

SECTION V

Public and Private Universities in Comparative Perspective



The Public and Private Universities in Perspective

Introduction

The chapter provides us some key governance issues as they relate to the universities covered in the study. It examines similarities and dissimilarities as they deal with the mandates and objectives of the institutions; and also with the vexed matter of public to private goods syndrome within the higher education landscape in Ghana.

Mandates and Missions

The public universities in Ghana have been established with definite mandates to meet various development needs of the country. The epochal contexts within which specific public universities were established largely determined the couching of their mandates. For the public universities, their respective mandates are spelt out in the laws (Ordinances, Acts of Parliament or Decrees) that established them. The mandates are indicated to give direction to the specific roles each of the public universities is to play in the country's development agenda. The pathways for the realisation of the mandates of the public universities are normally reflected in the content and the principles of their respective statutes; and in recent times, this is also evident in their respective strategic plans. The founding of the public universities actually spans the colonial to the postcolonial periods. This, therefore, put us in a position to situate the respective mandates within the framework of how the demands of the period influenced the framing of the content of the laws.

Even though the setting up of the private universities has not been based on any specific Acts of Parliament or Decrees, the objectives for joining the ranks of higher education are usually captured in the specific institutional constitutions, statutes and strategic plans that are purposed to address the voids they seek to remediate. It is important to reiterate that the private universities in Ghana are products of the late 20th century and the early 21st century neoliberal environment, which is palpably different from the state-centric environment in which the first public universities – University of Ghana, KNUST and the UCC – were, established (Gasu 2011a). The temporal differentials somewhat presented a new scope of global circumstances, which demanded the posing of a different set of questions pertaining to the expected roles of higher education and how that was to be realised. We will now turn to an analysis of the governance systems of the respective universities, as has been determined by the mandates the institutions had been assigned.

The Public Universities and their Mandates

The four public universities were set up with mandates to meet specified national development needs. Between the founding of University of Ghana, in 1948, and that of the University for Development Studies, in 1992, Ghana as a country had stepped through several development challenges that required institutional responses for human resources development. The various universities were established on the conviction that their specialised fields of focus would serve as channels for a holistic human capital building for the tasks of national development.

The University of Ghana, when it was established as an affiliated institution under the University of London, was intended to address the paucity of human resources in the administrative set up of the colonial state that was on the threshold of independence. The focus, therefore, was to train administrators with a liberal philosophy that was modelled along the traditions of metropolitan Britain. In the Colonial Ordinance that established the University College of the Gold Coast (University of Ghana), it was simply put that the institution was set up for the ‘purpose of providing for and promoting university education, learning and research.’ However, the content of the programmes and the inculturation within the institution, at the time, became a problematic issue for the nationalist government, under Kwame Nkrumah, that came to power in 1951. This subsequently called for the interrogation of the extrinsic relevance of the contents of the courses that were rolled out in the University to the Ghanaian and African situation. The polemics that emerged regarding the extrinsic value

of the programmes of the institution became a protracted issue, till they were supposed to be resolved in 1961; under Act 79 that weaned the institution off the University of London mentorship.

Thence, a vigorous effort at indigenising the critical academic and administrative staff went along with refocusing the content of programmes that reflected the African situation became a major concern (Adesina 2006; Agbodeka 1998). As a higher education institution in a newly independent African country, premium was placed on enhancing the contribution of the University towards teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge that met the aspirations of both nation building and the unity of the continent. As enshrined in the University of Ghana (1961) Act 79, the mandate was not only to deal with the Ghanaian situation but to reflect the pioneering and the frontal decolonisation role of Kwame Nkrumah's pan-African agenda.

Similar, scenarios did also play out in the KNUST. The Colonial Ordinance of 6 October 1951, which set up the Kumasi College of Technology (the antecedence of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology), charged the institution with a mandate to train graduates for the scientific and technological development of the country. But the nationalist government under Nkrumah, again, found the mandate too broad to address the specific concerns of the Ghanaian and African situation. And with a similar institutional mentorship arrangement as that of the University of Ghana, which placed both institutions under the University of London, the umbrage that was exhibited towards the content and relevance of the courses to the Africa situation became the portion of the University in Kumasi to bear, as well. Consequently, a similar approach was adopted in dealing with the concerns of the government towards making the institution relevant to the Ghanaian and African development situation. Again, the promotion of the academic and research activities of the University toward the continent's unification was made a critical factor in the new legislation that underpinned the mandate of the institution, namely Parliamentary Act 80 of 1961. An accelerated indigenisation policy for the critical academic and administrative staff of the two chartered universities was rolled out for the purpose of actualising the significance of the programmes to the local situation.

While a conscious effort was made to enhance the local content of the programmes, the governance structure and the received culture remained largely unaffected. The governance structures and the accompanying culture were defended as the bastion for academic quality assurance. The leverage which institutional autonomy provided and the latitude that academic freedom guaranteed were to be ensured in order not to diminish the status of higher education as the citadel

of academic excellence. However, in the emerging situation it was sensed that the zealotry of the nationalist government to reshape the universities was creating an eccentric path for governmental interference and scenarios for governmental tele-guiding of the internal workings in the University of Ghana and the KNUST. As this situation conflicted with the traditional liberal notions of academic quality assurance in higher education governance, divisions in opinion regarding the scale of governmental involvement in the corporate governance of the public universities emerged. The dividing line was mainly between those who defended the status quo of minimalism in governmental direction of the universities, and the advocates of state extensionist view as postulated by the nationalists.

The argument from those who adopted the posture of state extensionism was that the stultifying effects of colonialism and the circumstances in the newly independent states like Ghana were such that the intellectual and research outputs of the higher education institutions should feed directly into the national development agenda. The universities in Ghana, as were conceived in the newly independent African states like Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya, among others, were to be essentially developmental universities, with intellectual outputs that connect with the programmes of the state (Mamdani 2008; Adesina 2006). This was typified by the examples of universities of Dar es Salaam and of Ibadan. Parallelism in the efforts of the state and higher education was to be discouraged; as they were construed as wastage of scarce public resources. Given this plausible argument, whether the public universities could effectively execute their respective tasks within the framework of intrusive governmental control, remained a nagging issue.

At the centre of the ensuing debates were the traditional liberal notions of higher education autonomy and the cultural correlate of academic freedom. These were the tenets upon which the colonial higher education projects were built and the culture that legitimated their existence. But the waning of liberal democratic culture in the national political system and the rise of political monolithism in the immediate postcolonial period only created doubts about the real intents of the government. The intrusive role of the Interim University Councils gave credence to the notion that given the chance the universities were to become sheer propaganda tools of the government. Such governance approach belied the postulate of the nationalists that they seek to enhance the extrinsic value of institutions of higher education in the country. It must be said, though, that the mistrust that had existed, among the principal stakeholders, about the appropriate role of the state in the governance system for the existing two universities was ideologically driven.

The eagerness of the nationalist government of Kwame Nkrumah to reshape the universities to fit into the immediate developmental needs of the country and

the African unification agenda brought his government into endless altercations with the advocates of the liberal mission of these institutions. As pointed out in chapter 4, the Colonial Governor had restrained Nkrumah from pulling the University College of the Gold Coast (University of Ghana) out of the mentorship arrangement with the University of London. The attainment of independence, in 1957, created an opportunity for Nkrumah's government to become more assertive in redefining the mandate of the two existing universities, especially as the halting influence of the Colonial Governors were removed upon the attainment of republican status in 1960.

The first real opportunity for setting up of a higher education institution that was to capture the essentials of the Ghanaian situation was through the establishment of the University of Cape Coast, in 1962. The University of Cape Coast was established with the basic objective of training teachers in the sciences and general arts. The institution was to fill the obvious gap that had existed in churning out professional teachers for second cycle schools. The schools at the secondary level play a critical intermediary role in linking basic schools to the universities. The understanding of the government, at the time, was that the efforts at enhancing the capacity of human resources through university education would be thwarted if the pedagogical skills for knowledge transmission at the secondary level were inefficient.

Whereas the recognition for the training of teachers for secondary schools was the pivotal issue for the establishment of the University of Cape Coast, it was also a matter of concern that that objective would be lost if the institution was left to clone professionals that were alienated from their Ghanaian cultural roots. The scepticism of the government about the mission of the colonial higher education projects in the country was still alive. In line with the existing ongoing domestication processes, the University was placed under the tutelage of the University of Ghana. This was the case, notwithstanding the fact that protestations from within and without the University of Cape Coast that the institution would best be served if it was placed under the University of London (Agbodeka, 1998). Doing so would have been a negation of the very anti-colonial stance that the government had taken in respect to the governance of the universities. Not even a change in government after the military putsch, which dislodged Nkrumah's government in February 1966, did affect the *status quo*. As had been pointed out in chapter 6 of this volume, it was not until 1971 that full autonomy was eventually granted the University of Cape Coast.

Even though it was the government's expectation that the governance structure of the UCC should be different from those of the earlier universities, that effort

failed largely because there was no indigenous higher education system to serve as a model aside from what had been inherited from the colonial projects. Thus, even though the UCC did not come under direct mentorship of the metropolitan universities, its tutelage under University of Ghana turned out to produce enculturation of the very institutional values that were thought to be the universal foundations for higher education. It is in this sense that we find similarity in the governance structure of the first three public universities and the cultures in which their operations are legitimated.

Nonetheless, the 30 years' time lapse between the establishment of the University of Cape Coast in 1962 and the University for Development Studies in 1992 was significant in many ways. Firstly, the initial governmental suspicions that the universities were instruments for mental re-colonization had substantially reduced. The futility of corporate governance redesign for the University of Cape Coast was also very much in evidence. And by 1992 the socioeconomic arrangement that placed the state at the centre of the public space had substantially waned, as a result of the global neoliberal wave. The country's population was also fatigued by the unmitigated autocratic control that had pitted the state against higher education in the existing power matrix. In a word, Ghana was on the verge of returning to another liberal democratic experiment that has coincidentally worked quite well since.

The biting effects of economic failure and the commercialisation of social products in the emerging market economy brought to the fore the issue of uneven spread of the benefits and costs of the economic policies pursued in the interregnum. As the distribution of the benefits and costs tendentiously mimicked the colonial spatial development pattern, especially to the disadvantage of northern Ghana, the UDS was set up with the aim of contributing towards the bridging of the north-south development gap in Ghana. The legal framework of the University as was framed in the PNDCL 279 lucidly spells out this mandate with such a passion that makes it appear that the institution was regional in nature. The conviction of the state-managers regarding its adherence to the mission was so strong that the University from the very onset was established as a chartered institution of higher education. This was the first time that a public university in Ghana started without it being placed under any direct mentorship arrangement with any existing university. Clearly, this stance was born out of the belief that placing it under an existing university would contaminate its mission, towards what was perceived as the inadequacies of the existing public universities. The American Land Grant University philosophy upon which the UDS was set up, as pointed out in chapter 7, in theory provided the institution the latitude to shift to the

American corporate governance system. However, the governance structure of the UDS follows the traditional British system. This has been the case largely because the members of the Task Force that was assigned the responsibility of putting together the framework for the establishment of the University were drawn from the existing universities they could only offer what they were familiar with.

As had been alluded, the UDS came into being in the era when the power contest between the state and higher education had taken new dimension. The experiences of the past have produced a learning curve that somehow settled that paranoiac relationship that had existed between state managers and the universities. It was realised that the interest of the government could still be served if higher education was given space to engage in a dialogical relationship with government on matters of mutual interest. It is in this sense that under the 1992 constitution, the Head of State was removed from assuming the position of Chancellor of public universities. This is not to suggest that governments have absolutely ceded their influence on the workings within the universities. The intercessory roles that the NCTE, the NAB and Vice Chancellors Ghana (VCG) played have helped in reducing the tensions between state managers and the universities. The roles of these bodies are to ensure that the public universities do not pursue objectives that are not inconsistent with those of the state.

Having indicated that, it is also important to recollect that the 1990s marked the transition from the antecedent situation of full state-sponsorship of higher education to the phenomena of fee paying arrangements as it is today. For the public universities specifically, that meant the adoption of new governance cultures and leadership capacities for the corporatisation of higher education. In practice it meant the transfusion of the ethics of commercialisation of the products that the universities offer. The Psacharopoulos' calculus of the rates of return for higher education that is said to convey private benefits and for which the individual consumer must pay for, had come into effect in Ghana through the fee payment recommendations of the URC.

The dialectical clash of ideas that became inevitable between the consumers of higher education products on the one hand and the providers of such services on the other hand, created instability for the leadership of university education in Ghana; especially as students through the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) resisted the imposition of fees. The instability that emerged was quite crippling on the leadership of the public universities as the integrity of academic calendars could not be guaranteed. However, this transition phase was short-lived as it dawned on all the stakeholders that the *status quo ante* could not hold in the face of global trends. The payment of fees has thence become part of corporatised

effort for fund mobilisation in the public universities, with many programmes being offered on purely commercial lines. As public universities adopted this line of mobilisation of funds, concerns have been raised about its implications for quality service delivery. Some of the reasons adduced by lecturers that engage in sandwich, parallel and weekend programmes point to the fact that research and publication tends to be sacrificed for economic gains from these moonlighting activities. These are problems the leadership of these institutions must deal with as they aspire for their institutions to be visible in the knowledge economy.

Private Universities' Mandates

The de-monopolisation of establishing higher education has created the space for private operators with Smithian market instinct to take advantage of the situation to set up institutions for the large unabsorbed qualified school leavers. The VVU and the CUCG are just two examples of a large number of private universities currently operating in Ghana. These two universities were established by two Christian religious organisations. It is clear from the strategic missions of the two universities that they have the objective of remedying the moral turpitude that they perceive exists among Ghanaian youth, even as they achieve higher education. Both institutions seem to carry prelatric messages to the lecture halls; which is to suggest that academic scholarship without religious ethics was degeneracy. In the governance system of both universities, therefore, we find an admixture of religious concerns and the secular scholastic demands for higher education.

The missions of the two institutions are consequently replete with moral/ethical objectives they seek to realise. It is clearly indicated by the two faith-based universities that humankind can only be of good service to society if they are driven towards the realisation of Augustinian vision. The role of their respective Departments of Religious Studies programmes is instrumental in their quest to offer a new dimension to higher education scholarship. While the institutions were established to enhance the moral standards of their graduates, the apparent contradiction in their stance is that the commoditisation of their services indeed debars access to the poor, who may need that moral rectification as well. The challenge the leadership of the private universities face is how to cut cost through extensive teaching tasks of lecturers and yet expect the same overused staff to engage in robust research and publication activities. That balance, it appears, has not been found yet as the publication profiles of the lecturers have shown in the respective chapters above.

From Public to Private Goods Syndrome

It is discussed quite extensively that higher education in Ghana, and the rest of Africa, were established at the time when graduates of the universities were considered to be of high social and economic benefit to the society (Ochwa-Echell 2013). The state, therefore, took social responsibility of creating and providing higher education services as public goods for all that qualified (Mamdani 2006). The responsibility the state assumed in paying the costs for training the human resources was, therefore, construed as the avenue for state control of the internal workings of the universities.

As indicated, the ability of the state to bear the responsibilities of the universities in Ghana began to diminish as the economy slumped in the 1970s. The ramifications of the ill-performing economy were far reaching; the political system became unstable and with a restive population. The loss of the state's fiscal capacity to continue ensuring higher education as a public good laid the basis for students' riotousness and interruptions in academic calendars up to the 1990s. The leaders of the universities hardly had an antidote to the riotous students that sought to undo the imperative of redefining higher education a private good through institutionalisation of fee payments.

The resistance to commercialisation of academic programmes in public universities could not be carried for too long, as the global reality is one that has come to largely accept private good conception of higher education. The stoppage of the students' riots could only be done through the repressiveness of the state; and not through the ability of the university leadership to resolve the matters themselves with the students.

With the corporatisation of the public universities, the governance systems between public and private institutions have become blurred. This has sparked a turf war between the public and private universities in the marketplace for sandwich and parallel programmes. The consequences of such accumulation drives are well shown in the mediocre scholarly publications across board. Yet both the public and private universities have isomorphic visions of becoming world class higher education institutions. The leadership in both the public and private institutions has not demonstrated adequately that they make their respective institutions active participants in the knowledge economy.

