Experimenting in distance education: The African virtual university (AVU) and the paradox of the World Bank in Kenya—A rejoinder

Ishmael I. Munene

Educational Leadership Department, College of Education, Northern Arizona University, P.O. Box 5774, Flagstaff, AZ 86004, USA

Abstract

This rejoinder is in response to criticism against the African Virtual University (AVU), an internet-based education modality, by Amutabi and Oketch [2003. Experimenting in distance education: the African Virtual University (AVU) and the Paradox of World Bank in Kenya. International Journal of Educational Development 23, 57–73]. By closely focusing on AVU “foreignness”, its equity effects, as well as questions about its sustainability, this riposte argues that the origins, developments and modus operandi of the new virtual educational system mirrors that of the state universities in Kenya. The paper concludes by arguing in favor of the theory of isomorphism as a more comprehensive analytical framework for assessing complexities of the development and role of internet-based education in developing countries.

Keywords: Kenya; Virtual university; Higher education; Distance education; World Bank

1. The argument

I read the article on African Virtual University by Amutabi and Oketch [2003. International Journal of Educational Development 23, 57–73], with keen interest. The article offered a thought-provoking analysis on the subject of distance education via the new digital technology in Kenya. The authors offered an incisive critique of the nexus between the emerging neo-liberal agenda of international donor institutions like the World Bank, the new ideology of globalization, which has permeated into the higher education spectrum, and the new Internet technology in a university system undergoing significant structural transformation. From their analysis, the merits of the African Virtual University (AVU) in Kenya’s higher education development pale considerably when examined from the rationale of the project, its relevance, expansion of access, cost factors, pedagogical advantages, long-term sustainability, and its effects on general educational developments.

The analysis yields three paramount conclusions that are the focus of attention in this rejoinder. The first is the “foreignness” of the new educational modality: AVU represents the epitome of an alien project imposed on African education. Of AVU, Amutabi and Oketch observe that the project is a harbinger of foreign dependency, specifically American, and “…will ensure the greatest dependence by Africa and other developing continents of the South” (Amutabi and Oketch, 2003, p. 58).
The project’s curricular and instructional approaches are seen as reinforcing this foreign orientation. The second conclusive argument made revolves around equity considerations. The authors cast the AVU as exacerbating the prevailing inequalities rather than ameliorating the situation. They contend that “...AVU services (are) accessible mainly to an urban clientele but inaccessible to the majority rural population” (Amutabi and Oketch, 2003, p. 64). Finally, the question of sustainability looms large in their argument as this poignant question demonstrates: “Can Kenya, in whatever form, governmentally or through private entrepreneurs, be able to continue the project once donor funds are exhausted?” (Amutabi and Oketch, 2003, p. 67) These issues mark the point of departure between the authors and this rejoinder. The thesis in this reply avers that while the mode of educational delivery in AVU differs from that of traditional state universities in Kenya on account of its use of digital technology, its foreign legacy, equity effects as well as its sustainability dilemma mirror those of the state institutions. The conceptualisation, implementation and current status of AVU follows the trajectory of the evolution of state universities in which they share a complementary synergy.

2. Foreign legacies and traditions of dependency

The assertion that AVU exacerbates the chain of dependency that ties Africa to metropolitan countries intellectually needs to be tempered by the historical reality surrounding the genesis of the modern African university. The founding of universities in colonial African such as Makerere in Uganda, Ibadan in Nigeria and University of Nairobi in Kenya in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was along the lines of universities in the metropolitan colonial powers homeland. The University of Nairobi, just like Makerere and Ibadan, began as a constituent college of the University of London charged with the responsibility of producing an elite colonial civil service to staff the emerging colonial bureaucracy. Thus, both in character and social function, the university traditions in Kenya began with “the fundamental pattern of British civil universities in constitutions, standards and curricular, in social purpose,...And for social function...they were, as in England, to nurture an elite” (Ashby, 1964, p. 18). This historical legacy was the embryo that grew and developed to encompass all aspects of Kenya’s universities, with the umbilical cord of dependency firmly rooted in the academic traditions of the west. As Plye (1978, p. 2–3) has aptly noted:

There is much in our education system (in Britain) which makes it easier to define problems in terms of narrowly scientific objectives. The existing relationships between universities (with the unidirectional flow of “experts” and advisors, the flow of overseas students to this country, etc) have tended to transfer the same standards and expectations to LDCs...Technologies for the satisfaction of basic needs and for rural development have received little attention...curricular, books and teaching methods are too closely imitative of practice in industrialised countries. This has spilled over from teaching into research expectations.

The result is a university system that is far from the vision and expectations of the local Kenyan population, an alien institution that has been in existence even before the conceptualisation of AVU. The alienation of the Kenyan university and the perpetuation of the dependency chain are not only restricted to state universities but have also been quite prevalent in the emerging private higher education sector. Virtually all private universities, whether secular or non-secular, have a foreign origin or connection, thanks to the state requirement that they seek affiliation with other universities before they seek a local charter. The United States International University (USIU), the oldest and main secular private university, is an affiliate campus of the Alliant University (formerly USIU) based in San Diego, USA. Its academic curriculum, teaching methodology and staff structure is a carbon copy of the mother campus. Its major objective is to cater for clients who wish to access the international (read American) labour market in the emerging globalised economy. Equally, non-secular institutions have followed suit. Daystar University’s foray into academia commenced as an affiliate of Wheaton College in the US to which it still has extensive links spanning across curricular and staff exchanges. DaystarUS, a not-for-profit organisation based in the US, serves as a conduit for channeling material and other donations from America to the institution. The same is true of the Kenya Methodist University (KEMU). The university has maintained strong development partnership with Loyola University of Chicago in addition to Tufts University in Massachusetts. Like
the DaystarUS, KEMU Development Association (KEMUDA) is a not-for-profit agency that mobilises US resources for the church university. Therefore, private universities have aggressively contributed to the strengthening and sustaining dependency networks in Kenya’s higher education in ways that even public universities would have found formidable.

The other important sources of dependency are the “links” between local Kenyan state universities and their more affluent counterparts in America and Europe, inspired by either individual academics or academic and research units. University administrations at Egerton, Kenyatta, Moi universities and the University of Nairobi have established fully-fledged directorates to manage these institutional linkages, which gained momentum in the mid 1990s.

While the “link” phenomena seems to be an “academic” response to the deteriorating material conditions in Kenya universities, it is in reality the most overt form of dependency with a unidirectional flow of intellectual exchange, from the West to Kenya. Western authored textbooks, technical support including computers, “expert” professors are sent to teach and research on African issues and PhD scholarships for locals to study in western universities are aspects of the link package. Rarely do we see Kenyan scholars sent to teach and research in American and European universities in spite of the local expertise that they possess. Little wonder that many of the Kenyan academics have consistently maintained a westernised outlook. The power relations in this “link” arrangement short-change the local academics as Brock-Utne (2003:38) notes “The mere fact that one is giving money, and is a ‘donor’, while the other party receives the money and is a “recipient signifies a disempowering and asymmetrical relationship”.

The outcome of this dependency syndrome is predictable. The Kenyan society, from the political, economic and intellectual elites, has remained largely an imitator of the west. Their attitudes, values and interests are consistent with those of the rich industrial nations. As a former student and teacher at one of the Kenyan public universities, I went through an extensive and intensive period studying, internalising and validating western theoretical models without any attempt to critique the orientation or search for indigenous homegrown models. Following in the footsteps of our university teachers, my fellow students and I laboured hard to imitate European and American scholars in our teaching, research and scholarship the moment we joined the faculty ranks. As matters stand today, little seems to have changed. Western-authored books continue to be the main course texts in addition to being the bulk of the reading materials in the libraries. In the meantime, the local publishing industry is in limbo electing instead to specialise in publishing for elementary and high school. Beyond academia, the dependency mentality has assumed new heights. Today, gravitation towards western consumption habits including food, clothing, housing and type of automobile owned has become a status symbol.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to address certain dimensions of dependency that are crucial to explain some apparent contradictions with the phenomena in so far as African higher education is concerned. Dependency is not necessarily a linear and one-way street. Rather, it can occur in both directions, albeit under specific conditions. Let us consider higher education dependency in colonial Africa as a case in point.

Surplus dependency, as Mazrui (1992) calls it, occurs if society B depends on Society A, if B needs A more than A needs B. In the colonial dispensation, metropolitan Europe regarded Africa as a source of raw materials, viable markets, supplier of labour, and receiver of surplus population. In this regard, the colonial powers needed the colonies more than the latter needed the former. Europe, therefore, was a dependent of the colonial empire for its economic needs. This European economic dependency on the colonial empire meant that the colonies had some leverage on the part of the coloniser (the core requires the periphery economically). The colonial university exercised a modicum of this leverage through the production of colonial administrators, some of whom went to work in metropolitan Europe as well as in the wider colonial empire.

Nevertheless, the extent to which colonial African universities could have radically influenced Europe, and thus enhanced their independence, was severely constrained. This is because they were essentially
instruments of Europe’s cultural penetration in Africa. Appreciating this position requires a consideration of the other type of dependency, deficit control dependency. According to Mazrui (1992), in this type of dependency, B is dependent on A if B has less control over the relationship than A has. From this perspective, African colonies were at the mercy of metropolitan Europe, responding fervently to its economic dictates. Europe wielded both military and political clout to ensure this level of subservience.

Military and political clout was reinforced by the colonial universities, which served as avenues for dumping European cultural artifacts into the continent without reciprocal cultural-counter-penetration by African culture. Through the universities, Africa received from Europe, language, religion and culture; in return, Africa availed material economic goods such as land, mines and labour according to Mazrui (1992). Through the universities, need for western culture rather than an African one was extend throughout the continent. The pre-independence African university became the most powerful agent of western cultural importation. Thus, whereas economic dependency can be bidirectional with both countries exercising some level of leverage over the other based on control of some economic products deemed desirable by the other, this is not possible with cultural dependency. As we have seen with the colonial African university, the process is inherently unidirectional with the dominated country being the recipient of cultural artifacts of the dominant nation. And university education in post-independence Africa has continued this tradition of western cultural dependency unrestrained.

What accounts for the increasing intellectual dependency on America? The answer to this question lies in the decline of the state as the main catalyst of higher education development in Africa and the ascendancy of private initiatives and market-based approaches to educational development and provision. Since the mid 1980s, the American-based World Bank became dominant player in African higher education. In a series of policy edicts, the bank has labeled African higher education as a failed enterprise (see for instance, World Bank, 2002) and recommended, among other measures, the need to encourage private universities, accelerated privatisation of aspects public universities as well as the need for alternative approaches to educational delivery. The AVU is a World Bank initiative in this context. In other words, the Bretton Wood institution prescription was a gradual adaptation of the American model of higher education with its privatisation and quasi-marketisation distinctiveness. This was the genesis of weaning the continent away from the state-dominated European university model. This, coupled with USA’s dominant role in higher education, its economic might and technological advances and its, has tilted the balance of cultural dependency by African universities from Europe to America. So whereas in the colonial epoch, and in the first quarter century of independence Africa the state was the main engine for university development and the cultural dependency of the institutions was to Europe, the last decade of the 20th century has seen the emergence of the World Bank and private initiatives as the main catalyst of university reconfiguration and development. Accompanying this transformation has been the institutional cultural dependency focusing on America.

In this context, rather than view AVU as aggravating the cultural dependency condition in the country, we should see it as operating within the already existing neo-colonial mentality that abounds in the Kenyan (and African, for that matter) social fabric. Rather than perceive the AVU as a totally new dimension in the chain of dependency, we should look at it as an extension of the existing mechanism of social and intellectual alienation. It is a process that started with the colonial university which “…like the men who manned the colonial outposts, was intended to academically colonise the mind of Africa. Its philosophy and premise were European—it was, like the entire educational process, created to kill any remnants of Africanity in the student and the continent” (Ashby, 1964). Apparently, in Kenya this success is not in dispute, the enthusiastic reception of AVU confirming that the colonisation of the mind is a road that has been well traveled.

3. Role of elites, and advantages of organisational synergy

Does AVU in its current format and location deny access to a sizeable segment of the population? Apparently Amutabi and Oketch think so. They identify three factors that fortify their claim. First is the high cost of telephone services, computers and software, which renders AVU out of reach for a majority of the population. The second issue is the
location of AVU centres in major urban areas, which limits their access to only the residents in these areas. Third, they contend that the location of AVU centres in university campus further removes them from the reach of the bulk of the citizenry. The overall argument in their equity claim is that AVU in effect remains a preserve of the urban elites, and is largely inaccessible to rural inhabitants. These assertions certainly have some merits; however, they need to be examined critically, paying close attention to the contexts in which university development takes place.

As in the case of dependency, the equity arguments put forth mirror the general developments that characterise university development in Kenya. Take the question of elites for instance. The development of university education began on the premise of training local elite for the colonial service. The initial beneficiaries of this education were mostly sons and daughters of local elites, the traditional chiefs who collaborated with the colonial authorities. The Koinanges, Waiyakis, and the Wa’ngombes, to name but only three, are some of the well-known families with strong roots in colonial administration, and whose leadership in business and politics in post-independent Kenya owes much of its success to university education in the colonial era. It cannot be gainsaid, therefore, that the colonial university education played the greatest role in introducing the most conspicuous basis of socio-political and economic stratification in the country. Due to the historical roots of university development, it is highly unlikely that the university would eventually ensure that equitable access was guaranteed to all socio-economic groups.

Research in the 1980s and 1990s revealed the extent to which university education in Kenya had continued to be disproportionately weighted in favour of the offspring of the advantaged. Hughes (1987) research, which explored the access and post-graduation experiences of the University of Nairobi students, revealed that while expansion of university education had helped broaden access, the lower socio-economic groups continued to be disadvantaged. Furthermore, the post-graduation experiences registered the greatest decline in equity with students from affluent families securing permanent employment within a short period of graduation. Their counterparts from lower socio-economic status took longer to gain employment and mostly took on temporary employment. Similar findings were also established by Eshiwani (1983) who noted that students from upper socio-economic status had dominated participation in higher education. The expansion of higher education in the late 1980s and early 1990s failed to radically remedy the situation and only served to confirm that under conditions of increased competition family background is more influential in access as well as post-graduation experiences (Hughes and Mwiria, 1990).

The criticisms leveled against AVU on account of its orientation to elites needs to be reexamined within the wider context of the role of elites in the diffusion of innovation. Elites are both innovators and early adopters of innovation. The social disposition of elites makes them more acquiescent to create new products, institutions and procedures of performing tasks than non-elites. Because they possess superior achievements in wealth, education, and entrepreneurial orientation, elites are the first in society to embrace changes, if not experiment with them. Little wonder that they have been the first group to adopt new alternative modes of educational instruction. Research indicates that most online students are mature, full-time workers in middle to higher socio-economic (Peterson and Dill, 1997). That the AVU appears to target elites is therefore a logical development in the evolution of web-based distance learning.

The situation of the AVU centres in university campuses is itself a strategic decision borne out of necessity for synergy in educational development. Quite often organisational development takes the form of process-based subunits around the organisation’s core work processes, and network-based structures that link the organisation to other interdependent organisations. I believe this is the techno-structural design that has guided the location of AVU centres in university campuses. The advantages of such an arrangement are easy to discern.

Students taking similar courses and their academic advisors are grouped together in one location. This provides a good environment for group discussions and study sessions. Second, it allows the students, many who may not have had experience with a traditional university life, to make use of other university facilities—both academic and non-academic. Third, it also increases the diversity of the student population on campus, from an undergraduate population drawn exclusively from high schools to a diverse one with mature-age students drawn from the labour market.
The location of AVU centres on university campus is also consistent with developments in other countries. Northern Arizona University, where I teach both in-class and online courses, has a growing number of residential full-time students who opt to take part of their course on the World Wide Web. Data collected by the Institutional Research and Planning Office shows that full-time residential students prefer to take online courses on campus because they like the campus life experience, have close contact with fellow students, and can physically meet their academic advisors as well as use library facilities. Thus, from both an organisational, and student welfare perspectives, it makes good sense to locate Internet learning centres on university campuses. Even if telephone facilities, hardware and software availability in rural Kenya were not a handicap, locating AVU centres in rural towns as suggested by Amutabi and Oketch would deny both the universities and the students the benefits of the synergy that accrues when such facilities are positioned in a university campus.

4. Costs and the question of sustainability

Finally, let us shift our attention to the other major criticism by Amutabi and Oketch, that the cost of AVU programmes is prohibitive and far exceeds the cost of traditional university courses including expensive ones like medicine, architecture and engineering. The authors are quite right in lamenting the exorbitant fee structure that characterises the programmes. They are also accurate in disclosing the dismal number of students enrolled in the online programmes. Under these conditions, the authors contend that the AVU project may be unsustainable in the long run. Are there reasons that can account for these sky-high user charges? Perhaps.

Two reasons account for this circumspection. The first is financial squeeze afflicting higher education. Financial austerity is a reality that confronts many higher education institutions, in Africa as well as in the west. Costs have been rising faster than inflation since the 1980s while the ability of parents and states to support the increase have been on the decline (Mumper, 2001). Table 1 indicates that even the traditional university system has proved to be a financial burden for Kenya with deficits increasing year after year. Investing in information technology pushes the bar even higher since the initial start up costs is extremely high. Thus, strategic financial advisors advocate the utilisation of external resources including foundations, corporations, governments, donors and even former graduates to defray such set up costs (Keller, 1997). Cultural dependency notwithstanding, Kenya took the most reasonable way out by accepting the partnership of the World Bank in this venture, a partnership that has, since 2002, been terminated with the de-linking of AVU from the Bank. Today the project head office is in Nairobi, Kenya. The second reason relates to low economies of scale. While the initial start up cost is high and enrolments are low, online programmes can be extremely costly. However, as enrolment rises and the system becomes fully operational, institutions do register a decrease in costs due to economies of scale. We can thus appreciate the position of AVU at the moment.

A number of important inferences arise from the foregoing analysis. First, is that costs of AVU programmes are high just as they would be for any new institutions with low economies of scale, traditional universities included. Second, just as the development of Kenya’s public universities has been an exercise in collaborative endeavour between the state and international partners, so is the development of AVU. Finally, the financial quandary in which Kenya finds itself has translated into doubts about the financial sustainability of not only the AVU’s online education but also elementary and secondary education, as well as the traditional university.

5. University isomorphism in AVU development

From the preceding analysis, the neo-liberal critique and Bates’ (1995) framework for assessing online distance learning, which Amutabi and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deficits</th>
<th>US$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>222,705,554</td>
<td>2,969,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>310,858,544</td>
<td>4,144,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>216,326,145</td>
<td>2,884,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>147,715,640</td>
<td>1,969,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>135,313,271</td>
<td>1,804,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>503,280,783</td>
<td>6,710,410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oketch utilise extensively, may be inadequate to capture the complex picture presented by AVU internet-based education programme. We need a new paradigm that will explain more adequately the emergence, development and sustainability of web-based learning in Africa. A more encompassing theory would be that of isomorphism first articulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). An overview of this theoretical framework and how it explains the positioning of AVU in traditional universities is appropriate.

When new organisations emerge, rational actors make their organisations increasingly similar as they try to change them. In other words, efficiency for new organisations stems from legitimacy, and legitimacy emanates from conformity to the “general” rules and norms, and, therefore, it is rational to conform in order to gain legitimacy. This, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), leads to organisational isomorphism and homogeneity of organisational structures. Though AVU as a virtual university differs from the traditional university in terms of format of instruction, the location of many online universities in traditional institutions indicates a move towards isomorphism and homogeneity in that the virtual universities gain legitimacy by adhering to rules, norms and regulations observed by traditional institutions.

For this level of isomorphism and homogeneity to be successful, four conditions are obligatory. First is the condition of structuration whereby interaction among actors must increase for isomorphism to appear. That is interaction amongst organisations in the field has to increase for the process to occur. For most virtual universities, instructors tend to be full-time faculty in a traditional university. This is true for AVU where all instructors are from national universities hosting the virtual university. AVU therefore provides an avenue for instructors of the same university tradition to interact, a powerful incentive to situate the online institution in a traditional university campus. The second condition is the rise of inter-organisational structures of domination and patterns of coalition. Currently, very few stand-alone online universities exist. Indeed knowledge production is still dominated by traditional universities. Under these circumstances it makes sense to establish digital universities within the existing university structures.

The third condition relates to increase in information load within a specific organisational field. Increased travel, advances in technology, and globalisation have all led to greater than before levels in interconnection between traditional universities. The digitisation of publishing and improved information flow makes it possible for traditional universities to set up online campuses. Finally, all actors need to develop a mutual awareness of an involvement in a common enterprise. For the traditional university and the instructors, the existence of a virtual campus reinforces the traditional mission of the institution, namely the delivery of knowledge albeit via a different mode.

This is not to say that any of these conditions cannot exist when a stand-alone online university (such as the financially successful University of Phoenix in the USA). However, the four conditions are more likely to exist in a traditional university with an online virtual campus. This most probably explains why the largest number of virtual universities have been established by the traditional institutions.

These four conditions only give a satisfactory environment for the causal mechanisms that lead to institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Three causal mechanisms are discernible. Coercive isomorphism is largely political and centres on the question of legitimacy. As DiMaggio and Powell speculate: “coercive isomorphism results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations of society” (p. 150). Great pressure, from governments, regulatory authorities or societal expectations, exists for online universities to align themselves along the lines of traditional universities. Such pressures can be felt as a force, persuasion, or as an invitation to join in collusion resulting in virtual universities forming a sort of subsidiary of a traditional university. “Subsidiaries”, DiMaggio and Powell write, “must adopt practices, performance evaluations and budgetary plans that are comparable to policies of the parent corporation” (traditional university). Virtual universities like AVU mirror the traditional universities in terms of origin, curriculum, student admission, fees structure as well as location.

The second causal mechanism is mimetic isomorphism. According to mimetic isomorphism, uncertainty is a potent force behind imitation and institutional convergence. Where a “chaotic” environment exists, such as where technology is poorly understood, the environment creates symbolic
uncertainty, when goals are ambiguous, new organisations feel compelled to model themselves on other organisations in their field deemed more legitimate and successful. The fluidity of educational goals, the relative newness of digital technology to run virtual universities (and for Africa, the underdevelopment of this technology) and uncertainty about the viability of the future of online universities, have created the impetus to locate virtual campuses within traditional institutions. To mitigate the detrimental effects of uncertainty, the AVU has patterned itself alongside traditional universities.

Lastly, normative pressures of professionalisation are powerful factors leading to isomorphism. Where unified rules and ethics of professional conduct exist in organisations, a strong incentive exists for new organisations to ally and pattern themselves along the lines of older organisations. Rules governing academic standards and conduct, faculty qualifications and admission requirement’s among others, have long been formalised traditional universities. It is thus more cost efficient to establish virtual universities within traditional institution where professional rules of institutional operations are in existence.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that the theory of isomorphism has more explanatory power in accounting for location of virtual universities in traditional institutions than dependency theory does. Its power lies in its ability to take into consideration not only cultural dependency but also organisational and operational parameters. Using this theory, it is possible to explain from a variety of organisational perspectives the convergence of traditional and virtual universities in a single campus.

6. Concluding remarks

This rejoinder was an attempt to examine development of the AVU within the context of the development of university education in Kenya. The foreign legacy and continued dependency, the preponderance of elites in the development and access, and the growing problem of financial stability and sustainability that characterise Kenya’s universities marked the point of departure with Amutabi and Oketch who question the origins, development and relevance of internet-based education in Kenya.

We argued that the origin of the AVU mirrors the historical trajectory that had been laid out by the public university system—foreign institutions transplanted into the local context without significant localisation or indigenisation. It is this origin that has lead to the current dependency syndrome that afflicts not only within the local academy but also the entire fabric of society. Thus, the AVU follows a tradition well laid out by the preceding socio-educational developments in the country. Furthermore, we contended that the preponderance of elite participation in the AVU as well as its location in university campus has historical antecedents, and is indeed an organisational inevitability. Since Kenya’s universities have disproportionately attracted more students from middle-income to high-income backgrounds, their overrepresentation in the AVU programmes reflects the pervasiveness of inequality in the country’s higher education.

Organisationally, it makes sense to locate AVU centres in universities since structural links with other facets of the traditional university creates a synergy that is conducive both for the students as well as the centres and the universities. Finally, we noted that high cost and financial sustainability of AVU are twin issues that cut across the entire gamut of education in Kenya today. Traditional universities, elementary and secondary schools are finding it increasingly difficult to operate under conditions of severe financial stress.

It was concluded that the theory of isomorphism offers the best explanation for the location of the AVU within the traditional university set up. This theory captures both the historical and organisational rationale in more concrete terms than dependency theory does. Since the necessary conditions of structuration, patterns of domination and coalition, information load regarding higher education development as well as the mutual awareness of involvement in a common enterprise exist, it has been possible for coercive, mimetic and norms of professionalisation to occur leading to the convergence of traditional and virtual universities in one campus.

References


