

TRANSFORMING HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY UNIVERSITIES: FROM ENDANGERMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

Abubakar Kateregga,¹ Telesphore Ngarambe,¹ Charline Mulindahabi,²
Canisius Ruterana¹

Abstract

This study was conducted in eight universities within the East African Community (EAC). Its objective was to investigate the endangerment situation of the Humanities in order to suggest some lessons for Rwanda in transforming the teaching of these subjects. The endangerment was measured in terms of stakeholder salience, declining student enrolment, government budget-cuts as well as the devalorisation of these disciplines and negative society perceptions towards them. The study investigates the causes and consequences of this endangerment and shows how the embattled disciplines can be helped to survive. It draws on the stakeholders' theory of salience to argue that less salient stakeholders in universities can have their saliency strengthened through policy. Humanities are disciplines holding the key towards solving a set of complex social problems in the current globalised world because they offer a sure channel of imparting analytical and critical thinking skills, effective argumentation and negotiation skills. It is argued that if left unchecked, the current devalorisation of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) in favour of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) will eventually lead to a non-holistic education with inadequate skills for all categories of students, including science ones. Graduates need these skills to cope with challenging social demands in their workplace.

Key words: Arts, endangerment, Humanities, HASS, stakeholders' theory of salience, critical thinking skills, holistic education, job opportunities, STEM

¹ University of Rwanda, College of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Arts and Languages, Department of Languages, Translation and Interpreting Unit

² University of Rwanda, College of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Economics and Governance, Department of Political Science and International Relations

Introduction

Since its inception in 1963, the University of Rwanda (then the at that time Université Nationale du Rwanda - UNR) has undergone a number of changes. The Humanities were first taught at UNR - Ruhengeri campus, and later transferred to Butare Campus in 1995. At that time, the English Department alone had more than one hundred students. However, owing to the government policy of promoting Science and Technology, fewer students started getting enrolled in the Humanities. This policy mainly affected four departments negatively: African Languages and Literature, French, Philosophy and History, hence recording the lowest number of students. In 2009, a new Faculty of Arts, Media and Social Sciences (FAMSS) was created in an attempt to boost the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS). In 2008, FAMSS intake rose from 400 to 674 students, but later in 2010 dropped to 463. In 2011, enrolment dropped significantly to 61 students! For the academic year 2016/2017, the School of Arts and Humanities enrolled only 19 students. If this trend continues unchecked, Rwanda's universities may cease training any philosophers, linguists, writers or creative thinkers.

Statement of the problem

Many governments of the global South have tended to support the policy of promoting Science and Technology, especially in their universities. This has happened at the expense of teaching Humanities subjects, which have continued to receive minimum support from government. The Humanities that are threatened with endangerment include, but are not limited to, Languages, Literature, Linguistics, Philosophy, Psychology and History. The East African Community (EAC) universities seem to be doing this without critically examining their societal needs and aspirations. Consequently, many graduates in these countries are criticized for being passive receptors of knowledge with inadequate "critical thinking skills necessary in making reasoned judgments" in real life situations (Beyer 1995:8). Critical thinking refers to an intellectual process that enables individuals to skilfully conceptualise, apply, analyse, synthesise, and evaluate information in order to solve individual and collective problems (Scriven 1996). The current cost-cutting policy debate for the Humanities has become "dangerously polarized" to the extent that nobody seems to recognise any more the contributions made by these normative disciplines to humanity (Higgins 2011:1). In order to overcome this pending problem, universities should redesign their programmes to develop and promote the teaching of critical thinking skills.

Objectives and research questions

The objective of this study is to identify factors that contribute to the endangerment of the Humanities in EAC universities with a view to promoting these disciplines and making them sustainable. Three major research questions for this study are: (1) What are the causes of the current HASS de-valorisation at UR and EAC? (2) What are the challenges of teaching HASS at UNR in particular, and in EAC universities in general? (3) How can HASS disciplines be transformed to become more marketable?

Endangerment discourse: definition, scope and application

The epithet ‘endangered’ is often associated with plants, birds, animals or even languages which soon may no longer exist, because very few of them are now alive - endangered species, endangered languages, and so on. To ‘endanger’ is therefore to put someone or something at risk or in a state of being harmed, damaged or destroyed. Other verbs used synonymously with this term include: to threaten, to menace, to jeopardise. The ‘discourse of endangerment’ has become so ideologically charged that it has attracted the interest of many players in various disciplines. These include conservation groups, minority rights activists, international organisations, advocates of local or indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), funding institutions, the media (Silverstein 1998, Blommaert 2001, Hill 2002, Freeland and Donna 2000, Duchêne and Heller 2007). Pursued to its logical conclusion, the ‘endangerment discourse’ warns that if nothing is done to stabilise threatened species, humankind may be deprived of something valuable in the future, hence the pressing need for protection in the present.

Is ‘endangerment’ an appropriate term to describe HASS disciplines in Rwanda’s universities? Is the endangerment discourse generated for purely academic reasons or is it rather motivated ideologically or economically? Is the discourse restrictive to HASS at UNR and nationally as well as EAC universities, or is it applicable to the entire set up of the global university system? What should universities and governments bear in mind as key stakeholders in higher education, if indeed they are facing the challenges and dilemmas of endangered subjects?

In answering the above questions, Higgins (2011) contends that the dilemma of promoting or protecting the HASS is an ideological one. He shows that it is rooted in the global higher education policy template which gives an upper hand to STEM disciplines as opposed to all other disciplines of knowledge production. In the United Kingdom, budget cuts for HASS are seen as having started with Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher with her Education Reform Act of 1988. She described the teaching of HASS as “putting out poison” into the public mind; and she was determined to purge British universities of “irresponsible critical thinking” notably stressed by social scientists and historians (Higgins, 2011: 1).

In terms of their geographical spread in the world, HASS disciplines have become endangered as long as budget-cuts have transcended the British ideological discourse to affect university curricula across the entire world. Should the purpose of higher education aim to service public interests or should it simply service the national economy? If it aims at servicing the economy, and rightly so, as it seems to be currently, should it do this at the expense of other social functions?

This paper argues that the STEM agenda in universities outside Great Britain should not stick exclusively to the aspirations of the British people without questioning the rationale and relevance behind those ideals. Rather, the objectives of higher education in a nation should reflect what the people on the ground wish to achieve. This is what Higgins (2011: 2) refers to as “applied nationalism.” A country like Rwanda with a unique scenario in its process of nation-building has its own specific needs and aspirations. In 1994, Rwanda passed through genocide where more than one million people lost their lives. The country is currently grappling with complex social problems of national unity, family violence, conflicts and reconciliation (National Unity and Reconciliation Commission 2008). For these complex moral and challenges in human relations, STEM disciplines seem to offer no immediate solutions. The country has also overhauled its linguistic landscape. English replaced French as the medium of instruction in schools and as a new official language. In October 2016, Kiswahili was tabled in the country’s Cabinet as the fourth official language alongside English, French and Kinyarwanda. Such developments need to be brought into the centre of considerations while making an argument in favour for or against advocating the sustainability of HASS disciplines.

In favour of a holistic education

The STEM policy in higher education promotes the servicing of economic aspirations of the people by multiplying wealth through the promotion of science and technology. In the twenty-first century, some industrially developing countries have reaped many benefits from this economic argument. As for countries with high GDPs, science and technology have helped them to tilt global trade balances in their favour through innovation and cost-effective techniques of production (Harpham 2011).

Other studies support the teaching of STEM disciplines based upon vocational motivations (Engell and Dangerfield 2005). They argue that for disciplines to get support from university administrators, they must fulfil three conditions: (i) devotion to the study of money-related disciplines, (ii) capacity to attract research funds, (iii) demonstration that their graduates will become wealthy after completing their studies. However, these studies note that the Humanities score zero on every one of these three criteria. In other words, the declining trend of enrolment in the Humanities is caused by the economic inadaptability of the latter to the needs of the people.

Yet others point to the scientific basis for narrowly focussing on STEM disciplines, arguing that from the eighteenth century to date, enlightenment has been associated with two different modes of arriving at knowledge—the empirical/experiment model and the soft-skills model. While on the one hand the benefits from the experimental model produce more concrete and palpable results in transforming society, on the other hand, the knowledge produced by soft-skills is regarded as mere interpretation and is therefore assumed to be relatively “less productive” compared to experimental knowledge (Armitage et al, 2013).

This paper argues that concentrating exclusively on STEM disciplines falls short of providing a well-rounded education that is essential for success in the world of work. Students of all academic backgrounds need critical thinking skills, effective argumentation and negotiation skills in order to succeed.

Stakeholders’ theory of salience

This study draws on the stakeholders’ theory of salience by Mitchel et al. (1997) to hypothesize that policy interventions will lead to the survival of the Humanities in Rwanda. Studies have been conducted on the extent to which some disciplines are valorised in comparison with others (Slaughter and Leslie 1997, AHRC 2006, Benneworth and Jongbloed 2009). It was found that compared to the Natural and Pure Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences - in this paper referred to as HASS research - are given less attention and value in terms of their research base (Alfa en Gamma Stralen [AWT] 2007). HASS disciplines are not considered to be ‘salient’ because key stakeholders in universities are currently motivated by business interests within the context of an increasingly monetized global economy. Such discipline valorisation has been criticised for its exclusive consideration of commercial benefits at the expense of broader societal contributions (Rothblatt 1997, Barnett 1990, Geiger 1993, Slaughter and Leslie 1997, 2001, Bridgman and Wilmott 2007, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2007, Benneworth and

Jongbloed 2009). In other words, driven by the increasing rise of capitalism and economic benefits, universities are now beginning to move away from their traditional social/public role and mission of creating knowledge to solve common problems of civil society (Barnett 2000, May 2007, Bridgman and Wilmott 2007). Consequently, HASS research has tended to remain with consumers who are generally non-profit oriented with low purchasing power (AWT 2007). Stakeholder salience is the degree to which leadership in higher institutions of learning gives priority to the interests of some stakeholders and not others (Mitchell et al. 1997).

In this article, a stakeholder is defined as “any group of people or individuals who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (Freeman 1984: 46). In this context, stakeholders should therefore not be seen as purely “passive recipients of general benefits; they may demand a more voice active voice in the organisation’s running to improve the value of their share and their benefits” (Benneworth and Jongbloed 2009). Over the past few years, due to the changing nature of society, new university stakeholders have emerged (Benneworth and Jongbloed 2009) such that the theory of stakeholder management can be used to solve complex social organisational conflicts (Allen 1988, Cohen and March 1974). The traditional university stakeholders made of parents, students, teachers, senior/junior administration staff, international community of scientists, industry, politics, public sector, general public, donors, (Jongbloed et al, 2007) differ from one university to another and/or from one community or country to another.

Mitchell et al. (1997) identify three attributes that a stakeholder must fulfil in order to be considered salient - power, legitimacy, and urgency. A stakeholder’s degree of salience increases as these attributes in his or her possession increase. In case a stakeholder possesses only one attribute, she is described as ‘latent’ while one with two attributes is an ‘expectant’ stakeholder. A ‘definitive’ stakeholder is one who combines all the three attributes mentioned above (Mitchell et al. 1997). Given the dominant status of government as the major funder of higher institutions of learning (HILs) in Africa, the former tends to assume a ‘definitive’ stakeholder status while other stakeholders rotate between ‘latent’ and ‘expectant’ scales.

While existing studies in donor countries show us that ‘latent’ stakeholders in the Humanities were empowered to become more vibrant after introducing policy interventions in the UK, Netherlands and Canada (Benneworth and Jongbloed 2009), it is questionable whether this can

work in aid-recipient countries like Rwanda, given the suspicion that those in poor economies may have regarding the appropriate use of their funds. This paper, therefore, seeks to make a contribution to this gap.

Study design

The empirical data collected for this study is underpinned by *relativist-subjective/interpretivist-constructivist* viewpoints (Mason 2002, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln 2005, Creswell 2007). Qualitative approaches were used to generate data because the study dealt with perceptions, opinions and meanings attached to social phenomena within a social setting (Blaxter et al, 1996). A thematic approach was deemed appropriate to analyse qualitative data (Jwan and Ong'ondo 2011).

Pilot survey

A pilot survey was conducted in January 2015. It was based on two basic questions: "Are all HASS subjects endangered at the same level? State the subjects you feel are endangered and those which are not and why." The results of the pilot survey revealed that Social Sciences (Political Science, Economics, Management Studies, Sociology and Law) were not considered to be 'endangered' in Rwanda's universities. On the other hand, the Humanities, namely Languages, Literature, Linguistics, History, and Philosophy were identified as endangered disciplines. The reasons given were that on completion of their studies, most graduates of these subjects find it difficult to get jobs; and that the Rwanda government does not give adequate scholarships to university students who wish to study them. It was also pointed out that many students have a negative attitude towards studying the Humanities because the latter are generally despised by society. Hence, the original proposed topic of combining 'the Humanities with Social Sciences' in the same cluster was dropped. Only Humanities were retained as endangered disciplines.

Sample frames and sample selection

The study adopted a multi-stage cluster sampling method (Bryman 2012) because it involved a big population in several countries. The sample frame consisted of primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The primary sampling unit was based on universities from four EAC member countries, i.e. Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. The civil war in Burundi (2015/2016) did not allow us to collect data from that country. The secondary sampling unit consisted of two universities from each of the four EAC countries which made a total of eight universities. The selection was based on a criterion of public/private universities for each country and hence, the following universities were selected:

- RWANDA: University of Rwanda (UR), Institut d’Agriculture, de Technologie et d’Education de Kibungo (INATEK)
- UGANDA: Makerere University (MUK), Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU)
- TANZANIA: University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Open University of Tanzania (OUT)
- KENYA: University of Nairobi (UoN), The East African University (TEAU).

The tertiary sampling unit included a total of 150 respondents as summarised in the table below:

Category of respondents	Countries	No. of respondents	Instruments administered
Deans/Assistant Deans	Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania	5	Semi-structured interviews
University administrators	Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania	7	Semi-structured interviews
Lecturers	Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania	30	Focus group discussion
Students	Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania	50	Focus group discussion
Parents	Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania	10	Focus group discussion
Senators/MPs	Rwanda	10	Semi-structured interviews
Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)	Rwanda	10	Semi-structured interviews
Ministry of Labour (MIFOTRA)	Rwanda	5	Semi-structured interviews
Rwanda Development Board (RDB)	Rwanda	5	Semi-structured interviews

Category of respondents	Countries	No. of respondents	Instruments administered
Academy of Languages and Culture (ALC)	Rwanda	5	Semi-structured interviews
Workforce Development Authority (WDA)	Rwanda	3	Semi-structured interviews
Public Sector Foundation (PSF)	Rwanda	5	Semi-structured interviews
Ministry of Sports ad Culture (MINISPOC)	Rwanda	5	Semi-structured interviews
Total		150	

Techniques for data collection

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to generate data from a diversity of respondents because they encouraged free talk and discussion. The respondents were selected on the basis of being stakeholders in education. In this context, the guiding principle was Freeman’s (1984: 46) definition of a stakeholder that includes “any group of people or individuals who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives.” In Rwanda, the respondents included: students, parents, deans, principals, educationists, department heads as ministry civil servants. As for other EAC countries, students, lecturers and department heads, deans as well as parents were targeted. Ministry officials outside Rwanda proposed time schedules that were incompatible with the researchers’ availability, hence they were left out.

Data analysis

“Data analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what story you will tell others” (Bogdan and Biklen 1998: 157). Using structured interviews and focus group discussions, the researchers collected data from eight universities from four EAC countries, transcribed the data, edited them and made a sentence by sentence analysis to determine relationships in accordance with the objectives and research

questions. All categories and themes determined were grouped and analysed in order to make coherent meaning out of them.

Findings

In conformity with the objectives/research questions of this study, five major themes emerged during the analysis of the data collected: endangered subjects, causes of endangerment, using government policy to promote Humanities, perceptions towards Humanities as well as transforming Humanities for sustainability. A wide range of salient and non-salient respondents were involved in this study on account of being stakeholders according to Freeman's (1984: 46) definition of a stakeholder already stated above.

Theme one: endangered academic subjects

The respondents were asked to identify endangered subjects first and then to give the causes of endangerment. They are abbreviated as [RR] for respondents from Rwanda, [RU] for those from Uganda, [RT] from Tanzania and [RK] from Kenya. A sporadic sampling of their narratives are presented here for lack of space:

RR1: "Psychology and psycholinguistics were phased out in INATEK." [HoD]

RR2: "In UR history used to be endangered but when government discovered its contribution to national unity and reconciliation, it issued a new policy to protect it; it is now no longer endangered because it has many students. But philosophy is no longer taught." [LECTURER]

These narratives from two Rwandan universities reveal that the endangerment scenario is not homogenous across the country. Each university in Rwanda has its own endangered subjects. The narratives further show that if nothing is done to protect some Humanities in Rwanda's universities, the country will one day experience a shortage of philosophers, psychologists, critical thinkers, and negotiators. A similar shortage was noticed for history and the country re-advocated for its retention and enhancement. In many Rwandan universities, Humanities are at the mercy of key stakeholders who may decide to phase them out or not, depending on whether they meet the conditions that fit in the salient stakeholders' needs template. In private universities, the main criterion of retaining a discipline is the number of students who wish to pay for studying it. In government universities, however, the current trend is to push for a cost-sharing/privatisation policy whereby students who have not won a government sponsorship can also financially support themselves, hence ending up with a handful of government sponsored students in

Humanities. In the second narrative, national interests in some disciplines are threatened. For instance, studying history in Rwanda helps in inculcating the spirit of nationalism and national reconciliation, the government of Rwanda has hastened to protect this subject. In 2015, another similar development was observed when Rwanda's Head of State announced in the National Dialogue (*umushikirano*) that Rwanda's mother tongue should be taught from nursery to university.

In Kenya, Philosophy was endangered but later was protected from being phased out as a result of lobbying administrators within the university, by senior staff within the discipline.

In Uganda, however, each of the universities has its own endangerment tale to tell. In MUK for example, local and foreign languages - apart from English - are endangered as reported by these respondents:

RU 4: "German and French are seriously threatened with total extinction because there are currently only two students of German who are taught by four lecturers."

RU 5: "Ugandan local languages such as Luganda, Runyakitara and Kiswahili are also badly affected." In another Ugandan university (IUIU), one foreign language - Arabic - seemed to be a thriving and popular subject.

The collected narratives showed that each of Uganda's universities teaches a different set of languages. For private institutions, key stakeholders dictate terms about what should be taught or not. The teaching of languages is normally based on the availability of teachers or on the interests of the founding body of the university (salient stakeholders). What is contradictory, however, is that contrary to what is stated in Uganda Government White Paper for Education (1992), i.e. that government should promote the teaching of mother tongue at all levels, it seems that no such promotion is done at higher levels of Uganda's education as per the finding above on local languages.

A respondent from Uganda (MUK) reported that History was seriously endangered:

RU7: "This came from the President of Uganda himself who once made a statement that history is just about narrating stories. Since then, a university professor teaching Humanities is paid one million Uganda shillings less than a science professor!" [LECTURER].

Yet, paradoxically, another respondent from MUK revealed that the translation department, also within the Humanities, generates more revenue than any other income generating project.

In Tanzania, the narrative from UDSM also revealed a similar endangerment narrative for History and for Philosophy but not for Foreign Languages:

RT 9: “[...] The possible cause is that today most people focus on studies that can quickly open them to job markets or can bring income quickly.” [LECTURER]

On the other hand, in Kenya many Humanities-related disciplines are not endangered at UoN. This is associated with the country’s geographical location as a hub for international trade and diplomacy within the region.

RK10: “In Kenya there is a high demand of Humanities graduates compared to the supply. They are employed in teaching, organisations, refugee schools, UN missions.” [STUDENT]

In sum, throughout the EAC, endangerment of Humanities-related disciplines varies regionally. In Rwanda and Uganda, the scenario seems to be worse than in Kenya and Tanzania where there is a high demand for Humanities graduates in international organisations and in the para-statal sector, and in the hospitality industry. Overall, the risk of phasing out History, Philosophy, Local Languages and some Foreign Languages varied considerably in the universities and countries under study.

Theme two: causes of endangerment

The respondents were asked to identify the causes of endangerment. In Rwanda, this question was also directed to civil servants in MINEDUC and MINICOFIN. The latter was chosen because it has to vet all funds given to government ministries. The narratives from the Rwandan senior civil servants demonstrated a high degree of awareness of how government business is done, fundraising, national budget construction, and fiscal management. In these social environments, government is tightly constrained to spend money strictly as allocated, and programme development is limited to set templates. Moving funds outside pre-determined budget lines in these countries is tantamount to a breach of contract.

In Uganda, similar to the above finding, endangerment was also blamed on foreign hegemony.

RU 14: “Take the example of Singapore which has one of the highest GDPs in the world. They have a policy where mother tongue is integrated in the school curriculum.” [LECTURER]

RU15: “There is no science in Africa! What we call science in Africa is mere imitation of what others have done. But real science should be based on the culture of the country!” [LECTURER]

These remarks reveal that faculty perceive the impact of brainwashing as a foreign factor responsible for undermining African local knowledge production and transmission in indigenous or local languages. It was noted that elsewhere, economic success correlates with learning from an early age in one’s mother tongue.

Theme three: using government policy to protect Humanities

Respondents were asked what should be done in order to protect Humanities subjects from endangerment and to enable them to survive alongside STEM disciplines. The results obtained for this question from respondents in different countries agreed on policy issues as a way forward though they had different approaches. In Rwanda, the narratives were critical of the existing government STEM policy.

RR 16: “Language competency is needed [...] in teaching sciences [...] and scientists cannot otherwise communicate [internationally], write minutes or scientific reports.” [RDB]

A selective approach adopted by the government of Rwanda in favour of History, for instance, shows that government officials could do more to promote the Humanities if they so wished. The blame for endangering the Humanities in EAC still rests in part with the people’s respective representatives in government. In order to save the Humanities from extinction, there should be a change of attitude among national policy makers toward these endangered subjects. In Tanzania, the government’s support was also regarded as crucial by respondents, who analysed the problem from a more pragmatic point of view. It was recommended that a balance between the Humanities and income generating disciplines should be struck.

The respondents in this study indicated their view that the Humanities are here to stay in universities, with or without government subsidies. It was advised many times that the universities should be income generating and look for funds from private fundraising activities, or from university alumni, philanthropic donors, and other well-wishers.

A university is an autonomous institution which has many opportunities of establishing income generating projects where money can be generated and diverted to support some useful programmes. Otherwise, as in Kenya, endangerment of the Humanities is relatively low; Kenyan universities generate income which is used to support other university programmes. The Kenyan respondent supported the above argument:

Similarly, in Uganda where some Humanities departments have fared relatively well economically, the funds have been used to support poorer departments.

RU 22: “Government policy focuses on promoting Sciences. However, the money generated by many private students who are generally Humanities-related, goes to a general pool to support Sciences.” [LECTURER]

RU 23: “At one time, in terms of income generation, the Translation department of Makerere University generated almost 2 billion Uganda Shillings per year!” [LECTURER]

To summarize this point, the above respondents seemed to suggest that higher university authorities should work towards achieving close economic collaboration between departments, schools and colleges.

Theme four: Perceptions towards studying the Humanities

The respondents were asked how they perceived the Humanities and how they interpreted the future of these disciplines. The respondents’ answers from various countries/universities elicited some similarities and differences. In Rwanda for instance, there were respondents whose perceptions toward the Humanities were negative:

RR24: “I cannot send my child to study history. If he insists I will force him to study sciences.” [PARENT]

RR25: “Most parents do not understand the relevance of the Humanities, they force their children to learn sciences.” [STUDENT]

RR26: “As parents, we should not force our children to do what they do not want. Instead, they should be supported to do what they want.” [PARENT]

RR27: “Public opinion in this country is that if you study Humanities you have no future.” [HoD].

RR28: “Humanities are despised as substandard subjects: *Amaburakindi*.” [MIFOTRA]

These narratives eloquently depict the current perceptions towards the Humanities in Rwanda. Some students who wish to study the Humanities

seem to be forced by their parents not to do so. For some parents, they seem to be doing this out of ignorance. They argue that if one does Humanities at university, one is bound to be a failure in life. The implication of these narratives is that, nationwide, people are not aware of the value and importance of the Humanities, especially the unschooled parents and lower-level school staff. The narratives also show that perceptions are a cause of endangerment if they are negative although they can also be a solution to endangerment, if they are favourable. Unlike the above respondents, one respondent in Tanzania was aware of the importance of all subjects. He had this to say:

RT29: “No subject is an island on its own. They are all relevant in one way or another to society.” [DEAN]

The above statement was corroborated by another Kenyan respondent who felt that the Humanities are useful and valuable for his country. He said:

RK30: “In Kenya, there is a high demand for Humanities graduates compared to the supply.” [STUDENT]

In Uganda where the negative mind-set of the general public resembles that of Rwanda, all local culture-related disciplines are under-valued; these include learning mother tongue. Some Ugandans think that culture-driven development is not the best for the country. However, other respondents from Uganda shared divergent views on the matter, whereby two opposed views emerged; they show that studying Sciences without grounding it in local culture might be counterproductive; while another one is in favour of learning Sciences for their own sake, as artefacts of high culture abroad, a discursive gateway to the global market and attractive careers abroad and in the international job market at home. Thus emphasis on learning in one’s own language would be counterproductive.

Overall these narratives suggest that in order for Africa to develop, there should be ways of integrating local input in the science curriculum.

Theme five: transforming the Humanities for sustainability

The respondents were finally asked to propose suggestions about how to transform the Humanities in order to make them more attractive to students and employers. Practical solutions were proposed from Tanzania, involving innovative curriculum design to include training in practical skills, restructuring and repackaging so that STEM and HASS students can receive an all-round education, especially in their first year. The Rwandan respondents complemented these suggestions, urging transformational strategies. These included linking programmes with the employment sector, to bring graduates closely in line with potential employers in the

country, through kjjj]work/study credits, internships, job fairs [...] to the community, in order to showcase the relevance of the Humanities to society.” [MIFOTRA]

But it is possible to over-encourage humanities curricula as this may over-flood the job market for job-seeking graduates.

RR 39: “[...] Policy makers should be cautious [...]There is a policy for sciences. Government provided incentives for science graduates but later many scientists were produced and now they are too many to be absorbed.” [RDB]

RR 40: “Need for national dialogue on the fate of the Humanities to raise awareness to all the stakeholders.” [LECTURER]

RR 41: “Policy makers give little attention to the Humanities because researchers don’t provide evidence to bring about change.” [MINEDUC]

RR 42: “There is need for research [and] think tanks for the Humanities to showcase the benefits and achievement of the Humanities.” [REB/ NCDC]

RR 43: “CASS should conduct research to know what employers are saying about its graduates.” [HEC]

The narratives revealed what should be done by different stakeholders to solve the problem of the Humanities. First, the respondents agree on restructuring the Humanities curricula in order to provide an all-round education for all university students (including natural and applied science students). Thereafter, universities are called upon to create partnerships with employers to enhance academic program visibility through assertive marketing strategies. Further, researchers are called upon to identify missing gaps in the present curricula. As for curriculum designers, they should produce content that links what is learnt at school with what is taught and what is needed by society.

Proposals for sustainable advanced studies in the Humanities

The findings of this study show that Social Sciences in EAC universities (Economics, Business and Management studies, Law, Sociology and Political Science) are not endangered subjects. However, the Humanities in Rwanda and Uganda’s universities (English, French, Local languages, Literature, Linguistics, History and Philosophy) are seriously endangered in terms of poor student enrolment and negative perceptions by society. They are threatened with possible disappearance from the teaching curriculum. In Tanzania and Kenya, the endangerment is mitigated by the support from private universities where better student enrolment is felt. In

the Islamic University of Uganda, Arabic is successful because it is supported by policy both at donor and institutional levels. This shows that there is need for government intervention to enable the Humanities to survive.

These findings corroborate with the current situation in many universities worldwide where the purpose of higher education has diverted from the traditional threefold mission - teaching, research and community service. In the globalised economy, education is no longer serving the above public interests. On the contrary, it has increasingly become an engine of economic development (Higgins 2011). As voiced by many respondents, the prioritisation of STEM disciplines in EAC universities has left a legacy of budget-cuts for the Humanities and consequently a closure of many of these disciplines.

This paper has presented the options for EAC universities: either to continue prioritising the teaching of STEM disciplines at the expense of the Humanities, or to give the latter some substantive support to enable them to survive. In choosing which path to take, this study raises three fundamental questions that university stakeholders in EAC should not lose sight of: (1) Can the STEM policy alone offer durable solutions to the EAC's complex set of socioeconomic and political problems? (2) If EAC universities choose to maintain the status quo, will they be serving central state interests (applied nationalism) or will they be serving the interests of a global economy? (3) If EAC universities choose to protect the Humanities from disappearance, who will benefit, or lose, and how?

In answering these questions this study has shown that EAC countries are still grappling with major social problems, such as lack of unity and reconciliation, war and social conflict, terrorism and migration. Tackling any of these problems requires conflict resolution techniques, social engineering strategies, and reconciliation mechanisms, skill sets that Mathematics and Technology cannot provide singlehandedly (Higgins, 2011). The data has also demonstrated that graduates in Humanities can contribute to national GDP, especially in the private sector (music, dance and theatre industries, writing books, event management, hospitality, heritage studies, human resource management, diplomacy, community organisations, and so on).

The respondents said that most job advertisements today require people endowed with *communication* and *critical thinking skills* as a precondition. A respondent from Uganda said that real science is that which is based on

culture which refers to people's way of life, usually expressed best through the medium of language (Humanities). It has also been argued that *Africa will never have an edge over economically developed countries in terms of science and technology* and hence needs to *concentrate on culture-driven development* where it enjoys a comparative advantage. This finding is corroborated by the successful use of home grown solutions in achieving Rwanda's development targets such as *gacaca, imihigo, itorero*, and so on (Government of Rwanda 2013). In other words, if EAC governments push for an exclusive science promotion policy, they may end up failing to produce scientists who match global Northern standards and norms. African nations will continue to depend on foreign expertise to solve Africans' socially and politically related problems.

This study has found that key stakeholders in EAC universities (university managers, government) are supportive of the STEM policy which is already a *fait accompli* in their respective state administrations. The data has also shown that these stakeholders, driven by economic interests, are pushing the burden for shouldering the costs of *knowledge creation* to private universities, claiming that governments do not have adequate budget lines for that purpose. But knowledge creation is a public good. So this is a misappropriation of responsibilities of the state. This finding is corroborated by previous studies (Rothblatt 1997, Barnett 1990, Geiger 1993, Slaughter and Leslie 1997, 2001; Bridgman and Wilmott 2007, OECD 2007; Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2009). The data from two key stakeholders in Rwanda and Tanzania has revealed that foreign donors disburse funds to support Science and Technology while the recipients of this aid have no say in diverting such foreign loans or grants. One of the interviewed stakeholders stressed that the Ministries of Finance and Labour have no choice but to implement the STEM policy essentially defined by foreign interests of stakeholders and investors from abroad.

While it may be justifiable for donors to attach conditions to their funds, it is also questionable whether it is fair for recipient governments and universities to shun from their traditional roles and responsibilities of defending their local interests (Barnett 2000, May 2007, Bridgman and Wilmott 2007, Higgins 2011). The data collected from Rwanda shows that some Humanities subjects, like History, might be selectively supported for a net benefit when the research or training provided suits the government's needs and interests. Therefore, instead of simply relying on donor funding to promote them, EAC governments should do more to meet the expectations of fewer non-salient stakeholders (students, parents) because the latter are tax-payers.

The data also shows that even STEM graduates in their workplaces who are devoid of communication/critical thinking skills are not part of the solution in addressing social challenges of the globalised world. Yet another respondent said that “*languages are needed in teaching sciences [...] and some people including graduate scientists cannot write minutes or [scientific] reports*”. This point was supported by a set of respondents who were concerned with a marked decline in the quality of graduate performance from all backgrounds. In short, therefore, the primary data collected shows the usefulness of the Humanities. The data clearly shows that EAC policy makers are aware the importance of Humanities but seem to be apathetic about promoting them for similar reasons advanced by the British Prime Minister in the literature.

This study has further revealed that some parents force their children to study STEM disciplines against the child’s will. This has led youth to abandon fields of their interest, reinforcing frustration, neglect or abandonment of studies, to the extent of using drugs, loss of self-confidence, self-respect and career initiative.

One other important issue proposed to save the endangered subjects is the need for a policy to protect these academic arenas. However, there are some influential stakeholders who are opposed to this priority. It is argued that even STEM subjects that are supported by government policy, they seem to be “*more endangered than the Humanities*” because the increasing numbers of these graduates have exceeded demand due to the limited availability of science-related jobs in the country.

Be that as it may, even though government protection of the Humanities features both pros and cons as reflected in the data, most of the respondents supported the view of introducing a policy on the Humanities. This implies that the government policy issue should not be dismissed. While it is undeniable that no foreign donor is willing to disburse funds to support the teaching of Humanities, it is also important to stress that donor countries have enacted policies in their home countries to support the same embattled subjects - the Humanities. Countries like the Netherlands, UK and Canada have created, through policy, national research councils and institutes to promote research and innovation in the Humanities. These include *Maatschappelijke Top Instituten* in the Netherlands, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the UK and the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2009). In South Africa, the National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) has also been created. However, no such

thing has been proposed in EAC countries. The findings of this study confirm the dual importance and complementarity of HASS and STEM by showing that even the best known world philosophers (Newton, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes) made significant contributions not only to STEM disciplines alone but also to the Humanities.

In this context, Rwanda's Cabinet in 2016 approved a draft organic law establishing Kiswahili as one of its other official languages. If this law is pushed to its logical conclusion, its implementation should imply a complex multilingual situation in Rwanda whereby the teaching and learning of four official languages in this country ought to be backed by a strong national language policy. Thus, EAC countries should consider the precedent set by these countries to establish their own Arts and Humanities research councils. Through government support and through mobilising the private sector from university alumni, other well-wishers, citizens in the diaspora, and corporate social responsibility appeals, National Research Councils of Arts and Humanities can be supported. This would help to transform the Humanities without creating donor suspicion of fund diversion.

Conclusion

This study aimed at finding strategies for transforming the Humanities in EAC universities from endangerment to sustainability. In achieving this broad objective, research questions were formulated and a methodology designed. The study confirmed that the Humanities in EAC universities are endangered and need to be protected from disappearance. The findings have shown that there are a number of ways that this can be done. Universities should embark on a restructuring programme to provide an all-round education for both Science and Humanities graduates. Curricula should be contoured to conform with the multi-dimensional needs of society in nations sorely in need of experts in community development and participatory democracy, social engineering, cultural heritage conservation, legal advocacy, moral theory, cross cultural communication, multi-lingual interpretation and translation skills, historical expertise. Universities should create partnerships with employers and market their academic programs for greater visibility. They should explain the importance of the Humanities to parents, students, teachers and heads of institutions in order to change the public mindset towards these disciplines. As for researchers, they are called upon to investigate the current curricula and inform curriculum designers on identified gaps. Lastly, as for policy makers in EAC, they should treat as a priority the survival of the

Humanities as a means of ensuring national development is both enlightened, and sustainable, serving the needs of an informed and self aware citizenry.

Recommendations

In view of the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. EAC governments should mobilise the private sector and university alumni, well-wishers as well as citizens living in the diaspora to fundraise for the creation of Arts and Humanities research councils in the respective countries.
2. In order to make the Humanities sustainable, universities should bring existing schools and colleges to work together in order to redesign new academic programmes where critical thinking skills, philosophy, analytical skills, effective argumentation and negotiation skills are made compulsory to all university students.
3. Through advocacy and lobbying of key university stakeholders, subject specialization should start in the second year to give room to all university students to study an all-round curriculum in the first year.
4. Universities should conduct sensitization programmes to parents and students in order to bring about a change of mind-set towards studying the Humanities.

References

- Alfa en Gamma Stralen [AWT]. (2007). *Alfa en Gamma stralen—Valorisatiebeleid voor de Alfaen Gammawetenschappen*. Den Haag: Adviesraad voor het Wetenschaps-en Innovatiebeleid.
- Allen, M. 1988. *The goals of universities*. Milton Keynes: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Armitage, D. and Bhabha, H. 2013. *Mapping the future of humanities at Harvard University*. [www.http://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/Mapping%20the%20Future%20of%20the%20Humanities.pdf](http://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/Mapping%20the%20Future%20of%20the%20Humanities.pdf). Accessed June 16, 2016.
- Arts and Humanities Research Councils [AHRC]. 2006. *AHRC's knowledge transfer plan*. Swindon: AHRC. http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/images/4_97014.pdf. Accessed May 14, 2016.

- Barnett, R. (Ed.) 1990. *The idea of higher education*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Barnett, R. 2000. Realising a compact for higher education. In K. Moti Gokulsing and C. DaCosta (Eds.). *A compact for higher education*. Ashgate: Aldershot, pp. 33-45.
- Bauman, Z. 1997. Universities: Old, New, and Different. In: A. Smith and F. Webster (Eds.) *The Postmodern University? contested visions of higher education in society*. London: SRHE and Open University Press. pp. 17-26.
- Benneworth, P., & Jongbloed, B.W. 2009. Who matters to universities? A stakeholder perspective on humanities, arts and social sciences valorization. *Higher Education* 59 (1) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40602420> Accessed April 11, 2016.
- Beyer, B. K. 1995. *Critical thinking*. <http://www.criticalthinking.org/University/inivlibrary/library.ncl> Accessed January 24, 2016.
- Blaxter, L. Hughes, C. and Tight, M. 1996. *How to research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Blommaert, J. 2001. The Asmara declaration as a sociolinguistic problem: Reflections on scholarship and linguistic rights. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5(1): 131-155.
- Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. 1998. *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bridgman, T. and Wilmott, H. 2007. Academics in the 'knowledge economy': From expert to intellectual? In A. Harding, A. Scott, S. Laske, and C. Burtscher (Eds.) *Bright satanic mills: universities, regional development and the knowledge economy*. Ashgate: Aldershot, pp. 20-50.
- Bryman, A. 2012. *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, M. and March, J. 1974. *Leadership and ambiguity: The American college president*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Creswell, W.J. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.) California: Sage Publications.

- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. 2005. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) London: Sage Publications.
- Duchêne, A. and Monica, H. 2007. *Discourses of endangerment*. London: Continuum Press.
- Engell J. and Dangerfield, A. 2005. *Saving higher education in the age of money*.
<http://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/Mapping%20the%20Future%20of%20the%20Humanities.pdf>. Accessed August 15, 2016.
- Freeland, J. and Patrick, D. (Eds.) 2000. *Language rights and language survival*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Freeman, R. E. 1984. *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Geiger, R. L. 1993. *Research and relevant knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Government of Rwanda [GoR]. 2013. *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2013-2018: Shaping our development*. Kigali: GoR.
- Harpham, G.G. 2011. *The humanities and the dream of America*.
<http://harvardmagazine.com/sites/default/files/Mapping%20the%20Future%20of%20the%20Humanities.pdf>. Accessed January 12, 2016.
- Higgins, J. 2011. Dilemma of the humanities. <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-06-24-dilemma-of-the-humanities>. Accessed February 24, 2016.
- Hill, J. 2002. 'Expert rhetorics' in advocacy for endangered languages: Who is listening and what do they hear? *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12: 119-153.
- Jongbloed, B. Enders, J. and Salerno, C. 2007. Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a research agenda. *Higher Education* 56(3): 303–324.
- Jwan J.O. and Ong'ondo, C.O. 2011. *Qualitative research: An introduction to principles and techniques*. Eldoret: Moi University Press.
- Mason, J. 2002. The use and misuse of focus groups.
<http://www.useit.com/papers/focusgroups.html>. Accessed August 4, 2016.

- May, T. 2007. Regulation, engagement and academic production. In A. Harding, A. Scott, S. Laske, and C. Burtscher (Eds.) *Bright satanic mills: Universities, regional development and the knowledge economy*. Ashgate: Aldershot, pp. 119-132.
- Mitchell, R.K. Agle, B.R. and Wood, D.J. 1997. Towards a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review* 22(4): 853-886.
- National Unity and Reconciliation Commission [NURC]. 2008. *The causes of violence after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda*. Kigali: NURC.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. 2007. *Higher education and regions: Globally competitive, regionally engaged*. Paris: OECD/Institutional Management of Higher Education.
- Scriven, M. and Paul, R. 1996. *Defining critical thinking: A draft statement for the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking*. <http://www.criticalthinking.org/University/inivlibrary/library.nclk> Accessed August 2, 2016.
- Silverstein, M. 1998. Contemporary transformations of local linguistic communities. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 401-426.
- Slaughter, S., & Leslie, L. (1997). *Academic capitalism: Politics, policies and the entrepreneurial university*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.
- Uganda Government [UG]. 1992. *Government white paper on implementation of the recommendation of the report of the Education Policy Review Commission*. Kampala: UG.