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Topic: Modification of Stakeholder Approach to Higher Education Funding in Zimbabwe post COVID-19

Authors: *KudakwasheZvitambo, **MufaroDzingirai, & Herbert Masukume***

[*]*Senior Lecturer, Department of Business Management, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, Email:zvitambok@staff.msu.ac.zw*
***Lecturer, Department of Business Management, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, Email: dzingiraim@staff.msu.ac.zw*
[***]*Lecturer, Department of Business Management, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, Email: masukumeh@staff.msu.ac.zw*

Abstract

Public-private partnerships have become a topical issue in the higher education funding discourse around the world in recent years especially when it comes to developing countries. This situation has attracted the attention of policymakers, scholars and other stakeholders due to the dwindling government's financial support, massification of higher education, and emergent of the competing needs of society. While common knowledge indicates that meticulous delivery of high-quality higher education plays a crucial role in the socio-economic transformation of any country, the dwindling of the government's financial expenditure towards higher education in Zimbabwe becomes a great concern worth scholarly attention. This heightens the need for advancing knowledge base on public-private partnerships as an innovative solution for higher education funding. Nonetheless, paucity but nascent literature on public-private partnerships for higher education funding in Africa, especially in Zimbabwe, becomes an area for academic apprehension. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the modification of the stakeholder approach to higher education funding in Zimbabwe post-COVID-19. The objectives are to analyze the contributions of private stakeholders to higher education funding in Zimbabwe, to examine the contributions of public stakeholders to higher education financing in Zimbabwe, and to assess the financial needs of higher education institutions in relation to funding in Zimbabwe. The study adopts interpretative philosophy which advocates a qualitative theoretical approach. Comprehensive analysis of the secondary data concerning public-private partnership leads to a model on higher education funding strategies in Zimbabwe. The study concludes that the higher education funding system needs to be revisited, hence recommends the adoption of the Stakeholder Higher Education Funding Model.

KEYWORDS: **Public-Private Partnerships; Higher Education; Stakeholder Approach**

Introduction

Recently, higher education funding has become an issue of great concern within the landscape of higher education around the world given the contraction of government funding and massification of higher education. Despite the fact that institutions of higher education are expected to offer high-quality education, the financial health of these institutions seemed to be questionable especially during times of contracted government expenditure (Bowl and Hughes, 2016). In the context of Australian universities, Irvine and Ryan (2019) concluded that universities show signs of financial unhealthy which threatens their financial sustainability.

Althoughhigher education institutions in the developed countries are well-known to be better-resourced than those in developing countries, they still face funding challenges given that their respective governments embrace austerity measures (Cohen, Guillamon, Lapsley and Robbins, 2015). To make matters worse, the emergence of COVID-19 cause serious financial challenges in the higher education sector. In this regard, many higher education institutions were pressurised to adopt online teaching and learning while their respective governments channel more financial resources towards COVID-19 pandemic alleviation. This state of affairs has attracted much attention of scholars, educators, policy-makers and researchers to look for other innovative ways to finance higher education institutions for the purpose of ensuring financial sustainability. Regrettably, not much is known about the financial sustainability of these institutions in the post-COVID-19 era.

In the African context, the study notes that there has been a rapid expansion of both public and private higher education institutions in the past three decades (Dzingirai, 2020a). Given this information, many governments in Africa face a plethora of challenges like a decline in quality tertiary education and inadequacy of resources (Adetiba, 2019;Dzingirai, 2020b;Goujon, Haller and Kmet, 2017; Akalu, 2016). This implies that the growth rate of higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa is not in tandem with the investment in higher education. Admittedly, many African governments have weak financial muscles when it comes to financing public institutions of higher education. This state of affairs led to the rapid growth of private higher education institutions during the past two decades (Tlali, Mukurunge and Bhila, 2019). This rapid expansion of these institutions in Africa at a time when the African governments face financial problems prompted an academic discourse on how best to finance them.

In light of the above discussion, Zimbabwe is not an exception when it comes to the massification of higher education. Notably, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, former president of Zimbabwe spearheaded education for all policy that produced good results as substantiated by the high demand for higher education in Zimbabwe. This was made possible owing to sound economic performance in the early 1980s and 1990s which enabled the government of Zimbabwe to increase government expenditure towards education (Nziramasanga Report, 1999). Admittedly, student enrolmentrapidly increased in the higher education sector from 19 285 students in 1997 to 92 279 students in 2017 which translates into 378.5% growth. Based on the above statistics, the government of Zimbabwe cannot bear the financial burden associated with this alarming rate of student enrolment in the higher education institutions considering its Gross Domestic Product. Regrettably, the emergence of the COVID-19 has forced the government to divert a greater portion of its expenditure towards the health sector. In fact, government expenditure reprioritisation has been witnessed on 30 March 2020 whereby the Treasury disbursed ZWL$50 million each to the Ministry of Health and Premier Medical Aid Society in an attempt to ensure well-preparedness against the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2020). Dwindling government expenditure towards higher education during and post-COVID-19 era cause researchers to pause and think about what can be done. Given this worrisome situation, the researchers ask the question: What are the innovative ways that can be used for higher education funding in Zimbabwe in the post-COVID-19 era?

Stakeholder Approach

It is widely accepted that the stakeholder approach was developed by Freeman (1984). He argues that managers must manage the stakeholder relationship in an attempt to align organisations with new social trends and demands. In this context, stakeholders can be loosely defined as individuals, groups or organisations that can influence the attainment of organisational goals. These may include interest groups like trade unions, government agencies, customers, competitors, suppliers, communities and shareholders. Recently, the stakeholder approach has gained much prominence in the strategic management and corporate governance literature especially in the confinement of the business world as applicable in a dynamic and chaotic operating environment. The study notes with interest that the concept of "stakeholder" has been applied in various disciplines such as environmental policy, law, public administration, ethics, and health care (Freeman et al., 2010). Nonetheless, its applicability in the higher education context, especially when it comes to higher education funding, need to be tested. Notably, the stakeholder approach has become more important than ever in the modern world since relationship management hasbeen widely considered a strategic tool for addressing social issues (Freeman, Phillips and Sisodia, 2020; Stocker, Arruda, Mascena and Boaventura, 2020; Sulkowski, Edwards and Freeman, 2018).

In the context of higher education, Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker and Boaventura (2020) highlight that the development of sound and fair relationships with internal and external stakeholders creates more value. This means that the managers of higher education institutions who create and maintain good relationships with stakeholders can achieve a competitive edge. Despitethe relevance of stakeholders in higher education settings, the stakeholder approach has gained much prominence in business practices and strategic management. Accordingly, it appears to be more interesting to apply the stakeholder approach in higher education, especially when it comes to funding. Higher education institutions, as non-profit making organisations, play a key role in scientific investigation and dissemination of knowledge in an effort to create a better society (Ferrero-Ferrero et al., 2018; Bilodeau et al., 2014). Admittedly, the existence and success of higher education institutions can be easily understood via a stakeholder lens. Accordingly, it appears to be justified to devise innovative higher education funding strategies that ensure stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

Higher Education Sector in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has experienced an increase in the number of higher education institutions since independence. University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was the first university in Rhodesia before independence as it was established in 1955. After regaining its independence in 1980, this university was renamed as University of Zimbabwe and it remained as the sole university until 1991. After that Higher education institutions in Zimbabwemushroomed to encompass, agricultural training colleges, teacher training colleges, technical and vocational training colleges, polytechnics and universities (ZIMSTATS, 2017). Scholars, researchers and policymakers question the ability of the Zimbabwean government to finance these institutions in the face of economic deterioration.

In the case of Zimbabwe's universities, they increased to 16 universities across the country by the end of 2017. These institutions includethe University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Midlands State University (MSU), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Chinhoyi Universityof Technology (CUT), Lupane State University, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), Manicaland State University, Catholic University, Solusi University, Africa University (AU), Women's University in Africa (WUA), Zimbabwe National Defence University, Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU), Reformed Church University (RCU), and Harare Institute of Technology (HIT). Among these universities, only 6 were privately owned and not directly funded by the government. However, the government provides support and a good operating environment which require funding. However, a key questionrelated to the adequacy of government higher education funding given the rapid expansion of public universities in Zimbabwe can be asked.

Moreover, Zimbabwe has witnessed a rapid growth of teacher training colleges. In this respect, there were 14 colleges as at 2017. These colleges includeMorgenster, Mkoba, Masvingo, Mary Mount, Joshua Nkomo, Hillside, Bondolfi, Belvedere, United College of Education, Madziwa, Seke, Nyadire, Mutare, and Morgan Zintec. Government directly fund all teachers colleges in Zimbabwe.The enrolment in teachers' training colleges increased from 16 418 students in 1994 to 286 610 in 2017 (ZIMSTAT, 2017). Nonetheless, universities are also offering teacher training qualifications.

In the case of polytechnics and industrial training colleges, there were 15 colleges as at 2017. Notably, the enrolment in these institutions sharply increased from 12 411 in 2013 to 20 268 in 2015 (ZIMSTAT, 2017).Government directly fund these colleges. The above statistics heighten the need to look for innovative strategies to finance higher education in Zimbabwe.

Higher Education Funding in Zimbabwe

Following the expansion of higher education in Zimbabwe, it becomesimperative to look at higher education funding in Zimbabwe. The capacity of the Zimbabwean government to fund higher education has been constrained owing to the economic meltdown generated by the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) and political instability that manifested since the late 1990s (Hove and Ndawana, 2019). This state of affairs has negatively affected the provision of high-quality higher education. Although both private and public universities were initially subsidized and state-funded respectively, cost-sharing measures were executed in public universities while funding for private universities was withdrawn. This has led to a situation whereby the academics were underpaid and the universities were financially constrained. The government funding of colleges and universities comprised of grants and students loans as from 1954 to 1998 (Mukwambo, 2016).

In light of the above, the Zimbabwean government devises a strategy to relieve pressure on public funding by increasing student contribution in form of tuition. Notably, the government contributed only 20% of the student costs while 80% was contributed in form of a loan (Mukwambo, 2016). The government introduced a 100% state-backed loan facility for students in public and private universities as from 2002 to 2006 in the face of prohibitive fees and economic decay (Munanga and Matindike, 2013). Nonetheless, such loans were not repaid by students and also the burden of the government increased since several students were being enrolled by institutions of higher education. Regrettably, political tension post-2000 has forced the European Union donors to withdraw funding of several projects in Zimbabwean universities and the benefits linked to the Association of Commonwealth universities such as scholarships and funds for research increasingly became scarce.

Following the failure of the grants and loans programme in 2005, the Zimbabwean higher education sector experienced a number of setbacks. For instance, higher education institutions experienced a sharp increase in the number of drop-outs since many parentscouldnot affordto pay exorbitantfees and other expenses such as accommodation (Tshuma, 2013). In response, the Zimbabwean government introduced the Cadetship Support Scheme (CSS) in 2006 targeting only undergraduate students. This programme was widely considered a powerful tool for bringing equity in higher education funding since the programme helpedseveral students from poor backgrounds (Chimhenga, Mafa and Mpofu, 2015). Nonetheless, this programme appeared to be discriminatory since post-graduate students facing financial challenges were not considered. Moreover, the government faced challenges related to funding capacity since many students from poor backgrounds were being enrolled in higher education institutions. Unfortunately, the Zimbabwean government scrapped the cadetship programme in 2017 because universities and colleges were owed US$34 million by Treasury (Kadire, 2017).

Research Methodology

The study adopted an interpretative paradigm that advocates a qualitative approach.The interpretative paradigm enables the study to analyse the views of different scholars since it argues that reality can be obtained from people's experience of the phenomenon (Leedy&Ormorod, 2010). Qualitative approach enabled the study to collect narrative data from various sources. Furthermore, the study adopted a desk-top research data gathering method which helped the researchers totheoretically collect datafrom secondarysources on higher education funding. Thematically analysed data on stakeholder approach and higher education funding deduced generalisations used to come up with a Stakeholder Higher Education Funding Model in Zimbabwe.

Results and Discussions

Results showed that globally, most countries use government grants to fund higher education institutions (European Commission, 2011; Urah and Convoy 2015). Government grants constitute 70% of higher education institutions budgets (Nehis, 2017; Turan, 2020). In addition,Jongbloed (2010) and Orkdashvili (2017) reveal that Europe, America, Asia, Australia and other continents combine government grants with other funding strategies like loans, tuitions fees, endowments and donations, revenue from higher education institutions business activities, research grants and investments to fund higher education institutions activities. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic does not much affect developed countries in funding higher education since they have strong economies (Turan, 2020).

On the other hand, African governments face a plethora of challenges in trying to fund higher education which includes expansion and massification, economic problems, social and health issues (Poverty, drought, HIV-AIDS, COVID-19 etc), students unable to pay tuition fees, and mismanagement of funds and corruption (Weidman, 1995; Menon; 2012; Teferra, 2014; Gudo; 2014; Afolayan; 2015;Bowrin, 2020). However, government grants fund approximately 70 percent of higher education institutions' budgets in Africa (Gudo, 2014; Ahmad, Saripuden, and Soon, 2015). African Countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, naming a few, tried to introduce cost-sharing strategies including student loans, cadet schemes, Trust funds, etc but these funding strategies failed dismally due to mismanagement and corruption (Molutsi, 2009; Teferra, 2014; Ahmad, 2018).

In Zimbabwe government find it difficult to continue funding higher education institutions considering the current economic scenario (Hove andNdavana 2019). The economic cake gets smaller and smaller year in and year out due to the economic meltdown being experienced by the country. Therefore, academics and other stakeholders need to come up with workable solutions to this situation. Economic challenges had hard hit the majority of the people in Zimbabwe that they could not afford to send their children for higher education. Higher education graduates failed to get employment creatinga poverty cycle. Both parents and government cannot fund higher education institutions operations without support from private partners.

Furthermore, Zimbabwe Auditor General Reports (2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019) indicate mismanagement and governance scandals in the higher education institutions which cause financial leakages. These issues impact negatively the operations of these institutions and their ability to offer quality and affordable education.

On the other hand, results also showed that the need for higher education continues to increase rapidly since secondary schools now have qualified teachers who produce good results (ZIMSTATS 2017). In addition, parents now understand the significance of education as a weapon to fight inequality and poverty. Furthermore, more female students require higher education as compared to the pre-1980 period. All these factors increase the number of students requiring higher education but pose funding challenges.

Similarly, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the funding challenges since the government had to channel more funds to fight the pandemic at the expense of higher education funding. Results showed that funding of COVID-19 became a priority and other issues had to be put on hold (see Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2020).In addition, the pandemic negatively impacted other sources of higher education funding like donations, scholarships, students fees, naming a few, since government impose shutdowns and other restrictions in order to contain the disease. These results paint a gloomy picture for the higher education funding in Zimbabwe if nothing is done as a matter of urgency. The study presents conclusions and recommendations in the next section.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that, in most countries, 70 percent of the higher education institutions budgets get funded by the government. This creates funding challenges in developing countries that are facing economic challenges.COVID-19 pandemic compounded the challenges since all sectors of the economy were affected reducing the Gross Domestic Product of most countries. In developed countries, higher education institutions had the autonomy to complement funding using the cost-sharing approach, research grants, higher education institutions investments, endowment income, private contributions and so forth whilst African higher education institutions do not have that autonomy. In Zimbabwe, the government cannot continue funding higher education alone but require other stakeholders to come in through Private-Public Partnership programmes. Therefore, the study recommends adoption ofthe Multiple Stakeholder Higher Education Funding Model indicated in Figure 1 which suggests the following:

Cost-sharing Approach

Students should be categorized into classes according to their ability to pay. Those who can afford to pay commercial fees should do so whilst those from poor backgrounds should receive support from Higher Education Fund. Private higher education institutions should be run on a commercial basis, that is, a hundred percent dependency on fees. Other programmes should be run on a commercial basis. For example, postgraduate courses which attract working-class students. For example, parallel and weekend programmes are to be run on a commercial basis.

Ministry of higher and tertiary education can negotiate with banks to come up with education loans available to those who can afford especially the students from middle-income parents. These loans should be managed properly with audits.

Government Grant

Government should allocate funds towards higher education in its budget. Government should introduce Higher Education Tax which goes towards higher education funding. The Higher Education Tax of at least 1% can be introduced on luxury goods like beer, cigarettes, etc. The Higher Education Tax would be distributed to the higher education institutions.

Government can also introduce a 0.5 % tax on Diaspora remittances which goes directly to funding higher education institutions. These funds collected through various tax measures should be managed properly.

Zimbabwe development education fund (ZimDef) should be run properly and channelled towards the funding of higher education institutions. If properly managed, these funds can go a long way in providing funds for higher education institutions operations.

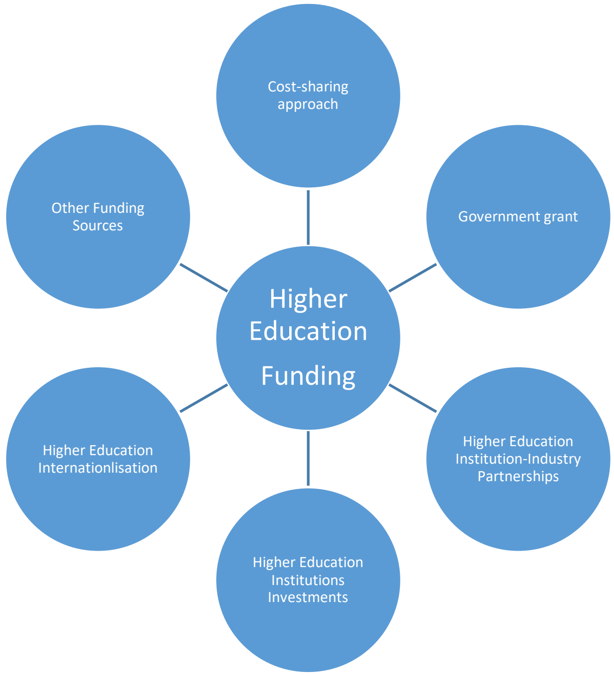

Figure 1: Multiple Stakeholder Higher Education Funding Model

Higher Education Institutions-Industry Partnerships (HEIIPs)

Students would be attached to companies. These students would work full time for the company and in return, the company pay their education fees (apprentice programme). This creates a win-win situation whereby the companies get cheap labour and in return students get school fees. Other full-time students should spend less than 4 hours on theory aspects then the other 4 hours working in the industry. Such arrangements will boost industrial production and enable it to fund higher education institutions activities. For example, adopting the approach used in training health manpower. This is possible in Zimbabwe because all provinces have higher education institutions.

All industry and business researches should be done by higher education institutions. Such arrangements will benefit higher education institutions through gaining experience in industry researches and also funds generated by that research.

Industry and business can donate towards higher education funding as their humanistic social responsibility programmes. However, such activities should be monitored to eradicate corruption. These donations should be openly declared to the stakeholders for transparency purposes.

Higher Education Institutions Investments (HEIIs)

Higher Education Institutions come up with productivity projects and students work in those projects producing products for the market. In return, students get fees from those projects. For example, Agricultural faculties in Universities and Colleges can make the agriculture students to work on the farms producing goods for the market and get fees and experience in return. Government would provide farms to these colleges and universities.

Higher Education Institutions should invest their surpluses on the money and financial markets instead of keeping in the bank losing value due to inflation. They can make use of their lecturers some of them who are experts in those fields. In addition, they can issue shares and bonds to the public.

Furthermore, they can use a diversification strategy whereby they offer consultancy and other programmes which brings in income, for example, short courses. If these programmes are managed properly they yield dividends.

Higher Education Internationalisations

Higher Education institutions should attract international students who pay fees in foreign currency. They can expand globally establishing institutions in other countries. This can be a cash cow for them. The programme should be done in liaison with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that students can be recruited at the government level. In addition, these institutions can attract foreign research grants. Further, these institutions can attract international scholarships and bursaries for local students.

Other Funding sources

Formation of vibrant Alumni chapters/Associations can contribute immensely to Higher Education funding provided they are involved in the activities of the institutions.

Higher Education institutions should search for research grants, especially for postgraduate students. This can go a long way in contributing to the funding of certain activities at the institution.

All donations from various stakeholders should be put in a pool and distributed to higher education institutions. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary educations should be in charge of sourcing local and international donations from various sources.

Deliberate expansions of private higher education institutions alleviate pressure on public institutions reducing the burden on government grants.

Area for further research

Researchers can investigate the practical applicability of the Multiple Stakeholder Higher Education Funding Model in the Southern Africa Region countries.

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