The Impact of Massification on Higher Education in Africa: A Case Study of Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi and University of Cape Coast in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Due to the increase in the number of students applying for access to higher education institutions in Africa, there have been tendencies to increase the number of students being allowed into programs. This has led to increased pressure on the Universities as they have had to demonstrate academic excellence in terms of the quality of education being provided. The paper set to examine higher education literature in order to explore the impact of massification on Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi and the University of Cape Coast in Ghana (UCC). The findings point out that there are several challenges, which have risen as most universities do not have adequate resources to meet the demands brought about by the increased student numbers. However, it was also noted that there have been great strides to improve the quality of education being offered by the use of different other forms of learning such as e-learning.

KEYWORDS  higher education, massification, quality education, e-learning

INTRODUCTION

Scott (1995)¹ used the term massification in the context of higher education systems to describe the rapid increase in student enrolment in the latter part of the twentieth century. African countries have embarked on a mission of ensuring that higher education can be accessed by many of their secondary school graduates from as early as the 1980s. This was mostly due to increased populations due to better economic and health systems, which had reduced infant mortality. In support of emerging nations’ priorities, national government and international organizations accordingly made substantial investments in higher education throughout the developing world². Most of these countries adopted different strategies, which helped make education easily accessible to people in the country as higher education was believed to be essential for the development of a country since it provides the necessary human resource and skills required in innovation strategies. Bloom (2005)³ supports this by reporting that the expansion of tertiary education may promote faster technological catch-up in a country and also improve its ability to maximize its economic output. It is with this thought in mind that countries have gone ahead to expand their higher education institutions at a massive rate. This massive expansion is a welcome development in the countries as it ensures that access is improved and brings new opportunities, but at the same time has become a burden as it brings numerous challenges. Many countries are overburdened with economic crises and deteriorating facilities such that maintaining of high standards in the education sector is often overlooked in favor of creating more graduates. Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, and other African countries have also embarked on massification of higher education and some of the universities doing this at a large scale is Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi and the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. Bunda College of Agriculture is one of the five colleges of the University of Malawi. The other colleges are College of Medicine, Chancellor College, Kamuzu College of Nursing, and the Polytechnic. It is situated in Lilongwe 35.2 km from the capital city in the central region of the country. The college offers BSc, MSc, and PhD degrees in agriculture, environmental sciences, and developmental studies. Bunda College of Agriculture has introduced several parallel programs and this has ensured that there is an increase in its annual enrollment. In the year 2008, Bunda had an annual enrollment of 350 students as compared to 919 students in 2016 and this is not different from what is happening in other African countries especially in Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, and Benin. UCC enrollment has increased rapidly from 8959 in 2000 to 15,835 in 2012. What is interesting to note is that much as there has been an increase in the number of students that have been enrolled into the universities, there has been no increment in terms of infrastructure, space, teaching staffs, and resources provided to the students. According to Mohamedbhai (2005)⁴, “an important characteristic of the majority of African higher education institutions is that they have experienced institutional massification, but with no adequate planning and
with no proportionate, accompanying increase in resources (human, financial, and physical) to enable them to cope with the situation.” Most governments are ill equipped and ill prepared financially to assist in the development and adequate management of the large numbers being admitted in schools. This has created a lot of challenges, as well as compromises in terms of the quality of education provided to the students in the institutions. This paper will, therefore, provide an analysis of the impact that higher enrollment of students in universities of African countries, has had on the quality of education provided to its students using Bunda College of Agriculture in Malawi and the University of Cape Coast in Ghana (UCC) as case studies.

THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Higher education institutions, which are held in high esteem are usually measured on a basis that they are providing quality education. Quality education is a concept, which has several parameters attached to it. According to Crosby (1979), quality in education is achieved when education output conforms with the planned goals, specifications, and requirements. Hence, quality is not a vague concept, which can be made visible by the presence of one or more beneficial feature, which was either made possible because of preference or convenience; rather, quality in education is a very conscious and planned effort of all those who are involved and about every stage and component in this activity. In this case, quality of education is about the output that education brings in terms of the achievement of the set goals and achievement of specifications and requirements. If there has been an achievement of these set goals and specifications, then we say that quality education has taken place whilst if there has been a failure to achieve these goals and specifications then it means there is no quality in the type of education being given out. There are several parameters that one looks at when checking for the quality of education and these are education policies and practices, resources, learners profile, curriculum, faculty knowledge, skills and abilities, institutional design and strategy, leadership and open system thinking, and change. Zaki (2013) states that “higher education through its policies and practices, resources, learners profile, curriculum, faculty knowledge, skills and abilities, institutional design and strategy, leadership and open system thinking, and change. Therefore, these monitoring processes can help to ensure that quality of education is maintained. The Malawi National Education Sector Plan (NESP 2006) outlines the following parameters in higher education management strategies to achieve quality education in the country in terms of relevance and quality by proposing urgent and significant investments to upgrade teaching and learning infrastructure, enhance funding to increase qualifications, especially the number of PhDs, establish a National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) to monitor quality, oversee accreditation, and advise the government on higher education policy and finally to establish a semi-autonomous accreditation and quality assurance agency under the supervision of the NCHE (NESP, 2006: 11–12). These mechanisms can help to actually improve the quality of education in the country as they tackle the problem areas, which are evident in the provision of higher education in an era of massification.

THEORIES SURROUNDING REFORM IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND MASSIFICATION

Higher education reform comprises any planned changes in the way a school or school system functions from teaching methodologies to administrative processes. When tracing the influences of educational reform in African countries, it is inevitable that one must take the historical approach as African countries started to regain their independence in the early 1960s and the major thing they focused on was education reform. Post-colonial theory focuses on the aftermath of the colonial period where African countries had regained their independence, but were still under the economic and cultural domination of the west. African leaders decided that higher education would be the driving force of change in their nations as they needed to reset the mindset of the younger generation. Because of this need, African countries started changing their education systems with major reforms in the curriculum as a curriculum comprises of national needs, values, norms, and aspirations of a country as well as higher education enrollment. Kabwila (1995) states that when Malawi became independent in 1964, it became imperative that the education system to be reformed so that it would be relevant to the needs and challenges of an independent nation. Newly independent countries wanted to put down their norms, values and, national aspirations in their education system so that they could wipe out whatever the white man had written and developed their own national ideals. According to Chirwa (2014), education is supposed to be relevant, appropriate, and responsive to the needs of individual learners and society at large. However, some scholars argue that massification is as a result of the center exercising its power over the periphery in the dependency theory. These scholars argue that throughout history, the center has
manipulated the periphery through the missionaries who went to Africa, then later on the colonialists who had a lot of control over the physical labor of the Africans. The colonialists were later on driven out of the continent, but still more colonialism remains and that is through the colonization of the mind. Therefore, Africans are seen to have exchanged physical with mental colonization. “The periphery, it is said, has been forced or lured into a pernicious copying of the education system of the center. Even after release from colonial rule, the disjunction between what is taught and what is needed locally continues. For example, the application of science to agriculture, small-scale farming, household management, and hygiene is neglected in favor of concentration on abstract, "academic” material. The languages of the former colonial masters continue to provide vehicles of instruction, communications, and administration.” African countries have adopted systems of higher education learning that are not relevant to the developmental needs of their societies, which has then led to stagnation in their developmental process. Other scholars argue that curriculum change is mainly because of globalization as the constant interaction between countries has led to the exchange of new information which a country realizes may be good for their continued national development. Chisholm (2005)\(^{10}\) argues that the wind of massification sweeping across nations especially in southern Africa is due to the phenomenon of globalization, rather than just the desire of individual nation states. Institutions of higher learning in today’s education setting are heavily influenced by the things happening outside and within their countries.

**EFFECTS OF MASSIFICATION ON QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN BUNDA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**

According to Maguire (2000)\(^{11}\), “by international standards African Universities are very young, dating from the 1960s when the independence movement began to gain momentum. The African universities have achieved much in a short time but now with increased enrolment and declining budgets there is a serious risk of universities losing their influence on the higher education of Africa’s youth.” Due to the increased intake of the number of students at Bunda in recent years, the college has come up against several changes and challenges that have compromised the quality of education being provided to the students. Findings from a research conducted by IADP (2009) (International Association for Digital Publications)\(^{12}\) pointed out that “like most African tertiary institutions, the University of Malawi is confronted by ongoing challenges as demands for tertiary education continue to grow but access to both physical and human resources remains fixed.” There is no mechanism set up that will ensure that more resources should be provided as the number of students is rising. This has therefore resulted in a number of problems and challenges, which the higher education institutions need to work on if they have to maintain the high standards of education.

One of the major challenges, which emerged is that of inadequate resources as enrollments are often greater than the capacity of universities to handle the rising number of students such that the resources are not enough for every student. Higher education institutions develop a course with prescribed textbooks which a student needs to access in order to have a better understanding of the course. However, due to the limited number of books, students face a situation where one book is shared among 200 students. This has proved to be a challenge as it defeats the whole purpose of prescribing textbooks which students cannot access. A study conducted at Bunda College of Agriculture’s OER Project outlined that one of the major problems that students were facing at the school was that the “Students could not always access the ‘Recommended Readings’ that accompany the syllabus outline as the College Library did not have or had an insufficient number of these Texts.” According to Arnowe (2007)\(^{13}\), “University of Ghana and the UCC are a mere shadow of their earlier glory; drained of teaching staff, lacking in equipment and teaching materials, housed in degenerated infrastructure, surrounded by an air of demoralization, and incipient decay.”

Inadequate physical infrastructure has also been a problem for Bunda College of Agriculture as the students’ dormitories and cafeteria cannot support all the enrolled students. When the university was being built, accommodation was only meant for few students. According to a report by UNESCO (1988)\(^{14}\), hostel accommodation was provided for 438 students only. These are the same hostels that are still standing towards a population of 919 students who have been enrolled in 2016. This has resulted in outsourcing the services from nearby houses and restaurants and these have resulted in the provision of substandard products and services to the student community. The University of Cape Coast also faces the same problem according to Sampong (2009)\(^{15}\) as he states that “there is an acute shortage of trained teachers created by an expansion of pre-tertiary enrollments due to rapid population growth, the success of basic education reform, and the inability of Colleges of Education to produce the required number of teachers because of inadequate infrastructure. This shortage is not limited to Ghana but is prevalent in all countries of sub-Saharan Africa.”

Another challenge is that of staffing as there is an imbalance in the lecturer–student ratio as there are more students as compared to the available qualified lecturers. This is a result of poor salaries as members of staff usually go for greener pastures leaving the school at a moment’s notice. The vacancies they create are not easily filled as few people have the required qualifications. According to Obeng (2004)\(^{16}\), “traditionally, there are five Universities in the country. These are University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Development Studies, and University College of Education, which has now attained full University status. For some time now, these public institutions of higher learning have been battling with acute shortage of lecturers. It is a common sight that among the many teething problems faced by these national institutions of higher learning: lack of lecturers stands out to be very critical.” Due to the demand to fill these positions, compromises have to be made and in this case, recruiting under-qualified staff as evidenced...
in an article in the university world news which revealed that “up to half of the world’s university teachers may lack post-graduate degrees because of the pressures of “massification.” Altbach (2008) also states the same as he points out that “the need to respond to the demands of massification has caused the average qualification for academics in many countries to decline.” This has resulted in the decline in the quality of education being provided in the higher education institutions such as Bunda and UCC.

Economic factors also play a large part in the challenges that have emerged due to massification. African universities largely depend on government funding to function. Due to economic constraints, the government is reducing the amount of money being allocated to Bunda College such that the available resources are not enough to help run the school’s daily activities. The school has therefore resorted to increasing the school fees, which has created a major problem where there is massive dropout since a large number of students cannot afford to pay the fees. The same is the case for the University of Cape Coast where funding for scientific research remains a key problem in Ghana, especially funding from local agencies. “Government funding for research is low; scientific research and development (R&D) receives about 0.3% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) [79]. This is less than half the GDP spent in other African countries, such as South Africa, where about 0.87% of GDP is spent on local scientific research [80]. Research funding from the Government of Ghana also falls below the African Union’s recommendation that a minimum of 1.0% of national budgets of member states should be spent on local R&D [19]. Only a small fraction of the limited funds (about a 10th of the 0.3% of Ghana’s GDP) goes to support actual research costs because the vast majority (over 90%) is spent on salaries, remunerations, and other operational expenses.”

This has, therefore, beats the idea of massification itself as few graduates are being produced as compared to the initial enrollment.

CONCLUSION

Massification has proved to be beneficial to young people in Africa especially in Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, and Benin just to mention a few as they have been given a chance to study a course of their own choice in the best universities. However, the enrollment of such large numbers of students has created a problem since the quality of education is being compromised in the process. There are few resources available such as books, classrooms, and even the teaching staff is not large enough to adequately cater for every student in the system. As a result, the quality of education is becoming poor with each passing year and this will lead to an emergence of a work force that does not have any skills, which will then affect the development of the continent in the long run. There is a need for additional resources such as infrastructure reading materials, and teaching staff so as to complement the high number of students being enrolled. If such a balance is created, it will ensure that students have access to good quality education as all resources will be available.

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