PROCEEDINGS OF THE 18TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Major theme: "Invigorating African Higher Education Institutions' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic"

08 September 2020

Research and Knowledge Management Office (RaKMO),

St. Mary's University

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Address all communications to:

St. Mary's University

Research and Knowledge Management Office (RaKMO)

P.O. Box 18490/1211, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel: +251(0)11-558-06-16

Email: rakmo@smuc.edu.et

Website: www.smuc.edu.et

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Your excellency Dr. Mulu Nega, State Minister of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Your excellency Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology at the African Union Commission

Your excellency Prof. Etienne E. Ehile, Secretary General of the Association of African Universities

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is both an honor and a privilege to welcome you all to this 18th edition of the international conference on private higher education in Africa. Our decision to hold the conference virtually at a time when the whole world is facing its worst adversary in our age is not only a testimony to the indomitable spirit of St. Mary's University but also an indication of the dedication of our partners who have chosen to stay on course and support our efforts.

Our partnership with the Association of African Universities since 2010 has always been marked as the time when our conference grew to a continental and later international platform for discussing the PHE phenomenon at regional and global level. It is a pleasure to be able to celebrate the 10th anniversary of that special relationship and to have among us the then Secretary General who decided to work with St. Mary's to promote the status of the private higher education sector in the continent. Please, allow me to recognize the former chief architect and Secretary General of the AAU, Prof Jegede from who you'll be hearing very soon. His successor Prof Etienne E. Ehile, AAU's Secretary General and the Research and Academic Director Prof Jonathan Mba have equally been instrumental in maintaining the relationship and supporting the role played by St. Mary's at continental level.

Over the last five years, our partnership with the African Union Commission (AUC), UNESCO, Ethiopian Airlines and the International Network for Higher Education in Africa (INHEA) led by its founding director Prof Damtew Teferra has helped us to boost the breadth and status of the conference. At this juncture, I especially wish to recognize the support we received from these organizations and particularly from Her excellency Prof. Sarah Agbor and Prof Damtew Teferra for gracing our previous conferences and offering their unconditional support. I also wish to gratefully acknowledge the continued support from the earlier Ministry of Education and now Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The fact that we have the presence of excellencies Prof Afework Kassu and Dr. Mulu Nega in this conference is a clear

indication of the Ministry's commitment towards the promotion of PHE across the continent and beyond. Last but not least, I wish to express our gratitude to the selfless assistance of Ethiopia's former Deputy Minister of Higher Education Dr. Teshome Yizengaw and the irreplaceable contributions he has made towards our success. It gives me tremendous pleasure to record that all of these champions are with us today, devoting their precious time, to contribute once more to the success of the conference in one way or another. I'm sure you'll be hearing from all of them in due course.

This year, the Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE), based in the US, has joined us as an additional partner. PROPHE was created in 2000 by Distinguished Professor Daniel Levy, the leading authority in the field, and is based at the University of Albany, State University of New York. PROPHE coordinates its activities through regional participation in all regions of the world and is working as a leading information power house for global private higher education. Professor Daniel Levy will be speaking in the afternoon. We hope this new and exciting relationship will further allow us to be visible at global level and share the continent's experience and knowledge worldwide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we have 7 papers and 2 keynote addresses that dwell on the major themes of the conference. Presenters have been drawn from all parts of the world and more than 250 people from different regions of the globe have registered to attend the conference online.

As you might be aware, the effects of the pandemic on Africa's nearly 2,000 higher education institutions have been substantial. Around 10 million students are experiencing disruption in their studies due to the closure of institutions. Among the many challenges faced is the shift to online teaching, which is now promoted as an alternative form of educational delivery but has its own challenges due to many factors that hinder its success. I hope Prof Jegede will have a lot to say in this regard.

We can anticipate that as the crisis persists, it can seriously impact the commitment of governments toward higher education in the face of competing demands from other priority sectors serving vulnerable segments of society. Furthermore, global support to higher education in general and research collaborations and partnership schemes in particular may be massively scaled back or significantly weakened. Private providers across the continent, which are excessively dependent on tuition and fees, have already been hard hit, with many facing downsizing or even closure.

African higher education institutions are thus expected to do more in the months ahead, while concurrently battling across many fronts. In this regard, the role of leadership in the fight against the pandemic is critical. I hope Dr. Teshome's keynote speech will offer some directions as to how we can make the best out of this threat. The approaches to overcome COVID 19 will also be discussed in the afternoon session by leading panelists such as Professor Damtew Teferra from INHEA, Prof Daniel Levy from PROPHE, Prof Jonathan Mba from AAU and Dr. Solomon Benor from MoSHE. It is my ardent belief that the ideas generated will have meaningful contribution towards combatting the serious challenges we are facing today and our preparation towards a post COVID 19 era.

Finally, I wish you all a productive day and humbly request His Excellency Prof Afework Kassu, State Minister of the Ethiopian Ministry of Science and Higher Education, to make an opening speech to conference participants.

Thank you for your attention.

Opening remarks

H.E. Professor Afework Kassu, State Minister, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ethiopia

Mr Wondwosen Tamrat, Founder and President of St. Mary's University

Your Excellency Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner, Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union Commission

Your Excellency Prof. Etienne E. Ehile, Secretary General, Association of African Universities

Mr Solomon Debebe, Managing Director, Ethiopian Aviation Academy, Ethiopian Airlines.

Prof Damtew Teferra, Chair of Chairs, of the Advisory Council of Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Ethiopia

Distinguished guests and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my greatest pleasure to be with you online at this ***International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa organized by St. Mary's University*** and its partners for the 18th time. I also would like to join the previous speaker in appreciating all participants near and far, outside our continent, who have spared their time to take part in the conference.

This 18th edition makes it so exceptional that the entire conference participants are virtually connected due to COVID-19, which has created not only health crisis but also education and economic havoc across the world. The resultant effect of the pandemic is deeply felt in our continent, where a decade-long fast economic growth is curtailed and countries have deployed their meagre financial resources to mitigate the spread of the virus and subsidize the livelihoods of vulnerable communities.

More than ever, the education sector is hit hard and its magnitude is difficult to assess because no one knows when things will get back to normal. It is in this testing environment that the organizers of the conference have chosen a fitting theme "***Invigorating African Higher Education Institutions' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic***".

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We, Africans, have occasional disease outbreaks here and there and have developed the resilience to withstand them in the worst of times. The highly socialized communal culture has been an asset that the needy have relied on during times of economic hardships. Yet, it is this value that the pandemic is bent on eroding by way of keeping people apart from one another in a bid to mitigate its spread. This very action has resulted in the closure of

educational institutions in the entire world. The impact of the closures is deeply felt here in Africa since resource constraints have prevented governments to take appropriate measures of interventions as desired.

To date, a full semester is lost due to COVID-19 and the future looks uncertain considering the increase in the number of people infected with the virus in our continent. We are not yet sure when to open in-person classes. Africa is indeed challenged by its effort to change the behavior of its citizens toward increasing physical distancing and reducing social interactions. These requirements, although necessary to control the spread of the virus, unwittingly dismantle the salient features of African societies whose social and economic development depend on physical contacts. Truly, using information technology gadgets for education and business transactions is at its nascent stage in our continent. It is still, by and large, a privilege enjoyed by urbanites in Africa not discounting the initiatives, here and there, to reach out to the rural population.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Ethiopia, as in the rest of Africa, education is one of the key sectors of the social asset, which has been seriously affected by the pandemic. The closure of all educational institutions since March 2020, has brought about immense disruptions to the academic lives of 30 million students and parents who care for them. While all colleges and universities are affected by the pandemic, the magnitude of the problem is much more pronounced on private HEIs since they are tuition dependent for their day to day operations. To minimize the challenges they are facing, my Government has made some tax-related interventions, though not necessarily adequate. Institutions that run postgraduate programs have also been allowed to continue delivering courses online considering that all graduate program students are capable of attending the programs using the internet.

In a country where the population is exceeding 110 million, being the 2nd largest in the continent, and having rural population of not less than 80%, one can easily understand the challenges Ethiopia is facing. Today, we have 51 public universities and more than 250 private HEIs; four of them fully-fledged universities. Currently, in these institutions, we have hundreds of thousands of students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. This growth has been catalyzed by the fast economic growth that the country has enjoyed for more than a decade. The growth in the private sector is unprecedented. We had no private higher learning institution 25 years ago and only two public universities were in existence by then. One can imagine the pace at which we are able to reach where we are today. Considering the increasing number of higher learning institutions in the country, the Government established a separate Ministry of Science and Higher Education two years back to cater to the growing needs of the sector. The frequency of contacts with private higher learning institutions has significantly increased as a result.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This online conference is to highlight the response that higher education institutions are making to COVID-19 Pandemic. Unless institutions of higher learning are actively engaged in mitigating the effects of the virus, the loss of human lives and the accompanying social and

economic crisis would be unimaginable. Starting from increasing the awareness of communities in their surroundings, institutions have been involved in serving as isolation sites (quarantine sites) and testing sites for COVID-19 suspects, and as treatment sites for those who were tested positive. They also were involved in contact tracing, in producing sanitizers, personal protective equipment, and other innovative technologies of importance for COVID-19 response.

Most importantly, the timely research undertakings on multi-disciplinary COVID-19 research priority areas, the dissemination of results via online intellectuals discourses (WEBINARs) and publications and/or via media engagements would make a big difference in informing policy makers toward expediting the control of the Pandemic and the turn of the teaching-learning process and businesses to normalcy. These all were pronounced by Ministers of Science, Technology and Innovation and Higher Education of many African countries during a continental webinar organized by the African Union Commission, Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology in August 2020, where country-specific experiences were shared.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to call up on our African Higher Education Institutions and Research Institutions to strengthen their collaboration on COVID-19 and other researches and to disseminate their findings and recommendations by organizing continental platforms using virtual communication technologies. These, I hope, would strengthen the science and policy interphase which is usually labelled as weak in Africa. In this context, conferences like this will have far reaching implications.

Finally, I would like to thank St. Mary's University in spearheading and organizing the series of conferences on Private Higher Education in Africa without interruption for the last 18 years. I would also like to thank the partners, the African Union Commission, the Association of African Universities, the University of KwaZulu Natal, Program for Research on Private higher Education (PROPHE) at New York University, and the Aviation Academy, Ethiopian Airlines for their immense contributions. I also have the highest appreciation for all paper presenters and participants for devoting their time to share their ideas with fellow scholars. At this juncture, on behalf of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, I pledge to continue supporting the sector in every way possible ***as we go forward facing the challenges*** and "***adjust to the new normal***".

Wishing you all to have productive discussions, I now declare the online conference open.
I thank you.

Opening remarks

H.E. Professor Etienne E. Ehile, Secretary General, Association of African Universities (AAU), Ghana

H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner, Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union Commission, Ethiopia.

H.E. Prof. Afework Kassu, State Minister, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ethiopia.

Mr. Solomon Debebe, Managing Director, Ethiopian Aviation Academy, Ethiopian Airlines.

Prof. Wondwosen Tamrat, Founder and President of St. Mary's University (SMU), Ethiopia.

Eminent Academics, Researchers and Professionals here present,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All Protocols duly observed,

Good morning!

I am pleased to participate in the 18th Edition of the International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa on the theme: ***Invigorating African Higher Education Institutions' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic.***

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

The uniqueness of higher education, whether private or public, lies in the fact that it is responsible for the scholarship needed to generate new knowledge, whether in social or physical sciences, or in the abstract or real world, or in any other discipline. There is the urgent need for revitalizing higher education on the continent as it is germane towards the achievement of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the global United Nations Agenda 2030 (otherwise called the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs).

Ladies and gentlemen,

This virtual international conference has been held because of the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic and the need to keep the doors of university campuses open. In this respect, the choice of the theme for this conference is both germane and urgent.

As the world battles the Coronavirus pandemic which has created major disruption to every aspect of our society, including higher education, the Association of African Universities

(AAU) has taken a number of steps towards helping our members and the general African Higher Education to manage the impact posed to HE by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The AAU empathises with all African higher education regulatory bodies, academic institutions and other partners affected directly or indirectly by the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The AAU recognizes that the African HEIs have been challenged by this crisis to revise and devise creative and innovative ways to continue their academic calendar in the face of restrictions to physical interaction and travel and the disruptive lockdowns.

The AAU has indeed taken concrete steps to help our member institutions adjust and adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic so that their core functions are not adversely affected. One of the initial activities of AAU as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was to administer an online needs assessment survey to African HEIs with a view to finding out their preparedness or otherwise to face the disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the top challenges that they have reported as captured in the online survey administered by AAU on COVID-19 include (i) no preparedness for online courses; (ii) the 'digital divide' that is affecting students living in unconnected areas; (iii) broadband infrastructure challenges; (iv) lack of e-learning platforms; and (v) handling large numbers of students online.

One of the numerous activities of AAU as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was for AAU to enter into partnership with *eLearnAfrica* and *Wiley* companies to quickly support African universities to migrate their teaching and learning activities online. This partnership among the AAU, *eLearnAfrica* and *Wiley* aims to respond to the challenges that AAU member universities have reported in coping with COVID-19 disruptions. Having thus identified *eLearnAfrica* and Wiley Education Services to quickly support our African Universities, AAU circulated a proposal to all African Universities with a view to supporting them in quickly implementing eLearning as a response to the COVID-19 disruptions. These efforts have yielded tangible results.

Additionally, a webinar was organized for the CEOs of national and regional regulatory agencies of higher education in Africa on Thursday, 21 May 2020 on the theme: *Response of African Higher Education Regulatory Bodies to COVID-19 Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges.* The goal of the webinar was to share information on how the regulatory agencies were supporting the HEIs in coping with their teaching and learning during the virus crisis. The virtual meeting further offered an opportunity to discuss best practices on how HEIs were offering uninterrupted educational services to their students by distance learning in order not to disrupt their academic calendars as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its related lockdowns. A similar webinar was also organized for all vice chancellors, presidents and rectors of African universities on the theme: *Vice Chancellors Dialogue: Keeping African Universities' Learning Doors Open*. The event provided an opportunity to share and discuss practical lessons on how institutions are handling the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since that time till date, AAU has been mounting various webinars and online workshops on various thematic areas designed to inform and enlighten key stakeholders on how to continue academic training and learning in the midst of COVID-19.

It is my firm belief that this one-day virtual conference on ***Invigorating African Higher Education Institutions' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic*** will contribute to the global discourse on how private HEIs plays a critical role in transitioning to online teaching and learning in Africa during the current crisis. On this brief note, may I join the previous speakers to welcome you all and wish you productive deliberation.

My very best wishes for your good health and safety in these perilous times of COVID-19.

Thank you for your attention.

Opening remarks

Professor Sarah Anyang Agbor, Commissioner, Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union Commission, Ethiopia

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I welcome you all to this 18th International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa, organized by St. Mary's University and its partners. No wonder that in its 18 year history, this must be its first online annual event in the series, whose attendance modality is chosen by the social distancing guideline imposed on citizens across the world due to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. The African Union Commission, together with the Association of African Universities, has been partnering with St. Mary's University in organizing this annual event for ten years now. During this time, the AUC made its conference venue available for some of the events. I really congratulate St. Mary's University on making this 18th conference happen uninterrupted due to COVID-19.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The AUC strongly believes that governments alone cannot carry the burden of creating access to tertiary education due to resource limitations, even in the developed world; which is why almost all African countries have private higher learning institutions running demand-driven programmes at various levels. In recent years, the gross enrolment ratio in higher education has shown tremendous growth across Africa. This may partly be attributed to the involvement of private players in the education sector. Of course, governments have laid out large amounts of money on universities targeting science and technology as key aspects to gear up development. While the expansion of higher education is a highly commended action, students enrolled in these institutions should be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills upon graduation toward serving their communities. It is noteworthy to recall here that the African Union has a mechanism by which countries share experiences from each other; the African Peer Review Mechanism. Scrutinizing the education system across countries in the continent is not far from it. Such initiatives have contributed a great deal to respond to emergency situations in the continent. The response to COVID-19 is no different.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to give you background information before I delve into issues related to higher education. It is clearly stated in the 'Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak' adopted by African health ministers in February 2020 that 'minimizing social disruption and economic consequences of COVID-19 outbreaks' was set as one of the two goals which could mitigate the effects of the pandemic. In this regard, the AU and Africa CDC have been important convening powers of coordination and joint standard setting for AU member states. Considering the peculiarities of communities in African countries, lockdowns, as in the developed world, would have devastating consequences to every aspect

of societal values. Yet, every measure advised by the WHO and Africa CDC has been taken by most African counties. This brings us to the disruption of the teaching-learning process in the entire education system. As you well know, COVID-19 proliferates wherever there are large gatherings of people, and the best examples are education institutions. Had it not been for the closures of schools and colleges early on in Africa, one could imagine what fateful consequences would have been encountered.

Today, at this point in time, the discussion across the continent is the safe return of students to schools. The decision does not look that easy. Yet, the closures have their own negative outcomes, especially on students from disadvantaged background; poor nutrition, stress, exposure to violence, sexual harassment and other serious violations of human rights. Long-term closures may have dire consequences on students' wellbeing. The question now is how safely can students go back to classes? This remains a conundrum. What can governments do if private institutions go bankrupt? If colleges are allowed to open soon, would they put in place all the hygienic requirements? What are the monitoring, testing and tracing mechanisms prepared in the event of viral outbreaks?

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this conference, I expect participants to have a thorough discussion on the questions raised above. No question is so urgent as much as they are for the entire institutions of higher learning. In parts of Africa, where there are unstable conditions prompted by conflicts, peace may be a priority. However, there is relative peace in most of Africa, and the issue of bringing the economy back to normal requires undertaking thoughtful measures to open colleges stage by stage. The many years of economic and social development has regressed significantly within a few months of COVID-19 geared disruptions of every aspect of development. The outcomes are clear. People at the lowest tier of income ladder have borne the brunt of the Pandemic and they will be the ones that need immediate attention in the community services of universities.

That said, I would like the conference to have successful deliberations and would set forth policy briefs upon its culmination. The AUC will always be supportive of the conference organizers who have brought about 18 years of proceedings, which would be used as resources for any one studying Private HEIs in Africa.

Finally, allow me to congratulate St. Mary's University and its partners, the Ethiopian Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the African Association of Universities, the Ethiopian Airlines, the University of Kwazulu Natal, the International Network for Higher Education in Africa and the PROPHE.

I thank you.

Teaching and learning in the COVID-19 era: A case of Botho University Eswatini

Rosah Bothloko, Sthembile Hlatshwayo and Emmanuel Lungile Howe, Botho University, Eswatini

Abstract

Higher education is important for producing the quality of graduates required for a country's economy. Failure to sustain or ensure effective higher education learning systems can often lead to unfavourable situations where learners are unable to learn and uncertainty about the future of education happens. The COVID-19 pandemic has created substantial challenges and opportunities for the higher education community worldwide. The sudden COVID-19 disruption exposed many higher education institutions to various challenges such as reduced resources to respond to the crisis, personal and academic challenges and the transition from the traditional face-to-face learning approach to online learning. The lack of resources, academic capabilities and online teaching readiness to transition to online delivery were the major factors that affected institutions. Few higher education institutions that had the resources offered online delivery. The overall concern was the readiness of higher education institutions in unpredicted digital learning situations. This research employed a qualitative approach and online questionnaire survey with students with the intention to explore how teaching and learning presence is fostered and maintained during the COVID era. Online surveys were utilized to gather the level of transition and measurement of various constructs which included learner characteristics, online learning awareness, technology skill readiness and access. The findings were organized into three main categories, forms of communication, online delivery approaches and teaching presence and the conclusion is that the level of presence between the lecturer and students, the degree of involvement demonstrated by the lecturer significantly influences the quality of learning under crisis related situations. The findings show that maintaining online teaching presence, adoption of a continuity plan, utilization of existing learning tools or platforms and constant feedback with students are all fundamental elements that tertiary institutions can adopt to address unexpected situations that may disrupt their learning processes.

Keywords: Teaching and learning, higher education institutions, COVID-19

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption world-wide in the education system, and exerted pressure to every area of life. Industries in general had to respond swiftly to this pressure and it came at a very huge cost in terms of lost time and money. This led to the temporary but long closure of institutions of learning in a lot of countries around the world. Education being the key to life had to find ways to survive. However, with the imposed social distancing, which became a new norm, institutions of learning had to shift to online learning very quickly to allow education to continue. Across many countries, institutions of higher learning were faced by a tremendous challenge of un-readiness to shift to either online learning or blended learning. Blended learning refers to a synchronization of the traditional

face-to-face interaction by teacher and learners with the online learning. Acute shortage of technology resources, such as devices, access to internet and/or data have exposed institutions of higher learning, especially the state owned ones. The other challenge that institutions are facing is lack of the knowhow to apply the online learning pedagogies by academic staff of institutions. This paper intends to show how Botho University Eswatini responded to the pressures of COVID-19 pandemic, in ensuring that teaching and learning do not get disrupted. This paper also assesses the challenges Botho University Eswatini faced as it was positioning itself in the new paradigm shift, and the opportunities presented for the university by the new normal.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Corona Virus Infectious Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) is a type of Corona Virus group of diseases. It is in the same group with diseases that once also ravaged the world such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). It has been reported that COVID-19 originated from China, in the city of Wuhan, in December 2019. It is a novel disease, and as yet it does not have cure. The disease has been initially reported as a Zoonotic disease, meaning it is transmitted from animals to humans, and with its quick spread, now the transmission is between humans. Research has indicated that the disease is transmitted through droplets fallen on the surfaces as people cough or speak. To reduce the fast spread of the virus, World Health Organisation (WHO) encouraged people across the world to adopt social distancing, use of sanitizers, washing hands with soap regularly before touching the face and wearing of masks covering nose and mouth, for one to contain droplets and delay the spread, which can eventually reduce the contact rate (WHO, 2020).

Africa's first COVID-19 case was recorded in Egypt on 14 February 2020. Since then, a total of 52 countries in the continent have reported cases. The disease has reached the Africa continent through travellers returning from hotspots in Asia, Europe and the United States. Closer to home, Republic of South Africa reported its first confirmed case on 5 March 2020, and by 13 March 2020, Eswatini reported its first case. From that day up to today, there has been a lot of change almost daily, mankind adjusting to the new normal way of living lives and doing things. With institutions of learning still temporarily closed in the Kingdom of Eswatini. Botho University Eswatini adopted the online learning mode, with the shift happening as early as from 19 March 2020, just 4 days after the first case was reported. The shift was this quick as the university had long invested in blended learning strategy before COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 has contributed to the paradigm shift from traditional pedagogical methods to technology-based teaching and learning (Mahaye, 2020). The lockdown of education institutions caused major interruptions in student learning processes which consists of disruptions in internal assessments and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative (Simon & Hans, 2020).

Normal calendars of different educational institutions had to be adjusted due to COVID-19. Universities had to shift examination dates in order to prepare their examination rooms and ensure that they are adequate for all students, (social distancing had to be observed during exams). The era where lecturers depended on printed instructional materials has shifted to a

technology space where classrooms are not only constituted of brick and mortar but rather integrated with virtual platforms (Wilkramanayake, 2014). Throughout the crisis, supporting students in distress remained the University's major concern.

Literature Review

Teaching online is traced back to 2002 where private non-profit institutions offered online programs (AACN, 2003; Allen & Seaman 2013; Allen & Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2016). Ali, Haolader & Muhammad (2013) posit that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning is relatively a new phenomenon and it has been the educational researchers focus. Furthermore, the effective use of ICT technologies of teaching and learning as well as in classroom is relatively a new trend in most developing countries (Ali, Nargis, Yasmeen and Iqbal, 2015).

Teaching in blended and online learning environments requires different pedagogical practices than teaching in face-to-face learning environments. How educators are prepared to teach impacts the quality of instruction provided in blended and online courses. Teaching presence is essential to achieving student learning outcomes (Gurley, 2018). One of the most important aspects in teaching and learning is interaction. Fournier, Scott & Scott (2020) affirm that interaction in higher education which includes student-content, student-student and student-lecturer are very important aspects that contribute towards achieving positive academic achievement. Khan (2000) conducted a study on Web Based Instruction (WBI) and concluded that it is a hypermedia-based instructional program that utilizes the attributes and resources of the World Wide Web to create meaningful learning environments where learning is fostered and supported. Also, list serves, newsgroups, conferencing tools contribute to the creation of a virtual community. E-mail on WBI provides asynchronous communication to both students and instructors. Bickle, Rucker, & Burnsed (2019) identified attributes that contribute to humanizing online classrooms. These scholars revealed that students' perceptions of a high quality course were dependent upon continual communication with the instructor, a predetermined method of connecting students with one another and students' ability to express their opinions in different group activities and the use of technology allowed online learners to make humanistic connections with other students and the instructor.

Online teaching and learning requires the extensive use of technology. Before COVID-19, technology was used in teaching and learning as an adjunct teaching aid which was meant for enhancing learning. Technology has now become a need, and this has brought challenges to learners who stay in the remote rural areas, as they depended a lot on face-to-face interactions. Bertacco (2020) laments that opportunities for incidental learning, peer support, collegiality and communication in the target language, are also reduced in online classes. She further argues that online learning created a challenge in catering for all learners' needs. In face-to-face learning, learners are dependent on their listening skills and online learning can create a considerable strain on them and may fail to participate in online learning as it was the case in face-to-face learning.

Various studies have been conducted regarding the association between online, blended and face-to-face learning with the student community. Garrison, Anderson and Archer (1999) designed the community of inquiry model which provides a conceptual framework for the online learning experience. This model relies on the assumption that learning occurs as a function of three primary and co-dependent elements, namely social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence.

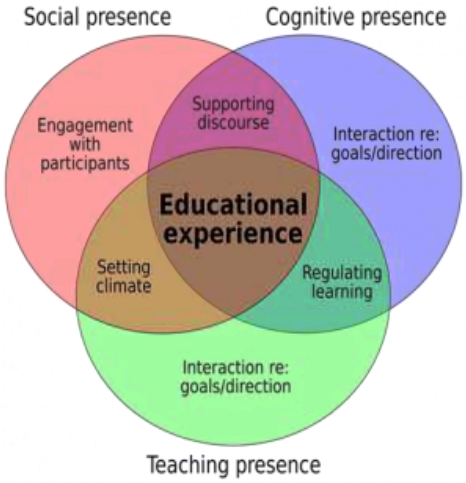


Figure 1: Elements of an educational experience (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010)

Social presence provides a sense of the extent to which a communication medium facilitates awareness of the other person (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996). Garrison *et al.,* (1999) defines teaching presence as the "bidding agent" which directs the educational purposes for the specific community of learners. Cognitive presence is "the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse" (Garrison *et al., 2001*).

Methodology

The data was collected during the transition phase of face-to-face teaching and learning, to online platforms, and through online survey which was sent to students to gather their experience, perceptions and expectations. The online survey was distributed in two phases. The first phase gathered data on student online readiness while phase two of the collection was to obtain the experiences of learning online. Phase two was repeated bi-weekly for a further two (2) months to monitor the improvement of the student online learning experiences.

How Botho University Eswatini responded

Preceding COVID-19, Botho University had already invested in a robust state-of-the art Mobile Learning and e-Learning infrastructure that has been the backbone of its online distance learning programs. All Botho University students and staff, including those in conventional learning, have been using Blackboard Learn and its Mobile application in a blended mode to enhance teaching and learning (combination of classroom and online learning).

Blackboard Learn is the Botho University Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). It is an online campus that supports teaching and learning, allowing students to access their course materials online. Blackboard App and Blackboard Instructor App are the mobile versions of Blackboard which students can access using their smartphones or tablets. Blackboard provides access to learning materials and activities online. It has a plethora of features and functionality that provides an unparalleled level of student engagement such as discussion forums, wikis, blogs, journals and advanced content management features that allow for textual, audio, visual and pictorial content. In addition, Blackboard provides powerful assessment features that allow plagiarism checking as well as comprehensive reporting and analytics that allow for easy identification of "at-risk" students. Also, Blackboard allows easy and full access to e-Library facilities. This allows students and lecturers to access the Both University E-Library, which leads access to the following Databases; Emerald, Ebscohost, Proquest, Dawsonera, Jstor and BU Repository, for access of all the E-Books, E–Journals, theses, dissertations, case studies and many more resources. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Botho University deployed all its technical might to ensure that learning and teaching continues in spite of the restrictions due to COVID-19.

The university developed and implemented an approach of how to prepare for the migration to online learning. This approach consisted of three (3) stages to ensure a smooth transition to online learning. The first stage involved formulating and contextualizing of the asynchronous and synchronous learning approaches, the second stage was the campus online transition stage and the third stage was implementing the online learning activities.

STAGE 1: Contextualizing the learning approach

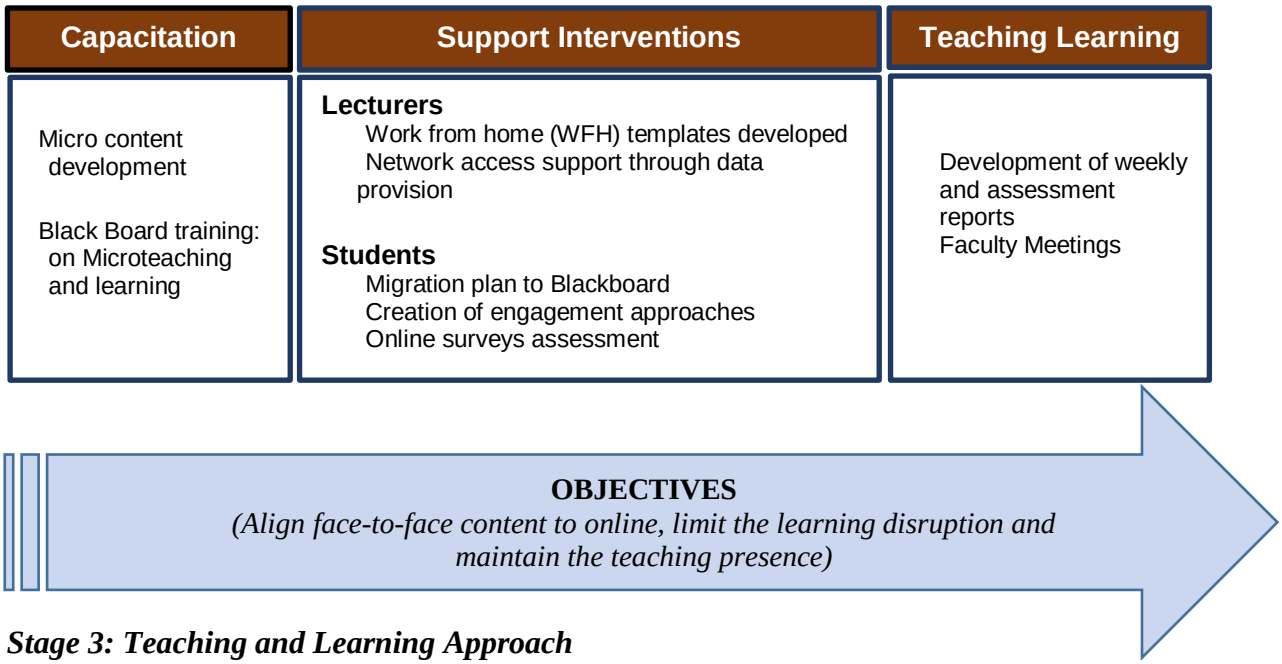
The objective was to identify the different student learning styles with the aim of aligning to the most appropriate delivery platform. The table below shows the phases used to allocate the resources based on the learning approaches.

	Activity	**Learning Approach**	
1.	Class discussion	Asynchronous & Synchronous	Discussion forum in Blackboard as well as conduct online sessions during the regularly scheduled class time
2.	Class lectures	Asynchronous	Recorded video posted to Blackboard
		Synchronous	Blackboard session during the regularly scheduled class time
3.	Class Resources	Asynchronous	Books, Articles, Videos can be posted on Blackboard and access to E-library resources
4.	Small-Group Discussions	Asynchronous & Synchronous	Discussion forum in Blackboard

5.	Office Hours / Student Support	Asynchronous	Email, "Ask the Lecturer" Discussion forum in Blackboard, chat via WhatsApp, feedback/review via Microsoft Forms
		Synchronous	chat via WhatsApp sessions for Office Hours
6.	Student Submission	Asynchronous	Through Blackboard and Turnitin

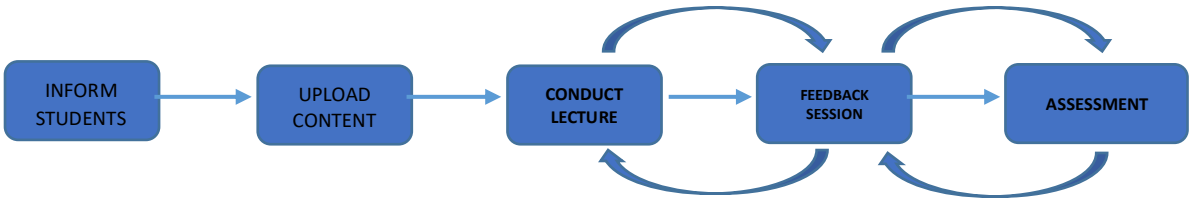
STAGE 2: Online Transition

The diagram below shows how the university responded in transitioning from face-to face to online learning.



Stage 3: Teaching and Learning Approach

This stage focuses on how the actual online teaching and learning occurs, and it provides guidance on how lecturers and students conform to the approach.



Teaching and learning support interventions

The interventions introduced by the university during the lockdown proved to be very beneficial in ensuring that teaching and learning is maintained.

Support Interventions: lecturers

(a) *Teaching readiness:* The university's approach to ensure that the lecturers are ready for the transition to online learning was guided by the following questions

- Do you have a laptop or home computer?
- Do you have Internet access at home?
- Can you access the tools listed here below and do you know how to use them?
- Do you have a webcam and the Zoom app installed in your laptop?
- Do you have access to your teaching materials?
- Do you have access to the content resources (books, articles, videos) that you will need?
- What is your experience in teaching online? Can these experiences be leveraged at this time?

These questions were crucial for seamless online delivery of the content and the university was also able to utilize existing policies to achieve quality online teaching.

(b) Course Delivery:

The university aligned the teaching approach with the online learning platform and was guided by the following questions;

- Which tools does the University offer that can support your essential course elements?
- What do you need help with? Which resources can the university support you with?
- Based on the strategies you have selected, identify the tools and resources that make sense for your class.

Throughout this process, IT support was available through our campus IT technician, who was also available online.

(c) Teaching and learning interventions

To monitor whether teaching and learning was ongoing during lockdown, a reporting tool which the university refers to as Work From Home (WFH) was completed daily. The WFH sheet required lecturers to state the percentage of students who participated on Blackboard, WhatsApp groups and emails, the mode of delivery for the day's content, challenges encountered by lecturers and also any suggestions they could offer to make online teaching during COVID-19 a success. The WFH sheet also enabled heads of departments to monitor teaching and learning progress as well as track students participation in lessons so that follow ups were done with those students who were missing online lessons.

Support Interventions for students

During the abrupt closure of learning institutions, a fresher training on the learning platform could not be provided. However Botho University Eswatini ensured that learners were ready for the transition by applying the following interventions;

(a) *Online learning readiness.* An online survey was conducted to determine the readiness of the students, and guiding questions that were posted were:

- Do they have a laptop, mobile phone or home computer?

- Do they have the Blackboard App installed in their mobile phones and/or computers?
- Do they have access to Blackboard content resources (books, articles, videos)?
- What is their experience in learning online?
- What assistance might they need?

These questions were crucial in determining the student learning style, the anticipated learning context and access to the learning platforms.

(i) Uploading content on learner's tablets through the learning management system
The lecturers made sure that all the relevant content was uploaded so that learning may continue with minimal disruption. If a student was not active either on WhatsApp or Blackboard, the lecturer would phone that particular student to find out why they are inactive.

(ii) Constant communication with students using social media platforms
The lecturers maintained constant communication with the students through WhatsApp. The purpose of the WhatsApp groups was to notify students to log into Blackboard, check newly posted content material, address and discuss questions raised by students and most importantly encourage student online participation.

E-library accessibility

Another approach used by the University was full utilization of the electronic or e-Library. Botho universities subscribe to different databases that work globally and pay every year. The databases have academic journals with different articles published by scholars and e-books. Students are able to access e-library and get e-books while at the comfort of their homes. This enabled them not to be disturbed by lockdown but to continue with doing research for their assignments. They also had the advantage of accessing the e-library at whatever time convenient to them. E-library also features Press Reader, which enables students to read newspapers online. Botho University librarian was also able to guide students on how to get access to e-books by issuing out steps to follow to students while they were at home.

Blackboard Usage

Using Blackboard, lecturers posted self-recorded lectures or lectures from YouTube. They also uploaded teaching slides aligned to learning outcomes. Additional reference materials were also provided to students. Through the discussion forum on Blackboard, students were able to ask questions and lectures responded to them. Internal assessments were issued out using Blackboard and course announcements were posted. Blackboard allows lecturers to post all information about their courses and students are able to get all the important announcements.

Assignment submission

In order for students to submit given assignments, students used Turnitin. This is an online system used by Botho University to check plagiarism in students' assignments. When COVID-19 forced tertiary institutions to close, students were already familiar with submitting assignments online using Turnitin because they were taught how to use it when registering at Botho University. The sole challenge brought by lockdown was that assignments submission dates had to be shifted in order to give learners enough time to access the internet. With all people at home, the internet had glitches and it was not easy to have access to it.

Experience gained

Assessment and Evaluation

The transition from face-to-face teaching to online delivery had a serious impact on how assessments were conducted. Learners as well as lecturers were uncertain about the procedure for administering the remaining assessments. Prior to this crisis, a majority of the final assessments were in the form of written examinations, therefore the university had to change to a project based assessment approach. Results of the survey undertaken about Botho Eswatini students' resource revealed that the majority of students (81%) used laptops for their assignments and tests. This is due to the fact that Botho University Eswatini students are provided with tablets just before they resume lessons.

Academic Continuity Plan

In an effort to ensure that the students do not "fall" behind their learning schedule, the lecturers engaged in efforts to convert the learning content into a micro learning format where students can access the content using their smartphones and tablets. The institution conducted training on developing micro content for conformity into the learner's tablets. Provision for learning resources included weekly mobile data for lecturers who were working from home, as well as the modification of the academic calendar to incorporate online learning activities.

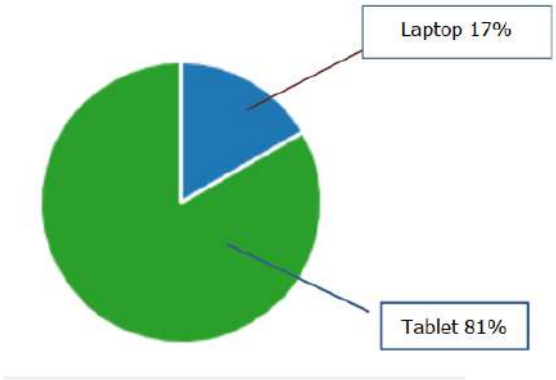
Challenges in shifting to online learning

Online delivery approaches used by Botho University lecturers include using Blackboard, virtual laboratory, e-library and Turnitin. These are Botho University existing online systems used for delivering content. During orientation of first years, students are guided on how these online systems function and how they access them. The university has access to free Wifi for both students and lecturers. Access to free Wi-Fi enables students to do research, access e-library and submit assignments through Turnitin. Students have no challenges with online platforms used by Botho University. With the spread of COVID-19 pandemic which led to tertiary institutions closing, this meant that students will no longer have access to free Wifi. Regardless of this challenge, lecturers continued using Blackboard, emails, WhatsApp groups to deliver content and communicate with students.

Learning Tools and Network Access

The transition to online learning greatly affected the students in accessing the network with available learning tools. Results of the survey revealed that 64% of the students used their

tablets to access the internet and 36% used their cell phones. The provision of tablets by the institution to students after they had registered enabled lecturers to continue with their lessons even during lockdown. Since students had the resources needed for online learning, they were able to type, send assignments and write tests while they were at home.

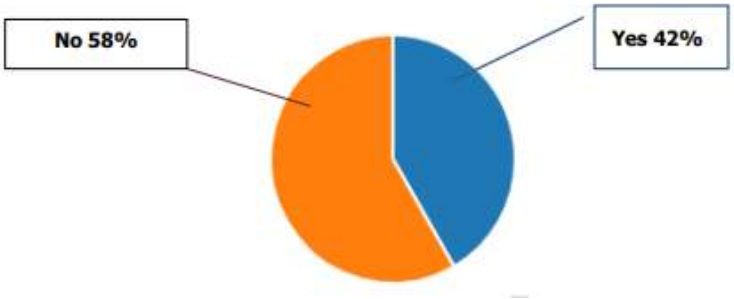


Online Practical Provision

Certain modules required that students should have the prescribed software installed in their tablets. However, the tablets had limited capabilities for installing these softwares. Blackboard has a feature called Virtual labs where students can conduct practicals virtually. However, this proved to be a challenge for the learners because learners were not mentally ready to conduct practicals online.

Access to e-learning resources

Learners were asked about accessing learning resources online and whether enough support was provided.



Some of the learners' comments included the following;

"When I try to enter that platform, it tells me that it isn't available."
"I just have no clear picture of how to use it."
"I'm unable to access the books."
"I can't use it; I don't know how to use it and I can't get to the point where I have to select a book."
"I still do not understand how it functions and how one could function it."
"I do not understand how to use it yet."
"I've tried so many times but I never gained access."

"It loads forever."
"I don't know how to operate it."
"It displays no information in it."

Teaching presence

Lecturers constantly encouraged their students to participate in online lessons. If a student was absent in an online lesson, the lecturer would contact the student through the WhatsApp group and in some cases phone the student and find out why he or she missed the lecture. This motivated students to be active participants in lectures since they felt that lecturers care about them. Also, students felt that they had all the support they needed from their lecturers who were concerned about their studies thus they had no reason to give up.

Financial Challenges

The major challenge with teaching during lockdown was that students lacked finances to load data bundles and therefore participate online. The survey findings show that 62% of students revealed that they are no longer able to access Blackboard due to financial challenges. Furthermore, 80% of them revealed that they had challenges accessing Blackboard during the initial stages of the lockdown.

Leveraging on blended learning culture

Students continued with online lessons, submitted assignments, wrote tests and the end of semester examination amidst COVID-19. Results were released and shared online. All this was made possible through online teaching which was not just adopted during COVID-19 but it is a culture of Botho University. Botho University continually invests in excellent infrastructure and the latest technology-driven learning resources.

Student Feedback

The university made it a point to involve the students during this transition by obtaining their experiences. The comments below summarise their comments and suggestions on how to improve and maintain the quality of online learning.

Comments and suggestions

1. *"I think if we can have shortened videos will do and with me it keeps on loading ever since we were transferred to Blackboard … now I missed a test."*
2. *"Deadlines on quizzes, assignments and tests should be placed when lecturers are definitely sure that all students can access the Blackboard. Not everyone can access Blackboard due to financial problems, so if there was a way to make it free and accessible anytime can it please be done."*
3. *"The network might need to be a little faster and Blackboard needs to stop shutting down."*
4. *"Please make sure the system files open on our phones as well."*

5. *"I think we could at least use WhatsApp more often instead of Blackboard."*
6. *"Have different Blackboard's for each campus so the system isn't flooded."*
7. *"Maybe get most of the work on our school emails."*
8. *"Apply innovative feedback and assessment strategies."*
9. *" If the App can stop shutting me out, and the video can be downloaded"*
10. *"We should also be given the chance to ask questions during discussion and not only answer them and also when writing testes we should be able to see the marked result so that we know where we are at fault."*

Conclusion

Tertiary institutions worldwide have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in many universities to be closed. In the Kingdom of Eswatini, the tertiary institutions faced many challenges on assessing and responding to this crisis. However, this global pandemic also created opportunities for universities to experiment as well as to gauge their resilience in unexpected circumstances that can affect the teaching and learning processes. This outbreak has shown that maintain the teaching presence is very important to ensure that students do not lose focus and hope in completing the learning activities. Although the anxiety was very high among the students and lecturers, the findings show that an academic continuity plan is vital to consolidate the changes and challenges encountered. This academic continuity plan provides guidance during the transition period of migrating from face-to-face learning to online learning. This includes converting the content to suit the online learning format and the availability of learning resources.

In addressing financial challenges, tertiary institutions should have provision in place to cushion the impact. Provision to online learning resources must be maintained as part of the migration phase, given that the students already have access to electronic learning tools. This links very well with the blended learning culture.

The findings also highlight the importance of communication and the various platforms available for asynchronous & synchronous learning approaches. It is important to identify the learning style or approach that the institutions need to implement so that it is aligned with the student preferences. This mix is fundamental in maintaining the learning process and achieving the learning objectives. Institutions that already have an online learning platform will find it easier to consolidate these elements, and they can also leverage on the presence of a blended learning culture. Future improvements tertiary institutions can adopt is by providing a complete online learning experience adopted by a learning framework that incorporated all the elements of teaching and learning.

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Research and Research-Related Activities in the COVID-19 Era: Implication for Higher Education Institutions

Melaku Girma, St. Mary's University, Ethiopia

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore different perspectives of how to go about conducting academic research in COVID-19 era and to trigger greater debate in Ethiopian context. A May 27, 2020 Science Magazine article outlines that Universities are expected first and foremost to come up with safe protocols/guideline for safe practices in order to move forward. Schiffer and Walsh (May 20, 2020) hinted that America's top research institutions identify and explore the challenges that research operations are facing. They are related with social distancing requirements, university finances are stretched, the expectations of pre-pandemic research grants and contracts, and international activity, and recruitment. As cited in Clay (March 19, 2020) members of APA's Board of Scientific Affairs, offer advice among other thing to: work remotely, modify the research and analysis, protect the human participants and animal subjects, cross-train staff, do the things that researchers never have time for, support junior colleagues, and keep things in perspective. The Leaders of Africa (July 6, 2020) suggested that the COVID-19 era presents us with a learning process in which survey organizations and partners must adapt and be flexible. The Canterbury Christ Church University (April 17, 2020) advises students that there is a need for guide to decide whether their research can continue at the start, followed by some generic resources and suggestions. These are followed by some more subject specific suggestions, and finally by suggestions for Desk Based Research and Action Research. The University suggested that there are a number of alternative research strategies that students could consider. For example, analysis of existing media content, analysis of archival data and texts acknowledging shortcomings in the thesis, meta-analysis of published studies, and systematic literature review.

Finally, regarding COVID-19 and private higher education, Wondwosen Tamrat assessed the Ethiopian context. In his newsletter article in the University World News (May7, 2020), he stressed the immediate mounting difficulties on private higher education vis-a-vis public higher education institutions. Accordingly, the private sector was not and still is not able to move smoothly toward online provision to ensure continuity of teaching and learning. He emphasized that while the obstacles are substantial and still growing in many cases, now is the time to scrutinize the major issues explicitly and prepare for the decisions needed in the months ahead. In this regard, recommendations include: revisiting the national directives, bailing out the private sector and, planning and preparing to enter the post-pandemic era by making hard decisions.

Keywords: Research, COVID-19, Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

Though the novel coronavirus started in China, it is now spreading out across the world, with almost all countries affected. According to WHO report on September 04, 2020 globally there were 26,489,636 confirmed cases and 873,552 deaths. In Ethiopia, as per the report of the

Ministry of Health and Public Health Institute on September 4, 2020, there were 55,213 and 856 confirmed cases and deaths, respectively. At the frontline, medical staff is fighting to cope with one of the biggest challenges in care workers' careers. At the same time, specialists are working day and night to develop a vaccine.

In this small desk-based research, attempt has been made to bring together thoughts and experiences for doing research in COVID-19 era. The ideas compiled come from journal articles, newspaper articles, blogs and webpages, and include experiences of doing participatory, qualitative and quantitative research, through to ethical issues that may be faced and how to deal with them.

Beyond the frontline, social scientists have a crucial role to play in foreseeing, understanding, and analyzing the on-going societal transformations, and in developing solutions that help our societies to move forward. Over the coming years, social scientists will tackle different societal issues. And they will often do this in field that is also part of their home, interconnected with their personal lives. How can we safeguard the health of our scholars? How can we reinforce researchers' strength? Here, I invite participants to think and converse on how to adequately cope up with the challenges of research in COVID-19.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore different perspectives of how to go about conducting academic research in COVID-19 era and to trigger greater debate in Ethiopian context.

Moving Academic Research Forward During COVID-19

COVID-19 is not just altering everyday life; it's also upsetting research. As universities and colleges across most countries go virtual, researchers need to attempt to protect their participants, subjects, scholarship and careers.

The coronavirus crisis has challenged higher education institutions in many and unexpected ways. As universities have to take radical measures and make major efforts to slow the infection and to better understand the virus; they are making new paths in crisis management. This brings both challenges and opportunities to most universities in developing countries like Ethiopia in particular in relation to digitalization and digitally enhanced learning and teaching, opens science, research, quality assurance, funding and civic engagement.

A May 27, 2020, Science Magazine article outlines the difficulties of pursuing research during the COVID-19 pandemic stating the unprecedented disruption of society. The Magazine also points out that many universities are expected to be online in the coming months. Initially, most on-site research "ground to a halt." Now, sites are ready to ramp-up research by working with public health experts, staff, etc. to come up with safe protocols moving forward. Across the world, early mitigation strategies hampered research sites and projects. In the countries most effected, most "nonessential" research was at least temporarily halted. This included lab research, field work, and educational research, but exceptions were made for work needed to maintain machinery and monitor certain long-term projects. In the

U.S., researchers have been working closely with government agencies to get clarification of what activities are allowed, especially under active grants.

According to the Magazine in resuming on-site research, sites in China, Europe, and the U.S. have been developing guideline for safe practices. Science looks at six representative public and private institutions, which have developed "overlapping yet distinct guidance" for research communities. Recommended actions include the health of workers and study subjects and "fair and transparent processes for [safety-related] decision-making." Specific challenges can be occupancy levels, facility prioritization, and library usage.

Resuming University Research in the Post COVID-19 Era

Schiffer and Walsh (May, 2020) hinted that there are no clear best practices to copy and no good instances to follow. We can, however, identify the issues to be faced and prepare for decisions needed in the months ahead. To them, America's research universities have long been a source of national prosperity and tremendous intellectual progress in service of the entire world. The university research enterprise is indeed a fundamental source of the nation's strength and resiliency, yet the pandemic is forcing adaptations that were unimaginable a few months ago. They indicated that they have connected with research leaders at some of the top research institutions in the nation to identify and explore the challenges that research operations are facing. They include:

- Social distancing requirements are nearly impossible to meet for many research areas.
- University finances are stretched, along with almost every other sector of the economy.
- The expectations of pre-pandemic research grants and contracts are often incompatible with the current situation.
- International activity, and especially student and postdoc recruitment, is highly inhibited by travel restrictions and increased logistical hurdles to visa processing.

According to Schiffer and Walsh, while the obstacles are substantial and still growing in many cases, now is the time for planning and preparing to enter the post-pandemic era with Hard Decisions Required. The areas included are:

- Any transition toward full research activity will be impacted by larger societal issues: how the pandemic progresses, how effectively medical advances can fight the virus and how societal, governmental and economic expectations evolve.
- Even when full return to work begins, the broad rejuvenation of university research will likely be staged to keep density in labs and on campuses low. Universities can expect a period of uncertainty, both economically and under the threat of possible reinstatement of social distancing measures.
- Planning must weigh the needs of research and researchers' careers against the risks of infection and substantial financial costs. The decisions will necessarily vary significantly by field.

For other research, however, hard decisions will be required on what should get prioritized. These include:

- The work most related to the pandemic or other health concerns;
- The work that is easiest to conduct with continued social distancing;
- The work with the highest scientific promise or the largest implications for technology transfer or national security;
- The work that most impacts the careers of graduate students, postdocs, contingent faculty and pre-tenure faculty members or the work that does not depend on supplies, equipment and other resources that are needed for health care during an active phase of the pandemic.

In responding to such questions, university communities will need to reflect on their paramount educational mission. Beyond the researchers themselves, planning also must include the infrastructure of dedicated administrative and technical staff that support and sustain researchers and the operations of research. Finally and critically, universities and government agencies must attend to the needs of international students and scholars.

Doing Research during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Jeff Zacks, PhD, of Washington University in St. Louis, who chairs APA's Board of Scientific Affairs (BSA), says that the research that will be affected first is a kind of study that involve bringing groups of people together in close proximity. To mitigate the impact, Zacks, his fellow BSA members and other experts offer the following advice:

a. Prepare to work remotely

Make sure you have a laptop, charger, webcam, contact information for team members and access to any electronic materials you'll need. If you don't yet know how to use Skype, Zoom and Hangouts, now's the time to learn.

b. Check in with your program officer

Since it's not clear when the pandemic will be over, it's important to think creatively about how to sustain your research over at least the next three to five months, says Carmela Alcántara, of Columbia University's School of Social Work. Then reach out to your program officer/funder and share how the crisis is affecting your work and how you plan to keep making progress.

c. Modify your research and analysis

Researchers who rely on face-to-face interaction to collect data will have to hit pause or go online. If you're shifting to remote data collection and storage, keep in mind that changing methodologies means modifying your institutional review board approval and doing another round of consents, says Alcántara.

d. Protect your human participants and animal subjects

Universities have to stop any and all face-to-face human research because of the risks involved, says Sangeeta Panicker, Director of Research Ethics at APA, pointing to the risks for participants traveling to and being in labs as well as risks to the personnel keeping labs open.

e. Cross-train staff

"You want to reduce the likelihood of institutional knowledge being locked up with one person," says Bethany A. Teachman, of the University of Virginia. "We don't want people to feel pressured to come in." By training other staff to do data management, for example, another team member can step in if someone gets sick.

f. **Maintain communication with your team**

Frequent communication is key to not only keep the research going but also safeguarding your team's mental health, says Teachman. In addition to weekly Zoom meetings, she has written to her team members to ask about their concerns and offer problem-solving help. "A big part of it is telling them that these are not normal times, and that it's OK not to be as productive" she says.

g. Do the things that you never have time for

"While it's frustrating not to be able to do data collection, this is a great chance to work on a paper, take an online course, build that skill you were always saying you were going to do," says Teachman. "It's also a good time to write grant proposals."

And keep research staff busy, too. "We can't say, 'I'm going to fire you temporarily but rehire you when we can recruit again,'" says Evans, who is putting staff to use checking data for journal articles in preparation.

h. Support junior colleagues

Students, trainees and early career researchers are most vulnerable right now. As faculty, do what you can to help ensure they can continue progressing toward their goals and be flexible about deadlines. Reach out to junior colleagues and offer data sets they can work with or opportunities to collaborate with you. If you're an early career researcher yourself, document how the crisis is affecting your research and talk to your chair about how you can protect your chances of tenure, says Major.

i. Keep things in perspective

"Right now, this is very traumatic for everyone," says Evans. But, she and other researchers say, it is important to remember that you are not the only one in this situation and that normal research activities will eventually resume. Zacks says, "It's going to be OK."

Conducting Survey Research in the COVID-19 Era (Leaders of Africa July 6, 2020)

The Leaders of Africa is an independent and non-partisan collaborative that shares the experiences of thought leaders, and educates and conducts research on leadership in Africa. The collaboration indicated that surveys play an important role in gathering the perspectives of citizens concerning pertinent political, economic, and societal matters. During the present COVID-19 global pandemic, understanding citizens' opinions is perhaps even more essential given the need to achieve positive public health outcomes and ensure endangered livelihoods are protected.

However, in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, survey data collection has been hindered in part due to lockdown measures and legitimate fears about putting survey teams and respondents in harm's way.

The collaboration suggested that the COVID-19 era presents us with a learning process in which survey organizations and partners must adapt and be flexible. They further revealed important insights about some of the ongoing adaptations and techniques survey teams can take to conduct field surveys. Here are five insights:

i. Rethink data collection strategies while acknowledging the shortcomings

Face-to-face field research generally yields fairly high response rates, and there is more control over the random selection process. But, with the advent of COVID-19, many survey and polling organizations have begun to rely on other data collection methods including telephonic surveys and in some cases SMS polls.

ii. Protect enumerators in face-to-face interactions

The panelists agreed that measures need to be in place to protect enumerators and respondents, including providing masks to enumerators and maintaining some spatial distance. The one concern raised is how respondents would perceive enumerators coming from outside the community

iii. Acknowledge the variation of experiences with COVID-19 and what it means for fielding surveys

One of the suggestions is to acknowledge the competence of research boards in African countries to take the lead, particularly in countries where COVID-19 has been largely in control and local survey organizations have an approach to field surveys with minimal health risks.

iv. Understand how fear of COVID-19 is linked to experiences with the virus and other threats to livelihoods

With studies beginning to capture citizens' views on the COVID-19 threat and the response of their government, it is expected that some of the effects of worsening economic conditions

will top the list citizens' most important problems. This does not mean that COVID-19 is not a serious concern or that citizens are not aware of its presence. But, the impact varies and more immediate livelihood concerns may be a priority of citizens.

v. Broaden some of the themes we include on surveys, particularly those related to COVID-19

The panellists mentioned how surveys can enhance evidence-based discussions of misinformation, local COVID-19 remedies, mental health, and the opinions of young people under the traditional survey baseline age of 18. There was agreement among the panellists that youth's voice needs to be amplified in survey work, including gauging how young people experience stressors associated with COVID-19 and their opinions on pertinent topics, such as the opening of schools. Ultimately, surveys will play a crucial role in ensuring that a broader set of voices shape public and policy discussion related to COVID-19 and political, economic, and societal matters.

COVID-19: Alternative Research Strategies –Advice for Students

According to Canterbury Christ Church University (17 April 2020), there is a need for guide to decide whether your research can continue at the start, followed by some generic resources and suggestions. These are followed by some more subject specific suggestions, and finally by suggestions for Desk Based Research and Action Research.

Deciding whether research can continue-generic information

Any advice contained must be subject to published policies and advice in the order of precedence below:

i. Government legislation, advice or guidance relating to measures to combat COVID-19

ii. The University statement on Continuity of Research and Research-Related Activities

iii. Policies, procedures, guidance and advice under the University Research & Enterprise Integrity Framework.

There are a number of alternative research strategies that you could consider. For example:

- Analysis of existing media content
- Qualitative and quantitative analysis of archival data and texts
- If your project is empirical, but due to data collection being foreshortened, discuss with your supervisor whether any alternative/additional data analysis procedures could be applied
- Whilst you do not have sufficient statistical power to carry out your original data analysis, whether sufficient data is available for a more limited analysis and this can be acknowledged in the thesis
- Meta-analysis of published studies
- Systematic literature review

Tertiary Education and COVID-19: Impact and Mitigation Strategies in Europe and Central Asia

It has been stated that, though, as the result of the arrival of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown in many Europe and Central Asia (ECA) countries, tertiary education institutions have had to move swiftly toward online provision to ensure continuity of teaching and learning, the transition seems to vary from country to country. For those countries that had invested in the sector and approached digitalization in a strategic way pre-crisis (for example, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany), it seems that this transition was comparatively easy. Countries that had not developed a strategic approach toward digitalization did not provide the support; those that, more broadly, had seen decreasing investment in higher education faced significant difficulties.

Nevertheless, the following 10 key recommendations were forwarded to policymakers and tertiary education institutions, and to donors and multilateral agencies, on how to address the crisis.

I. **Account for all staff and students,** particularly those who were engaged in any mobility programs away from their home institutions, and support to the extent possible the return of staff and students to their home countries.

II. **Address infrastructure issues and lack of equipment swiftly**, to the extent possible. Share educational materials and resources among institutions. Many countries provide open-access resources; make sure they are known and available.

III. **Take timely decisions on the academic calendar** (exams, admission, and graduation) based on epidemiological guidance and available information. Communicate them clearly so that all the involved actors, particularly students and their families can plan.

IV**. Make equity a priority during the crisis and beyond**. Provide additional support to at-risk students who are particularly affected by the crisis, to the extent possible. Where learning is discontinued, plan flexible measures to bring students back on board as soon as possible and help them catch up.

V. Institutions should **consider a freeze on staffing arrangements as long as it is feasible**. The end of the crisis will provide a more opportune moment to consider medium-term staffing needs.

VI. **Communicate with current and prospective international staff and students**, take care of their specific needs, and where decisions cannot be taken right away, provide flexibility and facilitate decision making.

VII. **Work with quality assurance agencies** to adjust quality assurance mechanisms to the crisis and the evolving situation. This concerns not only online learning but also established schedules and mechanisms for the accreditation and evaluation of programs and institutions.

VIII. **Liaise with pre-tertiary decision makers** to find suitable joint solutions in countries where university access is based on high-stakes exams.

IX. **Ring-fence public funding for tertiary education**. Decreasing funding for teaching and learning, research, and innovation will harm post crisis economies in a lasting way.

X. **Plan for a gradual reopening**. Prioritizing the areas that would need to be accessed at the earliest opportunity, and analyzing the precautions (such as masks and number of people in the building), which should apply and could help speed up the process of reopening.

COVID-19 and Private Higher Education: The Ethiopian Context

According to Wondwosen Tamrat's news article in the University World News, an international newspaper and website posted on 07 May 2020, the Ethiopian government decided to close all types of educational institutions on 16 March 2020 followed by establishing a national taskforce that started mobilizing the public towards combatting the impacts of the pandemic. Most private institutions responded swiftly to the call by contributing money, sanitary items, essential supplies and even their buildings to be used for quarantine and storage purposes. In the article, Wondwosen stressed the immediate mounting difficulties on private higher education vis-a-vis public higher education institutions. This is because among other things:

- The vast majority of PHEIs across the country depend almost entirely on student tuition and fees;
- Most PHEIs run their programs in rented buildings owned by individuals and private businesses;
- They employ tens of thousands of people and incur substantial expenses on rentals and salaries;
- PHEIs pay taxes and duties, and they repay loans from financial institutions at exorbitant rates;
- They receive little or no direct or indirect assistance from the government.

As the result, according to Wondwosen, the private sector was not and still is not able to move smoothly toward online provision to ensure continuity of teaching and learning and, at least to some extent, exams. The challenges include poor internet connectivity, exorbitant internet costs, and lack of appropriate technology. The pervasive lack of a well-developed learning management system has forced many institutions to revert to social media platforms like Telegram, Facebook, etc. as an immediate resort to send lessons to students. Another serious challenge is the mounting number of students that do not have the opportunity or capacity to access the digital platforms created. These challenges continue to be a source of unhappiness for students and disagreement between students and institutions.

Finally the author stressed that while the obstacles are substantial and still growing in many cases, now is the time to scrutinize the major issues explicitly and prepare for the decisions needed in the months ahead. In this regard, the following recommendations were suggested:

- Revisiting the national directives in order to accommodate the challenges of private higher education;
- Bailing out the private sector to alleviate the negative impacts of the pandemic;

- Planning and preparing to enter the post-pandemic era by making hard decisions. Even when fuller return to work begins the private sector can expect a period of uncertainty, both economically and under the threat of possible reinstatement of social distancing measures.

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Employment Characteristics, Transition and Status of SMU Graduates': The Case of 2016 to 2018 Graduates

Daniel Zewide, St. Mary's University, Ethiopia

Abstract

Background and purpose

St. Mary's University has been trying its best in producing qualified professionals in the fields of Business and Informatics to the labour market in the different economic sectors. To continue competitive in offering quality education, a tracer study was conducted to investigate the employment characteristics, transition to employment, and satisfaction of graduates in the jobs they are engaged. Moreover, it emphasized on studying how graduates have been employed, their job-hunting strategies, duration it took them to secure their first jobs and how their works related to their fields of studies. This survey focused on graduates, who completed their studies between 2016 and 2018 academic years in the undergraduate programs.

Methodology

To meet the purpose, descriptive survey design was employed. The samples were considered using random and purposive sampling techniques. A total of 392 participants engaged in the study (312 graduates, 72 employers and 8 officials). Data from graduates and employers were collected using questionnaires. Furthermore, qualitative data from top officials and officers were collected using interview. The data gathered through quantitative and qualitative methods were analyzed and triangulated in line with the research questions raised.

Major findings

Most graduates (93%) were employed and have secured their first job with less than six months. They reported that they commonly used friends (25%), media (24.4%), and the Career and Internship Unit (CIU) (21%) as job hunting methods. Still, the majority of employers (61%) have been inviting graduates through short notices and CIU. Most graduates (84.3%) were full-time paid workers. As to working sectors, 63% of graduates have been working in private companies, while 25% of them are working in government offices. Regarding employment status, 85% of the graduates were employed on permanent basis while the remaining were hired temporarily (4.5%), on contractual basis (5.1%), and self-employed (5.5%). As to monthly salary, it was found that 17.91% of graduates are earning Birr 10, 000 and above, but more than 75% of them have been paid less than the average salary of Birr 8,900.00 or median salary of Birr 9,150.00.

On the other hand, graduates responded that their fields of specialization, personal skills, reputability of SMU, and GPA, have contributed to their employment ranking first to fourth respectively; between 78% to 84% of graduates reported that the knowledge and skills they acquired from courses delivered were relevant to their jobs. Similarly, employers have also confirmed that graduates have the required knowledge and skills in their fields of specialization. But to 14% of them, their experiences were not relevant to jobs they were

assigned; the majority of graduates (76 %) expressed their feeling of satisfaction with their current jobs whereas some of them (24%) were dissatisfied due to receiving insufficient salary and allowance, not assigned in the right position, and career challenges. On the other hand, some are interested to start their own business (self-employed), while others want to continue their further education. Regarding reasons for their unemployment, those unemployed graduates (7%), stated that a few vacancies and opportunities, disparity of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates, and inadequate experience in searching for jobs, were the main shortcomings.

As to the role played by the undergraduate program, most graduates (89.4% to 94.7%) hold the view that it has contributed to their professional skills. Besides, 77%-82% of them have validated that the program has given them better exposure in developing their personal skills. These finding were also supported by employers and the University officials that "graduates have the essential professional skills and personal skills, but more need to be done on those employability skills relevant to the labour market in the future. It was also reported (83.8% - 92% graduates) that the teaching and learning environment was effective. Likewise, the academic support services were also helpful, though they require improvements. However, a reasonable number of graduates (15.9% - 29.5%) have the view that they were not sure of their creative and critical thinking, problem solving, and research skills. They have doubts on the adequacy of academic advising, their engagements in extracurricular activities, administrative supports, and facilities especially in computer laboratories. Students' problems related to selection of fields, study skills, grading, and academic deficits have to be handled properly with the inclusion of different responsible bodies.

Regarding SMU, it was expounded that it was in good status and need to keep its prominence. However, some limitations that dishonour the effort of the University like some teachers' deficiencies in their language capacity, problem on research advising and commitment to support prospective graduates in their research endeavours, problem of developing teaching manuals for courses that are offered commonly, exam preparation and using test results for feedback purpose on timely basis, handling students' hitches, unfair grading, and lacking professional work ethics were reported. Concerning curriculum, it was suggested that updating and using software-based courses and including International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) are important. Finally, based on the study findings, practical implications for effective teaching-learning environment, student support services, and upgrading the capacity of prospective graduates in providing adequate customer service were made.

Keywords: Tracer, employment characteristics, transition, employability, professional, personal skills, job satisfaction

Introduction

St. Mary's University is one of the pioneer private higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It took a little over a decade of experience to become a full-fledged university primarily beginning as a college, then university college and finally a university fulfilling the necessary formalities needed to be so. It has established an institutional set up, CEIQA, which has been

in operation for the last sixteen years, evaluating university-wide strengths and weaknesses through internal quality audit schemes. As a result, St. Mary's University has gone through gigantic changes to meet its Vision (i.e., to become among the leading higher education centres of academic excellence in teaching and learning, research, publications, and community services in East-Africa and contribute to the development of Ethiopia) and Mission (i.e., to offer conventional and distance education that is accessible to the larger society focusing on quality and standards in teaching, research and outreach services).

These days, the University is delivering regular and evening undergraduate program in different fields of studies of graduate program in more than 13 fields of studies. The University produces qualified workforce to the different sectors of the economy in the country. It also strives to scale up its links with enterprises to facilitate job opportunities and placements to graduates.

The University established the Career and Internship Unit in 2004. Since then the Unit had been coordinating Practicum and Apprenticeship courses for Diploma program students in Teacher Education and TVET respectively until both programs phased out, after which the Unit has taken charge of Internship for Degree program students to the present day envisaging to strengthen its activities far beyond.

Currently, the Unit is giving career development service to facilitate employment for new graduates and conduct internship program through creating link and partnership with stakeholders and collaborators. Most importantly, the office is highly expected to coordinate and monitor the application of internship, create awareness programs on entrepreneurial skills for prospective graduates and career club members, organize trainings on employability skills, preparing CV/resume and application writings, and provide information about employers' interest and work ethics to would be graduates (CIU,2017).

Approving the quality and relevance of education is expected of any higher education institute to continue competitive in producing professionally qualified graduates to meet the demands of companies.

Thus, it is important for St. Mary's University to conduct tracer study to find out the transition of its graduates to jobs, their employability rate, capacity to apply what they have learnt in the form of knowledge and skills in the working environment.

Statement of the Problem

In many countries, higher education institutions conduct graduate tracer studies to respond to the main challenge related to the changing needs of the labor market. For example, in Europe, education policies and programs have been encouraging reforms that aim to improve the efficiency of the education systems to decrease youth unemployment rates, and develop graduates' knowledge, skills and competences needed in a competitive labor market (National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Europe, 2016).

According to Menez (2014), recognizing the reality in today's academic world, the role of higher education institutions cannot only be limited to imparting knowledge, but also to

contribute to maintain a competitive economy and, most important of all, to secure the dream of graduates to get jobs and become socially accepted and successful in their respective field of endeavors. On the other hand, one of the major factors for underemployment and the difficulty in finding jobs is the inability of graduates to meet the necessary skills and competencies required by the industry.

For Ballon (2007), higher institutions need to play a significant role in offering higher education courses to students who will, in due course, become graduates with full competence in their fields of study. To keep pace with global competition, fresh graduates need to familiarize to the new business environment and workplace. Moreover, Robinson and Garton (2007) also stated that the fundamental component that empowers graduates to keep up with those demands appears to be the employability skills and traits that are taught during tertiary education. It is also a common principle in business that HEIs should provide graduates with the proper skills essential to achieve success in the workplace.

Furthermore, Zinser (2003) explains that career and employability skills must be taught in Universities, since many students leave education without the necessary skills to succeed in the world of work. It should also be emphasized that graduates should leave higher education better in many ways than when they enter it (Washer, 2007). This improvement should be attributable to the undergraduate curriculum which is important to equip them with skills they can use to 'sell themselves' to employers (Latisha and Surina, 2010).

St. Mary's, as a University College, conducted a graduate tracer study in 2008. The study mainly focused on the employability and performance of the graduates as well as possible improvement in the demand-driven education service by the University College. It was found that the employment rate of graduates since graduation was 61%. The sectors where graduates employed were in private followed by the public.

Regarding, self-employment, its contribution was found to be minimal. Employability opportunities made available for graduates by industries were limited. The industrial linkage was found very narrow. Employers expressed their feeling that graduates lack research, entrepreneurial, and project management skills. Services delivered in the University College were in good conditions. In Parallel, the graduate survey has also made recommendations to improve things in the University College. It is almost a decade with no tracer study so far.

Checking whether the University has been achieving its goals is critical. To examine this outstanding issue, a tracer study was carried out to investigate the employability of graduates in the undergraduate program from 2016 to 2018. Moreover, the study emphasized on the role played in job-seeking, the length of time graduates took before getting employed and how their areas of work are related to the programs offered by the University. Most importantly, the study has attempted to help identify which programs are still relevant to current market demands and the findings of the study are to inform future improvement as well as further studies.

Basic Research Questions

The study has attempted to answer the following research questions.

- What is the extent of the transition of graduates from schooling to employment? Were they able to get paid employment with reasonable time?
- What are the job search approaches used by graduates during their transitional process?
- To what extent did graduates' personal factors influence their job search?
- To what extent did the knowledge and skills obtained from course works contribute to the success of graduates?
- What is the extent of the job satisfaction, income, and job stability of graduates? and
- What is the extent of the perception of employers with regard to the performance of graduates?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The overall purpose of the study was to find a clear perception of graduates' employment characteristics, transition to jobs, employability rate, and how they searched for a job.

Specific Objectives

Thus, the specific objectives of the study were to:

- investigate how the graduates moved from the University into various workplaces;
- find out the job search approaches used by graduates to secure employment during transition;
- identify graduates' employment status and the organizations where they work;
- compare the skills attained from the course of study and the requirements of the labor market, which contribute to the success of graduates;
- assess the relationship between graduates' fields of study and work experience, their job satisfaction, monthly income, and job stability; and
- analyze the perceptions of employers about graduates' performance and programs.

Significance of the Study

The aim of the undergraduate program at St. Mary's University is to equip students with professional skills to be Accountant, Finance Manager, Auditor, Marketing Manager, Business development officer, IT specialist, Programmer, Enterprise Manager, Human Resource Manager, Manager at different levels, etc. Thus, this tracer study should center on documenting the employment characteristics, transition to employment and the level of satisfaction of the graduates for services delivered by the university, learning environment and facilities. Hence, conducting this tracer study is assumed to have the following benefits:

- produce adequate information on the quality of the undergraduate program, its effectiveness, adequacy and relevance to the graduates' professional and personal skills and productivity and satisfaction;
- provide insights into having comprehensive bases for the preparation and implementation of better policies to effect better quality in Accounting and finance, Business Education, IT and Computer Science;
- give suggestions that could be positively considered by authorities in curriculum revision planning;
- offer information on the achievement of graduates which may in turn improve their services in the business education programs; and
- serve as source to interested groups to undertake similar tracer studies with wider sample in the future.

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to assessing the employability and working situation of graduates of first degree programs in business related courses and Computer Science at St. Mary's University from 2016 to 2018. The graduates of the years under discussion were considered for the study since better database has already been available for these groups. The study focused on investigating the employment characteristics of the graduates, their job hunting approaches, duration it took them to get their first jobs, occupational profile and level of job satisfaction, and employers' perceptions on the performance of graduates.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

It is clear that graduate surveys are empirical studies which can provide useful data for assessing the outcomes of the education and training of a particular Higher Education Institutes. This information may be used for additional improvement of the institution in the frame of quality assurance.

The theoretical framework of this study was adapted from the works of Schomburg (2003). The framework was designed to show the relationships of variables with graduates' professional success. Therefore, information on the professional success with respect to objective indicators (i.e., methods of searching jobs, duration of job search by field of study, quality of the first job, occupational position, full/part time, permanent/temporary) and subjective indicators (i.e., overall satisfaction with career, status, income of graduates) are needed. Moreover, information on the relevance of knowledge and skills with respect to work requirements, area of employment, and professional position is required.

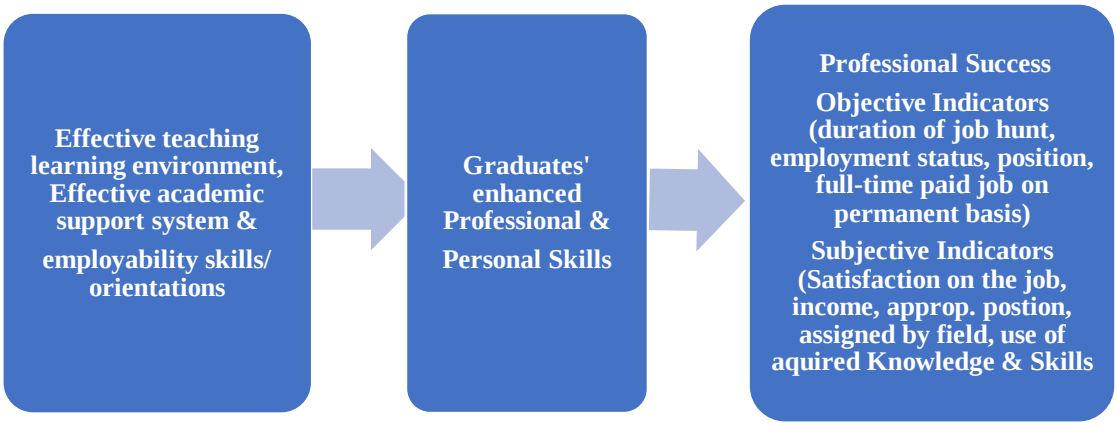

Figure 1: Conceptual frame work of the study adapted from Schomburg (2003)

Research Design

The design of this study was survey belonging to the descriptive research. More specifically, mixed methods design was used to collect, analyze and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study were all regular first degree program graduates of SMU between 2016 and 2018 academic years and employers. The size of the target population was 2,271graduates and 100 employers. More specifically, the sample graduates were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. In addition, key informants from the University were included in the survey.

Determining Sample Size

In order to select the desired number of samples with respect to departments and year of graduation, Yamane formula has been employed. Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate the sample size of graduates and employers.

Accordingly, from a target population of 2,271, at a 95% confidence level and ± 5% precision level, a sample size of 340 graduates was assumed to be representative. They were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques.

On the other hand, from a total of 100 employers, 80 employers were randomly selected for the study through a similar procedure.

Table 1: Summary of the Sample Subjects

No	Year of graduation	Quantitative data				Qualitative data			
		Graduates		Employers		Top managers & officers	Deans	Dep't heads	Total
		N	n	N	n				
1	2016	538	80	100	80	4	4	4	172
2	2017	940	141						141
3	2018	793	119						119
Total		2271	340	100	80	4	4	4	432
Sampling techniques		Stratified and simple random		Simple random sampling		Purposive	Purposive	Purposive	

N- Target pop, n- Sample size

As observed in Table 1, for collecting quantitative data through questionnaire, a total of 340 graduates and 80 employers were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Whereas, about 12 respondents (top managers, deans, department heads, and officers) were purposively selected to give their views on issues that focused on graduates' employability and whatever challenges they encountered while hunting jobs, etc.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. The primary sources were graduates, employers, top managements, deans, and department heads. The secondary sources were related documents such as, degree program course catalogue, education policies, standards, guidelines, and operational manual for career internship unit, related documents from HERQA and research study results and other relevant documents.

Data Collection Tools

Adequate and reliable data are crucial to make sound decisions. Such significant data need to be gathered across using distinctive tools for the purpose of triangulation. Therefore, questionnaire, interview, and documents were used.

Questionnaires

Two types of questionnaires, one for graduates and the other for employers have been used to collect data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through these instruments. The tools consisted of both close and open ended items.

The questionnaire prepared for graduates included 5 major parts (i.e., personal detail, educational background, employment information, current employment status, personal and professional growth of graduates and overall effectiveness of the teaching learning environment and academic support services at SMU) with 22 major close-ended questions and in between a great number of sub items, to be answered by ranking and rating on a 5 point scale, and 3 main open-ended items were used in the process of data collection. The

close-ended items were optional questions which have a five point Likert scale rated as Very High = 5, High= 4, Moderate = 3, Low = 2, and Very Low = 1. Similarly, a five point Likert scale, Outstanding = 5, Very Good = 4, Good = 3. Poor =2, V. Poor =1, were used.

In the same way, employers' questionnaire involved about two main parts (i.e., background information, and questions pertaining to SMU's undergraduate program) with a total number of 10 primary questions and more than 25 sub-items under some major questions. The questionnaire was developed to obtain the most relevant information about graduates' career outcomes and employers' perceptions on graduates' performance.

The employers' questionnaire was prepared and written in the English language. However, in the process it was translated into the Amharic language to reduce language barriers. The latter is the working language of all participants and that they could easily understand, explain and describe concepts related to the variables.

The data collection was carried out from January 15 to March 20, 2020. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed to graduates (340) and employers (80). Among the distributed questionnaires, 384 (91.43%) were properly completed and returned. The rest, 36 (8.57%) questionnaires, were either not returned or not completely filled out and, therefore, were discarded. Thus, data from 312 graduates and 72 employers were analyzed.

Interview Guide

As part of the study instruments, interview guide has been prepared to collect information from key informants that include top managers, faculty deans, department heads, and officers of the University. The interview guide covered seven open-ended questions that focused on graduates' employability, transition, challenges and measures to be considered to improve conditions for graduates' employment in the undergraduate program of SMU. Among the 12 officials, only 8 of them were interviewed.

Document Review

Documents such as three-year records of graduates employed at different companies by the support of Career and Internship Unit, annual performance reports of the unit, tracer studies reports at national and international levels and others were consulted.

Data Analysis

Depending on the nature of the data obtained from respondents, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (version 20) computer software. Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out; hence, statistical measures like frequencies, percentages, medians, and interquartile range were used to summarize data. Besides, qualitative data were analyzed by organizing them based on themes.

Pilot Study

In order to assure the reliability of the item scales in the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. 40 questionnaires were distributed to the norm group that had been randomly selected from recent graduates of 2019 majoring in different fields of Business (Accounting, Marketing Management, Informatics, Management and Tourism), before it was administered to the actual sample of the study. The subjects completed the questionnaire. The reliability tests for the five sub-scales and the two major components are summarized as follows:

Table 2: Reliability Indices of the sub-scales and the aggregate components

No	***Reliability test of the main scales and sub-scales***	***No of items***	***Cronbach's Alpha***
1	***Professional and personal skills***	***14***	***0.899***
1.1	*Graduates' Professional skills*	*7*	*0.808*
1.2	*Graduates' Personal skills*	*7*	*0.830*
2	***Effectiveness of teaching learning environment and academic support services***	***22***	***0.909***
2.1	*The teaching learning environment*	*12*	*0.868*
2.2	*Academic support services*	*7*	*0.774*
2.3	*Facilities & infrastructures*	*3*	*0.731*

As can be seen in Table 2, it was found that the two major components, professional and personal skills and the effectiveness of the teaching learning environment and academic support services are very highly reliable with a reliability index of 0.899 and 0.909, respectively. The two sub-scales under the professional and personal skills are strongly reliable as their Cronbach's Alpha varied between .808 and .830. Likely, the sub-scales that make up the effectiveness of the teaching learning environment are strongly reliable, because the reliability indices, which vary between 0.731 and 0.868, are very high.

DeVellis (2012), George and Mallery (2003) and Kline (2000), explained that a Cronbach's Alpha between 0.7 and 0.8 is considered as an acceptable coefficient for describing the internal consistency of set of items, whereas, those reliability indices below 0.5 are unacceptable.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Respondents' Characteristics

Demographic variables such as sex, education level, year of graduation, qualification, specialization and working firms are presented as follows.

Table 3: Sample Graduates by Year of Graduation

No	Graduation year	Total	%
1	2016	81	23.75
2	2017	140	41.35
3	2018	119	34.90
	Total	**340**	**100.0**

As presented in Table 3, 23.75 percent of graduates from 2016 batch, 41.35 percent of graduates from 2017 batch, and 34.9 percent of graduates from 2018 academic group were proportionally and randomly selected in turn. Among these, 230 (67.65%) were females and 110 (32.35%) were males.

Table 4: Sample Subjects by Sex and Educational Background

No	Sex	Graduates		Graduates' educational background				Employers	
				Bachelor		Master's			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Female	193	61.9	164	52.56	29	9.3	36	50.0
2	Male	119	38.1	106	33.97	13	4.2	36	50.0
	Total	**312**	**100.0**	**270**	**86.5**	**42**	**13.5**	**72**	**100.0**

As observed in Table 4, of the sample subjects included in the study who filled out the graduates' questionnaire successfully, 193 (61.9%) were females and 119 (38.1%) were males. Regarding employers, 36 (50.0%) of them were females while 36 (50 %) of them were males who participated in providing responses by filling out the employer's questionnaire properly and completely.

Regarding educational background, 86.5 percent of graduates have a Bachelor's degree while 13.5 percent of them have received their Master's degree, of which, females (9.3%) were more than males (4.2%) in receiving their Master's degree.

Table 5: Graduates' Fields of Studies and Employment Status

No	Fields of studies			Employment status		
	Responses	N	%	Reponses	N	%
1	Accounting & Finance	181	58.01	Yes	173	95.58
				No	8	4.42
2	Marketing Management	51	16.35	Yes	43	84.31
				No	8	15.69
3	Computer Science	38	12.18	Yes	37	97.37
				No	1	2.63
4	Information Technology	4	1.28	Yes	4	100.0
				No	-	-
5	Management	28	8.97	Yes	26	92.86
				No	2	7.14
6	Tourism & Hospitality Management	10	3.21	Yes	7	70.00
				No	3	30.00
	Total	**312**	**100.0**			

Referring to Table 5, 58 percent of the graduates studied and specialized in Accounting and Finance, 16.35 percent of them graduated in Marketing Management, 12.38 percent studied Computer Science and about 9 percent specialized in Management. However, very few have been graduated in Tourism and Hospitality Management (3.21%) and in Information Technology (1.28%), subsequently.

As observed in Table 5, it could be grasped that graduates from Accounting and Finance (95.58 %), Marketing Management (84.31%), Computer Science (97.37%), Management (92.86 %), Tourism and Hospitality Management (70%), and Information Technology (100.0%), were employed on paid works, respectively. However, some graduates (2.63-15.69%) were not hired. Those three in Tourism and Hospitality Management were found engaged in their own businesses as self–employed.

As shown in Table 5, it could be said that the large majority that add up to 290 (92.95%) were employed and yet a few of them, 22 (7.05%) were unemployed. From the interview of top Managers, Deans and Department heads, it was learned that the employment rate of graduates is encouragingly good, for example 70 to 80 percent were hired. Moreover, they indicated that our graduates have been favorably accepted by employers.

Table 6: Methods of Identifying Vacancies

No	Responses	Graduates		Employers	
		N	%	N	%
1	Friends	77	24.7	_	_
2	Relatives	40	12.8	_	_
3	Written short notices and seating for selection test	54	17.3	44	61.1
4	Advertisement in the media (TV or Radio, Newspapers)	76	24.4	5	6.9
5	Career and Internship unit of SMU	65	20.8	17	23.6
6	Using others' recommendations/head hunting	-	-	6	8.3
	Total	**312**	**100.0**	**72**	**100.0**

As observed in Table 6, referring to methods of getting information about vacancies, 25 percent of graduates reported that they got information from friends, 24.4 percent from media, 20.8 percent through Career and Internship Unit of SMU, 17.3 percent on written notices, and 12.8 percent from relatives in that order.

On the other hand, about 61 percent of employers reported that they have been inviting graduates on short written notices and administer selection tests and 23.6 percent responded that they contact graduates through SMU's Career and Internship Office. However, using others' recommendations/head hunting (8.3%) and inviting graduates on TV and /or Radio (6.9%) are less likely used by employers.

Table 7: Duration to get the first job after Graduation from SMU

No	Responses	N	%
1	Immediately after graduation	114	36.5
2	Less than three months	122	39.1
3	Less than six months	56	17.9
4	Less than one year	13	4.2
5	About one year	5	1.6
6	More than one year	2	.6
	Total	**312**	**100.0**

As indicated in Table 7, about 37 percent of graduates responded that they got their first job immediately after graduation (could be within one month or less). For about 39 percent of them, it took them less than three months, while for about 18 percent graduates, less than six months. However, 4.2 percent of graduates responded that the time gap to get their first job was about less than one year. From the data, it can be seen that, most of the graduates (94 %) have secured their first job within less than six months, of which 76 % of them secured their jobs in less than three months.

Table 8: Graduates' Current Position as to Paid Work

No.	Status of work	N	%
1	I am working full-time.	263	84.3
2	I am working part-time, but seeking full-time work.	15	4.8
3	I am working part-time, but not seeking full-time work.	4	1.3
4	I am self- employed.	17	5.4
5	I am working on contractual basis.	6	1.9
6	I am not working, but looking for job.	7	2.2
	Total	**312**	**100.0**

From Table 8, it could be understood that most graduates (84.3%) are full-time workers. On the contrary, about 5.4 percent of graduates are self-employed and 4.8 percent of them are working on part-time basis, but seeking full-time work. Still, a very few of them (1.3-2.2%) were either working on contractual basis, part-time basis, or not working but looking for a job.

Table 9: Graduates' Employment Status & Working Sectors and Employers' Organizations

No	Employment status	N	%	Sectors	Graduates' responses		Employers' responses	
					N	%	N	%
1	Permanent	265	84.9	Gov't/ public	91	29.17	6	8.4
2	Temporary	14	4.5	NGOs	8	2.6	2	2.8
3	Contractual	16	5.1	Private	196	62.8	64	88.9
4	Self-employed	17	5.5	Self-employed	17	5.45	-	-
	Total	**312**	**100.0**	**Total**	**312**	**100.0**	**72**	**100.0**

As presented in Table 9, 84.9 percent of graduates were permanently employed. Whereas, only 5.5 percent were self-employed. Still a few graduates are either working on contractual basis (5.1%) or temporarily (4.5%).

As to their working sector, 63 percent of graduates were working in private organizations. Next to private entities, 29.17 percent are working in Government/public offices, but, about 5.45 percent of them are self-employed and 8.4 percent are hired at NGOs. The trend of response is similar in that 88.9 percent of employers are from private sectors. Next to privates, though few in number, 8.4 percent of government offices, and 2.8 percent of NGO's, were employers of SMU graduates in that order.

Table 10: Factors that contributed most to find Jobs

No	Responses	N	%
1	Areas of specialization	122	39.1
2	Reputation of SMU	59	18.9
3	One's personality	74	23.7
4	Scholastic standing/CGPA	57	18.2
	Total	**312**	**100.0**

As to factors that contributed most to graduates to obtain their current jobs, the data summarized in Table 10 signifies that their areas of specialization is prioritized first by the large portion (39.1 %) of graduates and the second factor considered was " one's personality" by 23.7 percent of them. Graduates personality factors refer to gender, competences during graduation, employment conditions e.g. economic sector, size of organization, and the experiences after graduation. By the same token, almost equal number of graduates (18.9% and 18.2%) have considered "Reputation of SMU" and "CGPA" as the next factors that contributed to get their jobs.

Table 11: Relation and Usefulness of Courses to Jobs

No	Responses	Graduates'			
		Relationship between their field of study and jobs		Usefulness of the knowledge/skills of courses to jobs	
		N	%	N	%
1	Very much	125	40.1	142	45.5
2	Much	119	38.1	119	38.1
3	Little	59	18.9	47	15.1
4	Very little	9	2.9	4	1.3
	Total	**312**	**100.0**	**312**	**100.0**

As can be seen from Table 11, the degree of relationship between graduates' study fields and jobs they are engaged in was reported by graduates as very much (40.1%) and much (38.1%) individually. On the contrary, 19% and 2.9% of the graduates commented that the relationship is little and very little, respectively.

Similarly, as to the usefulness of knowledge and skills obtained from different courses to the jobs, about 45.5 percent of graduates indicated that they are very much useful, and 38.1 percent of them responded that they are much useful to the job they perform. Nevertheless, a relatively very few graduates stated that the degree of usefulness of the knowledge and skills they acquired to jobs they are involved in are little or very little. Perhaps this could be linked with the mismatch between jobs given and field of studies.

Table 12: Degree of Satisfaction in one's Current Work and Staying on the Job

No	Degree of satisfaction in one's current job			Staying on the current job		
	Responses	**N**	**%**	**Responses**	**N**	**%**
1	Very much	115	36.9	Yes	209	67.0
2	Much	123	39.4	No	103	33.0
3	Little	51	16.3	**Total**	**312**	**100.0**
4	Very little	23	7.4			
	Total	**312**	**100.0**			

The sample graduates have been asked whether they are satisfied or not with the job they are engaged in. From the data in Table 12, it could be understood that between 36.9 and 39.4 percent of graduates, their degree of satisfaction is 'very much' or 'much'. However, a few of them, between 7.4 and 16.3 percent are dissatisfied with the jobs they are working. As observed in Table 12, 67 percent of graduates responded that they need to stay in the job they are involved. However, 33 percent of them are not interested to continue in their current job.

Those who responded that they wanted to discontinue their job were asked about their immediate plan. The majority of them stated that their future plan is to begin their own private businesses. They wanted to be self-employed and interested to manage themselves in the future. Others also stated that they are learning their Master's degrees; interested to work in big companies like banks in the future.

Table 13: Causes for Graduates' Unemployment

No	Responses	Rank given								
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
1	Mismatch of educational qualification	22	6	9	19	13	5	9	13	9
2	Your personality	7	8	2	6	4	13	7	8	22
3	Not passing the pre-employment interview	5	3	16	7	16	11	15	12	5
4	Not passing the pre-employment exam	5	2	7	14	10	11	11	13	8
5	Inadequate knowledge and skills	6	7	5	10	17	15	6	3	4
6	Lack of employment skills	10	11	12	13	11	11	8	5	7
7	Few vacancies and opportunities	38	22	7	2	5	1	48	6	3
8	Inequality of jobs creation to increase no of graduates	15	30	15	3	3	2	4	34	4
9	Inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job	11	15	21	8	6	5	6	5	29

Those who reported that they are not employed, were asked to rank the supposed causes for their unemployment. The data summarized in Table 13, indicates that a few vacancies and opportunities (by 38 graduates); mismatch of educational qualification (by 22 graduates); imbalance between jobs creation and the increased number of graduates (by15 graduates); inadequate experience in hunting jobs (by11 graduates); and lack of employment skills (by 10 graduates) were selected and ranked as the primary causes to their unemployment. Likewise, imbalance of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates (by 30 graduates); few vacancies and opportunities (by 22 graduates); and inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job (by 15 graduates) were also selected as the second thoughts for their unemployment.

Referring to the third ranked group, inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job (21 graduates); not passing the pre-employment interview (16 graduates); imbalance of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates (15 graduates) ; and lack of employment skills (12 graduates) were selected and rated as the third causes for their unemployment.

Taking into account the three ranks given, a few vacancies and opportunities, imbalance between jobs creation and increased number of graduates, inadequate experience in hunting/searching a job, Mismatch of educational qualification, not passing the pre-employment interview and lack of employment skills were the main drawbacks for their unemployment.

Discussions

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the employability rate, status and satisfaction of SMU graduates and the degree of relationship and usefulness of the courses taken to jobs they have been engaged.

To that end, the first three research questions mainly addressed the determination of the extent of the transition of graduates from education to employment, access to paid work with reasonable time, job search approaches used by graduates and their personal factors that influenced their job search. As to the employment status of graduates, it was reported that most of them (93%) were employed, while a few (7%) of them were not able to find jobs. This finding has been substantiated by the University top and middle level officials that graduates' employment is favorably decent. Concerning the duration they find jobs after graduation, 37 percent of graduates got their first jobs immediately after graduation, whereas it took 39% percent of graduates about less than 3 months. With less than six months most graduates (94%) have secured their first jobs. These findings substantiate findings of past studies in which the average duration to get first job for majority of graduates was 3 to 6 months (Catacutan, et al., 2020; ETF, 2016; Mand & Matidza, 2016; Hailu et al., .2015; Gines, 2014; Oseifuah et al., 2014; Shongwe & Ocholla, 2011; SMUC, 2010).

That said, those graduates who reported that they were not employed, have been given choices that were assumed as causes for their unemployment. According to their responses, a few vacancies and job opportunities, gap of jobs creation compared to increased number of graduates, inadequate experience in hunting jobs and lack of employability skills were identified as major hindering factors to their unemployment. Regarding methods used to hunt

for job, though varying approaches were there, graduates have been using information on vacancies intensely through media (i.e., TV, Radio, and Newspapers), friends, and Career and Internship Office and written notices. Yet the great majority of employers (61%) had been inviting graduates through written notices and Career and Internship Unit.

Concerning paid work, it could be said that most graduates (84.3%) were full-time paid employees, but very few of them (4.8 -5.4%) were either self-employed or working as part-timers. With respect to field of specialization, those graduates from Management (89.3%), Informatics (88.1%), Accounting (87.3%) and Marketing Management (76.5%) in turn are found engaged in full-time paid jobs.

Regarding place of work, the majority of graduates (63%) are working in private companies, whereas, 29% of them are working in government offices, and yet few of them were in public or self-employed. Employers as well supported this view. According to them, 88.9 percent of them are from private sectors.

Pertaining to status of employments, most graduates (85%) were hired permanently, while few graduates were employed temporarily, contractual or self-employed. At department level, graduates from Accounting and Finance (90.1%), and Informatics (83.33%), Management (78.6%), Marketing Management (76.5%) and Tourism (60%) were employed permanently.

Regarding factors that contributed most to their employability, graduates asserted that their field of specialization was key. Next came their personal skills. Yet, the reputability of SMU and scholastic achievement (CGPA) took the third rank since almost the same number of graduates has selected them. This finding is consistent with the study findings of (Hailu, et al., 2015; Gines, 2014; and UNESCO, 2012). As to the relevance of technical knowledge to the job they do, most graduates (86%) reported by endorsing that they have the necessary know-how. However, for some of them (14%), their knowledge was not relevant to the job they were hired. Perhaps, this might be due to assignment to jobs not related to their field. Such a mismatch between areas of specialization and job placement prevails in labor market. These days, securing the job is a priority to most graduates in such environment where job scarcity is high. Such situation has been experienced by graduates from Debre Birhan University (Getachew, 2015.)

With reference to relationship and usefulness of courses to the job they are engaged in, the large majority of graduates (78-84%) communicated that the courses offered at the university and the knowledge and skills they acquired are strongly related and are useful to their jobs. But, for some (16-22%) graduates, it was not so. In this regard, most of the employers have authenticated in their report that the graduates have adequate knowledge and skills in their fields of studies. They are capable of doing things in the job diligently with confidence. These results confirmed with findings of studies conducted by different studies that graduates were satisfied with trainings offered in their respective Universities (Getachew, 2015; Hailu, 2015; Gines, 2014; UNESCO, 2012; Hiedmann, 2011; Schomburge, 2011; Shongwe, and Ocholla, 2011; Uguonah and Omeje, 1998; and Zembere and Chinyama, 1996).

Concerning the degree of satisfaction, the majority of graduates (76%) testified that they are strongly satisfied with their current jobs, but some of them (24%) were little satisfied.

Concerning their income, 58.11% of graduates have been receiving a gross salary between less than Birr 3000 and 7500, while 41.86% of graduates were earning from Birr 8000 to 10000+. This data delineates that graduates' salary may not be adequate to their daily expenses and their family needs due to the existing standard of living. According to salary explorer.com (2020) the median salary in Ethiopia is Birr 9150.00 per month, whereas the average salary is Birr 8970.00. This indicates more than 75% of the graduates have been receiving salary less than the median salary or the average salary determined in Ethiopian context. Only 17.91% of graduates have been earning Birr 10, 000 and above per month.

Among the reasons for not being satisfied, inadequate salary and allowance, not appointed in the right position, and career challenges were chiefly talked about by graduates. Similarly, employers have stated that graduates' turnover was high and the main cause described was the need for better salary.

On the contrary, the majority of graduates (67%) would like to stay in their current job while one-third of them (33%) are lacking interest to continue in their job and rather aspire to begin their own business (self-employed) and some would like to continue their further education. This finding corresponds with previous findings carried out by (Fentiman, 2007).

Qualitative Data

Pertaining to what the University should do to improve in the future, it was explained that the University has been doing its best in offering quality education. Such a trend has to be maintained and continued. However, gaps that need the University's attentions are indicated as well.

As to academic support services, it was indicated that students had been facing challenges related to their selection of field of specialization, academics, study skills, academic and research advising, grading, communication, peer pressure, etc. Moreover, in reality adequate services from concerned bodies were not obtained (i.e. guidance and counseling, registrar and respective departments). According to employers, graduates were knowledgeable and skillful, and do assigned activities with a feeling of responsibility, are eager to learn, ready to change, competitive and have good work ethics. Still, more is needed to improve the employability of graduates in the future. The University should strengthen graduates' career link with current needs in the labor market. These include marketing tasks, skills for labor market analysis, which is mandatory in the bank, customer recruiting, digital channel sales, resource mobilization and making them problem solvers. Besides, improving their language skills, enhancing creative thinking skills, entrepreneurial skills and related transferable skills relevant to the business are critical.

Regarding curriculum, both graduates and departments have shown similar views that accounting software applications like Peachtree Accounting, and Auditing, and IFRS related courses have to be up-dated and incorporated. E-view, STAT, and SPSS need to be also included. Besides, extracurricular activities should be effectively organized with the purpose to engage students actively.

Regarding the link between employers and CIU, most companies reported that they have good relationship with the office and ensured that the office has been cooperative and responsive to their requests. But most employers have suggested that the link should be strengthened and expect the Office to e-mail them adequate information about fresh graduates every year. And finally, the employers stated that though they knew people in the office, their attachment should be institutionalized so that the link becomes official.

Conclusions

Based on the major findings of the study, conclusions could be drawn as follows:

Graduates' being hired with a reasonable time interval, engagement in full-time paid jobs permanently, and getting employed in private companies at large scale imply that the private sector trusts the professional capability of graduates, which designates the competitiveness of graduates on one hand and the reputability of the University on the other.

It could also be inferred that, nowadays, the expansion of banks, insurance companies, industries, service giving organizations and the role played by the University in creating job opportunities to graduates through its Career and Internship Unit might have contributed better to SMU graduates to be employed in big numbers. This possibly could be taken as the first indication of professional success. From both findings (graduates and officials) as well it could also be figured out that graduates' employability status and rate was really commendable.

Largely, the data from graduates and employers, concerning knowledge and skills, suggest that courses offered in the different fields of specializations were appropriate to jobs. From this data, it could be inferred that except few, most of the graduates seemed to be assigned to jobs by profession, which corroborate that the knowledge and skills obtained were relevant to jobs they were placed in. Above all, graduates' fields of specialization, personal skills, reputability of SMU, and GPA have contributed to their employability rate.

The number of self–employed graduates was very little. This may indicate that we are producing job seekers more than job creators, which needs attention in the future.

With regard to salary, more than three-fourth of graduates are earning that may not adequately satisfy their daily expenses and family needs. However, most of them want to stay on the job, even though they are not earning better salary. Staying on the job may not guarantee satisfaction with the job. But, if they leave their jobs, they may not get a second chance to be employed due to shortage of job opportunities. In the same way, those graduates who do not want to continue in their current jobs stated that salary and allowance are key among others.

Taking into account the major findings with respect to graduates' transition to employment, job hunting methods, duration for securing the first job, employment status, and relevance of knowledge and skills acquired to the jobs, etc., St. Mary's University graduates' appear to be successful in their profession.

It seems good that graduates are competitive in the job market. Furthermore, it is evident that the University is also fully trusted by different organizations in relation to the provision of quality of education.

Implications

Based on the results and conclusions, the following implications were derived:

Top Managers and Administrators

- The University officials ought to create synergy among the University community to sustain its reputability through offering quality education and producing professionally competent graduates based on labor demands in such a competitive business environment. Enhancing its image further is highly indispensable.

Career and Internship Unit and Departments

- Members from these two offices need to work collaboratively on the provision of internship program since it is one major area in which students would be acquainted with the real world tasks. Such a program has to be strengthened to increase the practical experience of students by creating strong link with companies. Students should be assigned to the appropriate work and effective monitoring system should be in place.
- The job creation opportunity to prospective graduates should be expanded to make all graduates beneficiaries by consolidating career and job fairs by inviting new and big companies; forming strong ties with agencies that are working on graduates' employment, job search and creation like Ethio- jobs, Derja.com, Jobs creation Commission Ethiopia, etc.

Faculties, Departments and Offices

- Graduates' mindset towards engaging in the creation of jobs of their own should be positively shaped and supported. To this end, faculties, departments and the CIU should collaboratively deliver trainings on entrepreneurship-geared skills to prospective graduates inviting experts with real life experience during their stay and make a strong link with government offices that support graduates to create their own jobs through the mechanisms put in the policy direction of the country. Such actions seem important to encourage graduates to enable them get self-employed.
- Faculties and departments in the undergraduate program seem to equip prospective graduates with up-dated knowledge and skills in the profession, especially on market demand-focused fields of studies that prepare them to be competent and competitive in the labor market.
- Improving and refining graduates' employment through provision of practical course level trainings on employability skills and work values are important to meet the demands of the labor market and most importantly on how graduates could give adequate customer services (communication skills; honesty, integrity, dependability.

team spirit; self-initiation and work ethics; self-confidence; self-management; work place adaptation; CV/resume writing and application writing; and Leadership skills).

- Students' problems related to selection of fields, study skills, academic advising, grading system, and adjustment problems need to be regularly solved by guidance and counseling service, departments, Registrar Office and Career and Internship Unit. There should be synergy among these offices to provide the required support. This gap demands the academic support services to be strengthened.

RaKMO, CEIQA and CIU

- Members from these offices of the University could carry out further study in the future with relatively large samples on key curriculum and instruction, and relevant employability skills to the labor market and on how prospective graduates are made to be actively engaged in job creation of their own.

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The Impact of COVID-19 on Private Higher Education in Argentina from a Latin American Perspective

Dante J. Salto, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and national government's consequent lockdown of all non-essential activities in March 2020 hit an Argentina already on the brink of economic crisis. All universities but one switched their course offerings for the new semester online. This presentation addresses the impact of COVID-19 on private higher education in Argentina as an example of a country where government provides little to no support to the private sector in higher education and the public support is fully funded by the government (tuition free). Although the private sector has been hit hard by the crisis, the impact will certainly be different depending on type of institution. Especially notable is how non-elite subsector universities have developed capacity to offer online education in the past fifteen years, creating a sizeable niche that neither private elite nor public universities had exploited. Whereas online offerings mark PHE's most striking intersectoral advantage, the quite decisive distinction in funding sources marks its most striking disadvantage. The only public funding to PHE is for research and only a few private elite and religious institutions do research. While private elite institutions will likely survive the impact of the pandemic, non-elites, specifically those that have not adapted to online education, may lose some of their students to other private institutions. Also, due to the economic crisis and the loss of family income, students may switch to public tuition-free universities.

Keywords: private higher education, COVID-19, Argentina

Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has reshuffled many institutions, including higher education worldwide. In Latin America, half of the students in higher education attend some type of private institution (Levy, 2018). So, any question regarding policies addressing the pandemic and impact of COVID-19 on higher education needs to account for this sizeable sector in the region. This paper centers on the case of universities in Argentina, public policies toward PHE in the pandemic context, and the organizational responses (e.g., institutional policies) to COVID-19 in a Latin American context.

The presence of private higher education in the region varies drastically by country. Some countries enroll a large majority of their students in the private sector (e.g., Chile and Brazil), while others have essentially expanded their systems through public institutions (e.g., Argentina and Mexico). In some countries, public higher education is tuition-free (e.g., Argentina and Brazil) and in others public institutions also charge tuition (e.g, Chile and Colombia). These differences in their enrollment trends and the countries' approach to funding higher education make it necessary to contextualize the Argentine case and how it could explain what may happen in other countries. A common feature in all countries,

although to some less extent lately in Chile[1], private institutions heavily rely on tuition fees to remain in business. So, to a large extent, all those private institutions are facing challenges due to the economic impact of COVID-19 on jobs and employment.

The Argentine case shows how a tuition dependent private higher education sector has been facing challenges in the midst of a pandemic, to compete with a tuition-free and fully subsidized public sector. In March 2020, the national government imposed a lockdown of all non-essential activities, in an Argentina already on the brink of economic crisis. This paper aims at analyzing the role of public policy toward PHE in this context and the organizational responses of higher education institutions to the pandemic.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section briefly describes private higher education in Argentina. The second centers on key comparisons between the private and public sectors and within the private sector. The comparisons highlight key public policy toward PHE and the differentials responses to the pandemic. The last section presents some conclusions.

The Role of Private Higher Education in Argentina

Higher education in Argentina is binary and includes university and non-university institutions. The focus of this paper is on the university level comprised of universities and university institutes. The private university sector in Argentina enrolls one of five students. Many factors explain its relatively small size compared to its public peer. First, the creation of private universities after the independence (1816) was banned until 1958. Public universities had been present for a long time. Second, by the time the national government allowed the establishment of private universities, most of the demand for university-level education had already been absorbed by the public sector. Third, private universities do not receive governmental funding except to conduct research and have to compete with tuition free, fully subsidized public universities. Fourth, the enactment of the Higher Education Act of 1995 put in place stricter regulations to establish private universities than public ones (Rabossi, 2011). This regulatory approach has meant a "quality" check, leading to few private non-elite demand-absorber universities in Argentina.

Public universities in Argentina and most of Latin America tend to be at the top of the academic prestige. Even though some private universities in each country may have gained prestige over time, and in some cases are comparable to their top public counterparts, they remain a small number (García de Fanelli, 2007; Rabossi & Salto, 2018). In the Argentine case, two aspects of the universities and the public policies are key to understand their responses to the pandemic. One relates to the private sector reliance on tuition to survive and the other is linked to public's sector reliance on governmental funding.

Public Policy and Organizational Responses (to public policy and to the pandemic)

The COVID-19 pandemic and national government's consequent lockdown of all non-essential activities in March 2020 hit an Argentina already on the brink of economic crisis.

[1] Due to the recent enactment of legislation private and public institutions in Chile are tuition-free except for those students and families at the top 30% (Bernasconi, 2019).

All universities but one switched right away their course offerings for the new semester online. The leading (and only) resister, the University of Buenos Aires, a public university is also by far the largest higher education institution in Argentina. Initially, back in March, the university postponed classes until June instead of the regular March start alleging that moving instruction online would significantly affect quality. However, due to the extension of the lockdown, the university announced that most academic units have transitioned to teaching online based on the original academic calendar (Fanelli et al., 2020).

Although only one public university reacted against moving its operations online, also known as emergency remote education, public universities have been less keen to offer online courses than their private counterparts. While public universities enroll four of five students, they serve only a small fraction online (3% of their students). In contrast, some institutions in the private sector have been increasing their online education programs and this sector overall enrolls an astonishing 21% of its students in online programs[2]. The situation was much different just compared to five years prior to 2015. The trend over time shows a substantial enrollment increase in online program in the private sector from 31,000 to 86,000, in 2010 and 2015, respectively. Face-to-face enrollment of private sector during the same period has remained stagnant, only increasing from 321,000 to 325,000. Especially notable is how much this capacity building was done by the non-elite subsector, creating a sizeable niche that neither private elite nor public universities had exploited.

However, much to attribute the private-public online differential capacity to innovation versus resistance to change, program offerings undeniably facilitate PHE online capacity. Except for some health sciences programs offered in its semi-elite institutions, the private sector enrolls the vast majority of its students in social and commercial fields. These programs do not require practical training such as medical residencies or scientific lab work, making the transition to online instruction not as burdensome.

Whereas online offerings mark PHE's most striking intersectoral advantage, the quite decisive distinction in funding sources marks its most striking disadvantage. The only public funding to PHE is for research and only a few private elite and religious institutions do research (García de Fanelli, 2016). Some also fundraise but they are not allowed to set up endowments and thus donations are mostly limited to one-time capital projects. Thus, private universities are hugely tuition dependent.

Moreover, students and their families must cover the full price of tuition and fees. The government does not provide any type of financial aid (loans or scholarships) to university students. It follows that likely non-elite private universities will face the greatest financial challenges, and possible enrollment decline, due to the students' reliance on middle class family income. Where private universities may have some financial adaptability that the public sector lacks is that most of its academic positions are temporary and part-time. This is particularly true of nonelite universities. On the other hand, full-timers may not be so financial burdensome for leading private universities since many of them are funded by the national government's National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET).

[2] Unless otherwise noted, the data refers to 2015 information as it is the last official published data available.

Although the national government in Argentina does not fund private universities, 11 out of 64 private universities requested temporary financial relief to the national government through an emergency program targeting businesses in different areas. Remarkably, private universities are non-profit institutions, so applying for this financial relief program has probably been the result of financial hardship. The program offers governmental loans to pay staffs' salaries due to documented financial hardship (loss in revenue compared to the previous year) and the government reduces the social security contributions that the beneficiaries have to pay.

Concluding remarks

The Argentine case exemplifies core similarities and differences in public policy and university responses to COVID-19 in higher education. Many of the findings apply to other Latin American countries as well. It is clear that the tuition-dependent private sector may suffer more consequences than the public sector. Specifically, the non-elite private institutions could be worst hit since they rely on tuition fees paid by middle class students. However, as analyzed in this paper, some of the non-elite institutions have been instrumental in offering online programs ahead of the pandemic, building capacity and accumulating experience not available in elite private institutions or public institutions altogether. Some private non elite universities have even requested financial relief plans targeted to businesses, a move that will likely have lasting consequences.

Although the public sector does not rely on tuition fees, enrollments may be impacted. Due to its open access and tuition free features, public universities enroll more needy students than their private counterparts. These students may already have problems accessing online classes due to technology limitations (e.g., lack of equipment and lack of internet access). Public universities have little room to make investments in technologies or scholarships for their students, as the large majority of the funding they receive from the national government goes to pay salaries. The national government is limited as well, as the fate of the government budget lies amid a dual health and economic crisis.

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Closing Remarks

H.E. Dr. Mulu Nega, State Minister, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ethiopia

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to make these concluding remarks at this historic conference, taking place virtually, which is prompted by the world-wide Pandemic, and would like to congratulate St. Mary's University and its partners on the successful completion of the conference. With the major theme "Invigorating African Higher Education Institutions' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic," the 18th International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa has covered sub-themes, including youth employability, global networking, e-learning and inclusive education. I believe that the ideas that have transpired at this conference will help us reflect on our actions to make them more responsive to current developments. It is noteworthy to state here that, six months back, we did not think that we would consider e-learning to be the main mode of learning at tertiary level. In a continent where the majority of the population is alien to the internet, e-learning may have been less appealing. But, today, every country is weighing in, with a sense of urgency, on expanding their technology infrastructure to enable citizens learn and work at home.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Noting that we are moving forward to the post-COVID era, as discussed at this virtual conference, we need to be realistic about our resources and expect challenging times lying ahead of us; hence the need for further research to find out ways and means to lessen the social and economic pain emanating from the Pandemic. Our linguistic and religious diversity should be considered as assets to be cherished not as tools to be exploited for sinister motives. As you well know, scholars are largely confined to the serious paperwork to promote themselves to the next academic rank, while the cyber world is swarmed by misinformation laden with hate speech against one or the other social group. What will the role of scholars be at these testing times where access to vaccines against COVID-19 has become a political not a health issue? This will remain a critical question toward figuring out what education would look like in the post COVID era. Some of the discussion points, not exhausted due to time constraints, should be dealt with after this conference is over.

That said, our preparedness for in-person classes requires thorough planning in terms of human and material resources. The ideal requirement could be ensuring immunity to all campus goers by enabling them access the vaccines; but that would be a far cry for Africa. The practical way out is, as health professionals advise us, either waiting for a flattened curve of the Pandemic or letting classes begin putting in place strict hygienic regime in classes and

on campuses. Our home take assignment will be to reflect on the choices and reach a decision in consultation with the health authorities.

To conclude, my Ministry has been supportive of private higher learning institutions and encouraging them to undertake research works and organize conferences, like this one. It is in this spirit that MoSHE has joined hands with St. Mary's University whose hard work is shared by the AUC, AAU, EAL, University of Kwazulu Natal, INHEA and the PROPHE.

Thanking the organizing team, key note speakers, paper presenters and participants, I declare the conference closed.

I thank you.

Ethiopian

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Research and Knowledge Management
Office (RaKMO)
P.O. Box 18490, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251(0)11-558-06-16
Email: rakmo@smuc.edu.et
Website:http://www.smuc.edu.et