

sources effectively, rather than pursue shortcuts to improve their rankings.

THE QUEST FOR QUALITY REGIMES

The global market place for higher education is exploding with a plethora of new and old, bona fide and dubious players and providers. Accordingly, the scope, mode, platform, and practices of educational delivery have diversified tremendously, increasingly necessitating the need for a reliable—and trustworthy—quality regimes.

As a consequence, numerous quality agencies are being established at the national and regional levels. For instance, more than half of the African countries now have national authorities regulating higher education quality—with various levels of effectiveness. As the higher education sector continues to diversify, there is a great need for such entities at the global level. The ranking agencies are supposed to be these gate keepers of quality at the global level; but they have so far not lived up to that expectation.

Over a year ago, I received a phone call from a vice-chancellor at a university in South Africa who suggested coordinating a withdrawal from the rankings by the country's institutions. The proposal was to encourage all universities in the country to refuse to participate and instead to dedicate all their resources, energy, and time to more relevant concerns. Rhoades, one of the premier universities in South Africa, already refuses to participate in the rankings, so a precedent exists.

An international roundtable on rankings, supported by the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia, took place in May 2017 in Vancouver. The roundtable deliberated on the scope and significance of university rankings and proposed concrete actions and interventions on the issue in the future.

CONCLUSION

According to *THE*, “the reputation league table is based on nothing more than subjective judgment.” QS also states that 60 percent of its scores are dependent on reputation, and are thus subjective. What is depressingly astonishing, however, is how seriously the world of higher education (and beyond) takes these self-serving businesses, which use defective and flawed instruments year in and year out.

Rankings will not be disappearing anytime soon. In fact, as additional rankings join the fray, they are more likely to generate more buzz to insure their survival and influence. But it is not inconceivable that the proliferation of these rankers may be the beginning of the end of their huge influence—as institutions pick and choose particular rankers which presents them in a favorable manner. In the end, institutions at the very top and the massive bottom of the

rankings will continue to watch the ritual from the sidelines, while the tempest continues undeterred in the rankings teapot.

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Research: The “Lost Mission” of African Universities

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The first universities in Africa were established with the triple mission of teaching, research, and community engagement. However, between the early 1970s and 2000, teaching became the only de facto mission of many of these African universities. Yet, many university leaders hold the mistaken notion that their universities have always been research universities. It is only over the last decade that the research mission has emerged again as a key vision of African universities.

In colonial times, the British government set up several commissions to explore the need for higher education in British colonial Africa. Among eight well known commissions and advisory bodies established during the colonial era (from the Madden Commission in 1841 to the Asquith Commission in 1945), it is worth noting that the Channon Commission (1943) was the first to mention the need for future universities in the British colonies to include research as a core function. Thus, research became part of the mission of universities that were later established by the colonial and national governments.

Since the establishment of universities in British colonial Africa in the late 1940s, several conferences have been held to discuss the notion of the African university and its mission. These meetings brought together key stakeholders in higher education across Africa and assessed the role and relevance of universities at each period of their history. Of the four main conferences held before 2000 (Addis Ababa Conference, 1961; Tananarive Conference, 1962; Accra Workshop, 1972, and Tananarive Conference, 1980), it was only the 1962 conference that strongly emphasized research as a key mission of African universities.

Years after these national universities were founded, most governments in their respective countries were overthrown. Military governments interfered with the administration of universities by appointing their political affili-

ates to positions of authority, and in some cases instructing heads of universities on how the universities should be managed. Although universities had the desire to carry out research, they lacked the necessary funding, a critical mass of researchers, and infrastructure to carry out research.

WHEN RESEARCH BECAME A “LOST MISSION”

When African universities were established, they were expected to know what research was about and to make their findings available to the government and society, helping to tackle societal and development problems. However, the years after independence saw a lot of government involvement in the management of the universities. Those governments did not pursue the research agenda of the universities, but rather furthered their nationalistic views of how universities should be run. In that period, the research mission of these universities became “lost”: many African universities and their governments did not see research as a priority, which resulted in a very low research output. Postgraduate research was virtually nonexistent. Universities only carried out their mandate of developing human resources for the country. Between 1960 and 2000—the period of the “lost research mission”—African universities were labelled, among others, “teaching,” “vocational,” and then “developmental.” During that period, they were never known as “research universities.”

Evidence of this “lost research mission” period can be found in the low research output of the continent during that period. Data from the Thomson Reuters WoS-Science citation index (SCI) shows that Africa, excluding South Africa, produced 1,646 publications between 1985 and 2000 and 5,534 publications between 2000 and 2015 within the sciences. These numbers fall well below the total global scientific output for the same period, of 44,963,737 (mostly from Europe and the United States). In addition, during the period of the “lost research mission,” the ratio of gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) to gross domestic product (GDP) of all African countries excluding South Africa was less than 0.2 percent—and nonexistent in most African countries.

During this “lost research mission” phase, many African universities were mandated by their national governments to train skilled workers including health assistants, secretaries, and both engineering technicians and engineers. In addition, researchers were mostly interested in research that would facilitate their promotion within the university—with fewer publications needed to be promoted. Outcomes of research carried out at the universities were hardly disseminated to the public and, in some cases, were kept confidential. Anecdotal evidence suggests that universities were also under siege from dictatorial governments that did not like researchers publishing anything contrary

to the official standpoint. This authoritarian tendency forced universities to focus on knowledge for its own sake.

REGAINING THE “RESEARCH MISSION”

Since 2000, African universities have shifted policies and now embrace global changes in their missions. The advent of university rankings, internationalization, and the issue of massification have all prompted university administrators and national governments to reconsider the “lost” research mission. For instance, in defining its new mission, the University of Ghana (UG) stated that, “It would aspire to move closer to some of the world-renowned universities who have achieved world-class status through cutting edge research” (UG, 2012).

Since 2004, universities have begun to invest more effort into research and publishing in international journals. Postgraduate studies have also been enhanced, especially at the masters’ and doctoral levels, by recruiting more professors to undertake the supervision of research graduates and by establishing laboratories.

Due to periods of military dictatorship, research at African universities lagged for four decades.

To improve their research output, most universities have also established offices of research and development and schools or faculties of research and graduate studies. Offices of R&D are very new to most universities, and mainly found at flagship universities, such as UG or the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. The belief is that these research offices will increase the focus of the university’s research, improve the quality of research, and attract funding. The task of these offices is also to help foster and improve relations with other research institutions and with donors in the West.

The new research mission of African universities has forced them to develop policies to guide them through the process of improving their research effort. In addition, universities have also developed research ethics and general research guidelines for their academic and research staff.

CONCLUSION

Due to periods of military dictatorship, research at African universities lagged for four decades, while great progress was achieved at counterpart universities in Europe, the United States, and selected Asian countries. This has

contributed to a low classification of most African universities in international rankings. To establish themselves as research universities, African universities will need to overcome enormous challenges, including lack of funding; inadequate training of their research staff; lack of appropriate structures for research evaluation; and a need to ensure research accountability, which is presently nonexistent.

In addition, African universities need to define what university research is, and what form of research (basic and applied) they want to prioritize, in order to meet their research mission. Research findings should benefit their respective national governments and communities and contribute to development and the knowledge economy.

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India: World-Class Universities?

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Not long ago, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee declared, “If we provide enough funds to 10 to 15 top institutions for the next four to five years, these institutions will certainly storm into the top 100 of global academic rankings within the next few years.” Late in 2016, the ministry of human resource development issued a series of draft guidelines and regulations to create 20 World-Class Universities—10 public and 10 private. Unfortunately, this laudable goal will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in the short or medium run. Why?

INDIA’S HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

India’s higher education and research sectors have for decades been generally underfunded, especially in view of the tremendous growth in numbers of students. Compared to the other BRIC countries, the percentage spent on education, 4.1 percent of GDP, is second to Brazil. But in terms of research expenditures, India is at the bottom, with only 0.8 percent of GDP. And India educates at the postsecondary level the lowest percent of the relevant age group among the BRICs. Although India now has the second largest higher education system in the world, following China, the pressures for expansion to meet both public demand and the government’s own targets are immense.

The higher education system is poorly organized to create world-class universities. None of India’s state governments seem to have an ambitious vision for the development of world-class institutions at the state level, and none provides funding for higher education that is adequate to main high standards of quality. The central universities are better funded and do not have the immense, and globally unique, responsibility for supervising India’s 36,000 colleges that the state universities have.

In the past, when India wanted to create new and innovative higher education institutions, entirely new schools were started—such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, the Indian Institutes of Management, and a few others. Indian planners did not want to grapple with the seemingly insurmountable governance problems of the existing universities. Indian regulations stipulate that eligible universities should have around 20,000 students. While international data shows that most world-class universities have around this number, many do not, and this guideline would eliminate the IITs—arguably the only Indian institutions with the spirit and governance that might permit rapid advancement.

Creating world-class universities requires careful thought, planning, and quite considerable funding over the long run. If recognition in the global rankings is a goal, the challenges are even greater because the rankings are a moving target, and the competition is fierce. For example, the Russian government is funding an initiative with the goal of five Russian universities entering the top 100 by 2020. More than US\$400 million is being given each year to 15 top universities. Japan recently started its Super Global Universities Project. China continues to spend heavily on its top universities, two of which have made it into the top 100 of the Shanghai ranking for the first time. India is very much a latecomer to the world-class party, and will not be spending enough to make much headway. Funding will be 500 crores of rupees (around US\$75 million) over a year period—or perhaps 5 crores (about US\$1 million) annually for each institution if funds are uniformly distributed. These amounts are entirely inadequate to make much of a difference.

A WORLD-CLASS BLUEPRINT

We analyzed the experiences of ten new universities that have achieved considerable success in our book, *The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World-Class Research Universities* (World Bank, 2011). We found that all share some common characteristics. The following list provides necessary but perhaps not sufficient conditions for building successful top level research universities.