Differentiation of Higher Education Institutions in Uganda and their Philosophies: Is it Diversion or Inclusion?

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Abstract. This article discusses university diversions from their original purposes in order to achieve economic independence and sustainability. While these institutions are social systems that reconcile contradictory functions, they have long relied on marketing and branding to attract quality students, funding, and partnerships, in order to endure differentiation. Nonetheless, the majority of institutions have diverted from their original purpose, while others are struggling to distinguish themselves as unique; still others are unable to define their purpose, identify their culture, and also fail to align their inputs with their outcomes. In effect, those institutions that have attempted to uphold differentiation have simply duplicated what already exists in other institutions, albeit with different visions and mission statements. Nonetheless, while the lost differential was initially perceived as a disadvantage, it has proven to be a boon in terms of inclusiveness. The article concludes that the skills' gaps in the areas of science and technology, as well as the drive to achieve social economic development through regional balance, resulted in the establishment of additional science-oriented public universities, but with inadequate funding, which necessitated the inclusion of more marketable programs to supplement government funding. The article recommends that, the government should always conduct situational analyses, assess needs, and devise financial mobilization strategies in order for Ugandan universities to maintain their philosophies.

Key words: Higher education, differentiation, diversions, institutional philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, Higher education institutions (HEIs) have relied on marketing and branding to attract quality students, donor funding, and collaborations with other institutions (Larsen, 2008). However, the majority of these institutions continue to struggle to distinguish themselves as unique and different institutions, define their purpose, identity and culture, as well as to align their inputs with their outcomes (CHET, 2008). Similarly, while most institutional names often symbolize aspects of differentiation, their visions and mission statements provide little guidance to current and prospective students trying to choose institutions that are appropriate to their needs and interests (Weber and Duderstadt, 2008). Approximately two decades ago, HEIs faced exponential growth, which resulted in the opening of doors to private providers, while governments established more institutions, but with purpose. This evolution resulted in institutions establishing campuses in various geographical locations while retaining the original campus names, despite the fact that campus names originate from locations such as hills, regions, divisions, or even country of origin. According to Jack (2008), (a marketing guru), differentiation should lead to superior competitive advantage or institutions die in a bid to offer

"everything" and specialize in "nothing" - because to differentiate is to '*offer a different and unique brand from others'*. Jack (2008), strongly advised companies 'to demonstrate differentiation' by clearly showing 'visible difference' from others and provide justification for "customer preference". Therefore, any institution that has no specific focus or purpose, stands to lose their competitive advantage.

The term "differentiation" has been used to refer to a variety of concepts. For example, Teferra (2008), discusses three main ways in which differentiation has been used: (i) curriculum differentiation (CD), (ii) differentiated instruction (DI), and (iii) differentiation used by researchers to encompass everything. In line with Teferra's (2008) definition, Ayalon (2006) conceptualizes curriculum differentiation (CD) as students participating in a variety of different courses, educational programs, and differentiated instruction (DI) as educational and instructional practices that take place in a specific classroom. In education circles, differentiation refers to the process of developing various types, profiles, and forms of higher education institutions (van Vught, 2007). According to educationists, differentiation specifically refers to the legal differentiation of types of institutions; in terms of functions and processes that operate on different levels, between institutions of the same type, and are effective within an individual institution, such as institutional quality and system competitiveness, accountability and sustainability (Graham, 2005; van Vught, 2007). Other types include; internal, vertical, horizontal, functional, and institutional differentiation (Graham, 2005; Scott and Theresa, 2007). Differentiation of higher education referred to by this article is 'external diversity' – that is, the differences between institutions, rather than 'internal diversity' (Cloet *et al.*, 2015; van Vught, 2007).

The nature of higher education

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are mandated to teach, train, and conduct research in continuous interaction with their social environment, as well as to engage with the community by providing expertise, and with consumers who play an active demand and supply role, as they have the ability to apply for and disapprove of the courses offered in an institution. Recognizing this fact, HEIs have been forced to increase the application of marketing strategies and policies in order to meet the demands of the environment (Teferra, 2008). By implication, institutions must target the market and develop competitive strategies to meet consumer needs in order to survive in a competitive environment, but cognizant of marketability as well are relevance to institutional philosophy and purpose (Teferra, 2008). Traditionally universities have transmitted knowledge

through the training of graduates, the preparation of people for the labor market, and the transmission of university culture, which is frequently embedded in an institution's brand (Bok, 2010). Institutions, on the other hand, have a purpose and a brand that are deeply ingrained in who they are and where they came from, because they are founded to carry out a specific mission and a long-term purpose (Ayalon, 2006). As expected therefore, the brand and reputation of many institutions are natural extensions of their purpose (Graham, 2005). As a result, the organization and operation of higher education systems tend to differentiate academic programs, instruction, and research agendas (Barifaijo and Namara, 2012).

The context and problem

Over the last two decades, countries and institutions all over the world (including Uganda) have been forced to seek alternative funding sources to supplement those provided by the government, a force that has compelled institutions to compete for funds, partnerships, and students, resulting in aggressive marketing strategies (Svensson and Wood, 2007). These demands have varied in their nature and intensity, necessitating the development of new strategies in order to excel in the educational market. In an effort to promote differentiation, the Ugandan government established universities with distinct purposes, brands, values, culture, and products (referred to as programs) that were 'curricula specific' and on purpose (Kasozi, 2012). These institutions deviated from their original purpose, functions, tasks, culture, and philosophical acumen along the way. Instead of focusing on training scientists and specifically, medical professionals, institutions chose to become inclusive by establishing technology-related, developmental studies, and other social science courses (Basheka *et al.*, 2013). However, while governments have always set politically justified agendas, they often times clashed with the practical, economic, and legal viability of these institutions because, such overlaps frequently arose as a result of specific demands and expectations of various interested actors. Scholars (e.g. Mouton, 2010; Newby, 2008, and Dewey, 2011), have explained how different types of institutions, their sizes, status rights, and functions, are associated with shifts in social interests and stakeholder preferences, giving societies and communities the power to decide on the nature of programs established. In Uganda, HEIs are organized into three (3) distinct types of higher education (public and private): (i) universities, (ii) other degree-awarding institutions, and (iii) tertiary institutions (colleges), with some vertical and horizontal differentiation among universities.

Like other countries, Uganda's higher education system

(HES) has been rapidly changing as a historically diverse national system, with 'top-down' policy reforms, but with new 'bottom-up' institutional initiatives, internal and external mediation mechanisms that have been established at national and institutional levels to embrace differentiation (Kasozi, 2006). This move broke the long-standing monopoly of Makerere University (1922-1989), Uganda's only university at the time, which offered all programs ranging from "Grade IV" certificates to "post-doctoral" qualifications. Faced with scarcity of science professionals, Uganda's government established Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) in 1989 to offer mainly medicine and other related science courses. In 2003, Gulu University was founded to offer specifically medicine, but other science-related courses. With the strategy of establishing extra science-based institutions failing to produce enough medical professionals as scientists, the Ugandan government passed a policy in 2005 to scrap government funding of most non-science courses, except Bachelors of Laws, Business Administration, Commerce, Information Technology and Languages, instead increased funding for science-based students in all public universities, as a move to motivate students at lower levels ('O' and 'A') to embrace science subjects. From 2007 to 2018, the government established four more public universities, namely Busitema University in 2007, Muni University in 2008, Lira University in 2012, and most recently, Soroti University in 2017, all of which specialize in science-based courses (NCHE, 2019). Aside the traditional universities mentioned above, there are other degree-granting institutions, such as Uganda Management Institute (UMI), which was founded in 1969 to offer postgraduate programs to develop capacity in leadership, governance, management, and administration-related skills among public servants, opening doors to private and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). UMI began offering Master's degrees in 2006, and today, UMI offers ten (10) Master's and four (4) Specialized PhD programs (UMI Annual Report, 2019).

Due to the inevitable inclusion adopted by these institutions it became difficult to demonstrate sustainability of their institutional philosophies, even after benchmarking with other institutions, that has resulted instead into a host of undifferentiated brands (Barifaijo and Namara, 2017; Kasozi, 2012). To sustain and uphold their original philosophies, higher education leaders should strategically rethink the three components of the institutions' identity - 'purpose', 'brand' and 'culture' in order to create unique and outcome-focused values, in order to come up with compelling statements that distinguish them from their competitors. Otherwise, if the status quo is maintained, it may continue to cause consternation among stakeholders, thereby jeopardizing national development. Two objectives guided the discussion: (1) to establish institutional philosophies in

the five HEIs (*Uganda Management Institute, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Busitema University and Nsamizi National Training Institute*), and (2) to analyze the rationale for the diversion from original purpose of these institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Given the complexities of the subject matter, this research took a qualitative approach, which required not only policymakers at the national and institutional levels, but also academics who engage in such debates and research. In a complex situation, Kothari (1994) recommends this approach. Due to time constraints, a cross-sectional design, which is commonly used for single studies, was used. A sample was drawn from five HEIs, three of which were public universities and two were other degree awarding institutions. The decision was based on their differentiated presumption at the time of their establishment, in order to confirm the levels of differentiation. Institutions that participated included: Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Gulu University (GU), Busitema University (BU); Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Nsamizi Training Institute (NTI) *(as other degree awarding institutions)*. Makerere University was purposefully left out, given the fact that it is an inclusive university that was the first in Uganda and held a monopoly for nearly 67 years (1922 – 1989). Methods included interviewing, as recommended by Kothari (1994); as well as documentary analyses to analyze visions and mission statements, programs offered, and other related documents useful for the research from a sample of twenty (20) respondents who were purposefully chosen based on their positions. These included fifteen (15) education leaders and five (5) senior officers from the Ministry of Education. Corresponding tools were developed, and piloted to ascertain their quality. Researchers were trained to minimize potential errors and ethical blunders. Data analysis methods such as thematic and content analysis were used to analyze the data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the fact that most differentiation literature has focused on branding, programs, and outputs, Cloet (2013) identifies 'culture' as the most important dimension for differentiation. Cloet (2013, 2015) argues that a unique culture must support an institution's purpose and brand, and that differentiated systems are more likely to be created by a strong, regulating government or by autonomous institutions operating in market-like settings. As a result, autonomous private HEIs do not attempt to develop a profile that is distinct from all others; rather, instead of seeking a suitable

niche, each institution is frequently driven by income-and-status maximization, and ends up mimicking successful institutions, limiting their system-level differentiation. As a result, this situation is likely to have an impact on students' experiences and instead create ambiguity as they try to determine the suitability of the institutions of their choice. In fact, to bring institutions back on track, Teferra (2008), suggested that every institution should reflect on whether '*students' daily experiences align with, and reinforce the institution's purpose and brand'.* This is a critical concern because the process of forging a strong organizational identity begins with establishing and committing to a clear and differentiated purpose, brand, and culture that emphasizes the students' experience (Dearing, 1997). Dearing further advises higher education leaders to reinforce the institution's identity in the way they communicate with students, connect with employees about the institution's values, select and develop their faculty and staff, structure the institution, measure and manage the instructors' performance.

In order to achieve all the above, the alignment of the brand, culture, and values must be done on a regular basis with the purpose of differentiation and should guide institutions with no support identity on how differentiation processes should be supportive of institutional culture (Teferra, 2008; Dearing, 1997). Because culture encompasses and guides institutional direction for students, it has enormous implications on what it feels like to purposefully belong to an institution and appear on campus every day, to learn in class, interact with other students, and share experiences with professors (Dewey, 2011; van Vught, 2007). Similarly, student recruitment, enrolment, and experience must be communicated to all stakeholders because they have direct implications for the institution's long-term sustainability, as clear communication, alignment of activities, and consistent execution will translate the institution's identity into a reality if the purpose is well communicated. As a result, institutions should take the time to educate the community and other stakeholders about the desired purpose, brand, and culture for which they want to be known, because the greater the level of alignment of a university's purpose, brand, and culture, the stronger and more consistent its institutional identity (Grace and Gravestock, 2009; Teferra, 2008). Otherwise, if responses from people on campus or in the community differ significantly from the leaders' descriptions of purpose, brand and culture, it indicates that the university and its community do not agree on its true identity.

Meaning and evolution of differentiation

In education, the term "differentiation" is elusive and frequently confused with "diversity," possibly because it is mostly used in business circles to emphasize the purpose of branding, competitive advantage, and profitability. Although Van Vught (2007), defines differentiation as "a process in which new entities emerge in a system", it is different from "diversity", which explains the variety of entities within a system. As a result, rather than seeing differentiation in terms of universities or programs, it focuses on the process by which a system's diversity grows (Duderstadt *et al.*, 2008). Duderstadt *et al.* (2008) recommend the following nine principles for institutions to succeed in the implementation of differentiation:

- all functions of HESs must be seen as equally valued;
- the path and nature of HEI differentiation will be affected by any future changes in the system/institution;
- the differentiation discussion/decision must be linked to funding models;
- a move towards greater differentiation requires tough choices by institutions and government;
- differentiation requires performance indicators to evaluate whether institutions are meeting the expectations and outcomes expected of them;
- the mandates of institutions in a differentiated system should be transparent;
- a more differentiated system benefits from third party advice at key decision points;
- a move to more differentiation must attend to the consequences intended or otherwise on students;
- greater differentiation takes time, multi-year planning, and discipline in execution.

These are heavy requirements that necessitate institutions that are strong and dynamic in order to withstand the tensions between these contradictory functions, given that differentiation was developed to address complex situations in highly homogeneous societies where organizations competed for similar markets (Parsons, 1966). Differentiation was a diversion from their original purpose, rebranding their products to gain a competitive advantage in the global market, which dates back in Charles Darwin's 19th century, and has become a well-known concept in the social sciences, but was first explored in an extensive study by Durkheim's Classic theory that was supported by earlier scientific theorists such as Henri Fayol, Max Weber and others when they advocated for "Division of Labour" among other principles of management (Clark, 1987). Parsons (1966) developed his "Structural-Functionalist" conceptualization of differentiation in an attempt to extend Durkheim and Weber's idea. Their evolutionary approach has primarily been captured as an element in the adaptive processes of social systems, which retain these structures and processes that lead to greater

environment adaptation (Merton, 1968).

Similar to the functionalists whose focus was on 'assumed needs' and functions of social systems, evolutionary approach tended to view differentiation as a component in a process of enhancing the adaptive capacity and the efficiency of social systems (Huismann, 1995; Clark, 1983). In contrast to the biological analogy and the economic theory, the biological one is a natural selection, whereas in the social system, the social actors' behavior is purposeful and non-random. Therefore, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) advanced the institutional isomorphism approach of how organizations must adapt to the existence of, and pressures from, other organizations in their environment, because these adaptation processes tend to lead to homogenization, as organizations respond more or less similarly to uniform environment conditions. Isomorphism, on the other hand, acts as a constraining process, forcing institutions to resemble other organizations that face the same set of environmental conditions (Huismann, 1995). Consequently, while these institutions may want to rebrand and appear different, they also recognize that some products are more coveted than others, compelling them to deviate from their original purpose and rebrand their products to become inclusive, resulting in them offering the same products in order to remain relevant but also competitive. As a result, educational progressivism and instrumentalism have sought to make higher education more accessible and democratic, which explains how the addition of courses reduces student attrition rates and appeals to a wider range of 'different' learning styles (Graham, 2005; Dewey, 2011; Kraak, 2001).

The significance of differentiation in higher education

Differentiation has the potential to generate values and social legitimacy, to select dominant elites, to train labor forces, and to generate scientific knowledge and support its application in society (Castells, 1993). Nonetheless, while a differentiated academic system is required for research universities to thrive, the fulfillment of different functions necessitates the collaboration of different institutions in order to distribute the functions throughout the HES and research system, in which different institutional types undertake different combinations of functions (Altbach, 2013). This trend has resulted in institutional isomorphism, in which newly established institutions mimic the dominant "mother" universities with only a name change but the same programs. Similarly, to meet societal challenges in a given country, a higher education system with a greater abundance of alternative institutions is necessary. Simultaneously, such a system can accommodate a diverse student body and achieve academic success, as well as improve the environment

For internationally competitive research and other opportunities to make a significant contribution to solving social and local problems (Grace and Gravestock, 2009; Honey and Hooks, 2010; Hussey and Smith, 2010). Differentiation has also been shown to improve access for students with diverse educational backgrounds and achievements; it promotes social mobility by providing multiple modes of entry, multiple forms of transfer, and upward mobility. It was also found to meet the labor market's needs through a variety of specializations for economic and social development (Grace and Gravestock, 2009).

In fact, differentiation was discovered to serve needs of interest groups by allowing many to develop their own identity and political legitimization; to allow for the critical combination of elite and mass HE; to absorb a heterogeneous clientele; and to respond to a variety labor market demands (Honey and Hooks, 2010). However, such dogmatism can also be a detriment to the same people in similar magnitudes (Canterbury Christ Church University, 2012c). Despite many state's desire to increase diversity in higher education, growing homogenization has been blamed on a combination of 'strict and uniform government policies' and the ability of powerful academic communities to defend their norms and values (CHET, 2008). However, tertiary systems around the world have become less diverse and differentiated in recent years, making inclusion more difficult (Teferra and Altbach, 2003). Teferra (2008), discourages the 'cosmetic' differentiation and advises HEIs to establish clear and differentiated purposes that move beyond simple mission statements, to boldly affirm the institution's reason for existing from a historical, ethical, emotional and practical perspective. Institutional purposes therefore should answer two questions: (1) *What are the reasons for our existence?* and, (2) *What value do we provide to the world?* The answers to these questions will guide the purpose statement, which will provide the institution with the necessary direction and declare why an institution is a student's preferred choice among others. Given that most institutions' mission and purpose statements are similar (if not identical), institutional leaders should become more forward-thinking in order to carefully craft a differentiated and compelling purpose message to leverage competitive advantage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The four functions of higher education institutions are: producing values and social legitimation, selecting the dominant elites, training the labor force, and generating scientific knowledge and supporting its application in society (Castells, 2008). The various functions must be distributed differently across a higher education and

research system in which different institutional types perform different combinations of functions. To thrive in this regard, HEIs require a clearly differentiated academic system. As a result, Uganda, like any other developing country, must rationally differentiate itself because institutions must be clearly identified and supported in order to sustain a specific direction (Altbach, 2013). As guileless as it may sound, some institutional leaders had no idea why their institutions existed in the first place; others had never seen the strategic plans of the institutions. Except for MUST, where all informants were well-versed in the institution's philosophy, the rest had only a few who clearly understood their institution's vision and mission. Although MUST was founded to provide science and technology in the fields of medicine and information technology, other arts-related courses such as development studies, business administration, planning, and community development, among others, were introduced. Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Nsamizi Vocational College, on the other hand, had been established to provide postgraduate diploma programs in governance, administration, leadership, and management-related programs in order to develop public servant capacity and conduct in-service trainings.

Other constituencies such as private and non-governmental organizations were brought on board. Nonetheless, as time went by, UMI introduced professional courses, doctoral and master's programs, while Nsamizi introduced undergraduate programs. Similarly, although Gulu University had been introduced to support the two existing institutions to offer medicine and other science programs, courses such as business administration and others were introduced. Lastly, whereas Busitema University was also established to further enhance capacity in the science-based courses in the country through the introduction of engineering, agriculture, computer science etc, other science-based courses were also introduced. However, Cloet (2015) emphasizes that while the logic behind differentiation is to create real value for the customer, it also necessitates institutions being economically efficient. Similarly, Küster *et al.* (2011) discovered that such brand inflexibility may make current market conditions extremely complex. In fact, this finding is supported by most Ugandan HEIs' current thinking about the limitations of clinging to institutional philosophy. Indeed, van Vught (2007) found that differentiation enhanced institutional culture; enabled access for students with different educational backgrounds and achievements; enabled social mobility by offering different modes of entry, multiple forms of transfer, and upward as well as 'honorable downward' mobility; met the needs of the labor market by creating a growing variety of specializations that are needed for economic and social development; served the needs of interest groups by allowing many to develop their own identity and political legitimization, as well as permitting

the crucial combination of elite and mass higher education. Mass systems are more diversified than elite systems, as they absorb a heterogeneous clientele and try to respond to various demands from the labor market. Cloet *et al.* (2015), concluded that despite these obvious advantages, in recent decades' tertiary systems around the world have become less diverse and differentiated, which he attributed to 'one-size-fits-all' government policies that tend to drive towards homogenization, and the ability of powerful academic communities to defend their norms and aspirations.

It is worth noting that UMI maintained its philosophy to a large extent in developing postgraduate courses and enhancing skills for those already in service in the original areas of governance, leadership, management and administration, for the institution in question had in place evidence of 'out-put' performance reporting that was mandatory, and done on quarterly basis, that contributed to consistency. This practice kept the institution on track not only in terms of meeting its goals and completing tasks, but also in terms of aligning programs with the goals of the mother departments. Busitema, on the other hand, having been established on different campuses that were majorly science-based, endeavored to maintain its original purpose, in teaching unique programs not taught anywhere in the other institutions, which actually created a new niche in the country. Similarly, Busitema had no choice but to differentiate, given the structure and location. In this regard, Ng'ethe (2008) discovered that the limited number of differentiated institutions influenced whether or not to differentiate, which was confirmed by Cloete *et al.* (2015) in relation to institutional isomorphism and how newly established institutions simply replicated the dominant 'mother' university. As a result, while differentiation should allow institutions to focus on specific programs in order to produce quality and accomplished professionals, HEIs in Uganda have become increasingly similar – in terms of operations and programs. MacGregor (2008) discovered that, while these institutions appear to be different from the outside, they are actually similar, save for the wording of the visions and missions. According to MacGregor (2008), there are four factors that contributed towards institutional homogenization in Africa. First, the issue of funding which is often based on total student enrolment, with institutions being forced to divert from the philosophy to include money-spinners, popular and affordable, thereby undermining differentiation; Second, institutional governance that takes a consistent approach to establishing institutional laws, limiting differentiation in governance mechanisms; Third, private providers of offshore higher education in Africa that seem to provide differentiated programs by offering degrees from other countries; yet they also offer popular courses in money-making areas, being offered almost in every HEI in Uganda, thereby failing differentiation. Lastly, even with

the so-called different nomenclatures, the curricula are similar across these apparently different institutional types.

Similarly, even ostensibly dissimilar academic programs were discovered to be similar, with the exception of course content alignment and different course titles. Non-science courses were specifically designed for medical schools such as MUST and Gulu to enable medical students to: learn about development economies in order to become more analytical as medical professionals; keep up with the latest technology; and, business administration to help students manage human and financial resources effectively. Specifically, information technology was perceived by these institutions to be very critical in the analysis, diagnosis and other complex tasks that require the use of technology. Scholars (e.g. Graham, 2005; Dewey, 2011; Kraak, 2001) discovered how educational progressivism and instrumentalism have sought to make higher education more accessible and democratic, and how the addition of courses not originally planned reduces student attrition rates and appeals to a wide variety of 'different' learning styles. Cloete *et al.* (2015), concludes that such change dynamics can only be moved in a differentiation-enhancing direction through effective governmental policies and regulations.

Notwithstanding, although initially every institution had been introduced with a clear purpose, numerous challenges such as funding structures; cost of science and the corresponding equipment, societal demands and proximity - forced these institutions to adopt mixed models. Therefore, so long as governments continue to establish new universities with one basic model, they will continue to 'clone' existing ones (Cloete *et al.*, 2015). Almost all public and private institutions that had attained institutional autonomy and developed unique profiles had actually ended up combining mimicking and budget-maximizing behavior, with institutions ending up recruiting large numbers of fee-paying private students in cheap courses which has compromised quality due to student-staff ratios (Cloete *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, whereas the absence of differentiation had been perceived to have negative effects, the current research found that it actually promoted high standards through research teams that combined various professionals – especially engaging in quality research and outreach for social, economic transformation and sustainable development. Diversions had yielded results due to strong synergies and unique experience of accomplished professionals, given such a hybrid of research teams (scientists, economists, statisticians, sociologists, politicians, educators, and philosophers). Although this arrangement targeted to achieve different purposes, differentiation has become difficult to achieve because all public universities are under similar governance models, policies and laws, which has affected both horizontal and vertical differentia-

tion, as institutions strive to become inclusive and gain competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

The skills gap in the areas of science and technology has resulted in the establishment of additional public HEIs; aside from the fact that these institutions are a decisive factor in the attractiveness of regions with the potential to actively influence demographic processes – including the participation of an HEI in regional development that involves raising awareness of the corresponding developments. Hence, differentiation has become extremely difficult to achieve given that institutions are established to address societal challenges that require both science and humanities/arts courses. Furthermore, such initiatives necessitate extensive consultation with stakeholders in order to gain their support. As a result, the inclusion of arts courses that were not originally planned for, exacerbated by the government's persistent budgetary constraints, significantly disrupted the status quos of many institutions, weakening the orientation potential of types of institutions and diversifying graduate competences. In addition, the government's inability to adequately cover some of the needs of the funded students further widened the funding gap. Although differentiation has potential benefits, the authorities have been deafeningly silent about the Ugandan higher education landscape; yet, differentiation has been glorified for its unique branding. However, a stronger differentiation may be detrimental to institutional financial sustainability. Finally, as appealing as differentiation may sound, it may make quality in these institutions difficult given that it is the similarities that allow partnerships and collaborations to exist. By implication, institutional undertakings such as curriculum development, external examination, peer reviews for paper publications and promotions would not be possible with strict differentiation, because institutions heavily rely on experts with the required expertise from other institutions to ensure quality.

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