



Challenges of privately sponsored students in universities in Kenya: a case of Moi University

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ABSTRACT

There are many changes occurring in higher education in Kenya and the world over. These changes range from a rapid expansion in student enrolments to a proliferation of programmes and institutions offering higher education. Moi University introduced such a programme in 1998. As a result of these developments, there has arisen concern amongst the stakeholders on the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of higher education offered. The paper reports the findings of an investigation carried out in the year 2003 to determine the internal efficiency of the Privately Sponsored Students Programme at Moi University. The target population for the study was all the students enrolled in the privately Sponsored Students Programme at Moi University in the 2002/2003 academic year. Data for this study was collected by use of a questionnaire from a random sample of 300 respondents. The significant finding was Privately Sponsored Programmes operated below optimal efficiency levels. Although enrolment growth rates had been steady in the immediate past three academic years, dropping out, temporary withdrawal and other indicators of inefficiency were on the increase and therefore a source of concern. Different degree programmes demonstrated different levels of efficiency in the way they translated their inputs (students) into outputs (graduands). Students with outstanding fees balances were barred from graduating. Also, it was established that many critical performance inputs were lacking or in short supply, such as library books and journals, computers, furniture in lecture rooms and chemicals in laboratories. To reduce these inefficiencies, there is need to enhance provision of critical inputs like books and journals, computers and science equipment as well as various consumables items. There is also need to assist students to identify suitable accommodation places. In order to break barriers of suspicion between regular and self-sponsored students (PSSP) the University should work towards integrating the two groups of student as far as possible.

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Introduction

The huge cost of providing university education, whether publicly or privately borne has prompted governments and tertiary institutions to establish mechanisms to evaluate, assure and improve the quality of the education offered (Craft 1994). Jean and David (1994) argues that the problem associated with increase in student numbers is the proliferation of types of institution offering higher education. This development and the key issues mentioned above raise the legitimate question of the quality of students produced (output), considering that budgetary constraints mean that quantitative expansion can only be achieved with shrinking financial resources. Quality is a multidimensional concept and embraces a number of functions and activities, which include quality of staff and programmes, quality of learning and students, quality of the infrastructure and the learning environment. Within the context of this study quality (output) is taken to be a reflection/result of efficiency and effectiveness of higher education systems.

Educational performance indicators have been used in the developed world to assess efficiency in higher education. Performance indicators have been extensively used in the higher education in the UK and other developed countries since the 1980s as a means for funding higher education institutions. They

were introduced by governments of these countries purposely to establish a stronger and more publicly observable link between funding and performance in the context of economic stringency.

Like all other Kenyan public universities, Moi University started to offer evening classes under continuing education programme to raise money as part of income generating activities – IGA in 1998 (Moi University Six Year Development plan 2000). This has since developed into a fully-fledged evening study programmes named Privately Sponsored Students Programmes.

The theory of production borrowed from Economics underpins this study. Here, production is defined as “the creation of utility,” where utility means “the ability of a good or service to satisfy a human want” (Gould and Lazear 1989). Education is therefore looked at as a process of creating utility in the students who eventually become a produced means of production. The theory of production consists of an analysis of how the entrepreneur - given the “state of the art” or technology - combines various inputs to produce a stipulated output in an economically efficient manner. Consequently, education is deemed to have a production function given as:

$$E = f(S, St, B, Ls, Lc, E, \lambda)$$

Where S = Student time

- St = Staff time
 B = Books
 Ls = Learning space
 LC = Learners Characteristics
 E = Environment
 λ = Other variables (error)

Unlike a manufacturing industry, an educational institution such as the university is a multi-product firm. Its output consists of the development of the individual student and the advancement of knowledge. The development of the individual involves the acquisition of a peculiar mix of many different skills; literacy, numeracy, manual dexterity, physical strength, mental agility, facility in languages, cultural appreciation, scientific understanding and so on (Johnes 1993). Since money is a scarce resource an investigation into whether inputs are efficiently used to produce output is needful.

The variables considered in this study were:

(i) Labour inputs

- (a) Student numbers and time
- (b) Teaching staff numbers and time
- (c) Non-teaching staff and time
- (d) Quality of students

(ii) Outputs:

- (i) Semester exam scores.
- (ii) Career aspirations of the students.

Methodology

Research Design, Population, Sample and Data Collection Instruments

This study used descriptive research design to examine the performance indicators in the Parrell programme. The target population for the study was all the undergraduate students in PSSP at Moi University numbering 1,669 enrolled in the year 2002/2003 drawn from the 16 degree programmes offered in the following 8 faculties and 1 school: Faculties of Education, Science, Law, Agriculture, Health Sciences, Forest Resources & Wildlife Management and School of Social cultural & Development Studies.

The respondents were selected from the Faculties of Education (BED, Arts); Technology; and Law and School of Business Management. These four had reasonably larger numbers of students in all the years of study. Stratified sampling technique was used to select respondents from each of the sampled faculties. Respondents were drawn from years one through to four. In each stratum simple random sampling was used to obtain 439 respondents, which is approximately 30% of the population, in the four faculties and the one school.

Primary data on attitude of the regular students toward the privately sponsored students and the relationship between lecturers and the students were obtained by the use of a questionnaire.

Data processing and analysis

The data collected from the respondents were analysed using descriptive (frequencies) and inferential statistics with the help of the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The statistical techniques used tested the relationships between inputs and outputs, and the strength of the relationships. Inferential statistics used included, the chi-square and Mann Whitney U tests.

Findings

Causes of dropping out

The objective of this study was also to determine the time taken by students to complete their degree courses (against

stipulated time). Hinchliffe (1987) postulates that in practice, analyses of internal efficiency in higher education use such indicators as repetition rates, dropout rates, class sizes, teacher contact hours, intensity of use of facilities, and overall unit costs. Four main causes of wastage (dropout, repetition, deferment) have been identified in literature to include financial pressure, inadequate prior preparation in secondary schools, inappropriate standards for promotion and graduation. In this study, six causes of wastage emerged. These included lack of fees (financial), family responsibilities, age, failing exams, the strain of studies and boredom. Financial problems and failing exams emerged as major causes of dropping out. Other causes only featured minimally. These findings are similar to those of Riak et al (1996) in their study "*Socio Economic Study of Access to University Education*" in which they found that the majority of the students withdrew from university (dropped out) for such reasons as: high university education fees, hope for a scholarship abroad, lack of job opportunities for university graduates, despair after failing examinations and repeating the year, high insecurity in the university due to riots and closures, and wanting to start a business. Many other studies have also found financial problems to be a serious problem that university students faced. Ekstrom et al (1986) singled out low economic status as a cause of dropping out. This can be attributed to the fact most households incomes are low among other reasons for dropping out.

Similarly, majority of the male students often dropped out because of being unsure about what to study, unsatisfactory grades and tiredness of being a student, while women gave up studies most often for financial reasons, family responsibilities, or because they were tired of the student life. The current study however found out that age, family responsibilities, the strain of studies and boredom were not significant that this, did not cause a student in the privately sponsored programme to drop out of the university. Nevertheless the similarity in the findings between the two studies was that more females tend on the whole to drop out of university than males.

The present study found that students in the privately sponsored students programme men were more likely to drop out if they failed examinations. This finding appears to be consistent with Natriello's (1994) observations that one of the strongest correlates of dropping out among students was the lack of academic success in school. Students, who more often got low grades, fail subjects, and were retained in a grade had a much greater chance of leaving school prior to completion. Students who had difficulty meeting the academic demands of the school (institution) tended to leave, rather than continue in the face of the frustration they often experience in trying to obtain good grades.

Boit (1998) found that dropping out were also related to social isolation (where 15.4% of the affected students had left home for the first time); inadequacy or remoteness of staff (14.3%); and difficulty in budgeting between work and social interests. This study identifies dropping out to be due to remoteness (aloofness) of the teaching staff.

Learning environment

The Privately Sponsored Students learn in an environment that is 'unique' since they are not in a typical traditional residential university set up. The Campus is situated in a town suburb, partly an industrial set up and partly residential. The students have to commute to and from the campus. Invariably they are faced with problems associated with accommodation

and transportation unlike the regular students. These problems in addition to vagaries of weather particularly during the rainy months of April-October can have some impact on the students' enthusiasm to learn. Natriello (1994) observes that in addition to characteristics of students and the conditions they encounter in school organizations, the larger environment in which the students and schools are embedded affects truancy and dropping out. From the foregoing, the residential environment of the students can be a cause of their dropping out. The university therefore needs to negotiate with the landlords on behalf of the students for suitable accommodation in a common area. This will promote a sense of oneness and shared purpose.

Quality of Students

Democratization of higher education has led to institutions which are not only much larger but more highly differentiated. There is diversity of students comprising the young and old. The privately sponsored students' programmes admit both mature and direct school entrants. The admission criteria for mature entrants include professional certificates and diplomas different from JAB criteria. The entry qualifications are a good proxy measure of the quality of students. Watson (1984) observe that the impact of part-time, "special access" and mature students goes far beyond devising user-friendly course structures and allowing credit for prior or experiential learning. Their growing prominence in higher education will transform traditional relationships between teachers and students. The former no longer largely owns the curriculum; instead it becomes a joint enterprise. Universities therefore have to cope with far less sophisticated students and with students who possess knowledge and skills different from but equal to those of their teachers, as well as a strong sense of "entitlement" derived from the substantial personal investment they have made in order to "return to study".

Boarding Facilities

Boarding facilities are an important input resource in the university production function. Their availability within the vicinity of the university translates to less cost in terms of students commuting time and money as well as the physiological and psychological stress as a result of having to use public transport. The Privately Sponsored Students are not housed on campus and therefore face the challenges of trying to secure accommodation in the neighbourhood. An influx of student clientele within the vicinity of the campus has created an opportunity for landlords to raise rent beyond threshold levels. A combination of high costs of living and tuition can be distressing for students with meager financial resources. As a result many of them drop out or perform poorly academically. Difficulties experienced by students in PSSP can lead to social vices such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and prostitution resulting in poor academic performance, dropout, pregnancy and AIDS. While looking at the determinants of achievement, Harbison and Hanushek (1992) noted that improved physical facilities are systematically beneficial to student learning. Supplying to a school that previously had none of them could increase student achievement by 9 to 13 percent points. In effect, they concluded that the quality of the physical plant is positively related to student performance.

The current study found the lack of appropriate boarding facilities for the Privately Sponsored Students to be significantly related to dropping out. This is consistent with the findings of Johnes and Taylor (1990) in a study on the performance indicators in UK universities in which student/staff ratio, the

length of course and the type of accommodation used by students had an effect on the non-completion rate. It was found that living at home during term time increased the students chances of not completing. This was attributed to lower student involvement in the academic and social activities at the University (either through choice or of necessity). In contrast students who lived in University accommodation were found to be more independently minded and had greater access to the activities and facilities offered by the University, including counselling services (Johnes and Taylor 1990).

Psychological Attributes of the Students

Research on truancy and dropping out has often focused on the characteristics of individual students that can be linked to non-attendance at school (Natriello 1994). Among the factors identified in the United States of America were related to racial and ethnic minority status, low socio-economic status, poor school performance, low self esteem, lack of positive relationships with peers and adults. The present study investigated the attitudes of regular students towards the self-sponsored students. The aim of this was to establish the attitude that regular students have and its impact on self sponsored students. It was found that the regular students actually looked down upon the self-sponsored students. This negative attitude was significantly related to dropping out of the self-sponsored students. Lecturers were also found to have a low opinion of the self-sponsored students, often intimidating and calling them names. They saw them as academic failures who had bought their way into the University. These findings were consistent with those espoused Natriello et al (1990). Relating school organization and student experience in school, they conclude that dropping out is associated with limited availability of positive social relations and the lack of a climate of caring and support. Natriello (1994) argues that positive supportive relationship between teachers and students and among students, and a climate of shared purpose and concern are key elements of efforts to hold students in schools. Similarly, the findings show that factors related to dropping out were social isolation (where 15.4% of the affected students had left home for the first time); inadequacy or remoteness of teaching staff (14.3%); and difficulty in budgeting between work and social interests.

Recommendations

i. To mitigate inefficiencies arising from dropping out, withdrawal and deferments due to financial difficulties, the University could establish financial aid such as endowments, workstudy programmes and a bursary scheme based on academic merit. A flexible modular or unit system in which students can take courses or units they can afford, stepout and join the programme at time convenient to them should be seriously considered.

ii. Modalities should be worked out for integrating regular and privately sponsored programmes both in the Main and the Eldoret West Campuses. This will help correct the poor attitude held by regular students toward privately sponsored students. It will also enhance the quality teaching since self-sponsored students will not only enrich the regular students with their work experience but will encourage the other students to demand return for their investment from the lecturers. Consequently lecturers will take their work more seriously.

iii. In order to enhance equity and equality of opportunity in higher education the government should look for ways of advancing loans to self sponsored students through Higher Education Loans Board to finance their education. Such loans

should attract interests that are below market interest rates and slightly higher than the current highly subsidized government loans to regular students. This will help to reduce the dropout rate that is due to financial problems.

iv. The university should be involved in identifying accommodation on behalf of the students so that students stay within the same vicinity as much as possible. This will help to create an environment of solidarity conducive for learning and social development. It will also ensure that unscrupulous landlords do not exploit students through charging exorbitant house rents.

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