The Governance and Management of Higher Education in the Commonwealth of Asia: Sharing the Asian Experience for the Common Good in the Commonwealth of Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of this article was to critically explore the experiences and lessons of governance in higher education systems in the Commonwealth of Asia, and most importantly how these experiences and good practices can be applied to the governance and management of higher education in Commonwealth nations, especially in the Commonwealth of Africa. In order to address the purpose of this research study, systematic secondary research was conducted through a keyword search strategy. Using the gathered data, discussions were made on the various governance and management aspects in three Commonwealth Asian countries namely Malaysia, Singapore, and India in aspects and issues such as university autonomy, quality assurance, university-based research development, funding, institutional differentiation, and governance reforms proved salient for discussion. It is important to note that this article is not attempting to address higher education across geopolitical contexts by comparing governance practices between Commonwealth Africa and Commonwealth Asia; instead, it aims to share good practices for the common good and to generate a contextual application of higher education governance practices between the Commonwealth of Asia and the Commonwealth of Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Asia, Commonwealth, Governance, Higher Education, Management

Introduction

Effective governance in higher education is an important aspect and issue that policymakers should take into consideration, given that governance of higher education systems is critical to the ability of a nation to produce the necessary human capital (David et al., 2018). Higher education has seen significant changes and reforms over the past

several years, with such reforms focusing on various changes, from instigating new ways of providing higher education (e.g. e-learning), to expanding the capacity of higher education systems to continuous internationalization of higher education (Zajda & Rust, 2021). With such reforms in mind, transformations in the governance and management of higher education systems worldwide also occurred. However, some Commonwealth African countries, such as Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and Uganda, are still facing issues concerning higher education governance. For example, in Nigeria, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) remained steadfast in their engagement in an ongoing strike to put pressure on the federal government to address various issues that hinder the 'survival and sustenance of public university education and autonomy'. Issues the union accentuated during their strike addressed: the need for better accountability and good governance of various public universities, withholding of union members' salaries, dilapidating infrastructures of public universities, and more. Such issues could have significant implications on the quality of education in public universities, as well as university autonomy (Nigerian Tribune Online, 2020). Empirical studies have highlighted the importance of proper management and governance practices on the quality of education and poor governance could lead to the erosion of autonomy (Olorunsola, 2018).

In light of this, the purpose of this article is to critically examine the practices in governance and management of higher education systems in some Commonwealth Asian countries, particularly Malaysia, Singapore, and India to raise awareness on how lessons from these nations can be used to inform the Commonwealth of Africa. The study chose the Commonwealth of Asia and Africa as the source and recipient of good practice in higher education governance, respectively, for one reason – the Commonwealth of Asian and African countries are members of the Commonwealth of Nations, or simply the Commonwealth, with shared common roots as former British colonies.

The Commonwealth of Nations is a political, voluntary association of 54 sovereign states, and most members are former British colonies or dependencies of those colonies. Voluntary association with the Commonwealth enables members to gain joint support and coordination towards achieving international goals. The members of the Commonwealth, which are independent sovereigns, shared commonalities, particularly being ruled by the British Empire during the colonial period (Commonwealth, 2020). Commonwealth Asian countries are a mixed group of nine countries: varying in size from Singapore to India (Tahir, 2001), and Commonwealth Africa is comprised of 21 countries: Botswana, Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The purpose of the Commonwealth of Nations was to ensure that their member governments will share the same economic, political, environmental, and societal goals. Given such relationship among commonwealth members, it raises some questions as to why some member countries lag in terms of development in higher education, especially concerning governance.

The following research questions will be addressed in this article:
- What are the higher education governance trends in Malaysia, Singapore, and India?
- How did Malaysia, Singapore, and India overcome challenges in governance aspects such as university autonomy, quality assurance, funding and access?
- What lessons can Commonwealth African countries take away from the governance experiences of Malaysia, Singapore, and India?

Literature Review

Dimensions of Good Governance in Higher Education

The term governance has been a common concept within the public sector, as well as in social sciences, with several empirical and theoretical studies exploring this concept. However, governance can be complex and often times abstruse and can vary depending on the field of knowledge it is applied to (Ysa et al., 2014). Typically, governance can pertain to the interactions among the governments, stakeholders and non-government and non-profit institutions through which the policy

decision-making process is governed and executed (Fukuyama, 2013). It is the political process that encompasses goal setting and executing actions for achieving such goals (Magalhaes et al., 2013).

In the context of higher education, governance refers to the approach in which higher education institutions are organized, being able to operate internally, to secure the objectives of higher education to serve the common good while sustaining and strengthening the trust of the public in such institutions (Reale & Primeri, 2015). A key element of quality higher education is good governance (Zaman, 2015). Good governance refers to a set of principles, practices, and processes that ensure the effective, responsible, and ethical management of higher education institutions. It encompasses the mechanisms through which decisions are made, policies are formulated, resources are allocated, and institutional goals are pursued. Higher education governance can be a complex topic, having to consider the different dimensions or aspects that are taken into consideration for a 'good' governance in higher education to be realized. The indicator of good governance include transparency and accountability, stakeholder participation, ethical and responsible leadership, quality assurance and continuous improvement, and equity and inclusivity (Hidayah et al., 2020). Higher education is better illuminated by applying a variety of perspectives (Gornitzka et al., 2020).

Autonomy of the University

Autonomy is a major dimension within the study of higher education governance. Autonomy, in its broad definition within the higher education governance context, pertains to the opportunity and the capacity of the higher education institution to carry out decision-making processes and implement actions of its own choosing in pursuing its missions and goals (Mandey, 2004). Autonomy of university institutions can involve academic freedom in terms of the study programmes being offered, the freedom to decide on the organizational structure, the opportunity to make decisions concerning financial aspects (e.g. tuition fees), and/or autonomy in making decisions concerning personnel management (Rayevnyeva et al., 2018). In fact, university autonomy is a basic right of higher education institutions (UNESCO European Center for Higher Education, 1992).

Quality Assurance

Another major dimension of good governance in higher education is quality assurance because governance and quality assurance in higher education are closely linked (Gornitzka et al., 2020). There are various definitions of quality assurance within the higher education governance context. As per UNESCO-IIEP, quality assurance is the 'continuous process of evaluation, monitoring and improvement of the quality of the overall higher education system, institutions or programme' (2016, p. 2). It is a mechanism used at a strategic level to manage higher education institutions, especially concerning strategic planning for safeguarding and improving quality of education and other activities carried out by universities and/or higher education intuitions (Majstrovic et al., 2010). Quality assurance is of great importance in shaping higher education systems in many countries, having to consider the rapid increase of student enrolment and diversification of institutions (e.g. increasing number of private higher education institutes) (Darwin & Lewis, 2005). This results in quality assurance processes being of high priority for higher education stakeholders (Anane & Addaney, 2016).

Governance Models in the Commonwealth of Asia

To further explore the governance models of higher education systems in the Commonwealth of Asia, it is important to review relevant studies that shed light on the specific approaches and practices adopted in this region. While the existing literature has provided valuable insights into the dimensions of good governance in higher education and the importance of autonomy and quality assurance, it is essential to expand the scope of the review to encompass studies focused on the governance models implemented in Asian countries.

One study that examines the governance models of higher education in Asia is conducted by Lee and Lee (2019), who analyze the governance structures and practices in a diverse range of Asian countries, including India, China, Japan, and Singapore. Their research explores the role of government intervention, the autonomy of universities, and the involvement of various stakeholders in decision-making processes. By examining these governance models, the study contributes to a better understanding of the unique characteristics and challenges faced by higher education systems in the Commonwealth of Asia.

Another relevant study by Chen and Wu (2018) investigates the governance practices of higher education institutions in Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. The authors delve into the mechanisms of decision-making, the role of regulatory bodies, and the relationship between universities and the government. Their research offers valuable insights into the governance frameworks employed in this specific subset of Asian countries, providing a comparative analysis that can inform the discourse on higher education governance in the Commonwealth of Asia.

By incorporating these studies and others that specifically examine the governance models of higher education systems in the Commonwealth of Asia, a comprehensive understanding of the Asian experience in governance and management can be achieved. These studies contribute to the broader discussion on good governance in higher education and provide valuable insights for the Commonwealth of Africa as it seeks to learn from the experiences of Asian countries in shaping its own governance practices.

Challenges in Commonwealth African Higher Education Governance

With many of African nations continued to develop and experience fast paced population growth such as Nigeria for example, governments of such countries are continuously facing struggles when it comes to governance of their higher education systems (-). There have been studies in the past that have explored the challenges facing Commonwealth African countries when it comes to governance in higher education, especially concerning autonomy and quality assurance. For instance, Ajayi and Awe (2010) highlighted that autonomy of Nigerian universities is hindered by the continued interference from the government, further affecting universities' work and functions in teaching, research and others. Nigerian universities were also found to have difficulty in financial autonomy due to the 'pseudo-welfarist policy' of the government banning payment of tuitions without providing sufficient financial support to the universities. Similar issues on university autonomy were also found in Ghana, in which the academic community, and the higher education institutions were dissatisfied about their continued conformance to the rules and regulations forced onto them by the ministries and the government departments (Owusu-Ansah, 2015). In South Africa, the bureaucratic structures imposed by the government limits South African universities to decide on which programmes to offer, on the teaching strategies, and on which programmes will get funded by the government (Kori, 2016).

Likewise, higher education institutions in some Commonwealth African countries are facing problems when it comes to quality assurance, as well as higher education access. For instance, many Nigerian Universities are having difficulty in quality assurance due to various underlying causes, including under-funding, increased enrolment rates, inadequate physical facilities and poor management (Rowell & Orighofori, 2018). In Ghana, despite the significant improvements in the establishment of external quality assurance mechanisms, challenges are still evident, from inadequate quality assurance regulators, irregular performance of institutional audits, and others (Swanzy et al., 2018). In addition, Commonwealth African countries are facing problems in relation to equitable access to higher education, given the fast-growing population of these countries (Mahabub, 2014; Guerrero, 2014). This has been largely due to limited resources and increasing demand (Mohamedbhai, 2014).

Methodology

In order to address the research questions of this paper, the research focused more on exploring the higher education governance practices and experiences of Commonwealth Asian countries through literature review. Systematic research was conducted considering the vast information that is available from sources concerning the topic being investigated. To gather data sources, a simple keyword strategy was adopted, involving the use of certain keywords and/or combination of keywords such as 'higher education governance', 'university autonomy', 'Malaysia', 'India', 'Singapore', 'quality assurance', 'funding', 'access', and others. Through analyzing the data sources, the higher education governance practices and experiences of aforementioned countries were shown, which can be adopted in higher education in Commonwealth African countries.

In collecting sources, the following selection criteria was taken into account: (1) published within 2010 to 2020, (2) either be journal articles, governmental documents, or non-government published articles, and (3) partially or fully tackle governance issues (e.g. autonomy, quality assurance, funding and access) in higher education in Malaysia, India, or

Singapore. Malaysia, India, and Singapore were chosen for this current study as they also faced problems with university autonomy, quality assurance, funding and access in the past and were able to carry out reforms to improve higher education governance and address the aforementioned governance issues. A total of 41 articles were gathered and selected for the research. A simple synthesis of the information from the gathered secondary sources was conducted, organizing data and information using themes representing the aforementioned higher education governance practices and ideas.

Results

An Overview of Higher Education in Commonwealth Asia

Higher education in many countries in Asia, especially in South, East, and Southeast Asian regions, experienced significant expansion, which resulted in a diversified system encompassing a variety and types of institutions operating in the system. The diversification of higher education in the region allowed for many countries to have the capability to expand and respond to the social and economic needs and demands for higher education (Ratanawijitrasin, 2015). Besides the continued diversification of higher education, internationalization of the system in Asia was also observed, in which transnational education as well as the presence of branches of foreign educational institutions had continued to develop and grow (Lee & Healy, 2006; Cheng, 2017). Lastly, higher education in Asia underwent significant massification that involved fast-paced expansion of the system, as well as the increasing access to, and participation in higher education (Mok & Jiang, 2018). The massification of higher education is in some Asian countries based on the premise of increasing the number of higher education institutions.

In some Commonwealth Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and India, higher education is viewed as an important component in supporting nation-wide strategic visions and plans, placing emphasis on quality as well as on quantity of higher education (Povera & Yunus, 2020; Ministry of Education Singapore, 2020).

Higher Education Governance in three select Asian Commonwealth Nations

Focusing on Malaysia, Singapore and India six areas which emerged during data analysis are discussed, namely: (a) trends and national reform in higher education governance; (b) university autonomy; (c) quality assurance; (d) access to higher education; (e) funding for higher education and lastly, (f) institutional differentiation and diversification. Malaysia, India and many commonwealth nations have a number of communalities in their higher education system, and Singapore is seen as advanced nation with a number of good practices that can be adopted and adapted by the commonwealth nations.

In the following section, six areas of focus related to chosen Asian Commonwealth countries – Malaysia, Singapore, and India – are discussed, namely: (a) trends and national reform in the higher education governance; (b) university autonomy; (c) quality assurance; (d) access to higher education; (e) funding for higher education and lastly; (f) institutional differentiation and diversification.

Trends and National Reform in Higher Education Governance

For the past decades, there has been a significant growth in higher education in Asia, including in Commonwealth Asian nations. Based on the report by UNESCO`s Institute for Statistics (2015), enrolment in higher education in Asia increased especially in East and South Asian region and is driven by a mix of demographic trends, public preferences, policy decisions and external economic situations. Even middle- and low-income countries in Asia are experiencing progress in accessibility to bachelor's degree programmes. Enrolment in private higher education institutions also increased dramatically over the decade in many Asian countries, such as in Singapore, Malaysia and India (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015).

Malaysia. Malaysia has been recognized for its higher education system, aiming for making the country a global education hub by the end of 2025 as a major goal in its recent 10-year plan of the Malaysian Government for its higher education (Al Hilli, 2015). In the late 20th century, higher education in Malaysia had been structured based on western higher education system (i.e. UK and the US), catering to the needs of local and international students (Lee et al., 2017). Since then, the development of its higher education system encompassed increasing the number of private higher education institutions, alongside rapid market liberalization (Chin, 2019). Recent governance trends in the country focused on the

extension of autonomy to public universities, which was supported by key governance reforms such as the Education Act of 1996 and the National Council on Higher Education Act in 1996. However, critical policy areas such as appointment of top administrators and budget allocation for public universities are still governed and controlled by the government (Azman, 2012).

In addition, recent policy developments in Malaysia require higher education to focus more on the quality of learning experience for students. This is, in part, due to the re-alignment of the education system, including higher education, with the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 blueprint for the country. The idea of realigning the higher education system with this 2030 vision was drawn from the purpose of reducing the wealth gap in the country and transforming the country into a higher-income nation. Higher education, under this vision, is expected to deliver targets concerning the preparation of human capital in the country to satisfy the skills demand of the country's new economic industry (Povera & Yunus, 2020). In addition, the Malaysian government, through the Malaysian Ministry of Education, introduced and enacted several reforms under its Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, with various strategies and changes be made to achieve strategic goals in five key areas – access, quality, equity, unity and efficiency. Reforms and changes focused on the area of quality included improving the access to education, including higher education, raising quality standards, revisions in curriculum, and maximizing system efficiency (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020).

Singapore. Singapore's higher education system underwent significant changes over the past several years, with the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education as the governing body for providing higher education in the country. Although the government had been seeking to establish autonomous universities, the state's interference in the activities of higher education institutions is still observed (Sam, 2016). Recent governance reforms enacted in Singapore took form in the enactment of the Corporatization of NUS and NTU under the Companies Act in 2006, which allowed for increased role in the university/governing bodies and council in institutional autonomy, as well as for the establishment of accountability frameworks used to ensure institutional accountability (Raza, 2010). These reforms were argued to represent a decentralization and marketization under the state supervision model of higher education governance, despite such reforms being presented to denote relinquishing of total control over higher education governance (Tan, 2019).

India. The higher education system in India experienced drastic changes, the number of Universities in India has increased 34 times from 20 in 1950 to 677 in 2014 (Sheikh, 2017). Not just in relation to the number of higher education institutions serving in the system but also the types and the geographical spread of these institutions. There have been some steps made by the government to improve autonomy in higher education institutions, but the government still maintains greater control on various aspects including the operational decision making of these institutions (Rao, 2015). State governments in India are given some degree of control over higher education in each Indian state, as per programme of the Central Government to decentralize devolve the authority and responsibility over higher education system from the central to the state governments in the country (British Council, 2014).

However, even though the country has seen increased numbers of higher education institutions in the past years, the higher education system remained insufficient in terms of having the capacity to attain enrollment ratios that is on par with the ratios of other middle-income economies. The tertiary gross enrolment rate is increasing rapidly, but the rate remained to be below China's or even Brazil's by around 20 per cent (Trines, 2018). Nonetheless, the government recently planned to roll out a new policy to better improve the structure of the education system of the country from early childhood education to university. Still in its consultation phase, the policy would likely disassemble the current higher education system, developing over 10,000 multidisciplinary universities.

The motivation behind this policy is to 'end the fragmentation of higher education by moving higher education into large multidisciplinary universities and colleges … aiming to have upwards of 5,000 or more students' (Jeffrey, 2019, para. 12). Recent reforms focused on the funding of its education system, including higher education, in which reform consultations findings potentially double the funding for the public education, including public higher education in the country.

University Autonomy

University autonomy emerged as an important focus area in many higher education systems, defining the relations between the higher education system, including institutions, and the authorities (e.g. government) governing such system (Martin, 2013). Although some governance reforms extended autonomy to higher education institutions to a certain degree, governments remained to have high levels of control in some of the procedural and substantive matters of institutional autonomy, primarily on the curriculum design and budgeting. However, some Asian countries are adopting a 'state-supervised model' and 'state-control model' for governance and management of higher education (Austin & Jones, 2016, p. 116). Singapore's higher education system was argued to be governed under the State supervision model of higher education governance (Tan, 2019). This means that all matters associated with governance, management and leadership are key responsibilities of the central government (David et al., 2018).

Moreover, in many Commonwealth Asian countries, university autonomy can be politically defined, given that the system is closely monitored and controlled by the government or a governing body; hence, it is a top-down system of governing academic autonomy. For instance, Malaysian universities and higher education institutions are accountable for responding to policies and initiatives enacted by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education – e.g. number of students, approval of new degree programmes, etc. (Azman, 2012). However, autonomy within individual institutions is stimulated through academic collegiality, operational performance, and others (Azman, 2012; Sam, 2016).

Nonetheless, empirical study by Al-haimi, Ibrahim and Hamid (2019) showed that there is a fast-paced and effective autonomy development at both private and public universities in relation to various academic, management and financial matters. For instance, there were high levels of autonomy concerning academic pay and conditions, personnel autonomy, curriculum and teaching, academic standards and research. In India, autonomy in higher education remained to be an issue, but recent developments in autonomy had been observed. For instance, in early 2018, the Indian government granted autonomy to about 20 higher education institutions, both in private and public sector, and progressively granted autonomy to other institutions for the next years (Sancheti & Pillai, 2020).

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance plays an important role in higher education systems globally, ensuring that such systems would promote value, excellence and reliability and would meet the demands and expectations for higher education (Ryan, 2015). Quality assurance models and policies vary from country to country. In Singapore, the Ministry of Education devised and enforced the Quality Assurance Framework for Universities, in which universities in the country are subjected to external auditing to ensure high level of quality in various areas of operation as based on audit findings (Sam, 2016).

In Malaysia, the government established the Malaysian Qualifications Agency that will evaluate, through benchmarking and quality audits, the quality of the programmes provided by higher education institutions in the country (Azman, 2012). In India, quality assurance is performed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, assessing universities and other higher education institutions on various quality criteria, including innovation, infrastructure and learning resources, teaching-learning practices and others (Pabrekar et al., 2015).

Access to Higher Education

Higher education systems in Commonwealth Asia had been expanding rapidly, causing financial stress for governments, forcing institutions to seek out alternative funding sources and push for restructuring the system (Asian Development Bank, 2011). Countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, India are restructuring their respective higher education systems through various ways, including privatization of higher education, corporatization of public universities, public-private strategic partnerships and accommodation of transnational education (Songkaeo & Yeong, 2016). Malaysia and Singapore saw recent developments in the private higher education provision and corporatization of public universities (Wan et al., 2017), while other Asian countries have greater number of private universities and higher education institutions than public or state universities because the government encourages participation of private entities (i.e. majority of these entities are nonsectarian or owned and operated by private entities not affiliated to any religious organization) in the system (Suarez et al., 2018).

Private higher education institutions have been of great importance in their role in the overall national objectives of governments, particularly when it comes to social and economic development (Chaves, 2013). Many Commonwealth Asian

countries recognized private higher education institutions as important entities in system wide higher education. Malaysia, for example, officially recognized private providers as complementary institutions supporting public or state-owned institutions in meeting the demands of increasing student population for higher education (Da, 2007; Lee et al., 2017).

The liberalization of higher education systems in many Commonwealth Asian countries allowed governments to be sustainable in their funding and expenditures, and allowed for more equitable access. In terms of access and equity, some Commonwealth Asian countries are still facing disparities and challenges. For instance, in India, there were still significant discrepancies in the enrolment ratio between rural and urban areas, in which enrolment ratio is much higher in urban areas than in rural areas. More so, gross enrolment ratio for male is also higher than that of female, which reflected some gender disparity in the access and participation in the higher education system in India (Bordoloi, 2012).

Funding for Higher Education

In terms of funding, Malaysia, India, and Singapore also had made some reforms to improve the funding mechanisms of higher education institutions in the country. For instance, the National Higher Education Strategic Planning 2020 and the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 implemented performance-based allocation mechanisms of Malaysian Universities, with the intent of stimulating competitiveness among these institutions. Performance indicators like enrolment rates, research and development, quality of teaching and learning are used for this funding allocation scheme (Ahmad & Farley, 2014).

In Singapore, public higher education institutions still receive endowment funds from the government, but still enjoy the autonomy to establish their own funding mechanisms to support internal developments. On the other hand, private universities and institutions follow market-oriented model for their funding base, encompassing competitive and diversified fund mix from fees, donations, research grants, and even the state (Sam, 2016).

Institutional Differentiation and Diversification

Higher education in Commonwealth Asian countries faced tremendous expansion resulting in differentiation or diversification in the types or classification of institutions operating in the system. In Malaysia for example, there are three categories of universities – research universities, focused universities and comprehensive universities. The common category of higher education institution is the research university category, which are complex institutions that primarily focus on research that play significant and academic societal roles. With research focus in mind, these types of universities had been of great importance in generating new information and analysis that further stimulate advances in technology, and human conditions via social sciences and humanities (Altbach, 2011). In Malaysia, there are five Research Universities, namely, Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) (Malaysian Education, 2019). On the other hand, comprehensive universities are those institutions that provide a wide range of courses and fields of study. Lastly, focused universities are those institutions that focused on specialized fields, in which Malaysia has around 11 focused universities.

Discussion

This study focuses on exploring the governance and management practices of higher education systems in Commonwealth Asian countries, specifically Malaysia, Singapore, and India with the intention to identify good practices for adopting and adapting in Commonwealth Africa.

Student Enrolment in Higher Education Institutions

As revealed in the findings of the secondary research conducted, Commonwealth Asia countries have experienced growth in higher education as indicated by the increase of student enrolment in higher education institutions. Malaysia, for one, is well-recognized for the accomplishments it attained over the years driven by its 10-year plan for higher education ("Malaysian Government Release a New Higher Education Strategy," 2015). The developments in Malaysia's higher education can be attributed to its massification, which, according to Abdullah (2018), has led to increased number of student enrollments in higher education, improved quality of university education, and increased participation and access to higher

education. Similarly, Singapore and India have experienced drastic changes in their higher education systems, considering that they also have performed actions to improve their higher education.

Dimensions of Governance

In relation to the higher education practices in three Commonwealth Asian countries, the findings suggest that the four dimensions of governance – university autonomy, quality assurance, funding and access, and institutional differentiation and diversification – are embodied by Commonwealth Asian nations. Consequently, these findings can be linked to the literature review regarding governance in higher education. Malaysia and India, having increased university autonomy, thereby provide their higher education institutions freedom to accomplish their goals and perform their responsibilities in providing quality education to students (Mandey, 2004; Rayevnyeva et al., 2018).

Quality Assurance

The three Commonwealth nations also have extended their efforts in assuring the quality of their higher education which entail that they have performed a mechanism of strategic planning to safeguard and enhance higher education quality (Majstrovic et al., 2010). On the other hand, Malaysia has specifically exhibited institutional differentiation with the diversification of its types of institutions. As indicated by Darwin & Lewis (2005), this approach helps shape higher education systems alongside increased efforts in quality assurance and in the number of student enrolments.

Governance Reform

From the literature, the higher education governance trends in Malaysia, Singapore, and India, have shown that the Commonwealth Asian countries in this study have implemented their approaches or initiatives in higher education to positively shape the learning experiences of their students. The changes that these nations have undergone are presented, revealing that their national governments have implemented actions to improve their higher education systems.

An overview of some of the governance reforms is also highlighted in the study, such as how Singapore has enacted the Corporatization of NUS and NTU under the Companies Act in 2006 to increase institutional autonomy and how Malaysia, led by its Ministry of Education, has executed strategies under its Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020; Raza, 2010). From that, the articles used have placed emphasis on the current changes occurring in the higher education systems of Malaysia, India, and Singapore, thereby revealing the milestones they have accomplished.

Initiatives or approaches implemented by Malaysia, Singapore, and India to overcome their challenges in higher education is addressed through a comprehensive discussion of the countries' approaches in relevance with the four dimensions of governance, namely university autonomy, quality assurance, institutional differentiation and diversification, and funding and access. Most of the sources obtained from the secondary research were used to discuss the answer to the second research question, thus indicating the efforts exerted by the national governments of these three Commonwealth Asian nations in improving higher education governance. To mention, both India and Malaysia have exhibited high levels of university autonomy (Azman, 2012; Al-haimi et al., 2019) while Singapore is argued to be using the state supervision model of higher education governance (Tan, 2019).

For the last dimension, the study has specifically focused on Malaysia's expansion. The lack of information regarding Singapore's and India's institutional diversification is the reason for the limited findings.

Lesson for Common Good - Commonwealth Asia to Commonwealth Africa

The reforms and developments in the governance of higher education systems in many Commonwealth Asian countries could provide useful lessons for achieving better governance of higher education systems in the Commonwealth Africa. Many Commonwealth African countries are still facing governance issues concerning their higher education systems. The lack of institutional autonomy in higher education is still evident in many higher education systems in Commonwealth Africa, limiting academic freedom for universities (Amadi & Ekpoafia, 2018). Some experience funding issues, which limited the growth of universities and other higher education institutions to meet the increasing demand for higher education (Kokutse, 2018; Munene, 2019). Such lack of funding further caused low levels of research outputs, and

stagnating development of specialized higher education institutions necessary for meeting knowledge-based economy (Agachi, 2019).

With these issues in mind, the following are potential implications for Commonwealth African countries drawn from the Commonwealth Asian experiences in higher education governance, namely: (a) institutional autonomy and accountability; (b) strengthening governing boards and council; (c) strengthening research-based university; (d) expanding access through the growth of private higher education; and, (e) finding new sources of funding.

Institutional Autonomy and Accountability

Institutional autonomy and accountability had been an issue covered in governance reforms of many Commonwealth Asian countries, in which governments extend institutional autonomy in planning, devising and implementing their respective governance structures (Azman, 2012). This paper recommend that Commonwealth African governments improve institutional autonomy while maintaining some control over public universities and higher education institutions (e.g., allocating budgets). This approach will enable public universities to have more flexibility in setting and achieving their strategic goals. Besides focusing on autonomy, governance structures should be established in a manner that it provides a right equilibrium between autonomy and accountability, given that the latter is also a critical challenge for some Asian governments in terms of funding large fraction of higher education institutions (Speziale, 2012).

Strengthening Governing Boards and Council

Providing or extending institutional autonomy for higher education institutions would likely require reforms associated with the institutional management and leadership of higher education institutions. To take advantage of such institutional autonomy, it is critical for higher education institutions to build up the management and leadership capabilities of governing boards and councils. One implication within this issue could be increasing inclusivity and representation for external entities in governing boards, considering their potential role in providing vital data and information concerning demand in the market (Garwe & Tirivanhu-Gwatidzo, 2016). This is recommended based on positive impacts and experiences when such a model was implemented in Asian nations.

Strengthening Research-based University

Several Commonwealth Asian universities had shifted their focus to becoming research-based or research-oriented institutions that provide not just traditional higher education needs but also to provide hubs for innovation and research (Ramli et al., 2013). Building and strengthening research capacities of universities in Commonwealth Africa could be of great help in revitalizing higher education on the continent, and that it would be a great way for diversifying the system. More so, Commonwealth African governments could also set up research institutions focused on specialized areas, like the National University of Singapore's research centers of excellence specializing in life sciences and engineering (National University of Singapore, 2019).

Expanding Access through the Growth of Private Higher Education

Private higher education institutions had played a significant role in system-wide higher education in many Commonwealth Asian countries (Chaves, 2013). Similarly, Commonwealth African higher education systems are diversified, in which differentiated public and private higher education are in place. However, the rapid growth in the population and the growth in the demand for higher education on the continent could have policy implications focusing on the expansion of private higher education. Private higher education could help increase access to higher education and could provide options to student population (Mugabi, 2012). However, reforms for greater access through growth of private higher education should ensure that private higher education providers have the necessary capacities and resources to meet and satisfy the needs of students (Zeleza, 2018). Capacity problems have already been observed in many public universities across the region, and the well-equipped and capable private higher education could encourage competition in the system forcing public universities to improve (Tamrat, 2018).

Finding New Sources of Funding

As discussed earlier, many Commonwealth Asian countries expanded institutional autonomy to higher education institutions, and Commonwealth African governments could follow suit. With such decentralization of autonomy in the higher education system, increasing the autonomy would require institutions to diversify their funding structure, and should reduce their reliance on government funds and budgets (Praneviciene et al., 2017). Having effective and diversified funding for higher education institutions would be of great help functioning as an instrument for achieving external efficiency.

Many public higher education institutions in Africa are dependent on the base funding provided by the state or the government; hence, diversification of funding would provide them with greater autonomy, especially in funding activities in line with their strategic goals and objectives (Raza, 2010). Past studies already highlighted the issue of funding in the higher education systems in many Commonwealth African countries (Munene, 2019). For instance, the Ghanaian Minister of State in charge of tertiary education highlighted that the country is constrained when it comes to public sector expenditures affecting the funding structure of the tertiary education in the country. As he stated, public sectors like transportation, healthcare, and education are competing significantly for state funding (Kokutse, 2018). Nigeria, on the other hand, had also been facing serious problems concerning the funding of its higher education, and education sector in general. There were plans of diversifying the finance structure for higher education, with the possible cost sharing and the ability of each tertiary institution to generate a substantial part of its revenue outside the government subventions being taken into consideration (Okuwa & Campbell, 2018).

Conclusion

Governance and management of higher education systems has been an important issue for policy makers and governments. Considering the role of effective governance and management of the system would help in achieving national goals related to human capital development. This research explored the experiences of three Asian countries with regards to governance and management of higher education to determine its potential application in the Commonwealth African countries. Governance and management policies and structures across Commonwealth Asia vary, with many countries having top-down structures of governance and autonomy. Quality assurance also played a significant role in higher education systems in many Commonwealth Asian countries. Also, quality assurance models and policies vary from country to country. University-based research, institutional differentiation and development of private higher education are common areas of governance trends in Commonwealth Asia. Although Commonwealth African countries have varying governance and management goals in terms of their respective higher education systems, Commonwealth Asian experiences and good practices on higher education governance can be adapted and adopted based on the peculiarities in the local context.

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