Employability and Open Education Resource Policies development: critical reflections from selected SADC Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Distance education has been widely accepted by many higher education institutions (HEIs) and the public, although a certain section still thinks that ODeL is suspect to poor quality offerings and outputs. Although there is no any evidence suggesting that face-to-face (f2f) delivery mode is much more effective and reliable than ODeL, some studies have demonstrated that ODeL may indeed suffer from poor quality tuition and outcomes, given the limited opportunities and resources accorded to the students and the system as a whole. The implications of such perceptions are that some teachers, students, parents and employers have often avoided and/or undermined ODeL by not recognising its qualifications and/or the graduates even when such graduates come from the same universities. Such stratified treatment has further implications on students' motivation, self-actualisation and their ability to become creative, critical and imaginative thinkers, and/or on their chances to secure competitive employment once they graduate. These events are happening when the majority of developing countries are failing to grapple with problems of underemployment, unemployment and/or overemployment on one hand, and the proliferation of Neo-Darwinism on the other hand, often emanating from what Bourdieu termed conceptual and capital currency differences. Since under-employment and unemployment debates are gaining momentum for both f2f and ODeL delivery modes, it is incumbent upon ODeL managers that they design employability and Open Educational Resources (OERs) policies which can be utilised to guide the students, teachers and employers alike by providing them with relatively normative instruments for testing, measuring and assessing employment prospects for the students. Given the growing poverty levels in Africa, her unique dispositions, and inconsistencies in the way employment can be secured, enjoyed and measured, there is need for employability and OERs policies that are specifically designed for Africa's conditions. Such policies would then guide educational offerings both at national and individual HEIs levels based on common grounds and shared understandings. While this study emanated from different workshops that were funded by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), as a consultant, it also emerged from contextual analyses that were done between September end and early October 2023 within the SADC Region. The studies utilised document analyses and various theoretical propositions such as those by Pierre Bourdieu, Reay Diane, Sen and Nussbaum amongst other justice theoreticians. This topic attracted my attention because, as a proven ODeL scholar and enthusiast, I wanted to explain and understand the role of ODeL policies and their implications within depraved HEIs contexts in Malawi and elsewhere.

Key words: ODeL, ODL, massification, access, quality, SAVE project, ADB, curriculum justice, epistemological access

INTRODUCTION

This report covers the two activities on the development of Employability and OERs policies which were done at some universities in Malawi from 6th of October 2023 to 8th of October 2023. This was a second workshop following the one that was done from 3rd to 5th October 2023 held in the same venue. Both workshops emanated from the contextual and baseline analyses that were conducted in Malawi in preparation for these workshops. Key to the findings of the contextual and baseline studies was that many universities in the SADC region were at three levels in terms of ODeL policy development. For example, the first group had ratified their policies and were in full force. The second group of HEIs had draft policies awaiting vetting and enhancement. The third group, on the contrary, did not have any ODeL policies even though they were still offering ODeL programmes. Specifically, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Malawi, among other SADC countries, had draft policies at both national and institutional levels. This case was also obtaining at Mzuzu University (MZUNI), the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUARNAR) and the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS) where they simply had ODeL draft policies. On the other hand, the University of Malawi (UNIMA), Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) and Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHES) did not have any ODeL draft policies, as they had just introduced their ODeL in 2023 and thereabouts. Common among Malawi universities was that they all did not have any employability policies nor any OERs policies. These realities demonstrated the fact that issues of employability and/or OERs were not only relegated to the end but also neglected by many universities across the globe (Mohee & Putty-Rogbeer, 2020). It is on this basis that universities X, Y and C, with the support of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), held a series of training workshops on the development of different ODeL policies including the ones on employability and OERs. The purpose of the workshops was to engage stakeholders and academics on the outcomes of the contextual analyses concerning the status of ODeL across the SADC Region and the policies available, if at all available. In the end, the workshops were tasked to design, develop and/or enhance the different ODeL policies.

Accordingly, the following sections present some background literature on employability and OERs policies, and what was exactly done during the workshops. Specifically, thirty participants attended this workshop, comprising of both males and females, and representatives for persons with disabilities (PWDs). These people came from different academic departments and schools within the universities. There were also members of staff from the administrative section and Heads of ODeL. There were also support staff who provided security, logistical and secretarial services throughout these sessions. Out of the 30 participants, six were female, while 24 were male, although this number kept on fluctuating upwards and downwards as days went by due to other activities taking place within the universities. This paper may be useful for HEIs wanting to introduce ODeL in their universities, especially during policy development stages. The approaches described herein are not really dogmatic and/or normative procedures for hosting policy workshops. They are simply subjective and probable approaches that had proved successful to this workshop at that time. To us, it was a chance experiment that had managed to achieve positive results. Thus, readers going through this paper may equally benefit from some literature reviews on policy development processes, and what exactly goes into the policies of this nature. Just like with the mainstream ODeL policies, we discovered that employability and OERs policies were not really prioritised by many African universities, hence we struggled to

find example policies and/or best approaches for doing this work. When found by some luck, most of them were in draft forms and/or were still being developed hence did not provide us with the best benchmarks.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE TO EMPLOYABILITY AND OERs POLICIES

The importance of having Employability and OERs policies within HEIs spaces has been emphasised by different scholars across the world (see Aamodt, 2010; Clarke, 2018; Ekta, 2018; Forrier, 2003; Harvey, 2001, 2003, 2005; Knight, 2001; Mohee & Putty-Rogbeer, 2020; Morley, 2001; Sewell, 2007; Silver & Aires, 2013; Sin, 2019; Wagenaar, 2014). Despite such overwhelming evidence, African universities, especially those in the SADC Region, have for long operated without any policies. This also comes at a time when many donors and governments alike are making huge investments towards the democratisation of knowledge through initiatives such as the free world knowledge (FWK), open access initiatives (OAIs) and others aimed at facilitating free access to information (ATI), knowledge and education (Besanco et al., 2020; Moriaty, 2019; Popp, 2015). It is for this reason that the Universities X, C, Y and COL joined hands to mount different training workshops on the development of main ODeL policies, Employability policies and OERs policies respectively. These workshops would finally culminate into the development and enhancement of the three policies as well as ten market-relevant self-instructional materials (SIMs) into OERs to be used for ODeL purposes.

Employability discourses in public spaces

According to Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer (2020), there have been calls to develop Key Employability Indicators (KEIs) through which HEIs and National Quality Assurance Agencies (NQAAs) can monitor employability progress as a quality concept within their institutions. These calls have increased due to the ever-changing needs of society, and the need for knowledgeable and skilled graduates who can function effectively within the knowledge economies of the 21st Century. Although employability debates have persisted in the public spaces, educators, employers and society alike seem to have held fragmented views of how employability can best be articulated, monitored and achieved within HEIs contexts. Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer (2020) further observe that some scholars have often conflated 'lifelong employment' with 'lifelong employability', even though the two notions are not one and the same. While employability discourses have recently become less important among the unemployed youth, Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer observe that it still remains an issue, especially among active labour groups such as HEIs, employers, politicians, NGOs, Economic Associations and society in general, with each of these groups blaming the other. It can be possible that the youths have lost interest in employability debates because not all of those who are not employed are really unemployable due to lack of skills or competencies as claimed. Arguably, labour groups, trade unions and employers alike have for the first time formed a strange alliance that seeks to chastise HEIs and the graduate as the only sources of unemployment and under-employment. Some of their main arguments are that HEIs have stuck to antediluvian and irrelevant curricula; have underprepared and poorly trained their graduates and that the trainers themselves have not been competent enough to train employable graduates (Chibambo, 2023; Vally and Spreen, 2012).

While the above arguments may partly hold, given the complex nature of employability issues, it ought to be understood that the concept of employability is quite dynamic and has inconstant variables that are usually reflected in the advancement of skills, knowledge and values within and without HEIs spaces. For instance, lifelong learning theorists have often argued that employability discourses should mainly focus on how to prepare citizens for progressive learning in formal and informal settings. Accordingly, ODeL has been viewed as the right vehicle for providing necessary lifelong employability skills. Conversely, technical instrumentalists, who are also strong advocates of human capital development and economic theories, have also argued for curricula that can impart relevant market-oriented skills-based modules at the expense of humanities and other social sciences which are often accessed by the majority of poor students. As Peters and Roberts (2008) and Vally and Spreen (2012) caution, such assumptions do not only misrepresent the role of higher education, but also over-burden HEIs as they already operate like Cottage Farms within neoliberal-minimalist spaces. They further argue that these claims have also created and sustained inequalities in education through epistemic commodification (over-pricing), epistemic neo-capitalism (profiteering) and epistemi-cide and compartmentalisation (monopoly and patronisation) (du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014; Leibowitz, 2017). Since such technical instrumentalist knowledge, for example engineering and medicine, is unusually overpriced, it has hence become the product of the privileged few of our society. Additionally, elite children, due to the socioeconomic capital, social labour and social network of their parents, will easily get competitive employment, unlike the disadvantaged children who come from poor families and are mostly concentrated in the arts and humanities. This then implies that HEIs and National Quality Assurance Agencies (NQAAs) should monitor and evaluate employability initiatives with ODeL institutions through quality assurance instruments (QAIs) by focusing on all critical components of the educational systems to minimise problems of unemployment and inequalities (Ntshoe & Letseka, 2010). The issue is that these inequalities are not only pinned to modules offered, but also delivery modes such as f2f convention against ODeL as the latter group is often ostracised and disadvantaged both in public practices and perceptions. Thus, to bridge this gap, QAIs should mainly focus on teaching and learning, research, assessment, curriculum design, student engagement, collaborations, industrial linkages, work integrated learning and assessment (WIL), student support services (SSSs) and programme design, monitoring and evaluation and feedback, among others. Although QAIs should be designed in such a way that they do not disadvantage ODeL contexts given its unique nature, they should still try to promote best practices and results as those achievable within f2f contexts at minimum.

Rethinking HEIs contextual and employability concerns within neoliberal-minimalist policies

As discussed in the previous section, many nations and organisations continue to push for universal access to higher education through massification. Amidst massification efforts, debates on the traditional roles of schooling, such as research and teaching for enlightenment and intrinsic values against the need for technically skilled human capital for economic growth and development, refuse to die. Such debates have created dilemmas in terms of responsibilities to financing and resourcing HEIs between the state and the family. For example, neoliberal-minimalists have contended that higher education should be funded by individuals because it first benefits the individual and his family economically before such benefits trickle down to society and the nation. Conversely, postmodernists (anti-minimalists) have argued that the state should fully fund education because it already gets money from over-taxing its citizens who

finance all public institutions including HEIs, and that a highly educated society would mean more PAYE taxes going back into treasury coffers (Chibambo, 2023; Ngobeni et al., 2023; Nsapato, 2017). Since politicians and parents have often blamed HEIs as lacking quality and underpreparing graduates for the labour market, this has justified the imposition of minimalism and commodification of knowledge in which students are required to pay prohibitive tuition fees for their own education as if it is a physical product, also known as commodified education. Due to continued concerns regarding increased unemployment against commodified education, HEIs have been forced to collaborate with government and private companies (PPPs) to provide students with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through WIL so that they can learn practical skills as well improve their prospects for networking and landing employment while in school. In some developed countries, such PPPs have significantly managed to nominalise the rifts among universities, employers, governments (politicians) and society.

Given the effects of knowledge massification, commodification and increased graduation rates against diminishing labour market, it is not surprising then that human capital development and employability concerns have become main agendas within the corridors of HEIs and public spaces (Vally & Spreen, 2012). Specifically, the role of education in developing all-round-human-beings (HDT) for critical thinking, enlightenment and civic values (Sen, 1999; Walker, 2012) as opposed to the knowledge economy propositions, has shifted towards human capital theory (HCT), which emphasises knowledge economy propositions for satisfying labour-market. These have required that HEIs prioritise programmes that impart technical skills and attributes that can help graduates serve the immediate needs of the employers (Mohee & Putty-Rogbeer, 2020). Precisely, HEIs have been urged to produce graduates who are fit for the labour-market through interdisciplinary programmes, industry-based curricula, and lifelong learning prospects needed in the 21st Century era. Such ambitions nevertheless have created more dilemmas in terms of the traditional roles of education, disagreements among education stakeholders on knowledge and attributes for the 21st Century, and conditions for achieving such knowledge (Mohee & Putty-Rogbeer, 2020). Moreover, lack of internal structures for monitoring and evaluating employability agendas, HEIs impoverished resource conditions (Peters & Roberts, 2008), and neoliberal-minimalist policies (Chibambo, 2023; Ngobeni et al., 2023; Vally & Spreen, 2012), have all helped shape the nature of graduates amidst job scarcity concerns. Essentially, there have been limited understanding among all labour groups on how employability ambitions can be conceptualised within HEIs contexts. Accordingly, the development of these Employability and OERs policies is one of the many attempts to help educators, employers and society reach a consensus for producing graduates who can at least satisfy the expectations of all critical stakeholders cognizant of neoliberal-minimalist pressures.

Quality for employability purposes within minimalist education contexts

Recently, calls for increased access to HEIs have been challenged by neoliberal-minimalism, and structural adjustments in which transparency, accountability, productivity, cost-effectiveness and saving have become common values in education. Advanced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other multinational organisations, neoliberalism has demanded African governments to reduce state funding on public services including hospitals, agriculture and education. Countries have been asked to spend wisely by minimising costs on wage-bills, allowances and field trips among others. Accordingly, governments have been compelled to increase tuition fees for once-free public education. Minimalism has also called for privatisation or outsourcing of noncore services such as kitchen, security, cleaning, accommodation, printing, etc within HEIs, and in worst cases, liquidation of

profitless public companies, which were however largest employers of the poor citizenry (Apple, 2001; Chibambo, 2023; Ngobeni et al., 2023; Peters & Roberts, 2008).

The issue here is that, the combination of neoliberal-minimalism, economic recessions, wars, pandemics, over-population, and a stagnant labour-market might have significantly contributed towards unemployment in society. Therefore, it is off the point to accuse only HEIs for problems of unemployment and underemployment currently being experienced. As Vally and Spreen (2012) add, correlating HEIs with the quality of graduates and their performance on the labour-market may also be problematic. Such arguments also do not make sense when we consider the historic realities of the 1950s, during which the supply of graduates was smaller than the demand for the labour market. Similarly, since measuring employability has often been skewed due to conflations between employment and underemployment, then it is irrational to leave employability concerns in the hands of HEIs alone. It is equally absurd to measure graduate employability as the sole tool for measuring individuals' skills and competencies, let alone, quality of HEIs themselves. These aside, HEIs should- at minimum- demonstrate that their programmes are relevant, and that the graduates can contribute towards the much-needed human capital development as in HDT not just HCT. There is further need for active labour groups and HEIs to avail tools that can be domesticated for monitoring graduate readiness for learning and employability purposes. This is the reason Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer (2020) have urged countries and HEIs to design QAIs and accreditation tools that can enhance structures, systems, processes and curricula alongside employability demands.

Reimagining Employability Indicators and Quality Assurance

According to Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer (2020) and Harvey (2003), there are disagreements between policymakers, HEIs and employers on how employability can be monitored, evaluated and actualised. For example, England and Scotland have used their NQAAs to develop national-wide approaches for employability purposes, although this task remains at HEIs level in some countries. Again, some HEIs have freed departments to design their employability policies in line with their feasible aspirations. This means countries and HEIs have designed different employability and OERs policies, which have however been harmonised as guided by regional and national policies (Makoe, 2018; Makoe & Gatsha, 2020; SADC, 2020) to minimise gaps, contradictions and contestations associated with employability and OERs discourses. By including employability and OERs issues into NQAAs, both HEIs and labour groups have been able to monitor strategies for employability and OERs development, while harmonising the approaches.

In addition, Morley (2001) urges HEIs to use consistent Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for assessing employability and OERs initiatives to minimise contradictions, gaps and subjectivities inherent in employability discourses. Conversely, Harvey (2001; 2005) adds that KPIs can improve accountability, transparency and sustainability of employability and OERs initiatives. This then implies that NQAAs should include employability KPIs to promote common goals and values regarding employability and OERs pursuits at all levels. KPIs should also target system-wide sub-themes within HEIs lifecycle such as WIL experiences, graduate attributes and knowledge, and development of opportunities across multiple curricular facets for monitoring and evaluation purposes. These will then bolster internal and external employability processes by ensuring that HEIs performance is measured through consistent benchmarks and deliverables. This way, HEIs may demonstrate their suitability and relevance as expected by all active labour groups, NQAAs and society. As observed by Ntshoe and Letseka (2010), combining KPIs and university-wide QAIs, will ensure consistent ways for actualising,

monitoring and evaluating employability efforts at HEIs level. This also means that KPIs, within the bounds of employability discourses, should consider systems inputs and outputs, which will later provide data for measuring progress and regressions arising from employability initiatives.

Understanding key employability indicators and tool kits for measuring employability efforts

Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer, (2020) contend that KEIs within HEIs and ODeL contexts should be based on employability theoretical perspectives drawn from the Guidelines for Employability Quality Standards (GEQS), which was developed by the Johannesburg Commonwealth of Learning Regional Community of Practice (CoP 2) of 2019. This meeting identified key transferable skills such as creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills, soft-skills such as Resume writing, entrepreneurship skills, integrated career guidance, counselling and internationalisation. They added hard-skills such as understanding content, intellectual skills, professional/practical skills and transferable skills for employment. The authors thus proposed a list of quantitative and qualitative indicators against each standard on which the toolkit could be customised, based on HEIs micro and macro needs. The toolkit further provided leeway for departmental choices based on their needs and aspirations. Consequently, Mohee and Putty-Rogbeer, (2020) designed an individualised evaluation toolkit based on the generic KEIs framework, which would then aid HEIs and NQAAs evaluate their employability progress. This would also help assess and support university-wide systems, and allow them take ownership of their programmes while being accountable to society.

Understanding OERs within higher education contexts of Malawi

Generically, OERs emerged from open source discourses, which refer to source codes usually made available to the public at no fees for possible modification, redistribution and use (Open Source Organisation, 2006). This model usually encourages peer production, sharing and teamwork to generate source codes, designs, patents and documents for limitless public use. The movement began in response to the limitations of traditional publishing models which ring-fenced services and goods using intellectual property rights (IPRs) laws. Open source has thus aimed to enhance universal access to information, knowledge and software through the use of free licences that allow publishers and users to manipulate and redistribute data under fair dealing laws (Gerbe et al., 2010; Lakhani, von Hippel & June 2003). It is also argued that open-source movement has gained popularity because of the Internet, which has made adaptation, redistribution and use very easy. Open-source licences thus allow products, designs and models to be used, modified or shared under definitive terms and conditions (Popp, 2015). This means individuals can review and customise the product based on their contexts. If the licence only permits non-commercial redistribution, modification and use, that licence may sometimes be considered as a pay-up-licence because you need to pay before adapting the product for commercial purposes. Even when open-source licences are free, there are still restrictions and other hidden costs, such as acknowledging original sources. You need to preserve the names of the authors and a copyright statement within the material, or redistribute the product under the same licence (as in a copy-left licence), and those approved by the Open Source Initiative (OSI) based on their Open Source Definition (OSD).

Digital materials and possible open access licences

There are many open-content projects such as the Wikimedia Foundation (Wikipedia and Wiktionary) which use open-content licences under the Creative Commons licensing. They

adhere to principles similar to licences utilised by open-source software. They ensure that content remains free for re-use; source documents are freely available to anybody; and manipulation and editing are acceptable. Similarly, the Project Gutenberg (Project Gutenberg, 2012) and Wiki-source post books are in public domain or have their copyright expired, hence providing free access to readers. There is also the Open ICEcat catalogue for IT and Lighting sectors with product data-sheets based on Open Content License agreement usually distributed in XML and/or URL formats. Additionally, the Google Sketchup's-3D Warehouse community project is centred on the use of proprietary software, which is distributed under Creative Commons licensing. Together, the open-source movement has radically revolutionised the educational landscape.

Towards the reconstruction of OERs and Employability policies in higher education

Within HEIs contexts, there have been several debates bordering on Intellectual Commons, from which the Creative Commons (CC) movement was born. The CC movement is also attributed to the Rice University Connexions Project, the MIT University Open-Course-Ware project, Eugene Thacker's article, the Salman Khan Academy and Wikipedia Projects which emerged outside the IT world. Essentially, open-source curricula have provided free instructional media which can be modified, distributed and reused. Thousands of Open Access Journals (OAJs) and books have provided content to the public while charging authors article processing fees (APCs). In turn, readers can download, read and/or manipulate information for free. Common examples include Frontiers, PLO, MDPI, IGI Global, Vide-Leaf, Springer and many other publishers who use the CC Licence, and are mostly regulated by DOAJ, Cross-Ref, Scopus and the COPE.

Importance of OERs in education:

As Besanco et al., (2020) observed, sharing research findings openly has made data available to the masses with or without time, financial, and geographical limitations. It has helped academics share notes and readapt them for use instead of reinventing the wheels. It has also simplified the revision of content through the use of malleable online tools unlike in traditional publishing models. The UK Joint Information Systems Committee (UKJISC), for example, developed OERs policy which was regulated by OSS-Watch. The OSS-Watch was mandated to regulate universities' creation, manipulation, distribution and use of OERs within the UK. In the USA, President Obama signed the Health-care and Education Reconciliation Act worth $2 billion to finance the TAACCT programme in 2010, and it was the largest OER initiative globally. TAACCT has since then collaborated with employers and HEIs in creating technical instrumentalist curricula that can meet the needs of manufacturing, health, energy, transportation, and IT industries (Open-Source Organisation, 2013). This is similar to what Malawi universities have just done as they developed their first ever draft Employability and OERs policies with support from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). These gestures demonstrated that, as the world democracies grow, so should knowledge democracies through provision of OERs, while minimising the epistemological injustices orchestrated by massification and commodification.

Guided by the KEIs (Mohee & Putty-Rogbeer, 2020), HCT assumptions (Walker, 2012), HDT assumptions (Nussbaum, 2006; 2010; 2012; 2013; Sen, 1999) and the literature reviews, policymakers can now design effective ODeL policies. The assumption is that, this approach allows participants to analyse and understand global trends and debates on employability and OERs policies, and why these debates have been hot among HEIs and active labour groups of

society. Accordingly, the coming sections are dedicated to the objectives, approaches and deliverables of this workshop.

Approaches to policy development

The best approaches to policy designing and development would require defining and clarifying the objectives of such policies. It is envisaged that this processes only commences after adequate baseline and contextual analyses of the HEIs and the problem itself (Makoe, 2018; Makoe & Gatsha, 2020), and that the participants should engage with such findings. There is also need to analyse different ODeL policies and relevant literature on employability and OERs, while interrogating different theoretical perspectives that inform debates on employability, OERs and knowledge democratisation to inform our local policies (Leibowitz, 2017; Simui, 2022).

Since such tasks are usually facilitated by consultants, he/she should utilise different motivation or ice-breaking tools such as presentations on the findings of the baseline studies; basic principles of ODeL and its philosophies; different debates on employability and OERs (E&OERs); the mission and vision of the HEIs; its current position, theoretical propositions such as neoliberalism-minimalism, HCT, HDT, Capabilities Approach (CA) (Sen, 1999); and the dilemmas related to employability and knowledge economy debates. The concepts of E&OERs are then defined and articulated in relation to the HEIs contexts, their external and internal environment (PESTLE analysis) and global practices. Should HEIs have no draft policies on E&OERs, then the consultant can identify employability Toolkit from COL and other E&OERs policies to benchmark theirs. Members should then review the different policies alongside the HEIs curricular documents, policies and strategic plans. Furthermore, participants should be divided into sizeable groups; one group can work on OERs, another on Employability policies. This is recommended when one policy is longer than the other, otherwise allocate equal numbers for each group. You also need to allocate equal numbers of subthemes based on their choices. Identify group leaders who should record the findings and also coordinate the activities of their groups.

Based on sample policies and KEIs, you need to identify the following eleven subsections to inform your employability and OERs policies:

a) *Institutional strategy:* the concept of graduate employability is embedded at the institutional and programme levels. Intellectual and transferable skills development are encouraged across the whole student life-cycle.

b) *Programme designs:* minimum entry requirements are set in consultation with the industry and professional councils. Student enrolment is coherent with future demands of the industry.

c) *Programme design*: programme learning outcomes should encourage development of a range of skills required by the job market, including inter-alia, communication, creativity and entrepreneurial skills. Opportunities are provided for academics and students to interact regularly with relevant employers and professional bodies to keep them aware of market trends. Programme design includes a range of research methodological/ analytical skills required for the work world. Activities that promote entrepreneurial skills and attitudes across all programmes are encouraged.

d) *Teaching and learning experiences (TLEs)*: institutional teaching methods are innovative, varied and make effective use of available teaching and learning

materials (TLMs) to expose learners to a variety of communication practices. Programmes of study and pedagogies employed promote independent learning, and lifelong learning skills (in-service training). Teaching and learning encourage the development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. TLEs are designed to provide opportunities for teamwork, build rapport with their peers and others. Students engage in activities and other learning experiences that equip them with research skills and competencies. TLEs are designed to promote awareness and respect for alternative views and sensitivities, nationally and internationally. Coursework reflects the development of a full range of skills (written, oral and visual communication) that enable students become effective communicators.

e) *Digital learning environment* (DLE): appropriate technological infrastructure is provided to facilitate and support learning. There is easy access to technological devices and connectivity for users. Programmes promote mastery of basic digital competencies. Educational technologies accommodate different students' needs and affordability. Students are exposed to discipline specific technological tools applicable in the industry such as accounting or publishing software.

f) *Learner engagement:* staff and students engage in networking platforms. Opportunities are shared by students and staff through trusted relationships. Formal and informal learning experiences equip students with networking skills. Students learn through social networking forums. Learning experiences promote awareness of businesses, social issues, and employer needs. Learning experiences promote engagement with trans-disciplinary knowledge.

g) *Assessment:* assessment strategies take into account the need for students to master problem-solving skills and competencies required in a changing work environment. Students are assessed on their ability to analyse information, synthesise views, make connections where appropriate, and propose creative solutions. Students are exposed to frameworks for self-assessment to share professional strengths and weaknesses.

h) *Industrial linkages and collaborations:* WIL is adequately considered through conceptualisation, designing, and assessment tools for expected learning outcomes. Students to engage in WIL through practicals, internships and experiments as part of their learning. WIL is effectively managed and assessed by both HEIs and employers to ensure mastery of skills. There are ways for students to access information on possible job opportunities related to their study programmes.

i) *Student support services (SSSs):* opportunities for students to engage with peers and others different contexts to build confidence in communicating their ideas. Support is given to students to help them master language of instruction while improving their communication skills. Help students develop interpersonal skills and appropriate body language for effective communication. Programmes promote self-awareness, assertiveness, trust, commitment, courteousness and resourcefulness. Formal and informal mechanisms equip students with soft and hard-skills such as CV writing, interviewing, report writing and summarising.

j) *Internationalisation:* HEIs programmes allow for credit transfer system that is well aligned with other HEIs globally for student mobility. HEIs offer joint

qualifications with other universities globally. Opportunities for learning foreign languages are provided for.

k) *Research, service and projects*: HEIs take advantage of technologies to rope in global researchers to develop human capital. Research outputs are guided by existing IPR and licences. Research-teaching collaborations provide opportunities for curriculum reforms to include employability attributes. Students are encouraged to participate in service or community projects.

From this stage, you will need to define Generic HEIs core functions based on the eleven sub-themes (a-k) above, employability key standards (objectives and strategies), and KEIs through qualitative (reports on WIL) and quantitative aspects (students/employer surveys) etc. You finally circulate evaluation forms for consent, and an evaluation questionnaire on the workshop's activities, successes and recommendations for future improvements and modifications. Participants should also be asked to fill media forms permitting the consultant and sponsors publish the policies, pictures and any material emanating from such gatherings.

Expected deliverables

When the workshop is funded by donors such as COL (COL, 2023), it is envisaged that at the end of that gathering, stakeholders should be able to improve their understanding of E&OERs and different licencing and copyright regimes. They should be able to analyse available E&OERs policies and their implications on practice and epistemological justice. In terms of education, the role of neoliberal-minimalism on access to equitable quality knowledge, dilemmas and potential depravations emanating from commodification and massification of education should be discussed. Draft Employability policy and OERs policy for HEIs are now developed and terminally reviewed awaiting external peer reviews and editing before submission to Senate for ratification. Participants are also exposed to different SIMs licencing procedures and their implications on OERs, authorships and IPR.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper set out to examine the implications of E&OERs policies within the context of neoliberal-minimalism. The study showed that while employability concerns have been there for decades due to wars, economic recessions, poverty and pandemics among other reasons, many HEIs in Africa are operating without any policies. The contextual analysis undertaken in Malawi through literature reviews and observations demonstrated that Malawi did not have any national or individual E&OERs policies despite having ODeL programmes on the background, raising serious questions of quality and the standards of education. As Makoe, (2018) and SADC, (2021) had established, E&OERs policies are the lifeline for any successful and credible ODeL programme. And since ODeL is key suspect to poor quality education when compared with f2f programmes, there is need to design comprehensive E&OERs policies to systematically cover the whole life cycle of the programme. The paper also established that during policy formulation tasks, group leaders should consolidate all conceptual contributions made to have the policies ready for peer reviews, QA checks and ratification by Senators. Indeed, best practices entail that consultants should be ready to answer the queries from policy designers beyond the actual workshops. It is equally ethical to acknowledge the donor who provided funding for such policy formulation tasks. Since knowledge and skills are dynamic concepts as they regularly change

following socioeconomic and cultural changes, then E&OERs should be periodically reformed in line with socioeconomic changes, if they are to remain relevant to the society.

Final recommendations

Based on the literature reviewed thus far, many universities in Malawi still host ODeL as parasite departments or sections. Thus, HEIs should aim to convert such departments into Institutes or a Directorates for them to grow and expand their operations (Chibambo, 2016; Simui, 2022). There were also problems of internal politics within HEIs, which negatively affect curriculum provision and student experiences. Moreover, student socioeconomic and cultural capital within HEIs have compromised their participation, progress and progression hence the need for policy adjustments to prepare them for equitable employability prospects (Bourdieu, 1984; Reay, 2004, 2005). There is also need to embed soft and hard skills throughout students' learning life-cycle. Malawi's HEIs should incorporate WIL and community engagement activities into the curricular to help students apply the skills in real-time contexts. Importantly, HEIs should strengthen entrepreneurship components to increase prospects for employability and job creation. The finding that Malawi HEIs did not have any draft E&OERs policies should be cause for worry as this reflects badly on our commitment towards the development of genuine human capital as reflected in HDT.

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