

Tertiary education reforms in Botswana



Introduction

Like many other countries around the world, Botswana began a major programme of reform of its tertiary (post-secondary) education system at the beginning of the 1990s. The reforms focus on increasing access to, and equity in, tertiary education; improving the quality of provision; ensuring the relevance of programmes to the needs of the learners and society; and promoting a focus on research and development. These types of reforms are found in both developed and developing countries around the world. For instance major tertiary and higher education reforms have been initiated in countries such as Japan, Canada, Sweden, New Zealand and the UK. In these countries, reforms of tertiary and higher education have focused on quality improvements, efficient financing, the relevance of programmes to the needs of society, and improvements in management and governance. Related reforms have taken, or are taking, place in developing countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, India, China, Malaysia, Mauritius, Kenya and Namibia.

The themes of the reforms point to a common understanding across the world that tertiary – or even better, higher – education is a critical factor in the transformation to a knowledge economy and society. This understanding has been more clearly and strongly articulated in recent work (since the early 1990s) on strategies for tertiary/higher education by some intergovernmental organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank and the Commonwealth. Botswana's tertiary education reforms, therefore, have to be understood both within the specific context of the country's historical human resource needs and these global reformist trends.

Botswana's tertiary education reforms in context

Having inherited a largely illiterate population at independence in 1966, post-independent Botswana has had to invest heavily in education and training in its first three decades. Since independence, education and training in Botswana has received over 25 per cent of the annual national budget. This has been hailed as one of the highest educational budgets by international comparison.

This compares favourably on an international scale, as it is one of the highest education budgets relative to overall budget. However most of the investment was targeted at providing primary education for the majority of the children; and basic (first three

years of) secondary education, known as junior secondary. Subsequently, there has been a significant growth at the senior secondary school level, which covers two years following on from junior secondary. The achievements at these levels, including adult literacy, have been quite remarkable for Botswana. In 2006, for instance, Botswana's primary and secondary gross enrolment ratios (GER) were 113.2 per cent (of 6–12-year-olds) and 79.6 per cent respectively. The literacy rate had also jumped from below 20 per cent at independence to 81 per cent in 2003. The transition rate from primary to junior secondary was estimated at 97 per cent in 2008; and from junior to senior secondary significant improvements were recorded, with rates of around 30 per cent in the late 1990s rising to 67 per cent in 2008.

Although these were impressive developments in the country's general education and basic literacy – which came about as a result of building more schools and related educational infrastructure, having an increased role for private education providers and concerted training in teacher education – they were not matched by corresponding progress at tertiary level. At independence, Botswana had no university or tertiary institution of its own. Its only university, collectively owned by the three countries of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (BLS countries), was the small University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) located in Roma, Lesotho. The UBLS at the time enrolled less than 5,000 students, a quota shared between the three member countries. The decision taken by the Lesotho government in 1975 to nationalise the Roma Campus, which resulted in the expulsion of students from the other two countries, did not help Botswana's effort to increase its citizens' access to tertiary education. Following the abrupt and unilateral decision by the Leabua government in Lesotho; Botswana and Swaziland agreed to continue their joint venture in higher education by establishing the new University of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS) from the leftovers of UBLS. This project lasted until 1982 when the two countries amicably decided to develop their tertiary education independently.

In the two decades following Lesotho's breakaway, Botswana developed four distinct strategies to provide itself with much-needed but scarce human resources.

The first strategy was to tailor training to key services by establishing a number of semi-tertiary institutions intended to train primary and secondary school teachers; agricultural demonstrators; nurses and paramedics; artisans and technicians; police, army and prison officers; and wildlife game wardens. Each ministry, and in some cases department, established its own diploma-awarding institution.

The second strategy was to ensure that the focus of the university was on programmes to produce teachers and administrators; rather than engineers and medical doctors who would take longer to train and require much larger investment. This resulted in the University of Botswana, established as a national university in 1982, having the bulk of its programmes directed towards the humanities, education and social sciences rather than science, engineering and technology. Now it is this imbalance, and the pressure to redirect its programmes towards the new requirements of science, engineering and technology, as well as accounting and business disciplines, that provides the university with a mammoth reform task.

The third strategy was to sponsor significant numbers of citizens, comparatively, to study outside the country. Many young Botswana (Botswana citizens) have over the years studied in foreign countries, for example in the UK, USA, Canada, Germany, Russia and more recently in Australia, South Africa, India and Malaysia. Although the numbers of externally trained citizens have been significant and were largely tailored to areas of study that were generally not available within Botswana, this strategy was more expensive than training locally and proved unsustainable.

The fourth and final strategy, which remains quite expensive and unreliable for the long term, has been Botswana's significant dependence on imported foreign skilled workers. Botswana has been and continues to be dependent on foreign skilled personnel – locally dubbed 'expatriates' – in the technical areas of, among others, medicine, engineering and technology, accounting and business, finance, science and vocational-technical education. These workers, employed in both the public and private sectors, have served the country well in the context of a rapidly growing diamond-driven economy over the past four decades since the late 1960s.

Tertiary education reforms

Since independence, Botswana has undertaken two major educational reforms. Both were carried out by Presidential Commissions on Education and had far-reaching impacts on the country's whole education and training sector.

The first major reform was in 1977 and produced a report entitled *Education for Kagisanyo* or 'Education for Social Harmony', so called because its main focus was on ensuring basic education for the majority of the then semi-literate population.

The second Presidential Commission on Education was appointed in 1993 and again produced a far-reaching agenda for whole

system reforms. This commission submitted its report, which the government then adopted as the Revised National Policy on Education (known locally by as RNPE) in 1994. The RNPE laid the foundations for current reforms in tertiary education and in several other areas of the education and training sector. For instance the government accepted the commission's recommendations to establish, among others, the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) to oversee the development and long-term planning of the tertiary education subsector; the Botswana Training Authority (BOTA) to oversee development of vocational training; the Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) to address out-of-school youth educational needs; and the Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) to supervise school-level examinations. All these new parastatals came into being through Parliamentary legislation in the late 1990s and each started operating effectively after 2000.

Tertiary Education Council

Since it was established in 1999 and began operating in late 2003, the TEC has ensured progress in key areas.

For the first time in Botswana, the government has a clear and distinct policy on tertiary education with defined goals and expected outcomes. That policy, which was passed by Parliament on 11 April 2008, seeks to increase access to tertiary education, improve *quality*, ensure the *relevance* of the programmes of study and that, through *research and innovation*, tertiary education in Botswana becomes a tool for economic diversification and general development.

For the first time in Botswana, all public and private tertiary education and training institutions are required to register and meet clearly laid out criteria and regulations for operating their businesses. By the end of December 2008, the TEC had used these criteria and regulations to register up to 31 such tertiary institutions. In the past two years, the number of learners in the tertiary education sector studying in Botswana has increased from around 22,000 in 2006 to around 47,000 in 2009 (from 11 per cent to 17 per cent – see Table 1 and Figure 1).

The above figures suggest a mammoth growth in a short time, definitely with lots of challenges including those of quality.

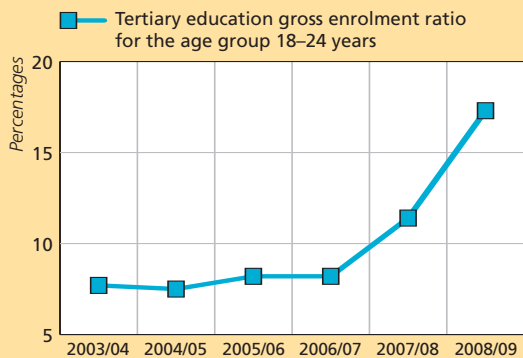
The challenge facing Botswana, like other countries of the South African Development Community (SADC) and globally, is how to reconcile *massification* (increased enrolments) of tertiary education with good quality education which is globally competitive and nationally relevant. The TEC has, by registering institutions, started to tackle this global problem systematically, in a steady and focused

Table 1 Participation in tertiary education, 2003/04–2008/09

Year	Population of age group 18–24 years	Tertiary education's total enrolment	Tertiary education gross enrolment ratio for the age group 18–24 years
2003/04	258,646	20,011	7.7
2004/05	262,602	19,655	7.5
2005/06	266,650	21,738	8.2
2006/07	270,361	22,257	8.2
2007/08	274,084	31,129	11.4
2008/09	277,439	47,889	17.3

Figure 1 Tertiary enrolment

Tertiary education gross enrolment ratio (TEGER) for those aged 18–24 years



way. Registration, for instance, has eliminated the three-month and six-month diplomas that used to be offered by local private institutions. In just two years, Botswana has seen a drastic shift of students/learners moving from public to private institutions. While a sizeable number of the students were those lower-level performers who could not be admitted to elite public institutions – such as the University of Botswana, Botswana College of Agriculture and Botswana Accountancy College, and other colleges of education and nursing schools – in most cases the learners, who are almost all government sponsored, made a deliberate choice to go to private institutions. The consequences of such choices are summed up in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 Student enrolment 2007/08

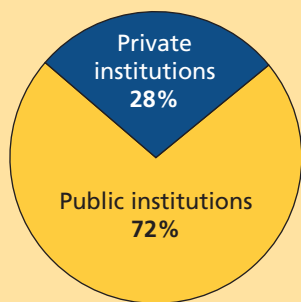
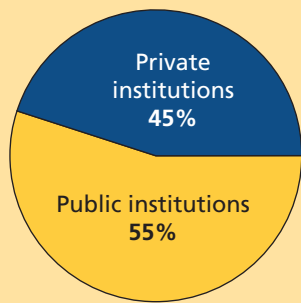


Figure 3 Student enrolment 2008/09



Through registration, the TEC has ensured that staff qualifications, management systems, governance structures, classrooms, libraries and laboratories have all been substantially improved in a short space of time. In some of the private tertiary institutions these resources did not exist before. The institutions were established and run by private families. There were lots of ‘briefcase’ operators then, which created confusion. The TEC was established and started operating in that situation.

The TEC monitors staff qualifications and other quality-related matters in institutions as regularly as its limited resources permit. However the challenges of quality and relevance in tertiary education are many and deep-seated. They are greater in private tertiary education institutions than in public ones. They are also global rather than unique to Botswana. These challenges, by their nature, are process orientated. That is, they take time and require multiple interventions to resolve. Besides, quality and relevance issues are moving targets. A point does not exist in education when one can say quality and relevance have been fully achieved.

Way forward

The TEC has developed multi-pronged strategies and interventions to tackle quality and relevance in Botswana’s tertiary education, which include the:

- Regular audit and inspection of institutions
- Submission of annual reports by institutions to the TEC
- Introduction of a quality assurance framework, now being implemented by all registered tertiary institutions
- Annual regulation of enrolment numbers
- Planned introduction of a major accreditation process of programmes of private tertiary institutions in July 2009
- Planned establishment – following on from the implementation of a new Tertiary Education Policy (2008) and a new National Human Resource Development Strategy (NHRDS, 2009) – of a Human Resource Development Council and Sectoral Committees, by the TEC and Ministry of Education and Skills Development, to work with tertiary and training institutions to address challenges of quality and relevance
- Development of a Funding Model to ensure that tertiary education is well resourced to provide quality and globally competitive programmes
- Assistance given to the recently established Education Hub with activities designed to attract additional quality institutions from outside the country to start operations in Botswana in partnership with local tertiary institutions.

The aforementioned interventions show a clear direction guided by policy and strategy for tertiary education in Botswana. Our goals and outcomes at the TEC and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) would be achieved when many citizens have access to quality tertiary education and can improve the quality of their lives, better serve their country and successfully compete globally for jobs and other opportunities.

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