

# CHAPTER 1: University Statism: Context and Overview

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This study seeks to investigate the survival strategies employed by state universities in Zimbabwe focusing on the enrolment expansionism by the Midlands State University (MSU). This chapter provides a study overview that particularly is about the background to the problem, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, research hypothesis, delimitations of the study, significance of the study and research limitations.

Enrolment expansion in state universities has been a central phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the world (Rumbley *et al*, 2010). Globally, for example, the United States of America (USA) embarked on enrolment expansion in state universities (*Ibid.*). The Great Recession of 2007-2009 induced and accelerated enrolment expansion in state universities (Kim, 2014). In recent times, this has been particularly evident as USA total university enrolment increased from 18.2 million to 21 million between Fall 2007 and Fall 2010 (Barr & Turner, 2013). The University of Alabama in Birmingham showed enrolment expansion as the students were 14,690 in 2011 and the number rose to 18,698 in 2015 (Bentley & Bice, 2016).

Nevertheless, striking feature of the Great Recession was the relative shift from state support and provision of higher education to private and federal support. Tuition increases at public universities were increased during the era of the Great Recession and such escalations shifted the costs of higher education from states to students. The increased tuition served as one of the few channels for revenue generation by government. The federal aid policies, including the Pell grant, became more generous such that many students were eligible to get the education grants resulting in many students enrolling at universities (Barr & Turner, 2013).

China also witnessed enrolment expansion in its university education, with the gross enrolment rate jumping from 9.8% in 1998 to 24.2% in 2009

(Wang & Liu, 2011). There were 29.79 million students enrolled in state universities, making it the largest higher education system in the world in absolute terms. This wave of radical growth began in an intense manner in June 1999, when the central government finished the decision to enlarge the higher education structure in China. The strategy of enrolment expansion was required to accept more students in universities. The rationale of the government included easing the immediate labour market and developing human capital for future development (Beall, 2012).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, most public universities embarked on enrolment expansion in excess of their capacity. This resulted in “massification” and negative consequences on educational quality (Mohamedbhai, 2013). It is posited that Makerere University in Uganda embarked on enrolment expansion as a strategy to introduce new courses and to take in more qualified students (Musaazi, 2014:208). It is also observed that there was a drastic reduction in state funding of higher education in 1989 that translated into a deepening financial crisis at Makerere University (Mamdani, 2008:10). This resulted in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Uganda government signing the first Structural Adjustment Programme that they agreed on privatisation. The strategy of privatisation at the Makerere University was to get the commercial units to become profit-making through enrolment expansion of fee-paying students and so become “income generating units” (*Ibid.*).

Privatisation contributed to enrolment expansion at Makerere University as they pursued profit-maximisation for commercial units and income maximisation for the faculties (Mamdani, 2008:52). Currently Makerere University has 50 000 students (MUIMP, 2014). The university decided to lower entry requirements for evening school, lifting of limits on enrolment and increase in number of students in each program. These decisions opened the floodgates of students (*Ibid.*).

In Kenya, state universities also used the enrolment expansion as a strategy to compete with several private universities that were emerging (Kamau, 2013). It is argued that public universities have been ‘forced’ to expand their programmes, create flexible education schedules and build

up campuses away from their traditional locations (Jowi and Oanda, 2012). The commitment that the people and the government of Kenya made to expand the availability of education at all levels has been a national accomplishment (Mukanji *et al.*, 2016). Since its independence in 1963 universities throughout Kenya have dispersed to the rural areas both as a strategy to expand access and position themselves as business entities while expanding enrolment (Hughes & Mwiria, 2009). It is argued that population increase in Kenya contributed to high demand for education and university education as well. The population in Kenya in 2006 was 38 million and by 2012 it was 43 million showing an increase in population growth (Jowi & Oanda, 2012).

In South Africa, enrolment expansion in state universities has been experienced as well. After the end of the apartheid regime, higher education moved, in its structural features, from a fragmented and operationally racialised system to a relatively (at least formally) more integrated system of many public universities (traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology) such that 990 000 students were enrolled in the state universities (HETS, 2015). The University of South Africa (UNISA) embarked on enrolment expansion as they offer open distance learning to students within their country and other students from the region and the whole world such that in 2010 students were 293 437 2 and the numbers rose to 337 612 in 2015 showing an increase in student enrolment (UNISA, 2015).

Enrolment expansion in South Africa resulted as an element of the restructuring of South African higher education. There was the change in the explanation of those organisations known as technikons to universities of technology (Townsend, 2010). Student enrolment increased from 28 000 in 2013 to 33 711 in 2015 (WITS, 2016).

In Zimbabwe, higher education has grown faster since the attainment of independence in 1980. There are 18 universities of that twelve are state owned and the rest are privately owned (Madzimore, 2016). The state universities in Zimbabwe are Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Great Zimbabwe

University (GZU), Gwanda State University, Harare Institute of Technology (HIT), Lupane State University (LSU), Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences, Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences, Midlands State University (MSU), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) (Zindi, 2015). The major aim of the government after it came into power in 1980 was “education for all” from primary level, secondary education to higher education (Mhere *et al.*, 2014). The increase in population in the country also meant increase in enrolments from primary, secondary and tertiary education. Zindi (2015) posits that the large numbers of secondary school graduates became the tail that began to wag the dog of university enrolment.

**Table 1.1** Zimbabwe State Universities and Their Enrolment (*University Rankings, 2017*)

| Name of University                              | Year of Establishment | Enrolment at Inception     | Current Enrolment |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Bindura University of Science Education         | 1996* 2001            | 125                        | 2000              |
| Chinhoyi University of Technology               | 2001                  | 1200                       | 4000              |
| Great Zimbabwe University                       | 1999                  | 120                        | 3000              |
| Gwanda State University                         | 2012                  | 65                         | 150               |
| Harare Institute of Technology                  | 1988* 2005            | 300                        | 3000              |
| Lupane State University                         | 2005                  | 81                         | 3000              |
| Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences | 2016                  | 350                        | 500               |
| Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences   | 2015                  | 50                         | 200               |
| Midlands State University                       | 2000                  | 400                        | 25 000            |
| National University of Science and Technology   | 1991                  | 270                        | 5000              |
| University of Zimbabwe                          | 1955                  | 68 in 1955<br>1000 in 1980 | 15 200            |
| Zimbabwe Open University                        | 1999                  | 5000                       | 16 000            |

Table 1.1 shows that there was an increase in figures of enrolment per each university since its inception showing that there is high demand for university education in Zimbabwe (Matorera, 2016).

The high demand for university education in Zimbabwe encouraged the government to increase the number of universities to cater for this (Mhere *et al.*, 2014). Another reason for the increase in state universities was to build a trained and professional labour force and hence improve productivity in the country (*Ibid.*). However, the massive increase in student enrolment extensively exerted pressure on the national budget (Majoni, 2014). The government found it difficult to provide all the funding required in education, especially higher education whereby the expenditure per student in higher education was over 300% of GNP per capita (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011:4). Lack of funding from government to state universities meant that state universities were left to generate income and realise profit where possible, hence rely less on government funding. This meant that Zimbabwe state universities had to generate income and become self-sufficient (Majoni, 2014).

The fact that the state universities need to generate income and become self-sufficient has paved way for universities to implement survival strategies such as privatisation, commercialisation and enrolment expansion. This has resulted in intense competition among the universities to gain a bigger market share. Hungwe (2011) observes that MSU is among the state universities in Zimbabwe that has embarked on the survival strategy of enrolment expansion. This is supported by the student enrolment that rose since its establishment in March 2000 from 400 to 10 499 in June 2006 (*Ibid.*). MSU has established more campuses and diversification of programmes that have made higher education more accessible at this university but has also raised concerns on the quality of education being provided by the institution (Mupemhi, 2011).

In the past, state universities have implemented different strategies for survival in competitive environments and during the periods of economic structural adjustments. These include privatisation, commercialisation and enrolment expansionism (Mamdani, 2008). This study seeks to investigate into enrolment expansion as a strategy used by state universities in Zimbabwe to gain a competitive advantage over other players in the same industry. The study also explores the perceptions of

stakeholders on the quality of service delivery in state universities and the opportunities for quality university education at MSU.

Almost all state universities in Zimbabwe have embarked on the double intake strategy such that the enrolment of state universities in Zimbabwe is in excess of 55 000, a phenomenon referred to as “massification” (Madzimore, 2016). Midlands State University has not been spared on using this growth strategy and as a result the university has managed to build a bigger clientele base of 23 000 students per year (Hungwe, 2011). These students are distributed to its five campuses namely, Harare, Zvishavane, Mashava, Mutare and Gweru that is the main campus. Having a suitable location in most of the major towns in Zimbabwe and a wide branch network increases market growth and sustainability. However, it is not clear how enrolment expansion as a strategy has affected the performance of public universities in Zimbabwe. There is a possibility of quality declining, as state universities have focused on growing student numbers while doing little to raise graduates’ skills.

Several studies have been done on university education expansion under different contexts in Zimbabwe. Shizha & Kariwo (2011) focused on challenges facing university education expansion in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that due to reduced government funding to state universities, the universities must find strategies of funding themselves. Another study also investigated on university education expansion and noted that political and economic crisis between 2000-2008 affected access of funding by state universities and, as such, state universities had to find strategies for survival (Majoni, 2014). Despite this background, limited studies have been done to investigate into the effects of enrolment expansion on state universities in Zimbabwe as a strategy for survival. This study has been inspired by the need to fill this gap in knowledge. The study, therefore, seeks to investigate the effects of the strategy of enrolment expansion on the performance of state universities in Zimbabwe focusing on MSU.

The main objective of the study is to investigate the impact of enrolment expansion as a survival strategy in state universities in Zimbabwe focusing

on MSU so that we may have insights that can prepare strategists to have foresights. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the effects of survival strategies on performance of state universities in Zimbabwe
2. To establish the impact of enrolment expansion strategy on quality of higher education;
3. To proffer policy options to improve the performance of state universities in Zimbabwe.

### Research Questions

1. What are the effects of survival strategies on performance of state universities in Zimbabwe?
2. What is the impact of enrolment expansion strategy on quality of higher education in state universities?
3. What survival strategies should be used by state universities to improve academic performance in higher learning institutions.

### Research Hypothesis

- H0: The survival strategy of enrolment expansion does not affect quality of higher education in state universities in Zimbabwe.
- H1: The survival strategy of enrolment expansion affects quality of higher education in state universities in Zimbabwe.

This study may be of great benefit to various stakeholders who either have a direct or indirect interest in higher education in Zimbabwe. The study may provide information on effective survival and competitive strategies among state universities in Zimbabwe to policy makers and scholars. It may help policy-makers in the state universities as they would be able to know for certain what survival and competitive strategies play a role in shaping their operations and how they affect performance and at the same time they would know the best strategies to use to remain competitive.

For scholars, this study may expand their knowledge on strategic responses in universities and identify areas of further study. It may also benefit academic researchers since it will help them in developing theories

concerned with the study. Other stakeholders may benefit by being informed on the competitive challenges affecting state universities and the various ways in that universities respond to increased competition.

Several researchers from different countries, internationally and regionally have studied issues about enrolment expansion in universities but none has examined the effects of enrolment expansion in state universities in Zimbabwe and specifically the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe therefore this study will research on the survival strategy.

The study analyses the impact of enrolment expansion as a survival strategy used by state universities to have a bigger market share. Most of the state universities have embarked on enrolment expansion. The study focuses on Midlands State University only. It covers the period 2000 – 2017.

The research was likely to face some limitations such as that the respondents would be not readily available due to work commitments. To overcome this limitation, appointments were made in advance so that data were collected when respondents have confirmed availability and some questionnaires were sent through email to acquire information from other informants who were not easily available in person. Another potential limitation was that of confidentiality as some MSU students were not allowed to offer MSU information to outsiders. To overcome this limitation, approval was sought from the relevant authorities and all the data collected was treated as confidential and was to be used for the purposes of this study only.

The monograph is made up of five chapters:

**Chapter one** consists of the introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, the research objectives, research questions, hypothesis of the study, justification of the research, the scope of the study, limitations to the study, monograph outline and chapter summary.

**Chapter two** presents and critically discusses the theoretical underpinnings behind the subject under investigation and the detailed



conceptual definitions of the constructs used in the study. It shows how survival strategies have an influence on quality of university education.

**Chapter three** is made up of the methodology employed in understanding the research problem. The methodology includes the research design, data collection procedures and data presentation and analysis.

**Chapter four** presents the findings of the study based on the data collected.

**Chapter five** provides a detailed discussion of the results and the theoretical and practical implications of the results and giving direction for future studies. At the end of the thesis document, references and a set of appendices will be included that contain the questionnaires of the survey forms used to collect primary data for this work and other supplementary documents of the study.

This chapter has focused on the introduction of the topic, highlighting the background of the research study by providing information on the strategy of enrolment expansion in state universities and how enrolment expansion affects quality of education at MSU. The chapter has also spelt out the statement of the research problem. It also presented the research objectives, questions, hypothesis, and justification of the study, scope and its limitations, monograph outline and then concluded by giving the chapter summary. The next chapter focuses on reviewing literature by other authors in relation to the growth strategies, enrolment expansion and the strategies that can be employed by universities to enhance quality education.