

Chapter 13

African Universities Quality management Challenges and Higher Education Agenda

Olugbemiga Samuel Afolabi

University of Johannesburg, South Africa & Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

Harrison Adewale Idowu

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Higher Education in Africa has gone through various stages and processes. Starting from the colonial period, higher education was conceived as the fulcrum to drive development, provide skilled workers for administration, and showcase the best in knowledge production in the continent. The listed aims were seen as the Higher Education agenda. However, years after independence, questions are being raised about the quality of knowledge dispensed and viability of graduates to compete in the labor market, within and outside Africa. To answer these questions, the chapter, relying on survey and secondary data, addresses the challenges of quality management in African universities in view of the Higher Education Agenda. This is with a view to recommending policy options that address the quality management deficits in Africa's Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

There is no gain saying the fact that the mere presence of higher education is insufficient, without attaining and sustaining certain level of standards to ensure quality. The quality of higher education in Africa has, to a large extent been described as poor and in need of serious, nay, urgent attention. Our argument is that quality management is one very potent and veritable tool with which the higher education agenda in Africa can be achieved. As argued by Odukoya, Chinedu, George, Olowookere, and Agbude (2015), owing to globalization, there has been a compelling demand on universities to improve on the quality of higher education they offer to people. Thus, quality management is basically a two-way issue involving knowledge dispensers (lecturers) and those receiving it (students). In the middle, university

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managements serve as the facilitator and framework to achieve the Higher Education Agenda through verifiable quality management practices. Furthermore, Materu (2007) posits that some African countries such as Ethiopia, Madagascar, South Africa and Nigeria have accepted that the quality of higher education in their countries is not up to standard and have therefore, seen the need to improve on the quality of higher education. This is to ensure that the expected improved quality meets international standards of higher education. This is reflected in their pursuits of improvements in quality of training, teaching and academic outputs published in reputable journals.

Also, there is the consistent complain by African employers on the unemployability of African graduates (Ansu, 2007)- a situation largely traceable to the poor quality of higher education provided in African universities. In addition, the increasing rise in population in the continent has also been identified as a major factor contributing to the deterioration in quality of higher education in Africa as more students seek and gain admission that the universities have no capacity for (Odukoya, et al., 2015). This has impeded on the quality of higher education, to the extent that while the population of students in African universities keeps increasing, the infrastructure and sometimes, the manpower do not increase in direct proportion to the increasing population. In such circumstances, quality necessarily depreciates. Aside universities as sites of learning, quality is an important feature of every organization (Odukoya, et al., 2015), no matter its size and type (private or public, small or big). As such, no university can boast of being one in the real sense of the word without corresponding quality (Giertz, 2000). The concern for Africa is that, even though higher education has been consistently seen as very critical asset for a knowledge economy as a critical agenda, there remains disturbing concerns about the quality and relevance of higher education in African universities.

According to Vlasceanu, Grunberg, and Parlea (2007: 76), quality management is “an aggregate of measures taken regularly at system or institutional level in order to assure the quality of higher education with an emphasis on improving quality as a whole.” Quality management, a practice wherein measures are put in place to improve quality is nonetheless, a task demanding experience, will and sincerity. Unfortunately, a lot of African universities, due to historical and contemporary reasons, do not possess the qualities to engage in quality management/assurance. Even where quality management is being done, they face serious challenges that continue to undermine the quality of higher education in the continent.

Harvey (2010) asserts that the global push and agitation for quality higher education had started in 1990s. This had led to the establishment of several quality-assurance bodies around the globe. Some of such quality management/assurance bodies include but are not limited to: The Bologna Process; the Bruges-Copenhagen Process and the ‘EU2020’ Strategy in Europe; the Brisbane Communique in Australasia; ENLACES in Latin America and the Caribbean; the African Higher Education Area in Africa; the SADC Protocol on Education and Training; and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in South Africa, among others (Baumgardt and Lekhetho, 2013: 422). Elsewhere, a study by the EUA (2011) has identified the present-day mechanisms for quality management in universities. Some of the mechanisms identified by the study include periodically conducted self-studies and evaluations of units’ mechanisms for the approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes; student and staff satisfaction surveys; and implementation of student surveys on teaching effectiveness. Others include analysis of the quality of teaching staff and learning resources; student workload assessments and graduate tracer studies; and monitoring of indicators and statistical information to analyze students’ progression and success. Afolabi and Omal (2018) has also looked at the role of Governing Councils in quality management.

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