


# Chapter 16

## Impact of Academic Capitalism on Quality Higher Education: A Utilitarian View

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter uses the utilitarian view to explore the impact of academic capitalism on the quality of higher education. It uses the qualitative approach, a descriptive survey design. The author engaged with university administrators, faculty, policymakers and industry stakeholders to obtain their perceptions and experiences. Interviews, surveys, document review were used. It employed the thematic approach to data analysis, unraveling various understanding into the motives, strategies and consequences of academic capitalism within the higher education sector. By applying a utilitarian framework, the chapter scrutinizes the extent to which educational endeavours align with economic utility, workforce demands and national development agendas. The chapter examines the implications of commodifying knowledge and prioritizing market-driven outcomes on higher educational quality, equity and social cohesion. It brings out the imperative of balancing utilitarian objectives with broader societal aspirations to enhance holistic development, sustainability and quality of higher education.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Academic capitalism refers to the commercialization and marketization of higher education institutions. This concept encompasses the ways in which universities engage in entrepreneurial activities, pursue financial gains, and prioritize competitive advantages. Recent studies by scholars like Slaughter and Leslie (2017) analysed the complexities of academic capitalism, and also analyzing its impact on university governance, research priorities, and academic labour. In an era marked by globalization, technological advancement, and shifting economic paradigms, the ground of higher education is undergoing profound transformations worldwide. Zambia, like many other developing nations, is grappling with the complex interplay between academic pursuits and economic imperatives within its higher education sector. As the country endeavours to navigate the demands of the knowledge economy and meet the challenges of

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sustainable development, then the phenomenon of academic capitalism emerges as a critical focal point for scholarly inquiry and policy deliberation.

Recent literature enhances the complex nature of academic capitalism, highlighting its connections with neoliberal ideologies, market forces, and institutional dynamics. According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), as cited by (Slaughter & Leslie (2017), the academic capitalism refers to the commercialization as well as commodification of higher education, driven by a pursuit of profit, prestige, and competitive advantage. Within this framework, universities are increasingly incentivized to adopt entrepreneurial practices, prioritize revenue generation, and forge strategic partnerships with industry and government entities.

Moreover, Marginson (2013) supports global dimensions of academic capitalism, emphasizing its manifestation in diverse geopolitical contexts and its implications for knowledge production, dissemination, and circulation. In the Zambian context, the imperatives of academic capitalism intersect with broader socio-economic challenges, including unemployment, skills mismatch, and uneven access to educational opportunities. As the government seeks to promote economic diversification, innovation, and human capital development, questions arise regarding the role of higher education in driving sustainable growth and fostering societal well-being.

Against this backdrop, a utilitarian perspective offers a contact through which to examine the alignment between educational endeavors and economic utility within Zambia's higher education ground (Musonda & Mumba, 2023; Banda & Mpolomoka, 2023; Chanda, Mubemba & Chitondo, 2023c). Drawing on the principles of utility maximization and cost-benefit analysis, this perspective interrogates the extent to which academic pursuits contribute to national development goals, address societal needs, and enhance individual welfare. By scrutinizing the motives, strategies, and outcomes of academic capitalism through a utilitarian framework, this research seeks to explain the tensions, trade-offs, and potential synergies inherent in the pursuit of economic and educational objectives. According to Ntshoe, Higgs, Higgs & Wolhuter (2008), the higher education sector has undergone significant changes in recent years due to the influences of global competition, new managerialism and neo-liberalism ideologies, and these changes are likely to influence higher education well into the twenty-first century.

## **Objectives of the Chapter**

1. To examine the motivations driving academic capitalism practices within higher education institutions.
2. To assess the impact of academic capitalism on the quality and accessibility of higher education.
3. To provide recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to foster a balanced approach to academic capitalism that promotes both economic development and educational excellence.

## **Theoretical Underpinning**

Bentham Jeremy's (1789) utilitarianism theory was used in this study. As the founder of utilitarianism, he was generally an English philosopher and social reformer who lived in the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. He developed the principle of utility, which forms the foundation of utilitarianism. According to Bentham, the rightness or wrongness of an action can be determined by its tendency to promote pleasure or prevent pain. One researcher who has recently quoted and used Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism theory in their work is Peter Singer, in his book 'Practical Ethics' published in 1979 and subsequent editions draw heavily upon utilitarian principles, including those espoused by Bentham. Singer applies utilitarianism

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