

Original Paper

The Significance of Quality Higher Education for Sustainable Growth and Development in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia

Context

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Received: April 24, 2020

Accepted: May 2, 2020

Online Published: May 7, 2020

doi:10.22158/eshs.v1n1p32

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eshs.v1n1p32>

Abstract

This paper examines the role of quality higher education for sustainable growth and development for African countries including Ethiopia. In providing access to quality higher education in Africa, using the Ethiopian context as a case study. It draws on Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HEfSD) is being significantly shaped by the global sustainability agenda, and it further explores the potential of higher education program delivery system in an Ethiopian context. In addition, the study explores the policy of the conventional higher education. Two instruments were used to gather relevant data, namely: interviews and document analysis. Three quality indicators used, coherence, efficiency and impact of higher education, were used as tools of analysis.

This article is divided into three sections which explore three key linked aspects of the importance of higher education.

- 1) Higher education.*
- 2) Its access and Quality.*
- 3) Concept of the Sustainable development of African countries, including Ethiopia.*

The author of this article develops a powerful framework for quality higher education and its essentials for growth and development, and seek to apply this in to various developing countries for sustainable growth and development in a range of international settings. In so doing to make an important connection between theoretical frameworks of the above practical elements. Given the constraint of different segment of the development integration, the finding of this study highlighted the importance of higher education in developing countries including Ethiopia, for fulfilling's sustainable development

agenda of the country.

Keywords

access, quality, higher education, sustainable development, qualitative method, quality assurance, conventional education system

1. Introduction

The concept of Higher Education is high on the agenda of governments across the world, as global pressures focus increasing attention on the outcomes of education for economic prosperity and social citizenship. However, there is often an underdeveloped understanding of how quality education is formed, what drives it and how it impacts on schools and colleges. Quality higher education, its Process, themes and Impact makes these connections and links to the wider challenges of educational leadership in a contemporary context. Nevertheless, Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HEfSD) is being significantly shaped by the global sustainability agenda. Many higher education institutions, responsible for equipping the next generation of sustainability leaders with knowledge and essential skills, proactively try to action the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in HEfSD policy, curriculum and practice through scattered and isolated initiatives.

Higher education with appropriate quality and low cost is achievable with in conventional system of higher education which is based on classroom teaching and learning or with in alternative mode. Expansion is now the defining trend in the worldwide development of higher education. Some scholars have predicted that by 2025, 40 percent of the global workforce will be knowledge workers with a need for tertiary qualifications Mannan (2010). The World Bank, which made basic education its priority in the 1980s and 1990s, has changed its focus towards the development of higher education. This is an indication that higher education is getting precedence in the contemporary knowledge based economy. This, in turn, requires countries that have not yet developed their higher education systems to do more. Indeed, there is evidence suggesting that developing countries want to join the knowledge society by following the example set by developed countries, where age participation rates in higher education of 40 to 50 % are now perceived as necessary for sustained and sustainable development Kanwar (2009, p. 30). According to Mannan (2013), national policies on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasise the need for expansion of the education system, which focuses on the conventional method of delivery of basic education and tertiary level services in building human and social capital. However, today, it is further seeking and explaining the alternative means of an intervening strategy to break the conventional business as usual and in doing so providing access to higher education services and dissemination of information and knowledge that affects personal and community life of individuals became vital especially in developing countries.

Globally, higher education has been expanding over the last few decades and, according to Altbach *et al.* (2009), it has struggled to meet demands. According to a UNESCO (2003) report, many countries

have experienced higher rates of expansion and increase in student enrolment than anticipated. New, non-traditional learners have also appeared on the scene; these are “mature” students, i.e., those who are 30 years and over, who either had missed the opportunity of benefiting from higher education, or who want to improve on their qualifications, or who desire a career change. In Addison, Lifelong learning is now a common trend worldwide. This mass demand for higher education is creating great pressure for systems and institutions which are required to provide higher education of quality and relevance to the many students who are seeking to better their lot in life through higher education.

The same trend of a rapidly growing demand for tertiary education is seen in most African countries, even over the past decade. For example, in Uganda, enrolments grew from 20,000 in 2001 Musisi (2003) to close to 180,000 in 2011. In Ethiopia, there was an increase from 79,000 in 1991 to more than 600,000 students in the higher education system in 2012 Teferra (2014). In Kenya, enrolments in state universities have risen by 41% in two years—from 1995,428 in 2012 to 276,349 by the end of 2013 Nganga (2014). However, these increased enrolments were not accompanied by investment of resources and this had serious implications for quality.

Internationally, different means of providing higher education have been explored as a result of the realisation of the inadequacy of traditional contact institutions to meet the increasing demand for higher education. The overall demand for higher and adult education, especially professionally related courses is increasing in most countries. There are a number of reasons for this including, among others, changing demographics, the increased number of secondary school graduates, and the movement to lifelong learning, as well as the growth of the knowledge economy. While the demand is growing, the capacity of the public sector to satisfy this need is being challenged Knight (2006). While the international mobility of students and scholars represent long-standing forms of academic mobility, it has only been over the past two decades that greater emphasis has been placed on the movement of educational programmes, higher education institutions and new commercial providers across national borders.

Given the less developed nature of higher education systems in developing countries, many of these countries have become targets on the lack of capacity by governments to meet the growing demand for higher education. The lack of access to higher education has contributed to a shortage of qualified staff in public universities and other areas that require high skills in both the public and the private sectors. It is argued that given the constraints of resources to provide adequate access to higher education through traditional contact mode of delivery, lifelong education providers would play an important role in providing access to quality higher education. To this end, this article uses the Ethiopian higher education system as a case study to explore the role of higher education in providing access to post graduate education in Ethiopia. It asks the research question “*How can the higher education in Ethiopia enhance sustainable growth and development in the country?*”

Higher education with appropriate quality and low cost is achievable within traditional systems of higher education which is based on classroom teaching and learning mode. Expansion is now the defining trend in the worldwide development of higher education. Some scholars have predicted that by 2025, 40 percent of the global workforce will be knowledge workers with a need for tertiary qualifications. Quinn, C.N. (2012, The World Bank, which made basic education its priority in the 1980s and 1990s, has changed its focus towards the development of higher education. This is an indication that higher education is getting precedence in the contemporary knowledge based economy. This, in turn, requires countries that have not yet developed their higher education systems to do so. Indeed, there is evidence suggesting that developing countries want to join the knowledge society by following the example set by developed countries, where age participation rates in higher education of 40 to 50 % are now perceived as necessary for sustained and sustainable development *Kanwar* (2009, p. 30). According to Mannan (2013), national policies on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasise the need for expansion of the education system, which focuses on the conventional method of delivery of basic education and tertiary level services in building human and social capital.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Background to Higher Education in Ethiopia

Higher education in Ethiopia has over the years faced problems of under-development which found expression in the neglect of higher education by successive governments since the turn of 20th century. Some of the features of the system include inequitable access to higher education, out-dated curriculum and poor quality of education. Currently, higher education faces problems associated with the relevance of programmes of studies and research, equity, resource constraints and inefficient utilisation of resources *Bogale* (2006). The result of this is that access to higher education opportunities, in general, and postgraduate education, in particular, has been limited. This has necessitated the need to look at the alternative means of providing higher education especially in developing countries like Ethiopia. The same trend of a rapidly growing demand for tertiary education is seen in most African countries, even over the past decade. For example, in Uganda, enrolments grew from 20,000 in 2001 *Musisi* (2003) to close to 180,000 in 2011. In Ethiopia, there was an increase from 79,000 in 1991 to more than 600,000 students in the higher education system in 2012 *Teferra* (2014). In Kenya, enrolments in state universities have risen by 41% in two years—from 1995,428 in 2012 to 276,349 by the end of 2013 *Nganga* (2014). However, these increased enrolments were not accompanied by investment of resources and this had serious implications for quality.

The education system in Ethiopia has, generally, faced a number of problems, including inequality, inaccessibility, the irrelevance of the old education system and low quality. Generally, higher education in Ethiopia was neglected and, consequently, became underdeveloped. Currently, higher education faces problems associated with the quality and relevance of programmes of studies and research, equity,

resource constraints and inefficient use of resources. The universities' have not been able to produce the large numbers of the human resources required for the development of the country Bogale (2006). After acknowledging the undeveloped status of higher education in the country, the present Ethiopian government introduced reforms in the higher education system to enable higher education institutions to contribute to the development of human resources needed for the social and economic development of the country. The main reason for restructuring the Ethiopian education system was to bring about a desired quality of standard and a relevant system for the economic development of the country—an aspect which was not recognised by the old education system. Thus, the major focus of higher education in the country should be to provide quality and relevant education.

As a result, new higher education reform policies were adopted in Proclamation No.351 of 2003 and Proclamation No.650 of 2009 MoE (2009). For the first time, following the implementation of these reforms, higher education institutions became autonomous and were able to run and manage their own affairs, including appointing their own academic vice-presidents and institutional managers. The notion of Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HEfSD) is becoming a mainstream in scholarship. There is an increasing debate, both in the literature and at the policy level, about the role of higher education institutions in addressing the complexities across human and environmental interactions globally.

Since its inception the new higher education reform policies in Ethiopia was adopted in the effects of the new education and training policy include a significant increase in the number of higher education institutions and—as a consequence—the enrolment rate and participation of female students in higher education. Table 1 presents the enrolment trends in postgraduate programmes in higher institutions for both public and private higher educational institutions.

Table 1. Enrolment Trends in Postgraduate Programmes in Higher Education Institutions by Ownership, Degree Programme, Sex and Year

Year	Public or Government				Non-Government		Total		
	Master's		PhD		Master's		Total	Female	%
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female			
2007/08	7,211	702	258	7	-	-	7,469	709	9.5
2008/09	9,436	1,069	325	26	364	51	10,125	1,146	11.3
2009/10	12,621	1,485	791	47	860	171	14,272	1,703	11.9
2010/11	18,486	2,490	789	99	875	193	20,150	2,782	13.8
2012	22,804	4,635	1,849	319	1,007	228	25,660	5,182	20.2

Source: MoE, Statistical Abstract, (2011/2012)

The above table shows a significant increase in postgraduate enrolment, both in public and private higher educational institutions in Ethiopia. The percentage of female postgraduate students in the country also indicates a significant improvement from 9% in 2007 to 20.2% in (2012). The sharp increase in enrolment was because of the private higher education sector, including distance education. However, tertiary enrolment in Ethiopia remains significantly low compared to other developing countries. Currently, it stands at 2.5% suggesting that more needs to be done to develop alternative means of education. Therefore, government needs to attract more private investors especially in the higher education sectors. In Ethiopia, as in other African countries, distance education could facilitate the advancement of human resource development at different levels.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of Latchem and Jung (2007) and Perraton (2000) was adopted and used to guide data analysis. The framework is based on the quality assurance indicators in higher education. The framework adopted examines the various quality assurance approaches employed in Asian higher learning settings. In their context, different ways of managing the quality in brings together the three quality indicators chosen for this study, namely: **coherence**, **efficiency** and **impact**. The first quality indicator of the study is known as 'coherence' which relates to the national education policies with regard to higher education development and the private sector. It was found that like other higher education institutions in Ethiopia IGNOU followed the country's higher education policy and guidelines to operate in partnership with local private higher institutions. 'Efficiency' is the second quality indicator used to assess the institution's various activities such as the quality of course materials, student support services and learner's assessment methods. The third quality indicator is 'impact' which is concerned with the assessment function of the various stakeholders' perceptions including among others, the MoE, HERQA (write in full) as well as the main key players of the study: the graduates of MARD, prospective students and staff members. The theoretical approach posits that there is interplay between the main activities of teaching and learning, which directly affect the quality in higher education in general.

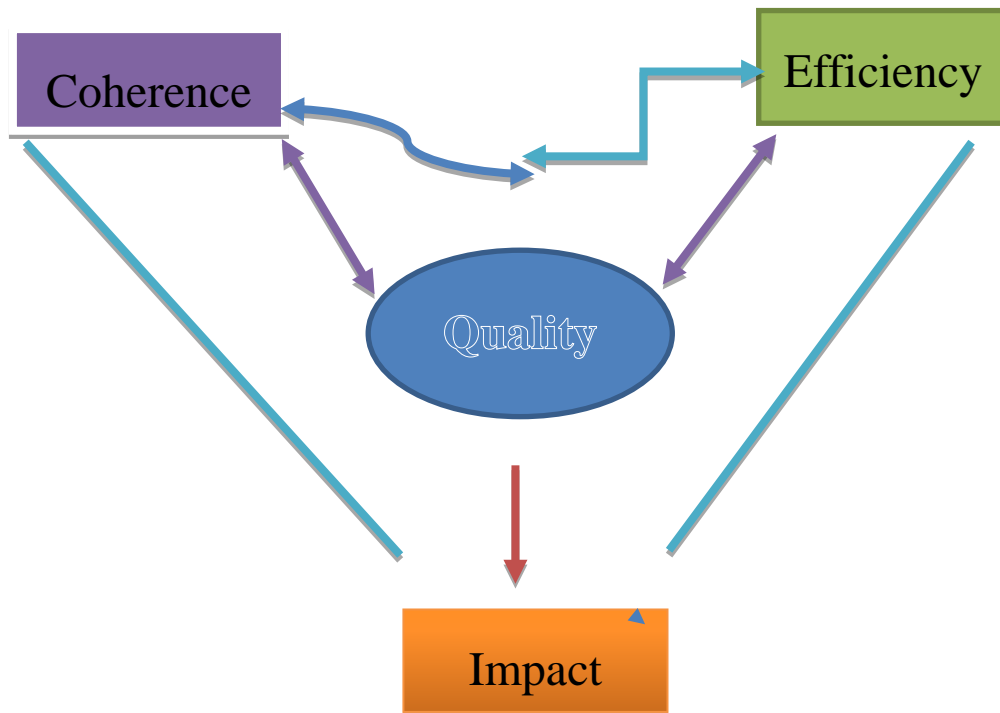


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Adopted for and the Three Quality Indicators

4. Methodology

A qualitative research design was used in this study. In particular, a case study was employed. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the research site and potential respondents. The study was delimited to one university called the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in Ethiopia. IGNOU was selected as a case study because it is one of the largest universities in the world which provides higher education opportunities on open distance and conventional levels. It is also one of the leading educational institutions in Ethiopia with a high number of postgraduate students compared to other private universities in the country. It offers nine Master's programmes, namely: Master of Business Administration; Master of Commerce; Master of Arts in Public Administration; Master of Arts in Rural Development; Master of Arts in Economics; Master of Arts in Sociology; Master of Arts in Political Science; Master of Arts in Social Work; and Master of Arts in Tourism Management. The focus on the Master in Rural Development was based on the fact that a majority of the Ethiopian population (85%) is engaged in agricultural work and lives in rural areas Tesfaye (2010). As result, an education programme that has a focus on rural educational development will have some relevance in this context, especially in meeting the human resource needs of the country.

A total of 40 participants were purposively selected from those who already involved in higher or postgraduate education programs and interviewed accordingly.

5. Discussion and Reflections on the Findings

In this section we discuss the implications of the findings. There is increasing recognition among scholars as well as participants in this study that conventional higher education wider access to for men and women, marginalised group of people and working populace. It also improves the quality of the existing education system and maintains equity by democratising higher education. However, the debate around higher education expansion calls for further improvement within this sector. Participants in this study suggested that the student support services which remain centralised need to be decentralised as many postgraduate education students come from far regional areas. In addition, it was also revealed that final results took an average of two or three months to be returned to them. In an attempt to widen access to those who are marginalised and living in rural areas greater resources are required from different stakeholders including private sector in order to develop efficient and effective higher education. Therefore, higher education, in general, and postgraduate studies in particular, can be achieved through the collaboration of government, universities and the private sector. The participants of this study, collectively and individually, said that there are many factors that hinder the effective development of higher education. The problems as revealed by the participants relate to the institution, stakeholders' perceptions of distance education as well as, the policies of national education in the country. Indeed, stories from a number of participants indicate the importance of policy integration with private higher education programmes, was suggested that HERQA should have a clear policy framework with more autonomy and authority to be an external quality control agency for conventional higher education.

In terms of the quality of IGNOU's postgraduate studies all participants were not in agreement. To say that the quality of higher education in Ethiopia, at this level is at the desired quality standard seems to be unrealistic. However, they all agreed and acknowledged that IGNOU's provision of access to postgraduate studies had positive aspects.

Definition of one of the Key terms: Sustainable Development: Definition and Principles Although many definitions abound, the most often used definition of sustainable development is that proposed by the Brundtland Commission (Cerin, 2006; Dernbach, 1998; Dernbach, 2003; Stoddart, 2011). This broad definition, which will be used in this article, does not limit the scope of sustainability. The explanation does, however, touch on the importance of intergenerational equity. The overall goal of Sustainable Development (SD) is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision making process.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the constraints of resources that many governments face in meeting the demand for higher education in general and postgraduate studies in particular, especially in developing countries,

including Ethiopia, such as IGNOU, offer educational opportunities for rural-based communities and marginalised groups, who would, otherwise, not have been able to access higher education. This article demonstrates that conventional higher education can provide access to higher education in the Ethiopian context. However, it is difficult to determine whether the quality issues are up to the required standard. Rather, there is a need to encourage the institutes to fulfil the quality indicators in order to enhance quality of higher education. We argued in this article that government should make a greater effort to utilise the full potential of higher education by providing policy framework for the sector and to assure development of quality assurance policies and, thereby, meet the various human resource development needs of the country.

This article recommends that in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of higher education the following need to be done: decentralise services into different regional administrative centres, and put in place quality assurance mechanisms and integrate into the national education. We also highlighted the key factors which impact on the growth of higher education programmes in the country. In particular the possibility of improving and integrating with other conventional education systems through the policy framework, and furthermore, it highlighted also the use of modern information and communication technologies ICTs in these programmes. Nevertheless, Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HEfSD) is being significantly shaped by the global sustainability agenda. Many higher education institutions, responsible for equipping the next generation of sustainability leaders with knowledge and essential skills, proactively try to action the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in HEfSD policy, curriculum and practice through scattered and isolated initiatives.

With this quality higher education for sustainable growth and development for African countries including Ethiopia fulfills its main objectives.

7. Acknowledgement

I would like to express my great appreciation and acknowledgment for this Journal publishers for their encouragement and support during this article publication. My families and close friends are deserve further gratitude and appreciation for their time and support and encouragement during my studies and various articles productions.

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