

Research Application Summary

The wrath of unprecedented university expansion in Kenya

Michieka, R.W.^{1,2}

Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology (JKUAT), P.O. Box 62000 – 00200 Nairobi,
Kenya

Kenya National Academy of Science (KNAS), P.O. Box 4618-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

Corresponding Author: Ratemo.michieka@uonbi.ac.ke

Abstract

This paper examines critical issues that nurture human beings through university education. It analyses the effect of rapid university expansion in Kenya and their impact on the economic and social sustainability. A country's development relies heavily on high calibre research, a disciplined academia and society, integrity of the citizens, and a secure trusted environment. The paper further examines the causes of poor academic performance, students' competencies, and rapidly degenerating academic programmes due to over-duplications in upcoming and existing institutions. Public perception university on graduates is also reviewed. Further, the issue of self-sponsored students and the surge in creation of campuses are highlighted. Finally, the near impossible demand of PhD lecturers is discussed against the backdrop of part-time lecturers.

Keywords: Commission for University Education, Joint Admissions Board, Kenya, parallel degrees

Résumé

Cet article a examiné les problèmes cruciaux qui forment les humains à travers l'enseignement universitaire. Nous avons analysé les effets de l'expansion rapide des universités au Kenya et leur impact sur la durabilité économique et sociale. Le développement d'un pays repose en grande partie sur une recherche de qualité, une académie et une société disciplinée, l'intégrité des citoyens et un environnement sûr et fiable. Le document a examiné en outre les causes des mauvais résultats académiques, des compétences des étudiants et des programmes universitaires désuètes en raison de la duplication excessive dans les établissements. La perception du public sur les diplômés de l'université a été également examinée. En outre, la question des étudiants qui s'autofinancent et la montée en flèche du nombre de campus sont mises en évidence. Enfin, la demande quasi impossible des enseignants ayant un doctorat, est discutée dans un contexte d'enseignants à temps partiel.

Mots clés: Commission pour l'enseignement universitaire, Conseil mixte des admissions, Kenya, diplômes parallèles

Human nature beyond accomplishment

Human nature wishes one to be above all others and command respect at all times. The art of acquiring and owning fame goes back to thousands of years. Accomplishment is a make-feel-good phenomenon – happiness. An individual has arrived once he/she acquires traits that outshine others. When one thinks that the impossible is possible, it is the ultimate satisfaction in the heart and brain. University education is sought by all and sundry to fulfil the desire of a feel-good ego. In academia therefore, the university is the ultimate accomplishment that surpasses all the world treasures. Without it, man feels deficient as titles matter, not necessary richness, hence the high demand.

Education creates gaps in society. It changes mind sets; it chooses paths to be followed, creates disparities, and forms divergent paths. An accomplished academic opens avenues for prosperity and commands a community or an institution. This character sometimes and overtime can easily erode the gains attained by individuals. Any accomplishments need to be nurtured and respected. Accomplishments bring forth a character and nurturing bears a character. The two scenarios are completely different. One needs nurturing after accomplishment.

Universities are viewed as avenues where the impossible becomes possible. They are the ultimate problem solvers for the society, country, and world. Therefore everybody strives to be a problem-solver through university education. Problem solving can take many angles including research, lecturer, politician, leader, preacher, doctor, engineer, etc. that all depend on individuals' egos. The pursuit of knowledge is definite but not time bound. This provision is often largely pursued through universities. It is in university that one can do what others cannot do. Human beings desire titles, which sound beautiful in their ears, and would love to use them.

A University is the highest level of education where students study to earn degrees. It also allows for high calibre research by the students and faculty. Each country strives to boost their institutions. A good analogy that has similar features is the ownership of a State airline. No matter how badly an airline performs financially, each country would strive to own one and boast for one.

Establishment of university: The individual university character. Every African country has either State-owned universities or individually run ones. Depending on the colonial power that developed a particular university system, programmes and characters are highly stimulated to it. Religious based universities have their prominence in religious matters. Their roles and missions are articulated in nurturing a wholesome person based on specific religious faiths. Their character is therefore pronounced in the initial stages of their academic development.

Public or government supported universities are established differently. They undergo various nurturing stages under an older public university and graduate, or become of age and are awarded full autonomy after a reasonable incubation period. Under normal circumstances, the university college is expected to develop a sound niche and character, which will be its torch bearer during subsequent years. It can be a university with a bias

on science, agriculture, technology, commerce, architecture, engineering, religious studies, medicine, etc. or a combination of many programmes. However in terms of niche and character, the bias must be articulated very early during the establishment stage. Quality staff and programmes are highly emphasized by the mentoring university.

In many countries, a quality assurance body like the Commission for University Education (CUE) in Kenya is involved in the development of programmes and revises the qualifications of the staff for the proposed new university. It is a time consuming process and patience from all the players is required. That is what many of us went through.

The character of each university is unique. The new university is expected to exploit areas that are relevant to the country that may not have been exhausted. The character must benefit the academia and society, and new knowledge must be effective. Research portfolio is vital in angling a niche. National priorities take precedence as scholars seek the economic and academic fulfilment. Certain areas of research may be solely for scholarly exploits in view of adding knowledge to a wide society. In developing nations, the future of the university and students' admissions is heavily weighted on its sound, saleable, and diverse academic programme. Emphasis is laid on economic development and graduate employability.

Demand for higher education in Kenya. During the 1980s and 1990s, the few existing universities in Kenya would not absorb all qualified students. Until 2005, Kenya had six public universities and six private ones. They could not admit all the students since admission was pegged mainly on bed capacities. The older universities were developed with specific characters, visions, and missions. Their perception was developmental and technological. Training facilities were equally pegged to laboratories available especially to the sciences and engineering based universities.

Table 1 lists the Kenyan Universities, including their years of establishment. This table shows the chronological development of each university. It is not the intention of this paper to go through every mentoring state of individual universities. Suffice it to say that other than Moi University, all the public universities went through a mentorship cycle. Moi University was established through a thorough study of need and demand by the stakeholders. The unprecedented expansion of universities with 10 public universities between 2003 and 2013 revolutionized the education system in Kenya.

The period of university upsurge in Kenya. The most dramatic and sadden award of charters to universities occurred between 2013 and 2016. The number of public universities shot to 22 by the end of the year 2013 and escalated to 30 by 2016. They were given charters as per the 2012 Universities Act. The increase in the number of universities was viewed as an excellent development for the counties that were devolved during the 2010 Constitution promulgation. Each county was supposed to boast one or more public universities.

Planning for the unprecedented university creation was void. Little thought was put on the unforeseen consequences. The people of Kenya were happy and praised the move as progressive, courageous, forward looking, and socio-economic developmental. A legacy was created and the Ministry of Education and Technology (then) was upbeat.

Table 1. Universities operating in Kenya

	Name of the University	Year of Establishment	Year of Charter
<i>Public Chartered Universities</i>			
1	University of Nairobi (UoN)	1970	2013
2	Moi University (MU)	1984	2013
3	Kenyatta University	1985	2013
4	Egerton University (EU)	1987	2013
5	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)	1994	2013
6	Maseno University (Maseno)	2001	2013
7	Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST)	2007	2013
8	Dedan Kimathi University of Technology		2013
9	Chuka University		2013
10	Technical University of Kenya		2013
11	Technical University of Mombasa		2013
12	Pwani University		2013
13	Kisii University		2013
14	University of Eldoret		2013
15	Maasai Mara University		2013
16	Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology		2013
17	Laikipia University		2013
18	South Eastern Kenya University		2013
19	Meru University of Science and Technology		2013
20	Multimedia University of Kenya		2013
21	University of Kabianga		2013
22	Karatina University		2013
23	Kibabii University		2015
24	Rongo University		2016
25	The Co-Operative University of Kenya		2016
26	Taita Taveta University		2016
27	Murang'a University of Technology		2016
28	University of Embu		2016
29	Machakos University		2016
30	Kirinyaga University		2016
31	Garissa University College (MU)		2011
32	Alupe University College (MU)		2015
33	Kaimosi Friends University College (MMUST)		2015
34	Tom Mboya University College (Maseno)		2016
35	Turkana University College (MMUST)		2016
<i>Private Chartered Universities</i>			
36	University of Eastern Africa, Baraton		1991

37	Catholic University of East Africa (CUEA)	1992
38	Daystar University	1994
39	Scott Christian University	1997
40	United States International University	1999
41	Africa Nazarene University	2002
42	Kenya Methodist University	2006
43	Saint Paul's University	2007
44	Pan African Christian University	2008
45	Strathmore University	2008
46	Kabarak University	2008
47	Mount Kenya University	2011
48	Africa International University	2011
49	Kenya Highlands Evangelical University	2011
50	Great Lake University Kisumu	2012
51	KCA University	2013
52	Adventist University of Africa	2013
53	KAG EAST University	2016
54	Hekima University College (CUEA)	1993
55	Tangaza University College (CUEA)	1997
56	Maris International University College (CUEA)	2002
57	Regina Pacis University College (CUEA)	2010
58	Uzima University College (CUEA)	2012

Institutions with Letters of Interim Authority

59	Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology	2002
60	Aga Khan University	2002
61	GRETSA University	2006
62	Presbyterian University of East Africa	2008
63	The East African University	2010
64	Management University of Africa	2011
65	Riara University	2012
64	Pioneer International University	2012
65	UMMA University	2013
66	International Leadership University	2014
67	Zetech University	2014
68	Lukenya University	2015
69	RAF International University	2016

Source: Commission for University Education 2017

New university management systems that reduced the establishment dreams. With the sudden creation of the full-fledged universities, all systems had to go. It may not be possible to enumerate all that was needed to set up a fast functional university. Admittedly, the created universities had indeed been 'nurtured' by a parent or senior university. The mentoring duration varied for each upgraded constituent college.

Suffice to point out here that there was a need to set up a full functional university detached from its mentor. There was an urgent need therefore to have in place a budget, Chancellor, Council Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans of Faculties,

students, administrative and other support staff. The lower cadre were in place, competition and soliciting for senior posts kicked the highest note. There was jostling, soliciting, and canvassing for the top positions. Every means necessary was employed to win the posts. The most utilised route was through political canvassing. Political parties played a major role in securing top positions despite the fact that advertisements were made public and candidates applied for posts. Charters were awarded en masse and 14 new public universities were created in 2013. The new universities were expected to provide the highest level of education, where one can study for a degree or do research.

A few universities were lucky to attract some of the best qualified top managers, however at the cost of the source institutions who lost experienced academicians. Major rifts however arose among communities. The demand for locals to lead the new institutions was catastrophic to say the least. The hard journey to realise the mission and vision started was curtailed, in most cases ending up with localised institutions, driven by politics rather than the much needed science and quest for knowledge to solve community problems.

The consequences of poorly thought out universities expansion dream. The university explosion created unprepared demands that were not conceived at the inception. The following points highlight the most obvious problems which are being experienced by the 35 public universities in Kenya.

- (1) Inadequate budget provision: A public university is a public good. It is the prerogative of the Government to meet the budgetary allocation of all services of a university. It is the role of the university to make money. In other words they are not business entities but national institutions to provide knowledge, opportunities for training and research, and community services for development. Kenya is a young developing nation that needs research, manpower, and technological innovations at all times. At this stage of development, the country cannot relinquish its role to fully fund university operations. These are State ventures boasted by countries worldwide.

The current situation of university funding is pathetic. Granted that Kenya needs more universities but not at the unprecedented growth, the jump start was so abrupt that treasury could not meet the obligations.

- (2) Lack of qualified lecturers: The demand by the Commission for University Education (CUE) requires that all university lecturers must possess a PhD degree in order to teach. But this is unattainable in the current context. A simplistic method was employed by some upcoming universities that trained PhDs en masse and awarded degrees without much academic rigour. The consequences are disastrous for quality university education. This was worsened by private entrepreneurs running universities who in most instances have awarded degrees to just fulfil the CUE requirements for its staff, without the rigorous training needed for PhD holders; after all they had to remain in business.
- (3) Under normal circumstances, a solid and well-grounded PhD research takes three to eight years before a degree being awarded. Supervision has to be done by a competent Professor in an area of the a degree candidate. Normally, a seasoned Professor can only supervise one to four candidates at a time regardless of the discipline.

There was and still is a need to recruit teaching staff in the shortest time possible. The solution was to poach academic staff from the already established universities and award unprecedented privileges while lowering promotional requirements. This situation caused the exodus of staff. Many people moved to their rural enclaves with elevated salary packages and some others enrolled for PhD degrees with a view of getting university employment. Some universities that were less than four years had the audacity of presenting PhD recipients to the Chancellors who believed in their Senates' rushed decisions. This scenario has a far-reaching implication on the quality of graduates in the country.

The regulation passed by the CUE was a wishful thinking. The five-year duration was far from being adequate. After all, training funds were not forthcoming. This paper has not segregated disciplines – they vary in time requirements.

Lack of qualified lecturers necessitated overloading the existing ones and employing the services of Master students to teach Undergraduate and even other Master students, this greatly reduced universities to low level training institutions. Affordability to pay part-time lecturers was a challenge, many withdrew, many never attended all the lecture hours, the students were and are still the major losers to present, and as a country Kenya releases half-baked graduates.

The catastrophic en mass student enrolment, parallel degree programmes, and part time lecturers. The increase in the number of universities was a blessing to the country including students, parents, and public domain. But before this expansion, Kenya had established the University Act, in which the students were jointly admitted by a competent no-nonsense Joint Academic Board (JAB). This board was a gentleman's agreement pact composed of all high echelons of university managers. It included, among others, the Vice-Chancellors, respective Deputies, Principals of University Colleges, and Deans of respective Faculties. The JAB put in place operational rules which were adhered to the letter. It was the most transparent admission board with the highest integrity of any Kenyan outfit. It admitted the students on merit according to cleared programme capacity. The JAB will go down in history as a non-corruptible and firm student placement entity.

With the increase in universities, JAB would not admit all qualified students who scored C+ (the minimum grade for university admission). The university senates in consultation with respective councils introduced fee payments to the students who scored a grade of C+ and above. Very many bright students who would not have gained entrance to university had a perfect opportunity to continue with their education at higher level. It was viewed as a perfect decision, but this was not without a cost.

The self-sponsored, parallel, or alternate degree students had to pay a substantial fee differential unlike JAB admitted students who were Government sponsored. Some students under the newly introduced mode of admission could indeed be absorbed by JAB, but the bed space and other insufficient infrastructure would not suffice. The students with grade A would benefit from first priorities.

Parents and sponsors seized the opportunity and paid for their children. In the late 1990s, every university adopted two modes of admission including JAB or government sponsored

students and self-sponsored students. They would however benefit from the same teaching and university facilities.

University management and councils agreed to compensate lecturers for the extra students' enrolment. Hefty payments were instituted for extra teaching according to the number of self-sponsored students admitted in each programme. The normal university salary and all other benefits stood. The staff with many students earned more than their monthly salaries. In fact, there were two payments per month for progressive lecturers. In between JAB was replaced by the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) with the mission to establish criteria to enable the students to access the courses for which they applied for taking into account the students' qualifications and listed priorities.

The academic revolution was real. Campuses were created all over the county to admit more students. Nobody bothered to know where the students would reside. Many universities sited their campuses in the most unsafe place for academic discourse. One could find a teaching campus on top of bars, hardware, supermarkets, and even next to livestock selling venues. The worst scenario is when the students were told to seek their own residential premises in rural campuses that had no basic infrastructures and other amenities. Security was compromised and academic quality was not maintained.

This paper does not suggest that all the students must be accommodated in university halls. But it calls for the awareness of the nation of Kenya that has not attained basic living standards including access to piped water, power connections, and supermarkets. The current Kenya socio-economic development does not guarantee conducive rural learning environment.

The results of this expansion of university campuses put unprecedented strain on lecturers and infrastructures. A few universities put up modern teaching facilities using the proceeds from parallel degree programmes. Campuses that were sited in certain rural areas were seen as financial ventures and indeed caused business persons to come up with reasonable residential premises for the expanded community. Still, there was lack of basic amenities and security was compromised.

This section of the paper cannot be exhausted as specific details and examples are not cited. However, one example is appropriate here. Virtually, every public and private university opened a learning campus in Nairobi because the city presented the best financial opportunity.

The Academic Strip. The University way and Koinange Street intersections in Nairobi were the most active academic venues in Nairobi. Lecture halls were hired along the street, buildings were bought to host parallel degree students, and small shops were converted into recruitment offices for students. One block of ten storeys could host a good number of competing universities with identical academic programmes.

The convenience of working class Kenyans who had a thirst for education was complete. The students would work to the venue after 5:00pm and quench their thirst with evening classes.

Both undergraduate and Master programmes were offered. Many assorted programmes were dispensed. Several politicians had the opportunity to earn degrees at a cost even when they were not qualified.

Two reasons related to the financial heydays contributed to the creation of this academic strip. The first reason was the proximity of the working class Kenyans to the learning venues. The second one was the utilisation of University of Nairobi's academic staff as part-time lecturers. The academic strip was directly opposite to the main campus of the University of Nairobi.

A lecturer would walk from one university to another; render services of equal magnitude, get paid two times, and possibly proceed to another campus out of the city for a similar engagement the next day. Part-time job opportunities were created and it was all a gain-gain situation. There were financial heydays for both the universities and staff. Degrees were awarded as the teaching staffs were financially satisfied. The near-duplication of academic programmes across universities made it easy to criss-cross lecture halls and deliver lectures with ease. The number of students soared with one lecturer for about 1000 students in one hall. Marking of scripts became untenable and students lecture attendance was not guaranteed.

Many universities put up magnificent buildings while others bought city high-rises using the proceeds from parallel degree students. The money was put into good use.

Financial nosedive within the universities (crunch). One mistake that was made from the beginning of setting up new campuses was the excess duplication of degree programmes. Many universities introduced highflying programmes and started offering them without enough lecturers and facilities. Many of them depended on part-time services with a skeleton permanent one. For instance, law or medicine programmes required residential teaching staff to nurture the students, which was hardly effective.

Part-time lecturers are the least person to depend on for quality services. Their allegiances are elsewhere. They can hold a university at ransom by refusing to mark scripts or hold marks of students once they are not paid for their services. This situation is common in Kenyan universities whose financial problems were translated into denying this group of services providers their rightful pay. Some part-timers may mean well, but many are denied their pay and sue the university.

The huge Government reduction of university funding has heavily affected their services. It is common knowledge that virtually all the 35 public universities cannot meet their financial obligations. This is a shame to the Government that boats itself of expanding higher education even to the counties. Public universities are a public good. They need support and advice to tremendously reduce, amalgamate, or collapse programmes.

The duplication of courses, creation of campuses without students, and lack of research funds have negatively impacted on the quality of education in Kenya. How did this happen?

With the introduction of self-sponsored students, universities seized the opportunity to expand programmes across Kenya and beyond. They competed for the same students, same financiers, same part-time lecturers, and same lecture halls in town. Many academic strips or triangles were created in all big towns. There was a peak financial harvest and a nosedive. The survival of the fittest theory kicked in, and only the toughest campus could withstand the competition. Many universities were forced to pack up and leave.

Under the regulations of the KUCCPS, many students were admitted to declared programmes in both public and private university. Funds from government sponsored students would not sustain the already saturated academic programmes. The universities had financial challenges that would have been managed if the rapid and unprecedented university expansion was planned properly. History dictates that institutions of higher learning must be mentored. Even churches have branches that eventually grow to full-fledged assemblies or become autonomous.

The philosophy of having a university in every county is political and is not in line with sound planning. This is an archaic wishful thinking with no substantial justification. Let institutions of higher learning grow gradually and on demand not be created by emotions even if the constitution stipulates so. The consequences of the already established ones are glaring.

The graduates are hurting most. They have no (available) jobs and are not able to be job creators as we normally advise them. Each year, Kenyan universities graduate thousands of students into the job market. Most are not of the quality the country needs, but they are indeed graduates. They can be retooled to fit to the market.

The consequences of financial nosedive are many. They include lack of human resources, limited attendance of staff to international conferences, lack of research in cross-cutting technologies, lack of quality journal publications, poor student supervision, and many other negative results.

Training of PhD candidates can be a nightmare. Consider the following scenario. How can a university Professor who has not published in a high impact peer-reviewed publications supervise a PhD candidate's dissertation? It is important to attract research funds and publish papers and train quality candidates. The Government role cannot be emphasized enough.

En masse graduation of students from universities would not make a country be a first world without science, technology, and innovation. You can pool all the universities into one great one, fund it generously and ask for breakthroughs. The country will still be great rather than boasting of 35 available universities that do not have any tangible technological development. Kenya economy cannot sustain the funding in its current quagmire.

Acknowledgement

This paper is a contribution to the Sixth Africa Higher Education Week and the RUFORUM Biennial Conference, 22-25 October 2018, Nairobi, Kenya.

References

Commission for University Education. 2017 Kenya Accredited Universities CUE List. Nairobi: Commission for University Education.