Enablers of pedagogical change within universities: evidence from Kenya, Ghana and Botswana

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Abstract

Quality of teaching and learning in higher education is increasingly recognised as a pressing issue on the African continent, and there have been various reform initiatives to transform classrooms and institutions. However, little is known about the factors that affect pedagogical change in institutions, and enable or constrain these innovations from taking root. This study explores the cases of eight diverse universities in Botswana, Ghana and Kenya, ones that had implemented a range of innovations including problem-based learning, community placements and academic development programmes. The analysis draws on qualitative data involving interviews with lecturers and senior management, institutional documentation and campus visits. Lecturers were seen to engage in diverse ways with the initiatives, being either opponents, surface adopters, transformers or champions. Four factors emerged as key to influencing the uptake of pedagogical interventions: the drivers of the initiative; the existence of a shared vision; resourcing and incentives; and opportunities for reflection and transformative learning. While some initiatives are more 'champion-led' and others more 'institution-led', sustainable change involves attention to both university structures and individual practice, and to the interactions between them.

Keywords

African universities; learner-centred education; pedagogical reform; teaching and learning in higher education; transformative learning

Introduction

The quality of higher education in Africa has been a significant source of concern in recent years (Ashwin & Case 2018; Chege 2015; Cloete et al. 2015; Foley & Masingila 2014; Oanda & Jowi 2012; Wangenge-Ouma 2008). Disinvestment from the 1980s through structural adjustment programmes left public higher education systems with a shortfall, and funding per student has not recovered since (Oanda & Sall 2016). The private sector has grown across the continent, and, while there are some well-regarded institutions, there is considerable unevenness, with difficulties of regulation. Expansion of the systems has outpaced development of PhD programmes, meaning that institutions struggle to train and recruit sufficient numbers of qualified staff (Tettey & PHEA 2009; British Council/DAAD 2018). Furthermore, there has been media panic about employability, with graduates seen to be ill-equipped for the realities of the labour market (McCowan et al. 2016; Nwajiuba et al. 2020).

All this is underpinned by a perception of predominantly 'chalk and talk' based pedagogy, involving rote-learning and reproduction in exams, without the opportunity to develop criticality.

In response, there have been varied efforts to revitalise higher education on the continent, within the institutions themselves, through national governments, and international agencies. In the area of research, there have been a variety of initiatives such as the World Bank's Regional Centres of Excellence project, the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship programme and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA) programme, not to mention a host of national level initiatives. There have also been initiatives relating to teaching and learning, many of which have focused on innovation, particularly online or blended learning, such as the projects forming part of UK government funded Strategic Partnership for Higher Education Innovation and Reform (SPHEIR). There have also been widespread efforts to transform conventional classroom pedagogy through the establishment of local centres of excellence for teaching and learning, through extending inductions and workshops for teaching staff and through the promotion of accredited teaching qualifications for the university level. Parallel to these pedagogical interventions, universities and national higher education agencies have also been engaging in reforms to curricula in the disciplines, in dialogue with professional bodies and industry.

Yet despite these extensive initiatives, the landscape remains variable across institutions, faculties and departments, with some embracing change, and others facing ongoing challenges. The factors influencing the extent and nature of uptake of these currents are not well understood, and consequently national policies and local initiatives struggle to move beyond rhetorical impact. This article aims to shed light on the conditions that facilitate and constrain meaningful change in teaching and learning, with a focus on Botswana, Ghana and Kenya. Responding to the lack of detailed empirical work on pedagogy in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, it aims to contribute to current policy debates, in which national agencies and institutions are implementing policies relating to quality[1] enhancement, academic staff development and curriculum relevance. The analysis aims to illuminate some of the often-veiled reasons why many well-intentioned initiatives in these areas fail to bring deep or lasting change. Focusing on eight cases of initiatives to improve, or in some cases radically transform, curricula and teaching practice, it assesses factors influencing the possibilities of change, including – among others – the founding missions of institutions, senior and middle management buy-in, international partnerships and mobility, and professional development opportunities for staff.

In discussing these dynamics, the article will begin with a brief outline of existing literature on pedagogical reform in African higher education, followed by a discussion of the methods adopted in this research. The main part of the article consists of an analysis of the factors influencing uptake of pedagogical interventions, focusing on the drivers of the initiative, the existence of a shared vision, resourcing and incentives, and spaces for transformative learning. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings

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[1] Quality is also central to the research function of universities, and its positive impact on society, though this article will only focus on teaching and learning.

for the crucial task of transforming the teaching and learning environment in institutions across the region.

It is important to note from the outset that the research was conducted before the beginning of the COVID pandemic. There have been considerable impacts of COVID on educational quality – on account of deteriorating conditions for student learning, disruption to university schedules and cuts in funding – as well as transformations in university practice with long-term implications, in particular introduction of technology, moves towards distance learning and more flexible staff working patterns. These changes must be taken into account in considering the future implications of the findings presented in this article.

Pedagogical reform in African higher education

As is common around the world, only primary and secondary school teachers have historically been trained to teach in most African countries (Wanzare & Ward, 2000, Brewis & McCowan 2016). Lecturers' learning on how to teach in most universities in Africa has been largely disregarded in national and institutional policies, the assumption being that excellent academic qualifications result in effective teaching. As a result, there remains a strong tendency towards teacher-centred approaches within many institutions (Arasa & Calvert, 2013). There are, however, signs of change. Omingo (2017) shows that some private universities in Kenya have initiated effective academic staff development activities, which have encouraged lecturers to adopt more learner-centred, reflective and professional approaches to teaching – and, encouragingly, suggests that such changes moved students past simply learning to pass examinations to instead work to 'take charge of their lives' and bring about social change in their communities. There have also been moves towards formal teaching qualifications. In Ghana, for example, an academic staff development initiative by the Centre for Teaching Support of the University of Cape Coast has involved the design of a modular programme which is to lead to a Master's degree in Higher Education Teaching (University of Cape Coast, 2016)[2].

Although academic staff development initiatives[3] can be conducive to improving students' learning experience (Vorster and Quinn, 2012), they are not yet widespread in the region, although many have emerged in South Africa and, on a smaller scale, in a few countries in East and West Africa. The implementation of academic development programming is often hampered by a number of structural factors, including a lack of strong, explicit regulations at the national level, a small pool of facilitators, heavy teaching loads for faculty (which leave little time for professional development) and limited funding, either due to a general shortage of funds within higher education or a prioritization of funding towards activities other than teaching enhancement (Omingo, 2017; Hudson, 2017; Brewis & McCowan 2016).

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[2] This initiative was flagged by the Minister for Education, Dr Mathew Opoku Prempeh, as a potential requirement for all academic staff of higher education institutions in Ghana.
[3] Although potentially problematic, due to its deficit orientation towards academic staff (D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005), the phrase "academic development" will be used throughout the article to refer to professional development opportunities focused on the improvement of teaching, given its predominance in the contexts under study. In other contexts, these activities can also be called academic staff development, faculty development, educational development and professional development.

In addition, a number of more general factors limit change in university pedagogy within the region, such as heavy emphasis on rote examination as the best indicator of quality (Schweisfurth, 2015) and a general lack of opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in practice (McCowan et al. 2015; Unterhalter et. al, 2019). Although student evaluations of teaching are often collected, feedback tends to be mainly generic and uncritical (McCowan 2018), and there are few clear channels through which lecturers can share their teaching, such as conferences and other networks on higher education (Oanda, Chege, & Wesonga, 2008). As academic development tends to be a "self-driven" system (i.e. it is at the discretion of individual lecturers to attend), academic staff development initiatives also remain fragmented and varied, with many lecturers opting not to participate because they already feel confident in their teaching ability or have different priorities, e.g. research (McCowan 2018; Omingo, 2017). Finally, there are significant impediments to pedagogical change, which might best be classified as "cultural", including deeply-ingrained "orientations" towards teaching (Kember & Gow, 1994) as being largely an exercise in transmission of knowledge from expert to novice and related orientations towards learning on the part of students, which can lead to student resistance to newer forms of pedagogy (Hudson, 2017; Mbabazi Bamwesiga, Dahlgren & Fejes, 2012; Vavrus, 2009).

In an effort to counteract these trends, some individual governments (e.g. in South Africa and Ghana) have set up funds to improve teaching and learning in higher education. International partnerships have also provided funds to build capacity in quality assurance and enhancement (Brewis & McCowan 2016), and individual institutions have implemented strategies to reform teaching in response to demands from the labour market (Schendel & Gantner, 2017). Such initiatives have supported some lecturers in the region to modify their teaching approaches and adopt new methods of assessment, thereby positively affecting student learning outcomes. However, many other initiatives have had little to no impact. A question arises, therefore, as to which factors enable the successful implementation of pedagogical reform efforts in the region. This question can be considered through the lens of available literature on pedagogical reform within higher education (e.g. Trowler, 2008; D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005; Light, Cox & Calkins, 2009). However, much of this literature is limited in its applicability to the African continent, given the heavy reliance on data from high-income, largely "Western", contexts, such as the USA, Australia and the UK. With the exception of a growing literature on academic staff development in South Africa (e.g. Quinn, 2012), very little empirical work has examined processes of pedagogical change in the region. The current study, therefore, offers an important extension of the existing literature, by highlighting factors which appear to be important for successful pedagogical reform efforts within three Sub-Saharan African contexts: Ghana, Kenya and Botswana.

Methods and contexts

This article draws on data collected as part of the *Pedagogies for Critical Thinking: Innovation and Outcomes in African Higher Education* project, which gauged the development of critical thinking of undergraduate students, and its relationship with the teaching and learning environment (Schendel et al. 2020). The broader project involved 14 universities from public and private sectors in Ghana, Kenya and Botswana.

The three countries selected share a common history of higher education in the British colonial system, and have English as the primary language of instruction (although there is significant linguistic diversity within the population as a whole). Nevertheless, they have other substantial differences which prove illuminating in the comparative analysis. They are located in West, East and Southern Africa, highlighting some geographical and cultural differences, and they have differences in scale, with Botswana (2.3 million) having a much smaller population than Ghana (30.4 million) and Kenya (52.6 million) (World Bank 2021). There are also socio-economic differences, with Botswana having a significantly higher GDP per capita (US$8,259), although Ghana (US$2,202) and Kenya (US$1,711) have both seen economic growth over recent years, and are now classified as lower middle-income countries (World Bank 2020). All three have well developed higher education systems relative to many of their regional neighbours, with research-intensive flagship universities (University of Botswana, University of Ghana and University of Nairobi) (see Teferra, 2017), a growing number of regional public institutions (in the case of Kenya particularly), and an expanding private sector. Given the small population of Botswana, there are some obvious differences in the number and diversity of higher education institutions (HEIs), with 17 mainly small-sized institutions catering to only 49,444 students (gross enrolment ratio [GER] of 24.9%), compared to 212 HEIs[4] with 443,693 students in Ghana (GER of 15.7%) and 49 HEIs with 562,521 students (GER of 11.5%) in Kenya (UIS 2020).

This article draws on qualitative data from the *Pedagogies* project, more specifically those data which were collected at the eight participating institutions in which interventions had been made to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (three in Kenya, three in Ghana and two in Botswana). Broadly speaking, all of these initiatives focus, in some way, on implementing more "learner-centred" approaches, whether through a curricular intervention (such as problem-based learning or the establishment of credit-bearing community placements) or through the provision of academic development programming for faculty, focused on encouraging more learner-centred methods of pedagogy and assessment. In some cases, the intervention pertains to the whole institution, and in others it is located in a specific faculty or department. These sites display a diversity of different approaches to and conditions for teaching and learning, as well as differing locations (capital, regional), disciplinary focus, and public/private sectors. It is important to note that they cannot claim to be 'representative' of all HEIs in the countries in question. Indeed, for the most part, the sample consists of well-established institutions with wide public recognition, and so would be expected to display a higher quality than the average for the higher education sector.

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[4] All tertiary institutions, includes colleges of nursing and education

Table 1: Characteristics of the university cases and their interventions

Name	Type of Institution	Site	Innovation
Kenya A	Public university (regional)	Faculty	• Problem-based learning across the curriculum • Community placements extend beyond classroom-based learning by requiring students to engage with complex problems in the 'real world'.
Kenya B	Private university (religious)	Faculty	• Staff development programme promoting active, collaborative, and 'student centred' methods of pedagogy • Use of constructive alignment in all modules ensuring assessment is supporting learner-centred pedagogies
Kenya C	Private university (religious)	Whole institution	• Staff development programme promoting critical reflection and active, collaborative, and 'student centred' methods of pedagogy
Ghana A	Private university (philanthropic)	Whole institution	• Liberal arts modules for first- and second-year students. Students in all programmes are required to do modules in social studies, African studies etc. to encourage them to adopt a critical approach to knowledge and to develop generic skills of analysis, interpretation and argumentation. • Community placements • Staff development programme active, collaborative, and 'student centred' methods of pedagogy
Ghana B	Public university (specialist)	Department	• Problem-based learning • Community placements
Ghana C	Public university (regional)	Faculty	• Community placements. All students at the end of first and second years have an intensive experience of living and working in a rural community, involving carrying out a diagnostic assessment of development needs.
Botswana A	Public university (national)	Faculty	• Problem-based learning across curriculum • Extensive group work • Community placements
Botswana B	Private university (for-profit)	Faculty	• Enquiry-based learning • Staff development programme promoting active, collaborative, and 'student centred' methods of pedagogy

Qualitative case studies were carried out of each of these institutions, involving a number of field visits by the authors and other researchers on the project during 2016 and 2017. Data

collected involved semi-structured interviews in English with lecturers and senior and middle managers in each of the institutions[5]. A number of documents at the institutional level were also collected and analysed, including institutional vision and mission statements as well as strategic plans, teaching and learning strategies, academic development programmes and curricular approaches[6].

A limitation of this study is the absence of formal observations of taught courses within the universities in question. However, triangulation of views between the three categories of respondent (senior management, lecturers and – in the broader project – students), as well as extensive periods of fieldwork in the eight institutions, allowed us a degree of confidence in characterising the teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, a key aim of this study was to explore the understandings and interpretations of teaching and learning on the part of lecturers, and these aspects could best be captured through interviews.

The interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed. In interpreting the data, Trowler's (2008) ideas on pedagogical reform were utilised, revolving around five key questions: Where does it come from? How well resourced is the initiative, and how seriously is it being pursued? What codes of signification does the initiative carry? How will it affect existing power relations? How will it affect existing subjectivities? What theory of change underpins the initiative? The analysis also draws on Schendel's (2015; 2016a) framework for understanding relevant dimensions of the learning environment, acknowledging the influences of student and lecturer inputs, departmental culture, student-lecturer interactions and academic experiences.

On account of ethical requirements, anonymity of the institutions is adhered to throughout the article. This requirement does present some challenges in terms of contextual understanding of the institutions – which in some cases have unique characteristics – but as far as is possible, the analysis will make reference only to relevant background characteristics. Simple letter codes (e. g. Kenya A etc.) are used throughout the article to refer to the institutions.

While not representing a formal comparison, the different cases and countries involved in the research are juxtaposed so as to illuminate these questions through their points of meeting and departure, while acknowledging their differences and uniqueness where necessary. Pedagogy, and pedagogical reform, are understood to be deeply contextual processes (in line with Alexander 2001), embedded in cultures, so any implications or recommendations derived from the analysis must be understood as being resistant to technical implementation without this attention to context. The diverse identities of the researchers are also relevant in this respect – based in Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, the USA and UK – influencing the use of criss-crossing comparison (Sobe, 2018) and interactions with other members of the broader research team.

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[5] In the eight institutions discussed in this article, a total of 74 interviews were conducted with staff members (28 in Botswana, 25 in Kenya and 21 in Ghana).

[6] In the broader project, focus groups were also carried out with undergraduate students in their second or third year of studies, from a wide variety of disciplinary areas, though this data was not drawn on in this article.

Factors influencing uptake of pedagogical innovations

Educational institutions and systems are littered with well-meaning policies and initiatives that either never reach the classroom, or do so in unrecognisable ways. It is essential, therefore, to assess the extent to which the interventions identified were in fact implemented within the eight institutions involved in this study. Yet in doing so we should not slip into a mechanical notion of implementation: teachers are not mere vessels for the channelling of a policy in identical fashion, they are human agents with their own values, ideas and histories, who actively shape the messages they receive. The question is, therefore, not so much the extent of *fidelity* of implementation, but of *enactment* (Snyder et al. 1992).

The fieldwork showed definitively that in all eight cases, the planned interventions were in fact taking place, although with varying effectiveness of implementation. For those institutions implementing academic development programmes, for example, it proved hard to engage all lecturers from across the different faculties. For those operating community placements, difficulties encountered limited the richness of the learning experience for students. For those incorporating problem-based learning (PBL) into the curriculum, resources did not always allow for the close interaction required between lecturers and students. The factors affecting this variegated implementation will be the focus of the analysis that follows. Four factors emerged from the study as key to influencing the uptake of pedagogical interventions: the drivers of the initiative, shared vision, resourcing and incentives, and finally transformative learning[7].

Drivers of the initiative

In the absence of national policy requiring universities to adopt particular pedagogical approaches, the origin and impetus of initiatives at the institutional level is pivotal to understanding their adoption. In this section, three aspects of this question will be discussed, each of which emerged as crucial to the experiences of the participating universities: the incorporation of a pedagogical approach as part of the founding mission of the university, the role played by international links and partnerships, and finally the influence of local champions.

As can be seen in Table 1, our sample includes diverse institutional types. In each country, there are public universities, some of which have a national or alternatively a regional focus, or focus on a particular area of disciplinary study, and also private universities, which are distributed across religious, philanthropic and for-profit types. There was some influence of these institutional profiles on the work undertaken within them: for example, the public institutions generally had more extensive research profile than the private universities,

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[7] It is important to emphasise that this analysis focuses primarily on the institutional level, despite the fact that conditions of teaching and learning in the institutions in question are not only born of institutional initiative, but also of national level policy and trends. A full understanding of the conditions affecting teaching and learning would include not only the institutional level factors analysed in this article, but also national and even global level factors (e.g. marketization within higher education; the adoption of neoliberal management structures and approaches to quality assurance; etc). However, due to space constraints, this paper will focus solely on the institutional factors emerging from the current study.

leading to distinct configurations of academic work; the for-profit private university had a stronger emphasis on employability and entrepreneurship than the non-profits. The size of the institution is also influential in this regard, with the large institutions less likely to have a unifying mission, though for these large institutions, the study worked either at the level of faculty, department or programme, rather than the whole institution. Yet, while there was some influence of these characteristics on the forms of teaching and learning undertaken and their ability to introduce pedagogical reforms, these institutional categories and the accompanying missions are by no means deterministic, and there are always emergent features of universities that develop in the course of their trajectory over time.

The two examples of most comprehensive and extensive implementation of learner-centred pedagogies (Ghana A and Kenya A) were both rooted in the founding of the institutions. Ghana A, a private institution, was founded on the model of US liberal arts universities and thus incorporated a series of specific elements from the outset: a broad curriculum underpinned by 8 learning goals through which all students, regardless of their course and country of origin (the institution has a diverse student population from about 24 countries), complete classes in African studies, social studies and design; extracurricular activities for all students, involving community work, volunteering and work placements among others; and an extensive induction for teaching staff especially on the vision and teaching orientation, as well as ongoing professional development relating to teaching and learning.

The initiative in Kenya A is based in a single faculty within a public university, but its distinctive approach has also existed since its founding. The faculty established at Kenya A was created as a counterpoint to the traditional educational methods in that discipline, with community-based practice and problem-based learning being defining features from its establishment. The initiative therefore has full endorsement from senior management, the lecturers are fully inducted into the culture, and new students are aware of what to expect when they enrol.

There were other examples of the importance of founding mission. Ghana C has a mandate of promoting development in the surrounding regions through education. Its curriculum and pedagogy are structured to equip students with the requisite academic training, complemented by relevant community experience as well as tools and skills to effectively deal with development and other poverty-related issues at the grassroot level. As discussed below, however, resources and other factors have limited the institution's ability to fully follow through on this mission. Ghana B also had a specific orientation in its founding to support practical application of learning, and emphasised quality teaching, entrepreneurship and community engagement in its mission statement, although the interactive, hands-on approaches endorsed by the institution were not made concrete in an institutional teaching and learning strategy.

These elements of endorsement from the top and clear expectations of incoming staff and students are highly influential, when compared to more fragile initiatives proposed by mid-level management, or introduced after many years of traditional practice. However, one challenge to long-standing initiatives is fatigue. As one lecturer at Kenya A stated, "At first it was easy because people were passionate about it but with time I think because it's something that has run for more than 20 years, people are running out of that passion of

doing it" (Lecturer, Kenya A). On balance, the data from this study suggests that the positive dimensions of the intervention at Kenya A have helped to ensure its continued success, but, in the long term, fatigue may pose a challenge.

Embedding progressive pedagogy at the founding of an institution is certainly highly conducive to effective implementation, though concluding that it is essential would be disheartening indeed for most HEIs. Fortunately, there are a variety of ways in which traditional pedagogies can be transformed over the course of time. One such approach is via local 'champions'. In these cases, a single committed person or group of people working either at the grassroots or in management provides the initial spark for reform, as well as much of the ongoing impetus. Kenya B and Kenya C are examples of local innovations that emerged from the efforts of individuals (in both cases, individually-championed staff development programmes), but gradually achieved a stronger institutional presence and recognition (in the form of established teaching and learning centres). Academic development has been particularly effective in these two institutions since it has been led by these charismatic practitioners who have been able to model good practice in their own work, and not just recount it theoretically. The champions in each case have also been effective in ensuring some institutional uptake of the academic development practices.

However, the promotion of innovations through local champions is not a 'silver bullet', as there are challenges in these cases of ensuring uptake across the whole institution and in engaging other champions. Indeed, in both cases highlighted here, although the initiatives were intended to be university-wide, strong practice was actually confined to a few departments. Succession is also an issue, as discussed in Kenya B:

> Sincerely the initiative has lost momentum, it was three, four years. I was talking to a lecturer the other day and he told me, if there is something important that I have gained … it was the training in academic practice. Many lecturers have gained….. But… maybe there is a succession issue of the person in charge of the programme. (Director of Quality, Kenya B)

Another highly conducive element is international links, as discussed in other studies on this topic (e.g. Schendel 2016a, in relation to Rwanda). While all of the cases covered in this article were locally established and managed, many had important international connections that facilitated the work. As stated above, Ghana A was inspired by the US model of liberal arts colleges, and the founder's ongoing relationship with US universities. The PBL approach in Kenya A was also facilitated through a partnership with a Canadian university which had been one of the pioneers of the approach, and drew on other international experiences. The local champion in Kenya B had been involved in a partnership with a UK university to develop teaching and learning practice amongst lecturers, which was influential in establishing a practitioner network in the country. In all cases, the innovations have developed particular local forms in response to contextual factors and the actions of local champions. However, the international links were vital to the initial uptake.

International links can also arise through disciplinary channels. This is unsurprising, given that lecturers are embedded in global academic communities through which influences can sometimes flow more easily than between disciplines within the same country. The examples

discussed in this paper include faculties within the health sciences and architecture; in all three cases, expectations related to international accreditation within the field were highly influential. In addition to these more collective links, there was clear evidence of influence on individuals through international contacts, with a number of lecturers reporting having brought ideas around pedagogy first acquired while studying or working elsewhere in the world (what Samoff (1993) terms 'institutional socialisation'), back to their home institution or department.

Shared vision

A second major factor in determining the effectiveness of an intervention is the existence of a vision of teaching and learning, and the extent to which it is shared across the institution/department. One way in which that takes place is through the existence of a whole institution teaching and learning strategy or policy. Botswana A, for example, has an extensive and coherent institutional policy, within which teaching and learning takes a prominent place. Central to the university's *Learning and Teaching Policy* is the notion of 'intentional learning':

> This guiding policy statement is supported by a learning and teaching philosophy that is based on the principle of "intentional learning", which puts an emphasis on pedagogical strategies that encourage active learning, the achievement of learning outcomes and the development of self-directed, independent learners who have learned how to learn. This is in contrast to content-oriented teaching strategies that focus primarily on "covering the material" and passive learning. (Botswana A document)

Kenya B's *Teaching Philosophy* also makes explicit the set of principles underpinning its approach:

> We believe that all students admitted to study in [name of university] have a positive orientation to learning and have an inherent capacity to learn. The role of the lecturer is to facilitate learning. This involves creating the conditions necessary for deep learning to take place and creating a passion for the subject matter. (Kenya B document)

Although there is no doubt that it is helpful to have a written strategy, the data clearly indicate that the simple existence of an institutional teaching and learning document does not guarantee its implementation. The challenge is to ensure that the principles of the policy are effectively communicated to – and supported by – all faculties and departments, and that there is consistency with other mechanisms of evaluation in the institution. However, often dynamics within an institution can militate against this.

In Botswana A, for example, respondents indicated that internal politics between departments hindered consistent uptake of the *Learning and Teaching Policy*, leading to diffuse implementation:

> What I have found out in this university is people don't share, people are afraid to be critiqued and they feel… that you are undermining them and if

you ask questions they also think that maybe you are trying to show off. So there is more of "pigeonhole learning" where people are just working in their silos. I tend to feel that the more we discuss in the staffrooms the more we discuss in the departmental boards the more we discuss at the faculty boards level should enhance us but most of the time we never ever discuss pedagogical approaches. (Lecturer, Botswana A)

The same institution also demonstrated the dangers of evaluation mechanisms which are not in sync with the overall aims. The key performance indicators (KPIs) used to monitor the *Learning and Teaching Policy* also have only an indirect connection to pedagogy: namely, student retention, course pass/fail, student progression to the next level of study, time to completion rates, graduate destinations into employment or further study, student satisfaction with courses and teaching, and employer satisfaction. Given that there could be positive indicators for these without a significant change in teaching and learning, and vice versa, the KPIs have not been effective in ensuring successful implementation of the policy.

In contrast, it was clearly evident within some institutions that the core principles of the teaching and learning approach informed all aspects of academic activity. At both Ghana A and Kenya A, for example, both new faculty and new students are explicitly inducted into the pedagogical approach:

> We have, every year, an introductory course like this one for students because there is no way you can bring new students to your school and you teach differently from the way they are taught, without telling them how you teach them and how you examine them. Because when they fail, eventually, you will be accountable, so we introduce them into that. During this course we also invite new members of staff, all new members of staff who have not learned the PBL are free to attend so they can also pick the methods, the steps that we follow. (Lecturer, Kenya A)

At Ghana A, such induction even extended into the hiring practices of the university, with one senior administrator going so far as to say, "if you plan to come and teach [here], this is the way, so if you don't like it, you can go somewhere else".

These efforts to induct new students and faculty to "the way things are done here" appears to have a strong impact on the long-term adherence to the founding principles of the institutions. One lecturer from Kenya A even recounted a time in the institution's history where there were student strikes and riots because of ineffective implementation of PBL, an event which forced the institution to formulate a more clearly defined vision and embed it more fully into the structures of the curriculum.

The extent of staff development differs significantly across the eight institutions. The most prominent programmes were in evidence in Kenya B and Kenya C, although the two universities in Botswana also had provision. In Ghana B, Ghana C and Kenya A, there was less discussion of staff development in the traditional sense, because the whole-scale curricular change that the institutions experienced necessitated staff involvement. Schendel and Gantner (2017) refer to this as "informal" staff development, where the staff members are

actively involved in discussions about pedagogy and curriculum but via a curricular design process, as opposed to stand-alone support for individual lecturers' pedagogy. This kind of approach is often in place when a change is first made but it then requires active maintenance over time to sustain (i.e. by inducting new lecturers whenever they arrive), as discussed above in relation to Kenya A and Ghana A.

The existence of a shared vision, therefore, is fundamental to meaningful transformation of teaching and learning in the institution. Naturally, the formulation of an official document or institutional policy is not sufficient for ensuring its uptake in practice. Consistency with other institutional policies and metrics, engagement with middle level management, staff development programmes and the creation of spaces for discussion are essential, as are the two remaining factors that emerged from the data: the resourcing provided for the initiative, and the establishment of spaces for learning and transformation for teaching staff.

Resourcing and incentives

Resources are a commonly cited barrier to any intervention. Not all of the changes needed to ensure effective learning environments require significant amounts of investment, but most have some requirements, particularly in terms of staff time. The circumstances facing one of the Ghanaian institutions in the study (Ghana C, a public university) clearly demonstrates the harm that can be caused to a founding mission, as a result of inadequate resourcing. Although Ghana C was also founded with an explicitly innovative approach to teaching, funding challenges have significantly impacted the university's ability to successfully implement the particular pedagogy that underpins its approach (namely, an extensive programme of credit-bearing community placements for students). As a result, the innovative model – although still in operation – is no longer entirely fulfilling the aims and achieving the outcomes that it did at the time of its founding. This demonstrates a sharp contrast between well-resourced and poorly-resourced institutions particularly in terms of funding sources (i. e. Ghana A, with international links and studentship, financial support and higher fees, and Ghana C which is heavily dependent on public funding), serving as an "enabler" and a constraint respectively for the implementation of an innovative model.

Class size is a key element with significant resourcing implications. Although there are ambiguities in educational research on the impacts of class size on learning, it is clear that small numbers are advantageous in terms of a learner-centred approach, in providing greater opportunity for group projects and class discussion, and for students to approach lecturers and seek clarification. Very large class sizes are a common feature of higher education on the African continent, particularly in public institutions, and are evident in some of the participating universities. Ghana C, in particular, has serious challenges related to enrolment, particularly in the humanities courses with lower fee levels. Although not common, one respondent (a lecturer who teaches a foundation course) shared that he had recently taught a class to more than 1600 students. Such overwhelming numbers work against innovation, particularly when there is also a lack of resources available to support the development of alternatives to traditional classroom arrangements. However, in this particular sample of institutions, class size was not a universal constraint. Numbers were seen to be manageable at Kenya C, for example, with most lecturers reporting groups of about 30 (the maximum size

is 60). Relatively high resourcing also allows Ghana A to maintain relatively low class sizes (generally <50 per class).

The issue of class size is, of course, highly context specific, as is evident from the fact it was rarely mentioned in the Botswanan institutions, given the relatively small size of the higher education sector in that country. The particular pedagogical approach employed also affects measures of appropriate class sizes. At both Kenya A and Ghana B, for example, which are faculties/departments implementing PBL within larger public universities, class sizes are relatively small (e.g. <60 per class), in contrast to other departments within their respective universities. However, classes have grown in recent years, due to resource constraints, and lecturers at both institutions argue that the classes are now too big to effectively implement PBL. These discussions highlight the relative nature of the concept of class size and problematize the notion that there is a particular size threshold for quality, irrespective of the pedagogical approach employed.

A further aspect of resources is physical infrastructure and facilities. In the case of both the private universities in Kenya (B and C), facilities appeared to be available for supporting more learner-centred pedagogy, including projectors, audio-visual aids and adaptable classrooms. Nevertheless, lecturers at Kenya C lamented the lack of appropriate technologies, laptops, internet connection, and the ability to use mobile phones for pedagogical purposes, as well as a lack of support staff to develop e-learning. The Botswana A campus is extremely well endowed in this regard, with attractive, modern and functional buildings. Students very much appreciate the library facilities, and compare its infrastructure favourably with other universities. Botswana B students were also complimentary about the physical environment in the campus being safe and clean, although there were a number of complaints from lecturers across all universities in relation to lack of equipment being a constraint on the implementation of pedagogical reform. This was particularly the case in areas in which equipment is expensive, such as electrical engineering and health sciences. The disparity between the external infrastructure and a lack of useful equipment was put succinctly in this interchange with a lecturer:

> I: So then what are the biggest challenges that you face in terms of your role
> as teacher?
> P: Resources. yeah I mean there is a big challenge in terms of resources
> I: Aah but you have got beautiful buildings,
> P: Yes we have these beautiful buildings with empty laboratories. (Lecturer,
> Botswana B)

A third important area relates to staffing. PBL and community-based learning are labour intensive as lecturers are required for the tutorials and to go into the field, and use of the learner-centred approach generally requires time to plan. A number of issues were raised regarding the difficulties of recruiting and retaining academic staff on permanent contracts with exclusive dedication to the institution. In some cases, staff had to teach excessive hours in order to generate further income to supplement their salaries. Lack of time for preparation therefore became a significant barrier, leading to replication of lectures and acting against the pedagogical innovation. Similarly, a predominance of part-time lecturers in the private institutions creates obvious problems of dedication to the institution, while rapid staff

turnover also creates difficulties in terms of inducting new lecturers to a particular pedagogical approach. Moonlighting was also an issue, particularly in the Kenyan and Ghanaian contexts, limiting dedication to teaching, particularly given the constraints on speaking with students outside class, and spending adequate time in preparation and marking. Engagement in work outside the university appears to be less common in Botswana, perhaps because of the stronger economic situation of the country overall (and the resulting relatively higher salaries for academics, in comparison to the other two contexts under discussion).

A Head of Department at Kenya C echoed the views of staff across our sample in highlighting this point in relation to the particular time investment needed for learner-centred approaches:

> Take it this way: when you get into problem-based teaching you can't moonlight. But remember we also need money sometimes you are forced to choose. Which way do I go? The moment you get to problem-based learning that requires critical reflective learning, you can't teach many courses because it is quite engaging. So you find a lecturer is in a dilemma: I go this way I have little income, I also have my problems to sort out. Sometimes you are forced into taking too many classes – the moment you have too many classes you resort to banking[8]. Because banking is the easiest way out, you simply pick your notes and go to class and you are waiting for the time and then you go your way.

Even aside from such pulls from outside of the university, lecturers face competing priorities which take time away from teaching, class preparation, marking and professional development. Despite official policies about time allocation (e.g. at Botswana A, where staff are officially allocated time as 40% teaching, 40% for research and 20% for service), the actual time spent on these different activities will inevitably be influenced by the incentive structure at the university. As can be found in universities all over the world, lecturers in all of the institutions reported that research and publications were considerably more important than teaching in considerations of promotion.

Officially, policies did reward teaching, but in practice it was given little weight. Kenya B's *Teaching Philosophy,* for example, states "The University accords teaching equal importance as research and is constantly exploring ways to improve and reward it" and "[the] University's promotion criteria lay emphasis on the importance of teaching in gaining promotion, and much more emphasis on the production of a dossier of evidence about teaching performance". Yet, in practice, lecturers affirm that research predominates in decisions about career progression. Similarly, one lecturer from Botswana A estimated that 90% of promotion at his institution is based on research and publications. Although some institutions have incorporated other incentive structures (e.g. the lecturer of the year award at Kenya C), many institutions within the sample had no such incentives focused on teaching.

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[8] i.e. Freire's (1972) conception of 'banking education', transmission-based pedagogy.

On balance, therefore, resourcing plays an essential role in ensuring effective implementation of pedagogical reform interventions. Although the sample discussed here includes some of the best-resourced and well-regarded institutions in the respective countries, many institutions reported a range of ways in which limited resources were impeding successful implementation. One can assume that other institutions will encounter similar – or even more acute – challenges in this regard.

Transformative learning

The sections above have outlined some of the institutional factors at play in determining the effectiveness of uptake. But ultimately, teaching and learning will only be transformed if those changes materialise at the level of the individual lecturer. This final section assesses the influential factors relating to transformation of lecturers, individually and collectively.

This transformation is no easy task given the strong counter-tendencies coming from outside the institutions. Uptake of the interventions was often difficult for staff and students on account of their upbringing and prior education experiences, as well as, in some cases, many years of lecturing according to different principles:

> So they come to the university with an awareness that this approach worked for me, they are not trained teachers…. A person teaching literature went through a process of being lectured, occasional discussion here and there, occasional presentation. They are socialized in that, so when they think of going to class, the best approach that they are comfortable using is one that they are aware of. (Teaching and learning coordinator, Botswana A)

In all three contexts, this resistance is, to a large extent, indicative of a broader clash with the dominant academic culture, the prevailing practice in other universities, which has its roots at the school level. This clash can be direct, i.e. when lecturers actively resist innovative pedagogical approaches, but it can also be indirect, i.e. when a lecturer *intends* to adapt his or her teaching method but cannot move past some of the underlying principles. A lecturer at Kenya B, for example, demonstrated this latter tendency well when discussing the process of countering the expectations of academic upbringing:

> …the system where I came from, the lecturers would show up three times in a semester, but we [would] still have to do the exams. And we [would] still have to go through everything. I kept on telling myself if I ever become a lecturer I will never do this to the students. So I always try as much as possible to dedicate a lot of time, preparing for my classes, and once I have dedicated that time, I also take that time to transmit them knowledge. (Lecturer, Kenya B)

This statement is interesting as – on the one hand – it shows high levels of motivation to be more 'student centred' but – on the other hand – it clearly demonstrates that the lecturer still holds a fundamentally 'transmission' approach to teaching (i.e. assuming that the role of the instructor is to 'transmit' knowledge), as opposed to a 'facilitation' approach (to support a student's own exploration of knowledge).

While it is not possible to cover this aspect in full in this article, there is also the important issue of student responses. There are instances (e.g. Botswana A) in which the lecturer 'genuinely' desired to keep his/her students engaged but due to students' resistance to the 'engagement' ended up giving up, and relapsing into teacher-centredness. The message here might be that interventions to get lecturers to shift from traditional teaching to more active pedagogical styles should also be accompanied by similar interventions for students, as was the case at Ghana A and Kenya A. Usually, institutional interventions are tilted in favour of staff, the implicit assumption being that students will change as and when their lecturers change. Such thinking smacks of 'technical rationality', resting on the assumption that students are malleable. The reality, though, is that students can be and often are a formidable barrier to change, especially in situations where their 'voice' (as in student evaluation of staff exercise) count towards lecturers' promotions and progression (Tabulawa 2004).

Given this background, many of the institutions found it challenging to reorient the pedagogical work of the staff. Some of the institutions have taken this task very seriously – we can highlight here Kenya B, Kenya C and Ghana A as clear examples – by developing spaces for lecturers to reflect deeply on their practice and the underpinning epistemic principles, thereby allowing them to make strongly rooted, rather than superficial changes, to their practice:

> … you cannot have a student think critically if you have not been taught how to think…. So through [the academic development] programme it is intended to transform the lecturer to think critically and from there they can now go to transform the students to think critically. (Lecturer, Kenya B)

The transformative element is even stronger in Kenya C, where the academic development programme features a "Teaching for Critical Reflective Thought" workshop, which aims to contribute to "shifts in worldview", "changes in … self-awareness and self-understanding in their role as a learner and teacher" and "perspective transformations concerning teaching and learning". This initiative, which is based primarily on the value of reflexive teaching, sees quality teaching as being predicated on a deep shift in lecturer perspectives and view of the world, and the ability to question previously held assumptions. Another theoretical principle at Kenya C is that the training provision itself needs to be aligned with the principles being promoted – i.e. the workshops themselves need to be participatory and learner-centred. The data indicate that this more transformative focus has had an impact on teaching staff involved in academic development programming at this institution.

Similar findings from South Africa corroborate the potential impact of this more reflective approach to academic development (e.g. McKenna, 2012). However, despite the promise inherent in such an approach, such initiatives do not always reach all staff. As discussed earlier in reference to resourcing, competing commitments can make lecturer engagement difficult:

> But it is not always working. Part of it there is a competition of workload which means delivery and also the senior lecturers are also busy. So what happens is that mentorship, that peer evaluation, that peer observation is not well done (Senior manager, Kenya B)

A key debate in teaching and learning in higher education is whether development activities should be made compulsory for staff (and if so, whether they should be compulsory only for incoming staff or also for existing lecturers), and whether they should be accredited. Botswana A has intentionally made their inputs non-mandatory for staff, as explained by the deputy director of the teaching and learning centre:

> The way the university has conceptualized professional development, and the way we have fitted in, is one where we do not demand that academics take specific workshops in teaching and learning …That is a strength but also a weakness, it's a strength in the sense that we're not seen by academics as dictating their engagement in teaching and learning aspect. Teaching academics in university tend to react negatively when a programme of professional development is imposed on them, it has a backlash effect in terms of interest and commitment so volunteerism takes that away. …the downside [is that] the number of participants are very low. Out of an average of 30-40 participants expected in a workshop only 5-6 and we are lucky if we get 8 participants. The implication… is only touching a few, not a bulk number of academics. So the overall impact over time is then limited by that very low participation rate.

Other institutions, such as Ghana A, believe strongly in making the courses mandatory, as is also discussed in the following statement from the Director of Quality at Kenya B:

> It needs to remain mandatory, we need to structure it properly, the centre for academic development … needs to be given support. … People cannot read about the philosophy they have to practice. We need to make the programme mandatory for all staff. We may need to structure it in a better way so that it may not be seen as an afterthought… Be structured and put into the curriculum in such a way that it allows time for lecturers to go through willingly so that they are motivated. As it is now it's seen as punishment.

These factors have led to the provision being established as credit bearing, and finally as a Masters level qualification, at this institution. Kenya C and Botswana B have also moved towards making some training compulsory, by rolling out a Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education Teaching (PCHET), which all lecturers in the faculty will have to do. It is possible that these mandatory initiatives will result in much fuller embedding of the desired changes, although they may also lead to increased resistance from staff.

A further issue raised by one of the lecturers at Kenya B, and common across the institutions, was the lack of mentoring, leading to ineffective implementation of the intervention:

> [U]nfortunately we don't have a meaningful mentorship programme in [name of university] therefore everybody comes into the system and muddles through. And you could muddle in successfully or muddle in unsuccessfully. Depending on your previous training, depending on your

willingness to learn, depending on your openness, depending on your willingness to ask questions or engage with somebody who has been there before. I have had a situation where a young faculty requesting to come to my class. But that is on a personal level it is not institutionalized. There is nothing institutionalized in terms of facilitating and ensuring that lecturers are at the level where they are.   (Lecturer, Kenya B)

The unevenness of uptake between different lecturers leads to a highly variegated ecology of practice. While a few lecturers express open opposition to learner-centred methods, more common than resistance to the interventions is the surface-level adoption of the external practices, without endorsement of the underpinning principles. In Kenya C, for example, there is evidence that lecturers absorb the messages of the intervention in terms of concrete activities, but are not transformed in terms of their ideas at a deeper level:

But then we have some people who come and go to the same course but they never realize what this course is all about…The course is helping people change, but they still use more active learning techniques, small groups and debates to make banking tastier. Banking is usually very boring. It has nothing on it. Just boring to read it. But now we can make banking fun, enjoyable! They never make the philosophical shift from banking to teaching transformative value. They have not made that pedagogical shift. (Workshop coordinator, Kenya C)

These dynamics were seen across all of the eight institutions in our sample, and similar processes have been observed elsewhere in the world (e.g. Brinkman, 2016, in relation to schoolteachers in India and Schendel [2016b], in relation to higher education in Rwanda).

When examined together, the data from the three contexts involved in this study indicates that it is possible to classify lecturers as falling into one of four different groups: those who actively oppose the intervention or who have no or limited engagement (which we can term *opponents*), those who adopt external displays but without a deeper transformation (*surface adopters*), those who fully transform their practice (*transformers*), and those who are *champions*, and work to disseminate intervention further. Opponents were rare in all eight institutions. Indeed, it appears that all of the institutions in question have been very successful in producing surface adopters of more innovative approaches to teaching. However, a challenge remains to convert surface adopters into transformers. In some institutions – particularly those which have created reflexive staff development spaces – this has taken place, but there have been constraints on widening the experience to all staff. Among the eight institutions involved in this study, only three have managed to create a collective culture of teaching, in which the majority of teaching staff fall in the transformer or champion categories. These three – Ghana A, Botswana A and Kenya A – demonstrate what is possible when active academic development programming is combined with full institutional (or faculty-level) support and integration across all areas of academic activity.

Final reflections

Understanding the quality of teaching and learning in higher education, and the factors underpinning it, is crucial for societal development. All three of the countries included in this study, and most in the world, give universities a central role in their advancement towards prosperity and quality of life for all – in accordance with the recognition of the sector in the Sustainable Development Goals (McCowan 2019). Yet the positive impact of higher education on society – through transformative learning of a personal, civic and professional nature – is predicated on sufficient level of quality, and not simply on expansion of the system.

The pedagogical innovations adopted by the eight universities in this study have been shown in the international research literature to be conducive to these forms of transformative learning and the development of critical thinking. Yet the official endorsement of these practices is no guarantee of their effective implementation in practice, and in many cases can remain at the level of rhetorical adoption. This study has shown that there are certain crucial factors affecting this implementation: the drivers of the initiative, and the extent to which it is embedded in the structures of the institution and championed by staff members; the presence of a pedagogical vision that is shared across an institution (or on a more modest scale the department or faculty); the necessary resources to implement it in practice, along with the work conditions and incentives required by lecturers; and finally, the opportunities and spaces for teaching staff to engage in reflection on their practice, and transform themselves and their teaching. The final point is particularly crucial in moving from a rhetorical acceptance of a learner-centred approach (the *surface adopters*), to becoming *transformers* and *champions*, involving not only the adoption of particular practices such as collaborative group work and projects, but a shift in epistemic orientation towards an understanding of knowledge as provisional and constructed.

One of the primary factors for the success of these initiatives is local buy-in. None of the interventions has been 'parachuted in', imported from outside the country or enforced by a national body without the consent, involvement or ownership of the institution itself. However, that does not mean that the approaches adopted are entirely endogenous: in almost all of these cases, there have been generative interactions nationally and internationally, involving cross-fertilisation of ideas and capacity-building of staff members. A certain form of internationalisation is, therefore, important – the partnerships between the institutions and others elsewhere in the world have been extremely fruitful for enhancing teaching and learning quality. At the same time, this international dimension can be problematic in its own right, as teaching staff can reject the principles of "learner-centred pedagogy" entirely as being a Western import with little local relevance (e.g. Schweisfurth, 2013; Tabulawa, 2013). Although, in reality, the "traditional" methods of university pedagogy in existence at many universities in the region (namely, the academic lecture) also have their origin in the Western academy, the perception that more "active" pedagogical methods are a neo-colonial import can be a serious impediment to reform, particularly in the absence of some of the factors outlined in this article (namely, support from management, a shared vision, and appropriately aligned resources and incentives). This difficult challenge relates to the fact that processes of pedagogical change are not technical and neutral, but involve normative positions, and values of a pedagogical, moral and political nature.

A further point is that implementation involves factors that are internal and external to the actors involved. On the one hand, it depends on the understandings of individuals and groups, their acceptance or rejection of the intervention, their interpretation and enactment of it; on the other, it depends on the resources available, the intervention's incorporation into institutional structures, and support from institutional leaders. Within this institutional sample, it is possible to identify cases which are more 'institution-led' (i.e. where structures and leadership have been particularly important) and others which are more 'champion-led' (i.e. where reform has been driven primarily by the actions of individuals within the institution). For example, initiatives such as that of Ghana C, which we might term 'institution-led', deal well with the external factors, but risk a lack of transformation in individuals leading to superficial compliance without strong embedding in practice. Initiatives such as Kenya B and Kenya C, which we might call 'champion-led', focus on the internal factors, ensuring a gradual expansion of actors who strongly endorse the initiative, but without corresponding structural changes, leading to more restricted coverage and difficulties of succession. These questions link in with perennial debates around structure and agency (a point also discussed by Quinn, 2012). The data from this study suggest that, ultimately, both of these factors - and the interactions between them - need to be acknowledged in ensuring pedagogical change. We need to remove barriers to effective practice – lack of resources, unconducive laws – but at the same time the transformation will not be possible without individuals and groups with a commitment to change.

Overall, the main implication of these findings is that these crucial issues must be addressed in a nuanced and holistic way. Pedagogical transformation involves all aspects of the functioning of the university and all of its actors. Although such a process can seem daunting, there is hope inherent in the stories outlined here. Some of the institutions discussed in this paper clearly demonstrate that it is possible for universities in the region to (re)orient their pedagogical approach to better prepare students for uncertain and challenging futures. Most importantly, the rewards are substantial. Indeed, many of the rightfully ambitious aims of countries in Africa and beyond can only be achieved if the nut of improving teaching and learning quality can be cracked.

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