



CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR BASIC MEDICAL EDUCATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF NILE COLLEGE SUDAN

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Higher Education (HE) has a role to play on inclusive national growth. This paper aims to explore the potential contribution of a private institute to this end.

Methods: A case study including a review of the philosophy, vision, mission and learning environment of Nile College, Sudan.

Findings: Nile College adopts a holistic philosophy articulated on excellence in education, leading to personal development and the improvement of the quality of life of individuals and communities and as a means to build sound values and morality necessary for good citizenship. Such development-oriented philosophy provides a platform for a supportive learning environment including curricula, facilities, research and monitoring and evaluation that produces skilled and motivated health workers, aiming ultimately at a socio-cultural and sustained development.

Value/Originality: It provides evidence that private HE is not a profitable enterprise but can be a robust learning system for national growth.

Keywords: excellence in teaching; Heritage; Nile College; professionalism; Sudan; social responsibility; sustainability; University of Khartoum; WFME.

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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Paul Howken (1997) identifies natural and social capitals as the main factors for future economic growth rather than labour and technology only. Social capitalisation is the ability to make market changes and governs society to achieve a holistic and integrated sustainable development based on health, equity, peace, security and stability as quoted by Anthony (2003).

Higher Education (HE) in this regard, has a critical role to play. However, as it is generally organised into highly specialised areas of knowledge and traditional disciplines, much of it stresses individual learning and competition and thus produces professionals who are ill-prepared for cooperative efforts. Designing a sustainable human resource future requires a paradigm shift towards a systemic perspective emphasising collaboration and coordination. HE can serve as a model for sustainability by fully integrating all aspects of campus life (Anthony, 2003).

The sudden implementation of HE revolution in 1990 and the establishment of 27 universities in less than three years had its repercussions on the quality of HE in Sudan. Old centres of excellence were largely depleted through the huge losses of experienced but underfunded staff. The combination of the trained staff migration and the lower quality graduate education meant less effective intergenerational transmission of knowledge and erosion of academic traditions (Ibrahim and Anoushiravan, 2008).

In the post-1995 liberalisation in Sudan, a new movement towards privatisation of education from pre-school to universities was deemed as a path to improve quality and excellence. With current structures and resources of many HE institutes, a huge reform is required to invest in financial and human resources for these institutes to effectively work (Gamal, 2010).

With this background, this paper is meant to share the experience of Nile College, a growing private health sciences institute with the holistic philosophy of excellence in teaching, trying

to follow the path towards improving the quality of education and contributing to national development.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This is a brief case study that was a review of the policy documents and guidelines of Nile College, including the philosophy, vision, mission, programmes, curriculum, evaluation and quality assurance strategies. The evaluation was largely based on the world federation Global standards for basic medical education (WFME, 2005, 2012).

Study area and sampling

Nile College is a campus located on the eastern bank of the Blue Nile, Khartoum, Sudan. It is owned by Nile Higher Education Group, established in 2003, by a group of eminent Professors with national and international recognition. It offers seven programmes: medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, medical laboratory sciences, nursing, computer information systems, business administration and accounting.

A convenient sample of the programme policy documents, guidelines and resources were reviewed.

RESULTS

The motive for establishing Nile College

The founders have recognised the fast changes in the educational scene in Sudan along with the colossal socio-economic development that requires provision of 'Quality HE'.

The philosophy of Nile College looks at education as a goal in itself that leads to personal development and improvement of the quality of life of the individual, the family and the community as well as a means by which to build sound values and morality necessary for good citizenship (Nile College prospectus, 2014/15).

Nile College as a private institute of higher learning draws on age-old traditions of HE in Sudan. It builds on those old traditions and ideals: integrity, excellence and relevance held by the University of Khartoum for more than half a century.

The vision of Nile College is to uphold these ideals as well as to pursue innovative goals both in direction and methods.

The 21st century is witnessing great changes in the socio-economic and technological sectors, which is expected to place pressure on the resources of HE institutes, not only in terms of numbers, but also greatly on the quality of education and training capacities. *It's the vision of Nile College* to contribute to the national socio-economic development through the promotion of services, education and manpower development.

Nile College Mission

Based on its philosophy and vision, *the mission of Nile College* is "dedication to community development through sound policies, provision of high quality educational and service resources as well as upholding multicultural values and heritage". This mission centres on quality

management of services in education, healthcare, research and socio-cultural development. The mission's focus includes cultural heritage and direction of educational resources towards developing the community development and building capacity.

The programmes and curriculum

The programmes of Nile College were established to supply the country's needs for a skill mix of human resources for health along with a few other disciplines felt to be a priority for the workforce in Sudan in general and in particular, supportive of the health's workforce.

Based on the philosophy and the mission of Nile College, the curriculum is designed to achieve learning outcomes that produce successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to community development. The curriculum design is outcome-based; integrated modules with both community and hospital-based learning experiences are included.

The foundation part of the curriculum provides the basics of communication skills, professionalism, ethics and cultural heritage along with basic sciences in a way that links the student to the local national issues.

The curriculum provides students with simple and effective ways of teaching to encourage active participation and develop self-directed learning skills. The programme offers further activities such as assignments; field work and research projects that facilitate key aspects of the students' individual and collaborative learning. Students' research projects are part and parcel of each programme activity and are tailored to address local problems. This is meant to prepare the student for community diagnosis and planning of appropriate interventions.

Through the field work and engagement with communities, health workers at facility level, patients and administrative authorities, students are empowered and prepared for their future professional environment.

Quality assurance strategies

1 In Community services:

- i. Provision of good services and resources for Nile College health service outlets.
- ii. Provision of scholarship for undergraduate and graduate studies especially for less privileged sectors.
- iii. Allocation of a good proportion of the budget for community and student services.
- iv. Offer subsidised health services through the teaching hospital.
- v. Market research for new degrees – examples: Business Administration/Information Technology (IT).

2 In the Academic Programs:

- i. Careful planning for provision of good teaching/learning environments.
- ii. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified academic staff.
- iii. Internal and external programs' evaluation following the World Federation of Medical Education criteria for basic medical degrees.
- iv. Using appropriate effective methods of instruction and students assessment aiming at validity and reliability and taking into consideration the English language 'handicap' in the early years of the programs.

- v. Adopting methods of curriculum monitoring through students feedback.
- vi. Provision of a comfortable and clean teaching and learning environment.
- vii. Provision of resources and funds for research and forging joint research programs with international institutions.
- viii. Drawing a research policy and regulations for priorities, and funding administration of research activities.
- ix. Provision of a good library both traditional and electronic subscribing in international source of learning resources.

3 *In governance and administration:*

- i. Recruitment of qualified and experienced administrative and financial staff and providing a comfortable working environment and conditions of service.
- ii. Training opportunities and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) both local and abroad.
- iii. Installation of IT resources and programs in all matters: academic, financial and administrative.
- iv. Working towards less bureaucratic procedures in personnel and financial transactions to create a user – friendly environment.
- v. Evaluation of administrative and financial performance through appropriate feedback and documentation.

Future directions to ensure sustainability

To contribute to national growth and sustainable development beyond 2015 and bearing in mind the challenges of the transformation of the educational endeavours, the Board of Trustees of Nile College committed itself to maintain and further improve the College's Programmes to meet these challenges.

The following decisions were endorsed recently and are underway of implementation:

1. Allocation of a substantial development budget based on the master plan.
2. Establishment of a research facility including a total laboratory and a teaching and office area of 1240 m² designed in a five-floor building. This resource aims to foster international collaboration in the area of life style and health, neglected diseases and global health.
3. Full control of financial decision-making, favouring scientific and educational development as a main policy guideline. This is ensured by ownership of Nile College drawn almost exclusively from Academics with international credentials and experience who are also committed to the principles of social accountability and professionalism.
4. Currently the College is engaged in a self – study (based on WFME guidelines 2003 and 2012) for accreditation purposes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The philosophy, vision and mission of Nile College are translated into its programmes' curricula and teaching strategies that are community oriented. The attention given to heritage and ethics is in line with new national and global developments in HE, foreseeing its role as an engine for change towards national development and growth.

The project demonstrates that academic leadership and emphasis on meticulous quality checks, would ultimately lead to a good teaching and learning environment, leading to personal as well as institutional development.

Intense use of educational inputs in planning, teaching and learning methodologies, students' assessment and programme evaluation are a must if we aim to create effective and robust educational systems.

CONCLUSION

Nile College is a growing private medical sciences institute that has established a robust learning system envisioning national growth and sustainability through contributions to socio-economic development based on excellence in education and training.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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