

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

By

Stephen E Armah (PhD)

Head of Department,
Department of Business Administration,
Ashesi University College
Berekuso, E/R, Ghana.
searmah@ashesi.edu.gh

Abstract

The rapidly expanding private university system in Ghana is facing challenges from a plethora of sources that can undermine the quality of the education provided by these private universities. On the supply side, the problem is linked to the fact that many of such private universities run solely on school fees and struggle to attract qualified faculty due to high teaching loads, low salaries, brain drain and competition for lecturers from the older, bigger, better established and better-resourced public universities. The relative ease of entry into the tertiary education sector also means that fierce competition is also a reality as new universities spring up while others fold up. The research focused on the private graduate schools in Ghana and found that problems arise from different sectors of the higher education system.

On the demand side, an adverse selection problem emerges because the pool of graduate students includes: (i) unmotivated students such as time-constrained working professionals who are under pressure to get more advanced degrees due to qualification inflation (ii) religious leaders and politicians not intending to use the graduate degree to conduct research but rather to shore up their social standing and (iii) unscrupulous private citizens willing to pay to get a graduate degree without actually doing the work for it. From an enforcement perspective, the National Accreditation Boards (NAB) is also resource-challenged and struggles to keep up with the numerous private universities perpetually springing up. Suggestions to improve quality of the private graduate schools in Ghana while addressing the problem of brain drain are identified and discussed after a review of the existing literature and after learning lessons from an analysis of the history of Ghana's public graduate sector.

I. Introduction

Human capital is now recognized as an essential complement to physical capital in the economic growth process. This consensus has been reached after some historical debates where proponents initially argued and formulated models to support the idea that economic growth was determined primarily by physical capital (See for example **Harrod (1939), Domar (1946) and Lewis (1954)**) with negligible contribution from human capital.

Solow (1960's) conclusion that technology was the secret behind sustained economic growth actually emphasized the importance of human capital in the growth process as technology is often created by highly educated and highly trained human capital. The subsequent global knowledge economy that has taken root in the 20th and 21st centuries depends heavily on the quality of human capital that a country has. The quality of a country's human capital is also directly determined by the quality of its higher education (Higher Ed) institutions or its universities. It is therefore essential for every country to guarantee the quality of its universities.

This Research focused on Ghana, a small country in West Africa which is well-known for being the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain independence. Ghana was colonized by the British and adapted the British system of Higher Education. Initially the state held a monopoly on Higher Ed but allowed private participation in 1993 as part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promoted Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs).

The private university system in Ghana is young but growing rapidly. From zero private universities and just three public universities in 1993, when the Ghanaian state held a monopoly on university education, there are now more than 20 public universities and about 81 private universities (National Accreditation Board (NAB), 2018). Of the private universities, about 20 run graduate programs.

One difference between public and private universities in Ghana is, while the public universities, receive state funding, typically employ seasoned full professor on a full-time basis and conduct significant amounts of research, private universities are small, conduct little research, typically employ part-time instead of full-time lecturers and are exclusively dependent on school fees. These characteristics cause problems for quality in private HEIs (**Sawyer 2004**).

In particular, despite the vigorous recent growth and dynamism in the private university system in Ghana, the sector seems to be 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. These quality-related problems are especially acute in the graduate compared to the undergraduate private universities where experienced full-time lecturers with the highest qualification are typically needed but are difficult to secure.

This research proposal is motivated by the key quality challenges in the private graduate university system in Ghana and focuses on the graduate programs in business as business seems to need the least infrastructure to set up and is very popular among students. The demand side quality related problems originate from an adverse selection problem, where unmotivated students willing and able to pay for a graduate degree constitute majority of students who apply for these graduate degrees. Further, some of the potential applicants are either foreign students with weaker qualification than the Ghanaian standard or are French-Speaking West African students but are not required to pass any English competency exams e.g. Test of English as a Foreign Language (e.g. TOEFL exam) to enroll in Ghanaian graduate universities.

The supply side quality related problems emanate from a dependence of private universities on school fees as the only source of funding. In comparison, the policy-related quality challenges have to do with resource constraints on the part of the National Accreditation Board (NAB) in charge of managing the university system in Ghana.

Defining Quality Education

Quality is a difficult concept to define (**Harvey and Knight, 1996; Misra, 2007** and **Green and Harvey, 1993**). When applied to Higher Education (Higher ED), 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, the quality of the education a person receives can only be credibly assessed over time, making its assessment particularly challenging.

Quality is often operationalized in Higher Education (HE) studies as Quality Assurance (QA). QA, as it relates to Higher ED in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), is defined as: “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**, p3 as cited in **Tsevi, 2015**).

This definition of Higher ED does capture some, but not all, of the multi-dimensional attributes of the type of Quality Higher ED that produces an enlightened individual. Quality is used holistically in the context of Higher ED in this research to imply more than just QA. We follow **Harvey and Green (1993)**'s definition of quality as "transformation". Per the definition of quality as "transformation", graduates of a "quality" Higher ED institution are understood to be "transformed" by the Higher ED processes. 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" (**Barrow, 1991**). Graduates of a quality Higher ED system should be able to acquire the problem-solving skills that are typically bestowed by international graduate Higher ED systems in the UK, EU and USA.

Brief History of the Evolution of Higher Education in Africa. A focus on Ghana

Higher education [used here to mean tertiary undergraduate or graduate education] was historically considered a public good and thus the exclusive duty of governments not just in Africa but the world over [**Sawyer 2004, Varghese, 2004 and Atuahene 2006**]. The explanation offered was that the positive externalities generated by Higher ED accrued to an even greater extent to the society than the individual. In standard economics, such a market failure in the production of a good will indicate that the good is a public instead of a private good [**Mankiw, 2016**]. Public goods are typically produced not by individual organizations but rather by government because private agents will 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, almost all higher education systems in the different African countries started as state monopolies [**Sawyer 2004**]. The Higher ED models that emerged in Sub-Saharan Africa post-independence typically followed the colonial master's higher education sector [**Teffer and Altbach, 2004, Sawyer 2004**]. For example, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania followed the British system of education while Gabon, Burkina Faso, La Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea, and Mali followed the French system [**Teffer and Altbach, 2004**].

Demand for HE education increased strongly in African countries in the last three decades (1980's-2010's) due to, among others, population pressure, "qualification inflation", globalization and the rise of the knowledge economy. The inability of the public Higher ED sectors in the different African countries to cope with the explosion in enrolment encouraged privatization [**Sawyer, 2004; Teffer and Altbach, 2004; Tsevi 2015**].

In most of parts of Africa (and Ghana is no exception), despite the increase in opportunities for students to **obtain Higher ED, Africa still has the lowest enrolment ratios in Higher ED [Sawyer, 2004]**. The reasons

for the low enrollment ratios is historical but the current booming African Higher ED industry 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 developing countries particularly in Africa. The IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) mandated the elimination of state monopolies in African Higher ED and facilitated the opening of the HE market and the genesis of private universities in Africa [Adu, 2009; Utaka, 2008; Azameti, 2013]. This research focuses on Ghana as it has one of the fastest growing private HE sectors not just in Africa but the whole world. From two private universities in 1993, it grew to about twenty-one private universities by 2004, sixty-five private universities in 2016, seventy-four in 2017 and eighty-one private universities in Ghana by January 2018 (NAB, 2018).

A focus on Ghana

Led by a socialist leader, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana was the first Sub-Saharan African 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 near Monopoly on Higher Education (HE) in Ghana from independence in 1957 till 1993 when Ghana had only three public universities. [Sawyer, 2004; Tetteh, 2014]. The University of Ghana (UG) pre-dated independence but the two other public universities were established by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana [Baryeh, 2009; Tetteh, 2014; Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah, 2013].

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. This was part of the plan of the previous British governor of the Gold Coast, Gordon Guggisburg (Darko, 1986). The University of the Gold Coast at the time was affiliated with the University of London (Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Tsevi 2015).

The University of Science and Technology (later renamed Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) originated from the Kumasi College of Technology, which came into existence on January 22, 1952 (Darko, 1986). Kwame Nkrumah actively saw to its founding in response to the need for advanced technical education in the country. Kwame Nkrumah also founded the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in 1962 to train professional teachers in the arts and sciences of Ghana's secondary schools and polytechnics (Tetteh, 2014; Tsevi 2015; Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah, 2013 and Darko, 1986). UCC, KNUST and UG

trained most of Ghana's elite pre-2000 after which some private participation in the university sector started to gain traction and a few private universities also graduated students.

The Research Problem, Research Questions and Relevance

The private undergraduate Higher ED sector in Ghana and SSA in general is still young. The private graduate Higher ED sector in Ghana is younger still and faces significant challenges. Historically, the public universities in Africa (except for the universities in then apartheid South Africa, Four Bay College in Sierra Leone and Makerere University in Uganda) themselves graduated few or no PhDs. However, there was a program initiated in colonial times to allow first or second degree holding lecturers to get advanced degrees in the former colonies to return to teach in the public universities (Darko, 1986). For example, in Ghana, lecturers often obtained scholarships to attend prestigious universities such as Oxford University and the University of London [Sawyer, 2004].

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 other parts of the world. This is perhaps not strange as the foreign trained PhD holders give up significant income to teach in Ghana. The average US-trained assistant professor (lecturer) in a business-related subject working in the USA earns an annual salary of about \$ 80 000 while the same person working in Ghana will earn about \$20 000, a four-fold difference. Further, lack of access to data, top conferences, relevant software, top academics and other inputs reduces the quality of the experience for the professor that chooses to relocate to Ghana after training in the USA.

Unlike the undergraduate Higher ED sector which employs MA and BA holders, the graduate sector can, by law, only employ PhD and MPhil holders. There are few qualified personnel available in country to the private graduate Higher ED sector as these professionals prefer to work in the much better funded public universities or to work abroad where salaries are higher. Qualified faculty are difficult to attract due to factors like brain drain; low salaries compared to the cost of training; competition from the better-resourced public universities; institutional focus on teaching and an inability to support research.

Supply Side Problems

For public universities, profit is not usually a defined goal as a significant amount of funding comes from the state. In contrast, for majority of private universities (except for religious and social enterprises), 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.

The negative implications for quality are self-evident for private universities because the quality of the education may suffer as quality is difficult to determine in the short run for students, but the universities take school fees prior to enrolment. Due to the desire to turn a profit, such “for profit” private universities are often tempted to employ cheap but inferior resources and inexpensive but poorly qualified faculty and staff to cut cost and make profits since monitoring by poorly resourced authorities is difficult.

In Ghana, what makes the quality problem even more 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 in a practical sense to graduate Higher ED sector 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 (3 at the time of writing) although a university charter is required before university A can mentor university B. 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 PhDs to attract more students and make money since monitoring by the NAB is that much 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 or with a reputation for graduate study that raises questions. It is a well documented fact that even developed countries like the UK and Australia are the homes of predatory universities with international campuses or affiliate universities which turn huge annual profits from exporting HE to developing countries. The affiliating universities in developing countries in Asia and Latin America may be even less reputable and may be more corrupt and thus not shy of partnering with another corrupt African University to make profit. The foreign universities also find it difficult to give full access to all their resources to the Ghana based students because of the risk of it ending up in wrong hands.

Beside the challenges of limited sources of funding since these private graduate programs often depend entirely on school fees, there are 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 PhD-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. It may also be expensive to fly foreign lecturers to Ghana especially for those programs where distance learning facilities are not well developed.

A natural option that presents itself is reliance on Ghana-based PhD-holding adjunct lecturers, who are few and who may be primarily engaged in the public institutions. The result is often “moonlighting” or what Ghanaian lecturers call “Galamsey” where the full-time lecturers at both public and private universities also teach at other private universities. As a practical consequence, a problem arises in university research activities where for example, for capstone projects, each supervisor may be assigned too many students thereby undermining quality. Reliance on adjunct lecturers also implies that these adjunct lecturers teach at several private universities to survive, often travelling great distances between universities and arriving late and ill-prepared to teach. This practice undermines quality.

Demand Side Problems

Demand side challenges also often 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 where in the presence of uncertainty or relevant information, the types of customers available to an organization are not the type it desires [Mankiw]. For example, a customer desiring to buy a used car does not want to be besieged by vendors only selling lemon cars. As a direct comparison, the selection of graduate students that apply to private graduate universities in Ghana may expect to complete the degree on part time basis and may be unmotivated. This is because they are seeking graduate degrees not to conduct research nor to advance their careers. Rather, they may be seeking the graduate degrees because of “qualification inflation”, where higher degrees are often required to do the same job because of surplus labor. Moreover, applicants may seek graduate degrees just to shore up their social standing. This occurs especially among religious and political leaders who feel more validated by having higher 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, also feel more confident when the public is aware that they are PhD holders so that are addressed for example as honorable, Dr. Mr. A.

The related problem of moral hazard is as likely on the demand side as adverse selection because some graduate students that apply to private universities may 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 and to write their theses for them. This is a typical example of moral hazard. Clearly, the demand side incentives for the private graduate degree is just as perverse as the supply side profit incentive. Both do not foster quality graduate education

Relevant Research Questions

The supply side:

- What types of strategies or incentives structure 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?
- In what ways can both Internal Quality Assessment (IQA) and External Quality Assessment (EQA) fail in Ghana's private Higher ED? How have other countries solved these problems? What lessons can be inferred for Ghana?

From the demand side, natural questions that arise include:

- What types of strategies or incentives structure 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 with minimum effort, are those most likely to get the degree?
- What is the best way "to undermine this illegal market for private graduate degrees"? How have other countries solved this problem? What lessons can be inferred for Ghana?

The Policy Side:

- How can Internal Quality Assessment (IQA) and External Quality Assessment (EQA) be made more Effective?
- What strategies will incentivize the NAB to do its job more effectively? How can we limit the incentives by the private graduate universities to influence the NAB and prevent it from carrying out proper Quality Assessment (QA)?
- How and who should monitor the NAB's activities? Is the existing oversight of the NAB effective?
- How can the NAB be properly empowered to carry out its mandate?

- How can we make sure that a graduate degree from Ghana is sufficiently quality?

Research Relevance

The research will contribute to the scant literature on private graduate education in Ghana and Africa in general. The research results should help guide Ghanaian policymakers to act to optimize and sustain Ghanaian masters and PhD degrees. Relevant stakeholders that will find the results of the research useful include: Presidents of African universities and foreign universities who want to partner African universities to award PhDs; Prospective PhD students based in Africa; Policy makers and governments in Africa; Academe and Accreditation Boards in the evolving Higher ED systems in African countries.

II. The Evolving Private HE Sector in Ghana and Related Challenges

The emergence of the private sector in Ghanaian Higher ED and the Role of the National Accreditations Board (NAB) in Ensuring Quality Education.

In Ghana the liberalization process in HE 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 (**Utuka, 2011; Tetteh 2014; Boateng 2014**). Government issued a white paper in 1991 following submission of the URC report in 1988 to reform the sector (**Azameti, 2013; Tsevi, 2007; 2015**). The National Accreditations Board (NAB) was established by *PNDC law 319, 1993 and modified by the NAB Act 744, 2007* (**Utuka, 2011; Boateng, 2014**).

The emergence and evolution of private universities in Ghana's Graduate Higher Education Sector.

Private universities in Ghana have been offering master's degrees for more than 6 years now, but the first PhD from a private university was conferred by the Accra Institute of Technology (AIT) in March of 2016. [AIT graduated four PhDs in March and eight in August 2016].

According to information collated from the NAB website, there are about 20 private graduate universities offering master's degrees and about four private universities offering PhD degrees. There is a lot of uncertainty about private graduate HE in Ghana especially as many of the undergraduate degree-awarding private universities are in the process of rolling out one, few, or a few graduate programs or have plans to do so. This makes it difficult to track the exact number of graduate degree-awarding private universities as attrition of existing programs is plausible but often does not get reported. Further, graduate

programs offered by private universities in Ghana are typically part-time and designed for workers with child care responsibilities. The typical student is much older (> 35) than will be found in the developed world. 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 2 of the NAB Act 744, 2007, assigns to the NAB the task of accrediting Higher ED institutions and their programs in Ghana. Specifically, the duties of the NAB are: accrediting public and private institutions (contents and standard of programs); 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 issue of Presidential Charters to private universities; determining the equivalences of degrees, diplomas, certificates awarded by institutions in Ghana or elsewhere; and performing any other function determined and assigned by the minister of education.

In the international context [for example in the USA], 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). “Accreditation is the status accorded to a tertiary institution or program as satisfying and acceptable, according to defined standards set by the board” (PNDC 319, 1993, P7). The main quality assessment function of the NAB is the accreditation of both private and public universities (**Utaka, 2011; Tsevi 2015; Seniwoliba, 2014; Boateng 2014**). According to Utaka (2011), the NAB has a well-defined road map for aspiring institutions to obtain, and for existing institutions to maintain accreditation and the relevant documents are published on the NAB website.

Accreditation involves both an internal and external review process. The institutions complete an NAB questionnaire in the internal process. This is followed by external visit by the NAB and monitoring (**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 HE in Ghana: A comparison of the public and private sectors

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

The private Higher ED sector in Ghana started awarding undergraduate degrees post the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) mandated liberalization, hence, the creation of the NAB in 1993. Although some private universities awarded advanced degrees in divinity and theology, they did not venture into graduate education in a significant way until several years later. While public graduate universities often have many full-time lecturers (senior lecturers, associate professors or full professors), private universities typically have few full-time lecturers. They depend on part time lecturers, masters-holding assistant lecturers, and lecturers with PhDs but not yet on senior lecturer status.

III. A Brief Review of Literature in African HE

III.1 Challenges plaguing the quality of (private) HE in Africa.

A review of available literature on higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa reveals that the key challenges private universities in Africa (both graduate and undergraduate) face is funding and an over-reliance on school fees as well as a lack of capital for essential investment into infrastructure and quality personnel (Sawyer, 2004; Adeogun et al 2009; Iruonagbe et al, 2015; Akindele 2013; Seniwoliba, 2014).

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

Management challenges in these private universities are also acute (Amponsah and Onouha, 2014). Other problems include: lack of research focus; paucity of facilities, lecturers and administrative staff

(Tefferra and Altbach; Sawyer 2004); brain drain, dominance of part-time faculty and “moonlighting” faculty (Tefferra and Altbach; Amponsah and Onouha, 2014; Sawyer 2004); language issues (Tefferra and Altbach, 2004) and a lack of effective educational policy to manage quality for the evolving private HE sector. For example, in some African countries, accreditation boards are absent and hardly any external Quality Assessment is ever done.

Some universities also suffer from political interference and lack of autonomy (Oseni 2015; Sawyer 2004). There is also the perception of low quality of private universities, especially in Ghana and Nigeria as they typically attract students who fail to secure admission to the public universities (Oseni, 2015 and Sawyer, 2004). 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 (Sawyer, 2004; Tefferra and Altbach, 2004).

A problem that these still-evolving private university systems in Africa face that is often over-looked 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). They also have the potential to introduce values “different from conventional academe” (Sawyer, 2004).

Historical lessons in quality control in Higher ED institutions from Ghana’s public sector

Factors that accounted for the historical decline in the quality of Ghana’s public HE from 60’s-90’s.

Why was the quality of Higher ED in Ghana initially so high? One reason is that Ghana’s first public universities were set up as affiliates of reputable and established British universities (Sawyer, 2004). “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 (Ajayi et al, 1996; Mazrui, 1978).

Ghana was wealthy in the 1950’s and 1960’s so the universities were well funded. This is because Ghana’s population was small, so the university enrolments were also small and of high quality. Universities benefited from grants from foreign donors and international donor agencies (Sawyer 2004). Staff were well paid; conditions of service for staff were excellent; senior faculty had funding for research and enjoyed sabbaticals spent at Oxford and other prestigious universities. Moreover, ample opportunities for staff development existed to guide junior faculty to promotion (Sawyer, 2004). Local research was encouraged and well- funded with a strong component of field work and so flourished.

Why did quality of Ghana's universities decline in the late 70s-2000s (Sawyer, 2004).

What were the reasons for the decline in the quality of Ghana's university system in the 70s, 80s and 90s? The primary reason for the deterioration in the quality of Ghana's public university was the economic decline in Ghana in the 1970's and 1980's. As a result of dwindling economic fortunes, less money in the form of subventions arrived from the state for Higher Ed. This is a direct warning to the entrepreneurs who want to use the university system to make money. They must be warned that to offer quality education, so much expenditure is often required that the supplier of quality education must be prepared to take a loss at least initially. This means the business of HE may not be the best gimmick for making quick money.

The consequence of reduced funding in Ghana's public university sector were poorly paid staff, elimination of staff development programs, and unmotivated staff. The qualification of staff declined due to brain drain. Faculty quality plummeted as the high opportunity cost of a western graduate education forced migration of Ghana's PhD holders abroad, leaving masters holding lecturers to hold the fort.

In the 1980's and 1990's, scant resources were directed to primary education and away from Higher ED on the advice of the World Bank and other Bretton Woods Institutions. The same institutions in an uncharacteristic *mea culpa* have noted their advice was probably well-intentioned but ultimately naïve. This is because economic growth, wherever it is, is sustained by increases in the generation and use of technology which to some extent, depends on advanced education.

Another obvious 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. This caused enrolment to swell up, putting pressure on resources and reducing quality.

After the cold war ended in the 1990s, international donor organizations as well as state donors from the east such as China and the Soviet Union, reduced funding to Ghana's university system as the war for minds was virtually over. This undermined the quality of university education in Ghana. There were no more state-sponsored Scholars from China, Cuba and the former USSR teaching in Ghana's university system. Western governments like Europe, the USA, Australia and Canada also withdrew subsidies of expatriate staff and this reduced the popularity of postings to Ghana. Further, 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 funding.

To further complicate issues, increased school fees in the USA, UK, EU, Australia and Canada also made graduate education too expensive for Ghanaians to get graduate degrees abroad or to return home after graduation to teach due to high opportunity cost. Not surprisingly, the faculty that remained at home faculty aged and struggled to replace themselves, so mentorship was also weak. The existing university faculty focused on getting consultancies instead of doing research as it paid extra money and often worked as data collectors for faculty in advanced countries. This affected their quality in the long term.

IV. Creating incentives to ensure quality of graduate degrees in Ghana: Pragmatic Recommendations for Ghana

Demand Side Solutions: Minimize the Adverse Selection Problem

A practical and initial point of attack to ensure quality is to minimize the adverse selection problem plaguing the type of graduate students that will enroll in these private graduate institutions. The university administration and admission officers must be impressed upon to advertise and enforce the criterion of 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. In this light, the Ghanaian populace in general and the pool of prospective graduate students that will 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 the damage adverse selection does to the reputation of the quality of the degrees awarded and to the long-term reputation of those who get degrees from poor quality or fake school. Long-term 'reputation' of poor quality graduates is very costly and can lead to the shut-down of the university as student stay away, being aware that degrees from a poor-quality university does not really mean anything.

Even though the short term private gain of enhanced odds to gain a job in the future and guaranteed jobs for the staff and faculty of the university seems substantial and too good to pass up, the long-term consequences are dire indeed. Eventually, this will undermine the genuine development efforts that Ghana and its citizens are making, as the degrees awarded by these private universities will then be essentially useless.

In carrying out these educational campaigns, special emphasis must be placed on the impotence 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 in SSA. Such strong excess demand for graduate degrees, driven mostly by the high unemployment situation of bachelor's degree holders and qualification inflation, often incentivizes students to ignore quality and focus on access when it comes to the graduate degree.

Awareness campaigns by the media must focus on the dangers of senior industry practitioners like engineers, program managers and supervisors with graduate degrees but no corresponding skills on the policy direction and economic development of the country. The potential deleterious consequences for Ghana and those who get educated in Ghana of having government appointees with graduate degrees but no corresponding skills for the policy direction and economic development of the country must be highlighted. In that situation, the objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)s as outlined in SDG 4 "...ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development..." will be missed. The media has an essential mandate to name and shame key figures in society getting fake degrees or buying degrees. The media must showcase and report on comparisons of facilities of education in private universities as well as qualification of faculty and research output.

Supply-Side Solutions: Suggestions to enhance the quality of the private universities and effectiveness of Internal Quality Assessment (IQA)

The main problem underpinning the problem of quality for private universities is the problem of financing. University education is very expensive, both in terms of the infrastructure, and the labor costs because of the extremely highly qualified people who work there. Private universities must be innovative and diversify their revenue sources in order to wean themselves of dependence on school fees. Examples of different sources of revenue that they could exploit apart from school fees include: Alumni contributions, international grant from foundations, local fundraising, tax cuts from the government, government assistance to guarantee loans for students, and the sale of school branded merchandise.

Aside from the problem of financing, 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 private universities in the US, EU and Canada etc. that have been in existence for generations.

The quality of the faculty must also be improved with opportunities and incentives put in place for faculty advancement. The situation where no career advancement from the position of lecturer is required must stop. Faculty must seek promotion from lecturer to at least senior lecturer or be forced to abandon a

career in academia. Since the NAB requires that only university employees in the category of Senior lecturer must supervise graduate thesis, this will make sense. In other words, the minimum qualification of Senior Lecturer to teach in a graduate school makes sense and must be enforced because that is what is needed to be effective and supervise theses at the graduate level in a Ghanaian university.

Lecturers must be subjected to the tenure system to challenge them to put up their best to reach a certain level of quality. Faculty must be incentivized to seek career advancement or leave the field. Graduate schools must not be allowed to rely solely on just adjunct lecturers, assistant lecturers and lecturers just to cut costs.

Private universities in Ghana should seek accreditation from internationally known academic and professional accreditation agencies to signal quality. 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, student-faculty ratios, student-computer ratios, library holdings, well qualified teachers, library facilities etc. The defense of all Masters & PhD thesis should be a public Viva Voce defense that is recorded by video, documented and preserved as document of public record.

Regulation Solutions: Suggestions to enhance External QA by the NAB [Regulator]

The biggest challenge here is also funding. The Nab should lobby parliament to amend the law to ensure more realistic financing, given its mandate. The NAB should ensure site visiting teams comprising of quality professionals with integrity. Site visiting teams must be larger than three as small teams are easy to influence.

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 visiting team must include a photographer who will take detailed pictures of the facilities as part of the record. The NAB must also record at least two classes in session in each institution as part of the record. Moreover, the NAB should have a portion on their website where they allow students to compare the facilities of the different private universities. Furthermore, the NAB must close the loophole of reliance of private universities on more adjunct lecturers and increase the number of full time lecturers needed to run a program from two to four full time faculty to ensure quality.

Policy Recommendations: Some suggestions for government to enhance quality of HE

Since the number of PhDs that work in Africa are few, and brain drain is a serious problem, government must seek the retention of PhDs as solution to the brain drain problem on par with medical doctor brain drain. PhD holders must be allowed to import cars duty-free just like medical doctors as incentive for them to stay in country.

One of the main problems for quality is financing for student school fees so government can help the private universities foster partnerships with banks and credit organizations to grant 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. Also, 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 governments wants universities to locate and which types of universities are encouraged in its overall development plan as done in Asia. Government should then facilitate the provision of public goods in those areas.

V. CONCLUSION

A review of available but often changing statistics from the NAB reveals that the number of private universities springing up in Ghana is very high, especially given governments own efforts to establish more universities. However, the quality of these private universities has been called into question in the media and by civil society given the rather small-scale nature of the university enterprises often housed in small rented buildings with no library spaces for student study nor offices for lecturers. The research focused on graduate private universities and found several of them to be business ventures set up by profit seeking entrepreneurs focused on making money. This may damage the reputation of the quality of graduate education from Ghana. 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 the degree and not a quality degree. After intense desk research consisting of learning lessons from the history of Ghana's own public university systems and from university systems in more than ten different countries in the world (essentially all the continents), the research came up with key conclusions and recommendations for improving the quality of graduate education in Ghana.

The recommendations addressed both supply-side, demand-side, and policy-side challenges and should serve as useful information for policy makers in other African countries 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 graduate students of private universities etc.

References

- Adeogun et al (2009) Deregulation of University Education in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects. Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy Winter 2009 Volume 3, Issue 1, pp 1-8.
- Akindele, M (2013). Evolution of private universities in Nigeria: Matters arising and the way forward. Educational Research and Reviews Vol. 8(2), pp. 41-50, 23 January, 2013.
- Altbach, Phillip "Private Higher Education: Themes and Variations in Comparative Perspective" International Higher Education pp 2-4.
- Atuahene, Francis (2006). "A Policy Analysis of The Financing of Tertiary Education Institutions In Ghana: An Assessment Of the Objectives and The Impact of The Ghana Education Trust Fund." A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the College of Education of Ohio University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy.
- Boateng John Kwame (2014) "Barriers to Internal Quality Assurance in Ghanaian Private Tertiary Institutions" Research on Humanities and Social Sciences Vol.4, No.2, 2014.
- Green, D. and Harvey, L. (1993) 'Quality assurance in Western Europe: trends, practices and issues', paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education, Bonn, 21 July 1993.
- Harvey, Lee and Peter Knight (1996). "Transforming Higher Education". London: The Open University.
- Mankiw, Gregory (2016) "Microeconomics". New York: Cengage Publishers.
- Materu, Peter (2007). Higher Education Quality Assurance in Sub-Saharan Africa: Status, Challenges, Opportunities, and Promising Practices. The World Bank, Washington, D. C.
- Mishra, Sanjaya (2007) "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: An Assessment" Bangalore, India: National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).
- Sawyer, Akilagpa (2004) "Challenges Facing African Universities: Selected Issues" African Studies Review, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Apr., 2004), pp. 1-59

Seniwoliba, A.J. (2014). Academic Quality Assurance Practices in Ghanaian Public Universities: Experience from University for Development Studies. *Global Educational Research Journal*: Vol. 2(9): pp 152-166, October 2014.

Utuka, G. (2008). "Demonstrating quality: Evaluation of institutional and program accreditation in Ghana. *International J of Vocational and Technical Education* Vol. 3(8), pp. 135-142, November 2011

Tsevi, L. (2015). "*Quality Assurance in Private Higher Education: The Case of Ghana.*" A Dissertation Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the of Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies

Varghesse, N. (2006). "Growth and Expansion of Private Higher Education in Africa. Paris: *International Institute for Education Planning.*