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HAWKING OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN URBAN CENTERS IN KENYA: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

The demand of university education in Kenya has been increasing. Consequently, public and private universities have overenrolled to cater for this demand. Moreover, the universities have used this crisis to generate income to support both human and material resources needed for privately-sponsored students. To make education accessible to students, especially the working class, universities have moved to urban centers where they have strategically positioned themselves in satellite campuses. The main operation points of the universities are central business districts (CBD) in urban centers. Some of the universities that have not secured the coveted CBD premises have moved to the periphery. Proximity to the city notwithstanding, universities are engaged in stiff competition to outdo each other by introducing new and cost-effective courses which are taught in sandwich mode. Thus, the quality of the education offered in urban satellite campuses is brought into critical scrutiny in this paper with a view to establishing the challenges experienced and suggestions on how to improve the situation. This paper will rely on both primary and secondary data particularly records from selected private and public universities with regard to facilities and other resources. Observation and recording of information was utilized in data collection.

Key words: Challenges, Education, Hawking, Resources, University

INTRODUCTION

Evidently, the demand of education, especially higher education is substantial in Kenya and beyond. Precisely, in Kenya, advanced education is among the basic requirements needed for promotion, salary increase, and respect, but only to mention few benefits. Taking a critical analysis of access and quality of education in Kenya, Glennerster et al. (2011) argue that:

“Education is widely seen as one of the most promising paths for individuals to realize better, more productive lives and as one of the primary drivers of national economic development. The citizens and the government of Kenya have invested heavily in improving both the access and quality of education, in an effort to realize the promise of education as well as to achieve the education-related Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030” (pg. 3).

Indeed, the demand for education and in particular university training in Kenya saw the booming enrollment of students dating back to 1998. This new development was necessitated by the demand to have public universities generate income to sustain their academic programmes and other financial undertakings. Wainaina (2011) concurs with the aforementioned reasons and observes that:

“Over the last ten years, Kenya has witnessed an unprecedented growth of Module II programs in the

public universities. The nascent nature of these programs is borne out by the fact that the earliest started in 1998 and the rest have grown over subsequent years. Different terminologies have been used to describe these programs viz; parallel programs, self sponsored programs, direct entry programs, full fee paying academic programs and Module II programs” (pg.96).

Moreover, the Kenya government liberalization of university education gave universities and colleges a leeway to operate freely in order to meet the high demand for university education. Notably, the government has permitted universities to start constituent colleges and campuses, and in turn constituent colleges to open campuses. The government has recognized collaboration between private middle level colleges with universities and constituent colleges in offering diploma and degree courses. Recently, the government has granted charters to 6 long time established public universities and 15 new universities among them few which appear to be regional and politically. Even further, a number of private universities have been given interim letters or charters to operate . All these developments attest the government commitment to meet the demand for higher education

Institutional Framework for University Education in Kenya

Education at university and equivalent institutions has expanded rapidly in Kenya. Since the inauguration of the first university in Kenya in early 1970s, over 30 universities, both public and private, have been established in the country to meet the escalating demand for education. Equally, mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that quality education is provided. For example, the Commission for University Education is prominently entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that standards in opening and operating universities are in place. Also, university councils, senates, quality assurance departments, faculty and departmental academic boards among others agencies play a big role in the reinforcement of standards. The providers of university education in Kenya are ministry of education, science and technology, religious organizations, communities, private entrepreneurs and other stakeholders. Nonetheless, both public and private stakeholders have highly commercialized provision of education; hence, making it inaccessible to poor in addition to eroding the quality of education.

To fulfill the obligation of the tax payer, the government of Kenya has laws, regulations and policies among other measure that are meant to ensure the conditions for providing university education are in place. For example, the Universities Act, 2012 found the Commission for University Education to pursue the following objectives in promotion of university education.

- i. To ensure the implementation of the objectives of university education as spelt out in the Universities Rules of 1989,
- ii. Promote, set standards and assure relevance in the quality of education,
- iii. Monitor and evaluate the standards of university education system in relation to the national development goals,
- iv. Undertake or cause to be undertaken regular inspections, monitoring and evaluation of universities to ensure compliance with set standards and guidelines

In the context of the aforementioned act, the crucial requirement in provision of quality university education is the establishment of adequate and dependable material and human resources to sustain quality degree and diploma programmes for which the university is found and accredited. Although, many universities have fulfilled the basic requirements of being granted the charter or interim letter to operate and offer the programmes, they have with time generated to the level of offering mediocre education in the haste of generating income, and therefore putting university education into doubt and critical interrogation.

Statement of the problem

The expansion of education in Kenya has occurred due to high demand for it. The reasons for this demand are many and they range from desire for knowledge to economic empowerment. Unfortunately, the escalating demand for higher education has in some cases forced hasty provision of education opportunities which leave a lot to be desired. Consequently, the quality of the education offered in urban satellite campuses is critically examined in this paper with a view to establishing the challenges experienced and making suggestions on how to improve the situation. Indeed, among the multiple of issues scrutinized in the paper are capacity of physical and human facilities, location of urban satellite campuses, access and affordability of education, quality of learners and competence of teachers,

Justification of the Study

This study is timely, especially in the wave of ISO demand for maintenance of high international standards on the delivery of quality services to the consumers in every aspect of life. Thus, there is an urgent need to scrutinize service delivery in higher education sector, especially at the university because it is the pace setter in training of manpower and advancement of knowledge in the society. Also, due to overwhelming demand and expansion of higher education in Kenya, there is an imperative to put in place checks and balances on the provision of quality of education. Indeed, this paper is a thought provoking study that is meant to pave way for further scrutiny of the ever expanding education sector in Kenya and beyond

Review of Literature

The clamour for higher education should be clearly understood in the context of painful social, political, and economic cost. Specifically, Gudo et al. (2011) argue that “[D]espite the pressure to admit more students [, especially] in a double intake, public universities do not have adequate capacity to do so. The demand for university education in Kenya exceeds the capacity of public universities to accommodate all the qualified KCSE candidates” (pg.213) and other qualified, enthusiastic learners. Additionally, the quality of university education is compromised with big enrollments of students. It is argued in the article “Varsities need funds to attract top scholars” that:

“Matters are worse for the newly-established universities, as they cannot attract qualified lecturers, let alone professors. In fact, in such universities, most of which were given charters in the past two months, the only professors available are the administrators. The main reason for this state of affairs is the low pay package and lack of facilities, which make university teaching unattractive” (*Saturday Nation* 16th March, 2013, Kenya. pg. 12).

In the past, many universities, especially public universities undertook desperate measures to recruit masters’ level staff and part-time lecturers to teach students population which had increased due to double intakes of 1987 and 1990. However, the consequences of this move, were far reaching on quality education given. Precisely, Boit and Kipkoech (2012) maintain that:

“As a stopgap measure, the public universities recruited part-time lecturers from other public as well as private sector institutions such as polytechnics, private universities, and research institutions as well as from each other. Part-timing appears to be getting entrenched with the risk of becoming a permanent feature of the public university education system. In these times of economic stringencies public universities are using part-time lecturers as a short-term cost-saving measure since they do not draw benefits of regular staff such as medical allowance, house allowance, or pension. However, the effect of part-timing is the impact it is likely to have on the quality of university education in terms of teaching and research” (pg.39).

Thus, the immediate imperative in Kenya is to transform the education system, especially on aspects of access and quality, if the country needs to move forward and meaningfully be part of scientific and technologically advancing global village. Other outstanding educationists have appreciated the increasing demand of education in Kenya, while emphasizing the need to improve its quality. In his paper ‘The Transformation of Higher Education in Kenya: Challenges and Opportunities,’ Kinyanjui (2007) candidly observes that:

“Transformation and Paradigm shift in Higher Education: The Public University Inspection Board report has called for a paradigm shift and a radical rethinking on how to address the increasing demand for access and equity; the way students are initiated and socialized into university community life and the way the quality of learning and research is processed, ensured and maintained” (pg.1).

Put in another way, The Public University Inspection Board report and other stakeholders are calling upon a well thought paradigm that will enable students access quality education which will sustain the total transformation of the society. Kinyanjui (ibid) further underlines that:

“The paradigm shift envisaged entails transformation of higher education their concrete context of meeting national challenges of socio-economic development, innovation, creativity, adoption and adaptation of scientific and technological changes for the benefits of Kenyans, and to confront global challenges of competition in the Knowledge economy” (pg. 1).

In response to this challenge, this paper critically scrutinizes the quality of education offered at university level in urban satellite campuses in Kenya with a view to establishing the challenges experienced and offering suggestions

on how to improve the situation. Supporting this line of thinking, in the context of escalating demand for education in Kenya, Gudo et al. (2011) emphasize that:

“The demand for university education in Kenya has significantly increased and continues to swell. [Evidently,] Many secondary school graduates and the working class look for opportunities to pursue university education. [Nonetheless,] Universities being accountable to the public as stakeholders need to guarantee that they offer quality teaching, research and community service to its students. With the increasing numbers of students seeking places in public universities, the question of quality is critical and requires urgent attention” (203).

Even as the government endeavours to ensure quality among other things is maintained in higher education, it should not lose sight to offer equal opportunity to all Kenyans to access education. Correctly Kinyanjui (op cit) emphasizes that “The main challenge is how to increase access to higher education to cater for the increasing high number of school leavers and others who desire tertiary education (university), while maintaining quality and ensuring equity and affordability”(pg.2) at all times without other hidden cost.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the observation and key informant interview methods of research through which facilities such as lecturer rooms, libraries, laboratories and other supportive infrastructure such as playgrounds and those for indoor games were observed. The observation was made against set standards by the University Rules of 1989 and the Commission for Higher Education (later the Commission for University Education) in its *Handbook on Processes for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Kenya* (CHE, 2008). While the observation method used an observation checklist, the key informant interviews were carried out with students, lecturers, and Heads of Academic Departments (HoDs) in six universities with *campuses* in Meru, Eldoret, Embu and Nakuru towns and the City of Nairobi. In total gender inclusive population of 30 students and 18 lecturers who included heads of university academic departments from different schools/faculties were interviewed in three private and three public universities in a period of 12 months between January and August 2013.

Findings and Analysis

A close observation shows that provision of higher education in urban centers in Kenya is extremely expensive to students, especially on the accommodation, transport, and subsistence. Majority of the students interviewed agreed that the physical facilities, especially in urban campuses were inadequate, yet the fee is high. They pointed out the existence of poorly equipped libraries, inadequate space in classrooms, and lack of offices for staff among other facilities. Further, they bitterly complained that the burden of paying for transport to the campus and back to residences located far from the university, expensive accommodation, and other miscellaneous cost were frustrating their efforts to learn. Although, most of the lecturers interviewed were hesitant to comment on the status of physical and human facilities in their campuses, they would quip to the interviewer that “*it is obvious what you see*”. Meaning the aforementioned facilities are inadequate to sustain teaching and learning. Note that on average, a student will pay per semester over Kes 20,000 on rent and Kes 25,000 on transport and subsistence. These figures may vary depending on the location of the campus. Precisely, adding to the cost of about Kes 100,000 for tuition the amount is beyond the affordability of an average parent or guardian. Given this overwhelming cost, it has become increasingly difficult for students to sustain attendance of required academic sessions and hence several of them drop out of university programmes.

Many urban campuses are located in small spaces and therefore they cannot develop the required infrastructure to support the increasing number of students. Many students interviewed expressively maintained that campuses in the middle of towns need to be relocated to places which are conducive for learning. Even further, most lecturers interviewed admitted that the location of their campuses and glaring limited space were not good for business of teaching and learning. Some campuses are located in buildings, especially meant to serve as offices of small companies. More so, other campuses are housed in former residential houses. Consequently, it has become hard for many universities to have adequate classrooms, offices and good libraries for delivery of quality services. Further, a number of urban campuses lack recreational spaces for students; therefore most of the time students would move out of crowded campuses and loiter in streets and adjacent entertainment joints.

As argued earlier, many urban campuses are located in areas mostly referred as central business districts and peripheries of the same centers. Indeed, as observed, these areas are noisy and have distracting heavy human traffic. Simply, the areas are not conducive for learning. But the irony of it all is that university management teams insist

that these centers are strategic and accessible to attract students. Unfortunately, the reality is different because in several cases students and lecturers waste a lot of time wading through human traffic to attend classes at the required time. Even when a student or lecturer manages to overcome such obstacles, he/she will be stressed up to benefit meaningfully from learning sessions.

To attract more learners into programmes that are yet to be okayed by the Commission for University Education, many universities admit to satellite campuses students who have performed below C+, the required university admission cut point. Quite a number of students admitted that they scored below C+ in the Kenya Secondary Certificate of Education examination and had to be subjected to simple and waste of time bridging courses. The attempt to give this caliber of students bridging courses in order to meet the required qualification is unprofessionally done. Part of the problem is the need to make as more money as possible and hence admitting under qualified candidates only to subject them to bridging courses that they obviously pass.

In some universities, the curricula of some programmes have been simplified to attract more students and in essence make other universities offering same programmes unpopular. It is common for students to prefer enrolling in some universities where programmes are less demanding than others. The whole idea of offering university education is reduced to hawking it to any gullible learner. Even the qualified students who joined Module 11 in public universities or private universities complained of shoddy teaching and inadequate infrastructure, especially in urban campuses. They added that lecturers do not begin teaching on time. They only come the last weeks before the main examination to teach around the questions they have set. And since students want to pass in courses offered they do not bother reporting such lecturers to the relevant university authority

Some universities do not have required trained manpower to teach and mentor students. This is a fact that the Government of Kenya has ably acknowledged in the Kenya Vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007). To make the programmes 'cost effective', a good number of universities recruit part time staffs that are ill-equipped by training and experience. There were instances where some universities were observed to employ postgraduate students who were yet to complete their studies or engaging tutorial fellows in the teaching of postgraduate students against the fact that this is a training position. Rarely, do some universities engage genuine masters and PhD holders because they are too expensive to pay. Consequently, the courses offered and the products realized exhibit mediocrity. Evidently, the heads of departments interviewed expressed that they are not able to attract and engage PhD holders to teach in their campuses because of poor pay and in some cases the nonpayment of part time teaching. Also, the many lecturers interviewed admitted to have a master degree. But a few reported that they have registered for PhDs which they are not able to complete because they are busy teaching on part time basis in other universities

Further, the qualification of some lecturers teaching in urban campuses is questionable because as said earlier several universities engage cheap trained manpower. A number of lecturers are mostly recruited from high schools and obviously lack university teaching experience. Worst still, these lecturers lack rigorous training in content and research because majority are graduates of the same *makeshift* campuses where academic rigor is seemingly compromised. In addition to incompetence of lecturers, the issue of corruption is common in these campuses, especially in allocation of teaching courses. Some heads of departments allocate courses on basis of friendship, nepotism, tribalism, and underhand deals. Even further, when these heads of departments fail to get friends to teach courses, they hurriedly recruit cheap and inexperienced lecturers from neighboring private and public institutions. Worst still, engaged lecturers may teach in more than one campus and in effect compromise the quality of the content in addition to encroaching on time to deliver it.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing findings, it is arguable that the capacity of physical and human resources to support student numbers, especially in urban university satellite campuses is wanting. The locations of these campuses are not conducive for any serious learning. It is apparent that quality of university education has greatly been compromised leading to production of many half-baked graduates. The recruitment of unqualified students and reliance on part time staff is noted for the deteriorating academic standards and quality of graduates. Where qualified staff is engaged the problem is the payments for part time teaching take many months to be effected even when their service charters give a different waiting period. Most Heads of Departments live in fear of the university management to flex their muscles and decline engaging mediocre lecturers. Major reforms are urgently needed in the higher education sector particularly the provision of the necessary physical and human resources for quality improvement.

Therefore, the Kenya government should tighten the regulations of checking standards through proper training and adequate funding of enforcing manpower. Universities that do not meet the threshold of the desired conditions to open and operate satellite campuses should be shut down. The students who do not meet university entry requirements could enroll in middle manpower colleges to take bridging programmes before pursuing degree courses. Equally, lecturers who are not productive should be discontinued from teaching at the university until they demonstrate dependable expertise in the aforementioned areas of university scholarship. Further, the government should retrain or fire university managers who are hindrance to processes of creating and sustaining transparent and accountable processes of maintaining high academic and managerial standards at the university. Once the above is done among other things, the quality of university education will improve for the better.

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