Journal of Higher Education in Africa

Revue de l'Enseignement Supérieur en Afrique

Special Issue on

Conceptualising and Researching the Public Good Role of Universities in Africa

Numéro spécial sur

Conceptualiser et rechercher le rôle du bien public des universités en Afrique

Guest Editors / Rédactrices invitées

Elaine Unterhalter

Stephanie Allais

An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Research and Policy

Volume 20, No. 2, 2022

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La Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique (RESA) est publiée par le Conseil pour le devéloppement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique (CODESRIA), Sénégal. La revue publie des analyses, de l'information et des approches critiques des défis actuels auxquels l'enseignement supérieur reste confronté à travers le continent tout en mettant un accent particulier sur la recherche et les politiques d'orientation en cours. La revue publie des contributions de chercheurs, de professionnels et de décideurs politiques, en anglais et en français.

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Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, Angle Canal IV
P.O. Box 3304, Dakar, SENEGAL
Tel.: (221) 33825 98 22/23; Fax: (221) 33824 12 89
E-mail: publications@codesria.org; Web Site: www.codesria.org

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(b) Non African Institutes/Institutions non africaines	$200 US
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CODESRIA would like to express its gratitude to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Open Society Foundations (OSFs), Oumou Dilly Foundation, UNESCO, Ford Foundation and the Government of Senegal for supporting its research, training and publication programmes.

Le CODESRIA exprime sa profonde gratitude à la Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA), à l'Agence norvégienne de développement et de coopération (NORAD), à la Carnegie Corporation de New York (CCNY), à la fondation Andrew W. Mellon, à l'Open Society Foundations (OSFs), à la fondation Oumou Dilly, à l'UNESCO, à la Fondation Ford ainsi qu'au Gouvernement du Sénégal pour le soutien apporté aux programmes de recherche, de formation et de publication du Conseil.

Journal of Higher Education in Africa/
Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique
Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022 (ISSN 0851–7762)
(https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2722)

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 1-16

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2723)

Editorial

Elaine Unterhalter* and Stephanie Allais**

This special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* examines global debates concerned with higher education as a public good, in the context of the lived realities, political and economic constraints as well as opportunities in contemporary Africa. While the articles draw on research and analysis conducted from 2017 to 2019, and were completed before the seismic changes associated with the COVID pandemic, the framing ideas regarding a contextualised understanding of the relationship between higher education and the public good are highly resonant with the processes of the COVID conjuncture. In this Editorial, we distil the key ideas that have shaped this collection of works, describe the research study that connected them, and draw out some of the implications of the findings for thinking about higher education and the public good in the light of the major disruptions of 2020–2021 for higher education in many African countries.

Higher education has been the object of much policy and research attention in Africa, with a focus on delivering particular kinds of institutional orientations regarding teaching, learning, research, socio-economic and politico-cultural development. Higher education has been seen as key to unlocking the potential of the youth bulge in Africa, responding to the demands of a growing middle class, and transforming commodities-based economies into knowledge societies (World Bank 2009; Cloete, Maassen and Bailey 2015; Chuks 2017). It has been seen as a key element in supporting peace-building and healing the divisions of deep conflict in a number of African countries (Milton and Barakat 2016). The health research conducted in a number of African countries during COVID-19 has played a key role in sequencing the virus, trialling the vaccine and understanding community health support (Adepoju 2020; Mutapi 2021). But the connection of higher education systems to the enormous needs of health, education and socioeconomic development through the pandemic has been uneven (Kana, La Porte and Jaye 2021; Mutapi 2021; Reimers 2021).

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The potential of higher education in Africa to connect with and support a range of development outcomes has been noted as significant but under realised, for some decades (Oketch, McCowan and Schendel 2014; Teffera 2017; Howell, Unterhalter and Oketch 2020; Nhamo and Mjimba 2020). While some comment on a 'renaissance in African higher education' (Higgs 2016), and others on the effects and framings of colonial epistemicides (Nyamnjoh 2012), key questions abound about relevance, quality, financing and power relations, hierarchies and exclusions. These bring to the fore arguments to decolonise the curriculum, consider epistemic exclusions and forms of violence, appropriate pedagogies and languages, as well as to consider the structure, organisation, political, economic, social and spatial cultures and relationships of universities.

The student protests in South Africa in 2015 highlighted the problems of access and funding, but these were not isolated events, and student protests – with very different dynamics and aims – have been noted in the past six years in diverse countries, which include Nigeria, Malawi, Kenya, Ghana and Senegal (Fourie-Malherbe and Muller 2020; Rukato 2020; Mulinge and Arasa 2017; Egwurube 2021; Noll and Budniok 2021). They expose an unresolved colonial legacy in these higher education systems, partly linked to their relationships with the postcolonial state and uneven forms of development, provision, and connection to pressing local political developments.

The articles in this Special Issue focus on Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa, but many of the trends reported here, which concern a difficult and highly differentiated relationship between higher education institutions in Africa and the conceptualisation and enactment of the idea of public good, have been associated with other countries on the continent (Woldegiorgis, Turner and Brahima 2020; Languille 2021).

Higher education in Africa has moved through several phases, from the establishment of flagship national universities in the post-independence period for state bureaucracy formation (Teffera 2017), to the emergence of developmental universities with a commitment to indigenising knowledge and benefiting marginalised populations (Assié-Lumumba and CODESRIA 2006; ADEA and AAU 2004; Coleman 1986; Mamdani 2007; McCowan 2016); from more recent tendencies towards the marketisation of public institutions as a significant growth of the private sector (Wangege-Ouma 2008; Provini 2019; Mogaji, Maringe and Hinson 2020), to concerns to develop research intensity in some institutions (Sawyerr 2004; Cloete, Maasen and Bailey 2015; Cloete, Bunting and Van Schalkwyk 2018), much commented on as part of the COVID response (Habib 2021; Kinyanjui, Fonn, Kyobutungi et al. 2020). These orientations have been intertwined with concerns to widen participation (Allais, Unterhalter et al. 2020; Aarts et al. 2020) and lead the discussion around decolonisation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 2020). These different phases can be exemplified by particular kinds of institutions at particular moments, but these moments and the institutions that express this experience do not characterise the whole sector in every country on the continent. However, each facet of this history reflects a different way of understanding the relationship between higher education and the public good in the context of the histories of the countries of Africa.

One clear aspect of this relationship concerns the implications of the higher education sector for inequality. Obvious advantages are conferred on those who manage to go to university, but they still constitute a minority in all African countries. Students and graduates will experience many inequalities within institutions and in the status of their qualifications in the labour market. These experiences raise issues, not only of the public good relevance of higher education, but also of how higher education and its relationship with society may be conceptualised given overlapping fields of inequality (Lebeau and Milla 2008; Mamdani 2017; Habib 2019). Key overarching questions are: who is defining the public good, how and why, and what kinds of relationships with higher education are entailed? While these questions may be posed in relation to every country in the world, the relationship between higher education and the public good in Africa has some specific features, connections and disconnections to processes elsewhere in the world. This Special Issue reflects some of these specificities, engaging with, reflecting on and developing some of the debates about the relationship between higher education and the public good from an African perspective.

Two broad themes recur in this collection. Firstly, the contested nature of the concept of the public good, and how this is defined. Secondly, how the role of higher education in relation to the public good is shaped by the various contexts in which it operates, resulting in many complex enactments. Taken together, the papers provide a useful overview of the multiple ways of understanding the role of the public good and higher education in Africa today, how debates within Africa can shed light on these concepts, and how some of the sharp issues highlighted by the COVID conjuncture may be interpreted in the light of some of these experiences.

A major cross-cutting theme relates to the effect of context on higher education and the public good. This highlights not just the multiplicity of ways in which ideas about the public good are put into practice in particular higher education institutions or systems, but also whether or not context (itself shaped by higher education experiences) is part of the concept of public good itself. Several papers in this Special Issue note the role of higher education in addressing the unjust legacies of colonialism and the specific formation of apartheid in South Africa. They draw out the need to expand access to higher education to those who have been and remain disadvantaged by these legacies. But concerns with expanding access are tempered by political-economic contexts in which doctrines of fiscal conservatism dominate. There is thus a context-related tension noted in the collection, between the need for higher education to play an instrumental role in supporting economic and social development, and its intrinsic value in supporting the deepening of democratic practice and social transformation. The papers highlight the significance of history, the role of place and lived relationships associated with teaching, learning and research, within actual higher education institutions. They suggest that these facets of context are as significant as abstract formulations in understanding the relationship between higher education and the public good in the context of the different African countries discussed here.

The ways in which these tensions around conceptualisation and enactment are contested and resolved has important implications for the development of the higher education sector in Africa. The pandemic has been associated with a general pivot to online learning, in some countries for the major part of two academic years. It has highlighted the interconnectedness of forms of inequality, different formations of the state, and the enormous need to respect human rights, planning well for the social protection that will be required for contemporary and anticipated economic, climate, health and education emergencies. Thus the pandemic has highlighted the many forms in which we need to think about public good and the many different kinds of relationships that higher education institutions need to be attuned to.

The articles in this Special Issue were all developed as part of the project 'Higher education, inequality and the public good: A study in four African countries', which we co-directed. The study was funded from 2017 to 2019 by an ESRC/Newton/NRF funding research partnership and subsequently supported with a grant from the UCL GCRF research funds. The project brought together researchers from the four countries and colleagues from the UK.[1] The project aimed at developing an analysis of how key constituencies – students, academic and non-academic staff working in higher education, members of university governance bodies, employers in the public and private sector, senior government officials, and leadership figures in civil society – understand higher education and the public good within each country and across the region. The project team set out to examine the links that were made by individuals connected to the higher education sector and by analysts of that sector between higher education and a range of meanings of development. They gave particular attention to how notions of higher education and the public good have been formulated in societies with histories of colonisation that are marked by high levels of poverty and inequality.

Work also took place towards developing an indicator of higher education and the public good, and discussions were held regarding the ways an indicator might be useful to governments and higher education institutions to evaluate policy and practice. As part of a development and expansion of publications arising from the project, attention was subsequently given to the relationship between higher education and development in a range of developing countries (Howell, Unterhalter and Oketch 2020) and to how some of the harms associated with health, environmental and economic disasters have been addressed by higher education institutions (Unterhalter et al. 2021).

The investigation was conducted in the context of increasing international policy focus on higher education associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted in 2015, and the severe pressures on higher education in Africa associated with expanding provision under resource-constrained conditions (Aarts et al. 2020). The study and work that arose from it focused on the role of higher education in Africa in reproducing or redressing existing patterns of inequality and strategising for overcoming inequality in relation to the SDGs and COVID.

The views are divided on how the growth and shape of the higher education sector and its relation to other forms of post-school provision affect equalities and inequalities nationally and internationally. This theme is noted in a number of discussions on education and the public good (Marginson 2016; McCowan 2015, 2019; Unterhalter 2021); and the project aimed to deepen some of this analysis, drawing on conceptual review and empirical data. Four aspects of the public good and higher education were given particular attention in this project. These are:

1. Equity and social development;
2. Funding, employment and economic growth;
3. Pedagogy and curriculum;
4. The lived experience of space and work in universities.

These different facets are explored in the articles, which articulate different emphases and concerns.

The four countries chosen for the study were selected partly because they have been shaped by similar colonial histories, and all have recent experiences of higher education expansion. In each, the growth of the higher education sector has taken place within conditions of widespread poverty and unevenly distributed economic growth, with fault-lines along race, gender, ethnicity and region, producing an associated set of emerging tensions that require ongoing balancing and management, while eliciting much public discussion and debate. However, while these trends link the four countries, there are other distinctive factors that influence and shape higher education provision in each country, as the papers in this Special Issue show. The intention of the project was to draw on accounts of these differently located experiences to develop a nuanced understanding of how the relationship between higher education and the public good is articulated in the selected African countries and the implications of this for a more refined conceptualisation.

The overarching research question that guided the project was:

> What views and debates exist around higher education and the public good in the four selected African countries, and how do the similarities and differences between these enable us to understand how meanings are constituted and changed around these concerns within and between different countries?

Three sets of sub-questions were posed:

1. How has the idea of higher education and public good been understood and contested amongst different constituencies in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria since the emergence of new university governance structures from 1990? To what extent and in what ways do these views consider inequalities?
2. How do aspects of political economy and socio-cultural division within and beyond higher education shape perceptions of the meaning of public good? How do socio-economic differences shape the relationships between learners from different contexts, and between learners and teachers? How do pedagogies and curricula across disciplines and different forms of occupational knowledge contribute to this? What reproduces and what transforms experiences of poverty and inequalities, and how does this link to understanding of the public good?
3. What indicators are currently used to assess the relationship between higher education and public good, and to what extent is this data sensitive to a range of inequalities and forms of poverty in different countries? Is there sufficient cross-country data on how higher education connects with the public good to build an indicator that can be used in cross-country comparisons? What proxies could be used in the development of an indicator of higher education and the public good to compare countries?

The investigation, which took place between March 2017 and May 2019, used a mixed-methods approach, entailing the collection of new data and the analysis of existing data sets, and allowing for the collection and triangulation of data on the same theme and the exploration of a similar issue through different frameworks and contexts. The subsequent data analysis was built from a range of discussions in team meetings in 2019 and online dialogues between research team members during 2020 when travel was impossible. In briefly summarising the articles it can be seen that the significance of context, associated with histories and intersecting inequalities, emerges as highly salient in order to assess the relationship between higher education and the public good in the four countries.

The first paper, by Elaine Unterhalter and Stephanie Allais, provides an overview of conceptualisations of the public good role of higher education, and then considers whether, and how, these apply in the African context. It explores how the public good in higher education is substantive for those who experience it and how this can be expanded to address concerns of wider constituencies and develop some sense of solidarity with those who do not share the experience of higher education. The authors start with two key conceptualisations of the public good roles of higher education. Firstly, higher education has been portrayed as *instrumental* in shaping a version of the public good, where its qualifications, knowledge production, innovation, development of the professional classes and expertise are perceived to lead to particular manifestations of public good, delineated as economic, social, political or cultural (McMahon 2009; Stiglitz 1999). A contrasting set of arguments portrays the relationship between higher education and the public good as *intrinsic*. In this, the intellectual, physical and cultural experiences that are enabled through higher education express and enact the public good, associated, for example, with democratisation, critical thinking, active citizenship and reductions in prejudice – that is, they may prefigure forms of universalisation and connection across existing boundaries of inequalities (Singh 2001; Calhoun 2006; Leibowitz 2013; Marginson 2011; Locatelli 2017).

Unterhalter and Allais then draw on these conceptualisations in relation to the African context to argue that the roles and functions of higher education in any society are constrained and shaped by the histories of social, political and economic relations in that society and its connection with other national and global formations. They also point out that studies on the African context suggest that versions of the instrumental and intrinsic notions of the public good and higher education are quite distinct, but in some contexts may be seen to overlap. In addition, a number of studies of widening participation, particularly in South Africa, have highlighted how the notions of the public and the private good of higher education need to be problematised. The challenge they confront is that there remains a need to distinguish a public good from a private goods . There is also a need to refine the analysis of the public good so that it identifies the state as a key provider of universal goods but also acknowledges that all states may not act in this way, which is illustrated in the histories of all four states in this study. Thus, the authors argue that we need a notion of how the public good connects with the public sphere, while acknowledging that different publics are involved.

The second paper, by Colleen Howell, is a metareview of the literature published since 2010 on higher education and the public good in Africa, with a focus on Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. It maps the conceptual and contextual foci of the literature on higher education in Africa and notes several important trends. Recognising the unequal geographies of knowledge that frame the global knowledge economy (Badat 2010), Howell explicitly aims to identify literature from a wide range of sources rather than relying on mainstream databases of journals and published work only. Importantly, she notes that the research on these issues is dominated by literature that focuses on South Africa, and that this inevitably skews the regional picture.

Her broad distinction between papers that focus on conceptual vs contextual issues is useful in providing a framework for thinking about the public good and higher education in Africa. She coded papers as conceptual for the rigorous review and further categorised them in terms of whether they approached the idea of the public good as an instrumental or intrinsic value. Papers coded as contextual focus on issues that are important to the functioning of higher education in specific countries, with further coding highlighting the specific issues she explores as aspects of the 'conditions of possibility' of higher education. In all the countries included in the study there is limited critical engagement around research and research development in universities. Finally, the review highlights the importance of context in understanding the relationship between higher education and the public good. Cross-cutting contextual issues include income and inequality; race and ethnicity, and gender. Higher education's enactment of the public good is constrained by social, economic and political forces at the national and global level, which constitute the 'underlying generative framework' that shapes the inequalities that persist across the continent.

Moses Oketch analyses the relation between higher education financing and the public good in Kenya, examining higher education as a 'public good' in terms of the debate around whether the benefits of higher education primarily accrue to individuals or to society more broadly. Oketch uses this frame to interrogate the financing of higher education, noting the tensions between small-scale, free higher education with restricted access, and expanded access higher education based on cost recovery and cost-sharing models. Importantly, he observes that the extent to which higher education exists as a public good in any country is primarily a result of policy decisions. He uses the expansion of the Kenyan higher education system to illustrate the relationship between financing approaches and access, as well as noting the 'unintended' public good consequences of expanded higher education, such as a thriving civil society sector. This nuanced approach to understanding the tension between higher education funding and access to university education is important in terms of elucidating the challenges of providing/expanding access to higher education in contexts marked by restrictive fiscal policy.

Christine Adu-Yeboah explores the expansion of higher education for the public good in Ghana and stakeholders' perspectives on its quality. She notes that the higher education system has expanded since the 1990s and currently includes 72 private higher education institutions and 12 public universities. Although most students enrol in degrees in the humanities, increasing enrolment in STEM-based degrees is a national priority. Access to public institutions is limited by academic performance in secondary education, and is highly competitive. She adopts an explicitly instrumental approach to understanding the links between the quality of higher education and the impact of higher education on the public good. The public good is understood in primarily economic terms, with higher education viewed as important in improving productivity and producing effective labourers.

Adu-Yeboah uses a framework based on a model of the production function in human capital theory to examine the contexts, inputs, processes and products of higher education in Ghana. Drawing on qualitative research with Ghanaian stakeholders in higher education, including public and private universities, government officials, members of civil society and students, she concludes that it is necessary to improve the quality of higher education from the perspective of all these stakeholders in order to ensure that it contributes effectively to the public good.

Jibrin Ibrahim's account of the Nigerian university system focuses on corruption and the erosion of the public good. The paper discusses the relationship between higher education and the public good in Nigeria in terms of the declining quality of the higher education system since 1980. He attributes this decline to a combination of interrelated issues, which include: changes in economic policy that result from the implementation of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s; an increase in the numbers of tertiary institutions without adequate increases in funding, which has resulted in a large number of underfunded institutions; the academic union's narrow focus on members' remuneration, rather than a broader focus on academic freedom and the public good; high levels of corruption among university staff, both in the theft of funds and the inflation of academic output through the use of publications of dubious quality; and the sexual harassment and exploitation of students. Ibrahim argues that there is a need to re-establish the linkages between higher education and the public good in Nigeria to support the rebuilding of a state that can provide the 'prosperity, welfare and security of all its citizens'.

Public good as a lived experience of those who work in higher education is charted by Mthobisi Ndaba. He discusses the perspective of academics at two South African universities who actively work towards producing outcomes for the public good. Ndaba's micro-scale approach, which focuses on individual academics, complements the macro-scale views of the public good in other articles in this Special Issue. He highlights the complexities of trying to work for the public good in institutions that are increasingly corporatised and which do not necessarily recognise the importance of these contributions. There are several costs associated with working for the public good within the higher education system. These are: relational costs; personal resource costs; psychological costs; career-related costs; and identity contingencies. Ndaba concludes by arguing that it is important to understand the links between higher education and the public good at both the macro and micro scales in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of this complex relationship.

Palesa Molebatsi looks at meso-level relationships that have a bearing on the production of a connection between higher education and the public good. She focuses on South African universities and their spatially located communities, distinguishing between universities that were very connected to particular locales and their associated social relationships, and those that positioned themselves as detached from a specific local environment, with affiliations rather to wider epistemic or politically situated communities. She draws out how differently spatialised views of the public sphere can affect the way in which higher education for the public good is conceptualised and realised.

The ways in which higher education institutions or national education systems may seek to monitor or evaluate the public good relationships of higher education is explored by Tristan McCowan and Palesa Molebatsi. Based primarily on secondary data and a review of the relevant literature, their paper focuses on the role of indicators and rankings in higher education. McCowan and Molebatsi discuss the impacts that the choice of indicators and approaches to ranking have on the sector and its ability to contribute to the public good. They provide a useful overview and critique of how indicators and rankings are used in global higher education, and how this process tends to exclude universities in the global South. They show that current approaches to measurements of global quality in higher education are problematic because they assume a universal definition of higher education and roles and functions in different types of universities that operate in diverse global contexts. They argue that the use of a standard set of indicators to assess institutional quality is inherently reductionist and narrows the conception of higher education's role by focusing on what can be measured, rather than what is meaningful to those who work and study in the institutions or engage with aspects of public good. In response to the limitations of the existing measures, they propose instead a dashboard approach to constructing indicators of universities' contributions to the public good, in terms of instrumental and intrinsic values.

The dashboard includes six broad themes in respect to the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of universities impact on the public good. Themes in the intrinsic dimension include: solidarities in the public sphere; equity of access; and deliberative space (including measures of academic freedom, representation, student participation and dialogical pedagogy). Instrumental themes include: graduate destinations; knowledge production; and community engagement.

This approach avoids conflating the distinct elements of higher education and the public good, and allows users to observe strengths and weaknesses in different areas. It also enables the use of qualitative and quantitative measures across the various dimensions. The dashboard presents a starting point for challenging the extensive limitations of international rankings in their narrow understanding of quality, their fostering of unhealthy competition, and their impetus to performativity.

The final paper in this collection, by Siphelo Ngcwangu, reflects on experiences of doing research on higher education and the public good in South Africa. Ngcwangu studies the process of participating in a multinational research project on higher education and its role with regard to the public good, from the perspective of a research team working in South Africa. The paper explores the complexity of researching in this field and the multiple perspectives from which the sector can be studied. It explicitly positions higher education in terms of the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which it operates. He highlights how the public good is understood by research participants in terms of higher education's role in addressing socioeconomic inequalities, and identifies various tensions that affect this role. Ngcwangu's central argument focuses on the importance of understanding higher education and its conception in terms of the public good as contested reflections of the social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which it operates. He synthesises the contestations using categories identified by Louise Morley (2021) in terms of: lack and the need to catch up, which acknowledges the pressure on universities of the global South to focus on attaining global prestige as a result of the commodification of higher education globally; voice theory and the university's role in reproducing inequalities and reinforcing marginalisation; and the challenges presented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and an associated shift to 'blended learning'.

Across the papers, there is no single approach to a definition of the relationship between higher education and the public good. Some writers formulate a notion of a single public good nurtured by higher education, or, alternatively, many goods from which individuals benefit. Some see this as a heterodox process, in which the public good may link with the public bad, with crucial implications for thinking carefully about social policy and education. The papers demonstrate that these contestations need to be read contextually. We cannot think of higher education and the public good without thinking about particular formations of higher education, in particular socio-economic and political settings, and how particular histories and lived relationships problematise and animate the idea of the relationship between higher education and the public good. Appreciating these contextual factors in shaping the role and functioning of higher education, and thus its relationship to the public good, is a central theme in this special issue.

Comparisons between and within countries have allowed for more nuance and depth to be built into the conceptual framing and in considering the forms of enactment by individuals and institutions in particular contexts. Collectively, the papers demonstrate that mainstream conceptualisations of higher education and the public good are underpinned by particular understandings of the nature and form of higher education and how knowledge is acquired, developed and disseminated. These abstract orientations may be very far from the reality of highly unequal, socially stratified and politically complex societies, such as those documented by the authors in this Special Issue. Thus, a reconceptualisation of the public is required for these contexts. This requires some challenge to conceptualisations of the private, given the strong obligations of individuals who come from low-income backgrounds to extended families, and the sharing of the benefits of higher education amongst their communities of origin.

A key issue is how to understand inequalities and elites. In a hypothetical globalised knowledge economy, widening participation in higher education could be a force for public and private transformation, including democratisation, and personal and economic growth. In an equally hypothetical state concerned with social services and improving the well-being of all in the society, even a small higher education system could serve the public through the graduates it produces and the research it conducts. However, such a higher education sector can also map on to elite practices and contribute to further differentiation and subjection, and indeed, objectification, of excluded social groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown both processes at work, with life-saving health research taking place in some of the universities in Kenya, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria, accompanied by the many tensions of trying to deal with multiple inequalities and uneven distance-learning provision. These are all issues for further research and reflection as the massification and privatisation of higher education in most African countries continues, and as the process of dealing with and attempting to recover from the pandemic unfolds.

Note

1. The research was funded through ESRC award Number 174071 and the UCL GCRF funds 2018 and 2019, and the South African NRF award number UTSA160426163125 as well as the SARCHI Chair in Skills Development.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 17-39

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2724)

Theorising the Relationship Between Higher Education and the Public Good in Africa

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Abstract

This article explores conceptualisations of the public good role of higher education and considers their application to higher education in African countries. The article starts by delineating a number of different ways in which higher education and the public good are linked, grouping these together as instrumental and intrinsic versions of the relationship between higher education and the public good. In considering the connections and disjunctures between these two formulations and the way studies on higher education in contemporary Africa have engaged with this debate, we argue for discussing the importance of processes that link or have the potential to connect instrumental and intrinsic visions of higher education and the public good. We discuss these, drawing on a set of framing ideas associated with conditions of possibility and forms of social contract, which, we argue, express a less abstract form of this discussion, more responsive to the complexities of context associated with actual higher education institutions and the systems they work in.

Keywords: Africa, higher education, universities, public good

Résumé

Cet article explore les conceptualisations du rôle de bien public de l'enseignement supérieur et examine leur application à l'enseignement supérieur dans les pays d'Afrique. L'article commence par décrire un certain nombre de différentes façons dont l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public sont liés, en les regroupant en versions instrumentales et intrinsèques de la relation entre l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public. En examinant les liens et les disjonctions entre ces deux formulations et la manière dont

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les études sur l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique contemporaine se sont engagées dans ce débat, nous plaidons pour discuter de l'importance des processus qui relient ou ont le potentiel de relier les visions instrumentales et intrinsèques de l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public. Nous en discutons, en nous appuyant sur un ensemble d'idées de cadrage associées aux conditions de possibilité et aux formes de contrat social, qui, selon nous, expriment une forme moins abstraite de cette discussion plus sensible aux complexités du contexte associé aux établissements d'enseignement supérieur réels et aux systèmes dans lesquels ils fonctionnent.

Mots-clés : Afrique, enseignement supérieur, universités, bien public

Introduction

This article explores conceptualisations of the public good role of higher education and considers their application to higher education in African countries. The article starts by delineating a number of different ways in which higher education and the public good are linked. We selected a range of ways in which the definition of public good is argued for and pose questions about the form of higher education this presupposes. As many arguments about the public good emerge from the disciplines of Economics and Politics, these analyses tend to assume particular ideal types of higher education. One of our questions concerns whether existing higher education institutions and systems of higher education are able to fulfil this role and, if so, under what conditions.

Instrumental or Intrinsic Relationships Between Higher Education and the Public Good

Two distinct approaches frame how higher education and the public good have been linked. One approach may be termed instrumental, in that it looks at relationships established by higher education that may or may or not in the future cause public good, associated with, for example, expanded healthcare, education, social protection and wellbeing. The second approach may be termed intrinsic, as arguments are made that the experience of a particular form of higher education, associated with critical discussion, debate and particular forms of association, is in itself a public good (Unterhalter and Howell 2021).

Higher education has been portrayed as *instrumental* in shaping a version of the public good in which qualifications, knowledge production, innovation, development of the professional classes and expertise are perceived to lead to particular manifestations of the public good, delineated as economic, social, political or cultural (McMahon 2009; Stiglitz 1999). The questions that economists have asked about the public good, particularly about availability and allocation (Gazier and Touffut 2006), intermingle in this analysis with ideas about the benefits that flow from higher education, which are taken to be universal. There is an assumption here that higher education is associated in some direct way with shaping necessary research and learning, contributing to what works to ensure development, national cohesion or economic growth.

The openness and dynamism of the instrumental form of the relationship between higher education and the public good is linked with mobility. One problem with this approach is that it is susceptible to misapplication, as situations and the people in them change. Additionally, the approach may be insensitive to the relationships between work and learning in higher education. Another problem is that short-term achievements that appear to allow forms of learning associated with higher education to be repeated may not end up contributing to long-term goals with regard to public good. For example, a training package for medical students geared to expensive treatments, with little attention to social determinants of health, may not adequately contribute to a knowledge base that secures health for all.

A contrasting set of arguments portray the relationship between higher education and the public good as an *intrinsic* one, where the intellectual, physical and cultural experiences enabled through higher education express and enact the public good. This is associated, for example, with democratisation, critical thinking, active citizenship and reductions in prejudice – that is, these experiences may prefigure forms of universalisation and connection across existing boundaries of inequalities (Singh 2001; Calhoun 2006; Leibowitz 2013, 2011; Locatelli 2017). It is important here to consider the historical conjuncture that shapes experiences of higher education at a particular time, what it may mean and what is entailed in prefiguring universal meanings of the public good in different contexts of historically formed inequalities. In these analyses, the relationship between higher education and the public good means that the public good (often delineated in terms of critiques of forms of power and a site for open access to information) is an intrinsic part of the experience of higher education and the relationships that are nurtured there.

Intrinsic arguments tend to stress the psychosocial, cultural, relational insights and soft power, or forms of insight that are developed in particular kinds of higher education or put under stress through particular relationships of colonialism, racism, misogyny, globalisation and neoliberalism. These arguments assert that it is experiences of the physical, intellectual/cultural or affective *spaces* of higher education that express and enact public good through 'envisioning' and providing a language for or symbolic depiction of freedom, solidarities and alternative descriptions (Gamedze and Gamedze 2016; Ndebele 2017). Thus, learning in higher education is portrayed as interactive, and what is placed at the forefront of the learning, teaching and research aspects of higher education are critical perspectives with regard to what needs to be explored.

Intrinsic analyses tend to look at what is happening at a particular historical conjuncture regarding the experience of higher education and its relationship with other elements of the public sphere, which is not always associated with the state. They draw out the implications for some broader discussion of public good, with temporal results often only loosely sketched. These analyses also tend to emphasise how participants *interpret* public good, but there has been less theorisation of what *outcomes* are entailed. These may be associated, for example, with participation in the public sphere or supporting forms of social citizenship.

An issue that confronts this loose kind of formulation is how higher education, which will always be a setting in some form for elites, is positioned in these practices. The intrinsic form of analysis is susceptible to misapplication in that in the forms of critique may not be appropriate at particular times and may not in and of themselves help with realising long-term values. For example, a focus on decolonising the curriculum for students at an elite higher education institution might enhance their experience of critical thinking but may not directly contribute to a universalisation of education.

A further consideration in framing intrinsic ideas about higher education and the public good is that higher education is not monolithic; like its socioeconomic context, it is highly stratified and pluralised. There are multiple higher educations, which often aim at educating different social groups and produce many varieties of learning from experience, that underpin this vision of the public good. Many less elite universities have a strong applied focus and provide vocational training. Hence, their contribution to the public good is more self-evident. Elite universities in most national locations, however, tend to educate privileged communities and produce politicians, entrepreneurs or senior managers in the economy, senior civil servants or cultural commentators. Their engagement with the public good in higher education spaces is mediated through many of the relationships of inequality that characterise the national and global political economy.

Thus, there are different kinds of conditions of possibility in play in relation to the different interpretations of the relationship of higher education and the public good. For instrumental arguments, conditions of possibility shape the form of the institution, approaches to learning, teaching and research, relationships of allocation and what is known about outcomes, and how all this is monitored. For intrinsic arguments, conditions of possibility are concerned with the interplay between the institution, socio-cultural and politico-economic processes and interactions around research, teaching and learning. There is much more limited concern for monitoring and evaluating the relationships that might follow.

In considering the connections and disjunctures between these two formulations and the way studies on higher education in contemporary Africa have engaged with this debate, we argue for discussing the importance of processes that link or have the potential to connect instrumental and intrinsic visions of higher education and the public good. We discuss these below, drawing on a set of framing ideas that are associated with conditions of possibility and forms of social contract, which express a less abstract form of this discussion.

We suggest that the intrinsic and instrumental arguments in the existing scholarship rest on a notion of an ideal higher education institution that possibly exists in elite forms of institution, or for elite groups of academics or students, but is very far from many higher education institutions that exist in Africa. The analysis we make seeks to foreground the significance of context and the conditions of possibility in helping to connect a future-oriented and instrumental vision with an interactive, here-and-now, intrinsic approach.

Public Good and Higher Education: Real or Ideal Relationships?

A good is something of benefit to people. A good is public or common when its benefit extends beyond the confines of an individual or small family group, concerns a wider collective and suggests some sense of universal accessibility. The nature of this collective may be defined in 'hard-edged' institutional terms, such as citizenship of a state, or in softer 'fuzzier' ways delimited by a set of social, cultural or ethical ties of affiliation and aspirations for universality. These ties may be narrow, linked to a relatively small group or particular class of goods. Or, as in notions of human development, they may encompass everyone alive in the world and generations not yet born. The wider notion stresses the common sense meaning of public good as being in some ways universal and good for everyone at all times. It is evident that the notion of the public good is not singular and questions of locus bring different assumptions into play. There are thus some very different ways of understanding what comprises a public good and some very different ideas about how to justly or 'rightly' secure this. These different ethical views are associated with very diverse forms of higher education. Thus, mapping this field is complex.

The notion of public good associated with higher education is contested in questions around how the good or goods manifest themselves, what constitutes their private, public, common or ethical nature, and whether and how they can be produced by universities or other kinds of higher education institution. There are further normative questions, which concern the forms of public goods that should be prioritised and how they should be funded and distributed. Other questions concern what processes of redress of past, current or future inequalities, within and beyond higher education institutions, are appropriate when making assessments about the public good roles of higher education.

Oketch (2016) points out that questions of *how much* higher education is required for what kinds of public good are often not interrogated. In addition, a key question concerns what distributional practices should be considered around public good and higher education—that is, whether the major focus should be on distributing at individual, community, national or international levels, and whether non-market or market goods are to be allocated (Marginson 2016: 95). Many authors have sharply divided views on the question of distribution (eg Olssen and Peters, 2005; McCowan, 2016b). It is linked to a further question, which is concerned with the extent to which higher education can create forms of public good on its own, and whether its capacity to do this is a reason for special treatment for the sector.

An important distinction is made by Locatelli (2017) between education *as* a public good and education *for* the public good. We draw on this in highlighting discussions of intrinsic and instrumental connections between higher education and the public good. In the first sense, the focus is on the need to protect accessibility of all to all levels of education and thus is close to the notion of a (human) right. In the second sense, the attention is on how education can promote public goods that are associated, for example, with improved health and wellbeing, citizenship or decent livelihoods, and it is here that some of the issues particularly pertinent to higher education come into play.

A similar distinction is made by Brennan and Naidoo (2008) in relation to the 'import' and 'export' functions of higher education regarding social justice. Using an industrial frame, we can also view the public good in higher education in relation to inputs (equity of access), process (experiences within the institution) and outputs (impact on the broader society). One question we are concerned with in response to Oketch's question of *how much*, is whether the instrumental connections between higher education and the public good require only sufficient or minimal levels of experience of higher education for this to count as a public good, or whether some more expansive intrinsic experience of public good in higher education is also needed.

A primary consideration here is what might be distinctive about higher education, in relation to education generally, in the promotion of the public good. Universities are commonly considered to have three primary functions: teaching, research and service or community engagement (Oketch, McCowan and Schendel 2014). They share with schools and other forms of education the provision of a space for learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. But what is particular to universities is the production of new knowledge through research and scholarship, although not all universities do this to the same degree and many higher education institutions pass on forms of skill or professional knowledge that draw unevenly on research. Research, however, can often be specialised, and its instrumental public good manifestations may be very slow to take shape. Corporate commissions for research, intellectual property rights and patents may temporarily restrict access to knowledge, but with time it is usually dispersed into the public domain. By contrast, teaching is the most obviously public role with instrumental effects. The benefits of teaching are to some extent dependent on the distribution of access (and are often restricted to the privileged, which, in turn, can cement their privilege in society). But it is relatively hard for knowledge and attitudes distributed through teaching to be corralled, and the growth of digital platforms and ICT has further expanded their reach (Lupton, Mewburn and Thomson 2017). Thus, the instrumental and intrinsic versions of public good have many connections, although the shape of the argument made for each is somewhat different.

In the discussion that follows, we look at instrumental arguments that consider higher education to have a role in bringing public good into being, which can be at a local, national or global level. These are temporal or causal arguments. In assessing the research literature, establishing relationships of causality or association between higher education and public good is a challenge. This form of analysis also raises the question of how much higher education, and in what form, generates some of the instrumental links with the public good.

In the next part of the discussion, we look at arguments that assert that relationships within higher education express intrinsic relationships of public good. These often focus on documenting the space of higher education and the relationships that are formed there. While these are richly documented in some studies from Africa, the long-term outcomes of particular forms of intrinsic public good, which persist over time as an outcome of higher education rather than of other cultural interactions, are harder to document. But the concern to pin down outcomes and causation for both instrumental and intrinsic versions of the arguments may obscure the interrelationship between them and the ways in which particular contexts may require us to reconfigure the notion of public good.

Instrumental Arguments: Higher Education Brings About Public Good

Arguments that connect higher education instrumentally with the public good state that higher education is linked, as a direct or associated cause, to various formations of the public good. These may entail – singly or in some combination – economic growth, innovation, improved distribution of income and wealth, more tolerant attitudes, better informed citizenry, better protection and use of environmental resources, a healthier population, and the creation of new knowledge that can address social problems and challenges and expand human development or social solidarity.

These arguments either amalgamate the formations of goods as 'the public good', or discuss specific forms of good separately as particular instances of the public good. But in whichever form, this type of argument positions higher education as an engine of these public good processes. These arguments are largely framed by a political-economy orientation that draws out some of the public good benefits of higher education as a phase of deepening research and knowledge production. Many writers who use this approach pay less attention to the expression of the public good *within* higher education institutions.

The instrumental version of the idea of public good is often linked to claims about the benefits of a knowledge economy as well as those of research and innovation. These benefits, it is argued, contribute to the public good in ways that are economic and non-economic. The latter are defined as enhanced democratic participation or deepened insights into equalities, although they are contested (Nixon 2010). These economic and non-economic benefits of the public good (singular) flow from higher education, it is sometimes argued, but without assessing how many people participate and in what proportions, what is or is not taught to which people, and the pedagogic relationships that pertain. The arguments look at the correlation between high levels of participation in higher education in some countries (Korea, Singapore and China are often quoted) and high levels of economic growth, innovation and civic solidarity (Hanushek and Woessmann 2015; Marginson 2016). However, the causal links can be difficult to establish definitively, and some argue that the causality runs in the other direction.

The argument sometimes points to the paradox of high levels of growth in GDP in Africa in the last decade, and high levels of poverty, unequal distribution and limited development of productivity or research, some of which may be linked to poor methods of data collection and inadequate methods of calculation (Fosu 2015; Jerven and Johnston 2015; Hope 1997). This growth paradox is associated with apparently inadequate levels of higher education to 'trigger' a deepening of the public good, although there has clearly been an expansion of participation in higher education in Africa.

Working with Samuelson's (1954) description[1] of public goods as those products or services that are non-rivalrous and non-excludable (cannot be used only by some groups), the clearest example of non-rivalrous and non-excludable public goods is knowledge that is generated through research and scholarship. For example, it is not possible to exclude certain people from the benefit of, say, literature or minimising cross-infections, even though these insights may have begun in specialist institutions. The knowledge a teacher has about how to motivate a learner cannot be confined just to that pedagogic interaction. And the use of that knowledge by other teachers or learners, lovers of literature, or practitioners of high levels of hygiene in hospitals does not detract from its insights, in fact it amplifies them. These kinds of public goods cannot (easily) be monetised or restricted.

However, although public goods are non-rivalrous and non-excludable, we know that the history of education in just about every African country has made it very difficult for groups who are not privileged in some way to access that 'common' knowledge that is certificated. There is nothing particularly context rich about the concept of public goods, but who can and cannot use them in practice will vary across socioeconomic groups and is linked to forms of political power and participation. Thus, conditions in different African countries will determine who can and cannot make use of these public goods, notwithstanding their non-rivalrous and non-excludable form. Public goods are available to all, sometimes associated with the idea of knowledge, communication and educational exchange being open and accessible to everyone, not privatised or put behind pay walls or requiring expensive technologies.

Elements of the public good are realised in connections between communities and collectives that work at a meso or micro level. For example, an individual who studies a degree in medicine will reap the rewards of a high salary and a meaningful livelihood from that experience and the resulting qualification. Nevertheless, public benefits will also be generated by that outcome—in this case, the positive impact of the doctor's work on others' health.

At the other end of the scale, the instrumental links of higher education are associated with global public goods such as clean air, knowledge of public health, support for human rights and conflict resolution. These cross over national boundaries and are not dependent on a single political authority for distribution. But these global public goods require cross-border co-operation that is economic, political and supportive of research and knowledge exchange. This concept of global public goods has attracted significant attention in recent years. For example, Stiglitz (1999) has provided an influential analysis of knowledge as a global public good. The idea has been applied to basic education by Menashy (2009), which has implications for thinking about higher education. Global public goods have been endorsed within mainstream development thought and by agencies such as the World Bank (2007) and the Global Partnership for Education (Unterhalter, Howell and Parkes 2019).

More recent literature on this notion focuses on and raises the possibility of examining the contribution that public higher education systems would make to the realisation of global public institutions (UNESCO 2018; Marginson 2013, 2007). Some of it examines universities as locations of world politics and seeks to better understand and theorise universities as significant political actors (Kamola 2014). However, this literature largely draws on models of higher education institutions and global public goods within the global North. We might consider this nascent work in relation to African higher education institutions and see them as critical providers of global public goods. But we need to pose the question regarding what conditions such institutions would need to satisfy to contribute to global public goods, and then evaluate the institutions we have.

Many discussions on higher education systems in the context of internationalisation (Guri-Rosenblit 2015; Hammond 2016) focus on the emergence of what are seen as 'world-class universities', with specific indicators used to denote the degree of 'worldclassness' of these institutions (Altbach and Salmi 2011). They focus primarily on elite institutions. We need to unpack the link between higher education institutions, global public goods and national and global public institutions. In Africa, many of these relationships are coloured by past histories of colonialism and continued inequalities in the participation in research and knowledge production. Some of the characteristics associated with world-class universities (Altbach 2015) include their capacity to craft a farsighted approach towards learning and imagination among faculty and students, through developing, for example, outstanding faculty members who can contribute substantively to teaching and research that responds to national and global societal challenges. The role of higher education as a public good would, in this respect, be examined in its contribution to the realisation of various types of global public good services that are critical in helping especially poor countries benefit from global knowledge and skill assets. It would do this by making such assets widely available and by building the capacity of countries to benefit from them (Wanner and Fredriksen 2013). The debate about the decolonisation of the curriculum and recentring ideas about Africa in these discussions raises questions about who defines global challenges and solutions (Heleta 2016).

Even more extensive in scope than arguments about higher education instrumentally linking to global public goods are arguments about higher education and its link to human development, which is a form of public good. Boni and Walker (2013, 2016) develop an analysis of higher education and human development, arguing for enhancing the social change orientation of universities. Their discussion summarises some of the public good goals for universities and some of the forces that create inequalities. While they do not develop a particular normative account of public good with a view to human development, they do delineate some of its features, particularly a concern with the conversion of resources into capabilities, agency, human dignity, equality and public deliberations. Unlike some work that makes claims about the public good outcomes of higher education without looking at conditions within higher education institutions, Boni and Walker (2016) present detailed accounts of intrinsic experiences of public good in higher education. We now turn to look at this form of the argument. A key question concerns what we know about processes of causation between higher education and notions of the public good, and what insights we have on the sustainability of these relationships.

Intrinsic Argument: Higher Education as a Space to Experience Public Good or Human Development

The notion of a public good as something experienced in the mind or the body, both within and beyond higher education institutions, has a number of different facets.

A form of the link between higher education and public good is experientially connected to the idea of the public sphere (Habermas 1989, 1996; Taylor 1991). The public sphere is a fluid space of media, local public meetings and lectures, in which public reasoning and critical commentary on society is aired. This is, ideally, a space of critique in and through higher education institutions that enables the formation of attitudes, participation, citizenship and critical belonging. It also a forum for ideas about building and sustaining the institutions that support greater equalities, social justice and democratisation. Both ideas of the intrinsic form of the public good and the public sphere have a bearing on what is taught in higher education, how it is taught, some of the spatial relationships in higher education and experiential features of working and studying in particular kinds of institutional cultures. Thus, intrinsic ideas about higher education and the public good include discussions of widening participation and enhancing access, although these discussions are also often framed in terms of the instrumental arguments.

Marginson (2011) connects this notion of the university (but not necessarily the technical or vocational tertiary level institutions) with Habermas's depiction of the English coffeehouses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which were settings close enough to some centres of power but were also sites of critique of power. Habermas's idea of a public sphere draws on Kant's (1798) views on critical reason and the need for universities to maintain autonomy from the state in order to critically scrutinise politics, economics and society.

For Rawls (1999), and political liberals, the space of the overlapping consensus is a public space in which we all need to co-operate for the common good, regardless of what private and very different ideas of the good one might hold. He derives this notion from the history of dealing with the legacy of ferocious religious wars in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But we need to consider the extent to which this form of overlapping consensus as a means to deal with histories of violence, racism and dispossession is appropriate in the African context, or whether other notions of a public sphere of recognition, forgiveness and acknowledgement of difference might be more appropriate. Further, we need to consider what this means for institutions that are primarily constituted by elites, or at least relative elites.

The first wave of universities established in Africa were elite institutions designed for those who would be in government (Mamdani 1996; Cloete and Maassen 2015; Teferra 2017). They remained far removed from the society in which they were located and were socially distant from the people these universities aimed to serve. They were found in the capital cities of African countries (Ajayi, Goma and Johnson 1996; Teferra 2017) and were sometimes sites of critiques of political centres of power, but those studying and working in those universities were often socially closer to those in power than those who experienced intersecting inequalities (Mamdani 2008).

There is a dimension of the common good that is distinctive and has some different features from this notion of public sphere. For some writers, the common good is a shared space of collective construction – thereby having a procedural, in addition to a substantive, meaning. This view emphasises the importance of some of the experiences of higher education as offering access to this form of collectivity. As stated by Deneulin and Townsend (2007: 12),

> '[T]he common good is not the outcome of a collective action which makes everybody better off than if they acted individually, but is the good of that shared enterprise itself. It is the good of the community which comes into being in and through that enterprise.'

UNESCO (2015) and Locatelli (2017) employ the term 'common good' to indicate the shared space for the construction of education in practice by communities, and thereby as a critique of the individualist conception of public goods in economics. (This usage is distinct from the term 'common good' in economics, which refers to a good that is non-excludable but may be rivalrous). It is this term, in fact, that appears in the title of Marginson's (2016) latest work on the topic of higher education, which uses it in the sense of 'formation of common relationships and joint (collective) benefits in solidaristic social relations within a country' (2016, 16). Marginson's articulation of ideas about higher education draws mainly on examples from Europe and the US.

A resonance may be seen between this notion and scholarship on collective forms of belonging, epistemologies, culture and values that are sometimes described as a feature of African ways of knowing (Waghid 2014). The scholarship includes epistemic/ethical relationships (Hoffman and Metz 2017), or postcolonial epistemologies (Mamdani 2017; Nyamnjoh 2012; Mbembe 2016) that identify common experiences of knowledge hierarchies, dispossession, racism, violence and connected inequalities.

We need to emphasise that the argument about the intrinsic value of public goods, common goods or the public sphere also has an instrumental dynamic, in that universities can provide a space for discussion, debate and deliberation. In this sense, institutions can represent a public sphere and have an instrumental role in promoting critical scrutiny of government and policy and allowing for a creative rethinking of society. However, despite all these potentialities, whether universities actually promote public good/s in these ways depends on their commitments and practices, as well as the composition of their staff and student body.

Marginson (2007) argues that the public benefits emanating from universities do not necessarily correspond to their ownership or management, and that both public and private institutions produce a 'variable mix' of public and private goods. Nevertheless, private institutions – unless blessed by a generous endowment or significant public funding – rarely have the financial autonomy to ensure open and equitable access and to conduct research and sustained community engagement in the public interest. In addition to marketisation, Marginson (2007) highlights 'status competition' and the rankings fever as a major impediment to the promotion of the public good. McCowan (2016a) has noted how positional inequalities between institutions in Africa may also have a bearing on realising rights and equalities.

There are a number of contemporary accounts (Singh 2001; Calhoun 2006; Tilak 2008; Dill 2011; Nixon 2010; Naidoo and Williams 2015; Williams 2016) in addition to the ones listed above that address conceptions of public good in and through higher education. To a large extent, these are works of advocacy, written in response to the concerted undermining of the public dimension of universities in the context of the marketisation of public higher education systems, the growth in the number and size of private (and particularly for-profit) institutions, and the intensifying public perception that the university is (and should be) a vehicle for furthering private interests. Nevertheless, these accounts expand our normative and analytical understandings of the relationship between universities and the public good. Their central question is how the institutional form of a higher education institution shapes its capacity to engage in critique and engagements from the perspective of the public sphere.

While a number of authors consider how universities are constituted in a way that they can contribute to the production of public goods (Brennan, King and Lebeau 2004), much of this discussion is anchored in institutional theory and largely focuses on processes of change. These processes enable higher education institutions to accommodate change in the external environment in ways that ensure their continued relevance within the civic community (Clayton, Bringle and Hatcher 2012), but this work does not ask questions about the issues of inequalities, poverty, and politics that are a feature of many African institutions.

The other dimension of this strand of intrinsic formation of public good in higher education concerns community engagement. It discusses how academic departments should create spaces within their structures and through the curriculum to cultivate social and moral values in students and surrounding communities and lay the foundation for social networks that can promote public goods (Clayton, Bringle and Hatcher 2012). Some studies have focused on the behaviour of higher education institutions and how they adjust to be in synergy with and at the same time energise changes in the wider institutions of society that are central to the public goods mission.

In the United States, Fitzgerald et al. (2012) argue that community engagement as a crucial aspect of engaging the public good impact from higher education institutions is undermined by political and economic circumstances. Funding limitations, for example, force institutions to consider disengaging from their communities as they find ways to cut costs, and privilege certain disciplines perceived to have higher returns for both individuals and the institutions. Pasque (2006) traces the genesis of the disengagement of HE institutions from active community engagement to the emergence of the post-war military-industrial complex and the negotiation of new relations with America's research universities. The emergence of specialised research institutes outside the universities to support the military complex gradually shifted the criteria for faculty evaluation from broad social needs to narrow disciplinary expertise. The concept of 'optimal learning' is used in the United States to refer to the capacity of universities to organise learning in ways that help strengthen democratic and civic institutions beyond the classroom, impacting on societal organisations, businesses, corporations and value-based organisations. However, this literature rarely looks at whether these community engagement networks are among elites who attend higher education, and whether it is social solidarity with the poor that is advanced.

A further term that has come to prominence in relation to the public good form of higher education is 'the commons', which has been extended from its original meaning as shared agricultural land to include the cultural and political realm, and particularly knowledge in the digital age (Hess and Ostrom 2006). 'The commons' is an open, non-hierarchical, co-operative space where people come to use and share a commonly owned resource. It is therefore inimical to the market and, possibly, to the state. In education, the commons has manifested itself through new opportunities for autonomous learning offered by the Internet, as well as through the emergence of open access courseware. Self-directed learning and free courseware call into question the existing role of higher education institutions as a particular situated space for the public good, and raise questions about the commons as a site for learning that dissolves some of the hierarchies of knowledge, pedagogies and inequalities between institutions.

Connecting Instrumental and Intrinsic Ideas of Higher Education and the Public Good: Problematising Publics

While we can distinguish quite clearly between versions of the instrumental and intrinsic notions of the public good and higher education, it is also important to see how they overlap in particular contexts. In addition, a number of studies of effects of widening participation, particularly in South Africa, have highlighted that the notions of the public and the private good of higher education need to be problematised. Higher education may be both instrumental and intrinsic to the public good, servicing what might be understood as private needs but could also be understood as redressing poverty and want.

We need some way to distinguish a public good from a private good. We also need some way of refining the analysis of the public so that it identifies the state as a key provider of universal goods but acknowledges that all states may not act in this way. The histories of all four states in our study illuminate this. Thus, we need a notion of how the public good connects with the public sphere, but we also need to acknowledge that there are different publics. The idea of the public good takes in aspects of private want, need, fear and shame, which the idea of the public sphere might not be refined enough to address at all levels. Universities are places where engagements with public culture take place, but forms of cultural nurturing may be confined to small groups, depending on particular contexts. The intrinsic argument may have implications not just at the rational or critical level, but also at the level of care. We thus need to think about universities as places that treat their staff and students well. This notion of care and connection in the idea of the public good is not just limited to a particular campus.

Unterhalter (2017, 2018), in looking at forms of public private partnership (PPP) in education, argues that there are considerable overlaps in instrumental and intrinsic notions of higher education and the public good, and stresses the importance of paying careful attention to the contexts in which ideas are formulated and the relationships between opportunities and outcomes are developed.

We need to consider a range of ideas about conditions of possibility to expand some of these notions, and draw out some of the implications for the social contract they entail. The phrase 'conditions of possibility' is associated with Kant's metaphysics but has been widely used to indicate forms of socio-political context that acknowledge the situated agency of individuals and institutions (Camic and Gross 1998; Worthington and Hodgson 2005). A related set of ideas that are associated with the capability approach which map out conversion factors (social, environmental, economic, political) that constrain or enable individuals and groups to turn opportunities (or capabilities) into outcomes (or functionings). The divergent discussions of the instrumental and intrinsic relationship between higher education and the public good tend to stress different kinds of conditions of possibility or conversion factors. Thus, instrumental arguments tend to look at conditions of possibility that are associated with funding, governance and fidelity to national development plans, while intrinsic arguments tend to look at conditions of possibility associated with tolerance, reflective exploration and experience. In the language of the capability approach, intrinsic arguments might facilitate capabilities whereas instrumental arguments might support functionings.

Conclusion

This article has argued that ideas about higher education and the public good can be divided into instrumental and intrinsic approaches, and that there is some cross-over between them. While some writers formulate a notion of a single public good, or alternatively many goods from which individuals benefit, there are many who see this as a heterodox process, in that the public good may be tied to the public bad. However, there are few longitudinal studies that consider causation in Africa. Secondly, we have looked at how the public good in higher education is substantive for those who experience it and how this can be expanded to a wider collectivity or develop some sense of solidarity with those who do not share the experience of higher education.

We have argued that these contestations need to be read contextually. Thus, we cannot think of higher education and the public good without thinking about particular formations of higher education, in particular socioeconomic and political settings, and how this problematises and animates the idea of the public good.

Note

1. In Samuelson's 1954 paper titled 'The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure', he proposed a theory the basic assumption of which was a clear distinction between the following two kinds of goods:
   (i) A private consumption good whose total can be parcelled out among two or more persons, with one person having less if another gets more (Samuelson 1955, 350). Hence, if X^1 is total good, and X^{11} and X^{21} are the respective private consumptions of Person 1 and Person 2, Samuelson said that the total equals the sum of the separate consumptions, or $X^1 = X^{11} + X^{21}$ (Samuelson 1954). This is a condition of summation.
   (ii) A public consumption good is one that is provided for each person to enjoy or not, according to his or her tastes. Hence, the public good can be varied in total quantity of X^2 for its magnitude. It differs from a private consumption good in that each person's consumption of it, X^{12} and X^{22} respectively, is related to the total X^2 by a condition of equality rather than of summation. This is a condition of equality. Thus, by definition, $X^{12} = X^2$, and $\mathrm{X}^{22} = X^2$" (Samuelson 1954). Samuelson acknowledged that, realistically, much—though not all—government activity can be fruitfully analysed as some kind of a blend of these two extreme polar cases.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 41-66

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2725)

Mapping the Literature on Higher Education and the Public Good in Africa

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Abstract

This article presents the main outcomes of a rigorous review of literature undertaken for the project 'Higher Education, Inequality and the Public Good: A Study in Four African Countries', which is discussed in this special edition. We set out to review some of the literature on higher education in the four countries that were the focus of the project – Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa – and to map its conceptual and contextual focal points. The article presents and discusses the trends that emerged from this mapping exercise and, in conclusion, reflects on what some of these trends may mean for the relationship between higher education and the public good in Africa.

Keywords: higher education, Africa, context, inequality, public good

Résumé

Cet article présente les principaux résultats d'une revue rigoureuse de la littérature entreprise pour le projet « Enseignement supérieur, inégalités et bien public : une étude dans quatre pays africains », qui est discutée dans cette édition spéciale. Nous avons entrepris d'examiner une partie de la littérature sur l'enseignement supérieur dans les quatre pays qui étaient au centre du projet – le Ghana, le Kenya, le Nigéria et l'Afrique du Sud – et de cartographier ses axes conceptuels et contextuels. L'article présente et discute les tendances qui ont émergé de cet exercice de cartographie et, en conclusion, réfléchit sur ce que certaines de ces tendances peuvent signifier pour considérer la relation entre l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public en Afrique.

Mots-clés : enseignement supérieur, Afrique, contexte, inégalité, bien public

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Introduction

A central concern of the research project that is the topic of this special issue was to understand how higher education and its relationship to the public good may be conceptualised in the African context, given Africa's particular complexities and patterns of inequality that are strongly shaped by the colonial legacy and its postcolonial relationships (Lebeau and Milla 2008; Mamdani 2016, 2017; Habib 2019). We therefore asked the question: Who is defining the public good and how? (Unterhalter et al. 2019). We were cognisant of the complexities and inequalities in setting the parameters around what scholarship contributes to these debates, and that the voices of African scholars are often marginalised as a result of the relatively weak research capacity of the region's universities (Cloete et al. 2015) and the unequal geographies of knowledge that frame the global knowledge economy (Badat 2010). With this in mind we set as one of our research objectives the undertaking of a rigorous review of literature relevant to the contextual and conceptual concerns of the study.

This article presents the main outcomes of a key line of enquiry within this review. This was to map the conceptual and contextual foci of some of the literature on higher education in Africa. It discusses the trends that were evident from this line of enquiry and considers some of the issues that emerged that we regarded as important to the concerns of the project.

Methods of Conducting the Review

The literature review drew on a number of the principles of systematic reviewing, in an effort to make the engagement as rigorous as possible. This was largely enabled through the EPPI software,[1] which assisted us to systematically screen and code the literature and follow clear steps of analysis in relation to our research objectives.

From the start, two overarching intentions informed our approach to the review. The first was to develop, through the eyes of scholars and researchers from and writing about the African continent, a careful understanding of the contexts in which they were doing their research. We focused particularly on the critical issues that have shaped the development and functioning of the higher education systems being studied, both positively and negatively. The second intention was to take the widest possible view of how research and scholarship around higher education and the public good in Africa has been defined.

We recognised that, to meet these objectives, the literature review would need to move beyond an exploration of mainstream databases to mine other, less prominent sources that contribute to African scholarship. We were also cognisant of the fluidity of meanings behind terms that were important to the project, such as 'higher education' and 'public good'. This alerted us to the need to try to use terms, in our search of the literature, that would capture the different ways in which higher education might be described across the different contexts, but without losing the focus of the review.

Despite our efforts to expand the scope of information sources and the terms, there were still a number of important but inevitable limitations to the review process. Central to these was the fact that the review was still strongly dependent on accessing literature that was available online, mainly through university repositories, open access knowledge platforms and organisational websites. Thus, publications that were not in digital form were excluded.

We also restricted the review to literature published in English. Although English dominates the research spaces of the four countries we focused on in this project, we recognised that in considering only English literature we would be excluding the contributions of many African scholars, especially those publishing in French and Portuguese. We acknowledge that the literature review was limited by these constraints, which create equally important limitations to what is presented and discussed in this paper.

Searching the Literature

The initial search of the literature targeted selected research platforms and databases,[2] using various search strings and limiting the search criteria to works published in English between 1994 and 2018. This resulted in an initial database of 5,969 references. Through a careful screening of titles and abstracts, we then excluded 4,599 references. Our exclusion criteria included: no focus on higher education; no explicit discussion of the role of higher education in relation to society, especially around ideas of the public good or common good (even if these terms were not used); and no contextual relevance to the project. A source was seen as contextually relevant if it dealt with one or more of the project countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa) or other African countries, or discussed higher education in the context of countries in the global South, with conceptual relevance to the project.

This screening process resulted in 1,370 contributions that met the criteria for inclusion in the review. We coded this literature according to its main geographical or 'contextual' focus – that is, the main country or region being researched and/or discussed – using the following codes:

- Ghana
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- South Africa
- Broad Africa focus
- Global South focus (broadly)
- Global North and South (sources that covered both contexts)
- Global North with conceptual relevance.

To enable us to look more carefully at the countries and regional context of the project, we then collated the contributions that had been coded for Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria or South Africa, or as having a 'Broad Africa focus'. This refined list of 1,012 references created the body of what we called the 'African literature'. This paper discusses some of the patterns that were evident across this body of work.

To further analyse the African literature, we coded it into two main categories. One delineated those studies that were strongly conceptual in nature, where the focus was mainly on exploring, broadly or through a particular lens, the relationship between higher education and society. The second broad category denoted the literature that primarily focused on particular contextual issues – that is, issues that are important to the functioning of higher education in the specific countries or across the region.

At a later point in the research process, we coded these two groups once more. For the first, we drew on the conceptual frame of the project to categorise the literature according to how the relationship between higher education and the public good was discussed and understood. Our framework recognised that conceptualisations of the relationship between higher education and the public good have tended to have 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' dynamics (Unterhalter et al. 2019). The former emphasises higher education's role in leading to particular manifestations of the public good in the future, such as levels of skill and knowledge needed by the country. The latter concentrates on higher education as a 'space' where intellectual, physical and cultural experiences express and enact the public good (ibid). We used this conceptualisation to code this literature according to whether it largely addressed the 'instrumental' or 'intrinsic' role of higher education, or where there was evidence that both were being explored.

The second group of literature was further coded for the specific contextual issue that was being explored. In line with our conceptual framework for the research we understood that these contextual issues reflected the conditions of possibility that might enable or hinder higher education's enactment of the public good in the countries and the region (Unterhalter et al. 2019). We developed fourteen codes to capture these contextual issues. These were:

1. Colonial legacy
2. Globalisation and internationalisation
3. Equity issues to do with access, participation and inclusivity (this code included inequalities and access to higher education as well as equitable participation and discrimination within higher education, including gender and disability)
4. Curriculum and pedagogy
5. Research and research development
6. Funding
7. ICTs (including distance education and the use of ICTs in higher education)
8. Academics (conditions and struggles)
9. Student struggles
10. Academic freedom and autonomy
11. Governance, leadership and management
12. Private higher education
13. Quality assurance and accountability
14. General overview (broad spectrum with no one issue dominating the discussion).

The discussion that follows describes some of the trends that were evident from mapping the African literature in this way. It also reflects on some of the issues that emerged from this mapping and considers their importance to the concerns of the project.

Emerging Trends from Mapping the African Literature

The focus of the African literature

As already explained, the first step towards reviewing this literature was considering what it addressed – whether it was primarily conceptual in nature, theorising the relationship between higher education and society, or whether its main focus was on researching and discussing contextual issues that impacted on and shaped higher education. Figure 1 shows this broad cut of the African literature for each of the countries and for the literature with a wider African focus.

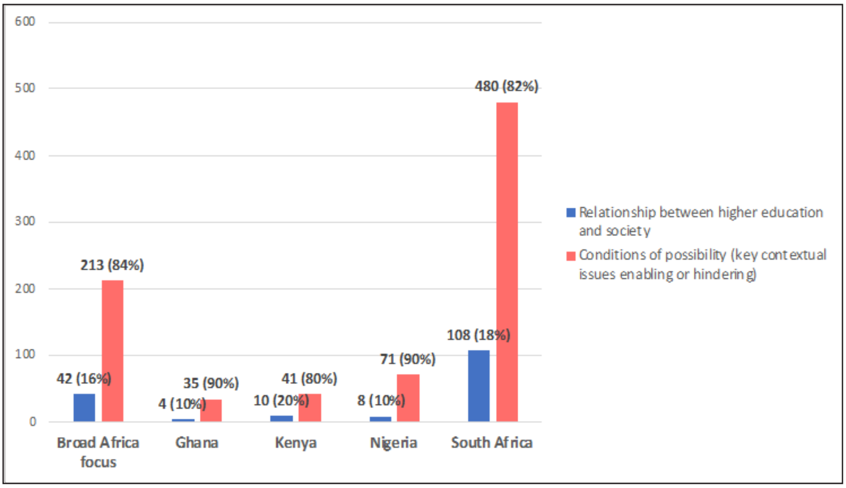

Figure 1: The focus of the African literature (n = 1012)

This process of coding showed that there is a strong orientation in the African literature towards grappling with the contextual issues that are seen as important to understanding the role of higher education on the continent (83 per cent). One example is the debates on the funding of higher education and the extent to which the costs of higher education might restrict the enactment of its public good role, especially in relation to broader issues of equity (Breier 2010; Ilie and Rose 2018). So, while this literature was regarded as relevant to the concerns of the review, because it explored the relationship between higher education and the public good, this relationship was primarily explored through research and scholarship on the contextual issues that enabled or hindered this relationship – the conditions of possibility (Unterhalter et al. 2019).

Only 17 per cent of the literature explored this relationship at a largely conceptual level. Looking at it from a country level, for Ghana and Nigeria, the proportion of articles with a strong conceptual focus was especially low (10 per cent), whereas for Kenya and South Africa, it was slightly higher (20 per cent and 18 per cent respectively). What is important to note is that the number of conceptual contributions from South Africa was nearly double the number for all the other countries and those with a broader Africa focus combined. Even if the key limitations of the review process discussed above are recognised, such as the inclusion of literature published in English only, this finding highlighted a trend that was evident across the review process – the relative strength of South Africa's higher education research infrastructure and its knowledge production capacity across the continent

(Cloete, Bailey and Pillay 2011) at both national and institutional levels. There is, however, an increasing awareness, particularly at government level, of the importance of universities in the global context of the knowledge economy.[2] Research production at the eight African universities is not strong enough to enable them to build on their traditional undergraduate teaching roles and make a sustained contribution to development via new knowledge production. A number of universities have manageable student-staff ratios and adequately qualified staff, but inadequate funds for staff to engage in research. In addition, the incentive regimes do not support knowledge production.[3] In none of the countries in the sample is there a coordinated effort between government, external stakeholders and the university to systematically strengthen the university's contribution to development. While at each of the universities there are exemplary development projects that connect strongly to external stakeholders and strengthen the academic core, the challenge is how to increase the number of these projects. The project on which this report is based forms part of a larger study on Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa, undertaken by the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA; Cloete, Maassen and Bailey 2015). This dominant trend across the African literature is discussed further on.

It is important to recognise that dividing the foci of the African literature into the two broad categories, 'conceptual' and 'contextual', involved a process of analysis and thus judgement of what we considered to be the primary focus of the contribution. There were some studies that had both a conceptual and contextual focus, but more often it was the engagement with the contextual issues that dominated the work and we therefore coded it as having this emphasis.

Coding the literature this way may have allowed for a distinction to emerge between these two broad foci that is less clear than it implies. When these findings were presented and discussed at events across the four countries to share the research findings, a number of stakeholders emphasised that researchers studying higher education in Africa focus on the contextual issues that influence it because for many of them these issues are so fundamental to their own lives, especially if they are teaching or working within universities or in government ministries tasked with the management and governance of the system (Unterhalter et al. 2019). It was argued that it is not possible to begin to conceptualise higher education and the public good in Africa outside of a careful engagement with the context and the complex set of historical and contemporary forces that influence the role and functioning of universities (ibid). The dominance of this contextual literature and these assertions emphasise the importance of context in understanding the relationship between higher education and the public good (Unterhalter et al. 2019) and, arguably, any considerations around higher education and its role in development (Howell et al. 2020; Unterhalter and Howell 2020). This argument is discussed further on.

The Relationship Between African Higher Education and Society

Although this broad categorisation of the African literature identified a relatively small number of strongly conceptual contributions (17 per cent, or 172), some important issues emerged from further analysis of this scholarship. As already explained, we drew on the conceptual framework of the project to do this, coding this literature according to how the relationship between higher education and the public good was articulated. Table 1 shows the distribution of this literature when it was coded in this way and cross-tabulated with its contextual focus.

Table 1: The African literature on the relationship of higher education and the public good (n = 172)

Contextual Focus	**Intrinsic**	**Instrumental**	**Both**
Broad Africa focus	7	18	17
South Africa	24	43	41
Ghana	0	3	1
Kenya	3	4	3
Nigeria	1	5	2
Total	**35 (20%)**	**73 (43%)**	**64 (37%)**

This process of coding showed that a greater number of articles discussed the relationship between higher education and society in largely ‘instrumental’ terms (73 or 43 per cent). An important theme in this literature was the ways in which higher education contributes (or not) to development. Although some of the studies discussed development in social and economic terms, the strongest orientation in this literature was on the relationship between higher education and economic development. This was explored in relation to higher education’s role in ‘economic growth’ (Gyimah-Brempong et al. 2006; Uetela 2017) and through its knowledge production function, especially in positioning Africa within the global knowledge economy (Cloete et al. 2011; Cloete et al. 2015).

Other contributions that covered the relationship between higher education and economic development drew attention to its 'productivity effects' (Bokana and Akinola 2017), the alignment or misalignment of higher education with the 'world of work' (Kruss 2004; Wolhuter and Wiseman 2013) and the importance of higher education's contribution to the technological capability of countries for their development (Kruss et al. 2015).

Although only 35 articles (20 per cent) primarily explored what we had conceptualised as the 'intrinsic' relationship between higher education and the public good, these contributions were valuable in emphasising a number of important points that were salient to the region about the perceived role of higher education and 'public good issues'. Especially notable here were arguments around universities as 'agents of social change' across the continent (Chege 2009). These included the role of universities in 'peace education' (Ameyaw and Adzahlie-Mensah 2012) or as spaces able to play a critical role in conflict mediation and resolution in contexts of sustained or intermittent political conflict (Soyinka-Airewele 2003; Johnson 2013, 2017). These latter arguments suggested that, as institutions that reflect the broader society, universities in volatile political contexts with deep societal divisions bring people together across these divisions and lines of conflict (Johnson 2013). As such they have the capacity to become models of 'peaceful communal co-existence' and 'equity and democratic values' (Ameyaw and Adzahlie-Mensah 2012: 200)

Discussing further how higher education may do this, some studies drew on research evidence to argue that higher education institutions facilitate particular levels of understanding and skill that are important to stable and democratic societies (Luescher-Mamashela et al. 2011; Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela 2012; Johnson 2013). These arguments tend to suggest that this role has both instrumental and intrinsic elements to it. Democratic values that inform future practices are strengthened through the knowledge and skills acquired by students and graduates in their courses, and through their participation in university processes, especially around student governance (Luescher-Mamashela and Kiiru 2011; Mattes and Luescher-Mamashela 2012).

It is also argued that what is taught and experienced in universities by students, other role players and members of the surrounding communities who interact with them, can counter 'hegemonic discourse' (Chege 2009) and create 'new paradigms' (Assié-Lumumba 2011). Similarly, universities offer opportunities for critique and mobilisation for political change

(Lebeau et al. 2008) and enable a deepened and more nuanced engagement with political problems, allowing for the development of new forms of 'consciousness' that draw from different disciplines, forms of knowledge and experiences (Johnson 2013). These arguments resonate strongly with other work that has been done on the role of tertiary education in development in low and lower-middle-income countries (Howell et al. 2020). A rigorous review of research from the last ten years on the role of tertiary education in development in low and lower-middle income countries showed a small but important body of evidence for how tertiary education (mainly higher education) 'plays (or has the potential to play) a very important role in strengthening and building the capacity of a vibrant and engaged civil society' (ibid 2020: 36).

These contributions in the literature and the research they draw from are important to deepening understandings of the 'intrinsic' public good role of higher education in Africa. However, some contributions emphasise that the capacity of universities in Africa to enact their public good role in these 'intrinsic' ways is challenged by contextual factors that make them vulnerable 'spaces' for the enactment of the public good (Soyinka-Airewele 2003; Howell et al. 2020). These scholars argue that Africa's colonial past and the extent to which its universities continue to reflect the 'colonial relations' of the past is central to this 'vulnerability' (Assié-Lumumba 2011). Their enactment of a public good role therefore requires systematic processes of decolonisation (Assie-Lumumba 2007, 2011; Ameyaw and Adzahlie-Mensah 2012; Mbembe 2016; Mamdani 2016; Maringe and Ojo 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017).

Other scholars argue that universities continue to be embedded within complex relationships with the state and the broader society, which requires them to manage contradictory functions (Castells 2001) and makes them vulnerable to broader societal influences, such as those of party politics (Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume 2014). Thus, enacting a public good role in the ways noted above requires universities to grapple with complex processes and conflicting influences (Howell et al. 2020). What is perhaps most important for some scholars is that despite their potential to be spaces for the enactment of an 'intrinsic' public good, universities in Africa still largely remain 'elite' spaces (Ogunsanya and Lebeau 2015) and persist as 'powerful mechanism(s) of social exclusion and injustice' (Badat 2016: 82).

The Conditions of Possibility

The 840 contributions in the African literature that focused primarily on the contextual issues that impact on and shape higher education were also analysed using the fourteen 'conditions of possibility' codes described earlier. Figure 2 shows the broad picture that emerged across the African literature when it was coded in this way. Although there were some differences across the four countries, the overall picture indicates that the greatest emphasis in this literature was around equity concerns in higher education. This included research and scholarship focusing on: access to and participation within higher education systems; ongoing discrimination within institutions, particularly in relation to gender; and associated concerns around building more inclusive higher education institutions. The impact of globalisation on higher education on the continent and the opportunities and challenges of greater internationalisation for institutions also emerged as a relatively important issue across the studies reviewed.

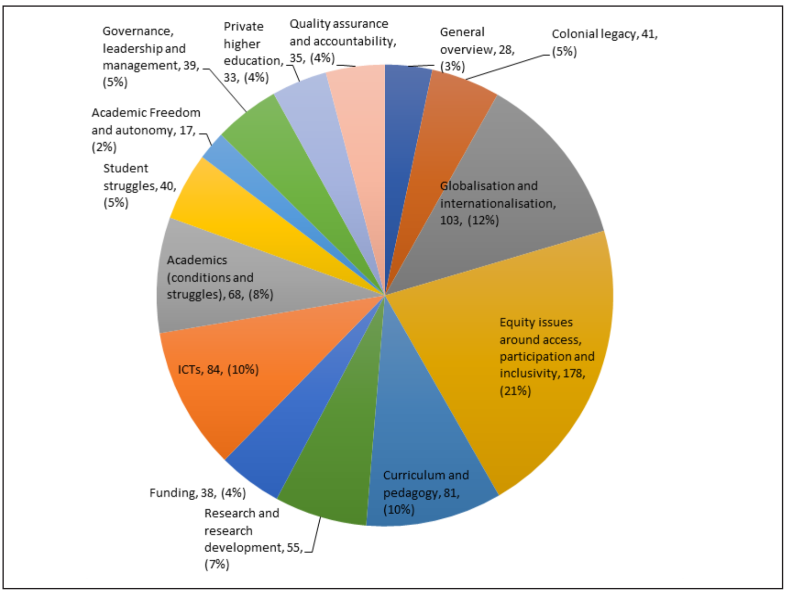

Figure 2: The conditions of possibility explored in the African literature (n=840)

While the importance of equity issues was evident in all four countries, the picture was slightly different when the literature that focused broadly on the continent (coded as having a 'broad Africa focus') was considered on its own. Figure 3 shows that issues around globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education are given the greatest attention in this literature (29 per cent). Additionally, this literature tends to focus more on the impact (and persistence, for some writers) of the colonial legacy on higher education across the continent than was evident in the literature on specific country contexts. This suggests that although a number of scholars address issues around globalisation and the implications of the colonial legacy within the context of their own country, they are often discussed as regional concerns.

Another matter that is addressed fairly often in this literature is Information Communication Technology (ICT) and its impact on our potential for higher education in the region. They discuss the use of ICTs in higher education mainly in relation to the curriculum, stressing both the opportunities and challenges it presents. However, this category also includes studies on the issue of distance education in Africa and, most particularly, its potential (or not) for increasing access to higher education across the region.

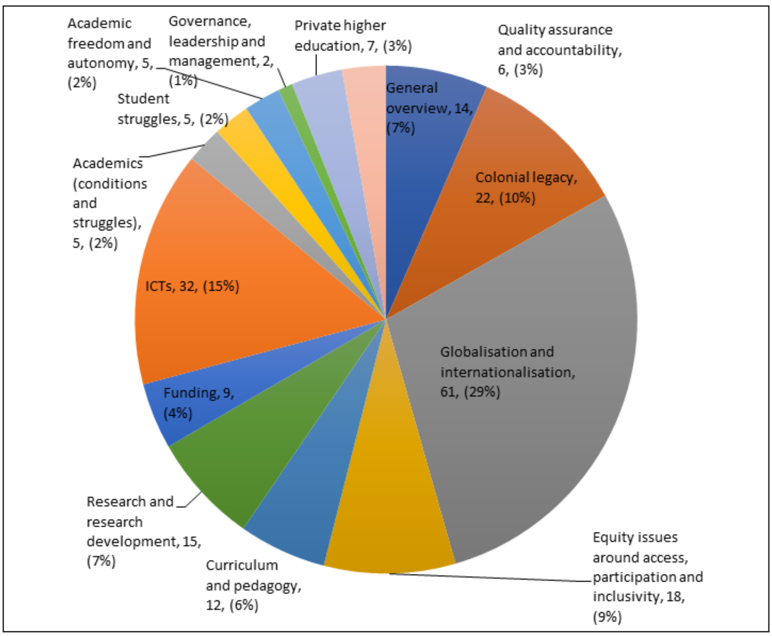

Figure 3: The conditions of possibility explored in the literature with a 'broad Africa focus' (n = 213)

The discussion that follows presents some of the noticeable trends in this literature across the four countries. Although, in some cases the number of contributions for a particular code is relatively small, some interesting trends and differences are evident across the four countries.[3]

Ghana

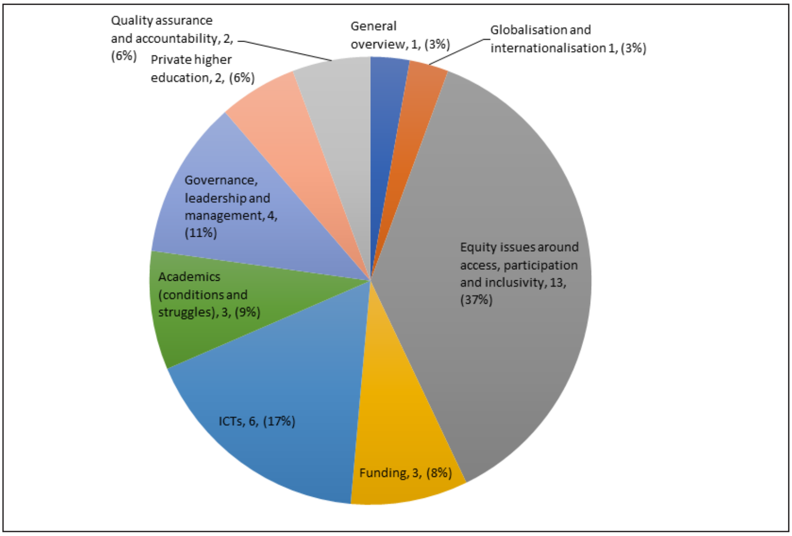

Figure 4: The conditions of possibility explored in the literature on Ghana (n = 35)

A total of thirty-five studies explored the conditions of possibility that presently shape higher education in Ghana. This literature was dominated by equity concerns in higher education, proportionally the highest (37 per cent) across all four countries. The key issues were around access to higher education and unease that, despite the significant expansion that has taken place in Ghana in higher education provision over the last twenty years, inequities remain regarding who can access this provision—a 'participation gap with respect to students' socio-economic status, gender, regions of origin, and the type and location of secondary schools attended' (Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah 2013: 1).

A number of the studies look more carefully into one or more of these fault lines, emphasising their intersections and the complex ways in which these affect access to higher education. Important examples explored gender, socio-economic status (Morley Leach and Lugg 2009; Morley and Lussier 2009), family size, and the quality of the schools children attend (Yusif, Yussof and Osman 2013). Gender also features in this literature through studies that deal with the persistence of gender discrimination within institutions, especially considering how it impacts participation and shapes the experiences of women students and staff (Adusah-Karikari 2008; Adu-Yeboah and Forde 2011; Badoo 2013; Adu-Yeboah 2017). Central to these contributions is the pervasive influence of patriarchy within higher education and the complex ways it plays out within institutions. They explore issues such as underrepresentation in leadership positions, the multiple responsibilities and dynamics of balancing home and work, interrupted careers, the lack of mentoring and support networks within higher education, and the persistence of practices within institutions that continue to effectively exclude women. Some of these studies also explore the complexities of institutional initiatives to address these challenges and what enables or hinders their success.

The Ghanaian literature also has a relatively strong focus on ICTs (17 per cent). It offers critical reflections on the use of ICTs in teaching and learning within university programmes, including student perceptions about online learning (Asunka 2009; Oteng-Ababio 2011; Buabeng-Andoh 2017). The literature considers more broadly the value and importance of distance education in Ghana, especially in relation to increasing access (Kumi-Yeboah, Young and Boadu 2013; Tagoe and Abakah 2014).

There is also some emphasis in the Ghanaian literature on the 'institutional realities' that universities face on a daily basis (Abugre 2017). These impact on improvement efforts and the complexities of strengthening governance mechanisms and processes for institutions to operate in service to society.

Kenya

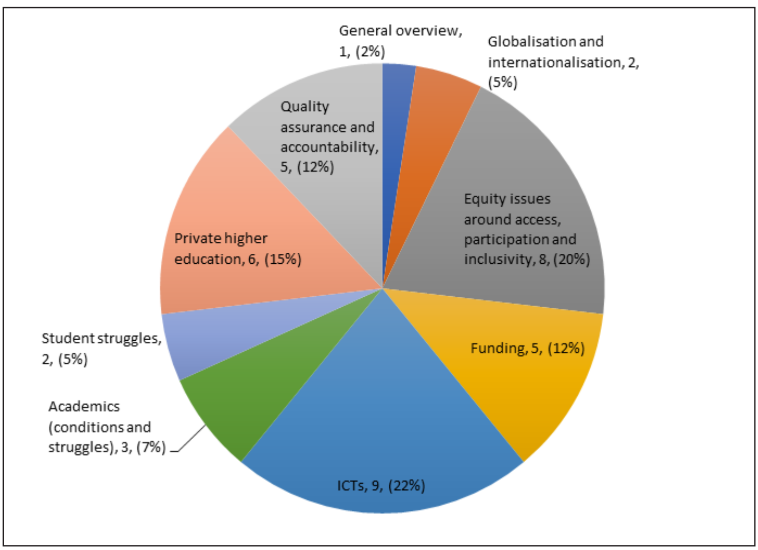

Figure 5: The conditions of possibility explored in the literature on Kenya (n = 41)

Forty-one studies focused on the conditions of possibility that enable or hinder higher education in Kenya. Like Ghana, the greatest number of these studies deal with equity issues (20 per cent) and ICTs in higher education (22 per cent). Also, gender features strongly in this literature, with studies looking at access to higher education for women students and the institutional experiences of women students and staff (Kamau 2004; Barasa 2013; Machira 2013). Other equity concerns that are raised include those contextual factors that are important in influencing academic success (Karimi 2012), and the complexities of 'ethnicity' or 'tribalism' in the development of the university system in Kenya (Munene 2012).

The potential and challenges of distance education for the country (and the continent), and the context of the 'digital divide', is the focus of a number of Kenyan studies. There is a particular emphasis in some of these contributions on the African Virtual University initiative and its impact (Amutabi and Oketch 2003; Munene 2007; Nafukho and Muyia 2013). This work includes initial concerns about the ability of online provision to increase access, and later reflections that suggest that, despite the pioneering role of online learning, a number of challenges undermined its potential to really address the key equity issues that still persist in higher education.

The development of private higher education in Kenya is another important focus in this literature, which engages critically with the implications of the growth of this sector for equity concerns; the quality of provision; the knowledge production role of universities; the different 'categories' of private institutions that exist; and the implications of their continued development going forward (Oketch 2004; Oanda, Chege and Wesonga 2009; Bonnell 2015; Irungu and Kimencu 2016).

Nigeria

A total of seventy-one studies looked at the contextual issues that shape higher education in Nigeria. Once again, equity featured relatively prominently. An important focus here is on who gains access to universities in the country and thus who benefits from higher education provision. Regional divisions are noted in Nigeria, what Isomonah and Egwaikhide (2013) call the 'North/South Dichotomy'. A number of studies explore how these divisions affect patterns of access to higher education and the quality of the education that is offered (Adeyemi 2001; Ingwe, Ikeji, Ugwu 2011; Isumonah and Egwaikhide 2013; Nsoedo 2014).

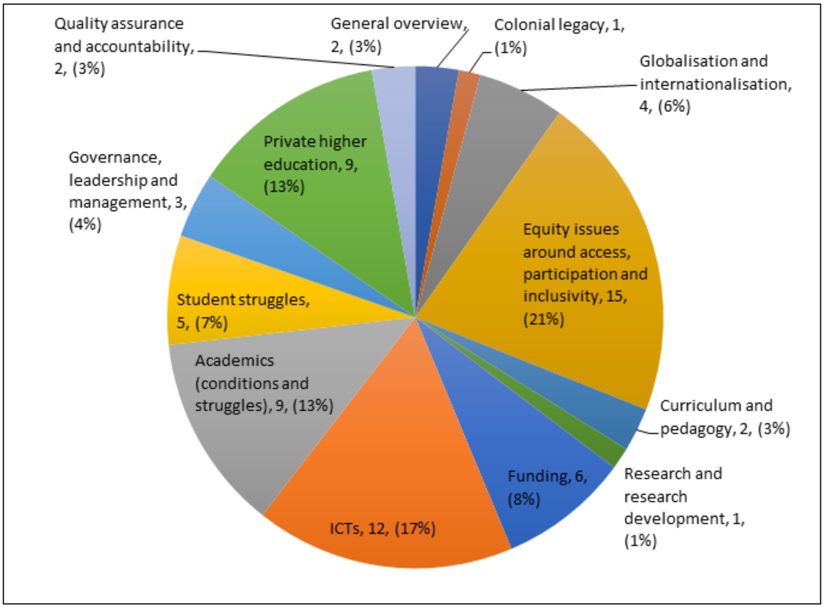

Figure 6: The conditions of possibility explored in the literature on Nigeria (n= 71)

The literature on equity concerns in Nigerian higher education also has a strong focus on gender. It considers the factors that impact the enrolment of women in higher education (Mukoro 2013; Oti 2013; Eraikhuemen and Oteze 2015), including the intersections between gender-related issues and other contextual concerns, such as the regional inequalities noted above (Adeyemi and Akpotu 2004). Other studies comment on the complex experiences of women students and staff within universities and the gendered nature of the university environment (Odejide, Akanji and Odekunle 2006; Imonikhe, Aluede and Idogho 2012; Oti 2013).

As in Kenya, the growth of private higher education in Nigeria is discussed by a number of scholars, who engage critically with its positive and negative effects (Umahi 2015; Abidogun 2015; Aremu 2015). Studies that address the struggles of students and academic staff also feature relatively prominently in Nigerian literature. At the time of the review, Nigeria had proportionally the largest number of studies on academic and student struggles.[4] Among these studies, Beckman and Jega (1998), Adeola and Bukola (2014) and Aghedo (2015) address student struggles and concerns in Nigeria and the factors that influence industrial action by academic staff in Nigeria (Ineme and Ineme 2016).

South Africa

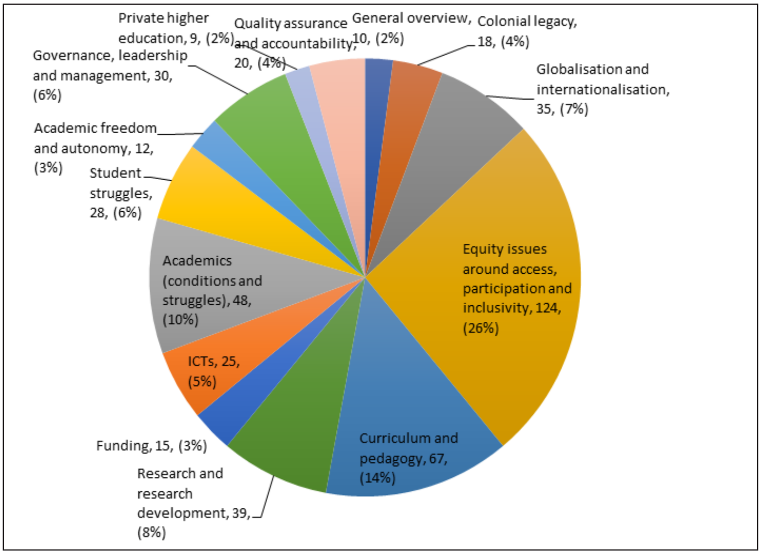

Figure 7: The conditions of possibility explored in the literature on South Africa (n = 480)

A total of 480 contributions in the review focused on the conditions of possibility in South Africa. As with the other countries, the literature is dominated by concerns around equity in higher education (26 per cent). Inequalities in access to the public higher education system, which is still strongly shaped by the inequalities of the country's apartheid past, comprise a key theme (Nkomo 2012; Cooper 2015; Mabokela and Mlambo 2017). However, compared to the other three countries there is a greater focus in this body of literature on issues of student success once students enter the system. A number of writers emphasise how existing patterns of inequality in the society influence participation and progression through the system (Boughey 2012a; Scott 2010, 2013; Calitz, Walker and Wilson-Strydom 2016), with a range of societal and institutional factors influencing student success (Boughey 2005; Bokana 2010; Boughey 2012b; Bokana and Tewari 2014; Cloete and Duncan 2016; Cosser 2018). Although research around gender discrimination and its persistence in higher education is also emphasised in the South African literature, unlike the other countries the issue of language and its relationship to persistent inequalities in higher education is emphasised in this context, with studies showing the complex ways in which language interacts with class, privilege and power within the university (Leibowitz 2015).

A much larger proportion of studies compared to the other countries are concerned with curriculum and pedagogical practice within universities in South Africa, which are argued to be fundamental to the public good role of universities (Behari-Leak and McKenna 2017). Particular initiatives to affect necessary change in teaching practice, recognising its critical importance to social justice concerns within South African higher education, have been published (Leibowitz and Bozalek 2016; Leibowitz and Naidoo 2017; Bozalek and Zembylas 2017). Over the last few years, this focus in the South African literature has increasingly sought to address the complexities of decolonising university curricula as a central social justice concern within the country's higher education system (Higgs 2016; Luckett 2016; Heleta 2016; Horsthemke 2017).

Like the Nigerian literature, the South African studies also have a relatively strong focus on student and academic struggles. Important here is the literature that has emerged since 2015 and the system-wide student protests that were encapsulated by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements (Booysen, 2016; Badat 2016)

Conclusion

This article has presented and discussed the picture that emerged when we mapped the conceptual and contextual foci of the African literature that were included in a rigorous literature review undertaken for the project. Although mapping this literature in this way has limitations that are essential to acknowledge, this picture still suggests some trends that are important to reflect on.

The first of these is that, in whichever way this African literature is categorised, it is dominated by literature on higher education in South Africa, mostly published by South African scholars. The historical forces that have contributed to this picture (Mamdani 1993; Sawyer 2004; Assié-Lumumba 2011) and the more contemporary ones that shape the global knowledge space (Badat 2010) are discussed in more depth in other contributions to this special edition. What is important here is that the South African literature strongly interrogates higher education's apartheid past and the processes of transformation since the advent of democracy (Badat 2009). While this context may offer important insights into understanding the relationship between higher education and the public good in Africa, the skewing of the regional picture through this dominance cannot be ignored (Unterhalter et al. 2019).

What is equally concerning is that across all the countries, including South Africa, there appears to be limited critical engagement with research and research development in universities. Only fifty-five (7 per cent) of the articles from this African literature were coded as focusing on research and research development. Of these, thirty-nine dealt with South Africa, one with Nigeria and fifteen had a broad Africa focus. This research gap may in itself reflect the challenges around research capacity across many African universities, which is a concern for higher education systems in many low- and lower-middle income countries (Howell et al. 2020). However, it still has important implications for the issues we explored in the project and discuss in this special edition. It has consequences for the research and knowledge that informs and frames global debates and dominant understandings and conceptualisations of the relationship of higher education and the public good. The most serious of these is that African experiences and voices are restricted in these debates, and the published scholarship that can be drawn on is skewed towards South Africa.

Mapping the African literature in the review also highlighted context as central to understanding the relationship between higher education and the public good. On the one hand the mapping brought to the fore the forms of inequality that persist in each country and thus the relations of inequality in which higher education is embedded. In all four countries, issues of income and inequality are noted, as are issues of gender. However, in South Africa race and associated matters around language are of major concern in the debates around higher education and inequality. Ethnicity is raised in discussions of Kenyan higher education and in Nigeria and Ghana regional issues appear to link inequalities with ethnicity. Thus, there are different dimensions of inequality across the region and within country contexts. Although these differences make formulating a common understanding of the public good across the region a complex task, they alert us to the importance of understanding how the relationship between higher education and the public good is enacted and made meaning of within its context.

On the one hand we therefore need to proceed carefully with how conceptualisations of higher education and the public good are developed and applied. However, we also need to be alert to the 'pitfall of according higher education too "immense and unwarranted weight"' as an agent of social justice, in isolation from the conditions in society at large, 'which may either facilitate or block (its) effects' (Badat 2020, citing Wolpe and Unterhalter 1991: 2–3). We need to understand that higher education's enactment of the public good is constrained by those social, economic and political forces at the national and global level that constitute the 'underlying generative framework' (Fraser 1995: 82) that shapes the inequalities that persist across the continent.

Notes

1. EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information) is the online tool for research synthesis of literature reviews developed by the EPPI Centre, UCL, IOE, https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk.
2. The following databases/research platforms were explored: SCOPUS, ProQUEST, Web of Science, African Education Research Database (AERD) (https://essa-africa.org/AERD), African Journals Online (AJOL) (https://www. ajol.info) and the CODESRIA online library (https://www.codesria.org).
3. The charts (figures 4 to 7) reflecting the conditions of possibility discussed in the country context include only those codes that received some attention in the literature, that is where there was at least one or more contribution.
4. These are also important in the South African context and are increasingly prominent in the literature following the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMust Fall movements in that country.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 67-87

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2726)

Higher Education Finance as a Public Good in Kenya

Moses Oketch*

Abstract

This article discusses the transformation of the higher education financing model and how this relates to the concept of higher education as a public good in the context of Kenya. Following independence in 1963, the new Kenya government – like most countries in sub-Saharan Africa that attained independence in this period – considered the establishment of a university to be one of the symbols of a republic and of national advancement. The government valued the public role of university education during this early phase of Kenya as a sovereign nation, even when access remained highly restricted. But, equally, the private benefits of being a university graduate were evident to the Kenyan citizenry. For two decades, Kenya had only one public university – the University of Nairobi – but after 1984 the state rapidly expanded higher education, partly in response to demand. Several universities have since been established, both public and private. Concurrently, the government has pursued a cost-sharing financing model to support this rapid expansion, which is contrary to the notion of higher education as a public good to be provided free of charge. This article examines this transformation of the financing model together with higher education as a public good and concludes that each has influenced the other in Kenya's context.

Keywords: Kenya, higher education finance, public good, human capital, equity, student loans

Résumé

Cet article traite de la transformation du modèle de financement de l'enseignement supérieur et de son lien avec le concept de l'enseignement supérieur en tant que bien public, dans le contexte du Kenya. Après l'indépendance en 1963, le nouveau gouvernement du Kenya – comme la plupart des pays d'Afrique subsaharienne qui ont accédé à l'indépendance

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à cette époque – considérait la création d'une université comme l'un des symboles d'une république et de l'avancement national. Le gouvernement appréciait le rôle public de l'enseignement universitaire au cours de cette première phase du Kenya en tant que nation souveraine, même lorsque l'accès restait très restreint. Mais, également, les avantages privés d'être un diplômé universitaire étaient évidents pour les citoyens kenyans. Pendant deux décennies, le Kenya n'avait qu'une seule université publique, l'Université de Nairobi, mais après 1984, l'État a rapidement développé l'enseignement supérieur, en partie en réponse à la demande. Plusieurs universités ont été créées depuis ce temps-là, tant publiques que privées. Parallèlement, le gouvernement a adopté un modèle de financement avec partage des coûts pour soutenir cette expansion rapide, ce qui est contraire à la notion de l'enseignement supérieur en tant que bien public à fournir gratuitement. Cet article examine cette transformation du modèle de financement ainsi que l'enseignement supérieur en tant que bien public et conclut que chacun a influencé l'autre dans le contexte du Kenya.

Mots-clés : Kenya, financement de l'enseignement supérieur, bien public, capital humain, fonds propres, prêts pour les étudiants

Introduction

Higher education matters for individual life chances and society (McMahon and Oketch 2013; McMahon and Oketch 2010; McMahon 2009), so this makes it a 'public' good, although some may argue that this does not preclude it from also being a 'private' good. National education policies across the world seek higher enrolment and completion rates, sometimes on the basis that higher education is a 'public' good and on the basis that it is a 'private' good. All over the world, higher education has become more expensive and how to finance its expansion has generated debate and raised questions about which funding model or combination is economically feasible and sensible, practical and moral, within any given context (Oketch 2016). The taxpayer-funded model seen as 'free' can support effective but elite universities in small numbers, especially if applied with fiscal rigour.

Widening participation in higher education is said to require a greater diversification of funding sources or a shift in some of the costs to those students who make use of it (Barr 2004 in Oketch 2016). Human capital theory is instrumental in this debate, in part because it puts a monetary value on the knowledge, skills and competencies of individuals, based on the amount of education they have received through rate-of-return analyses (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2004; Psacharopoulos 1994). According to human capital theory, when young people enter higher education, they are making a short-term investment in opportunity cost, tuition fees and living expenses while at university, and anticipate long-run benefits in the form of higher earnings after graduation. There are also spillover benefits for the rest of society (Goodman and Kaplan 2003; Keller 2006), including future generations (McMahon and Oketch 2010).

Ultimately, human capital theory indicates that higher education confers a wide range of personal, financial and other lifelong benefits; likewise, taxpayers and society derive a multitude of direct and indirect benefits when citizens have access to higher education (Sandy et al. 2010). The question then is, who should pay for its costs, especially its expansion? As a public good, it should be free, but since human capital theory embodies both 'private' and 'public' aspects it has helped to generate this complex debate on the publicness of higher education, especially when evidence based on a rate-of-return analysis shows that a great majority of its benefits are private. But this is because a rate-of-return analysis largely defines benefits as private economic returns in terms of earnings and productivity in the labour market, while ignoring many of the social benefits beyond earnings that are important to society and often not easy to measure. To this, Becker (1993) once said that the theory of human capital arouses passion to the extent that even people who generally are in favour of the broader benefits of education often dislike the phrase 'human capital', partly because they fear that the theory emphasises the 'material' effects of human capital over its 'cultural' effects. Nevertheless, Becker's call for more weight to be given to the 'cultural' effects of human capital did not receive much attention because economic enrichment dominated the purpose of higher education in many contexts.

Schultz (1961, 1963) is credited with coining the phrase and developing human capital theory, and he too emphasised its contribution to economic productivity. Over time, in many countries, government policies that draw on human capital theory have predominantly defined the benefits of higher education as private economic enrichment. As Marginson (2011: 414) has argued, when this happens, 'the rationale for public good activity vanishes, along with the public funding that supports it', and what follows is the growth of market forces in higher education whereby costs are shifted to students and their families through different configurations of cost-sharing. As this happens, the aspects of higher education benefits that are seen as 'public' or as 'private' create tensions between claims that higher education benefits the entire society and so should be free of charge and the counter-argument that private individual benefits are substantial and so individuals should contribute to the cost of their higher education. The concern is that the 'public' is being lost (Zemsky 2003) as benefits are increasingly defined by government policies as private economic returns, which has led some scholars to lament that higher education is not being treated as a public good and social service (Tilak 2009). But to what extent is higher education a public good?

Samuelson (1954) defined public goods as those goods that are non-excludable and non-rivalrous. Non-excludability simply means it is commonly available to all, and non-rivalrous simply means that one person's consumption of the same good does not affect its supply to others. Before Samuelson's public goods theory, public goods were normally considered to be goods that were produced in the public sector (Holcombe 2000: 273). Samuelson defined a good as public if it had one or both characteristics of joint need in consumption and non-excludability (Samuelson 1954). His original definition covered only the characteristics of jointness in consumption, but economists writing after him have also recognised non-excludability as a key element of publicness. As such, a good becomes non-excludable if, once produced, the producer cannot prevent other people from consuming the good, a criterion that higher education should fulfil for it to be regarded as a pure public good. Non-excludability allows people to consume the good without paying for it, thus creating a 'free rider' problem. As such, the good will be underproduced in the market, which creates a role for government production (Holcombe 2000: 274).

Knowledge is considered to be almost a pure public good (Stiglitz 1999) and since knowledge is said to be the unique claim of higher education (Marginson 2011), higher education is a public good beyond doubt (Tilak 2009). But despite this recognition and the fact that higher education is not universally available and requires academic qualification in prior levels of education, the question of equity and the role of cost-sharing in extending and redistributing educational opportunities is frequently emphasised in the debates on the extent to which higher education should be treated as a public good. These debates centre on whether higher education should be accessed by all free of charge or whether it should also be defined as a 'private' good because some of its benefits are solely to the individual. Some even go further to argue that free higher education restricts access (Barr 2004), which would suggest that it is not a pure public good as such. For others, such as Tilak (2009), even if some people are excluded from higher education, that does not invalidate its publicness, and it is not possible to provide efficient and equitable higher education through market mechanisms (including, presumably, models of cost-sharing).

In this regard, as a public good higher education should be accessed free of charge by all, although 'all' is never quite all since access to higher education is not universal. The main argument Tilak advances is that, for a public good such as higher education, private demand would fall severely short of socially optimal levels under market provision, so considerations of the role of the market should not be entertained for higher education.

Even if admission is rationed, as is usually the case given the criteria for admission into higher education institutions, the distribution of the social benefits associated with higher education cannot be rationed; they benefit everyone in society (Tilak 2009). It is also not generally desirable to ration admissions to higher education, even when there are admission criteria (Weisbrod 1988), although this raises the question of the quantity of higher education that can be made available given that it is normally not universally provided and attendance is not a requirement.

A further problem arises once the desired quantity is considered a normative issue, because it leads to questions such as, 'How much and what kind of educational equality is desired [taking into consideration the context]? How much social resources should be allocated to these objectives, given other objectives?' (Marginson 2011: 417). The answers to these questions suggest that how higher education is classified as a public good may lend itself to context and that what is a public good is not absolute. As Tilak puts it, 'it can depend upon government policies, market conditions, level of development and political realities' (Tilak 2009: 451). But does this suggest that the concept of public goods can be open to interpretation? Let's say it is, then the interpretation, in Tilak's view, 'should consider all aspects including the intrinsic nature of the given good, the public goods it produces [besides itself being a public good], the social purpose it serves, and the limitations of markets or what is widely known as market failures in the production of such goods' (Tilak 2009: 451–452). Marginson (2011: 413) has also addressed this issue by arguing that 'the public character of higher education is not so much a function of the timeless character of universities but grounded in social practices', and that as such 'higher education institutions are more or less "public" and "private" according to the policy and funding configuration chosen by them' (ibid.), which would suggest that the publicness of higher education is determined by policy.

There are many debates on this issue, but Tilak is among those who argue that higher education is a public good beyond any doubt and should not be subject to any form of market forces. On the contrary, Barr (2004, 266) while not commenting specifically on the publicness of higher education, argues that the 'equity objective is not free higher education, but a system in which no bright person is denied a place because he or she comes from a disadvantaged background'.

Many low- and lower middle-income countries recognise the contribution that higher education makes to national development and that, by nature, higher education (like other levels of education) is shaped by policies that are pursued by a government. So higher education can appear 'private' if government policies are favourable to market forces in higher education, and 'public' if the policies are totally against market forces being involved. Because it is policy-determined, higher education as a public good, like other public goods, does not just simply emerge in a vacuum 'but under specific conditions that enable and limit what can be achieved' (Marginson 2011, 420). So, what is frequently witnessed are government policies that seek the optimal balance necessary to expand and finance higher education as a public good through the taxpayer while also recognising that higher education generates private benefits, which means that some of its costs should be shifted to students and their families.

This issue is even more complex in low-income contexts because of low rates of access to higher education and the desire to accelerate access opportunity. At the same time, increasing access through taxpayer-funded higher education, without having realised universal access to earlier levels of education, raises issues of equity and equality of opportunity (Oketch 2016), and questions such as 'Whose public good?' and 'In whose interest?' (Marginson 2011: 417) are unavoidable. This question is even more critical in contexts where there is no provision of universal quality basic education. In this context, it matters how higher education benefits are defined. As Marginson (2011: 414) put it, 'when the great majority or the only benefit of higher education are defined as private economic enrichment, the rationale for public good activity vanishes, along with the public funding that supports it'. This suggests that the notion of higher education as a public good and higher education finance can influence each other.

Kenya has been seeking to expand higher education access, possibly with consideration of higher education as a public good, while at the same time taking into account how to finance it. Since 1973, the Kenya government has used student loans as a means of extending and redistributing higher education opportunities. This paper considers how Tilak's statement (2009), that higher education must be completely free of charge as a public good even when it excludes others, and Barr's diametrically opposed argument (2004), that free higher education is bad for access, play out in the context of Kenya, a country that initially took a cautious step towards expanding higher education but early on introduced student loans and used elements of market mechanisms to increase access.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. The second section examines human capital and the concept of higher education as a public good. The third section pays attention to rates of return and the public good. The fourth section focuses on the performance of the student loan scheme in Kenya, while the fifth section summarises how finance configurations and public good processes have influenced each other. The sixth section offers the conclusion.

Human Capital and Higher Education as a Public Good

Conceptually, the human capital life-cycle framework includes estimates of earnings and private and social non-market benefits derived from education. These benefits are enjoyed throughout the remainder of the life cycle (McMahon 2009, 2018; McMahon and Oketch 2010). The earnings or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are measured as market-based returns. But since graduates use their human capital productively in the community as well as in the household, their higher education generates benefits that are referred to as non-market benefits. Therefore, there are three kinds of benefits: time spent on the job-generating market benefits (such as wages and GDP); time spent in household production at home generating private non-market benefits (such as better child health, better spousal health); and time spent in the community generating social benefits to others (such as better civic institutions, greater human rights), which extend to future generations (McMahon and Oketch 2010).

Taking social benefits into account suggests that higher education should be regarded as a major instrument in shaping society, including culture and democracy, and in this regard it is a public good beyond doubt (Tilak 2009). But decisions by individuals and their families to pursue higher education tend to be made without anticipating these social benefits, partly because they are indirect and not easy to measure. So, it is important how a government defines the benefits derived from higher education, which requires all three types of benefits (to the individual, household and community) to be added together when governments develop policies for higher education finance. Whereas private benefits in the form of wage earnings have been dominant in the rate-of-return analysis, the non-market benefits are substantial and important, and extend to future generations. As McMahon (2018) points out, the non-monetary social benefits and their importance for regional and national development are poorly understood: 'there are important implications for public funding policies, for academic policies, for rates of growth and development over time, and for institutions supporting democracy, human rights, and political stability that have not been systematically explored (2018: 1). But they are far greater than the market benefits an individual enjoys privately.

At the same time, 'free' university education is seen by some economists as capable of supporting effective but narrow access to university education, which ends up excluding many. Free higher education for all is considered by some to be very costly and that richer students are more likely to benefit from it. Table 1 illustrates this point.

Table 1: Sustainability and Equity Impact of Various Cost-Sharing Schemes

Cost-Sharing Modality	Financial Sustainability Impact	Equity Impact
Free higher education for all	Very costly	Richer students more likely to benefit
Universal fees	Less demanding on fiscal resources	Equitable if financial aid available
Fees only for parallel students	Less demanding on fiscal resources	Richer students more likely to benefit
Targeted free tuition	Costly	Potentially most equitable

Source: World Bank, 2019

Students from rich and poor economic backgrounds have both defended free higher education. Those from a poor background see higher education as crucial for their social mobility and believe that making it free is essential for them to access it. Richer students have defended free higher education based on meritocracy and to preserve quality, suggesting that they believe market forces erode the quality of higher education (Oketch 2016). Barr (2004) and Barr et al. (2019) have argued that higher education should be 'free at the point of use', which is a different phenomenon from totally free higher education. When higher education is 'free at the point of use', it means that there would be no upfront cost barriers for anyone who is academically qualified and desires to pursue higher education.

One way to realise this 'free at the point of use' model is to allow student loans to play a role in extending and redistributing educational opportunities. This model exists in many countries as governments accept that a higher education qualification confers benefits to the individual, who in turn should contribute to its financing by paying some or most of its cost. A financial model that makes higher education 'free at the point of use' in a context where free higher education is considered unaffordable, is perhaps a win-win situation because it enables a government to widen participation, which is socially desirable goal, while shifting some of the costs to the student without the burden of upfront payment by the student.

Along with means-tested aid, making higher education free at the point of use (which is a deferred payment loan scheme), its proponents argue, is a policy option that can better achieve equity objectives while accelerating access for all population groups. There are different types of higher education loan schemes, which include fixed-amount repayments; percentage of earnings repayments; income-based or mortgage-type loans; and income-contingent repayments (Barr et al. 2019; Oketch 2021). Income-contingent loans (ICL) are viewed favourably for the 'free at the point of use' model because repayments depend on the debtor's future income (Barr et al. 2019), and even when a person's income rises, the repayments increase but cannot exceed the cap defined by the ICL policy.

In many countries, higher education is not universally available. Its demand is driven by the labour market or requirements for higher education qualifications. Even families and students are conversant with the increases in earnings and job prospects that higher education brings – what Becker (1993) referred to as the material effects of human capital. Many systems of higher education are selective, such that only academically qualified students are enrolled in higher education. Often, the majority of these students are from middle- and higher income households, with many young people from poor backgrounds excluded. Some economists argue that this selective model does not expand access, whereas models of cost-sharing can aid the expansion of access by shifting some of the costs to students and their families. The models of cost-sharing include: 1) making higher education 'free at the point of use' (study now, pay later) through student loan schemes; 2) allowing students who wish to enrol to pay higher fees directly (pay-as-you-go schemes). For low-income countries, the argument goes, higher education should be made more self-sustaining by recovering more of the public costs and reallocating some of the tax revenue to primary, secondary and other areas of education with the highest social rates of return (McMahon 1988: 135). This should be done along with developing a credit market for education together with selective scholarships, especially in higher education (ibid. 135–136). These suggestions have been implicit in Kenya's higher education finance modalities since 1973, which are the focus of the next sections.

Rate of Return and the Public Good in Kenya

There is a large body of literature on the development of higher education in Kenya. Much of it consists of policy analysis, studies of access to higher education and the changing nature of supply and demand more generally from a policy perspective. Some examples include literature on higher education finance (Gudo 2014; Johnstone 2006; Oketch 2016; Otieno 2004) and rate-of-return analysis (Kimenyi, Mwabu and Manda 2006). Rate-of-return analyses focus on the extent to which an education system yields returns to individuals and the economy that justify the resources invested in the education system. For the individual, estimates of returns measure the benefits to education in the form of wages. There are private rates of return, which include the costs and benefits captured by the individual, whereas social rates of returns are benefits and costs for the society. Rate-of-return analyses can be useful in evaluating broad education policies (Kimenyi et al. 2006), but they have also been criticised severely (Bennell 1996) as being narrow. Table 2 captures rates of return for primary and tertiary education in select countries, including Kenya. Worldwide, primary education is shown to have higher rates of return, but those of tertiary education are also considerable, at 19 per cent. In Kenya, a study by Kimenyi et al. (2006) showed that tertiary education had a high rate of return (25.1 per cent) whereas primary education yielded only 7.7 per cent.

Table 2: Education Rates of Return

Country/Region	**Primary Education %**	**Tertiary Education %**	**Authors**
World	26.6	19.0	Psacharopulos and Patrinos 2004
Papua New Guinea	6.0	9.2	Gibson and Fatai, 2006
Philippines	9-10	17.0	Schady 203
India	2.4	10.3	Dutta 2006
Kenya	7.7	25.1	Kimenyi, Mwabu and Manda 2006
Nigeria	2-3	10-15	Aromolaran 2006
Ethiopia	25.0	27.0	World Bank 2003

Source: World Bank 2009: Accelerating Catch-Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, 7

In Kenya, like most countries in the world, higher education is not completely a matter of personal choice because schooling spaces at the secondary level are far greater than the number of places available at the universities. Ability as measured by academic performance in end-of-school examinations is the main criterion for selection into higher education. Table 3 shows trends in performance in high school and university placements in recent years. The data in the table indicates poor performance in the Kenya examination that enables admission to university. The minimum entry requirement is C+ — in 2017, only 11.48 per cent of the candidates who took the examination obtained this grade. So, 88.52 per cent did not qualify to join university or attained less than a C+ grade, indicating overall poor performance in the examination. The performance in the previous year (2016) was only slightly better, with 15.57 per cent qualifying to join university. The performance in the other two previous years (2014 and 2015) was much better in comparison with 2016 and 2017. What accounts for this difference is that, since 2016, there has been a stricter process to prevent examination leaks and the examination itself could have become harder. The other significant factor is that, in 2017, all those who qualified were placed by the Kenya Universities and Colleges Placement Service (KUCCPS), which means they were all admitted into public universities under the government loan scheme (study now, pay later). In the previous years, less than 50 per cent of those who qualified to join university were placed by KUCCPS under the government loan scheme, leaving the rest who wished to join to do so through a parallel (pay as you go) programme scheme, whereby they were admitted to the public university but paid the cost upfront on their own, or they could choose to join private universities.

Table 3: Trends in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Performance and University Placement

	Form 4 Total Enrolment	Number Qualified (C+ And Above)	Percentage of Candidates with C+ And Above	Number of Students Placed by Kuccps	Percentage of Candidates Placed by Kuccps
2014	482,133	149,717	31.05	56,986	46.84
2015	521,240	169,492	32.52	67,790	46.09
2016	571,161	88,929	15.57	74,046	44.79
2017	610,501	71,018	11.48	71,018	100.00

Source: World Bank, 2019

The World Bank's research on the revitalisation of higher education (World Bank 1995, 1988) contributed to the development of a cost-sharing framework for education in low-income countries, including Kenya where a loan scheme has been operating since 1973. The reforms that were advocated by the Bank recommended measures such as student loans, and the immediate shifting of room and board costs to students and their families. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, in the 1980s, provided analytical evidence that social rates of return were higher for basic education, taking into consideration the social goals of this level of education (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1985). McMahon (1988: 136) suggests that with respect to the potential for greater efficiency, overburdened tax systems limit the expansion of all education and prevent economies of scale in higher education, and in doing so keep unit costs higher than they need to be in higher education (e.g. Psacharopoulos et al. 1986: 55). With rapidly increasing numbers of 'qualified' students finishing high school, the capacity to meet the effective demand at the public universities becomes severely strained in this scenario, and private sector institutions sometimes are hastily organised to fill the gap.

Kenya had already introduced a university loan scheme in 1973, possibly with these aims of extending and redistributing educational opportunities. At the time this did not expand access, but in later years a greater use of cost-sharing can be associated with the expansion of access to higher education. This point is developed later in the paper. The 1973 loan scheme operated as a low-key loan scheme due to poor loan recovery. In the end, it did not expand university education substantially, although the University of Nairobi itself expanded by adding more faculties and establishing constituent campuses. The loan system was reformed in 1995 when the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) was established as a new state corporation with the purpose of supporting undergraduate students with loans based on individual needs and the Board's resources. The loans range from KES 35,000 to a maximum of KES 65,000, and are subject to an interest rate of 4 per cent per year. Students are expected to start repaying their loans within one year of the completion of their studies (World Bank 2019: 29).

The Student Loan Scheme and its Performance

Figure 1 compares the non-paying loanees in the pre-HELB period (1970–1995) and the post-HELB period (1996–2017). As of 2017, there were a total of 179,692 non-paying loanees comprising 27,926 from the pre-HELB era and 151,766 in the post-HELB era.

The variation in the aggregate trend between pre-HELB and post-HELB is an outcome of the greater participation in undergraduate education that followed the rapid expansion of university places, and suggests that borrowers are experiencing worse outcomes than the earlier group and therefore are unable to repay the loans. This situation indicates that the taxpayer burden has expanded as higher education participation has increased relative to jobs available for these graduates. But, at the same time, greater expansion with potentially many social benefits of a non-monetary nature may have resulted from this expansion. These benefits constitute the public good aspect of higher education (Tilak 2009). Appiah and McMahon (2002) pointed out that these benefits to communities are not evident when only a few individuals participate in higher education. They further emphasise that the social benefits that derive from higher education can take between twenty-five and forty years to be fully embedded into the society. This suggests that Kenya is on a positive trend in expanding higher education, if these non-market benefits are to be enjoyed by future generations. Failure to expand now would mean that the future generations in twenty-five or forty years' time will be set back by this number of years if expansion were to wait. However, the trend in non-payment of the loans suggests that the idea of cost-recovery is complicated in contexts where graduates are unable to secure jobs to be able to repay their loans.

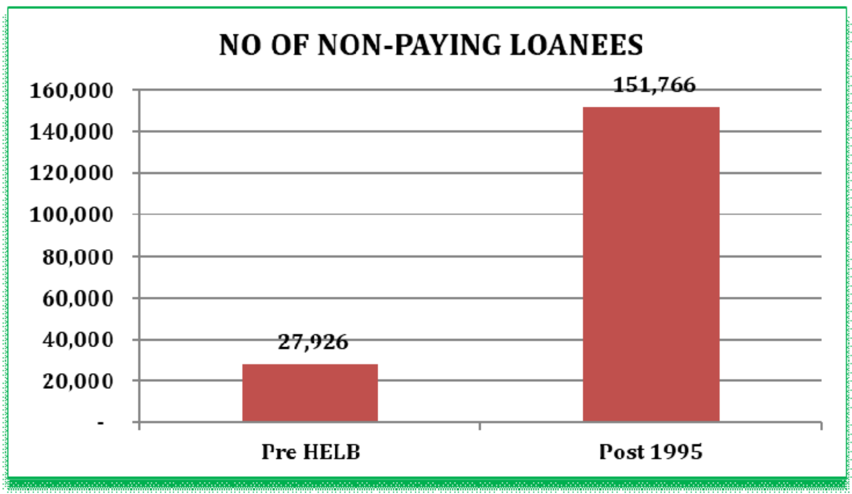

Figure 1: Number of Non-paying loanees (Pre HELB and Post HELB)
Source: HELB, Kenya, 2019

Figure 2 further shows how the number of non-paying loans has grown from 1971 to 2017. This confirms that loan recovery has been weak. One reason is that the loan scheme and other subsidies in Kenya are not selective enough when admitting students into university. This is due to little attention being paid to developing a financial needs analysis. Greater selectivity is required in order to ensure that there is no exclusion of academically qualified students from poor families and to make it possible for those students from economically more able families to contribute to their higher education. All students who are admitted under what is known as the 'government scheme' are automatically enrolled in the HELB scheme irrespective of their family's ability to pay, which aligns with making higher education 'free at the point of use'. Nevertheless, if these loans were to be recovered more effectively, then the objective of equity and the role of student loans in extending and redistributing educational opportunities could be realised in Kenya because it would mean that more resources would be generated by the recovered loans.

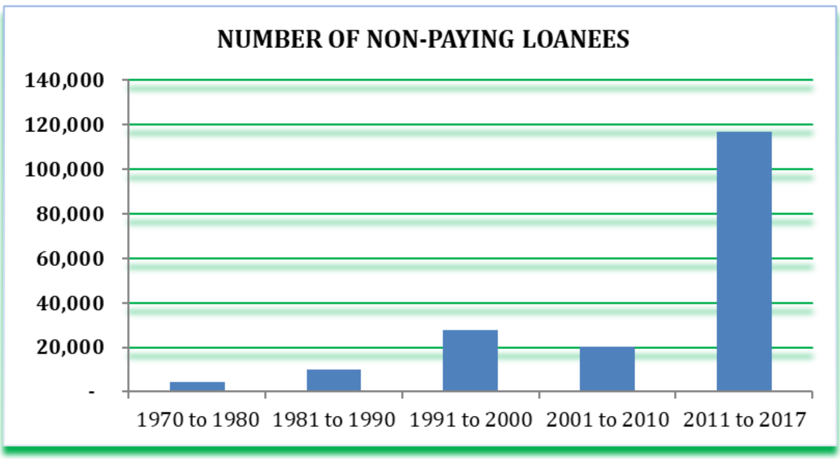

Figure 2: Growth in non-paying loanees (1970-2017)

Source: HELB, Kenya, 2019

Recovery rates are also low because many graduates face a tough labour market, so they take longer to secure the long-term stable employment they need to repay their higher education loans. This situation is sometimes made worse by a government that expects graduates to be 'job creators' instead of 'job seekers'. Designing an efficient and equitable system for cost-recovery will remain challenging in Kenya's context if graduate employment does not rise quickly. An efficient and equitable loan scheme will be dependent on the extent to which Kenya's economy grows and how quickly it generates graduate-level jobs. Thus the existence of a loan scheme on its own does not guarantee equitable access to higher education.

Figure 3 shows the socioeconomic distribution of students in higher education. It confirms that Kenya's higher education system is extremely socially unequal despite the availability of financial aid through HELB. The disparity ratio is 49 (9.8 divided by 0.2), which means that the richest income group is 49 times more likely to access higher education than the lowest income group. This is not a problem that starts at higher education, but is traceable to primary and secondary education where poor students progress less well than those from the richest income groups (World Bank 2019).

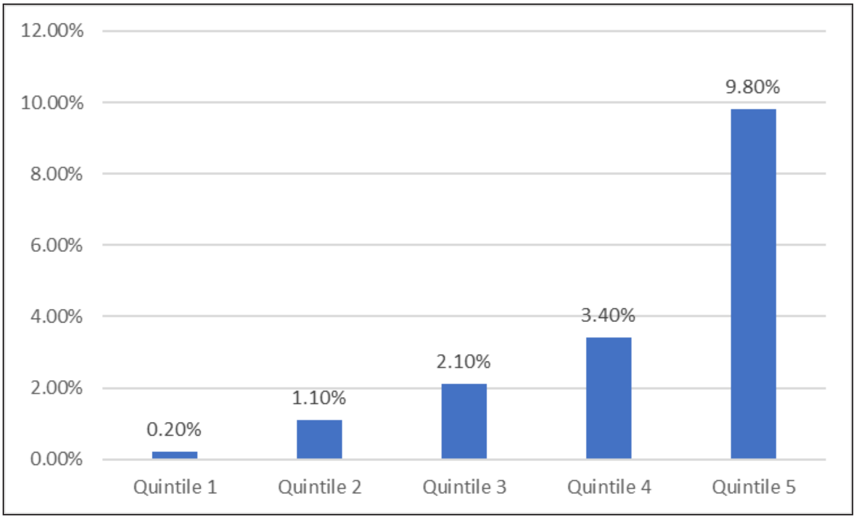

Figure 3: Enrolment Rates of Kenyan Students by Income Quintile (2016)
Source: World Bank, 2019: 30

Besides HELB, Kenya implemented a pay-as-you-go scheme around 1998/1999 as a second model of higher education finance, and to expand access. It became known as the 'Parallel Programme' or 'Module II', whereby a cohort of students were admitted into the public university and offered parallel teaching of courses that were already being offered in the mainstream programmes, but they paid the market rate cost of their university education upfront. These students were largely from families who could afford to pay the 'parallel programme' fees. There has been praise associated with this scheme, but there have also been many problems, including what have been seen as perverse incentives for universities to 'cash in' on the parallel programmes at the expense of a good university education and university experience for students. In some instances, demand-driven courses were hastily put together and offered to students, some of which could have been offered at diploma level.

There are media reports that the Kenya government has recently decided to review the parallel programme and control the money it collects from direct fee payments; there is even the suggestion that the programme could be scrapped. The funding model that included the parallel scheme opened university places to other students, including mature students who wished to enrol to pay higher fees upfront (World Bank 2019; Oketch 2003). Quality has certainly been an issue of concern (Odhiambo 2011) associated with this 'pay-as-you-go-scheme' although university managers have been quick to defend their institutions against claims that in focusing on parallel programmes they have compromised on quality.

Finance Models and Widening Participation as an Unintended Public Good

Some benefits from higher education are direct and others are indirect, but they all have to be taken into account when discussing higher education as a public good and the financing models to pay for it. The indirect effects come about through intervening variables, such as that education contributes to the rule of law and political stability, which in turn feeds back to aid economic growth, generating externalities that benefit others and future generations. These externalities and feedback effects are not typically anticipated by the family and student who invest in education (Lucas 1988), and there are those sceptics who do not address this issue but there are also many non-sceptics who do (Breton 2008; McMahon and Oketch 2010: 42). The history of Kenya's higher education financing can be divided into two phases.

1. *1963–1983 (free and very low-key loan scheme financing)*: Kenya was served by one university, the University of Nairobi, which had been elevated to university status in 1970. Participation was restricted by poor academic performance in the lower levels of the education system, such that only a limited number of students attained the academic qualification required to be admitted to university. Exclusion from university education was high and expansion remained restricted. University education during this period was highly prestigious and university graduates found immediate employment in civil service and in state-run corporations. Although low in numbers, these graduates were instrumental in the Africanisation of government institutions during this period (Amutabi 2002). University education was free of charge until 1973 when a loan scheme was introduced, but access to university remained free at the point of use. The recovery of the loan was weak due to a weak infrastructure in which even those who worked in civil service where repayment could have been easier to administer did not have their loans deducted from their earnings.
2. *1984–present (loan scheme and pay-as-you-go financing):* Kenya's government developed the confidence to expand university education. In 1984, Kenya established its second university, Moi University, which was brand-new, constructed from scratch. The next year (1985) Kenyatta University College, which had been a constituent college of the University of Nairobi to accommodate the Education Faculty, was elevated to university status and

renamed Kenyatta University. Two years later (1987), Egerton University was established by elevating an agriculture farm college that had been in existence since 1939. In a span of three years (between 1984 and1987) Kenya had gone from having one public university to having four. By December 1994, Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology, that had been a constituent College of Kenyatta University since 1988 was elevated to a full university and became Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. Within a decade of creating its second public university, Kenya had five full universities with several constituent colleges. This was a massive leap, which also included a double intake of students into the university in 1986 and 1990. Some of the benefits to society from this rapid expansion of public higher education to accommodate demand are indirect, and may not have been anticipated by the students and the government of the day. For example, Kenya has a vibrant civil society that has become stronger over the years. It cannot be ignored that higher education expansion has contributed to strengthening civil society in the country. This in turn has aided the democratic space in Kenya. As Amutabi (2002, 164) argues, '… the university students have bequeathed to Kenyans and to the democratization process the power to riot, to protest, and to stand up for their rights'. At the same time, it is evident that Kenya's government defined some the benefits of higher education as private, and this is informed by the use of cost-sharing to expand university education.

3. In a later period, from 1998/1999, the government introduced direct upfront payment in the form of parallel programmes, to respond to demand but also to shift costs further to students, with the possibility that instead of complementing university budgets, the parallel programme resources were an essential part of the fiscal management of the public universities. In the end, this approach is claimed to have potentially undermined the quality of university education and student experience, even though it also expanded access.

In 2013, ten colleges were promoted to full university status. In 2019, it was reported that Kenya boasted about thirty-four public universities and university colleges (Owino 2019) although a report by the Commission for University Education (CUE) indicated that as of 2018, there were thirty-one public chartered universities and six public universities constituent colleges (CUE, 2019). The effects of the expansion will become even stronger some twenty years into the future, because higher education is a dynamic process whereby current benefits derived from participating in education are the result of the education of prior generations (McMahon and Oketch 2010). Future generations will derive benefits as a result of the education of the current generation. The projected expansion to 2030 in terms of student enrolment is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Planned Evolution of the Kenyan Higher Education System by Main Segment (2016–2030)

Subsector	**2016**	**%**	**2030**	**%**
Public universities	479,000	73.8	636,651	47.6
Private universities	85,000	13.1	234,262	17.5
OUK	0	0.0	267,728	20.0
Public TVET	27,000	4.2	100,000	7.5
Private TVET	58,000	8.9	100,000	7.5
Total	649,000	100	1,338,642	100

Source: World Bank, 2019

It seems logical that the projected expansion of higher education in Kenya is important for Kenya's development and higher education as a public good, but it is also worth pointing out, as has been stated earlier in the paper, that all three benefits of higher education should define the financing model in expanding access – that is, the benefits to the individual, to the household and to the community. That said, it seems in Kenya's context that the transformation of the financing model may have aided higher education expansion and the associated externalities that arise from this expanded access – that therefore the concept of higher education as a public good and the transformation of the financing models processes have influenced each other. To paraphrase Marginson (2011), in Kenya's context, which combined the loan systems of 'study now, pay later' and the parallel programme of 'pay as you go', its state higher education system has become both 'public' and 'private'.

Conclusion

State universities in Kenya are comparatively young, but they accomplished their initial mission of producing adequate human resources for the civil service, national corporations and the private sector; graduated hundreds of thousands of students; and helped foster an intellectual community in the country (Oketch 2003). In just fifty years, public higher education expanded from a single university to about thirty-four public universities and constituent colleges by 2019. Rapid expansion has occurred under a period of cost-sharing. Amutabi (2002) has emphasised the public good purpose of the Kenyan universities in terms of developing and contributing to an Africanised civil service and democratic space in the country, a role that the Kenya government must have valued when the University of Nairobi was established. But soon after, the government introduced student loans as a mechanism to expand access, indicating that the benefits of higher education were now defined as private economic enrichment and that students needed to contribute to its costs. Free public higher education as a public good attracts widespread agreement but Marginson (2011) has argued that the desired quantity raises normative issues. The extent to which higher education can be expanded freely given other educational objectives is debated in the literature. That said, it seems logical to conclude that in Kenya's context, the transformations of the financing model may have aided the expansion of higher education and served a public good purpose and as such that both processes have influenced each other.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 89-110

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2727)

Expanding Higher Education for the Public Good: Ghanaian Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Quality Dimension

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Abstract

This study examined the views of twenty-three stakeholders connected to the Higher Education (HE) sector in Ghana, to understand the links they make between HE and the fulfilment of the public good. The study, which was conducted in 2018, was purely qualitative, employing individual interviews and focus group discussions. The results showed that stakeholders make strong links between the quality of inputs into HE, the approaches used in imparting and assessing relevant knowledge and skills, and the quality of graduates. They also drew links between the quality of HE, the products and their ability to serve the public good in addressing the problems of the society. The implication is that the quality of an institution is measured by the quality of investments made into it, the quality of faculty and instruction and its ability to serve the public good. The study recommends that HE institutions should design programmes that regularly develop the pedagogical competence of HE faculty to make HE pedagogy more relevant to societal needs. It also makes a case for the provision of academic/remedial support for students who may be underprepared for HE, while ensuring that the quality of HE practitioners and participants is of an acceptable standard. Lastly, higher education institutions should create conditions that can bring about innovations in funding, good governance and accountability.

Keywords: higher education, public good, quality, inputs, products, Ghana

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Résumé

Cette étude a examiné les points de vue de vingt-trois parties prenantes liées au secteur de l'enseignement supérieur (ES) au Ghana, afin de comprendre les liens qu'elles établissent entre l'ES et la réalisation du bien public. L'étude, qui a été menée en 2018, était purement qualitative, utilisant des entretiens individuels et des discussions de groupe. Les résultats montrent que les parties prenantes établissent des liens étroits entre la qualité des apports dans l'enseignement supérieur, les approches utilisées pour transmettre et évaluer les connaissances et compétences pertinentes, et la qualité des diplômés. Ils ont également établi des liens entre la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur, les produits et leur capacité à servir le bien public en abordant les problèmes de la société. L'implication est que la qualité d'une institution est mesurée par la qualité des investissements qui y sont faits, la qualité du corps professoral et de l'enseignement et sa capacité à servir le bien public. L'étude recommande que les établissements d'enseignement supérieur conçoivent des programmes qui développent régulièrement la compétence pédagogique du corps professoral de l'enseignement supérieur afin de rendre la pédagogie de l'enseignement supérieur plus adaptée aux besoins de la société. Cela plaide également en faveur de la fourniture d'un soutien académique/de rattrapage aux étudiants qui peuvent être sous-préparés pour l'enseignement supérieur, tout en veillant à ce que la qualité des praticiens et des participants de l'enseignement supérieur soit d'un niveau acceptable. Enfin, les établissements d'enseignement supérieur devraient créer des conditions propices à des innovations en matière de financement, de bonne gouvernance et de responsabilité.

Mots-clés : enseignement supérieur, bien public, qualité, contributions, produits, Ghana

Introduction

There is enough evidence in the literature to show that higher education (HE) is a public and a private good; that participation in HE is the gateway to knowledge and skills capital for the development of individuals, communities and nations (McCowan 2016). Although HE began in elitist institutions, participation in HE has increased since the late twentieth century (Powell and Solga 2011; Marginson 2016; Wright and Horta 2018). Globally, higher education enrolments doubled between the year 2000 and 2016, from 100 million to 216 million (Wright and Horta 2018). In some contexts, there is limited capacity to respond to the growing global demand for graduate enrolment (World Bank 2017).

Africa has also experienced some expansion in the past two decades, with enrolments more than doubling between 2000 and 2010 (UNESCO 2013), albeit with low participation rates in some countries (Muthui 2013). Ghana is one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa with increasing enrolments. With only two public universities at independence, by 2015, it had eleven public and about seventy private tertiary institutions (British Council 2015). However, due to limited academic facilities and inadequate family economic resources, among other reasons, there is a mismatch between supply and demand (Goode 2016). Thus, many qualified applicants are unable to participate in higher education.

During the 1980s and 1990s, universities across Africa struggled to maintain standards of academic quality, as international agencies and national governments reduced their HE budgets in response to international pressure to prioritise funding for primary education. In recent years, however, the international discourse around investment in HE has given way to new understandings of how HE contributes to economic and human development, which have strengthened the justification for investment in HE around the world (Oketch, McCowan and Schendel 2014).

Mere participation in HE is not sufficient for the development of the knowledge, skills and values needed for economic and human development (Arum and Roksa 2011; Blaich and Wise 2010). Rather, it is the application of the right inputs through the right approaches that count towards the production of highly skilled human capital. This means that HE institutions must be sites for the production of the right human resource for today's world of work. Yet, this seems to elude many HE systems that are expanding, including Ghana's.

In many developing economies, including Ghana, national policies and HE institutional goals aim at making all HE graduates useful to the economy. Accordingly, the relationship between HE, employment/unemployment and employability has gained more attention among higher education practitioners. Especially in Ghana, there has been much public outcry against graduate unemployment in recent years. While the aggregate unemployment rate in Ghana stabilised at around 4–5 per cent after 2009, there appears to be a slightly upward trend of late. For example, the total unemployment rate in Ghana rose from 6.6 per cent in 2017 to 6.7 per cent in 2018 (Adenira, Ishaku and Yusuf 2020). In 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, the total unemployment rate was estimated at approximately 7 per cent (Danish Trade Union Development Agency

[DTDA] 2020). However, unemployment among the youth is consistently estimated to be higher than total unemployment. In 2017, unemployment among the youth was approximately 12 per cent (Adenira et al. 2020); in 2019, this was estimated at 14 per cent, which is slightly higher than the West African average of 12 per cent (DTDA 2020).

A breakdown of youth unemployment by education suggests a higher unemployment rate among graduates (Baah-Boateng 2015). According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round Six (GLSS 6), the most recent data available, unemployment is estimated to be 6 per cent among graduates, compared to 2.7 per cent of people with no formal education and 3.35 per cent of those with basic education (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). While this is challenging, assessments of demand for key skills, such as ICT, suggest there is a deficit in the skills needed to perform high-level IT tasks (Darvas and Palmer 2014). The most recent data available (World Bank 2010, as cited in Darvas and Palmer 2014) shows that, in 2009, there was a demand for about 3,000 high-level IT jobs in Ghana's labour market. The estimated supply was 970. However, in that same year, around 350,000 people were employed in the Ghanaian construction industry, a number that was estimated to grow to one million by 2020, of whom approximately 250,000 would be skilled. Even so, Darvas and Palmer (2014) highlight the difficulty in achieving this strong growth due to the lack of sufficiently qualified high-skilled labour. Similarly, estimates using data from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) suggest a shortfall of approximately 100 graduates per year in different construction-related disciplines, including architecture, land economy and civil engineering. Much of this is attributed to the lack of graduates with effective and readily applicable skills (Darvas and Palmer 2014), which suggests a gap between 'quality' and 'industry-ready' graduates.

The debate has mainly focused on graduate quality and the skills gap between industry requirements and what graduates carry with them into the labour market. However, this reflects only a marginal share of unemployment. According to a study by the Ghana Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (2013), some skills that tertiary education graduates were expected to have – such as the ability to analyse data, propose solutions and make decisions; argue logically; solve problems; and communicate effectively (oral and written), among others – were found to be lacking. This has given cause for dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates that Ghanaian HE institutions produce, a situation which is likely to affect the future image of HEIs. This study, therefore, intended to examine the links made by individuals connected to the higher education sector and analysts of that sector between the quality of HE provision and its products and the fulfilment of the public good. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What perspectives do Ghanaian stakeholders hold on the characteristics of higher education that contribute (or not) to producing graduates capable of serving the public good?
2. What major quality-related issues in higher education concern stakeholders in Ghana?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Quality is at the heart of education; it is a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention and achievement. Good-quality education translates into learning outcomes that develop the capacity of the individual to secure employment, improve his/her life and that of his/her family, community and nation. Although there seems to be no consensus among scholars on the definition of quality education, certain indicators of good-quality education are known to be critical for producing learning outcomes capable of transforming individuals and communities. These include some input and process variables, such as teachers, teaching and learning resources, desirable entry characteristics of learners, and facilities, among many others (UNESCO 2015). The literature points to a direct link between inputs and educational quality at all levels. For example, in Ghana, the unequal allocation of resources in the country's geographical regions and educational institutions reflects in the entry characteristics of learners in HE. Thus, depending on how resourced secondary schools are, they may be categorised between A and D according to their academic performance and funding. Therefore, students entering HE may have weak academic grades, which may eventually affect their exit quality.

Adequate financing of educational inputs also determines the quality of the educational process and output. These work in tandem to facilitate the teaching and learning process, culminating in educational learning outcomes (Woessmann 2004). Thus, the greater the quality of educational funding, the greater the quality of students' learning outcomes. It must be noted, however, that improvements in students' learning outcomes require policies and practices that transcend spending. Sustained quality teaching is another factor that plays a critical role in the process of HE provision. Effective teaching and learning occur when teachers are equipped with up-to-date knowledge, skills and professional pedagogies, which are acquired through regular and continuous professional development (Hénard and Roseveare 2012).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study links the education production function with human capital theory, by incorporating Adams's (1998 cited in Chapman and Adams 2002) three components of the production function model (that is, input, process and output/product) with Stufflebeam's (2003) fourth dimension (that is, context) to derive the context, input, process and product (CIPP) framework. This, in combination with Shultz's (1961) conception of education as an investment, is meant to show how investment in education works to provide the needed resources that produce a high-quality, productive workforce. The 'product' element of the model has been linked to Robeyns's (2006) interpretation of the instrumental role of education, which is the major emphasis of the human-capital approach to education.

Human capital theory views education as an investment that yields returns to the individual in the form of higher earnings and to the state in the form of employment and economic growth, thus making education instrumental for economic growth (Gillies 2015). Human capital theory also positions education as both an individual and a public good, in the sense that the individual is rewarded financially from the education investment and the economy is boosted by individuals with advanced human capital. The theory stresses that the knowledge and skills that individuals acquire through education raise their productivity in the workplace. In essence, the better and higher the investment made by individuals in education, the higher the yield. This idea implies that it is the quality of a workforce (through education) that determines their earnings. Viewed this way, the education system and its quality become an important focus for state investment.

Gillies (2015) identifies two challenges that characterise human capital theory: it diminishes the concepts of education and of the human. Education is positioned in a subordinate, instrumental role, with its broader aims and purposes narrowed to economic goals. Consequently, there is a risk of narrowing the curriculum to consist of 'skills for work' and losing the concept of personal growth or the development of 'whole' individuals. The emphasis shifts from knowledge and disciplinary depth to transferable skills, especially those seen as conducive to market profitability. The quality of skills of school-leavers, college and university graduates thus becomes the key focus in relation to employability.

With regard to diminishing the concept of the human, Gillies (2015) claims that human capital theory reduces individuals to merely capital goods and economic potential to be exploited. Humans are constructed as mechanical objects, thus, downplaying what it means to be a living person, rather than a life to be lived (Gillies 2011, cited in Gillies 2015). These challenges notwithstanding, human capital theory continues to play a dominant role in national and international discourse on economic policy in education.

Recognising these nuances, the study adopted human capital theory with a focus on the context, input, process and product (CIPP) model (Figure 1) while concentrating on the relevant HE knowledge and skills that would yield returns, improve graduates' personal lives and contribute to national development.

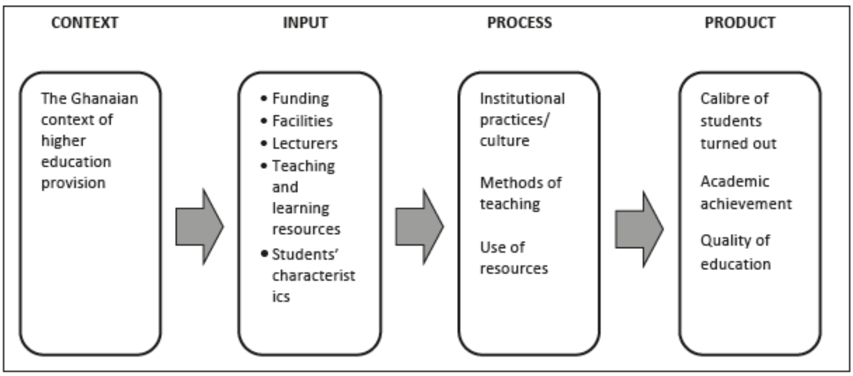

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

The study was conceptualised on the premise that context is important in understanding the provision of and trends in higher education in any country. Also, it is based on the view that the quality of the inputs and processes in context translate into HE products. It is therefore critical that discourses on higher education and the public good take cognisance of the mix of contextual factors, inputs and processes that work together to produce an employable HE graduate who can access the benefits that inure to individuals and communities through participation in HE.

This article has five sections. The first is the introduction, which makes a case for this study, followed by a description of the context, the methodology, the results and discussion, and finally, the conclusion and recommendations that are drawn from the findings. The next section discusses the context of the study.

The Ghanaian Context of Higher Education

Expansion of HE

Ghana's HE landscape has gone through a complex evolution, beginning with the first colonial post-secondary institution in the then Gold Coast in 1924. Its prime purpose was to produce human resource for public service and build capacity for leadership, national development and modernisation (Antwi 1992). The HE system began expanding in the 1990s with the opening of more public and private institutions when demand for the employment of graduate professionals and the liberalisation of the economy opened the gate for more universities to be established. The most current available data indicates that, by 2016, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) had accredited seventy-two private higher education institutions and twelve public universities.

Although the public institutions run programmes in all disciplines, with some specialising in science, technology, energy and natural resources, most students enrol in humanities and social science-related programmes, a trend that is of much concern to education planners (Ministry of Education 2005). Therefore, expansion in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) has been a key national priority both for state-run university education and teacher education. Private institutions, on the other hand, tend to offer programmes that respond to labour market needs (such as entrepreneurship, and vocational and technology-oriented programmes, etc.).

Access and Participation in Higher Education

The requirement for entering into full-time study at higher education institutions in Ghana is good passes in six subjects (three core and three electives) in the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSSCE). Entry also depends on the availability of academic and residential facilities and government subsidies to institutions. Due to the limited space for applicants, and the keen competition to access the public institutions because of their lower cost, many eligible applicants are turned away through a highly selective institutionalised process. In the 1980s, a negligible number (0.7 per cent) of the relevant age group was represented at university (UNESCO 1998); this had increased to 16.2 per cent by 2015 (Ministry of Education 2019). Private institutions admit some of the 'leftovers', many of whom come from elite and middle-class backgrounds. Table 1 and Figure 2 show the gross enrolment trend of public and private HEIs between the 2009/2010 and 2016/17 academic years.

Table 1: Gross enrolment trend of public and private HE

Type of Institution	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Public	179,998	185,268	202,063	221,632	238,574	248,507	155,402	371,822
Private		32,275	59,899	61,874	75,272	72,239	Not available	72,156

Source: National Council for Tertiary Education [NCTE], 2016

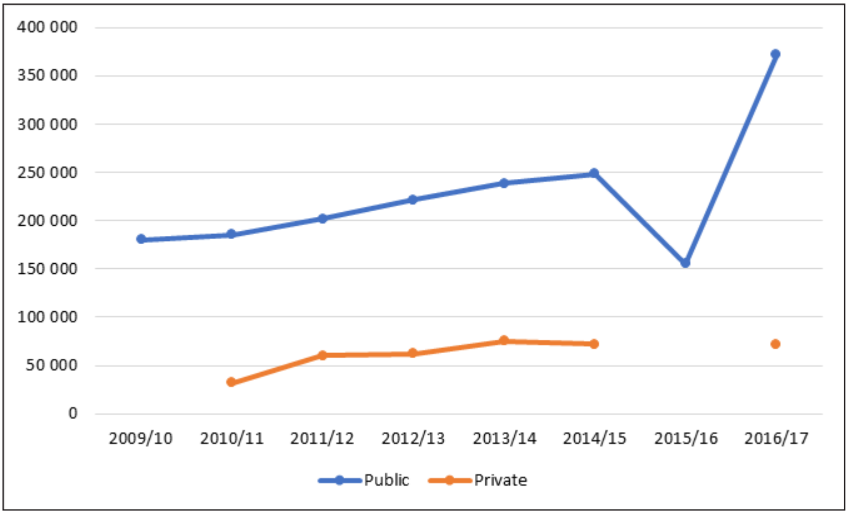

Figure 2: Gross enrolment trend of public and private HE participation
Source: NCTE, 2016

Accessing and participating in higher education also depends on one's ability to pay. Different funding regimes have been in operation since independence, including the current cost-sharing system that was introduced in 1997. The cost-sharing system implies that students pay academic facility user fees while government pays for tuition, administration costs and the provision of major infrastructure. The implication is that the financial base of families and households is a direct determinant of students' access to and participation in HE.

Public sources of funds for running higher education institutions are obtained from the government's annual budgetary allocations, the Annual Budget Funding Amounts (ABFA) and the Ghana Education Trust Fund's (GETFund) support for capital acquisitions, staff development and research. Funding for private higher education institutions, on the other hand, mainly comes from students' fees and internally generated funds. In addition, the government has earmarked a portion of the Teaching and

Learning Innovation Fund (TALIF), established with the support of the World Bank and managed by the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) for private tertiary education institutions. However, the amount is negligible (NCTE 2015).

The higher education system in Ghana has expanded in terms of the number of institutions. However, although national policies and HE institutional goals take cognisance of equal and equitable opportunities for prospective students, and despite free tuition, access and participation still seem to advantage those with the wherewithal (including financial capability). Again, the HE programmes that are widely accessible seem to be in disciplines for which job opportunities are non-existent, thereby making the fulfilment of the public good appear to be mere rhetoric.

Methodology

This paper draws from the 'Higher Education and the Public Good in Four African Countries – Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa' research project, funded by the NRF/ESRC/Newton Foundation. The paper presents perspectives of Ghanaian stakeholders on the links they make between the quality of higher education provision and its products and the fulfilment of the public good. The project was purely qualitative, employing individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews were conducted with a cross-section of twenty-three stakeholders, made up of: heads of agencies at the national level; stakeholders of civil society, including employers concerned with higher education issues; and students and staff from three higher education institutions. There was a blend of males and females, thereby, giving the respondents' perspectives a gender balance.

The heads of agencies and stakeholders of civil society we interviewed were the political head of higher education, being the most senior civil servant in higher education administration at the Ministry of Education, and one head in each of the following: a regulatory body, a funding body, a labour/trade union and an institution concerned with the recruitment of higher education graduates. They had varied academic qualifications, ranging from bachelors to doctoral degrees in various subject areas. Many of them also had rich experiences in academia and international exposure before joining industry.

In the case of the participants from higher education institutions, three institutions were purposively sampled, based on their different locations and characteristics: one comprehensive public university in a region which is nationally ranked as the fourth most disadvantaged, in the southern part of Ghana; one community university college in an oil-rich regional capital, also in southern Ghana; and the third, a faith-based private university in a commercially vibrant region in the middle part of the country. The participants comprised a vice-chancellor, a deputy registrar in charge of human resource, administrators, heads of department, academics (lecturers) and students. The staff and students were pooled from various subject areas, including business, home economics, financial accounting, mathematics, economics, religion, education and public health. Undergraduate and postgraduate students were interviewed.

The individual interview guides and focus group discussion schedules were designed and validated by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast in April 2018. All the student interviews were conducted through FGDs. There was also one FGD with lecturers. All the others were individual interviews.

Data collection took place from May to September 2018, by three researchers, with each being assigned a number of respondents. Appointments with the respondents were made by phone, and on the appointed dates the researchers visited the respondents in their respective offices or designated sites. The individual interviews lasted for a minimum of thirty minutes and a maximum of fifty minutes; the FGDs lasted between fifty and ninety minutes. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymised, after which they were analysed by coding that was generated partly on the basis of the research questions and associated themes and partly from internal discussions by the research team.

Results and Discussion

The stakeholders in this study expressed strong opinions about the link between the quality of higher education institutions and their ability to serve the needs of the society as a public good. They agreed that social and economic development happens when universities equip the workforce with knowledge and skills they can put to use. They also agreed that universities must be of good quality in order to produce well-trained graduates for the labour market. For instance, a good-quality university should imbue in its recipients the necessary knowledge, skills and values to help improve the quality of their own lives, that of their families and the nation.

The views expressed were in relation to the input and process components of the conceptual framework that guided the study, while relating these to the quality of the product (output) – the graduate. Factors considered under the input variable were qualification and training of lecturers, entry characteristics of students, funding and facilities. The process factor looked at teaching approaches and assessment.

Higher Education Inputs

Qualification and Training of University Lecturers

The common understanding among the participants in this study was that universities offer learners the opportunity to engage with different perspectives, and develop their originality and creativity, thus equipping them with the skills to solve societal problems.

> … to train human resource and equip them with skills that will enable them to provide services to solve critical challenges that affect society, so that there will be prosperity and growth. (Vice-chancellor, private university)
>
> Higher education is supposed to refine people's knowledge and skills so as to exploit the resources available in the country, both natural and human so that the people in the country can enjoy. (Head of department and lecturer)
>
> Higher education is a process where individuals develop their intellect or mind to think critically. (Funding body representative)

Because the role HE plays is so important, provision must be made for major inputs. This includes the quality of lecturers employed. Lecturers are pivotal to the success of education since they are critical in translating the curriculum into relevant learning experiences for students and, thus, determine what skills students acquire for their future endeavours (Hénard and Roseveare 2012). In this study, some staff of the higher education institutions also attested to this fact. One Head of department observed:

> The quality of staff who have been handling both academic and administrative matters in tertiary institutions, these two categories of staff play very important roles in sending out products who will fit well in the society. (Head of department, private university)

Although most HE staff (including lecturers) possess the requisite qualifications, there were concerns about the inadequacy of their professional development. According to some students, this was evident in the poor application of theoretical knowledge during the teaching and learning process. On the basis of their experiences, the students claimed that some lecturers lacked the relevant teaching strategies:

> Some of the university teachers are not that qualified, they do not have the skills … they don't make their teaching practical … So you will sit there and they cannot connect whatever they are teaching you to the real-life experience. At the end of the day, they have a lot of good stuff in their head but how to apply it out there becomes the problem. (Students' FGD, S1)

Especially in private institutions, some of the lecturers were described by the students as 'bad nuts' who did not 'measure up to standard':

> For the private sector, what I can say about them is that some of them are more concerned with the profits they can make from their investment and so certain standards that they're supposed to follow fall short. For example, if you look at the faculty that they have, some of them do not measure up to what is required for higher education training. There are a few bad nuts which have joined, but, the few good ones, they are up to task. (Students' FGD, S2)

This was further compounded by some lecturers' lack of enthusiasm to teach, which they exhibited in their teaching:

> Basically, if you go to the private universities you have a lot of people there who really … didn't want to be teachers but because they don't have anything to do and they're seeing it as a source of income, so they go into it. So the passion is not there to be able to impart to the students. (Students' FGD, S2)

In sum, the adequacy of the training of HE faculty, their enthusiasm and commitment to their work were issues that stakeholders perceived had the tendency to affect the quality of work negatively and, by extension, the quality of HE products. This was particularly the case in private institutions, which in many cases were financially constrained and thus were unable to recruit highly qualified staff. What seems to be the norm in many Ghanaian private institutions is the engagement of high-calibre staff from public institutions on a part-time basis. Such staff thus add to their already overloaded work schedule, thereby short-changing the students who may themselves not be very well prepared for independent study in higher education.

Entry Characteristics of Students

Human capital theory suggests that we need to train more human resource to function better in society (Blaich and Wise 2010; McCowan 2016). The current expansion in many higher education institutions in Ghana is aimed at the realisation of this goal. However, there seem to be some unanticipated consequences. One of these is the heterogeneity of HE clients, a phenomenon that ruptures the traditional notion that HE is 'designed for educating a privileged minority of young, white western men without disabilities or without the constraints of employment or dependents' (Hinton-Smith 2012: 4). The weak academic backgrounds of some participants was a matter of concern for many of the lecturer-participants:

> I think the liberalisation of the tertiary education landscape is the problem now. It seems we've broadened the landscape so much so that it's not everybody who is there who should have been there. I think that the bar is a bit low

> now and, for that matter, we may not be getting the quality of product that we would have aimed for. (Lecturer 2, public university)
>
> If the massification affects the quality, then we don't expect the end-product to be as before. (Senior staff, public university)
>
> Their IQs are low. They may not be able to fit well – I mean, the tertiary education – they may not be able to absorb as much as they need to fit well in the world of work. … they may not be able to acquire the skills that they need. So, for that matter, when they come to the world of work, I think they may not be able to fit. (Lecturer 1, public university)

This was especially worrisome in the private institutions, as many of them struggled to attract well-qualified applicants. While public institutions are oversubscribed, private institutions are usually unable to match the competition. For this reason, private institutions feel impelled to admit students who have been 'rejected' by the public ones, with most of these students possessing the financial means but weak entry grades. Additionally, private institutions need to meet their financial obligations, which are realised mainly through students' fees. Some lecturers commented on this thus:

> When it comes to private institutions, I think that it's basically finances, because everybody is looking for students everywhere and at a point in time you have to lower the standard to be able to get them because you need to survive. Because if you want to go strictly by regulatory standards you might not be able to meet your financial obligations. So you have to come down to a certain level to admit students. Some are not really qualified to be at the university and they don't match up to the standards … (Lecturer 3, private university)

It was noted that, often, well-qualified students who cannot afford the fees lose out at both public and private institutions. The role that the quality assurance and regulatory bodies are required to play to ensure the quality of HE staff and admitted students appears to be unchecked. The observation of a Head of department in a private university exemplifies this position:

> On the admission requirements, I think the regulatory bodies need to be a bit stringent on the requirements and also make sure that the institution is scrupulous when it comes to admitting students. (Head of department, private institution)

Being inclusionary, the HE system now has to find ways of dealing with the issues associated with expansion, such as the funding challenge, which drives away many qualified applicants in spite of the so-called expansion, the knowledge deficit of new entrants and the challenges of private participation.

Funding and Facilities

Undoubtedly, empowering higher education institutions to produce good-quality human resource requires a huge financial input. Yet, this does not seem to be happening in the Ghanaian higher education institutions that the stakeholders in this study spoke about. The stakeholders corroborated that, currently, the government subvention for higher education is not commensurate with the expansion. This situation is further exacerbated by a consistently dwindling financial allocation.

> I would say funding is a major challenge. For me, funding is very, very critical. Even in the public universities, the government provides funding for only, maybe, salaries. So, funding sources is something that is a major challenge. (Vice-chancellor, private university)
>
> Funding continues to dwindle and to dwindle and to dwindle and to dwindle compared with the expansion that government itself is calling for in higher education. (Staff, public university)
>
> Funding is a big problem now. The facilities we have, especially in the public institutions are not adequate. (Staff, public university)

According to the stakeholders, the funding challenge leads to resource and infrastructural deficits. In their view, the quantity and quality of physical facilities that have resulted from the funding challenge is a major hindrance to quality teaching and learning. Stakeholders from all three types of institutions in this study (public, private and community college), including civil society, alluded to this fact:

> Institutions are struggling to get the facilities and resources they need to train the people who go through higher education in the country. So, funding is still a challenge in tertiary education, both public and private. (Head of department, private institution)
>
> … the lack of resources for higher education … . You visit some of the higher institutions and get to their lab and it will be like my village … (Employer)

Infrastructure constitutes a critical element in institutions of higher learning. Evidence points to the fact that high-quality infrastructure, and conducive physical environment for that matter, produces many benefits, including better instruction and positive student outcomes (Teixeira, Amoroso and Gresham 2017). However, this challenge appears insurmountable in some higher education institutions. In Nigeria, for example, Subair, Okotoni and Adebakin (2012) revealed that the quality of infrastructure in some federal and state universities was not only grossly inadequate, inconvenient and outdated but also did not befit the status of infrastructure in a university.

This was deemed to be one of the causes of poor teaching and learning, which also led to the production of graduates who were unable to meet global standards. Inadequate structures and facilities in tertiary institutions creates low morale and discomfort among students and generally affects the quality of tuition and learning (Isa and Yusoff 2015).

I draw one major conclusion from the stakeholders' views regarding the funding challenge and inadequate/poor state of infrastructure in HE: in spite of the call for expansion in higher education to meet national development, investment in HE by the state is minimal, which suggests that funding higher education may not be highly prioritised by the state. Therefore, the quality of HE products (graduates) should not be expected to be above the level of investment made into their preparation.

Higher Education Processes and their Effect on HE Products

The higher education processes that this study explored were teaching and assessment approaches. This was against the backdrop that, in equipping students with the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to address the problems that confront society, the approaches employed should be fit for purpose. Regarding HE pedagogy, both students and lecturers pointed to the fact that HE instruction primarily focused on theory, to the detriment of hands-on practical training:

> You see, oftentimes we learn about the theory, theory, theory, but then the practical aspect is what we are lacking. We need to garner the knowledge, yes, but then the practicality is something that we are lacking. (Students' FGD, S2)

> Pertaining to the problems we are facing as a country in terms of higher education, I think in the aspect of training, the education is meant to train only the theory aspect, let me put it that way. The practical aspect is not there. So even if someone can be a graduate and even have first class and employed, he cannot perform well in the office. Then it means all the years that you spent in school, excuse me to say, we just wasted it. (Students' FGD, S4)

These views reveal a gap in the method of training students for the job market. Higher education expansion and emphasis on theory were blamed for students' lack of critical thinking skills and, hence, their inability to create new knowledge that will benefit the society.

> When we were there (in the university) we were asked to write essays. They would give a question and you are supposed to give the theories surrounding it, give your critical analysis about that theory and come up with your own suggestions related to the environment where you come from. And with that one, you see that the student will be given the opportunity to think beyond what he has been taught in the lecture theatre. But these days, because of

> the numbers, this is not possible. So you see that, even though they will have acquired a degree, but when you put a simple problem before them they are not able to analyse it critically. In this world now we need people who are analytical thinkers to do the work for us. (Trade unionist)

This finding relates to a study conducted by the Ghana Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (2013) which found that certain skills expected of HE graduates, such as problem-solving, the ability to analyse data, propose solutions and make decisions, among others, were lacking. The stakeholders in this study noted that these skills were lacking in HE graduates partly because in the course of their training internship opportunities were either non-existent or limited.

Industrial attachment provides an avenue for students to apply theories obtained in HE directly to practice, while using the skills obtained to inform the creation and reinforcement of new knowledge in HE. Expressing his views on this, the vice-chancellor of a private institution bemoaned the inability of HE institutions to live up to this expectation. He noted that whereas, elsewhere, students are made to undergo internship during vacations, in Ghana the practice is not well organised because of weak collaboration between HE and industry. This was corroborated by the trade unionist who made the following observation:

> One thing that I have realised is that our higher education here, especially for those that are doing the technical skills: they are limited in practical work. They may have the theory but when they have to actually use their hands to implement that theory that is in their heads, there is nothing, because that actual practical training was not provided at the university because of lack of funds. So if we really want to train our people to fit into the global society then we should look at the practical aspect very critically, especially for those who are doing Technical Education, the Home Economics and all those people, we should give them practical training that will let them be able to use the skills that they learn. (Trade unionist)

Consequently, it was intimated that when industries employ graduates, they incur huge expenditure to build their capacity. The obvious solution, according to the vice-chancellor, is to review the methods used in teaching and inculcate 'graduate soft skills' to ensure that the desired impact is made.

> … we need the training to change, we also need to change our training pedagogy to make sure that we are giving them the skills that will help them in their workplace. (Vice-chancellor, private university)

> I think that's also within the industry-led skills – and the postgraduate soft skills – that we really need to inculcate into our students so that when they complete they will have those soft skills that are very, very important in a place of work. (Vice-chancellor, private university)

Closely related to the issues the students raised concerning the predominant transmission approach to teaching is the mode of assessment. Ideally, through assessment, higher education graduates should be capable of demonstrating the knowledge and skills they have acquired through their training. Unsurprisingly, the students in this study revealed that the overemphasis on memorisation of content yielded the reproduction of that content.

> The system focuses on just memorising what you're given, that is, the lecture notes. Our system is about reading what you've been given and that is it, so if you're able to reproduce what you have been given, you will pass. (Students' FGD, S3)

Knowledge transmission and theory dispensing without practical application will undoubtedly lead to reproduction. It is also imperative to note that the output of graduates – for example, their ability to use their job positions to solve problems associated with the workplace – is a means to measure the quality and effects of the institution. This position was supported by both the students and the vice-chancellor:

> If the products are good then we can say that the educational institutions are actually working because that is what we consider as the end product. (Students' FGD, S1)
>
> … how people will be able to solve, analyse issues and then solve critical challenges in whatever position that they get in. Somebody who, for example, has to head a senior high school, how is that person using his knowledge to promote the good development of that institution? (Vice-chancellor, private university)

Conversely, many of the stakeholders doubted the ability of HE graduates to meet the needs of the job market and thus transform the economy of the nation. A Head of department, for example, quizzed rhetorically:

> … productivity … means that product of tertiary institutions, when they go to the world of work, what are they able to do? Are they able to translate the knowledge they acquire in school into practical situations? (Head of department, private university)

These perceptions point to the fact that the current pedagogical processes in HE do not seem to prepare students with the relevant skills, in spite of today's complex and highly technological society which requires skilled human resource to match it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the links made by stakeholders between the quality of higher education provision and its products in fulfilment of the public good. The results showed that stakeholders make strong links between the quality of inputs into higher education (in this case, the faculty, students and funding/resources), the approaches used in imparting and assessing relevant knowledge and skills, and the quality of graduates. They also drew links between the quality of HE, HE products and their ability to serve the public good in addressing the problems of society. The implication is that the quality of an institution is measured by the quality of investments made into it, the quality of faculty and instruction and the ability of the products to serve the public good.

A combination of factors need to be addressed to improve the quality of higher education. Firstly, I consider proposals towards improvement in the three inputs discussed in this paper, that is, lecturers, HE students' characteristics, funding and infrastructure. As it is evident that there is a strong link between teachers/teaching quality and student learning and that teacher quality is the most important factor in student learning, it is becoming much more imperative that the training and continued professional development of HE faculty is given more attention. The absence of this partly accounts for the lack of hands-on experience and overemphasis on memorisation and reproduction, which was noted to be a concern to students.

In the absence of academic conferences, seminars and workshops, which lecturers attend voluntarily, it appears there are no consciously planned, career-stage continuing professional development programmes offered by higher education institutions. This is further exacerbated by the fact that most lecturers do not possess professional teaching qualifications. Universities, quality assurance units and regulatory bodies need to consciously consider designing programmes that develop the pedagogical competence of HE faculty, as well as continuing professional development programmes that regularly update and enhance their general professional skills with the aim of making HE pedagogy more relevant to the societal needs.

I now consider the issues raised by the stakeholders regarding the characteristics of HE participants. The massification of HE, the heterogeneity of participants and the weak academic grades some present in HE are subjects that have gained research attention. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be adequate conscientisation among HE faculty about the diversity in the characteristics of HE participants. Higher education institutions need to attach more importance to the role of student support centres and continuously provide the necessary logistics for academic/remedial support to students who may be underprepared for HE work. Conversely, regulatory bodies and quality assurance units need to ensure that the quality of HE practitioners and participants is of an acceptable standard.

Regarding funding in HE, I make two proposals. Firstly, given that higher education is a public good, adequate funding should be given to it by the government to ensure that HE institutions are resourced enough to make them more accessible. Again, there should be more conscientious efforts in allocating budget for infrastructure and physical facilities to meet the increasing number of HE clients and enable institutions to produce graduates who can compete in the global labour market.

Contrarily, it is obvious that the government alone cannot fund higher education, much as it is clear that many students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds are incapable of financing their education without government's financial support. Therefore, higher education institutions should focus on creating conditions that can bring about innovations in funding, good governance and accountability.

Looking ahead, research on how different types of institutions (urban-elite/less-endowed) operate to develop human capital for the country's needs will be critical to arrive at best practices and changes or new directions to improve the quality of HE graduates in Ghana.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 111-136

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2728)

The Nigerian University System, Corruption and Erosion of the Public Good

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Abstract

This article examines the nature, causes and implications of the decline of the public good within Nigeria's university system over the past three decades. In that period, there has been a significant shortfall in the finances of the university system from federal and state governments, creating the material basis for its inability to recruit, retain and manage quality academic and non-academic staff. Essentially, it highlights how the self-interest of academics, expressed through their powerful union, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), has engaged in a struggle with government to improve the remuneration of academics rather than the quality of academic services. At the same time, corruption has sapped the system and led to significant levels of exploitation of students, in general, and the sexual harassment of female students. The public good within the university system is rooted in the constitutional provision that directs governments to provide quality and free education at all levels. But governments have failed in this mission, and families have had to pay for their children's quality education. This outcome has created massive inequality, with only the wealthy able to ensure quality education for their children, usually abroad. This has weakened the commitment of those in authority to push for the return of quality education at the national level. The result is that the Nigerian state appears to have provoked a class struggle in which poorly educated youth and the lumpen classes are marginalised and excluded from the ladder of social mobility.

Keywords: curriculum, higher education, university system, university governance, corruption, public good, academic freedom, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), sexual harassment, peer review, massification, funding

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Résumé

Cet article examine la nature, les causes et les implications du déclin du bien public au sein du système universitaire nigérian au cours des trois dernières décennies. Au cours de cette période, il y a eu un déficit important des finances du système universitaire de la part des gouvernements fédéral et des États, créant la base matérielle de son incapacité à recruter, retenir et gérer un personnel académique et non académique de qualité. Essentiellement, il met en évidence comment l'intérêt personnel des universitaires, exprimé par le biais de leur puissant syndicat, le Syndicat du Personnel Académique des Universités (ASUU), s'est engagé dans une lutte avec le gouvernement pour améliorer la rémunération des universitaires plutôt que la qualité des services académiques. Dans le même temps, la corruption a sapé le système et conduit à des niveaux importants d'exploitation des étudiants, en général, et de harcèlement sexuel des étudiantes, en particulier. Le bien public au sein du système universitaire est enraciné dans la disposition constitutionnelle qui ordonne aux gouvernements de fournir une éducation gratuite et de qualité à tous les niveaux. Mais les gouvernements ont échoué dans cette mission et les familles ont dû payer pour l'éducation de qualité de leurs enfants. Ce résultat a créé des inégalités massives, seuls les riches étant en mesure d'assurer une éducation de qualité à leurs enfants, généralement à l'étranger. Cela a affaibli l'engagement des autorités à faire pression pour le retour d'une éducation de qualité au niveau national. Le résultat est que l'État nigérian semble avoir provoqué une lutte des classes dans laquelle les jeunes peu éduqués et les classes impuissantes sont marginalisés et exclus de l'échelle de la mobilité sociale.

Mots-clés: curriculum, enseignement supérieur, système universitaire, gouvernance universitaire, corruption, bien public, liberté académique, Syndicat du Personnel Académique des Universités (ASUU), harcèlement sexuel, évaluation par les pairs, massification, financement

Introduction

In his lecture entitled 'Salvaging Nigerian Universities', one of Nigeria's most senior academics, Ladipo Adamolekun (2017), regretted the serious decline in the quality of universities and reminisced about his days as a student at the world-class University of Ibadan in the 1960s. He recalled the three qualities that made the university great: quality teachers, an enabling environment for learning, and international competitiveness. 'All three combined to ensure that Ibadan was indeed a world-class university', he concluded. However, he warned that we must not take the decline of universities in isolation. All other strategic elite institutions in the country, including the civil service, the judiciary and the military, have suffered a similar decline, he added. It is indeed completely true that Nigeria is suffering from a generalised and dramatic decline in the quality of its institutions, and the current crisis that affects higher education cannot be understood in isolation.

I was a student at Ahmadu Bello University in the 1970s, and during that time the universities were still quality institutions, even if they had by then lost their 'world-class' status. The three qualities indicated by Adamolekun also applied to us. On graduation, I joined that university's faculty and, within a few years became an active member and later a leader of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), our trade union. The ASUU of our time, the 1980s and 1990s, was committed to sustaining the quality education we had. Alas, we won many battles but lost the war. By 2013, I could no longer recognise our universities and wrote the following in my newspaper column during yet another long and destructive strike by the union:

> Over the past two decades, the compulsory sale of hand-outs to students by some lecturers and the sexual harassment of female students have become constant topics for musical lyrics and beer parlour jokes. More importantly, there is a significant part of university professors whose promotion has been on the basis of self-publication rather than peer review and many professors in Nigerian universities today have not got a single peer reviewed journal publication in their CV. This means that we have a growing percentage of fake professors in our universities who cannot stand up and get respect among their peers in the international context. ASUU demands to receive remuneration of international standards without a struggle to ensure that the quality of their members is also international can only lead to increased reputational erosion. (Ibrahim 2013: 12)

This article is about trying to understand how we got to this terrible situation within the context of the decline of the public good in higher education. The easy part of the story is the story of declining finances in the university system, which made it difficult for the universities to recruit and above all to retain quality staff, engage in research and provide a conducive atmosphere for learning and research. The more complex story relates to the corruption of Nigerian society in general, which created a mentality of looting and wanton exploitation in whatever situation people found themselves. ASUU was also unable to retain its focus on the struggle for academic freedom and university autonomy and transformed into a more classical union seeking to protect the interests of its members alone. To some extent it lost sight of the essentials – students, teaching and research.

Methodology

The study is based on literature review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. It is therefore essentially qualitative in approach. Key informant interviews were conducted across the country's university system based on purposive sampling of the political leadership of the Ministry of Education, the National Universities Commission, Academic Staff Union of Universities officials, vice-chancellors, chairpersons of university councils, the TET fund and the business community. Focus group discussions were conducted with students of three universities. The author also draws from his personal knowledge, having served as a member of the tactical committee of the Academic Staff Union of Universities for almost a decade.

The discussion aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between the university system and the pursuit of the public good within the context of a serious crisis in the educational system. We seek to show that the essence of this conjuncture is rooted in the changing dynamics of conceptions and understandings of the public good since the 1980s. The notion of higher education and the public good is informed by a range of political, economic and social factors that characterised that particular historical epoch. The economic crisis of the 1980s and the policy response adopted in the form of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) precipitated the predicament in higher education. Central to this quandary, therefore, is the failure of the developmental project of the Nigerian state. Partly because of this, the system of higher education was improved on the initiative of the founding fathers of the nation, who considered education as an important value the country owed to its children. Enrolment grew at all levels of education, and the university, which had been conceived as the privilege of a small elite, was confronted with the problem of massification as student numbers exploded.

Massification created a crisis in the state's capacity to cope with the need for increased funding. What was even more profound, however, was the entry of globally influenced, market-driven policies towards higher education that restricted the perceptions of the benefits of higher education to its economic value and framed the quality and effectiveness of institutions within these parameters. Specifically, the forces of globalisation represented by the Bretton Woods institutions pushed for a radical approach that devalued higher education in countries where the economic performance levels, they believed, did not justify high levels of investment. In other words, higher education was no longer a national priority. In terms of the political economy, the most important transformation that occurred was rising inequality, which led to the exit of elite children from public education, thereby creating a sharp class divide between the quality of education in the public and private sectors.

It is also important to understand the impact of people's positioning in relation to the higher education system and how this may influence how they make sense of higher education, the public good and private interests. University academics, trade unions and students have organised effectively to challenge the state's attempt to withdraw from its commitment to fund public education. The upper echelons of the elite have responded by taking their children out of the arena of public education. Consequently, they have diverted funds from the sector. The move of the elite away from public education in a context of growing inequality signalled a value shift from the pursuit of the public good to private gain, based on access to high-quality or low-quality education. From an understanding of education as an instrument that benefits extended families and communities, the elite has successfully restricted its impact to nuclear families and, specifically, their own children.

The Nigerian University System: From an Elite Arrangement to Massification

Nigeria has a long history of university education and a very large higher education sector. The higher education sphere in Nigeria presently encapsulates universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, which train teachers. It has been argued (Fafunwa 1975) that we can trace the history of higher education in Nigeria way back to 1827 when the Church Missionary Society founded the Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. It had the mandate to train students from the British colonies of Nigeria, Ghana (Gold Coast), Liberia and Sierra Leone. It was the only educational institution that provided an opportunity to anglophone West Africans who may have qualified for admission into British universities but did not have the means to go there. In the early twentieth century, there was an increase in the need for skilled human resources, which led to the commencement of the process of establishing more higher educational institutions in the region. This gave birth to the establishment of the Yaba Higher College, in 1932, which offered courses in medicine, agriculture, engineering and teacher training (Yaqub 2001).

The Yaba Higher College remained the main higher educational institution in Nigeria for a long time and succeeded in producing much-needed indigenous personnel who serviced the operations of the British colonial government of Nigeria. Nigerian nationalists and elites saw the college as an inferior alternative to university education, and clamoured for the establishment of proper university education. Following this pressure, the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa, known as the Elliot Commission, was set up in 1943 to report on the organisation and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa and to make recommendations regarding future university development in that area. The recommendations of the Elliot Commission led to the establishment of Nigeria's first university college – the University College Ibadan – in 1948, which was an affiliate of the University of London.

In 1959, as the government of Nigeria was preparing for independence, it appointed the Ashby Commission, which made several recommendations, among which were student enrolment and admission criteria, flexibility of university courses, and the establishment of four universities. The outcomes of the commission regarding balance in the structure and geographical distribution of university education led to the establishment of the four 'Ashby universities' according to the then regional division of Nigeria: the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (Eastern Region, 1960); the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) (1962, Western Region); Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (Northern Region); and the University of Lagos (1962). In the same year, 1962, the University of Ibadan attained autonomous status as a degree-awarding institution. In 1970, after the creation of the Mid-Western Region, the University of Benin was established. The six universities established during this period, 1960 to 1970, are still referred to as the 'first generation universities' (Jega1994; Yaqub 2001).

From 1975 to 1980, the period of 'oil boom' (which would later translate to 'oil doom'), Nigeria began to exploit its vast revenue flows from petroleum and associated products to expand its system of higher education. Specifically, the government established seven new universities. These were the universities of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Bayero University in Kano, known as the 'second-generation universities'. Subsequently, the quest of the federal government to advance technological development in Nigeria led to the establishment of seven new universities of technology at Akure, Bauchi, Owerri, Minna, Yola, Makurdi and Abeokuta. These institutions were later merged with some conventional universities in 1984. Subsequently, in 1988, they were demerged, with two – Makurdi and Abeokuta – being converted into universities of agriculture in the early 1980s. A third university of agriculture was established at Umudike in 1993. Taking advantage of the 1979 Constitution, which placed education on the concurrent legislative list, states established their own universities (fourteen between 1980 and 1992), bringing the total number of universities in the country to forty (Jega 1994; Yaqub 2001).

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, there have been unprecedented developments in the university education system in the country. Access to university education was accelerated by establishing more state universities as well as private universities. In 2010, the federal government approved the take-off of nine federal universities in states that previously had no federal university, bringing the number of universities in Nigeria in 2010 to 117, consisting of thirty-six federal universities, thirty-six state universities and forty-five private universities. In 2012, Nigeria had 122 universities (thirty-six federal, thirty-six state, and fifty private), seventy-one polytechnics, forty-seven monotechnics and seventy-nine colleges of education. Six years later, according to the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (Abubakar Rasheed, KII 2018), the number had risen to 162 universities. Each of the thirty-six states of the federation has at least one university, totalling forty-seven. The latest is Zamfara State University. The following states have two universities each – Kano, Imo, Rivers and Edo – while Ogun State has three. Most of the seventy-four private universities in the country are faith-based institutions, but a few are owned by foundations and individuals.

The proof of access to university is in the numbers. University student enrolment rose from barely 100 in 1948 to 3,681 in 1962; 7,697 in 1965–66; about 17,750 in 1972–73; and about 250,000 in 1994 (Jega 1994: 3–5). Today the federal universities have a student intake of over 1.5 million but only 37,000 academic staff, which is 70 per cent of the existing requirement.

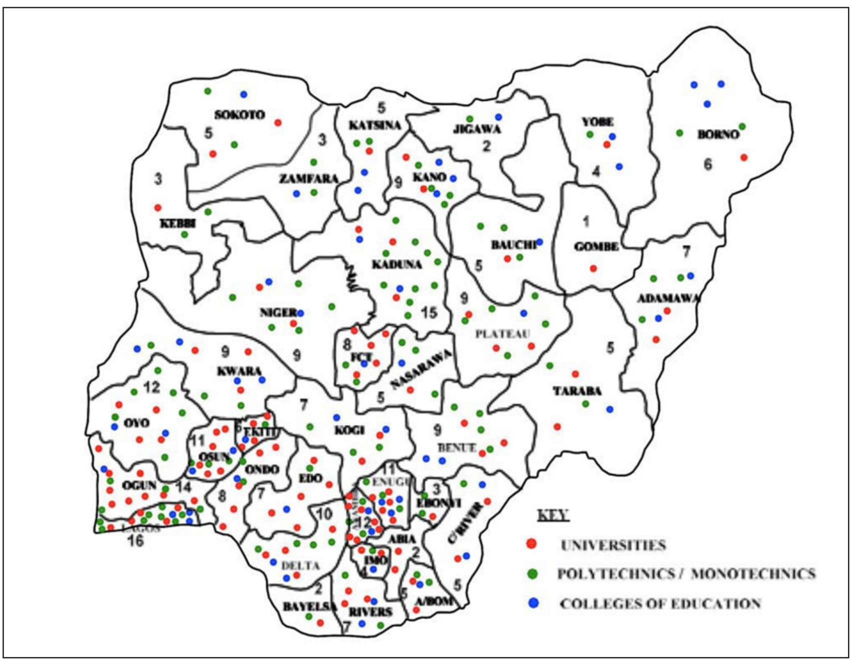

Figure 1: Geographical Distribution of Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria
Source: Bamiro (2012)

There is an uneven geographical spread of these universities, as shown in Figure 1, with the southern part of the country having the highest concentration. This probably informed the federal government's establishment of nine universities in one fell swoop in 2011, with the aim of ensuring a federal university in each of the thirty-six states in the federation (Bamiro 2012).

Abubakar Rasheed (KII 2018), Executive Secretary of the Nigerian University Commission argues that the massification challenge faced by the university system is huge. Nigeria has a population of nearly 200 million, and over a five-year period, from 2012 to 2017, over 7.8 million young Nigerians applied to be admitted to Nigerian universities, but only a little over 1.5 million were actually admitted. This meant that only 19 per cent of applicants to universities over the five-year period gained admission, leaving nearly 81 per cent seeking other alternatives. Many of them had to go to colleges of education and polytechnics because they could not get into their choice of university. The danger for the country, he stated, is that it is grooming an angry and frustrated youth who believe that the state has failed them by denying them the means to achieve their ambition of getting a university degree.

State Policy: Education is a Public Good

Nigeria's national educational policy is based on the premise that the most effective investment a nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, social and human resources is in education. It is considered to be the greatest force that can bring about change. It is in this context that educational policy and framework becomes extremely important. The national policy on education seeks to engender the following:

1. The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society.
2. The development of the intellectual capacities of the individual to understand and appreciate their environment.
3. The acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills, which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community.
4. The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environment. (Yaqub 2001: 15)

It is in this context that the Nigerian Constitution defines education as a public good that the state has an obligation to provide to citizens in an equitable manner. Accordingly, Article 18 of the Constitution states that:

18. (1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

18. (2) Government shall promote science and technology.

18. (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide:

    (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education;

    (b) free secondary education;

    (c) free university education; and

    (d) free adult literacy programme.

In pursuance of this policy, university stakeholders, such as student unions, the academic staff union of universities, trade unions, and left and progressive intellectuals, have held successive governments to this constitutional provision. It is almost a 'sin' for a Nigerian government to propose the introduction of tuition fees in the tertiary education sector. At the same time, government does not provide sufficient funds for universities to enable the quality academic and research output that is expected of them. The result has been a steady decline in the quality of the university system and the lowering of standards.

In the early days of the Nigerian university system, the faculty as well as senior administrative staff were essentially expatriate. Standards were set by the University of London through the tradition established by University College, Ibadan. Initially, staff organisation was mainly for recreational activities and social interaction. As the system developed, the process of unionisation started, on the basis of promoting the collective interest and the general welfare and conditions of service of the staff. This led to the formation of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) in 1965. NAUT had a membership strength of 1,209 at the time of its formation (Jega 1994). In its bid to improve the welfare of members of staff, in 1967 NAUT submitted a memorandum for a salary review, making the case that there had not been any salary review in Nigerian universities since 1959. There was no response to this memorandum and NAUT did not have the strength to forcefully push for its demands. In 1973, NAUT embarked on its first major industrial action, demanding an increase in salaries, but this was easily smashed by the Gowon military regime by mere threat, which in turn exposed the weakness of the organisation (Jega 1994).

On 11 February 1978, NAUT was transformed into a trade union and renamed the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) by military decree. It remained fallow for two years because academics were apparently unaware of the change. In any case, at that time academics did not consider themselves to be workers, so the idea of unionising professionals was strange in the Nigerian system, in which workers joined unions whereas professionals joined associations.

The turning point in terms of the debate over the public good and the Nigerian university system was in 1980. That was the year Biodun Jeyifo and Uzodinma Nwala were elected pioneer President and Secretary of ASUU. They both had a radical socialist ideological bent and were convinced that the state had a responsibility to provide the best education to all citizens without students having to pay. The public good was defined essentially as free and high-quality education paid for by the state. The Trade Union Act of 1978 allowed professional associations to operate as trade unions and it was in that context that the NAUT was replaced by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), a trade union.

For the new ASUU leadership, it was a golden opportunity for intellectuals to join the working-class struggle as trade unionists and provide intellectual support to the larger struggle to improve the educational system, but even more importantly, to contribute to building a progressive Nigeria. The subtext was that revolutionary cadres were in the process of linking brain-power to the task of the socialist transformation of Nigeria. Since 1980, a hard core of committed socialist intellectuals has succeeded in remaining the backbone that controls the affairs of ASUU. According to Nwala (Ndibe 2018), the Shehu Shagari regime had established a committee to review conditions in the universities under S.G. Kuki, and he and Jeyifo prepared a memorandum, which became the ASUU "bible".

The arrival of radical unionism in the university system meant that engagement no longer focused only on catering for the advancement of the welfare of academics, but also on having a greater voice in the operations of the Nigerian university system and the affairs of the nation at large. It was at this point that the university community developed the mission that the ASUU was not just a union to fight for the welfare of its members but an instrument to serve the general good of the Nigerian people and play an important role in national development. In line with this new mission, in 1983 ASUU joined Nigeria's trade union centre, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), as a full member. It was a choice that was calculated to broaden its base and increase its social relevance. In 1981, ASUU had strongly supported the NLC in its struggle for a national minimum wage. The formal integration of ASUU into the NLC brought the intellectual community closer to the working-class movement and made it more conscious about the plight of the Nigerian worker. Academics joined the fight for the right of the Nigerian worker in several dictatorial military governments and during the Shehu Shagari regime (Jega 1994). With academics now fully in the labour movement of Nigeria, from then on there would be a qualitative development and growth of the Nigerian Labour Congress. It would afford the academics an opportunity to learn from the experience of the struggle of other workers (Jega 1994: 12).

In 1983, the ASUU grew and began to see itself as a sort of 'People's Tribune' and defender of popular causes. The issues it engaged with after the overthrow of the Second Republic in 1984 became increasingly political. The new administration of General Muhammadu Buhari, which came into power in January 1984 during a period of serious economic crisis, rejected the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan on offer at the time and embarked on a pathway of nationalistic economic policies, which pleased the ASUU. However, the Buhari regime had little respect for human rights and completely disregarded academic freedom and university autonomy, to which ASUU was very committed. The ASUU soon got into trouble for criticising it. By the middle of 1985, the economy of Nigeria was in deep crisis due to a dramatic decline in revenues and the inability to pay for imports. The Buhari regime refused to accept the dictates of the IMF and World Bank and rising authoritarianism generated popular resentment. This created the conditions for its overthrow by Ibrahim Babangida on 27 August 1985. The struggle for university autonomy and academic freedom continued. ASUU used its popularity to join the fight for democracy after it became clear that the regime of General Babangida was not genuinely committed to its announced plan of returning the country to democratic rule and did not have a real intention to hand over to a democratically elected leadership (Jega 1994). It was only in 1999 that General Abdulsalami Abubakar handed over power to a democratically elected government.

Frequent and Long University Strikes and the Public Good

It is phenomenal that, in spite of all the changes that occurred over forty years, the ASUU has been able to maintain its radical engagement. Its preferred mode of action against government has been to strike, which has been an ongoing part of Nigeria's national strife and trauma since 1982. The number of days during which Nigerian universities were closed due to ASUU strikes under the Fourth Republic are staggering: 1999 – 150 days; 2000 – 90 days; 2002 – 14 days; 2003 – 180 days; 2005 – 3 days; 2006 – 7 days; 2007 – 90 days; 2008 – 7 days; 2009 – 120 days; 2010 – 157 days; 2010 – 190 days; 2013 – 150 days; 2016 – 7 days; 2017 – 35 days; 2018–2019 – 97 days (*Business Day* 2019; *Premium Times* 2019).

For ASUU, strikes are the only action powerful enough to force government to provide additional resources for universities; they believe that they use this power in pursuit of the public good. However, the conduct of these long strikes may not be completely altruistic. Closing down the universities and sending students home for three to six months forces parents to put pressure on government to accept ASUU demands. During the strike, the staff do not work and Nigerian law is clear in its 'no work, no pay' policy during a strike. However, after each and every strike, government has been forced to pay the salary arrears to the striking staff. Meanwhile, many academics engage in paid teaching in private and state government universities during the strike period. They therefore benefit materially from the strikes, which might explain why the strikes often run for a long time. Each strike ends with an agreement in which government commits to provide significant additional financial resources for the universities, but never pays up all that it promises. The result is anger in the universities, warning strikes and usually the organisation of a very long strike every two years or so. The focus of the strikes has become very narrowly focused on material benefits for lecturers. Students become the collateral damage of these strikes as their studies are disrupted and they stay longer at university before they graduate.

ASUU is right that the government promises and never delivers, and that it therefore should be held accountable. The Nigerian government is irresponsible and does sign deals that it has no intention of honouring. However, the struggle for a responsive and accountable government is a much larger one and goes far beyond the ASUU struggle. ASUU needs to learn what every trade unionist knows – the gains in the struggle are never total, they are always incremental.

It is difficult to justify frequent strikes in the university system as the pathway to the pursuit of the public good. It is clear that the strikes have become focused essentially on more money for lecturers rather than the lofty ideals that ASUU espouses. The strikes have seriously affected university calendars over the decades and generations of students have lost one to two years of their lives waiting for their lecturers to return. The strikes have shortened teaching weeks, affecting the capacity of lecturers to cover the course outline and thereby contributing to the decline in the quality of graduates. Precisely because of this impact, wider sections of the elite have moved their children from public universities to private universities where ASUU is not allowed to operate, there are no strikes, and lecturers teach and cover the course outline. As more of the elite take their children out of the public system, the unintended consequence is that, increasingly, the government commitment to rebuilding the universities is weakened; as the elite, have placed their children in private universities within or outside the country. Another outcome is that family budgets have transformed drastically over the past three decades, with a considerable percentage devoted to expensive private education for children from nursery to tertiary levels. In other words, public education has been abandoned, left to the children of the poorest and least influential citizens.

While being critical of ASUU, I believe that, historically, it has been a positive force. According to Adamu Adamu, the Minister of Education:

> ASUU is a very, very positive force … Perhaps I should call them the conscience of education. Even if there is the will on the part of government to do good, sometimes it would require the academic staff union to push it, to insist. This is not a blanket endorsement of whatever ASUU is doing but in this respect, I think they are a force for good. (KII 2018)

ASUU has become almost the only institution that is formally engaged in the normative terrain of articulating and struggling for values and the public good. There is no doubt that without its strikes the university system would have been much worse than it presently is. It is for this reason that the ASUU struggle for the public good is legitimate, even if it does not achieve its full objectives. One of the limitations of the struggle is the assumption that the main problem is finance, which has to come from government. There is, however, a more profound problem, which is internal to the university system. Rising corruption is destroying the system from within.

ASUU and Rising Corruption in the Academy

The Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission identified academic corruption as one of the most serious challenges facing the university system, in the form of academic malpractice and sexual harassment. He hoped 'that between now and 2025 we should be able to have a fairly freer system, more honest, more transparent, more accountable, where the freedom of the staff and the students is better guaranteed and where all issues of corruption in whatever forms are being reduced to the barest minimum (KII 2018).

There are clear limits to the struggle of ASUU, among them being the responsibility of academics. Academic ethics has taken a hard blow as lecturers exploit their students by selling handouts and sexually harassing their female students. The academic principle of peer review has declined and a significant number of university professors are promoted on the basis of self-publication.

I followed with keen interest the debate spearheaded by Okey Iheduru on Toyin Falola's USA Africa Dialogue listserv (see Ibrahim 2013). Iheduru is an American professor of Nigerian descent. During his sabbatical in Nigeria, he had participated in six NUC accreditation panels and was shocked to find that universities routinely recruited mercenary professors purely for the accreditation exercise. He started the debate by challenging this common and pervasive but fraudulent practice. Programmes that had been staffed for three to four years by an army of full-time and part-time assistant lecturers would suddenly list full-time and/or part-time associate professors/readers and full professors in order to meet the NUC staffing mix requirements. The worst culprits he said were the private religious universities.

He also challenged the propriety of the common practice of supposedly peer-reviewed academic journals in Nigeria demanding upfront monetary payment from prospective authors. He expressed his surprise at the virtual absence of policies or discussions about quality assurance regarding scholarship output in the university system. According to him, most of the Nigerian scholars he met had never heard of Google Scholar, not to speak of more reputable academic citation counts for published journal articles, including those published in Nigeria, or other (sometimes controversial) measures of quality, such as Web of Science/Web of Knowledge and Pearson's 'Impact Factor' reports on journals and academic publishers.

Most Nigerian scholars therefore do not live in the world of the international academy where peer review matters and is the basis of assessment. Nigerian universities still have some scholars who are respected internationally but they are now a minority. As Iheduru put it,

> … it should worry us that an academic that boasts 50–100 'professional papers' cannot equally boast of one citation count on Google Scholar! … More than 90 per cent of the CVs I reviewed listed as publication outlets 'Volume 1, Number 1' or Departmental journals or self-published books or books whose publishers' names and addresses are more innocuous and lesser known than the remotest streets in Ajegunle, Lagos or Ekeonunwa Street, Owerri. I concede that 'writing for themselves' is not unique to Nigeria, but most scholars elsewhere don't engage in this kind of massive inflation of output that is clearly indefensible.

Many Nigerian scholars are not even aware that academic assessment is not something to pay for. Given this culture of academic corruption, should the Nigerian government decide today to grant all the financial demands of the universities, there will be no fundamental improvement in their quality because of the internal rot that has destroyed them from within.

The failure of ASUU is its refusal to address these internal problems of academic corruption and collapsed standards. There has been a large expansion in the number of university staff and students without a commensurate expansion in quality. Massification in university intake has been accompanied by expanding mediocrity in the university system. In addition to the problem of fake professors, most universities have a majority of junior faculty as staff and most of the few senior faculty members are of doubtful quality. University stakeholders must therefore develop a more comprehensive approach to resolving the problems in the Nigerian university system. A decline in government funding cannot be taken as the most serious problem confronting the academy. Merit and effective peer review must be returned to the university system. In addition, there are pressing issues relating to sexual politics.

The Rot Deepens: Sexual Harassment as Academic License

As far back as 1981, the Cookey Commission – a presidential commission charged with investigating wages and work conditions in Nigeria's public sector – unearthed evidence of significantly high levels of sexual harassment in the universities. They reported that passing or failing female students was often a function of their acceptance or resistance of sexual advances from some lecturers (Pereira 2007: 149). A survey by Project Alert of sexual harassment at thirteen universities revealed that 14.4 per cent of female respondents had experienced sexual harassment by fellow students, cult members in particular, or male lecturers (Pereira 2007).

Sexual harassment by academics is particularly insidious: the 'unethical and unprofessional conduct' of lecturers in using their institutional power to commit horrible crimes, mostly against women, is often overlooked because the institution tends to protect them (Pereira 2004: 2). Additionally, Pereira (2004) points out that the prevailing justification in the university system is that since civil servants corruptly enrich themselves in their offices so lecturers should also enjoy what they can based on what they have access to. It is in this context that lecturers started exploiting their students through the sale of marks or handouts and male lecturers started preying on their female students.

Academics are very defensive about sexual harassment of female students. The core argument they make is that many girls are corrupt and seek to seduce their lecturers to get higher marks, which they do not deserve. There is even a slogan that has emerged to justify the rising tide of corruption – 'Use what you have to get what you need'. Some male lecturers claim that many female students also believe in this, which is why they allegedly 'seduce' their lecturers. This is absolute nonsense as it wishes away the core ethical responsibility of teachers not to exploit their students. The reality is that many lecturers are misusing their position in the academy as a licence to harass, exploit and criminally assault their students. If this is not fought, the universities cannot be revived.

In 2019, many more reports emerged in the media about the criminal behaviour of some lecturers. For example, a 17-year-old student of the University of Ilorin reported that her Arts Education lecturer, in February 2019, 'locked his office while she was inside, pushed her to a table and raped her. The man covered her mouth to stifle screams and later left her alone in the office after the encounter' (*Premium Times* 2019). The accused denied the allegations, but multiple interviews with senior university officials, including the head of Department, the dean of Faculty of Education and the dean of Students' Affairs, confirmed that the attack had occurred.

Increasingly, the police are being invited to investigate such cases because many lecturers are never punished for their actions, since they deny the incident and their colleagues prefer to believe them rather than the girls who report harassment. Another case occurred in the Faculty of Education of Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, where a girl was raped by a lecturer, who was supposed be her guardian. The police were called in and it was discovered that the lecturer involved 'was both HIV and hepatitis positive and had infected the girl' (*Daily Trust* 2019). In a second case in the same university, this time in the Faculty of Social Sciences, a lecturer threatened a female student: 'He plainly told the girl she can't pass the course without submitting herself to him. Left with no option, she came here to the Security Unit and reported. We set a trap for him by asking the girl to play along. He went and booked a hotel room, and we arrested him while he was attempting to have sex with the girl' (*Daily Trust* 2019.

These sting operations are being organised by Ahmadu Bello University because the university ran into problems when it sacked a professor for sexual harassment. The professor in question was said to have made sexual advances to his postgraduate student, who was married. The woman alerted her husband, and together they tricked the professor to meet her in a hotel room in Kano, where he was arrested. The university sacked him but he went to court to challenge the termination of his appointment. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which believed the professor's story that he had gone to the hotel room to receive chapter three of the thesis she was writing. The court ordered the university to reinstate him. The standard of proof of sexual harassment has become very high as more cases emerge. According to the Chief Security Officer of Ahmadu Bello University, Colonel Tukur Jibril (rtd), 'We have to use evidence that even in a court of law, these people would not escape justice.' (*Daily Trust* 2019).

Has the #*MeToo Movement* Arrived at Nigerian Universities?

The most celebrated recent case of sexual harassment in the Nigerian university system is that of Professor Richard Akindele. He was demanding sex for marks from a female student; she recorded him and leaked the tape. The audio recording went viral and was reported on globally. The conversation was used as evidence by the university committee that investigated the matter, and both professor and student were invited to give testimony. The student said that the professor told her she had failed his course but that he would raise her mark to a pass if she had sex with him. The professor contended that the student knew she had passed but was seeking to score an 'A' and that this had led to him being the one who was sexually harassed. The committee's decision was that in both scenarios the professor's behaviour was scandalous in that it had brought ridicule to and tarnished the reputation of the university. This is interesting language, as it focused on the reputation of the institution rather than the harm to the student. However, the committee acknowledged the sexual harassment and dismissed the professor from the services of the university. A new twist emerged after his dismissal. He was arraigned in the Federal High Court, Osogbo, by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) for corruptly attempting to have sex with one of his students in exchange for marks in his course and was tried, found guilty and jailed for two years (Olawale 2018). The case set new jurisprudence in which 'marks for sex' became a criminal offence that could lead to prosecution and sanction.

The above case might not necessarily signal the growth of the #MeToo movement in the Nigerian university system, because specific circumstances made it possible. According to Pereira (KII 2018), the university has a Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, which had been working on gender issues and sensitising students. Secondly, a non-governmental organisation – Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Exploitation (WARSHE) – had been active in the university, mobilising students. Thirdly, a legal rights NGO – the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), led by Dr. Abiola Akiode-Afolabi – played a major leadership role in guiding the student through the difficult interrogation by the investigating committee, and they were the ones that referred the case to the ICPC. Pereira therefore argues that there must be enhanced efforts to provide enabling conditions for female students to successfully report sexual harassment and get remedy before the #MeToo movement has its moment in the Nigerian university system. Nonetheless, there has been a significant increase in reporting and investigation of sexual harassment since the Akindele case was successfully conducted and prosecuted.

The general corruption and spread of sexual harassment in the university system deepened over the years because university administrations and the ASUU have not invested sufficiently in developing and implementing a code of ethics to guide the conduct of staff and students. ASUU actually lost the moral high ground in 2016 when the Nigerian Senate proposed the Sexual Harassment Offences Bill. The ASUU president at the time, Professor Biodun Ogunyemi, argued at the public hearing of the Bill that the nation's universities and tertiary institutions as a whole were established by law as autonomous bodies and so had their own regulating procedures. ASUU, he said, would not accept the passage of any law to punish lecturers because it would 'violate university autonomy'. He added that the Bill was discriminatory because it was targeted at educators while sexual harassment was a societal problem and not peculiar to tertiary institutions (Vanguard 2016). While it is true that sexual harassment is indeed a general problem, various studies have shown that it is very prevalent in tertiary institutions and ASUU has not taken any initiative within the university system to contain it. Indeed, ASUU should be ashamed of this tacit defence of the culture of unbridled sexual harassment in the university system.

I agree with Pereira (KII 2018) that the university, like society at large, has not defined women as equal members of the public, so the public good has been conceptualised without seeing women as central constitutive elements. She argues that the public sphere itself has always been seen as an arena for private gain and that the travails of women in the university system are rooted in this doctrine, which sees women as part of the 'benefits' that male lecturers can enjoy. A more gender-inclusive approach to the public good is therefore required if standards and quality are to improve in the university system.

Funding

The issues that face Nigerian universities are associated with the links between the school system, disconnection from the needs of the economy and approaches to funding. In 1978, the then military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo abolished tuition fees at the universities and introduced what it called a 'tuition-free regime' in the tertiary education sector. This policy has endured for over forty years. The provision was inserted into Nigeria's Constitution of 1979 and, subsequently, the Constitution of 1999. Reviewing the provision is problematic because it is strongly supported by powerful forces such as trade unions and the progressive intelligentsia. Meanwhile, government faces other needs and has not been able to fund the university system sufficiently. Public universities themselves have very serious problems in that they cannot generate significant revenue streams to compensate for falling budgetary allocations. As the tuition-free regime has become a no-go area, the question of funding remains fundamental.

Of all the input into the university system, funding is the single most-important non-material resource. It is generally said, 'Get funding right and most other things will fall in place'. But in Nigeria university education funding has declined consistently since the inception of the tuition-free system. Initially, the Ibadan College was adequately funded in all aspects of teaching and research because it was the only higher institution in the country. After the addition of the first-generation universities, education was still well funded and maintained at internationally respected standards. It was even reported that there were years when the funding received was slightly above the amount requested. According to Hinchiliffe (2002), the federal budget for education rose from NGN 6.2 million in 1970 to NGN 1,051.2 million in 1976. Thereafter, it declined to NGN 667.1 million in 1979, rose again to NGN 1,238.5 million in 1980, declined in succeeding years before rising to NGN 3,399.3 million in 1989. It dropped further to NGN 1, 553.3 million in 1991 before rising before rising gradually to NGN 9,434.7 million in 1994. in 1996, the federal government funded its polytechnics at the rate of USD 251 per student, its colleges of education at the rate of USD 394 per student and its universities at the rate of USD 300 per student. Thereafter, the declining trend continued. However, in the year 2000, funding for tertiary institutions did improve significantly (Afolayan 2015).

The cost of running universities can be broken into two major components. The recurrent costs comprise staff salaries and allowances, teaching costs, students' textbooks, stationery and boarding, as well as research and administrative support costs. The capital costs include items of long durability, like land, school buildings, teaching equipment, vehicles, staff houses and boarding facilities. The government is expected to provide adequate funds to match the various responsibilities of the public university educational system, both recurrent and capital (Okebukola 2002). The federal government is the major funder of higher education in Nigeria but the growth in this expenditure has been inconsistent over the years. The several contributing factors include economic recession, the country's huge foreign and domestic debt, declining government revenue mainly from petroleum, mismanagement of economic resources, and above all, mega corruption. But the key problem has been the phenomenal growth in the number of students and universities in the country.

Considering the above issues faced by the federal government, these institutions need to engage in revenue-generating projects with a view to supplementing the government subventions. For universities, the obvious approach is to raise fees from students. However, this has been almost impossible at public universities, where ASUU, and indeed most Nigerians, are convinced that it is the government's responsibility to fund higher education. Part of the argument is that earlier generations received free education at the tertiary level so it is unethical to deny the current generation the same privilege.

The Nigerian university system is complex and class-based and operates in an international environment in which many within the elite send their children abroad for their education. The educational system in the country is completely bifurcated, with very low-quality public education for the poor and variable higher-quality education for the children of the elite. Alongside this divide, Nigeria has 13.2 million children of school going age who are not in school (Trust 2017). At the same time, the Nigerian elite send their children to some of the best-quality schools in the world but also to poor-quality schools abroad.

There has been an extraordinary development of private universities in the country. The expansion is not directed at addressing the crisis of massification, as private universities are expensive and therefore shut out the children of the poor. But although they target the children of the elite, for the most part these children are sent to foreign universities, as indicated above. The private universities therefore have too few students to be economically viable. In addition, they have very high infrastructure costs.

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund was established to provide supplementary funding for tertiary education in the public sector, but over the past decade it has become the only fund to provide direct intervention in key academic areas for the sector. This includes support for the provision of essential infrastructure for teaching and learning, the procurement of instructional material and equipment, support for research and publication and, most importantly, the training of academic staff to acquire higher degrees, attend academic conferences and publish their manuscripts, as well as the publishing of journals (Abdullahi Bichi Baffa KII 2018). Government has become completely dependent on the fund and has been reluctant to provide additional resources.

University Governance, Academic Freedom and the Curriculum

The university is known to be the highest citadel of learning for the production of intellectuals, researchers and general workforce for both governmental and non-governmental establishments. The International

Conference convened by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1950, in Nice, stipulated that universities worldwide should stand on three major principles: the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for the truth may lead; the tolerance of divergent options and freedom from political interference; the obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principle of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity, and to lead mutually material and moral aid on an international level.

One way to achieve these principles is to resist any development that might erode their academic freedom and autonomy. According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the right to education can only be beneficial if accompanied by the academic freedom of staff and students.

Universities are established by law and tradition to run on a committee system. Governing councils develop policies for the university, and the vice-chancellor and his or her deputies co-ordinate the policy implementation in conjunction with committees operating in faculties and institutes. Senate has responsibility for academic matters. As corruption has grown in universities, the first negative impact has been on the governance system in the university. In many universities, the committee system for university governance has collapsed and over the past few decades vice-chancellors have come to see themselves as sole administrators of their institutions. Private universities are relatively new and by the time they started coming up the committee system had already died.

Appointments to university councils of public universities are done as compensation for political support, and many join with the mindset of seeking contracts to enrich themselves rather than to develop the university. When a policymaker's interest is only to take from the system and not to give to it, you have a problem.

The general position in Nigeria is that in spite of the problems related to autocratic governance of the universities, academic freedom has been protected. According to the chief regulator of Nigerian universities:

> In all public universities, especially the federally owned universities, there is academic freedom. As you are aware the freedom is largely being facilitated by the active interventions of the academic staff unions, especially the Association of Staff Unions, ASUU over the last three of four decades which have been harping on the issue of academic freedom in the universities with little interference from the government or the owners. In terms of research, yes, in fact, in my view if you ask me now as the chief regulator I will say

> the freedom is even reckless because in terms of research, Nigeria has not defined its human resource and research needs. Virtually no researcher receives directives on what to work on. (Abubakar Rasheed, KII 2018)

The difficulty, however, is that Nigeria runs a centralised system of curriculum development. This is supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC), which selects professors to develop curricula for all the disciplines. All universities in the country are obligated to use exactly the same course outlines, with no possibility of developing independent academic programmes. This is a serious challenge to academic freedom.

According to Abubakar (KII 2018), since he took over running the Commission, he has engaged in extensive reviews by getting stakeholders, including industry and professional associations, to participate in the review of curricula. He himself poses the following question on the irrationality of the present system:

> Why should a student of agriculture in Port Harcourt read the same curriculum as a student of agriculture in Sokoto – one is in the desert and the other one in the swamp area … So part of the reform we are doing is this realisation that the curriculum had been very rigid and we need to liberalise, and we have started. (Abubakar Rasheed, KII 2018)

The concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are among the most important concerning the existence, mission and role of university throughout the world. According to Ajayi (1980), the two concepts relate to the protection of the university from day-to-day interference by government officials, specifically on the selection of students; the appointment and removal of academic staff; the determination of the content of university education and the control of degree standards; the determination of size and rate of the growth; the establishment of the balance between teaching, research and advanced study; the selection of research projects, and freedom of publication.

Historically, the institutional autonomy of Nigeria's universities has been eroded by prolonged military rule through, mainly, the appointment of vice-chancellors without regard to rules and procedures. The Gowon, Obasanjo and Babangida regimes summarily dismissed and incarcerated academics, and banned the ASUU. Vice-chancellors appointed by the military acted like 'military commanders' in favour of their appointees without minding the effect on the university institution (Jega 1994, 9–11). Jega identified three major responses by academics to academic freedom and university autonomy: complacence and apathy; complicity and duplicity; organised opposition and struggle championed by ASUU. The third response attracted increased backlash. While they kept championing the cause of the institutions, some Nigerians criticised ASUU's demands. This quagmire painted a gloomy future for academic freedom.

The point is also made that prolonged military rule alone is not the cause of the poor state of academic freedom. Academics (ministers of education, special assistants, advisers, vice-chancellors, provosts, deans, directors, heads of department and heads of section) recruited by the military regimes, who initiate, implement and execute actions inimical to academic freedom because of selfishness, also share the blame. Jega proposes an academic culture and ethics and calls for '... a national consensus on a declaration containing the needs and aspirations of Nigerian academics'. This is to be done in line with the Lima and Kampala declarations, bearing in mind specific circumstances. He also proposes a code of conduct that can sanction its own. Underfunding, inadequacy of facilities, poor conditions of service and violations of university autonomy and academic freedom have contributed to demoralising academic staff. Suppressed, demoralised and pauperised, they in turn oppress and exploit students.

One successful aspect of the ASUU struggle was academic freedom. The universities now appoint the vice-chancellors without external interference from the presidency. All my conversations with my comrades in the universities, however, tell me that the expectation that the quality of academic leadership would improve with the application of this principle has proved completely false. Professors with dubious academic qualifications have been winning the struggle to be vice-chancellors. There is massive evidence of systematic plagiarism, and as more academic leadership falls into the category of those with doubtful credentials, the real battle to save the universities is lost from within.

Conclusion

Nigerian universities have lost the high quality they had up to the 1970s. The quality of faculty is low, the enabling environment for learning poor and they have lost, first their international and subsequently their regional (West African), competitiveness. This can be seen by the large number of Nigerian students who go to Ghana for higher education.

The decline was precipitated by the massive growth of student intake and rapid decline in public revenues, which led to a crisis of funding. The collapse would have been even more dramatic but for the strong commitment and struggle of ASUU in defending the universities as the site and essence of the public good. The ASUU struggle has kept on the front burner the 'socialist' pro-poor provisions of Chapter 2 of the Nigerian Constitution. ASUU has, however, failed in entrenching the culture of public good within the university community, as corruption has set in and produced a culture of irresponsible behaviour and exploitation of the system. ASUU must therefore strive to broaden its struggle to confront the corruption that is destroying it from within. My key argument is that the depth of corruption is so profound that it has deviated the universities from the pursuit of the public good. University faculty motivations today are focused on the economic and sexual exploitation of their students while university management is engaged in massive theft of public funds. Many vice-chancellors are currently facing investigations or trial for looting university funds.

This study highlights that the university is no longer an embodiment of the public good in Nigeria. From 1950 to 1980, education was an instrument for promoting hope and social mobility for the children of the masses. That was how the inextricable linkage between higher education and the public good developed. Since 1980, however, rising income inequality and the expansion of young people in search of what Nigerians called 'the golden fleece' has created a new dynamic. The linkage between higher education and the public good, which could be the pathway for rebuilding a state that would provide prosperity, welfare and security for all its citizens, has been shattered.

In removing their children from the Nigerian public university system, the elite have ensured that it is the children of the poor who are the main beneficiaries of public university education and that they are not competitive compared to foreign-trained children. Essentially, the Nigerian state has abdicated its responsibility for the qualitative development of the children of the masses and stalled their social mobility. Increasingly, high-paying jobs are open mainly to foreign-trained Nigerians. The result is that the Nigerian state has provoked a class struggle in which poorly educated youth and the lumpen classes are consuming the country in sectarian violence, insurgency, militancy and rural banditry.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 137-157

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2729)

The Other Side of the Story: The Costs of Being a Public Good Academic

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Abstract

This article argues that the relationship between higher education and the public good should be understood not only from a macro-level point of view, in terms of how higher education systems and institutions contribute to the public good. It should also be understood from a micro-level point of view. Drawing on a qualitative study of the role of academics in higher education's contribution to the public good, this article demonstrates that micro-level-focused research allows for a deeper and richer insight into the intricacies of this relationship. It does this from the vantage point of the costs of being a public good academic, as recounted by fifteen academics from two universities in South Africa. The perceptions of these academics indicate that the costs of producing public good at universities in South Africa are more than just the financial costs covered by student fees, government subsidies and donor funding. They include relational, psychological and career-related costs, as well as those related to personal resources and identity contingencies, which academics must deal with in advancing the public good. This article concludes that further micro-level-focused research can uncover more nuanced aspects of the complex relationship between higher education and the public good.

Keywords: academics, higher education, public good, South Africa

Résumé

Cet article soutient que la relation entre l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public ne doit pas être comprise uniquement d'un point de vue macro, en termes de la manière dont les systèmes et les établissements d'enseignement supérieur contribuent au bien public. Elle doit également être comprise d'un point de vue micro. S'appuyant sur une étude qualitative du rôle des

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universitaires dans la contribution de l'enseignement supérieur au bien public, cet article démontre que la recherche centrée sur le niveau micro permet une compréhension plus profonde et plus riche des subtilités de cette relation. Il le fait du point de vue des coûts d'être un universitaire de bien public, comme l'ont raconté quinze universitaires de deux universités d'Afrique du Sud. Les perceptions de ces universitaires indiquent que les coûts de production du bien public dans les universités d'Afrique du Sud sont plus que les coûts financiers couverts par les frais de scolarité, les subventions gouvernementales, et le financement des donateurs. Ils comprennent les coûts relationnels, psychologiques et liés à la carrière, ainsi que ceux liés aux ressources personnelles et aux contingences identitaires, auxquels les universitaires doivent faire face pour faire avancer le bien public. Cet article conclut que d'autres recherches axées sur le niveau micro peuvent révéler des aspects plus nuancés de la relation complexe entre l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public.

Mots-clés : universitaires, enseignement supérieur, bien public, Afrique du Sud

Introduction

The relationship between higher education and the public good has been extensively studied (Badat 2009; Singh 2001; Calhoun 2006; Tilak 2008; Dill 2011; Jonathan 2001; Leibowitz 2012; Marginson 2011, 2012; Nixon 2011; Unterhalter et al. 2019; Waghid 2009; Walker 2012, 2015; Williams 2016). This body of literature draws attention to how higher education, as a direct or associated cause, can produce and promote various forms of public goods, such as economic growth and development, innovation, reduced inequality, more tolerant attitudes, social justice and transformation, better-informed citizenry, better protection and use of environmental resources, a healthier population, social transformation, and the creation of new knowledge that can address pressing social problems and expand human development. However, this literature does not provide a broad enough understanding of the relationship between higher education and the public good because of the following reasons:

1. It focuses mainly on the macro-level of this relationship (higher education systems and higher education institutions) without saying much about its dynamics at the micro-level (what happens within institutions and the different roles that different stakeholders play therein) (Badat 2009; Singh 2001; Calhoun 2006; Tilak 2008; Dill 2011; Jonathan 2001; Leibowitz 2012; Marginson 2011, 2012; Nixon 2011).
2. The small portion that considers the micro-level of the relationship between higher education and the public good draws attention mainly to students' experiences in higher education institutions and the role of graduates in

society, which presents one side of the story of the public good that higher education produces (or should be producing) for its beneficiaries. It does not say much about what it takes for higher education to be a public good and produce public goods for its beneficiaries (Ashwin and Case 2018; McLean and Walker 2012; Walker and McLean 2010).

3. Considerations of what it takes for higher education to contribute to the public good are mainly about the financial costs that need to be covered through student fees, government subsidies and private donations. Very little, if anything, is said about the role that academics play in higher education's contribution to the public good and what it costs them to play this role. Gaining insight into this extends and deepens our understanding of the other side of the story, which is about what goes into bringing about the public good in higher education. It expands and enriches the literature on the relationship between higher education and the public good.

This article, therefore, argues that an increased focus on the micro-level can deepen our understanding of the other side of the story. Based on a portion of a study about the role of academics in higher education's contribution to the public good, this article outlines the costs (relational, psychological, personal, career and those associated with an academic's racial identity) of being a public good academic, as recounted by academics from two universities in South Africa. These costs relate more to academics' roles that are outside their core functions of teaching and research. This is because the participants of this study did not recount any costs associated with teaching and research. It does not mean that academics contribute to the public good only through roles that are beyond the call of duty, which relate more to social responsiveness or community engagement. It also does not mean there are no costs associated with teaching and research, and the pedagogical, epistemological and research methods that academics choose to use in these roles. Okech (2020: 313) discusses these issues in relation to 'how decolonisation projects in universities in the United Kingdom and South Africa ignore the invisible labour and penalties that accompany this work by illustrating the wider constellations of gender and racialised power operating within them'. Ssentongo (2020) engages with these issues by examining the politics of academic promotion and the predicament of African publication outlets at Ugandan universities, which addresses academics' knowledge production role.

This article extends the debate about the costs of the public good of higher education beyond finances. It also gives insight into the depth of understanding we can gain when we consider the micro-level in our quest for a deeper understanding of the relationship between higher education and the public good. The term 'public good academics' refers to academics who are driven by a commitment to the public good and are progressive, reflexive, critically conscious, socially competent and have an understating of and commitment to their civic responsibility to advance the public good agenda. In the South African context, which is characterised by a history of colonialism and apartheid, the public good agenda in higher education is centred on the transformation[1] imperative of the democratic dispensation. This includes redressing the injustices of the past by widening access for the previously disadvantaged, improving success, eradicating poverty, inequality and unemployment, and contributing to economic growth and development.

This article's structure is as follows: the first section is an introduction to the article; the second section discusses the methods used in the study; the third and fourth sections discuss literature on higher education *for* the public good and higher education *as* a public good, respectively. The fifth section presents the costs of being a public good academic, as recounted by participants of this study. These include relational, psychological and career-related costs, and those related to personal resources and identity contingencies that academics must deal with in advancing the public good. The final section provides the conclusion of the article and makes recommendations for future research.

Methodology

This article draws on data collected between September 2018 and June 2019 at two universities in South Africa. The data collection was part of a broader study that sought to get some insight into academics' conception(s) of the public good; the role(s) they perceive themselves playing in advancing the public good, being among the key stakeholders in higher education; and their perceptions of the conditions that affect, negatively or positively, their contribution to the public good.

This study adopted a qualitative approach, which allows for an understanding of social or human problems by eliciting participants' accounts of their experiences, perceptions and the meanings they ascribe to the problem in question (Creswell 2014; De Vos, Strydom, Founche and Delpot 2011). This involved using a pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule to conduct fifteen one-on-one in-depth interviews with academics of different levels of seniority and disciplinary backgrounds at two universities in South Africa. One university is a historically white university, and the other is a historically black university.[2]

In this article, I use 'Yellowwood University' and 'Protea University' as pseudonyms to refer to these institutions, respectively. This serves to maintain the ethical principle of anonymity in my presentation of the data (Monette, Sullivan, De Jong and Hilton 2014). For the same reason, I have also assigned pseudonyms to the academics I interviewed. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. The data was analysed using King and Horrocks's (2010) three stages (descriptive coding, interpretive coding and overarching themes), which offer a systematic way of thematic analysis to ensure consistency and rigour. The following section foregrounds some of the gaps in the literature to show that a consideration of the micro-level-focused research can be a helpful undertaking in the quest to better understand the relationship between higher education and the public good. It focuses on literature about higher education for the public good and higher education as a public good.

Higher Education for the Public Good

There is an extensive body of literature that discusses the relationship between higher education and the public good. Different perspectives of this relationship are evident in this literature. Some scholars understand it from an economic perspective, others from a capabilities perspective, and yet others from a socio-political perspective. Those who interpret it from an economic point of view argue that universities play an important role in promoting economic growth and development by producing new knowledge through research, facilitating innovations and producing graduates to become part of a productive workforce in the labour market (Cloete and Maassen 2015; Cloete, Bailey, Pillay, Bunting and Maassen 2011; Altbach 2013; Bloom, Canning and Chan 2006; Sharma 2015).

However, some scholars are critical of the claim that higher education contributes to economic growth and development (Badat 2009; Collini 2012). In an article about theorising institutional change, Badat (2009) argues that the instrumentalist orientation of this claim reduces higher education to its efficacy for economic growth and strips it of its broader social value and functions. Collini (2012) echoes this critique in his discussion of the university as a public good. While acknowledging that universities produce useful outcomes, such as knowledge and graduates, he argues that these outcomes are not the main justification for these institutions to exist. He advocates for a new 'genre' of arguments that would enable universities to be understood as 'a corporation for the cultivation and care of the community's highest aspirations and ideals' (Collini 2012: 86). Some scholars are supportive while others are critical of the economic understanding of the relationship between higher education and the public good. However, all their views focus mainly on higher education systems and institutions and what these do for the public good, which gives a macro-level understanding of higher education and the public good.

From a socio-political point of view, Badat (2009) suggests that higher education has great social and political value, which is not accounted for in the economically oriented instrumentalist understanding of its public good. This broader social value is articulated in how other scholars have defined public good in relation to social transformation, social justice, reduction of inequality, democratisation and the cultivation of the human (Badat 2009; Leibowitz 2012; Pusser 2006; Singh 2001, 2011). Leibowitz (2012), for example, argues that the public good of higher education institutions, particularly public universities, cannot be divorced from issues of social justice, especially in societies like South Africa that have a history of colonialism, apartheid, gross inequality and poverty. Following a similar line of thought, Walker (2015: 323) concludes that a public good cannot be provided through market mechanisms but requires public action, agency and a particular stance from academics and students to 'fight for what is valuable about universities'.

Some scholars look at higher education and the public good from the capabilities point of view (Walker 2015; Walker and McClean 2015). The capabilities approach does help to unpack the broader social value of higher education that, according to Badat (2009), is missing from the instrumentalist, economically oriented understanding discussed earlier. Walker (2015) and Walker and McLean (2015) suggest that the production of professionals may not just be about economic growth if universities can produce what they call public good professionals. These are professional graduates who have gained from higher education the knowledge, skills and values that enable them to contribute to poverty alleviation, reduction of inequality and enhancing the wellbeing of other people in general (Walker and McLean 2015). This view mainly focuses on the institutional level of the relationship. It locates the link between higher education and the public good in what higher education institutions do or can do for the public good, which is to produce public good professionals. However, it does not address the question of what it costs academics to produce this calibre of professionals. The common denominator between economic, socio-political and capabilities understandings of the relationship between higher education and the public good is that they all present the ends as more important than the means of public good processes in higher education, which gives one side of the story of higher education and the public good.

Higher Education as a Public Good

Those who understand higher education as a public good in itself draw attention to the need to protect its accessibility to all, a view that is closely associated with the notion of education as a human right (Badat 2009; Kerr and Luescher 2018; Marginson 2011; Masehela 2018; Singh 2001; Walker and McLean 2015; Walker and McLean 2010). This perspective presents the public good as something experienced, in the mind or the body, within and beyond higher education institutions, which links to Habermas's notion of the public sphere (Marginson 2011). It also incorporates ideas about building and sustaining higher education systems and institutions that support greater equality, social justice and democratisation.

Both ideas, of higher education as a public good and a space in which to experience public good, have a bearing on what is taught in higher education, how it is taught, some of the spatial relationships in higher education and the experiential features of working and studying in particular types of institutional cultures. This experiential argument also has an instrumental dynamic, in that universities can provide a space for discussion, debate and deliberation, often between academics and students, about humanity's intellectual, cultural and scientific inheritances as well as historical and contemporary understandings, views and beliefs about the natural and social worlds (Badat 2009). In this sense, they can represent a public sphere and have an instrumental role in promoting critical scrutiny of government and policy and allowing for a creative rethinking of society. This comes out clearly in how Badat (2009), Singh (2001) and Walker (2015), describe the social value of the university as a public sphere.

In Walker's (2015) view, one way in which the university contributes to the public good is through social transformation – that is, in being a public sphere that exposes students to the 'other' and helps them understand 'otherness'. This positions the university as a space of encountering difference, foregrounding the broader social value that Badat (2009) refers to and appealing to intrinsic rather than instrumental notions of the public good. This encounter with diversity, she claims, helps students learn tolerance, thus contributing to reconciliation. This also finds expression, though in a different form, in Singh's (2001: 9) definition of 'public good' as:

> A set of interests that are not reducible to the sum of interests of individual or groups of individuals and that demarcate a common space within which the content of moral and political goals like democracy and social justice can be negotiated and collectively pursued.

These arguments about higher education as a public good, like those that focus on higher education for the public good, look at the relationship at a systemic and institutional level. Even though the argument about the interaction between academics and students in the public sphere of the university says something about the micro-level of this relationship, it doesn't tell us much about what it takes to facilitate that interaction and critical engagement. It tells us only that universities are a public good because they serve as a public sphere – a space in which these kinds of interactions and critical engagements can take place. This is not unique to the literature that argues that higher education is itself a public good. In higher education and public good literature generally, works that consider the micro-level of the relationship mainly focus on students' experiences and the role of graduates, which still presents one side of the story of the public good that higher education is and does for its beneficiaries (Masehela 2018; Kerr and Luescher 2018; Walker and McLean 2015; Walker and McLean 2010).

Findings

This section provides an insight into the other side of the story from the vantage point of the costs of being a public good academic, as recounted by academics from two universities in South Africa. It demonstrates that what it takes to produce the public good at universities in South Africa is more than just the financial costs covered by student fees, government subsidies and donor funding. There are other costs borne by academics, which include relational costs, personal resources, psychological costs, career-related costs and identity contingencies. This discussion reveals the intricacies of the relationship between higher education and the public good that are unlikely to emerge from macro-level-focused research. It demonstrates the benefits of zooming in on the micro-level of this relationship.

Relational Costs

Many of the academics I interviewed at Protea University did not recount any relational costs of advancing the public good agenda. Only Mr Martin, who is a bioinformatics lecturer, and Dr Getz, who is anthropology senior lecturer, mentioned it. Even these two spoke about these costs in a way that suggests that they are not as high as at Yellowwood University. This suggests that there is a stigma associated with one's commitment to social issues and that this commitment can lead to the loss of friendships and collegial relationships. On the one hand, Mr Martin claimed that in his department, the biology department,

> The targets of success are impact on the international stage. So, the impact of that can be quite frustrating because basically if you are interested in social issues, you are very much seen as an odd minority, especially in the faculty of science.

This does not seem to have much impact on the relationships that academics have with each other although 'odd minority' does suggest a kind of isolation or disconnection from the 'majority' who are committed to being competitive in the global stage. On the other hand, Dr Getz recounted how her solidarity with and involvement in the #FeesMustFall Movement, at a historically white university where she worked before moving to Protea University, 'ripped apart' many of her relationships with her then colleagues.

> The student movements really ripped apart a lot of friendships and collegial relationships. So many of us lost friends and colleagues and projects because of how we stood with the student movements. So, I left [the university] in objection but also, I needed a new direction because I didn't want to resent things. (Dr Getz)

While both Mr Martin's and Dr Getz's statements about relational costs suggest that these are not prevalent at Protea University, it does not mean that the collegial relationships there are perfect. These relationships may be affected by factors other than an individual academic's commitment to advancing the public good agenda.

Some of the academics at Yellowwood University argued that advocating for access, equality, and institutional transformation is a fight and a struggle that sometimes impacts negatively on relationships and collegiality among the academic staff members on campus. While this was a common theme in the data from the Yellowwood University interviews, three interviewees spoke about relational costs in more obvious terms. Prof Smith, a language education professor, made an example of the experiences of lecturers who she referred to as 'progressive'; academics who find themselves being silenced by their colleagues. 'I'd say the public good camp, they don't sit in the Senate. In departmental meetings, they feel silenced.' This friction is experienced not only by those who do not sit in the Senate. Prof Logan, an education policy professor, suggested that it is also experienced by those progressive academics who do sit in the Senate. Speaking of his own experience as a member of the Senate and of a number of committees in the university, Prof Logan suggested that there can be friction between those who sit in these bodies because some are resistant to the call for transformation in the university. This tension negatively affects collegial relationships.

Dr Gibbs shared similar views about the impact of the struggle for transformation on collegial relationships among academics on campus. For him, what affects relationships the most is the fact that when they fight for equality and transformation, they are not fighting 'a faceless institution', but their own colleagues:

> The consequences [of the struggle] are very personal. I mean, those structures are deeply embedded in every level of the university. If you take it from school level up, for example, the fact is that you are not fighting a faceless institution. You are fighting people who are sitting with you in the same school, who see access and who see equity in very different ways to you. And so, for example, the kinds of arguments about how one sees access for people who've been historically deprived of access becomes a major issue when you're fighting your own colleagues in your own department, never mind the university as such.

The relational costs that these academics are recounting here also suggest that not all academics view the public good in the same way, even within the same institutions. For example, all the participants of this study perceived institutional transformation as critical to creating a higher education for the public good, especially in the South African historical context. However, the disagreements, conflicts, resistance and breakdown of relationships because of processes of bringing about transformation indicate that some academics in the university do not see transformation as a contribution to the public good.

Personal Resources Costs

A commitment to the public good agenda may mean that academics expend personal resources, particularly in fulfilling their public good roles as lecturers, supervisors, mentors and activists. This was not a prevalent theme in the data collected from Yellowwood University. Only Dr Elba, who is an academic literacy senior lecturer, spoke about activities that academics do for the public good that require the investment of their personal resources. He argued that academics are hesitant to involve themselves in community engagement because it often requires them to commit much more than just themselves. It requires them to invest personal resources because there is often no institutional support for community engagement work. He said, 'People are more prone now than ever before to protect what they have and reaching out means you don't only have to give of yourself, but you also have to give of the resources you have available.' This echoes some of what emerged from the data collected at Protea University, where the theme of personal resource costs was more prevalent.

Given its status as a historically black university, the majority of the student body at Protea University is from disadvantaged backgrounds and the university is not as well-resourced as its historically white counterparts are. The challenges that face these students necessitate that the academics who teach them play roles that are beyond their call of duty. Doing so often requires them to use their own personal resources. For example, Prof. Mathosa, the head of the Anthropology Department at Protea University, has had to be a father figure to some of his students, which has meant using money from his own pocket to cover the costs of some of their basic needs.

> You know, I encounter a lot of problems as a lecturer. Students come here to my office to say, especially at my age now. Students see me more as a father figure. They come here, '*Tata andinamali. Ndicela imali.* (Daddy I don't have money. May I please have money). My parents are struggling. *Nd'celund'ncede* (Please help me) with my schoolwork so that…' So, you end up being this daddy. (Prof Mathosa)

Dr Getz echoed Prof Mathosa, arguing that academics at Protea University routinely spend their own money to ensure that students have something to eat because food insecurity has become an issue and it interferes with teaching and learning on campus.

> There are students who are having panic attacks and really stressing, having to choose whether to eat or to come to campus. It's a lot. So, routinely giving their personal money to students. So that's the kind of comrade academic that I've seen at [Protea University], which has been quite impressive to me, that kind of commitment to students and seeing academic labour as part of political work. (Dr Getz)

The literature shows that student hunger is a common problem in many universities in South Africa (Van den Berg 2015; Rudolph et al. 2018; Dominguez-Whitehead 2015), and it is not uncommon for academics to dig deep into their pockets to help alleviate it, as recounted in several reports from different universities (Jeranji 2019). It makes sense, therefore, to assume academics at Yellowwood University may also spend their money on feeding students, even though the participants in this study did not mention it.

Dr Getz added that, for her, part of advancing the public good agenda beyond the university means 'my salary and the resources of the university can be used to sustain, augment and support the work of really interesting activists in South Africa'. In other words, the political work of bringing about the public good on and off campus comes at a price; it requires academics to invest their personal resources. Academics who pay this price, according to Dr Getz, are 'comrade academics'. For Mr Martin, they are 'progressive as academics'. These terms distinguish public good academics from those who are not as committed to the public good agenda.

According to Mr Martin, those he described as progressive academics, who were in solidarity with the students during the time of the nationwide student protests, put together money from their own pockets to ensure that the student activists who were arrested had access to legal representation and that their bail charges were paid.

> There were about 40 or 50 students, probably 60 students who were arrested during the period from 2015 up until 2017. And they would end up here [in the local Magistrate's court] and the bails charged were quite high. So, at first, some of us were just haphazardly involved in trying to collect money for bail because it was about R3,000 per student. And then we set up a structure to try and like be more organised to try and track what was happening. (Mr Martin)

What is evident from the quotations above is that, for some academics, advancing the public good may mean spending some personal, particularly financial, resources to create the conditions that allow for effective teaching and learning. This decision is not imposed on them – instead, they do it of their own volition, because of their commitment to the public good agenda.

Psychological Costs

Psychological costs are the negative psychological effects of being a public good academic at universities in South Africa. Most participants' comments about psychological costs mainly related to the aftermath of the #FeesMustFall protests, which took place from 2015 to 2018. Dr Getz, for example, as an academic who supported the #FeesMustFall Movement, spoke about her horrific experience of witnessing police brutality and violence during the protests at the historically white university where she worked before moving to Protea University.

> And I was really horrified, not only by the police on campus, police brutality on campus, the escalation of the violence between students and police and also the way in which the university after the student movement started to put surveillance technology everywhere. And I was really horrified by that and I know that I was getting another five-year term and I just thought, 'I'll go crazy'. (Dr Getz)

The psychological aftermaths of the #FeesMustFall protests were also mentioned by some academics at Yellowwood University who even cited the suicide, associated with depression, of a prominent academic from one of the historically white universities in South Africa as an example of the psychological costs that came with the protests.

Psychological costs also refer to the impact of academics' work overload as higher education massifies without a corresponding increase in academic staff. Most academics at Protea University expressed concerns about their added burden of administrative work, providing social support to students, and the pressure that the university was putting on them to do more research since it was establishing itself as a world-class research-intensive university. All these factors contribute to the public good in terms of knowledge production and improved student university experiences and academic success. However, the participants argued that these expose them to the risk of psychological problems, such as stress, fatigue and burnout. This concern was well articulated by Prof Aaron, an accounting professor at Protea University:

> Nothing is taken away from my load. Everything is added to my load, which means I get stretched further. And the pressure of trying to produce the same quality but being stretched, is actually what causes the stress because you're still operating professionally at the same level. ... But it doesn't cause stress for everybody because some people don't have, some people don't care. (Prof Aaron)

The concerns about psychological costs echo the findings of a study by Ntshoe et al. (2008) on changes in the academic profession in South Africa. They found that academics 'are expected to fulfil the roles of administrator, manager, support staff and student counsellor without incentives or the assistance of additional personnel' (Ntshoe et al. 2008: 401). While their study suggests that these increased expectations negatively affect academics, they do not identify this negative impact as the price that academics must pay for their commitment to the public good. Making this link gives us a better understanding of what it costs to produce the public good of higher education.

Career-related Costs

The public good work that academics do over and above their key performance areas is not always recognised by the universities' promotion criteria. This work also involves challenging existing structures to bring about institutional transformation, equality, equity, and non-discrimination. However, fighting to change the status quo for the public good gives them a negative reputation in the university, which works against them when it comes to promotion opportunities. This is evident in the data from both Yellowwood and Protea universities. For example, Prof May, who is a community engagement co-ordinator at Yellowwood University, asserted that unconventional ways of sharing and distributing knowledge, such as writing articles for news outlets like the *Daily Maverick*, do not always get recognised by the university. She added that a commitment to the public good agenda might put one out of the promotion trajectory, which Dr Getz of Protea University described as a 'self-aggrandisement machine'. Prof May believes that there is a need to disrupt the trajectory in such a way that academics are able to fully commit to the public good agenda and still be able to succeed in their careers in terms of promotion.

> There is a cost. I get the debates about cost and, you don't get promotions and you are not in that kind of trajectory. But I think the trajectory needs to be disrupted. That's my starting point … So, there is a cost to academics of doing public good at the moment, but they need to make the argument that it isn't an either-or if they can. (Prof May)

Academics from Yellowwood University suggested that transformation at their university was happening at a snail's pace. Fighting for decolonisation, equity of access and success for students, and battling against racism on campus, the alienation of black students and staff and the underrepresentation of black academics, could put one at a disadvantage when it comes to promotion and opportunities for career advancement. The findings suggest that, at Yellowwood University, academics who are pressing for transformation, which participants deemed to be an important part of the public good, are less likely to be promoted or receive funding to conduct research that would help them progress in their careers. As Dr Elba put it, this happens to academics who are 'challenging those structures and coming up with alternatives and it's not well-received'. For example, Dr Gibbs argued that arguing for disadvantaged students' access and success 'backfires on those who are fighting for them. The backfiring is simply exclusion. And so, if you want to play the promotion game, if you want to play the access game for yourself, it becomes really difficult.' He added, 'If I were to fight this kind of fight and I were to apply to the faculty for funding, there is no way that your application is going to hold the same weight as somebody who works favourably at other levels.' In other words, challenging the system disadvantages one when it comes to opportunities for personal career advancement.

For some academics, the exclusion that Dr Gibbs referred to went to the extent of forcing them out of their jobs at the university. As Dr Zoziwa explicitly stated, 'We all know how some lecturers were told to leave because they dared talk about notions such as transformation.' She cited the case of a prominent professor who was forced out of the university because of his commitment to fighting for decolonisation. The same example was made by Prof Logan. He described this prominent professor as one of the first academics to make the call for decolonisation, saying to university management, 'We need to undo your understanding of what black learners know … my black students know more than you think that they know. I'll teach them at a level that is empowering.' Prof Logan argued that part of the reason why the professor was forced out of Yellowwood University was that the management 'didn't want to open the door to changing the white curriculum, essentially' and the professor had refused to budge on his commitment to decolonisation.

Academics at Protea University also spoke about experiencing career-related costs even though the reasons behind these costs were different from those recounted by academics at Yellowwood University. Dr Getz, for example, argued that 'The institution of the university is becoming more and more corporatised, more and more conservative and more and more invested in its own reproduction as opposed to invested in changing the society in which it exists.' As a result, she argued, academics who are committed to the public good, particularly in the community beyond the borders of the university, may 'lose the capacity for promotion' because they 'lose being the darling of the university' and 'lose people respecting you within the terms of the university'. She made an example of the advocacy work that some of her colleagues spent a lot of their time doing. This advocacy work led to the insourcing of workers at one of South Africa's historically white universities. She argued that advocacy is not recognised as part of their job as academics. As a result, it 'doesn't count in terms of promotion but is absolutely about building a university that can speak to the consolidation of a public'. Mr Martin and Dr Swan echoed Dr Getz in arguing that some of the public good work that academics do beyond the call of duty is not always recognised nor rewarded by the university. This includes advocacy and political activism.

Academics from Protea University referred to their university's transition from being teaching-intensive towards establishing itself as a world-class research-intensive university. They argued that, because of this mission, there had been increasing pressure on them to do more research and write more publications. This pressure was evident in that research now weighed more than teaching and community engagement when it came to promotion. This meant that academics who did more teaching and community engagement, which they perceived as important contributions to the public good, were less likely to get promotions than those who do more research. In Dr Swan's words, 'people might just want to run off to promotions and that you know. They don't maybe make an effort so much with their teaching.'

Identity Contingencies

Academics also face costs associated with their given social identity, particularly their racial identity. I refer to these costs as identity contingencies, a term coined by Claude Steele (2010), which means situations that a person with a given social identity has to deal with in order to get what he or she wants. In this study, academics from both universities spoke mainly about racial identity contingencies, which are the most common in South Africa, given its colonial and apartheid history. However, the silence of some participants about other social identity markers, such as gender, race, and nationality, does not necessarily mean there are no identity contingencies associated with them. The literature suggests that there are challenges that academics face because of these identity markers, even though they are not directly associated with their contribution to the public good, but have an impact on it (Ayala-López 2018; Harry et al. 2017; Khunou et al. 2019; Muberekwa and Nkomo 2016; Ramohai 2019; Shober 2014).

While it was mainly black academics who spoke about these racial identity contingencies, Dr Elba made an interesting point, which suggested that racial identity contingencies are experienced by white academics too, even though none of those I interviewed mentioned them. He said, 'There is a stigma attached to whiteness as there are stigmas attached to blackness and I think that staff in themselves should be proactive in debunking those stigmas.' Black academics, particularly at Yellowwood University, argued that they have to deal with several racial identity contingencies in their pursuit of the public good. These include racism and being alienated from the social, intellectual and political life of the university in different ways. It also includes being treated with contempt and condescension by students and colleagues for no reason other than that they are black and therefore have to prove that they are worthy and competent enough. This is something that they believe white academics never have to do. Dr Gibbs's words capture these identity contingencies very well:

> So, for me, I think part of the experience at the university, as I said, it's highly contradictory. You have this fabulous opportunity to work with students from across ranges of wealth and poverty and with all its problems ... At the same time, the space is alien. I do not feel at home at [Yellowwood University]. … I don't belong here. I've got to prove myself. Students who challenge me, they wouldn't challenge white colleagues. They want to know your qualifications. They want to know how long you've been qualified. Are you more senior to this one or less senior to this one … (Dr Gibbs).

In this quote, Dr Gibbs suggests that to play their role(s) as public good professionals at historically white institutions like Yellowwood University, academics of colour must first deal with being alienated and having their competence constantly questioned because of their racial identity.

Other academics shared similar views. Dr Zoziwa asserted, '[Yellowwood University] will always remind you that you're black.' She also stated that there were numerous stories of black academics who had been treated with contempt and condescension by their students not only at Yellowwood University but also in other historically white universities. As an example, she mentioned her sister, who works at another university. 'You come [into class] and you immediately know that, as a black lecturer, people are saying, "Oh! Why are you standing in front of me?" My sister is a lecturer at [a historically white university] and she has got those kinds of stories.' This example echoes Dr Gibbs's experience at Yellowwood University. He recounted his experience of several incidents where he, as a coloured person,[3] was alienated from a particular political forum run by students in the university. His account of these incidents reveals how the country and the university's history have laid the foundation for the alienation that people of colour continue to experience on campus:

> So, what I do, I walk around campus and I go to student meetings. Yeah, I've been chucked out before because I am not dark enough. That's happened on the campus on three big occasions. But I understand where it comes from. It's not gonna be a case of labelling or whatever. And then the other day I got an email from one of the students who said, 'I'd love to engage with you. You are consistently coming back and we consistently push you out of our forum. But I've heard from some of my friends at res that you are doing this kind of work in your master's program. I'd love to engage with you'. In other words, we are sitting in complexities of a past here that makes us not sit with each other. (Dr Gibbs)

Academics from Protea University were silent about racial identity contingencies. This does not necessarily mean that they do not exist on their campus. However, their responses suggested that they find their university space welcoming to people of all races and that its culture is more accommodating to diversity. Most of them spoke about experiencing a sense of belonging on campus because of the culture that exists in it. In Prof Mathosa's words:

> But one thing about Protea University that I can tell you, which is still the case now. As a black scholar, academic, here I don't feel like I don't belong in this place. I've never once felt like I don't belong. There are frustrating things as you were saying, you know. There are frustrating things maybe administratively but I never for once felt like there is an agenda here to somehow compromise me scholarly or as a person. (Prof Mathosa)

Prof Mathosa's words are the extreme opposite of what Dr Zoziwa and Dr Gibbs said about their experience at Yellowwood University as black academics. This suggests that experiences of advancing the public good are different for the academics at these two universities. The racial and political histories of the universities may have something to do with these differences.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the link between higher education and the public good should not be understood at a macro level only, with the focus mainly on how higher education systems and institutions contribute to the public good. A micro-level view, focusing on what happens within institutions and on the different role-players, enhances and deepens our understanding of the complex relationship between higher education and the public good. This was demonstrated in this article through a discussion of the costs of being a public good academic, as recounted by academics from a historically white university and a historically black university in South Africa. This discussion indicates that the costs of producing public goods at universities in South Africa are more than just the financial costs covered by student fees, government subsidies and donor funding.

Zooming in on the micro-level of the relationship between higher education and the public good gives an insight into the costs that academics incur as key role-players in higher education's contribution to the public good. It revealed relational, psychological and career-related costs and those related to personal resources and identity contingencies. This means that to be a public good academic at a university in South Africa, one must be willing to pay the price. The costs, as discussed in this article, are just one aspect of what we can learn about higher education and the public good when we focus on the micro-level of this relationship. Based on the findings of this study, I believe that further micro-level-focused research can help uncover more aspects to deepen and enhance our understanding of the link between higher education and the public good.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of higher education transformation in South Africa see *Researching the Public Good: Reflections on experiences of doing research on higher education and the public good in South Africa*, in this special issue.
2. In South Africa, historically white universities are those that were for the exclusive education of white people, and historically black universities are those that were for the exclusive education of black (African, Coloured and Indian) people before the dawn of democracy.
3. Coloured people in South Africa are people of mixed European and African or Asian ancestry.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 159-184

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2730)

Place, Public Good and Higher Education in South Africa

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Abstract

Worsening poverty and inequality continue to affect large segments of the South African population. Universities are critical in contributing to overcoming these challenges. This article looks at the relationship between South African universities and the communities and places in which they are located. The history of South African higher education shows different kinds of relationships with the places in which universities were set. Data collected from interviews in 2018 with key informants in South African universities notes their criticisms of government development policies that lacked vision with regard to the development of place-based relationships for the public good. This data indicates that in the absence of an enabling policy framework to link communities and places, certain universities, individuals who work in them and members of communities around universities have developed their own approaches. I argue that these activities indicate actions by certain members of a spatial community, which can be understood as practices associated with a public sphere. Through this process individuals and institutions can play a central role in defining and contextualising the public good role of universities in their communities.

Keywords: public good, public sphere, universities, place-based development

Résumé

L'aggravation de la pauvreté et des inégalités continue d'affecter de larges segments de la population sud-africaine. Les universités sont essentielles pour contribuer à surmonter ces défis. Cet article examine la relation entre les universités sud-africaines et les communautés et les lieux dans lesquels elles sont situées. L'histoire de l'enseignement supérieur sud-africain montre différents types de relations avec les lieux d'implantation des universités.

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Les données recueillies à partir d'entretiens en 2018 avec des informateurs clés dans les universités sud-africaines notent leurs critiques des politiques de développement gouvernementales qui manquaient de vision en ce qui concerne le développement de relations territoriales pour le bien public. Ces données indiquent qu'en l'absence d'un cadre politique habilitant pour relier les communautés et les lieux, certaines universités, les individus qui y travaillent et les membres des communautés autour des universités ont développé leurs propres approches. Je soutiens que ces activités indiquent des actions de certains membres d'une communauté spatiale, qui peuvent être comprises comme des pratiques associées à une sphère publique. Grâce à ce processus, les individus et les institutions peuvent jouer un rôle central dans la définition et la contextualisation du rôle de bien public des universités dans leurs communautés.

Mots-clés : bien public, sphère publique, universités, développement territorial

Introduction

Place-based development refers to the extent to which multidimensional development strategies – which include improvements in economic, social and cultural wellbeing – are relevant and responsive to the specific needs of a spatial location; the location may be rural/urban, and it may be a town, city, region or country (Barca, McCann and Rodriguez-Pose 2012). Interventions associated with place-based development may be designated as opposed to place-neutral development, where similar (if not identical) development strategies are adopted in different places (Chien 2008). Place-neutral strategies tend to give little detailed attention to the specificities of place.

Universities may be understood as engaged in place-based development, which takes account of their location, or in place-neutral development, which underplays aspects of their regional or locational setting. This orientation may have particular consequences for how the relationships between universities and the public good and the public sphere are understood. The public good role of higher education refers to the indirect benefits that wider society enjoys from the expansion of higher education. It includes benefits like economic growth, better health outcomes and increased public debate (McMahon 2009). The idea of the public sphere draws on the ideas of Habermas and is discussed by him as a public space where ideas are exchanged and formulated, allowing public discourse to occur (Habermas 1989). In the abstract, neither concept says much about place-based development, but this notion is useful in reading some of the histories of universities in Africa.

In the book *Decolonisation in Universities: The Politics of Knowledge*, Auerbach (2019) makes the case that the African universities of Dar es Salaam and Makerere have made different contributions to the places in which they are spatially located. For instance, while Dar es Salaam has 'stood as a nationalist hallmark', Makerere was intended to be the 'quintessential colonial university' (Auerbach 2019: 80). Although Makerere University has changed substantially since its founding and oriented itself to the needs of its urban setting through, for example, the Urban Action Lab (UAL), established in 2016 to research urban infrastructure waste and sanitation (Ernston 2016), the history highlights how universities can shift between place-neutral and place-based orientations.

In this article, I look at the relationship between South African universities and their place-based communities. A number of writers on South African universities and place-based development argue that the democratic South African state has failed to adequately appreciate and support the role of universities in contributing to place-based development. They highlight how the debate around whether universities are for elites or for the masses has made it difficult to agree on the place-based role of different universities (Thakrar 2018: 195). Fongwa (2017) notes the importance of ensuring that knowledge institutions and workers are embedded in a local context, which is not always the case for all South African universities. Schalkwyk and De Lange (2018) understand institutional embeddedness as a product of scholarly engagement, organisational strategies, a coherent policy framework and capable leadership. Nkomo (2007) argues that the government should ensure that policy objectives like land reform are met in order to support community-based income-generating projects. This is necessary so that local municipalities are better able to support universities and the communities around them (Nkomo 2007).

In their book, *Anchored in Place: Rethinking the University and Development in South Africa,* Bank et al. (2018) discuss the inadequacies of the South African democratic state in facilitating a relationship between South African universities and the communities in which they are located. The book analyses the different strategies that have been used either by the South African government or by universities themselves (in the absence of a facilitating state) in attempts to stimulate place-based development. Aspects of the book, written in 2018, deal with social movements, such as student protests, which have been organised in response to the lack of place-based development through universities (Bank and Sibanda 2018).

The aim of this paper is to explore the contribution that universities can make to the social, economic and cultural development of their local communities. Place-based development through the public good role of universities is made difficult in South Africa by the fact that mutual benefit does not always accrue organically from simple agreements between communities and universities (Bank 2019). It requires continuous, patient and concerted effort underpinned by a realistic sense of the capabilities and responsibilities of all actors (Bank 2019). This raises questions about how the public good role of universities affects the ways in which higher education for the public good is conceptualised and spatially realised by a range of actors in different contexts.

The article builds on the argument made by Bank et al. (2018) and presents some additional policy analysis to illustrate how the higher education policy framework formulated in post-apartheid South Africa inadequately facilitated the development of a relationship between South African universities and their surrounding communities. Using interview data from key informants in selected universities, gathered in 2018, pockets of place-based development that have taken place in and around some of South Africa's universities can be sketched, enabling some reflections on place and the public good in relation to South African higher education.

The Historical Relationship Between South African Universities and their Place-based Communities

A history of South African higher education highlights the selective use of place-based development policies by certain universities, which drew on particular conceptions of the public good in certain moments.

In the main, universities under apartheid could be categorised according to one of two types of public good relationships with the broader South African society. In the first instance was a group of universities that worked closely with the state to respond to the needs of the places they were located in. These were the white Afrikaner universities and the Bantustan universities set up in the former homelands of the 1970s (Bank 2018). These universities played a highly instrumental public good role in social and economic development for the apartheid project. In the second instance was a group of universities that distanced themselves from the places they were anchored in and from the wider national society. These were the white English universities, which can be described as more place-neutral. These universities viewed themselves as playing a more intrinsic public good role in South African society and referred to themselves as 'liberal universities' (Bunting 2006: 42). While they understood themselves as public institutions that were entitled to public financial resources, they did not concede to the idea that they were under the control of the state. Specifically, these universities understood their missions to include inherent academic freedom, meaning that they had the prerogative to teach what they deemed suitable and research what interested them (Bunting 2006: 42).

The new democratic government, established in 1994, had a choice to make regarding which of these two types of institutional arrangement it would move forward with when restructuring the university sector. To structure higher education with a place-based emphasis would require that the public good role of universities be linked to and defined by a particular perspective on place, addressing the inequalities that affected the most marginalised members of communities who lived around the universities. This would require some appreciation of what the place-based relationships entail. Cloete and Van Schalkwyk (2021) show how the South African state has not supported such a move and has maintained a higher education system that largely appears to serve elite segments of the population. They conclude that university education, in some instances, facilitates elite formation (Cloete and Van Schalkwyk 2021).

In charting a path in a different direction, a direction towards a higher education system that included marginalised communities, the democratic government would have had to focus on identifying previously excluded members of the spatial community associated with each university. These members of the community would then need to be involved in the activities of the higher education sector. For example, they could be involved through the establishment of civic spaces, rural development programmes and evaluations of the impact of higher education institutions on communities.

A second approach was to consider a place-neutral choice with regard to universities. This would entail that the state play a classic role of non-interference with universities, simply setting up the conditions for universities to steer their own missions both internally and in relation to the communities located around them. While both choices at the time were critical for the future of democratic South Africa, a balance between them was required.

In section two I discuss in more detail the restructuring of the university sector after 1994. I show how the new democratic government's policies neglected to adequately promote the idea of universities having development roles that emphasised instrumentally and intrinsically place-based public good outcomes. Perhaps not intentionally, the policies were slanted towards a more place-neutral approach. Before turning to that discussion I first consider some issues that arise from thinking about place-based development, universities, the public good and the notion of the public sphere.

The 'Public Good' as Contextualised in the 'Public Sphere'

There are different interpretations of the relationship between universities, place and the public good. These interpretations usually depend on the conditions of possibility within a particular place and context. Inequalities in higher education in different places and contexts often limit the conditions of possibility for realising the public good. This raises the question of how different ideas of the relationship between higher education and the public good suggest various kinds of links with notions of place-based development. Therefore, analyses of higher education, place-based development and the public good require substantial contextual reflection.

The notion of the public good is highly contested. Samuelson gave his well-known definition of public goods as non-excludable and non-rivalrous (Samuelson 1954). In the first instance, this means that consumer A's consumption cannot exclude consumer B from enjoying the benefits of the public good; hence there is no reason for consumer B to cover the expenditure of providing the public good (Buchanan 1968). Therefore, consumer B may free ride. In the second instance, provision of a good for consumer A involves provision of the same good for consumer B (for example a lighthouse) (Buchanan 1968). In contrast, private goods are sold to consumers who can afford market prices (McNutt 1999). This dichotomy, though it has become naturalised, is seemingly unhelpful because it is an oversimplification. The public/private divide can be understood conceptually, empirically, or both ways. The empirical component presents an opportunity to foreground place and context when theorising the relationship between higher education and the public good. In the empirical sense, the concept of public good must be understood in terms of the place and context it is located in (Marginson and Considine 2000: 28). The public good can be defined as the benefits, whether economic, social, political or cultural (Unterhalter et al. 2019), that the public derives from a particular action or intervention undertaken by either themselves or others. In this case the action or intervention is higher education.

There are two distinct ways in which the public good discourse is framed in higher education: the instrumental role that higher education can play in society (such as developing knowledge, professionals and innovation), and the intrinsic role (such as shaping culture) (Oketch et al. 2014; Unterhalter et al. 2017; Unterhalter and Howell 2021). In the instrumental view, the public good is understood as leading to development outcomes like economic growth through aggregate increases in national productivity, individual labour market earnings and social cohesion, among other outcomes (McMahon 2009). The intrinsic conceptions of the public good include among others the notion that more higher education leads to outcomes like public dialogue, democracy and participatory citizenship (Leibowitz 2012).

These outcomes may take different shapes in different places. The instrumental and intrinsic ideas about the relationship between higher education and the public good may also take a shape that mirrors the local context. For example, in South Africa, some believe that in order to mirror the local context the notion of entrepreneurial-ness should be understood and enacted through the 'Ubuntu' moral code. Thus, this notion of entrepreneurialism seems to overlap the intrinsic and instrumental conceptions of the public good. I expand on this later when I discuss the interview data presented in this article.

The idea of the public good has close conceptual connections with the idea of the public sphere. The public sphere concept has evolved to describe societies in Western Europe, making it a key example of a place-based concept. Habermas's definition is widely cited. Habermas defined the public sphere as a shared space that is created and maintained through critical discourse and argumentation (Habermas 1989). Put differently, the public sphere is a social *space* where different ideas are exchanged between members of the public. It can be both a physical and non-physical place (Adut 2012). Problems arise with the theory of public spheres because Habermas' formulation of the public sphere is based on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elitist democracy of bourgeois European society (Fraser 1990). This democracy excluded anyone who came from an 'alternative' public sphere (alternative meaning anything deviating from the bourgeois norm) or from different places (Fraser 1990). As Benson (2009) states, this formulation failed to appreciate the need to incorporate pluralistic and diverse discursive styles that are not associated with elites. The less pluralistic a public sphere is, the more likely it is that the distribution of the public good will be unequal. From this discussion it is evident that the public sphere concept can be strongly grounded in place.

The public sphere concept allows us to foreground inequalities like class and gender among other crucial problems when thinking about place-based development, but it may not be able to accommodate the range of competing views on these issues. Place-based development strategies that take pluralistic public spheres into account allow multidimensional relevance and responsiveness to the specific needs of varying spatial locations (Barca et al. 2012), but this requires a range of conditions to make these possible. In the following section I explore the context of South African higher education. I consider some of the historical trends around the spatial locations of, and conditions of possibility for, universities.

Universities Under Apartheid: Place-based and Place-neutral Development

When the Nationalist Party came into government in 1948, all segments of society and the economy were structured along racial lines (Feinstein 2005). By the 1970s, South Africa was formally divided into ten separate territories on the basis of ethnicity (Feinstein 2005). Racial groups in South Africa were categorised into four defined groups: Black Africans, White, Indian or Coloured (Posel 2011). All people who were classified as Black African were considered citizens of one of the Bantustans, although in reality this was a law that was impossible to put into practice (Unterhalter 1987). The different independent and non-independent states and Bantustans were governed through different sets of policies and for many this entailed the establishment of universities.

The overarching motivation of all policies across all groups of states was to advance the development of the white Republic of South Africa (Posel 2011). The Bantustans were granted *de jure* independent traditional leadership. On paper their leadership had the freedom to do what was in the interests of their citizens' separate development. For example, the traditional leaders had the right to allocate land for agricultural production and for housing (Legassick and Wolpe 1976: 88). In reality, however, some Bantustan leaders and their allies enjoyed personal benefits to the detriment of their citizens. In Bophuthatswana, Mangope's regime was held together by patronage and corruption: jobs, land and trading licences were distributed in return for political support (Khunou 2009: 13).

A very different vision for South Africa was formulated at the University of Fort Hare, which was established in 1916 (UFH 2021). The physical structure had served as a fort or stronghold for the British military, so that to this day the ruins that remain are a visible symbol of the strong place-based function of the architecture of Fort Hare (UFH 2021). Yet despite the presence of the ruins as a symbol of defence (and exclusion), the university operated as a racially inclusive physical space until the 1959–60 takeover of the National Party.

When the apartheid state took control of South Africa and all its institutions, the Extension of University Education Act of 1959 was passed, and a number of new universities were set up linked to the Bantustan project (Scott 2009). Each Bantustan was accorded a university. These included the University Colleges of the North (Turfloop) and Zululand (Bunting 2006). Outside the Bantustans, racially segregated universities were established for Coloured people in the Western Cape and for Indian people at Durban-

Westville (Illorah 2006). Badat (1999: 9) emphasises the active role that the state played in seeing to it that education policy served the separate development goals of that period: 'African education needed to reflect the superiority and supremacy of the ideology of white rule and superiority.' For instance, the University of the Transkei was set up in 1977 with the expectation that it would produce the human resources required to run the Bantustan's independent economy (Khunou 2009). Thus, under apartheid, universities in the Bantustans played an instrumental public good role as place-based agents of change linked to the apartheid project (Bank 2018: 4). The apartheid project was controversial and unjust because the distribution of the public good, associated with economic, political and cultural power, was to the benefit of a minority of white people.

Despite the intention of the apartheid state to limit the Bantustan universities to place-based and narrowly specified forms of development associated with the training of teachers, health workers, and administrators to fulfil the vision of the apartheid project, this aspiration failed. The 1972 student protests co-ordinated by the South African Student Organisation (SASO) were triggered by the expulsion of student struggle leader, Onkgopotse Tiro, who had urged his peers at Turfloop to resist segregated education (Badat 1999: 116–117). Several other acts of resistance ensued across other universities. At the University of the Western Cape and the University of Durban-Westville students fought for anti-racist reforms on campuses, supported by some staff and faculty (Anderson 2003; Badat 1999; Barnes 2006).

In the areas of South Africa that were reserved for the white population, the Afrikaans universities played significant place-based roles (Bank 2018). One of the main Afrikaans institutions, Stellenbosch University, which was established in 1918 (Baumert and Botha 2016), is situated in a wine-growing region along the banks of the Eersterivier. Stellenbosch has for many years produced research and skilled graduates to support the wine industry in the Western Cape (Bank 2018). With significant endowments from wealthy white farmers, Bank (2019) cautions that, according to her, this is an institution immersed in white privilege. It has for this reason, according to Bank (2019), been able to support and be supported by a wealthy white farming population (although Stellenbosch has since become a more urban 'secondary city') (Bank 2018).

There are plans to ensure that research goes towards responding to the vulnerability of communities around Stellenbosch. To mitigate the risk of house fires, these plans propose the development of smart green architecture, keeping the town small and developing housing recycling projects to limit the use of material like wood (which leads to deforestation) (ESSHF 2014). This demonstrates the relationship that can arise between place and the shape that the research function takes in a university. In turn, universities then make public good contributions to their local communities through their research function.

In the 1930s, the state committed to addressing the poor-white problem. The University of Pretoria established departments of social work and applied sociology to respond to the 'social deviance' among poor whites (Fourie 2006; Thumbran 2017). In 1968, the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) was established in Johannesburg to serve an urban Afrikaans-speaking population with a '…policy phase that focused on "particularism". In other words, the university had an ethnic definition imposed on it because it was closely related to the community it was located, and particularly focused on the needs of the community' (Klee 2017: 58). Klee (2017: 56) notes that the Rand Afrikaans University, now known as the University of Johannesburg, was established to '… address the lack of skills among Afrikaners' and train students '… to keep up with the modern world especially in the fields of industry, media, and technology' (Klee 2017: 114).

In contrast, the English-speaking historically white universities resisted place-based 'functional definitions' of their roles under apartheid (Bank 2018: 4). Many faculties distanced themselves from making an instrumental public good contribution as this was associated with propping up apartheid. They branded themselves as universities committed to academic freedom and merit, distinct from the 'applied universities' of the Afrikaners and Africans (Davies 1996). These universities took a place-neutral stance and considered that they played an intrinsic public good role in South Africa society.

In certain respects, some of these universities made themselves accessible in ways that gave the public access to some physical and cultural public goods, fostering the intrinsic public good. For example, the historically advantaged university (HAU) known as Rhodes University is famous for not being gated-off. That said, it is also located in the hills above Grahamstown (RU 2021b), seemingly distanced from the local community below it. This symbol amplifies the image of white liberal universities as lofty or out of touch. While Fort Hare is a historically disadvantaged university (HDU), and aspects of the two campuses have been merged, Bank (2019) accuses both Fort Hare and Rhodes University of seemingly failing to react to the needs of their contexts. She argues that both institutions have 'misread the curvatures of their contexts' (Bank 2019). Bank does not state explicitly what she means by this, but other scholars have elaborated on this statement.

Goga (2010) describes the ongoing problem of racism at Rhodes, which has been apparent even in online discussion forums. This demonstrates how exclusion may not be physically visible in the form of a fence that surrounds the university but does rear its head in other non-physical ways (Goga 2010). The university has been accused of not seeing and addressing forms of racism in its institutional culture that are hidden. On its website, Rhodes University makes the claim that changing the institutional culture is particularly hard because of its invisibility (RU 2021a).

These complex issues of culture affect universities and their sense of place differently. Chimucheka (2012) argues that one of the reasons that community engagement at Fort Hare is seemingly less effective than it could be is that the reasons for which students choose to participate in community engagement are not well-enough understood. This, according to Chimucheka, impedes the ability of the state and the university to develop policies that would motivate students to participate in community engagement initiatives.

Digby (2013) suggests that, in contrast, the medical campus of the University of Natal was very politically active. The political aspirations of the black medical students included using their education to uplift black people. These students criticised black students on other medical campuses for being too liberal (Noble 2021) because they directed their medical education towards lofty and elitist ends (Noble 2021: 141).

In another liberal white university example, according to Adam (2009), the University of the Witwatersrand was characterised by a liberal tradition that permeated even the faculties that were, by nature, instrumental. And yet, not only did the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) have a distant relationship with its inner-city community during the period under the 1980s and 1990s (Mabin 2019), but a significant share of its on-campus presence was modelled on its British peers (Bank 2018: 3). Moodie (1994) states that for many years most senior academic staff at the University of the Witwatersrand were made up of graduates from British universities. In 1948, the Senate was made up of twenty-eight professors with first degrees from abroad, while only nineteen had degrees from South Africa. Thus, Wits has had a tense relationship with its local community.

In sum, the apartheid state left something of a binary system behind with respect to place and ideas about public good. The democratic government had a choice to make about which of these two types of institutional arrangements it would move forward with when restructuring the university sector. A first policy choice for the post-apartheid government would require a focus on those who had previously been excluded from the better-developed segments of the public sphere, associated with the white population. The post-apartheid government would need to support their integration into a new unified national public sphere through the right sets of policy tools. These tools would need to facilitate the role of universities in strengthening or creating new connections between universities and a geographic place-based public sphere. They would also enable a process whereby contextually relevant conceptions of the public good could be derived from members of local communities. A second choice would be to promote particular conceptions of the public good that were place-neutral and not linked to particular contexts. The policy discussion around these two poles are outlined in the next section.

Universities as Tools for Transformation Under the New Democratic Government

From its inception in 1994, the democratic government of South Africa understood the difficulty of changing the old institutional arrangements that it had inherited from the apartheid state. The policy-making process for a post-apartheid South Africa was structured to negotiate the complex institutional terrain in the university sector. A Government of National Unity was set up on 11 May 1994 (Habib and Taylor 2001), which brought together members of the newly elected African National Congress (ANC), members of the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party (Beall et al. 2005). Transformation was foregrounded in all policies (Habib and Taylor 2001), but at the same time was underspecified and ambiguous (Du Preez et al. 2016). For example, the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 mainly framed transformation in terms of efficiency (Du Preez et al. 2016). This meant increasing the numbers of previously disadvantaged students in lecture halls while also granting subsidies to universities that had a good rate of awarding degrees to this demographic (Wangenge-Ouma 2010).

In 1996, the newly elected president directed the National Commission on Higher Education to 'preserve what is valuable and to address what is defective and requires transformation' (NCHE 1996: 1). Under the Government of National Unity, the policy-making process for higher education included a variety of actors: political parties that had been involved in the liberation process; the newly elected ANC government; student organisations; academics; and civil society, to name a few (Davies 1996). Contestations arose between these different actors, stemming from the need to respond to the instrumental forms of public good, which could address the enormous challenges of a very unequal society, and maintain the vision of an intrinsic public good ideal associated with higher education, free speech, critical scholarship and independent research. The policy document concluded that instrumental needs were to be addressed through 'the development of professionals and knowledge workers with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation' (DoE 1997a: 4).

The intrinsic public good ideals associated with academic freedom and the space for universities to lead critical public discourse were also articulated in the policy paper (Bank 2019: 4). For instance, the policy paper states that the education system would 'support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights through educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order …' (DoE 1997a: 6).

In an attempt to balance these potentially contradictory demands, the transformation project was framed in a two-pronged manner by the new South African government: the first goal was to create a higher education system aligned to racial redress, and the second was to contribute to the common good of society by producing and applying knowledge in society and the economy, ensuring the availability of human capacity, and availing opportunities for lifelong learning opportunities (DoE 1997b). There were, therefore, a number of transformation-oriented initiatives and processes that sought to develop policies and implementation strategies in areas such as the size and shape of higher education, governance, funding and quality assurance (Badat 2010). For example, the National Higher Education Plan (DoE 1997a) established targets for participation rates, institutional and programme mixes, the vision, principles and policy goals for the system.

With respect to changing the size and shape of the system, closing the gap between historically advantaged universities and historically disadvantaged universities was a critical imperative. HAUs comprised the white English and white Afrikaner universities, while the HDUs comprised the universities that historically had catered to students in the Bantustans (Bunting 2006). Black, Coloured and Indian students were to be given better physical and financial access to higher education (DoE 1997a). This approach was intended to unify the system by addressing the imbalance in resources provided to white and non-white groups of students. Previously, most non-white students were in HDUs with fewer resources (e.g. staffing resources) (Odhav 2009), while white students often had greater and easier access to higher education in the better resourced HAUs (Reddy 2004). Despite redressing the resource imbalance, not enough concern was given to developing a place-based connection between the unification of the system, HAUs and HDUs and activities in the universities that could benefit the surrounding communities and/or contribute to transformation Grobbelaar (2018: 129).

The need to change resource allocations and widen access to the non-white demographic of students in South African universities quickly turned into a numbers race that ultimately reproduced inequalities in universities. Reddy (2004) describes this approach to transformation as emphasising quantitative, procedural changes so that the system would be efficiently regulated and co-ordinated by the state. This approach was not only important in order to serve local instrumental needs. It was critical in reinserting the country into global relations from which it had been excluded due to the sanctions under apartheid. Reddy (2004) describes this aspect of transformation as the need for the state to be more responsive to the challenges presented by globalisation through the production of a skilled workforce for the knowledge economy. Given that one of the contradictions that had made apartheid unsustainable was that it had created a skills shortage in various sectors of the economy (Feinstein 2005), building a solid workforce was crucial for social and economic transformation. But the focus on a knowledge society meant that the global space was configured as more important than the local. Marginson (2004) argues that the national and the local have in some moments been sacrificed for global affirmation. Reddy (1998) confirms this for the transition moment in South Africa, describing how a consultant from the World Bank significantly guided the values and visions in the White Paper.

When the Nationalist Party government was elected in 1948 the proportion of black students in universities was as low as 4.6 per cent of the total student body (Badat 1999: 48), and most were enrolled at the University of Fort Hare. In 2017, 84,8 per cent of South Africa's university students were black (Essop 2020). The fast growth in numbers of students from 1997 meant that the policy framework for transformation grew progressively more focused on the quality of higher education. The White Paper on Higher Education released in 2013 stated that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) would focus on staffing, retaining academics and ensuring that academic careers were attractive in order to meet the needs of the quickly expanding system (DHET 2013). To some extent this led to a narrow focus on the internal affairs of the campuses of South African universities. While this focus was necessary to address some quality issues, the student demonstrations highlighted the effects of the neglected relations between universities and the local communities outside the campuses.

It can be argued that the 'Rhodes-Must-Fall' student protests of 2015 were in part a reaction to this neglect. These protests criticised and aimed to dismantle institutional alienation and discrimination, which made students feel disconnected from the universities. Students also felt that given their socioeconomic backgrounds, their support needs were not catered for (Jansen 2017). The initial 'Rhodes-Must-Fall' Movement drew attention to the lack of transformation in South African universities. Universities were found wanting as spaces that reflected the identities of most South African students. Students understood symbols like the statue of Rhodes as indicating a white cultural hegemony still embedded in campus structures and activities (Jansen 2017). There was a feeling among students that their struggles in the university were connected to the places, households especially, that they had come from. Their place/household contexts had been contexts of poverty and deprivation (*City Press* 2021). Students felt that universities were not doing enough to acknowledge and respond to their backgrounds of poverty and deprivation (Pillay 2016). Research has been conducted to show that students' socioeconomic backgrounds affect their academic experiences and their academic success. Student poverty has since become a key theme in South Africa's university sector (Jansen 2017). Out of the 'Rhodes-Must-Fall' protests emerged the 'Fees-Must-Fall' protests (Pillay 2016). This was an extension of the resistance against the problems already outlined, after it was declared that fees would rise for the academic year of 2015 (Jansen 2017).

As the protests spread across South African universities, students expressed disdain for the generally unequal structure of not just universities but all of South Africa's social, political and economic structures (Mpofu 2017). They lamented that universities were structured in a way that distanced them from not only students but also the other people who worked in the university. In other words, the university, which should have been a public sphere for the collective of listeners and speakers, was silencing the voices or ideas of some through structural exclusion.Among the excluded, the students identified cleaning and other campus staff. They noted the plight of outsourced workers, whom they referred to as their parents. Maduna (2018) quotes one of the movements most visible leaders, Naledi Chirwa, who said that their parents (workers) would still have to suffer the feeling of alienation even after the insourcing victory had been won:

> But it's not the end because the institution still subjects our parents to inhumane conditions, ostracisation and marginalisation. But the insourcing victory is one for the books because it particularly has to do with how whiteness places a price tag on labour that is flooded by black people.

Students identified with workers because their own socioeconomic backgrounds were such that their real parents were in fact cleaners or work in similarly low-level jobs. What students were highlighting was their frustration with the general treatment of all low-level workers, not just at universities, but in other sectors of society and the economy (Maduna 2018). Through this line of discourse, students found solidarity with workers on their campuses (Mokoena 2019). Students became the source of a place-based connection between themselves and marginalised workers in a geographically contoured public sphere. This demonstrates that although the democratic government had set out to racially transform and unify the higher education sector, it had failed to orient its policies to include those who had been structurally excluded. The state's development goals seemingly failed to draw out conceptions of the public good that ought to have included everyone within the university public sphere.

While the 'Fees-Must-Fall' student protests gained significant momentum and public support, they did not resolve the problem of unaffordable fees for most South African students. As a result of those protests, in 2017 then president Jacob Zuma declared that the government would fully subsidise free higher education and training for poor/socioeconomically challenged students going forward (Areff and Spies 2017). In the first weeks of March 2021, however, students at Wits took up the struggle again (Felix 2021). This was triggered by the state's announcement that funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, which loans money to poor and lower-middle class students, would be reduced.

In the post-apartheid period actors in higher education had different understandings of needs in the context of the space associated with the sector. Some of the detail of how this was linked with place emerges from the interview data.

Place-based Conceptions of the Public Good and the Public Sphere

Data was collected from thirty-four key informants[1] who were working/studying or living in and around universities in South Africa in 2018/19. Analysis of these interviews indicates how some of the unresolved tensions between different notions of the public good and the public sphere of the university were articulated. Those interviewed included higher education experts, academics, university leaders, students, academic and non-academic unions, government departments, regulatory bodies, and civil society. They were asked a range of questions about how they understood the relationship between higher education and the public good, and what some of their experiences of this had been.

Three main themes came out from the interviews:

1. A lack of co-ordination from the state and a lack of political will from university management to drive a place-based public good role for universities.
2. Pockets of place-based public good interventions that were manifesting in community engagement projects. In some universities, these were formal and in others they were informal.
3. A widely circulating idea about the community and each individual's relationship to it, understood through the moral code of Ubuntu.[2.]

A senior figure in public administration expressed the importance of state co-ordination so that innovation policies met community needs:

> … there is need to coordinate government policies, the other one is to localise innovation. The problem that we tend to have is that we globalise innovation. If I am here, I must understand what the problems in this community. (Interview, senior government official 16, 1 December 2018)

Thus, a place-based public good can only be achieved if government policies foreground the needs of the localised community. But a lack of political will from university management to imbue universities with the sorts of values that are oriented towards the spatially derived public good was also noted. A member of civil society pointed out that:

> If you look, there was a generation of rectors at some stage and you knew where they were standing, and now there is a new generation that you can't even say what are the values of him as a person … the fortunate or unfortunate part is that institutions become what their leaders are …

Despite this, pockets of place-based public good interventions were described in the community engagement of some universities. Among these was a formal community service-learning initiative that is part of a course offering. Students get credits for performing this service-learning component in their course:

> … we also have what we call community service learning, which is an academic programme credit theory done in a number of programmes … it would be those students who are doing language could go and work with communities and design programmes say in a Court of Law because some people go to jail, not because they have done something wrong, but they don't understand the language or that the interpreter himself does not interpret correctly. So, we have a programme where our students work even with interpreters, we help them with the vocabulary. (Interview, university administrator, community interface, 15 March 2018)

This was one among a limited number of examples of initiatives driven by universities. In contrast, a notable proportion of place-based public good community engagement appears to be initiated by civil society. According to one Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transexual Queer Intersexed (LGBTQI) activist working within an inner-city community:

> … it's up to us as civil society to broker this kind of relationship … we really got into the partnership with (the university). LGBTI learners need to be better protected on campuses. (Interview, leader of civil society organisation 22, 10 September 2018)

This LGBTQI activist was one key informant among a number who spoke about community engagement as a predominantly self-driven exercise. In addition, a member of a worker trade union at a HAU felt that most of the time it was actors other than the university who drove community initiatives – actors like workers:

> … there is the policy of this university is very it is 100% super, but when it comes for implementation that is not accommodating there is a barrier somewhere somehow … we workers have to push that … (the university) is a research university but sometimes we have a problem with water, where are the researchers we cannot say I'm researching in this part but the problem of the public because the water is affecting all of us. (Interview, representative of trade union at a HAU, 16 February 2018)

Like workers, it seems that in some cases students rather than the university take the initiative in thinking about broader societal issues and possible solutions. A student at a HDU in a low-income urban area explained:

> For students here in (the low-income urban area), we are staying with the community here, how best we can try to change the conditions of this community? You can see when you enter the gate it's them, how do we deal with the issue of shebeens just opposite our institution, and what image do those give our institutions. (Interview, student leader, at an urban HDU, 4 May 2018)

This example indicates that the state's policies exclude members of each community who are already marginalised, fragmenting the public sphere. Some actors in the university sector take it upon themselves to include these groups, and in so doing, they surface place-based conceptions of the public good role that universities ought to play. What key informants seem to suggest is that their understanding of the public good role of universities is quite unlike what is stated in the official policies of the state covered over the course of this article.

Where actors spoke strongly in favour of a responsive place-based public good role for universities, they used the concept of Ubuntu. This suggests that some actors view social and economic contributions to place-based public good interventions as insufficient without the normative emphasis on the bonds that connect all human beings, but especially communities and families. A senior official in a government agency stated that if Ubuntu were prioritised, it might not matter that some of the outcomes of universities' work were not 'commercially viable'.

> I think for me public good is personified by Ubuntu, which is doing something without having to expect recognition or reward for it … Interventions might not be commercially viable to be sold as products, but if they change lives, that for me is my understanding of public good … also, it is an honour to be able, as blacks, to support our people. (Interview, chief executive officer of a government agency, 20 February 2018)

He went on to say that the financial support that black people give their families and communities should not be referred to using terms with negative connotations, like 'black tax':

> For me that is the problem, that we call it a tax. The word tax is bad. It should not be 'black tax' because it is a good thing for graduates to do. That's also where entrepreneurship must come from; from this spirit of giving. Even the next generation of students will grow up to know their role in the community, especially the villages and the rural communities. (Interview, chief executive officer of a government agency, 20 February 2018)

To summarise, the data collected from the interviews with key informants shows that the state is perceived as having failed to drive a place-based public good role for universities in South Africa. In participants' view the initiative for place-based community engagement in universities is coming from a few individuals or from small groups of actors in the university sector. They considered that the public good can only be realised if the public sphere includes those who are otherwise excluded from social, cultural and economic life. Concepts such as black tax and Ubuntu appeared to be place-based development processes that key informants supported, and considered as related to the public good role of universities in South African communities.

Conclusion

The South African case is clearly a complex one. There are seeming inconsistencies in the state's policy goals for place-based development associated with the university sector and what actors in the sector aspire to. While the state has attempted since democracy to restructure the higher education sector and redress the inequalities of the past, its policies seem to have fallen short of meeting the aspirations of a large proportion of actors in the university sector. The different types of contributions to higher education transformation have been underpinned by different conceptions of the public good role of universities. The new democratic government's policies appear to have inadequately promoted the idea of universities with development roles that emphasise instrumentally and intrinsically place-based public good outcomes. Interviews conducted with actors in South Africa's higher education sector between 2018/19 suggest that key informants have grown impatient with the effects of the state's place-neutral development policies. In the absence of an enabling policy framework, universities, individuals in universities and members of the communities around them are leading their own projects. Their conceptions of the public good are derived from expanded ideas of the public spheres to include diverse communities that are expressed through the concepts of Ubuntu, support, partnership and service, among others discussed in this article.

Because the impetus for place-based development has come from certain actors within universities and the communities around them, this has come with some advantages and disadvantages for how and where they locate ideas of the public good role of universities in relation to their communities. There is the advantage that previously excluded members of the community or public sphere are increasingly included. However, there is also the disadvantage that it seems universities are expected to play every public good role in the community—from entrepreneurship to 'black tax'. Two issues arise with this. The first is, as Tilak (2018) warns, a delicate balance to be struck so that universities do not become too parochial when striving to be relevant and responsive. The second is that not much policy or research is available in South Africa on what more place-based interventions or more community engagement interventions mean for the 'core functions' of universities in South Africa (Boughey and McKenna 2021, 130). Place-based development through universities may be necessary and desirable. However, it must be managed so that South African universities can still be sufficiently outward-looking. It must also be managed so that thought can be given to the implications for the role of research or teaching in place-based development interventions.

Notes

1. The interviews were conducted as part of the research project *Higher Education, Inequality and the Public Good (*ESRC/NRF award number 174071*)*. The breakdown of the numbers in terms of key informants interviewed were: 7 academics (from 4 different universities, referred to as small town historically white universities; large urban historically white universities; large urban universities

of technology; and rural historically black universities) and higher education experts; 6 regulatory bodies and government departments/agencies; 6 civil society organisations; 5 student representatives; 7 university leaders; and 3 worker union representatives. For full discussion of these data see Unterhalter et al. 2019.

2. 'Ubuntu' is the moral philosophy which states 'I am because others are' (Metz 2007).

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 185-210

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2731)

Indicators of Higher Education and the Public Good in Africa: A Dashboard Approach

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Abstract

Indicators and metrics have gained increasing prominence in international higher education in recent years, and global rankings have become a powerful force in shaping ideas of what the university is and should be. Yet these measures do a poor job of capturing the broad role of the institution, and particularly in recognising its actions in promoting the public good and addressing inequalities. African higher education institutions have struggled to perform well in the conventional rankings, whose indicators rely on extensive resources for high-level research. This article explores the possibilities of alternative metrics for understanding the public good contribution of universities in the context of four African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. After assessing the shortcomings of the existing indicators and metrics, and the challenges of the availability of data, it puts forward a dashboard approach as a possible new model. Dashboards have the advantage of avoiding the conflation of diverse qualities of importance and allow different profiles of an institution to be compared. The article proposes six main elements for the dashboard: solidarity with society, equitable access and deliberative space (which correspond to the intrinsic notion of public good) and graduate destinations, knowledge production and community engagement (which correspond to instrumental notions). Finally, the challenges of implementing public good metrics in practice are discussed.

Keywords: Education indicators, quality of higher education, higher education policy, public good, university rankings

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Résumé

Les indicateurs et les métriques ont gagné en importance dans l'enseignement supérieur international ces dernières années, et les classements mondiaux sont devenus une force puissante pour façonner les idées sur ce qu'est et devrait être l'université. Pourtant, ces mesures ne parviennent pas à saisir le rôle général de l'institution, et en particulier à reconnaître ses actions dans la promotion du bien public et la lutte contre les inégalités. Les établissements d'enseignement supérieur africains ont du mal à bien performer dans les classements conventionnels, dont les indicateurs reposent sur des ressources importantes pour la recherche de haut niveau. Cet article explore les possibilités de mesures alternatives pour comprendre la contribution des universités au bien public dans le contexte de quatre pays africains : le Ghana, le Kenya, le Nigeria et l'Afrique du Sud. Après avoir évalué les lacunes des indicateurs et métriques existants, et les défis de la disponibilité des données, il propose une approche de tableau de bord comme nouveau modèle possible. Les tableaux de bord ont l'avantage d'éviter l'amalgame de diverses qualités d'importance et permettent de comparer les différents profils d'une institution. L'article propose six éléments principaux pour le tableau de bord: solidarité avec la société, accès équitable et espace délibératif (qui correspondent à la notion intrinsèque de bien public) ; et les destinations des diplômés, la production de connaissances et l'engagement communautaire (qui correspondent à des notions instrumentales). Enfin, les défis de la mise en œuvre de mesures de bien public dans la pratique sont discutés.

Mots-clés : indicateurs de l'éducation, qualité de l'enseignement supérieur, politique de l'enseignement supérieur, bien public, classement des universités

Introduction

The dawning of the age of data has represented a dilemma for educational policy, research and practice. On the one hand, it has heralded an era of rational decision-making on the basis of transparent information about the effectiveness of different interventions. In this way, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon in 2015 were accompanied by a series of 169 targets by which progress could be measured and accountability ensured. On the other hand, it is broadly (if not universally) acknowledged that not all that is valuable in education can be represented by numerical indicators, not to mention the challenges of collecting this data in practice. The danger of 'what can be counted' squeezing out 'what counts' is very real.

Concerns about this emphasis on measurement have been exacerbated by the ease with which these indicators[1] can be converted into rankings, thereby fostering competition between countries and institutions and creating an unhealthy culture of winners and losers, of adulation and shame. In higher education, these rankings have been particularly prominent, and have led to a wholesale shift in higher education policy, in many countries, in order to insert a few of the nation's universities into the top 200.

Rankings form part of a broader trend towards quantification, through which new kinds and categories of things are created (Espeland and Stevens 2008). Quantification has become so commonplace that the meanings of the units under consideration are often taken for granted. Sociologists such as Desrosieres (2001) and Espeland and Stevens (2008) have explored how numbers create realities: for example, distinctions are made and institutionalised in a census between who is part of the polity and who is not, involving quantifications and classifications of citizenship relating to race, gender, education and so on. This numerical device has decisive implications, determining the rights and social protections that citizens and non-citizens are afforded. An extension of this problem is the determination of whose labour counts as a productive contribution to the polity under the census. Women's work has been underreported in the past, and continues to be in the present (Hatton and Bailey 2001).

These tendencies are clearly visible in higher education, where numbers determine what quality is and which institutions are rewarded or not. Critical responses to these developments have included a rejection of all rankings, indices and indicators on the basis that they distort the true value of the educational process, leading to performativity, punishment of the already disadvantaged and the undermining of qualitative evaluation. Yet, some have advocated for engagement rather than delinking with measurement. In the words of Unterhalter (2018: 5), this represents, 'a recognition of the need to get on the metric bus, but also a wish to change the direction that bus is going'.

This article assesses the extent to which this approach might be fruitful in relation to ideas of the public good in higher education. It explores the possibilities of identifying an indicator or indicators of the public role and public benefits of higher education in Africa, and collecting the required information in practice. We recognise that this task is fraught with difficulties and contradictions, not least because it places in tension the need for the contextualisation of ideas of public good – a key aim of the broader research project within which this study is located – and the need for the comparability of an indicator.

This research forms part of the 'Higher Education, Inequality and the Public Good in Four African Countries' project, which explored conceptualisations of public good in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South

Africa. The four countries were chosen for comparison because, while each is distinctive, they resemble each other in some ways. All use English widely and share experience of British colonial rule, which has influenced their higher education systems and the forms of higher education found there, although South Africa has distinctive characteristics from the legacy of apartheid. They also have very high levels of wealth and income inequality. While these similarities make comparability possible, the four countries differ, too, in their cultures and histories and with regard to the form and extent of initiatives to widen participation in and improve quality of higher education. While the broader project involved extensive qualitative data collection from various higher education stakeholders, this article is primarily theoretical, drawing on secondary literature on rankings and indicators and drawing out the implications for the countries in question. The article does not aim to put forward a definitive indicator, but to assess the possibilities and analyse the conditions that affect the task. In doing so, it argues that a dashboard model of indicators is the most promising way forward, in its ability to provide a range of relevant information without falsely conflating or ranking it.

Data collected as part of the broader project indicated that stakeholders across the higher education system in the four countries considered that the current rankings were inadequate in valuing the diverse roles of higher education and failed to recognise the significant contribution made by higher education institutions in Africa. They also endorsed attempts to develop new indicators relating to the public good, as discussed in this article. Nevertheless, this study is fully aware of the risks associated with such a task: first, the narrowing of a conception of the public good through focusing only on what can easily be measured; second, the spurring of new forms of competition between higher education institutions around any indicators adopted; and third, encouragement of performativity, in focusing attention on the targets themselves rather than the substantive work that underpins them.

The discussions below will draw on the important distinction made in the broader project (see Unterhalter et al. 2017) between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* versions of the public good in higher education. Much of the attention in recent literature (McMahon 2009; Oketch et al. 2014) has been on the societal impact of universities – for example, the collective economic benefit through externalities and tax revenue, improvements in health and nutrition, poverty reduction and strengthening of democracy. Yet, there is also a form of public good in higher education that is internal to its own functioning. Universities can serve as a public sphere (Marginson 2011) and instantiate the space for dialogue and encounters across diversity that constitute public good itself. In order to fulfil this role, the question of access to higher education is crucial. Following Locatelli's (2017) conception, we need to pay attention to higher education *as* a public good, as well as *for* the public good. As will be argued further below, indicators of higher education and the public good need to acknowledge both intrinsic and instrumental dimensions.

Rankings

Rankings play an influential role in the higher education landscape, shaping the work of administrators and researchers and affecting the decisions of students and parents regarding their choice of institution, programme, etc. While national rankings are more numerous, the dominant players are global university rankings (Hazelkorn 2011, 2015). The hegemony of the elite is so entrenched that the top 100 places in one of the most influential rankings (Quacquarelli Symonds [QS]) are monopolised by only twenty countries – all of them located in Europe, North America, East Asia or Australasia, with Argentina being the only South American nation to feature (McCowan 2019).

Other influential global rankings are the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and the Times Higher Education (THE) (Marope and Wells 2013). Another significant ranking is the Webometrics World Ranking of Universities, an offshoot of bibliometrics, which measures the amount of web content that a university puts out and the impact of these outputs in terms of the number of citations that these receive. Quite unlike the other rankings, it includes most universities in the world (roughly 30,000) rather than a few hundred or thousand (Webometrics 2019).

Rankings compare higher education institutions using a range of indicators, such as citations, research funding, entry standards, student satisfaction, etc., to which a score is assigned and the scores are often aggregated into a single-digit proxy (THE 2019). League tables present numbers on the overall quality of ranked universities, ordering them from highest to lowest scoring. It is a known fact that the choice of indicators comes down to the judgement of each ranking organisation, therefore a lack of objectivity in the process is one of the biggest problems with this methodology (Hazelkorn 2014).

According to Marope, Wells and Hazelkorn (2013), proponents of international university rankings believe that they offer us a 'common yardstick' with which to compare universities, much as we compare economies. And yet, despite all the differences in types of institutions, rankings compare without distinguishing between types (Sowter 2013). It is argued that countries such as the USA and the UK, which have the highest number of top-ranked universities, do not provide for social mobility. According to data reported by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS 2021), students from low-income households who are enrolled in England's most selective universities, such as the Russell Group, experience good labour market outcomes. However, this demographic makes up only 2.6 per cent of the Russell Group student population, making for a low mobility rate (IFS 2021).

Furthermore, it is not obviously the case that universities have to be ranked. While they can be compared along a vertical spectrum, the horizontal spectrum is better suited to account for the diversity of institutions – showing differences in terms of size, function, age, etc. Most university rankings, unfortunately, construct measures of vertical diversity, backgrounding the importance of horizontal diversity between universities (Kehm 2016). This leads to the exclusion of most universities in regions such as Africa and Latin America.

There are three main problems that must be elaborated in order to demonstrate the processes by which rankings lead to exclusion and inequality. The first is that most rankings are characterised by forms of weighting that are not clearly related to what they claim to measure (i.e. quality). The second is that ranking weights tend to be heavily skewed towards research. And the third is that rankings have perverse effects that change the logic of the academic profession.

Regarding the first problem, rankings claim to capture the quality of universities when in reality their measures exclude critical aspects of quality, namely: long-term learning outcomes, student happiness on campus, graduate satisfaction, etc. While indeed these are difficult to measure, ranking systems fall into the pitfalls that they do precisely because they measure the measurable, not necessarily the meaningful (Marope, Wells and Hazelkorn 2013). Although the OECD lauds rankings for their transparency (Tremblay, Lalancette and Roseveare 2012), rankings do not tell us much about quality – for example, many higher education institutions make a developmental contribution to their communities and countries, and yet are excluded from the most elite rungs of global higher education.

The second problem is that most global ranking systems have a clear tendency towards research. The QS world university rankings looks at six performance indicators related to teaching, employability and internationalisation (QS 2019b). For academic reputation, it conducts a global survey of academics, asking them to identify what they believe are the leading institutions in fields of expertise that they feel they are qualified to comment on; another global survey is conducted on where employers think the best graduates in their sector come from (QS 2019a). The THE rankings, by comparison, with a total of five indicators, rank teaching based on, among other things, a reputation survey (15 per cent), staff-to-student ratio (4.5 per cent), institutional income (2.25 per cent) and industry income (2.5 per cent) (THE 2019). Finally, the ARWU (or Shanghai Ranking) uses six indicators to measure, among other things, academic papers published in the prestigious journals *Nature* and *Science* (weighted 20 per cent), papers indexed in the Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index (weighted 20 per cent), and per capita performance (weighted 10 per cent) (ARWU 2019). Because most universities in Africa may not perform well in terms of research, attract enough international faculty or score well in any of the other areas emphasised in global rankings, there is no place for most of them in the race for the top spots (Teferra 2017).

Finally, there are several possible perverse effects of rankings – for example, academic staff may have contractual obligations linked to rankings results. Hazelkorn (2011) found that arts departments that failed to contribute to rankings outcomes lost financial resources to sciences departments. This may pull academic staff from teaching towards practices like publication slicing.

The criticisms raised here have inspired work towards metrics that give a better picture of the contributions that universities make in different societies. While their merits are debatable, alternative rankings are on the rise. The next section examines four alternative approaches: benchmarking, classification, multidimensional rankings, and finally, system-level rankings.

The description of university rankings and how they work illustrates that they say little, if anything, about the overall performance of higher education systems and their wider socio-economic benefits. Some new rankings have emerged, which focus on specific aspects that have been ignored in the general rankings – such as contribution to the SDGs in the Impact Rankings, and the People and Planet University League of environmental and ethical performance. Alternative approaches like benchmarking allow comparisons of systems from countries at similar stages of development, in similar types of regions of the world, or with similar political contexts (Salmi and Saroyan 2007). Such an approach offers an understanding of the 'wider social benefits' of higher education by looking at 'all missions' of universities to include 'regional engagement' as an indicator. The biggest strength of benchmarking is said to be the more holistic measure of the university, its quality and its impact (OECD 2017).

Like benchmarking, classification is also considered a more 'holistic approach' to assessing institutions. The Carnegie Foundation's elective 'Classification on Community Engagement' is considered more holistic because it considers the university activities that are related to the university's 'Third Mission', i.e. outreach (Carnegie Classification 2019). The Carnegie Classification lists universities according to three categories: outreach activities and partnerships, curricular engagement, and a third classification that straddles both these categories (Carnegie Classification 2019). Institutions are required to self-report by filling out a survey to provide data on their community engagement and hence obtain their classification.

Then, there are multidimensional rankings, like the European Union's U-Multirank. Some of this system's features include its user-driven format (individuals or stakeholder groups can rank according to their priorities), and its multidimensional approach – for example, it allows for comparability between universities with similar missions, and it offers a multilevel analysis that can be used at institutional, disciplinary or departmental level (U-Multirank 2019),[2] which gauges systems on the basis of four dimensions: resources, environment, connectivity and output. This approach leads to results that are distinct from institutional-level rankings, such as putting Sweden and Denmark in the top five, despite having few high-ranking institutions.

Current Indicators for African Universities

African higher education institutions have proliferated significantly. Before 1960, only eighteen of the forty-eight countries on the continent at the time had universities (Sawyerr 2004: 4). More than sixty years later, the continent has an estimated 1,703 institutions (688 public and 1,015 private) between its fifty-four countries (IAU WHED 2021). However, fast growth in quantity has left much to be desired in quality as hyper-massification increasingly burdens a frail system. Indeed, African universities are left on the margins because most are not research universities (Cloete et al. 2011), but an additional limitation is the data gap that constrains the possibilities of higher education management.

Data Availability

Barely a sprinkle of universities in Africa make the global ranking lists. Only two African universities, both in South Africa, featured in the top 200 of the THE rankings for 2020: the University of Cape Town is Africa's top university, sitting at 136, while the University of the Witwatersrand is rated at 194 (THE 2019). The same two feature in the top 300 of the ARWU's 2020 ranking (ARWU 2019).

One of the limitations that prevent African universities from participating in these rankings is a lack of reliable data because of costs and other logistical challenges. Teferra (2015) points out that while the continent has been at work exploring the possibility of an African ranking system, the striking reality is that data collection and management remain problems, to the extent that it is not known how many universities there are on the continent.

According to the World Bank Statistical Capacity Indicator (2016), Nigeria scored 67.8 per cent in terms of statistical capacity, higher than the sub-Saharan Africa average. Notwithstanding the relatively strong capacity, data collection and processing in Nigeria has faced significant challenges in relation to dissemination and archiving, constraining decision-making (World Bank 2016).

In South Africa, the data gap is less pronounced. The issue drew much attention at the onset of democracy, in 1994, but has since improved. In 1997, the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy highlighted the severe lack of data related to people living with disabilities in South Africa – data necessary for government to design, plan and implement strategies in response to the needs of this group (Howell 2003). The 'data revolution' has also become central in the debates surrounding the SDGs and African economic development. However, more recently, the limitations in good-quality data in Africa continue to affect its ability to report on SDG outcomes.

That said, there are efforts among international statistical agencies to support African data collection and management in order to make partial, if not full, sense of the continental higher education landscape. The available statistics for the four countries studied here are provided in the section that follows.

Higher Education Indicators

In relation to higher education specifically, obtaining comparable international indicators can be a challenge on account of differences in definitions of what counts as higher or tertiary education. This is particularly so as to whether technical and vocational institutions are included, as well as differences in the age ranges used to calculate net and gross enrolment ratios. As argued by Atherton, Dumangane and Whitty (2016), attempts to understand and monitor inequities of access globally are severely hampered by inconsistencies and unreliability of data.

Nevertheless, the creation of the World Inequality Databas*e* on Education (WIDE) – a collaboration of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report – has led to great improvements in this area, supplementing the indicators already held by UIS. The following section presents some of the indicators held in these international databases.

The most commonly utilised indicators are the figures on gross enrolment ratio (GER): while the net enrolment ratio, which assesses access rates for the 'appropriate' age group, provides a more precise gauge of coverage, it is less often available, and comparisons between countries are most often made using the GER, which includes overage and underage students. For the countries in our study the figures are as follows (data are not available for Nigeria):

Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratios in Tertiary Education

	GER %
Ghana	15.7
Kenya	11.5
South Africa	22.4
Nigeria	No data

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020

Note: Figures for Ghana are from 2018, and for Kenya and South Africa from 2017. Percentages to one decimal place.

These figures are low in relation to the global average of 38 per cent, but are significantly higher than the average for sub-Saharan Africa, of 9 per cent. These enrolment ratios are important indicators of the availability and accessibility of higher education places, but in order to have a deeper understanding of equality of opportunity, it is important also to understand who takes up these places. To a large extent, the dramatic expansion of higher education in recent decades has privileged the middle classes and other advantaged groups (Marginson 2016; McCowan 2016).

Gender is one of the important variables in this regard, and has the most widely available disaggregated data. The gender parity index (GPI) – the number of females enrolled at a particular level of education, divided by the number of males – shows some striking disparities in the same three countries:

Table 2: Gender Parity Index in Tertiary Education

	GER %
Ghana	0.77
Kenya	0.74
South Africa	1.43

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020

Note: figures for Ghana are from 2018, and for Kenya and South Africa from 2017. Percentages to one decimal place.

Ghana and Kenya, therefore, show a significant underrepresentation of women in tertiary education, and South Africa has predominance of females. These figures should be seen in light of the overall global GPI of 1.14, which shows a larger number of females than males in tertiary education around the world. While the disparities are large in all cases, from a social justice perspective the barriers to women's access in Ghana and Kenya are particularly worrying on account of the greater difficulty that women face subsequently, in converting higher education into employment and other opportunities.

The WIDE database presents information on the attendance ratio (distinct from the GER as it gauges the percentage of eighteen- to twenty-two-year-olds who are attending higher education). Importantly, it disaggregates by a range of factors: gender, income, location (rural/urban), region, ethnicity and religion. In relation to location, for example, the three countries – as expected – show a marked disadvantage for rural areas (in this case, data for South Africa is not available).

Table 3: Higher Education Attendance Ratio, by Location

	Urban %	Rural %
Ghana	6	1
Kenya	17	7
Nigeria	15	3

Source: WIDE 2020

Note: Data from demographic and health survey (DHS) 2013 (Nigeria), DHS 2014 (Ghana), DHS 2014 (Kenya).

The diverging results obtained from different forms of measurement can be seen clearly here, as Ghana, which has a higher GER than Kenya according to UIS figures, is substantially lower on this attendance gauge. Disparities are also evident by income level.

Table 4: Higher Education Attendance Ratio, by income quintile

	Richest %	Rich%	Middle %	Poor %	Poorest %
Ghana	14	3	2	0	1
Kenya	26	11	8	4	2
Nigeria	24	10	3	1	1

Source: WIDE 2020

Note: Data from DHS 2013 (Nigeria), DHS 2014 (Ghana), DHS 2014 (Kenya)

With the exception of the anomaly of the figures for 'poor' and 'poorest' in Ghana (extremely low in both cases), as expected there is a clear correspondence between income level and chances of access, with the bottom two quintiles in all cases having extremely restricted chances. While all of the countries are highly unequal, Kenya fares slightly better in ensuring that poorer students have some measure of access to higher education.

The above tables provide crucial information on inequalities of access to higher education, on which policies might be built to overcome the barriers facing certain groups. Yet, inequalities of access are just one dimension of the public good in higher education. Indicators on other aspects are even harder to come by.

One area of potential interest is the distribution of higher education students across different disciplinary areas that often correspond closely to professional activities after graduation. These figures are held by UIS for groupings of subjects (data for Nigeria is not available).

Table 5: Distribution of Enrolment by Field of Study – Tertiary Education

	Education %	Arts and humanities %	Social sciences, journalism and information %	Business administration and law %	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics %
Ghana	31.9	8.8	4.2	28.3	4.2
Kenya	23.9	8.3	6	33.4	7
South Africa	19.3	5.1	15.5	32.2	7.3

	ICT %	Engineering manufacturing and construction%	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary %	Health and welfare %	Services %	Unspecified %
Ghana	3.2	9	1.9	8.7	0.9	3.5
Kenya	5.3	4.2	2.8	6	1.8	1.5
South Africa	3.2	8.1	2	6.7	0.4	0.1

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020
Note: The figures are indicative only as taken from the latest year available, hence do not add up to a hundred. Percentages to one decimal point.

While the figures above are only indicative, they do show some interesting trends. Enrolments in all three countries are heavily weighted towards the professional courses of education, business and law, with low proportions of students in the academic areas of natural sciences, mathematics, arts and humanities. Given the importance of agriculture in the economies of these countries, there is a surprisingly small percentage of students in the 'agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary' category, and a number of African countries have been lamenting the decline in number of students in these areas. While the conclusions to be derived for the public good are not straightforward, most would agree that all disciplinary areas are needed, so maintaining balance between them may be the most pressing goal.

Much use, therefore, can be made of disaggregating enrolments by disciplinary area. Nevertheless, to understand more closely the impact of higher education on the public good, it would also be necessary to separate out courses within these broad disciplinary areas (which might have quite different implications). Moreover, and more challengingly, we would need to know what kinds of employment graduates are moving onto – whether in the public or private sector, whether in the area corresponding to the university course or not – and the extent of their commitment to the public good within their employment.

A final area of relevance to the public good in which indicators are available is funding. Absolute levels of funding for tertiary education, and expenditure per student, of course differ markedly on account of the wealth levels of the countries in question. Yet, as shown in Table 6, viewing funding in relation to GDP can be revealing:

Table 6: Government funding of tertiary education as a percentage of GDP

Ghana	0.81%
Kenya	0.69%
South Africa	0.94%

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020.
Note: figures for Ghana are for 2014, for Kenya, 2015 and for South Africa, 2018. Figures for Nigeria are not available.

The world average is not available for this indicator, but for specific countries the range for 2017 was from 0.16 per cent for Mongolia up to 2.74 per cent for Sierra Leone, with above 1 per cent of GDP for the most part signalling healthy investment. The figures for Ghana, Kenya and South Africa indicate a fair level of public commitment to the sector, but fall short of what would be needed for real transformation. In conjunction with this indicator, it would also be important to look at figures for household funding of tertiary education, as private funds are significant in all of these countries, yet unfortunately this indicator is not available for the countries in question.

The above is a non-exhaustive list of the indicators that are readily available, and which can be compared internationally. Some others are the proportion of enrolments in public and private institutions, distribution of students between different ISCED levels, or between undergraduate and graduate studies, and the number of publications in internationally indexed journals. These indicators provide us with some pointers as to the public good role of higher education, though leave us with as many questions as they do answers.

We have explored how far alternative metrics might be feasible, by looking at data that has already been collected, and indicators that are made available by international agencies, such as the UIS. However, there are many gaps in relation to the public good, in terms of the *intrinsic* and *instrumental* dimensions, for which limited data is available. It is necessary to supplement these existing data sets with further forms of data, whether with what is already held at the local level by institutions, or with new data collected specifically to create public good indicators. The following section will assess these gaps, and discuss the ways in which a dashboard may provide some form of response.

The Dashboard

To begin the work of constructing a dashboard we elaborate some of the problems with measuring the university's public good role given the complexity of universities as multifunctional institutions, the absence of counterfactuals and problems of data availability and reliability. Thereafter, we define the dashboard approach, and then construct the proposed dashboard by populating it with six themes, each defined by indicators drawn from the quantitative measures presented above and the qualitative notions of the public good from the data collected through the project. The themes are not determinate, and can vary. This variance will likely be the function of institutional or national context here framed in terms of conditions of possibility and forms of social contract.

Two main things emerge from the project: first, that context should frame the way in which indicators are defined; second, that the mediation between the university or university system and public spheres determines the public good contribution of the university to the societal whole. The main forms of the public good that emerged from the project data cover three areas. The indicators that feature in the dashboard can be understood as reflecting one of these three areas, namely:

1. Fostering care and nurture in the university (through the enactment of solidarities that might improve working and living conditions on campuses).
2. Ensuring public access (through funding or open gates).
3. Serving society as a whole.

A dashboard is a graphic representation of indicators, which presents a variety of institutional or national performance data through an information management system. It shows the indicators 'at a glance', also revealing the direction that the indicators are moving in while providing several other broad contextual pieces of information. A dashboard offers a practical way of looking at data across countries, as well as organising qualitative and quantitative data. Unlike existing metrics, which focus on a single composite indicator, the dashboard gives fuller information because it tries to address some of the shortcomings of indicators and indices which, respectively, tend to be one-dimensional or tend to conflate diverse elements by retaining a range of dimensions in an easily readable format.

Constructing the Dashboard

In determining which indicators should be selected for representing the public good role of higher education, there are two primary considerations. The first relates to a decision regarding which areas of the university's activities to focus on. This is a particularly complex decision, given the multifaceted nature of the institution's work across the areas of teaching, research, community engagement and more. Furthermore, there are questions surrounding counterfactuals given that some of the potential functionings of institutions may not (yet) be realised. In assessing graduate destinations, for example, we need to know what graduates *could have done* as well as what they actually *did*. For example, we cannot treat equally the case of a woman who could have obtained high-level employment but chose to be an unpaid sculptor, with another who was unable to secure employment because of labour market discrimination (even though they might both appear as 'not employed' in the data). This kind of granularity is only possible with in-depth qualitative work, and is not possible to represent in large-scale indicators.

The second question is whether it is possible and viable to collect and report information pertaining to those characteristics. We have already seen above the difficulties of data collection and reliability of data, even with the most prominent indicators at the international level. To be sure, some pragmatic decisions need to be taken to temper the ideal of what we would like to gauge in understanding the contribution of higher education to the public good.

We undertake this task of constructing the dashboard cognisant that there are deep philosophical contestations regarding what the public good is, one of the major issues being the blurred line between public and private. Anticipating that we cannot overcome these old and intractable contestations in a single project, however, we take advantage of the opportunities presented to formulate a working definition of the public good.

For each African country, the *contextual framework* is mapped out in terms of two aspects: conditions of possibility and forms of social contract. Conditions of possibility are the factors that stakeholders in each higher education system believe need to be addressed in order for higher education to function in a way that enables it to contribute to the public good or to be recognised as a public good; these can be either internal or external (Unterhalter et al. 2019). Social contract, on the other hand, refers to the agreement among members of a society to co-operate towards certain social ends or benefits, through a commitment to higher education (ibid). What is key to understand is that the factors captured within these two concepts have catalysing effects that can equalise the stratification within university systems and within society through university systems. In other words, getting the conditions of possibility and the social contract right is the driver of public good change. Through these drivers of change, the communicative exchange between the public spheres and the relationality between them either facilitates or constrains the public good.

Figure 1 is a diagram of the proposed dashboard. Six themes are presented, three of them intrinsic and three of them instrumental, each with discrete indicators that may overlap. The data captured will vary. Some indicators may be represented quantitatively, others qualitatively, and some may be a combination of both. The data captured per theme will also cover a range of private and public outcomes enjoyed by individuals, small collectives or the whole of society, cutting across these public spheres. In these ways the indicator takes on a multidimensional and multiscalar form, with the context in each country foregrounded in terms of conditions of possibility and forms of social contract.

Let us take the conditions of possibility and social contract as given. The arrows that form a circular process illustrate the direction of the relationship between conditions of possibility, forms of social contract and the intrinsic and instrumental forms of the public good. As much as the conditions of possibility and the forms of social contract determine the possible public good in the university, so too does the university affect the extent to which conditions of possibility and forms of social contract can be altered. In other words, aspects of the relationship include feedback mechanisms that can either reproduce or disrupt the public good (leading to forms of public bad). With that, the next sections elaborate the details of the dashboard.

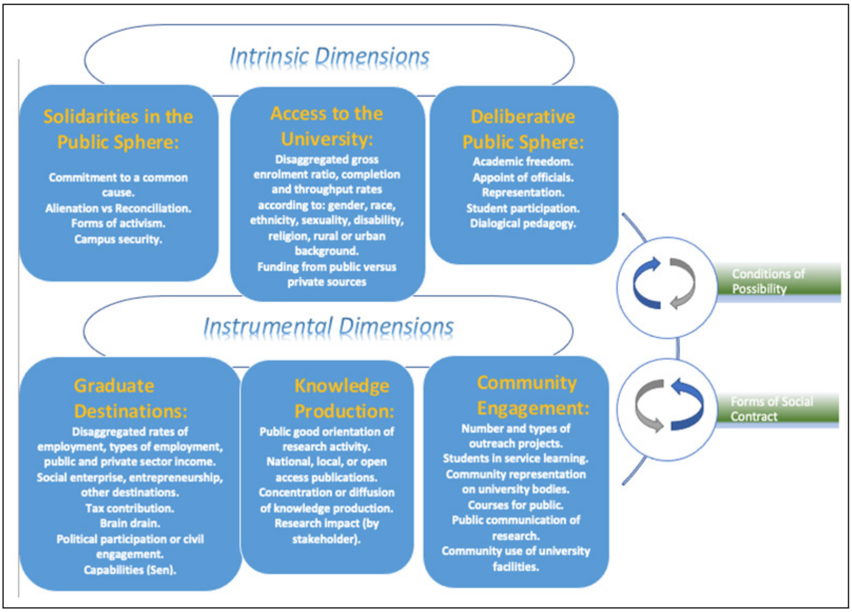

Figure 1: Public Good Dashboard

Beginning with the intrinsic dimensions, the first theme captures the 'solidarities in the public sphere'. The indicators therein are: institutional stratification; commitment towards a common cause; degree of alienation versus reconciliation (where issues of language policy can be highlighted); forms of activism; and campus security. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators can be employed here. For example, the degree of campus security can be reflected quantitatively using the number of safety-related incidents that are reported on the campus. In contrast, to capture perceptions regarding alienation and reconciliation might require a perception survey (qualitative data).

The next theme is that of 'access to the university'. The question of equity of access has already had some discussion in the above section concerning existing indicators. As noted, the four countries differ with regard to the form and extent of initiatives to widen participation in higher education. Although the expansion of access to higher education is a national policy goal in each country, the level of political support for realising this and the way in which inequalities affect access differ in each case. Thus, the equity of access dimension in the dashboard tries to bring in an expanded notion of access that incorporates specific social justice outcomes, considering such indicators as: disaggregated enrolment ratios in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, proportion of students with disabilities, whether students are from rural or urban areas, etc. Most of these indicators would be reflected quantitatively, but again there may be room for perception surveys to get more detailed data on students' experiences given their religion or ethnicity, for example.

Finally, the 'deliberative public sphere' theme sits in close relation to the equity of access theme. This is because the feelings of alienation experienced by those in the university (captured in the solidarities theme) create the need for access to university structures through more inclusive processes in the appointment of officials, student representation, student participation and a dialogical pedagogy with a pluralism of ideas. This last point illustrates that none of the dimensions conceptualised here are intended to be thought about in mutually exclusive ways. A number of possible overlaps can be imagined because the many things that take place within the university and the number of challenges they raise cannot be separated out neatly. Some of the data captured for this theme would be quantitative – for example, student representation in terms of numbers by race, gender, etc.; some would be qualitative – for example, looking at some of the techniques used in the classroom to bring students into the teaching and learning process in a more participatory way.

The relationality between the three themes can be summarised as follows: solidarities in the public sphere shape the way that equity of access and deliberation arise within the university. It is hard to imagine students acquiring knowledge in a context of instability and violence. In this scenario it would seem inappropriate to tick a box that indicates that equity of access was achieved simply because students were formally enrolled in the institutions. Or, suppose that a university does not have a diverse enough mix of students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds – then, a deliberative space cannot exist in the absence of these sorts of pluralities.

Now we turn to the instrumental dimensions, where we propose three themes: graduate destinations, knowledge production and community engagement. These might be described as pathways through which the internal public spheres of the university interact with the broader external public spheres in society, forming some of that communicative exchange between the public spheres. The direction of this relationship is not a simple one-way process, but bidirectional.

Under the 'graduate destinations' theme, the indicators captured include social enterprise or entrepreneurship that graduates might be participating in, the tax contribution of these graduates and the capabilities they acquire (which then have an effect on society through lower crime rates, improvements in health, etc.). Capabilities would be another qualitative indicator based on the sorts of perception studies that currently exist. In these studies, students are asked to identify the capabilities that they believe they should acquire or have acquired through their university education. Other indicators could be quantified.

Because graduate destinations are described in a number of surveys in relation to the reproduction of social inequalities, this dimension presents another opportunity to reveal the stratification within and between universities by showing how long graduates from less well-off families tend to remain unemployed after graduation or by showing the types of jobs (by status and income level) that they secure in the labour market. Another issue in relation to this is the problem of 'brain drain' in African contexts. The transnational nature of study and employment casts doubt on purely national influences and impacts, and hence requires us to acknowledge the necessarily global nature of the public good. This may be captured in the dashboard both in terms of the negative and positive aspects of brain drain. While brain drain may reduce the amount of highly skilled labour in a country or region, its positive aspects include the formation of diasporic networks between graduates in the home countries and those in host countries (Salmi and Salmi 2017).

For the second theme, knowledge production, the public good orientation of research and knowledge-sharing are among some of the more critical issues that key stakeholders raised. This primarily refers to whether research is responsive to local needs that are development-oriented. Some of the other indicators that we propose are not just concerned with the kind of research conducted, but also with who has access to research. The suggested quantitative indicator to reflect this is the number of open access publications that are made available to the external public.

Finally, the third theme, 'community engagement', is particularly significant since it is largely ignored in mainstream international rankings. Community engagement benefits both the community and the graduates themselves as the latter derive certain capabilities from giving back to and building the community public sphere. The indicators for this theme include: number of students in service-learning, and number of outreach programmes, among others. Both can be captured quantitatively, while members of the community can give their views regarding the impact of community engagement through a perception survey. Some of the debates worth highlighting here are the difficulty of defining the parameters of the community, how far they extend, who is brought into the structure of the community and who is excluded.

While each of these six areas is multifaceted and has a range of potential indicators, including figures for all of them would make the dashboard impractical in terms of data collection and unwieldy to use. Instead, a proxy for each may need to be chosen. This article does not attempt to select the specific proxies – which should be subjected to stakeholder debate – but the essential criteria for the proxy would be that it is an unambiguous example of the general category, is broadly comparable between contexts, and is viable in terms of data collection. Proxies cannot of course represent the whole of the category of which they are part, so are inherently limited. But, if well selected, they can provide a useful compromise between representing complexity and ensuring usability.

Conclusion

We argue, therefore, that a dashboard approach is the most appropriate for gauging the public good contribution of universities in Africa (and beyond). It avoids the conflation of the distinct elements and allows users to observe strengths and weaknesses in different areas. It also enables some qualitative and some quantitative measures across the various dimensions. For each of the six broad areas outlined above – solidarities, equity of access, deliberative space, graduate destinations, knowledge production and community engagement – a proxy may need to be selected, one that is practical in terms of collecting data but also adequate for representing the dimension as a whole (acknowledging that no proxy will be fully representative). While the information available internationally on equity of access (for example in the WIDE database) is crucial, it captures only one aspect of the public good, and therefore needs to be supplemented with others. The suggestions presented in the dashboard are a starting point in order to push thinking beyond the current limitations with respect to proxies and related datasets, and the extensive limitations of international rankings in their narrow understanding of quality, in fostering unhealthy competition, and as an impetus to performativity.

One chief limitation of the more prominent metrics applied today is their decontexualised character. With respect to the operationalisation of this particular dashboard, one possible way around this limitation is to have institutions provide self-reported data. Specifically, institutions may report on dimensions that are most relevant to the public good roles that they play. Furthermore, institutions are encouraged to self-report on the contextual factors that act upon the dimensions most relevant to them.

As outlined above, there are advantages to system-wide as well as institutional-level indicators and rankings. Indicators focusing on individual universities can homogenise by intimating that all institutions need to display the same characteristics, and have the same areas of specialism and ethos. They also foster competition rather than co-operation. System-level indicators acknowledge that different institutions can play complementary roles within the system, and cater for student heterogeneity as well as the diverse needs and interests of society as a whole. In encouraging this diversity, constant vigilance is needed to prevent horizontal differences from turning into vertical differences, which would lead to stratification of the system and the reproduction of socioeconomic inequalities. A possible way forward here is for countries to combine institutional-level and system-level indicators, to provide important information for universities while acknowledging their need to work together.

One of the most intractable dilemmas that an initiative of this sort faces is that between simplicity and complexity. The reality of the work of universities and their impact on public good is multifaceted and highly complex, and anything approximating to a single number – even when comprised of a series of amalgamated indicators – will be reductive. And yet, displaying the full complexity of these ideas will render the message unappealing for policymakers and for the public. The success of the mainstream international rankings is that they provide a single line on which to order all institutions – we can easily see where an institution is located in relation to all others, and how it rises and falls year-on-year. There is likely to be a strong relationship between simplicity and public uptake.

Countries may decide, therefore, that amalgamating the six proxies into a single composite indicator is preferable in order to raise the profile of the public good indicator. If this decision is taken, it must be recalled that the index is likely to hide significant disparities between the different aggregated areas, and strategies for action should take the disaggregated data as their starting point.

There is, of course, a chance that all of these efforts may prove to be counterproductive. As has been seen extensively at the school level, the use of targets and other indicators has led to unhealthy cultures of performativity and even falsification of results, even when motivated by the need to address inequalities in the system (Ball 2012). Furthermore, there is the question of reporting fatigue, with universities required to provide a host of different kinds of information to national higher education bodies, leading to a heavy burden on administrative resources and a distraction from the substantive work of the institution. If universities in Africa are already playing a significant role in promoting the public good, why do we need an indicator at all? These questions cannot be dismissed altogether, and there are genuine risks in this kind of initiative.

Nevertheless, we consider that the contrary tendencies are sufficiently strong as to make the risk worthwhile. As argued by Marginson (2011), higher education globally is constrained in fulfilling its public good role on account of marketisation and status competition. The commercialisation of higher education systems is undermining equity of access (through intensifying cost barriers in the system, in addition to the uneven playing field of competitive entrance exams that has long existed), but also prevents the conducting of research and community engagement in the public interest. These constraints are particularly evident in the rapidly expanding for-profit sector, mainly constituted of institutions running low-cost applied social science and professional degrees, with fewer activities beyond direct classroom or distance instruction.

Yet constraints on the public good role are also evident in public universities in which creeping marketisation has been observed in most countries around the world. Status competition is more ambiguous, and it cannot be denied that much of the activity of elite universities can and does bring public benefit. Yet the forms of competition promoted by international rankings – as outlined extensively above – privilege elite publications and reputation to the detriment of inclusive admissions and community engagement work. McCowan (2019) adds to these outcomes the trend of unbundling, through which the constituent elements of higher education (teaching, research and community engagement, and within teaching, the elements of course design, delivery and assessment) are being separated in order to drive down costs and maximise profitability. This disaggregation of elements reduces any leverage in the system for ensuring equality of opportunity and promoting public good benefit for external communities.

The dashboard proposed in this paper offers an opportunity for higher education stakeholders to counter the effects of marketisation and commercialisation. One could say it creates the opportunity for a cultural shift. Whereas the 'market for higher education' defines students as consumers and drives students to treat higher education as a product for sale, this dashboard re-centres the role that students, civil society, communities and other stakeholders all play in co-constructing the university. Thus, the dashboard has the ability to reorganise the power dynamics between stakeholders. By redefining the relevant stakeholders as not simply passive recipients of the public good conferred by universities, it accents their contribution to the public good.

The trends of marketisation, status competition and unbundling mean that while stakeholders in the higher education system may be motivated by the public good, as shown by the data collected for the Higher Education, Inequality and the Public Good in Four African Countries project, they are severely constrained in being able to deliver it. This article has argued that identifying indicators of the public good, and systematising them in a dashboard, can assist in bringing the public good to the centre of the university's and the higher education system's attention, and can – to some extent – counter the weight of the international rankings. A dashboard would also serve a function in enabling the self-evaluation of institutions, for understanding how they compare with others (not necessarily in order to promote competition between them, but to understand the differences), and provide a basis on which to enhance their work. The huge potential of the higher education system, in helping to achieve the SDGs and in ensuring just and prosperous societies, will only be achieved if it is underpinned by public good values and can focus its resources on public-oriented activities.

Acknowledgements

This article draws on research from the 'Higher Education, Inequality and the Public Good in Four African Countries' project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and the National Research Foundation of South Africa as part of the Newton Fund. We are grateful to the many colleagues who contributed to the ideas expressed in the article through events and dialogues in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

Notes

1. This article uses the term 'indicator' to denote information that relates to a single variable of interest, as opposed to an 'index', which may comprise a variety of indicators combined. Indicators may be qualitative or categorical, but are often numerical. Rankings are formed when entities are ordered in relation to their performance on particular indicators or indices.
2. https://universitas21.com/rankings
3. International Standard Classification of Education
4. Further data is held by the World Bank and the OECD for a reduced set of countries.
5. The public good can be conceptualised in a unitary way or as a series of discrete goods. The latter view is common in economics, following the seminal treatment by Samuelson (1954).
6. These themes surfaced through data analysis at the country level using codes generated partly on the basis of the research questions and partly on the basis of internal discussions by teams in each country. This was followed by a workshop in London where a tentative outline of key emerging themes was drafted. Thereafter, workshops were conducted in each African country where the findings were presented to stakeholders who contributed feedback to the team. Finally, a final round of the thematic analysis was conducted by the team, bringing us to this working definition of the public good.

7. These are: funding; equitable distribution of educational resources and policy contradictions; institutional conditions such as colonial legacies, gender-based harm or language policy.

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JHEA/RESA Vol. 20, No. 2, 2022, pp. 211-231

(ISSN 0851–7762) (https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2732)

Researching the Public Good: Reflections on Experiences of Doing Research on Higher Education and the Public Good in South Africa

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Abstract

This article discusses the experience of doing research on higher education and the public good in South Africa within a bigger project titled 'Higher Education, Inequalities and the Public Good: Perspectives from Four African Countries'. Qualitative data was collected through key informant interviews by a team of eight researchers who concentrated on specific groups of stakeholders as per the themes of the research. The aim of the interviews was to understand the perceptions of stakeholders both within and outside the university system on the public good role of university education in South Africa. This article focuses on three key issues: locating the research in the context of South Africa's democratic transition, methodological challenges and pitfalls, tensions, and missing questions/silences. We were doing our research in the aftermath of the student protests of 2015 and 2016, and many of the stakeholders we interviewed were actively involved in making sense of the issues that the students raised. The research team formulated the 'DNA' framework for analysing qualitative data from the stakeholders, which refers to the *descriptive, normative and analytic* aspects of the data that pointed to a unique way in which we could frame our findings. By reflecting on the research process and our positionality in it, the paper contributes to the general field of qualitative research studies, bringing in the dynamics of conducting research in large-scale cross-national projects.

Keywords: public good, higher education, South Africa, qualitative research, #FeesMustFall

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Résumé

Cet article traite de l'expérience de la recherche sur l'enseignement supérieur et le bien public en Afrique du Sud dans le cadre d'un projet plus vaste intitulé « Enseignement supérieur, inégalités et bien public : perspectives de quatre pays africains ». Des données qualitatives ont été recueillies au moyen d'entretiens avec des informateurs clés par une équipe de huit chercheurs qui se sont concentrés sur des groupes spécifiques d'intervenants selon les thèmes de la recherche. L'objectif des entretiens était de comprendre les perceptions des parties prenantes à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du système universitaire sur le rôle de bien public de l'enseignement universitaire en Afrique du Sud. Cet article se concentre sur trois questions clés : situer la recherche dans le contexte de la transition démocratique en Afrique du Sud, les défis et les pièges méthodologiques, les tensions et les questions manquantes/silences. Nous avons fait nos recherches à la suite des manifestations des étudiants de 2015 et 2016, et bon nombre des parties prenantes que nous avons interrogées ont participé activement à donner un sens aux problèmes soulevés par les étudiants. L'équipe de recherche a formulé le cadre « ADN » pour analyser les données qualitatives des parties prenantes, qui fait référence aux aspects descriptifs, normatifs et analytiques des données qui indiquent une manière unique de formuler nos conclusions. En réfléchissant sur le processus de recherche et notre position dans celui-ci, l'article contribue au domaine général des études de recherche qualitatives, apportant la dynamique de la conduite de la recherche dans des projets transnationaux à grande échelle.

Mots-clés : bien public, enseignement supérieur, Afrique du Sud, recherche qualitative, #FeesMustFall

Introduction: The Qualitative Approach

At the centre of qualitative research are questions of access, 'trustworthiness', sampling, ethics, identity, objectivity, and subjectivity, which place emphasis on the shaping and reliability of the research. Interviewing a wide range of stakeholders is therefore crucial in gathering sufficient data on these aspects. A very important concern of doing the South African research for the 'Higher Education, Inequalities and the Public Good: Perspectives from Four African Countries' project was to reach stakeholders from and associated with universities that reflected the key apartheid historical divides, primarily around race and associated urban planning, that remain so important to the university system.

The interviews were therefore conducted with six categories of informants: three vice-chancellors and one deputy vice-chancellor; student leaders, including leaders of four student representative councils and an elected leader of the national union of students – the South African Union of Students; seven academics, one from an academic staff union and the others (referred to as Experts) from a range of institutions that specialise in researching higher education. The interviewees were associated with four types of universities: Small Town Historically White University; Large Urban Historically White University; Large Urban University of Technology; Rural Historically Black University.

Most participants were very keen to be interviewed even though they were sceptical about our central theme of the public good concept. However, this also intrigued them. The wide range of participants at different professional levels meant that the team had to negotiate several boundaries and adapt to identities as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' simultaneously. Our entire research team consisted of academics and PhD students who are situated in a particular way as scholars in the higher education system. Participants who were in government, business and university management tended to have a policy and political orientation to the issues we raised, whereas students, unionists and civil society activists saw the research as an extension of their activism and raised pertinent issues in relation to the public good more generally.

When we spoke to academic staff, our positionality was that of peers, as many of us are fully aware of and involved in the issues that emerged in the discussions. What we gained was valuable insights into how the underlying issues that inform the transformation of higher education in South Africa remain critical in realising the public good. The interviews made it clear that the stakeholders viewed the concept of public good as encompassing a much wider range of issues, many of which relate to the socioeconomic inequalities that prevail in South Africa. Our reflection is that the interviews showed that the question of public good cannot be studied in isolation from the politics and character of the state. Participants largely explained their understanding of public good as tightly connected to the nature of the state's approach to development and social transformation.

Interviewing across a wide range of stakeholders produced a large amount of data, which needed to be analysed in a systematic way through coding and generating themes. In tackling the challenge of analysing the data we originated our own framework, which we have termed the 'DNA' framework (descriptive, normative and analytical) for analysing the data. This will be elaborated on further in the article. The basic premise of the DNA framework was that the questions that were pursued produced data in the three categories. It was *descriptive*, in the sense that the respondents simply described what they understood public good to be or not be. It was *normative*, in that interviewees spoke extensively on what ought to be the public good in university education. And it was *analytic*, being largely about tensions and contestations over the meaning of the public good, exploring ways in which it intersects and contradicts other paradigms of development within university education.

This article focuses on three key issues:

1. Locating the research in the context of South Africa's democratic transition
2. Methodological challenges
3. Pitfalls, tensions, and missing questions/silences.

Locating the Research in the Context of South Africa's Democratic Transition

Higher Education Transformation, Post-1994

The policy landscape of higher education in South Africa has been influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, many of which are closely connected to the nature of the democratic transition in South Africa. In the early 1990s, there were strongly contending positions on how equality, equity and redress, as well as development and quality, should be approached in the university system. This related to which apartheid legacies should be accorded priority and the most appropriate way to configure a post-apartheid higher education landscape (Badat 2019). At the core of dealing with the apartheid legacy was the paradox of redressing historical imbalances in the context of a global capitalist order that, since the 1990s, has pressured institutions in the global North to adopt neoliberal reforms aligned to cost-sharing, rankings and fiscal austerity.

Since 1994 there has been a dramatic expansion in the enrolment of black African students in higher education institutions, in absolute numbers as well as proportionally. A report by the National Department of Education in 2001 states:

> This is illustrated by the fact that while in 1993 only 30 000 (or 25 per cent) of the African students in contact higher education institutions were enrolled in the historically white institutions, this had increased by 1999 to 148 000 (or 57 per cent). Thus, social redress, which includes both the provision of student financial aid for poor students and the provision of resources to institutions to deal with the learning needs of under-prepared students, cuts across the past divide between the historically black and historically white institutions.

The demographic shifts in higher education occurred because of the emergence of a new social order in South Africa that is central to our research on the public good. The notion of public good in the South African context is interpreted to relate strongly to transformation, which is centred primarily on redressing racialised inequalities of the past. National policy positions over the democratic era have acknowledged that demographic changes in access are inadequate if they do not translate to success and the timeous completion of academic studies, by black African students. A strong sentiment in higher education policies is that the efficiency of the system needs to be improved, the poor success rate of black African students is a matter of serious concern, the mix of academic programmes needs to favour having more black African students in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and more supportive mechanisms need to be put in place to support black students in the university system.

In a critical analysis of the enrolment trends in South African universities between 1998 and 2012, Cooper (2019) makes the compelling argument that what occurred was a combination of what he calls a 'skewed' and a 'stalled' revolution when it comes to the race-class demographics of university enrolments and transformation. The revolution is 'skewed' in that the inherited legacy of inequality in the South African higher education landscape meant that Historically White Universities (HWUs) continued to attract more white students while Historically Black Universities (HBUs) experienced a decline in total student numbers in the early to mid-1990s.

At the six black African HBUs, there was an unexpected decline in total student numbers. While also maintaining more than 95 per cent black African enrolments, each of these six HBUs at first showed an increase in total student numbers up to 1993, but then saw a dramatic decline in student enrolments, especially at the University of Fort Hare and the University of the North, where total enrolments decreased by more than 30 per cent after 1996 (Cooper 2019: 296).

The revolution is 'stalled' according to Cooper in that the leadership of the upper band of the HWU institutions seemingly have:

> … sought to slow down the decline of absolute numbers of white students to retain what they have viewed as the quality side of the 'equity-quality paradox' – not least in terms of the current academic ideology among such institutions of seeking standards as judged by international university league tables about so called (research) quality (Cooper 2019: 318).

Cooper's perspective is vital in understanding the race and class dynamics that intersect to shape the higher education sector in South Africa.

The above discussion points to the importance of understanding the socioeconomic context of higher education transformation in South Africa to ensure that the study of the public good is not disarticulated from the realities facing the system. South Africa is a country with high levels of inequality, which poses a variety of tensions on the processes of transforming universities. Ashwin and Case (2018) argue that two main tensions prevail in the higher education system of democratic South Africa:

1. Between the aspirations of school-leavers and the current provision of undergraduate higher education: public funding has not grown in accordance with growing enrolments in South Africa and thus an increasing share of the cost has been shifted to students and their families.
2. Between massification and stratification: the massification of higher education is typically, but not inevitably, accompanied by increased stratification (Ashwin and Case 2018).

These tensions ultimately create new patterns of inequality. The questions of affordability of university tuition fees and a family's inability to meet the costs of tuition fees mostly affect black students. More specifically, the #FeesMustFall (FMF) mobilisation had to do not only with financial exclusion but a much broader failure of post-apartheid higher education and a much deeper problem of exclusion for black South Africans, whose contestation had been at the centre of student protests earlier in the year (Cini 2019).

#FeesMustFall[1] and the Struggle for Free Education

The #FeesMustFall student protests of 2015 and 2016 arose after the vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand announced a fee increment of 10 per cent. The protests sparked wide analysis (Booysen 2016; Nyamnjoh 2016; Allais 2018b; Mathebula and Calitz 2018; Motala, Vally and Maharajh 2018) about the financing of higher education, the prospects of fee-free higher education, access and success within higher education, the colonial orientation of the curriculum, student voices and the political economy of falling fees.

University funding in South Africa has historically been characterised by constraints and tensions related to the fiscal situation as well the economic performance of the country. Funding frameworks since the apartheid era have been situated within the divisions between Historically Black Universities (HBU) and Historically White Universities (HWUs). The key concern of policy-makers and researchers has been the adequacy of financial resources for the sector and the role that tuition fees play in the overall budgetary environment for universities. Allais (2018b) identifies three components in the university funding model for universities in South Africa:

1. The direct state subsidy, given based on student enrolment, student graduation, research which is published in recognised outlets and for specifically designated programmes and projects.

2. Student fees, which vary from institution to institution as public universities are autonomous. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is offered to very poor undergraduate students.
3. Third-stream income, which is obtained from donors, research grants, beneficiation of intellectual property, university-owned enterprises, and other sources. This is not large in most universities (Allais 2018b: 160).

Tuition fees are at the centre of the debate about free education in South Africa's university system. A comparison of South Africa's system of determining university tuition with other African countries shows that South African universities set their own fees whereas in other African countries the state determines the fees structure across universities and programmes. For example, Wangenge-Ouma and Carpentier (2018) argue:

> Unlike many African countries, for example, Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda, where tuition fees are controlled by government, are often undifferentiated across institutions and programmes and frozen; in South Africa individual universities set their own fees. Accordingly, fees at South African universities are differentiated by programmes and institutions. The differences in tuition fee levels between universities, even for similar programmes, can be considerable. Every year, except in 2016 when a freeze on tuition fee increases was implemented, South African universities increase their tuition fee levels. For a long time, students, government, and the general public, lamented the high tuition fee increases, but the practice persisted. Universities argued that the tuition fee increases were necessitated by existential needs – to mitigate inadequate public funding and avoid institutional decline (Wangenge-Ouma and Carpentier 2018: 52).

The #FeesMustFall protests raised serious questions about the affordability of fee-free higher education in the context of tight fiscal resources and a decreasing revenue base. The political call for free education generated varying responses from researchers, with some arguing that it was not only unaffordable but would ultimately sacrifice resources in other priority areas of the government. For example, Allais (2018b) argues:

> The #FeesMustFall movement has not won any breakthrough to increase the size of the fiscus – only to redeploy funds. In practice, this has meant taking money away from social services for much poorer sections of the population. Activists inevitably distance themselves from this and state that the fiscus can and should be increased. But the focus of the protests and demands has not been increasing the size of the fiscus ('We won't go back to class until the nuclear deal is cancelled') but increasing the size of the slice given to higher education (Allais 2018: 156).

The fact that fees have emerged as a central issue is because of the burden felt mainly by black middle-class and working-class families who have endured heavy debt levels in paying for their children's primary and secondary education. The pressures carried by those families coupled with the need to assist their children to advance to the higher education level means that in many instances those families simply cannot afford to enrol their children without expanded assistance from the state. It is a societal issue, which is a result of the political history of exclusion during apartheid and colonisation. It is also an issue of public policy consideration in many African countries, as shown in Languille's (2020) study of public private partnerships (PPPs) in Senegal's universities, wherein she analyses the difficulties of the state's management of competing objectives in public higher education resources,

> The fate of state-subsidised students in the private sector vividly symbolises the Senegalese state's impossible balancing act when trying to meet a series of competing objectives assigned to public higher education resources. They try to propel the country to the core of the global knowledge economy, open market opportunities to attract global capital and encourage the formation of a local capitalist class, manage the youth in a context of job-scarcity, secure social order on campuses, produce a skilled labour force and comfort the population of their commitment to social justice in education (Languille 2020: 31).

The #FeesMustFall campaign opened a debate that goes beyond the balancing act required to keep the fiscus stabilised and allocate resources fairly across all the pressing needs facing the government. Essentially this is a question about the nature of social and political redress in South Africa. It involves the types of choices that are required to make social transformation and inclusion truly possible. I am raising this within the context of the old adage that education is necessary but not sufficient to address the socioeconomic challenges facing society.

In addition to the wide array of issues that have arisen due to the #FeesMustFall campaign are questions of whether fee-free education would need to be provided for the poor only or should be offered on a universal basis to all who desire and qualify for higher education – what is called 'fee free for all'. Proponents of this view maintain that the question of the affordability of free higher education, as well as its underfunding, should be based not only on the quantum of resources available to the state for expenditure but also on a reformulation of social goals and critical examination of the state's fiscal capacity more broadly. One group of analysts who take up this argument are Motala, Vally and Maharajh (2018), who contend that:

> We think that a perspective less submissive to fiscal realism is necessary – whatever its complexities. This would require an interrogation of the state's

> fiscal capacity more broadly; a critical examination of its political and social choices and processes and an examination of what interests are dominant in present policy and practice. The fallibility of the claims about unaffordability lies in their inability to ask the question about what goals need to be achieved – that is, about the nature of the society envisaged in the prescriptions about fiscal rectitude. (Motala, Vally and Maharajh 2018: 171)

The social upheavals that occurred under the banner of #FeesMustFall signalled several structural fault lines in South African society, which are a direct result of the apartheid legacy as well as policy choices adopted by the democratic government after 1994. Debates about the university funding model must be located within wider changes to the funding of the social sphere within the state's budgeting system. Conceptualisations of the role of the tax system in this debate should not be seen as a mere technical exercise, they should be understood as part of an ideological and political issue which is shaped by the character of the state at a given time within a country's development. Budgeting and fiscal issues are as much about financial resources for income and expenditure as much as they are also about political economy questions that take into consideration the interaction of the state, the economy, and the society. The South African government, through policy documents such as the National Development Plan (NDP), speaks of the aim of building a 'democratic developmental state'. How does the prevailing tax system support such a vision of the state? A commission appointed by the Minister of Finance at the time – the Davis Tax Commission – found that the South African tax system was slightly progressive in nature but less so than countries at a similar level of development as South Africa. The commission stated:

> Overall, the tax system is slightly progressive, with progressive direct taxes compensating for more regressive indirect taxes. However, the South African tax system is less progressive than countries such as Brazil and Mexico, indicating that there may be some room for more progressivity in the tax system (Davis Tax Commission 2016: 102).

Our research on higher education Inequality and the public good was situated within a context of universities transforming in a political economy of neoliberalism. Our interviews with different stakeholders within and outside of the higher education sector revealed that the term 'public good' is quite elusive and gives rise to different interpretations. In the following sections I discuss the methodological approaches and challenges that confronted us, as a research team. Our experience is that multi-investigator and multi-institutional research in higher education elicits many tensions and difficult questions over key decision points in the analysis and reporting of the findings.

Methodological Challenges

According to Kinzie, Magolda, Kezar, Kuh, Hinkle and Whitt (2007), large-scale, multi-investigator studies in higher education – particularly those that use qualitative research methods – are less common, in part because such projects require funding and resources in amounts that only foundations and government agencies can supply. Several previous research studies analysed the complexity of international qualitative studies by exploring conceptual and ethical issues; changing modalities in international education development; interdisciplinarity; power and social justice; and stakeholder perceptions of higher education reforms (Kinzie et al. 2019; Mason, Crossley, and Bond 2019; Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz and Gildersleeve 2012; Shaw 2019). Our approach was to interpret ethically and faithfully what we found to stimulate the discussion on the public good dimensions of higher education in South Africa.

At the foundation of any investigation, the researcher(s) must decide on the method of inquiry that is appropriate to the specific phenomena under investigation. In many cases, this involves 'charting new territory' for the researcher. 'It is impossible to do research in a conceptual vacuum. Whether it is viewed as given, or socially constructed, the empirical world is limitless in its detail, complexity, specificity, and uniqueness' (Ragin 1992, 217). In the same vein, Burawoy (2009) argues that qualitative research is theory-bound: 'Theory guides the research from day to day, suggesting hypotheses to be investigated and anomalies to be tackled' (Burawoy 2009: 15). In other words, methodology is in the first instance related to and informed by theory. The research in this case occurred in a context of social upheaval, anxiety, and uncertainty within the higher education sector in South Africa. Our research was happening in the aftermath of the student-led protests under #FeesMustFall, which were based on the struggle for free education and widening access to higher education for those from historically marginalised black communities.

Our project opted for a qualitative research design, which included semi-structured interviews as primary sources of data, which were anchored on the research question of the study:

> What views and debates exist around higher education and the public good in the four selected African countries, and how do the similarities and differences between these enable us to understand how meanings are constituted and changed around these concerns within and between different countries?

Data Collection

Two interviews were conducted with non-academic staff unions. The first was with representatives of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), a large public-sector union that organises many non-academic university workers. The second was with a representative of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), one of South Africa's five federations of trade unions and historically the largest and most influential. In addition, interviews were conducted with representatives of government and regulatory bodies. These were with: the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET); the Department of Science and Technology (DST); the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS); the Council on Higher Education (CHE); Universities South Africa (USAF) (the vice-chancellors' body); and the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS).

A range of people from civil society were also interviewed. They were captured as: Gender Equity Officer; Save South Africa representative; Employer Association Representative; LGBTI and gender activist 1; LGBTI and gender activist 2; Right to Know representative; Social Justice NGO representative; University Community Engagement Officer; and Accountability International representative.

A team consisting of eight researchers (a professor, two senior researchers and four PhD candidates) conducted thirty-three interviews in five of the nine provinces of South Africa with a range of stakeholders. The team embarked on extensive work prior to conducting interviews to clarify key questions and review critical documents that would support our research process. We organised several workshops in South Africa and in London to ensure that the teams (the larger project includes Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana) had a common approach conceptually and methodologically. Our position was that the nature of our research required that we go beyond mere 'textbook' approaches to qualitative research. This was due to the dynamics of the field we were researching, which is characterised by change and eruptions daily. Qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. Qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry (Cresswell 2009).

We entered the field with full knowledge that a study of this nature brings a certain number of *doubts and fears* of our own as researchers, given that higher education is to a large extent a 'known' field to most of the team members. I refer to *doubts,* as it was impossible to insulate ourselves and pretend that we could be doing the research with a clean 'lens' without subjectively having our own perspectives on the matters. At times, previous contacts were used to secure appointments with the targeted interviewees.

Many of us have immersed ourselves in the theories and ideologies that prevail in higher education. Interviewing our own peers or colleagues in the broader sense of the 'field' posed questions of perception and preconception. We had to negotiate the identity of being 'insiders' as well as being to some extent 'outsiders' given our positionalities. We also had to deal with the realities of interviewing peers, some of whom we knew personally or knew as activists, academics, and senior managers within a variety of public institutions. Since some of us were already known by some of the interviewees, it meant that our professional identity as researchers in the field could have influenced the way the responses in the interviews were framed. While this vantage point is critical, we have found that being within the field also meant that some interviewees could have concealed more than they revealed within the interview process, due to sensitivities and ideological contestations in the university education research space.

In qualitative research literature there is a constant reference to the pros and cons of doing research among peers (Hockey 1993; Hellawell 2006; Mercer 2007). Hellawell (2006) has pointed out that in this type of research a dichotomy between insider and outsider research is almost established, whereas ethnographic fieldwork should be a continuum that combines both an 'outsider' and 'insider' dynamic. According to Hockey (1993) there are strengths to the insider view:

> The advantages of researching in familiar settings, for example the relative lack of culture shock or disorientation, the possibility of enhanced rapport and communication, the ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses and the likelihood that respondents will reveal more intimate details of their lives to someone considered empathetic are juxtaposed with the problems that proponents of insider research nevertheless acknowledge (Hockey 1993, 199)

We found ourselves challenging each other as researchers about what we understood public good to mean and whether the interview was addressing the matter or was more about the role of the state in higher education or even the way inequalities in society shape higher education. It emerged in the findings that the public good is a concept intermediated by relations of power, the structure of the economy and is non-rivalrous.

Fears related mostly to the stature and positionality of those who were interviewed, as some were powerful members in society and had a strong influence within policymaking processes while many had a very strong activist orientation, such as the students, trade unionists and several researchers. Interviewing those in positions of power influences positionality as well as the critical discussions about the research topic.

The interview dynamic presented a challenge to the researchers because the respondents often created a wider dialogue, at times deviating from the questions, which prompted the researchers to ask probing questions to ensure that adequate responses were received. We were not interviewing people from one constituency, organisation, or social group. We realised that the wide range of stakeholders required that we adapt our formal questions to elicit as much information on the topic based on their respective backgrounds. The style of questions followed Becker's (1998) advice, that qualitative researchers must focus on asking 'how?' not 'why?' questions. Becker says 'how?' questions give people more leeway, are less constraining, and invite them to answer in any way that suits them, to tell a story that includes whatever they think the story ought to include to make sense. 'Why' questions tend to be understood to be looking for a cause, maybe even causes for something that can be summarised in a few words (Becker 1998).

Data Analysis

The coding and analysis of qualitative data cannot be systematised or taught. It is an interpretive process that necessarily involves creativity and subjectivity. There are a growing number of researchers who believe that laying out procedures and calling for clarity and transparency in reporting of how researchers code their data goes a long way towards helping to deal with the issue of reliability of qualitative research (Benaquisto 2008). We realised that thirty-three interviews would produce huge amounts of data, particularly since these interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes. This meant that we had to adopt a careful approach to data analysis, one that was innovative and not tied down by the rigidities of textbook prescriptions on how to analyse data. The team acknowledged that analysing qualitative data of the magnitude our research had generated required an iterative approach.

It became quite clear to us after the first few interviews that the research team would need to compare field notes and summarise our individual observations as part of the initial step of data analysis. The field notes taken after every interview were a crucial source of data as they assisted in capturing the nuances of the fieldwork research. There is a contention amongst some scholars about the validity of field notes. For example, Mulhall states: 'Many would concede that field notes are only comprehensible to their author. If field notes are incomprehensible to outsiders, then assessing auditability may be problematic' (Mulhall 2003, 309). As far as it was physically possible, we ensured that at least two researchers formed part of an interview to ensure that they could debrief each other, make necessary additions during the interview and make recommendations for modification of the research interview schedules.

Our coding strategy was based on four categories:

1. Background and positionality: this is how the interviewees described their professional and personal background in relation to their role in higher education.
2. Understanding of higher education and the public good: how respondents explained their understanding of the public good and what influenced their understanding.
3. Context: we asked respondents to indicate two or three challenges that higher education faced South Africa
4. Evaluating: issues that would be important to consider/measure if we wanted to evaluate or 'judge' the progress that higher education was making towards the public good.

Developing the 'DNA' Framework

As stated above, we realised that the data generated from the thirty-three interviews would be bulky and require an approach to building themes that would be rigorous while also relating to our research topic. While it is common in large-scale research to use modern software to analyse and create themes, ours was an approach based on the nature of the research questions we asked as well as the international dimensions of the research.

What we called the 'DNA' framework is an abbreviation for descriptive, normative, and analytic. We created these categories based on the nature of questions we asked and the complexity of researching the public good, which is essentially a philosophical construct. We appreciated the fact that asking people in interviews to expand on a philosophical idea would be challenging given that there is a long intellectual tradition of studying the public good within disciplines such as Philosophy and Political Science. As we proceeded with the research, we asked ourselves 'Can the public good be researched through qualitative interviews?' 'What additional new insights would such interviews bring?' 'Are the perceptions of stakeholders in higher education any different from any other person's views on the public good question?' The idea of the 'DNA' framework was to narrow down these concerns, develop a way of having a better handle over the data and therefore produce reliable findings.

The additional four criteria that informed the DNA framework were elaborated in the following ways:

1. The tension between *instrumental* (e.g., comments about economic growth) and *intrinsic* (e.g. deliberation, tolerance) statements.
2. Internal and external conditions of possibility (IC and EC).
3. The role of higher education in/for public good today (descriptive). What should higher education do in South Africa (normative)? How do they analyse their role in this (analytic)?
4. Private vs public – explore the positions taken by different stakeholders on the ways that private and public universities advance the public good.

We developed the idea DNA framework after careful consideration of the deep explanations that came from the respondents and the need to show the patterns in the data. The *descriptive* part showed the interactions between a variety of factors that shape the role of higher education in South Africa: these pointed to convergence and divergence in the data. We found this very important in the initial stages of developing themes. The *normative* aspect of the framework concerns itself with statements that respondents made about what the role of higher education in South Africa ought to be. These normative statements indicated the importance of understanding the source of the claims that people make about the role of higher education and exposed the ways in which it is contested. This shows the kind of tensions that are elaborated in the findings of the study. *Analytic* statements involved making judgements on the 'success' or 'failures' of the higher education system in relation to the public good. We saw these statements as critical in making meaning of the information from the interviews as well as of the nuances in the statements of the respondents.

Considering all the innovations and interpretations outlined above, the team acknowledged that there would still be missing questions, silences and issues that were not adequately accounted for. The research topic itself elicited significant disagreements over which voices are heard and gain prominence and which voices are not prominently recognised. We took this seriously because qualitative research should not be merely about a rigid set of procedures and processes but should open our thinking about questions of power, culture and political processes that ultimately shape the higher education sector. It is against that backdrop that the article now discusses the pitfalls, tensions, and missing questions.

Pitfalls, Tensions and Missing Questions/Silences

It is self-evident that a study of this scope and depth may overlook several issues, given the complicated nature of the research design as well as the complexity of bringing on board multiple researchers across many research sites. In addition, our 'unit of analysis', which is higher education, is in a state of change in South Africa given the social upheavals discussed earlier.

Pasque et al. (2012) argue that as an applied and interdisciplinary field of study, higher education has an incredible opportunity to draw on a wealth of scholarly traditions to critique the status quo, interrogate power, theorise agency and work towards social justice. The study of higher education is not bound by any one discipline or its methods. Rather, scientists, humanists, artists, therapists, architects, critics, activists and many more individuals could potentially populate the scholarly landscape. As an applied field, the study of higher education could draw from all scholarly traditions where new methodologies and methods could be forged.

In pursuing this research, we realised that the higher education landscape mirrors many of the prevalent inequalities that exist in society, especially within an African context. While we could not possibly have exhausted all such issues, we do acknowledge that, globally, higher education is transforming in ways that are aligning strongly with the nature of neoliberal changes that have engulfed early twenty-first-century society across the world. The attempt to subject all facets of human life to the capitalist logic has not escaped the university system at micro or macro institutional levels. Drawing on the insights of our participants in the Knowledge Sharing Workshop2 hosted by Wits University on 4 March 2019 we briefly synthesise some important questions for future research in this field.

Lack, Deficit, and the Need to 'Catch up'

The competitive nature of universities as well as the commodification of higher education generally has placed pressure on universities in the global South to catch up with global North universities and move up the ladder of what is called the 'global prestige economy' of universities. A general trend now is the growing agenda of the corporatisation of universities, which questions the role of the university as pursuing social justice, developing mechanisms for addressing social inequality and facilitating the circulation of knowledge (Vally 2019).

Voice Theory – Representation, Homogenisation, and Abject terrains

Questions of gender, identity and sexuality are critical to any true understanding of the public good and require a specific focus in future research. Our engagements with many civil society gender-focused movements and activists showed that the universities in many instances have become sites for the reproduction of gendered inequalities as well as marginalization, as opposed to being the spaces in which these issues should be addressed. University campuses have become sites of masculine and aggressive cultures in which gender-based violence against women and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersexual (LGBTI) communities are becoming more prevalent (Nduna, Mthombeni, Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Mogotsi 2017). A public good agenda in higher education has to address such questions and create the kind of conditions to enable all voices that have been marginalised to be heard.

From a Human to a Post-human University

The university historically is an institution where masses of people (mostly young) have gathered in pursuit of knowledge, learning, inventing, and teaching. The idea of the university as a space where intellectuals gather for the sole purpose of knowledge development has been undermined by the growth of digital platforms that have had limited the interaction between the university and its constituencies, such as students. The widescale adoption of processes such as 'blended learning' in teaching is encouraging a culture of the university (at least those that are deemed to be comprehensively teaching- and research-focused) that is not necessarily a place of physical engagement between students and professors (Hill and Lawton 2018; Czerniewicz and Rother 2018).

Some South African universities have bought wholeheartedly into the notion of a so-called 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' (4IR) and transformed their entire branding and teaching methodologies to comply with the requirements of 4IR (Xing and Marwala 2017). The consequence of the adoption of some of these technologies could be that the university as an intellectual space may cease to create the kind of interactions that have produced generations of critical thinkers and scholars. Professors and lecturers are having to teach through podcasts, engage their students through electronic platforms such as Blackboard and reduce their classroom time. They are increasingly being casualised as a result. In the context of the prevailing inequalities in societies such as South Africa, the adoption of these technologies may result in the further marginalisation of students from poor and working-class backgrounds. These are serious questions when trying to understand higher education and the public good. They lead to important further questions about the future of the university and the character it will take in the context of the changes outlined in this subsection.

Conclusion

This article has sought to locate our reflections on the research for this project in the context of the higher education system in South Africa, which has been characterised by important changes since 1994. The student protests of the #FeesMustFall movement have brought into sharp focus the question of access and funding of higher education. Our experience from this research contributes to the field of interdisciplinary research on higher education within large cross-national projects We did this by researching what different stakeholders of the South African university sector understand as the public good.

The research process outlined in this article illustrates the complexities of doing qualitative research that involves multiple stakeholders with a big team of researchers. Identifying a common framework was the major challenge at the beginning of the project, and this was tied to the need to build a strong conceptual approach to the study. While most of the participants were willing and eager to participate, there was also resistance and querying of the research by some participants. This is mainly because the theme of public good evokes diverse emotional, philosophical, political and policy responses. As shown in the discussion on methodologies, we had to negotiate many boundaries due to power relations and pre-existing social relations within the field.

Notes

1. The #FeesMustFall movement was a hashtag-initiated movement of widespread student protests in South African universities. The protests were not the first – there had been many other protests about access to higher education, which were led by organisations such as SASCO since the early 1990s. What gave prominence to the #FeesMustFall were two things:(1) its association with a struggle for decolonisation under the aegis of #RhodesMustFall and (2) the situation of these struggles in Historically White Universities that are in the top tier of South African Universities and largely attract students from middle class backgrounds and the elite.
2. These three issues discussed are drawn from Prof Louise Morley's critical input to the Knowledge Sharing Symposium; she had titled the talk 'Provocations'.

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Journal of Higher Education in Africa
Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique
Volume 20, No. 2, 2022 (ISSN 0851-7762)
(https://doi.org/10.57054/jhea.v20i2.2721)

CODESRIA

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ISSN 0851-7762