

# Reflecting on Higher Education Institutions' Response to Evolving Demands of Human Resources in Tanzania: University of Dar es Salaam Experience

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## Abstract

*This article uses a case study to reflect on the role of higher education institutions in training human resources as a prerequisite for national and global development. It is based on data collected through interviews and documentary review. The findings indicate that the role of higher education institutions on the training of human resources has changed from focusing entirely on national development needs to the teaching of skills and competencies akin to job market demands. It is revealed that achieving a stable balance between teaching of general skills and employability skills under the market approach poses a challenge. This study proposes the adoption of asymmetrical balance as a strategy that enables public higher education institutions to combine the strengths of both the state and the market to address national and global development priorities.*

**Keywords:** asymmetrical balance, employability skills, human resources, marketization, national development

## Introduction

This article reflects on the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in training human resources in Tanzania. Higher education is a great asset which brings enormous benefits to both individual and the nation concerned. There is general agreement between policy makers and researchers that higher education is vital in developing productive and competitive human resources to meet the demands of national and the global economy. The skills, knowledge, creativity and research developed through higher education constitute a major factor in any nation's success in creating jobs and advancing prosperity. Arguably, the drive towards economic competition between nations is determined by the quantity and quality of their human resources.

MacCowan (2015) observed that the university transmits a body of knowledge for the core professions; it fosters scientific enquiry for furthering the interests of the nation-state and it serves diverse societal interests and drive economic growth through human capital formation and technological innovation. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) sees universities as playing a key role in building a national innovation system (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Simply put, higher education plays a critical role in the supply of high level skills for social and economic benefits.

### **Higher education and training of human resources**

Higher education regulates the flow of skilled labour and matches the supply of graduates to the actual economic demand and utility (Tamlinson, 2012). Its role in preparing human resources has been considerably reshaped overtime. This has been due to structural changes both to HEIs and in the nature of the economy. There are different perspectives with regard to the role of HEIs in training human resources.

The first perspective is more rigid, internal and inward looking. According to this perspective, HIEs were/are required to train and produce human resources for internal public utility only within the government state sectors. This perspective operates under the notion of the state control model that best embraces the central control and planning philosophy. Under this perspective, the government decides on the national requirements of high-level manpower in the different professions, in the civil service, in the parastatal organisations and in national institutions. As a result, HIEs were/are not required to enroll students beyond the required quota for each profession. It meant that HIEs could not, at any given time, produce more of a certain type of professionals than were required by the nation. This model had been operating in many developing countries in Africa since a independence to mid-1990s.

Within the context of African countries, public HEIs and universities in particular were traditionally viewed as social institutions that train graduates and equip them with the various skills and competencies required for national development (Msigwa, 2016). This period coincided with the notion of the ‘developmental university’ model of the 1960s and 1970s which assigned public universities in Africa a decisive role –‘key instrument for national development’ (Assié-Lumumba, 2011). This was also the case in Tanzania. Matching demand and supply had advantage because there was no wastage in the form of unemployment. However, this perspective has been criticised because it constrains enrolment and hinders innovation. For example, HIEs are criticised for being too rigid on academically oriented provision and pedagogy and not enough on applied and functional skills and competencies.

It has been argued that public universities were offering outmoded curriculum and graduating large number of graduates with minimal relevance to the prevailing labour market needs (Tomlinson, 2012). This gave rise to the second perspective regarding the ability and relevance of HEIs in training graduates with a number of skills, competencies as well as knowledge required for employability.

The second perspective marked the emergence and adoption of the market principles of running of public higher education. Contrary to the state model, the market approach embraces broad access to and ensuring equity to post-secondary education. The underlying rationale for the introduction of the market approach is to improve efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of higher education. Under this approach, HEIs such as universities were/are required to train and equip graduates with skills, competencies and knowledge necessary to achieve labour supply fluidity. However, this approach has been criticised on several fronts because teaching and training that focus on satisfying the labour market only has profound limitations. Markets are not homogeneous entities; they comprise individuals and groups who differ in many ways and who may have conflicting needs and requirements (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Also, the demands of the market are short time and thus detrimental to the realisation of the long term goals of higher education and of the nation.

The first criticism holds that lack of employability skills exists because skills possessed by graduates are no longer in high demand in the labour market. This is possibly due to the fact that job skill demands are shifting due to labour market variability just as the economy and jobs within it shift. Thus, skills that are demanded today are likely to be useless in the next day. Reflecting on this reality, it seems that possessing graduate skills and competencies does not in itself guarantee employment, nor does it ensure graduate-level employment (Piróg, 2016).

The second criticism leveled against the market approach contends that the problem of the market is heightened by the fact that specific jobs require specialised skills, competencies and knowledge. However, McCowan (2015) warns against overemphasis on skills and qualifications for the job market at the expense of non-measurable values of the university education. In addition, Maringe and Gibbs (2009) observed that the market is selective, undermine, devalue and subordinate certain values such as liberal education's virtues of tolerance, critical thinking and trust and benevolence. It is worth noting that skills such as critical and original thinking and which have been traditionally the hallmark of higher education are not acquired in highly specialised courses (Hammer & Star, 2004).

This has further ramifications because highly specialised programmes and courses do not necessarily guarantee that their graduates will be successful in a competitive

job market. This is compounded by employers who tend to promote a vision of the 'ideal graduate' who is talented, creative, dynamic and full of potential. Unfortunately, and more often, those qualities are not necessarily associated with the skills development approach favoured by many universities (Clarke, 2018). Thus, HEIs should teach and train graduates to acquire skills, competencies and knowledge that would make them think beyond getting jobs.

In the same vein, studies have shown that training for specific jobs tend to make students think that certain skills, competencies and knowledge are more important than others. This may explain why programmes and courses such as those in humanities and arts as well as those which focus on the critical theory and social issues are undermined. They also become disadvantaged because their role and values are regarded as peripheral and not relevant to the commercial needs of the market (Trust Africa, 2011). Indeed, graduates who went through this kind of training failed to develop multi-disciplinary knowledge. In connection, the changing higher education-labour market dynamic intensifies and perpetuates class-cultural structural divisions in both accesses to specific forms of higher education experience and subsequently to economic outcomes in the labour market (Tomlinson, 2012). This has impact on equity and access in the employability either in the public or in the labour market settings.

The third perspective advocates that the transition from the university to the workforce will remain a challenge among graduates in the labour market. Therefore, a balance that calls for an expansive and reflective approach to graduate training and value development in graduates is imperative. The World Bank insists in its report '*Constructing knowledge society: new challenges for tertiary education*' that:

Meaningful education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century should stimulate all aspects of human intellectual potential. It should not simply emphasize access to global knowledge in science and management but should also uphold the richness of local cultures and values, supported by the time-honoured and eternally valuable disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, including philosophy, literature, and the arts (World Bank, 2002, p. 31).

It can be deduced from the excerpt that universities should introduce programmes and offer courses that balance skills and competencies for greater national capacities, labour market flexibility and global competitiveness. This implies that HEIs should strive to balance their offerings in order to produce graduates who can resolve the 'asymmetry' that emerged between the national and market demands. The foregoing has wider validity considering the similar situations in so many countries in the globe including Tanzania.

As response, reforming higher education is an inevitable development, and a necessary one, to assist in making HEIs more relevant and competitive. Universities, the home of higher education, are obliged to constantly undertake restructuring within their systems in order to meet current and future challenges. They respond to human capital formation through different ways including expanding student enrolment at different levels; reviewing or modifying the existing course content (based on stakeholders' suggestions) and introducing new courses and/or programmes that seek to develop key competencies and relevant future skills to meet the national and global development goals. In some cases, university departments used a mix of embedded and stand-alone teaching methods as part of their efforts to develop employability skills to ensure that the acquisition of such skills is made more explicit (Mason, Williams & Granmer, 2009).

With respect to the University of Dar es Salaam, it was imperative to rethink and reorient its functions and objectives in order to play a role in realising the national socio-economic and political goals as well as meeting the evolving demands of the growing global knowledge economy. Central to HEIs and universities in particular is to adopt a transformative and reflective approach towards training quantity and quality human resources for national and global demands. In view of the foregoing, a fundamental research question was 'how well does the University of Dar es Salaam respond to demands of human resources needed to attain national and global development goals?'

### **Theoretical framework**

This study applied the Human Capital Theory (HCT). According to OECD (2001), human capital is a productive wealth embodied in labour, skill, knowledge and practices. In the context of this study human capital refers to the knowledge and skills which university students acquire and which are foundations of their labour market outcomes. In essence, HCT suggests that education (skills, competencies and knowledge) increases the productivity and earnings of individuals. In this case, education is viewed as an investment which is not only crucial for individuals but also the key to the economic growth of a country (Tan, 2014).

Its main proposition is that people are considered as a form of capital for development. Therefore, education and schooling prepare human resources and increase productivity of individuals and organisations as well as encourage growth and development at the international level (Nafukho, Hairston & Brooks, 2004). This suggests that the total quantity of training correlates with a country's economic performance and that there is close correlation between the stocks of skilled labour

and productivity. The theory provides a rationale for the expansion of higher education because a country's capacity to develop clearly depends on its capacity to train quantity and quality human resources (Marginson, 2019). This aligns with the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 which emphasizes the need to create well-trained and skilled human resources for its effective implementation. Building on this foundation, HCT provides a framework that guides educational policies and the design of academic programmes and courses in higher education institutions, which eventually contribute to individual and socio-economic development of the nation.

### **Research approach and design**

A qualitative study methodology was employed to collect and analyse data. The approach was selected because of its investigative strength of gathering high quality and in-depth information about a particular phenomenon. Similarly, the case study of the University of Dar es Salaam (Mwalimu Nyerere Campus) was used to investigate its role in preparing human resources as part of the reform process to strategically contribute to the needs of the nation and global market at large. The University of Dar es Salaam was purposely selected as a typical case to conduct this study for several reasons. Firstly, it is the oldest public university which offers a range of experiences and changing policy contexts with respect to the training of human resources in Tanzania. Secondly, of all public higher education institutions in Tanzania, it was the first to adopt and implement transformation through a systematic programme of self-evaluation and reform since 1994 which led to, among others, expansion of students' intake as well as academic programmes (UDSM, 2009b, p. viii). Epistemologically, it represents an ideal institution to examine its performance with respect to the training of human resources as depicted in its reform programme and in its other official documents (UDSM, 2015).

### **Participants and their sampling**

The researcher combined purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select 30 participants including 25 academics, three administrative staff and two student leaders. Participants were deliberately selected based on their experience, diverse backgrounds and administrative positions to produce the most valuable data in various aspects of the university. It is worth noting that only data on human resources is presented in this article. This diversity of participants facilitated diversity in the answers. Under snowball sampling, participants were accessed through the process

of reference from one participant to the next (Denscombe, 2017). In agreement with Denscombe, each participant was asked to nominate another participant who would be relevant to the purpose of the research problem. According to Denscombe (2017), snowball technique is completely compatible with purposive sampling.

### **Data collection and analysis**

To address the main research question, two sources of data, namely interviews and documentary review were used to collect data on various aspects of the institution including training of human resources. In order to collect in-depth information, the researcher used one-to-one semi-structured interviews to seek participants' views regarding the university's role on training of human resources. The use of one-to-one interview has the following advantages: it is relatively easy to arrange, opinions and views expressed stem from one source; it is easy to control in terms of ideas to grasp and interrogate and easier to transcribe recorded interview (Denscombe, 2017). The interviews followed ethical protocols. Furthermore; documentary review was done to get detailed insights into the vision, mission, strategic plans and operations of the university regarding the study. Data analysis was informed by reflectivity. According to Richards (1990), 'reflection is a response to a past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as the basis for reevaluation and decision-making and, as a source for planning and action' (p.5).

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings indicated that the role and functions of the university have varied with time and also within the socioeconomic and political contexts of the country. In Tanzania, the debate on the role and functions of the university started after independence when the country adopted a socialist development strategy. The debate resurfaced again following the major shift in the late 1990s which led to the adoption of a market economy and political pluralism. This shift, in turn, had implications for both the core operations of the university and for its focus on national development. Overtime the university has been training the human resources but with varying emphasis based on the changing contexts within the country and outside it.

## The role of the university during the socialist era to the mid-1990s

The findings revealed that the immediate task assigned to the university was to train human resource in order to meet the urgent need for skilled cadres in the various posts in government and industry. Tanzania attached great importance to the university as it viewed it as a key partner in achieving its development priorities. One area through which the university assisted the country as revealed in its various documents was to meet the high-level human resource needs of the Tanzanian society. This aspiration was elaborated at length as follows:

The institution was meant to satisfy the needs and interests of the government in training the high-level manpower required to man the political and administrative structures that were created by the new administration. In such circumstances, it is understandable that political considerations did have a great influence on all decisions regarding priority in the establishment of academic units as well as the academic programmes of some units (UDSM, 1998, p. 110).

The quote above suggested that the role of the university was to train and supply quantitatively and qualitatively the needed human resources to the government and its sectors. As presented earlier, the admission to higher education was centrally controlled through the manpower policy. Participant B explains how the policy informs student intake:

[...] before 1990 the prevailing policy was to control the number of students who joined the University and that number was determined by the centrally planned manpower policy in the country. The number of students never exceeded what was planned in the central plan by the government for human resource development.

It can be deduced from the quote that the implementation of the manpower policy limits institutional efficiency and effectiveness because it constrains student intake and militates against equity.

In this case, various institutional documents were accessed to establish the enrolment trend at the undergraduate level as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Undergraduate Student Enrolment in Main Campus, 1961/62-1989/90*

Year	Enrolment	Year	Enrolment	Year	Enrolment
1961/62	14	1971/72	1,457	1981/82	3,357
1962/63	17	1972/73	1,575	1982/83	3,213

1963/64	34	1973/74	1,852	1983/84	3,113
1964/65	89	1974/75	2,077	1984/85	2,913
1965/66	261	1975/76	2,023	1985/86	2,987
1966/67	454	1976/77	2,145	1986/87	2,972
1967/68	711	1977/78	2,071	1987/88	n.a
1968/69	964	1978/79	2,281	1988/89	2,743
1969/70	1,263	1979/80	3,400	1989/90	2,839
1970/71	1,309	1980/81	2,586		

Source: University of Dar es Salaam files and records      n.a implies data not available

Table 1 indicates an exponential increase in student enrolment in undergraduate degrees since 1961/62 academic year. Indeed, expansion in student intake is an indicator of the university commitment to the state. The decline in student enrolment from 1984/85 academic year can be due to the fact that the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Science of the University of Dar es Salaam was converted and upgraded to Sokoine University of Agriculture.

A part from student intake, expansion was also vivid in the establishment of different academic units which offer a broad range of disciplines and courses to prepare graduates to work with the people of Tanzania in diverse areas of specialisations. Records indicated that, from 1961 to 1989, there were nine faculties including Law (1961), Arts and Social Sciences (1964), Science (1965), Medicine (1968) and Agriculture (1969) and five institutes including Institute of Development Studies (1973). The academic curricula and courses offered by these academic units reflected the national development vision as revealed in Nyerere's (1971) speech as Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam at the inauguration of the university in 1970:

In its teaching activities, and in its search for new knowledge, therefore, the aim of the University of Dar es Salaam must be service to the needs of a developing socialist Tanzania. This purpose must determine the subjects taught the content of the courses, the method of teaching, and the manner in which the university is organised, as well as its relations with the community at large (p. 110).

In light of the quote above, the philosophical position inherent in the objectives and functions indicated that the university was more internal and inward looking in its offerings including preparation of its graduates. The university prepared its graduates to serve in the socialist state. The following examples indicate the way in which the state's socialist ideology was infused into the courses offered at the university (UDSM, 1982).

- *EC 100: Introductory to Political Economy*: To introduce students to Socialist and Capitalist theory and practices relating to the allocation and utilisation of resources with special reference to the problems of development in East Africa.
- *DS 603: Socialist Transformation in Tanzania*: To examine the political economy of Tanzania, taking into account various historical periods, the prospects and problems of the socialist transformation and the changing strategies in the implementation of socialist policies.

As may be seen in the examples cited above, the country's political ideology influenced the curricula of the university. Ideologically, socialist ideas were infused into the course content in order to prepare graduates for and orient them in respect of the development of a socialist country. The state and the university had a symbiotic relationship. While the government funds and employs graduates, the university trains the human resources and produces knowledge for public consumption.

### ***The role of the university under the market model from mid-1990s to the present***

Findings during this period indicated that HEIs as exemplified by the experience of UDSM continued to train human resources depending on the skills, knowledge and competencies required of the time. In the years since mid-1990s, in Tanzania, the changes that took place in the economic and political spheres led to the emergence of new perspectives including the epistemological dimension of knowledge. This was reflected in what to teach and in what context, while social values changed altogether. The changes had implication for the educational sector. For UDSM, the following quote from the vice-chancellor's address to the 2001/2002 incoming undergraduate students lucidly summarised the new concerns:

The role expected of a university in a knowledge economy goes beyond its traditional roles of knowledge creation, training of young minds, and service to the community and transference of culture. The University is seen as an agent of economic growth; a knowledge factory, as it

was, at the heart of a knowledge economy – one in which ideas and the ability to manipulate them count for far more than the traditional factors of production (UDSM, 2001, p. 9).

This shift was further reflected during the interviews with participants. Participant A said:

From the 1990s the art of thinking in the strategic plan during the institutional transformation changed. We said that we should not limit the number of student intake just for the sake of what the government needed. University education is not for the sake of the government alone. We should also look at what the society needs. So, we should not be confined to the number of graduates required by the government to fill the positions available. Instead, we should think of higher education as a pool of educated people who are important for propelling the development of society.

From the quotes, it can be deduced that the manpower planning policy that restricted enrolment was challenged. The introduction of the market approach shifted university from the elitist to exclusive model which had been evident until mid-1990s to mass higher education. Higher education was required to expand the locus of student intake in order to produce more graduates beyond the government requirements.

As a response, the university reformulated its objectives and functions as indicated in the University Charter (selected):

- To be a producer and supplier of key policy-makers, experts and personnel in charge of key positions in industry, public, and private institutions as well as governmental and non-governmental institutions.
- To prepare students for work as scientists or professionals by providing academic and professional or vocational courses of instruction and to take such other steps as may be necessary or desirable towards ensuring an output of mainly job creators who possess professional qualifications or skills as opposed to job seekers.
- To provide, promote and maintain centres of excellence and exemplary good management in terms of knowledge creation, skills development, effective entrepreneurship and the formation of a responsible attitude for the betterment of the society as well as its mode of governance (UDSM, 2007, pp. 7–9).

The shift resulted in the expansion of student intake and introduction and diversification of academic programmes and courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels with a vision to cater for skills, knowledge and competencies needed by the graduates and demanded by the nation and in the labour market.

### *Expansion of student intake*

Data presented in Table 1 indicated that student intake increased significantly in the period between 1960's to mid-1990s. As pointed out earlier, originally, the university was internally focused and inward looking. However, in this period, the university changed its focus; it has been producing more multi-skilled human resources required by the labour market within the context of the global knowledge economy. The purpose of higher education and the university, in particular, was no longer to train graduates for the state bureaucracy and public sector but also for the market. This change in practice was reflected in a new focus of the university which was to empower its graduates to be competitive in the global labour market through the teaching of professional skills and competencies as well as science and technology. This implied that the ideal of the market permeated into the university core activities including teaching.

Based on the need to produce greater numbers of trained human resources, the university increased its student intake:

Indeed, such expansion of student enrolment is crucial as it demonstrates the University's aspiration to assist the nation in obtaining the critical mass of professionals required to spearhead the various interventions for growth and poverty reduction (UDSM, 2009a, p. 9)

Despite the university's intension to expand enrolment, participant D stated that the nation is experiencing a great demand for human resources specialised in the fields of science and technology. The university has not yet succeeded in producing sufficient graduates in the fields of science and technology to meet the needs of the Tanzanian economy.

Nevertheless, the university continues to sustain expansion and equity in student enrolments (UDSM, 2015). In terms of student intake, substantial progress had been made towards achieving this goal. For example, the available institutional records indicated that the enrolment at undergraduate and postgraduate programmes had increased since the implementation of the Institutional Transformation Programme (ITP) in 1994. Table 2 indicates undergraduate enrolment trend in Main Campus.

Table 2: Undergraduate Student Enrolment in Main campus in Selected years

Year	Enrolment	Year	Enrolment
1994/95	3,359	2011/12	13,725
1998/99	5,047	2013/14	13,498
2000/01	6,691	2016/17	15,184
2002/03	7,859		
2008/09	11,771		
2010/11	11,938		

Source: UDSM Facts and Figures & Annual reports (various years from 1995/96–2016/17).

Student expansion was a result of various strategies including equity-driven strategies such as affirmative strategies (cut-off point and pre-entry programme) as well as market-driven measures like enrolment of private-sponsored students and efficient utilisation of resources.

Similarly, the enrolment of postgraduate students increased from 114 in 1993/94 to 2,646 in 2010/11 and 4440 in 2015/2016 (UDSM, 2004; UDSM, 2012, UDSM, 2018). The enrolment at both levels is on increase as per the strategic plan projection. For example, in its corporate strategic plan (2014-2023), the university states its intention to continue to consolidate its undergraduate training and prioritise postgraduate training (UDSM, 2015). The expansion of student intake is in alignment with the goal of the institutional strategic plans to produce highly-skilled human resources as well as Development Vision 2025, a national roadmap, towards attainment of the socioeconomic development that is inclusive and sustainable.

While the increase in student intake is visible, there has been a concern over graduates' lack of skills, competencies, and knowledge required by the labour market. This is clear evidence of a mismatch 'asymmetry' between the job market needs and the outputs produced by public HEIs, thus implying a 'demand-response imbalance'. The university responded to this challenge by taking the following measures.

### *The teaching of employability skills*

Along with expanded enrolment, the need for training of competitive human resources led to restructuring and/or the introduction of new academic programmes and courses to cater for skills, knowledge and competencies tailored to meet the

demands of the labour market. Reforms in the mid-1990s in political and economic orientation from socialism to liberalism had impact in terms of which values and goals of the university education shifted to meet market needs. This leads to a shift in the orientation of courses and programmes from an emphasis on development within the socialist planned economy towards the market-driven economy that emphasised practical and applied skills and competencies. This epistemological paradigm shift implied fundamental changes that obliged the university to prepare its graduates to acquire the inter-disciplinary skills and competencies required to fit them for the rapidly changing global socio-economic and political landscape. This has led to, among other initiatives, the introduction of market-driven programmes.

The teaching of marketable or employability skills in line with labour market requirements was imperative. This would help students to acquire knowledge, working skills and competencies to increase their chances to secure better job opportunities and transform them from being 'job seekers' to being 'job creators'. Therefore, there was a dire need to orient students towards this transition. Luhanga et al. (2003) explain how the university's strategic plan aimed at preparing its graduates to fit into labour market:

As part of the efforts to change the students' mindset and in response to changes in the economy and declining labour market, the University has created a multi-disciplinary Entrepreneurship Centre. Accordingly, an object has been introduced into the RSP requiring all University programmes to be oriented towards producing job creators rather than job seekers (p. 109)

Similar measure is stipulated in the University Charter:

To prepare students for work as scientists or professionals by providing academic and professional or vocational courses of instruction and to take such other steps as may be necessary or desirable towards ensuring an output of mainly job creators who possess professional qualifications or skills as opposed to job seekers (UDSM, 2007, p. 8).

In order to achieve this strategic goal, HEIs in Tanzania introduced, diversified and reconfigured their academic programmes and eliminated the outdated ones. For UDSM, in 2010/11, there were a total of 144 academic programmes, 79 undergraduate and 65 postgraduates (UDSM, 2010). On academic programmes, one institutional document states that:

In order to sustain the market demands and to cater for national development requirements with focus to industrialisation agenda, the

university continued to improve the existing programmes through curriculum reviews as well as designing new ones (UDSM, 2018).

The reviews and additions of new programmes especially at postgraduate level are in line with the UDSM Vision 2061 to address the critical problem of human resource requirements in higher education.

Based on the foregoing observation, higher education institutions should continually reflect on their offerings in order to make them relevant to the market. The following are examples of the courses introduced at UDSM and their justification:

- **Entrepreneurship:** To prepare graduates for work creation and self-employment.
- **Computing and ICT:** To ensure that graduates are computer literate and to produce a future generation of ICT-literate workers and citizens.
- **Communication skills:** To equip graduates with language competency as regards speaking and writing.
- **Research method courses:** To provide graduates with research skills and competencies.

Within a contemporary context, the argument is that the university's mission has changed from the traditional role of training personnel for the public sector to offering courses that encourage entrepreneurship, that is, employability skills, to its graduates. In particular, the offering of these courses and others were/are meant to acquaint students with a range of both practical and soft skills to make them capable of creating self-employment while, at the same time, contributing to the national development

The introduction of courses oriented towards providing employability skills and competencies rose a question on what knowledge, competencies and skills the public university like UDSM should emphasize on. The root of the debate is on the nature of the market. Reflecting on the role of the university, participant E, a junior staff, was of the view that the new courses shifted the traditional role of the university in training strategic thinkers towards a polytechnic orientation which focuses on addressing market-based needs. In making this claim, he said:

You can see most of the courses being restructured here address immediate problems. I have a view that this move is contrary because the university exists to ensure that we build capabilities among students who can think broadly. That is why we emphasize on teaching theories or perspectives which would later on help students to handle all the industrial needs. Of course, the university is moving towards industrial

needs and government needs but I think caution has to be taken that the traditional role of the university should remain.

The quote highlights a fundamental tension between the changing focus of increasing the number and types of academic programmes as outlined in the university strategic plan and the need to provide basic skills and competencies to undergraduate students. The use of the term ‘immediate’ in the quote illustrates the context in which the adoption of corporate strategies that bow to the market cannot or does not have long term goals. This may be attributed to the fact that the market does not always have the same policy goals as the government which is inherently goal-oriented and involves planning in order to attain certain predefined ends. This suggests that the market model detaches the university from fulfilling its social obligations of providing service to the public and aligns it with the neoliberal practices and ideology that serve the market.

Furthermore, participant C said that emphasising on teaching of market-driven programmes and courses transformed the university into a ‘vocational institution’ that produces artisans or low-level skills and relinquishes its core mission of producing knowledge. In her analysis, participant E theorised:

I think there was some kind of mixed or misunderstanding amongst academic members. Somewhere people talk of offering courses that meet the market needs and others said ‘wait a minute we know the behaviour of the market’. The market is the same whether it is for human labour or other items. Some people think that the university should actually address the needs of the nation rather than the needs of the market where nobody knows who controlled the market.

Participant E’s comment illustrates the dichotomous nature of the tension surrounding the introduction of the market-driven academic programmes.

The first perspective gets support from those participants who idealised the historical public good model which was premised on the assumption that the university’s exclusive aim is to fulfil the national development goals. The participants argued that public higher education and the university should continue to contribute to meet the national development goals through its role in knowledge creation and production of highly skilled citizens. In addition, they expressed doubts about the consequences of the market approach as adopted in the academic programmes offered. Participant F, in particular, felt that the transformation had made a significant mistake in terms of knowledge creation. Indeed, she claimed that ‘transformation introduced market-oriented programmes instead of producing a mass of critical thinkers who could be able to inform the government’. In her view, there will be time

when the nation will miss people who are capable of conceptualising, questioning why certain things are happening and why they are happening in that particular way. This suggested that narrowing the focus from teaching to acquiring skills and competencies alone may lead to a potential loss of values crucial for national development. Arguably, responding to the labour market only has undermined the traditional role of the public university by decreasing both critical inquiry and access to knowledge (cf. Lynch, 2006). Accordingly, and based on Nyerere's (1973) view on the role of the university, 'the university is a place where people's minds are trained for clear thinking, for independent thinking, for analysis, and for problem solving at the highest level' (pp. 192–193).

The second perspective advocates for the introduction of market-driven programmes. It holds that it is not possible for the university to remain conservative. This perspective further stressed that the historical nation building/public interest approach to higher education is old fashioned, conservative and outdated. The advocates of this perspective maintain that the vision of the university should change in order to accommodate both internal and external changes.

In the light of the foregoing perspectives, there is a need for public HEIs to balance the teaching of broad knowledge as well as skills and competencies that cater for both national and market demands. In order to meet demands which are not fully aligned, there is a need for the university to balance the needs of the state and the needs of the labour market without compromising the broader, fundamental purpose of the university as 'an agent of national development'. However, identifying a stable balance poses a challenge because the demands posed by the state and market are different and they vary over time. This is because addressing the competing, yet simultaneously complementary, demands of both the state and the market caused 'asymmetry' in the university operations including training of human resources. Puutio, Kykyri and Wahlström (2008) define asymmetry as 'an objective lack of proportion between the two parts of an object' (p. 36). There is no doubt that asymmetries are common in any organisational context and are both embedded and manifested within the organisation processes or activities.

Based on the findings, I advocate for an 'asymmetrical balance' – a strategic approach which public higher education institutions could apply to 'balance competing goals and enable the pursuit of equally desirable goals' within the context of both the state and the market imperatives (multiple imperatives) in the provision of higher education. The implementation of 'asymmetrical balance' would enable public HEIs to combine the strengths of both the state and the market in order to achieve national and market demands. The adoption of the 'asymmetrical balance' will enable public HEIs to respond to both national and market demands and, hence, to become efficient, effective and responsive institutions.

## **Conclusion**

This article reflects the changing role of public HEIs of training of human resources from its traditional role of teaching graduates for government bureaucracy to training graduates for job market demands. It is argued that the fact that the government does not have the capacity to offer employment to all university graduates, the introduction of entrepreneurial and practical courses will enable graduates to develop the skills and competencies required to start their own businesses. It is further argued that it is important to ensure that the teaching at the university level extends beyond the development of marketable skills and include other skills such as creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking and innovative skills that enable them to be critical and innovative in face of the major issues and/or problems confronting the community at large and the nation.

## **Recommendations**

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. Firstly, in a dynamic environment, it is proposed that public higher education institutions and public universities, in particular, should strive to achieve a balance between professional programmes that focus on specific skills, knowledge and competencies and basic academic disciplines that promote general knowledge and critical thinking. All these are crucial in preparing skilled graduates for self-employment, national development as well as the knowledge economy. Secondly, the teaching of specialised and highly vocational courses should go hand-in-hand with teaching of general courses and skills including, among others, critical thinking and problem solving. Thus, teaching of practical and specific skills and competencies should not be over emphasised to the detriment of national priorities. Thirdly, conducting regular tracer studies and consultative meetings is imperative in order to determine skills, competencies and knowledge gap on one hand and inform curricula review in HEIs on the other hand.

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