

PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY COLLABORATION**Dr Edmond Marunda****Senior Lecturer****Faculty of Commerce, University of Zimbabwe****Dr Elizabeth Marunda****Managing Director****Fettmer Consulting (Pvt) Ltd****ABSTRACT**

Sustainable national development is determined by a country's economic development, its people's mind-set and their capabilities. Accordingly, an infrequent, minimised frequency of seminar discussions and conferences on research findings by both academia and industry, not only retards the rate of collaboration between the two, but grossly hampers a nation's economic development as well as people's standard of living. A critical review of literature and observations underlined the challenges faced in the potential collaboration of academia and industry in Zimbabwe. These include, a varied perception of research findings, misdirected national scholarships, limited opportunities for local academic publications, a few lecturer entrepreneurs, great variation between practice and theory of basic business concepts and business practices abating the guiding philosophy of unhu/Ubuntu. The conclusion drawn was that, solving socio-economic problems through research by academia and industry takes second place to acknowledging unethical business conduct, which in fact deters academia and industry from collaborating with each other. It is advanced that to effectively promote the academia-industry collaboration, there is need to significantly increase the national research budgets and local on line publication opportunities for researchers. Other measures include implementing government policies designed to allow college and university lecturers run enterprises, increasing funding of technical entrepreneurship education, a well-balanced, transparent disbursement of local national scholarships and the creation of media space for nationwide discussions on research findings. Ultimately, the glue for the academia-industry collaboration lies in encouraging localised seminar discussions on research findings by students on attachment, their college and company supervisors, culminating in conferences for academia and industry.

Key Words: *Research, Collaboration, Publications, Academia, Industry, student attachments*

1. INTRODUCTION

Martyn Shuttleworth (2008) provided a far-reaching description of research, positing that research basically encompasses data, material and truths gathering contributing to the existing knowledge base. This advancement of knowledge can be buttressed by reviewing and empirical testing of conducted research and application of the acquired knowledge aligned to real-world situations. Although research is critical for policy development and analysis, planning and informed decision-making in business operations (Nagel, 1999), it is unfortunate that academia and industry still lack a conventional, consistent platform for discussing and sharing research findings and recommendations. Challenges incapacitating such collaborations are vast and are highlighted through a critical analysis of observations and literature review in this article. Furthermore, the challenges are addressed through identified recommendations based on these research findings.

2. BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Evidently, the development of any country is grounded on its capacity to adopt emerging global technologies or the results of local research and development. Those intended to excel in sustainable developments must seriously pin their development and growth efforts in investments generating knowledge that meets the demands of society satisfying basic energy needs. Zimbabwean scenarios compelling academia and industry to work independently of each other are among the following:

- The Zimbabwean environment is dominated by entrepreneurs who essentially operate in primary and secondary production sectors but hardly conduct research or advance knowledge to youths in both the educational institutions and the informal sector.
- The majority of Business Management lecturers in colleges and universities do not own enterprises. Consequently, they end-up teaching business theories founded on industry practices in other countries across the global village not necessarily reflecting the Zimbabwean business environment.
- College/university lecturers are compelled to publish externally thereby limiting their generation of research findings involving and pertaining to local industries.
- The closure of an estimated 4 600 Zimbabwean companies between 2011 and 2014 (Zimbabwe-national-budget, 2015: 215) continues to deny learners in the education system spanning from Early Childhood Development to College or University levels opportunities to visit, observe, research and participate in training and skills acquisition during student attachments.

- The limited funding for technical and entrepreneurial training in the education system further widens the gap between academia and industry as some learners leave school without the requisite knowledge of how industry operates (www.ibe.unesco.org/Countries, 2015: 4 accessed 12 April 2015).

Plainly, recommendations emphasizing how best academia and industry should collaborate in research for the benefit of the national economy and improving the standard of living of Zimbabweans are identified and articulated for implementation. It becomes important to advance a stable and useful working relationship between academia and industry vis-à-vis research issues in industry serving the education system and the later serving and nurturing industrialists and entrepreneurs. In addition, this research article is a wakeup call to policy makers so that they:

- recognise and emphasise the importance of academic publications through local journals;
- encourage discussions on research findings through social media platforms, print and electronic media, seminars or conferences among researchers from both industry and academia; as well as
- allow business college/university lecturers to be employed elsewhere or run their own enterprises.

Additionally, this research study will highlight the approach to incorporating business concepts for research.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To encourage industry and academia including students on attachment to research into those areas of business practice where they notice a variance between theory and practice; and
- 2) To design strategies to facilitate a stable and useful working relationship on research between academia and industry.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW AND OBSERVATIONS

A critical review of the literature and analysis of observations made on the issue of academia-industry collaboration has identified challenges to this collaboration described below.

4.1 Company closures

Between 2011 and 2014 an estimated 4 600 companies folded up and over 55 000 employees were retrenched (Zimbabwe-national-budget, 2015: 215). According to this National budget (2015: 232), each year colleges churn out an estimated 700 000 graduates onto the labour market who remain largely unemployed. Lecturers and students interested in industry based research are denied opportunities to do so. In addition visits and on the job training for learners are reduced to a few companies operating in various industries.

4.2 Limited number of Entrepreneurs amongst Business College/University Lecturers

Most lecturers in the legal and medical professions run their own enterprises, yet only a few lecturers teaching in the Business field do in fact own businesses. This creates lecturers who have solid educational credentials but no real-world experience. Their engagement therefore dispossesses their teaching from relating to the Zimbabwean business environment or addressing pertinent local business environment issues. A lecturer having mastered business theory and gone into teaching, but still lacking practical or hands-on skills, might offer students compromised learning opportunities, ultimately denying industries and the economy an eminent basis for wealth creation.

Lecture delivery is the most widely used method of teaching in universities and colleges. Bligh (2000) argues that, if 50-minute lectures are well designed to accommodate opportunities for student questions and discussion, transmission of information will be effective. He reiterates however, that lectures in their current format aiming to bolster conventional learning activities encompassing developing critical thinking involving knowledge application are ineffective. He asserts that participatory teaching methods embracing student opportunities for discussion and student activities like research are necessary. Lecturers should therefore have a strong practical orientation if they are to succeed in capturing students' interest in learning through participatory teaching methodologies.

4.3 Limited publication in local peer-reviewed and professional journals

It is appreciated that academics are publishing with both external and local journals. Seminars and conferences are being held on research findings. Relevant industrial sectors are being invited. However,

well established journals are found in great numbers outside Zimbabwe. The demand for research publications in the few local university journals is high. Most lecturers therefore publish their research articles with foreign journals. This minimises opportunities for organising platforms for discussing the research findings and recommendations and the subsequent application of knowledge in the relevant local industries.

Consultants in foreign lands become more conversant with Zimbabwean local issues in all aspects of the economy. It is no surprise that at times external consultants win tenders on local issues further prejudicing Zimbabwe's consultants from both identifying and solving their own problems. This can lead to shoddy operations where locals are underpaid at the expense of expatriate researchers. This way, useful research findings are diluted and local researchers play second fiddle to the external consultants, a practice that fails to realise sustainable national economic development.

4.4 Limited Appreciation of the theory and practice of Technical and Entrepreneurial Skills Training in the education system

Although in 1980 leading educationists could not lobby successfully for a mind-set change of the public encouraging them to appreciate technical subjects versus academic subjects, productivity versus consumerism, entrepreneurship versus employment, the current high unemployment rate of over 90% in the formal sector has persuaded the public to realise the importance of meshing theory and practice of technical subjects and entrepreneurship (www.indexmundi.com › Factbook › Countries › Zimbabwe › Economy). The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) having observed that the Zimbabwe education curriculum was inclined towards academic subjects recommended the adoption of more practically oriented subjects. Maravanyika (2011) highlighted issues leading to students shunning the vocational curriculum in preference to the more traditional academic education. Misozi, *et al* (2013) bemoan the negative societal disposition towards the learning of technical vocational subjects since they view them as manual work generating revenues for educational institutions.

4.5 Misdirected National Scholarships

Misdirecting scholarships deprives the economy of potentially competent individuals. There are local and external scholarships for the gifted learners from poor backgrounds. However, these scholarships

have been hijacked to fund the education of the connected learners depriving both the gifted learners of a bright career opportunity and the economy of competent scientists, engineers in mining, agriculture, tourism and infrastructure.

4.6 Varied Perceptions on the Value of Research

Unfortunately, in Zimbabwe, solving problems through research is normally not the focus, but ensuring that the loyalists are rewarded and so should be included in the investigative or research teams' ultimately bringing forth favourable research findings and recommendations, thereby maintaining the status quo as far as possible. Therefore should research findings highlight failures by a leadership, such findings are regarded as negative and recommendations based on them are often dismissed, or are attributed to machinations.

Therefore the state controlled media would not readily allow the academia-industry discussions of such research findings and recommendations.

5. RESEARCH IMPLICATION

5.1 Company Closures

Business acumen in the country is questionable, and therefore academia-industry discussions of research findings might sharpen entrepreneurial skills.

5.2 Limited number of Entrepreneurs amongst Business College/University Lecturers

Business Management lecturers who have never owned an enterprise are disadvantaged, also deprived are the students, the relevant industry and the economy. Owning an enterprise will provide a lecturer with a springboard for knowledge and experience which combined with business theory will benefit the students.

5.3 Limited Opportunities for Local Academic Publications

Consultants in foreign lands become more conversant with Zimbabwean local issues in all aspects of the economy. It is no surprise that at times external consultants win tenders on local issues further prejudicing Zimbabwe from both identifying and solving its own problems, which is a more sustainable route to take in order to realise sustainable national economic development.

5.4 Limited Appreciation of the theory and practice of Technical and Entrepreneurial Skills Training in the Education System

The challenge with the average Zimbabwean is looking at issues from a party political perspective and racist angle thereby distorting reality upon which inappropriate decisions are made which are detrimental to the economy and the people of Zimbabwe. Holding discussions between academia and industry would help address this anti developmental perspective. Chimutingiza, Mwando and Kazembe (2012) attribute the discrepancy between the academia and industry perceptions on the level of graduates' competencies to the absence of a reliable institutional structure bringing researchers and the business world to a platform where they can share and discuss research findings and ideas. Dale and Robinson (2001) argue that the quality of the curriculum, the effectiveness of lecture delivery and the value attributed to the qualification by key stakeholders is dependent on the perceptions and expectations of academia and industry.

5.5 Misdirected National Scholarships

Besides targeting the gifted poor, students pursuing areas not offered in Zimbabwean universities should collectively constitute the groups targeted by scholarships. The National Budget statement for 2015 has however promised to see existing scholarships limiting future awards in order to fulfil identified skills gaps. Varied newspaper articles point to a practice suggesting that most intended beneficiaries do not benefit since the education system is deprived of funds. These would otherwise develop college and university infrastructures, offer lecturers and teachers' opportunities to upgrade their teaching, their academic and technical skills as well as being in a better position to offer quality education and research findings for discussion and implementation in industry. It is therefore critical

that these future scholarships be directed to deserving incumbents whose research findings would be useful in Zimbabwe.

5.6 Varied Perceptions on the Value of Research

Whether research findings and recommendations are negative or positive, they should be discussed by both academia and industry. Further utilised to develop new policies or review existing policies, facilitate appropriate planning as well as enhance informed decision making in business operations and educational institutions.

5.7 Variation between practice and theory of basic business concepts

In some Zimbabwean organisations, the literacy level of certain basic business concepts like conflict of interest, delegation, team work, unity of purpose is questionable, as the practice in industry often differs from the taught theory. Therefore academia and industry research as well as discussions of research findings will clarify such concepts. Chimutingiza, Mwando and Kazembe (2012) found that collaboration between academia and industry would benefit students on attachment through effective strategic alliances and partnerships.

5.8 Business Practice Contrary to the Guiding Philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu,

Organisations without manifestations of unhu/Ubuntu face severe challenges in their business operations. Having the latest and most sophisticated technology will increase efficiency and effectiveness if only people driving this technology are treated with humanity, respect and are acknowledged or treated with unhu/Ubuntu. This will motivate academia and industry to increase research activity and discussions of research findings.

6. CONCLUSION

Solving problems is the focus of research. Academia and industry collaboration in discussions of research findings and recommendations should intensify problem solving In order to step up this

collaboration, relevant strategies addressing the collaboration challenges should be designed thereby improving the standard of living of each and every Zimbabwean.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Research budgets

The Zimbabwe Research Council and University budgets should be increased in order to encourage constant research in basic business concepts showing immense variation between theory and practice, whose findings and recommendations are shared and discussed by academia and industry.

7.2 Local publication opportunities

More print and on-line local academic publication opportunities and discussion platforms for research findings and recommendations should be offered to researchers in academia and industry.

7.3 Capital projects' funding

A government policy should be put in place affording loans and allowing teachers, college and university lecturers to run enterprises. This should equip them with entrepreneurial skills for the teaching of Entrepreneurship Education Start Up from Early Childhood Development to College/University thereby enabling both education personnel and learners to stay in touch with industry. All education stakeholders should be made aware of the importance of funding technical entrepreneurship education which brings young learners closer to industry at an early age.

7.4 Investments to resuscitate ailing companies

Domestic and foreign investment drives should be made to ensure the resuscitation of closed companies and the opening of new ones thereby affording attachment opportunities to college or university students

7.5 National scholarships

Local national scholarships should be targeted at the gifted poor and those pursuing studies that are not offered at undergraduate level in Zimbabwe. Excess funds from these scholarships should be used to improve infrastructure in the education sector, offer funding for the manpower development of teachers, college and university lecturers as well as funding seminar platforms for conducting discussions on research findings together with industry.

7.6 Academia and Industry collaboration

Academia and industry media discussions on research findings based on the societal guiding philosophy of unhu/Ubuntu, relating to developments in the country, would be a welcome development, since unhu/Ubuntu forms the basis for sustainable business and organisational operations, as well as national development. It has been observed by the researchers that industry are more inclined to use the services of students on attachment rather than employ full time workers to save on labour costs. This practice however, impacts negatively on quality service provision, the quality of students' skills acquisition and relevant research output. It is recommended that, just like in the legal and health fields, lecturers in business be drawn from practitioners in the industry albeit at higher management levels such as managing directors and chief executive officers.

7.7 Distribution of research assignments

When a need arises, research assignments should be given to diligent and appropriate personnel either in academia or and in industry. Recommendations based on the resultant research findings, whether positive or negative, should be considered and correctly implemented in educational institutions, industry and the economy at large.

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