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Globalization of Higher Education in Senegal

Ashley Morris

Abstract

This paper marks the changes that have taken place in the Senegalese higher education system. As Senegalese citizens and leaders have worked diligently to improve their economy and society as a whole, they have experienced a great deal of obstacles in moving forward. Throughout this process, education has been an important aspect to improving the economic and social development of the country. Included in this economic, social, and educational overhaul, higher education was a component that required a great deal of work. In order to contend in the global society, the higher education system needed to be reformed. This paper, included a discussion of the reformation process of Senegal's higher education from the French model at the heart of its inception to the adoption of the Bologna process. This process has allowed higher education in Senegal to become better with time and grow in its success.

Higher education reform is among the most pressing topics in many countries today. Across the globe, governmental agencies and those in higher education have worked diligently to improve higher education by instituting data informed policies, ensure sustainability, meet the overall demands of the 21st century, etc. Doing so requires a great deal of analyzing, planning, and implementing changes which are not easy tasks. Many countries have begun to take a serious look at their higher education systems and make the necessary changes to affect change. Senegal is one such country.

Senegal, a West African country, has fought tremendously and made great gains with respect to improving its society and its higher education system as a whole. Previously a French colonized country, Senegal has experienced a great deal of tumult throughout the years in seeking to rise to prominence and move toward a stable democracy. Senegal's last two leaders, Abdoulaye Wade and Macky Sall, have brought about numerous changes to the country. Currently, "Since taking office, SALL has launched an economic reform program aimed at boosting economic growth..." (CIA, "Africa: Senegal", 2015) Economic reform has been an important part of improving Senegal's society; however, a great part of the reform includes education.

Education is a key element in the economic and social development of any country, and Senegal is no different. Higher education has not always been at the forefront of reforms in the past. As a French colonized country, Senegal followed the French university system model, which emphasized a broad, general education instead of a focused, program-specific professional core (Ritter, 2011). Senegal universities were focused on the needs and objectives of the French: "the first African universities were built to meet the specific needs of colonial administrations and orientations were pursued even after African countries became independent" (Sall & Ndjaye, 2008). As the country progressed and moved toward reformation, the inadequacies of its higher education system were revealed. Senegal fell short in many aspects including socially and economically; however, these short falls stemmed partially from one major issue – a lack of quality education. Senegal faced issues like overcrowding, lack of faculty, lack of facilities, and

lack of resources. Such issues prevented Senegal from moving forward in the way that it should to compete in the global society.

Senegalese leaders began to take a serious look at its higher education system, eventually deciding to break from the French model that had been in use for years. In doing so, Senegal began to look into the Bologna Process as a possible reformation process. Soon afterward, under the leadership of Wade, “Senegal’s education leaders began the reformation process by bringing in elements of the North American system and by drawing heavily on the whole Bologna process” (Ritter, 2011). Adopting the Bologna pushed Senegal to adopt international standards which include the benchmarking of universities and promotion of free competition (Sall & Ndjaye, 2008). The plan, formulated by the Development Program for Education, consisted of objectives including increasing access to basic education, improving the quality of learning, making the system management more efficient, and affecting all education levels over a period of ten years from 2000 to 2010 (Boccanfuso et al., 2015). For Senegal, the reformation process was the beginning of great changes as well as challenges within its higher education system.

One major issue that Senegal’s higher education reformation faces is funding. Currently, Senegal has five public universities. However, opening these institutions required a great deal of planning and funds. The higher education system was in need of qualified professors, quality programs, and improved access to high quality instruction. Therefore, outside stakeholders were an integral part of the reformation. The World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization were two sources of funding and/or hosts for many projects centered upon higher educational reformation. However, even with the funding, some challenges are inextricably connected to the globalization of Senegal’s higher educational system.

One of the problems with the higher education system in Senegal, and Africa as a whole, comes into play when assessing the globalization and commodification of education. Sall and Ndjaye state

[Senegal] cannot keep training human resources that will ultimately be exported. Globalization means that universities have to meet internal and external demands of academic performance oriented toward Africa’s endogenous and sustainable development. Universities are expected to guarantee highly qualified teaching teams and high-quality instruction and research. (2009, p.49)

Therefore, the Senegalese economy, especially with respect to the labor market, is extremely important. It is not reasonable for Senegal to provide its citizens with a higher education only for them to be exported or not make gains in employment levels. Boccanfuso et.al (2015) studied the effects of improvements in the quality of higher education on the labor market outcomes of highly educated individuals. The Senegalese labor market is one that falls into similar perils of some African countries: it has a high unemployment rate for highly education individuals. However, the higher educational reform instituted in Senegal led to increases in the employment rate and allowed young workers to more easily find jobs (Boccanfuso et al., 2015). All in all, the higher education reform has proven to be quite beneficial to Senegal.

Although it seems that Senegal may fall behind other countries in reforming higher education, overall, the country has made great strides in globalizing its higher educational system. Surprisingly, the issues that Senegal faced in its transition from a colonial to post-colonial country did not prevent it from rising to a place of prominence in higher education. Furthermore, the many changes in leadership and political struggles have created strife that the

country overcame and pressed pass. These victories serve as small steps toward positive reorganization and positive shift toward one important issue – education.

The improvement of higher education in Senegal has opened the country up to the international market. As Senegal continues the reformation process and furthers the goals and objectives outlined in the process in becomes better able to increase socio-economic development and strengthen its university system. Higher education will become the driving force behind pushing Senegal forward. Therefore, Senegal must continue to align its entire higher education system to international standards. Doing so helps to carry out the initial intent of the reform:

[to] put [African universities] in a position to satisfy local needs and push back the frontiers of knowledge as agents in the global knowledge economy on an equal footing with their counterparts, position them as partner and resource center for regional cooperation and African integration... (Sall & Ndjaye, 2008, p.53)

Since the reformation of Senegal includes the three-cycle studies of the Bologna process known as LMD, the overall programs within its system are welcomed by other countries including those in North America and Europe. The country should continue to build on the foundation that it has laid in changing the higher education system. The changes that Senegal has made in higher education will continue to propel it to a greater level of success within higher education.

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Ashley N. Morris earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Mercer University (2007) and a Master of Arts in English from Georgia Southern University (2009). She is currently enrolled at Georgia Southern University pursuing Doctorate of Education in Higher Educational Leadership. Currently, Ashley is a full-time English Instructor at Albany Technical College. Her research interests include Postcolonial Literature, African-American Literature, and Theory and Criticism. Ashley currently resides in Albany, GA with her husband David.