

# WENR

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WORLD EDUCATION NEWS & REVIEWS



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## The Higher Education Crisis in Developing Countries

"... the crisis of higher education is not merely one of public confidence vis-a-vis the performance of higher education; it is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, an internal crisis of purpose, that is, one which touches on the very nature of individual institutions, their roles and functions and their place in the total higher education system." (OECD Conference on Policies for Higher Education, 1981)

by Jamil Salmi

Education and Employment Division  
Population and Human Resources Department  
The World Bank

### International Trends

Higher education is in crisis. Many developing countries are confronted with an alarming situation of uncontrolled growth of enrollments against a background of diminishing financial resources, a decline in the quality of teaching and research, and a rising problem of graduate unemployment. What has gone wrong? How is it possible that the carefully planned development of higher education during the last three decades has led to a crisis situation characterized by a pattern of unmanageable expansion? What kinds of reforms can be effective to overcome the present crisis?

#### From Enthusiasm to Disenchantment

In the early 1960s, the African, Asian and Latin American ministers of education met under the auspices of Unesco in Addis Ababa, Bangkok and Santiago respectively to adopt comprehensive educational plans calling, among other priorities, for a rapid increase in higher education enrollments. The ambitious quantitative objectives adopted at that time reflected a strong commitment to rapidly train the professional, technical and managerial manpower required for economic development.

The results surpassed the initial expectations. Between 1960 and the late

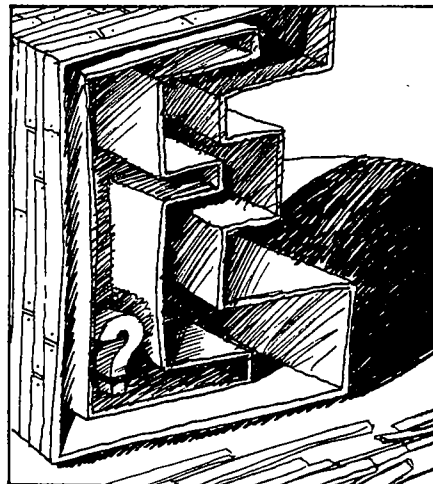
1980s, higher education enrollments were multiplied by 9 in Africa, 4 in Asia and 9 in Latin America. This rapid expansion was fueled by a strong social demand for higher education and facilitated by generous government policies of open admission, free education and, in many countries, grants for all students and guaranteed employment for all graduates.

However, the very success of these expansionary policies has put higher education in jeopardy as enrollments have grown at a faster pace than resources. The quality of teaching and learning has declined as a result of overcrowding, inadequate staffing, deteriorating physical facilities, poor library resources and insufficient scientific equipment. In many cases,

internal efficiency is very low and a significant proportion of the budget is wasted. In Madagascar and Senegal, for example, the pass rate at the end of the first year of university is only 13 percent and 20 percent respectively. Moreover, in many countries, the phenomenon of graduate unemployment/underemployment has become a serious problem even in scientific fields. This has been observed for instance in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Peru and Egypt.

Paradoxically, the rapid expansion of higher education has also had adverse effects from a social equity viewpoint. Despite increased democratization in terms of student enrollment, the present pattern of allocation of resources between levels of education is highly inequitable.

In many developing countries, where the majority of students come from high and middle income families, higher education receives a disproportionate share of the government education budget. In Brazil, for instance, 23 percent of the budget goes to 2 percent of the student population; in Rwanda 15 percent goes to 0.2 percent of the student population. In developing countries as a whole, the average unit cost in higher education represents 370 percent of per capita income compared to only 49 percent in industrialized countries.



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# PUBLISHER'S LETTER

## A Rare Glimpse

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This issue of WENR addresses higher education in developing countries, a subject that has been largely ignored by the international education community in the United States.

In many countries of Africa and Latin America, higher education is undergoing changes brought about by severe economic crisis since the early 1980s, and the resulting cutbacks in state funding. Jamil Salmi, writing on the Higher Education Crisis in Developing Countries, identifies some root causes of the current difficulties and even traces some of their origins to development plans drawn in the 1960s.

Political and ideological forces have also had a profound effect on education. From Iran, Golnar Mehran describes the impact of the 1979 Islamic cultural revolution, which has wrought a radical transformation of curricula, textbooks and even extra-curricular activities. In a trend that is strongly reminiscent of practices in the former USSR, Iranian schools are at the forefront in attempting to mold individuals with "total ideological and political commitment to the Islamic Republic."

These extreme changes are taking place in countries that have been relegated to the margins of the concerns of international educational exchange. As they have gone largely unreported, we have little current information that would allow us to measure their effect on the few students who still manage to make it to American universities. We hope this cycle of neglect will end in the 1990s and that American educators will expand their focus on education beyond Europe and selected countries of the Pacific rim.



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# COUNTRY UPDATES

## AUSTRALIA

Monash University in Melbourne will take charge of Australia's new "television university," with an enrollment of up to 12,000 students expected next year and more than 25,000 by 1995.

More than 30 university subjects will be available via Australian Broadcasting Corporation television and radio initially, with the number of units to increase to at least 150 by 1995.

Any Australian will be eligible to enroll, regardless of qualifications. Twenty-four units will be needed for a degree, and students will be required to pay an up front fee of Aus\$300 for each unit, or slightly more than on-campus students pay.

Monash heads a consortium of five universities that have been running a pilot open learning project this year. It is expected that the consortium will be awarded a 10-year contract by the Government, which is allocating \$53 million to the new Open University over the next three years.

Students will be able to enroll initially in two degree programs, a new Bachelor of General Studies, and a Bachelor of Business Studies. Special units also will be offered to teachers and nurses. (*University News* 10/19/92)

## CHINA

The Chinese government has called for the nation's universities to adapt to a market economy and implement radical reforms, including charging tuition.

The shake-up of China's outmoded university system is aimed at training more students in economic-based subjects. The new education policy also will allow the establishment of private universities, encourage foreign investment in higher education and give universities greater independence.

State Education Minister Li Tie-Ying called on Chinese universities to absorb and learn "some good educational administrative experience as well as teaching contents and methods from throughout the world, including capitalist countries."

When the government closed universities as "bastions of capitalism" and told students to work as peasants during the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao-Tse-tung said, "Learning from books leads to stupidity."

Since universities reopened, they have remained firmly under state control and suffering from a lack of funds. (*United Press International* 11/18/92)

## CYPRUS

The University of Cyprus was officially inaugurated in Nicosia on September 15, after having been in the works for 25 years. Representatives from 40 foreign universities attended the ceremonies. The institution has 10 faculties and an initial enrollment of 508 students, including 450 Cypriots, 44 Greeks and other foreigners. (*Ethnikos Kirikas* 10/19/92)

## FRANCE

Requirements for the *baccalauréat* will change from the beginning of the 1993 school year in an attempt to re-balance the streams of general education and break the "supremacy" of the *série C* (mathematics), according to Education Minister Jack Lang.

Starting in *seconde* (the first year of *lycée*), candidates will be able to choose from one of three general tracks: literary (L); economic/social (ES) and scientific (S); or one of four technical tracks: industrial sciences and technology (STI); laboratory sciences and technology (STL); medical and social sciences (SMS); or tertiary sciences and technology (STT).

Each new track will concentrate on the study of four major subjects along with complementary general subjects. The block of required courses will represent 25-26 hours of classes per week. Students will also have to take electives.

Two main constraints will be imposed on *baccalauréat* candidates. Although one or more options may be chosen in the block of major subjects, any option chosen in the *première* (second year of *lycée*) and pursued through the *terminale* (final class) will be tested in the *baccalauréat* examination. Secondly, the four major subjects in each track will account for at least 60 percent in the calculation of the coefficients of the *baccalauréat*.

According to Mr. Lang, the current *baccalauréat* requirements put students who are not scientifically-oriented at a disadvantage. Therefore, the new scientific track will group the present "C, D and E" series. Studies in industrial technology and biology have been proposed and can also be chosen as an option.

*continued*

The literary track (L) will consist—in addition to the four major subjects of French, a modern language, history-geography, and philosophy—of a science geared toward an understanding of contemporary problems. The new *L série* differs from the present “A” in that the number of hours devoted to history-geography and a modern language will be increased.

The economic and social track (ES) will emphasize mathematics as applied in the fields of economics and social sciences.

The scientific track (S) will consist of two common subjects for all students, math and physics/chemistry, and one subject chosen from the following: biology-geology, industrial technology, and biology-ecology. The number of hours of math will be two to three hours less than at present.

With four tracks in the technological *série*, the reform’s aim is to emphasize higher technological education, computer science and management. (*Newsletter/Faits nouveaux* 3/92)

The French government has proposed a massive 9.7 percent increase in spending on higher education for 1993, which means that for the first time, more than a fifth of the national budget will be devoted to education.

The extra money will enable the creation of 3,000 new jobs in universities, where student numbers will expand by 80,000 next year. There are also plans to expand and refurbish existing campus facilities. (*The Higher* 10/9/92 and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 11/11/92)

## GERMANY

Higher education faces sweeping reforms, including cutting first degrees from six to four years.

Rainer Ortleb, Federal Education Minister, said recently that courses would be split into four-year “basic” degrees emphasizing vocational and professional skills, followed by postgraduate study for some. The ministry plans to double the proportion of students attending *fachhochschulen* (polytechnics), which offer shorter and more applied courses than universities, to 40 percent of all students.

Although most degrees require six years of study, the average time the country’s 1.8 million students take to complete their degrees is seven years, and the average graduate begins a career at 28.

The need for reforms has a broad consensus among government, federal states and German rectors, and should be introduced next spring. (*The Higher* 10/30/92)

## HUNGARY

By the end of the decade, Hungary expects to have eliminated the last vestiges of the Soviet-style higher-education system that was imposed on it after World War II.

Under the Soviet model, research and education were artificially separated. Independent, single-discipline research institutes were formed under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which was given sole authority to award graduate degrees. The country’s classic European-style universities were downgraded to the status of undergraduate teaching institutions, and ultimately dismantled to form specialized colleges and schools.

An ambitious plan calls for a comprehensive restructuring of Hungary’s network of universities, colleges and research institutes—and a sharp reduction in their number. It also provides for a doubling of students enrolled in post secondary education to a total enrollment of 190,000 by the year 2000.

As elsewhere in Europe, unemployment among university graduates is increasing, but universities have been slow to respond to changes in the labor market. While there is an acute shortage of skilled personnel in law, marketing, management, public administration, and sales, universities are still graduating large numbers of agricultural, chemical and industrial engineers for massive state industries, which are now collapsing.

With only 10 million people, Hungary has nearly 1,400 individual academic departments spread among 20 universities and more than 50 specialized technical and vocational colleges. A recent study by the World Bank concluded that such a small country could not operate such a system economically. The new plan will lead to the formation of six to eight university centers out of the existing 74 higher-education institutions. Redundant departments will be merged or eliminated—a move being fiercely fought by these institutions. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 9/23/92)

## INDIA

The Indian Institute of Technology reports that the minimum credits to be earned for the award of the B.Tech degree is not less than 175.

Each student is awarded a final letter grade at the end of the semester in each subject. The letter grades and the corresponding grade points are: S = 10 grade points; A = 9; B = 8; C = 7; D = 6; E = 4; U = 0 and W = Registration cancelled for want of minimum attendance.

A student is considered to have completed a subject successfully and earned the credits if he secures a letter grade other than “U” or “W” in that subject. A letter grade of U in any subject implies a failure in that subject.

Requirements for the successful completion of a B.Tech degree in each category are indicated on the back of each transcript.

No class or division or rank is awarded to a student upon completion of the B.Tech program. However, a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 6.50 and above should be considered equivalent to First Class. (Correspondence of 10/92 from Indian Institute of Technology)

A fully autonomous Indian Maritime University will be set up soon to monitor the maritime training institutions under government control. The university, the first of its kind in India, will determine the syllabi of all training programs for an estimated 500 navigation officers, 600 engineer officers and 1,200 seamen annually. Currently, India's shipping industry faces a great shortage of these personnel. Over 60 percent of officers graduated find employment with foreign companies, while only 32 percent are employed by Indian companies. (*University News* 9/21/92)

## ITALY

The *Scuola Superiore Enrico Mattei* is a private institution of higher education offering a diploma in *Economia Aziendale* (Business Economics). Admission requires possession of a *laurea* or an equivalent foreign qualification in such areas as chemistry, economics, engineering, geology, law, etc.

The program length is one academic year of approximately eight months divided into two equal full-time terms. Five courses are offered during each term, and students must pass an examination in each course. The diploma offered has no legal value in Italy because it is awarded by a private institution. (Correspondence from Fondazione Rui of 9/92)

## KENYA

Kenya's Commission for Higher Education, which was established by the government in 1985, is in the process of a major restructuring in preparing for its role, from mid-1993, of an "apex body for the planning, programming, budgeting and financing of public universities."

It will continue to accredit private universities and equate foreign qualifications. It will also assume a new responsibility of accrediting some of the programs in post-secondary institutions by upgrading them to degree status and then awarding the degrees. (*ACU Bulletin of Current Documentation* 10/92)

The University of Nairobi was closed indefinitely in September to avert what the authorities describe as illegal meetings and demonstrations against President Daniel arap Moi.

The closure drew sharp criticism from pressure groups, particularly the Law Society of Kenya, which called on students and lecturers to ignore the closing order. Riot police, however, forced students to leave the university's three campuses and report to their rural chiefs. The University has become fertile ground for recruitment drives by rival political parties. (*The Higher* 10/2/92)

## KUWAIT

Prior to the Gulf War, Kuwait, with only 372,000 students in 570 schools, allocated \$1 billion for grades K-12. The Ministry of Education operated four post secondary institutions as well as specialized training institutions and vocational training centers. Kuwait University offered 17,000 students both undergraduate and graduate education.

When the Iraqis invaded, they dismantled the educational system. Institutions were looted and schools became barracks and operational centers for the Iraqis. No formal classes were held during the invasion year. Fortunately, all educational records had been computerized and copies were saved.

When the war ended, the Ministry of Education wanted K-12 schools operational by the fall of 1991, and so the decision was made to offer two years of education simultaneously to make up for the lost year. To accomplish this, schools reopened in August 1991, class periods were lengthened, and subjects such as music and physical education were eliminated.

At Kuwait University the faculties of engineering, allied health and medicine required replacement of sophisticated equipment which was not readily available. In addition, many faculty members had been non-nationals who fled Kuwait permanently. While facilities were restored, special arrangements were made for upper division students to complete their programs abroad. In October 1991, Kuwait University resumed instruction with a reduced enrollment. Faculty has been recruited from abroad, especially to teach English, medicine, and allied health.

A steady stream of sponsored Kuwaiti students continues to the United States as the government and private sector seek to train nationals for positions formerly held by expatriates. (*Membernews* SP/S 92)

*continued*

