

CHAPTER 5: Turning Fortunes Around the Expanded Enrolment in State University

This chapter summarises the study, offers the conclusions and recommendations of the entire study findings of this book. Key to this chapter is the assessment of the linkages between the literature reviewed and the study findings, to offer useful insights to academics, policy makers and the management of universities. Areas of future research related to this study are identified and proposed. In this chapter, conclusions and recommendations were linked to the research objectives.

The problem statement as presented in Chapter 1 indicated that 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). There is a possibility of quality declining, as state universities have focused on growing student numbers while doing little on the quality of education at the state universities. It is against this background that the research sought to investigate the effects of the strategy of enrolment expansion on the performance of state universities in Zimbabwe. Hence, the main objective of the study was to investigate the impact of enrolment expansion as a survival strategy used by state universities in Zimbabwe focusing on MSU.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of the survival strategy of enrolment expansion on the quality of education in state universities in Zimbabwe. To achieve the objectives, correlation analysis, regression analysis and one sample t-test statistics were carried out.

The study established that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion affects the performance of state universities. The results of the one-sample t-test statistics showed that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion has negative effect on the performance of state universities (mean=2.765, Std=0.484; $t(299) = -7.191$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that if the required education materials were scarce and the lecturer to student ratio

was high there will be poor performance of the university because under such circumstances, it is almost impossible to have students interact meaningfully with their lecturers.

Increment in students' enrolments resulted in additional administrative challenges to the University (Odundo *et al.*, 2015). Support for the results of this study was found in studies carried out by Ajayi & Adeniji (2009) who discovered that enrolment expansion placed more burden and pressure on the university education system. This study concluded that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion compromises university performance due to incompetent lecturers, inadequate resources and static curriculum.

The study concluded that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion has negative effects on the quality of education. The results of the study showed that there were several factors that contribute to the low quality of education such as shortage of lecture theatres, lack of residence accommodation for students, lowly qualified staff being recruited, reduced field trips due to inadequate transport, inadequate reading materials in the library and inadequate library staff. These results were confirmed by a one-sample t-test analysis of variances model that showed that enrolment expansion in state universities has significant negative impact on the quality of educational services rendered by the state institution (mean=1.784, Std=0.384; $t(308)=-55.613$, $p<0.000$). These results are consistent with some previous studies. For example, Gudo *et al.* (2011) found that lack of enough physical facilities such as lecture rooms, computer laboratories and laboratory equipment negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning in state universities.

In the circumstances that state universities are experiencing shortage in learning and teaching materials, it will lead to further deterioration of quality teaching and learning services offered by the state universities (Gudo *et al.*, 2011). In line with these findings, this study concluded that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion compromises quality of education at state universities.

The study established that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion has a negative impact on facilities and resources at state universities. The findings of the study showed a significant negative effect on facilities and resources at MSU (mean=2.3387, Std=0.642; $t(298)=-16.502$, $p<0.05$). There are infrastructure deficits at MSU on lecture rooms, reading materials in the library, ablution facilities, accommodation and catering services. The findings of this study corroborate findings by Mukhanji *et al.* (2016) who states that when lecture spaces are not easily accessible, both students and lecturers will likely waste time trying to access them, or completely fail to access them to conduct teaching and learning hence affecting the quality of education provided.

These views were also aired by Mwebi & Simatwa (2013) who contends that the arithmetic increase in enrolment of students without a corresponding increase in the resources and facilities poses a greater threat to the quality of education in higher education institutions. In view of these findings this study concluded that the survival strategy of enrolment affects negatively on the quality of university education especially if there is enrolment expansion without further development of infrastructure.

The study established that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion has slight effects on the skills of graduates. One-sample t-test statistics showed that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion has no significant effect on skills of the graduates (mean=3.032, Std=0.534; $t(295) = 1.045$, $p>0.05$). The study concluded that the skills acquired by MSU students were indifferent from those skills that they would have acquired if there was no enrolment expansion. This finding is not consistent with some previous studies. For example, Odundo *et al.* (2015) carried a study on the effects of mass university enrolment and their study found that massification had resulted in numerous administrative challenges, financial and governance challenges resulting in the production of half-baked graduates.

Most universities embark on enrolment expansion without the qualitative and quantitative growth in physical facilities implying that the quality of graduates will be in jeopardy (Mwebi & Simatwa, 2013). However, the

findings of this study concluded that enrolment expansion does not affect the skills of the graduates probably because of the commitment of lecturers and students (Felfe, 2014). The survival strategy of enrolment expansion affects negatively on the quality of higher education in state universities in Zimbabwe. This was fully accepted because of the statistically significant results that were achieved in the study. The assertion is supported as analysed using the regression analysis.

The findings of this study have contributed to the existing literature and the body of knowledge on the survival strategy of enrolment expansion in state universities. The researcher hopes that findings from this study would suggest more sustainable and viable intervention strategies that will lead to quality of education at state university. The results of this study have demonstrated that enrolment expansion affects the university performance, it affects the quality of education and has negative effects on the resources and facilities of the university. The research findings subsequently affirmed the hypothesis depicted by the conceptual framework in figure 5.1 below:

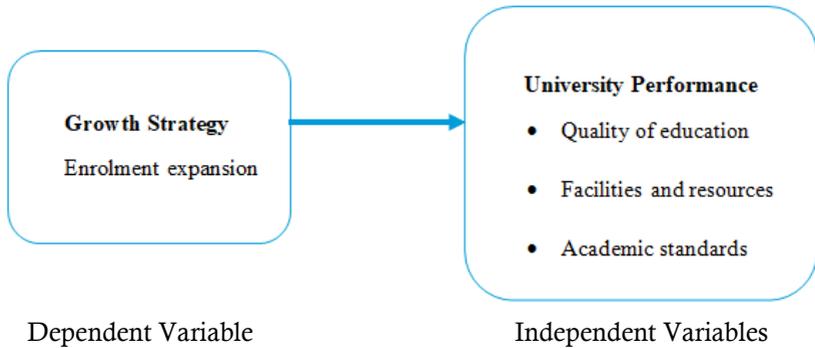


Figure 5.1 Amended Conceptual Framework (*Author compilation*)

Figure 5.1 above shows the modified conceptual framework after considering the information from Chapter 4. In this conceptual framework, we observe that enrolment expansion affects the

quality of education, facilities and resources and academic standards. The study showed that the skills of the graduates may not be affected by enrolment expansion. Hence, the conceptual framework is accepted as shown by figure 5.1 above.

Most studies that have been conducted to investigate the effects of enrolment expansion at universities were qualitative in nature. This study sought to offer, a quantitative contribution to the study thereby assisting colleges and universities in the higher and tertiary education industry to come up with better strategies and programs that enhance quality education.

The study has unravelled a wealth of quantitative data that can be used to statistically and conclusively identify the results of the survival strategy of enrolment expansion at universities. The results can be used to improve higher and tertiary education performance in the country. Most studies done on survival strategy of enrolment expansion have largely depended on qualitative data, the collection of quantitative data and statistical hypothesis testing has brought new insight that lays the foundation for more detailed industry wide studies.

In line with the findings of the survey, universities need to create strategies that ensure that the higher education institutions align with quality. Universities should have clear strategies to acquire a bigger market share in the higher education industry. A university can use growth strategies that does not affect the quality of education such as the differentiation strategy. The differentiation strategy aims at developing and marketing unique services and products for different customer segments whilst maintaining quality. As such a university can offer programs that suits high school graduates, parallel programs and block release or weekend classes for those who are employed who wish to advance their education. This will enable universities to maximize production while minimizing their cost of operation and growing their market share.

Based on the findings of this study, management should adopt and implement the following recommendations:

- a) The study indicated that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion in state universities has significant negative impact on the quality of educational services rendered by the state institution. This study recommends that enrolment expansion should be commensurate with expansion of number of teaching staff at state universities. Where enrolments must be increased, an appropriate recruitment of staff needs to be done to cater for operations such as preparation of notes, teaching, marking of assignments and marking of examination scripts in time to enhance quality. All teaching staff should be holders of a PhD and those who have Master's degree only should upgrade to Doctoral degrees.
- b) The results of the study showed that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion has negative effects on facilities and resources at universities. This study recommends that university physical resources like furniture, teaching aids, equipment, lecture halls, libraries and laboratories should be well maintained and expanded to cater for the growing numbers of students.
- c) Another purpose of this study was to find out if the survival strategy of enrolment expansion affected the skills of the graduates. The results showed that enrolment expansion does not affect the skills of graduates. This study recommends that universities should increase the human resource to improve on teacher-student ratio to improve quality of learning and develop the skills of graduates.
- d) The results of the study indicated that the survival strategy of enrolment expansion affects the performance of state universities. This study recommends that university management should develop and implement comprehensive coaching and development programs of the strategic plan to the administrators of the university, faculty heads and department heads to empower them with competencies to select and apply the right survival strategies and stronger focus on quality.

- e) In line with the outcomes of this book, the study recommends that universities should first understand and know their purpose and ability before adopting any growth strategy. This study recommends that to survive, universities should adopt the use of the three generic business strategies to gain competitive advantage. These strategies include cost leadership, differentiation and focus strategies (Porter, 2008).
- f) Government should have consistent policies that promote strategy formulation and implementation while creating enabling environment for competitive advantage among state universities.

The study covered one state university in the higher and tertiary industry (MSU) out of a total of ten state owned universities in Zimbabwe. The findings can be generalized to other universities in Zimbabwe that were not covered in this study and use multiple methods that include observations, interviews and focus group discussions so that the results can easily be generalized. The findings can also be generalized to other organisations that have similar settings.

Whilst the research resulted in significant correlation findings between enrolment expansion and quality of education at state universities that contribute important findings to the literature, several limitations exist. First, the data were collected from MSU students only in Zimbabwe, possibly, the results would be more enlightening if data were from all state universities in the country. For further development of this current conceptual framework, more study is needed in a large data set for all students in different universities to carry out industry wide analysis. Another limitation of the study was the students' personalities and preferences of the university performance. Personality and personal preferences would affect people's perceptions on the university performance and on what one defines to be quality education. In the current study, these factors were not controlled.

Another limitation was that some questionnaires were sent through email and the response rate was very low such that the researcher had to go

physically to meet the respondents. The researcher also suffered from limited access to participants due to the vacation period that meant that participants could only be contacted during the semester. The researcher ended up soliciting the help of the research assistants to contact students who were on block release and those who were doing research at MSU premises to communicate with and persuade target respondents to complete the questionnaires.

The results of this study suggest several interesting avenues for further investigations. The present study sample was obtained from MSU only, to enhance the validity, future studies should obtain a sample from more universities. Subsequent research should envisage replicating this study in other similar and developing countries in Africa to allow for comparisons of results. Furthermore, the study was a case study of one university, it is recommended that a longitudinal study be undertaken to see if the pattern remains the same.

State universities are now defined by massification, commercialisation of learning, commodification of knowledge and corporatization of governance (managerialism) all that have raised apprehensions about the nature of knowledge generation and transmission. Issues of quality assurance have taken center stage in contemporary narratives of higher education development in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the study was to establish the effect of the survival strategy of enrolment expansion on quality of education at state universities. Specifically, the study sought to establish the effect of enrolment expansion on university performance, on quality, on resources and facilities and on the skills of graduates. The study revealed that the strategy of enrolment expansion affected performance of the state universities to a great extent.

The study concluded that shortage of academic staff resulted in an increased lecture – student ratio that is a serious threat to offering quality university education. Shortage of physical facilities such as lecture rooms, reading materials in the library and few library staff affected negatively the quality of teaching and learning in the state universities leading to a lowering of academic standards and quality of education.

The study also concluded that to accommodate the survival strategy of enrolment expansion, state universities would first require that the capacity of physical facilities for teaching and academic staff is enhanced to adequately facilitate quality of delivery. The study recommends that the management of universities should be encouraged to use the best strategy to gain a bigger market share. The generic strategies that includes cost leadership, differentiation and focus strategies can be employed.