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Review article

Limits and opportunities of marketeering tertiary education in post-colonial Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This paper intended to assess the impact of marketeering tertiary education in Zimbabwe. The paper revealed that marketeering of tertiary education in Zimbabwe has drastically impacted on access to higher education and training. Poor and vulnerable students have found it difficult to access tertiary education due to escalating commercialized fees. Literature indicates that, even in developed countries like UK, marketeering tertiary education has led to decreased enrolments, diminishing prospects and reduced quality. In Zimbabwe, many of the students in tertiary institutions today are those who can afford to pay for their fees in one way or another even if their entry qualifications were not good enough. The poor and vulnerable who have excellent entry passes are either denied the opportunity or they are accepted and later drop out before completing their programmes because they cannot afford to pay. Although there are prospects that marketeering of education can increase accountability and efficiency hence quality, it does infringe on the rights of the poor and vulnerable who cannot afford the commercialized fees. In Zimbabwe, many people are indeed poor and unemployed and therefore cannot afford the fees. Marketeering of tertiary education has also impacted on funding of research and scholarship as tertiary institutions look for cost cutting measures so that they remain ‘profitable’. This paper then concludes that, therefore, marketeering of tertiary education has more limitations than opportunities in Zimbabwe. It has negative implications for quality and more so for access to tertiary education. It is also negatively correlated with future socioeconomic development and progress. On these bases, the paper recommends well established social safety nets, retention of the revolving fund for student grants, establishment of collaborative bursary grants and improved funding for research and scholarship in Zimbabwe.

1. Introduction

Before the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, tertiary education was provided along racial lines and was hardly accessible to the blacks. The number of tertiary institutions was extremely limited and entrance regulations were both selective and restrictive. At independence, the new government increased funding for education across the board and made it accessible to all and sundry. Policies were crafted to improve access, quality, equity, parity and relevance at all educational levels (Government of Zimbabwe, 2005). Tertiary education was highly subsidized and students at colleges and the only state University then barely paid fees but received lucrative grants which they were expected to repay after gaining employment. The quality of education was good then and according to UNESCO (2001) university enrollment increased by about 300% between 1980 and 1989. This was a reflection of the government's commitment to ensuring Education for All at all levels (Kapunga, 2007).

Owing to the socio-economic policies of the 1990s the gains made in tertiary education in the 1980s began to take a deep turn more so at the turn of the second millennium. This was at the same time when more universities were proliferating in the country of which today Zimbabwe has 10 states and 5 private universities. Somehow the government drastically cut its funding particularly of student grants which were later replaced by the much contested Cadetship Scheme for vulnerable students (Student Solidarity Trust, 2011). This was coupled with expectations that students were to personally fund their education. In other words, this marked the onset of a market system of tertiary education whereby colleges and universities were to raise much of their funds from student fees. In this context, the purpose of this paper is to critically assess the fundamental limits and opportunities of marketeering of tertiary education with respect to access and quality. The paper explores the impact of the market model of funding tertiary education on the fundamental rights of the generality of the students and its implications for access and quality of education.

2. Contextualization of the problem

In the context of the social model, education is a fundamental right which should be accorded to all and sundry. Of late this has only been rhetoric as tertiary education in Zimbabwe seems to be treated as a market place where students are seen as clients and education as a money spinning venture. When tertiary institutions are run as business enterprises, education is bound to be more expensive hence selective, elitist and fundamentally unethical. Thus, when education is subjected to the fundamentals of the open-market system issues of access, quality and equity are likely to be compromised. By so doing, is Zimbabwe not regressing to the colonial tendency of having only the elite accessing tertiary education? Are we not compromising the original ethical intent of the education system? Are we not technically excluding the poor and vulnerable students? What social safety nets has the government of Zimbabwe put in place in this regard? In responding to these and the main question "What are the limits and opportunities of marketeering tertiary education in Zimbabwe?" the paper critically assesses the relatively new phenomenon of marketeering education in Zimbabwe.

Studies that have been conducted previously focused on mere funding of tertiary education without detailed analyses of the logical impact of a market driven education system in Zimbabwe. The Solidarity Student Trust (2011) observed that, the tertiary education sector in Zimbabwe faces daunting challenges that have compromised the caliber of its produce as a result of the cumulative impact of a decade of political and economic crisis. The paper reacts to these issues in context and seeks to locate the knowledge gap within the discourses of the impact of marketeering of tertiary education in Zimbabwe.

3. Frameworks for marketeering education

Marginson (2009) comments that the goal of a market reform system in tertiary education is to redesign educational institutions into business forms that produce economic products (graduates) within an open competitive market. Using the example of the New Public Management (NPM) model which has been largely adopted by Westminster countries, part of Eastern Europe and China among other countries, Marginson (2008) argues that market systems of tertiary educational reforms have failed to create functional economic markets as envisaged. Some of the features of NPM are competition, entrepreneurship, and privatization of funding of tertiary institutions. In some way, Zimbabwe has adopted a system akin to NPM. The NPM is premised on the neo-liberal conception of education and public administration which was originated by Friedman and Hayek (Hayek, 1960; Friedman, 1962). In the United Kingdom, according to Marginson (1994) the NPM model was developed and implemented in the 1980s. The model designated tertiary institutions tobe a market without due regard for the empirical features of education in fundamental terms (Marginson, 2008). That is the model totally disregards the fundamental purpose of the provision of education which in the social and empowerment frameworks is a human rights issue and a liberating tool for the poor and the marginalized (DANIDA, 2000a; Narayan, 2002; CARE International, 2005; Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton and Bird, 2009).

3.1. The Zimbabwean context

In Zimbabwe, the Bill of Rights as per the Constitution Amendment Number 20 (2013) enshrines education at all levels as a fundamental human right compelling the state to ensure access to and equality of opportunity in tertiary education. However, the current tendency of marketeering of education is tantamount to the government deliberately neglecting its mandate in these regards. In a market model of tertiary education, even public higher education institutions, in this case state universities, are corporitised so as to more closely resemble private firms in their organizational design and culture (Clark, 1998). According to Blanche and Munzwembiri (2014), tertiary education should be accessible to all who meet the requirements of admission. This might not always be possible in a market driven tertiary education system since the likelihood is that colleges and universities would charge fees at commercial rates in order to maximize revenue collection and profitability. As it is, public colleges and universities in Zimbabwe charge at least US350 per semester for undergraduate programmes and at least US680 for post graduates programmes yet the majority of employed people in Zimbabwe hardly earn US300.Unemployment is high in Zimbabwe so that even those who manage the fees and complete their studies hardly get gainful employment. According to Zimstat (2015), the unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is pegged at 11.3% when taking into account those who are in the informal sector but whose income is difficult to determine. Other sources argue that the 11.3% rate is delusional and suggest that it is in fact hovering between 80% and 95% (www.indexmundi.com and www.newsday.com). Because of the economic recession in Zimbabwe many poor students are not be able to bear the cost of a market driven tertiary education system. Those who cannot afford therefore often drop out before completing their studies.

Commenting on the Browne Report, which advocated for the market model of tertiary education, Scott (2012), reports that even in the United Kingdom higher education lost 10% of its enrolment partly due to high fees and diminishing prospects exerted by marketeering of tertiary education. Scott believes that the UK's government reforms that treat university education as a tradable commodity will ultimately increase public expenditure. The situation in the UK is however not necessarily as pathetic due to the availability of well-established and fully funded social safety nets such as bursaries. In Zimbabwe, higher education is actually undergoing a series of crises which are far more intense than the situation in the UK. The Zimbabwean scenario is partly attributable to diminishing government subventions and declining economic growth, yet the demand for tertiary education is on the increase (Kariwo, 2007).

3.2. Issues of access to tertiary education

Kurima (2013) posted an article in the news online website explaining the outrage which emerged when the government, in one of the many events failed to pay university grants in 2013. Commenting on the issue, the author insinuated, "Zimbabwe is no longer the same education-power house of the glorious 1980s as the government can no longer maintain its own academic breed and in a damning development …has not even paid 5% of its standard requirement for the year 2013 (www.zimeye.com/outrageasgovernmentfailsto pay university grants). The government owed tertiary institutions over US64 million then. This scenario which has worsened and persisted to date has extremely restricted access to tertiary education by the poor and vulnerable. In the same article, a Member of Parliament lamented that the standard of university students welfare was appalling and that many potential students had either dropped-out or failed to access university education due to exorbitant fees of between US$350 to US$450 for under graduates and US$700 to about US$1900 for post graduate students per semester. ZINASU (2009) also complains that the fees charged by tertiary institutions are way beyond the reach of many. This scenario disputes the rhetoric that tertiary education is accessible to all qualifying candidates in Zimbabwe.

3.3. Issues of quality and purpose of education

In the market driven tertiary education system, the academic leaders are modeled as entrepreneurs pursuing economic gain rather than advancing the liberal purpose of education for the public good. From this analysis, Marginson (2009) further concludes that, in the market model, lecturers are not driven by the love of teaching or the love for students and the urge for research but by pay incentives and personal career goals. This has implications for the quality of education. Because of the pressure to meet increasing competition for human resources among tertiary institutions, the net result is tremendous increase in student fees coupled with decreased government support (Marginson, 2004). In this complex conundrum, the social purpose of tertiary education and its mandate for research and knowledge generation systematically falls out of the picture and according to Marginson (2010) space for higher education shrinks. Freedman and Fenton (2011) argue that, the notion that a university's entire purpose is to feel the economy with high salaried individuals through links with industry is not only perverse but also socially destructive. The same goes for treating universities as profit-making organisation (de Boer, et al, 2009). Instead of aiming for quality, tertiary institutions will understandably go for quantity in order to remain afloat in a fiercely competitive socio-economic environment.

On the contrary, Mok (2009) believes that by using a mix of competitive incentives, planning and audit mechanisms, the market model of tertiary education manifests in more effective central control. In U.K., the White Paper on Higher Education claims that competition between institutions, courses and academics will protect the interests of the students (Freedman and Fenton, 2001). The White Paper also pinpoints that the market model will result in efficiency and increased value for money. In stark contrast, Freedman and Fenton (2011) maintain, "While quality is skewed by market principles, inequality is increased." This is the likely result in Zimbabwe which is currently experiencing distorted economic fundamentals and large income disparities among the citizens (Kapunga, 2007).

4. Discussion

It is apparent from the foregoing that marketeering of education in Zimbabwe has disadvantaged able but poor students from accessing tertiary education. Those with weak academic passes at 'O' and 'A' Levels who could otherwise not have qualified but have the financial resources are enrolled at the tertiary institutions yet those with excellent passes, who are well deserving but poor are left out. The net result of this scenario is poor quality of the tertiary education system graduates. In other words, the performance levels of the majority of the current crop of students could at best be average. The long term effects have tremendous implications for future socio-economic development of the country. If the very candidates who have the potential for excellent academic performance are excluded from the tertiary education system in Zimbabwe, then the country cannot expect to produce the best human resources who will spearhead economic growth.

The social nets such as the Cadetship Scheme are hardly sufficient and reliable to cushion the poor. As of 2013/2014, the government owed tertiary institutions a combined figure of US64million in unpaid cadetship grants (www.newsday.com/.../govt-owes-colleges...). As a result, many of the tertiary institutions are shunning beneficiaries of this scheme. Failure by government to repay for the scheme and to avail student grants has made the lives of those poor students in tertiary institutions to be quite unbearable with media reports that some female students have resorted to prostitution to try and make ends meet. At times such schemes become overwhelmed by non-deserving candidates whose rich parents use their social statuses to influence the system to benefit their less deserving children and relatives. The poor have to bear the worst brunt of watching their dreams of accessing tertiary education extincting to oblivion.

In addition, tertiary institutions are concerned with increasing student enrolment without due regard for Excellency in order to intensify revenue collection at the expense of quality education. The tertiary institutions are no longer non-profit making organizations but are focused on maximizing on 'profit' margins. They have actually reneged on their liberal and social mandate of providing affordable education to all those who qualify as a matter of right.

Meanwhile, promotion of research through provision of research grants haseither been discontinued or has been drastically reduced as part of cost cutting measures and maintenance of an acceptable profit margin for the institutions which now run as if they were business units. In this way, the tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe are compromising their prime responsibility of promoting knowledge development through research and scholarship. Staff development through contact and sabbatical leave is highly constrained with some universities discouraging their academic staff members from engaging with foreign universities while many of the staff members have gone for years without going on either leave. Lack of such critical scholarship engagements demotivates staff and limits opportunities for professional growth. This has debilitating effects on quality, development and progress of tertiary education and training in Zimbabwe. The preoccupation of tertiary institutions with crafting of attractive commercial strategies for making more money has left the quality dimension of education at the mercy of fate.

The fact of the matter is that the government of Zimbabwe is finding it difficult to fund tertiary education as much as it might have loved. As such, marketeering of education has become one strategy for ensuring that tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe remain viable. The strategy has also been used as an instrument for enabling institutions, parents and students to become more responsible and accountable. For instance, many of the tertiary institutions have managed to renovate or upgrade their infrastructure to the extent that some currently boast of state of the art Information and Computer Technology (ICT) laboratories. Provision of learning and teaching media has drastically improved when compared to the period preceding the official use of foreign currency in the country which started in 2009. It is also possible that students have become more responsible towards the maintenance of institutional property fearing that if such property were vandalized or neglected fees might be increased to finance repairs or replacements. Students could also be encouraged to work hard because they cannot afford to fail and find themselves unnecessarily having to pay beyond the usual completion period. So, when the money generated through charging of commercial tertiary education fees is used to improve the learning conditions quality education may be achieved but access to education will ever remain constrained. The aforesaid comments reflect that marketeering is not the worst of strategies for funding tertiary education. Its effects only become most debilitating in economic recessions such as what is currently prevailing in Zimbabwe. True to it, in repressed economies, marketeering of education robs the majority of the poor students of their alienable right to education.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, this paper draws the following conclusions about marketeering tertiary education in Zimbabwe:

- Many poor and vulnerable potential students have been excluded from attaining tertiary education as a result of marketeering.
- The majority of those who are able to access tertiary education are the rich and elite who at times do not academically deserve the opportunity. Thus, the tertiary education system in Zimbabwe is no longer serving its social and liberal purpose but commercial intentions.
- The exclusion of genius but poor students from tertiary education and training will negatively affect the future socio-economic development of the country.

- Marketeering has affected the quality of tertiary education through reduced research and scholarship funding in Zimbabwe.
- However, when handled well in vibrant economies, marketeering has potential to increase accountability and resourcing hence quality of tertiary education.
- In Zimbabwe, marketeering of tertiary education can only succeed when more reliable social safety nets have been fully established.

From the conclusions of this paper, the following recommendations are proffered to reduce the negative effects of marketeering of tertiary education in Zimbabwe:

- Provision of well funded social safety nets. The Cadetship Scheme should be made accessible only to the deserving students and the public including the rural populace should be conscientised on its accessibility. A deliberate system of identifying the rightful beneficiaries should be put in place. Student grants should be retained and managed through a revolving fund.
- Significant subsidies on tertiary education should be established and the level of fees charged by all tertiary institutions regulated by government.
- Full research and scholarship grants for staff should be vigorously reviewed and improved.
- Scholarships and bursary funds should be negotiated and made accessible to those who cannot genuinely afford to pay for their own fees.

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