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HOUSEKEEPING CHORES OR THE QUALITY EDUCATION: THE DILEMMAS FACED BY LECTURES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

Faculty Article by Zedekia Sidha and Justine Magutu

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between task prioritization by university lecturers and quality of university education. It is based on the assumption that universities, like most street level bureaucracies, are chronically under-resourced for the work the public expects them to do. The lecturers must therefore make a choice on which of their numerous activities will be done first, which one second, and which will not be done all together. In making these decisions it is assumed that they would make choices that are in the best interest of the students and the university at large. However, lecturers also have their own interests, which may not always be congruent with those of the students and the University. This paper employs cross-sectional study design and the street level bureaucratic theory to discuss how lecturers resolve the dilemma between pursuits of their interests and those of the university in an environment of resource scarcity. The paper concludes that in light of the resource scarcity, university lecturers prioritize housekeeping chores over those activities that are core to the university mandate.

Introduction

University education is a priority for many countries in the world today (Mbirithi, 2013). In the current global environment, more and more jobs demand high skills and qualifications which can only be attained through higher education. As observed by Sifuna and Sawamura (2010), the key role of universities is to prepare individuals for positions of responsibility in government, business and professions. Consequently, university education plays a critical role in national development (Mbirithi, 2013). It is increasingly seen as an investment that is expected to contribute to the national prosperity in the long run (Yorke, 2000). This is particularly true for Africa due to the need for highly trained people to formulate and implement policies, programs and projects that can promote economic growth and development (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010; Otieno, 2013).

However, in developing countries especially in Africa, the rapid expansion of higher education is not matched with resources (OECD, 2008). Whereas there is an ever increasing student enrolment the resources are either decreasing or remain stagnant (Mbirithi, 2013). Many developing countries are struggling with the challenge of preserving or improving the quality of higher education as the educational budgets are compressed (World Bank, 1994). In Kenya, for instance, political decisions push university managers to admit more students than the capacity of individual universities in spite of decreased government funding (OECD, 2008). They are required to do more with less resourced.

The rapid expansion of university education in Kenya has raised concerns over its quality due to over enrolment, inadequate and out dated teaching and learning facilities and low staff morale (Mbirithi, 2013). There is congestion in lecture theatres, laboratories, libraries, and boarding facilities (Sifuna, 2010). According to the World Bank (2000), ensuring that the quality of educational programs meets local and international standards has become a great challenge in many developing countries. Research by faculty has dropped due to heavy teaching responsibilities brought by the rising student numbers. Quality university education implies that it has to meet both local and international standards, be competitive, transform and empowering the lives of the student (Schindler et al. 2015).

In their September 2015 report titled “Kenya’s Education Achievement and Challenges” the World Bank raised concerns over the quality of graduates being produced by Kenyan universities (The Daily Nation, 2016). According to the aforementioned report, the education system in the country is producing graduates without knowledge, skills, and competence to achieve its long term goals such as Vision 2030. An earlier study by Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) had observed that nearly 51% to 63% of the graduates in East Africa were half baked (not fully trained) and lacked the required skills for the job market (Sylvester, 2014). In particular such graduates are deficient in both numerical and essay capabilities (Mohamedbhai, 2014). As a result of this, most Kenyan graduates have remained jobless irrespective of the high level of human resource requirements for the country to meet its development goals. To a large extent this sorry state of affairs has been blamed on inadequate funding for educational institution in the country. The lack of funding has consequently affected the lecturers who are pivotal to the performance of the universities this study sought to find out how lecturers deal with the dilemma over chronic resource scarcity and public expectation of high quality graduates.

The study is underpinned by the street level bureaucratic theory (SLBT) developed by Lipsky Oto, who discussed policy implementation failure from a bottom up perspective to implementation research. According to SLBT, street level bureaucracies including schools, police services, welfare departments, and lower courts and criminal justices systems are characterized by chronic resource scarcity. Meaning the resources available for service provision in these departments are always far less than the mandate of the department both in terms of the number of clients and the range of activities for which the department is responsible. To cope with this situation, frontline

workers in these departments ration their services both in terms of the number of clients to be served and the number of activities to be implemented. While the expectation is that discretionary decision over which services to offer and who to offer a service are done in the best interest of policy makers, street level bureaucrats normally have interest of their own including the desire to make more income, increase comfort and prestige of their jobs, as well as reduce risks associated with it. If they are not monitored they can use their discretionary powers to undermine policy implementation.

It is against this background that this study sought to find out the effects of discretionary choices employed by lecturers on which of the tasks within their jobs to allocate more time and the effects of the same on quality of education. It has employed a cross-sectional study design composed of questionnaire survey, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews as well as document reviews. The primary data was collected from 40 lecturers teaching at Rongo University, Kenya and quality assurance officials in the university as well as those working at the Ministry of Education. The University had a total of 75 lecturers at the time of the study. Secondary data on the other hand was collected from published and none published materials relating to quality of university education.

The study was guided by the main study questions which is the relationship between chronometric discretion on the quality of university education. The term chronometric discretion is used in this study to refer to discretionary choices made by lecturers on how to prioritize their limited time against overwhelming workload. The specific questions were: 1) What is the correlation between performance monitoring and chronometric discretion? 2) What is the relationship between mentality energy requirement of an activity and chronometric discretion? 3) What is the relationship between students' declared interests and chronometric discretion? 4) What is the relationship between the desire to make more income and chronometric discretion and; the relationship between the university goals and chronometric discretion?

Understanding street level bureaucratic theory

Lipsky (2010) defined street-level bureaucrats as those public service workers who directly interact with citizens in the course of their work and who have substantial discretion in the execution of the same. Typically he noted that these include teachers, police officers, judges, social workers, public health workers, among others (Lipsky, 2010). Lipsky (2010) asserted that decision making process in street-level bureaucracies are normally characterized with uncertainty on one hand due to the unpredictable nature of human persons which is the subject matter of the bureaucrats' decisions and on the other hand the requirement of full enforcement of the law. For instance, a traffic act requires that all people within a moving locomotive must wear seat belts. There may be a case, however, of a pregnant woman who is just about to give birth and the seat belt available cannot fit her. The police officer manning the road block would certainly be faced with a dilemma on whether to make an arrest for the observed traffic law violation or not (Lipsky, 2010).

It is noteworthy, however, that the street-level bureaucrats' dilemma not only arises from the incompleteness of the law but also the fact that they keep changing "in most welfare departments, regulations are encyclopedic yet at the same time, they are constantly changed" (Lipsky, 2010, p.14). These pieces of information are never readily available for the street-level bureaucrats in a usable manner despite the fact that their case loads tend to be high and encounters episodic. They are thus under constant pressure to make decisions without trying search for relevant information about the case brought before them (Lipsky, 2010). Additionally street-level bureaucrats work with fewer resources than the requirements of their mandates. The demand for goods and services offered by street-level bureaucracies tend to be much higher than its supply. This demand keeps on increasing with less than proportionate increases in the departmental budgets for the street-level bureaucracies. "In the case of the police for example, the society expects them to intervene in many more social conflicts-interracial violence, assaults on blacks, family disputes, juvenile justice than it was 40 years ago" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 34). Additionally, the street-level bureaucrats rarely have clearly defined performance objectives. Most public service goals tend to be overambitious without clearly defined achievable and realistic targets (Hill & Hupe, 2008). Additionally they tend to be vague as a result of the conflicts that are embedded during the formulation process. It is common for the legislature to pass conflicts on a given policy problem it is unable to resolve to the administrative level for resolution. Lack of clearly defined performance goals and measurement make it difficult for the street-level bureaucrats to prioritize on which issues to expend their energies. It also makes it difficult for managers to supervise their supervisee given that there is nothing to hold them to account for in their performance or lack of it (Lipsky, 2010).

Finally the job performance of the street level bureaucrats is also affected by their relationships with the clients, "the clients in street-level bureaucracies are non-voluntary" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 54). Street level bureaucracies provide essential services. Most clients who seek services in the street-level bureaucracies have no alternative sources of the same service. There is no private police station for which victims of road rage or domestic violence can seek services of law enforcement. The result effect of this is that the clients are unable to punish the street-level bureaucrats by seeking the services offered from the alternative service providers as it would be the case, for the clients, in the private sector (Lipsky, 2010).

Coupled with the aforementioned, the street-level bureaucrats normally have interests of their own which are sometimes incongruent with those of the agencies they work for and those of their supervisors, "At the very least workers have interest in minimizing danger and discomfort of the job and maximising income and personal gratification" (Lipsky, 2010, p.18). In the public policy implementation process, the street level bureaucrats tend to pursue their own interests including that of increasing their autonomy and discretion as opposed to those of the agency in which they are employed. The only time they comply with organization rules and pursue its objectives is when such rules are backed with sanctions. For the police men however, even in cases where the organisational regulations are backed with sanctions compliance may

be low given that the police inspectors are not capable to be with patrolmen all the time as to detect and punish wrong doing (Lipsky, 2010).

In the process of reducing case load, the street-level bureaucrats ration the services of their agencies. They prioritize tasks so that they are able to concentrate on a limited number of selected clients, cases, and solutions. In the processes of ranking tasks for which to concentrate, street-level bureaucrats prioritize those program activities that are routine in nature as opposed to those which are complex. They give priority to those program areas where the program recipients are demanding action other than those that involve prevention, research, or outreach. Additionally they cluster the clients into various categories. Among these categories they prioritize those who are to benefit and those who will not (Hupe, Hill, & Buffat, 2016).

House Keeping Chores and Discretion and Quality of University Education Lecturers Working Conditions

Resource availability is an important determinant of quality of education especially an appropriate lecture –student ratio, adequate learning facilities, well-equipped libraries and access to internet resources. According to Yin and Wai (1997) university education is comparable to a living organism with input,throughput, and output. The same authors note that to get quality education one must invest in both the input and throughput elements of the system. To this end the study respondents were asked to rate their access to the following facilities (see Table 1).

Table 1

Access to Educational Facilities

Facility	Rating of level of access					Total
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Bad	Very bad	
Online journals	5%	23%	30%	37%	5%	100%
Books	2%	10%	13%	19%	56%	100%
Computers	30%	10%	60%	0%	0%	100%
Opportunities for practical	2%	7%	9%	72%	10%	100%

Source: Survey 2017

As can be noted in Table 1, most of the lecturers did not have enough facilities to the jobs which they are employed to do. This can plausibly be explained by the fact that while there has been exponential growth in both the number of universities in Kenya and the number of students enrolled in the same, this growth has not been accompanied with growth in the amount of funding. Notably while the number of students enrolled in public universities were 1,000 at the time of independence today there are approximately 276,349 university students in Kenya (Munene, 2016, p. 18). The resultant effects of these shortfalls in funding have resulted into high student lecturer’s ration. In Rongo University for instance there are only 75 lectures with a

student population of over 6,000 students. In light of the limited number of staff members in the institution, nearly every academic staff has been assigned the role of discipline coordinator. The roles of discipline coordinators include; sourcing for part-time lecturers in the particular discipline, allocating classes for all the lecturers in the discipline, monitoring teaching, organizing for both internal and external exams moderation, as well as ensuring that all exams are invigilated and fully processed. Out of these 25 are holding management positions with limited teaching workload. This finding is collaborated in an earlier study by Kimathi and Henry (2014, p. 345) that observed that: “in many of the Kenyan universities the following were common, lecturers teaching up to 36 hours per week, lecturers having no offices, overcrowded lecture rooms, less contact hours for school based students and limited library facilities” (p. 345). Such poor working conditions often lead to poor quality education.

Lecturers coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms refers to behavioral efforts employed by frontline workers during their interaction with the project beneficiary to master, tolerate or reduce external and internal demands and as well as conflicts that arise from such service delivery (Tummers, Bekkers, Vink, & Musheno, 2014). It occurs when frontline public service workers are faced with high loads as well as conflicting demands from their employers, their clients, the general public, and sometimes their personal values. Some of the coping mechanisms include rule bending, rule breaking, routinizing as well as rationing (Lipsky, 2010).

Faced with high caseloads, lectures in public universities ration services by prioritizing their work schedules. The study observed that on average the ranks were as follows: 1) administrative duties, 2) exam processing, 3) teaching, 4) research supervision, 5) research and publications, 6) community outreach, 7) curriculum development, and 8) fundraising/ writing research proposals. This data was further juxtaposed by data on performance monitoring and the respondents were asked to state which aspects of their jobs are highly monitored.

Table 2

Test of Correlation between Monitoring and Time Spent on Each Lecturer Task

Activity	Ranks monitoring	Ranks time spent
Administrative duties	1	1
Exams processing	2	2
Teaching	3	3
Publications	4	5
Curriculum development	5	7
Fundraising	6	8
Research supervision	7	4
Community outreach	8	6

Source: Survey data

Spearman's rank correlation rho

Data: monitoring and tm

S = 22, p-value = 0.04583

Alternative hypothesis: true rho is not equal to 0

Sample estimates: rho 0.7380952

As illustrated in Table 2, there is a strong relationship between the activities being monitored and those that lecturers prioritize their implementation. This is evidenced by the fact that the observed p-value = 0.04583 is less than the acceptable p-value of 0.05 at the confidence interval of 95% employed in this study.

With regard to how monitoring is done, the study established that administrative duties are monitored through compliance to the university almanac (calendar). In each senate meeting the heads of departments are requested to report on how they are doing as far as following the almanac is concerned. The head of department pass the same information down to the discipline coordinators who are tasked to ensure that senate directives are followed. Exam processing is aligned to the university almanac. Teaching on the other hand is monitored through the class attendance. There is no structured way of monitoring other university lecturers' duties. They are however evaluated at the end of the year during performance review sessions. Students are also regularly given evaluation forms to assess the performance of lecturers. Additionally the external examiner periodically writes a report on how the exams were set and the way students answered the questions. As it pertains to sanctions and rewards associated with the performance evaluation system, it was observed that the annual performance reviews rarely affect the lecturer's salaries; and due to the fact that most of them are employed on a permanent basis these reviews do not affect their employment status. Scripts from Focus Group Discussions FGDs indicated however that lecturers fear external examiners reports because they are normally read in public and a bad report may reduce ones standing and respect among his peers. Students' end of semester evaluation reports is rarely discussed with individual lecturers and therefore they do not know what and do not care what it contains. To my mind, this the greatest threat to the quality of university education. When the feedback from the end product users are not put into consideration during planning processes and product decision making processes that are concerned with product quality then it is highly unlikely that the

product will meet the customer specifications. This phenomenon is however not surprising; according to Lipsky (2010), clients in the street level bureaucracies are not the main reference group for the street level bureaucrats. This stems from the fact that their consumption of goods and services offered in the street level bureaucracies is not voluntary in nature. The street level bureaucracies offer unique services which cannot be found anywhere else. With regard to public universities, most students tend to be from poor families who cannot afford education in the private universities. They are thus very happy that they got a chance in the public university. Scripts from the student leaders' FGD also indicate that students rarely want to antagonize lecturers because they fear that they might victimize and fail them. This notwithstanding, as will be seen in the other section of the report, complaints from the students, whether issued individually or as a group, are taken very seriously by the universities.

Having noted that the university lecturers prioritize activities whose implementation progress is monitored by the University, the study also sought to find out how the lecturers prioritize their work in terms of amount of intellectual energy is required to execute it.

Table 3
The Relationship between Mentality Taxing and Prioritization of Lecturers' Activities

Activity	Ranks tm spent	Ranks mentality taxing
Administrative duties	1	8
Exams processing	2	7
Teaching	3	4
Publications	5	1
Curriculum development	7	3
Fundraising	8	2
Research supervision	4	6
Community outreach	6	5

Source: Survey data 2017

Spearman's rank correlation rho

Data: tm and Tax1

S = 148, p-value = 0.03676

Alternative hypothesis: true rho is not equal to 0

Sample estimates: rho -0.7619048

From Table 3 it is noticeable that there is a significant relationship between prioritization of duties and the level of mental energy required for the activity. This is evident from the fact that the observed p-value = 0.03676 is less than the acceptable p-value of 0.05 at the confidence interval of 95%. As indicated by the correlation value, which is rho - 0.7619048 the relationship is negative. Consequently lecturers do not prioritize jobs that require a great deal of mental energy in the course of their jobs. This finding is consistent with that of Hupe et al. (2016) who observed that in light of high work loads street level bureaucrats give credence to task that are routine in nature over those that requires research and innovation.

The other area identified by Lipsky (2010) as a strong determiner for street level bureaucratic discretion is the desire to make more income. To this end the respondents were asked to rank their activities in terms of the potentiality to give them additional income. The data generated was compared to the data that had been collected on how they prioritize their work schedules. Table 4 provides data on the test of correlation between prioritization of work schedules and rank of activities in terms of the potentiality to provide additional income.

Table 4

Prioritization of Work Schedules and Potentiality to Provide Additional Income

Activity	Ranks Time spent	Ranks mentality income
Administrative duties	1	8
Exams processing	2	7
Teaching	3	1
Publications	5	4
Curriculum development	7	5
Fundraising	8	2
Research supervision	4	3
Community outreach	6	6

Source: Survey data
 Spearman's rank correlation rho
 Data: tm and income
 S = 120, p-value = 0.2992
 Alternative hypothesis: true rho is not equal to 0
 Sample estimates: Rho -0.4285714

From Table 4 it is observable that there is no significant relationship between the time spent on activities and potential income derived from such activities. This evident by the fact that the observed p-value = 0.2992 is higher than the acceptable p-value = 0.05 at the confidence interval of 95% employed in this study. The failure to reject the null hypothesis in this section of the study has been brought about by the fact that different lecturers earn their income from different activities. Whereas those in administrative positions such as the deans, directors, as well as heads of departments are paid what is called responsibility allowances some positions such as discipline coordinators do not get paid any allowance. Therefore those that are not paid any allowance feel that their time would be better spent elsewhere where they can make extra income like part-time lecturing in private universities or consulting for non-governmental and governmental organizations It was equally difficult to get a representative ranking of community service and curriculum development. This stems from the fact the some of these events carry with them a per diem packages while other do not.

Street level bureaucratic discretion is also said to be determined by public pressure (Hill & Hupe, 2008) to that end the head of departments were asked to rank the lecturers' activities in terms of the potentiality that students will complain if the lecturers in their departments did not complete such activities. The Table 5 provides data on the rank between students declared interests and work prioritization.

Table 5

Correlations Between Time Spent and Students' Declared Interests

Activity	Ranks Time spent	Ranks students interests
Administrative duties	1	4
Exams processing	2	3
Teaching	3	1
Publications	5	6
Curriculum development	7	7
Fundraising	8	8
Research supervision	4	2
Community outreach	6	5

Source: Survey data 2017

Spearman's rank correlation rho

Data: tm and students

S = 20, p-value = 0.03676

Alternative hypothesis: true rho is not equal to 0

Sample estimates rho 0.7619048

From Table 5 it is noticeable that there is a significant relationship between prioritization of duties and the declared interests by the students. This is evident from the fact that the observed p-value = 0.03676 is less than the acceptable p-value of 0.05 at the confidence interval of 95%. As indicated by the correlation value is rho 0.7619048 which means that the relationship is positive. One of the possible explanations for prioritization of job task that relates to students expressed interests is the fact that failure to do the same would attract public outcry. This finding is collaborated by those of Hill and Hupe (2008) which indicates that one of the considerations made by street level bureaucrats in rationing the implementation activities is the extent to which failure to implement such activities would result in a negative public pressure.

Finally, Lipsky (2010) referred to the street level bureaucrats as the ultimate policy makers due to the fact that sometimes they pursue interest which are different from those of the policy makers and bureaucratic executives thereby undermining the policy implementation process. The table below provides data of the rank of correlations between prioritization of work schedules by lecturers and university strategic objectives.

Table 6

University Strategic Objectives and Lecturers Time Prioritization

Activity	Ranks Time spent	Quality University education
Administrative duties	1	7
Exams processing	2	4
Teaching	3	3
Research and Publications	5	2
Curriculum development	7	8
Fundraising/writing project proposals	8	1
Research supervision	4	5
Community outreach	6	6

Source: Survey data

Spearman's rank correlation rho

Data: quality and tm

S = 100, p-value = 0.6646

Alternative hypothesis: true rho is not equal to 0

Sample estimates: rho -0.1904762

As illustrated in Table 6 there is no significant relationship between prioritization of duties and university strategic objectives. This is evident from the fact that the observed p-value = 0.6646 is greater than the acceptable p-value of 0.05 at the confidence interval of 95%. It is worth noting however that the correlation value which is rho - 0.1904762 the relationship is negative. To this end the study rejects the null hypothesis. From the discussions it is deducible that university lectures prioritize work tasks that there is pressure either from students or the university management for their completion and those that are routine in nature. They rarely give priority to those job tasks that are intellectually demanding and their task ranking in order of priority is by no way related to the university strategic objectives.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration the objectives, findings and discussions, the study arrived at the following conclusions. To begin with, lecturers work in an environment of resource scarcity. Most of the study respondents complained that the work schedules were overwhelming and they did not have adequate resources to accomplish tasks demanded from them by the university. In light of this challenge, lecturers are forced to prioritize their work so as to meet the urgent needs of their departments. These decisions are largely influenced by public pressure, desire to make more income and not necessary the desire to improve the quality of education.

The study observed positive correlations between performance monitoring and time allocation for various job tasks. The responsibilities, which were closely monitored by the university, were allocated more time for implementation in comparison to those, which were not monitored. The same experience was reported for the activities, which were accompanied by real or potential pressure from students for their

accomplishments. A contrary experience was reported for job tasks that were intellectually demanding. Most of the lecturers' time in the university was reportedly spent on routine housekeeping chores as opposed to those that required research and innovation. For instance, the average number of publication by the respondents during the last academic year was one and only 10% had attracted a research grant. Finally, the study did not find any association between the university objectives and chronometric discretion employed by lecturers. While the university wishes to increase its funding base, attracting more research grants, as well as its academic ranking through the production of various publications.

Solutions and Recommendations

With reference to the discussion and conclusions, the study hereby proposes some recommendations. To begin, the university should relate its monitoring and evaluation system to its strategic objectives. The study observed that most of the activities in the critical pathway to the university policy objectives were not being implemented due to lack of follow up by management. For instance, while there is a motoring tool for class attendance and exam processing, none is available for research grants and publications. The common assumption within the teaching fraternity is that the university does not deem activities like research and publication that are not monitored, important.

Additionally, the university is yet to come up with a performance management system. All the staff members normally use the performance generic performance contract documents from the ministry. Most lecturers sign them as a statutory requirement other than a document for performance management and the same applies to the supervisors. No measurable performance objectives are discussed with the staff members at the beginning of every year. No midterm review applies. The only reasonable performance reviews are conducted when one requests them as a prerequisite for promotion. However, in light of the fact that there is no performance monitoring data, it is highly unlikely that such reviews will be effective.

Efforts should be made to improve the lecturers' working environments. The data from FGD scripts noted that the lecturers feel appreciated by the university leadership. Notably, none academic workers tend to have better working spaces and facilities in comparison to academic. There were also complains about the frequency and nature of communication between the university leadership and the academic staff.

Future Research Directions

In view of the summary, conclusions, and implications, the study gives direction for future research. The study failed to make conclusive statements over the relationship between the desire to make more money and quality of university education due to a sampling error. This relationship should therefore be retested. Additionally, it was not within the scope of this study to investigate all the aspects of street level discretion exercises by lecturers and their effects on the quality of university education. To that

end, the study proposes that future research efforts should investigate aspects of street level bureaucratic discretion that have not been investigated by this study.

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