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RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF INADEQUATE TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Institutions of education like all other organisations need to have adequate resources if their learning and teaching is to be effective (Boolag 2012). According to Drucker (2004), effectiveness is the degree to which an organisation realises its goals. Teaching and learning in public universities in Zimbabwe is generally ineffective because of lack of funding from government (Banya, 2011). Continuous stagnation in the economy coupled with acute shortage of foreign currency has made it impossible for the Zimbabwean government to provide its nine public universities in the country with adequate funding. Against the background of a literature review which examines the impact of lack of teaching and learning resources on public institutions of higher learning in developing countries, this article draws on a quantitative inquiry of challenges faced by public institutions of higher learning using a sample of 200 respondents from four of Zimbabwe's public universities. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population comprised all lecturers and students in the country's state universities. The sample consisted of 200 respondents made up of 100 lecturers and 100 students selected using purposive sampling. All the information was collected through a questionnaire which largely had close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to interpret data. The study revealed that infrastructure at the universities was in a bad state in all the universities. Accommodation and office space was at minimal forcing students to live off-campus where they share rented rooms resulting in most female students being manipulated by men. Most lecturers were sharing offices and this was not conducive for effective research. Most universities did not have adequate equipment and stationery for daily operations like printers, bond paper, paper punches, as well as files. The study recommends that the Government of Zimbabwe should provide adequate funding for public universities.

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Introduction

When Zimbabwe attained its political independence in 1980 from Britain it only had one public university. With the massive expansion of both primary and secondary education, the demand for university education grew up phenomenally. In response, the government resolved to establish one public university in each of the country's ten provinces. So far, there are nine public universities. There are five privately owned universities making a total of fourteen universities in the country. For a small country like Zimbabwe, to have such a high number of universities

is a very notable achievement. However, this also means serious challenges with regards to financing of these institutions since university education is very expensive to sustain. Faced with the sanctions induced economic stagnation and acute shortage of foreign currency, the government found it very difficult to adequately fund its public universities.

In a situation where resources are scarce, the quantity of funds allocated to universities does not only depend on the political will but largely on the availability of those resources. In most developing countries, there is always a chronic shortage of economic resources to support the educational needs of the nation (Coombs, 2007). Zimbabwe is not an exception to this question because it is in education where a large proportion of the national budget goes (Moyo, 2009). This study therefore, set out to establish the impact of inadequate resources on the teaching and learning processes in public universities in Zimbabwe.

Statement of the Problem

Teaching and learning in Zimbabwe's public universities is ineffective due to lack of adequate resources from the government which is their major source of funding. Economic challenges faced by the country due to a number of factors, including economic sanctions imposed by the Western countries, has made it difficult for the Zimbabwean government to provide the state's universities with adequate funding. This study sought to investigate the impact of lack of resources on teaching and learning in public universities.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to expose the magnitude of the challenges faced by public universities as a result of shortage of resources allocated to them by the government so as to come up with recommendations that could encourage the state to mobilise more resources for its institutions of higher learning.

Research Questions

1. What variables contribute to government's failure to sufficiently provide funding for its universities?
2. How has the inadequacy of resources affected the teaching and learning in public universities?
3. To what extent have students been affected by inadequacy of resources in state universities?
4. Were universities having adequate material resources for effective teaching and learning?
5. How is the shortage of resources affecting the lecturers at state universities?

Significance of the Study

The importance of the study is premised on the fact that it sought to reveal the magnitude of the shortage of resources and their impact on the provision of quality teaching and learning at state universities. A lot of literature exists on the problems encountered by universities in developing countries with regards to inadequacy of resources. There is relatively very little literature on this phenomenon about Zimbabwe's situation and this study would like to attempt to close that gap. It was also hoped that the study would proffer possible suggestions to mitigate the plight of state universities.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to challenges faced by state universities as a result of inadequate funding by the Government of Zimbabwe. In view of the small size of the sample and sub-samples used, the findings of this study therefore, will have limited generalisability.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was confined to four of Zimbabwe's state owned universities. It was concerned mainly with challenges faced by universities as a result of inadequate funding from the state. The respondents were lecturers and students. Vice Chancellors, Pro-vice Chancellors, Deans and university councils were not part of this study.

Literature Review

The trends in educational development are not always determined by economic factors but by a combination of economic factors and the prevailing social and political environment (Samuelson, 2011). In Zimbabwe for example, as Madziyire (2006) argues, quality education was sacrificed because of the expansion in education and the budget reached a stage where the economy could no longer sustain it. Some educational resources were stretched to the

limits and it was imperative to chart a new course. Fuller (2008) posits that the quality of an educational enterprise is a function of inputs and the efficient management of those inputs in relation to desired targets.

The education system can be said to consist of a number of interrelated parts that can broadly be grouped under means and results (Crisay and Maclock, 2003). Means refer to those parts that are necessary in order to achieve particular results like inputs and process variables and the input variables include students, teachers, facilities, capital and other factors that are injected into the education system (Moyo and Mumbengegwi, 2005). Moyo and Mumbengegwi (2005) also state that whatever is attained or achieved through the education system must have a bearing in wider society as outputs in the form of employment, increased productivity and improved quality of life.

Internal efficiency is closely linked with the education production function since the educational inputs and how they are transformed to produce outputs are examined. Efficiency has the internal and external dimensions (Ross and Postlethwaite, 2010). Quality in education may refer to efficiency with emphasis given to the relative cost of providing education. On the other hand, external efficiency in education refers to the benefits which society enjoys from well educated citizens and benefits may include crime reduction, social integration, appreciation of aesthetic values and such things as improvement in health, reduction of poverty and reduction of unplanned children (Shultz, 2008). This, therefore, underlines the importance of education and the justification of investment by states in the provision of education.

In Zimbabwe, the majority of state universities now face declining public expenditure, deteriorating teaching conditions, decaying educational facilities and infrastructure, student drop-outs due to lack of fees, shortage of experienced and well trained professors, neglect and increasing rate of unemployment among university graduates (Chitekuteku, 2011). One of the most critical problems facing higher education in Zimbabwe is the rapid decline in financing of universities relative to the rapid increase in enrolment at higher learning institutions. Universities consume the largest portion of the higher education allocations by spending 4.8% of gross national income against a continental average of 5.0% (Bolag, 2012). In spite of this, there are very inadequate resources allocated to universities.

According to Moyo (2009), there is no clear national vision and policy for higher education. Higher education strategic plans are often not linked to the budget; there is no framework and established criteria for the allocation of resources. Student fees remain too low to make a significant contribution to the financing of institutions. The current student financing scheme is inadequate, inequitable, inefficient and unsustainable (Moyo, 2009). Shoko (2013) in concurrence with Moyo (2009) asserts that education is no longer an integral component of the overall national development plan. Key policy analysis concepts and tools such as quality assurance, research infrastructure, support of employability and supra-national policies have been deliberately and consistently ignored in the education milieu of Zimbabwe.

Research Methodology

The study employed the quantitative methodology. The quantitative methodology was chosen for its ability to enable this study's findings to be generalised to other universities (Ary and Razaviah, 2010). The quantitative methodology was also found to be useful in this study because it enabled the researchers to investigate 100 lecturers and 100 students' perceptions on the inadequacy of resources in four of Zimbabwe's public universities.

The study settled for the survey research design. The use of survey research design enabled the researchers to gather widespread perceptions of respondents in regard to the studied phenomenon (Lawson and Lovell, 2010). The study used simple random sampling and purposive sampling to select 100 lecturers and students because it permitted every lecturer and student to have an equal chance of participating in the study (Kumar, 2008).

The researcher used a questionnaire with a mixed bag of close-ended questions and two open-ended questions to collect data from the respondents. Closed-ended questions enabled the researchers to collect predetermined respondents' opinions regarding the studied phenomena (Kumar, 2008). Researchers were able to obtain the actual feelings of the respondents regarding challenges they face due to shortage of teaching and learning resources in the selected public universities from the respondents' open-ended responses.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions and a few open-ended questions. The questionnaire was chosen because as Borg and Gall (2009) observe, it has the ability to reach many respondents who live at widely dispersed addresses and preserves anonymity which encourages greater honesty. However, as Cohen and Manion (2002) argue, the questionnaire generally has a low response rate and is inflexible in that it does not allow ideas or comments to be explored in-depth and many questions may remain unanswered. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaires to the selected respondents at their universities. The same method was used to collect the completed questionnaires. The questionnaire produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

Findings and Discussion

The study sought to explore the challenges faced by lecturers and students as a result of inadequacy of learning and teaching resources in state owned universities in Zimbabwe. This section is presented in two parts, namely, presentation of data and discussion.

Presentation of Data

Table 1: Profiles of Lecturers and Students (N = 200)

Categories of respondents	No. of questionnaires	No. of questionnaires returned	% of questionnaires returned
Lecturers	100	100	100
Students	100	100	100
Total	200	200	100

The response rate from both lecturers and students was very high. The size of the sample from which the results were based was therefore not affected by the problem of non-returns. Non-returns, according to Anderson (2010), introduce a bias in as much as they are likely to differ from respondents in many important ways thereby adversely affecting reliability and validity of the findings.

Table 2: Composition of Sample by Gender (N = 200)

Sex	No. of respondents	Percentage
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
Total	200	100

The information on table 2 above shows the distribution of respondents' sex. It reveals that there was a gender balance. This gender balance could be explained by the fact that it was deliberately arrived at through purposive sampling.

Table 3: Responses of Lecturers and Students to the Question: "Inadequate resources a result of economic challenges facing the country" (N = 200)

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	59	28
No	141	72
Total	200	100

The information above indicates that the majority of respondents (72%) disputed the fact that universities were receiving inadequate resources as a result of the economic problems the country was experiencing. Only 28% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

Table 4: Responses of lecturers and students to the question: "Universities are allocated inadequate resources because of Government's misplaced priorities" (N = 200)

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	188	94
No	12	6
Total	200	100

The information on table 4 above shows that the majority of lecturers and students (94%) believe that Government does not allocate adequate resources to its universities because it does not prioritise them and not because the country does not have adequate resources. A paltry 6% of the respondents felt that government did not neglect universities deliberately but due to lack of finances in the national coffers.

Table 5: Responses of lecturers and students to the question: “Inadequate resources from the government to universities affects attendance by students” (N = 200)

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	195	98
No	5	2
Total	200	100

Table 5 above reveals that an overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) believe that the inadequate resources allocated to universities by the government significantly affects the attendance of students to their lessons. Those who felt that inadequate resources did not constitute a hindrance to attendance represented an insignificant 2% of the respondents.

The questionnaire had two open-ended questions which bolstered data from the close-ended questions. The first question sought to find out from students how they were affected by the inadequate allocation of resources by the government to their universities. The overwhelming majority of the students indicated that since universities were no longer getting adequate funding from the government, the universities charged high fees to compensate for what they used to receive from government. As a result, most of them were struggling to raise these fees. Students also indicated that most of their universities did not provide accommodation due to lack of expansion of infrastructure as a result of lack of funding and most of them were renting expensive rooms and sometimes in places which were not convenient for learning.

The question sought to find out from the lecturers how they were specifically affected by inadequate resources from the government. Most lecturers indicated that shortage of resources brought about the problems of inadequate equipment for use on a daily basis like computers, office equipment, files and stationery. They also revealed that there was the problem of inadequate office space and the shortage of funds for conducting research as funds to travel to present academic papers at various were not available.

Discussion

Information from the study revealed that the majority of respondents did not believe that it was a result of the economic challenges that the country was experiencing that the government was not allocating adequate resources to universities. They felt that it was as a result of not prioritising universities when allocating resources than the poor performance of the economy. This tallies with observations made by Samuelson (2011) who argued that trends in educational developments are not always determined by economic factors; but rather by a combination of economic factors and the prevailing social and political environment.

Findings also revealed that respondents thought that inadequate resources allocated to universities contributed immensely to the poor attendance of lessons by some students. They indicated that students had to spend most of their time looking for money for fees as failure to pay meant that they were not allowed to attend lectures. This significantly compromised their learning time as they had to be away looking for money.

The study also revealed that as a result of inadequate funding from the government, most universities tended to pass on the costs to students resulting in high fees beyond the reach of most students. Although students admitted that

they benefit from the cadetship facility, they nonetheless mentioned that not all students were accommodated by this facility and that it sometimes took a long time for it to be processed. Students also stated that they were no longer provided with accommodation as ought to be the norm and as a result, they were renting and paying equally exorbitant rentals to unscrupulous landlords. As Moyo (2009) observed as a result of lack of proper accommodation in most state universities in Zimbabwe, students were failing to raise money for rentals and in some instances, some of the students (particularly the female students) were forced to engage in unorthodox means of raising money for rentals and other necessities.

The study also revealed that lack of funds from government compromised the status of academics in Zimbabwean universities as they were operating without the basic tools of their trade like adequate office equipment, stationery, and internet facilities and also found it difficult to conduct research and present academic papers at various fora within and outside the country.

Conclusions

Given the background of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- Both theoretical and empirical data in this study converge on the fact that as a result of failure by the government to provide adequate resources for its universities, students and lecturers are experiencing insurmountable challenges.
- Lecturers and students did not believe that the government lacked resources to support universities; but rather that it was a question of misplaced priorities by the planners who seemed not to appreciate the importance of investing in university education.
- Evidence from the study also reveals that both lecturers and students attributed the high levels of absenteeism at universities to financial challenges faced by students.
- Findings also revealed that due to lack of funding from government, universities had resorted to charging high fees thereby negatively affecting most students.
- Lecturers attributed poor working conditions and lack of proper facilities to inadequate funding.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations.

- The government should continue to strive very hard to mobilise more financial and material resources for its universities in order to provide adequate learning facilities and materials.
- It is also recommended that private sector – higher education partnerships should be built so as to augment the resources that the government provides to its universities.
- The government should also initiate a process of networking and collaboration between local universities and international organisations so as to help local universities obtain financial and material resources from the international institutions.
- Universities should build enough structures in order to accommodate all their students so that students do not end up renting in expensive lodgings which are sometimes not conducive for effective learning.
- There is also need to improve remuneration and working conditions for lecturers so as to motivate them to maintain the high standards of academic achievement that Zimbabwe is well known the world over for.
- It is also recommended that the government should provide adequate grants and loans to enable students to pursue their studies without fear of dropping out due to failure to pay fees.

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