

Effects of Self-Sponsored Programs on Academic Staff Performance at Kenyan Universities

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Abstract

The study sought to determine the effects of self sponsored programs (SSP) on academic staff performance and to establish factors contributing to the quality of work life (QWL) of the academic staff. It also sought to determine the relationship between QWL and performance. The study location was Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) in Kenya and the study population was composed of 194 MMUST academic staff. Stratification was used to ensure all faculties were represented. Proportionate random sampling was utilized by grouping employees according to their job positions or rank and a sample of 36 respondents was chosen. Pearson correlation was employed to test the hypothesis between, academic staff QWL and performance. The findings indicate that SSP negatively affects the performance of the academic staff in public universities and recommend that strict loading for academic staff in line with universities full time staff equivalent should be implemented.

Keywords: Staff performance, quality of work life, Universities, Kenya

Introduction

Universities all over the world are susceptible to the forces of globalization and are therefore undergoing transformations of their academic programs (Carnoy, 1999). According to Castells (1996) the society has become increasingly networked through systems, alliances, spread of languages and practices. Universities being integral parts of society, form part of this network. As a result, the universities are in uncertain times and are faced with diverse and complex forces, which they have to respond to in satisfying the needs of the society (Barnett, 2003). These forces have resulted in universities students increased enrolment due to of pressure from the public seeking the commodity marketed as “merchandise” – university degree.

Irina (2002) notes that in Africa, universities that had virtual monopoly for decades are now encountering new challenges in the form of virtual consortia, global branches of universities, new technologies, a new breed of students with higher expectations and the increasing tendency for government to rely upon the market to encourage greater responsiveness of higher education systems.

The main change to the universities in Africa has been the “commodification” of knowledge and the centrality of its generation and application to social and economic development and thus transforming the university system into a corporate organization (Sifuna, 2003). Punchi and Kumara (2001) assert that within new market forces under globalization, education is no longer viewed only as a social good but also as an economic commodity thus the typical strategy of its economic rationalization is privatization and commercialization.

Despite the high fees charged, enrollments into these programmes have continued to grow. The last two decades have witnessed tremendous growth in the number of universities in Kenya to respond to the demand. While in 1984 Kenya had only two public universities, currently, it has seven, namely; University of Nairobi, Moi University, Egerton University, Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Maseno University and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Lately, there has also been an upsurge in the number of private universities and university colleges’ absorbing former national polytechnics. This scenario is a pointer to the success related to SSP entry opportunities for Kenyans in public universities enrollment.

Over the last four decades, the social demands with respect to higher education in Kenya have clearly intensified. This has been exemplified by the rise in enrollments in public and private universities, the proliferation of more private universities and the establishment of SSP in the public universities. Student enrollment in public universities in Kenya increased rapidly from 600 in 1964 to 2,502 in 1982 then to 20,873 in 1990 and then to 40,000 in 1995 (Abagi, 1999). It is now estimated that Kenyan public universities will have a 100,000 enrollment mark by the year 2015. Okech and Amutabi (2002) observe that the idea of an academic degree as a “private good” that benefits the individual in terms of increased earnings rather than a “public good” is now widely accepted. They argue that the logic of today’s market economy and an ideology of privatization have contributed to the resurgence of private higher education. This is a clear testimony of the apparent increased-enrollment scenario in Kenyan universities.

Okech (2000) indicates that there is a difference between Kenya’s education policies in the 1970s, 1980s and those from the beginning of the 1990s. The latest policies were widely influenced by the World Bank conditions on third world nations and arguably relate to the role of the “market” in higher education. Universities are now regarded as corporate entities, which depend on expertise in finance, law and marketing and customer relations to survive. Higher education has become an “industry” and students “customers”, and the function of the former is to deliver education and training services to customers at an affordable price. The connotations, which come with the word consumer or customer, are quite different from those of student (Ogot, 2002). Managers of Kenyan universities are expected to adopt a market view of the services their institutions provide hence the application of monetary value on services which experts render; charging tuition fees and adopting business like relationships in all dealings with clients including students. This has also led to the introduction of SSP as a commercialization strategy.

There has been concern on the quality of graduates from public universities, lowered entry requirement, academic staff taking extra loads and self overburdening. Examinations and fees related issues causing students unrest are common headlines in Kenya and are attributed to the SSP. The introduction of SSP was seen as an opportunity by some scholars (Carnoy, 1999, Castells, 1996) while others viewed it as a threat to higher education (Nico, 2000, Stiglitz, 2002). Consequently, education is not treated as a mix of social, cultural and economic policy, rather it is viewed as a branch of economic policy alone (Wedikkarage, 2001). The universities academic staff bears the burden of implementation of the new SSP policies designed to meet the economic goals. Bidemi (2009) contends that private entry schemes have overburdened lecturers and consequently lowered academic standards, he noted that the Makerere University business plan of 1990s (copied by Kenyan and Tanzanian public universities) was done without evaluating implications of access, standards and equity issues. The share of the public budget devoted to higher education has continued to decline in anticipation of the SSP subsidy. Consequently increased enrollments through SSP compromised the quality of teaching and research due to overcrowding and inadequate staffing. The deteriorating physical facilities, poor library resources, and insufficient equipment compounded by low quality student’s enrollment through SSP aggravated the situation (Salmi, 1991). University Lecturers are gladly taking up extra load in the attempt to cope with increased enrollment and to earn extra premium from SSP compensation policy.

Okech (2000) states that the students have expressed lack of intellectual confidence as evidenced in examinations through reported irregularities, strikes related to exams and increased supplementary or re-take of exams citing that the problems may be related to the apparent poor management of student's tuition. Public universities in Kenya are losing their yester glory and are no longer considered ivory towers of intellectualism as evidenced by declined publications, employers' complaints on quality of graduates and declined intellectual "pride" of the dons (Nico, 2000; Stilgitz, 2002). Indeed, SSP provides alternative income both for universities development and academic staff income. Porter and Lawler (1983) suggest that this presents a positive reward; however, the demand from the academic staff to meet this performance may seriously damage their QWL. The study aimed at providing accurate information and characteristics that are observable in the current status of QWL and performance of academic staff in public universities.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used because the research focused on determining the status of a defined population with respect to certain variables. The descriptive survey encompassed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The study location was in MMUST, Kenya. Respondents were sourced from teaching faculties which included Faculties of Engineering, Science, Education and Social Sciences; Centre of Disaster Management and School of Nutrition and Nursing. The study population consisted of 194 active academic staff of MMUST. These employees were further disaggregated into academic faculties and divisions, based on their rank; classified as Professor, Associate professor, Senior lecturers, Lecturers' and Assistant lecturers'. Out of this classification, 6, 19, 19, 104 and 46 employees were ranked as Full professors, Associate professors, Senior lecturers, Lecturers and Assistant lecturers respectively. Proportionate random sampling was used to select a sample of 36 employees who were grouped in mutually exclusive classes according to their job positions. Stratification ensured that all faculties, centers, schools were represented in the study. The study used both primary and secondary data which yielded information such as academic staff loading, academic performance records, course enrollment, SSP statistics etc. Data for the study was obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Data collected was analysed through descriptive statistics. Pearson correlation was used to determine the statistically significant differences between QWL and organizational performance relative to other independent variables of rank in the university.

For QWL, the job descriptive index (JDI) acted as an authoritative guide (Imparato, 1972). A questionnaire constituting a slightly modified form of the Job Descriptive Index was used to collect data. Performance was measured with survey items that tap different dimensions of performance and provide a broad assessment of perceived organizational performance. These dimensions come from Brewer's (2005) typology of organizational performance consisting of internal and external dimensions, each of which focused on the core administrative values of efficiency, effectiveness, fairness and equity concerns.

Research Findings

The results indicate that most academic staff was not comfortable with both their QWL and performance as a result of SSP programs. This was because they disagreed with all the aspects which concern their QWL and performance. 50% of the academic staff observed that SSP contribution to their personal life was 0-20% while 40% alludes that its contribution to their personal life was 21-40%. 88.9% of the academic staff said that SSP rewards are not commensurate with the work demands; academic staff felt that due to poor/ delayed payments, SSP rewards were not commensurate with the work demands. There were general feelings from the Faculty of Engineering that the SSP policy discriminates classes with few SSP students. 97.2 % of the academic staff observed that SSP affected university academic performance. They gave the following reasons; poor students' facilities, overcrowded students in lecture halls and inadequate attention and evaluation of students, the urge for more lessons to obtain more pay results into lesser time for preparations, admission of marginal students hence declined standards of academics, laxity of lecturers due to poor motivation and poor entry student qualifications. 83.3% of the academic staff observed that SSP effect on their wellbeing affects their performance in lecturing, publications and research. Academic staff felt this was as a result of lack of intellectual challenge from students to stimulate their thought for quality lectures and a lot of repetitive work hence limited time to engage in research and publications. The majority of the academic staff (20) would like the management to improve or change the SSP compensation policy. They would also like the SSP and regular compensation consolidated. The findings imply that SSP have a negative influence on the performance of academic staff members.

To test the hypothesis that there is a correlation between the levels of QWL for university academic staff and their performance, mean score of variables testing the QWL for academic staff were correlated with those that test their performance. The correlation was found to be 0.14. at 95% confidence interval indicating a significant relationship between QWL for the academic staff and their general performance. This implies that the higher the QWL, the higher the performance of university academic staff.

Conclusion

Majority of academic staff were in agreement that teaching SSP interfered with their research and publications activities. This was true where SSP was overloaded onto the staff resulting in lowered performance. Academic staff perception that their opinions do not matter and that team work lacks within departments was a low motivation indicator and they strongly agreed that SSP has an effect on their well being which affects their job performance. It could further be deduced that SSP issues cause differences in opinion and lack of team spirit in departments.

The majority of the academic staff concurred that the effect on their well being affects their performance. The finding reveals that QWL of academic staff affects their performance. Most academic staff felt they had no choice but to teach SSP students, this was perhaps due to the evening students expected to be taught by the day students academic staff in order to harmonize exams. It was also important to note that the day students were integrated with SSP day students increasing the class sizes and therefore inseparable in lecture halls. This scenario therefore may negatively impact on the QWL of the 'unwilling' lecturer to service the extra students as they feel forced to serve.

The agreement by the majority of the academic staff that their flexibility and social integration is affected by the SSP service is a strong indicator of the negative effect of SSP on the QWL of the academic staff. This scenario may be attributed to the fact that the academic staff is overloaded with tuition work, rotating from one class to the other and having little time for workplace social integration or flexibility. Lack of common rooms and social space attributed to overstretched facilities may also contribute to low QWL. Lack of time for academic staff to attend to their private life as perceived by majority of lecturers was also a clear indicator for low QWL.

Academic staff did not agree that SSP involvement gives them opportunity for continuous development and they felt no personal future development through SSP. It was further observed that the university staff appraisal forms did not capture SSP participation component as a promotional decision requirement for lecturers. This attributed to lower QWL status of the lecturers involved. SSP was not viewed by majority of the academic staff to integrate their personal goals and its contribution to economic rewards on their personal life. However, it was observed that few lecturers presented views of generous rewards from the SSP. It was further perceived that the rewards were not commensurate with work demands. The lecturer's negative views on pay equity resulting from SSP negatively affected their QWL.

There was a positive correlation between the relationship of QWL and the overall performance implying that the performance of individual employees and the overall organizational performance is dependant on the nature of their QWL. Therefore the higher the employee's QWL, the better the performance. The study recommends that strict normal loading be calculated for each cadre of staff in line with the university full time staff equivalent taking into account the student's numbers alongside units that constitute a normal load for the academic staff. It was noted that SSP loading should be evaluated alongside the other achievements in research and publications to contribute to individual's appraisal for promotions. Finally, there was need to rework on the SSP compensation policy to reflect work demands and provide clearer equity perspectives both in the internal and external dimensions.

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