

Chapter 1

Stakeholder Approach for Quality Higher Education

Neeta Baporikar

HP-GSB, Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia

ABSTRACT

Higher education is not necessary for economic growth and development is a general presumption, the belief being literacy and primary education is. Increased concerns for 'Education for All', also led to overall neglect of higher education in many developing countries. But given the inter-dependence of one layer of education on the other, higher education becomes critically important for developing and sustaining a good quality primary and secondary education. It is also a necessary feature for economic growth, development and sustenance. Higher education system suffers from a yawning gap in funds, outdated regulatory mechanisms, poor quality, and low efficiency. Liberalization of sector to attract large scale investments is the key to access, affordability, and equity. However, the core issue still remains 'quality in higher education'. This chapter through in depth literature review and content analysis delves into stakeholder approach for quality higher education, which would hopefully not only optimize the higher education impact but also guarantee quality higher education.

INTRODUCTION

There is a general presumption that higher education is not necessary for economic growth and development. On the other hand, it is literacy and primary education that is important. Increased national and international concerns for Education for All, also led to overall neglect of higher education in many developing countries. The problem of resource scarcity added further to the problem. But given the inter-dependence of one layer of education on the other, higher education

becomes critically important for developing and sustaining a good quality primary and secondary education. It is also a critical factor necessary for economic growth and development and also for its sustenance. It is important to note that while literacy and elementary education are important and necessary for development, they are not adequate for economic development. Without realizing the importance of higher education in development, many governments tend to ignore higher education and thereby the casualty is quality. This may result in outcomes that would

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prove to be costly to the society not only in the long run but also in the short to medium terms. On the other hand higher education is a crucial input for access to better opportunities in life. Higher education system suffers from a yawning gap in funds, outdated regulatory mechanisms, poor quality, and low efficiency. Liberalization of the sector to attract private domestic and overseas investments on a large scale is the key to access, affordability, and equity. This gives rise to the different stakeholders who may be group or individual with different interests.

Background

The notion of stake holding has recently come up more frequently – not only in management literature, but in policy studies in general and higher education in particular (Maassen & Cloete, 2002; Marstein, 2003; Neave, 2002; Nyseth & Ringholm, 2004). The Norwegian political scientist Johan P. Olsen mentions stakeholders as a part of the service enterprise model, and points out that the higher education institution is dependent upon external actors (Olsen, 2005). However, the core issue still remains ‘quality in higher education’. Moreover, this stakeholder approach may actually threaten university autonomy and academic freedom which are the true genesis of ensuring quality in higher education. Hence, the need for a holistic review of this much welcomed approach to quality of higher education. Theoretically, the term stakeholder in management literature has had two main consequences for how companies and their relations with the surrounding world have been analysed. First, the number of actors and groups of actors has increased, i.e. stakeholders that the companies have to take into consideration. Second, the companies have to pay attention to the stakeholders’ values and beliefs (Neave, 2002). The subject of stakeholder theory has traditionally been the company. When the theory is applied to higher education institutions, this implies that the term itself expands to take other important exter-

nal actors and networks into account (Maassen, 2000). Much of the literature on stakeholders in higher education is on the one hand closely related to strategic management and concentrates on the importance of stakeholders (Burrows, 1999; Goedegebuure et al., 2006; Goedegebuure & Lee, 2006). On the other hand, stake holding is perceived to be part of the increasing managerialism in higher education and thereby perceived as something new (Neave, 2002; Maassen, 2000; Amaral & Magalhães, 2002). My motivation for exploring the stakeholder concept over time – as applied to a higher education– is, to see whether any difference in quality is made due to stakeholder influence. Applied to higher education, stakeholder theory can clarify how these higher education institutions relate to their environment and also shed light on the changes taking place in higher education.

Several publications refer to the use of managerialism and more market like steering mechanisms in higher education (Olsen, 2005; Bleiklie, 1996b; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000; Gornitzka & Maassen, 2003; Kyvik, 2002a; Larsen & Norgård, 2002). The higher education reforms are part of a whole range of administrative reforms more generally referred to as New Public Management – focusing on modernization and improving efficiency. Parallels can for example be drawn to what has happened in the Norwegian health services (Bleiklie, Byrkjeflot & Østergren, 2003; Michelsen & Aamodt, 2006). Along with quality, which can be simply described as a way of how well the learning opportunities are made available to students to help them to achieve their award? It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them. This means that by and large, the institutions themselves could determine what constituted quality – which seems sensible at one level, except that if it were that simple then institutions could guarantee superb quality simply by setting themselves very modest ambitions, and then meeting or exceeding them.

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