

Access with Success: Approach for Sustainable Social Changes in Developing African Societies: A Case Study of South Africa

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ABSTRACT The study explored the effect of participatory access on the learning abilities of undergraduates. Mixed methods approach was adopted for data collection. Questionnaire was administered to 400 undergraduate university students, while interviews were conducted for 8 lecturers from a selected university in South Africa. The high level of agreement among students indicated that assignment type, language of instruction, peer pressure, time management, family social background and previous education background constitute learning challenges for students. Findings from lecturers support the view of the students and further suggest that most of the challenges experienced by the students continue to linger due to the level of quality added in the education system of the nation, especially black dominated institutions. The findings proposed that participatory access should be discouraged through the provision of necessary education promoting facilities and motivating environment.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is described as one of the leading nations in Africa in terms of economy and university education in Africa (IMF 2015; WUR 2015). It was once a British colony and seems to have so much foreign influence in its educational system. Statistically, there is high rate of drop-outs from tertiary institutions in South Africa. The country experiences about forty percent drop-out rate annually (Macgregor 2007). This has however been attributed to series of factors, some of which are: language/academic literacy skills, institutional cultures of the institutions of higher learning, lack of infrastructural resources, university pedagogic systems, neo-colonialism, among others (Sawir 2005; Glew et al. 2015; Meier and Hartell 2009; Wellman and Fallon 2012; Abrantes et al. 2007; Kuzhumannil and Fehring 2009; Postareff et al. 2008).

Sequel to the argument regarding the factors attributed as causes of learning challenges and poor positive social changes among youths, the report of the British Department of Health (2001) suggests that learning disorders should be reflected. Thus, the need arises to consider how learning challenges and learning disorders are perceived in education and their correlation with social changes/development within the society. Learning challenges, learning disorders Learning disabilities, learning deficiencies, are

generally used interchangeably to mean challenges that hinder the learning abilities of individuals. In the context of this study, learning challenges and learning disorders should be understood to have distinct definitions. Learning disabilities, deficiencies, and disorders will interchangeably focus mainly on learning problems caused by health issues. The British Department of Health (2001) explains that learning disabilities include health challenge that can be characterized by lack of potential capability to comprehend new or complex pieces of information and to acquire new skills; and lack of capability to function independently. Usually, these would be health impairment that started before adulthood, with an enduring consequence on the individual's development. Learning challenges on the other hand will strictly refer to learning difficulties emanating from physical, social and environmental factors. Learning challenges can be characterized by socio-economic factors, environmental factors, parental factors, peer factors and educational policies (Fook and Sidhu 2014).

Having understood the distinction between learning challenges and learning disorders; it is also important to understand that learning challenges in the higher education context has been and is considered an issue of 'access' (Akoojee and Nkomo 2008). Access to higher education has initially been defined to mean 'participatory

access'. Participatory access as defined in Akoojee and Nkomo (2008) refers to allowing students to enroll at higher education institutions; therefore, their 'presence' in these institutions is considered participation. In recent studies, particularly since the dawn of the 'fee must fall' campaign by the university students in South Africa; the participatory access has been seen to be even more undesirable. A new understanding of what 'access' to higher education should mean has been coined as 'Access with success'. This is defined to mean allowing students to enroll in higher learning institutions and to put measures in place to ensure their success.

Literature Review

Access with success has debatably remained an issue in many universities in African countries. However, in recent studies, particularly since the dawn of the 'fee must fall' campaign by the university students in South Africa; the participatory access has been seen to be even more undesirable (Akoojee and Nkomo 2008). A major cause of participatory access has been the availability and provision of the necessary facilities needed by students to study and become impactful in their societies (Adeyemi 2001). It is arguable that in South Africa, participatory access thrives more in institutions that are predominantly blacks than those dominated by their white counterparts. This has led to series of dropouts of students from black dominated institutions; thereby hindering development within the host community where the institutions are situated as education is considered a driving force for development (Mitra 2011). Suffice to state that host communities of institutions given access with success tend to experience higher level of development compared to host communities of institutions with participatory access.

Universities in Africa continue to maintain policies of the colonial rule. Meanwhile, a major focus of African universities in the early 90s was the Africanization of African universities (Ajayi and Ekundayo 2008). The adoption of foreign systems in home based universities seem to be contrary to the vision of the African heroes (Yesufu 1973).

Several learning challenges experienced in universities constitute the reason for dropout. Fook and Sidhu (2015) identify different learning challenges which affect students. These

learning challenges include: volume of assignment, cognitive abilities of students, etc. One of these learning challenges is the adopted language of instruction. Sawir (2005) explains that the language of instruction used in a classroom situation determines the level of comprehension from the students. Hence, adoption of appropriate language of instruction encourages and promotes learning, vis-a-vis, adoption of inappropriate or complex language of instruction hinders learning.

Philosophical Underpinning

Considering the correlation that exists amongst learning challenges, poor social changes/development, participatory access to higher education and neo-colonialism in South African tertiary institutions, motivation theory is adopted for this study.

Motivation Theories

Motivation is a major factor which has significant influence on the behaviour of different individuals (Brown 2007). Motivation is described as a driving force that propels or spurs an individual to action (Schunk and Pajares 2009). Motivation theories explain motivating or demotivating discrepancies in learning at tertiary level of education. In other words, from motivational theorists' perspective, the factors that can motivate or demotivate learning are explored.

There are varieties of motivation theories, but those that guide the theoretical framework of this study include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, McClelland's Achievement Theory, Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory and The Hawthorne Studies.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow's theory explains that the hierarchy of human needs is in ascending order. These needs include physiological needs, safety/security needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization need. Physiological needs are basic needs that humans cannot survive without (food and shelter) while self-actualisation is a need that humans can survive without (Cole Panchanadeswaran and Daining 2004; Weihrich et al. 2008). They opine that self-actualisation need, also referred to as self-fulfillment need is

regarded as the highest need in the hierarchy. Hence, the lowest sets of need on the hierarchy are the more important.

In the field of education, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory explains that students enroll in higher institutions in order to experience self-actualisation. The drive for self fulfilment determines their drive to work (Cannice and Koontz 2008). In other words, students will work hard when there is future ambition in view. However, the theory further indicates that self-actualisation need is impossible without physiological needs first being met. Thus, the theory shows that deficient nutrition and poor attention to the security needs of students hamper learning.

Additionally, pursuit of self fulfilment is a motivating force for some lecturers. Based on this theory, such lecturers will strive to make the difference, so as to attain self-actualisation. There will be difference between professionals (lecturers) who get involved in the profession for other reasons besides self-actualisation and their counterparts who joined the profession due to self-actualisation (Brown 2007). This theory therefore, proposes that lecturers who are in the profession for self-fulfillment will ensure proper dissemination of thoughts and knowledge which is part of the drive for self-actualisation.

Motivation can be intrinsic, that is, self-driven motivation (Coon and Mitterer 2010). In this regard, the motivating factor is not visible. Similarly, motivation can be extrinsic, that is, a case of external factors performance. From the theory, both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation are important for learning to take place. Thus, the lack of motivation of students can constitute learning challenges at any level, tertiary institutions inclusive.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed method research paradigm was adopted for the study to collect data on access

with success, its influence on the learning abilities of students in universities and consequently sustainable positive social changes in developing societies in sub-Sahara Africa. Questionnaires with close ended questions were used to gather quantitative data from 400 randomly selected undergraduates from a selected university in South Africa. Moreover, interviews were conducted for 8 conveniently selected lecturers for the qualitative part of this study. Convenient sampling technique was adopted in selecting the lecturers due to their time schedule. However, the reason for the qualitative data was to ensure triangulation in the data collected quantitatively from student respondents. Kumar (2014) states that qualitative data is useful for triangulation in order to ascertain the correctness of quantitative data for the same study. South Africa was purposively selected for the study because it has the best rated university in Africa according to the 2016 World University Ranking (WUR) report and conversely, the highest rate of dropout in sub-Sahara Africa.

RESULTS

The findings from the quantitative part of this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the identified learning challenges faced by undergraduate university students in the selected South African university. Twenty-six percent of the student respondents agree that the adopted language of instruction constitutes challenge to their learning abilities. 21.5 percent agree that the volume and type of assignment received from lecturers constitute learning challenges to their learning abilities. Meanwhile, 12.5 percent agree that peer pressure is the cause of the learning challenges experienced by them. 11.5 percent agree that their previous learning backgrounds is the cause of their learning challenges. Eighteen percent agree that the social-economic background of their

Table 1: Frequency of the causes of participatory access to sub-Sahara African universities

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
Language of Instruction	104	26.0	26.0	26.0
Volume and Type of Assignment	86	21.5	21.5	47.5
Peer Pressure	50	12.5	12.5	60.0
Previous Education Background	46	11.5	11.5	71.5
Family Social Economic Background	72	18.0	18.0	89.5
Poor Time Management	42	10.5	10.5	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

family is the cause of their learning challenges, while 10.5 percent agree that lack of time management is the cause of learning challenges for them.

Result Retrieved from Interviews with Lecturers

Interviews conducted with some lecturers from various faculties in the selected university in South Africa indicate that South African universities are patterned after foreign universities, which is the case with many other African countries. The findings from interviews with lecturers are presented in themes below.

Available Materials and Assignment

The reference materials adopted for instructions in universities are mostly foreign. Some interviewees explain that lecturers are handicapped due to their inability to get suitable indigenous materials for their course. One of the lecturers states that:

“A lecturer cannot lecture or communicate with his students effectively without quality materials. Unfortunately, many of the quality materials found around are foreign.”

In addition, another lecturer explains that:

“The materials consequently determine the assignments that would be given, hence we end up patterning our classroom after the western world.”

Language of Instruction

According to the interviewees, language of instruction is about the strongest tool in teaching and learning situations. A lecturer states that:

“If the language of instruction is less complex and easily understood, then learning exercise will be easily comprehended, however if the reverse is the case, learning becomes a challenge”. Another lecturer argues saying: “the use of local language as medium of instruction cannot be ruled out. It is the major way by which our academic culture can be preserved.”

Six out of the eight lecturers interviewed hold the view that as long as the students will comprehend when they are taught in the home language, then, the home language should be adopted. One of the lecturers stressed that in foreign

countries, students are made to learn the language of the nation before they commence classes fully. However, few of the lecturers hold the reservation that the English language will highly be needed to meet global standard. Yet the argument of lecturers was that:

“It is better for students to understand concepts properly, with less of world standard than for world standard to be met while students lack understanding of the concepts taught.”

“Students cannot be motivated when they do not understand the language or system being practiced, especially when the system seems porous to them.”

Previous Learning Experience

All lecturers shared the similar sentiment that the previous experiences of students influence their learning abilities. In the South African context, most of the lecturers interviewed held the opinion that high school are patterned after the standard of the western world. This in turn affects the students when they get to the university. One of the lecturers states that:

“High school learners grow to become people they have been trained to be. Whatever learners are built to become are the things they end-up becoming. I strongly believe that the current experiences of students is dependent on their previous experiences, yet our high schools are established to fit into the western culture, norms and beliefs. This will affect the experiences of students in the university. We cannot change the rule of the game half way.”

The lecturers hold the view that students from high schools where English is well spoken and encouraged will cope easily and better at the university compared to students from high schools where the home language is often used. In other words, the high school experiences of students put them at either advantaged or disadvantaged position respectively. One of the interviewees states that:

“High school experience is all encompassing. It cuts across all the activities of students. Hence whatever, they exposed to at that level will always have effect on their future, either in the area of decision making or attitude, etc.”

Policy Making and Implementation

In addition to the identified challenges, the policies adopted by African universities are for-

eign to the African society and they affect the learning abilities of students. The lecturers hold the view that policies are the bedrock upon which universities thrive. They all consent to the view that “the moment the right policies that can promote ingenuity are made and implemented, African universities will be successfully Africanised. Few of the lecturers kept repeating that:

“Our universities were built on policies of the colonial masters and are still living by them. Until policies are made to preserve and promote our academic culture as Africans, we continue to live in slavery.”

This aligns with the report of Nelson Mandela Foundation (2004) that the experiences of the apartheid are still being obtainable in the educational system. This is applicable to other African nations. Meanwhile, Yesufu (1973) had earlier stated that African leaders worked towards ensuring that African universities are Africanised through constituted policies. This is contrary to the experiences in recent times and this seems to hinder the learning abilities of students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that quality seems to be lagging in the kind of education provided in the selected university. The findings corroborate the work of Fook and Sidhu (2015) who opine that the volume and type of assignment given to students by lecturers can constitute learning challenges for the students as long as quality is not ensured. The finding also supports the work of Akoojee and Nkomo (2008) who aver that the quality of education provided in black dominated institutions is poor and that affects the learning abilities of the students. Poor quality is noticed in the area of the policies made to guide teaching and learning activities, type of assignment given to students, gate keeping measures which should be aimed at checking the previous learning background of students among others. According to Hutt and Tang (2013) quality in a given education system will be questionable when the learning abilities of students are affected negatively. They further opine that it will be considered as malpractice on the part of the education providers. Moreover, one of the findings of this study shows that the language of instruction consti-

tutes leaning challenge to the students, hence, such should be considered an issue of poor quality in the education provided. Such is described as participatory access since the success of students is not adequately considered and ensured.

Further finding of the study suggests that students seem to be encouraged to strive for university degrees, yet the quality of education provided are of less standard. This finding coincides with the report of the Association of African Universities (2008) and work of Odhiambo (2011) who conducted a similar study using Kenya and submitted that the level of quality provided in tertiary institutions in Africa is of major concern and there is need to reconsider such. The quality comes in various forms such as the language adopted for medium of instruction, policies and measures put in place to motivate students.

Surmise therefore to state that the findings of the study suggest that several learning challenges experienced by students in the selected university are as a result of the type of quality put in place by education providers. This quality is viewed from various perspectives such as: language of instruction, type and volume of assignments, availability of basic learning materials, gate keeping measures, among others (Phenny 2006).

CONCLUSION

Students are given the opportunity to enroll for different degrees, however, the materials, structures, manpower, facilities and guidance needed to enable them to finish in record time are not made available. This affects the students negatively and constitutes participatory access. The host nation is also affected in different ways. These includes societal underdevelopment, unemployment, slavery, high crime rates, increased drop-out rates, poor academic performance, poverty, among others. Hence, the following recommendations are proposed to help ameliorate the hazards caused by participatory access to education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ The previous knowledge of students should be taken into consideration before they are admitted to pursue any degree in the higher institution of learning. This will enable the students to have adequate

knowledge and proper foundation on their choice of course.

- ◆ Higher institutions of learning should be left in the care of individuals who understand the worth and are able to pilot the affairs of the institutions towards achieving national success. Individuals who consider institutions of learning as a money making venture should be discouraged from owning any. However, the government should strive not to politicize institutions of learning.
- ◆ Proper monitoring should be put in place in order to ensure that institutions of learning provide relevant services that are expected of them.
- ◆ Policies on language of instruction, pedagogy, inclusion of technology and other facilities that will help facilitate teaching and learning processes should be carefully considered and put in place.
- ◆ Adequate structures should be made available for both lecturers and students. This will enhance teaching and learning processes.
- ◆ Career counselors and other student service providers should be put in place to assist students in achieving academic success. These student service providers and counselors should be saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that they help motivate students in achieving their goals.

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