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## Problems Faced by Non- State Universities in Zimbabwe

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### **Abstract:**

*Due to expansion of higher education in Africa, non-state university operation has increased. In Zimbabwe, there are currently six non-state universities that are operating under a Charter; this is half of the total number of state universities in the country, hence their service is of significance to the country. This study examined the challenges these non-state universities face. The researcher took the advantage of a meeting for non-state universities called for by the responsible Minister in the capital on a similar issue. Each university was represented by all faculty deans and one lecturer per faculty, N=38. Data was collected during presentations by university representatives and during discussions with the minister through notes taking. Additional information was collected from the universities representatives after the meeting. Findings revealed infrastructure problems, lack of resources, economic challenges, limited research, poor corporate governance, low enrollment, poor condition of service for lecturers and staff and lack of grants for students as major challenges. The study recommends that the non-state universities should re-examine their operations in this changing world; ZIMCHE should work towards standardization of degree programs and grading systems in order to allow easy transfers of students to other universities; the government should monitor discrepancies among lectures and staff condition of service; it should also apply tax exemption to non-state universities on importing institution related assets, also, the mother-churches should fund their universities to alleviate financial constraints and they should not interfere unnecessarily with the running of the universities.*

**Keywords:** non-state university, higher education, challenges, charter

### **1. Introduction**

Higher education was formally introduced in Rhodesia (present day Zimbabwe) in 1957 at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasa land (now University of Zimbabwe) and was affiliated to the University of London. It started with a low intake of 58 students and the number later rose steadily (Garwe 2014). This University College later developed into a fully-fledged University of Rhodesia in 1970, a university that was operating at international standards since it had the necessary resources to be called a modern day university of the time.

At political independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, there was an education expansion at all levels as noted by Kariwo, (2000) who recorded an increase of primary school enrollment from 20% in 1980 to 86% in 1981. This increase at lower levels caused demand for higher education in the country and this necessitated the establishment of more universities. The expansion of tertiary education in Zimbabwe was therefore mainly in response to ripple effects created by massive expansion of primary and secondary enrollments (Majoni 2014). This is when the Government allowed private operators to be involved in the provision of education, including the establishment of their own universities. Amponsah (2013) highlighted that the private institutions were mainly established by Christian missionaries for religious and educational reasons, among others. Garwe (2014) mentioned that in Zimbabwe, non-state universities, (usually known as private universities) started in 1992 in response to the need to fill in gaps in access to higher education. The establishment of non-state universities was made possible by the establishment of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in Zimbabwe in 1990. Garwe (2014) further propounded that the Council was mandated to advise the Minister of Higher Education on matters pertinent to higher education. In response to this call, the first non- state university charter was granted in 1992 to Africa University (AU), a United Methodist Church related institution. It was soon followed by Solusi University (SU), a Seventh Day Adventist Church related institution, in 1994.

To date, four more non-state universities were established namely: Catholic University in Zimbabwe (CUZ) of the Catholic Church in 2001; Women's University in Africa (WUA), a private university that started operating in 2002 to empower disadvantaged women in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole; Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU) of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Church in 2011 and finally Reformed University in Zimbabwe, a Reformed Church University which faced quality assurance challenges that led to its closure in 2004 and was allowed to re-open in 2012. The charter spells out the functions and governance of these universities which include operations and payment of workers.

The establishment of non-state universities in Zimbabwe was a positive development in the education sector for it contributed to increasing access to higher education. Nyarko (2001) pointed out that private universities in Africa should be considered as a potential growth industry, which may possibly generate revenue, create employment opportunities and other spillovers to the rest of the country economies in which they operating in.

These non-state universities share a lot of characteristics in common, for instance, the Mission Statement for RCU reads, "To be a relevant world class centre of excellence in special needs education, theology and community services embedded in Christian values". This is closely related to those of SU, AU, CUZ, and ZEGU. These five church related universities, as indicated in their mission statements, show their commitment to moral values as well as holistic and quality education. Garwe (2014) argued that the mission statement of WUA also embraces quality education but is mainly inclined towards addressing gender disparity consistent with the fact that it is not a church-related private institution.

Although non-state universities are usually associated with shortage of resources, including skilled manpower and infrastructure, quality is ensured by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), a relatively new body, established through an Act of Parliament (Chapter 25:27) in 2006 which replaced the National Council for Higher Education. ZIMCHE was given mandate to register and accredit institutions of higher education; Section 5 (1) of the Act reads:

to promote and coordinate education provided by institutions of higher education and to act as a regulator in the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research in institutions of higher education. It is also responsible for institutional quality assurance system; that is, monitoring and accreditation of degrees programs.

As Majoni (2014) elaborated, the government of Zimbabwe through ZIMCHE monitors quality in institutions of higher learning.

## 2. Related Literature

A number of researches have been carried out in the area of higher education mainly on problems and possible solution affecting higher learning, specifically in universities. Majoni (2014) studied the challenges facing university education in Zimbabwe concentrating on teaching and learning, research and publication. Findings revealed that there is low remuneration and non-payment of part time lecturers and salaries in general are low compared to regional universities. Again, research in universities is not given the emphasis and quality it deserves mainly because of shortage of resources and workload for lecturers that are too high to allow them to research. Again, researchers (lecturers) lack the necessary induction and training for meaningful research while the seasoned ones go away for greener pastures.

Findings also showed that faculties and departments do not have the essential training and induction in the area of quality assurance. Again, degree programs offered by universities do not meet market needs, that is, the industry. On the part of the students, results exposed that there is high student dropouts as the government is unable to provide sponsorship and bursaries for their education. Quality is also compromised by lack of proper infrastructure and libraries that have outdated books. The research recommended that the industry and commerce should assist universities in funding and collaborative research while public and private partnerships can assist in quality assurance in university operations.

A similar study was carried out by Garwe (2014) who sought to provide an understanding of the quality assurance challenges and opportunities faced by private universities in Zimbabwe. He analyzed the factors that determine provision of quality higher education in private universities as well as the resultant effects of failure by these universities to achieve the minimum acceptable standards. The results exposed financial constraints and poor corporate governance as the major factors causing failure by private universities to uphold high quality standards. The study recommended the necessity for an operative national quality assurance agency in making sure that only universities with adequate financial, material and human resources should be permitted to operate as private universities. It also recommended the university management to put in place, maintaining and continuously improving the processes and procedures that lead to quality service delivery.

On addressing the challenges faced by Higher education in Zimbabwe, Healing the Zimbabwe Tertiary Education (2011) suggested the idea of donor funding to supplement whatever is available for higher education, hence addressing the problems through the collective efforts. In addition, the same paper highlighted on the Student Solidarity Trust (SST) that proposed for the Portfolio Committee on Education and Members of Parliament (MPs) to call upon the Minister of Higher Education and Technology to initiate platforms for all Higher Education stakeholders to engage in addressing the associated challenges. The SST also called on the members of parliament to formulate legislation that can provide funding for Higher Education students through loans and grants.

Elsewhere in Africa, Kumba (2010) reported a leadership controversy at a non-state university (a religious private university) in Kenya where a Presiding Bishop of the associate church used his own powers to dismiss the Vice Chancellor without considering the law that regulates institutions of higher learning in Kenya.

In the same region, that is, East Africa, Mwapachu (2010) examines the future of the university in Tanzania. He studied the national, social and economic challenges that confront the state universities and came up with the proposal that the universities should strategically re-position themselves in response to current demands of the new economy as set out in the Millennium Development Goals.

In West Africa, Amponsah (2013) studied the operation of private universities in Ghana and Nigeria. The study concentrated the achievements and challenges of these private universities. Findings revealed that the private universities were able to provide the necessary services, that is, producing best quality graduates who were academically and ethically equipped. The study also revealed financial-high cost of faculty and staff development; lack of well-resourced libraries; brain-drain of top quality faculty and staff; inadequate relevant teaching and learning equipment and poor infrastructure as the major challenges.

A similar study was carried out in Nigeria where Omoregie (2011) examined funding of 41 Private Universities in country. The study contended that the Federal Government should consider seriously the funding of the Private Universities through the Education Tax Fund and Petroleum Technology Development Fund in the same way they are concerned with the Federal and State Universities; the argument being that part of a nation's citizens should not be separated simply because they are attending private universities yet they get empowered to serve the same nation.

Adamu (2004) focused on the educational reforms in higher education in Nigeria and highlighted that the greatest challenge faced by the Nigerian university after independence from Britain was whether to retain its British legacy or open itself to other influences. The advantage of retaining the British framework was the nation's labor that was British based. Assessment of employees was also based on British patterns, thus retaining British educational framework had the comfortable currency of predictability.

Teferra (2004) took a broader approach, studying the challenges for the 21st century Higher Education in African. The study realized that generalizing about a continent as large and as diverse as Africa was difficult, however, some common elements were found: challenges in providing higher education, poor management, brain drain, limited research and services in the continent.

The above reviewed literature show that non-state universities contribute significantly to higher education in Africa, however, they are affected by a plethora of challenges. This study wants to find out the challenges that the non-state universities in Zimbabwe are facing.

### **3. Method and Material**

The researcher took the advantage of a meeting for non-state universities called for by the responsible Minister in the Capital in August 2015. Each of the six non-state universities was represented by all the Faculty Deans and one lecturer per faculty making a total of 38 participants. Each university had compiled a list of challenges and possible solutions it faced prior the meeting in accordance with the minister's requirements. These compilations were presented and discussed at the meeting with the minister. The researcher took notes during presentations and had also a privilege of collecting any necessary details from the presenters after the meeting. The collected data was organized and analyzed qualitatively resulting in a coherent write-up of findings.

#### *3.1. Finding*

Findings revealed that non-state universities have made some notable accomplishments in higher education; along with the state universities, they have provided higher education to both local and international students and they have provided the industry with degreed personnel. They have also introduced research and some universities are in the process of establishing specialized university research units among other achievements. However, they encounter a number of challenges.

##### 3.1.1. Infrastructure Problems

The non-state universities have a challenge on internal infrastructure (especially libraries and other essential buildings, for instance, accommodation for students and staff) as well as the external infrastructure (mainly roads). Roads leading to the universities are worn out and the universities cannot repair them. This makes travelling, especially during the rainy season, difficulty. This also badly affects the university vehicles, thus causing another problem. Some universities wait for the government to chip in since they cannot afford to do the repairs. Similar findings were also found in West Africa, where Amponsah (2013) reported of poor university infrastructure in Ghana and Nigeria.

##### 3.1.2. Lack of Resources

Non-state universities in Zimbabwe lack a range of useful resources. These include library resources, e-learning resources, resources for the blind and the disabled, laboratory equipment, computers among other resources. These findings in Zimbabwe tallies those in Ghana and Nigeria as found by Amponsah (2013) who found lack of well-resourced libraries.

##### 3.1.3. Limited Research

There is minimal research in non-state universities due to limited research know-how as well as limited research funds. Some non-state universities are relatively new and are still adjusting to research in higher education demands. This is in line with research findings by Majoni (2014) who realized that research in Zimbabwe universities is not given the emphasis and quality it deserves mainly because of shortage of resources and too high workload for lecturers.

##### 3.1.4. Economic Challenges

Financial constraints are a common challenge for non-state universities in Zimbabwe who should be self-sufficient in all their operations without government assistance. Contrary to Omoregie (2011)'s proposal of state funding for non-state universities, the Charter in Zimbabwe has no room for state financial assistance. Garwe (2014) had similar findings in his study. Financial constrains result in other related problems, for example low remuneration for lecturers and staff. Similar findings were gathered by Majoni (2014) who noted that salaries for lecturers in Zimbabwe are generally lower than for other lecturers in regional universities. Another ripple effect of economic challenges by non-state universities in Zimbabwe is brain -drain: Amponsah (2013) also found brain-drain of top quality faculty and staff as a challenge to private universities in West Africa.

### 3.1.5. Low Enrollment

The six non-state universities are worryingly affected by low enrollments. While Buzindadde (2000) noted that institutions of higher learning have become overwhelmed by the large number of applicants, which have forced many of them to admit students beyond their intake capacity, this is not true for non-state universities. The decline in enrollment has even been worsened by the low economic situation in Zimbabwe within these current years yet the fees remained high. Non-state universities charge high fees in order to survive because the government funding schemes do not cover according to the Charter.

This finding of low enrollment tallies the report by Kariwo (2007) that the private higher education sector in Zimbabwe contributes a small share of enrollments and program offerings in higher education. Chivore (2006) attributed low enrollment to limited curriculum at non-state universities. The degree programs offered at non-state universities are limited to Humanities, Education, Agriculture, Business Management and Theology. Areas like Engineering, Medicine and Geology, among others, are a preserve of well-established state universities such as UZ and National University of Science and Technology (NUST) (Chivore 2006).

Almost all the non-state universities in Zimbabwe complained of poor corporate governance the major problem being the church that that interferes too much in the activities of the universities. This is similar to findings by Garwe (2014) who realized that the church endorsed their unskilled church people into university posts. Kumba (2010) also found related results; he reported a leadership controversy at a non-state university in Kenya where the Bishop of the church used his own powers to dismiss university leadership.

### 3.1.6. Lack of Grants and Loans

Students attending non-state universities have a great challenge of high fees. The situation is worsened by lack of grants and loans, a facility which is sometimes available for state university students. This situation has caused a high rate of student drop-out, some trying other universities while others just going in the streets. For those who try other universities they also face challenges: some universities allow only a limited number of credits to be transferred from another university regardless of how much credits has been done by the student. These can be as little as 12 credits and this disadvantages a transferring student.

Another challenge faced by a transferring student is of suiting in the existing programs at the new university. Although ZIMCHE is working on the standardization of university operations in Zimbabwe, there are some differences from one university to another, especially as far as content to be covered in a given program is concerned. There are also differences in grading system, that is, some universities follow the British (numerical) while others follow the American (letter) grading systems. This can cause interpretational problems.

It can be concluded that non-state universities have accomplished something in higher education, that is, provision of higher education to both local and international students. They have also provided the industry with degreed, knowledgeable personnel. They have also introduced research and are in the process of developing it with some universities already establishing specialized university research units among other achievements. However, they encounter a number of challenges. The challenges encountered by non-state universities in Zimbabwe are very similar mainly because they are all (serve one) church related universities, as propounded by Amponsah (2013) that the private institutions were mainly established by Christian missionaries. The social, economic and political environment of operation of these non-state universities are also the same, hence similar problems encountered.

## **4. Recommendations**

The non-state universities should re-examine their operations in this changing world; they should strategically re-position themselves in response to current demands of the new economy. This means that they should vary their degree curriculum bringing in those programs that are relevant to the national economy and responsive to the prevalent labor market demands. This can cause increase in enrollment and attract skilled lecturers, thus cubing brain drain.

ZIMCHE should work towards standardization of degree programs and grading systems in order to allow easy transfers of students to other universities. It should also standardize academic promotions for lecturers and staff.

The government should monitor discrepancies among lectures and staff condition of service and should at least set minimum remunerations for each category.

The government should apply tax exemption to non-state universities on importing institution related assets.

There should be cooperate support among universities (whether state or non-state) in the country so as to share knowledge and ideas on issues pertaining university education and operation.

Corporate sectors should be encouraged to brand prospective graduates so that they are assured of job availability on completion of studies.

The mother-churches of the non-state universities should fund their universities to alleviate financial constrains among these universities. They should also not interfere unnecessarily with the running of the universities and let those skilled in such areas do the operations.

The government should offer grants and loans to students in non-state universities. Also, donor fund can be attracted to supplement what is available for non- state universities.

There is also need for the development of updated university mission statements; mission statements which focus on updated educational quality that is abreast with the changing world, staff development and research opportunities as well as proper governance and management of non-state universities.

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