

Full Length Research Paper

Effects of democratizations of university education on quality of higher education in Kenya: A case of Moi University

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In the last few years, Kenyan public universities have mounted parallel degree programmes for students who are qualified and are financially able to pay for their university education. Moi University introduced such a programme in 1998. As a result of these developments, there has arisen concern amongst the stakeholders on the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of higher education offered. The paper reports the findings of an investigation carried out in the year 2003 to determine the internal efficiency of the Privately Sponsored Students Programme at Moi University. The target population for the study was all the students enrolled in the Privately Sponsored Students Programme at Moi University in the 2002/2003 academic year. Data for this study was collected by use of a questionnaire from a random sample of 300 respondents. The significant finding was Privately Sponsored Programmes operated below optimal efficiency levels. Different degree programmes demonstrated different levels of efficiency in the way they translated their inputs (students) into outputs (graduands). Also, it was established that many critical performance inputs were lacking or in short supply, such as library books and journals, computers, furniture in lecture rooms and chemicals in laboratories. To reduce these inefficiencies, there is need to enhance provision of critical inputs like books and journals, computers and science equipment as well as various consumables items.

Key words: Democratization, education, efficiency, indicators, performance, quality.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a considerable growth in student enrollments in further and higher education in both developed and developing countries in the last three decades. This growth has occurred at the time when higher education is experiencing unprecedented challenges. Every higher education institution wants to boast that it offers 'high quality learning and teaching'. As Vaneeta and Gosling (2005) put, their mission statements consistently claim that universities and colleges seek to provide excellent teaching and a high quality learning environment.

The pressure for expansion of higher education in most developing countries, Kenya included, is primarily as a result of demographic pressures and the influence of the perceived benefits accruing as espoused in the

human capital theory by Schultz and Denzin amongst other Education Economist. As the effects of the increase in student numbers have become more apparent in student achievement and retention, the call for ever more demanding and intrusive processes of quality assurance has become stronger. Such processes are designed to reassure both politicians and students that their public and private investment in higher education is giving them value for money (Harvey, 1995). Some of the key developments in higher in Kenya in the recent past include: diversification of higher education; increase in both full time and part time students; increase in the number of mature students and increase in students with non-standard entry qualifications.

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Higher education in Africa is said to be producing relatively too many graduates of programs of dubious quality and relevance and generating too little knowledge. There is also evidence that the quality of outputs show unmistakable signs of having deteriorated to the extent that the fundamental effectiveness of the institutions is in doubt. Consequently, there is skepticism about the quality of graduates produced in higher education institutions in Africa (World Bank, 1988).

Educational performance indicators have been in use in the USA much longer. They were developed in order to judge standards and differentiate high-ranking from low ranking institutions. In Africa and Kenya in particular, educational performance indicators are rarely used to monitor aspects of performance of higher education. On the other hand, Hannan and Silver (2000) agree that despite clear policy statements and funding opportunities that have been made available in many countries, the climate for innovation remains fragile.

As the numbers of students entering higher education rise, the demand for efficiency and cost-effectiveness drive much of institutional policy. This affects the nature and organization of the curriculum as well as the physical environment within which teaching occurs. Much of the so-called McDonaldization of higher education (Ritzer 1993; Hayes and Wynyard, 2002) is driven by this concern for greater efficiency.

In other universities, the programme is called “parallel, alternative, or module II programmes”. Considering that the evening programme is carried out at “market rates”, it is essentially more costly than the regular system, which enjoys government subsidy. Invariably, it targets the middle and upper segments of the socio-economic groups who have the financial ability to pay for it. In the developed world, where participation in higher education approaches, or exceeds, half of young adults, traditional forms of teaching come under mounting pressure to change. Vaneeta and Gosling (2005) agree that the changes that are required amount to a transformation of higher education, with implications for teaching, course design, use of learning technologies, scholarship and quality management.

However, there have been concerns expressed about the efficiency and effectiveness of these parallel programmes. According to Harvey (2002) education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. As more students enter universities and colleges than ever before, traditional forms of teaching are under increasing pressure to change. These pressures derive from a variety of sources: a more diverse student profile, globalization, and flexibility in modes of delivery, marketization of higher education, funding, and accountability (Vaneeta and Gosling, 2005).

There has been some disquiet among students in the regular programmes, who have complained that universities were paying more attention to parallel programmes at their expense. Furthermore, parents and the students

in the parallel programmes who have invested greatly in the education want value for their money. Consequently, there is need to investigate how the programme is performing in terms of input and output parameters i.e. its level of efficiency and effectiveness. The purpose of the study was to investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSSP in transforming inputs into outputs. The variables considered in this study were:

(i) Physical capital inputs:

- (a) Learning space utilisation
- (b) Number of library books and accessibility
- (c) Computing facilities

(ii) Outputs:

- (a) Progression rates.
- (b) Degree awards (classes).

METHODOLOGY

Primary data on student motivation, space utilization, computing facilities and boarding was collected through a survey carried out among students at various levels in the Eldoret West Campus. Secondary data on student enrolment were obtained from documents in the Admissions and faculty offices respectively at the main campus and from the Students' Registry at the Eldoret West Campus. Other data on library resources in particular, books were obtained from the university library staff at the main campus and at the Eldoret West Campus using a pre-prepared checklist.

Data processing and analysis

The data collected from the respondents were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The statistical techniques used tested the relationships between inputs and outputs, and the strength of the relationships. Inferential statistics used included, the chi-square and Mann Whitney U tests.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Computer use

UNESCO (1995) in Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education, points out that the most viable institutions of higher education, in both financial and operational terms are those which have succeeded in incorporating mechanisms and information systems that enable them to remove mediocrity and guarantee quality of teaching, research and service. These are also the institutions, which stand a better chance in the competition to obtain resources from the public and private sectors. Moi University appears to be lacking far behind in the provision of information systems and computing facilities to the students, especially in the Eldoret West campus.

Lecture rooms

While inputs such as buildings and lecture rooms are critical in the learning process their conditions/state are equally important. Adequate and suitable furniture, availability of safety equipment (emergency exits and fire extinguishers, for instance), sufficient lighting and cleanliness of the facility can either promote or inhibit learning. These are variables that facilitate the psycho-logical well being of the students.

The research findings indicated that furniture was not sufficient in the lecture rooms used by privately sponsored students in Eldoret West Campus. Consequently, some students stood throughout lectures. Moreover, the lecture rooms were not designed for teaching purposes; they were offices and go-down structures leased from the Kenya Ports Authority. Hence they are not the size of a traditional class or lecture room. However, the facilities have been converted with great ingenuity for teaching purposes: classrooms, lecture and theatre halls and offices as well as the library.

Although the lecture rooms are fairly well maintained however, other necessary fixtures were lacking for instance, safety features such as emergency exits as well as firefighting equipment.

Accessibility to Library books

Privately sponsored students indicated that they encounter problems accessing books and journals in the library. The problems cited included hoarding of books, un-cooperative library staff, transport to the library on the Main Campus and competition for books on short loan, Books in the Eldoret West Campus Library were said to be relatively few compared to the current population of students. Students enrolled in B. Ed were most seriously affected as there were very few education books compared to other faculties.

Lecturers preparation and punctuality

Academic staff constitutes the largest single input in the university production function. Academic staff apply their labour (time) to different outputs. Time spent on teaching (including preparation) will have some effect on research output, and research time on teaching output (properly measured to include quality). It is presumed that one productive lecturer hour presupposes up to another one hour of preparation and guidance perhaps three hours.

The current study found out that lecturers prepare sufficiently in the students' opinion. In spite of this, it was also found out that lecturers were not always punctual. This could be the result of timetable disharmony for lecturers who have to teach the regular students on the main campus as well as the privately sponsored ones at

Eldoret West Campus or poor coordination at the department level. The result is that lectures begin late into the term (semester). Either way, punctuality (or lack of it) has implications on the quality of output. Harbison and Hanushek (1992) tie quality to the intensity of teacher interaction with the students. In the study, there was lack of remedial counselling (corrective sessions) after tests and common admission test (CATS). In addition to their finding, they were of the opinion that individualized attention from the teacher is an important learning determinant, in which students' achievement would be expected.

Coursework and examination

There are several processes in the input-output framework, which are involved in the transformation of inputs into outputs in the education production function. They include selection of programmes, relative values of different types of programmes, characteristics of the programme such as content, duration and type of certification; learning environment in the form of social, financial, cultural, political conditions that will affect the student's performance in and ultimate benefit from, a training programme. The findings indicated that student coursework was regularly marked, but remedial counselling was rarely done, if ever. Consequently, the students do not benefit from lecturers feedback. Students are therefore unlikely to grasp certain difficult and subtle concepts since evaluation is not used to enhance understanding. Hence students end up as passive recipients without getting the opportunity to expand their knowledge. This is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of products (students) being produced. This scenario is a result of lecturers who have to cope with teaching between the two programmes.

Privately sponsored students also face problems associated with missing CAT marks, transcripts not prepared on time, shifting of examination venues, and being barred from sitting examinations due to fees balances. Inability to pay full fees was a significant factor in the students' failure to sit end of year examinations. In such cases, exams were deferred until such time the students had paid up. This finding is consistent with Riak et al. (1996) findings in "Socio Economic Study of Access to University Education". This study found that many university students in Kenya considered withdrawing from studies when they failed their examinations and had to repeat the year. Failing exams is the second most critical cause of dropping out of privately sponsored students after fee problems. According to Natriello (1994), students who more often get low grades, fail subjects, and are retained in grade have a much greater chance of leaving school prior to completion. Students who have difficulty meeting the academic demands of the school (institution) tend to leave, rather than continue in the face

of the frustration they often experience in trying to obtain good grades.

Failure to release transcripts on time becomes a handicap when students have to look for vocational employment. Students also indicated that many at times their CAT marks were missing forcing them to re-sit CATs or take supplementary examination at the end of the academic year, which impacts negatively on the overall performance of the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority should be given to the acquisition of adequate books, journals, periodicals, and digital information facilities to the library at Eldoret West Campus. The university should also put high on the agenda the provision of computers and Internet services.

Investment on physical capital, like purchase of furniture such as (suitable desks and chairs) and safety equipment in lecture rooms to enhance learning environment and to improve the quality of output.

For better utilization of physical resources like lecture rooms, campus grounds and staff; extra-mural courses or open learning and distance education could be introduced to make use of idle facilities during the day.

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