

Management of Education Quality: A Case of Two Historically Disadvantaged Universities

NS Modiba

University of Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract: The paper critiques how lack of quality university education persists to aggravate the treble challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality in myriad societal members. Quality university education is expected to assist in the social ills of the nation. This is a qualitative case study paper which is conceptual and empirical in nature. Interviewing techniques and document review were used to collect data from the 12 lecturers attached to the Historically Disadvantaged Universities (HDUs). Such data were analysed through thematic content analysis and constant comparative methods. Research findings revealed that firstly, an enabling learning environment is essential to offering quality university education that eradicates social-ills. Secondly, failure to expose students to meteoric rise at the pre-tertiary sector, compromises the envisaged quality university education. Thirdly, the closure of the former teacher-training colleges overburdens universities. Fourthly, badly coordinated curriculum changes at the pre-tertiary sector, compromises quality at universities. Fifthly, the absence of the culture of quality and excellence at universities, worsens the situation. Lastly, under-prepared pre-tertiary learners contribute to lack of quality tertiary education at the HDUs. The researcher recommends for the HDUs to embrace decolonisation project to enable them to reverse lack of quality university education.

Keywords: Disadvantaged, Environment, Historical, Management, Quality

1. Introduction

The 21st century universities need to strive for quality tertiary education sector to benefit their societies. Gold (2016) accentuates that in higher learning institutions, quality schooling remains a stress-buster for students and sundry. This suggests that with a quality schooling in place, not a single student would fail to conclude her studies on time. Quality education under discussion in this paper, is being comprehended by Sebola (2015) as the creation of a structures and order which cannot be externally imposed, which results from interaction between a multiplicity of governing nodes which influence each other in the creation of a certain order or behaviour. University require order and a certain way of behaving by students to succeed with its core-function of tuition. HDUs are just like their counterparts anticipated to offer quality university education to their students. This is despite the myriad infrastructural backlogs they face. Heilbron (2018) concedes that students receiving quality university education are groomed to contribute immensely to the eradication of social ills. That quality education enables them to push back the frontiers of unemployment, poverty and inequality experienced in society. When quality university education is adequately managed, it has a potential of serving as an equaliser in a society.

Graduates imbibing quality university education are likely to grow up to be generous and committed humanitarians in their society (Enaifoghe, 2019). Quality university education could prepare them to be assets in their communities. Quality university education irrespective of whether gleaned from the HDUs or not has a potential of developing a student as a totality where she will be able to fit in her own society and be a treasure. Sobuwa (2018) reminds that teaching personnel in quality universities, are not likely to involve themselves in mutinous actions that jeopardise students' development through knowledge generation and dissemination however, legitimate their grievances could be. This implies that students at quality universities are likely to experience a unique knowledge capacitation that prepares them for their service in a society. A feature of quality university education is that it does not make students to be in the news for the wrong reasons such as having students rioting over trivial issues that could be resolved round the table discussions. Quality universities promote no lawlessness, ill-discipline and disorder by students because of their focus on quality research, teaching and community engagement activities that ascertain that their institutions contribute to the reversal of poverty, inequality and unemployment plaguing a society from where university students

are sourced. Clarke (2009) reminds that quality and goal-directed universities are free from tensions in the sense that students would not be baying for the blood of certain teaching personnel who could be accused of not excelling inside the lecture rooms. It may not be astonishing to find quality universities being populated by lecturer-activists. To confirm the indispensability of student capacitation especially in HDUs, Msila (2016) articulates that decent schooling has a potential of steering the half-sinking ship into the bay of educational transformation and social change. With a sound schooling in place, a university, that was known to be too disadvantaged to produce brilliant and exquisite student results, could register exceptional student performance. This is possible, because, a quality schooling whether experienced from the HDUs or not, does teach civil ways of engagement for institutional members especially when faced with insurmountable obstacles, like unemployment, poverty and inequality. Furthermore, quality university education is known to be able to teach how to decimate and professionally resolve social ills (Fox, 2010; Theletsane, 2014; Moyo, 2015). Khoza, (2015) and Masina (2015) emphasise that unemployment, inequality and poverty could be eradicated through quality university education. Nkuna (2015) and Tisdall (2015) remark that apartheid has instilled in African professionals and their students a sense of self-hate and inferiority complex to the level of battling to create sustainable quality university education, capable of contributing to the elimination of the experienced social ills. Students receiving quality university education are encouraged never to doubt themselves and their potential in contributing to the eradication of the identified social ills (Yukl, 2006; Motsepe, 2015). Universities need to be encouraged to embrace quality education that capacitates students into assets in their society. (Shejavali, 2015; Siswana, 2007).

2. Theoretical Considerations

Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005) remark that a theory represents a mental view of phenomenon or a system that normally forms the basis for a chain of reasoning. This signifies that when one advances a particular argument on a phenomenon such as critiquing how lack of quality university education persists to aggravate the treble challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality, with a theory in place, one's argument is likely to hold substance. The critical theory has been selected to underpin

this paper. The theory was developed in 1937 by Horkheimer and focuses on changing a society other than understanding a society. Its choice rests on the relevance the researcher finds in it in terms of sufficiently illuminating issues of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Apart from enabling the researcher to frame this paper, the critical theory helped the researcher to make meaning from the whole notion of quality university education and how it contributes to the addressing social ills. One of the principles of the critical theory is that social problems stem from social structures and cultural assumptions of individuals. By implication, the thinking that created the mentioned social ills may not be the right thinking to eradicate them. The prevalence of unemployment, poverty and inequality could benefit the elites in a society and hurts the downtrodden. The fundamental principles of this theory were helpful in clarifying how allowing the social ills unattended could unveil university education not to be to the right quality of helping to eliminate social ills (Motsepe, 2015). The selection of the critical theory in this paper, is informed by its encouragement of reflective and analytical thoughts as regards eradicating social ills. The two chosen HDUs in this paper, are struggling to mitigate poverty, unemployment and inequality in a society. The question to pose is whether the absence of quality university education is a deliberate or a demonstration of an inequitable distribution of resources to the tertiary education sector by the governing party, almost three decades in a new dispensation. The critical theory attempts to respond to such a question (Moyo, 2015). The experienced treble challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality are surmountable through giving people skills and expertise. The critical theory serves as a basis for reflecting on the quality university education, as offered in HDUs to eradicate unemployment, poverty and inequality in a society. Higgs and Smith (2010) advise that knowledge and how we understand truth, including scientific truth, moral truth and historical truth need not be separated from everyday life. This explains that lack of quality university education worsens the social ills (Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2009). A critical theory seeks to liberate humans from circumstances enslaving them. A critical theory admits that quality university education could mitigate social ills of unemployment, poverty and inequality (Ngcukana, 2018).

The researcher contends that not every theory other than the critical theory could productively

illuminate and delineate a problem of this paper like the chosen theory (Allen, 2015). The problem of this paper centres around the worsening of the social ills with the existence of university education which appears to be struggling to be impactful. Critical theory advocates for critical reflection on society and its social ills, in order to discover the hidden assumptions that maintain the existing power relationships that keep some societal members perpetually enslaved though in a different form and guise (Higgs & Smith, 2010; Arden, 2013; Tisdall, 2015). Hofstee (2010) submits that the researcher risks wasting the reader's time where she fails to distinguish between a topic to read about and a research problem to solve. The above explication implies that with a research topic, the researcher gathers data about it while with the research problem, the researcher strives to have it surmounted. Hofstee (2010) advises that the statement of the problem has to be free from ambiguity. Evidently, the problem of this paper centres around the worsening of social ills with the existence of university education which appears to be struggling to be impactful to the elimination of poverty, unemployment and inequality in society. A plethora of literature reviewed attests that, HDUs whose education is no quality, could struggle to push back the frontiers of unemployment, poverty and inequality in their societies (Ngcukana, 2018).

The research questions addressed in this paper are anchored on the critical theory as the theoretical perspective underscoring this paper (Higgs & Smith, 2010). The main research question is: In what way could the quality university education contribute to containing the spread of poverty, inequality and unemployment in societies? Broad as it is, the above question could be broken down into the following sub-questions:

- How is a quality university education understood?
- How is lack of quality university education aggravating social ills?
- How can decolonisation of university education enable it to be responsive to social ills?

3. Methodological Approach

This is a qualitative paper anchored on the qualitative research paradigm for various reasons. For

instance, the problem which the paper pursued, centred around the worsening of social ills with the university education appearing to be struggling to be impactful to the elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment. (Dawson, 2006; Levin, 2005). The choice of the qualitative research methodology was triggered by the paper being underscored by the critical theory which creates a synergy with the qualitative paradigm (Hofstee, 2010). The combination of the two helped in illuminating issues of lack of quality university education and the unabated social ills. The absence of decolonisation in universities, deprives the HDUs to radically transform to become more responsive to the social ills faced by societies. This paints a dark picture of some HDUs perpetuating a spirit of servitude and under-development. A good case in point is when the unemployment statistics in the country is 34,4% with universities in existence whose education was supposed to be contributing to the reduction of unemployment. This occurs amongst others as a result of lack of enabling tuition environment which could have paved way for the HDUs to be part of the solution of eradicating social ills (Masina, 2015). With the critical theory underpinning this paper, the researcher utilised it, to interrogate how lecturers in HDUs understand their community engagement responsibilities specifically the eradication of the disturbing social ills. Of interest, it is the kind of discourse universities normally engage themselves in, as part of overcoming the perennial treble challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. The theory was applied to establish the common reaction by these HDUs as regards utilising decolonisation to make their curricula sufficiently responsive to social ills. Partnering the qualitative research approach and the critical theory enabled the researcher to make an in-depth understanding of why social ills like unemployment, poverty and inequality are proceeding unabated in this new dispensation. Finally, interviewing techniques and document review were utilised to construct data relevant for this paper. All the, primary and secondary documents containing information about quality university education and the prevalence of inequality, poverty and unemployment in a society, were studied. To corroborate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with six members in each of the two sampled HDUs. Responses were audio-taped for transcription later-on. Thematic content analysis and constant comparative methods were applied to analyse the data. Poor quality university education, condemns graduates into job-seekers instead of

being job-creators who could push back the frontiers of inequality, poverty and unemployment in society (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005).

4. Results and Discussion

Findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research questions. Findings are answering the posed research questions. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the interviewing technique and the document review. The two HDUs whose quality education were critiqued, were being referred to as University A and University B. Six lecturers in each were being referred to as Lecturer 1A up to 1F from University A and Lecturer 2A up to 2F from University B. That was done to protect their actual identities. The researcher sampled those HDUs in South Africa for scrutiny of their contribution to the elimination of the treble challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment in society (Moyo, 2015). Their choice was on the basis of the researcher having familiarised himself with issues of poor university education and its lack of impact on the eradication of social ills. A critical theory has been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to emerge with these findings which are being critiqued with literature. Findings and discussion for this paper are the following: the disabling learning environment, the absence of the meteoric rise, the closure of ex-teacher training colleges, the under-coordinated curriculum changes, the absence of the culture of quality and excellence and the underprepared pre-tertiary learners (Motsepe, 2015). A detailed discussion of each finding follows.

4.1 A Disabling Learning Environment

Exquisite teaching and learning happens easily after the establishment of the necessary institutional structures, systems, policies, procedures, processes and appropriate university environment (Brunton, 2003:B-11). Lecturer 2F of University B laments that *"when some HDUs are found to be pulling hard in terms of contributing to the unravelling of the social ills, that is due to hostile university teaching and learning environments that lack the necessary stability for quality university education to occur"*. Lecturer 1D of University A shares that *"Historically Disadvantaged Universities could offer a quality tertiary education like any other university, immediately they survive in harmonising their university environments with those of the pre-tertiary learning institutions"*. On the said

matter, lecturer 1A of University A recounts that *"any obstructive teaching and learning environment that hinders the occurrence of quality University education, could do so even at the Historically Advantaged Universities as a proof that an environment impacts on the quality or otherwise of education everywhere"*. Evidently, sufficient attention to sound environments at the universities could assist in dealing with social ills (Tsheola, 2002; Mbeki, 2003; Madue, 2013; Zwane, 2015; Pela, 2018).

4.2 Absence of Meteoric Rise

Where students join the tertiary education sector being class and quality, they could enable universities to train them smoothly in their chosen careers (Anonymous, 2021). That the pre-tertiary learners are attending schooling on a rotational basis, as a result of Covid-19 pandemic, signifies that such learners could join the tertiary education sector being ill-prepared for it. Such students could aggravate the already existing challenge of the HDUs of not being able to offer quality education to eradicate social ills (Adams, 2015; Macha, 2016; Zwane, 2021). Lecturer 1C of University A cautions that *"before Historically Disadvantaged universities are being blamed for not doing enough in terms of training graduates who will fight down unemployment, inequality and poverty in a society, it must first be determined as to whether the universities found those students being to the required or universities deal with students who have been exposed to lack of meteoric rise during their pre-tertiary years"*. Lecturer 2A of University B submits that *"the present disjuncture between universities and pre-tertiary schools is failing universities in the form of passing to universities learners who never tasted meteoric rise from their pre-tertiary schooling years and who contribute to the image of Historically Disadvantaged Universities continuing to be gloomy in producing graduates who do not bravely confront the faced social ills"*. The researcher supports research respondents that the real rot is not so much at the universities, but at the pre-tertiary level. Even the body of literature reviewed confirms this (Omano, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Gobillot, 2008; Cunha, Filho & Goncalvers, 2010; Thornhill & Van Dijk, 2010; Sebola, 2012; Qwabe, 2013; Tisdall, 2005:15).

4.3 Absence of Culture of Quality and Excellence

HDUs need to be reputable for their desire to reverse social ills. Anonymous (2021) remarks that

pursuance of quality university education, could brand a higher learning institution apart from enabling it to contribute to the confrontation of the treble challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Lecturer 1F of University A submits that *"all universities could contribute to blunting poverty, unemployment and poverty as long as they uncompromisingly encourage a kind of University education that is responsive to social ills"*. Lecturer 2A of University B laments that *"all categories of universities whether Historically Advantaged (HA) or otherwise, have to prioritise addressing what obtains in their own societies, in the form of developing programmes to capacitate societal members of all cues to be self-sufficient against the existing diverse forms of social ills"*. Lecturer 1C of University A declares that *"lack of adequate resources by some HDUs should no longer serve as an excuse when the contribution of such universities to the elimination of the witnessed social ills is hugely invisible"*. Universities need not relegate the eradication of the treble challenges of poverty, unemployment and poverty for their perpetual relevance (Zwane, 2021).

4.4 Under-Prepared Pre-Tertiary Learners

Enaifoghe (2019) asserts that some Historically Disadvantaged Universities are being crippled by mediocre post-school youths in their ranks who have been microwaved at the pre-tertiary level. Lecturer 2C of University B emphasises that *"prior to some universities being mis-judged to be contributing less to the eradication of poverty and its associate problems, it has to be acknowledged that some of the students-customers serviced by those university, are no university materials given their under-preparedness"*. Lecturer 1D of University A reasons that *"the day all universities draw their pool of students from affluent society, will be a day when a judgement about the contribution of universities to the abolishing of the treble challenges are legitimately made"*. Lecturer 2E of University B shares that *"the majority of the HDUs can surpass their current contribution to unravelling poverty, unemployment and inequality in society on condition that students joining them are adequately prepared for the university education"*. Some problems inherited from the pre-tertiary sector prevent HDUs from surmounting social ills (Magana, 2021).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Research questions posed in this paper were all answered. For instance HDUs need to deal with lack of quality university education, to be enabled

to reverse social ills. It is prudent for HDUs to create a viable and functional partnerships with the other lower education sectors to fix curricula-related challenges. That stands to enable universities to improve the quality of their offerings which may translate into enhancing the calibre of their graduates whose service in a society could be matchless. Universities, irrespective of being Historically Disadvantaged or otherwise need to contribute to mitigating social ills. Lack of meteoric rise at the pre-tertiary sector needs attention. So is the under-preparedness of the pre-tertiary learners. Finally, HDUs cannot co-exist with unemployment, inequality and poverty. The study therefore recommends the following. The basis of these recommendations are the discussed findings which are as follow:

- There is a need for Historically Disadvantaged Universities to fathom why is it that where they are located, social ills of unemployment, poverty and inequality are not decimating.
- There is a need for the Historically Disadvantaged Universities to embrace decolonisation project to have their university education being responsive to the needs of society.
- There is a need for Historically Disadvantaged Universities to develop intervention programmes to decimate poverty, unemployment and inequality.
- Lastly, there is a need for the Historically Disadvantaged Universities to produce graduates whose impact to the eradication of the social ills would be conspicuous for everyone to notice.

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