

Higher education marketisation and its discontents: the case of quality in Kenya

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Abstract This study addresses the implications of higher education marketisation for quality in Kenya. It focuses on full fee-paying programmes, the de facto market source of revenue for Kenya's public universities. The study argues that Kenya's public universities were precipitately subjected to diminished public capitation, and so was their plunging into marketisation. These institutions started enrolling full fee-paying students at a time when they were strained in terms of institutional capacity. There were not enough physical facilities, and most of those available were suffering decay following many years of neglect. They did not have enough teaching staff, a problem, which the marketisation agenda has made worse. The desire to claim a bigger share in the student market has seen the introduction of many new courses in advance of capacity to offer them. The study concludes that by seeking economic self-determination through full fee-paying programmes, in advance of a well-developed institutional capacity, the subsequent pressure seems to have made the quality situation worse.

Keywords Full fee-paying programmes · Higher education · Institutional capacity · Kenya · Marketisation · Public universities · Quality

Introduction

Globally, the proportion of governmental funding in the overall budgets of public universities (in real terms) continues to drop (Johnstone 1998, 2001; Marginson and Considine 2000; Sporn 1999; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Wangenge-Ouma 2007). Universities across the globe are thus faced by what Johnstone (2001, p. 2) describes as “creeping austerity: a slow but unrelenting worsening of the financial condition of most universities and other institutions of higher education, particularly as they are dependent on governmental, or tax-generated revenue”.

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Cutbacks in state funding threaten the survival of institutions of higher learning; hence prompting them to undertake various adaptive responses to ensure continued survival. As Sporn points out, “given pressing problems of resource supply, institutions of higher education need to find adequate strategies to meet the needs for this new situation” (1999, p. 68).

Marketisation, which, from a funding perspective, refers to strategies and processes for generating revenue from private sources (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Nafukho 2004; Oketch 2003), has oftentimes been fronted as the solution to the plummeting resource supply to public universities from governmental sources. Proponents of higher education marketisation have consistently argued that large-scale public funding of higher education is no longer tenable and is regressive; that generous public funding of higher education undermines equitable access, efficiency and even quality (Barr 2004; Johnstone 1998, 2001; World Bank 1994). It has further been argued that marketisation, other than being a solution to the funding conundrum facing many public universities, could also be the panacea to the crises of inefficiency, inequitable access and poor quality (Jongbloed 2003). This study does not contest this argument. Rather, it seeks to show that marketisation, while helping to mitigate the funding conundrum facing many public universities, in certain contexts; it has pernicious implications that threaten the critical role of universities as sites of intellectual production, scientific and technological innovation and as citadels of excellence.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section is the study’s research methodology. This is followed by an analysis of trends in the funding of Kenya’s public higher education. The third section discusses the phenomenon of full fee-paying programmes. This section is followed by a discussion of the implications of full fee-paying programmes for quality. The last section is the conclusion.

Research methodology

This study addresses the quality implications of full fee-paying programmes, the de facto market source of revenue for Kenya’s seven public universities. The investigation relies upon qualitative field research methods. Data were collected through interviews with academics and academic management staff, focus group discussions (FGDs) with students, and personal communications with academic staff and students at a public university in Kenya. Analysis of institutional documents and observations on site were also conducted.

Interview data was obtained from interviews with 25 academics, including academic management staff. Seven FGDs were conducted. Each FGD consisted of between 7 and 10 students. FGDs consisted of students taking various courses (Science and Humanities) and in various years of study. This was important so as to capture a holistic picture and avoid making generalisations where there were exceptions. In essence, the diversity of members of the FGDs ensured reliability of data. Students across all the years of study helped locate the issues raised on a continuum, i.e. whether the problems were new, have been there all along, have been exacerbated or have been addressed. The choice of faculty for in-depth interviews observed the same diversity. Both young and old academics, teaching various programmes in science and humanities, were chosen.

Document analysis included institutional documents, viz. strategic plans, financial reports, reports of the Auditor-General on institutional accounts, and institutional reports to government commissions. Observations were carried out over a period of one month.

Observations focused on the general state of the physical infrastructure, crowding in lecture halls and general crowding on campus.

Data analysis relied upon models of assessing quality in education developed by Cheng and Tam (1997) and Cheng (2003). Cheng and Tam (1997) and Cheng (2003) have conceptualised seven models of assessing quality in education. These are the goal and specification model, the resource-input model, process model, satisfaction model, legitimacy model, absence of problems model and the organisational learning model. Only three of these models are employed in this study, i.e. the resource-input model, the process model and absence of problems model. The analysis also utilises the concept of institutional capacity, as advanced by Cloete and Maasen (2002), Muller (2001) and Navarro and Gallardo (2003).

The identity of the case study university is not revealed. This is consistent with a prior understanding between the researcher and the case study university to maintain anonymity. One university was chosen to afford a more detailed analysis of the study's concerns. Although one may hesitate to generalise the study's findings on all the public universities in Kenya, substantial literature on the subject (Caroll 2006; Mamdani 2007; Obong 2004; Musisi and Muwanga 2003; Ngome 2003; Oketch 2003) seems to point to a universality of this study's findings.

Trends in funding Kenya's higher education

In many African countries, resources for higher education have steadily declined through the years. This decline has invariably been ascribed *inter alia* to inflation, devaluation of the currency exchange rate, huge external debts, economic and political turmoil, inter-sectoral competition for public funds and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's macro-economic principles of budget deficit reduction and restricted social spending (Banya and Elu 2001; Carnoy 2000; Johnstone 2001; Nafukho 2004; Teferra and Altbach 2004).

Kenya's public universities, like many others in the world, have suffered many years of underfunding. Wangenge-Ouma's (2007) recent analysis of public funding of higher education in Kenya in the period 1996–2005 shows a diminishing trend. For instance, from 1996 to 2000 higher education funding as a percentage of GDP averaged 0.94% and reduced in the period 2001–2005 when it averaged 0.74%.

Due, in part, to the diminishing state capitation of Kenya's public universities, almost all of Kenya's seven public universities have had to endure severe financial difficulty. For instance, from 1997/1998 through 2000/2001 Egerton University posted huge deficits and a negative working capital. In 2001, the Auditor-General described Egerton University as being "technically insolvent". Even when the university posted surpluses in 2002 and 2003, the university was unable to remit statutory deductions and retirement benefits amounting to Kshs. 276,000,000 (US\$ 3,942,857) and Kshs. 138,427,362 (US\$ 1,977,534) respectively, prompting the Auditor-General to describe the university's financial position as "precarious" (EU 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005).

The other universities are no exception. In 1998 the Auditor-General described Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) as being "technically insolvent" (JKUAT 1998, p. 2). In 2001 through 2004, the Auditor-General's reports showed that the university was experiencing financial problems (JKUAT 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005). As on 31 May 2005 University of Nairobi (UoN) was running a debt of Kshs. 1,626,007,778.55 (US\$ 23,228,683) accumulated over the years (Magoha 2005) and

in 2004/2005 financial year, Kenyatta University (KU) experienced a deficit of Kshs. 200 million (US\$ 2,857,143) (KU 2005a, b; Standa 2005). The universities have always blamed their unenviable financial situation on restricted funding from the state.

Overall, government funding of Kenya's public universities has been inadequate and unreliable, hence putting these institutions in a situation of financial emergency. These conditions of financial decline necessitated a response by the universities to ensure that they survive. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that organisations deprived of critical revenues will seek new resources so as to remain effective, to survive. To ensure that they survive, Kenyan public universities resorted to marketisation—winning revenue from non-government sources.

Economic survival through marketisation

Marketisation has become the archetypical mode of generating revenue for many public universities. In Kenya, marketisation constitutes, *inter alia*, formation of university owned for-profit companies, co-ventures with private proprietary non-university institutions, farming, petty trade on campus and admission of full fee-paying students (Nafukho 2004; Kiamba 2004; Wangenge-Ouma 2006, 2007). Full fee-paying students are admitted over and above the students who come in with government subsidy. These students are enrolled into courses invariably referred to as parallel programmes. These programmes are also known by other names *viz.* module II, income generating academic programmes, alternative degree programmes, self-sponsored programmes and special entry programmes.

Parallel programmes were primarily introduced for purposes of generating critical additional revenue for public universities, to mitigate anorexic allocations from the Kenyan fiscus. The University of Nairobi was the first one to introduce these programmes in 1998. Kiamba (2004) correctly locates their introduction against the background of a biting fiscal hardship UoN was experiencing coupled with the government's declared inability to continue large-scale funding of the higher education sub-sector. External forces, linked with Kenya's encounter with globalisation were also responsible for the introduction of parallel programmes. Their introduction as a response to thinning public financial support was in part, a consequence of the discrediting of the public model of financing higher education, aided by the establishment of neo-liberalism as the dominant economic mode. Parallel programmes fit in with neo-liberalism's treatment of higher education as a private commodity; a traded commodity to be purchased by a consumer, a product to be retailed by academic institutions (Altbach 2002).

All of Kenya's public universities have since started parallel programmes. Although parallel programmes are now in vogue in several African countries, such as Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia, Uganda's Makerere University was the first one to start such programmes in 1992 (Caroll 2006; Court 1999; Obong 2004). It may thus be argued that Makerere University served as a test case and legitimated the practice for other public universities in Uganda and in some other African countries to follow. The influence of Makerere University on other African universities has further been enhanced by recent writings, which have painted Makerere's experience with these programmes as a phenomenal financial success (Court 1999; TFHES 2000; Clark 2004; Musisi and Muwanga 2003).

Overall, parallel programmes constitute the main horse on which marketisation has entered Kenya's public universities. They are an aspect of global processes of marketisation in higher education. They are a local, context specific response to pressures that are otherwise global in nature.

Parallel programmes have been vilified as much as they have been praised. They have simultaneously been called revolutionary and retrogressive. The literature contains a number of issues that have been raised regarding these programmes. These include access, equity, control and utilisation of generated funds, the general administration of the programmes and quality (Caroll 2006; Mamdani 2007; Altbach 2002; Sawyerr 2002; Musisi and Muwanga 2003; Obong 2004; Oketch 2003; Wangenge-Ouma 2006). Of these issues, quality concerns are arguably the most frequently raised, and perhaps, the most critical. There exists a valid fear that these programmes, though financially rewarding, have dented the quality of Kenya's public higher education.

Emerging quality issues

As aforementioned, following a steady decline in state funding of Kenya's public higher education, these universities, motivated by the need for survival, have been trying to shift their resource dependence from the (unreliable) state to the market. The resort to the market, via parallel programmes, to seek economic survival, has not only led to increased capital acquisition and accumulation, but also concerns regarding the quality of services and products of Kenya's public universities.

The identified quality issues are discussed within the context of:

- (a) Adequacy of teaching staff
- (b) Physical and pedagogical resources
- (c) Human and institutional capacity

Teaching staff

The presence of a skilled workforce is a critical factor of production in any organisation. According to Ngome (2003), as at 2000, all the public universities in Kenya had over-employed. He claims that UoN was over-employed by over 739 academic staff members and that "the strain of over-employment at UoN applied to all public universities in the country" (Ngome 2003, p. 364). Ngome's claim is however contradicted by data from UoN (2005) and JKUAT (2005), which show that the two universities were experiencing staff shortages, which were acute at senior levels. For instance, although UoN had an establishment of 311 associate professors, only 145 were in post; and against an establishment of 543 senior lecturers only 294 were in post (UoN 2005). In the case study university, the Vice-Chancellor admitted the institution was experiencing a shortage of staff, especially in courses that were popular with parallel students, such as MBA.

Shortage of staff was blamed on a prevailing shortage of lecturers long before the introduction of parallel programmes and also the introduction of apparently popular courses—targeted at parallel students, before a sufficient corpus of staff to teach those courses was developed. In many departments, lecturers who have left the employ of the university or died have not been replaced.

Failure to hire more staff is explained by two main reasons. One, considering that almost all the universities offer similar programmes, especially those considered competitive, there are not many qualified people available to service them. Cases of universities advertising the same positions several times, and failing to get qualified people have been reported. In such cases, it was not uncommon for unqualified and mediocre people to be

recruited. Another reason is the cost implications of hiring more staff. Thus, limiting the recruitment of more staff is an element of economic efficiency—spending less and saving or generating as much as possible.

In some departments, it appears the shortage of staff has been abetted by the willingness of existing staff to take on extra teaching load, for material gain. It was noted that because parallel programmes are lucrative, some lecturers were willing to take two, or three times the recommended teaching load.

The problem of inadequate teaching staff has led to lecturers having huge teaching loads and having to teach all the year round without a break. Since the introduction of parallel programmes, almost all the universities have programmes running throughout the year, in some cases including evenings and weekends. University vacations have been made to coincide with school holidays so as to allow school teachers enrolled in the parallel programmes to attend lectures. The only time some lecturers had a break was when universities were forced to close due to strikes by students or industrial action by staff. Such closures were usually followed by crash programmes to make up for the lost time (and money), occasioning even more stress to both the staff and students.

To survive the overwhelming workload, lecturers and departments have developed coping strategies, some of which are detrimental to the attainment of quality education. Some of these strategies include:

(a) Assigning teaching assistants full teaching responsibilities. Although they are usually assigned junior classes (first and second years) it is not uncommon for them to be assigned senior classes.

(b) Master's by "project" work (minor dissertation) and postgraduate supervision by junior staff. The master's programme is usually conducted in two main ways: by course work, examinations and thesis or by course work, research project (minor dissertation) and examinations. The first mode lays more emphasis on research, which culminates into the writing of a full thesis. In the second mode, more emphasis is put on course work and a minor dissertation, which does not necessarily require any fieldwork. Since the onset of parallel programmes, many departments have done away with the full thesis mode. One of the main weaknesses of the minor dissertation mode is that the papers do not go through the quality assurance processes that full theses have to endure.

The main problem with master's studies seems to be the explosion in the number of postgraduate students against few competent supervisors. As a result lecturers now have to supervise many students, in some cases up to 20 at a time. These students have to be dispensed with very fast to create room for more to enrol. The many students lecturers have to supervise within a short time have definite implications for rigour. Besides, it is not unlikely that the supervisor may not be competent in all the areas students are doing their projects. As such, as one lecturer pointed out:

"Supervision at postgraduate level has become extremely weak. We do not create enough time for our students at all. Many of us like to put our students in our vehicles [and] as we drive to other things that we do, we are commenting on their work: "I looked at your work, fine, it looks okay here, and here it does not look okay. Here I'll be looking at it again, but meanwhile I'd like you to look at A, B, C..." as you are driving, negotiating corners! This is what happens as lecturers run from one campus to another." (Personal Interview, February 2006).

The other response by departments to the many postgraduate students is assigning them junior staff as supervisors. Persons who were previously deemed unqualified to supervise postgraduate students now do so. The rush to supervise postgraduate students has further

been fuelled by the desire to clinch promotions. Since the number of students one has supervised is an important ingredient in the promotion criteria, some lecturers have sought to mitigate their inability to conduct research and publish, by supervising many students. One lecturer put it thus:

“I have seen a situation where colleagues rush for these clients [parallel students] to better their CVs [curriculum vitas]. So what happens is; a lecturer who has not been productive in terms of publications now sees supervision of projects as a green field.” (Personal Interview, February 2006).

The proliferation of masters by minor dissertation has therefore had implications for academic rigour. The overwhelming number of postgraduate students has occasioned a shift to just producing graduates, so that room can be created for more students to enrol. There seems to be limited interest or a creeping inability to conduct critical scholarship. Adherence to high standards of scholarship is steadily becoming a mirage. As one lecturer put it in an interview, “If you look at the kind of projects we have now in the department; they are of very poor quality”.

Cases of plagiarism going unnoticed and students engaging the services of others (“academic entrepreneurs”) at a fee make the quality issue at postgraduate training even worse. In the case study university, cases of students taking previous projects and slightly altering the titles and changing names, then presenting the projects as their original work were reported: “some students were simply taking previous projects and changing names whereby if somebody did a study in Kisumu they put there Kakamega”, one lecturer lamented. Cases of plagiarism were partially blamed on “academic entrepreneurs” who did projects for students at a fee. All these “entrepreneurs” did was to change a few things in a previous project then submit it to their unsuspecting clients as original work. But even if these entrepreneurs did not plagiarise previous work, the very act of engaging them has far reaching implications for the quality of postgraduate research and the graduates produced.

(c) Introduction of big group assignments is another adaptive strategy being employed. Before the upsurge in student numbers it was reported that group assignments were limited to groups of between three and five students. This has since changed. To minimise the number of scripts for marking, lecturers prefer giving big group assignments, at times, of up to 15 students each. From the accounts of students on how the big groups impacted on them, it appears the practice has resulted in the inevitable loss of quality of learning experience for students.

(d) Doing away with tutorials is perhaps one of the most profound consequences of the upsurge in student numbers. Although some departments discontinued tutorials long before the commencement of parallel programmes, the introduction of these programmes expedited their discontinuation in departments that still offered them. In the case study university, only one department still offered tutorials. Tutorials have many roles. They ensure that students have understood the lecture, and are places for developing broader intellectual and analytical skills in presenting and communicating ideas, as well as working in a team, nurturing critical thinking, creative reflection and promoting independent learning. The discontinuation of tutorials meant that students had to rely on the less interactive large-scale lectures, where their only participation in the learning process was writing notes. The discontinuation of tutorials is likely to have a bigger impact on weak students, many of whom have apparently been enrolled following the democratisation of university access via parallel programmes. From the accounts of lecturers, the number of weak students has gone up since the introduction of parallel programmes. For some lecturers, parallel students are to blame. One of them put it thus:

“When I started teaching parallel students, for the first time, I came across students who could not express themselves in English. Number two, they were struggling. You could tell they were struggling by their helpless attachment to the teacher. They felt so secure with the teacher; coming to you to ask very mundane questions that they would answer in the library! Our regular students [government-sponsored students] don’t behave like that. Our regular students are confident; confident to a level of being reckless!” (Personal Interview, February 2006).

Tutorials would be ideal for the weak students to be assisted.

Parallel programmes have also introduced a money culture in the public universities, turning lecturers into ‘academic capitalists’ *a la* Slaughter and Leslie (1997). Following many years of poor remuneration, a number of lecturers have turned parallel programmes into a cash crop. Although moonlighting has been an ongoing practice, the onset of parallel programmes has created more opportunities for lecturers to make more money. As such, it was not uncommon for lecturers to have more than three part-time teaching jobs. As a result of overstretching themselves, they inevitably suffered burnout. They were also hardly available for consultation by students. Some of them frequently failed to show up for lectures, especially those involving the government-sponsored students. The missing of lectures by faculty meant that they did not cover the entire course content. As if to mitigate their failure to cover the expected content, a number of them resorted to teaching what students have christened “examination areas”. This meant that during the few times the lecturers turned up to teach, they only taught areas from which they set or were going to set examinations. The teaching of “examination areas” helped the concerned lecturers to cover their tracks, as students would perform highly in their subjects thereby giving the misleading impression that they had been taught well.

Physical and pedagogical resources

Quality concerns have also arisen due to the present resource conditions at the case study university. Even though the university, like all the others, has established outpost campuses to accommodate some of the parallel students, its facilities have generally failed to match the rate of increase in enrolment. The challenge for many academic staff is how to handle large classes with inadequate facilities and supplies; and for students, how to eke out a rewarding educational experience in the present immiserating conditions.

The general observation is that facilities have been outgrown. The facilities at the university’s main campus were put up to accommodate a limited number of students, and no other facilities have been established to cater for the increased number of parallel students. The most strained facilities were classrooms. Experiential accounts from both lecturers and students painted a picture of despair. In some courses, especially in education (teacher training), crowded classrooms were the norm. Although these courses were taught from the biggest lecture halls in the university, with a sitting capacity of about 500 students, it was not uncommon to find about 800 students squeezed in the lecture halls, with many others following lectures while standing outside the lecture halls or perching on the windows. The beginning and end of lectures were usually marked by chaotic scenes as students jumped in and out from every available opening.

Crowded classroom conditions not only made it difficult for students to concentrate on their lessons, but also made the teaching—learning process less interactive. What remained of teaching in these crowded conditions was actually some form of public address, where

notes are dictated. At times it was not even possible for students to take notes due to audibility problems occasioned by the faulty public address systems in the lecture halls. Although overcrowding was the main problem, cases of total unavailability of space were also reported:

“...the first class I had with my master’s students was under a tree. We did not have a place for them. We tried squeezing them in a small room we couldn’t fit—we started suffocating! So we said we might as well just go out under a shade. It went on like that for some time. We used to walk all over the university hoping to find an empty venue where somebody may have cancelled a class. At times when you are in the middle of the lecture the people now come—the ‘owners’ of the classroom, so you move again” (Personal Interview, February 2006).

The problem of inadequate space became even more critical during sit-in continuous assessment tests and examinations. Since the university did not have sufficient lecture halls of adequate size, there was a tendency to crowd the students even during examinations. The result has been an increase in cases of examination irregularities.

The problem of insufficient lecture halls has also created time-tabling problems. Cases of lectures clashing, i.e. two or more lectures being scheduled to take place at the same venue simultaneously, were said to be on the increase. Alternatively, some students would be scheduled to attend two different lectures at the same time. Although time-tabling problems were usually experienced at the beginning of the semester, some of these problems lingered far into the semester occasioning waste of time and loss of learning for students.

Other than the clashes in the timetable, transition from one lecture to another was yet another problem. This problem affected both students and lecturers. The few big lecture halls are far flung such that students who had lectures immediately following each other wasted a lot of time walking from one lecture hall to the other. They either had to attend the first lecture up to the end and get late for the subsequent lecture, meaning they would miss seats; or leave halfway through the first lecture so that they can arrive in time for the subsequent lecture. Either way, learning was interfered with.

Other important facilities and resources that were either lacking or inadequate were those for science courses and books in the library. Although this problem was acute at the university’s newly established campuses, the main campus was no exception. Regarding facilities for science courses, the problem ranged from inadequacy to unavailability. Most laboratories had very few equipment or did not have them at all. Science students were thus forced to crowd around the few equipment available during experiments, with most of them being forced to spectate as the experiments were carried out.

The inadequacy and unavailability of science equipment, including laboratory consumables, had implications for scientific training. Because of the scarcity of resources, students did not have the opportunity to carry out enough practicals, yet practicals were the hallmark of science education. Because of the increased number of students, the few laboratories available were crowded and students were not able to carry out as many practicals as they are supposed to.

The problem of inadequate facilities also applies to library resources. The inadequacy of library resources was not a new problem. Lecturers who have been teaching at the university long before parallel programmes were introduced indicated that the problem of inadequate library resources was an old one at the institution. The problem of inadequate library resources has further been compounded by the proliferation of new courses, most of which are targeted at parallel students. Students pursuing these new courses often had to

rely on lecture notes. It was not uncommon to find all the primary text books missing from the library. In case they were available, it was not unlikely that only a few copies were available. The university's library thus no longer signified a source of reading and research material but rather a reading space for students to conduct private studies and revise for examinations.

The role of human resources, physical facilities and pedagogical resources in facilitating organisational performance is widely acknowledged. The adequacy and quality of human resources and facilities of institutions offering higher education should be of particular interest as these are at the core of these institutions' effectiveness in educational provision, and to students and society at large; value for their investment in higher education. Human resources and other facilities are therefore critical in the quality functioning of institutions of higher learning. They are a catalyst for improved performance.

The adequacy of resources and facilities has become a critical issue following the unprecedented upsurge in the number of students. Many of the universities have enrolled more parallel students than the state-subsidised ones. From 2001/2002 to 2005/2006, UoN had 25, 517 parallel students as compared to 20,882 who were government-subsidised (UoN 2005). From 2000/2001 to 2004/2005, JKUAT had enrolled 3,479 students over and above 3,150 state-subsidised ones in the same period (JKUAT 2004). At Kenyatta University, structures originally meant for 500 students now cater for over 12,000 students (KU 2005).

From the perspective of the resource-input model of assessing quality (Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003), it is apparent the case study university is lacking in critical resources necessary for a high quality educational experience. The resource-input model assumes that adequate and quality resources are necessary for educational institutions to provide quality services (Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003). The institution is lacking sufficient physical and human resources, and also pedagogical resources such as library resources and laboratory consumables. The influx of students has also increased the incidence of weak and under prepared students. Sufficient physical and human resources and high quality students are important resource-input quality indicators (Dill and Soo 2005; Harvey and Green 1993; Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003; Jongbloed 2003).

The problem of overcrowding in lecture halls, clashing of lectures, absence of tutorials, failure to turn up for lectures and the resort to teaching "examination areas", poor supervision of postgraduate students and the phenomenon of "yellow" and "yellowing" notes would, in the context of the process model of assessing quality (Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003), be interpreted as inimical to the attainment of a quality educational experience. The process model assumes that an educational institution is of high educational quality if its internal functioning is smooth and the learning experiences are fruitful (Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003).

All the raised issues, associated with parallel programmes, could be seen as problems, which the absence of problems model of assessing quality (Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003), take as being indicative of poor educational quality. The absence of problems model postulates that educational quality means the absence of problems and troubles (Cheng and Tam 1997; Cheng 2003). According to this model, the problems associated with the introduction of parallel programmes are defects, which occasion institutional dysfunction.

Marketisation and institutional capacity

Institutional capacity may be defined as the full range of qualities necessary for an educational institution to function successfully. These qualities include deft management,

adequate and skilled human resources, adequate and well maintained physical facilities of the right size, and important scholastic resources like computers, laboratory equipment and library resources. Institutional capacity, thus, refers to the capability of institutions to carry out their stated missions. For universities, this mission entails, in the main, high quality training and research.

Navarro and Gallardo (2003), Cloete and Maasen (2002) and Muller (2001) suggest that when universities are in circumstances of vulnerability, when the environment is undergoing rapid changes; they must have corresponding capabilities in order to remain as effective organisations. Capacity is the very essence of strategy (Navarro and Gallardo 2003).

Cloete and Maasen (2002) and Muller (2001) argue that depending on the capacities institutions already have; they may respond to financial stress from positions of weakness or strength. Responding from a position of weakness is regarded “as a precarious strategy because here applied research or relevant curricula are sought in advance of consolidated disciplinary capacity. It is a strategy that is not sustainable in the long term” (Cloete and Maasen 2002, p. 473).

The commencement of parallel programmes, as it has been argued in the preceding discussion, has brought about pressures, which have implications for the attainment of quality higher education. It has also been argued that most of the issues concerning quality predate the introduction of parallel programmes. Consequently, the on-going marketisation of Kenya’s higher education may be said to have exacerbated an already deteriorating situation. A lecturer explained it thus:

“I don’t think that if there is an impact on teaching and learning, that impact can be attributed solely to the introduction of parallel programmes. For me I’d be interested in asking myself “had we achieved a substantial level of quality teaching and research in the university before we introduced parallel programmes?”, so that we can say the parallel programmes were being grafted on a university system that was keen on quality teaching and research in the first place. For me, if we lack quality in terms of teaching and research during the era of parallel programmes, I would want to see it as a continuation of a tradition of lack of quality. If I was to apportion effect, what has had more effect on quality; parallel programmes or the existing university tradition on the quality of teaching? I would say, the existing university tradition. So that when parallel programmes were introduced they had no chance of any better quality than any other programme that was being offered at the university.” (Personal Interview, February 2006).

The same lecturer then concludes that parallel programmes have only made “worse, a bad situation”. That being the case, it may then be argued that the case study university responded to financial stress, via parallel programmes, from a position of weakness, which as Cloete and Maasen (2002) point out, is a precarious strategy.

Observations made by Wandiga (1997) seem to vindicate the argument that parallel programmes have only made “*worse a bad situation*”. In a study on capacity building and institutional development in higher education in Kenya, Wandiga (1997, p. 13) posits that

The high prestige and esteem that the public universities in Kenya enjoyed in the 1970s and early 1980s no longer exists... Today, public universities are seen as institutions that are nearly on the brink of collapse....

The shortage of physical facilities for teaching, shortage of library resources, teaching and research equipment, which still persists to date, is usually blamed on the many years of

under funding of the higher education sub-sector by the state. It can then be argued that the introduction of parallel programmes, as a response to austerity, came about when these institutions were still suffering serious inadequacies in terms of resources and facilities for robust scholarship. Parallel programmes were therefore precipitately introduced.

The introduction of parallel programmes was inevitably going to increase student numbers. Unfortunately, this rise in student numbers appears to have proceeded without detailed planning of the full consequences. This was obviously undesirable, but it is important to recognise that the universities seemingly had no other option: they were faced with a very serious financial crisis that had to be addressed. They had to survive.

What the findings of this study have pointed out are the pitfalls of commodifying and marketising universities and students. The emerging evidence suggests that marketisation worsens quality of higher education when it is undertaken against a context of existing deterioration, in advance of capacity to provide quality higher education.

The capacity conundrum is further compounded by the emerging practice of introducing new programmes, considered marketable, without due regard to existing capacity to offer such programmes. Thus, not enough thought is given to the academic or disciplinary requirements of these programmes. One may therefore sum up that the marketisation process has inevitably inverted the university's priorities: from pursuing robust, high quality scholarship, to generating more revenue.

Conclusion

The foregoing exposition does not seem to point to a university experience one may describe as being of high quality. It brings to the fore a series of important questions posed by Oketch (2003) regarding the ongoing marketisation of Kenya's public higher education. Oketch (2003, p. 1) asks:

- (a) Will the market model be able to creatively address the challenges of increased demand for higher education while ensuring that quality is maintained in Kenya's higher education? Or,
- (b) Will the market model lead to increased enrollment, providing quantity-driven education full of credentials, but little value in terms of quality?
- (c) Will students graduate with degrees without learning?

The problem seems to be at the 'input' and 'process' levels. The students (many of whom are apparently 'weak') are too many against few competent teaching staff, and inadequate teaching, learning and research infrastructure (laboratories, equipment, library resources, etc.). This inadequacy has evidently impacted on the 'process'. Teaching (large-scale lectures) has been limited to dictation of 'yellow' and 'yellowing' notes; tutorials have been discontinued; practicals and assignments have become a 'crowd' affair, and in some courses practicals are either not conducted at all or are done sparingly.

The introduction of parallel programmes has presented students and lecturers with multiple dilemmas and challenges. The few lecturers, already overworked because of the many students and have to shuttle from one campus to another (occasionally with short transition time) are also forced to make do with inadequate or obsolete equipment and insufficient library resources. Students are faced with overcrowding, tutorials have been discontinued and practicals are few and haphazardly conducted. These are ideal conditions for a miserable university experience. The outcome is, unavoidably, mediocre education.

Overall, it is concluded that Kenya's public universities were precipitately subjected to diminished capitation, and so was their plunging into marketisation. These institutions started enrolling parallel students at a time when they were strained in terms of capacity. There were not enough physical facilities, and most of those available were suffering decay following many years of neglect. They did not have enough teaching staff, a problem, which the marketisation agenda has worsened. The desire to claim a bigger share in the student market has seen the introduction of many new courses in advance of capacity to offer them. By seeking economic self-determination through parallel programmes, in advance of a well-developed capacity, the subsequent pressure seems to have made a bad situation worse.

With the increased enrolment of mostly under prepared students, large-scale lectures, mass supervision of postgraduate students, termination of tutorials, inadequate library and laboratory resources, among others, it may not be possible to describe the case study university as a thriving site of intellectual production. For, as pointed out by Sawyerr (2002, p. 58):

...while teaching is a core function, teaching without regard to the quality of learning is not. [...]. Where time for tutoring students and mentoring young faculty is reduced to a bare minimum, an effective teaching and learning environment ceases to exist, and the notion of a space for reflection and the cultivation of critical thinking is completely out. Prospects of providing "world class teaching, research and services" are, at best, dim.

Kenyan public universities thus need to develop and strengthen their institutional capacities to enable them remain committed to high quality provision, even as they compete for revenue in the higher education market. The problem of capacity can be partially solved by offering courses in which the universities have enough competent staff and scholastic resources. The problem of inadequate staff has been worsened by the ongoing programmatic isomorphisms, where all the universities now offer similar programmes, beyond their core areas of strength. Thus, one way universities can mitigate the problem of inadequate staff is by differentiation and specialisation into different areas. Differentiation of focus and specialisation of programmes will enable these institutions to concentrate on what they can do best.

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