Implementation Dilemma of the Concept 'Research-Intensive University' at Institutions of Higher Learning: A Critical Analysis

Mahlangu Vimbi P

*University of Pretoria, Department of Education Management and Policy Studies,
Faculty of Education. Groenkloof Campus, South Africa
Email: vimbi.mahlangu@up.ac.za*

Pitsoe Victor J

*University of South Africa, Department of Educational Studies,
School of Education. South Africa
Email: pitsovj@unisa.ac.za*

Abstract

Critical theory is used in trying to understand the concept of research-intensive universities and the moral collapse of teacher training institutions in higher education. What makes critical scholarship different from interpretive scholarship is that it interprets the acts and the symbols of society in order to understand the ways in which various social groups are oppressed. This article is driven by the researchers' own experiences at institutions of higher learning in South Africa, as well as literature review. Moral reasoning is important within the professions because of the social status of professions. Claims by various groups about fairness of college access are central to the public discourse about equal treatment. The pressure to publish is keenly felt by all education academics, so considerable tension could arise over who is involved in initial teacher training. There is a danger that training quality teachers may be compromised as research-intensive universities will pay more attention to research at the expense of teaching and learning

Keywords: University; research-intensive; teacher training; critical theory; moral collapse.

1. Introduction

This article critiques the concept '*research –intensive universities'* in the context of the role universities are expected to play in the South African context with regard to teacher training. Teacher Training Colleges had been closed in South Africa and the training of teachers was given to universities with the hope that quality teachers will be graduated there to supply the schooling system. Criticism involves the application of principles or values in order to make judgments for the purpose of bringing about positive change. Understandably, criticism comes in a variety of forms. For example, rhetorical criticism carefully examines and judges the quality of discourse. Our subject here is critical social science, which critiques basic social structure (Littlejohn, 1992, 238).

Those who seek to maintain their status make different arguments about admission and access to professional education than those who seek to improve opportunities across generations (St. John, 2009, 4-5). Universities, although they produce graduates with trained minds, may therefore be thought to be deficient in some respects. They produce graduates in particular disciplines in numbers which do not bear any adequate relationship to the needs of society (Jevons & Turner. 1972, 108-109).

2. Assumptions Made in this Article

There is a danger that training quality teachers may be compromised as research-intensive universities will pay more attention to research at the expense of teaching and learning.

3. Methods

This is a qualitative study. The researchers' experiences at institutions of higher learning in South Africa, and literature

review were used as form of data collection.

4. Literature Review and Discussion

A power driven system approach that can cause unnecessary hostility is dangerous for the success of any institution (Adeyemo 2013, 11). A university is not just a teaching institution, but it is also an organisation that involves itself with its local community (Ashcroft & Rayner 2011, 214). The research role is about generating new knowledge, community service is about applying and transferring new knowledge in the form of ideas, research results and skills between educational and public service organisations, business and the wider community. Teaching is about producing knowledgeable graduates who can apply their education to the real world (Ashcroft and Rayner 2011, 215). Poor planning at institutional level may contribute to the so-called research-intensive universities' problems such as the low quality of teaching and teacher training activities.

Literature suggests that even the best universities cannot be the best in everything. Therefore, it might be more appropriate for many institutions to focus on building world-class departments, especially in fields that are of special relevance to the society (Sadlak and Cai (eds) 2007, 367). This article argues in favour of Faculties of Education at institutions of higher learning to be teacher training intensive faculties than being research intensive. Chikoko is of the view that institutions provide the context within which students undertake academic activities, therefore they should shoulder some blame for negative student outcomes (Chikoko 2010:33). This article concludes by suggesting that the rational response is for research-intensive universities to create a two-tiered system within each university. The top-tier should involve undergraduate programs that are selective, challenging and often research-intensive. The lower tier should meet the needs of the majority by providing high quality education at a general level to large numbers of students (Cộtĕ and Allahar 2011, 115).

This article argues in favour of Faculties of Education at Institutions of Higher Learning to concentrate more on teacher training than on research and community engagement projects as priorities. Research and community engagement projects should be part of the Faculties of Education but not to be their main core functions. Research must inform teacher training programs but not at the expense of teacher training activities. This article is aware that the functions of Faculties of Education at universities are research, teacher training and community engagement activities.

The word university was chosen for certain educational institutions, not because universal knowledge was offered there, but because teachers and students formed an autonomous corporation, *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* as it was called from the beginning of the 13th century in Europe (Van Selms, 1966,2). If an institution is not engaged in teaching and research, then it cannot qualify as a university. Regardless of how a university changes, the core activities of the university should always be found back in its activities (Bitzer, 2009, 59). Universities have diffuse missions and vague, ambiguous goals, and they must devise decision-making process to contend with a high degree of uncertainty and conflict (Ibid, 2004, 351). The Partnership for 21st

Century Skills has developed a unified, collective vision for 21st century learning and education support system that can be used to prepare young people for a global economy. To be "educated" today requires mastery of core subjects (Wan and Gut 2011, 47). Higher education institutions perform the following roles:

Training: Knowledge economies need skilled personnel at all levels and in growing numbers. Technology requires sophisticated knowledge and, just as important adaptable skills to deal with rapid technological change. Universities and other postsecondary institutions provide this education and training.

Research: The universities provide the basic and applied research necessary for knowledge economies. University-industry linkages and academic involvement in biotechnology and other fields indicate the value and relevance of research. The perception that universities are 'theoretical' is the perception that they promote research, which is commonly claimed, is not always compatible with the demands of teacher preparation. The pressure to publish is keenly felt by all education academics, so considerable tension could arise over who is involved in initial teacher education and who has the space and resources to produce research (Kruss, 2008, 177-178).

Social and cultural criticism. Often left out of the academic equation of the 21st century is the role of the university as a forum for debate about culture, politics and intellectual life (Altbach and Peterson (Eds), 2007, xix-xx). The purposes of education are as follows: to prepare students to succeed in postsecondary education; to produce literate, educated citizens who participate in a democracy; to prepare workers who can succeed in the modern global economy; to teach the basics in reading, writing, math, and in building strong character (Wan and Gut 2011,102).

Higher education has a long history of modelling the kind of civil debate that can promote intergroup understanding, diffuse tensions, and encourage greater cohesion in society. One way that it does this is through the encouragement of dissenting points of view and the promotion of a tradition that allows those views to be voiced. One of

Plato's great achievements in his establishment of the Academy was that he did not allow the institution to become a site for the perpetual reworking of his ideas. In spite of Plato's disillusionment with democracy, the institution he founded promoted the kind of independence of thought that inspired and protected people like Aristotle who were diametrically opposed to some of Plato's fundamental teaching (Altbach & Peterson, 2007, 59).

Different countries, of course, have different systems of higher education and different institutional structures and cultures. Some nations have research institutes as the locus for creating new knowledge, while universities have the education of undergraduate and graduate students as their primary mission. In such a system, the creation of new knowledge (research) is organised separately from human capital formation (teaching) (Altbach & Peterson, 2007, 167). The Research-Intensive universities appear to be neglecting their core functions of balancing teaching, research and community engagement by trying to do the work of research institutes such as the work of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) etcetera.

Critical theory is firmly grounded in a particular political analysis, its concern is to provide people with knowledge and understandings intended to free them from oppression, verification of the theory is impossible until the social vision it inspires is realised, it tries to generate a specific vision of the world as it might be (Brookfield, 2005, 23-29).

The following features inform all varieties of critical social science: Critical social scientists believe that it is necessary to understand the lived experience of real people in context. Critical Theory shares the ideas and the methodologies of some interpretive theories. What makes critical scholarship different from interpretive scholarship is that it interprets the acts and the symbols of society in order to understand the ways in which various social groups are oppressed.

Critical approaches examine social conditions in order to uncover hidden structures. Critical theory teaches that knowledge is power. This means that understanding the ways one is oppressed enables one to take action to change oppressive forces. Critical social science makes a conscious attempt to fuse theory and action. Critical theories are thus normative; they serve to bring about change in the conditions that affect our lives. In a word, analysts working in this tradition align themselves with the interests of those opposed to dominant order of society. They ask questions about the ways in which competing interests clash and the manner in which conflicts are resolved in favour of particular groups (Robert M. Seiler, nd).

Since at least the time of Plato it has seemed clear that persons must specialise in the development of skills. For they vary from one another in their "native" propensities and talents, and a great portion of each of their lives must be devoted to developing one or a very few of these (Wilshire, 1990, 129). This article asks the following questions: Is the role of the Research-Intensive Universities not driven by administrative rules and money at the expense of providing quality teacher education and producing morally sound professional educators?

Has a new idea of the university emerged from the chrysalis of the old, needing but a name for recognition? It has been said that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet-but changing the terms, fostering new discourse, acknowledging a new paradigm, can in themselves assist a shift of values and assumptions which makes new practices more than superficial (Duke, 1992,1).

5.   The Role of Higher Education

Human action is not independent of moral reasoning. Rather a specific action may be moral or immoral, using or abusing power in different situations. One can abuse power unconsciously, in which case preconventional moral action can be unintentional (St. John, 2009:79). One of the assumptions is that education increases the volume of employment, works to eliminate poverty, (Simmons (Ed), 1980, 146-147). The task of a university is on guiding the students, to bring cohesion to scholarship and to stimulate creativity by preserving existing knowledge and passing it on within a broad interpretation of academia's role: testing and improving the quality of knowledge; developing knowledge further; using combination and confrontation as tools (Guni, 2006,xxiii). The fundamental principles guiding the transformation of higher education institutions amongst others, include: Equity and redress-a critical identification of existing inequalities and a programme of transformation with a view to redress; democratisation-the system of higher education should be democratic, representative and participatory and characterised by mutual respect and tolerance and those taking and implementing decisions must be accountable; development-the higher education system to contribute to the common good of society through the production, acquisition and application of knowledge (Motala & Pampallis, 2001,23).

6.   Assumptions about Universities

The functions of universities in the modern world are to provide post-secondary education for secondary school leavers.

The millions of young men and women who, term after term, semester after semester, have registered and re-registered on campuses around the world for first degrees and diplomas have given the modern university its distinctive appearance, architecture and character. The primary mission of universities is quite clearly in the area of teaching (Duke, 1992:1; 17).

This article argues that universities must have a common value by identifying themselves as centres for teaching and learning, the pursuit of truth and objective knowledge, research, liberal education, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, a neutral and open forum for debate , rationality, the development of the students' critical abilities and autonomy, the students' character formation, providing a critical centre within society, and preserving society's intellectual culture (Duke, 1992:29). This article poses a question as to why are students admitted to institutions of higher learning on a full-time basis if more priority and attention will be given to one area of interest e.g. research at the expense of teaching and learning, and community engagement?

Section 9(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, says everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. This article argues in favour of formal equality which means that teaching and learning, research, and community engagement be given equal status. Formal equality means sameness of treatment: the law must treat individuals in like circumstances alike. Substantive equality requires the law to ensure equality of outcome and is prepared to tolerate disparity of treatment to achieve this goal (Currie & de Waal, 2005:230-233).

This article is of the view that teaching and learning, research and community engagement should be given equal status at institutions of higher learning. An institution, to be able to make its character clear to existing and prospective faculty and staff, must first have a clear character. It is then important that institutions must make every effort to hire individuals who are compatible with the nature of the institutions. One of the most common mistakes occurs when an institution primarily devoted to teaching advertises a position as if the institution was a research university. This shows that the institution itself has not come to grips with its true nature (Cornesky, Baker (Ed), Cavanaugh, Etling, Lukert, McCool, McKay, Min, Paul, Thomas, & Wagner, 1992:1).

Universities can and do overemphasise to themselves the importance which external authorities attach to the traditional functions of teaching and research; research advances , especially, can be so obscure to the public that they have little impact unless they can be linked to some practical outcome well in the future (Shattock, 2003:127). This article argues that universities and faculties of education in particular, have a moral obligation to train teachers and to quality assure them when doing their practise teaching in schools. Challenges may arise when evaluating lecturers for performance purposes. The issue may be the evaluation discrepancy where those lecturers who are teaching and marking loads of students' work are scored differently, and those lecturers who publish articles are also scored differently? This article poses a question as to what are the roles and responsibilities of universities with regard to teacher training in the post-apartheid South Africa.

Some of the key challenges facing Research-Intensive Universities are framed around questions of reform and responses to the forces associated with the process of capitalist globalisation, which have led to the demise of the welfare state in the North and the developmentalist state in the South, and the emergence of the so-called knowledge economy. The Research-Intensive Universities lack strategies on how to balance autonomy and viability, expansion and excellence, equity and efficiency, access and quality, authority and accountability, representation and responsibility, diversification and differentiation, internationalisation and indigenisation, global presence/visibility and local anchorage, academic freedom and professional ethics, privatisation and the public purpose, teaching and research, community service/social responsibility and consultancy, diversity and uniformity, knowledge economy and knowledge society (Zeleza & Olukoshi, 2004:3).

Educational institutions must respond to the specific demands from the centre to produce particular forms of output in terms of students with predetermined skills and knowledge that will sustain and of enhance economic development in their particular country. They must also be able to demonstrate that this is what they are doing and that they are implementing national policy in such a way as to contribute to the human capital outcomes required from the education system (Bell & Stevenson, 2006: 44-45). University lecturers do not only do research and teach. They work within universities and departments, and these institutions must be kept going since they are in many different ways indispensable to teaching and research. Students must be admitted and supervised; their course of study and syllabuses must be organised and repeatedly revised; the students must be examined. Resources must be acquired and administered; books and equipment must be procured. All these are different from research and teaching but they are necessary conditions (Welsh, 1977:9-10).

This article argues that Faculties of Education at universities are neglecting their core functions of properly training teachers by intensively prioritising research activities instead of checking whether practising teachers are doing what is

expected of them in the chosen schools where they are doing their practise teaching. According to a Mexican CAP Survey conducted in 2007, teaching is the central activity of Mexican FT faculty, as reported, out of a median number of hours worked per week of 43.0, a median of 20.0 h per week in classroom teaching and other activities related to it. Teaching was followed by research and administration, as half of the faculty surveyed reported devoting at least 8.0 h and 5.0 h per week, respectively, to these activities. Almost all academics in public research centres preferred research over teaching (96.5%). Academics in other types of institutions were more teaching oriented: 76.6% of those in public technological institutions, 69.8% in private institutions, and 56.5% in public state institutions (Locke, Cummings, and Fisher, 2011, 62-63).

7. Biasness of Teacher Training Faculties of Education

According to Chikoko (2010,33) many universities in South Africa promote their public role by celebrating their successes such as high recruitment and graduation numbers, but do little to address student dropout rates. Chikoko (2010) argues further that there are reports that each year, many students depart from universities without completing their studies

Research at intensive-research institutions often concentrated on the issues of structure, governance, funding and management at the expense of its 'inner life' of learning and teaching, science and scholarship. Higher education research has been accused of being philistine, even anti-intellectual, business (Teichler and Sadlak 2000:126-127). It is possible for Faculties of Education to separate Research, Community Engagement, and Teaching and Learning, for example Teichler and Sadlak 2000,38-39) were able to separate between Research, Policy and Practice. They further argued that it is possible to merge them. Universities are increasingly in competition with each other, but they should not forget their joint responsibility for younger generations (Guni 2006, xxv).

In the same manner Faculties of Education may separate their research, community engagement and their teaching and learning activities. Those institutions which claim to be research-intensive need to do away with the training of beginner teachers. The reason is that these beginner teachers may lack the basic knowledge of a qualified teacher.

8. Food for Thought

This article argues further and supports the idea that faculties of education at institutions of higher learning must concentrate on their core functions of preparing teachers and give the research aspect to research centres (Human Sciences Research Council), and other relevant research centres. This article proposes a model in which teacher training activities are more visible than research and community engagement activities in Faculties of Education. Teaching and learning should be more visible in Faculties of Education, followed by Community Engagement and lastly Research. Research for faculties of education should take place at the coal face where practising teachers are engaged.

Generally, universities may also remain research intensive to a lesser extent, but their Faculties of Education must concentrate on teacher training and do minimal research to inform their practice. Teacher training universities tend to emphasise research at the expense of their core function of preparing teachers for the country. This article asks if two people doing the same teaching qualification at any of the research-intensive universities in South Africa or anywhere in the world will have all the skills required of a professional teacher? This article acknowledges the value and importance of research but the Faculties of Education at institutions of higher learning must prioritise the training of teachers in teaching and learning, hence their name. According to Prince, Felder and Brent (2007,8) most faculty members begin their academic careers with little or no training in either teaching or managing a research program, let alone in how to integrate the two. Giving new faculty some early guidance via workshops and mentorships could significantly strengthen their research- teaching nexus, and it would also go a long way toward enhancing both the institution's research productivity and the effectiveness of its teaching programs.

Teaching should be informed and be evidence-based. Teaching activities and achievements should be documented. Teaching approaches should in general be replicable by others, in the sense that someone should be able to understand enough of a teacher's approach to try it for them. Teaching should have some conceptual underpinnings, in the sense that there should be a reason why teachers do what they do as teachers. Teaching should involve some assessment of process and outcomes so that we can tell whether our teaching approaches are effective, in particular in promoting particular types of learning. Teaching should involve some sort of reflection that might lead to change and improvement. Teaching should build on such reflection to effect change (hence the idea that scholarly teaching is dynamic and even creative) (Knapper 2008, 7-8).In Asia institutions of higher learning are reacting to a variety of demands. There are demands by individuals for high level scientific and professional skills (Green 1997, 61). This poses a challenge to institutions of higher learning to review the way they train their beginner teachers.

Universities that are involved in teacher training should provide adequate opportunities for their students and to foster a commitment to social and civic responsibility. In conclusion, Faculties of Education should be intensively involved in the evaluation of training teachers while doing their practice teaching in schools. As much as institutions of higher learning have academic freedom, they should also have moral obligation to prepare teachers adequately. Research, teaching and community engagement are to be treated equally. Hence, academics should be evaluated and promoted based on their strong areas of involvement than grading all using one criteria, for example, article publication.

Prince, Brent and Felder (2007, 1) point out that research and teaching have different goals and require different skills and personal attributes. The primary goal of research is to advance knowledge, while that of teaching is to develop and enhance abilities. Researchers are valued mainly for what they discover and for the problems they solve, and teachers for what they enable their students to discover and solve. Excellent researchers must be observant, objective, skilled at drawing inferences, and tolerant of ambiguity, and excellent teachers must be skilled communicators, familiar with the conditions that promote learning and expert at establishing them, and approachable and empathetic. Having both sets of traits is clearly possible and desirable but not necessary to be successful in one domain or the other. Moreover, first-class teaching and first class research are each effectively full-time jobs, so that time spent on one activity is generally time taken away from the other (Prince, Felder and Brent 2007, 1).

According to the European University Association (2011, 66), the existence of rankings no doubt encourages universities to improve their performance. In striving to improve their position in the rankings, universities are strongly tempted to improve performance in those specific areas that are measured by the indicators used to prepare rankings. Highly ranked universities have to make great efforts to keep their positions because their rivals evolve as well (CHERPA, 2010). The following are some examples of distortive action that may be taken just to perform better in university rankings: More publications and more publications per FTE – this could be a positive development, but in practice it simply means more articles in Thomson Reuters − or Scopus-covered journals, rather than in books and other types of publication. If attempts are made to improve research performance solely to improve ranking scores, this may lead to the one-sided support of research in medicine and sciences at the expense of the social sciences and by completely excluding research in the humanities (European University Association 2011, 66).

For all indicators that involve FTE (research staff, teaching staff, all academic staff combined), performance may be 'improved' by playing with the definitions of categories of staff. In rankings that use the staff/student ratio as the only proxy to characterise the quality of teaching, making changes can lead to remarkable improvements. Therefore, the use of such indicators in global rankings is prone to manipulation, as long as there are no exact definitions, for example as to whether domestic students (or staff) with foreign citizenship can be counted as being 'international'. There are a number of examples of actual manipulation in order to obtain higher scores in rankings. Several cases of the manipulation of different indicators in the USNWR Ranking appear in the U-Multirank interim report (CHERPA, 2010, 60).

This article suggests that the rational response is for research-intensive institutions of higher learning to create a two-tiered system within each university. The top-tier should involve undergraduate programs that are selective, challenging and often research-intensive. The lower tier should meet the needs of the majority by providing high quality education at a general level to large numbers of students (Cộtĕ and Allahar 2011, 115). These universities should develop opportunities for students and to foster a commitment to social and civic responsibility by all teacher training faculties.

9. Conclusion

This article asks the following questions: To what extent do the research-intensive universities take part in community engagement activities? Is the interaction between the research-intensive universities and the community institutionalised? Do policies and procedures serve to either enhance or inhibit Teacher Training Faculties of Education to take students to communities for their practice teaching and evaluate them effectively? Do Faculties of Education reward those academics who either support teaching, research or community engagement equally? Are their benchmarks for annual salary decisions, promotion, and tenure not bias?

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