

Strengthening Governance in Tertiary Institutions: Revitalising Higher Education Management System

The role of the tertiary education sector in producing the human capital skills for the future growth of a country's economy is undisputed. A key theme among representatives of the sector is transforming African higher education for graduate employability and socio-economic development. The challenge remains in effectively managing the sector so that it not only addresses the appropriate skill needs of the labour market but recognizes the diverse learning requirements of its students, the operational demands of efficiency and social relevance of its institutions. Addressing these challenges requires sophisticated monitoring and evaluation of the sector's performance.

Most African nations are faced with numerous challenges in the collection, compilation and analysis of statistical data in higher education institutions. There are huge data gaps in mapping the sector, as evidenced by international reports such as the African Union Outlook reports and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' World Education Digest. In 2012, as few as five of the fifteen SADC member states were able to provide their regional economic community with higher education statistics with the most recent data only available for 2009. Without quality statistical information, however, no sound planning, monitoring or decision-making can be ensured. Thus, a systemic approach and the management of quality, statistical information is the basis for educational development. Information is vital for measuring progress and identifying problems on time.

Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, recognising these challenges, undertook an initiative with the assistance of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) to revitalize its tertiary statistics by the introduction of standardised institutional record keeping systems among its range of tertiary institutions.

The findings from this intervention indicate that critical enabling conditions that need addressing include a review of existing policy to ensure: all training institutions (including the private ones) provide annual statistics; the provision of sufficient and qualified staff to support these statistics; the establishment of information communication technologies and connectivity within institutions and the Ministry; the institutionalisation of an organisational culture that relies on evidence-based decision making.

A key lesson learnt by this intervention is that it is vital to have a systematic feedback loop between institutions and the Ministry if the provision of post-secondary and tertiary training is to address the skills development challenges of Zimbabwe effectively. The underpinning foundation of such information is good record-keeping systems at the institutional level and a comprehensive, relevant information management system at the national level.





Introduction

Zimbabwe's higher education sector underwent massive expansion after independence, more than doubling its student enrollment and provision of diverse course offerings. However, in recent years, severe constraints on government resources have negatively affected information flow on the sector making it fragmented and incomplete. In partnership with ADEA and UNESCO, in 2009 the Ministry produced a report on The Status of Human Capital Development and Training Institutions in Zimbabwe. In order to produce this report, the Ministry revamped its annual statistical census system and for the first time in many years obtained comprehensive statistics from all its public tertiary institutions. The potential and ways to collect data from private institutions were also explored.

A key research finding from a 2009 government report, noted that Zimbabwean tertiary institutions have limited institutional, student and staff records and, hence, poor statistical systems. This works adversely on the ability of institutions and the Ministry to plan for and manage the sector. It was also noted that private institutions are not submitting statistical data as required. This was the context which initiated the Ministry's intervention to revitalize its higher education information systems.

Research Study and Intervention

In order to address this developmental challenge, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education decided to begin its intervention on higher education management information by reviewing the status of its institution's record keeping systems - a key source of tertiary statistical data.

In 2010, the Ministry produced, together with ADEA, The Case Study Report on Tertiary Record Keeping Systems-Zimbabwe. A sample of twelve tertiary institutions, including four teachers' colleges, four universities, two polytechnics, one industrial training centre and one private college, were visited. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions involved heads of institutions, departments, bursars, registrars and IT staff, among others. Record systems on students, staff, finance, materials, equipment, buildings and other assets were reviewed.

The study highlights a number of challenges. These include: poor coverage of data; inaccurate reporting of statistics leading to limited convergence; definitional issues on how to report data and huge discrepancies between staff establishments and vacant posts which indicate a lack of planning when using staff statistics. Many institutions experience poor coordination between departments resulting in poor quality control mechanisms and the inaccurate supply of data.

A follow-up stakeholder workshop, involving representatives of most tertiary institutions, reviewed the findings and agreed to adopt a capacity building strategy involving technical training with key institutional personnel. In 2012 and 2013 a series of training workshops, split across the different types of tertiary institutions, were held specifically with the aim of improving their record keeping systems and aligning these to the needs of the Ministry's higher education management information systems.

Research Findings from HEMIS Capacity Intervention

Legal Framework

- Although various legal acts govern institutions in the tertiary sector, there is no explicit mention of the provision of statistics from universities especially and hence no consequences are found for institutions not providing them timeously or at all.
- Annual dissemination of statistics on the tertiary sector is currently not a policy objective.

Status of Ministry's HEMIS

- Needs to make explicit linkages between national policy objectives and statistics e.g. no tertiary statistics on enrolment by age or on calculating full-time equivalences among part-time students currently available.
- Internal data verification processes are not correctly followed by most institutions.

Status of Institutional MIS

- ICT based management system is desirable for integrated record-keeping but most institutions view the costs as unaffordable.
- Collection of annual statistics is challenging as different types of tertiary institutions have different calendar years and graduation dates.
- Statistics from private independent colleges, particularly student data on trade tests and enrolment abroad need to be collected.
- Coordination on statistics on National Foundation Certificated courses is needed as these courses are offered by institutions under three different ministries which include; the Ministries of Youth Development and Economic Empowerment, Primary and Secondary Education besides Higher Education.
- Despite the importance of HEMIS, it is not performance evaluated and so staff prioritize other tasks.

Universities

- Inappropriate ISCED classification of fields in higher education occurs because of a failure to establish a common understanding among institutions and the central ministry.
- A multiplicity of semester periods across institutions compromises an agreed and common date for the universities to submit their annual statistics.



Teacher Training Colleges

- The design of the census questionnaire is an issue in that sometimes students doing double majors may end up being counted twice.
- There is a need to modify the questionnaire to allow for the collection of statistics on teachers being trained in various specialisations such as primary, secondary, special needs, ECD and on secondary subject specialisations.

Polytechnical Colleges and Industrial Centres

- There is continuous enrolment throughout the year and statistics are provided thrice annually but the national enrolment figure which is compiled once a year reflects only a third of actual enrolments.
- Current statistics do not distinguish how non lecturing staff are paid as there are a number of sources – the polytechnic, the government salary bureau or the local authorities. Further, statistics are needed on temporary appointments, reappointments and staff and student transfers.
- Current statistics do not report on apprenticeships or attachments comprehensively.

Percentage of data availability on AU priority areas in the SADC region by member countries

Country	2006	2009	Difference
Angola	31.3	50	0.3
Botswana	58.3	16.7	-41.7
D.R.C	14.6	60.4	45.8
Lesotho	54.2	27.1	-27.1
Madagascar	72.9	70.8	-2.1
Malawi	33.3	33.3	0.0
Mauritius	58.3	52.1	-6.3
Mozambique	56.3	54.2	-2.1
Namibia	47.9	22.9	-25.0
Seychelles	6.3	29.2	22.9
South Africa	37.5	45.8	8.3
Swaziland	60.4	41.7	-18.8
Tanzania	37.5	39.6	2.1
Zambia	18.8	22.9	4.2
Zimbabwe	10.4	14.6	4.2
Average	39.9	38.8	-1.1



Recommendations: Call to Action ■ ■ ■ ■

A review of policy across education and training acts, in particular the Manpower Development Act, Education Act and University Act to ensure that all training institutions are compelled to provide information to relevant authorities with consequences for failure.

- Creation of policy supported mechanism to coordinate the production of tertiary statistics across all training institutions, public, private and in other ministries.
- Recruitment of qualified HEMIS staff.
- An enforcement of an annual statistical census of all training institutions, both private, public and across all ministries. Set deadlines must be met.
- A review of all the census questionnaires to ensure their relevance and accuracy in measuring key tertiary issues. Formulate mechanisms of avoiding double enrolment across institutions and double counting within institutions.
- The development of ministry wide software for institutional management of information systems customized to the needs of the different tertiary institutions.
- The creation of statistical information feedback mechanisms both within institutions and between the institution and the ministry to improve organizational learning from performance and delivery.
- Regular statistical capacity building among tertiary institutions to address definitional and course classification issues. Ensure that HEMIS becomes a results related measure of staff performance.
- Link HEMIS with the proposed National Qualifications Framework.
- Clarify matters as they arise and develop guidelines for the execution of duties.

Findings on Tertiary Record Keeping

- Coverage of records on students, staff and assets found across all tertiary institutions.
- Most institutions follow the same pattern in updating, reporting, using and archiving records.
- Nearly all institutions did not have integrated record keeping systems but kept stand-alone records.
- Record formats often did not comply with the national information requirements from the Ministry, thus affecting the accuracy of the information supplied for national monitoring.
- The registry departments of institutions are responsible for archiving records which are kept for between three and five years.
- Records on finance were the most poorly kept as evidence indicates that income-generating projects are not recorded in some instances.

ICT and Software

- Most tertiary institutions rely on manual systems and the occasional stand-alone computer for their record storage.
- All universities and polytechnics have some form of electronic back-up of stored data.

Qualified statistical staff

- Qualified and statistical staff are largely absent not only from individual institutions but from the Ministry's own central planning office.
- The freeze on public posts is detrimental to HEMIS.

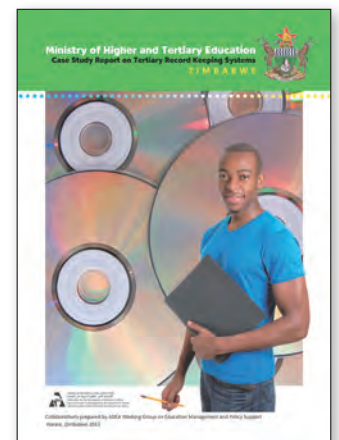
Dissemination of information

- Universities in most instances use websites, brochures, press releases, exhibitions and outreach programmes to inform the public of their institutional activities. Some produce statistical summaries profiling their institutions.
- Teacher colleges, polytechnics and industrial centres seldom have websites but all have brochures of their institutions for public consumption.
- Ministry annual statistical yearbooks have not been published regularly in recent years.

Case Study Report on Tertiary Record Keeping Systems is available as an e-copy at www.adea-wgemps.org

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