COUNTRY REPORT ON ZIMBABWEAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION – 2019

BY
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FOREWARD

This country report of the *International Distance Education and African Students (IDEAS)* project provides an overview of the Zimbabwean university education. It also elaborates on the historical background and current state of the university education system, and the extent to which it provides equitable and quality education. The report draws from an extensive secondary desktop review, as well as primary data collected during the IDEAS project.

A clear change towards the massification of university education post 1980 is shown in the report. Positive changes that include greater access to a larger part of the population are reported. Efforts towards gender participation in higher education are also noted. This, however, has not been necessarily accompanied by the appropriate resourcing to ensure good quality education in the country. The report shows how the tertiary education of Zimbabwe is struggling to compete globally, with much external competition for its students and academics alike, especially from its neighbour, South Africa. Due mostly to the depressed economic and unstable political environment in the country, a steady decline in the tertiary education system is evident. It also highlights the growth of distance education in the country, and the important role it plays in Zimbabwe's higher education. The report concludes by highlighting the proposed strategies that the country hopes to employ to improve the quality of higher education in the country.

This chapter, *Country Report on Zimbabwean University Education – 2019*, is intended to advance better understanding of Zimbabwe's university system, and reasons why Zimbabweans opt for IDE with universities in other countries or why student migration matters.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SADC	Southern African development Community
ZIMCHE	Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education
ZOU	Zimbabwe Open University
ZIMSEC	Zimbabwe School Examinations Council
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GCE	General Certificate of Education
ZNGP	Zimbabwe National Gender Policy
WUA	Women's University in Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Production
UZ	University of Zimbabwe
NUST	National University of Science and Technology
HIT	Harare Institute of Technology
MSU	Midlands State University
STEM	Science Technology and Mathematics

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe is a Southern African country. Zimbabwe shares its borders with Zambia to the North, Mozambique to the East, Botswana to the West and South Africa to the South. Its capital is Harare. Zimbabwe is part of the Southern African development Community (SADC). Zimbabwe's main economic activities are agriculture and mining. The country has, however, been suffering a severe economic collapse since the early 2000's. It currently does not have an official currency. Although production is still happening in the country, it is very low. The country has a very high employment rate, with rates from official and unofficial sources ranging from 30-98 %. However, most of the economy has become informal, with many people trading on the streets for survival. Zimbabwe's population at the last census conducted in 2012 was reported at 13, 061, 239 (ZIMSTATS, 2012). Although as many as 16 languages are spoken in Zimbabwe, the official language of business is English, with Shona and Ndebele the two other languages that can be found on official forms and notices, and are also included in the national education curriculum.

Figure 1: Geographical location of Zimbabwe in Africa (source: bl-libg-doghill.ads.iu.edu)

The first university in Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, was founded in 1952 (University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland) and was set up by a special licence with the University of London. Zimbabwe now has nine state universities and many colleges. Prior to independence, the University of Zimbabwe was the country's first and only university. Zimbabwe still boasts of its high literacy rate, with amongst the highest on the continent (estimated to be over 90 %). This high literacy is to the credit of several pro-education policies that were implemented shortly after independence in 1980. To this effect, the higher education system of Zimbabwe has been moving from an exclusive, elitist system, to a more inclusive, mass system. Thus, the building blocks of this change have been the inclusive education policies introduced in the country shortly after independence, such as the National Development Plan of 1980, whose education goal was based on the UN declaration of Human Rights.

1.1 The structural organisation of Zimbabwean Higher Education

The overarching state body that oversees the running of all higher education institutions in Zimbabwe is the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. The official registration and accreditation state arm of higher education is the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE).

2. State and private universities in Zimbabwe and their spatial distribution

The spatial distribution of universities in the country closely follows provincial demarcations. Zimbabwe currently has ten unitary state provinces, namely Bulawayo, Harare, Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Masvingo, Matebeleland North,

Matebeleland South and Midlands. All of the state and private universities are located in the respective provincial capitals (Figure 2; Table 1). The Zimbabwean government aimed to have at least one state university in each province. Currently, two of the provinces do not have a state university, with proposed plans in the pipelines, namely Manicaland University of Science and Technology and Marondera University of Science and Technology (which is currently a centre for agricultural research for the University of Zimbabwe).

Table 1: *State and private universities in Zimbabwe*

Name of University	State University	Private University	Location	Year founded	Approximate Enrolment
University of Zimbabwe	Yes	No	Harare	1952	
National University of Science and Technology	Yes	No	Bulawayo	1991	
Women's University in Africa	No	Yes	Harare	2004	3500
Bindura University	Yes	No	Bindura	1996	
Great Zimbabwe University	Yes	No	Masvingo		
Solusi University	No	Yes	Bulawayo	1990	4500+
Chinhoyi University of Technology	Yes	No	Chinhoyi	2001	
Harare Institute of Technology	Yes	No	Harare	2005 (to offer degree programmes)	
Catholic University of Zimbabwe	No	Yes	Harare	1995	
Lupane State University	Yes	No	Lupane	2005	
Midlands State University	Yes	No	Gweru	2000	25 000

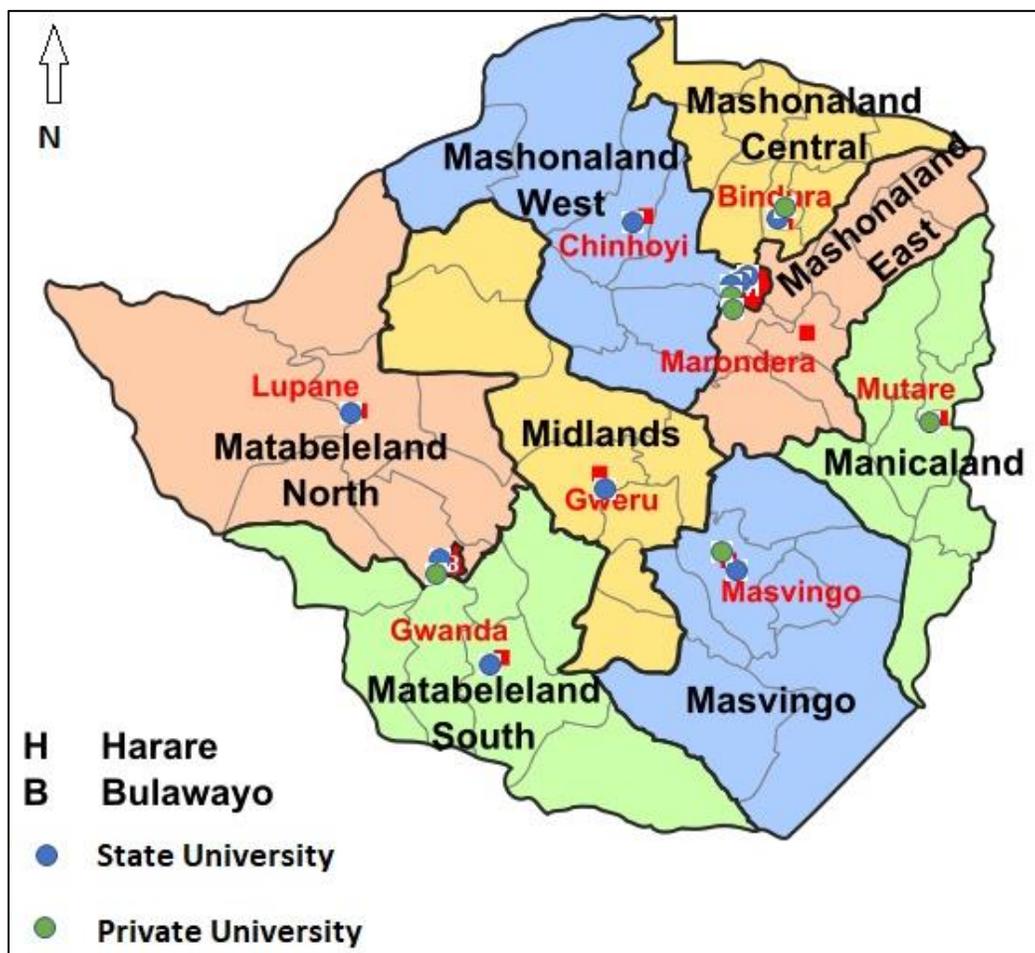|					
Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University	No	Yes	Bindura	2012	
Africa University	No	Yes	Mutare	1992	
Gwanda State University	Yes	No	Gwanda	2012	
Reformed Church University	No	Yes	Masvingo	2012	936
Zimbabwe Open University	Yes	No	National	1995	30 185

Figure 2: Spatial Distribution of Universities in Zimbabwe

3. Demand and supply of university education and open distance learning

Zimbabwe, like most other sub-Saharan countries in Africa lacks the capacity to absorb all its students who are qualified to access tertiary education and training. According to Dzvimbo (2015), the Zimbabwean secondary school system (Ordinary certificate level) churns out approximately 300, 000 students each year, with only 30 % of these being absorbed into the formal and informal employment sectors. In response to the rising demand for university access, open distance learning was introduced. The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) was established so that it could provide university education and training which is flexible, relevant, accessible and most effective. It is the country's largest university, employing approximately 800 staff members. ZOU now has an enrolment of over 22 000 students in fifteen undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that Zimbabwe has come quite far since independence, where there was only one national university, that had a carrying capacity of a meagre 2, 200 full-time students, to (now) nine public and several private universities with a total estimated enrolment of somewhere between 30, 000 and 43, 000 full-time students between 2014 and 2018 (Kariwo, 2014; Vambe, 2018). It must be noted Zimbabwe, however, continues to lose highly capable young minds to its neighbour, South Africa, and to other countries especially the UK, Australia and Canada; actual figures of which are currently not known. Furthermore, it is important to contend with the issue of the geographical bias within Zimbabwe of university admissions. For example, 60 % of ZOU's students are domicile in Harare. This may point to the issue of the inaccessibility of learning technologies in other parts of the country, particularly the rural areas, who remain largely

excluded in accessing tertiary university education. All state universities also have their campuses in urban town centres.

4. Admission into universities

Universities in Zimbabwe provide both higher education and higher professional education, offering both degree and non-degree programmes. Degrees are awarded at undergraduate level as bachelor's degrees, whilst master's and doctorates are awarded at the postgraduate level. Non-degree qualifications are certificates and diplomas. Technical and teaching colleges in the country can only issue certificates or diplomas. To be admitted into a bachelor's degree programme at a Zimbabwean University, a student generally needs to have at last five Zimbabwe General Certificate at Ordinary 'O' level passes, with grades that are class 'C' or better, and two of these must be in Mathematics and English. Additionally, the student must also have at least two passes at the Zimbabwe General Certificate at Advanced 'A' level. These certificates are awarded by the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC). The syllabus and certification level is the equivalent of the University of Cambridge International Examinations General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) at Ordinary and Advanced level certificates respectively. This system of university undergraduate degree admission has been effective since 1980 till present day. However, different degree programmes at different universities can set higher entry requirements, as a university can set its own admission policy. As there is great competition for successful university admission in the country, students usually have to achieve much higher grades than the stipulated general requirements. In order to gain entry into a college, a student only requires

five passes of the Zimbabwe General Certificate at Ordinary level at 'C' or better, with two of these being in Mathematics and English.

4.1 Admission by gender

Mashininga (2012) reported a sharp increase in female student enrolments in higher education institutions in the country, following the introduction of the Zimbabwe higher education affirmative action policy in 2012. The policy effectively allowed female students to be admitted into programmes at slightly lower admissions scores than their male counterparts. Female enrolment figures were quoted at 72 % and 63 % for primary and secondary teachers' colleges respectively, 44.28 % for polytechnical colleges, and 40 % for universities. Many challenges, however, still exist for females attempting to access higher education which include lack of adequate accommodation, lack of grants, sexual abuse and rape, victimisation by lecturers, lack of sanitary facilities, early marriages, poor access to affordable health care, gender imbalances in institutions, low female involvement in decision-making and in student bodies, low self-esteem, and lack of prenatal care. The Zimbabwe National Gender Policy (ZNGP) (2000) requires that all state universities implement gender equity programmes through gender mainstreaming, so as to ensure gender equity in the higher education system (Chauraya & Manyike, 2014). However, it was found that the quota system for admissions was implemented in very few departments, and only some universities actually have a written gender policy (ibid). Zimbabwe, however, has a university that is almost exclusively for women; The Women's University in Africa (WUA). The university has a current enrolment of 3, 500 students, 85 % of which are women. To date, WUA has graduated 6, 909 students from their degree programmes (WUA, 2018).

5. Quality of university education

Since 2006, the Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education has been responsible for registering and accrediting all institutions of higher education in the country. They are therefore the sole governing body that carries out quality assurance of all accreditations in Zimbabwe at the higher education level. The Times Higher Education World University Ranking is the global performance index that judges research-intensive universities across all their core missions: teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and international outlook. 13 carefully calibrated performance indicators are used to provide the most comprehensive and balanced comparisons, trusted by students, academics, university leaders, industry, and governments.

Universities are excluded from the World University Rankings if they do not teach under-graduates or if their research output amounted to fewer than 1,000 articles between 2011 and 2015 (and a minimum of 150 a year). Universities can also be excluded if 80 percent or more of their activity is exclusively in one of our eight subject areas. No Zimbabwean university currently features in this list.

5.1 Factors affecting the quality of university education

Several factors have been identified as affecting the quality of university education in Zimbabwe. Many of these factors are either directly or indirectly linked to issues of funding of universities in the country, which affect university resourcing. Identified factors are also strongly linked to the prevalent socio-political environment of the country.

Funding is probably the most challenging issue facing higher education in Zimbabwe. Dzvimbo (2015) alludes to the fact that Zimbabwe is amongst the poorest nations in the world, with a small Gross Domestic Production (GDP). This has resulted in the state's inability to provide institutions of higher learning with capital, as well as recurring expenditure. Universities, e.g. ZOU, often request funds for their annual running expenses, only to receive a fraction of the requested funds. In 1999 (which is the period preceding the economic crash in the country), ZOU requested Z$40 million for its recurrent budget, only to be given Z$10.3 million by the government. In 2017, it was reported that the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) revenues totalled to $40 718 636 against their expenditure of $43 373 728, resulting in a $ 2 655 092 deficit (Anon, 2017).

Present day, post the economic crash, however, another dimension to the funding crisis has been added on the part of user fees, which hinder the realistic charging of fees. Currently, Zimbabwe does not have a currency. Instead, it uses a bond, which is valued only within the country at 1:1 to the United States Dollar. This bond is however difficult to come by, as the release of this bond by banks is greatly limited to as little as 30 bond per person per week. As such, users are forced to use electronic fund transfers, and become subject to bank charges, and also require internet platforms upon which to access these services. These challenges have therefore forced institutions delaying to charge fees that correspond with the expenses they incur per capita in providing services to the students, and are thus running at a loss.

Many of the ascribed internal challenges of Zimbabwean higher education also have their roots in the unstable economic and political environment of the country. This environment has made the provision of long term policy documentation a rarity in Zimbabwe. Quite often, policy is just announced by government ministers, senior government officials and the president alike, only to be contradicted, retracted and revised frequently. A top-down approach in education policy is also evident, with politicians arguing that this approach is necessary given the prevailing economic crisis and the need to deal with past imbalances in the distribution of resources (Kariwo, 2014). Furthermore, issues in policy implementation are in most instances compounded by a lack of accompanying and supporting resources to effect policy. In response to the most recent call by government for universities to foster industrialisation and innovation, universities are challenged to rebrand themselves, and to shift to more technological platforms for teaching and learning.

These challenges have been exacerbated by the problems of staff retention in the country. Many senior and experienced academics leave the country in pursuit of more favourable working conditions and remuneration packages in better funded universities, such as those in South Africa and Europe (Dzvimbo, 2015). Similar to many other African countries, the switch to mostly digital technology in teaching and learning is seemingly premature and ambitious, as the country has not developed the necessary infrastructural capacity to accommodate this move. Currently, 70 % of Zimbabwe's population is rural, where electricity is mostly unavailable. Although internet is accessible due to mostly private mobile network providers, the cost of the technologies such as mobile phones and laptops is still not attainable to the average citizen. Data

costs are also exorbitant, greatly limiting the number of people who are able to use digital technology platforms for learning effectively to a privileged few.

Another key challenge to the provision of quality education in the country is the marred reputation that the tertiary education system has come to in recent years. This may be strongly linked to the unstable political state of the nation post land reform in 2000. The economic and political environment of the country led to a mass exodus of teaching personnel from the country, whilst dwindling resources to tertiary institutions led to the deterioration of infrastructure in universities, and to the degree programmes, especially Science Technology and Mathematics (STEM) programmes that are resource heavy. The most recent knock on the tertiary education's reputation and legitimacy, however, occurred in 2014, when the UZ granted a degree of doctor of philosophy (PhD) in sociology to the then president's wife, Grace Mugabe, who had no formal educational qualifications, had not attended the university nor written a thesis. She registered two months before she was granted the degree. This action confirmed the high levels of corruption within the system, which include political appointments in key positions in institutions of higher learning. To date, the court case against those involved remains inconclusive, further damaging the reputation of these institutions.

5.2 Proposed strategies for expanding access to and improving the quality of university education

In response to the current problems of the Zimbabwean tertiary education, the government has recently ordered an audit of all public and private institutions to determine skills gaps needing

attention at the learning level. This process is the basis of national curriculum development, with the ultimate goal of established knowledge-based industry to sustain the economy. This exercise was last conducted in the country in 1982. In the hopes of fostering greater innovation and industry relevance, the government is also looking to establish innovation hubs, which are campus-based centres whose purpose is to refine lecture room ideas. This is expected to increase industry uptake. The first centres are planned to be set up at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), the Harare Institute of Technology (HIT), Midlands State University (MSU), and the Zimbabwe Defence College.

Another key proposition is the finalisation of the Zimbabwe Qualifications Framework, which will standardise tertiary and higher learning qualifications. This is to resolve the problems experienced by students who enter university, after having acquired certificates or diplomas from technical colleges, only to not have the qualifications credited with the university, in spite of their relevance.

Some of these propositions, however, fall amidst on-going debates of the mandate of universities, whose sole purpose is not produce industry ready workers, but rather to produce thinkers, philosophers and problem-solvers. It is however argued that many of the graduates from Zimbabwean universities do not meet the requirements of employers, and thus cost employers with the provision of on-the-job training.

Other key propositions to resolve funding problems include the reintroduction of student loans in Zimbabwe. Prior to the economic crash of the early 2000's, the state provided loans to students

that would be repaid only after the student successfully graduated and secured a job or income. It is proposed that these loans will now be provided through FUNDI (Eduloan). This funding is speculated to also be available for ODL students. In order to increase access to online resources, the private sector is being asked to assist universities. So far, Econet, the largest private mobile phone service provider, will be setting up 'eduzones' in universities, where students can access free internet services on their devices.

Lastly, efforts are also being directed at bringing back Zimbabwean acquired tertiary qualifications to their former repute. These efforts are aimed at having qualifications internationally recognised and considered credible. Increasing research capacity through a five-fold mission to teach, research, consult, innovate and industrialise is being encouraged. ZOU is aiming to introduce regionally relevant short courses, so as to attract regional students. Universities are also becoming stricter in enforcing a PhD qualification for all teaching staff from a senior lecturing position and beyond.

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