

THE NEXT CHAPTER: REFLECTIONS ON THE ESSENCE OF VICE-CHANCELLOR PROF. LABAN P. AYIRO'S LED ENGAGEMENT WITH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS DURING THE ANNUAL POSTGRADUATE SEMINAR, 2025

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Prof Laban P. Ayiro, Vice-Chancellor, Daystar University,
Prof Samuel Muriithi Ag DVC, Academic, Research and Student Affairs,
Prof Muturi Wachira, DVC, Administration and Planning,
Prof. Paul M. Mbutu, University Registrar,
All Other esteemed Officers of the University,
Drivers of the Postgraduate Departments,
Directors, Deans, Other Staff,
Postgraduate Students gathered here today, and other students,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I salute you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank the almighty for this privilege to make brief comments on the essence of today's conversation between Daystar's postgraduate students and the Vice-Chancellor who is accompanied by all drivers and animators of postgraduate programmes.

I am equally honoured to have been recruited into Daystar University's academic family about six months ago. I feel I have found a befitting research, teaching, mentoring and coaching home.

Mr Vice-Chancellor when I learned the theme of this Annual Postgraduate Seminar was 'The Next Chapter', my mind quickly flash-backed into thinking about dissertation or thesis chapters. I imagine that is the trick a frightened brain does to a former student in four postgraduate programmes in 1977, 1984, 1985-88, and 2009-2002.

Gladly, this 'Next Chapter' is about Daystar's strategy in relation to offering a conducive learning environment to its postgraduate students. Our university leadership will explain in detail the D4D: *Design For Delight model* aimed at providing a rigorous but stimulating and accommodating intellectual experience for both our postgraduate and post graduate students.

Let me hasten to state we don't take it for granted that you chose to study in this university when you were spoilt for choice within and outside Kenya. So today's dialogue and similar palavers each succeeding year will focus on: What do we do as a university so as to meet your expectations fully in a timely fashion? We, of course, share the twin objective that your research through this institution will be world class

– and I don’t use these two words or is world-class one word, lightly. The end product of each postgraduate student must academically stand out for use in any institution where you are domiciled or will work in the future or generally in advancing societal development.

Hence this forum is intended to foster a partnership between you on the one hand and the university on the other to guarantee the right hand and the left-hand work harmoniously like the brothers (let me add sisters) of Psalms 133 to produce academic and applied research, innovation, commercialization and all associated products of high-quality scientific inquiry. Given the Vice-Chancellor is a renowned professor of research methods, we believe we have an eye and mind in our midst to act as a monitoring, evaluation and learning agent.

Although education is a public good, Daystar as a private, Christian-centered university must also embrace emerging private sector practices such as D4D and related customer service philosophies. This postgraduate seminar must address the core needs and demands of you as our esteemed clients. We therefore have invited you for a robust exchange regarding the steps Daystar should pursue to improve customer interaction at each customer touchpoint for the necessary customer satisfaction. We want you to feel you have received prime value for the fees you pay.

Allow me to share an experience I had in my first year Constitutional Process LL.B. 112 class this semester. After I had a draft outline of my interpretation of the curriculum, I asked my students to critique it and suggest what else they wanted to learn or not to learn. I also asked them how the course was likely to shape them as future constitutional lawyers of continental repute. This approach was inspired by, among other luminaries in pedagogy, Muhammad Yunus the Nobel laureate who in his book *A World of Three Zeros* suggests:

“As an integral part of the education system, I propose that every year each class should spend one week imagining the broad features of a world they would like to create if they were given the freedom to do it.

“I think that imagining such a world should be the most important part of the education process. Once they design this world they will start thinking about how to translate it from imagination to reality” (Scribe Melbourne & London, 2017: 148 – 149).

Secondly, our pedagogical innovation with my students was also premised on the Daystar dominant *problem-based learning* methodology. As the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire taught us in his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum, New York, London, 1970, 2002) the *banking model of education* through which teachers deposit information in the minds of docile students is outdated because modern education must be a liberating force for societal transformation. Freire emphasizes education must be dialogic, praxis based, humanizing, and liberatory.

To cut this story short, I learned from my students that there were new areas they wanted incorporated into our common learning and areas I had proposed which they didn't think were a priority. I felt they passed this message gently. We keep on negotiating how to study together. However, the one thing we don't bargain about concerns the scourge of plagiarism and kindred academic cheating.

Hence you are being invited to dialogue with the Vice Chancellor and his team so that this postgraduate engagement leads to an innovative co-creation or even if you will, two-sided public participation to ensure both postgraduate students and faculty can birth a learning space in which mutual expectations are met bearing in mind the high-quality necessary research output.

I hope as you continue to research towards completion of your degree of choice, you will incarnate the new ideas you are unearthing within your current work stations. Those places of work are important laboratories to measure the viability of your research in progress. In And I think your research output must itself ultimately transform you. If education at this level does not incrementally make you a better person poised to positively impact society in whatever assignment, then such education, permit me to say, is sterile. It is (mis)education for purposes of begetting an ornamental diploma and no more.

Let me conclude by confessing that in my stint as a graduate student in the four universities I alluded to you before, we weren't invited to such a gathering as this to share with our faculty how to better the learning habitat. May be this Daystar approach then was not the in thing. But also let me say without embarrassing my boss and colleague Prof Laban P. Ayiro, he is a man of many firsts which led to his recently naming during Kenya's Institute of Certified Secretaries Champions of Governance Awards as C.E.O of the Year. The knowledge and experience which behind this singular recognition is being put to use in Daystar and hence this innovative approach of inviting postgraduate students to an interactive dialogue about shaping the present and future of postgraduate education.

And again, without mortifying Professor Vice-Chancellor, I think like Jonah of the Bible, he was swallowed by a big fish or a whale in Eldoret, a land between Joppa and Tarshish where he may have believed that was the destination God was sending him to rescue a university, only to be vomited onto the dry Ukambani Nineveh land of Athi River. And so here we are Postgraduate Students, Vice-Chancellor and Faculty committed to a dialogue where the words of Jonah 1:6b: ring true. The Bible says:

“How can you sleep? Get up and call on your (G)od! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

The ship's captain did not know the God of Jonah, our almighty God, makes the impossible possible. We who are gathered here know better.

I thank you for listening to me, May the Almighty God bless you all in your academic pursuits.

DayStar University,
Athi River Campus,
8 March 2025.