



Challenges of Autonomy in Higher Institutions of Learning in Kenya:

Diluted Education?

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Introduction

One of the key sectors in a country's economy that affects development in a myriad of ways is education. To this end, the quality and access of education to the citizenry remains imperative in any country's development. Researches have negated allegations that higher education (HE) is not necessarily linked to a country's socio-economic development and the growth on national domestic product. According to Bloom, Canning, and Chan (2006), HE can produce both public and private benefits. The private benefits for individuals are well established, and include better employment prospects, higher salaries, and a greater ability to save and invest. These benefits may result in better health and improved quality of life. Public channels, though less well studied, also exist.

One possible channel through which HE can enhance economic development is through technological catch-up. The increasing emphasis on the knowledge society, the globalization of services, the scientific technical revolution and interest in economic welfare, to Garcia-Aracil and Palomares (2010), has necessitated interrelated and inseparable missions: teaching, research and the new third mission of the direct connection between university research activities and the external economic and social worlds (Martin and Etzkowitz, 2000). It is therefore apparent that the debate about aid to education, and its role in wider discussions of education and development, remains salient. Although there is apparently a global

orthodoxy around education for all, the Millennium Development Goals and the harmonization agenda, it is clear that reality is far more complex and messy (Colclough, King, & McGrath, 2010: 452).

University education is one of the most sensitive investments for any government both politically and socially. Sensitive because governments need both highly-trained people and top-quality research to formulate policies, plan programmes, and implement projects that are essential to national development. The research findings of the Bloom's, *et al* work indicate that more investment in HE may be justified, while more research into the role of HE in development is certainly warranted. This observation does not however alter the fact that there is growth in the numbers of these institutions. They have in the recent past multiplied at a very high rate and there are consequences to this.

Despite the fact that at the attainment of independence Kenya did not have a university of her own, over the years, there has been a tremendous growth of these institutions. The state as well as the private sector has increasingly expanded HE not necessarily to completely match a growing demand but to provide an arena where those financially able and those who qualify can access it. The challenge however, as the paper argues, is to provide (a) quality education to match labour market, and, (b) quality and relevant teaching and learning in the institutions. The paper argues that the Kenyan higher institutions of learning (HIL) have the challenge of proving that the educa-

tion sector should be contributing positively to the country's socio-economic development through provision of high skilled labour that fits and matches the job market demands. Research on HIL in different parts of the world indicate that there is a general decrease in government funding and a relatively high funding from the private sector, especially from charitable organizations and foundations (García-Aracil and Palomares 2010, OECD 1999).

Very recently (2010), the Kenyan government through the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) minister has announced the need to revise the policies of government funding in public (HILs). The then minister disregarded the social sciences and noted that those aspiring to take up sociology and anthropology in the universities, for example, will have to fully cover the cost of training without any help from the government. On the other hand, the students qualifying for courses that are "relevant to the growth of the economy" like medicine, engineering, architecture, actuarial sciences, and other scientific related courses, will receive increased support from government funding. This is a resolution that has also been taken up by the National Council of Science and Technology, a government body accredited with overseeing research and funding in the country. The Council only funds science and technology oriented researches.

The argument that I make in this paper is that lack of funding and under-grading social sciences has not only crippled research but also greatly affected teaching and learning activities in the HIL. A contextual analysis of the situation on the ground as the paper reveals shows that there are eminent challenges that have in different ways affected the quality of social science in the country. This is reflected in the job markets where the management of different companies has to engage the graduates in training before they can effectively take up the jobs. The paper indicates that lack of explicit research and development in HIL is a key cause of irrelevant labour skills. This is linked to (a) shortfalls in relevant research agendas since research funding from the North is not always contextual-based, and (b) failure of Kenyan government to invest in research that in long term may contribute to development, policy change, and implementation.

Expansion of HE in Kenya

Since the mid 1980s there has been significant expansion of public universities in Kenya in response to higher demand for university education. To emphasize this expansion Oketch (2009:18) explains that:

In recent times, and with a rapidly expanded education system coupled with sluggish economic growth, the number of those with university education has grown more than the labour market can quickly absorb. At the same time Kenya's HE has also become diversified in supply since the government no longer monopolises the supply of university places as it did in the first two decades of Kenya's independence.

Since the late 1980s, the provision of HE in Kenya has become increasingly diversified. The diversification has taken two forms: first; the establishment and growing prominence of private universities, and second; the privatization within the state universities through the introduction of 'parallel' programmes (Oketch 2009:20), which in other researches has been explained as resulting from the great expansion of public secondary and higher education in the late 1980's (see Eisemon 1992:157). Presently, there are seven public universities. These universities absorb students selected by joint admission board (JAB) – a government/universities' body that is constituted by both the government and the universities – as well as direct entry and parallel degree programme students selected by the university admission board. Direct entry students apply directly to the universities so that they can be absorbed immediately after the results are released. Parallel degree programme students mostly do not qualify for JAB selections due to strict observance of the cluster subjects and cut-off points. They apply for their preferred degrees in universities of their own choices and finance their studies without the help of the government.

I had a chat with one of the dean of faculties about this selection and my curiosity was to understand the selection processes. He explained that they justify the selection through availability of bed spaces that can accommodate a given number of students. This tech-

nically means that if a university has bed capacity of 4000 students then JAB is supposed to select these number of students. This, however, is theoretical and does not exist in reality. The universities have been selecting much more than the bed space allows, and especially the parallel students. When I enquired whether there is any consideration of human resource, the dean said the administration can only worry about this once the students have reported. He gave an example of a course (BSc. Actuarial Sciences) in which they have always admitted students yet the university has not employed any single lecturer trained in this field. Once, the students report the administration employs part-time lecturers. Most of the students joining universities in Kenya are bachelor of education arts and bachelor of arts students of which the majority are admitted through the parallel programme. This admission, however, is still not sufficient for all the students qualifying from the secondary schools to do parallel degrees.

Private universities in Kenya have emerged as viable options for acquiring HE. Such universities offer market-driven courses and compete the overcrowded public universities in providing a conducive environment for academic excellence. This is because most of them have modern infrastructure including libraries, information and communication technologies that are vital for academic excellence and research. Private universities are known for their good performance compared to public universities. This is attributed partly to good facilities and infrastructure and close policing by the Commission for Higher Education (the national HE accrediting body), which ensures that the institutions adhere to strict standards and regulations set by the government. Most importantly, the private universities give valuable education to their students, who pay a lot of money for fees. The universities therefore strive to provide education commensurate with the fees they collect from students (Mutula 2002). On the other hand, the numbers of students in these universities are minimal and therefore possible for lecturers to keep a keen eye on their students. The fee is on the higher side compared to that of public universities. Consequently, for the self-sponsored students in the public universities and

those in private universities, HE remains a 'commodity' for the privileged.

Kinyanjui (2007) argues that HE remains relevant in dealing with post-secondary education broad needs for knowledge, skills and competence which can be provided through diversified and differentiated approaches, to give opportunities to increasing number of people needing continuous and life-long learning. The main challenge therefore would be how to increase access to HE to cater for the increasing high number of school leavers while maintaining the quality, equity and affordability. The government is no longer able to absorb high numbers of students qualifying from secondary schools every year given the limited bed spaces at the public universities. However, my chat with the mentioned dean revealed that though the bed spaces are said to be the determinant factor, as a way of becoming autonomous in the provision of HE, since 1998, Kenyan public universities have been absorbing parallel students for parallel degrees. This is not determined by the bed space but by the number of applications. The parallel students pay higher fee than the JAB students and are not legible for the government loans¹ in support of their HE. In some of the universities, these students are taught together with the JAB students. In other universities, they are taught separately. Some of the Kenyan universities offer summer programmes that allow students to do crash programmes that enable them to take three academic years instead of the usual four.

It has therefore been argued that due to the partiality with which access to HE is treated in both cases – JAB and direct entry/parallel – JAB may not be a suitable body to select students for HE in Kenyan institutions. There have been calls to disband JAB and replace it with a system, similar to that used by private universities, whereby each individual university would make its own admission selection independent of the selection decision by another university institution or the MOHE. Those who support this line of action argue that it would allow students to practice their preferences and have 'real choice' within the public system similar to those in North America's public and higher education (Oketch 2009:18). The situation has now been complicated by the MOHE minister's an-

nouncement that the government will selectively support certain courses and not others. Attaining the equality longed for in access to HE could therefore be as well shelved.

The inequality in access to HE means that despite the demand and qualifications by the high numbers of students that require HE, not all of them will have a chance in the universities. Whereas some cannot afford it without government's support, others miss opportunities due to limited capacities. The outstretched capacities are not just in terms of technical facilities/resources, but also shortage of qualified staff. This is supported by research elsewhere that has shown that increasing workload is affecting academics in many parts of the world with the average workload for full time academics being variously reported between 49 and 55 hours per week. A confluence of factors appears to underlie this increasing load. On the one hand, there is the growth in the sector that has not been matched by resources for staffing. On the other, there is the shift by governments in many places toward (i) more competitive/performance based funding (which is now the policy that the Kenyan government is calling for) and, (ii) more auditing and accountability (Vardi 2009:499). The increasing student numbers, as well as the diverse course/training requirements for these students in tandem with the increasing demand for education has meant a shift in the teaching and learning activities. With the increased demands and load, academics have also reported their concerns about the resulting decline in collegiality and autonomy, and the increasing managerialism of universities (Anderson, Johnson, & Saha 2002). At the same time, their research activities have been diminishing and this directly affects the quality of teaching/learning activities and in the overall their quality of educational output.

In Kenya, demand for HE on the one hand, and, lack of adequate financial support on the other, is exhibited by the voluminous university intakes and establishment of as many subsidiary campuses and colleges as possible. This is a way of eliciting finances to support the established campuses and programmes therein. This results from government's policy established in the early 1990s that universities should be

autonomous and cultivate ways of supporting their activities. Funding policies on universities in Kenya therefore has a history as the section below elaborates.

Financing of Universities in Kenya

African universities up until 1980s enjoyed full financial support from their governments. Higher education in Kenya was free, with the public purse covering both tuition and living allowances (Weidman 1995). The rationale for free higher education on Kenya was based, among other things, on the country's desire to create highly trained manpower that could replace the departing colonial administrators. In return, and as Chacha (2004) argues, graduates were bound to work in the public sector for a minimum of three years. Oketch (2009:18) affirms this in his research on Kenyan universities by explaining that:

During the 1960s and early 1970s, those who entered university were given government grants and allowances to compensate for preferring to enter further education instead of direct employment, which was readily available after completion of high school. It was compensation for opportunity, cost and income forgone as a result of going to university. At the time, university graduates were scarce; the Kenya government needed to build capacity in the civil service and felt that giving such incentives would motivate the youth to study harder to attain the entry requirements for university education. It meant that private returns to university education were quite high but these incentives also fostered an elite model of university education.

The implication of this was that the institutions depended on the economic performance of the states. The oil-crisis of the 1980s whose effects were felt in all the economic sectors, coupled with the population growth of the moment and subsequently the need to satisfy the growing needs in education, healthcare and food (Otiende 1986) meant a challenge for the public universities to start a struggle in coping with the financial crisis of the time given the limited govern-

ment resources. This saw reforms in most African's institutions of higher learning, including Kenya's, some of which were streamlined by the World Bank through the government. It was resolved that universities should endeavour to become self-sustaining, an era which saw introduction of cost-sharing in Kenya (Eshiwani 1990). The pay-as-you-eat programme was also introduced for students who otherwise had been fed by the government. By 1974, as Chacha (2004) argues, provision of education in general had expanded dramatically and the number of students seeking university education had grown to an extent that it was becoming increasingly difficult to adequately finance university education by providing full scholarships and grants by the Government. The Government therefore introduced the University Students Loans Scheme which was managed by the Ministry of Education.

In the mid 1980's, management in these institutions was decentralized to allow the institutions' leaders decide on the best means of introducing income generating activities. Most of the universities became autonomous from the state and the leadership mandated with decision making. It is also at this time when donor-support institutions from the North became an option for the universities to further their research agenda. Around 1990, the Breton Wood institutions put pressure on the Government to cut subsidies to the public universities by introducing fees and to stop paying students allowances. On average, the student fee to study at the university is Kshs 120,000 (USD 1,538) per year for undergraduate courses. The JAB students are expected to pay Kshs 50,000 (USD 641) of this amount. The government subsidizes their fee by paying the remaining Kshs 70,000. The higher education loans board also provides loans for the needy JAB students and can further subsidize the USD 641.

Public universities cannot exist without the support of the governments and as Mutula (2002) and Kiamba (2005) argue, up to date public universities receive their funding through grants from the Government. The grants are subsidized by the income generating activities within the different institutions, including the fees received from parallel students. In

private universities the fees range from Kshs 96,950 to Kshs. 127,330 (USD 1,211-1,592)-see Mutula (2002). Private universities raise funds from their own resources (including the students fees) and do not receive any grants from the state. Universities also get external aid funding and donations mainly for capital developments, technical assistance and staff training. Despite the help, capitation from the government remains minimal in support of learning, management and research activities in these institutions. This is especially so for the social science researches.

There is visible general decay of the good facilities that existed in the universities during the 1970s and the early 1980s, when the universities enjoyed significant budgets from the Government. Research indicates that, HE today is a complex, demanding, and competitive reality. Its constituents-students, administrators, faculty, and various publics are drawn from diverse sectors of society. Its arena comprises institutions that receive decreased funding, are hounded with increased demands for accountability, and experience declining public support, recognition, and appreciation. HIL thus face some serious challenges and dilemmas to pursue or maintain excellence and simultaneously balance it with other imperatives such as broadening access, equity and transformation (Wangenge & Langa 2010). Coupled with these challenges is the dilemma of increasing demand for HE and the need to provide quality education even as the universities grapple with the challenge of shortage for lecturers.

Quality of education in HIL

The demand for quality HE and qualified personnel according to (Maviiri, 2006) is increasing and the public universities have found it challenging to accommodate the numbers of students applying for opportunities to these colleges. On the other hand, the higher fee charges by the private universities to sustain their programmes since they do not have government's support limits accessibility to education to the financially-able. Research shows that universities require resources such as students, funding, teachers, re-

searchers, and prestige. Given the importance of these resources to universities' survival and success, maintaining their steady flow is a task universities continuously undertake in competition with each other. Competition is not something universities choose to be in; it is a feature of the new context of higher education globally (Stabile, 2007; Wangenge & Langa 2010). The universities are at liberty to select and admit the numbers of students they need. The capacities of the available facilities have therefore been overstretched. Many of these institutions therefore cannot meet the research and learning needs of their clients. Despite this shortcoming, the main campuses continue to operate subsidiary colleges in different parts of the country. There is eminent competition of both private and public universities. This competition continues, oblivious of the inadequate manpower required to run and efficiently provide meaningful education to the students.

In Kenya, the universities are trying to put in place measures to generate income to augment meager government allocation. However, there is growing concern that there is so much focus on income generating programmes like parallel degree programmes (part-time degree programmes) at the expense of the regular programmes. In some institutions, the part-time programmes are given more attention because they do benefit the university in generating the much needed income but also provide an extra pay for the part-time lecturers (who are also teaching the regular programmes). JAB selected students raise concerns about the low admission requirements for some of the students who are admitted to the parallel programmes, which they believe, lowers the academic standards. JAB students also complain that parallel programmes are competing for facilities and that they only target the rich. For lecturers, those who are enlisted by their heads of departments to teach on the parallel degree programmes earn about triple their monthly salaries in addition to their normal monthly pay (see Mutula 2002). Those who do not get opportunities to teach complain of the partiality in the appointment processes. On the other hand, the school based programmes (bachelors degree programmes tailored for the primary and secondary school teachers when they

are on holiday-April, August and December) have exhibited great ignorance of students' welfare. I once took part in one of such programmes in a subsidiary college of my university. The teaching is only done when the primary and secondary schools close for a maximum of four weeks. The classes start at 7 o'clock in the morning and end at 7 o'clock in the evening. Two courses are taught every day, alternately for 3 consecutive hours. This means 12 hours non-stop for the students. They do not have a break in between for 12 hours! In this case, any other activity is not imperative. A chat with the students during the sessions indicated that their desire is just to get the certificates after completion but other activities² which are equally important in the lives of students for effective and all-round results are not a concern. At some point I mentioned to my students that I was doing a research on the kind of education they were receiving and that I needed to send it to the policy makers (MOHE) for action. Their response was that I should let them obtain their degrees before I submit my research findings.

The argument here is that quality of education should not at any time be compromised for money. If the capacities of universities are overstretched, the government should find a way of expanding other tertiary training institutions. There are also better ways of doing in-service training that provides quality education other than crash programmes that are not beneficial to the students. In Kenya, while university education has expanded by opening new universities, colleges and campuses, vocational and technical education and skills training opportunities have not followed suit. University education has developed at the expense of middle level colleges. Expansion and modernization of these institutions is paramount to increasing access and also making training relevant and adequate to the demands of the economy. As Kinyanjui (2007) explains, a systematic planned and demand driven development of middle level colleges as well as upgrading of the existing ones is required for modernization, innovation and industrialization of the country.

The scenario depicted here is that of a growing sector in terms of number of institutions but challenged

resources including staff and staff development in research and capacity building. The end product is declining standards of education and skills for the labour market in Kenyan economy. In the section that follows hereunder, I examine how the shortage of staff for these institutions has affected quality given to the students and how the parallel programmes are posing a challenge to the socio-economic development of the country.

Staffing and quality of education

One of the effects of the restrictions imposed by the World Bank was that of poor terms of service for academic staff that led to great difficulties in the attraction and retention levels, and in some cases leading to significant emigration from the universities, and indeed, from the affected countries to other places in search of 'greener pastures'. The emigration or flight of high level and skilled human capital, commonly referred to as brain drain, led to loss to the local economy: loss of their potential contribution to local capacity; loss of locally trained human resources; and loss of human capital investment by the state. Further, levels of performance for staff that remained in the universities significantly dropped as they sought additional or supplementary sources of income (Kiamba 2005). Their work load also increased from the gaps of those leaving the country or those abandoning the profession altogether. One way in which the university dons have expressed grievances in this case is to form trade unions to fight for salary increments and better working conditions. The University Academic Staff Union (UASU) is currently the governing trade union for all public universities in Kenya.

In 2003, most lecturers in Kenyan public universities under the coordination of UASU went on strike demanding for 200% pay increment. The ministry of education through the university vice chancellors threatened to sack all lecturers who were on strike. Though memos and threats of intimidation succeeded in having some of the lecturers get back to work, the damage had been in most of the universities. Continued intimidation was later to result in

sacking of UASU leaders in different university chapters. However, the government through UASU-MOE negotiations increased the dons' basic salary and house allowance by close to 100%, which was to be paid in bits and in arrears. The trend, however, since then has been that the dons have to keep in reminding the government to pay them the arrears by issuing strike notices. Currently, the salary ranges from a basic pay of USD 608 for an assistant lecturer to USD 1,230 for a full professor and a house allowance of USD 538 and 769 respectively per month. In reality, this salary remains low given the escalating standards of living and the need to engage in research activities. This has in different ways affected research activities and the quality of education offered in these institutions.

The state has little or no control over the teaching, research and learning activities going on in the campuses. The multiplication of these institutions through establishment of subsidiary campuses has meant a demand for more human power. There is therefore a shortage of academic staff and the implication is that most lecturers are masters degree holders with no research and teaching experience. They do not have restricted work load. Demand for their services means that they can teach in several of the campuses in one semester. Their aim is to make as much money as they can by teaching extra courses in different campuses because the state and university management do not regulate the workload per lecturer. Some lecture in more than five campuses in one semester. This eats into their research time but also their preparations for the courses that they teach. Media discussions about job skills and the training institutions/facilities available in the country indicate a gaping deficiency. The argument of the lecturers is always about the meager pay that the government pays. Should the pay be a cause for us to jeopardize research, learning and development in our institutions and countries?

No issue is more basic in modern higher education than the relationship between research and teaching. No issue occasions more superficial thought and retrogressive criticism both outside and inside the academy (Clark 1997:247). The challenges of education demand, teaching work load and the output are

mostly exhibited in the end products from our higher institutions. In Kenya, for example, the challenge has been that despite the 'qualifications' of the graduates from these institutions, those hiring the graduates have to commit their resources in training these graduates as trainees before they can fully fit into the job market. Studies in other African countries (see Cosser 2010) have also exhibited the same traits. As for the lecturers, there is no time for self development in studies and research. Students excel and work hard and later catch up with the lecturers who taught them even at the point of serving on the same grade. This is because promotion to the next level is usually pegged on publications in international peer-reviewed journals. This has in most cases been a challenge to scholars from the south due to demand for quality. Quality most certainly results from research—whether library or field based. Time dedicated to this therefore remains a determining factor and this is not always easy for most of the lecturers engaged in teaching of many courses.

Some of the lecturers who have not taken up part-timing as a way of making extra money are involved in consultancy work. The fact is, consultancy can be a rich source of research and those involved in the practice can exploit it as a wealthy arena for research, writing and publishing. However this has not been the case. I had a chat over the same with a colleague whom I will name Simon, who is seriously engaged in consultancy work. Part of the conversation went as follows:

Susan: Simon, sometime back we were of the same mind. We travelled to present papers in conferences and worked towards publishing. What happened? You are quite reluctant nowadays. You seem more keen and engrossed in consultancy work.

Simon: I earn less than \$1000 per month from this university. When I win a bid for consultancy in one go it is a fortune. I can settle all my bills and still have extra amount remaining. So why should I bother about workshops and publishing

which will earn me a promotion after 5 years and an increment of less than \$100?

Susan: I see. That makes sense now. So you mean if you were to make a choice you would rather not be in this profession? How long do you want to hold on to this job even though it is less paying?

Simon: The good thing with being a lecturer is that I only teach for a minimum of 9 hours per week. I can use the rest of the time to do consultancy. I have applied for jobs elsewhere and what might happen is that if I get one of those big jobs, because they are on contractual basis, I will take unpaid leave of absence from the university, go make money and come back to my permanent job of lecturing. Though this job is less paying, it is permanent and gives someone a sense of prestige. When people in the village call you a professor you feel honoured though you earn less. It is the job that introduced me to consultancy because of the background training and research...

The conversation went on and on but the relevant thing that I picked up was that dedication to academic research for most lecturers lack because of lack of incentives. It may also be linked to meager research resources and lack of government funding. Linked to this is what Kinyanjui (2007) refers to "other issues which require rethinking". These include the way staff are recruited, utilized and rewarded and their teaching and research environment is catered for; how the universities are funded and account for their resources, and how they are governed; and how the sector can drive socio-economic development.

Research

The Kenyan government may not be entirely committed to the furtherance of research in HILs especially in social science research. The amount of money given by the government to a lecturer for research per year in a public university in Kenya (at least in my university) amounts to USD 96, equivalent of USD 8 per month. This is an insult, yet promotion from one position to the other is pegged on a certain number of publications, and supervision of post-graduate students. With such kind of funding, not unless the lecturers are keen to use their insufficient salaries for research, their career lines remain on the spot. This could be one reason why publishing from the South, for some researchers still remain a challenge. The other implication would be that without research experience, especially at the doctoral level, supervision of post-graduate students is at stake. Supervision based on desktop research experiences are not only likely to affect the students' performance but also quality of education offered by those qualifying with masters and doctorate degrees. This is coupled by the challenges discussed earlier on of course overload and increasing numbers campuses and students.

Besides the challenges of teaching and work load thereof, most of those engaged in meaningful researches depend on donor funding especially from the North with little or no support from the government. If research work is mirrored from the perspective of outside donor funding, which is pegged to certain areas of interest, success is bound to be limited. This is because research agenda may also be quite different from issues that require special attention in the research locality. While not entirely disregarding the help that the South gets from the North in research, the need to realize the relevance of academic and research autonomy is all in the intentional effort of researchers who are on the periphery (in which case I refer to the social scientists in Africa and Kenya in particular).

There are a number of interrelated factors in the academics' environment that potentially affect the teaching-research nexus. The overarching factor as observed by Leisyte, Enders & Boer (2009:624) is the

growth of the higher education and research sectors (mass higher education and continuously expanding scales and scopes of the knowledge base). Their research findings may apply in cases where expansion has entailed broadening programmes being offered in the expanded institutional services. The challenge of funding, qualified personnel and research loopholes however cannot be overlooked. There has been a push by the WB, IMF and the concerned governments for research and institutions in general to obtain funding from the available funding organizations and not the government treasury. There is therefore limited public funding available academics are increasingly expected to spend time on acquiring external research funding if they want to continue their research activities. In their search for external funding academics face conditions that are new to a large extent. Increasingly research grants must be obtained on a competitive basis (Leisyte, Enders & Boer 2009:626). For some, applying for such funding is time consuming and that there is no guarantee that their applications would be approved. When they try once and fail they give up. To them research becomes next to impossible without funding. This not only affects their outcome in teaching but also stagnates the possibilities of their promotion. The challenge is also complicated by the fact that these dons have extra work load in an effort to get extra pay. Related research elsewhere shows that the imbalance between teaching loads and research significance puts the system under pressure and contributes to work intensification. This is reinforced by contradictory signals from institutional management, sanctioning bad research performance with higher teaching loads.

The question that should always be at the back of our minds as we struggle with how to reshape our education systems is how we should conceive excellence and success from these institutions. Should it be excellence in scholarship; teaching and learning; research and development; management processes; engagement with the community. According to Wangenge and Langa (2010:751), excellence in teaching and research is a crucial ingredient for promoting and supporting both national and regional economic development in terms of highly qualified skills, new

knowledge, leadership, and innovation. On the other hand, 'excellence' is seen as a key resource for HEIs to advance and survive in competitive environments in terms of gains from knowledge transfer, patents, enrolments, prestige in the scientific community, and in the public at large.

Opportunities and recommendations

The little funding from the government availed to subsidize the universities' income generating activities is not enough to support learning activities academic researches in Kenya. In this case, the immediate though not permanent solution would be that of sourcing for donor funding or through recruiting as many students as possible. Research however has indicated that new universities should be established on the basis of proper planning, availability of resources, and their potential to open up new frontiers of knowledge, research and economic opportunities. New universities, to Kinyanjui (2007) should be well-planned, appropriate and where possible utilize existing facilities. On the other hand, Srivastava and Su-Ann (2010:460) suggest that one way of continued sustenance of the education sector, and especially higher education, is by enhancing partnerships within both the private and public sectors. This has been echoed in researches, not just as a way of ensuring continued funding, but also as a means through which community development issues can be addressed.

There is much to learn from the regional institutions and therefore quality education does not just mean overly relying on the international input. Maviiri (2006) argues that cooperation within higher institutions can be by means of the higher education agencies collaborate with each other in order to promote cooperation. This approach is implemented by encouraging the mobility of students, academics, programmes and institutions in other countries in order to build a better – educated citizenry, without over – straining their limited domestic resources. On the other hand, the competition and commercialization approach which emphasizes higher education as a trade commodity that should respond to market

forces of demand and supply. As part of this approach, Vice Chancellors of Institutions of Higher learning are encouraged to see themselves less as implementers of national educational policies that have trickled down from their Ministries of Education and more as managers of multimillion business enterprises. This would necessarily mean that they would have to devise business plans and management actions as well as mobilize their teams of managers to produce best possible performance in order to compete with other institutions.

Cross-border Higher Education at the same time has a number of benefits in East Africa. It results in increased opportunities for nationals to access higher education. The governments of East Africa do not have the capacity to provide higher education to all their qualifying candidates. This challenge has inspired the surfacing of cross border education. Cross-border Higher Education promotes greater access to specific knowledge or skill-based education and training of scientists, civil servants, researchers, health care professionals, technicians, teachers in basic and secondary education and business leaders. By re-examining the role of the governments to get involved in research funding and Kenyan HE in the overall to eliminate the past oversights, social science education is likely to grow to different heights for sustained academic success as well as country's sustained development.

Kinyanjui (2007) on her part proposes the need to expand existing state and private universities targeting specific programmes which are backbones of socio-economic development such as medicine, engineering and sciences. Expansion of private universities will therefore require enhanced private sector investment and participation. Policies on infrastructural and financial incentives should be developed to attract increased private investments. Given the economic and the financial challenges of the time, innovation is called for in HIL to enhance academic and research autonomy and independence. This will not only generate the much needed income but will also improve educational research and quality of labour input.

Most importantly, the need to ensure quality education through staff training and availing research

funds on merit to the staff is called for. So far most of the studies done on quality of education offered in Kenyan institutions raise concern about the qualifications of the staff but also the workload from regular and parallel programmes. There is not only need for government intervention in regulating this, but also provision of favourable working environment within the institutions that will be research focused to encourage the lecturers to improve their skills through hands-on field especially in the area of social sciences.

Conclusion

Expansion of Kenyan HIL and the challenges thereof is an example of what is going on in most African or at least in East African universities. The question that may have been partially answered by the discussion in this paper is whether this expansion has diluted the education offered in these institutions. This expansion therefore juxtaposes issues surrounding quality, and the need for access to education but also whether integrating these two imperative issues is pertinent. The paper argued that in the case of Kenya, the government may be partially to be blamed for insisting on autonomy and almost completely moving out of the governance and management procedures of these institutions. The decentralization of power in the decision making processes is therefore questioned. This is because the government is responsible neither is it accountable on the performance, quality of learning and research activities in these institutions. The partial funding received from the government is not enough to sufficiently run the noted activities and therefore these institutions have been left with no choice but to open an arena of competition where numerous campuses are run by both private and public universities to ensure that there is funding not only to pay the staff, but also to run the activities of the institutions. This as the paper argues, has also meant the urgency to seek for donor or external funding either for research or learning processes to be enhanced. This however may not be reliable and neither is it sustainable. On the other hand, it may not benefit as many students, and lecturers in research as needed.

The paper concludes that there is need to encourage autonomy, not solely by the institutions but with the help of the government funding. This can be done through improvement of and/or establishing relevant tertiary level institutions/colleges. The government should also be committed to funding academic research activities so as to improve the quality of research and publications. On the other hand the dons' pay should be revised and improved to encourage not only their performance but their enthusiasm in teaching. Sanctions should be ensured not just on the numbers of courses taken up per lecturer, but also the qualifications of those handling such courses in these institutions. This will be relevant in ensuring quality.

Notes

1 JAB students are given loans by the higher education loans boards on merit depending on the exhibited needs of those applying for the loans.

2 Extracurricular activities remain very relevant in the lives of students. There is clear lack of balance between the curricular and extracurricular activities in most institutions of higher learning and/or tertiary colleges. See a research done by Clegg, S., Stevenson, J., and Willott, J. Staff conceptions of curricular and extracurricular activities in higher education, *High Educ.* (2010) 59:615–626

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