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Book Review

The Sustainability of Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Quality Assurance Perspectives

Paul Svongoro

University of Botswana, Botswana

svongorop@ub.ac.bw

Promise Zvavahera

IBS University, Papua New Guinea

promise.zvavahera@ibs.ac.pg

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The Sustainability of Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Quality Assurance Perspectives, edited by Neema-Aboki in Palgrave Macmillan's Sustainable Development Goals Series, explores the role of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa's sustainable development. Among other pertinent issues, the book explores how students in institutions of higher education might adjust to an uncertain future through technological advancements and methods. The book is organised under two themes: Curriculum and Teaching, and Higher Education and Innovations. Under these two broad themes, the book provides theoretical and practical perspectives on higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, relating them to international benchmarks while maintaining the specificities of the African context. The book therefore, contributes to the debates on inclusive and equitable quality education in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

While the South African context has dominated higher education studies discourse in Africa over the past two decades, Neema-Aboki's book dwells more on less-researched countries in the sub-Saharan region namely Uganda, Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia. Nevertheless, insights concerning literacy and numeracy from the South African context are still captured in Chapter 8 of the book. What makes this book relevant to all researchers, academics, higher education studies students, and policy makers is that it evaluates the status and practice of higher education quality issues of degree granting institutions and

other tertiary education institutions from the mentioned sub-Saharan African countries. The book therefore, bridges the gap between global and African contexts, and examines the progress of the Fourth Industrial Revolution within Africa. Finally, the book offers recommendations for curricula and societal changes.

The introduction of the book titled “Sustainability as an Acme of Quality Assurance in Higher Education” discusses the sustainability of higher education in Africa, focusing on quality assurance. The chapter begins with a preamble, and summarises each chapter, highlighting the context, originality, and significant contribution of the compilation, which is based on lessons learned from sub-Saharan Africa. Part I of the book is divided into seven chapters based on the theme of curriculum and teaching in higher education. Part II comprises a further seven chapters on the theme of higher education and innovations.

Chapter 2, “Models of Quality Assurance: Towards a Quality Assurance Framework of Digital Learning in Higher Education in Africa,” explores the contributions made by information communication technologies to higher education. The authors argue that digital learning has made higher education more accessible, making the goal of education for all achievable. According to the authors, digital learning allows students to study anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace, fostering international understanding. However, the authors raise a concern regarding how higher education institutions can ensure that the quality of digital education is comparable to face-to-face settings. To address this critical concern about the quality of digital education, the authors suggest that universities establish quality assurance procedures for staff and students, provide proper training for online course designers and administrators, have sufficient financial resources, and commit to efficient technology. The authors also examine the digitalisation of teaching and learning as external processes influenced by national and international trends and its internal processes within African higher education institutions using the process-oriented lifecycle model for quality assurance in digital learning.

The third chapter, titled “Monitoring and Evaluation in Higher Education: Quality Perspectives in Africa,” provides a comprehensive overview of quality assurance in higher education (HE) in Africa, focusing on techniques, theory, practice, and models. It outlines key steps in central/strategic monitoring and evaluation for such quality assurance, illustrating the role of monitoring and evaluation from the OECD/DAC framework. The chapter also shares insights on evaluation criteria, data sources, quality assurance use, data types, and data quality. And it offers benchmark frameworks and guiding documents for policymakers, higher education regulatory authorities, scholars, and institutions in Africa and the Western higher education space, addressing the lack of documentation on monitoring and evaluation for quality assurance in higher education.

In the chapter, “Quality of Teaching and Learning Through Internal Quality Curriculum Review Mechanisms: A Case of Private Higher Education Institutions in Post-Conflict Somalia,” the authors focus on the quality of instruction and learning in post-conflict private higher education institutions in Somalia. Stakeholders have long complained about the declining standard of education, with concerns about students' poor quality education and lack of employability. A cross-sectional, descriptive survey approach was used, with 253 academic staff members selected. A Linear Regression Model was used to assess the hypothesis. Among other findings, the study found that internal quality curriculum review procedures set the standard for instruction and learning, enabling graduates to acquire 21st-century transferable abilities. It recommended that university administrators conduct ongoing reviews to eliminate outdated material and comply with regulating body requirements for periodic curriculum reviews. These suggestions aim to enhance the quality of education in post-conflict Somalia for lifelong learning opportunities as per SDG 4.

Focusing on virtual learning at institutions in Uganda, Nabunya's chapter titled “Students Satisfaction and Virtual Learning Service Delivery at Bugema University” explores how online learning and digitisation have gained popularity in Ugandan colleges, with most institutions offering online courses alongside traditional classroom instruction. The chapter discusses the inconsistency in evidence supporting the effectiveness of online courses despite their importance in student satisfaction. The chapter uses Uganda's Bugema University as a case study to examine the relationship between academic staff and students' satisfaction with virtual learning services. The study found that even though internet quality and university resources were lacking, lecturers' use of online examination procedures, multimedia usage, and interaction with students were excellent. The chapter suggests that institutions need to establish technological teams for comprehensive support.

In the sixth chapter, which is also based on higher education in Uganda, Acaali explores the importance of sustainability in higher education institutions (HEIs) and their role in implementing the SDGs. HEIs have redefined their role from academic knowledge generation to addressing social and economic challenges in communities. Previously, HEIs were seen as ivory towers, focusing on academic matters and showing less concern for community development. However, due to the United Nations SDGs 2030 agenda, HEIs are increasingly recognised as partners in achieving the 17 SDGs. The author argues that HEIs are ideally positioned to carry out the SDGs through their research, community engagement, and teaching and learning arms. Uganda Martyrs University serves as a case study in implementing the SDGs through its triple mission of teaching and learning, research, and community participation. What is interesting to note is that while Uganda's higher education is guided by teaching, research, and community participation, Zimbabwe's higher education is based on five key pillars: teaching and learning, community service, research, innovation, and industrialisation. Innovation and industrialisation are seen as central to

Zimbabwe's implementation of the SDGs and improving the lives of all citizens (Togo & Gandidzanwa, 2021).

In Chapter 7, entitled “A Framework for Embedding Graduate Employability: Attributes of Higher Education Curriculum in Africa,” the authors debate the issue of the employability of graduates in developing countries—an issue that is prioritised by higher education policy-makers. In light of the current drive for higher education to achieve the United Nation’s SDGs, these concerns have surfaced once more. Policymakers emphasise the importance of employability skills for graduates to meet the demands of a flexible labour market and contribute to the SDGs. Enhancing graduates' employability is crucial for HEIs to generate human capital for the current labour market, especially in developing countries. A British Council (2014) study on graduates' employability and inclusive development in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa revealed concerns about their work readiness. Employers were generally satisfied with students' disciplinary knowledge, but perceived gaps in information technology skills, personal qualities, and transferable skills. In Nigeria, a significant skills mismatch was found between employer requirements and graduates' workplace skills in communication, information technology, decision-making, and critical thinking (British Council, 2014). This chapter therefore, addresses concerns about the employability of Africa's graduates, urging HEIs to improve their employability traits. The chapter proposes a framework for integrating graduate employability attributes into higher education curricula, contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. The framework uses the USEM (understanding, skilful practices, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition) model, a conceptual framework proposed by Knight and Yorke (2003), and is based on degree programmes in management sciences. This research is therefore, crucial for addressing employers' concerns and enhancing graduates' employability.

“Addressing SDG 4 via Learners’ Prior Numerical Cognition: A Predictor of Educational Performance in a Developing Country in Sub-Saharan Africa” is the title of Chapter 8. It explores the impact of learners' prior numerical cognition on their academic achievement in South Africa, aiming to ensure that all citizens are literate and numerate by 2030. It examines pre-service teachers' mathematical cognition, fluency, grasp of mathematical concepts, and inappropriate instruction. The study found that poor primary school instruction led to underperformance, impacting contemporary underperformance in higher education. Therefore, the importance of learners' past mathematical proficiency is highlighted.

Chapter 9, the first in Part II of the book, uses the scale-up paradigm created by Management Sciences International to look at how school in-service teacher training (SITT) is being implemented in Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia. Since its implementation in Tanzania in 2012, SITT has significantly improved the learning results of students. The study reviewed the SITT scaling design documentarily and employed a combination of research approaches. The design aligns with scaling features including government

engagement, capacity building for teachers and education leaders, mentorship from HEIs, research from teacher education institutions, and structured pedagogy. These insights inform the scaling approach, making it more appealing to governments and potential users, promoting large-scale scaling and policy uptake.

Chapter 10 titled “Mechanisms for Enhancing Employability Skills Among Students Within Vocational Education Training Institutions in Tanzania” examines how Tanzania’s vocational education and training institutes might enhance their students' employability abilities. Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative, self-management, planning, ICT, and technical abilities are the eight employability skills traits identified. A mixed-methods study design was employed, involving 140 participants. The findings indicate that interactive teaching approaches are least popular, with workshops and seminar presentations being the most employed. There are many different ways to conceptualise employable abilities; some associate them with technical skills, while others link them to entrepreneurship. With the exception of ICT abilities, which were at the novice level, students exhibited intermediate levels of competency in all areas. This study, therefore, suggests that institutes of vocational education should investigate more sustainable interactive teaching strategies and a more comprehensive definition of employability skills.

Moving on, Chapter 11 of the book focuses on the importance of synergies between higher education, the government, and industry in enhancing the quality of higher education in Africa. Aspiration 1 of Africa is based on the notion of “a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development” (p. 8). The chapter emphasises the importance of higher education for sustainable growth and nurturing African core values. It calls for significant educational investments to build human and social capital. The authors emphasise the need for strong partnerships between academic institutions, governmental agencies, and business sectors, using social capital and collaborative governance theory. The study also shows the importance of these partnerships for innovation and graduate employment. Lastly, the chapter introduces the Triple Helix Model of Collaboration to illustrate how government, business, and academics could collaborate.

Chapter 12 re-ignites the debate on the goal of higher education. The chapter interrogates its role in reducing socioeconomic disparities globally, especially in Africa, using neoliberal ideology and human capital theory. The chapter argues that while higher education has significantly aided Africa's development, tensions and conflicts have negatively impacted the African continent due to the Eurocentric Western epistemic system and the African development drive, potentially hindering its progress. The chapter therefore argues for the decolonisation (see decolonial scholars such as Heleta, 2016; Hlatshwayo, 2020; Jansen, 2017) of higher education to create a more inclusive and sustainable approach by proposing a decolonisation strategy that promotes a hybrid model and pluralistic viewpoint.

In Chapter 13, the authors examine how HEIs could help Africa become more energy sustainable. It looks at energy as a third-stream funding source, energy-related initiatives as sources of income, networks and consultancies for renewable energy sources, and new avenues for research. The authors also explore how HEIs might incorporate sustainable practices into their operations. For the researchers, renewable energy technologies give isolated communities access to clean energy and job opportunities.

In Chapter 14, “Quality Assurance of Higher Education in a Neo-liberal Context: Towards Transformative Practices in Africa,” the authors challenge the prevalence of neo-liberal quality assurance systems in Africa's higher education. The chapter examines the relationship between neo-liberalism and quality assurance in higher education through the lens of policy transfer. The SDGs and the relationship between neo-liberalism, higher education, and quality assurance regimes are the main points of interest in this chapter's analysis of quality assurance from both global and African viewpoints. Additionally, the chapter looks at how quality assurance regimes, higher education, and neo-liberalism interact, with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa. The last section makes the case for switching from neo-liberal-driven quality assurance regimes to a quality culture in order to maintain the region's higher education standards.

In the final chapter, “The Role of Higher Education and the Future of Work in Africa’s Fourth Industrial Revolution,” the authors examine the labour demands of the future workforce and the offerings of HEIs to determine how prepared Africa is for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The chapter emphasises the importance of professional development programmes for expanding fields in Africa given that automation can exacerbate economic gaps and raise skill premiums. However, the 4IR can also increase productivity and create jobs. The chapter concludes that collaboration between businesses, academic institutions, individuals, governments, and regulatory agencies will determine the future of Africa in terms of job types and technology use. To create a highly qualified workforce for the 4IR, African HEIs must address upskilling and reskilling when revamping their curricula.

In conclusion, this book explores higher education challenges in sub-Saharan nations and suggests collaboration between academic institutions, governments, and businesses to improve accessibility, inclusivity, and quality in higher education. However, some scholars argue that the Eurocentric Western epistemic system hinders Africa's progress and advocate for decolonisation to establish a more inclusive, pluralistic approach. Various chapter contributors propose a decolonisation strategy that supports a hybrid model of higher education, aiming to boost Africa's sustainable development. The book's shortcomings include not discussing the impact of increasing demand for higher education on student-instructor ratios and resource constraints on already underfunded higher education institutions. In addition, the contributors' perspectives on how institutions' focus on student retention and throughput affects the

quality of education and employability of graduates from these institutions (Botha, 2018) are also missing from the chapters.

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