

Inside the Malawi government's policy to increase access to university education: A case study of the University of Malawi

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Abstract

This paper is a discussion of the Malawi government's policy to increase access to university education as a way of trying to absorb more secondary school graduates into the university system. The discussion culminates from a qualitative study that was conducted at Kamuzu College of Nursing in Malawi to assess the impact of the policy in the University of Malawi. The study has found that the initiative has enabled more students to pursue a career in nursing and midwifery which has helped to increase the number of graduates from the college thereby increasing the number of nursing and midwifery professionals who are joining the workforce. On the other hand, this initiative has also created some problems for both the college and the students. Among other things, the college is facing the problem of large classes which are difficult to handle while some of the students live off campus where they are faced with a number of challenges. Therefore it is recommended that proper strategies should be put in place for the successful implementation of the policy.

Keywords: Malawi; University of Malawi; Kamuzu College of Nursing; national education sector plan; off campus

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1. Introduction

Since independence from the British colonial rule in 1964, the Malawi government has produced four formal education blue prints or plans which contain policies, goals and objectives to be accomplished within specified periods of time (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2008). One would assume that the plans are developed based on the needs and priorities of the country and also based on what is happening in the global education arena. These plans have necessitated the formulation and implementation of several policies governing education at all levels i.e. primary school, secondary school and even at university level. The most revolutionary of the policies in the history of Malawi is the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy that was introduced in 1994 at the beginning of the new multiparty dispensation whose main aim was to increase enrolment at primary school level (Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, 2011). While the introduction of the FPE was looked at as a political undertaking for the new government that had just been ushered into office, it was an initiative towards realizing the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and attaining the Education For All (EFA) goals (Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, 2011). Currently the Malawi government is implementing the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) which is one of the four formal education plans since independence. The NESP has run from 2008 and will wind up in 2017. There are three main thematic areas of intervention that NESP is working on and these are expansion of equitable access to education, improvement of quality and relevance of education and improvement of education governance and management at basic, secondary, technical and vocational and higher education.

1.1 Need for increasing access to university education

The importance of education in general and that of university education in particular has been extensively documented in literature. Helms (2008) considers tertiary education as the provider of advanced skills for the labour market through the training of different professionals such as teachers, doctors, engineers and others who play vital roles in the development of a country. Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) echo this assertion by arguing that education is the source of the required human resources for the development of a country. In addition to acknowledging that education is one of the fundamental human rights, Mwebi (2013) posits that education has the power to move individuals on the social ladder from low levels to high levels. In other words, education provides individuals with an exit from poverty. For Materu (2007) and Yizengaw (2008) higher education is vital for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Yizengaw extends the role of tertiary education by arguing that it supports the other levels of education i.e. primary and secondary education. He indicates that "Tertiary education is necessary for sustainable progress in basic and secondary education, through the training of teachers, school leaders and administrators, and through research providing direction for policies and strategies of a country's education system" (p. 8). On the other hand, the government of Malawi recognizes the role of education to the country itself and also to an individual in the Malawi Development and Growth Strategy (MGDS) where among other things it is indicated that education is "a catalyst for socio-economic development, industrial growth and instrument for empowering the poor, the weak and voiceless" (Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2006, p. 50).

Based on the role that higher education plays in development, it is the wish of any country to provide its citizens with the much needed education. However, it is not always possible for the countries to meet all the educational needs of their citizens due to a number of factors. In the case of Malawi, as is the case with most African countries, governments are facing the problem of unsatisfied demand for higher education. Every year,

huge numbers of students are graduating from the secondary school level but only a small percentage of them are admitted into universities. According to the World Bank (2010), the university system in Malawi is so small that only about 0.3% of those eligible are enrolled. Southern African Regional Universities Association, (2009) puts the figure at 1% while Ng'ambi (2010) indicates that only 0.6% of those eligible are actually enrolled. While there could be these differences in the actual figure, one cannot escape the fact that enrolment into university education in Malawi is very low as reflected by the percentages above. According to Divala (2009) the percentage of those who are admitted into universities is just too small compared to those who are left out even when they qualify for admission. Admittedly, Sharra (2012) reports that of those students who passed the University of Malawi Entrance Examinations (UEE) in 2012, only 21% were admitted leaving out more than 79% of the successful candidates. On the other hand, the World Bank (2010) indicates that in 2008, the University of Malawi admitted only 28% of those students who passed the UEE. This trend clearly shows that the demand for university education is far much higher than the system can absorb and this could be attributed to demographics where the increase in human population is putting pressure on the education system (Msiska, 2015). On the other hand, the high demand for university education could be due to the ripple effect of the FPE which has dramatically increased the number of pupils enrolling in primary schools (Southern African Regional Universities Association, 2009). The failure by the university system in Malawi to absorb more candidates is mainly due to the limited carrying capacity of the universities' infrastructure. Therefore, to try to deal with the problem, the Malawi government through the NESP came up with a goal to increase access to university education by putting in place strategies that would help to achieve the goal. In the rest of this paper, the goal will be referred to as policy.

2. Government policy to increase access to university education

According to the NESP, as part of the increasing access to tertiary education policy, enrolment of normal entry students into public universities is supposed to be doubled in a period of ten years with focus on critical academic areas. During the same period, private universities will be encouraged to expand their operations in order to enroll more students. As indicated in 1.1 above, the introduction of the policy is government's response to the problem of limited access to university education that has seen thousands of prospective university students failing to get admitted into the public and private universities. As one would imagine, there are a number of strategies that could be used to operationalize the policy including the use of open and distance learning, online learning and also increasing the number of students in the face to face mode of learning. The discussion in this paper is based on the latter strategy in relation to public universities.

According to the World Bank (2010) for a long time enrolment into public universities in Malawi was restricted by the available bed space because all the students were supposed to be accommodated at the universities. However, the implementation of the policy has brought a shift in that currently bed space is no longer a factor in student admission. Under the increased access to university education policy, there are two kinds of students who are admitted into public universities directly from secondary school. The first group is of those students who are on government scholarship and these are usually given accommodation at the institution. The other one is of those students who are on self-sponsorship and this group normally looks for their own accommodation off university campus.

The policy to increase access to university education has been in existence for more than eight years and there is need to assess its impact on the public university education system. This paper therefore is an assessment of the policy in the University of Malawi through the lens of Kamuzu College of Nursing which is one of the colleges under the University of Malawi. The assessment is based on what Kamuzu College of Nursing has experienced in the course of the policy's implementation.

2.1 The University of Malawi

The University of Malawi was the first public university to be established in Malawi by an Act of Parliament

in 1964 (University of Malawi, 2010). Over the years, this university has expanded in terms of programs offered, the activities it is undertaking and the number of colleges under it. Currently there are four constituent colleges under it. These colleges are located in different parts of the country and they offer different disciplines of study. Currently, the University of Malawi is made up of Chancellor College that is located in the city of Zomba in the southern region of Malawi. This college offers many disciplines such as humanities, social sciences, education and law, just to mention some. The Malawi Polytechnic in the city of Blantyre, also in the southern region offers programs in engineering, business studies and accountancy among other programs. The Malawi College of Medicine situated in Blantyre mainly specializes in medicine. Kamuzu College of Nursing with dual campuses located in the capital city and Blantyre; specializes in nursing and midwifery. For one to qualify for normal entry into the university, they must have credit passes in six subjects including English during the Malawi School Leaving Certificate Examinations that are admitted nationally at the end of the four year period of secondary education. Those who have a minimum grade of C during the International General Certificate of Secondary School Education (IGCSE) "O" level also qualify for admission. In addition they must apply for admission into the university through the National Council for Higher Education after which they could be admitted or not.

Kamuzu College of Nursing - Kamuzu College of Nursing is a constituent college of the University of Malawi and was officially opened in 1979. The main campus of the college is in Lilongwe, in the central region while the other campus is in Blantyre in the southern region. These two campuses are separated by a distance of about 300 km and academic members of staff commute between these campuses to fulfill their teaching obligations. The mission statement of the college is "to provide quality, comprehensive and cost effective nursing, midwifery and other health related educational programs in response to societal needs, utilizing the primary health care and outcome based approaches through teaching, research, service provision and consultancy to promote the health of the people of Malawi, Africa and beyond." The college has a student population of around 1150 and currently runs 14 undergraduate programs, six Master's Degree programs and one PhD program.

3. Methodology

The study used a case study research design under the qualitative approach. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008) qualitative research mostly deals with data that is primarily qualitative in nature such as words, pictures and such other non-numerical data. This approach was considered appropriate because the researcher wanted to have an in-depth understanding of the issues in relation to the policy to increase access to university education. This was based on Haepfl's (1997) understanding that qualitative research designs are used where the researcher wants to have a better understanding of a phenomenon. In the case of the current study, the researcher wanted to have deep insights about the policy which in turn would help to make an assessment of its impact on Kamuzu College of Nursing.

Data for the study were collected using three data collection methods: semi structured face to face interviews, document review and observations. Interviews were conducted with ten teachers and fifteen students at the Lilongwe campus of Kamuzu College of Nursing. The choice of Lilongwe campus was done for logistical purposes because it was convenient for the researcher due to proximity. Additionally, as indicated in the previous section, Lilongwe campus is the main campus and therefore it was assumed that information collected here could be representative of the whole college. At the same time, it was envisaged that teachers and students would be the most appropriate respondents for the study because of the central roles that they play in any education system; as such it was expected that they would be able to provide useful insights on the policy. The use of interviews as a data collection tool has been discussed by many researchers. Creswell (2003) highlights the importance of using interviews as a data collection tool in qualitative research by indicating that they accord a respondent the freedom to talk about an issue from their perspective and this helps researchers to have deep understanding about the phenomenon under investigation.

An interview guide was prepared and it had both open ended and closed ended questions. In general the

interview was meant to solicit information about the opportunities and challenges that Kamuzu College of Nursing was experiencing as a result of the policy to increase access to university education. Each interview lasted for 30 to 45 minutes. To maintain the interviewees' privacy, each interview was conducted behind closed doors in an interviewee's office. Interviews with the students were conducted in the researcher's office at the college. A few days after the interviews, the researcher approached the interviewees again in order for them to confirm that what was written down in the notes by the researcher was a true reflection of what the interviewees had said. This helped to increase the credibility of the data.

In order to complement the data from interviews, some official college documents were accessed and reviewed by the researcher. The documents which were particularly useful included student enrolment records and the college's annual reports. Lastly, the researcher was in a privileged position by virtue of being an academic member of staff at the college. As such, informal observations were also used to collect data. The collection of data using different methods helped to strengthen the credibility of the data through triangulation. This was in line with Maxwell, (2009) who argues that triangulation helps to make research findings more credible.

All the data that was collected was processed by the researcher to make them ready for analysis. The raw data in form of notes from the interviews, the documents and observations were organized and properly typed using a word processor to produce transcripts. The transcripts were carefully read through several times to have a full understanding of the data. Based on the purpose of the study, themes were identified from the data. All the information belonging to one theme was grouped by putting each theme as a subheading and then pasting parts of the transcripts under their appropriate themes using Microsoft word.

4. Findings and discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study that assessed the impact of the policy to increase access to university education in Malawi. The section is divided into two main parts dealing with opportunities and challenges that Kamuzu College of Nursing has experienced or is still experiencing as a result of the policy.

4.1 Opportunities

According to Malata (as cited in Kasalika, 2014), the vacancy rate for nurses in Malawi stands at 75%. This rate is too high for the efficient running of a health system and the government is working hard to reduce it. Therefore the policy to increase access to university education could be one response to reducing the high nurse vacancy rate in the country. Due to the implementation of the policy, Kamuzu College of Nursing has increased its student enrolment and the number of programs it offers. According to records at the college, normal entry year one students' enrolment has increased from 107 in 2010 to 270 in 2014, representing an increase of more than 100% which surpasses the government's 100% target for public universities as indicated in the NESP. While this increase may not be a direct opportunity to the college itself, Malawi as whole is benefiting from this increase in enrolment.

To begin with, secondary school graduates are the primary beneficiaries because some who would not be able to be admitted into the nursing and midwifery programs due to the limited past enrolment numbers have found their way into the college. The increase in the number of students who would want to pursue a career in nursing and midwifery translates into an increase in top level nursing and midwifery graduates (Registered Nurses) working in government hospitals, private hospitals, organizations in the health sector and some are employed to teach in private nursing colleges which train lower level nurses called nurse technicians. The increased access to university education policy has therefore helped to boost the number of nurse trainers who are having a positive impact on the operations of the private nursing colleges. According to the 2014-2015 Kamuzu College of Nursing Annual Report, most of the teachers in these private nursing colleges are graduates

from Kamuzu College of Nursing. This is an example where higher education is seen to support another sector of higher education and this could be looked at as an extension of Yizengaw (2008) who indicated that higher education supports other levels of education.

There has been an increase in the number of Kamuzu College of Nursing graduates working in hospitals as bedside nurses and also as managers. This has helped the government of Malawi to fill some of the vacancies that exist in the Ministry of Health thereby helping to improve the health sector in Malawi in general. However, it should be mentioned that even with the increased number of graduates from Kamuzu College of Nursing, the nurse vacancy rate is still high as indicated above. On the other hand the graduate nurses who are working in nongovernmental organizations at managerial level are contributing to the implementation of health policies in the country. Therefore the increased enrolment has led to an increased number of nurse and midwife practitioners, trainers and policy formulators and implementers in Malawi.

With support from donors and the government of Malawi, Kamuzu College of Nursing has registered rapid infrastructural development over a period of few years since the start of the implementation of the policy. Additional lecture rooms and offices have been built to accommodate the increased numbers of students and staff respectively. These new developments have helped to raise people's impression of the college in terms of the building structures. This is very important at a time when many public universities in Africa are suffering from infrastructural decay as indicated in literature. For example, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) report of dilapidated physical facilities in most public universities in Nigeria. Additionally, the World Bank (2010) reports a similar situation in some of the public educational institutions in Malawi. Such conditions may not help to build people's confidence in educational institutions. However, it should also be mentioned that there is still more that could be done in terms of infrastructural development to take care of the ever increasing student numbers at Kamuzu College of Nursing.

4.2 Challenges

While the implementation of the policy at Kamuzu College of Nursing has brought some opportunities as highlighted above, the study has also shown that the policy has created problems which need solutions as well. This part therefore presents and discusses some of the challenges that the study has found.

As noted in section 4.1 of this paper, there has been a huge increase in student numbers as a result of the policy. This has led to an increase in the number of students in classes, with some classes accommodating more than 200 students. Such big classes may have some negative effects on the quality of the learning process. Most of the teachers indicated that they were finding it difficult to teach and properly monitor such big classes. The situation is exacerbated by the unavailability of necessary resources such as public address system which could be used during class sessions. Similar situations have been reported in other parts of Africa. For example, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2008) observe that most of the public universities in Nigeria are experiencing the problem of student overcrowding in lecture rooms. On the other hand, Ahemba (2006) paints a generally gloomy picture of the situation in Africa as a whole and he notes that there is overcrowding of students in lecture halls where professors are faced with large groups of students of up to 2000. Such large groups demand extra effort from the teachers in terms of different aspects of teaching starting from class preparation to student assessment. For example, the teachers noted that it was difficult to give students regular and comprehensive formative assessment and feedback which are crucial aspects of student learning. Lizzio and Wilson (2008) consider formative feedback as performing an educative function in that it helps the students to improve. On the other hand, the students indicated that it was very difficult for those who sit at the back of the lecture rooms to properly get what is being taught and they noted that it was very difficult for them to be fully engaged in class activities.

As part of their nursing and midwifery training, students at Kamuzu College of Nursing take part in both theoretical and practical aspects of learning. The practical aspect takes the form of practical sessions conducted

in the college's skills laboratory and also clinical practice in a hospital setting. The practical sessions in the skills laboratory are very important in the training of nurses because the skills acquired during such sessions are applied in a hospital setting at a later time in their training. The clinical laboratory is also used for conducting Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) which is part of student clinical assessment. However, due to the increased numbers of students, the clinical laboratory has been rendered inadequate for all the students. According to the Kamuzu College of Nursing Annual Report for 2014-2015, the clinical laboratory has a capacity of 30 students which is far too low for the increased number of students. This forces the teachers to conduct other laboratory activities such as OSCE in rooms that were not meant for the purpose. Such an arrangement is not only demanding on the teachers but it may also work to the students' disadvantage in that they may not have rich laboratory experience outside the clinical laboratory.

Related to the problem of the clinical laboratory, is the problem of overcrowding in the clinical area in the hospitals where the students go to put the learned skills into practice. According to the Kamuzu College of Nursing Annual Report for 2014-2015 due to the increased student numbers, clinical supervisors are overstretched and this renders supervision by the teachers very difficult in that one teacher could be responsible for a big number of students. This makes the teachers to be overworked and in the end there could be little follow up on the students. This is similar to a study that was conducted by Msiska (2015) on private universities in which he found that most teachers in private universities in Malawi were overworked and as such they were unable to efficiently carry out their duties. Such a scenario in nursing and midwifery training may compromise the quality of nurses that are being trained.

It is the wish of every student to be appropriately accommodated if they are to achieve their academic goals. Oluwaseyi (2015) highlights the importance of good accommodation for students by arguing that improved student accommodation has the capacity to improve student academic performance. On the other hand, Muslim, Karim and Abdullah (2012) observe that good student accommodation is key to the students' academic achievement and perseverance in university. As stated elsewhere in this paper, the University of Malawi does not provide accommodation to all its students and Kamuzu College of Nursing is not an exception. Therefore some students look for accommodation outside the college in the surrounding townships. The study has found that in most cases the conditions which the students live under are not conducive to academic life. According to both teachers and students, the places where the students are accommodated are not secure and the houses that the students live in are of very poor quality and in some instances located in very noisy neighborhoods and in places which are a health hazard to the students. Similar problems have also been reported elsewhere in other parts of the developing world. For example, Kumasi Investment Promotion Unit (2013) in Ghana notes that by virtue of being accommodated off campus, the students do not benefit from security and other associated services that are provided to on campus students and cases of armed robbery attacks and theft of students' personal effects are common. The students are particularly vulnerable because in most cases they are in possession of electronic gadgets such as mobile phones and laptops which make them easy targets.

Other writers also report different forms of disturbances which students put up with such as noise, uncooperative landlords, bad smells, pollution and neighborhood vending (Oluwaseyi, 2015; Muslim, Karim and Abdullah, 2012; Yusuff, 2011). On the other hand, Yusuff, (2011) highlights the problem of sexual harassment by landlords against female students. These landlords may perceive the desperate students as making themselves available in the course of looking for accommodation. In a study that they conducted in Kenya, Yakaboski and Birnbaum (2013) found that there were live-in relationships between male and female students where a female student would cohabit with a male student in exchange for sexual favors. Faced with such distractive situations, it is very difficult for students to fully concentrate on their academic work.

In relation to the challenging accommodation circumstances, off campus students also have to deal with transport issues in terms of commuting between their accommodation places and the college. This is not only expensive but also time consuming because the students have to spend some of their valuable time to commute to and from the college instead of concentrating on their academic work. Some of the teachers reported that due

to undependability of the public transport system it is not unusual for off campus students to be late for classes in the first hour and noted that this, in the long run, may compromise the quality of nurses that are being trained. This is in line with what Yusuff (2011) found in her study where she indicated that those students who commuted to university were bound to be late for classes due to morning traffic jam and other reasons. Such inconveniences could be academically costly on the students as reported by Oluwaseyi (2015) who found that distance between university and accommodation place had an effect on students where off campus students felt that the distance they commuted had a negative effect on their academic performance.

The importance of teaching and learning resources in an institution of higher learning cannot be overemphasized. However, due to the increased student enrolment, it may not always be possible to have adequate teaching and learning materials. According to Akinwumi (as cited in Mwebi, 2013) increase in student admission without a corresponding increase in resources and facilities is a very big threat to quality education. Therefore, where resources are lacking one would always question the quality of education that is being provided.

The library is one of the most important resource banks in a university. That is why Mwangi and Udoto (2011) boldly assert that the quality of higher education in part relies on the availability of library resources and facilities for use by both students and teachers. Asiyai, (2013) concurs with Mwangi and Udoto by arguing that the strength of a university lies in the library. The study has found that the college library is lacking in its collection of reading resources. The number of books, periodicals and other materials has not increased much to match with the student population. Studies done in some parts of Africa such as Kenya and Nigeria also indicate a similar trend where libraries have their share of challenges. For example, in Nigeria, Asiyai (2013) found that universities to a large extent had obsolete collection of books and Mwangi and Udoto (2011) in Kenya observed that the libraries were not able to provide other services such as printing and photocopying because of lack of equipment. Gudo, Olel, and Oanda (2011) also report a situation in Kenya where their study found that there were unsatisfactory numbers of print journals and current books in public university libraries. They noted that this was a hindrance to student learning. Writing about the situation in Malawi, the World Bank (2010) observes among other things that libraries are poorly resourced. Lack of adequate teaching and learning resources is counterproductive to quality education especially in this era when many governments are putting issues of education quality as a top priority of their agenda.

5. Further consideration

The success and failure of the policy to increase access to university education would have management implications at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, national policy makers could use the strengths and weaknesses in the policy when formulating future policies. On the other hand, at the micro, institutional or implementation level, managers would be able to strategically position themselves in order to successfully manage the implementation of policies.

After looking at the challenges that Kamuzu College of Nursing is facing in light of the increased student enrolment over the past few years, some suggestions could be made on how to improve the situation. To begin with, on the issue of student accommodation, even before the policy got implemented, there should have been careful planning of the policy and government should have engaged itself in serious consultations with the private sector, especially those in the construction industry to build accommodation apartments specifically designed for students in the areas surrounding the college. These apartments could be rented by the students at manageable rates. In this way, students would be assured of their security and could live a life befitting a university student. While it is not clear if such consultations were done, in most cases governments are criticized of implementing education plans under the direction of donors without much or no consultation with other players. For example, Kadzamira and Rose, (2001) discuss the Free Primary Education Policy in Malawi whose framework, according to the authors, was to a large extent donor driven and did not involve other key stakeholders in its formulation process. Furthermore, Fowler (2004) argues that proper planning is required

before an educational policy is implemented. In part, this planning involves comprehensive consultations with other stakeholders in the education system in order to amass adequate support for the implementation of the policy. These stakeholders could be the private sector, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, other educational institutions, donors and others. The absence of such consultations may compromise the successful implementation of the policy.

It is very difficult and stressful for anyone to get decent accommodation in the capital city of Malawi and it is even more difficult and challenging for students, some of whom have not been to the city before. Therefore it would be recommended for Kamuzu College of Nursing to set up a committee or unit to look into accommodation issues for off campus students. This committee would be responsible for helping students to find appropriate accommodation and give students proper guidance on issues to do with accommodation. The committee would act as an interface or proxy between the students and landlords and make sure that all issues to do with student accommodation including security are sorted out before students move in. This arrangement would save the students from the stress which comes as a result of the desperation experienced during the time for looking for accommodation. With such a committee in place, off campus student accommodation could be secured even before the students report to the college. This committee could also be tasked with looking into off campus students transport requirements. The committee could liaise with the private sector in the passenger transport to provide daily transport for the students to and from college at specified times at an agreed student fare. This arrangement would give students enough time to concentrate on their studies.

Although there have been some infrastructural developments at Kamuzu College of Nursing since the implementation of the increased access to university education policy, more work needs to be done if the policy is to yield its intended results. Much as the additional lecture rooms are serving their purpose, the increase in student enrolment should have matched with an increase in other infrastructural needs. There is need for a spacious and well equipped skills laboratory to be put in place for student practical sessions. This is very crucial for nursing and midwifery students because the laboratory is where the students learn different skills before they are allowed to practice on human beings. As such the quality of nurses and midwives trained at Kamuzu College of Nursing would be greatly compromised in the absence of a proper skills laboratory. The college could also lobby the private sector, nongovernmental organizations and other donors to expand the college clinic and upgrade it so that some of the students could use the college clinic for their clinical experience. This would greatly reduce the student congestion that is experienced in the main hospitals where the students usually go for clinical placements.

6. Conclusion

The Malawi government's policy to increase access to university education is a good initiative that is bound to benefit the country enormously. It is understood that this policy has its foundation on the contribution that university education makes to the development of a country. However, to gain more ground on increasing access to university education, government should look at other additional options because putting too much emphasis on the already existing universities for the success of this policy, is creating other problems that require solutions as well. For a start, the efficiency and effectiveness of the universities would be greatly reduced and this would entail compromised quality of education. Therefore, the government should mostly be focusing on building more universities than overstressing the capacity of the existing ones. This could be the most viable solution to the problem of access to university education that is currently being experienced.

Furthermore, through the NESP, the government of Malawi recognizes the role of the private sector in helping the country to increase access to university education by indicating that it would expand the participation of the private sector in university education. However, this statement cannot be appreciated if execution strategies are not clearly spelt out by government. The question one may ask is how will the government expand the private sector? Consideration should therefore be made by the government to provide some technical and other forms of assistance to private universities that are already in operation to improve their capacity and

efficiency in the provision of education. Similar assistance should also be provided to individuals and other private enterprises that are planning to establish universities. In this way, the private sector will be given the impetus to participate actively in university education and this may play a significant role in increasing access to university education in Malawi.

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