

Examining Performance and Challenges of Private Universities in Malawi

Samson C. R. Kajawo

International Center for Teacher Education - East China Normal University

Abstract - Private higher education has been extensively accepted by many countries in the world, including Malawi. Are the private universities performing effectively? This study sought to examine the performance and challenges of the private universities in Malawi. The study was guided by three research questions which examined the performance of private universities and how universities' accreditation policies and resources such as financial, human and physical were contributing or affecting their performance. Guided by the systems theory by Bertalanffy, this study was conducted at six private universities located in the Blantyre City in Malawi using a mixed methods research approach; utilizing the descriptive convergent parallel design. It involved a total of 152 respondents using questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Documentary review and observations were also used for collecting data. The key finding of this study was that private universities were extending higher education opportunities to a lot of Malawians left out by public universities with relevant study programs. However, the study revealed that the quality of higher education offered in these universities left a lot to be desired due to numerous challenges starting from insufficient finances due to their over dependency on students' fees, of which their enrolments were beyond minimum levels. This led to challenges of inadequacy of qualified teachers and physical resources such as infrastructures and equipment. As a result of all these hiccups, education quality was compromised. The study therefore recommended that government should strengthen its monitoring and control efforts as well as support financially these institutions, and that private universities should come up with other ways of fund raising, as well as considering merging.

Key words: Performance, Examining, Challenges, Private universities, Malawi universities.

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Higher education has always been viewed to be a crucial element for social, economic, political and technological development all over the world. It is an important component of the education system of any country because it creates and advance new knowledge and skills through teaching and research. Higher education also produces people who have the high level skills that are critical to the country's socio-economic development and the implementation of development policies in a global society (Government of Malawi, 2013). Investment in higher education has been argued to be more beneficial in enhancing economic development than when such kind of investment is excessively focused on other levels of education (Tibalimbasa, 2010; Heyneman & Stern, 2015; Suleiman, Hanafi & Tanslikhan, 2017).

Higher education institutions are expanding fast, especially in the majority of developing countries (Mbirithi, 2013). In Malawi, university enrolment is still considered to be one of the smallest in the world. Education foundations date back to the colonial era in Malawi through the work of early missionaries. Until early 1990s, Malawi had one university, University of Malawi, which was founded and established by Malawi Government in 1964 and opened its door to the first cohort of 90 students in 1965 (Chivwara, 2013). By 1980s University of Malawi had five constituent colleges (Browne, 2002). Chivwara (2013) observes that prior to 1994, it was impossible for private sector to offer higher education services in Malawi due to strict government regulations and policies which were primarily aimed at controlling the quantitative output of graduates. For instance, Chivwara indicates that the Roman Catholic Church intended to establish a university as far back as 1964, but it was not possible due to the government restrictions. In 1994, Malawi Government made a decision of establishing Mzuzu University, another public university in the Northern part of the country with its first cohort of 120 students admitted in 1999. This move plus the two public universities' decision to start enrolling off-campus as well as additional students who were required to pay full amount of their tuition fees actually increased the number of students enrolled in the public university in early 2000s (Chivwara, 2013; Southern African Regional Universities Association, 2008).

Nevertheless, the efforts of the public universities in Malawi clearly did little to solve the university access problem since the demand for higher education continued to rise. According to World Bank (2009), the total university enrolment constituted less than 1% of students of eligible age in 2004 to 2006. As a result of the rising demand in higher education among the people in the country, the Government of Malawi decided to come up with a liberalization policy of higher education in the country which saw the inception of private universities in the country in 2006. By 2009, four private universities were operating in Malawi (World Bank, 2009). Many more public and private universities have been opened in Malawi through the years. In 2017 there were 22 registered universities in Malawi, of which four of these institutions were public while the rest 18 were private universities (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2017). In 2018, the number of private universities had increased to 28 (NCHE, 2018).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The mushrooming of private universities in recent years has been astonishing as well as commonly accepted all over the world. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is a recent development in many countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa where it only became to be adopted in the 1990s following the implementation of neo-liberal policies after the economic crisis of the 1980s, which led to major decrease in governments' public education funding (MacJessie-Mbewe, 2009; Ochwa-echel, 2016).

Malawi had about 28 privately owned universities offering various programs to the people in 2018. Were these private universities effectively managed to result in provision of high quality higher education to the country? Quite a good number of scholars had undertaken studies on higher education in African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe focusing on their emergence, internal management and various policies (Tibarimbasa, 2010; Amponsah & Onuoha, 2013; Mbirithi, 2013; Mapolisa, 2015; Obasi, 2007; Mande, 2006; Mwebi & Simatwa, 2013; Onsongo, 2007; Ochwa-echel, 2016; Garwe, 2015; Ajadi, 2010; Akpotu & Akpochofo, 2009). All these studies irrefutably and conclusively agreed that management issues such as adequacy of staffing, financial capacity and adequacy of facilities and equipment contribute to or affect the quality of education which universities offer. These studies generally found out that many private universities in Africa, though outstandingly benefiting their countries, were facing problems such as lack of well-resourced libraries, inability to train and retain top quality faculty and staff, insufficient teaching and learning equipment and infrastructure.

In Malawi, studies had also been done on higher education institutions, most of them focusing on higher education access policies especially on public universities (MacJessie-Mbewe, 2009; Chimombo, 2003; Gomile-Chidyaonga, 2003; Nur-Awaleh & Mtegha, 2005; Chivwara, 2013). Most studies conducted in the past had focused on public universities. However, nothing or little had been seriously done to study the performance and the challenges that are faced in the management of private universities in Malawi so that solutions could be explored and recommended.

The purpose of this study was therefore to examine the performance of private universities in Malawi in terms of their contributions to the higher education need of the country and thereafter find out challenges that they were facing particularly related to government policies as well as human, financial and physical resources, thereby exploring ways of mitigating the challenges for the quality higher education in the country.

The main research question was: How are private universities in Malawi performing and what challenges are they facing? The study also responded to the following three specific research questions:

- How are private universities performing in Malawi?
- What are the challenges faced by private universities in Malawi in relation to government policies and resources in terms of human, financial and physical?
- What strategies can be employed to mitigate the challenges that private universities in Malawi are facing to ensure quality education?

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research on private higher education is extensive. Current studies all over the world have focused on determining the management, performance and the contributions of private universities to the development of university education in various countries, as well as the challenges they are facing (Suleiman, Hanafi & Tanslikhan, 2017; Tibarimbasa, 2010; Mwebi & Simatwa, 2013; Amponsah & Onuoha, 2013; Mbirithi, 2013; Obasi, 2007; Mande, 2006; Mwebi & Simatwa, 2013; Onsongo, 2007; Ochwa-echel, 2016; Garwe, 2015; Ajadi, 2010; Akpotu & Akpochofo, 2009). Other studies have also sought to explore various policies related to university accessibility and staff management (Mapolisa, 2015; Hunter, 2009; Chivwara, 2013). It is fascinating to note that consistently running throughout virtually all of this literature is the premise that the emergence and adoption of private higher education has provided an opportunity for the provision and expansion of higher education to a lot of people who would not had access to such levels of education in the whole world.

It is also interesting to note that many scholars around the world have agreed that private education has become to be the most important aspect of global education. According to Kitaev (2003), private education has become to be a global reality that has been accompanied by globalization. Akpotu and Akpochofo (2009) observe that the wind of globalization and market reforms have even influenced the administrative centrally planned countries of Eastern Europe, France, Germany, Russia, China, Mongolia and Tanzania to embrace the culture of private ownership of educational institutions, a concept that has been alien to these countries' administration cultures in the past.

This just confirm what Kitaev (2003) observed in his publication that private investment in education has become a popular policy in both developed and developing countries since many countries in the world now see the need for the full participation of individuals to education as the only way to hasten the acceleration of their education systems; hence they allowed privatization of their education systems at all levels such as primary, secondary and university. The obvious reason could be to expand higher education opportunities to students who could not otherwise be enrolled in public universities due to stiff universities entry competition (Mugabi, 2009). Further to that, the expansion of private higher education provision was globally enhanced due to some unique merits of these institutions that enable them to be relevant. Suleiman et al. (2017) and Amponsah & Onuoha

(2013) observe that stable academic calendar is one of the strength of private universities they enable them to provide uninterrupted educational calendars throughout the year when compared to public universities especially in African universities. In addition to that, private universities' organizational flexibility in management and administration makes them to be more efficient in adjusting to organizational changes and innovations which enables them, as compared to public institutions, to introduce more curricular and program innovations, improved assessment methods, and modern teaching methods (Suleiman et al., 2017; Amponsah & Onuoha, 2013). Other scholars have also argued that some private universities produce more ethical and disciplined graduates than public ones (Amponsah & Onuoha, 2013) and that most of them provide relevant and quality education to the people (Suleiman et al., 2017; Leng, 2010).

Nevertheless, many studies especially those done in African countries have revealed many challenges facing these institutions which could be detrimental to their success as well as the quality of higher education services they provide. Firstly, many scholars have indicated that many private universities especially in Africa are operating on the bad side of the national higher education accreditation and monitoring policies (Ochwa-Echel, 2016; Shankar, 2016). For instance, in Kenya, Gogo (2010) found out that in 2010 private universities were enrolling students into study programs that were not recognized as offering proper qualifications to the various disciplines since they were not accredited by Commission for Higher Education. The same trend was observed in Nigeria. In Ajadi's (2010) study, it was revealed that most of the courses offered in some private universities did not meet the accreditation requirements set by the National Universities Commission (NUC). In Malawi, The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) rejected to register some universities in 2015 and 2016 since they failed to satisfy NCHE conditions (Nyondo, 2015; Muheya, 2016).

Secondly, studies on higher education in African countries have revealed that most private universities are facing very serious challenges regarding staffing for quality teaching (Oketch, 2009). Most private universities opted to engage part-time lecturers who were not always available to students for economic efficiency (Odebero, 2010; Gogo, 2010). This is not just African countries phenomenon; in Varghese's (2004) study, it was found out that over-reliance on part-time academic staff is a common feature of private universities irrespective of their location and orientation in the world, to the point that there are occasions where some private universities operate without any regular staff.

Furthermore, it is reported that many private universities were facing challenges in the financing and resourcing of their institutions for quality education particularly due to their sole reliance on students' fees (Ochwa-Echel, 2016; Okwakol, 2008).

From this review, it was noted that many studies had been done in many African countries related to performances and challenges of private universities in various countries especially in Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana and in many other Western and Asian countries, but almost none in Malawi since most of higher education researches were focused on public universities; and yet private higher education was expanding.

This study was therefore theoretically guided by systems theory of organizational management initially developed as the concept of "General system theory" by the biologist, Ludwig van Bertalanffy in the early 1950s (Mizikaci, 2006; Vaszkun, 2012). Bertalanffy considered open system as having inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes (Olum, 2004; Benowitz, 2001). Lunenburg & Ornstein (2012) elucidate that systems such as educational institutions receive four kinds of inputs in form of resources from the environment such as human, financial, physical and information resources. These inputs go through a transformation process (Benowitz, 2001). Outputs are the resulted products from the investment enjoyed by the people in the environment (Olum, 2004).

It therefore implies that environment, inputs and outputs are interrelated. Environment such as parents with their decisions, the potential employees or sponsors as well as the government's higher education policies which are made through the National Council for Higher Education affect the operations of the private universities especially in terms of inputs and processes such as students' enrolments requirements, programs of studies and courses to offer. Environment also contributes to the availability of financial resources as inputs which determine the adequacy of human and physical resources and facilities. Inputs and processes equally affect and influence the decisions of the crucial stakeholders in the environment, such as whether parents or guardians should send their children/ wards to those universities, and also as to whether NCHE accredit or disaccredit particular university. Obviously inputs such as resources affect output in terms of quality of the higher education offered. Output has an effect on the feedback from the environment as to whether they are satisfied by the performance of these universities and the graduates produced. This theoretical framework accurately reflected the findings of the study in which inadequacy of resources (inputs) affected the performance and quality of higher education produced by these private universities.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study employed mixed methods research approach using a descriptive survey research design. With this research design, views and opinions of various groups of people were sought and described accordingly in a bid to examine the performance and challenges faced by private universities in Malawi. The study was epistemologically and ontologically underpinned in the pragmatic research paradigm thereby adopting a mixed methods research approach (Creswell,

2014); utilising the convergent parallel mixed methods design (QUAL + quan), in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and used concurrently (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

The study was conducted in all six privately registered universities which were currently operating in Blantyre City in Malawi at the time of the study. It involved a total of 152 respondents as outlined in Table 1, utilizing simple random sampling to select students and teachers and purposive sampling techniques to select registrars, heads of various academic departments of the universities and also officials working in public and private sectors as the potential users of the universities products.

Table 1 The breakdown of number of respondents

Population	Quantity of respondents	Units	Planned target	Actually responded
Registrars	1 per each university	6	6	3
Heads of departments	2 per each university	6	12	10
Lecturers	5 per each university	6	30	23
Students	16 from each university	6	96	96
External officials	10 from each sector	2	20	20
Grand Total			164	152

Both secondary and primary data collection methods were used; secondary data from materials such as higher education quality assurance guidelines from the National Council for Higher Education of Malawi (NCHE) and strategic plans of the targeted private universities were accessed and used. On the part of primary data, semi-structured questionnaires with open-ended questions were used on the heads of various academic departments and lecturers. Unstructured questionnaires were used on registrars and government and private sector officials, while structured questionnaires were used on students of the universities targeted for the study. Semi-structured observation method was used by the researcher on the targeted private universities to find out more information from the working and academic environment of the institutions; including locations of the universities, libraries, classrooms, accommodation places together with the general environment of the institutions to enhance validation of information collected from interviews, questionnaires and various documents (Cohen, et al., 2005).

To ensure reliability of the tools, the “test-retest method” was used (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009), while criterion-related type of validity evidence using concurrent validity was used to ensure validity of the data. The researcher also ensured the safety of research participants by not indicating their names to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. All six private universities and individual respondents involved in this study were presented using pseudo abbreviations. Finally, data was analysed using mixed methods research approach in which

both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered and analysed concurrently (Creswell, 2012).

V. RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

A. Expansion of private higher education in Malawi

This study found out that there had been an expansion of private higher education provision in Malawi from the past ten years. After the government’s decision to liberalize the provision of higher education to allow private institutions operate in 2006, only four private universities were opened in Malawi by 2009 (World Bank, 2009). In 2017, there were 18 private universities registered in Malawi (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2017). The number of private universities increased to forty-one in 2018, which had later dropped to thirty-two after National Council for Higher Education, the Malawi Government’s higher education monitoring agency, ordered nine of them to close down since they failed to fulfil necessary requirements stipulated by the council for a university to be duly registered and accredited to operate in Malawi. The study therefore found out that private higher education was expanding very fast in Malawi, and that government was not just sitting down watching the show, but was putting all the necessary monitoring and control mechanisms on quality of education. Further to that, this study found out that even though most of these private universities were enrolling few students, the trends of students’ enrolment were promising in all six universities studied. This also shows that Malawi was not left out from the global and African trends of the fast expansion of private higher education, fulfilling the 2011 predictions made by Altbach and Salmi that higher education enrolment expansion would continue in most parts of the world.

B. Contributions of private universities in Malawi

Private university in Malawi were contributing not only to the development and provision of higher education of many Malawians, but also in many ways.

1) *Provision of relevant study programs or courses to Malawians:* This study found out that private universities in Malawi were providing some relevant study programs or courses which were on demand on the job market. It was found that these private institutions had some study programs that could not be found in public universities such as community/rural development, HIV and AIDS management and private security services, as well as many other study programs such as business related courses such as business management, financial management, business administration and quality control which were only offered at one public university of which its enrolment was very small comparing to its demand. All groups of respondents including the external stakeholders reported that the courses were relevant and were bridging the gap of qualified human resources that had been there for some years. This concurs to what Suleiman et al. (2017) observed. According to them, private universities owners are willing to adjust and adapt to current needs,

changes and innovations in higher education administration and could be flexible in programs of study and courses being offered to suit the society's needs in order to remain in competition.

2) *Filling the students' selection gaps left out by the public universities:* Many respondents in this study were of the view that private universities in Malawi were extending higher education opportunities to students who could not otherwise be enrolled in public universities due to stiff public universities entry competition. In the academic years of 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, more than 15,000 Malawians applied to National Council of Higher Education (NCHE) to be considered for selection by all four public universities in the country in the respective years. Only a total of 1,920 and 2,085 students respectively made it to various public universities in Malawi, while the rest, more than 70 percent in each year were denied that opportunity though they had all the requirements for the entry to public universities (University of Malawi, 2016). University of Malawi, being the biggest in the country admitted half of all public universities students; pointing to the fact that only about 4,100 students were admitted by public universities in 2016/2017 leaving out more than two-third of the qualified candidates not admitted; hence some of them getting a relief by enrolling in private universities. Mugabi (2009) argues that private universities enrol a significant number of students including those who would otherwise be unable to enrol at the public universities due to the quality of their grades and other reasons hence they widen students' access and choice in higher education. Moreover, in Malawi, the introduction of free primary school education in 1994 did not go together with the expansion of other levels of education such as public higher education; hence private universities were bridging the gap of tertiary education to some deserving Malawians.

3) *Flexibility in terms of mode of study programs delivery:* Many respondents in this study observed that private universities had flexible study programs schedules which were suitable to both young students as well as people who were already working but wishing to upgrade their education levels. This study found out that all six private universities studied had week-ends, evenings as well as day-release programs that were meant to suit the time schedules of any potential students planning to study at those universities. It was even interesting to note that students would apply to change, for example, from studying on weekends to evening classes, hence making them attractive to those working especially in private sectors which do not normally give education leave or holidays to their employees. This was in contrast to public universities in Malawi which were typically offering day-release and few block-release and weekend programs to their students hence making it difficult for someone working in private sector to further his or her education while still working.

4) *Provision of employment and investment opportunities to Malawians:* This study also found out that private universities were providing employment opportunities to

many Malawians employed and working in those institutions. From the results of the study, many Malawians were employed as teachers, administrators as well as support staff. Others were employed as office clerks, cleaners as well as guards. An unemployment rate in Malawi for the past 10 years has been around 7 percent for all adult population and 9 percent for the youth population (Trading Economics, 2018; Danish Trade Council for International Development and Cooperation [LO/FTF], 2016). Even though in Malawi unemployment rates are lower than the average unemployment rate of all Southern African countries, which was estimated at 25 percent (LO/FTF, 2016), the rate is still very high if compared to China (estimated at 3.9 percent) in 2017, United States of America (4.1%) in 2018 and Japan (2.4%) in 2018 (Trading Economics, 2018). This therefore means that provision of employment opportunities to both academic and non-academic staff members was assisting in reducing unemployment rates. This concurs with what was found in other African countries such as Nigeria, where it was found that creation of jobs was one of the major strengths of private universities (Suleima et al., 2017).

5) *Production of more ethical and disciplined graduates:* Many respondents in this study observed that private universities were assisting the government in producing more ethical and disciplined graduates. According to the majority (92%), most students in the private universities were well behaving than their counterparts in public universities. They observed that students in private universities were unlikely to engage themselves in barbaric activities such as violent demonstrations against the university administrations, acting uncivil to the members of public as well as using swear language on campus and sports trips of which was the order of the day in the public universities. This is in agreement with what Amponsah and Onuoha (2013) found in Ghana and Nigeria. According to these authors, private universities were producing more ethical and disciplined graduates as compared to public universities. According to Amponsah and Onuoha, the reason was because most of private higher education institutions in Africa are not as big as public universities hence students' management is easier than in public universities which enable student offices to easily monitor and supervise all students' behaviour. This reason could also apply to Malawi context.

C. *Challenges faced by private universities in Malawi*

This study found out that these universities were facing many challenges especially related to accreditation bodies, financial, human and physical resources.

1) *Government universities accreditation policies:* The majority of students, teachers and heads of departments of six private universities involved in this study (more than 80%) reported that private universities had problems with accrediting bodies. However, only university registrars involved in this study indicated that they did not have

problems with the accrediting bodies, hence contradicting with other groups as illustrated in Figure 1.

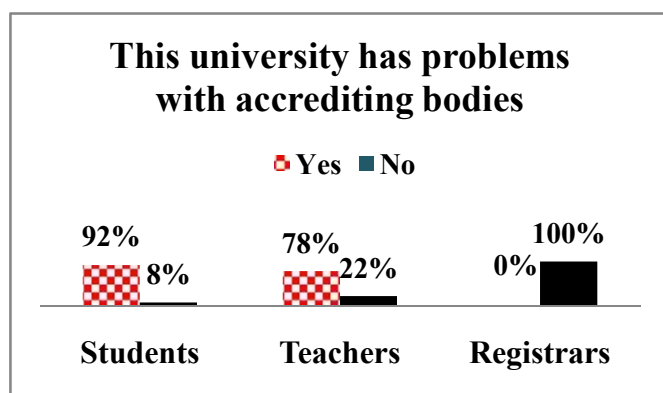


Figure 1 Respondents views to the accrediting question

In an effort of triangulation and verifying the issue with the external stakeholders involved in this study (government and private sectors officials), these officials reported that these universities had problems with NCHE; since it was all over the newspapers and on radios that some of these universities were continuously discredited or removed from the list of accredited institutions for failing to meet some sets of requirements for a higher education institution in Malawi. In the latest NCHE Press Release of February, 2018, the body de-registered nine private universities and forced them to close their institutions in Malawi with immediate effect (NCHE, 2018). However, the majority of students, teachers and heads of departments (83 percent) indicated that NCHE was too much strict and unfair to the private universities hence they were making many Malawians to lose trust in these institutions thereby making most prospective students deciding not to enrol in those institutions as a consequence of the bad publicity that they were offering low quality education.

In other African countries, Mande (2006) observes that the growth in number of private universities awakened governments to set control and monitoring measures through a regulation body to oversee the accreditation, quality control and licensing processes of private universities in their respective countries (Mande, 2006; Ochwa-Echel, 2016). However, despite instituting them, these regulatory bodies in place, studies have revealed that most of these agencies in many African countries were not exercising their roles effectively. For example, in Uganda, Ochwa-Echel (2016) failed to understand how some private universities received accreditation without charters as per the requirement of NCHE. In Kenya and Nigeria, it was reported that private universities were enrolling students into study programs that were not accredited by their countries' accrediting agencies, and yet there was no any tangible action by the respective countries' commissions (Gogo, 2010; Ajadi, 2010). The situation was very different in Malawi since many respondents indicated that NCHE was really exercising its powers and responsibilities by providing frequent monitoring,

control and assessments on all universities in Malawi to ensure that there were not compromising on the general qualities of higher education in the country.

2) *Financial resources*: In the systems theory's perspective, the open systems such as educational institutions are supposed to receive resources (inputs) from the environment in order to provide quality education (Bertalanffy, 1968). If an education institution fails to mobilise adequate resources from its environment, chances are that it might offer compromised quality education to the students. In this study, all groups of respondents admitted that most private universities in Malawi were marred by financial challenges. This was because the universities were solely depending on fees from students as their source of finances for all their operations and activities. The heads of departments involved in this study reported that their departments received insufficient funds hence were failing to procure enough teaching and learning materials as well as fund other essential educational activities such as field trips which in the end were affecting the quality of teaching and learning in these private universities.

Nonetheless, the majority of students involved in this study (84%) indicated that tuition fees at these universities were very expensive. The tuition fees at these universities ranged from MWK700, 000 to MWK 900,000 (approximately US\$ 970 to US\$ 1,250) per academic year, which was considered expensive in Malawi regarding the fact that the Gross National Income of the country according to the World Bank income ranking in 2016 was US\$ 1,140 (World Bank, 2016). In comparison, the generic students at the public universities were paying a range of MWK 250,000 to K350, 000 (US\$ 347 to US\$ 386) per year (Jailosi, 2016). Nevertheless, these said fees structures were still not enough for management of these private higher education institutions since the study found out that they were very small numbers of students enrolled in those institutions. Students' population ranged from a total of 50 to 500 students per university. The universities had a lot of courses or programmes of study which they were advertising as being offered, but not all of them were offered to students at those universities. Furthermore, many classes had very few students (ranging from 2 to 20). Altbach and Salmi (2011) observe that the higher education institutions' ability to offer quality education depends on the financial resources and adequate budgets that are available to the institution. In this situation, the overreliance students' fees could be counterproductive.

3) *Human resources*: The most important human resource at any educational institution is the teacher. According to Cockburn and Haydn (2004), every successful educational institution in the world knows the importance of attracting and retaining well motivated, talented and intelligent graduates to teach at their institutions. This study found out that all six private universities did not have enough qualified teachers. It was noted that only five percent of the

academic staff of all six universities were professors, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Teachers' qualifications in six private universities in Malawi

University	Professors	PhD Holders	Master Degree Holders	Bachelor Degree Holders	Totals
AAA	2	4	9	2	17
BBB	3	5	15	33	56
CCC	0	0	5	10	15
DDD	3	18	32	6	59
EEE	1	1	8	2	12
FFF	0	5	19	1	25
Totals	9	33	88	54	184

*Pseudo abbreviations used as names of universities

It was even discovered that some universities such as CCC and FFF Universities did not have any professors at their institutions. Worse still, CCC University did not have even one PhD holder. According to researcher's notes collected during observation, three of these professors were the owners of the universities while others were just part time teachers of the universities. The table also indicates that approximately 30 percent of teachers in these six universities were holding bachelor's degrees as their highest qualifications. This was extreme at BBB University where the majority of teachers (approx. 60%) were holders of bachelor's degrees. These bachelor's degree holders were teaching students pursuing bachelor's degrees as well. Worse still three out of ten heads of departments which were involved in this study were bachelor's degree holders, which were also teaching, as illustrated in the graph below:

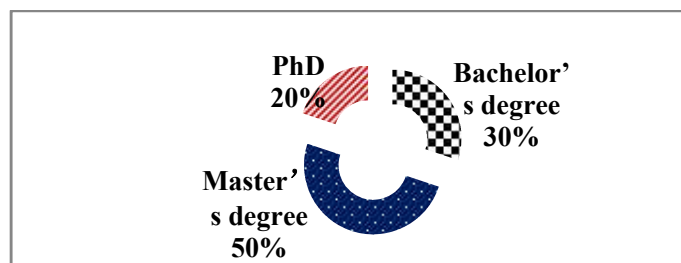


Figure 2 A Pie-graph showing qualifications of a sample of heads of departments

Further to that, the Heads of Departments reported that sometimes their departments did not even have enough teachers hence the universities often resorted to using staff from other departments to cover for those lacking in other departments, reducing subjects offered to students by sometimes postponing some of them to be offered in the next semester when the suitable teachers will be found or over loading existing teachers with more courses that lack someone to facilitate. The most interesting thing was that almost three-quarters of all master's degree and PhD holders were just part time teachers who were full time workers at the near-by public universities or companies.

Tubbs (2005) in his book "Philosophy's Higher Education" highlights the importance of a university teacher being ahead of his or her students' knowledge levels. Quoting Heidegger (1993), Tubbs observes that "...the good teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he still has far more to learn than they— he has to learn to let them learn" (p.50). A teacher must have a qualification higher than the level of education attainment his or her students' are pursuing. Hence this underlines the fact that these private universities were failing to employ enough qualified teachers for efficient and effective teaching and learning of students due to lack of adequate financial resources.

4) *Physical resources*: This study found out that private universities in Malawi were facing a lot of challenges in terms of physical resources such as infrastructures, materials and equipment. Upon asked to indicate if the stated resources were adequately available and accessible at the university, the following Table 3 shows the responses of the students and teachers.

Table 3: Students' and teachers' opinion on the adequacy of the stated resources

Resource adequacy	Students		Teachers	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Textbooks	31%	69%	22%	78%
Computers for use by students	30%	70%	17%	83%
Internet (freely accessible)	14%	86%	9%	91%
Library has enough books	23%	77%	43%	57%
On-line learning tools e.g. e-journals	20%	80%	13%	87%
Lecture halls	55%	45%	68%	32%
Extra-curricular resources	3%	97%	8%	92%
Laboratory and technical tools	19%	81%	17%	83%
Catering facilities	16%	84%	21%	79%

Table 3 above shows that both students and teachers had similar views that there was inadequacy of all the stated resources such as text books, computers, internet services, sporting and entertainment facilities, laboratories as well as catering facilities. Both teachers and students only rated highly classrooms or lecture halls as at least adequately available since 55 percent of students and 68 percent of teachers indicated that there were adequate lecture rooms for lessons in their universities.

It was interesting to note that only one of the universities covered in this study (FFF University) had very good facilities befitting a standard university at its own campus, while the

rest five were renting and improvising on properties which were obviously not originally meant to be university campuses hence creating no good and conducive learning environment to students. Approximately 75 percent of teachers and students in this study indicated that their universities did not have adequate textbooks in the libraries, computers for use by students, free accessible internet, on-line learning tools such as e-journals, extra-curricular resources such as sports equipment, gym halls, sports grounds, laboratory and other technical learning tools/resources. The teachers added lack of individual offices for teachers.

On the part of teaching and learning resources, these private universities generally used traditional chalk and chalkboard as the class resource. It was only at two universities where they had few projectors for the lessons presentations. This concurs with what was observed in other African countries. Okwakol (2008) found out that most African private universities do not have sufficient physical facilities such as lecture rooms, office, and library and laboratory spaces to provide a suitable learning and teaching environment to the students and teachers. This is totally unacceptable and is in contrast to the minimum standards of good universities. Altbach and Salmi (2011) observe that higher education institutions require physical facilities which are appropriate with their missions, which must be very expensive teaching spaces, libraries, and laboratories, as well as sophisticated information technology.

5) *Quality of teaching and learning at private universities was compromised:* The majority of students involved in this study viewed the teaching at their universities as being too much emphasised on theory than practice and did not adequately equip them for research, as illustrated in Figure 3.

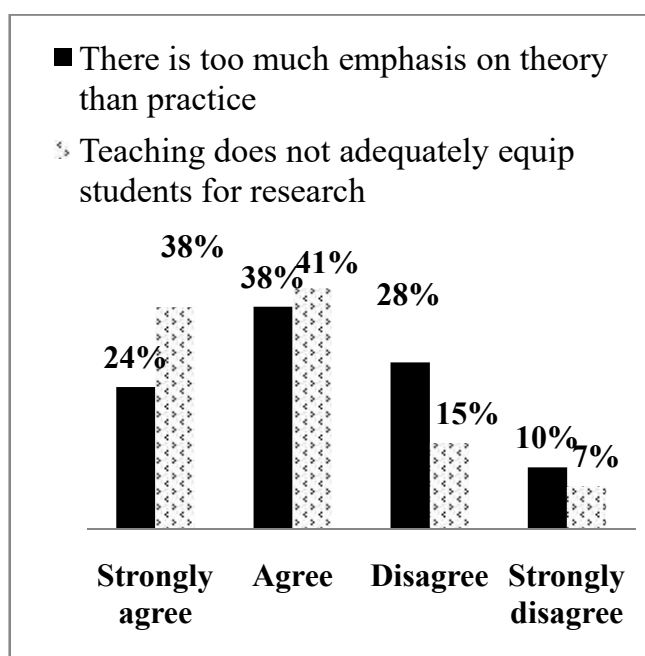


Figure 3 Students responses on quality of teaching at their universities

Additionally, half of the heads of departments involved in this study agreed with the students that there was too much theoretical teaching than practical at their universities because of lack of funds to procure enough resources and materials that enhance practical learning. But this contradicted with teachers' responses to the same questions, who majority of them (56.5% and 73.9%) disagreed to the statement that the way teaching was conducted at their universities was too much theoretical and not adequately equipping learners for research respectively. The differences in the responses could be as a result of the negative effect of self-reporting on self-assessment on the part of teachers. Since it was like they were self-assessing their own teaching abilities, the likeness of painting their own favourable good picture was very high. Hoskin (2012) observes that the use self-report questionnaires rely very much on the honesty of the respondents and sensitivity of the topic.

The researcher therefore interviewed six students from these universities to verify their claims. According to the students, most of the teachers were just reading their prepared notes, often dictating spellings for the students to copy; the teaching and learning which was actually teacher-centred and focused on passing of the examinations without exposing them to the higher order skills of application, synthesizing and evaluation in practical situations or simulations. This just validated the finding that teaching in these universities was of low quality to a certain extent.

6) *The general negative attitude of people towards private universities:* Many organisations cannot survive when people have negative attitude towards their products due to negative publicity. In this study, many respondents indicated that private universities were also facing a challenge of bad publicity of quality of their services which had resulted in many people having negative attitude towards the private higher education institutions and the certificates they provide. According to the majority of the respondents especially students and some external stakeholders, many Malawians had negative attitude towards private universities in the country hence they were automatically not thought as their first choices for enrolment.

According to some respondents, the negative attitude was partly caused by the negative picture that the quality assurance and monitoring agency (NCHE) put in the media about private universities in Malawi when they assess some of the private universities. This was also because most of these private universities, as already discussed, have very poor infrastructures, not suitable for university campuses hence provide very bad first impression of the quality of their services. Many studies have found that negative information hurts since negative reviews, messages, or even rumours have a power of creating negative attitude in the people's minds towards the organization and the products it is offering (Berger, Sorensen & Rasmussen, 2010; Yu, 2016). This was why many people in Malawi, even the academic staff of these

private universities, still wanted their children and wards to enrol in public universities rather than private universities.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it was generally concluded that the emergence of private universities in Malawi has, to some extent, contributed to the development of higher education since has provided higher education opportunities to many Malawians. However, the quality of higher education offered left a lot to be desired particularly due to inadequacy of qualified teachers in these universities as a result of failing to attract enough qualified teachers due to general poor remuneration packages offered. Quality was also compromised by lack of finances and physical resources such as libraries and laboratories. As a result of all these challenges and hiccups, education quality was compromised since teaching in these universities was too much focused on theoretical knowledge rather than practical, and that little emphasis was given to research and innovation. Nevertheless, the study found out that the challenges identified were within solution by the universities management and through government intervention.

B. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the study came up with the following recommendations on both policy and practice for both private higher education institutions' managements and Malawi Government.

1) *Recommendations to the government:* The Malawi Government through its monitoring agency, National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) needs to be applauded for its diligence in the monitoring and controlling quality of higher education in Malawi. Nevertheless, Malawi Government should revise the Higher Education Policy in the country to include a requirement that private universities should only start operating after being duly and fully registered and accredited by NCHE to avoid the situation in which universities were closed due to not meeting the standard requirements after operating for a while; consequently academically affecting the students who were enrolled in those universities as a result of wasting their money and time. It does not make sense why individuals would want to open an institution of higher education as a business without fully investing in resources befitting the standards of a university. The current rate of emergence of new private universities in Malawi and other African countries, if not properly checked and controlled, is alarming and dangerous. It could lead to a situation in which unregistered and unaccredited universities continue to operate as "degree mills" hence continuing producing graduates that are not fully educated, unproductive as well as unemployable.

Further to that, the higher education policy and law should be revised to also give absolute power to NCHE to use all necessary means to close all universities that fail the annual or

periodic evaluations to strengthen compliance to the minimum requirements provided in the Minimum Standards for Higher Education Institutions (2015) policy. As it is now, even though the universities are discredited, they are left to continue operating with the hope that they would be improving in issues which were noted in the evaluation reports. The universities are forced to close only if they are deregistered. This was the reason why many students complained in this study that they were not sure of their future at their universities because of fear of being discredited. Therefore, NCHE needs to be given power to immediately close those universities that have been evaluated to be below the required standards to make these universities proactive in maintaining highest standards at all times. This was because, having few high quality institutions was better than having plenty "degree mills" masquerading as "universities".

Lastly, NCHE should also have a public database that provides enough detailed information of all universities operating in Malawi. This study found out that information about universities in terms of their enrolment totals, facilities as well as the quality of education they were providing was scarce hence prospective students, parents and guardians were relying on particular universities prospectuses and websites, of which could be unreliable sources of factual information. Creation of the database or making detailed information especially about private universities accessible would assist the public to gain knowledge about the strengths and weakness of such universities, as well as help them to make decisions about which universities to enrol their children or wards, hence never regret in the future.

2) *Recommendations to the managements of private universities:* Management of private higher education institutions should formulate tactics of attracting students into their universities. The reason for inadequacy of resources in the six universities involved in this study was because of low enrollment rates in these universities which were solely relying on students' fees as their source of revenue. Some private universities could consider reducing their tuition fees to attract many students to enrol thereby benefiting on economies of scale advantages.

Further to that, universities need to find other alternative sources of funding in order to reduce sole dependency on fees. Proprietors and directors of these universities should think of other means of fundraising for the activities of their institutions. This could be through fundraising events just as it is done by very old and successful private higher education institutions such as Yale and Harvard in America (Yale Investments Office, 2016; Lampl, 2014; Black, 2015; Council for Aid to Education, 2017). The owners of these private universities can also think of listing their institutions as companies on stock exchange in order to raise money for huge investments from many shareholders. This could be a quick way of improving the resource situations especially on capital assets issues such as construction of lecture rooms, office

complexes, libraries and auditoriums, as well as purchase of their furniture befitting a university.

Thirdly, management of small private universities should consider merging their institutions. They could work together and merge in order to economically operate efficiently. This could be logical regarding the fact that most of these private universities have very few students enrolled and hence lack some equipment and materials. The merged institution would have relatively large investment and many students, and would save from the reduction of the average cost incurred in terms of teachers' remunerations and other bills (Kapoor, 2010). This could be described, in Hazzan and Lis-Hacohen (2016)'s words, as the 'reactive approach' of surviving and staying competitive in order to attract more students into well-resourced universities.

Finally, private universities need to open as businesses when they are ready to do so resource-wise. This is because it was not right for them to decide to open universities without enough qualified teachers, adequate facilities and other resources thereby playing around on innocent young people's futures in risking for subsequent mandatory closure. An institution of higher learning is not cheap to establish (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), that is why even the government was failing to open many universities in the country. Therefore, these proprietors should not just focus on profit-making since higher education institutions require physical facilities befitting higher education standards with very expensive teaching spaces, libraries, and laboratories, as well as sophisticated information technology, and well qualified teachers.

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