

## A critique for the modernisation of management in higher education institutions of developing nations

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**ABSTRACT:** Most universities in developing nations still yearn for management that can create a conducive environment for academic and research activities to thrive. In order to be productive and prosperous, higher academic institutions should be administered by creative minds that are willing, through consensus, to build and experiment with often-untested ideas and offer a variety of management styles. The current regimented nature of administration at engineering colleges and universities in some developing nations is an obstacle to engaging rich and imaginative minds in knowledge creation and development – the main purpose of the existence of universities. The majority of people who play the most critical roles in the management of universities in developing countries lack modern management traits that are important for such positions, and are rarely top academics, yet such persons are commonly entrusted with managing academic institutions. The article focuses, in general, on managerial practices that inhibit the growth of universities in developing countries. The author presents some recommendations on the best practices of managing higher education institutions so as to increase awareness of the need for good management in higher learning institutions.

### INTRODUCTION

Universities are places where knowledge creation and development is supposed to take place. In order to accomplish this goal, universities must be managed by persons of high academic standing who have the ability to offer quality leadership that will result in the achievement of institutional objectives. Furthermore, they must be persons who value knowledge and know how to create it through the efficient use and organisation of academic resources. The use of inexperienced outsiders can be, and frequently has been, damaging.

The idea of making a university an enthusiastic learning place is the dream of any university administrator. It is a dream that depends upon many factors, including: the availability of adequate financial resources, the enthusiasm of academic staff, the motivation of students, and the cooperation of administrative support-staff [1]. Most university administrators in developing countries have failed to mould universities into suitable environments for innovation and creativity. Lecturers and students cannot carry out research and undertake new initiatives to enrich their academic programmes.

Traditionally, university managers were expected to lead by directing or ordering things to happen. This conventional way of management is driven by the constraint in lecturers' and students' democratic rights. Modern management of academic institutions demands that lecturers and students should be free to conduct research and air their views without suppression in anyway whatsoever. Freedom of expression is today acknowledged the world over as a sacrosanct kingpin of democracy.

The recognition of staff and students rights should be accomplished by the creation of freedom to exercise those rights. It is the responsibility of the top-level management to

guide higher education institutions to practice democracy and turn them into places of academic freedom. Academic freedom is the right of scholars to pursue their research, to teach and to publish without control or restraint from the institutions that employ them [2]. Without academic freedom, universities are unable to fulfil one of their prime functions: to be a catalyst and sanctuary for new ideas, including those that may be unpopular. Academic freedom is not an absolute concept; it has limits and requires accountability. It recognises the right of academics to define their own areas of inquiry and to pursue the truth as they see it [3].

According to Farnham, while the rates of change differ, the *massifying*, *marketising*, and *managerialising* of higher education are universal, international phenomena [1]. In both developed and developing nations, there are no huge disparities among universities on the issue of management because the goals and objectives of the institutions are basically the same. Unless otherwise stated in the mission, as a teaching university (as is common in a few North American universities), most universities in the world teach and conduct research.

Good management in higher education institutions is one of the most challenging issues facing universities' administrators in developing countries today. For a long time, this problem has persisted and continues to draw the attention of major stakeholders in higher education institutions in those nations.

To rise to the challenge, there is need to re-evaluate the universities' activities so as to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century society. The challenge is to discourage the universities' top management from an autocratic system of administration to a democratic one, and to ensure that the reforms undertaken deliver the correct prescription for the well-known weaknesses or shortcomings. Furthermore, politicians should desist from interfering with the running of universities.

This article brings forward the poor management of higher education institutions as one of the main factors that have led to continuous falling standards of higher education in developing nations. It further challenges the current university administrators in developing nations by presenting them with a variety of management options for higher education institutions that are being practiced elsewhere in the world to achieve positive outcomes.

## THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Higher education institutions promote problem solving and leadership skills and values, as well as a commitment to quality, integrity and service to society. Thus, universities should be committed to serving society through the transfer of intellectual products so as to meet the changing needs of society [4].

University education targets the development of both individuals and society and is expected to contribute to the building of a nation's human resources by producing a cadre of qualified human labour. University graduates are expected to emerge with the production skills necessary to initiate and advance economic development. Students who enter higher education bring benefits to themselves, the economy and society as a whole. Since universities are the pinnacles of an educational pyramid, it is essential that they are well managed if other levels of education are to remain competent and so that all sectors of a country's economy be productive.

An additional role of higher education is to reflect and promote an open and meritocratic civil society. Civil society is neither state nor market, but is a realm that links public and private purposes. Within this realm, higher education promotes values that are more inclusive or more public than other civic venues, such as religious communities, households and families, or ethnic and linguistic groups [3].

Higher education is expected to embody the norms of social interaction, such as open debate and argumentative reason. It should also emphasise the autonomy and self-reliance of its individual members and reject discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religious belief or social class. The best higher education institution is a model and a source of pressure for creating a modern civil society. This is an ideal not often realised, but is nevertheless a standard against which to measure national systems [3].

## MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF DEVELOPING NATIONS

There is no doubt that the current training structures at higher education institutions in developing countries have invariably served their respective nations. However, amid the various global changes in higher education, there is a need for readjustments in order to fit into the new global system. The existing management styles at those universities in developing nations are not adaptable to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century higher education system, which is characterised by massive technological expansion and development.

The poor management of higher education institutions in developing countries is manifested in several forms, namely:

- Communication between heads of institutions, lecturers and other stakeholders is wanting, with the emphasis being on orders rather than consultation.
- Resources are poorly managed and misused, denying good services to students and staff.
- Most heads of universities are never involved in quality assurance processes, either because they are not well equipped for that or they do not know that it is part of their responsibilities.

Other researchers have found that, apart from funding and quality assurance, management is a prime problem facing engineering colleges and universities in developing countries [5].

## MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND PRACTICES THAT INHIBIT THE GROWTH OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

### Political Interference

Political interference in the running of higher education institutions is a typical phenomenon in most developing nations; this has led to the mismanagement of many institutions. In developing nations, politicians have always viewed academics as rivals and a threat to their interests. This is so because critical and opposing views on matters of governance and politics primarily come from academics based at universities.

Political loyalty and ethnic balancing, cronyism and nepotism have been occasionally used by some governments of developing nations as criteria for appointments of top administrators of a university. However, the majority of the university administrators appointed were professionally qualified and individuals of high integrity. The trouble is that when competent people are appointed on the basis of considerations other than merit they easily become an integral part of the mediocrity. Universities in the developing world need strong leadership, and whatever selection method is employed, it should allow strong leaders to emerge.

Higher education systems are effective only when insulated from the undue influence of political parties, governments or short-term political developments in educational affairs. Success in research and education needs to have consistency with academic decisions that concern institutional leadership, curriculum or research project funding, which are made for academic reasons. Excluding partisan political interests from the operation of a higher education system helps to safeguard meritocratic decision-making, a hallmark of an effective higher education system.

### Brain Drain

Another problem afflicting higher education institutions is brain drain – one of developing nation's intractable problems. However, many professionals in developing countries who participate in the diaspora are neither unpatriotic nor ungrateful. They are talented individuals who have been pushed out of their respective countries by a hostile environment. Brain drain has been caused by cronyism, the cult of mediocrity and ethnic cleavage. These take diverse forms. It affects recruitment, promotions, as well as scholarship and research grants and opportunities. These resources invariably go to favoured communities or individuals.

In the past, university managers in some developing nations made academic life unbearable for lecturers by creating

hurdles, eg academic repression intended to intimidate or discourage lecturers in their academic pursuits. For those who could not bear it, the only option was to leave. Most past regimes in developing nations punished professionalism and hard work and rewarded mediocrity, indolence and chicanery.

In developing countries, qualified staff with PhD degrees are scarce; thus, powerful university managers must handle this talent with care. It is unfortunate that the majority of developing countries' higher education institutions currently have no policy strategy to stem the waste of intellectual resources that they have invested heavily in. That is why brain drain continues unabated. The retention of top-level talent in developing countries requires improved governance in higher education institutions, greater intellectual opportunities, higher professional salaries and better working conditions.

#### Terms and Conditions of Service for Academic Staff

In developing countries, some universities' top managers and the governments are insensitive. For some time now, lecturers in those nations have suffered gross underpayment and harsh working conditions, while politicians enjoy high salaries. The affected lecturers feel oppressed, suppressed and depressed by what they consider to be serious imbalances with regard to salary compared to their peers in the civil service. Low salaries and service benefits are the major cause of brain drain. Ironically, whenever there is a strike by lecturers over pay, governments use the universities' administration to coerce lecturers to abandon such strike action.

Academic staff is the main input for high quality teaching and research [6]. The first function of university lecturers is to teach. In order to do this adequately, universities need basic, proper and adequate facilities, which include lecture halls, libraries, laboratories and staff offices. The role of lecturers as researchers and disseminators of knowledge has not been adequately addressed by universities in developing countries. Most governments have put this role aside, and money for research has hardly been given.

#### Lack of Equipment for Teaching and Research

The majority of universities in developing nations have inferior laboratory equipment and outdated journals. Higher education institutions require sufficient financial stability to permit orderly development. Financial uncertainty and sharp budgetary fluctuations hinder good governance and make rational planning impossible. Adequate funding is required in order to sustain academic programmes and conduct research. Without funding, it is impossible to for lecturers to create knowledge.

Universities cannot operate without adequate funding and be expected to deliver quality education services. The importance of higher education as a public good must be matched by adequate public investment to enable institutions to discharge their public responsibilities – a challenge for governments of developing nations. The challenge for university administrators in developing countries is to embrace good management practices to make those universities outstanding, world-class institutions.

#### Accountability and Transparency

Creating a transparent, logical and well-understood set of rules for budgeting and accounting can have an enormous influence

on the operation and performance of higher education institutions. Rules should encourage flexibility, stability and transparency. In many institutions across the world, bureaucratic rigidity results in inefficiency and waste. Higher education institutions must be accountable to their sponsors, whether public or private.

Accountability does not imply uncontrolled interference, but it does impose a requirement to periodically explain actions and have successes and failures examined in a transparent fashion. All interaction should occur within the context of agreed rights and responsibilities [3]. In the past, staff who questioned university transactions was considered disrespectful. In some developing countries, it is a tradition that universities do not publish their annual audited financial reports. Yet this is the only avenue for informing the public about the university's financial status. For a smooth running of universities, staff should view university managers as being honest and trustworthy, more understanding of the problems affecting them, and more tolerant to divergent views coming from the university community than the government.

#### Autocratic Leadership

Another issue that most university managers in developing countries have failed to address is frequent student strike action. Student protests are common occurrences in some universities of developing nations. Most of those protests have nothing to do with academic programmes, but much to do with the administration. In most cases, autocratic leaderships have provoked student unrest. Yet managers remain rigid and often fail to be responsive to the needs of their students. Universities' administration have not realised the need to involve students at every stage of decision-making.

Students must be part owners of the academic process in order to make teaching beneficial to themselves and to their teachers. While the administration must reject all arm-twisting and indiscipline, the only way to do so effectively is to allow students to feel partly responsible for decisions affecting them. Universities are like small countries and cannot flourish amid instability and chaos. Good management and leadership are required to end campus unrests.

Most student strikes and crises at universities in developing countries are offshoots of a dysfunctional political framework aided by shortsightedness and incompetence of the past and current top-ranking administrators at higher education institutions. The majority of university managers lack the requisite skills to handle student unrest. To diffuse frequent student unrest at universities, management should take steps to develop greater interpersonal communication between students and academic staff, as well as between individual students. The solution also lies on focused leadership and management expertise that can effectively deal with such problems.

#### THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN MANAGING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: GLOBAL TRENDS

Throughout the world, there are numerous independent and quasi-governmental agencies that monitor and influence the way universities operate, including government departments, regional agencies, charities, professional bodies and learned societies, validating quality assurance bodies, business and commercial interests and various other government agencies or

statutory bodies [7]. In developed countries, apart from financing various academic and research programmes at public universities, the governments' role is minimal in the management of higher education systems.

In developing nations, the exact role of governments in management of higher education institutions has never been clearly defined. Some universities in developing countries have been misused and neglected by the governments who are supposed to be their custodian.

Under systems of state control, governments own, finance and operate higher education institutions. In such systems, politicians frequently interfere with the running of institutions. Many developing countries have gravitated towards this model in the post-colonial period, based on the rationale that governments are entitled to control systems that they fund. However, the state control of higher education has tended to undermine many major principles of good governance.

The governments of developing nations need to develop a new role as supervisors of higher education, rather than directors. They should concentrate on establishing the parameters within which success can be achieved, while allowing specific solutions to emerge from the creativity of higher education professionals. An effective system of higher education relies on the state exercising active oversight. Governments must ensure that the system serves the public interest, provides at least those elements of higher education that would not be supplied if left to the market, promotes equity and supports those areas of basic research relevant to the country's needs. The state must also ensure that higher education institutions, and the system as a whole, operate on the basis of financial transparency and fairness.

However, governments must also be economical in its interventions. It should only act when it has a clear diagnosis of the problem, is able to suggest a solution and has the ability to apply this solution efficiently. Poorly thought-through government action is likely to weaken already inadequate higher education systems in developing nations.

## NEW EMERGING CHALLENGES FOR UNIVERSITY MANAGERS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

### HIV/AIDS Pandemic

While in the past, universities have been concerned with funding problems, staff exodus and student unrest, there are new emerging challenges. These new challenges include HIV/AIDS, globalisation and information and communication technologies, which are exerting undue pressure and slowing the growth of higher education in developing countries, particularly those in Africa. AIDS is considered to be the single greatest challenge that threatens to eliminate several gains of the past. Some of the affected staff have been unable to discharge their duties, while students have difficulties in meeting their academic obligations. HIV/AIDS-related illnesses have led to increased spending on health care by both universities and their members.

Universities should avail to their governments the needed professional and technical expertise in the interventions articulated in national plans, national response mechanisms and international interventions. With increased cases of staff and

students deaths as a result of AIDS, universities will find it difficult to sustain their programmes. Staff death due to AIDS, coupled with the general exodus due to poor terms and conditions of service, threaten to significantly affect the quality of teaching at universities.

Thus, universities are duty bound to provide intellectual and professional leadership in research and strategies to combat the spread of AIDS. Besides reducing the demand for education, AIDS is likely to limit access in that fewer people will be able to afford it. In the first place, resources are increasingly being channelled to treat and care those infected. Secondly, the beneficiaries of university education who get infected are not able to plough back resources spent on them to support their institutions.

### Sustainable Development

Concerns about environmental issues and an increasing realisation of the impact that human activities have on the environment, have changed approaches to new development projects. Throughout the world, governments and local authorities, industrial organisations, international development agencies, multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations, public and private institutions, including higher learning institutions, are integrating the principles of sustainable development with their plans to reverse the loss of environmental resources. Higher education institutions in developing countries have to follow suit by incorporating sustainability concepts in their curricula. According to Moldan, more attention should be focused on urgent issues like water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB) [8].

### Other Challenges

Other important emerging challenges to university management in developing countries include the promotion of gender equality, ie the elimination of gender disparity by empowering women to participate in higher education, and incorporating ICTs in the learning programmes at universities. ICT has been one of the key factors that has nourished and stimulated the development of the global economy and led to an increased sharing of different cultures. For higher education institutions, ICTs will affect the type of skills that students have when they enter higher education, their expectations of the facilities and learning modes to them and the type of skills and intellectual attributes that those leaving higher education will need to have if they are to operate successfully in the modern world [9].

## THE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The ongoing globalisation of higher education will demand that universities in the world conform to some universally accepted norms, which may include good management practice in the delivery of higher education. This means that universities that do not observe good practices in management will simply not succeed in an increasingly competitive labour market and complex society. Therefore, the university administrators in developing nations need to be trained in the requisite administrative skills that can make universities more globally competitive.

General management strategies and tips exist that can be used to make universities more suitable places for learning and

conducting research. Tips for good management practices in higher education institutions are offered in Table 1 and can be seen from the following perspectives:

- Management or leadership should promote teamwork, communication among people being led, and instil the idea that people can rely on each other in many different ways, ie cultivate a sense of participatory management;
- Management should be the source of inspiration and motivation for both staff and students. The ability to inspire staff has always been an essential tool of management;
- Management should be seen to safeguard lecturers' and students' interests;
- Management should take a positive stand against issues, that may interfere with the university as a safe learning environment.

Table 1: Summary of problems and recommended solutions for the management of higher education institutions in developing countries.

	Problem	Recommended Solution
1	Political interference	Delink university administration from politics and respect institutional autonomy.
2	Brain drain	Introduce staff retention policies that improve pay and research facilities.
3	Corruption	Introduce transparency, flexibility and accountability in management of university resources. Institutional governance should be conducted openly and be responsive to constituencies internal and external to the institution.
4	Lack of facilities including modern equipment, journals, books and database	Public/private sponsors should devote more financial support to higher education institutions.
5	Lack of managerial skills	Facilitate access to international good practices in management through meetings and workshops. Conduct training in institutional management at the system level.
6	Ethnic balancing in decision-making process	Adopt management system that promotes national integration based on individual competency rather than ethnic balancing.
7	Autocratic leadership	Encourage participatory management. Academic freedom within the law should be respected.

#### PROPOSAL FOR A WAY FORWARD

Whatever steps university managers in developing nations take, they have been neither appropriate nor effective responses to the challenges at universities. A more inclusive and broad-based management approach is necessary. Individual universities in developing countries could utilise stakeholders as the base to enhance good governance that will result in

effective higher education management. The stakeholders' group strategy in the management of higher education should be driven by the need to create a more strategic focus with a clear direction to achieve operational discipline and effectiveness in the pursuit of the overall objective: good management and the need to create the means to sustain performance, monitor progress and detect the need for change.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The core values universities are founded upon cannot be rendered obsolete by poor management and political interference. All over the world, universities are established under an assumption of free operation. Poor management of universities only limits an institution's ability to produce knowledge. Moreover, undemocratic practices can stifle the development of education, learning and experience. Higher education institutions, which are unsupportive of democratic principles, fail to provide the proper atmosphere required for the promotion of learning and research. A restricted institution will never adequately prepare aspiring national leaders for future occupations.

Universities in developing nations must embrace good management in order to be productive and surpass their positions in institutional rankings. In order to be productive, university staff need greater freedom of research, greater professional recognition, a more open society and greater material rewards in terms of good financial remunerations.

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**Conference Proceedings of the  
6<sup>th</sup> UICEE Annual Conference on Engineering Education  
under the theme: *Educating for the Right Environment***

edited by Zenon J. Pudlowski

The 6<sup>th</sup> UICEE Annual Conference on Engineering Education, under the theme of *Educating for the Right Environment*, was organised by the UNESCO International Centre for Engineering Education (UICEE) and was held in Cairns, Australia, between 10 and 14 February 2003. This 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the UICEE was an academic activity that, basically, commenced the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the UICEE's operations.

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