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Governance and Coordination of the Higher Education System in Namibia: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Considering that coordination can take many forms, and may be instituted through an array of policy instruments and tools, we take the position that coordination is both a consequence of pressures on higher education some of which are brought by market forces (globalisation) but also that state coordination of higher education can be a trigger for change. Our objective is to demonstrate this through a review of literature and legislative and policy instruments in Namibia. We complete the review with an in-depth analysis of key informant interviews on coordination in Namibia. We argue that although Namibia's approach of higher education governance and state coordination strongly emphasizes autonomy, which is in-line with international trends. We also argue that self-governance in an absence of policy does not promote effectiveness of HEIs in the country. We conclude that coordination and state steering of it, is in Namibia's context a consequence of experience in hindsight rather than a case of foresight.

Keywords

governance, higher education, Namibia, education policy, coordination system

Cover Page Footnote

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GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NAMIBIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Introduction and Objective

The establishment of a coordination system for higher education was one of the major aims of the Government of Namibia when it created the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in 2003. This step elevated the importance of a harmonised approach in higher education, with the goal of positioning higher education institutions to address two challenges by the year 2030: that of transforming Namibia into a knowledge-based economy, and that of reaching a quality of life equal to the standard of living in developed countries (GRN, 2004). As a result of the fact that Namibia developed its higher education policy under external influence, coordination was not seen as an immediate policy challenge soon after independence (Takala, 1998).

In Namibia, higher education (HE) is young and relatively new (since 1980s). It consists of one public and a private university, namely: the University of Namibia (UNAM), International University of Management (IUM) and a polytechnic (the Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN)), soon to be transformed into a University of Science and Technology. According to the Higher Education Act No. 26 of 2003, being a post-secondary entity does not constitute automatic qualification as higher education, although it does mean qualification as tertiary education. According to this distinction, as of 23 November 2012, 35 institutions (except IUM) that are accredited by the Namibia Qualifications Authority to offer postsecondary education are not part of higher education. Higher education category also excludes vocational schools

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from being considered higher education institutions (HEIs). Instead, they are part of the tertiary education system. The institutions of higher education can be grouped into two groups: a) those that operate autonomously, like the University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia; b) and c) those registered as private higher education institutions, such as the International University of Management.

Currently, Namibian HEIs offer education at the levels of certificate, diploma, undergraduate degree, graduate and some post graduate levels, each typically pursuing different levels of capacity in skill and knowledge inculcation for their graduates. A policy question that arises in a setting such as this, where there is not only some diversity of postsecondary institutional types, but also where there is an assortment of higher education operational frameworks, is this: Should there be some formal arrangements for coordinating groups of different and/or same types of institutions, and if so, what form should these arrangements take? In the light of Namibia's political past and with increased expectations of higher education institutions to be relevant and responsive, this question is current (Angula & Lewis, 1997).

Considering that coordination can take many forms, and may be instituted through an array of policy instruments and tools, we take the position that coordination is both a consequence of pressures on higher education some of which are brought by market forces (globalisation) but also that state coordination of higher education can be a trigger for change. Our objective is to demonstrate this through a review of literature and legislative and policy instruments in Namibia. We complete the review by in-depth analysis of interviews from key informant on coordination in Namibia. We argue that although Namibia's approach of higher education governance and state coordination emphasises strongly on autonomy, this is in-line with international trends. We also argue that self-governance in an absence of policy does not promote effectiveness of HEIs in the country. We conclude that coordination and state steering of it, is in Namibia's context a consequence of experience in hindsight rather than a case of foresight.

Theorising Coordination as a State Function

The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at its twenty-seventh session in Paris defined higher education as "all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments, that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities" (UNESCO, 1996, p.566). In this study higher education system is defined as a set of highly advanced, interrelated components or units involved in the challenge of joint-problem solving to accomplish a common goal in their pursuit of scientific, intellectual and moral rigor. These components may be administrative, educational or a combination of both. The different types of higher education institutions and institutions of learning constitute a system of higher education.

According to this definition, in a higher education system, there may be a variety of institutional types, as is the case in Namibia, and even clear sectoral distinctions, but the primary emphasis is on system-wide planning, catalyzing and harmonisation of the different components in order to accomplish a common goal as defined by an administrative system. The common goal, in this case the transformation of Namibia into a knowledge-based economy, can be approached from different angles, at several levels by different institutional types. If their activities as components of a system are not coordinated, expansion and efficiency may be difficult to achieve.

UNESCO also defined 'qualification in higher education' as meaning "any diploma, degree or other qualifying certificate that is awarded by an institution of higher education, or another appropriate authority, that establishes that the holder has successfully completed a course of study and qualifies him or her either to continue to a further stage of study or to practice a profession not requiring further special preparation" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 556-557). UNESCO also recommended that it is essential for the purposes of access to, pursuance and completion of higher education and for preparation for the practice of professions that States put into practice policies of evaluating competence that take into account not only the qualifications obtained, but also courses of study taken, and skills, knowledge and experience acquired. Thus, certain agencies need to be put in place to enforce evaluations of competence. In Namibia, the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) and the National Council for Higher Education have been established by Acts of Parliament, partly for this purpose. In these agencies and policies, coordination is very important. But how is coordination related to higher education? Or to put it differently, how does it influence governance of higher education? And, why should governments be concerned?

Worldwide, the growing demand for higher education has led to increase in the number of institutions offering higher education. This increase, accompanied by mounting costs, a different and new clientele the call for quality makes central direction of higher education difficult and consequently, resulting in calls for greater coordination. Traditionally, the role of the state to ensure that higher education programmes support regional, national and international socio-economic needs of the country in which it operates have been considered as part of rights and obligations between the state and its citizens. The expectation that the state should coordinate higher education system is not only a consequence of increased need to legitimise state spending (Kogan & Marton, 2000) but also to promote participation, cost effectiveness, accountability and transparency (Salmi, 2008).

In this sense, coordination is actually part of good governance. We adopt the European Union definition, which characterises good governance as "rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which power is exercised" (European Commission, 2001, p.11). Higher education must be seen to be exercising good governance especially because education systems are historically connected to nation building (Vaage, 2001). Coordination in higher education can be analysed by using concepts of power, relevance, legitimacy, ideology, autonomy and the dynamics in governance (Yokoyama and Meek, 2010). As other observers have noted (e.g., Clark, 1983; Karlsen, 2010), the state may have authority, but its power is moderated by the academic oligarchy and the market. The major question therefore has been how much control governments should exercise over higher education institutions (Fielden, 2010).

Literature on how the state goes about coordinating higher education indicates that policy instruments that prescribe how HEIs should be governed including deterrents, and on how compliance can be incentivised are not uncommon (Maassen & van Vught, 1994) because governments must have tools "to control and influence specific public sectors, such as higher education" (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000, p.268). For example, government is normally responsible for financing new academic programmes considered to be of national priority but it is not answerable on the responsiveness of such programmes. In countries where governments are strongly involved in steering higher education, states not only regulates through setting standards, control and supervising of what goes on higher education but they also monitor self-governance by universities (Yokoyama & Meek, 2010).

It is understood that state actions are done on behalf of and in the interest of society whereas those of universities depict autonomy and protection of the ideals it stands for. Thus, in the context of higher education policy, coordination draws a very important boundary, that

is, the where the roles and functions of the state begins and ends on one hand, and where the responsibilities and obligations of universities to the communities they serve start and stop on the other hand. The approach different countries adopt depends on the conceptual model they see as fitting their perspective. These may be bilateral - emphasising the facilitating and intervening role of the state; multilateral – acknowledging the role of multiple stakeholders that shape higher education for good or worse; or contextual relationships – takes historical background into account but stresses efficiency and client responsiveness based on performance-based evaluation and output-based funding (Yokoyama & Meek, 2010, p.555).

Many have written on the effectiveness of these models, but the reality is that the difference depends on the type and comprehensiveness of the tools; the state has to implement what it sees as a public entitlement. Regardless of the above, money, planning, regulation and persuasion have nevertheless been shown to be most useful instruments the state can use to steer coordination (Veld et al., 1996). Although there is very little written on this subject in Africa (Amonoo-Neizer, 1998; Lao & Saint, 2008), other researchers such as Fielden (2008); Salmi (2008) and Fielden (2010) show that this diversity of models and control measures, probably for historical reasons also exist in Africa. Namibia has taken the Anglophone model, which gives universities autonomy but uses legislative interventions for the ‘public good’. A number of sources, (including NPC 2007; World Bank, 2011) argue that if Namibia is to progress to a knowledge-based economy, it must overcome the following:

- HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,
- Poverty,
- Inequitable distribution of income,
- Relatively high unemployment rate,
- A fast approaching energy crisis,
- Low levels of industrialization,
- Inadequate economic growth,
- Inadequate capacity, especially specialist human resources,
- Gender inequality and women’s empowerment, and
- High vulnerability to external economic and ecological shocks.

The Government of Namibia is not expected to surmount these challenges alone. Hence, it has been argued that HEIs in Namibia must play a significant role in providing solutions to these challenges through training, knowledge creation, research and innovation (Mapaure & Mwandemele, 2012).

Methods

In the process of examining the individual and collective factors and processes that affect coordination of the higher education system in Namibia, was necessary to contend with both the “what” of coordination – what precisely needs coordination, and the “how” of coordination – which mechanisms are appropriate for coordination to succeed. In order to do this, the researchers did a comprehensive literature review and complimented it with 28 key informant interviews from the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), National Council for Higher Education (council members) (NCHE), Polytechnic of Namibia (PoN), Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA), Ministry of Education (MoE), the University of Namibia (UNAM), and the International University of Management (IUM). The respondents included heads of departments, deans and members of the executive administration

at HIEs in Namibia. In addition, heads of state agencies in education such as NQA and some members of the National Council for Higher Education as well as former Rectors of the Colleges of Education. The fieldwork for this study was carried out over a period of three months at different intervals.

It was important to interview these key players because there was already in 2004 a recognition that for Namibia to achieve “*a fully integrated, unified and flexible education and training system, that prepares Namibian learners to take advantage of a rapidly changing environment and contributes to the economic, moral, cultural and social development of the citizens throughout their lives*” (GRN, 2004, p.89), its higher education institutions should be responsive and relevant. Apparently, at that time Namibian HEIs were weak and ineffective in knowledge creation and application (Marope, 2005).

Similarly, we wanted to establish what coordination factors could be put in place to change the higher education landscape in the country considering that “*neither the private sector nor higher education institutions seem to have compelling incentives for engaging in R&D. Institutions of higher learning—the University and the Polytechnic—are not recognized for their leadership in knowledge creation, knowledge management, and innovation. Moreover, they seem not to be able to produce the required young stock of researchers and other workers required in a KE [knowledge economy]*” (Marope, 2005, p.38).

Research Findings

The reader may recall that approaches to the question of how higher education may be coordinated have been changing as a result of many factors. These factors include the impact that higher education has had on the economy through science and technology and volatility in higher education governance caused by expansion, demands by the market as well as the need for greater participation by the previously underrepresented groups. Expansion of higher education especially has been so great that some refer to it as a phenomenon that “has had an equal, if not greater, impact in the Middle East, South and East Asia, Latin America, and even Africa despite the difficulties that the continent has encountered” (Scott, 2010, p.217). Namibia, despite its young and small higher education sector has not escaped this phenomenon.

Legislative and Policy Instruments

For historical reasons, it is possible that at independence, Namibia did not envisage that it will have more than one higher education institution offering higher education. Had it been the case, it would have started with a Higher Education Act and a Higher Education Policy instead of a university Act. This would have meant the existence of a framework of governing higher education institutions where all parts of the higher education system are treated as ‘components of a whole’. A higher education Act was only promulgated in 2003 (to establish the NCHE), eleven years after the University Act and nine years after the Polytechnic Act. A Higher Education policy, following a study that pointed out the need for coordination in 2010 has been drafted. That said, presumably, Namibia adopted institutional approach to higher education coordination which assumes the existence of highly independent, self-governing or self-regulating institutions and minimal state intervention. In order to explain this, it is helpful to look into the legislative instruments in details.

The University of Namibia Act 18 of 1992

This Act of parliament establishes the University of Namibia and provides for its administration and control of affairs, for the regulation of its activities and for matters

incidental thereto. UNAM is established with the aim:

- a) to provide higher education;
- b) to undertake research;
- c) to advance and disseminate knowledge;
- d) to provide extension services;
- e) to encourage growth and nurturing of cultural expression within the context of the Namibian society;
- f) to further training and continuing education;
- g) to contribute to the social and economic development of Namibia; and
- h) to foster relationships with any person or institution, both nationally and internationally” (GRN, 1992, p.4).

In terms of governance, UNAM is constituted by a Chancellor, a Vice-Chancellor, two Pro-Vice-Chancellors, and a Council, a Senate, academic and administrative staff and students. Whereas the Chancellor is the titular head and is elected by Council for a period of six years, the Vice-Chancellor, his/her Pro-Vice Chancellors, a Registrar, Bursar and Librarian are appointed by Council. Council is composed of more than 26 members 6 of whom are appointed by the President of the Republic of Namibia. In addition to four people elected by Senate, the Ministries of Education and Finance are represented by their Permanent Secretaries on the Council. Other members include two alumnus, two representatives from the student council and two persons who are not resident in Namibia “on account of their knowledge of, and experience in, matters relating to higher education” (GRN, 1992, p.6). Notice that no reference is made to the market or market needs in the Council composition.

The Vice-Chancellor is the chief academic and administrative officer of the university. In this capacity, he/she is also the chairperson of Senate, a body responsible for vetting of all academic programs ranging from certificates to doctoral level degrees.

The University budget and expansion plans are approved by Council. Council, in a sense, institutes the autonomy of the university but through its committees and subcommittees, it also serves as the body that holds the university accountable. To retain transparency, the Act states that the university through its Council must provide its reports and audited financial statements to the Minister of Education, who in turn must Table such in the National Assembly. Autonomy and the independence of academic body is considered so important that the Act states that “no statute or regulation proposed to be framed under subsection (1) and which deals with any matter in relation to the composition of the Senate shall be adopted by the council unless the Council has consulted with the Senate” (GRN, 1992, p.14).

The Polytechnic of Namibia Act 33 of 1994

According to the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN, 1994, p.4), the PoN is established with the followings aims in mind:

- a) to provide postsecondary education career-education with due regard for human resource requirements of Namibian and with emphasis upon excellence in teaching within a climate conducive to the intellectual, social, aesthetic, and emotional development of students;
- b) to provide continuing education at a postsecondary school level in order to expand the educational horizon of the adult community;
- c) to conduct applied research;

- d) to develop equal opportunities in respect of the educational programmes of, admissions to, and employment at, the Polytechnic; and
- e) to provide an effective collegial governance structure that encourages active participation of all its constituents and that reflects the collective input of all interested parties.

Like UNAM, PoN consist of a Council, Rector, Vice-Rectors, Senate, academic and administrative staff of the Polytechnic, and students. The Act provides that “the governance and general control of the Polytechnic and its affairs and functions, and the administration of its property, shall be vested in the Council of the Polytechnic” (GRN, 1994, p.5). The Council composition is broad in that it includes the Rector, all Vice-Rectors, nine members appointed by the Minister of Education, one person nominated for appointment by the Public Service Commission, one person nominated for appointment by the Council of the Municipality of the City of Windhoek, one person nominated for appointment by the Engineering Council of Namibia and at least three but not more than 6 representatives from the private commercial, mining and agricultural sectors. Furthermore, Council also includes three persons who represent the interests of employees, employers, and women appointed by the Minister as well as one Senate and one student representatives.

We have gone into this detail to indicate the type of legislation Namibia chose and how the drafters conceptualized university governance. From this brief overview of the two legislations above, we can see that Councils or Boards are the supreme authorities at higher education institutions in Namibia. They make decisions and give mandates and direction on the overall governance of HEIs. It is also clear that *Academic* governance is left to *Senate* to lead and make recommendations to Council for approval. Thus, while the focus of authority and responsibility for academic, financial and estate matters lies with the governing body, academic governance bodies are mainly charged with the development of academic policies, determining the content, organisation and delivery of academic programmes as well as setting up a system of assessing student performance and measures aimed at improving quality assessment and assurance.

Although the state is the main sponsor through government subsidies, it does not get involved in setting fees, salary negotiations of staff and in putting a cap on student enrolment. This system is similar (in some cases) to models applied in other commonwealth countries (Meek & Wood 1998, p.167). However, when the state is reliant on institutions governing themselves to be effective, there may be a danger too for the state to lose its steering function particularly when planning and undertaking academic activities outside the HEIs themselves is considered.

The National Advisory Council on Education

The National Advisory Council on Education (NACE) was created by an Act of Parliament, the Education Act No. 16 of 2001 (GRN 2001, p.7). NACE whose powers and functions are grossly undefined, other than that it should advise the Minister on educational matters, upon the Advisory Council’s own initiative or in response to any question referred to the Advisory Council by the Minister, was short-lived. NACE was created specifically for the then Ministry of Basic Education but it become redundant without a legacy after the merger of the two ministries of education in 2005 when Dr. Hifikepunye Pohamba become the President of the Republic of Namibia.

The Namibia Qualifications Authority Act 29 of 1996

NQA was constituted by an Act of Parliament, the Namibia Qualification Authority Act of 1996. According to the NQA Act (GRN, 1996, p.4-5), the mandate of the NQA includes among others:

- a) set up and administer a National Qualification Framework;
- b) be a forum for matters pertaining to qualification;
- c) set the curriculum standards required for achieving the occupation standards;
- d) promote the development of, and to analyse benchmarks of acceptable performance norms for any occupation, job or position ;
- e) accredit persons, institutions and organisations providing education programs and courses of instruction or training for meeting stipulated national requirements;
- f) enquire whether qualification meet national standards;
- g) advice on matters pertaining to qualification; and
- h) evaluate and recognise skills and competences learnt outside formal education

In addition, NQA is also tasked with the responsibility of, through the National Qualification Framework (NQF):

- a) Evaluation of qualifications
- b) Setting standards
- c) Recognition and validation of prior learning
- d) Accreditation, and
- e) Quality audits.

NQA reports to its governing Council, which is multi-stakeholder framed in that it consists of not only the Vice Chancellor/Rector of HEIs, but also permanent secretaries of several ministries and 21 other members appointed by the Minister, including those representing professional councils. On some aspects of higher education, NQA is assisted by the National Standards Setting Bodies and their subcommittee, the Standard Generating Bodies (SGB). According to Marope (2005, p.68), the NQA is, in terms of the number of employed qualified staff, only qualified to effectively carry out its mandate and responsibilities to a very limited capacity.

The Minister of Education promulgated the Regulation for the Accreditation of Persons, Institutions or Organisation as per the terms of the NQA Act of 1996 (GRN, 2006). According to the list of accredited institutions provided by NQA to us during the time this study was carried out four years ago, neither the PoN nor UNAM are listed. Again, here we see the self-governing autonomy approach being reflected. However, the IUM, a private University is listed in the accredited institutions list. On the one hand, this presupposes that UNAM and PoN by virtue of them being public institutions would offer qualifications within the national qualification framework. On the other hand, NQA legislation does not make it compulsory for all HEIs to be assessed in all aspects. It does not prescribe what needs to be done in institutions of higher education. It is not uncommon to find situations like this because sometimes states allow HEIs to self-govern without retaining control (Fielden, 2010; Lao and Saint, 2008). Whether or not this form of governance is effective and allows governments to achieve their goals is a question still to be investigated.

The National Council for Higher Education Act 26 of 2003

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was established by an Act of Parliament, Higher Education Act No. 26 of 2003. According to the Act, the objectives of the NCHE are:

- A) to promote:
 - I. The establishment of a coordinated higher education system
 - II. Access for students to higher education institutions
 - III. Quality assurance in higher education; and
- B) to advise on the allocation of moneys to public higher education institutions.

Some of its functions include:

- a) to accredit, with the concurrence of the National Qualifications Authority, programmes of higher education provided at HEIs;
- b) to take measures to promote access of students to HEIs;
- c) to undertake such research with regard to its objectives as it may think necessary or as the Minister may require; and among others;
- d) to advise the Minister, on its own accord or at the request of the Minister, on a number of issues including the structure of higher education, the governance matters and the allocation of funds to HEIs.

The Act also calls on the Minister of Education to determine and table the National Policy on Higher Education in the National Assembly within 90 days of its determination, depending on whether or not the Assembly is meeting in its ordinary session. Administratively, the NCHE is managed by a Secretariat whose functions include the provision of such secretarial and administrative services and technical assistance as may be required by the NCHE or any committee of the NCHE (GRN, 2003, p.11). According to the data from the field, HEIs have high expectations about the functions of the NCHE. They expect it to solve the quandary of higher education funding. The Ministry of Education has tried to deal with this concern over the last two decades without reaching a consensus. The researchers are aware that several funding formula proposals exist, but they have not been adopted as policy yet. The absence of a funding formula has been noted to as a source of rivalry between UNAM and PoN (NCHE, 2010). HEIs also expect the NCHE to establish a quality assurance mechanism, to advise HEIs, to regulate their operations.

The Quality Assurance System for higher Education in Namibia was drafted and agreed on in 2009 (NCHE, 2010). It is believed that the 'quality assurance system' will assist government in coordinating the higher education system to such an extent that HEIs transition or articulation from one institution to another would be within the norms and standards of the NQF. In November 2012, the Chief Executive Officer of the NCHE Secretariat informed HEIs that the National Quality Assurance and Accreditation system would be enforced as from January 2013, a date which has now been postponed to January 2015.

Most respondents in this study, those from HEIs in particular, doubted the capability of the NQA and NCHE to enforce these policies. As one head of department put it, "these institutions need to have high-level experts...how can a Masters Degree holder judge the quality of my work as a professor?" This tension, however under-informed as it may be, points to the tension caused by an absence of a coordination policy and doubts about the capacity of government officials and the state reliance on external support. There is reason to consider this

seriously though. Nearly all – the funding formula drafts, postgraduate studies policy draft, national staff development policy, national innovation policy draft, science and technology policy, higher education policy draft among others were all developed by consultants, with support from ETSIP – an initiative banked by the donor community.

When it comes to issues of higher education governance, many Namibian academics are weary of the use of external ‘experts’, who apparently report as new evidence what is already known by practices. How then, will Namibian academics trust the system that relies on people they consider as remnants of the IMF’s SAPs? Apparently, there is nothing unusual about this (Samoff, 1999). Writing about the limited control and weak ownership over education by African governments, Samoff (1999) argues that Africa, despite the progress on expansion it has made, it remains in crisis. He claims that “Innovation, reform, even the day-to-day operations of the education system all require external assistance” (Samoff, 1999, p.252). It would appear that Namibia will have to begin to utilize its own human resources for its own solutions.

Moreover, there is a very thin line between quality assurance compliance and inspection. While the former is reluctantly agreed to, the later is not particularly liked by academics. Thus, in order for NCHE to actually steer higher education, it will need to create a system capable of balancing pressure on the one hand, and support on the other. This means not only coming up with enablers and deterrents but also having authority tools to persuade compliance. Without this, we could deduce that pressure will be viewed as ‘interference to autonomy’ and can easily lead to unnecessary confrontations between HEIs and the supreme governing agencies. Support without pressure on the other hand can also lead to waste of resources. Clearly, HEIs themselves want to have more and more autonomy and less ‘interference’ from the state. But they are not wholly complying with the spirit implied in various Acts related to higher education. Quality assurance for instance, has been approached from the point of view of voluntary institutional advantage. This has happened at the backdrop of continues perceived quality concerns, most of which has been reported in the media.

The Namibian HEIs have put in place internal and external mechanisms for quality assurance, which they feel are in line with their mandates. All, namely UNAM, PoN and IUM have created quality assurance units or offices headed by a Director. In addition, they have instituted what can be termed ‘peer mechanism of quality assurance’ to assert their autonomy and self-regulation. The Polytechnic has engaged the Higher Education Quality Committee of South Africa on Education in addition to joining the International Network of Quality Assurance. UNAM solicited quality assessment support from the South Africa Rectors’ Conference. More recently it has also used the Association of African Universities, the Association of European Universities and the Association of Canadian Universities in addition to peer review at disciplinary levels by Professionals Councils in medicine and engineering fields, to vet its programmes and systems.

While this is good practice and should be encouraged, it also points to some level of doubt in the Namibian policy system, which in itself is in its infancy. Some reported that evaluation by the NQF is optional while others considered it as important but not urgent issue. This could be a result of perceived weakness of the NQA and NCHE. Moreover, for the reasons given earlier, the NQA is unable to ensure that all institutions comply with the NQF. Even if the NCHE Secretariat would take it upon itself to ensure compliance, under the current legislation and policy, it would have to do so only after concurrence of the NQA.

Overall, HEIs reported that they are concerned about the lack of state engagement in the following:

1. Fair, rationale and appropriate funding formula for HEIs

2. Curriculum development and educational material sharing
3. Establishment of quality assurance and quality management systems
4. Support for the attainment of appropriate expertise, skills and facilities
5. Expansion of R&D activities
6. Research and professional development of staff
7. Knowledge on market-demand and supply issues to enable proper students intake levels

Coordinating and sustaining these different system needs is exceedingly difficult, precisely because a higher education policy does not exist, and where particular legislation permits state steering, such laws are not tied to an incentivising mechanism. But neither do they deter institutions from working together. So the issue is the absence of a high-level philosophical buy-in, convincing enough to trigger a HEI-wide awareness to succeed as a country. A previous study (NCHE, 2010, p.9, 53) concluded that, “One of the major barriers to coordination of the higher education system is the lack of shared vision and a shared sense of common purpose at the philosophical level. The shared vision must be compelling enough for HEIs to see coordination as a natural process”. Only a national higher education policy can do this. Perhaps, this is the reason why a senior staff interviewed revealed that pursuant to concerns raised by the HEIs and the Secretariat, the Higher Education Act is currently under review by a parliamentary committee.

As the study shows, coordination itself, in the absence of a well-articulated national higher education policy that creates the enabling environment and the ownership of a shared vision and goal cannot be effective because there is no unifying force. When one reads the Acts of both UNAM and PoN, ironically the term higher education is used twice on the former and is markedly absent in the latter. PoN Act only mandate it to offer what it describes as postsecondary education. It is no wonder, PoN has repeatedly argued for change of status into a university. Nevertheless, the approach taken by Namibia – that of self-governance by HEIs is in-line with recent trends globally. This is good as it is a generally accepted principle that universities operate more effectively, if given autonomy in key decisions – but this must happen within a scope of, and context defined by policy.

Conclusion and Discussion

With increased number of players in the HEI arena, the involvement and extent of state control or its absence is more than before visible. At the same time, the number of officials in institutions charged with overseeing or steering higher education has remained small. This makes it difficult for the state to exercise control over institution. Globally, there is a trend towards granting HEIs greater autonomy in return for holding them accountable for the achievement of strategic goals of governments. Finland, for instance, which for decades had universities as state agencies, recently changed university law and made them foundations.

This trend is not without an agenda – the state wants to see universities more engaged with the market – locally and globally. It does this through persuasion, money and regulation. There are signs that the neoliberal political ideology has permeated higher education policy-making in Namibia. Neoliberal ideology emphasizes light state surveillance over activities in higher education but strong market emphasis. From a theory perspective, there is still debate on what powers and controls should be retained by the ministries of Finance and Education, statewide governing board, or buffer body that must supervise HEIs (Fielden, 2010).

It has been said, at more than one occasion by politicians, that HEIs in Namibia must create employment through spin-offs from its Research and Development (R&D). More research funds, particularly in biotechnology and agriculture have been directed at UNAM and

PoN, and a National Innovation Policy draft has been proposed with the hope that these investments will propel Namibia's migration to a knowledge-based economy. The increase in legislation, put through by NCHE show that purpose of harmonizing higher education activities is not only to avoid duplication and encourage joint material production and course offerings, but also to enable the higher education sector to proactively respond better to the needs and challenges of Namibia, and to precisely contributing to nation-building.

Namibia does have several specialised, postsecondary educational and research institutions. Although they are formally part of postsecondary education, the Higher Education Act does not accord them the status of HEIs. Some of the work of these organisations, namely, the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Namibia Institute of Mining and Technology, Namibia Geological Survey and so on, is of high value, and if they were part of higher education, joint work with their counterparts could lead to proper harmonisation of specialised offerings and indeed, greater market impact. In the absence of criteria upon which an institution can be evaluated to form part of the higher education system, or indeed, to be excluded from it, the governance of higher education in Namibia and the steering of its direction by the state will remain open to interpretation. Again, a national higher education policy would shape the system in its thrust, the nature and depth of HEI competitiveness and market impact.

Recall, the different models discussed by Yokoyama and Meek (2010), Maassen and van Vught (1994), van Vught (1994) and Maassen (2000). There are some elements of each model also in Namibia. However, it appears that a choice of a particular model by a country is informed by its context. What informs a context is the rationale – the reason why higher education would be conducted in a certain manner, which itself is emanating from a defined purpose for higher education in a particular country. We are of the understanding that, although higher education greatly depends on how weak or strong the foundations laid in primary education are, the transformation of Namibia into a knowledge-based economy will not be achieved by a higher education system left to self-govern. Yes, it is clear that more than ever, the Government of the Republic of Namibia wants to see a strongly legislated higher education but one that is well funded and strongly monitored. This is clear on both accounts of new types of data it wants HEIs to report on and on the types of policies and initiatives it has proposed. Ironically, these are signs of retrospection and not foresight. Foresight, understandably, would have meant that the governance of higher education and the role of state in steering it may be bearing fruit now.

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