

HIGHER EDUCATION TRAJECTORY IN KENYA: HISTORICAL LESSONS AND PROSPECTS FOR UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: Since independence, higher education has undergone a complete metamorphosis from a colonial inherited system to a highly advanced Kenyanized and diversified system. In terms of numbers; within the 60 years of independence, higher education has expanded from one university to close to 30 public universities and almost an equivalent number of constituent colleges plus private universities. This paper thus delved into the terrain that has characterized university education since independence. The objectives of the study included: tracing the development of higher education since independence to present; examining the major shapers of university education during the Kenyatta, Moi, Kibaki and Uhuru regimes and to analyze the major issues affecting university education in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem: Since independence, university education has witnessed tremendous growth in terms of the increase in their numbers and the enrolments. However, university education has also been the subject of the political changes and other dictates which have taken place in the country.

Research Methodology: The study employed desktop review in which the historical method was used in collecting and analyzing data; most of which was qualitative. The data was in form of both primary and secondary data; it encompassed: expert reports such as Commission findings, Development Plans, Legislations affecting higher education, journal articles, authoritative books and articles together with internet sources. Analysis was done thematically by grouping the data in historical periods for convenience and chronologically detailing the events in each of the periods while describing the salient issues.

Result: The study was able to establish that the shapers of university education since independence are: need to churn out skilled manpower; need to Kenyanize higher education; political infiltration and patronage and the need to respond to the growing appetite for higher education. The major challenges and debates facing university education revolve around quality, relevance, tribalism and unbridled expansion without consummate facilities.

Conclusion: It is anticipated that this research will contribute towards the debate on higher education with a view of originating concrete-historically anchored proposals for the present and future discourse and action.

Recommendation: There is need to delink politics from the affairs of the university, especially management. Best practices from universities that have high standards need to be domiciled.

Keywords: *Higher Education, History, Trajectory.*

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Just like many African countries, Kenya poised herself at independence to tackle the problem of lack of technical personnel by focusing on Higher Education. Before then, university education was a high privilege, with many of those who got it doing so abroad or at Makerere University in Uganda. According to Mutula (2002), the 1965 Sesional Paper No.10 that was heralded by the government was categorical; it expressed its commitment to higher education by supporting the training of highly skilled personnel, the result being the establishment of the first university in Kenya five years later.

According to Onsongo (2007), the most dramatic growth in Higher Education in Kenya occurred in the 1990's when Kenya opened up its democratic space after the repeal of Section 2(A) of the constitution which allowed multipartism. During this period, many Kenyans demanded access to university education and this led to the opening up of the system. At the same time, this period also saw the introduction of private universities which came to compliment the much strained public universities at the time. In fact, Onsongo (2007) posits that during the 1990's, private universities took the advantage of the slow pace of expansion of the public higher education sector to venture into the university market.

According to Ngome (2013), the enrolment in students at Kenya's universities has increased from a mere 3,443 students in 1970 to approximately 276,349 by 2013. This expansion of university education has been lauded and scorned in equal measure. Critics have been quick to point out that quality has been sacrificed at the altar of quantity. Furthermore, this trajectory of higher education has been visited by inconsistent and at times erratic decision making characterized by the politicization of higher education and incongruent policies; all these have severely injured the intention of higher education in Kenya. Consequently, several debates suffice as to whether higher education can be trusted to solve the economic, social and political challenges in the countries. Therefore, it is against this background that the research sought to x-ray the developments in higher education so as to bring a comprehensive grasp of the state of university education in Kenya.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since independence, university education has witnessed tremendous growth in terms of the increase in their numbers and the enrolments. However, university education has also been the subject of the political changes and other dictates which have taken place in the country. These changes have affected both negatively and positively the trajectory of university education.

Therefore, the aim that was sought in this study was to trace the evolution of higher education in Kenya with a view of highlighting the determining factors of university education in Kenya with a view of abstracting historical lessons and generating practical based solutions that can be used in enhancing university education in Kenya.

1.3 STUDY OBJECTIVES

- i. Trace the origin of Higher Education from independence to present
- ii. Examine the major shapers of university education in Kenya during the Kenyatta, Moi, Kibaki and Uhuru regimes
- iii. Analyze the major issues affecting university education in Kenya

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical Review

University education is an important element in any society; according to Boulton and Lucas (2008), governments around the world have invested heavily in universities and made demands upon them. For example, in the European Union, universities have been entrusted with the modernization agenda. This shows how paramount university education is; it acts as a blue print upon which a country's aspirations are anchored on. Research demonstrates that there exists a positive correlation between economic development and transformation on one hand and higher education on the other. Boulton and Lucas (2008) aver that based on this understanding, governments around the world hold the view that high quality, internationally competitive research and higher education mostly contained within universities are prerequisites for long term success in globalized knowledge economies.

Muhammed (2008) states that for centuries; universities had a role in educating the potential professionals, businessmen, political leaders and social scholars, who serve in the society to enrich its values and develop its resources. Boopen (2017) states that since the year 2000, there has been an increasing and much improved understanding of the role of higher education in economic development. Consequently, there has been a marked improvement in Africa. In fact, Boopen (2017) adds that there has been a notable increase of improvement in higher education attainment and investment in Africa from 6.1 million in 2000 to 12.2 million in 2013. In fact, the current public expenditure on higher education as a share of all public expenditure on all levels of education is approximately 20% (World Bank, 2014). This has coincided with the improvement in the labor output, human resource and social development in the continent. However, this is still low when compared with international standards.

Bloom (2014) avers that higher education positively affects employment prospects since it attracts higher remuneration and as such; socially, leads to improved life expectancy. At the same time, higher education can enhance economic development in low income economies by enabling them to catch up with the more technologically advanced countries. Wolf and Gitleman (1993) reinforce this statement by demonstrating that university enrolment correlated with increased labor productivity and that the number of professionals was associated with economic progress. Another study by Bawn and Payea (2004) demonstrated that with facts from Taiwan that graduates had higher productivity and incomes than non-graduates. Therefore, the debate as to whether higher education contributes to national development finds its answer in the affirmative.

Higher education in Africa has experienced a myriad of challenges since independence. According to Zeleza (2018), the continent's higher education sector is plagued by huge capacity deficits and challenges that threaten its very survival, sustainability and contribution to the continent's historic and humanistic project for democratic and development transformation. In a nutshell, Zeleza (2018) enumerates six major challenges facing African universities as: institutional supply; resources; faculty; research; output and leadership. According to him, institutional supply comes in when despite the massive expansion of these institutions; Africa's enrollment ratio still remained low at 12.08% as at 2013 in comparison with the world average that stood at 32.9% as at 2013. On the contrary, in Europe; the percentage was at 61.5% and 51.8 in South America in the same year. Therefore, these statistics are a pointer to the dire situation that Africa's higher education finds itself in; a lot needs to be done as far as increasing the enrolment ration in order to meet the world average percentage.

The other challenge that Zeleza (2018) points out borders deficits; according to him, universities in Africa are not properly funded in order to carry out their mandate. As a result of this deficit, there has been a proliferation of for-profit universities which has led to the six Cs namely: Corporatization of management, consumerisation of students, casualization of faculty; commercialization of learning and commoditization of knowledge. In addition to this, universities in Africa face the challenge of inadequate faculty; the rapid growth in the number of universities has outstripped the supply of faculty. In Kenya, for example, statistics from the CUE indicate that in 2018 alone, there were 18,005 members of faculty in the country's 74 public and private universities together with the constituent colleges. Out of this, only 34% had doctoral degrees. This, according to Zeleza (2018) is equivalent to the number of faculty in any top three universities in the United States of America. The shortage has resulted into knee jerk solutions to address one of which is the over reliance on part-time lecturers. The predictable result of this arrangement has been limited engagement between family and students; this has led to dwindling in the quality of higher education in the country.

Yet another challenge that bedevils universities is that of research underperformance; according to a World Bank (2018) report, the continent only accounted for 1.3% of global research and Development with only 169 researchers as compared to 4,034 for North America. All these challenges are a true reflection of the Kenyan situation. The exponential growth of university education since independence has not been accompanied by quality and relevance. One major unique challenge that has stared at the Kenyan universities has been the usurpation of these institutions by the political elites; this politicization of the universities has held hostage their role as transformers and solution providers; instead, the Kenyan universities have been forced to descend to the arena of the toxic political environment that characterize Kenyan politics. Right from the Kenyatta regime where the appointments had to be vetted to ensure that they are politically correct to the Moi era where universities were under the grip of the government even in terms of what they teach to the Kibaki and Uhuru era where they are the pinnacles of tribalism and mismanagement; these challenges characterize the trajectory of university development in Kenya. Therefore, this research sought to trace this historical trajectory with a view of finding out the antecedents that have shaped university education in Kenya. Such issues will provide valuable lessons and recommendations for the future.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study employed State Capture Theoretical model. According to Martini (2014), state capture can broadly be understood as the disproportionate and unregulated influence of interest groups or decision making processes. This is where special interest groups manage to bend state laws, policies and regulations through practices such as illicit contributions paid by private interests to politicians so that they get control of key institutions in terms of appointments and business deals. It can also arise from close alignment of interests between specific business and political elites through family ties, friendships and acquaintances.

Simply put, this theory exemplifies how political control permeates self-regulated, semi-autonomous institutions thereby crippling their capacity to independently discharge their duties and functions in the correct manner. This scenario has played well in the Kenyan universities; since independence, state capture has been manifested through several ways; the political elite have over the years held ransom the universities by controlling their affairs to their advantage. During the Moi era, the president was the chancellor of all the public universities; this gave the state unfettered control of the affairs of the universities; important ingredients such as academic freedom were suffocated in the hands of state machinery. Intellectuals were disallowed from engaging in academic freedom and were severely punished for expressing their ideas. Those whose ideas did not favor the state were forced to seek asylum outside the country. In the last two decades, a new form of state capture has emerged; this is the tribalization of universities and it is expressed through appointments and management to these institutions which are lobbied by the political class with vested interests. This form of state capture has dwarfed universities into instruments of the achievement of political goals rather than transformative institutions.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed desktop review in which historical analysis guided the collection, assembly and analysis of data. Furthermore, the study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. These included the following: expert reports such as Commission findings, Development Plans, Legislations, Journal articles, authoritative books and articles together with internet sources. Analysis will be done thematically by grouping the findings in historical periods for convenience and thereafter describing the events chronologically. Specific legislations were quoted directly from the various legal instruments that were employed.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The years of the Establishment and Kenyanization of Universities

Kenya attained its independence in 1963 against a backdrop of inadequate skilled indigenous manpower to occupy the positions that were left by Europeans. At the time, the Royal College was elevated to the University of Nairobi on 20th May 1964 after the University of East Africa was formed. By the time, University of Nairobi was a constituent College. According to Mutula (2012), this was the first step that was made in as far as the development of university education was concerned. Bailey (2013) reports that the university begun preparing students in the faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and Engineering. Those who aspired to study Medicine or Law went to Makerere and Daresalaam Universities. In 1965, the government mooted the Sessional Paper No. 10 in which it was stated that education was the principal means of relieving the shortage of domestic skilled manpower and equalizing economic opportunities among all citizens. To this end,

the University of Nairobi Act (1970) was passed which established a National University. From then, University of Nairobi ceased to be a constituent college of East Africa University. Closely related to this was the establishment of the National Council of Science and Technology Act 1978. This was a body established to coordinate research in science and advice the government on relevant policy matters.

The first Development Plan of 1963-70 and the third Development Plan of 1974-78 laid great emphasis on higher education since the production of skilled manpower was propriety because the industries and economy was in need of them. Therefore, the early establishment of higher education was driven by the desire to churn out skilled manpower to drive the social, economic and political progress of the country at the time. According to Onsongo (2007), for close to 14 years, Kenya operated with one university namely the University of Nairobi. This university had an enrolment of 100 students (Commision for Universty Education). However, after its establishment as a fully-fledged university, it gradually increased its enrolment to 8,900 by 1984 (Commission for University Education).

This increase in enrolment was attributable to the establishment of two constituent colleges of the university-Kenyatta and Egerton. During this period, university training was aimed at meeting the human resource needs that the country had at the time. Similarly, between 1970, ten privately funded institutions offering university level education, mainly theological based were established. However, these institutions offered limited enrolment and a few tailor made programs. At the time, a lot of focus was on churning out as many skilled manpower as possible. The issue of quality had not been thoroughly looked into because the regulatory framework for university training had not been established. At the same time, many more Kenyan students travelled abroad to acquire further training.

4.2 The State Control of Universities and Further Expansion (1979-1990)

Between this period, university education underwent two major transformations; namely: government control and expansion. The president responded to the pressure for the increase in enrolment for university education by appointing the Presidential Working Party led by MacKay, a Canadian Law scholar in 1981. Following the recommendations of this commission, Moi University was established in 1984. Soon after, Kenyatta University and Egerton University were elevated into full university status in 1985 and 1987 respectively. They became the third and fourth universities respectively. Furthermore, in 1985, the Commission for Higher Education was formed to regulate, coordinate and assure quality as a result of the expansion. Four years later, in 1989, enrolment in the four universities had grown to 20,000. This increment continued through the 1990's as will be pointed out later.

According to Sifuma (1989), during this period, there was a lot of government control of universities; Mwiria (1992) adds that through a chain of Presidential directives, there was establishment of universities without due regard to the financial and human resources available. The president was the chancellor of all universities and he appointed and dismissed Vice Chancellors. Further, the government nominated most members of the university council. Government control of the universities was extended to administrative matters as well as the admission of students. Ideally speaking, Mwiria (1992) posits that as per the tradition in most Commonwealth countries, an intermediary body is supposed to handle matters of university deployment and quality. Therefore, the strict control of these universities was in the best interests of the political elite and an utter disregard of the tradition. According to Sifuma (1989), the

establishment of Moi University, which was Kenya's second public university and located in the Rift Valley where the country's then president hailed from, could be seen as a political response to factors related to historical and regional inequality.

Since universities then were seen as pinnacles of agitation against the repressive rule of Moi, Sifuna (1989) reports that there were strikes and these strikes led to closures of these institutions or long periods of time. For example, the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta College were forced to close for two years and this created a backlog of students that needed to clear school. Double intake was ordered in 1987-89 and this led to a total of 21,846 students in four universities. In 1988, the Kamunge Report, dubbed '*The Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training*' announced that by the year 2000, public universities would enroll 50,000 students; this came to pass.

What can be said about this period is that the government of the day tightened its grip on universities because of the need to contain political dissent that was expressed in universities among students and staff. In fact, during this period, many faculty members who were perceived to be dissenting were silenced and others opted for exile. The intellectuals were denied their academic freedom. For example, Sifuna (1984) avers that President Moi ordered the expulsion of student leaders and closure of UON after students criticized the government's decision to barr former opposition leaders from contesting the general elections. In 1980, the Academic Staff Union was banned. All these developments were inimical to the assurances that were made by President Kenyatta in 1970 during the inauguration of UON:

While never ignoring or betraying the most precious functions of an academic body, this university must gear itself at once and with the constructive zeal to all needs and realities of nation building. At the same time, any healthy university must be governed more by freedoms than by restraint, for this reason, we have enshrined in the Universities Act the greatest possible autonomy in terms of organization, teaching and research. If the mind of the nation is to flower through this then professors and lecturers must be able to teach free and publish without fear. (Kenyatta, 1970).

Throughout Kenyatta and Moi eras, this declaration failed to reflect the reality of the university at the time. These institutions were never autonomous and were dictated or interfered by the chancellor acting by virtue of his presidential power (Coomb, 1991). In the face of structural adjustment programs, the government became reluctant to properly remunerate university academic staff because of the frosty relations between the two. The end result was the compromising of quality university education.

4.3 Era of Expansion and Liberalization of University Education (1992-2000)

During this era, the autocracy of the ruling elite was still manifest in universities, for example, Shiundu (1994) states that around the 1992 elections, a good section of academics circulated lies and propaganda about the achievements of KANU. These scholars allowed the university to puppeteer political machinations in their institutions. On the other hand, this was also a period of further expansion of universities; the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) and Maseno were established; the former through technical support from JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) while the latter was upgraded from the former Siriba Teachers

College. In addition, more private universities were also established, they include: Baraton University, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Daystar University, Scott Theological and United States International University (USIU). These private universities were awarded charters by President Moi. During this period, university education was characterized by massification and high enrolment which compromised standards. Daniel (1994) avers that this situation led to Kenyan graduates being subjected to scrutiny when they joined universities abroad; contrary to tradition, it was not uncommon to find universities asking Kenyan students to take preparatory courses before gaining admission.

According to Mwiria (1990), the high number of students during the 1990's was not matched with the available facilities and human resource; the result was astonishing; theatres that were meant to accommodate 100 students ended up housing 1000 or more, the same situation was replicated in libraries, hostels and many other student utilities. This situation led to many university strikes and the government unleashed security forces to intimidate and terrorize the students. Many student leaders were either jailed or expelled from the institutions; a few died mysteriously. Lastly, Sifuna (1994) reports that the government, in collaboration with the university management, managed to control the student unions. Those student leaders who exhibited radicalism were technically disallowed from contesting for elections in the Students Unions.

4.4 The Period of Further Expansion and Regionalization of Universities (2002- 2013)

This period saw the elevation of universities from colleges or polytechnics. The period also saw the proliferation of more private universities. Those public universities which were elevated included: Masinde Muliro University (MMUST), Dedan Kimathi University, Chuka University, Technical University of Kenya, Technical University of Mombasa, Pwani University, Kisii University, Maasai Mara University, South Eastern University, Meru University, Multi Media University, Jaramogi OgingaOdinga University, Laikipia University, Kabianga University, University of Eldoret, Karatina University and Kibabii University. In addition to these universities, a total of nine constituent colleges were established. The private universities which were established included: Saint Paul's University, Limuru, Pan African University, Africa International University, Kenya Highlands Evangelical University, Kenya Methodist, Kabarak University, Great Lakes, KCA, Mount Kenya University and Adventist University.

The decision to upgrade middle level colleges and polytechnics into universities elicited mixed reactions; whereas those who were pro the decision welcomed the idea of having every university in each region. However, according to Anadye (2019), this decision threw spanner into the works into the fate of middle level colleges and polytechnics since it stifled their role in creating middle level manpower which was still imperative for the country.

Eshiwani (1994) further states that it is during this period that universities were allowed to start income generating activities to compliment the dwindling government capitation. To this end, parallel programs were birthed. According to Yego (2016), when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank introduced the so called structural adjustment policies, university management was thrown into disarray because these policies recommended budget cuts to universities. They were allowed to come up with innovative ways of supplementing the meager income. At first, the parallel programs faced a lot of resistance but later on it became a norm. As much as this program helped in increasing the enrolment in public universities, it was also accused of lowering quality of learning as many who had the wherewithal in terms of money were able to acquire papers in all manner of courses.

One attendant challenge that came with these developments is that of regionalization of higher education. Virtually all regions were in a scramble to grab a piece of the pie in terms of having a university located in their locale. This anchored in the feeling of ethnic ownership of these institutions, a thing which negatively affected the aims of university education. Further, the manner in which these institutions were established and commissioned was political; the president wanted to woo people of different regions by creating a university and the politicians from these regions were at the center stage in this arrangement. According to Mazrui (2008), the first five years of Kibaki administration helped to maximize academic freedom on Kenyan campuses though not without some degree of tribalism and corruption. These seeds are responsible to the current state in these institutions where tribalism and nepotism reigns high. The universities were not able to break off from the enveloping attitude of politicians.

4.5 Period of Reaping the Deeds of the past? (2013-2019)

Taking over leadership against the backdrop of expansion and regionalization, President Kenyatta's regime continued to promote and enhance expansion of universities, both private and public. However, during this period, some decisions were also arrived at in the management of higher education that brought contention. The first one was the enrolment of public students in private universities through government funding and the second was the examination reforms instituted by the then Cabinet Secretary Fred Matian'gi which saw mass failure and drastic reduction in enrolment in the universities. The latter decision dealt a shattering blow to the parallel programs since all those students who met the minimum requirement were absorbed.

The reduction in student enrolment sent shivers to the university management which had for a long time treated these programs as a cash cow. However, it can be stated that these programs promoted conflict of interest in the sense that those students who were pursuing their studies through parallel programs received preferential treatment as compared to the regular students by the lecturers. At the same time, there were many critics of the parallel programs who alleged that it led to the lowering of standards at the university, this will be argued shortly. The decision to enroll public students in private institutions also brought a lot of contention; this is because those who argued against it stated that it amounted to a government delegating its duty to private sector and an admission of failure on its part. Nevertheless, those who lauded the move stated that all students who qualified to join the university were under the government and the government was merely fulfilling its responsibility by ensuring that all are placed.

4.6 Challenges and Debates facing Kenyan Universities

The challenges that face the Kenyan universities have generated debates over the form and manner of these challenges and how to address them. According to Khamisi (2018), universities have not been spared from the broader challenges facing the society. He states that higher education has been a haven of graft, nepotism, cronyism and tribalism. These challenges have been manifested in several ways; half-baked politicians have bribed their way to university degrees, influential elites have been favored with honorary degrees and unqualified faculty members have been hired and promoted based on loyalty and ethnicity. In March 2014, the Chair of Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission stated categorically that universities and institutions of higher learning were leading in corruption in ethical malpractices and listed corruption, embezzlement of funds, misappropriation of bursary funds and false certification as some of the problems bedeviling these institutions.

Yet another challenge that universities face is that of quality of staff. Khamisi (2018), states that in some of these institutions, it is not uncommon to find a more qualified staff working under an unqualified staff. To this end, there have been debates as to whether members of faculty must pose PhD's for them to be considered qualified. In 2014, the Commission for University Education gave an ultimatum to University staff to ensure that by 2018, all of them have PhDs. However, Zeleza (2018) states that by 2018, there were only 18,005 faculty members in the country's 74 universities and colleges, at 34% that had PhD's. This, according to him, is equivalent to the number of faculty at any three of the large universities in the U.S The High Court gave a reprieve to those lecturers who faced the sack by stating that they should continue to teach in these institutions. Manyali (2019), however, posits that these dons are a frustrated lot and as such, they cannot deliver quality education. This shortcoming has even prompted scholars such as Manyali (2019) to suggest that universities need to come up with innovative ways of fast tracking the attainment of PhDs such as conversion of master's degree into PhD's through research. However, such proposals have not been put to test yet though in other countries these proposals are the norm

Tribalism is another challenge facing these institutions. In August 2016, the Chairman of National Cohesion Integration Commission (NCIC) Francis Kaparo, castigated universities as bastions of ethnicity because many of them had violated that Kenyan Constitution by basing their employment of staff on ethnicity. In an NCIC report released in September 2016, it was apparent that six communities occupied 70.8% of all jobs in institutions of higher learning in 31 universities and colleges. This has cast a shattering blow to the integrity of universities and caused an irreparable damage to its capacity to act as a pinnacle of scholarly pursuit; in short, universities have descended into the arena of Kenyan political ideology.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study has delved into Kenya's trajectory of Higher education since independence to present. It has been demonstrated that several things have shaped university education over the years; need for skilled manpower, Kenyanization of higher education, politicization and personification of university management along whimsical needs of the leaders and the need to meet the increasing appetite for higher education. All these factors were found to have influenced university education positively and negatively. Therefore, it is the contention of the research that it is possible to use the positive lessons and rectify from the negative lessons in order to guarantee quality and relevance of university education in Kenya.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. There is need to delink politics from the affairs of the university, especially management
2. Constant debate on how quality can be attained in universities should be encouraged among the scholars
3. The expansion of universities should be accompanied with quality education
4. Those challenges that face universities need to be addressed as a matter of priority in order to regain confidence in these institutions
5. Best practices need to be sought from those outstanding global universities and applied

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