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Quality and Education for Sustainable Development Challenges towards a Transition in Zimbabwean Higher Education

G. N. Shava¹, F. N. Tlou¹, Smarntha Shonhiwa*¹, Siphumuzile Hleza¹¹Faculty of Science and Technology Education, National University of Science and Technology, P.O Box 93, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe**Article History**

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Abstract: Purpose: The purpose of this article is to examine the challenges of providing quality and Education for sustainable development in the Zimbabwean higher education context. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7 proposes that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) should be included at all levels of education. However there is little guidance towards the achievement of this goal. It shall therefore the focus of this study to understand the challenges towards the transition to achieve quality and ESD in Zimbabwean higher education institutions. **Design/Methodology:** In this study exploratory qualitative and interpretive study was used. The qualitative study was embedded in an interpretive paradigm to explore the challenges of achieving quality and (ESD) in the Zimbabwean context of higher education. The researchers employed interviews because they yield in-depth data with the element of voice in the text. **Findings:** Findings from the study indicated that the transition to achieve quality and sustainability is constrained by multiple challenges emanating from institutional and agential conditions surrounding teaching and learning. **Practical implications:** The study has practical implications for higher education. This is a study conducted in Zimbabwe higher education such that the practical implication is the relevance of findings that are applicable to the higher education landscape. Little literature in Zimbabwe is available on ESD and that being the case this study provides in-depth literature on higher education quality and sustainability. **Originality:** This study is among the first studies conducted in Zimbabwe to understand the complexities associated with the transition towards achieving ESD. Opportunities for enhancing quality teaching and learning are provided for in this study. The study demonstrates that there is strong evidence that exists showing that investing in quality higher education is pivotal to reaching the SDG4 including the aspiration of Zimbabwe's Agenda 2030. This study demonstrates that quality higher education makes for good economic and is a development imperative and must be treated as a fundamental macroeconomic variable and given much priority as inflation, unemployment and budget deficit.

Keywords: Higher Education, Quality Education, Quality Assurance, Sustainable Development, Teaching and Learning, Zimbabwe.

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INTRODUCTION

Contextualising Quality Higher Education in Zimbabwe

Concerns about the quality of higher education is on the rise in Zimbabwe, and this comes at a time of growing recognition of the potential and (Materu, 2007) powerful role of higher education for human capital development. Little or limited literature is available on what Zimbabwe is doing to regulate and improve higher education quality. The main challenges to quality higher education systems in Zimbabwe are cost and human capacity requirements. The cost of a full scale quality assurance in higher education in Zimbabwe is unaffordable. The widespread recognition of higher education as a major driver of economic competitiveness has made tertiary education more important than ever in both industrial and developing countries. World Bank (2002) notes the importance of a knowledge based economy for sustainable development premised on higher education. Highly educated human capital is necessary to compete in an increasingly knowledge based global economy.

Tertiary education institutions support knowledge driven economic growth strategies and poverty reduction by generating new knowledge, building the capacity to assess existing stores of global knowledge and to adapt that knowledge to local use. Technical innovations and their diffusion lead to higher productivity, and most of these innovations are products of basic and applied research undertaken in universities. Progress in agriculture, health and environment sectors, science, engineering and technology is heavily dependent on the application of such innovations. Zimbabwe has managed to make efforts to support worldwide initiatives to improve the quality of education and also to widen and deepen access to higher education. Quality higher education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is critical to economic success and long-term development especial for Zimbabwe a country facing multiple challenges to growth and development on many fronts. Higher education in Zimbabwe faces challenges related to providing high quality and ESD to the learners. Higher education, like other systems of education is required to effectively respond to the needs of providing quality and relevant education for sustainable development.

Investment in higher education access has been achieved but inherited systems and policies of higher education have increasingly been unable to satisfy the dual demands of higher quality and sustainable development. Higher education supports the rest of the education system and it is not doubtful that any developing country could make significant progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without strong tertiary education systems. Higher education is necessary for sustainable progress in basic and secondary education, through the training of teachers, school leaders and administrators, and through research providing direction for policies and strategies of a country's education system.

As Zimbabwe look to higher education to make a significant contribution to economic growth and competitiveness, improvements in the quality of programs and institutions is critical. Higher education is central to economic and political development, and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalizing knowledge society. In Zimbabwe and perhaps the world over higher education (Shabani, 2007) plays a critical capacity building and professional training role in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Higher education is critical to achieving Education for All (EFA) and (MDGs). Higher Education institutions in Zimbabwe educate people in a wide range of disciplines which are key to effective implementation of MDGs and these include the core areas of health, agriculture, science and technology, engineering, social sciences and research. Bloom *et al.* (2006) argue that, recent research findings indicate that expanding higher education may promote and foster technological catch up and improve a country's ability to maximise its economic output. Higher education provides economic and social benefits, both to the individual and the public. It produces highly qualified human capital, adapts and generates knowledge, promotes international cooperation and improves competitiveness in the global knowledge-based economy. The purpose of this study was to establish the major challenges of providing quality higher education and also to provide information and analysis to higher education policy makers in Zimbabwe. It was also the focus of this article to provide information needed to identify and prioritise capacity building needs for quality improvement. The study focused on primarily quality education in degree granting higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. It also includes available information from one university which is privately owned. The article is structured in four main parts. Drawing from the literature the first section of the article unpacks the literature review and contextualises the study, and this explores the interplay of culture, structure and agency in sustaining quality higher education. The second section gives an overview of the research design and methods adopted in this study, while the third and fourth sections focus on discussion

of data and emerging main findings of the study and finally the presentation of conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of quality in higher education is rather difficult to define, especially in higher education context where institutions have broad autonomy and mandates to decide on their own visions and missions. Shava (2016) argue that, no authoritative definition of quality in higher education is possible. However, academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them. Undoubtedly, defining quality continues to be difficult, with some asserting that quality can neither be defined nor quantified and others asserting that quality is subjective and dependent upon individual perspectives. Despite the lack of consensus, it is important to have an awareness of the existing definitions in the literature, specifically when tasked with developing one's own set of definitions. The idea of quality in higher education is relative and when interpreting the term on its own, it is devoid of meaning since there are multiple criteria of quality (Boeren, 2019). It is impossible to assess the quality of an education system without first knowing what its goals are. An examination of the literature on quality higher education shows that quality (Boeren, 2019) in higher education is a relative term that can be contextually defined. The South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association (SAUVCA)'s Smout (2002) shows that quality in higher education is maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of minimum expectations and requirements that should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be striven for.

Smout (2002) argue that, various concepts have evolved to suit different contents ranging from quality as a measure for excellence to quality as perfection, quality as value for money, quality as customer satisfaction, quality as fitness for purpose, and quality as transformation. In this article the authors argue that depending on the definition selected, quality especially in higher education context implies a relative measure of inputs, processes, outputs or learning outcomes. Access to quality higher education should never be viewed as a luxury since the survival of a country depends on humans capable of adapting to emerging challenges and the ability to compete globally depends of quality higher education. Baum & Payea (2005) argue that, higher education has the potential to strengthen institutions, governance, social development, scientific innovation and technological advancement. Quality higher education in the context of this study refers to "fitness for purpose" meeting or conforming to general accepted standards as defined by an institution. In the diverse arena of higher education, fitness for

purpose varies tremendously by field and program (Okebukola, 2006). A broad range of factors affect quality in higher education institutions including their vision and goals, the talent and expertise of teaching staff, admission and assessment standards, the teaching and learning environment, the employability of its graduates (relevant to the labour market), the quality of the library and laboratories, management effectiveness, governance and leadership. Higher education in Zimbabwe challenges related to critical shortages of qualified staff, poor governance, leadership and management, inadequate finance and inability to diversify funding, poor and debilitating facilities and infrastructures deteriorating quality and relevance of teaching and research, limited capacity for research, knowledge generation and adaptation capabilities, and an inability to meet increasing demand for equitable access (World Bank, 2002). Shava (2016) argues that, the main challenges faced with Africa's higher education institutions is the decline in quality of education, learning, research, overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials, out-dated curricula, unqualified teaching staff, poorly prepared secondary students, and an absence of planned academic rigor and systematic quality assurance. In this article the authors argue that the absence or lack of effective regional, national and institutional quality assurance and enhancement systems and agencies in Zimbabwean universities further exacerbate the problems of quality and relevance. Also any attempt to open up the system of higher education or going comprehensive seems inevitably to lead to the belief that widening and deepening higher education will be achieved at the price of lower quality.

Structured quality assurance processes in higher education at the national level are a very recent phenomenon in Zimbabwean universities. The situation is changing rapidly with most universities establishing quality assurance units though with limited funding. Technical capacity is the most pressing constraint in national quality assurance agencies and institutional systems. Even though access to higher education is expanding in Africa, recent studies (Alconna *et al.*, 2008; & World Bank, 2007) indicated that it is the levels of quality in the education received and not merely enrolment rates or years of school, which are strong predictors of long term economic growth. Alconna *et al.* (2008) observed that the rise in higher educational enrolment in Sub-Sahara Africa is not accompanied by quality training and skills development. The decline in quality and relevance of tertiary education according to some analysts and researchers (Bloom *et al.*, 2005; Pillay, 2010; & World Bank, 2007) are generally attributed to inadequate funding, low levels of investment in research and development; and weak linkages between tertiary institutions and industry. The cumulative effect of these problems is a mismatch

between the skills, which graduates acquire from higher education and the skills needed in the labour markets.

QUALITY AND ESD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The notion of quality in the context of higher education is hard to define (Hanushek & Wossmann, 2007) precisely where Universities have broad autonomy to decide on their own visions and missions. Sustainable development is understood as the existence of a prosperous and fair economy which is sustainable for the environment which should become the world's first and most important concern as it is the only path towards the survival of our species. In this sense, ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement and other declarations like the Incheon declaration 2030 offer unique and valuable guideline for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals as key frame and the challenges and also define ambitious objectives (WEF, 2016). To achieve true sustainable development and quality in higher education, humanity needs to be empowered with good ideas and clarity of thought, policies about well-being and the common goal should be the priority (Boeren, 2019). The goals of sustainable development, especial in education, are ambitious because the challenges that are faced can become irreversible catastrophes. Ozga (2012) tells us that, education for a more sustainable future includes improving quality higher education, reorienting the education system to address sustainability, improving public awareness, and providing training to many sectors of society. Higher education institutions the world over should seek to orient their curricula to address issues of quality and sustainability and teacher educators are key change agents in orienting education towards addressing sustainability and quality. Higher education for a sustainable society means enabling people to develop the knowledge values and skills to participate in decisions that will improve the quality of life without damaging the planet for the future. Higher education therefore is taking a leadership role to prepare students and provide a sustainable society. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not the first set of goals designed to help nations work together towards achieving quality. The initial Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formulated in 2000 at the Darker Framework for Action and included eight goals to be achieved by 2015 (UNESCO, 2004; & World Bank, 2002). (UN, 2000; Gabay 2015; & WEF, 2000). The second goal specifically focused on universal primary education but remains silent about quality in education yet universal education of poor quality is meaningless, learners need to exit the education system with skills and competences for their survival.

On 1 January 2016 an ambitious new plan was launched at the Incheon Declaration, which increased the number of goals from eight to seventeen; (1) to

eradicate poverty; (2) to end hunger; (3) to ensure health and well-being for all; (4) to ensure quality education for all; (5) to achieve gender equality; (6) to ensure clean water and sanitation; (7) to ensure affordable and clean energy; (8) to promote decent work and sustainable economic growth; (9) to build resilient and sustainable industry innovation and infrastructure; (10) to reduce inequalities; (11) to build sustainable cities and communities; (12) to ensure sustainable consumption and production; (13) to take climate action; (14) to protect life below water; (15) to protect life on land; (16) to promote peace, justice and inclusive institutions; (17) to strengthen the global partnership and sustainable development (Palmer, 2015; & WEF, 2016). This therefore implies that education for sustainable development is far more than teaching knowledge and principles related to sustainability but in its broadest sense, it is education for social transformation with the goal of creating more sustainable societies to address through education, numerous interrelated challenges like poverty reduction, environmental protection, social justice and quality in education (UNESCO, 2017). The idea of lifelong learning for all is a key element of education for sustainable development and also specifically addressing sustainable development goal four which was the emphasis of UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals. This suggests that quality higher education can act as a powerful engine towards a developed, sustainable and a more cohesive and equal society. Quality higher education (Panetta & Williams, 2018) can also include increasing skills in relation to learning for sustainability, such as care for our planet (SDGs12 &13). While education is however not mentioned in the discussions of other goals this goes against research evidence on the benefits of education and the role it plays in achieving sustainable development which touches on domains of all the goals both at the level of the individual and society. SDG4 has been further broken down to ten targets based on the different roles to be fulfilled by different players.

Challenges of Providing Quality and ESD in Zimbabwe

Although Zimbabwean higher education institutions seek to be the breeding grounds for the skilled individuals whom the country need, they are plagued by critical shortage of teaching faculty and research scholars. The situation is more serious with respect to the shortage of senior faculty members with terminal degrees. Higher education institutions in almost all African countries are largely unable to retain qualified faculty and research scholars (Materu, 2007). They also face shortage of technical, administrative and management staff. The situation is crippling not only higher education institutions but also affects other levels of education services, health care systems and overall economic activities. Shortage of faculty members and other staff is further amplified by government freeze on employment, brain drain and retirements. Weak

leadership, management and governance exacerbate the challenges faced by higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. Palmer (2015) argue that, management inefficiencies drain scarce resources away from the fundamental objectives of increasing access, quality and relevance and thinly spread human and financial resources.

Education and training curricula tend to be obsolete and disassociated from the economy. Practical instruction receives insufficient emphasis, and students have little opportunity to develop technical competencies, problem solving experience or communication and organizational skills. Absence or lack of effective regional, national and institutional quality assurance and enhancement systems and agencies in African countries and universities further exacerbate the problems of quality and relevance. Technical capacity is the most pressing constraint in national quality assurance agencies and institutional systems. Higher education institutions in Zimbabwe do not yet possess adequate research capabilities, infrastructure, facilities and funding needed to make them active beneficiaries of global knowledge and/or to generate or adapt knowledge, innovation and problem solving. Institutions in Zimbabwe are increasingly unable to absorb the increasing demand of students for higher education. Increasing numbers of students graduating from secondary schools led to corresponding pressures in the demand for higher education. Admission policies have failed to address the imbalance between science and technology programmes and the humanities, as more students are admitted in the latter. Some of the reasons accounting for the unfortunate state of affairs include a weak regulatory oversight, a disconnect between industry and academia, failure of institutions to redesign their curricula and admission policies to cope with the prevailing exigencies, and resource constraints.

The current rate of increase in higher education enrolment is doubling in five years, a growth of 15% per year - the fastest in the world (World Bank, 2007). Among the unresolved challenges are the need to expand tertiary education coverage in a sustainable and equitable way, as well as inequalities of access and outcomes, in relation to gender, ethnic groups and geographic coverage. Graduate level (Master and PhD) student enrolments are small. The great concern is also in the small enrolment figures in sciences, engineering and technology, and health fields, which are critically needed for innovation, knowledge generation and adaptation and overall national competitiveness. Less than 30% of students in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in the fields of agriculture, health sciences, engineering and technology and basic and applied sciences (Yizengaw, 2008).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: AGENCY STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

The theoretical viewpoint of this study resonates with the thoughts of Margaret Archer's (1995) Social Realist Theory of Structure, Culture and Agency to analyze the challenges of providing quality higher education in Zimbabwe. Critical realist theory according to Archer (1995) accepts that there exists a reality independent of our representation of it but acknowledges that our knowledge of reality is subject to all kinds of historical and other influences. The Social realist theory according to Archer (1995) comprises of three milieus of structure, culture and agency which are superimposed on each other and these structures constrain or enable the actions of the agent. The structural milieu (Archer, 1995) comprises of roles, organizations, institutional structures, systems, policies, committees, substructures and positional levels within the organization. Structure includes the material conditions which would motivate action (Archer, 1995; 1996; & 2003). While culture mainly focuses on the way of life of a specific group of people which encompasses behavior, beliefs, values, customs, relationships and special symbols.

Agency refers to the personal and psychological makeup of individuals, their social roles and relates to the capacity people have to act in a voluntary way (Boughey, 2012). In any setting Archer (2003) argues, there are structural, cultural and agential properties which play a role of enablers or containers. The application of Archer's (1995) theoretical insights offer a framework for explaining the relationships of structure, culture and agency to understand the challenges of providing quality higher education in Zimbabwe.

Agency and Quality Improvement

Management in higher education should attend to the needs of and provide personal attention to individual staff members who play a central role in ensuring quality continues improvement. It is also the role of senior management to create an organization where all members understand that everyone must be supported. There is also need for collaboration with university councils and stakeholders to create and develop a vision and mission that will capture the imagination of the community. To achieve quality improvement, there is need to create collaborative work environment that is site based, support teamwork and promote cohesion and cooperation by creating and promoting a holistic approach to willingness among members.

Culture and Quality Continuous Improvement

Organizational theories have long reported that paying attention to culture is the most important

strategy that educational leaders can adopt. Within this context, (Archer, 2003) maintain that a desired organisational culture can only be created if management adopts functions of identifying, nurturing and modeling desired values as well as essential component of effective long term leadership. Studies on organisational change have isolated the organizational culture of an institution as a crucial factor to the successful improvement of quality outcomes (Archer, 2003). Organisational culture is seen as the way of life of a specific group of people which encompasses behavior, beliefs, values, customs, relationships with others and special symbols and codes (Archer, 2003).

Culture is not static and if the culture of learning is not hospitable to learning, then student achievement can suffer (Shava, 2016). Boughey, (2012) also reminded us that management in higher learning institutions are responsible for establishing a pervasive culture of teaching and learning. On the other hand Archer (2003) argue that management should understand the institution's culture before implementing change, it is also important to identify institution's existing culture before attempting to change it. Maslowski (2001) admits that when the complex patterns of beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas and behaviors in an institution are inappropriate or incongruent the culture may have a potentially negative influence on quality. Sustainable quality improvement and development is more readily achieved by first changing the culture of an institution, rather than simply changing the structures. Management seeking to improve quality towards sustainable improvement and development in Zimbabwe should focus on improving the institution's culture by getting the relationships right between themselves and stakeholders.

Structure and Quality Improvement

Structure in educational context relates to the rituals, policies and procedures that are followed in an institution to ensure quality outcomes. The structural domain comprises of roles, organizations, institutional structures, systems, polices, committees, substructures and positional levels within the organisation. Organizational structure is the skeletal framework within which people carry out their work. Effective educational managers direct structural changes that will establish positive conditions for quality outcomes. Successful management comprehend the critical role that the organizational structure plays in developing a successful institution (Ciulla, 2005). More importantly, Horng & Loeb (2010) affirm that, strategic management do not have one- size-fits all approach but they need to establish organizational structures to sustain quality improvement.

Research Questions

Based on this framework the study focused on the following research questions:

- In what ways do cultural factors constrain the achievement of quality higher education and ESD?
- In what ways do structural factors affect the transition towards achieving ESD?
- In what ways do agential discourses affect the provision of quality higher education?
- How do quality assurance structures influence the quality of higher education?
- What are the challenges higher education institutions face towards the transition to achieving quality education and ESD?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The strong desire to collect data that reflected the perspectives of the research participants resulted in the choice of in- depth, semi-structured interviews with participants drawn from three universities in Zimbabwe. The three universities are residential institutions. Participants were drawn from academics and administrators from the three universities. Four academics and three senior administrators were purposefully selected from each university. Quality Assurance Directors from each university also took part in the interviews. Contact interview sessions ensured direct contact with participants and improved the researchers' understanding of their perspectives. Creswell (2013) shows that interviews present the researcher the means to get hold of the experiences, knowledge, thought and feelings of participants. Data collection which took about one hour with each participant which was the intended length of the interviews was gathered in the month of May 2019. The researchers followed Bernard's (2002) lead, "the idea was to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace" (p.206)

In seeking trustworthiness, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the researcher should be concerned with activities that increase the probability that credible findings will be produced. Prolonged engagement which is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes, learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or the participant, and building trust, member checks by requesting an external coach to review the manuscripts accuracy and clarifications on the sequence of events, and peer debriefing were used to promote confidence that the researcher had accurately recorded the phenomena under investigation. Before the interviews researchers made contacts with each participant through their emails and telephonically to establish a relationship of trust. Participants were encouraged to communicate voluntarily within an atmosphere of trust and rapport and they were not put under any pressure to share their views. Beyond the semi structured interviews two participants escorted us

on a tour of their buildings including visiting lecture rooms discussing with lecturers. The authors took descriptive field notes using a voice recorder detailing information on events, activities as well as reflective field notes that highlighted personal thoughts related to emerging insights about quality. These multiple efforts to ensure trustworthiness supported the ongoing data analysis, as the researcher worked to analyze the data by themes into spreadsheet files, while carefully looking for data that would discount any emergent themes. As such, we explored the interplay between an individual's environment and an individual's thoughts and activities that are linked to quality related issues.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the data was conducted using a comparative method consistent with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Coding the data and constantly comparing and categorising emerging themes helped to make sense of the voluminous data gathered. Once interviews were completed and transcribed, the coding of data commenced. The analysis involved intensive reading of each transcript and the identification of key issues that connected the participants' accounts of their experiences. These efforts ensured and supported the on-going data analysis as the authors worked to analyse the data by themes into spread sheet files, and also carefully looked for data that would discount any emerging themes.

FINDINGS

The qualitative analysis of data was done based on the interview questions that were responded to by participants from the three Universities. Interview data was transcribed and key themes from each transcript were captured through intensive reading of each transcript which is consistent with a grounded theory and qualitative content analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; & Creswell, 2013). Evidence from the interview data indicated that Zimbabwean universities have the potential of offering high quality education to the learners given the entry qualifications of students. Zimbabwe has recorded significant progress in increasing access to higher education. Improving widespread quality and sustainable higher education has been the priority of Zimbabwean universities. In-depth analysis of responses from participants established that the reality is, Zimbabwean Universities are affected by low quality due to operational and methodological challenges.

Challenges of Providing Quality and Sustainable Higher Education in Zimbabwe

Higher education in Zimbabwe has been recognised as a fundamental instrument for the construction of knowledge economy and the development of manpower. The current population in Zimbabwean higher education is approaching 2 million but the quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning does not sufficiently

shape the minds of the learners and help transform society economically, socially and politically due to multiple challenges faced by the institutions. Grounded on the participants' accounts the presentation of findings includes the perspectives and reflections about their involvement in higher education teaching and learning in Zimbabwe. Comments made by all participants relating to the major challenges of providing quality and sustainability in higher education were as follows:

- Lack of funding to promote quality and sustainability in teaching and learning.
- Lack of senior management commitment to enhance quality and sustainable development
- Expanding access with limited infrastructure for teaching and learning.
- Inadequate teaching and administration staff, and the total lack of staff expertise to promote quality teaching and learning.
- Poor policy implementation and the lack of political will.
- Lack of Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and infrastructure.
- Lack of staff development initiatives and programs.
- Brain drain and poor leadership
- Lack of quality assurance monitoring structures to monitor and ensure accountability.
- Total lack of staff expertise and willingness leading to poor staff motivation.
- Lack of effective regional, national and institutional quality assurance and enhancement systems and agencies
- Poor and dilapidated physical facilities and infrastructure, e.g. some buildings are used before they are completed.
- Weak research and innovation capacity.

It emerged from the interviews with all participants that higher education is the bed rock and powerhouse for national development but the quality of provision is critically affected by financial constraints to purchase best of the art equipment for teaching and learning. One of the participants had this to say:

Higher education in Zimbabwe is critically constrained by the lack of funds mainly due to poor economic conditions in the country, the lack of finances has lead to inability to return qualified staff members and also poor learning and research facilities and resources. The lack of adequate funding has constrained research capacities across all universities which makes it hard for the integration of staff in the global knowledge society.

The study established that universities in Zimbabwe do not poses adequate research capacities, infrastructure and funding needed to make them active

beneficiaries of global knowledge. During the time of data collection it was established that one university had gone for almost a month without internet because the saver had broken down and for the whole month research activities were at a standstill in the university. All universities function with overcrowded and deteriorating facilities, some students residence were built in the early 1950s and these residences are in a state of dilapidation posing a health hazard to the students. Some study programs tend not to match with the labour market requirements, causing another concern about the relevance of curriculum preparing students for the employment market. In most universities students have little opportunity to develop technical competencies, problem solving experience and organisational skills. The lack of effective regional, national, and institutional quality assurance and enhancement systems and agencies in Zimbabwe has further exacerbates the problem of quality and relevance. One of the participants argued that:

Structured quality assurance processes in Zimbabwean universities is a major factor contributing to poor quality teaching and learning, there is total lack of technical capacity pressing constraints in national quality assurance and institutional systems.

Inadequate institutional capacity and weak political processes prevent universities and the on-going corruption all have the potential to contribute greatly to building a solid foundation for achieving effective, equitable and sustainable quality education in higher learning institutions. All higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the past few decades. Most learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and over dependence on public financing which in most cases is very little. The study participants argued that access to infrastructure such as internet facilities, library, text books, equipment in workshops and laboratories and classroom space is limited resulting in deterioration of quality of teaching and learning. The poor state of facilities in universities affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress.

Quality Assurance Challenges Facing Higher Education in Zimbabwe.

One of the major challenges facing quality higher education is the absence of quality assurance structures in most universities. A main finding in this study was that structured university level quality assurance processes are a very recent phenomenon and that most universities face major capacity constraints. Only a third of universities in Zimbabwe have established structured quality assurance mechanisms. The main challenge to quality assurance in universities is costs and human capacity requirements. In Zimbabwean universities operating a quality assurance unit typically entails an annual budget beyond the reach

of the universities and also requires appropriately trained and experienced staff. One of the participants argued that the cost of a full scale quality assurance system is unaffordable for most of the universities. Comments made by participants with regards to quality assurance challenges were as follows:

- Lack of effective quality assurance
- Difficulty of funding a sufficient number of academics who are qualified and available to serve as peer reviewers.
- Lack of appropriate training for those involved in the process of accrediting agencies at institutions and as peer reviewers.
- Lack of skills for implementation of quality assurance processes.
- Quality assurance senior staff appointed to lead such units initially knows little about quality assurance
- Insufficient human capacity for quality assurance.
- Lack of standards and mechanisms to regulate quality of education from cross boarder providers.

In this study there was consensus that quality assurance systems in Zimbabwean higher education were still at an infant stage and this confronted by many challenges. Effective quality assurance depends largely on the availability of highly qualified staff members within institutions and competent professionals and technical staff at Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE) which is the custodian of national quality assurance structure. As indicated before findings in this study indicate that quality assurance in Zimbabwe higher education experience several constraints; the difficult of funding a sufficient number of academics who are qualified and available to serve as peer reviewers and lack of appropriate training for those involved in the processes of accrediting. In some cases where institutions have quality assurance structures senior staff appointed to lead such agencies initially knows little about quality assurance except for having been involved in research evaluation along with many years of teaching and research experience at universities. Most people interviewed in the study indicated that the use of peer reviewers was creating a positive learning effects and contributing to creating a culture of learning within the university and members involved in accreditation and audit processes at other institutions get an in-depth exposure to other quality management systems and the exposure can contribute in a positive way to improve quality and sustainability development at their own institutions.

The Interplay of Culture, Structure and Agency in the Provision of Quality Teaching and Learning

Collectively, participants in this study highlighted that culture, reflected in the set of beliefs, values norms and practices in higher education learning institutions and the local communities affected the

provision of quality of teaching and learning. The concept of a culture of teaching and learning is widely used in Zimbabwe. It refers to the attitudes of all role players towards quality and sustainability in teaching and learning. In this study we define a culture of teaching and learning as a learning imperative and obligation to prioritise, attend to, and always act on matters relating specifically to enhance the chances of promoting quality and sustainability in teaching and learning. Study participants highlighted that cultural diversity exerts strong influence on quality teaching and learning in higher education. Culture influences what knowledge is valued, skills ethics, language and world view. The culture and values prevailing in a community contribute to the conservative orientation towards what takes place in learning institutions. One of the participants argued that:

There are certain cultural issues that cannot be overlooked and they continue to affect the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.

In this study participants identified the structural conditions that affect the provision of quality teaching as:

- Lack of infrastructure such as, science laboratories, workshops, student hostels, libraries, internet, and electricity.
- Lack of ICT infrastructure
- Poor quality infrastructure
- Poor physical facilities
- Poor leadership
- Lack of vibrant staff development programmes

All participants in the study highlighted that Zimbabwe's higher education face a decline in quality teaching and learning due to overcrowding and deteriorating facilities, limited and obsolete library resources and insufficient equipment and instructional materials. Research skills are most commonly acquired during doctoral training but most universities have minimal doctoral graduate output due to lack of human and material resources to enrol large numbers. Research is often neglected due to lack of research facilities and funds and due to increased teaching loads generated by enormous undergraduate enrolment expansions. The study established that most universities have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for years. The poor state of infrastructure and facilities for teaching and learning has adversely affected research resulting in inability to contribute to societal development and progress. Organisational structures and their agency play a major role in enhancing quality teaching and the entire achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs. According to Boeren (2019) the concept of structure and agency is interested in the structure of social reality and the extent to which individuals are free to act within the structure. The organisational structure is the skeletal framework within which people carry out their work.

During interviews with participants it also emerged that higher education institutions are likely to be more successful and achieve high quality teaching if they manage to attract high quality staff and particularly academic staff. Higher educational managers also need to work with their staff to focus on quality and seeking to create a culture of teaching and learning. Evidence from the study shows that:

- Higher education in Zimbabwe faces challenges related to critical shortage of senior faculty staff.
- Research capacities are generally poor due to shortage of senior faculty staff.
- The percentage of staff with PhD in the sciences and engineering departments in most universities is less than 30%.
- Majority of teaching staff are assistant lecturers.
- There is poor capacity to undertake research, provide quality teaching and leadership.
- High staff brain drain to the developed countries.
- Most professionals sent overseas for training fail to return to Zimbabwe.
- Agency to deliberate the relationship between current quality education needs and future generations.

In this study it was established that a big challenge to the attainment of quality teaching in Zimbabwean higher education was the lack of quality academic staff yet academic staff are the hub of any teaching institution. High quality academics are needed for high quality education system which in turn is indispensable for social change, social transformation and national development. Attainment of higher quality education requires academic staff of adequate quantity and quality.

Strategies to Improve Quality Higher Education Teaching and Learning

To achieve a quick fix of the broken system of higher education in Zimbabwe the study participants identified the following strategies that can be adopted:

- Higher education should not be seen merely as a key method of achieving sustainable development but part of the development itself
- Strengthening United Nations Sustainable Development into higher education with an emphasis on building capacities of educators and trainers to facilitate the implementation of ESD into education policy curricula, theory and practice.
- Institutional structures and bodies in higher education systems that shape, control and influence institutional operations and policies in relation to quality should have influential

control patterns, conditions and determine the status of quality in universities

- Provide high quality infrastructure and quality academic staff.
- Provide adequate funding for ICT infrastructure development
- Ensure adequate funding for affordable quality higher education
- Raise awareness and benefits of quality higher education among citizens and policy makers.
- Provide strong and accessible systems of higher education and training which will lead to stronger knowledge based infrastructure.
- Making efforts to put better quality monitoring and quality assurance systems in place
- Building partnership with other relevant stakeholders this means creating cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders.
- Making adequate investment in the best of the art infrastructure in institutions
- Mobilising strong national and international political commitment for quality higher education significantly investment in higher education quality.
- Introducing learners values and norms relating to the culture of quality teaching and learning

In all interviews, participants emphasised that the best way to strengthen quality in higher education was ensuring sufficient funding to invest in higher education. Besides massive investment in higher education Zimbabwe may consider to recognise the importance of investing in foreign aid in order to close the economic and social gaps between Zimbabwe and developed countries. All the suggestions raised by participants may be the possible measures of strengthening quality teaching and learning in Zimbabwe's higher learning institutions. The different strategies may be executed by different players at micro, meso and macro levels of society and it is important that these levels should work together and complement each other which is also in line with the structure culture and agency philosophy.

Discussions, Higher Education Quality, Sustainability and Development

The aim of this article was to increase knowledge on the challenges of providing quality higher education in Zimbabwe and also providing potential strategies to meet the fourth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4) which strives for quality in education. The SGD4, Target 4.7 state:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violent, global citizenship

and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2014; WEF, 2016; & UNESCO, 2017).

Drawing from the views raised in this study participants and the literature review, quality in higher is at the heart of sustainable development and should be a national and international priority and it requires a strong and sustained political commitment, enhanced financial allocations and the participation of all partners in the process of policy design, strategic planning and the implementation of the quality programs. Achieving high quality education necessitates a broad based approach which extends well beyond the confines of formal education. In this article the authors argue that the concept of quality in higher education is relative and that standing by its self the term is devoid of meaning since there are multiple criteria of quality. From the views of the study participants quality in higher education is a relative term that can be contextually explained or illustrated. Findings from the study illustrate that the development of a country into a great nation is only possible by addressing quality higher education for sustainable development. Quality and sustainability in higher education is seen as maintaining and applying high academic and educational standards both in the sense of maintaining expectations and requirements that should be complied with. Quality in higher education evaluates learning, teaching, research, transfer and return of investment. From the views of the study participants quality higher education is constrained by:

- Critical shortage of academic staff.
- Poor governance, leadership and management.
- Weak research and innovation capacities.
- Poor physical facilities and infrastructure.
- Inability to meet increasing demands for access and equity.
- Lack of teaching and learning materials/equipment
- Lack of ICT facilities and infrastructure.
- Lack of vibrant staff development programs.
- Lack of structured quality assurance mechanisms for monitoring quality educational systems.
- Lack of capacity for partnership building and networking.

Although it is generally agreed that the quality of higher education is on the decline due to policies of widening and deepening access to higher education, Zimbabwe higher education is facing multiple challenges emanating from cultural, structural and agential domains that are superimposed on each other and constrain the achievement of quality and sustainable development. Throughout the interviews participants reported several examples of deteriorating facilities and conditions of work which include non-maintenance of building and equipment, lack of

furniture for both students and academics and the lack of qualified personnel. In this article authors identified the major challenges of providing quality higher education and this was followed by highlighting strategies for improving the quality of higher education in Zimbabwe. Authors further highlighted the importance of higher education as economic benefits, social and political benefits, human capital and professional development, knowledge generation and adoption through research and innovation, equitable opportunities and access provision, support other levels of education, promote linkages to the world of work and promoting international cooperation. The authors also argue that the poor quality of higher education is the lack of quality assurance structures, the decline in per unit costs due to poor economic performance amid rapidly raising enrolments, insufficient numbers of qualified academics as the result of brain drain, retirements and HIV/AIDS, low internal and external efficiency, and poor governance and leadership. As argued in this article, weak leadership, management and governance are rampant and further exacerbate challenges to quality higher education.

Recommendations

Having explored the challenges of providing quality in higher education and the evidence provided by the study participants, it is recommended that:

- The implementation and maintenance of high quality education systems with infrastructure and quality assurance agency is highly recommended.
- The government of Zimbabwe need to explore more actively alternatives and innovative ways of increasing financial resources available to support infrastructure development in universities.
- Globalisation for resource related partnership for higher education is both an opportunity and a challenge but it should be sharpened and managed so as to ensure quality and sustainability in higher education.
- Globalisation has the potential to generate new wealth and resulting in the greater interconnectedness and interdependence and this effort of globalisation can help to harness new technologies for higher education.
- Ensuring that quality higher education is provided with adequate quality staff, quality infrastructure, equitable and sustainable resources and giving higher education sufficient priority in national budget.
- Zimbabwe needs to ensure that the broad vision of quality, sustainability and development in higher education systems is reflected in national funding, planning and policies.
- Zimbabwe needs to strengthen and widen participation and garner support from developed countries, partners and other

international development partners like World Bank through focused consultation, engagement and inclusiveness.

- Forge closer and official cooperation agreements with potential partners both in Africa and the developed countries.
- There is need to enhance and empower higher education institutions in Zimbabwe and the developed countries to contribute more effectively to Zimbabwean higher education development and transformation.

All in all higher education the world over is the major contributor to development, and long term holistic partnership with the developed countries will bring about positive results together with quality and sustainability results and have a reasonable impact on the transformation agenda of 21st century. The initiative will focus on quality, sustainability and development partnership that take account of country specificity, faculty development and institutional capacity building priorities.

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