



# Addressing Quality Issues in African Higher Education: A Focus on Ghana's Emerging Private, Graduate, Business Higher Education Sector

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## 1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the challenges facing the quality of graduate university education provided by private, graduate, business universities (PGBU) in Ghana. The purpose of the chapter is to make recommendations for quality improvement of the PGBU standard in Ghana.

The issue of quality in education is important as a poor quality university system will provide poor quality human capital that will be impotent in helping Ghana to achieve its developmental aspirations. Human capital was defined by Gary Becker as the investment in humans to increase their productivity in the future. It refers to processes like investments in schooling, health, on the job training, and the acquisition of cognitive, mathematical, and technological skills (Becker et al. 1990, 2).

Education is the main engine for transforming entrepreneurship into wealth, so ensuring the effectiveness and quality of university education is essential. Quality education is pertinent for the twenty-first century development agenda given the emergence of the global knowledge economy which depends heavily on quality human capital (Adu 2014, 1). The quality of a country's human capital and its ability to support research and innovation is

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directly related to the quality of its universities. It is essential for Ghana to guarantee the quality of its universities.

I highlight Ghana because of its booming private university education sector and I focus on business education because business universities are easy to set up in Ghana and are leading the boom in private universities. I emphasize PGBUs because graduate education is still young in Ghana and PGBU education is younger still, so the issues of quality are largely unexplored.

Human capital such as schooling is important to growth (Barro and Lee 2011, 1; Griliches 1977, 2; Hanushek and Kimko 2000, 1). As demonstrated by Imperial Japan, the Asian tigers and China, very few effective development agendas can be executed without a focus on quality human capital. A quality university system is essential.

Ghana's current development goals espoused in the "Ghana Beyond Aid agenda" of President Nana Akuffo Addo are predicated on the United Nation (UN)'s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Adei and Armah 2018, 1). The SDGs emphasize the primacy of human capital in facilitating economic development. Poor quality PGBUs will produce graduates without the necessary managerial, entrepreneurial, and business skills needed to lead business innovation and growth.

The private university system in Ghana is one of the fastest growing in the world. From zero private universities and 3 public universities in 1993, there are now more than 20 public universities and about 81 private universities (NAB 2019). Of the 81 private universities, about 20 run graduate programs.

The government of Ghana needs to ensure the quality of the PGBU system for the following reasons: (i) The private universities are mandated by national law to be "mentees" in a "mentee-mentor" relationship with state universities. The state universities enjoy a reputation of being higher quality than the private universities by virtue of their longevity, experience, and larger capacity so the quality of private university education must improve. The government must ensure quality for the private university because mentor universities may not competently do it as they often regard the mentees as competition. (ii) President Nana Akuffo Addo's vision of "Ghana Beyond Aid" demands the highest standards of quality from Ghanaian institutions like the PGBUs. (iii) Ghana must work to guarantee that the PGBU degree delivers the skills it promises to students to enhance their employability.

Quality graduate business education will generate business leaders to help scale up the country's small-scale productive activities in the manufacturing, service, and agricultural sectors. As Lucas (1990) explained, capital tends to move to countries with a productive labor force (19). A quality private university system will not only enhance the productivity of the Ghanaian

workforce but will also attract capital into Ghana to take advantage of the graduates (Amwelmoo and Armah 2019). Quality Ghanaian PGBU will help negate the pernicious effects of brain drain that is undermining development efforts in Ghana because graduates often migrate to seek education elsewhere (Owusu 2016, 3; Abraham and Armah 2017). Further, given Ghana's wealth of natural resources, an improvement in the effectiveness and skills of its labor force will help it manage its resources to avoid Sachs and Warner (2001)'s resource curse and rather enjoy a resource blessing (1).

Despite the vigorous recent growth and dynamism in the private university system in Ghana, the sector is besieged by quality-related challenges from the demand-side (student related), the supply-side (university related) and the enforcement side (accreditation and enforcement related) of the private university ecosystem. The demand-side quality related problems originate from an adverse selection problem, where unmotivated students willing and able to pay for a graduate degree may constitute most students who apply for these graduate degrees. The supply-side problems emanate from a dependence of private universities on school fees as the only source of funding. The implied moral hazard problem for the PGBU dependent on student fees is that they have incentives to admit poorly prepared students, reducing quality. The policy-related quality challenges have to do with resource constraints on the part of the NAB, in charge of managing the university system in Ghana.

## Defining Quality Education

Quality is a difficult concept to define (Schindler et al. 2015, 1; Harvey and Knight 1996, 1; Mishra 2007, 1; Harvey and Green 1993, 1; Green 1997; Altbach and Knight 2007, 1; Varghese 2004). When applied to Higher Education the definition of quality is even more elusive. This is because unlike the quality of an inanimate output of a manufacturing process that can be immediately tested, quality of education can only be credibly assessed over time, making its assessment particularly challenging.

Quality is often operationalized as Quality Assurance (QA). QA is “a planned and systematic review process of an institution to determine whether or not acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being met, maintained and enhanced” (Materu 2007, 3).

This definition of quality does capture some, but not all, of the multi-dimensional attributes of the type of quality education that produces an enlightened individual. Quality is used holistically in this research to imply more than just QA. This research follows Harvey and Green (1993)'s definition of quality as “transformation” (1).

Per the definition of quality as “transformation,” graduates of a quality university are understood to be “transformed” by the university. They can think critically and produce new knowledge. “They can partake autonomously in reasoned discourse...perform critical self-evaluation and come to the awareness of the ultimate contingency of all thought and action” (Barro 1991, 1). Graduates of a quality Ghanaian PGBU should acquire the same critical thinking, communication, technological, quantitative, problem-solving, analytical, evaluative, and leadership skills that are typically bestowed by international graduate universities in the UK, EU, and USA.

## **History of the Evolution of Higher Education (Higher Ed.) in Africa: A Focus on Ghana**

University education was historically considered a public good and the exclusive duty of governments (Atuahene 2006, 2). The explanation offered was that the positive externalities it generated accrued to a greater extent to the society than the individual. In standard economics, such a market failure in the production of a good or service indicates that the good is public instead of private (Mankiw 2009, Chapter 11). Public goods are typically produced not by individuals but by governments because private agents produce an inefficient amount of it. Private agents may also cut costs and undermine quality especially if the quality cannot be observed immediately as is the case of tertiary education. Not surprisingly, African universities started as state monopolies (Sawyer 2004, 5).

The universities that emerged in SSA post-independence followed the colonial master’s model. For example, Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya, and followed the British system of education while Gabon, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali followed the French system (Teferra and Altbach 2005, 23).

Demand for university education increased strongly in African countries in the last three decades due to population pressure, “qualification inflation,” globalization and the rise of the knowledge economy. The inability of the public universities in the African countries to cope with the explosion in enrollment encouraged privatization (Tsevi 2015, 3).

In SSA, despite the increase in opportunities for students to attend university, graduate enrollment ratios (GERs) are low. Africa still has the World’s lowest Gross Enrollment Ratios or GER (Sawyer 2004, 13). The reasons for low GERs are historical but the current booming African university sector more recently is due to several reasons. On the supply-side, the process was started in the mid-1990s following the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-prescribed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) which dictated

liberalization of Higher Ed. in Africa. The IMF's SAPs mandated the elimination of state monopolies in African Higher Ed. and facilitated the genesis of private universities in Africa (Tsevi 2015, 4).

## **A Focus on Ghana**

Led by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana was the first SSA nation to obtain independence. In conformity with Nkrumah's socialist ideas, the university system started as a monopoly and the government of Ghana held a monopoly on Higher Ed. in Ghana from independence in 1957 till 1993 when Ghana had only three public universities (Tetteh 2014, 2).

The university of Ghana was birthed in 1948 as the University College of the Gold Coast, following a recommendation for same by the Bradley Commission, set up by the ruling colonial governor at the time, Alan Burns, to advise him on the feasibility of such an endeavor (Darko 1985, 332). The University of the Gold Coast at the time was affiliated with the University of London (Tsevi 2015, 2).

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) was founded in 1952 by Nkrumah, who was then head of government business even though Ghana was not independent. KNUST was founded in response to the need for advanced technical education. Kwame Nkrumah also founded the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in 1962 to train professional teachers in the arts and sciences for employment in Ghana's secondary schools and polytechnics (Darko 1985, 21).

## **The Research Problem, Research Questions and Relevance**

The historical absence of local graduate degree awarding institutions implies there were, and still are fewer graduate degree holders in Ghana available to both the private and public universities compared to the developed world. This is not strange as foreign trained Ph.D. holders give up significant income to teach in Ghana. The average US-trained assistant professor in a business-related subject working in the USA earns an annual salary of about \$80,000 while the same person working in Ghana earns about \$20,000, a four-fold difference. Further, lack of access to data, quality equipment, top conferences, relevant software, top academics, and other inputs such as a thriving academic community reduces the quality of the experience for those choosing to relocate to Ghana after training in the USA.

The graduate universities can, by law, only employ Ph.D. and M.Phil holders although few qualified personnel are available. Ph.D. holders prefer the better funded public universities or abroad where salaries are higher. Qualified faculty are difficult to attract due to factors like brain drain, low salaries, competition from the public universities, institutional focus on teaching, and an inability to support research.

### **Supply Side Problems**

For private universities, turning a profit is an obvious motivation that attracts entrepreneurs. Such business-minded people see university education as a business opportunity where they can supply students with education for a fee. Such “for profit” private universities are often tempted to employ cheap but inferior resources and inexpensive, part-time but poorly qualified faculty and staff to cut cost and make profits since monitoring by poorly resourced authorities is difficult. Another implied moral hazard problem is the perverse incentive for universities to do nothing to check academic dishonesty and deviant student behavior that reduces education quality to avoid having to dismiss such students. Since large student numbers mean more profits, PGBUs are hesitant to dismiss them for misconduct even though these same universities promised quality education *ex ante*.

In Ghana, what makes the quality problem challenging for the still-evolving private graduate sector is the fact that the accreditation process employed by the NAB for the undergraduate sector is not applicable to graduate education although it applies by law. The explanation is as follows: All private undergraduate degree awarding universities in Ghana are required to affiliate with a public university. However, public universities in Ghana have been awarding graduate degrees for a relatively short time and regard the private graduate institutions as direct competition. They therefore cannot credibly mentor new graduate institutions.

There are few private universities with a university charter (4 at the time of writing) although a university charter is required before mentorship. The scarcity of available chartered universities locally to affiliate with, compels the new graduate awarding institutions to seek partnerships with foreign universities. The problem here is that the profit motive may drive both the Ghana-based graduate institution and its foreign partner to collude to award easy graduate degrees to attract more students and make money since monitoring by the NAB is more difficult for an out of country affiliate.

The foreign universities that grant the affiliation themselves are often of questionable quality as some of them are in low-income countries with a

rather short history of graduate education. Others have a reputation for graduate study that raises questions.

Besides the challenges of limited sources of funding, there is also, in some cases, poor infrastructure; lack of access to study spaces and library resources; paucity of standard academic journals and software; limited contemporary books and lack of qualified Ph.D.-holding lecturers. This limits the quality of graduate education that the Ghana-based student can obtain since a major part of graduate education is research training.

### **Demand-Side Problems**

Demand-side challenges also arise especially related to the twin problems of adverse selection and moral hazard. To illustrate, note that the type of students that are attracted to private graduate programs in SSA countries differ from what is found in developed countries, and are often subject to the phenomenon of adverse selection.

Adverse selection is the phenomenon that occurs wherein the presence of uncertainty or absence of relevant information, the types of seller (buyers) available to a consumer (seller) are not the type it desires (Mankiw 2009, Chapter 1). For example, a customer desiring to buy a used car does not want to be besieged by vendors only selling lemon cars. An insurance company does not want to sell policies only to very sick clients. As direct comparisons, the selection of graduate students that can afford private graduate universities in Ghana may be unmotivated for graduate work as they just need the degrees to secure jobs they already have. They are seeking graduate degrees not to conduct research but rather because of “qualification inflation.” The majority of PGBU available may be of poor quality because excess demand and market failures prevent their elimination.

Applicants may seek graduate degrees to shore up their social standing. This occurs among traditional, religious and political leaders who feel validated by having degrees like the doctorate degree. While pastors and other religious leaders when they acquire the title of doctor tend to attract more followers, politicians who often get positions, not based on their qualifications, but rather based on their political connections, feel confident when the public is aware that they are Ph.D. holders. Such students do not care about the quality of the PGBU. The poor quality PGBUs can discern bad from good students but since their objective is purely profit, they overlook the problem.

The related problem of moral hazard is as likely on the demand-side as an adverse selection because some graduate students that apply to private universities meet all the qualification requirements and initially, earnestly, intend to obtain a graduate degree. However, once they enroll, the pressures of family life and their jobs make them more open to the idea of paying other people to do their assignments for them. This is an example of moral hazard. As soon as a student is admitted, the university also has no reason to fail them as the student constitutes the cash cow. The students know this, so even if they intended to work hard, they will not, and quality falls.

## Relevant Research Questions

The supply-side questions include: What types of strategies or incentive structures will ensure that private graduate institutions enroll qualified students and make the necessary investment into providing quality private graduate education instead of focusing on the profit incentive?

From the demand-side, what types of strategies will reduce the adverse selection problem where only rich, powerful, politically or socially connected students with no need for research skills, but willing to pay for a degree, are those most likely to get the degree? From the policy-side, what strategies will incentivize the NAB to do its job more effectively? How can we make sure that a graduate degree from Ghana is quality?

## 2 Literature Review

### The Essence of Quality Human Capital and Its Contributions to Growth and Development

From a policy perspective, it seems clear that a developing country like Ghana must improve the quality of the human capital provided by its PGBU system. A quality PGBU system will provide competent graduates needed to conduct the research that generates growth. However, although Human capital is now recognized as an essential complement to physical capital in the economic growth process, this was not always the case (Benhabib and Spiegel 1994, 144).

The consensus of the pertinence of human capital for sustained long-run growth was reached after much historical debate. The neoclassical economists initially argued and formulated models to support the idea that economic



growth was determined primarily by physical capital, at least in the short run, with negligible contribution from human capital (Domar 1946).

Solow (1956's) conclusion that technology was the secret behind long run, out of steady state economic growth, indirectly emphasized the importance of human capital in the growth process as technology is often created by highly educated and highly trained human capital (1). However, for credible reasons, based on solid evidence, provided by numerous authors, the theoretical prediction of a role for human capital in growth theory was not irrefutably supported by the evidence (Hanushek and Woessmann 2012, 1).

Estimations of the reduced form of the theoretical Solow model with human capital specified as a factor of production in a Cobb Douglas production function with decreasing returns to scale yielded mixed results. A significant number of these estimations found insignificant estimates of human capital indicating a negligible contribution of human capital to growth (Benhabib and Spiegel 1994, 144). Other authors found a significant role for human capital in the augmented form of the Solow model (Mankiw et al. 1992, 408).

Endogenous growth theory promulgated by among others, Lucas (1988) and Romer (1990) in the 1980s and 1990s sought to more precisely identify the role human capital played in the growth process. Endogenous growth theories were premised on Nelson and Phelps (1966)'s assertion that a more discernible contribution of human capital to growth was through total factor productivity or technology (1). This led to the identification of a clearer pathway for the relationship between human capital and the Solow residual or total factor productivity also known as technological change (Benhabib and Spiegel 1994, 144).

Despite the theoretical and empirical validity of the role of human capital in stimulating technological development and consequently growth, there has been significant measurement problems of the human capital variable, questioning empirical growth estimations using human capital (Hanushek and Woessmann 2012, 1). Some of the measurement problems for the human capital variable comes from the difficulty in measuring human capital which was historically proxied by the amount of schooling (Barro 1991, 407).

According to Barro and Lee (2011, 541) who built a data set to accurately measure human capital, Romer (1990, 251), Barro (1991, 407) and Mankiw et al. (1992, 407) pioneered the measurement of human capital by proxying it with schooling but these data do not adequately measure the aggregate stock of human capital available. Notable authors who criticized schooling as a measurement for human capital include De La Fuente and Doménech (2006, 1).

Measurement problems increase when cross-country data on schooling are used. There are significant quality differences in the educational system of different countries which cannot be assumed away (Hanushek and Kimko 2000, 1). There is overwhelming evidence now that it is the quality and not the quantity of education that is responsible for the technology generation responsible for rapid economic growth and development (Hanushek 2013, 204).

Hanushek and Woessmann (2007) suggests that higher levels of human capital attainment do not guarantee long-term growth (1). Rather, it is quality education that guarantees the acquisition of cognitive, technological, managerial, entrepreneurial, business, engineering, and mathematical skills that can sustain long-run growth.

Building on the human capital revolution in the 60s and 70s, the endogenous growth economists identified human capital as the source of technology creation in the neoclassical growth models of Solow (1956) by endogenizing human capital in the growth model. Solow showed how human capital, through knowledge creation, generated the technology that fueled growth.

As Pelinescu (2015) narrates, there are two sources of influences of human capital on economic progress: the level and the growth rate effect (184). Human capital affects the level of growth (so called level effect) by its decisive influence on production, through augmenting labor productivity (Romer 1990, 251) and the growth rate effect by enhancing competitive advantage through innovation and technology diffusion (Horwitz 2005, 50).

Becker et al. (1990) make the argument about the key role of human capital in the growth process most forcefully (S12). According to them, since “Human capital is embodied knowledge and skills, and as economic development depends on advances in technological and scientific knowledge, development depends on the accumulation of human capital” (Becker et al. 1990, S12). Benhabib and Spiegel (1994, 143) and Nelson and Phelps (1966, 1) argued that education facilitates the adoption and implementation of new technologies (technology transfer), which are continuously invented at an exogenous rate. They suggested that the growth of technology, or the Solow residual, depends on the gap between its level and the level of “theoretical knowledge.” Benhabib and Spiegel (1994) formulated a total factor productivity model where Solow’s residual or technology is inherently created by human capital (143).

This current analysis is based on the model proposed by Benhabib and Spiegel (1994) which produced the result that human capital in levels significantly stimulates economic growth (143). The arguments are also consistent with the Augmented Solow models of Mankiw et al. (1992) who insist

on conditional convergence that allows a longer period of growth but re-emphasize the importance of human capital in levels in both the adoption and generation of new technology (407). Finally, the arguments here are also consistent with the predictions of the simple model by Lucas (2015) that ascribes all productivity growth to human capital: schooling and on the job training (92).

## **The Evolving Private University Sector in Ghana and Related Challenges**

In Ghana, the liberalization process in Higher Ed. was initiated by the University Rationalization Committee (URC) set up in 1987 by the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) to reform the tertiary education sector (Boateng 2014, 1). The government issued a white paper in 1991 following submission of the URC report in 1988 to reform the sector (Azameti 2013). The NAB was established by PNDC law 319, 1993 and modified by the NAB Act 744, 2007 (Boateng 2014, 1).

According to information collated from the NAB website, there are about twenty private graduate universities offering master's business degrees in Ghana. However, it is difficult to track the exact number of graduate degree awarding private universities as new ones emerge and some existing programs fold up. There are also online graduate programs offered directly by foreign universities and therefore, to some extent, bypass domestic regulation, monitoring, and quality control. This research does not consider online graduate programs.

## **The Role of the National Accreditations Board (NAB)**

Section two of the NAB Act 744, 2007, assigns to the NAB the task of accrediting universities and their programs in Ghana. The duties of the NAB are: accrediting public and private universities; determining programs and requirements for proper operation and maintenance of acceptable levels of professional or academic standards; publishing the list of accredited institutions at the start of each year; advising the president on the issuance of Presidential Charters to private universities; determining the equivalences of degrees, diplomas, and certificates awarded by institutions in Ghana or elsewhere; and performing other function assigned by the Minister of Education.

In the international context, accreditation involves a two-stage quality assurance process that first develops standards for assessing quality and then monitors the institutions to ensure compliance (El-Khawas 2003, 1). In Ghana, “Accreditation” is the status accorded to a tertiary institution as satisfying standards defined by the NAB. The main quality assessment function of the NAB is the accreditation of private and public universities (Seniwoliba 2014, 152; Baryeh 2009). According to Utuka (2011), the NAB has a well-defined roadmap for aspiring institutions, and for existing institutions to maintain accreditation. The relevant documents are published on the NAB website (135).

Accreditation involves both an internal and external review process. The institutions complete an NAB questionnaire in the internal process. This is followed by an external visit by the NAB (Roadmap to accreditation, 2010). In Ghana, accreditation is a three-step process: Interim authorization, Institutional accreditation, and Program accreditation. Interim authorization gives the institution the right to register a name for the institution and to gather the physical resources such as buildings and other infrastructure that will be needed to run a university. Institutional accreditation occurs post the NAB visit and inspection of facilities and faculty. The final step, program accreditation, involves the validation and approval of specific programs to be offered by the university and includes an evaluation of core curricula.

## **Graduate University Education in Ghana: A Comparison of the Public and Private Sectors**

Public universities in Ghana have historically awarded Ph.D.’s in a limited number of departments, usually as a collaboration with a foreign university to train academic staff (Sawyer 2004, 27). Fully accredited master’s degree programs were common in Ghana, but Ph.D. programs were rare. Currently, all public universities in Ghana offer master’s and Ph.D.s either as a standalone program or in collaboration with foreign research institutes or universities.

Private universities in Ghana started awarding undergraduate degrees after the SAP mandated liberalization of the economy. Business graduate programs are popular with private universities because unlike natural science programs they do not require the purchase of heavy equipment, yet job prospects are good. While public graduate universities have many full-time and experienced lecturers, private universities typically have few full-time lecturers. They depend on part-time lecturers, masters holding assistant lecturers, and

lecturers with Ph.D.'s but not yet on senior lecturer status though the rank of senior lecturer is required by the NAB to supervise graduate research.

## **A Brief Review of Literature on African Higher Education**

### **Challenges Plaguing the Quality of Privately Provided Higher Ed. in Africa**

A review of available literature on higher education in SSA reveals that key challenges private universities in Africa face are funding, an over-reliance on school fees as well as a lack of capital for essential investment into infrastructure and quality personnel (Adeogun et al. 2009, 1; Iruonagbe et al. 2015, 1; Akindele 2013, 41).

Another important problem is that majority of private universities in SSA are “for profit” universities (Tefferra and Altbach 2005, 20). These universities are typically less than 30 years and emerged post the SAP in Africa. They also have smaller total enrollments, higher student-faculty ratios and are typically situated in rented commercial buildings in urban areas with maximum access to prospective clients. Finally, they offer a narrow range of courses, calling into question the adequacy of the education provided (Sawyer 2004, 42).

Management challenges in these private universities are acute (Amponsah and Onouha 2013, 256). Other problems include lack of research focus; paucity of facilities, lecturers and administrative staff (Sawyer 2004, 42); brain drain, dominance of part-time faculty and “moonlighting” faculty (Amponsah and Onouha 2013, 4); language issues (Tefferra and Altbach 2005, 20) and a lack of effective educational policy to manage quality for the evolving private HE sector. In some African countries, accreditation boards are absent, and no external quality assessment is done.

Some universities suffer from political interference and lack of autonomy (Oseni 2015, 1). There is the perception of low quality of private universities, especially in Ghana and Nigeria as typically attract students who fail to secure admission to the public universities (Oseni 2015, 1). Some private universities also invite questions about their quality because of the heavy focus on foreign university affiliation, the quality of which is harder to monitor and verify (Tefferra and Altbach 2005, 20). Another problem that these still-evolving private university systems in Africa face is the problem of the dominance of faith-based institutions. These institutions often try to introduce part of their religious doctrine into the academic curricula and often poses a possible threat to academic freedom (Sawyer 2004, 40).

## Historical Lessons in Quality Control in Higher ED Institutions from Ghana's Public Sector

Why was the quality of Higher ED in Ghana initially high? One reason is that Ghana's first public universities were set up as affiliates of reputable and established British universities (Sawyer 2004, 27). "For the British colonies, the post-war universities were set up in a special relationship with the University of London to guarantee quality. Staff appointments, syllabi, and examinations were controlled from London" (Mazrui 1978, 331).

Ghana was wealthy in the 1950s and 1960s and its population was small, so the universities were well-funded as their enrolments were small and of high quality. Universities benefited from grants from foreign donors and international donor agencies (Sawyer 2004, 27). Conditions of service for staff were excellent; senior faculty had funding for research and enjoyed sabbaticals. Moreover, ample opportunities for staff development existed to guide junior faculty to promotion (Sawyer 2004, 27). Local research was encouraged and well-funded.

### Why Did the Quality of Ghana's Universities Decline in the Late 70s–2000s (Sawyer 2004).

Sawyer (2004) explains that the primary reason for the deterioration in the quality of Ghana's public university was the economic decline in Ghana in the 1970s and 1980s (29). As a result of dwindling economic fortunes, less money in the form of subventions arrived from the state for the public universities. The consequence of reduced funding in Ghana's public university sector was poorly paid staff, elimination of staff development programs, and unmotivated staff. The qualification of staff declined due to brain drain. Faculty quality plummeted as migration of Ghana's Ph.D. holders abroad, left masters holding lecturers to hold the fort.

In the 1980s and 1990s, scant resources were directed to primary education and away from Higher Ed. on the advice of the World Bank and other Bretton Woods Institutions. Another factor that dragged down on the quality of the Ghanaian public university system over time is the increase in population which put pressure on demand for more access to Higher Ed. and increased student-faculty ratios. This caused enrollment to swell, putting pressure on resources and reducing quality since the number of the state universities stayed constant.

After the cold war ended in the 1990s, international donor organizations as well as state donors from China and the Soviet Union, reduced funding to

Ghana's university system. This undermined the quality of university education in Ghana. There were no more state-sponsored Scholars from China, Cuba, and the USSR sent to Ghana. Europe, USA, and Canada withdrew subsidies of expatriate staff and this reduced the popularity of postings to Ghana. Lack of access to proper equipment and tools meant that the Western-trained African scholars who returned to teach at Ghanaian universities could not really execute useful research at home. For this reason, the research they did conduct, had a low developmental impact, making it hard for them to attract further research funding.

Increased school fees in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), European Union (EU), Australia, and Canada made graduate degrees too expensive for Ghanaians intending to return home to teach. The low Ghanaian salaries compared to the cost of foreign graduate degrees made such a choice untenable. Not surprisingly, the faculty that remained at home struggled to replace themselves, as mentorship was weak.

### **3 Pragmatic Recommendations to Ensure the Quality of Graduate Degrees in Ghana**

- i. The adverse selection problem concerning the type of graduate students that enroll in Ghana's private graduate institutions must be tackled. Universities must enforce quality by seeking qualified students, willing to put in the necessary effort and sacrifice deserving of a graduate degree. This will negate the current sentiment where potential candidates who can afford graduate school see the graduate degree as a consumer good that they deserve to consume once they have paid the school fees.
- ii. The PGBUs and the pool of prospective graduate students who enroll in these private graduate schools must be educated about the long-term opportunity costs of poor quality degrees. These opportunity costs come in the form of damage to the reputation of the quality of the degrees awarded and to the long-term reputation of those who get degrees from poor quality schools. Poor quality universities will undermine the development efforts that Ghana and its citizens are making, as the degrees awarded by private universities will be useless.
- iii. In carrying out educational campaigns, emphasis must be placed on the inability of the market to weed out poor quality private graduate schools. This occurs because of excess demand for graduate degrees fueled by the

- paucity of graduate degrees as against demand. Excess demand for graduate degrees, driven by qualification inflation, often incentivizes students to ignore quality and focus on access.
- iv. Awareness campaigns by the media must focus on the dangers of graduates with graduate degrees but no corresponding skills. The media has an essential mandate to name and shame key figures in society getting fake degrees or buying degrees. The media must highlight differences in facilities in private universities as well as qualifications of faculty and research output.
  - v. The main supply-side problem underpinning the problem of quality for private universities is financing. University education is expensive in terms of infrastructure and the labor costs. Private universities must diversify their revenue sources to wean themselves of dependence on school fees. Examples of different sources of revenue that could be exploited are alumni contributions, international grants, fundraising, tax cuts from the government, guaranteed loans for students, school farms and school owned businesses, and the sale of school branded merchandise. Private universities must take steps to strengthen management and ensure effective internal quality control. Private universities in Ghana can learn from the experiences of the existing public universities as well as from the experiences of international private universities.
  - vi. Opportunities and incentives must be provided for faculty advancement. Lecturers must be subjected to the tenure system to challenge them to put up their best to improve quality. The tenure system must come with cutoffs so that a lecturer cannot continue in the profession if they have not attained any kind of promotion in 5 years. Faculty must be incentivized to seek career advancement or leave the field.
  - vii. Graduate schools must not be allowed to rely solely on adjunct lecturers and assistant lecturers to cut costs. Private universities in Ghana should seek accreditation from internationally known academic and professional accreditation agencies to signal quality.
  - viii. Schools can focus on quality and ethics as part of their mission and seek to identify and improve metrics that will back their claim of quality e.g., small class sizes, low student-faculty ratios, low student-computer ratios, well qualified professors, quality library resources etc. The defense of all master and doctoral thesis should be recorded by video and preserved for public record.
  - ix. The biggest challenge to regulation is funding. The NAB must lobby parliament to amend the law to ensure more realistic financing, given its mandate. The NAB must ensure site visiting teams comprise of quality



professionals with integrity. Site visiting teams must be larger than three as small teams are easy to influence in a developing country known for corruption. The NAB must mandate all private universities to keep public websites that lists all the full-time faculty and their qualifications, a record of their research, as well as the title of their dissertations. This will facilitate verification and help students and parents to evaluate the quality of private university when deciding which university to attend. The NAB site visitation teams must include a photographer who will take detailed pictures of the facilities as part of the record. The NAB must conduct a video recording of at least two classes in session in each institution as part of the record.

- x. Since the number of Ph.D.'s that work in Africa are few, and brain drain is a serious problem, government must seek the retention of Ph.D.'s as solution to the brain drain problem. Ph.D. holders must be allowed to import cars duty-free since taxes on imported cars are exorbitant. This will incentivize them to stay in country.
- xi. Another problem is student school fees so government can help the private universities foster partnerships with banks and credit organizations to grant student loans. Administrative muscle must be built to keep a database of academic records that the banks can access to predict academic success and legal obligation to pay back the loans. The issuance of the Ghana card which is a digital identification is a step in the right direction.
- xii. Government can give scholarships to deserving students to attend private universities and assist students with obtaining loans for private universities. Government must take the lead in designing an overall education plan which includes private sector participation. The plan should also indicate areas where the government wants universities to locate and which types of universities are encouraged in its overall development plan as done in Asia.

## 4 Conclusion

A review of available statistics from the NAB reveals that the number of private universities in Ghana is high. However, the quality of these private universities has been called into question given their small-scale and tendency to enroll weak students.

The research focused on graduate private universities where several of them are business ventures set up by profit seeking entrepreneurs focused

on making money. The situation is compounded by the adverse selection problem of graduate students who are prepared to pay for the degree because they need access to any degree and not a quality degree to do research.

After desk research, learning lessons from literature and from the history of Ghana's public university systems key, conclusions, and recommendations for improving the quality of PGBUs in Ghana were made. The recommendations addressed both supply-side, demand-side, and policy-side challenges and should serve as useful information for policymakers in SSA with emerging private university systems. Further research must gather and analyze data from relevant stakeholders such as university administrators, NAB officials, faculty of both private and public universities in Ghana, current and past graduate students of private universities, and employers of alumni of private universities to interrogate the findings of this paper.

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