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## The Paradox of Curriculum Innovation and Implementation in a Liberalized Higher Education System in Uganda: A Challenge to Makerere University.

### Abstract

Due to economic liberalization policies in Uganda, higher education has been democratised. As a result, private universities which compete with Makerere in terms of places and quality of courses are being established. However, Makerere being the oldest and well established university has more students applying for self-sponsorship.

Accordingly, the number of private students has increased to about 14,000 a year. Therefore due to pressures of social demand and economic liberalisation, Makerere University continues to accept more students. This paper will examine how Makerere University has responded in carrying out curriculum innovation and implementation strategies to meet the rapidly increasing student population and market demands. Curriculum innovation in this paper will be considered as a process whereby Makerere University designs new courses and redesigns the old ones so that graduates can compete favourably for the job markets. Implementation is the way the designed and redesigned courses are being taught to the students by the lecturers. Our argument is that the success of liberalisation in Makerere University will depend on the designing, redesigning and implementing of the courses to meet the changing job market.

### Introduction

Economic liberalization policies in Uganda were introduced after having been recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank under the facility called Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). SAPs are policy reform strategies designed to reduce the role of the public state sector vis-a-vis the private business sector in the management of the economy. Accordingly, all forms of state controls and subsidies must be dissolved; Uganda must fully liberalize its economies, privatize state owned enterprises, implement retrenchment in the public services and pursue cost-sharing and private or self sponsored programmes in the state owned tertiary institutions, (Kiiza, 1997). As a result, the Education Policy Review

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I am an outgoing person who likes to see people out of the bondage of poverty through conscientization of the underprivileged. I like action related activities and hate all the activities and people who seek self actualization by trampling on other peoples rights and obligations.

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Commission (EPRC) (1989) recommended cost-sharing in tertiary institutions. According to the EPRC, "students and their parents should assume full responsibility for meeting all non-instructional expenses such as the cost of transportation to and from their homes, pocket money, feeding and dependants' allowances". (EPRC, 1989:89). With this recommendation, expenditure was shifted from higher to primary education so resulting in the introduction of Universal Primary Education, (UPE).

In response to the IMF and EPRC recommendations, the government introduced cost-sharing in Makerere University in 1990/91 academic year. All pocket allowances were abolished. Students took full responsibility of stationery and books. The university set up a book bank scheme under which students would borrow reference materials to read and supplement what they have learnt in the lectures. Every newly admitted student had to pay a registration fee of 50,000 Ushs to the university. The university started only meeting the expenses of feeding, accomodation and teaching the students. Thus, with this approach, the students and their parents or guardians were sharing the cost of their education with the government.

In 1995, Makerere University introduced private sponsorship scheme, also called self-sponsorship in addition to cost-sharing. Privately sponsored students have to meet all the university requirements on their own. In other words, unlike those on cost-sharing scheme the privately sponsored students have no kind of financial or material assistance offered to them by the government. In addition to the registration fee of 50,000 Ushs, the privately sponsored students have to pay fees, the amount of which depends on the nature and type of the course being offered in the particular institute, faculty or school. Unlike undergraduate students who are either on cost-sharing or self-sponsorship scheme, all postgraduate students are self sponsored. Before the introduction of cost-sharing and self-sponsorship, the university could take only a limited number of students out of those who qualified to join after doing 'A' level or mature age entrance examinations. This was due to the fact that the government could not meet the cost of all the students who qualified. In addition, the university had limited resources to cater for all the students who qualified. Thus, selection for entry to the university purely depended on the strength of the mark the student scored after sitting 'A' level or mature age entry examination. In other words the higher a student scores in these examinations, the higher the chances of being admitted to the university.

In spite of the introduction of cost-sharing and self-sponsorship, selection and entry into the university depend entirely on the strength of the student's score at 'A' level or mature age entry examinations. The higher the student's score, the higher the chances of being admitted on government sponsorship. In this case the student will be on cost-sharing scheme. Those who qualify to join the university but do not attain the required grade to be admitted on government

sponsorship are the majority. They are free to apply and be admitted on private-sponsorship scheme.

As a result, entry into Makerere University for any course is revolving around two issues, that is "qualifications" and "ability to pay". With democratisation of higher education, economic liberalisation policies and the ever increasing demand for higher education particularly in Makerere University a lot of students apply to join on private sponsorship. According to Gashishiri, (2002), "Makerere University is a dream land for every school going Ugandan. A parent's prayer is that her child makes it to the hill, gets out with a degree and leave the rest to fate. Many people still think that a University education especially that at Makerere is a prerequisite to the good life". For example, the New Vision of 15th July, 2002, reported that the number of private students has increased from last year's 10,000 to 14,000. Caught up between the pressures of social demands on one hand and of economic liberalisation policies on the other, Makerere University continues to accept more students than before but the facilities have not necessarily been improved accordingly. It is now common to find more than 150 students in a lecture room with a capacity of 100. Lecturers have more students and more teaching hours, (Kasirye, 1999). This paper will examine how Makerere University has responded with quite radical attempts to carry out curriculum innovation and implementation strategies so that it moves in line with the rapidly increased student population and in the light of economic liberalization policies. More focus will be on curriculum innovation and implementation at undergraduate level although in some cases, postgraduate level will be mentioned. The paper is divided into four sections namely:

- (i) Curriculum innovation in the light of Economic Liberalization Policies.
- ii) Curriculum implementation in light of increased number of students.
- iii) Examination setting processing and certification in light of increased student enrolment.
- iv) Summary, Conclusions and Suggestions.

#### Curriculum Innovation In the light of Increased Number of Students and Economic Liberalization Policies.

To cope with the increased number of students applying and being admitted on one hand and compete favourably for the available job market on the other, a lot of restructuring has taken place in Makerere University. Many institutes and departments have been established from the existing faculties and schools. With the exception of the Faculty of Forestry and Nature Conservation established from the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, no new ones have been formed. In addition, only one school has been formed, that is school of Postgraduate Studies whose major function is handling postgraduate

students in terms of registering but not teaching or supervising them.

As far as institutes are concerned, many of them have been established. For example Institute of Psychology from the school of Education, Institute of Languages from the Faculty of Arts, Institute of Economics from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Environmental Science and Natural Resources and Institute of computer Science from the Faculty of Science. The Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) has been elevated to an Institute of Adult and Continuing Education. (I.C.A.E) formerly, Makerere University had four institutes namely Institute of Public Health attached to the School of Medicine, Kabanyolo Agricultural Research Institute attached to the former Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics attached to the Faculty of Science and the Makerere Institute of Social Research which is independent. The Faculty of Commerce has been merged with National College of Business Studies, Nakawa and elevated to Makerere University Business School. It has been shifted from Makerere to Nakawa Campus. Within these institutes, faculties and schools, establishment of new departments is more or less a continuous process.

Various new courses have been designed and old ones restructured within the departments, institutes, faculties and schools. For example, the Faculty of Arts which used to offer only one degree at undergraduate level, that is Bachelor of Arts, is now offering nine degrees. The former Faculty of Commerce, now Makerere Business School used to offer only Bachelor of Commerce degree but is now offering ten degrees and various diploma courses, (Academic Registrar's Office, 2002). Most, if not all the designed courses are geared towards the demand in the available job market. Although this is a healthy innovation, it has its negative side effects. For example, some departments, institutes, faculties and schools with courses whose demand in the job market is limited or not there at all, have ended up having fewer or no students at all, while those with high expectations of job market have so many students applying to join them. According to Gimuguni, (2000), the increase in students at all levels has been attributed to high social demand for higher education due to the quest for success in life attached to attaining of higher education, leading to a lucrative job. This has resulted into what we may call "popular and unpopular" courses at Makerere University. Lecturers which have popular courses are having it rough especially when it comes to teaching and marking because the students are too many. Although it may not be easy to prove, lectures of popular courses are at an advantage over those with unpopular ones. Those with popular courses have chances of getting more or extra pay in addition to their salary than those with unpopular ones. Such a situation may create some envy among the lecturers. In addition, we should note that one of the major functions of the university is to preserve worthwhile knowledge. Acquiring such knowledge may not necessarily be geared towards the available job market. This implies

that courses which have such knowledge are unpopular and may eventually be extinct as a result of economic liberalization policies!! However, departments within institutes, faculties or schools which have unpopular courses have tried to overcome the problem by redesigning their courses and designing new ones which are market oriented. Unfortunately this measure might end up creating some problems. Such institutes, faculties or schools might end up designing courses which are not suitable for them. For example a course which deals with environmental management issues should have been better designed by the Institute of Environment and Natural Resources, but you might find that it is designed by another faculty altogether". When it comes to teaching the same faculty which designed such a course goes to "hire" the lecturers from another institute or faculty. Surely does it make sense to design a course which you can't teach properly and confidently? Such a scenario might also be taking place at postgraduate level whereby a masters or Ph.D. course is designed but the lecturers handling the students did not specialize in the masters or Ph.D. course they are teaching. Matters become worse when the number of students admitted for such a masters or PhD course is so big. When will such a lecturer get the time to supervise the big number of postgraduate students, moreover in a course where himself/herself did not specialise in during his/her training? May be this is why Karamagi (2002) sums it as follows, "Makerere must now strike a balance between upholding her integrity as an academic institution of repute and a commercial concern whose priority is money, money and more money". (The New Vision, Thursday, 7th November, 20002). Curriculum Implementation In Light of Increased Number of Students.

As noted earlier, some institutes, faculties and schools have courses which are popular such that they have very large numbers of students. Most affected are the Institute of Economics, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Social Sciences, Makerere University Business School, and the School of Education where the author of this paper happens to be teaching. As the number of students admitted in Makerere University increases, so also should be the number of new buildings equipment for classrooms, offices, libraries and laboratories, but unfortunately this has not been the case. Gashishiri, (2002) commented in the Monitor as follows:

The Faculty of Arts for example has over 20,000 students registered to attend lecturers in the quadrangle. Initially this enclosure was meant to handle about 6,000 students. To see that today it handles five times more than this is a sorry state" (The Monitor, Monday, 19th August, 2002)."

While Karamagi, (2002) commented as follows in the New Vision; "While the physical facilities and the human resources at Makerere have not been significantly increased, the number of new courses introduced is amazing". (The New Vision, Thursday 17th November, 2002). The Monitor (2002) quoted one of the university registrar, that

"according to their priorities, accomodation is not an issue, this should not be a problem as long as it does not affect the education process. Our chief priority is giving information to the students". (The Monitor, 19th August, 2002). This seems to imply that how and under what conditions this information has been given or whether the information has been properly understood by the students is not a big deal to the university.

Despite the increased number of students, Makerere has tried its level best to adjust accordingly so as to solve the problems of lack of space. For example in some cases lecturers use their offices as lecture rooms during certain hours. Available spaces in buildings have been turned into lecture halls. Some dining halls in students' halls of residences qualify to be ones only during the night and meal times, beyond that time they are permanently turned into "lecture halls". In the School of Education, undergraduate students are first divided into day and evening groups. The day group contains students who are on cost-sharing and private sponsorship scheme while all the evening group of students are on private sponsorship scheme. Then the day group of students is further divided into groups 1 and 2 while the evening group of students is divided into group X, Y and Z. This implies in some cases, a lecturer teaching students a particular course unit in a particular year, has to repeat the same lecture five times in order to cover all the five groups namely 1, 2, X, Y and Z at different times and days in a week. Each group has at least 250 students. The day group starts lectures from 8:00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m, everyday from Monday up to Saturday, while the "evening group" starts from 2.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. Therefore the evening group is in theory but not in practice because evening hours have never started as early as 2.00 p.m.

When it comes to giving lectures, it is a challenge to both the lecturers and the students. Due to increased number of students, the learning process in some of the institutes, faculties and schools is purely teacher-centred. In most cases, if not all, the chalkboard, chalk, lecture notes and the lecturer himself or herself are the only teaching aids.

Despite the fact that tutorials is an important component of the teaching process at university level, it is nearly becoming extinct in Makerere. This could be due to lack of space or tutorial groups are too large for effective teacher-student interaction. According to Gashiriri, (2002), "the situation at the university in the lecture rooms is pathetic with a lecture theatre that was initially planned to accomodate 30 students now taking in more than 150 at ago". (The Monitor, Monday, August 19th, 2002). To make matters worse, in most halls the number of seats available for the students are not enough. As a result, it is now common to find students coming for a lecture in a dining hall, turned "lecture theatre" 30 minutes earlier. The first impression one gets is that these students have a thirst for knowledge when in actual sense they are competing for the available limited number of seats. Mind you in some cases, during that time another lecture is being attended to by another group of students. In fact one should thank the Almighty

God that Makerere has not experienced fire outbreak otherwise escaping would be very difficult. To minimise such confusion, lecturers, are advised to give a lecture within the first 45 minutes of the hour and the last 15 minutes are left for students' movements. This has not completely solved the problem because some students have to move distance of over a kilometer within the campus so as to reach the lecture hall.

Since the number of students is so big, not everyone will hear however much a lecturer shouts when giving a lecture. When a lecturer is teaching and one happens to passby, he/she is forced to think that somebody is addressing a political rally. However, the affected institutes, faculties and schools have purchased some loud speakers which have been fixed in the halls but unfortunately they are not enough for all the lecturers. According to Ngu and Yunkep, (1992) such a measure might have been better suited to an audience attending a political or public rally, a musical concert or a play but could hardly be considered ideal for undergraduate lectures. The Sunday Monitor, (1998) quotes the Head of Mass Communication Department as follows: "But when you enter the economics class, you would be forgiven for thinking it is a political rally", (Sunday Monitor, November 14th, 1998).

The Department of Distance Education in the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) offers three external degree programmes namely, Bachelor of Education (B. Ed), Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.). Students who are pursuing these degrees are not full time. They only come for face to face session during particular periods in the academic year. Unlike other departments, it completely has no space where students can attend lectures during face to face session. In addition it has a very limited number of lecturers to teach the students. Despite its large number of students, it has tried to overcome most of the challenges. For example it has purchased enough loud speakers for all the lecturers. During face to face session, it hires lecturers from the various institutes, faculties and schools to come and teach the students. In most cases it makes sure that face to face sessions take place during holidays, when the full time students are not at the university so that it can hire the rooms and dinning halls in the various faculties, schools and halls of residences. However a major challenge comes when the face to face session is taking place when the full time students are at the university. In this situation of having no or limited space at the university, the department hires space outside the university in the various secondary schools within Kampala. By this time, the students in the various secondary schools are normally in the holidays. A departmental vehicle is always on standby to transport the loud speakers and the needed materials to the hired places. Lecturers are given transport to go to the various places where lectures are supposed to be delivered. Problems are faced by the students. For example, they need to move up and down looking for the various places where

lecturers are being given, they have to look for accommodation and feeding. Some of them are from upcountry in rural areas and they do not know all the places in Kampala.

Although the number of students has more than tripled since the introduction of cost-sharing and private sponsorship, none of the physical facilities have at least doubled. In the main library and the various school faculty and institute libraries, sitting space is too small to accommodate the students at the same time. For example the main library has a reasonable number of reading materials but the sitting space is too small to accommodate all the students at the university. The School of Education library has a sitting capacity of about 300 students. This contradicts with its number of undergraduate students which is about 4,000. The number of text books available is too small compared to the number of students. As a result, two situations have come up namely, if a student gets a chance of having a seat, in the library, he/she is likely not to get the text book. On the other hand if a student gets the textbook, he/she is likely not to get the seat. As a result most of the students rely on lecturer's notes and they can't read textbooks on their own to search for more knowledge. Although each department has a book bank, where students are expected to borrow textbooks, the number of books is too small to cover all the students.

Examination Setting, Processing And Certification In Light of Increased Student Enrollment.

After teaching the students, the next stage is assessing them by giving examinations, marking, grading and finally awarding them certificates. Assessing the students in Makerere is mainly in two stages. The first stage is by coursework which accounts for 30 marks and the second stage is by examination which accounts for 70 marks. The pass mark is 50%. At the end of the degree or diploma course, the students attend a graduation ceremony where they are officially awarded their degree or diploma certificates.

In 1997, Makerere introduced a semester system of teaching. The academic year was divided into two semesters and at the end of every semester, students have to sit for university examinations, each of which will contribute to the strength of the degree or diploma at the end of the course. Formerly, the academic year was made up of three terms. In all institutes, faculties and schools, students used to sit for coursework tests at the end of the term and examinations only at the end of the year. In fact in some institutes, faculties and schools, e.g. faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Sciences and School of Education, whose degree course duration is three years, students did end of year examination in the first and final year only. During the second year, the students only used to do coursework tests. This implies second year of study was a "year of relaxation" since the students were never under pressure of examinations. The first year examinations never accounted much on the strength of the degree at the end of third year. Failing to pass a paper, could mean either passing by compensation whereby you are promoted to another year or repeating the whole



year.

With the semester system, once a student fails a paper, he/she continues to the next semester but will retake the failed paper in the same semester of the next academic year. However, if a student fails five or more papers at the same sitting, he/she is discontinued. This implies a student can even reach third year when he/she has retakes sometimes called carry forwards of first or second year. In such a situation, students who have not passed the examinations in all the papers become overloaded after the end of the first year. This is because, in addition to the end of next year's semester examinations, they are supposed to re-sit for the failed ones in the previous years. In such a case, the examination load will be too much for him/her, and the chances of passing will be low. With a situation of overload at the end of semester examinations the Faculty of Law tried to stop students from re-sitting the failed examinations until after the end of their degree course, (The Monitor, 2002). This implied to have an extra period of time after fourth year. But unfortunately this approach has financial implications especially to the privately sponsored students, who are about three times more in number than the government sponsored. They will have to spend some extra money. As a result there was some demonstration by the students doing Law. According to The Monitor, (2002); "The students were protesting a new policy preventing them from re-taking any failed paper alongside the regular study load. The students said the new directive forces them to spend five years instead of four - at the university." (The Monitor, November, 2nd 2002). When the demonstration threatened to turn violent, the Academic Registrar intervened and suspended the policy in a bid to calm the students, (The Monitor, 2002).

With the increased number of students, the academic registrar's office has tried its level best to make sure that the examinations are thoroughly processed so that Makerere standards are maintained despite what is being written in the media. In fact any form of examination malpractices, once detected and proved correct, leads to expulsion of the party concerned, on the side of the student, lecturer or any other individual. Even cases have been reported in the media whereby prominent personalities such as members of parliament, Ministries, judges etc. being stopped from studying in Makerere or degree certificates being withdrawn from them later on, because they used wrong results. In fact chances of being expelled from Makerere or withdrawing its degree are 100% once an individual is proved beyond reasonable doubt that he/she entered using wrong examination results or is tampering with examinations, irrespective of what position you hold is the university or in the world.

Formerly, the examinations were centrally processed in the academic registrar's office but now they have been decentralised. Each institute, faculty and school processes its own examinations after which the results are forwarded to the academic registrar's office for further scrutiny by the Senate. However with the increased number of student

enrolment, lecturers may fail to know the students well and hence the effective monitoring and evaluating of students, especially, in assessing them academically becomes a real big problem, (Gimuguni, 2000). Increased number of students taking examinations coupled with the increased number of programmes have generally reduced the effectiveness of staff in the management of examinations. The current unreasonable staff student ratio coupled with socio-economic problems overstrain the staff on the ground, (Ajidiru, 1997). To minimise such problems, lecturers with large number of students, have changed the format of setting examinations. Examinations are no longer dominated with the essay type questions. Instead, they have objectives, structured, short answer and one or two essay type questions.

During examination period, nearly every available space at the university is occupied with students doing examinations. Although, (Ajidiru, 1997) commented that in Makerere the examination "system has been invaded by corruption, unguided principles and malpractices to an extent that the quality management and administration of examinations have ceased to be an issue", (Ajidiru 1997:6), this is just an exaggeration. During examination time, institutes, faculties and schools, make sure that enough manpower is deployed so that the process runs smoothly without any weaknesses. However some delays in marking examinations may happen because of the large numbers of students. Commending on the delay in marking and release of results, Turyagenda (2002); had the following to say: "It is logical to blame this on the increased number of students ... there are many more papers to mark - yet the examiners to mark them and the time to do it in have not increased." (The Sunday Vision, 3rd November, 2002). This is one of the reasons the author of the previous article in the Sunday Vision thought had caused the delay and subsequent postponement of the graduation ceremony from a fixed date in the month of October, 2002 to an unfixed date in the month of November, 2002. With increased number of students, the Freedom Square could no longer accommodate at once all the students who graduate in a particular academic year. Previously Makerere used to have one graduation ceremony in every academic year but starting from the year 2000, it started having two graduation ceremonies, one in the month of March and the other in October. However, this year, as noted earlier the October graduation was postponed to November, 2000. What we should note is that despite the increased number of students, and the harsh economic situation affecting the lecturers, there is evidence that Makerere has tried as much as possible to maintain its standards. Measurers are being put into place to make sure that standards do not deteriorate. As how the Vice Chancellor (2002) put it: "Our university still stands strong among others in Uganda and Africa at large in spite of how it is portrayed in the media as having a dwindling academic standard. Our teaching staff is equipped with over 600 PhDs and a reasonable number of Masters degrees whose role

now is appreciated among students". Thousands of students struggle to enter Makerere, employers highly yawn for our graduates and our donors continue to give us more dollars". (The New Vision, November 12th, 2002). If a lecturer is not having a Ph.D. he/she is preparing a proposal or has already started it.

#### Summary, Conclusions and Suggestions.

Let us make it clear that there has never been a perfect system. The moment one believes that the system is perfect, it is likely to decline. That is the reason why we always try to maintain and at the same time improve on it. Although there are problems facing Makerere University, such as limited space, high enrolment of students etc. it has tried to maintain its standards. No wonder, up to now a lot of students come from the whole of East Africa and beyond to have their degrees from there. Presently to be appointed to work in Makerere as a lecturer you need to have a PhD, and as an assistant lecturer, you need to have a Masters degree. All this is aimed at maintaining the standards. However with increased student enrolment and economic liberalization policies, the following steps need to be taken:

1. Teaching methods need to be modified, if possible modern methods involving the use of computers in teaching and learning need to be used.

2. Let the government grant Makerere University a "tax holiday" for at least two years. During that period all the money the government gets from the university should instead be used to put up building and all the necessary structures to accommodate the large number of students.

3. There should be a close working relationship between the employers of the graduates and Makerere University. In this case, whenever new courses are being designed, the employers should try to give their inputs on what they feel should be taught to the students. With this approach, there will be quality assurance mechanism.

4. Makerere University should increase its research grants to its academic staff so that they are up to date and this will help them improve on their teaching and promotion purposes.

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