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## Institutional Autonomy and Governance vis-à-vis the Management of Massification: A Case of Science-based Faculties at Gulu University in Northern Uganda

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the case of massification in science-based faculties at Gulu University. It is argued that the boom in university education in Uganda resulted into the increase in students' enrolment over time. This increase in enrolment resulted into situation of massification where the ratio of educational resources and class numbers became incompatible. Using qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, the survey, single-case and parallel cross-sectional designs, 294 respondents out of the 395 sampled population participated in the study. The findings underscored that Institutional Autonomy and Governance play a central role in the management of massification. The study finally concluded that although the organs of Council and Senate which constitute the hallmark of Institutional Autonomy and Governance were well established at Gulu University according to the Universities and Other Institutions Act (UOTIA), the University has met some challenges especially with regards to corporate governance practices. Finally the study recommended that Gulu University should encourage the corporate governance approach in all its management and administrative units with a view of promoting bottom-up planning in order to yield desired outputs and targeted outcomes as well as marshal the challenges posed by massification.

**Keywords:** Institutional autonomy; Governance; Management; Massification and science-based faculties.

### 1. Introduction

Gulu University, like any other institution of higher learning in Uganda and indeed in sub-Saharan Africa, has experienced rapid growth in students' numbers over the years. These escalating numbers and sometimes unplanned progress led to the imbalance between students' numbers and the availability of education resources and facilities (massification), which impacted negatively on the teaching and learning of science disciplines at the University. The "Human Capital Theory" based upon the work of Schultz (1961), Powers and Skamota (1995), Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1997) suitably explains the concept "massification" in higher education. The theory's assumption suggests that formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve production capacity of the population. The main point of the theory is that, education rather than being looked upon exclusively as consumption should be looked upon as an investment for the individual as well as for society. In short, the human capital theorists argue that an educated population is a productive population. Because of this therefore, there has been a general understanding that knowledge-intensive production is crucial for employment and welfare while knowledge-based production is dependent on a highly educated work force. The creation of an adequate supply of well-educated persons for the future therefore became the focus, together with the attention to immediate demands, therefore raising the demand for education at all levels including higher education and consequently increasing unplanned influx into the sub-sector, (massification of education), resulting into blowing-up of the investment cost of education. It is opined that massification unless well managed, results into stressful learning conditions for both the lecturers and learners. However, the merits of Institutional Autonomy and Corporate Governance play a central role in the management of massification.

Autonomy applied to university management, concerns itself with the relative ability of an institution to govern itself without outside control. Autonomy can be granted by law or through the financing system. The relationship is delicate and in discussing it, a distinction must be made between 'dependency' and 'intervention' (Husén, 1995). According to Goedegebuure (1993), the power of the university or college to determine its own goals and programmes is substantive autonomy, while procedural autonomy is the power of the university or college to determine the means by which its goals and programmes will be pursued. The extent to which this is experienced is determined by a number of factors and may vary across regions. Kerr (1987) states that, the authority pattern of a university lacks a well-defined chain of command, what exists explains a collegial partnership between the Vice

Chancellor and faculty members. Tagg and Howell (2005) and Baldrige et al (1978), cited by Ssetumba (2008) Ssetumba, describe universities as “organised anarchies and loosely coupled”.

Governance in the context of university education on the other hand, deals more with the crucial and critical role higher education plays today, not only in the promotion of democratic culture and institutions, but also in transforming the world into a global institution (OECD, 2002). David (2004), defined governance in higher education as “the structure and process of decision making” and “the establishment of policies to guide (the work of the institution) as opposed to the daily management and administration of the institution.”

Eurydice (2008) emphasizes that the governance structure of an institution tells how stakeholders, including; the executive head of the institution, staff, students, parents, governments, laypersons, etc. communicate with each other; who is accountable to whom, how they are held accountable and for what, etc. In many countries of the world, higher education is still viewed primarily as a part of the public sector. Governments have a predominant role, either directly providing (as in France) or purchasing or ordering services (as in Sweden). This is true even in countries like the United States where universities have long history of being entrepreneurial and seeking funds from a variety of sources (OECD, 2002).

In African states, governments’ roles in university governance still remain central. In Uganda the University and Other tertiary Institution Act is the legal framework on which governance of higher education hinge. The Ministry of Education Science Technology and Sports, MoEST&S (2006) heightens that well-governed institutions of higher education have strong “institutionalism” with functioning structures like University Council, Senate, Faculties, Departments and Unions whose powers, or limits of it, are well defined. A well-governed institution does not only depend on the charisma or the strength of the leaders. It depends, above all, on its own institutional strengths embedded in its structures, traditions, rules, achievements and viability (MoEST&S, 2006). This is to underscore the fact that the traditional model which constitutes governance at higher education is broadly collegial and consultative.

## **2. The Conceptual Framework**

According to Kajubi (1997), massification refers to the diversity of institutions and programmes, escalating expansion and widening of access to tertiary education and the large increase in numbers and size of universities. (Mohamedbhai, 2008), on the other hand refers to massification as that situation of inadequate and stagnant educational infrastructural growth and other educational resources against an increasing students’ population. Massification may have both positive and negative consequences. Mohamedbhai (2008) opined that massification is positive for an institution when the institution has adequate physical, human and financial resources to cope with the rapid increase in enrolment and diversity of programmes and to produce quality outputs and outcomes, and negative when an institution is bog-down to unplanned diversification of programs, high enrolment rates, inadequate education resources and infrastructure, high student-teacher ratio, just to mention, but a few. This state of affairs will inevitably have a direct bearing on the quality of education offered as well as on the output and outcomes of the graduates. It is however believed that where the worth of institutional autonomy and governance are upheld and sustained, management of massification becomes realized.

Management in this context is defined as the process of working with and through people and other resources to implement decisions and to accomplish organizational goals (Mafabi, 1992; Nwankwo, 1982), or viewed as a process of getting activities completed efficiently and effectively with and through other people or a process of setting and achieving goals through the execution of the basic management functions: Planning, organizing, commanding, directing and controlling which in operational principles puts management into three components, i.e. plan, execute and measure.

The main argument of this article is that massification though a recent phenomenon in higher education in Uganda is a real and complex subject to which keen attention must be focused. It is recommended that the power of Institutional Autonomy and Governance enshrined in the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA), 2001 with amendments, which constitutes the hallmark and foundation of management at university level, must be put to the test to cause management and administrative interventions to mitigate the ills of massification. It is also envisaged that by this study, managers and academicians at University level may develop management strategies to enable them address the challenges posed by massification and set pace towards the enhancement and provision of quality education.

## **3. Scope of the Study**

The study was conducted at Gulu University. Gulu University is found in Northern Uganda, East Africa. Gulu University was selected because of its most recent history in Higher Education. It is one of the fastest growing Public Universities in Uganda with up to about 4000 Students in only ten years of existence. The study examined various quality benchmarks developed by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) Uganda to monitor and regulate quality in Uganda’s universities with specific emphasis on how the benchmarks have been utilized to manage the massification process in the Science-based Faculties at Gulu University. The study was specifically conducted in the faculties of Agriculture, Medicine and Science.

## **4. Methodology**

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Qualitative methods enabled respondents to qualify, describe or explain their views as supported by Bell (1993). A survey research design, single-case and parallel cross-sectional type was used to gather information in the study. The single case design was chosen because it is very useful in exploring and understanding a uniqueness or exceptionality of a case. Kumar (2005) cited by Odiya (2009) noted that choice of the parallel cross-sectional survey design was owing to its ability to use different categories of respondents at a given point in time. The study design provided opportunity for the variables to be measured under the same conditions and for the categories to be given the same or similar instruments. This design was preferred amongst others because its findings can be generalized to a larger population.

## **5. Study Population**

According to Mugo (2011), a population is a group of individuals, persons, objects, or items from which samples are taken for measurements, for example a population of presidents or professors, books or students. In this study the population included: the Corporate Management level, the Decentralized Management level, the Collegial Management level, the Students' level and other stakeholders from the public. The Corporate Management comprised: Council Chairperson, Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, University Secretary and Academic Registrar. The Decentralized Managers comprise: The Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments. While the Collegial Managers comprise: the Professors and Lecturers. Information was also collected from students of three Science-based faculties: Human Anatomy, Computer Science and Bio-system Engineering. More information was collected from the public and at least ten reputable institutions.

## **6. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Plooy (2007) defines data analysis as a process of bringing order and structure to the mass of collected data. In the study, qualitative data from the various sources were sorted, summarized, analyzed and interpreted into a format from which meaningful conclusions were drawn according to how they answered the research questions. Similarly, quantitative data scores were organized and coded by assigning numbers to the responses of the items in the instruments. By use of chi-square test, results were computed and analyzed. Frequency tables and multiple response tables were also used to summarize the responses. Information derived was used to answer research questions that determined the relationships between the different quality benchmarks. In the Chi-square computation, all the objectives identified were subjected to test by SPSS version 15.0. The Pearson Chi-Square value for significance was determined between 0.00-0.05. Triangulation was finally employed to examine how the data collected from all the sources answered the research questions.

## **7. Findings and Discussions**

Table 1 appendix on page 17 contains the statistical analysis of Respondents' Views on Quality of Institutional Autonomy and Governance at Gulu University.

## **8. Institutional Autonomy**

The study revealed that Institutional Autonomy exist in Gulu University. Notably, of the 231 Respondents who participated in the study, at least 65.5% shared common opinion that the organs of Council and Senate were properly instituted at Gulu University against 19.03% and 15.49% who disagreed and were undecided respectively. The members of Top Management agreed that both Council and Senate were properly instituted organs at Gulu University. 68.56% and 79.74% were clear manifestation of their consents that Council and Senate were properly instituted. Only 24.45% and 14.11% disagreed that the organs of Council and Senate were instituted properly, while 6.99% and 6.17% were undecided whether these two organs were instituted properly.

## **9. Institutional Governance**

The analysis of Respondents views on the quality of institutional autonomy and governance found in table 1 on page 5 confirms that with regards to institutional governance and in line with questions 5 and 7 (Q5): Does Gulu University Council implements staff and students' related concerns promptly?, and (Q7): Does Gulu University Senate implements staff and students' related concerns promptly? And corroborating with question Q2 (iii) on the interview guide which stated; "Does Council and Senate address their mandates to the satisfaction of the University stakeholders?"

The unanimous position was that both Council and Senate of Gulu University are slow to respond to staff and students' concerns and sometimes they dis-agreed on the implementation of standing guidelines. The foregoing statements are demonstrative of poor Corporate Governance practices and were supported by responses from the questionnaires where 65.3% and 54.3% of the Respondents felt that both Council and Senate respectively did not implement staff and students' views and concerns promptly against only 25% and 34.65 % who agreed, while 9.65% and 10.96% were undecided respectively.

On a further response to Q2 (iii), the Deans, Heads of Departments, Lecturers and Students in their various cohorts during the face to face interviews and focus group discussions, had similar opinion that Council and Senate

implementations do not satisfy the expectations of the stakeholders. One significant example the Deans tied in with the Heads of departments was on the number of occasions, both the students' and staff representatives made appeals to Senate and Council on the issues of procuring more lecture chairs, equipment for practical disciplines as well as the recruitment of adequate academic staff to correspond to the pressure of unplanned enrolment, but no prompt actions were given.

Needless to restate, the conclusion one draws from these responses is that, though these key University Organs are well established in line with provisions 38 and 44 of the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA), 2001 as amended, their performance did not satisfy the hopes of the stakeholders in addressing the ills of massification which were critical institutional expectations.

Pointless to explicate, Council and Senate are the two key organs on which management and administration of the University rest. Both Council and Senate discharge their mandates through their committees. Council committees include: Appointment's Board, Finance, Academics and Students' welfare, while Senate committees are: Admissions Board, Quality Assurance and Examinations, Academic Programmes, Awards and Research and Publications. The study findings pre-supposed that Management and Administrative functions of the University are handled in accordance with the Act or other statutes enacted by the University Council, which then become the hallmark of autonomy and governance in a University's setting. Respondents however castigated that at times the system's response to address issues does not conform to expectations of the stakeholders.

The underlying principle here is that; Universities and Other Institutions of higher learning are complex organisations which serve a multiplicity of purposes in form of goals and strategic objectives which also shape the direction how they are to be governed. Digging deeper into this statement, it measures up to [Passi \(1994\)](#) statement who postulated that the University, like many formal organizations, faces the common problem of delays in decision making. [Kerr \(1987\)](#), states that, the authority pattern of a university lacks a well-defined chain of command. What exists explains a collegial partnership between the Vice Chancellor and faculty members. This is explained through the proper representation of the staff and students' union on both Council and Senate as vindicated through questions 2 and 3 of table 1 on page 5, where 68.5% and 77.7% respectively attested to the institution of collegiality in the University Management.

In the OECD countries for instance, University Autonomy and Governance are determined across eight areas:- Ownership of building and equipment, borrowing of funds, expenditure of budgets to achieve objectives, setting of academic structure/course content, employment and dismissal of staff, setting of salaries, deciding on students' enrolment and determining of tuition fees ([OECD, 2002](#)). In Uganda, this corporate responsibility has been highlighted in the Quality Assurance Framework for Uganda Universities and they emphasized the following themes: Admissions and dismissal of students, hire and fire of staff, design and implementation of Curricula, setting and charging of fees, setting and marking examinations, award qualifications and proposing and implementing the University budget (NCHE, 2006 No. 7).

Governance in the context of university education, on the other hand, deals more with the crucial and critical role higher education plays today, not only in the promotion of democratic culture and institutions, but also in transforming the world into a global institution ([OECD, 2002](#)). Q4, through to Q12 on table 1 on page 5 prominently dealt with governance related matters. Q4, 5, 6 and 7 on the same questionnaire measured the execution of corporate responsibility on service delivery. Unfortunately the respondents' views indicated that corporate responsibilities of both council and senate need to be strengthened. 37.6%, 25.0%, 40.6% and 34.7% respectively were responses that lay wanting Council's and Senate's performances at Gulu University with respect to the demands of Corporate Governance.

These percentages of the responses are low and cast doubts on the merits of Corporate Governance. These responses when corroborated with responses of Q2 of the interview schedules also yielded similar results. According to [Cooke and Slack \(1991\)](#), taking part in decision-making builds a sense of ownership and consequent determination to put the decision into effect. On the other hand, [Isoke \(1997\)](#) cited by [Ssetumba \(2008\)](#) argued that involvement in decision making encourages employees to trust the organization more than the decisions made. In Uganda, the University and Other Tertiary Institution Act (2001) is the legal framework on which governance of higher education hinge.

[David \(2004\)](#), defined governance in higher education as "the structure and process of decision making" and "the establishment of policies to guide (the work of the institution) as opposed to the daily management and administration of the institution. The researcher agrees to [David \(2004\)](#) underpinning that governance is a complex and demanding mission which only does not involve manipulation of the legislative framework, the characteristics of the institutions and how they relate to the whole system, but also how money is allocated to institutions and how they are accountable for the way it is spent, as well as less formal structures and relationships which steer and influence behaviour.

[Eurydice \(2008\)](#) on a similar note accentuates that the governance structure of an institution tells us how stakeholders (including the Executive Head of the Institution, staff, students, parents, governments, lay persons, etc.) communicate with each other; who is accountable to whom, how they are held accountable and for what. Eurydice's opinion was subtly expressed in the responses gathered through the section of the questionnaires on quality Autonomy and Governance at Gulu University.

The Ministry of Education Science Technology and Sports [MoEST&S \(2006\)](#) draws attention that well-governed Institutions of higher education have strong "institutionalism", with functioning structures like

University Council, Senate, Faculties, Departments and Unions whose powers, or limits of it, are well defined. A well-governed Institution does not only depend on the charisma or the strength of the leaders. It depends, above all, on its own institutional strengths embedded in its structures, traditions, rules, achievements and viability (MoEST&S, 2006). In Gulu University, this notion was confirmed in the results of the study by majority of the respondents. This position underscores the fact that the traditional model which constitutes governance at higher education is broadly collegial and consultative.

In view of the foregoing, therefore, universities around the world have tried to position themselves around their major themes and address development needs as well as market situations in their own regions and answer global expectations guided by regional quality standard or frameworks.

In the Commonwealth countries, for instance, most governments since the late 1970's have promoted a climate of critical self-assessment within their higher education sectors. This focus was extended to include the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness and an increased awareness of public accountability. This means therefore, that there is great need for our universities to appreciate self-assessment, general appraisal and evaluation within the universities.

The United Kingdom's and the European Union's perspective hinge so much on the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations (UNESCO, 2004) which target to ensure that European higher education is competitive internationally, with clear objectives aimed at increasing mobility and employability of European cultural diversity and therefore also respecting the diversity of higher education. In South Africa, the work of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has to provide judgement for the efficient and effective management of quality in their Universities (Singh, 2004). In Uganda, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was instituted in 2001 under the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE&S), its mandates amongst others were; to provide regulatory measures, provide checks and balances and maintained standards (MoEST&S, 2005). The Council developed the Quality Assurance Framework for Uganda Universities (MoEST&S, 2006) with the main focus addressing the following related themes: Institutional Governance, Quality of Teaching and Learning, Quality of Academic Staff, Sufficiency of Educational Facilities, Research and Publications, the Quality of Inputs and Outputs and Institutional Financial Management.

The study has revealed that management framework and its structures are properly instituted at Gulu University in accordance with the Act. Conversely, the study also revealed that these framework and structures are at times miss-represented by the implementers to the detriment of the system's quality attainment.

According to Mulford *et al.* (1998), it is only when leadership teams learn to work together and make and implement decisions that they begin to genuinely address students' matters. The challenge which remains to be addressed hinges around the intransigency of the managers at university levels to cope with appropriate corporate management dynamics, comply with institutional frameworks and adopt participatory engagements of all stakeholders to respond to situational challenges especially the emerging threats of massification and cause changes that can satisfy the institutions' vision, mission and strategic goals and objectives.

## 10. Conclusions

Massification, though a recent phenomenon, is a real and complex subject in higher education and more especially at University Education to which keen attention must be focused. The power of Institutional Autonomy and Governance enshrined in the UOTIA which constitute the hallmark and foundation of management at University level is not yet being adequately utilized at Gulu University to cause Management and Administrative interventions to mitigate the ills of massification.

## 11. Recommendations

Gulu University should:

1. Encourage the Corporate Governance approach in all its Management and Administrative units.
2. Promote the bottom-up planning so that stakeholders' participation takes centre stage at each planning levels for the realization of anticipated unit objectives.
3. Embark on the promotion of required procedural efficiency in order to yield desired outputs and targeted outcomes.

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**APPENDIX 1**

Table-1. Respondents' Views on Quality of Institutional Autonomy and Governance at Gulu University

ITEMS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	% Total
1. Council and Senate are properly instituted organs in Gulu University.	15.9%	49.6%	15.5%	13.7%	5.3%	100.0%
2. The staff union and students' guild are properly instituted organs in Gulu University.	10.0%	58.5%	7.0%	17.0%	7.4%	100.0%
3. The staff and students are represented on Gulu University Senate & Council.	22.0%	57.7%	6.2%	9.3%	4.8%	100.0%
4. Gulu University Council respects and encourages staff and students' views in Council.	7.0%	30.6%	14.0%	28.8%	19.7%	100.0%
5. Gulu University Council implements staff and students' welfare concerns promptly.	3.1%	21.9%	9.6%	41.2%	24.1%	100.0%
6. Gulu University Senate respects and encourages staff and students' views in Senate.	4.8%	35.8%	15.3%	30.1%	14.0%	100.0%
7. Gulu University Senate implements staff and students related concerns promptly.	4.4%	30.3%	11.0%	36.8%	17.5%	100.0%
8. The mandate (vision and mission) of Gulu University are clear.	23.0%	53.9%	6.1%	12.2%	4.8%	100.0%
9. The mandate (vision and mission) cater for all the key areas in the University.	9.2%	43.0%	18.4%	22.4%	7.0%	100.0%
10. The strategic plan of the University caters for all university's plans appropriately.	7.0%	31.9%	14.0%	35.4%	11.8%	100.0%
11. Staff in the University is recruited according to the guidelines set by NCHE.	33.9%	47.8%	10.9%	4.8%	2.6%	100.0%
12. Staff in the University is disciplined according to guidelines prescribed in the ACT.	35.5%	42.0%	10.4%	7.8%	4.3%	100.0%

Source: Primary Data