Again, Umutesi stated that leaving other factors constant, for students to excel in school, they need to have a favourable environment to study. On that score, needy students cannot excel in school when they are unable to fully attend lectures or classes because they have not been able to pay tuition to attend class.

There is no doubt that scholarship schemes are instituted for brilliant students and it is the responsibility of the Universities to ensure that beneficiaries are academically good so that the purpose for which the scholarship was set up is achieved in the end. In this case, right from the first year needy students should be identified through an impartial means and the necessary financial support given, even though, the University does not offer financial assistance.

The mere fact that the University of Education, Winneba officially does not support students financially does not mean nothing should be done to assist needy students. In fact, the University of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology have offices specifically designated to coordinate scholarship schemes for brilliant but needy students. It is advisable that UEW adopts this approach with the view to helping its needy students. This does not mean the UEW system had not or is not facilitating the award of scholarship to needy students but it has to become a concerted effort as pertains in sister tertiary institutions across the world. As a matter of fact, the Gender Directorate has assisted several female science students under the Carnegie Scholarship scheme over the past few years. Recently, too, the Vodafone Foundation through this directorate has helped a couple of the needy female science students. This has not gone far enough and much need to be done.

Even though a case is being made for needy students to have financial assistance, it behoves them to study hard to merit the scholarship awards that are instituted from time to time by benevolent organizations. Generally, most people agree that scholarship should be given to academically brilliant students. This is an indisputable fact and so it would be immoral and unjustifiable to offer financial assistance to needy but constantly uninspiring students who perpetually put up poor academic performance. Also, sight should not be lost on the fact that the Universities are not for academic minnows rather they are places for academic excellence.

### 3. Management Implications

At this juncture, it is prudent that to request the University of Education, Winneba authorities to establish an office to coordinate the solicitation of financial assistance to the needy students to ensure that all students irrespective of the financial background go through their courses of study without let or hindrance. Obviously, the University of Education, Winneba, as a public institution, cannot on its own stop a section of the students who are needy from paying fees and so philanthropic organizations who are always interested in needy students should contribute substantially into the Needy Students' Funds, which it is proposed should be set up. This is an urgent call since society cannot neglect the needy in its developmental agenda. It must be pointed out that everywhere in the Ghanaian media and even foreign media, every time, organizations are donating for one form or other needy but brilliant students at the basic and secondary school levels. The appeal here is that there are visibly needy students in the universities and other tertiary institutions who equally need financial assistance.

May be someone would argue that there is a students' loan scheme for all tertiary education students. Yes, that is true but, these students can hardly even get someone to guarantee for them and the quantum of money given to them is minimal to meet all their needs as tertiary education students, not to talk about repayment when they have completed their courses of study. In short this current arrangement is still not favourable for needy students and the alternative is the institutionalization of Needy Students' Fund, which could be used to assist the identified needy students.

**4. Conclusion**

It is hoped that if the Needy Students' Fund Office is set in the University of Education, Winneba and donations come in many, a needy student can smoothly complete his/her programme of study and excel within the stipulated time frame. The processes for identifying the needy students would be impartial since during the application period a panel would thoroughly investigate the background of fresh students before making recommendations for financial assistance, which it is believed, would benefit society in the long run.

**5. References**

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