

Institutional governance and management systems in Sub-Saharan Africa higher education: developments and challenges in a Ghanaian Research University

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Abstract This article examines the developments and challenges of higher education in developing countries. Using a thorough qualitative interview of deans, directors and heads of Department of the University of Ghana, this paper draws on their analysis to discover unexplored issues that affect the universities in developing countries. The study identifies weakness in institutional policies and infrastructure deficiency of higher education in Ghana as key challenging factors. Findings also show congestion of students in academic facilities of learning, teaching overloads and lack of research facilities as key factors hampering academic development in higher education. Therefore, the work advocates for the development of policies that take into account the institutional realities in the field of higher education. Governmental policies aimed at enhancing higher education in developing economies must first improve the existing institutional set up for their chance of success.

Keywords Governance · Administrative bureaucracies · Higher education · Institutional policies · Deficient infrastructure · Sub-Saharan Africa · Ghana

Introduction

In recent years, there has been the consciousness of the global world to shift national economies from money-based to knowledge-based as knowledge supersedes physical capital as the source of national wealth. Knowledge-based economies, internal resources and competencies of institutions have thus become a critical force in management literature (Fielden

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2008; Tecce et al. 1997). Consequently, knowledge is becoming more and more important in the present global competition, so do universities or higher education (HE) institutions. Yet, minimal attention has been paid to social and economic development of HE in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. As a result, there is limited knowledge about recent administrative developments and challenges of HE in the region. Higher education is generally regarded as the primary mechanism for promoting economic growth. Hence, Nwankwo (2012) argues that the emerging growth trend in Africa is not driven by the resource exploitative model, but that, knowledge has become the single most important engine of growth and a significant driving force of economic performance (OECD 2000; UIS/OECD 2003).

Higher educational institutions are responsible for equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills required for key positions in government, industry, public and private businesses. In fact, universities as HE institutions produce new knowledge through research and are able to transfer and disseminate knowledge and therefore, they are considered as vital institutions of civil society. Universities thus constitute a 'public good' by playing a critical role in the economic growth and development of countries and serving broad social purposes beyond individual or economic development benefits. Therefore, the importance of effective delivery of HE institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and in Ghana particularly is critical. This is because, the increasing pace of globalisation is also heightened by the 'commodification' of knowledge from universities in the global market for high-skill labour (Sawyer 2004). Accordingly, university education in developing countries has become increasingly commodified, where students are considered consumers while the institutions are suppliers. The high demand by students for university education presumes that HE institutions in SSA are faced with the challenges and pressures to accommodate the increasing demand and to supply efficient and valuable knowledge to students. It also requires all HE institutions to embrace the internationalisation dimension of HE and to develop policies and priorities in response to the new demands and opportunities stimulated by globalisation (Ninomiya et al. 2009). This new dimension is compelling universities particularly in developing countries to devise and establish strategies that will enable them become visible in the global world. A more push to higher education in developing economies is this era of internationalisation, where the influence of league table both at regional and international levels is associated with university reputation based on their (universities) rankings. This presumes that HE institutions in SSA must adopt governance and management systems that can resourcefully leverage their human capital and administrative prowess in order to be recognised in these competitive global educational frontiers. An institutional governance system is the construction of institutional arrangements that impact on and generate the mechanisms by which social and economic outcomes within organisations are created (Griffiths and Zammuto 2005). This is what higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa requires because it is accepted now, more than ever before, that universities or HE institutions influence the economic competitiveness of individual nations in the context of globalisation (Bloom et al. 2006b). Furthermore, universities offer significance service function through technological transfer to industries and help develop communities (Chege 2015).

Nonetheless, the prospects and challenges of HE within SSA continue to experience a shortage of empirical evidence (Bloom et al. 2006a), and in both theoretical and policy terms, lack adequate empirical knowledge of what is happening within university administration (Kapur and Crowley 2008). Consequently, more research and attention are needed to examine the current governance and administrative challenges on higher education in Africa, and this work responds to that.

Thus, this paper contributes to a growing literature but still nascent that examines the institutional developments and challenges of HE in Sub-Saharan Africa. Second, the paper is also significant in providing an empirical assessment of the developments and challenges that impact the governance and management structures of the University of Ghana and relate these features to the work of academic staff. By drawing from the real live experiences of senior academic staff through their personal narratives, the analysis situates the Ghanaian case in the broader international context particularly to other developing countries due to similarities in institutional and administrative practices.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, the work presents some theoretical and empirical reviews which help to conceptualise the discussions of the study, and then the background of governance structure of SSA. Second, a brief structural and institutional constraint on the background institution to situate the background dilemma for the study is presented. Third, a contextual design on the method of data collection and finally, the findings and discussion of the study results are presented.

Conceptual framework

Globally, HE institutions have experienced a dramatic expansion in this millennium, and its growth has been recognised in all regions. This perhaps acknowledges the point that HE contributes to economic and social values of nation states and therefore, the proclivity to invest in universities and colleges by both public and private authorities. For instance, Bloom et al. (2006a, b) have emphasised strongly that HE is a determinant as well as the outcome of income and economic benefits for public and private good. Hence, competition between universities for student enrolments and for high ranking lecturers has grown intensely globally in present days. In spite of this intensity of internalisation and increase demand for enrolment, African universities continue to offer less than 20% and with the exception of South Africa, most SSA countries continue to show no significant cross-border initiatives in HE (Altbach and Knight 2007). Similarly, Bloom et al. (2006a, b) argue that Enrolment rates in higher education in SSA are by far the lowest in the world.

This can mainly be attributed to structural weaknesses and inefficient capacity to facilitate the soaring demand for knowledge in higher institutions of learning. It is even more critical as availability of demand for HE shifts to exceed supply due to inaccessibility of HE institutions. For example, most African universities have and are still experiencing the attrition of educational facilities and faculty capacities (Kinyanjui 1994; Mamdani 1993; Saint 1992), due to decline in state funding. Thus, Teferra and Altbach (2004) claim that African HE is facing exceptional challenges in this millennium including the provision of teaching, research and service needed for the advancement of the continent. Specifically, Ngwana (2001) asserts that, most universities in Cameroon are faced with congestion of lecture halls and learning facilities, and these challenges are creating demoralised academic community in the country. Hartnett (2000), on the other hand, states that in Nigeria, many universities encounter relentless difficulties in recruiting and retaining academic staff, and while student enrolment continues to surge, staffing to cater for these students remains stagnant. Likewise, Saint (2004) in an investigation of HE challenges in Ethiopia found that brain drain of faculty has been an endemic problem within Ethiopia's higher education sector, and this continues to affect university students in Ethiopia. In Ghana, the situation is not different, there is high demand for university placement but fewer places to accommodate the demand coupled with

inadequate academic staff (Abugre 2014; Visitation Panel Report 2007). Equally, Morley et al. (2009), in a study of HE in Ghana and Tanzania, found that opportunity structures of universities in the two countries reflect social inequalities, despite institutional and national policy interventions to widen enrolment and participation in these institutions.

Therefore, recognising the turbulent environment of HE in Sub-Saharan Africa, this research explores how the institutional governance and management is influencing the development and challenges of academic work in HE in a developing context. This study specifically focuses on unearthing the developments and challenges on the governance and management practices of the University of Ghana. The reason is that, it appears that government deregulation during the 1990s and 2000s created a pluralistic environment where Ghanaian HE institutions began to take more liberties and act in more independent ways than they would have otherwise. Yet, observers have argued that HE has lost its significance of political and economic performance; even though, the role of institutions in national development has been discussed extensively within the context of economic performance of countries in general (Chong and Calderon 2000; Beck et al. 2000). Hence, it is proper to investigate the trends and challenges affecting the University of Ghana since most universities in Africa are clearly experiencing the painful economic cut back, including the erosion of faculty compensation, the extinction of some departments and degree programmes due to unavailability of academic staff, and other structural and governance inadequacies.

The landscape of governance and management in Sub-Saharan African higher education

Higher educational (HE) governance and management systems in SSA have evolved within the framework of global institutional development in this twenty-first century. The reason is that the micro world of African HE institutions is seen as an offshoot of the macro world of HE systems. Hence, the enthusiasm of HE institutions to respond to international needs is influenced by global, regional and local trends conditioned within globalisation and best practices of university governance systems.

The Sub-Saharan African HE systems until the end of the 1980s were fewer, they were regarded as symbols of national pride (Coleman and Court 1993) and they enjoyed a great deal of public budget and governmental support (Varghese 2013). However, this state-funded and greatly subsidised model of higher educational system which initially flourished began to fade as both the share of state and external funding of HE declined (Ishengoma 2004; Teferra 1997). As a result, many public universities in SSA started to be weakened in stature. For example, the deterioration of physical facilities, dwindling academic and administrative provisions include salaries of faculty resulting in faculty flight (Adeyemi 2000; Teferra 1997; Mwiria 1992). In most cases, the decline resulted in low-quality standards of teaching, diminished research competence and the lack of proficient personnel to provide policy support (Otieno 2003; Saint, 1992) to the individual nation state. Hence to survive, HE in SSA needed a reformation and survival strategies to revitalise university education through effective mobilisation of resources, and the restructuring of governance and management systems that are aligned with best practices. Consequently, the educational reforms in Africa were centred primarily on alternative financing and a more efficient and effective university management systems (Sanyal 1995). Other measures of reformation included the establishment of private HE institutions which got sturdily on the way in the late 1990s (Oketch 2003). This was to free

the hands of over reliance on state governments for university education. Thus today, in many African countries, it is the private universities that are growing rapidly than those in the public sector (Levy 2006; Varghese 2006; Mabizela 2002). In addition to retaining the subsidies from state funds, the introduction of cost-recovery and cost-sharing measures, and how public universities can generate internal income was encouraged (Ishengoma 2004; Sanyal 1995). These innovative beginnings were meant to improve the financial stands of the universities and expand enrolment devoid of overreliance on state funds (Clark 1998). Similarly, changes in governance structure of public universities meant that Ministry of Education (MOEs)' power of control decreased in terms of overall policies and strategic planning of the universities. Thus, responsibilities and autonomy were granted to HE (Fielden 2008), which led to a new landscape of HE governance and administrative management system in SSA.

In more specific terms, Ghanaian universities now enjoy an expanded university council, an independent academic board made up of several committees (emphasis on the University of Ghana), academic quality office, directorates of finance and audit (Budu and Quashigah 2013). In Nigeria, the newly established National University Commission (NUC) as an autonomous institutional governance structure now supervises institutional finances and the appointment of governing councils who oversee curriculum and physical development of HE (Olayinka and Adedeji 2013). In Kenya, the introduction of a Commission for University Education (CUE) to oversee the supervisory roles of all universities has been tasked also to coordinate the institutional governance and management systems of HE (Waema and Mbithi 2013). In Ethiopia, new governance structures involving a change from the collegial model to a managerial model and outcome-based strategic plan of HE have been established (Asgedom and Hagos 2013). In South Africa, the reforms led to the creation of new framework that oversees the directions of HE institutions with regard to planning and funding in order to achieve the intended national goals for universities (Schoole and Phatlane 2013).

It can be seen from the reforms that HE in Sub-Saharan Africa now enjoys a more operational freedom. However, this new institutional landscape of HE of the individual countries holds significant implications for institutional governance and management. Unlike the past, Universities now require to operate in more business-like in order to respond to the increasing demands of internationalisation with little funding from state governments. With this global challenge of increasing demands of internationalisation of universities and the high student demand for quality education, are universities in the Sub-region capable of overcoming these new developments and challenges in the educational sector? Morley et al. (2009) stress that Ghanaian and Tanzanian universities face greater structural inadequacies which have led to social inequalities among students. Similarly, Teferra and Altbach (2004) argue that African universities are presently functioning in very difficult circumstances. It is therefore noteworthy to explore the trends or developments and challenges of HE in SSA using the university of Ghana as a case study.

Structural and institutional constraints of the University of Ghana

The University of Ghana popularly christened 'the premier university' is not only popular and admired internally and in Sub-Saharan Africa, but globally. Founded in 1948 as a University College of London, the now University of Ghana has produced generations of graduates who have held key positions in every sphere of Ghanaian life and that of overseas. However and according to Manuh et al. (2007), the University of Ghana has gone through turbulent stages of

control leading to *institutional weakness* and deterioration (italics are author's emphasis). Moreover, pressures from the World Bank in 1986 on the government of Ghana to initiate educational sector reforms in HE led to a further deterioration of the University and other public universities due to funding problems. This institutional weakness is aptly captured by the Report of the visitation panel to the University of Ghana in 2007 as

The whole structure is overlarge, inert and indecisive, over concerned with formalities, not too much concerned with the tasks of managing the university through very difficult times, and not all concerned with strategy and thinking about the future... It is defensive in character... and not proactive. (Visitation Panel Report 2007, p. 270).

Similarly, the assertion by Ngwana (2001) that, in most Cameroonian universities, congestion of lecture halls and other academic facilities of learning and teaching overloads are creating a demoralised academic community is consistent with the findings of the Mfodwo Report on allegations of examination malpractices in 2005 of the University of Ghana. For example, the Mfodwo report noted that

For Legon, the student population has tripled from 10,000 in the last five years to the present 30,000. Given the large numbers graduating from SSS, increased admission is both the progressive and humane thing to do. What to do in the face of infrastructural developments that do not keep pace with rising student numbers is the necessary next step. (2005, p.52).

The above description demonstrates the university's structural and institutional challenges and weaknesses characterised by developing nations, and as a result, hinder the strategic choices of institutions (Ramamurti 2004). The statement above is equally through and consistent with Teferra and Altbach (2004) assertion that Africa faces a major challenge in providing access to university education to meet the demand of the teeming youth who are eager to study in the universities. Therefore, if the University of Ghana and many universities in SSA countries must satisfy the demands of global standards of HE, then more work is needed to conform to formal and international rules and frames of references. Meeting these global standards would enhance their governance systems and make them more visible in this global and competitive HE market. The subsequent section describes the empirical method of how data was collected for this study.

Study design and methodology

The goal of this research was to investigate the developments and challenges in the University of Ghana. Therefore, I focused on getting participants with very rich experience in the administrative and governance issues of the institution under study—University of Ghana. Consequently, employing a qualitative, inductive approach to help identify and understand the significance of the institutional developments and challenges of higher education is very appropriate for the study. Due to the exploratory nature of the investigation, a grounded theory approach defined as a 'process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organising these into a theoretical explanatory scheme' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 11) was employed. Following this approach, an open-ended interview protocol was developed to guide this exploratory research. The benefits of open-ended interviews is that participants or interviewees are free to answer in as much detail

as possible according to their own perception and thinking around the research phenomenon (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). This qualitative approach to data collection is consistent with methods employed to capture the complexity of live experiences of people on a particular phenomenon, and also to enable in-depth data collection and a thorough understanding of contextual factors. Therefore, the adoption of a qualitative orientation of this study is to reinforce the methodological rigour of the current work.

Participants and sampling

A theoretical sampling approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was adopted based on its relevance to the topic. Sites and participants are selected for a study according to the process of theoretical sampling (Descombe 2003). Hence, participants for this study were made up of senior and experienced academic staff of the university who apart from their normal duty as lecturers, also occupied administrative positions in the university as either Heads of Departments (HoDs), Directors of Research Centres or deans of the various schools and colleges. An e-mail message was initially sent to all HoDs, directors and deans in the university through the university portal (ugmail.edu.gh) to solicit an interview session with them on the above subject. In all, 18 senior academic staff members voluntarily participated in this study. Fourteen participants were heads of departments from the various units in the university, 2 participants were full deans of schools and 2 participants were full directors of research centres in the university. All participants had worked in the university for greater number of years and were made up of professors, associate professors, and senior lecturers.

Data collection

A face-to-face interview was conducted using an open-ended interview protocol with each participant. All interviews and conversations were taped recorded with permission from participants. The length of interviews ranged from 45 min to 1 h and 20 min, and all interviews were done in the various offices of the participants based on prior appointment. All data were collected between November 2012 and February 2013, and a follow-up in April 2016 after the manuscript was reviewed. This also helped in validating the initial data collected.

Data analysis

All 18 tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The preliminary analysis started with focusing on respondents' conversation. Participants' conversation was segmented into thematic 'thought' units and open coded (Strauss and Corbin 1998). These 'thought' units are the main ideas contained in a phrase or sentence. A sentence was given two or three codes if it contained more than one main idea. In this paper, participants' 'thought' units are those described as the basic unit of analysis. A coding format was created and updated on a frequent basis. Each category/theme and subcategory/sub-theme had a coding format or descriptions. During the coding process, a continuous comparative analysis was used to generate new categories/themes and patterns as they emerged through clustering of the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998). In the next stage, each theme found in the data was examined in accordance with the main objective of the study. The data was frequently reviewed and analysed in relations with the categories and the themes in

order to generate richer interpretations. Subsequently, an experienced colleague in qualitative studies was contacted to further conduct a ‘check-coding’ of the data as a reliability check (Miles and Huberman 1994: 64).

Methodological limitation

Despite the fact that the qualitative data collection method is grounded in naturalistic setting with enormous advantage of collecting real data, its subjective nature could limit the conclusions of the study through the idiosyncratic and subjective character of the researcher. Secondly, the subjective nature of using only senior academic staff without input from the administrative/clerical staff could slant the viewpoint of the participants. Additionally, there is a limitation of representation of the sample character in terms of gender and rank. In this study, only one female senior member was available to grant me the interview. A lot more opinions from female academics and also, from junior-ranked academic staff like lecturers and assistant lecturers, could throw more light on the results of the study. Nonetheless, as a theoretical sampling approach, the experiences of the participants of this study would undoubtedly provide robust results. Hence, future research could integrate the different levels of employees in a study.

Similarly, academic publications in home or local journals should be encouraged since these journals would better guide the contextual factors of the African terrain and therefore limit the rejection rate of international journals outside Africa. In most cases, reviewers from the developed world find it difficult to decipher the marked differences in the contextual factors as literature in developing economies is still growing. Nevertheless, fresh approaches and frameworks should be developed for capturing and evaluating the socio-economic impact factors of these home journals in order to make them more acceptable in the wider global frontier.

Discovering the concept category

As explained above, the categories (Table 2) were formed by the total number of concepts arrived at during the data analysis, and which were similar in meaning to the phenomenon under study (Strauss and Corbin 1998). They were developed and then coded into six (6) categories (classifications) that identify the various developments and challenges of institutional governance and management of the University of Ghana. The results of this analysis (Table 1) which yielded six main categories are those that emerged as overarching themes from the coding and concept-sorting processes.

Findings

The findings emanating from the interviews discussed here are those that are relevant to the concerns of this paper. The results yielded six major categories as follows: deficient institutional policies, deficient infrastructure, students’ numbers versus teaching loads, human resource factors, research quality and challenges and bureaucratic and inconsistent administrative environment (see Table 2).

Table 1 Characteristics of participants

No.	Position	Designation	Qualification	Years of experience	Length of interview	Gender
#1	Director	Ass. professor	PhD	10 years +	56 min	M
#2	Head of department	Ass. professor	PhD	10 years +	1 h	F
#3	Head of department	Ass. professor	PhD	10 years +	1 h and 20 min	M
#4	Head of department	Professor	PhD	10 years +	58 min	M
#5	Head of department	Professor	PhD	10 years +	49 min	M
#6	Head of department	Dr.	PhD	10 years +	51 min	M
#7	Director	Professor	PhD	10 years +	45 min	M
#8	Head of department	Dr.	PhD	10 years +	53 min	M
#9	Head of department	Dr.	PhD	10 years +	47 min	M
#10	Dean	Professor	PhD	10 years +	58 min	M
#11	Head of department	Ass. professor	PhD	10 years +	48 min	M
#12	Head of department	Mr.	MSc.	10 years +	46 min	M
#13	Head of department	Ass. professor	PhD	10 years +	50 min	M
#14	Head of department	Ass. professor	PhD	10 years +	51 min	M
#15	Dean	Professor	PhD	10 years +	57 min	M
#16	Head of department	Dr.	PhD	10 years +	49 min	M
#17	Head of department	Dr.	PhD	7 years	1 h and 3 min	M
#18	Head of department	Dr.	PhD	10 years	59 min	M

Ass. associate, *Dr.* doctor

Deficient institutional policies

All participants in the interview agreed that most of the problems involving higher education in developing economies are rooted in lack of policy initiatives and resources. According to the participants, there are often no clear-cut policies for alternative funding and development of university education since public universities are still fully funded and supervised by governments. In most cases, the university cannot take its own tactical decisions or entrepreneurial initiatives or policies that can offset contingency or structural difficulties when they arise. This is because, as a public institution, policies are subjected to governmental approval through the university council. This, however, can take a very long time to be ratified or disapproved by the Government. Consequently, as the universities compete with other challenging needs in the economy, governments rather feel obliged to concentrate their spending in the development of other areas of the society. Yet, the university is deficient in enacting its own policies on alternative funding. It is only when universities threaten strike actions that governments are able to release university budgets; however, these budgets do not come in full but in piecemeal

Table 2 Themes emanating from the study

Categories/themes from analysis of interviews

1. Deficient institutional policies
2. Deficient infrastructure
3. Student numbers versus teaching loads
4. Human resource factors
5. Research quality and challenges
6. Bureaucratic and inconsistent administrative environment

manner. Yet, the political climate in Ghana supports students' agitation against increases in their Academic User Facility Fees (AFUF). Respondent # 1 had this to say:

Here we are in an environment where our own students are not willing for the AFUF to be increased by a certain percentage, and whether we like it or not that would be instrumental in ensuring that the university has adequate funding to promote many facilities and other things.

Consequently, the university is found in a quandary because, even though universities are somehow semi-autonomous, they do not have the clout to make their own policies or decisions on some significant matters without government or public support. Thus, the policies initiated through the reforms to enable universities become autonomous are deficient as the University of Ghana still depends very much on government.

Deficient infrastructure

The respondents in this study emphasised the importance of creating a conducive and supportive atmosphere in the lecture halls for effective learning in any university. However, they bemoaned that the learning environment in this university is abound with infrastructure limitation as both lecturers and students face difficult conditions for study. Office spaces are very limited for academic staff while lecture halls are severely overcrowded with inadequate library and laboratory facilities. The sample responses below are illustrative:

As you know, in the sciences, we do a lot of practical work but, because of student numbers we have to always put them into smaller groups in order to fit the laboratory space. One group comes and there is no power, meanwhile we don't have generators, no adequate microscopes and other tools. (Respondent # 10's excerpt)

If you go downstairs our colleagues are coiled up in small cubicle call offices, so if a lecturer is meeting or counseling a student, all other lecturers are listening because what one says distract the other. Lavatory facilities here are very bad, how can such conditions be compared with world class universities? (Respondent # 16's interview)

In most instances, lecture rooms don't have adequate furniture. It is very common to see students struggling for seats. For such a university, it is uncalled for to see students carrying chairs to enter into a lecture. (Respondent # 9's interview)

Thus, the institutional environment for learning in most of the faculties is unpleasant and does not measure up to international standards. This is because the university lacks expansion and accelerated developments of infrastructure and still depend mostly on its old facilities. Consequently, facilities for lecture halls, offices and student accommodation are limited and deficient, and this can impact on academic work.

Students' numbers versus teaching loads

In this category, interviewees were of a unanimous view that the increasing number of student enrolment each year is having a toll on academic staff as student numbers do not commensurate with academic staff intake. Particularly with the University of Ghana as the premier and largest public university in Ghana, it remains the primary entering point and a first choice to most students seeking higher education in Ghana. In the midst of this burgeoning population of students, the state has repeatedly lowered public investment in recruiting the manpower needs of public universities and infrastructural development. The outcome is an explosion of student numbers and a diminishing number of

academic staff resulting in heavy teaching loads per academic staff. This is reflected in this quote by respondent # 1 the university:

The transformation that the university has gone through makes it impossible for research fellows to do 70% of research and 30% of teaching for promotion. We in this centre handle close to 5,000 students. As our courses are meant to develop the skills of students, we have no alternatives but to divide them into groups. We are 6 made up 1 associate professor, and 5 research fellows. Despite the fact that we rely mostly on part-time lecturers, we do 120 groups with an average of 5–6 groups each per research fellow, and approximately 8–10 hours spent on teaching, marking and evaluating students. How much time do we have left for research?

The high student numbers in the university puts a severe strain on both academic and the university infrastructure. In most cases, lecturers are forced to divide one course into several lectures in order for students to be able to get favourable attention from lecturers. This puts a stress on the teacher or lecturer as teaching loads become more than what is required per lecturer. This is aptly stated by respondent # 14 in the following words:

In a political science class, you get up to 1300 students in one lecture hall. Is this an effective lecturer/student contact lesson? How does the lecturer assess these students in terms of marking of the numerous scripts? So the lecturer spends his/her entire semester marking scripts for just one course. This is the stress lecturers go through as a result of admitting high numbers of students in a single year.

Human resource factors

Well-qualified and highly motivated human resources are critical to the quality of any university that hopes to be counted as a competitive institution in today's world of business. Good universities should be ready to recruit both quality academic and administrative staffs capable of efficiently managing their portfolios. However, the sources of recruitment into African universities have remained limited and may have become even narrower (Sawyer 2004). In the University of Ghana for example, the dearth of academic staff is exacerbated by some weak and deficient administrative staff. Most colleges and schools in the university rely on part-timers and assistant lecturers who hold master of philosophy degrees but not doctorate degrees which are supposed to be the basic qualification for university teaching. In the area of administration, the university relies mostly on National Service persons who are ill-trained and lack the basic clerical skills because of shortage of full time staff. Even most of the full time administrative staff who serve as support staff are mostly not qualified to handle their jobs. They lack the basic skills to do effective administrative work. This is evidenced by this quote from respondent # 11:

The administrative staff is weak and inefficient. If you do not want to be embarrassed with the most basic administrative letters, then you do not have to rely on them. However, administrative matters or management distracts you by taking a large chunk of your time, therefore taking you away from your core academic work.

Equally, respondent # 13 had this to say:

The secretariat support needs to be improved. As a Head of Department, most of the work falls back on you. Even simple administrative processes, and everybody is running to you for answers.

Research quality and challenges

Large population of students due to enrolment expansion with limited infrastructure under the existing resource conditions has implications on the issue of quality research in the university. For a university to be fully competitive and visible, its research and teaching should be of top priority. However, the quality of research goes with adequate support and enough time for researchers to have a conducive atmosphere, so that they will be able to refresh their skills and create new knowledge more efficiently and rapidly to meet the current economic environment than they currently do. Nevertheless, structural constraint in the University of Ghana is seriously affecting research output. The challenges in research quality and teaching are illustrated in the following excerpts.

Young lecturers have no space to sit and work. The little shared spaces that some academic staff have are filled with examination scripts due to student numbers. As teaching does not count in terms of promotion, most lecturers are giving into research and de-emphasizing teaching. (Respondent # 9's interview)

There are many times your computer breaks down, and for more than 8 weeks, you are chasing the ICT personnel to repair it. More serious is the fact that at times you get to the office, and it takes you the whole day to be able to access one e-mail. How does this condition help you to do research? (Respondent # 4's interview)

Bureaucratic and inconsistent administrative environment

All participants lamented on the excessive bureaucratic processes in the university administrative system. All the deans, directors and heads of departments interviewed emphasised the point that, though the university faces resource constraint, the processes in the acquisition and replacement of basic materials and equipment necessary for teaching and learning were very slow and cumbersome. A demand or requisition for an important tool or facility to aid in teaching and learning takes a very long time to come. This practice, they believe, was a major hindrance to effective teaching and research. Aside the unnecessary bureaucratic administrative processes, participants in the interview were of the view that some policies in the university were not consistent and uniform. The inconsistency in administrative procedures frustrated many staff members in the performance of their work. For example, some of the heads of department expressed their concerns about the criteria for promotion of academic staff as being inconsistent in most cases. Academic staffs get different reviews from their applications, and in some cases, you do not know exactly the quantity of publication materials one needs in order to meet the criterion for promotions. Promotions take a very long time before one gets a response to his/her application. Participants also lamented that, publications in journals from the University of Ghana and within Africa were treated with disdain and refused in some instances as materials worthy for promotion. Respondent # 6 noted that

It is frustrating to see that in this university the standard of promotions is not too clear. As a HoD, you find yourself in a tight situation when a faculty member's promotion is

rejected, and you try had to explain to the victim only to be told that his colleague in a different department was promoted with a lesser number of publications. I think the principles governing promotions should be made clear and possibly codified to avoid this bad perception of discrimination.

Discussion of findings

The main objective of this study was to examine the developments and challenges facing the University of Ghana and their direct and indirect influence on the work of academic staff. Since general dissatisfaction with performance and status of university education in developing countries particularly in Ghana are not backed by empirical investigation, this study delves into core issues that affect academic work and governance procedures, and presents the realities that impinge on the advancement of higher education in Ghana.

First, findings of the study show the deficiency of institutional policies of the University of Ghana. The university lacks the institutional policy that enables it to make its own decisions on certain matters without interference from government. Participants of the study lamented on the fact that though the university is semi-autonomous, it relied very much on governmental policies which in most cases were inimical to the university's administration and wellbeing. The fact that the university cannot initiate major changes of its own and also enact long-term policies beneficial to its development without political authorisation undermines the university as an autonomous institution. It is thus very important for policy makers of HE in Ghana to take a second look at the institutional framework regarding the governance and management systems. Because policies on HE are formulated and implemented by the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the National Council on Tertiary Education (NCTE), public universities in Ghana do not have the sovereign capacity to impose fees on students without permission from the MOE. Tuition fees are often negligible, and attempts by the universities to increase the level of fees encounter major resistance from students who subsequently are supported by political leaders due to fear of student unrest and demonstrations. Universities are therefore institutionally deficient in terms of raising monies on their own for academic and administrative purposes. The situation is made worse as university budget and accounts must typically be approved or audited by government officials, who may have little understanding of HE in general, or of the specific needs and targets of a particular university. Higher education institutions clearly need well-designed institutional policies on their governance structures.

Second, findings of this study demonstrate deficient infrastructure for teaching and learning in the university. Interviewees complained about the insufficiency of lecture halls and office spaces for students and lecturers, respectively. The inability of lecture hall to accommodate the soaring student numbers coupled with the lack of proper offices for lecturers is a major challenge to the university. This deficient infrastructural challenge is hampering the effective governance and administrative systems of the University of Ghana.

Another finding of this study is the problem of student numbers versus teaching loads of lecturers. Results from the analysis of the interviews indicate that the difficulties of academic teaching staff are facing with regard to heavy teaching loads resulting from multiple classes of large population of students on campus. The implication of high numbers of students and heavy teaching loads of lecturers explains the problems of quality teaching and research the university is faced with.

Additionally, the findings of this study illustrate the paucity of competent human resource in the administrative functions of the university. The interview results indicated the dearth of skilled administrative and support staff in most faculties in the university. This deficiency imposes serious challenges on the work of academic staff as, that administrative support element is seemingly void. The implication of this result is that the clerical and administrative task of the university suffers greatly. Additionally, academic staff are overburdened with additional work of clerical duties since they are unable to rely on some of the unskilled support staff.

Similarly, findings of this work show how research quality can be compromised in the university. The infrastructural difficulties that academic staff encounter in their daily functions as scientists affect the quality of their research. The basic tools that can help a scientist or researcher to effectively investigate a problem are almost non-existent. Efficient computers, uninterrupted internet access and electricity are major tools affecting research work in the University of Ghana. The respondents in this study emphasised the importance of creating a supportive atmosphere in the university workplace. This includes a thorough improvement in both the offices of academic staff and lecture halls in order to sustain the growth of teaching and research which are the basis of institutional legitimacy for university recognition. Universities are subject to a specific driven set of performance measures. Principally, in the HE sector academic activity is framed by the intensity of research. This is based mainly on research outputs in the form of academic publications. As universities are placed according to their research rating within a visibly available league table, institutional reputation and its effects on attracting research income and students especially international students who may bring more income are critical in sustaining the university. In the case of HE in developing countries, conforming to high class research and teaching assessment of academic staff would certainly give legitimacy to these institutions as resilient and high class universities. Nevertheless, attributing validity to these institutions as strong and resilient universities would mean paying attention to the development of their infrastructural base to support quality research work and teaching.

Unlike most studies on the challenges of HE, results from this study show an expansion of views of respondents on bureaucracy and administrative inertia on the part of university management. The excessive delays in the acquisition of teaching and research materials, the extraordinarily long holdup in the hiring of an academic staff, complicated promotions system all have a negative influence on the University of Ghana as an academic institution. A more serious problem is the inconsistency and a lack of uniform policy on academic promotions. Participants in the study bemoaned the imbalance in promotions of lecturers due to the lack of clear-cut procedures guiding academic promotions in the university. This problem of imbalance and uneven promotion procedures affects the morale of academic staff negatively. Similarly, academic publications in home or local journals should be encouraged since these journals would better guide the contextual factors of the African terrain and therefore limit the rejection rate of international journals outside Africa. In most cases, reviewers from the developed world find it difficult to decipher the marked differences in the contextual factors as literature in developing economies is still growing. Nevertheless, fresh approaches and frameworks should be developed for capturing and evaluating the socio-economic impact factors of these home journals in order to make them more acceptable in the wider global frontier.

Conclusion and implications

In conclusion, this study has brought new insights into the existing literature within studies in HE and particularly contributed to the paucity of theory in higher education in Ghana and in developing countries. Theoretically, this study argues that governance and management systems of a research university play a significant role in efficient delivery of academic teaching and research. The cultural and political dimensions of institutional framework of higher education in Ghana are challenging. Hence, institutional strategies can be redesigned based on the appreciation of contemporary pathways from research activity to effective teaching that can impact the established institutions positively. The key to success in driving higher education in developing economies' socio-economic impact is that policy makers must aspire to a rather harmonious view of open knowledge sharing with the academic community of practice. This though may be difficult to realise in the face of the significant power gap in political leaders entrenched in social democratic principles. This article nonetheless advocates the development of policies that take into account the institutional realities in the field. Governmental policies aimed at enhancing HE in Africa must first improve the existing institutional set up for chance of success. Otherwise, the major implication of enrolment expansion at this rate and under the present resource conditions will undermine the issue of quality of HE. In spite of the recommendations from the Sir John Daniels' report on the visitation panel in 2007, this study which is very current still finds intense problems like class sizes, heavy teaching loads, limited lecture halls and lecturer/student ratios somewhat pervasive in the University of Ghana. This goes to confirm the forces and persistent nature of culture and change management issues in Sub-Saharan organisations. Nonetheless, there is growing scholarly and practitioner interest in African institutions and management due to the prospective transformations of HE in Ghana and the Sub-continent as a whole. For example, the University of Ghana is currently attracting millions of US dollars from the Carnegie foundation, the World Bank and Robert S. McNamara Fellowships Programmes, Africa Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (ACCAI), etc., all in a bid for capacity development of its faculty and institutional advancement. For example, in 2011, the University of Ghana established a Diaspora Linkage Programme (UG-DLP) under its Next Generation of African Academics project funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The UG-DLP sought to promote partnerships with African Professors in the diaspora in order to draw on their expertise to enhance UG's faculty strength for post-graduate teaching, with particular emphasis on PhD training. Since then, the Carnegie foundation has sponsored a number of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctoral (PhD) students in the Sciences and Humanities to date. Similarly, in February 2015, the University of Ghana received an initial seed grant of US\$ 794,000 by the Open Society Foundations to coordinate the implementation of a project "*Co-producing knowledge on food systems for development in Africa*" under the Africa Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (ACCAI) Partnership. The project aims to contribute to expertise, knowledge and development of implementable policies in Africa to guarantee food security and to provide research grants to thirty (30) PhD, MPhil and post-doctoral candidates to deliver aspects of the project's research agenda. These partnerships have significantly addressed some of the barriers impacting academic quality of the university. There is therefore hope for HE in Ghana and in Africa as a whole if these bids are utilised prudently. This paper thus calls for the partnering of African governments and African HE institutions to engage more in positive initiatives that will improve infrastructure, teaching and research facilities and staff—the hub of legitimacy in global HE institutions.

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