

Getting ‘Entangled’: A Focus on the Hotel and Hospitality Curriculum Implementation in Public Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

Universities play a critical role in achieving Kenya Vision 2030 and the sustainable development goals. The demand for university education in Kenya has significantly increased and continues to swell. Many secondary school graduates and the working class look for opportunities to pursue university education, yet the process of curriculum implementation in these institutions of higher learning remains problematic. Employers in the hospitality industry have called on universities to produce graduates who are work ready. This cannot be achieved if these challenges are not addressed. This study explored the ‘entanglements’ inhibiting effective implementation of the hotel and hospitality curriculum in public Universities and their effects on the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education in Kenya. It highlights the issues of lack of physical teaching and learning facilities, under staffing and low staff morale, lack of financial resources, poor economic growth, lack of proper social amenities and infrastructure and lack of teaching aid. For each of the limitations, probable solutions have been advanced. In the circumstances that public universities are experiencing shortage in learning and teaching physical facilities, with higher student enrolment. My view is that it will lead to further deterioration of quality teaching and learning services offered in these universities. Attempt to meet the objectives of university education will turn into a mirage and exercise in futility. It will be mass production of university graduates who have certificates without matching academic, technical and psychological competence.

Keywords: curriculum, education, implementation, quality.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is the sum total of all the experience provided to the learners under the guidance of the school (Bishop, 1985). The process of curriculum implementation is problematic. This is due to a contribution of various factors. A government directive on double and most recently triple intake in universities resulted in increased student enrolment without corresponding facilities and teaching/learning resources, that has consequently posed various challenges to the implementation of the university curriculum and especially vocational programs such as the hotel and hospitality curriculum.

A study by Mwiria & Nyukuri (1994) on the management of double intakes describes the planning and implementation adjustments that were made to accommodate double intake of students in 1990 at Kenyatta University. According to this study a number of management changes took place at Kenyatta University to cope with the double intake. The first set of changes related to the expansion of tuition and boarding facilities. However, because resources to implement such changes fell far short of the demand, congestion in lecture theatres, science laboratories, libraries and dining halls remained a critical problem. The second set of changes related to the organization of the three semester year, which necessitated the use of available facilities throughout the year. Although commendable from the point of view of promoting a more efficient use of available resources, these measures also had some negative consequences; most notably the lowering of staff morale, the lengthening of the period it takes students to complete their degree courses as well as the lowering of academic standards.

1.1 CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOSPITALITY CURRICULUM

1.1.1 Inadequacy of Physical Teaching and Learning Facilities

Shortage of physical facilities in public universities in Kenya is well documented. According to studies done by various scholars private universities have better physical teaching and learning facilities as compared to the public universities (Mwiria & Nyukuri, 1994). Having gone through a public University, I fully agree with the narrative above. As a student, we frequently lacked lecture rooms of adequate size; the existing facilities were characterized by serious congestion, with some students being forced to sit outside the classroom and listen to their lectures through the windows. Under such circumstances, it was noted, it became almost impossible to have students interact meaningfully with their lecturers or to get them into the lecture rooms quickly enough to ensure

that teaching time was not lost. The story is the same in other public universities in Kenya which are also struggling to provide sufficient physical teaching and learning facilities thus posing as a challenge to the implementation of the hospitality curriculum.

In one of the studies, the researchers asked lecturers for their opinion on whether the available lecture rooms were satisfactory or not. The statement responded to was, "The University has sufficient lecture rooms for students". Results indicated that satisfaction level with lecture rooms were at 69.053% and 43.482% respectively for private and public universities (Mwiria & Nyukuri, 1994). The interpretation was that effective teaching and learning in public universities was hampered by lack of enough lecture rooms. Thus, some students missed sitting space during lectures or attended lectures as they sat outside the lecture rooms. Lack of appropriate sitting space causes lack of concentration and student attention to the lecturer who delivers a lesson. This encouraged rote learning as students heavily relied on lecture notes (Mwiria & Nyukuri, 1994).

Lack of up-to-date laboratory and workshop equipment has also hampered the implementation of the hospitality curriculum leading to ineffective teaching and learning. Hotel and hospitality being a practical oriented program requires students to carry out demonstrations in a well-equipped laboratory with state of the art equipment. This is important in their preparation for a career in the hospitality industry which is hands on.

Lack of these important practical knowledge leads to half-baked students who lack employability skills after graduating from the university. Employers have called on universities to produce more employable graduates as students are not often prepared for the workplace (Barrie, 2006; Kember & Leung, 2005). Employers are expecting graduates to be work ready. This cannot be achieved if these challenges are not addressed.

This is in agreement with Syomwene (2013) who opined that most schools in Kenya have inadequate facilities like classrooms, workshops, and laboratories. According to a report by UNESCO (2004) few schools and colleges have access to computers, the internet and email facilities which are essential for research and learning process. The universities mostly rely on old equipment, student services, library services and investment in new information and communication technologies (Syomwene, 2013).

The availability of facilities and resources in educational institutions in Kenya was among the issues debated on during the national conference on education and training held in Nairobi in November 2003. Technical and Vocational training institutions were cited as grossly underfunded making it difficult for them to acquire modern and relevant learning facilities to provide quality education (UNESCO, 2004). Public universities are poorly funded. Due to inadequate funding, the universities have not been able to undertake capital development in order to provide up to date teaching and learning facilities and to give good pay in order to attract the best staff (Syomwene, 2013, World Bank, 2000 and Cheboi 2001, Okwakol 2008).

Eshiwani (2009) posits that our universities are forced to work under adverse conditions; poor salaries, lack of resources for non-salary academic expenditure, such as textbooks, journals, teaching and research equipment and maintenance of such equipment. He asserts that the situation has resulted in a lowering of academic standards and of quality of graduates. Graduates are deficient in written communication and technical proficiency which make them unfit for the market.

To ensure effective implementation of the curriculum, the government should provide adequate funding for all public universities. The university should also prioritize the acquisition of more teaching and learning physical facilities.

1.1.2 Under Staffing and Low Staff Morale

For effective teaching to take place at a university there is a minimum ratio of lecturing staff against the number of enrolled students to be achieved. The Commission for University Education (CUE) has worked out recommended lecturer/student ratios associated with quality teaching and learning for the various disciplines studied at the universities. For Arts and Humanities it is 1:15 and for Social Sciences its 1: 18. According to a study by Gudo, Olel and Oanda (2011) on 'University Expansion in Kenya and Issues of Quality Education: Challenges and Opportunities, the researchers obtained the views of lecturers on the sufficiency of lecturing staff. Responses showed that lecturers were aware of the shortage of staff in both private and public universities in Kenya. At Baraton 66.667%, USIU 66.667%, University of Nairobi 70.049% while Masinde Muliro 66.667% reported shortage of staff in their departments. It was therefore interpreted that shortage of lecturers reduced efficiency of lecturers in offering effective services for quality education in private and public universities in Kenya. This finding corroborates earlier studies, Waituru (1999), Maria et al (2003) and Mutisya (2010) that singled out shortage of lecturers as serious threat to offering quality university education. As was found out, private and public universities have more part time than permanent lecturers. Part time staff are available for the scheduled lecturing hours but not for consultations with students. This arrangement denied students opportunity

for deeper understanding of subject matter through critical enquiry in guided debate and practice.

The university is understaffed with only four full time lecturers in the whole department of Tourism and hospitality management. This has necessitated the use of part time staff. The delay in paying part time staff for long periods has resulted in low staff morale thus hampering the implementation of the hotel and hospitality curriculum. The university should facilitate lecturers by paying them on time, this will enable them to effectively teach students and minimize cases of missing classes, and more full time lecturers should also be employed.

1.1.3 Inadequacy of Financial Resources

In order to effectively implement the hotel and hospitality curriculum, financial resources are needed to facilitate field trips and practical lessons. Under funding or delayed release of the money to the department for these two activities greatly hampers the implementation of the curriculum. The procedure for requesting for funding from the university is usually long due to bureaucracy, consequently delaying the students' field trips and practical lessons. Due to financial difficulties faced by the institution, sometimes students are not facilitated for both the field trips and practical lessons. Practical lessons are meant to give students a deeper understanding of subject matter through critical enquiry in guided debate and practice. Inadequate practical lessons or fieldwork deny the trainees' opportunity to link theory learnt in lecture halls and the field of work.

To solve this problem, it is strongly recommended that more efficient and shorter procedures should be implemented to hasten the release of funds to the department. Students' practical lessons are a priority and should be treated as such.

1.1.4 Lack of proper social amenities and infrastructure

Many public universities in Kenya lack access to fax, emails and internet which are essential in modern development. As much as public universities have tried to provide internet to both students and the administration slow internet connection is a major challenge. According to UNESCO (2004) few schools and colleges in Kenya have access to computers, internet and email facilities which are essential for research and learning processes. In addition, computer resources like hardware and software are expensive for any university to afford in reasonable quantities and quality. Technology is very dynamic and most universities cannot cope with these changes in terms of cost and relevancy. Computers are essential in the teaching learning process and lack of them impedes effective learning. Apart from the fact that computers are lacking in most schools in Kenya, some teachers lack computer literacy skills as well (Syomwene, 2013).

Computers and internet services are integral ingredients to modern day higher education without which quality of education suffers. Okwakol (2008) noted that a computer is increasingly becoming the major notebook, textbook, dictionary and storage facility for information for students in quality institutions of higher learning. She noted that universities that fail to utilize the benefits of the digital age-computer assisted learning, web connectivity and networked learning – cannot offer quality education. Library facilities and information systems in almost all universities are antiquated. Books and scholarly journals are not only few but very old and are therefore irrelevant to current institutional needs and priorities.

Various computer training workshops should be organized for teachers or they should be encouraged to become computer savvy. In addition the institution should work together with internet providers to improve the connectivity and internet connection.

1.1.5 Lack of Teaching Aids

The process of teaching and learning depend upon the different equipment available in the classroom. Teaching Aids can provide a welcome break for students who have been sitting for a while and listening to an instructor lecture in front of the class. Students learn better and retain more concepts when they are motivated properly through teaching aids. They provide direct experience to the students and help create an environment of interest for students.

Educators use various teaching aid besides textbooks to pique students interests and demonstrate how things work. Visual aids such as whiteboards or chalkboards, charts, chalk, marker pens, maps, models, flash cards, pointers etc are commonly used. Presentation tools such as bulletin boards, audiovisual equipment and overhead projectors are also utilized along with multimedia displays and computers.

It is a sad state that in many public universities in Kenya the most commonly used teaching aids are sometimes lacking. Audiovisual equipment such as overhead projectors is lacking and if available are few in number. Many classrooms lack working sockets and even if a lecturer wants to use a projector electrical connection becomes a problem as many sockets are not working. All these hamper the implementation of the hospitality curriculum. During a practical lesson a lecturer may want to demonstrate a concept by letting the students watch a video for instance, opening and serving wines, but due to lack of DVD players this may not be possible. Universities in China offering hospitality courses are now using simulations of a hotel set up to aid

students in learning. It's therefore recommended that the university should provide more teaching Aid to facilitate the teaching and learning process and also incorporate modern aids such as simulations.

1.1.6 Poor Economic Growth

The cost sharing strategy that was introduced in Kenya in 1988 as a recommendation by the Kamunge report, has greatly affected the implementation of the hospitality curriculum. According to this cost sharing strategy, the government was to pay teacher salaries and those of educational administrators, while parents were to provide for tuition fees, textbooks, and activity and examination fees. The community on the other hand was responsible of putting up physical structures and ensuring their maintenance (Kamunge report, 1988). The transfer of costs to parents at a time when they are struggling with the high costs of living and rising poverty levels in Kenya has made it difficult for them to support their children's education adequately making education beyond the reach of many. Many of our hospitality students are frequently denied examination cards due to fee balances thus critically affecting the implementation of the curriculum as exam assessment is an important part of curriculum implementation. Lack of fees also leads to increased drop-out rates and low completion rates. This is in agreement with Deolalikar (1999) who opined that in terms of access to quality of education, there was disparities since not all groups could marshal resources on an equal footing. The overall effect of the cost sharing strategy in education was the regression in all indices of participation and negative quality and equity impacts (East African Standard June 24 2001).

1.1.7 Government Interference in Higher Education Policy Implementation Process

This has affected many institutions as they are regulated by parastatals' act managed by the Commission for Higher Education which is constituted through a political process. According to Elimu Yetu (2003), education policy making and implementation in Kenya is a political process. Thus higher learning planners rarely expedite their functions without external political interference. Elimu Yetu Coalition (2003) posits that, "in most cases planners are called upon to execute decisions that are already made by the political establishment rather than advice". Curriculum reforms require a strong political will (UNESCO, 2004).

1.1.8 Poor Institutional Leadership

The lack of visionary leadership in institutions results to poor policy making and poor implementation. According to UNESCO (2004), curriculum reforms in universities require effective leadership which is not politically minded. There is also lack of adequate supervision of the hospitality curriculum from higher education oversight bodies.

1.2 CONCLUSION

Since all universities face similar challenges in successful implementation of the curriculum, there is a need of a collaborative approach in the harmonization of the curriculum. This will ensure that universities produce graduates who are equally equipped to face emerging challenges in the job market.

1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ The government should provide adequate funding to all public universities. Increased funding will help boost student enrollment in science degree programs. Universities will be able to acquire facilities, infrastructure and resources essential for offering science degree programs.
- ✓ More efficient and shorter procedure should be implemented to hasten the release of funds to the departments.
- ✓ The universities should prioritize in acquisition of more teaching and learning physical facilities.
- ✓ Unified curriculum will help solve the problem of mismatch between skills acquired and industry demand. This can be done through joint curriculum development initiatives. Inter-university curriculum development will ensure uniformity in similar degree programs. This will help universities produce graduates who are equally prepared.
- ✓ Increased funding and or access to affordable loans and grants will enhance institutional capacity to evaluate policy.
- ✓ Poor Institutional leadership can be solved through adequate funding that will ensure universities hire best qualified staff. Reduced government interference in the leadership of public universities is also fundamental in ensuring proper leadership.
- ✓ Universities should seek for alternative sources of funding to boost institutional development instead of relying on government funding and loans. This will help universities undertake capital intensive investment projects such as ICT Infrastructure and research and development.

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