

Transforming African Economies through Higher Education: A Synthesis of the Kenyan University system

Waweru Peter Ndirangu,

*Department of curriculum Instruction, Administration and
Management, Mount Kenya University*

Email: pnweru@gmail.com Cell: +254721-707-177

P.O. Box 4656-01002 Thika-Kenya

ABSTRACT

Kenyan Universities have faced a number of challenges in the delivery of quality education in the recent past. That notwithstanding, the number of public Universities in Kenya has tremendously grown in the last decade from six public Universities in 2005 to over 30 Public Universities by September 2016. At the same time, the number of private Universities in Kenya has also grown to over 23 Universities by year 2016. This has created a number of challenges worsening an already bad situation with constrained resources and few experienced lecturers in various domains being the main ones. This paper is a review of the situation of higher education management in Kenya. It offers insights into the milestones of the Kenyan higher education in the last decade.

Keywords: Public Universities, Private Universities, Management, Education, Quality Education.

Introduction

Writing for the Association of Commonwealth Universities (www.beyond2015.acu.ac.uk), Stephanie Bryant notes that the global landscape of higher education is changing. Higher education is being reshaped by globalization and the digital revolution. There are growing

pressures related to declining sources of income and rising costs. There is heightened competition for share of the global student market. Institutions are seeing a lasting effect from the global financial crisis impacting both enrolment numbers and philanthropy, and students have increasing demands and expectations of their educational experience.

She continues to opine that prospective students are becoming more consumer-orientated and making decisions about education accordingly. University rankings will increasingly have more influence on positioning institutions in the international market, and graduate career-readiness is a growing student concern. In this regard, students are looking for access to services and education across new technologies and more flexible delivery options. In order to be competitive and to meet these expectations, universities are required to invest in expensive facilities and infrastructure.

The rising number of Universities and institutions of learning has not made it easier for universities; the global students population is spoilt for choice in terms of academic institutions; the growth in the adoption of ICT and eLearning even making it easier for students from all parts of the world to access education from any part of the world, and at favorable costs. For example, the number of Universities in Kenya has grown overtime from 3 in 1980; 16 in 2006 to 22 public Universities, 14 chartered private Universities and 13 Universities with letter of interim Authority by November 2016. Africa itself has experienced similar growth in the number of Universities. In the 60's, there were only six public Universities in Africa. This was the decade where most of the countries in Africa were gaining independence. By the year 2005, the number of Universities in Africa had risen to over 400 Universities in 2005 and over 620 accredited Universities in Africa by November 2016 (Onsongo, 2007).

This rise in the number of Universities has been driven by a demand for higher education and by the expansion of African economies which has provided greater demand for a more educated work force. With all these issues, it is clear that a university's ability to differentiate itself in market; recruit a diverse student body; attract and retain staff of international distinction; secure multifaceted partnerships and attract research funding from philanthropists will be key to

surviving the challenges the sector faces. These challenges and opportunities face every University around the world and are not limited to Kenya only.

Higher Education in Kenya

Today, Kenyan Universities are facing the homogeneity of competition, the uncertain education policies and limited funds from the exchequer; increased competition from private Universities which are considered to be more efficient and organized in terms of delivery of content, each university is therefore forced to act like a business (Waswa, Ombuki, Joash, & Metet, 2013).

Public Universities in Kenya have faced major transformations as demand for education grows. In the year 2011, the Kenyan government began an ambitious process of increasing the number of Government sponsored students enrollment into public Universities from the 24,000 admitted in the year 2010 to 32,000 in year 2011. This increase in student numbers was done alongside upgrading and acquisition of tertiary colleges by public universities and transforming the into University colleges to cater for the large number of students. In many cases, the acquired institutions switched to production of courses offered by the universities at degree, diploma and certificate levels (Gudo, Olel, & Oanda, 2011). The increase in the capping of entry points for government funded students in Universities as had positive impacts on Public Universities; but the challenge of limited infrastructure has weighed in on these benefits in some cases leading to overstretched University resources due to increased number of students beyond the capacity that the Universities can handle.

The recent allocation of over 10,000 government funded students to Private Universities in Kenya has not made it easier for the public Universities. It is expected that this will level the ground between public and private Universities as demand for knowledge and skills of graduates as opposed to where the student studied will be the key consideration in the job market.

University Governance

Heads of institutions are normally vested with the largest degree of individual formal authority and responsibility within the learning institutions. In most universities, the instruments and articles of government or statutes stipulate that the leader is directly responsible for the day-to-

day management of the university, which includes directing and leading the university and its staff, determining academic activities in consultation with the academic board or senate and managing the budget and resources. As the chief accounting officer, the head is responsible to governance and funding agencies for ensuring compliance within the terms and conditions. The head is also the academic leader of the university, being chair of the academic board or senate, and in addition is responsible for representing academic interests internally to the council or board of governors and externally at a local, regional and international level. Traditionally, such chief executives are appointed to their salaried posts by a cadre of prominent academics without any formal training beyond their experiences in the academia (Sifuna, 2013).

The challenge of leadership in universities across Africa and particularly in Kenya is that public Universities leadership from the Vice chancellors, deputy Vice Chancellors, deans of schools, heads of departments and academic heads are rarely appointed based on their leadership capabilities (Sifuna, 2013). In most cases, as much as their academic qualifications form the basis of their employment, political, tribal, regional and religious factors are a critical determinant for appointment. Even worse, upon appointment, these heads rarely receive critical training in strategic planning, budgeting, human resource development and faculty management and hence most of them end up performing dismally.

A case in point has been the tribal and political undertones that have surrounded the appointment of Moi University acting Vice Chancellor in Kenya. The feeling from the local community has been that of entitlement as the University is located within their locality hence few could stomach the idea of “an outsider” taking leadership of the university (Standardmedia.co.ke, 2016). Perhaps more worrying from this incidence is the perceived effects of politics and University governance. Noting that this is not an isolated case, public Universities in Kenya have for long been blamed on nepotism. A closer look at the senior management of all the 22 chartered public Universities in Kenya portrays this worrying trend.

Challenges in the Higher education system in Kenya

According to Gudo (2011), three major transformations in the Kenyan higher education system introduced a set of challenges in the Kenya. The first challenge related to the introduction of

double intake in the year 1991 as the country shifted from the 7.3.3.6 system of education to the current 8.4.4 system. This led to the straining of tuition and boarding facilities and led to the expansion of these facilities to cater for these numbers. However, because resources to implement such changes fell far short of the demand, congestion in lecture theatres, science laboratories, libraries and dining halls remained a critical problem.

The second set of changes related to the organization of the three semester year, which necessitated the use of available facilities throughout the year. Although this move was commendable from the point of view of promoting a more efficient use of available resources, these measures also had some negative consequences; most notably, the lowering of staff morale, the lengthening of the period it takes students to complete their degree courses as well as the lowering of academic standards.

The third set of changes related to staff incentives. These have included accelerated recruitment of teaching staff, the application of relaxed promotion criteria, and the introduction of monetary incentives. The first two measures have tended to de-emphasize merit and the need for staff to research and publish and have had serious negative consequences on the quality of education offered by several Universities in Kenya. Finally, the double intakes necessitated changes in the administration of university examinations. The increased enrolments were accompanied by an increase in examination irregularities such as cheating while staff applied less rigorous criteria in grading examinations. Measures recommended by the various university Senates to curb such malpractices did not succeed mainly because of the unmanageable size of many classes.

Conclusion

Kenya is a country in the midst of national transformation. It is imperative that the government of Kenya and the Ministry of Education review the elements of human productivity that will modify how education is administered in the society today. A change in policy will assure that the growth that this country seeks occurs not through major changes, but through challenges or its citizens that are sometimes overlooked. There is need to link the demands of the country with the university curriculums as well as ensure the ways are found to level the ground for both public and private Universities to deliver a better trained workforce.

References

- Boit, J. M., & Kipkoech, L. C. (2012). Liberalization of Higher Education in Kenya: Challenges and Prospects. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 33-41.
- Gudo, C. (2014). Financing higher education in Kenya: Public – Private partnership approach. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review*, 1-5.
- Gudo, C. O., Olel, M. A., & Oanda, I. O. (2011). University Expansion in Kenya and Issues of Quality Education: Challenges and Opportunities. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 203-214.
- Marginson, S. (2016). *Public/private in higher education: a synthesis of economic and political approaches*. London: Centre for Global Higher Education, UCL Institute of Education, London WC1H 0AL.
- MBIRITHI, D. M. (2013). MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES FACING KENYA’S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION. *Unpublished Thesis*.
- Onsongo, J. (2007). The Growth of Private Universities in Kenya: Implications for Gender Equity in Higher Education. *Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa*, 111-134.
- Sifuna, D. N. (2013). Leadership in Kenyan Public Universities and the Challenges of Autonomy and Academic Freedom: An Overview of Trends Since Independence. *Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa*, 121-138.
- Standardmedia.co.ke. (2016, September Tuesday). North Rift Leaders storm Moi University in Protest against appointment of acting VC. *Standard Newspaper*.
- Waswa, F., Ombuki, C., Joash, M., & Metet, J. (2013). Assessment of corporate management practices in Public Universities in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 22-32.

