GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

THE MAKING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHOICE

Edited by:

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Great Zimbabwe University
KNOWLEDGE • CULTURE • DEVELOPMENT

GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

THE MAKING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHOICE

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FOREWORD



Professor Mandivamba Rukuni
Chair of Council

The story of the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) is one of resilience and ambition, reflecting the broader narrative of higher education expansion in Zimbabwe. Established in 1999, GZU has emerged as a beacon of knowledge and innovation, characterised by its commitment to academic excellence and community engagement. This foreword encapsulates the remarkable journey of GZU, underpinned by the visionary leadership of its inaugural Vice Chancellor, Prof. Obert Maravanyika, and the transformative impact of the second Vice Chancellor, Prof. Rungano J. Zvobgo.

The foundation of GZU was laid in response to the Chetsanga Commission's recommendations in 1994, which advocated the devolution of Teacher Training Colleges into degree-granting institutions. This marked a pivotal point in this journey, setting the stage for the upgrade of Masvingo Teachers College into a fully-fledged university.

Through the years, GZU has made significant strides in infrastructure development, enhancing its capacity to provide quality education. Masvingo has literally been transformed into a University Town thanks to Prof Zvobgo's capacity to build! The university has also cultivated a distinctive

academic brand, which is highlighted in this manuscript's second theme, comprising 12 chapters. Each chapter illustrates the unique attributes that position GZU as the University of Choice, focusing on areas such as linguistic diversity, legal pedagogy, and heritage.

A noteworthy development is the call by His Excellency, the President and Chancellor of GZU to decentralise the training of medical students to all State Universities countrywide. This initiative led to the official opening of the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences, commissioned by the President in 2021, with the inaugural class enrolled in 2023. Additionally, the Mashava Specialist Hospital, purchased by GZU, is undergoing refurbishment to serve as a specialist hospital for the province, complementing the teaching services of Masvingo Provincial Hospital. One of the chapters discusses the approaches of Zimbabwe's medical schools to Traditional Complementary and Alternative Medicine (TCAM) education, highlighting GZU's pioneering curriculum as a potential blueprint for sustainable, culturally responsive medical training.

GZU has also made significant contributions to the agricultural sector through its drylands initiatives in Chivi District, focusing on developing agricultural practices and technologies that optimise local resources and reduce vulnerability to climate change.

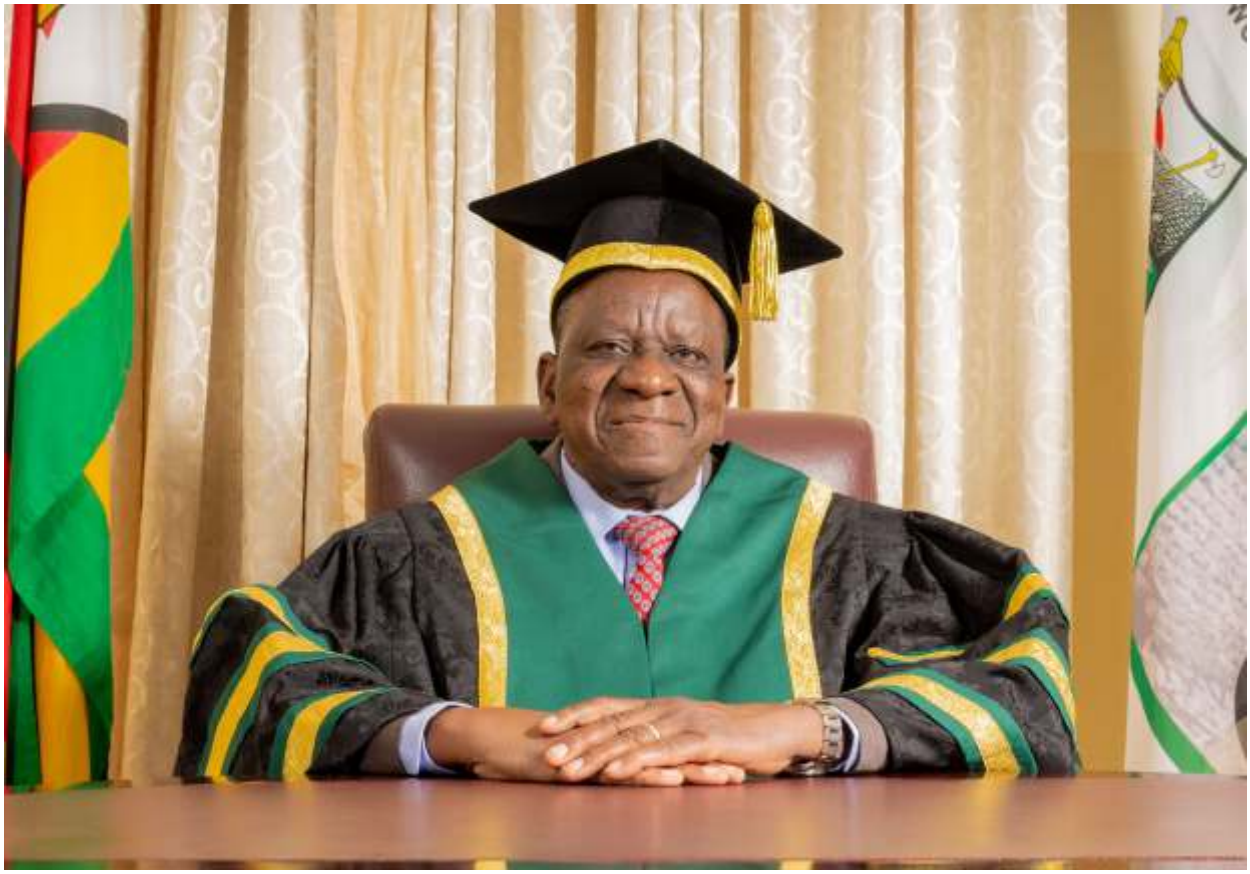
In terms of community engagement, GZU has played a leading role in the research and conservation of the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site, contributing to the restoration of collapsed walls and maintaining the integrity of this historical monument.

Furthermore, the introduction of the Heritage Based Education 5.0 doctrine at GZU has emphasised the need for universities to create and monetise their own resources through university-industry collaboration. The book traces the evolution of GZU's business development and how GZU's impactful interventions have redefined cultural enrichment in Masvingo, showcasing local heritage through arts festivals, music productions, and theatre performances.

In conclusion, this book serves as a testament to the extraordinary journey of Great Zimbabwe University, celebrating achievements, challenges, and the unwavering spirit of its leadership and community. It is my hope that readers will find inspiration in the pages that follow, as we continue to shape the future of higher education in Zimbabwe.

Professor Mandivamba Rukuni
Chair of Council GZU (2018- present)

PREFACE



Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo
Vice-Chancellor, Great Zimbabwe University

The emergence of Great Zimbabwe University within the community of universities in 1999 was a development resulting from the one state university per province policy formulated by Government in a bid to decentralise and devolve higher education in the country. The University's establishment marked a significant milestone in the nation's pursuit of intellectual and economic empowerment.

This book chronicles the journey of this venerated institution, from its humble beginnings to its current status as a premier state university in Zimbabwe. This book is written within the context of Zimbabwe's national policy imperatives, namely the National Development Strategy 1, the Heritage Based Education 5.0 Philosophy, and the National Critical Skills Audit of 2018.

Through an in depth exploration of its achievements and challenges, this book offers a candid reflection on the university's impact on Zimbabwe's social, economic, and cultural landscape located in the context of national development. From pioneering research and academic excellence to community engagement, innovation and industrialisation, the University has demonstrated a deep commitment to nation building and transformation.

Concomitant to its mandate of preserving Zimbabwe's identity, heritage and culture, the book reveals the ideological basis of naming its schools and facilities after Zimbabwe and Africa's liberation icons, recalling their vast and indelible contributions to the African liberation movement. Their names, etched on the University's infrastructure, are a reminder to present and future generations of our identity and continued struggle for our rightful space in the global community of nations. Eminent names such as Robert Mugabe, Herbert Chitepo, Simon Mazorodze, and Julius Nyerere serve as a powerful symbol of national and continental pride and identity. This deliberate strategy aims to preserve our collective identity as Africans, while reinforcing the university's commitment to preserving and promoting Zimbabwe's rich history and cultural heritage.

A dominant theme in this volume is Great Zimbabwe University's growth trajectory which became clearly defined in 2012 with my appointment as the University's second Vice Chancellor. The University witnessed unprecedented infrastructural expansion, exponential growth in student enrolment and an increase in academic programme offerings aligned with national development aspirations, stakeholder expectations and student needs.

For over two decades of its existence, GZU has consistently pursued education policies as directed by the parent ministry. From the education 3.0, through STEM and lately Education 5.0, GZU has been a leading light in the country's educational trajectory. It has been proactive in embracing Zimbabwe's shift from a STEM-focused education model to the expansive and more transformative Education 5.0 framework. Education 5.0, which emphasises teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation, has reconfigured the role of universities in national development. GZU has responded to this new paradigm by revamping its curriculum and strengthening its innovation and industrialisation capacity. Consequently, the University has designed programs and initiatives that go beyond traditional knowledge transmission to include practical, solution-driven research and enterprise development. Innovation hubs and incubation centres have been established to nurture student-led start-ups and socially impactful projects, aligning academic output with national economic needs. This transition reflects GZU's commitment to producing graduates who are not only employable but also job creators, equipped with the skills and mindset to drive industrial transformation in Zimbabwe. Through Education 5.0, GZU is not just educating students; it is helping to build a self-reliant, innovation-driven society. Through its community engagement initiatives, GZU is not detached from the society that needs to be transformed. It is actively creating a connection with its communities so that it serves the purpose of transforming the community. It is within this context that GZU has launched its Mashava Campus, bold move to prove that it is possible to start a university in a rural setting.

Notable highlights of the university's achievements are the establishment of its medical school, with a specialised niche in indigenous medicine and its integration in academic programming, the founding of the Herbert Chitepo Law School, the establishment of the Innovation Centre of Excellence in Dryland Agriculture located at Chivi answering to the call for food security in Zimbabwe and the region as well as the reliance on drought resistant crops. By embracing and incorporating the traditions and practices of Zimbabwe's indigenous cultures, the university has enriched its curriculum and fostered a deeper understanding of the country's cultural context, and contributed to the preservation of traditional knowledge.

The establishment of the campus radio station has been another innovative milestone in the life of the University and Great Zimbabwe University acquired trailblazing status in establishing a campus radio and effecting amendments to the Broadcasting Services Act. Campus Radio provides a platform for students to develop their creative talents, and for the implementation of Education 5.0 which places a premium on the production of goods and services. Campus Radio has become a vibrant hub for campus life, fostering a sense of community, and amplifying student and community voices.

This book is a testament of defying the odds, resilience and determination of the University's leadership, faculty, students, and staff, who have worked tirelessly to overcome obstacles and achieve greatness. It is also a tribute to the transformative power of education and its impact on community and the nation.

As Zimbabwe continues to navigate the complexities of development and growth imposed by the vestiges of colonialism and as it traverses the road to the decolonisation of its systems and institutions, the story of Great Zimbabwe University serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of higher education. This book is an invaluable resource for scholars, policymakers, students, industry and commerce and any persons interested in understanding the role of universities in shaping the future of Zimbabwe and Africa and pushing the boundaries of knowledge and innovation.

Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo
Vice-Chancellor, Great Zimbabwe University (2013-Present)

INTRODUCTION

The Making of the University of Choice

Vongai Z. Nyawo & Sylvester Dombo

Introduction

The story of the Great Zimbabwe University is a story of the expansion of higher education in Zimbabwe. For many years, Zimbabwe had only one higher institution of learning, the University of Zimbabwe, which was formed during the colonial period in 1955. It was not until 1991, over a decade after independence, that the National University of Science and Technology, a university with a strong focus on science and technology, was established in Bulawayo (Shizha and Kamuriwo 2011, p. xi). NUST was formed at the behest of the Williams Commission, which recommended that, based on manpower requirements for economic growth and the rise in the number of well-qualified 'A' level school leavers, university expansion had become a necessity in the country. The university was closely tied to the University of Zimbabwe. The establishment of NUST put in motion events that would culminate in the birth of state universities in every province in the country.

In 1994, the then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Dr Stan Mudenge, set up the Chetsanga Commission, whose mandate was to identify educational institutions that offered diploma programmes that could be converted and upgraded into degree-awarding universities. It is in this context that visions for the origins of the Chinhoyi University of Technology, Midlands State University and the Great Zimbabwe University were laid. The Chetsanga Commission developed a national blueprint for the expansion of higher education in Zimbabwe, which was anchored on the devolution of Teacher Training Colleges to degree-granting status (Maravanyika, 2006). Through the commission, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Technology degree programmes from the University of Zimbabwe were devolved to select Teachers' Colleges and Technical Colleges, with the thrust of them growing into fully-fledged universities in the future. The Chetsanga Commission identified Gweru Teachers College, Masvingo Teachers College and Chinhoyi Technical Teachers College. In the same vein, it was also recommended that some universities would start as university colleges of the University of Zimbabwe.

In 1997, the Maravanyika Committee was established to explore the possibility of upgrading Masvingo Teachers College into a degree-granting institution, which would later become a fully-fledged university. Thus, the story of the Great Zimbabwe begins with the Masvingo Degree Programme in 1999, which later evolved into the University College of the University of Zimbabwe. Subsequently, several events culminated in its transformation from the Degree Programme to Great Zimbabwe University in 2007, named after the magnificent and gigantic national shrine. The mandate of the new institution was to reclaim and preserve the country's national cultural heritage.

The trajectory that Great Zimbabwe University has taken from 1999 to date is worth celebrating. This book chronicles the journey of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), a venerated institution

whose transformation from modest beginnings into a premier state university is both inspiring and instructive. Situated near the historic Great Zimbabwe Monuments, the very symbol of national pride and identity, the university has grown into a dynamic and strategic player in Zimbabwe's higher education sector. Its story is not only one of institutional expansion but also one of alignment with the broader aspirations of national development.

Written within the framework of Zimbabwe's key policy imperatives: the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the Heritage-Based Education 5.0 philosophy, this book explores how GZU has developed in response to the country's developmental needs. These policies demand that universities do more than teach; they must become engines of innovation, industrialisation, and socio-economic transformation in the country. GZU has embraced this mandate with conviction, redefining its academic, infrastructural, and strategic priorities in the process to serve as a catalyst for national progress.

Organised into five thematic sections and written in 28 chapters, the book offers a comprehensive exploration of the making of GZU as the *University of Choice*. The first theme, Historical Background, traces the university's origins, its foundational vision, and the socio-political environment that shaped its early development. The second theme, Academic Brand, highlights how GZU has positioned itself within the competitive academic landscape with a curriculum grounded in heritage, science, innovation, and relevance while transitioning from a STEM-centric model to the holistic Education 5.0 framework. The third theme, Milestone Achievements, documents the university's major academic, research, and administrative successes that have contributed to its national recognition and growing influence.

The fourth theme, Infrastructure Development, showcases the remarkable transformation of the university's physical and digital spaces, from new campuses and lecture theatres to innovation hubs and smart learning environments, all designed to support a 21st-century learning experience. Finally, Building a Sustainable Future offers a forward-looking perspective on the University's strategic trajectory, its commitment to excellence and relevance, and its aspirations to lead in shaping Zimbabwe's knowledge economy.

Through these five lenses, the book not only celebrates the institutional progress of Great Zimbabwe University but also situates it within the larger narrative of national transformation. It is a story of growth, resilience, and visionary leadership a testament to what is possible when higher education is purposefully aligned with a nation's goals.

This book is a product of the second Vice Chancellor of the institution, Prof Rungano Jonas Zvobgo's vision to capture the fantastic journey of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) in the last two decades. The book serves to preserve institutional memory for posterity.

The book is structured into thematic chapters to enhance readability and coherence. The opening chapter, by Dombo and Nyawo, titled *The Evolution of the Great Zimbabwe University, 1999–2007*, sets the tone by exploring the institution's early foundations, key milestones, and the pivotal role of government, especially the leadership of then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Dr Stan Mudenge, in establishing new state universities, including GZU. The second chapter, by Nyawo, Chipatiso, and Dombo, examines the legacy of Professor Rungano Jonas

Zvobgo, the University's second Vice Chancellor, who transformed GZU into a nationally respected institution. His visionary leadership is credited with driving expansion in infrastructure, academic programmes, and inclusive education, all aligned with national goals such as Education 5.0 and Vision 2030.

Building on its historical foundation, the book moves into Theme 2: The Academic Brand being the most substantial and central section, comprising twelve chapters. This theme explores the distinctive academic identity of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) and the various factors that contribute to its positioning as the *University of Choice*. The opening chapter in this theme, authored by Manyanga, Rukara, Chiripanhura, Mubaya, Sibanda, Tevera, Mukwende, and Thondhlana, delves into the core of GZU's institutional identity its establishment as a heritage-based university. The authors critically examine the conceptual, historical, and institutional rationale for positioning GZU as a heritage-centred institution. Drawing on the symbolic and intellectual significance of the Great Zimbabwe Monument, the chapter illustrates how heritage is integrated into academic programs across disciplines. It further highlights how GZU fuses cultural identity with science, technology, and innovation to drive both academic excellence and national development.

Building on this foundation, the following chapter by Saungweme, Poshiwa, and Ganga explores the breadth and depth of GZU's academic offerings. The authors emphasise the University's broad disciplinary spectrum from humanities and education to law, agriculture, engineering, and health sciences. All programs are grounded in indigenous knowledge systems and are designed to critically engage with contemporary societal challenges, reflecting GZU's commitment to relevance and inclusivity in higher education. In his chapter, Talent Mawere chronicles the remarkable transformation of the School of Natural Sciences, tracing its journey from a small department to a prominent centre of influential research. The narrative illustrates how the School has embedded Education 5.0 into its foundational ethos. This move has cemented its status as a beacon of academic excellence and a vital asset to GZU and the country. This thematic section continues with a chapter by Alfandika, Maunganidze, and Muonwa, which showcases GZU's pioneering role in media education. The chapter highlights the establishment of Zimbabwe's first campus radio station, a significant milestone achieved under the visionary leadership of Professor Rungano Zvobgo. GZU Radio has become a national exemplar for practical media training, institutional communication, and community engagement. It now serves as a *Mecca* for other institutions seeking to develop campus or community radio stations throughout Zimbabwe.

In Chapter 7, Mazuruse and Tavengwa examine how Great Zimbabwe University has deliberately shaped its institutional identity through the symbolic naming of its Schools and Centres after prominent African figures such as Robert Mugabe, Julius Nyerere, Herbert Chitepo, Mbuya Nehanda, and Bernard Chidzero. These naming decisions serve not only as acts of homage but also as strategic affirmations of national pride, Pan-Africanism, and the university's ideological foundations, which are rooted in anti-colonial struggle, gendered resistance, and visionary leadership.

Chapter 8, authored by Nyoni, Madlome, Mazuruse, and Viriri, investigates GZU's pioneering efforts to promote indigenous languages within Zimbabwe's higher education landscape. The authors emphasise how this initiative aligns with the university's heritage-based mandate and Zimbabwe's constitutional recognition of sixteen official languages. Through targeted programs such as the government-supported Teachers' Capacity Development initiative, GZU has spearheaded the training of educators in marginalised languages, thereby reinforcing its role as a champion of inclusive education, cultural preservation, and linguistic diversity.

Building on this commitment to social impact, Masiya, Musebenzi, and Maphosa analyse the University's innovative contributions to the legal field through the Herbert Chitepo Law School (HCLS). The school's law clinic and its pioneering legal edutainment television program extend legal education beyond the traditional classroom setting into local communities, thereby enhancing access to justice and raising public legal awareness in Masvingo and beyond.

Academic offerings are not static; as Musengi and Chikodzi demonstrate, GZU continually reforms its curriculum in alignment with national development imperatives. Their chapter explores how curriculum review processes are driven by the need to meet labour market demands, integrate technological advancements, and contribute meaningfully to Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the Education 5.0 framework. The implementation of Education 5.0 is a subject of Chapter 11 by Mudzengi, Maravanyika, Nyawo and Mugadza. The authors examine the establishment of the Great Zimbabwe University Innovation Hub (iHub), a key milestone in the implementation of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 policy. The chapter illustrates how the iHub has become a centre for interdisciplinary collaboration, entrepreneurial development, and technological innovation providing students and staff with the mentorship and resources needed to turn ideas into industrial solutions.

In Chapter 12, Zvobgo, Maravanyika, Madzanire, and Mudzengi contribute a critical chapter on gender mainstreaming at GZU since 2013. While full gender parity remains a work in progress, the authors highlight a steady increase in women's representation, especially in academic and leadership roles. The university's transformative approach is reflected in the adoption of institutional gender policies and the establishment of the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies — key milestones in promoting equity and inclusion.

Continuing this theme is a timely chapter by Machingura and Chengeta, which examines GZU's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The authors demonstrate how the crisis compelled the university to rapidly adopt blended learning models, allowing it to maintain academic continuity during national lockdowns. More importantly, the pandemic catalysed broader institutional transformation, fostering technological innovation, pedagogical flexibility, and adaptive leadership qualities now embedded in GZU's academic culture. The theme closes with a chapter by Botman, Chipatiso, Mapetere and Rugara, which examines GZU's innovative student recruitment strategies in a highly competitive higher education environment. The authors argue that the university's adaptive and strategic approaches have ensured its continued growth and relevance.

Theme 3: Infrastructure Development comprises three chapters that explore the scope, types, and impact of the infrastructure projects undertaken by Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) in

fulfilling its educational mission. The section opens with Chapter 15**,** authored by Chindanya, Chikodzi, and Nyanga**,** which reflects on GZU's formative years when the university operated without a dedicated physical campus. The authors detail how institutional leadership swiftly devised strategies to overcome this challenge, offering valuable insights into the university's infrastructure policy and its responsiveness to the demands of a rapidly growing institution.

The growth of Great Zimbabwe University has demonstrated that physical infrastructure alone is not enough to sustain a forward-looking institution. In their chapter, Chikwanha, Hogo, Chibaya, and Nyawo examine the development of research infrastructure at GZU a critical, yet often overlooked, dimension of institutional growth. The authors examine how the University has positioned itself as a hub for academic excellence by strengthening its research ecosystem, highlighting the vital roles played by the library, research departments, and other key stakeholders in fostering a culture of innovation and scholarly inquiry.

Chapter 17 focuses on a flagship project: the development of the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences, which commenced in 2021. The authors position the school as a strategic response to a national call by the President and Chancellor to decentralise medical training across all state universities. Alongside this initiative, the refurbishment of Mashava Specialist Hospital marks a significant step towards strengthening provincial healthcare services, complementing the University's teaching mandate.

Building on this foundation, Theme 4: Milestone Achievements presents eight chapters that document GZU's transformative impact and key accomplishments over the past two decades. Poshiwa, Mudzengi, Mubvuma, and Pisa expand on this contribution through a case study of the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA) in Chivi District. This initiative exemplifies Education 5.0 in action, focusing on climate-resilient agriculture and the sustainable use of local knowledge systems. The authors highlight ICEDA's achievements, including the development of traditional grain and indigenous chicken value chains, mechanised equipment, improved crop varieties, animal feeds, and ethno-veterinary solutions. These innovations not only strengthen food security but also stimulate entrepreneurship and economic resilience in vulnerable rural communities. Chapter 19 evaluates the university's embrace of Education 5.0 through its strategic partnership with the Zimbabwe Agricultural Development Trust (ZADT). This collaboration has revolutionised teaching and learning by funding student-led business proposals and promoting a model that empowers students to become job creators and community problem-solvers.

Chapter 20 by Gwatidzo et al. presents Great Zimbabwe University's Medical School as a pioneer in integrating traditional medicine into formal medical education. Uniquely, 20% of the curriculum is dedicated to herbal and indigenous healing practices, with postgraduate programmes promoting rigorous research into local remedies. This blending of traditional knowledge systems with modern scientific practices positions GZU as a trailblazer in culturally grounded medical education, aligning with continental frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and global goals, including UN SDG 3 on good health and well-being. The chapter offers a replicable model for other institutions looking to bridge indigenous knowledge and modern medicine.

Muzambi, Gwatidzo, Gwavaranda and Asima highlight GZU's far-reaching community engagement, focusing on the contributions of its academic and non-academic staff to national institutions, state enterprises, parastatals, and civil society. The chapter profiles individuals whose expertise continues to influence public service and development sectors, reinforcing GZU's role as a reservoir of national human capital. This chapter is further complemented by Mudzanire and Gwindigwe's chapter, which examines GZU's global footprint. Through numerous Memoranda of Understanding, affiliations, and partnerships with international institutions, the university has increased its visibility and appeal on the global stage enhancing its brand as an institution of academic excellence and global relevance. Chapter 23 continues the focus on community engagement, specifically GZU's involvement in the preservation of the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site. The authors document the university's leadership in conservation efforts including the restoration of collapsed walls, removal of invasive species such as *lantana camara*, and the implementation of research, interpretation, and heritage management programmemes. These initiatives underscore GZU's commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage while integrating it into academic and community development agendas.

In Chapter 24, Saungweme and Chazovachii broaden the lens to explore GZU's economic and cultural impact in Masvingo and beyond. They argue that GZU has become a powerful driver of rural industrialisation and local economic development not only through agriculture, accommodation, transport, and retail services, but also through deliberate promotion of heritage and culture. Arts festivals, music productions, and theatre performances spearheaded by the university have redefined cultural expression, fostered youth talent, and enriched community identity.

The GZU has prided itself as being the *University of Choice* as evidenced by the popularity of the institution among the students. In Chapter 25 the authors focus on student life at GZU showing that in spite of the everyday challenges faced by students, they still find life at the institution quite intriguing. The chapter argues that student organisations, peer support networks, and University initiatives at GZU have played a fundamental role in fostering a sense of community thereby promoting student success. Chapter 26 examines the role of sports and extracurricular activities in promoting wellness, unity, and talent development within the GZU community. The university's substantial investment in sports for both staff and students is presented as a strategic element in building institutional morale, promoting health, and nurturing competitive talent, further positioning GZU as a holistic, student-centred institution.

Theme 5: Building a Sustainable Future comprises two forward-looking chapters that project the university's evolving role in shaping national, regional, and global development agendas. Opening the theme, Chikodzi and Tukuta explore the endurance and adaptability of GZU's vision in the context of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030, Education 5.0, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the African Union's Agenda 2063. The chapter reimagines GZU as a strategic engine of transformation, anchored in key niche areas such as infrastructure investment, innovation, entrepreneurship, climate resilience, environmental sustainability, and inclusive quality education. The authors emphasise the need for multidisciplinary research and academic–industry collaboration as critical drivers for positioning GZU as a central player in national planning and knowledge production. Building on this futuristic outlook, Maphosa and Masiya, in the final chapter, interrogate the broader trajectory of higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe within Africa's

shifting development landscape. They highlight the tension between progressive policy frameworks, including the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025) and Zimbabwe's Heritage-Based Education 5.0, and the persistent challenge of weak implementation in the face of systemic disruption and rapid technological change. The chapter asserts that the future of African higher education will not be defined solely by technology, but by bold, visionary leadership rooted in contextual understanding and a transformative public mandate.

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THEME 1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 1
The Evolution of the Great Zimbabwe University, 1999-2007

Sylvester Dombo & Vongai Z. Nyawo

Abstract

This chapter traces the trajectory taken by the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) from humble beginnings. The chapter focuses on the antecedents to what became the GZU, starting as the Masvingo Degree Programme of the University of Zimbabwe in 1999, becoming the Masvingo University College of the University of Zimbabwe (2000), then Masvingo State University (2002) and finally morphing into the Great Zimbabwe University in 2007. The chapter pays particular attention to the key changes, historical periods and actors that fundamentally shaped the establishment of the institution as well as the early vision that anchored the new institution. The birth of Great Zimbabwe University is located within the broader national goal of decentralising higher education and the promotion of regional development. The chapter, among other things, discusses the role played by the University of Zimbabwe, tireless efforts of the then Minister of Higher Education, Dr Stan Mudenge, and the institution's first Vice Chancellor Prof Obert Maravanyika in the early days of the University. Through interviews, archival sources, and documentary analysis, the chapter unpacks how the GZU overcame the birthing challenges it faced and cultivated its identity, and in the process, establishing itself as one of the top universities in the country.

Key words: Masvingo State University, University of Zimbabwe, Stan Mudenge, Obert Maravanyika, Higher Education, Masvingo

Introduction

The history of the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) is a compelling narrative of institutional drive, resilience, and visionary leadership. From its modest inception as the Masvingo Degree Programme under the University of Zimbabwe in 1999, GZU has evolved into one of Zimbabwe's leading higher education institutions. This chapter traces the complex and often challenging journey of GZU's establishment and growth, highlighting the key stages of its institutional transformation beginning as the Masvingo University College (2000), then Masvingo State University (2002), and ultimately into Great Zimbabwe University in 2007.

The story of GZU's evolution is not only an account of structural and administrative change, but also one that reflects broader national aspirations to decentralise higher education and foster regional development. The institution's development is intimately linked to significant actors such as the University of Zimbabwe, which played a mentorship role given its status as Zimbabwe's first University, the late Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Dr Stan Mudenge, whose political and administrative influence was instrumental, and the founding Vice Chancellor, Prof Obert Maravanyika, whose leadership laid the foundation for the university's

vision and identity. This chapter draws on interviews, institutional archives, and policy documents to explore how these actors and moments in Zimbabwe's higher education policy environment converged to give birth to GZU. In doing so, the chapter aims to provide a grounded historical account of the university's origins and the foundational vision that continues to inform its trajectory.

Education in Independent Zimbabwe: An Overview

To understand the proliferation of state universities in Zimbabwe in general and the emergence of Great Zimbabwe University in particular, it is important to first examine the broader historical context in which the country's education system evolved. This section focuses briefly on the first two decades of independence to foreground our analysis on the need for educational reforms in the country. Prior to 1980, the education system in colonial Zimbabwe was starkly segregated along racial lines as the country pursued the doctrine of separate development. European schools, commonly known as Group A schools, were located in areas reserved exclusively for white populations. Although Europeans made up less than 1% of the total population, the colonial government allocated to their education budget a lion's share of funding compared to that set aside for African education, despite Africans comprising over 99% of the school-aged population (Dorsey et al., 1991). This glaring disparity underscores the colonial regime's lack of commitment to the education and advancement of the black majority. Colonial education was designed to perpetually keep the Africans as sources of manual labour in the service of colonial industry.

At independence in 1980, when the first black majority government led by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) assumed power, it had to tackle head on, the challenges it inherited from the colonial education system. To do this, the government had to immediately construct new schools and reopen a number of schools that had been closed during the liberation struggle. The bulk of the work was to be done in the rural areas where a significant number of learners and teachers had been displaced, and where about one-third of the primary and secondary schools were located. Over and above the reconstruction of schools was the need to develop the education system across all levels, with a strong bias on secondary school education, in order to address the deep imbalances and inequalities inherited from the colonial era (Dorsey, 1981). The government's approach to educational reform and expansion was decisively anchored on the principle that education was a fundamental human right which was to be accessed by every Zimbabwean.

In September 1980, the newly elected government introduced free primary education for all, leading to a dramatic surge in enrolment. This resulted in a 2.76 per cent rise in primary school learners from 819, 586 at independence in 1980 to 2, 263, 947 in 1987. In spite of secondary school education not being free, there was a phenomenal rise in enrolment from a meagre 66, 215 in 1979 to 537,427 in 1986. The transition rate from Grade Seven to Form One also improved markedly, rising from 20 percent in 1979 to 78 percent by 1986. By 1988, primary school enrolment had reached approximately 2.2 million, while secondary school enrolment had grown to 653,353 (Dorsey, 1989). This astonishing growth placed an increasing burden on the higher education system to absorb the expanding pool of secondary school leavers. It was therefore not surprising that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education prioritised the

expansion of tertiary education opportunities. Consequently, within a span of about fifteen years, the Government of Zimbabwe facilitated the establishment of seven state universities (*Newsday* 3 March 2015).

University education in Zimbabwe was also conditioned by racist colonial policies that sought to disadvantage Africans. Although the idea to build a university for Africans had been mooted way back in 1936 by the Rhodesia Missionary Conference, it took several decades before it became a reality (Gelfand 1978). One reason why this idea took long to germinate was the absence of secondary schools for Africans that would produce graduates for university education. Indeed, Africans faced numerous problems in accessing secondary school and higher education throughout the colonial period. The problems facing Africans were succinctly captured by Gelfand:

> Some did manage to obtain their matriculation certificates by correspondence, thereby gaining admission to South African institutions such as Fort Hare; but a larger number went to South African schools, such as Umpumulu, Adams and Lovedale, mostly at their own expense (Gelfand 1978).

The first government secondary school for blacks, Goromonzi, was established in 1946, almost ten years after the recommendations of the Rhodesia Missionary Conference. According to Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins, as cited by Gelfand, Goromonzi was to be the only government secondary school for the foreseeable future for it was only meant to complement mission schools like St Augustine, Kutama and Dadaya. At independence in 1980, there was an increase in the number of secondary schools, although the last vestiges of inequality still remained. For example, Zindi argues that even after independence, enrolment in Group A schools, which had higher standards of education and better facilities than those in former African schools, continued to be based on one's skin colour or socio-economic status (Zindi, 1996).

Despite the numerous challenges facing Zimbabwe's education system, the government recorded significant successes, particularly in expanding access. To accommodate the rapid rise in enrolment, there was also an increase in the number of primary and secondary schools. The number of primary schools grew significantly from 2,401 in 1979 to 4,291 by 1986, while secondary schools increased dramatically from 177 to 1,276 over the same period (Dorsey, 1989). Existing schools were also required to expand their intake, leading to the introduction of double-session learning commonly referred to as "hot-seating." Additionally, many new rural secondary schools were established. Many rural secondary schools or 'Upper-tops' were established, with the first learning taking place at selected primary schools. Established mission secondary schools also increased their form one intakes beginning in 1980, so much so that each class would have between two and six streams. In urban secondary schools, form one classes increased to as high as ten streams. By the 1990s, these developments led to a growing number of secondary school graduates, which in turn created a pressing demand for access to tertiary education.

The 1990s saw a new demand in the expansion of tertiary education in the country. In response, the government undertook major reforms in the tertiary education sector to ensure that graduates from the expanding secondary school system could be absorbed based on their academic performance. Students with strong Advanced Level results typically enrolled in universities, while those with lower passes pursued studies at teacher training colleges, technical colleges, or

vocational institutions. By 2025, Zimbabwe had fourteen (14) teacher training colleges eleven (11) for primary school teachers and three (3) for secondary school teachers affiliated with the University of Zimbabwe and overseen by the Associate College Centre within the Faculty of Education (Dorsey, 1989). Additionally, there are eight government polytechnic colleges offering technical education, which are also supervised by the University of Zimbabwe.

Perhaps, the most transformative development has been the expansion of the university sector. From a single institution in 1980, the number of universities in Zimbabwe has grown to sixteen, including six private universities, and one Open University with centres in every province. To date, there is a university in each province of Zimbabwe. This is in sync with the Government's policy of taking university education to the people, in the spirit of 'leaving no one and no place behind'. As former Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Dr. Stan Mudenge observed, this rapid expansion reflects the post-independence government's commitment to reshaping higher and tertiary education to align it with the country's aspirations for scientific, technical, and research-driven development (GZU, 2007). It is in this context that this paper discusses the birth of a state university in Masvingo province, a university now known as the Great Zimbabwe University.

The Chetsanga Commission and the Birth of the Great Zimbabwe University

Like other state universities in Zimbabwe, the Great Zimbabwe University's (GZU) origins can be traced to the Government's policy initiatives of the mid-1990s which were aimed at expanding access to higher education. This expansion was necessitated by the growing number of school leavers seeking opportunities to pursue university education. To give effect to this vision, the late Dr. Stan Mudenge, then Minister of Higher Education, established the Chetsanga Commission in 1994. Its main purview was to identify institutions that could be upgraded into universities and to assess diploma programmes that could be elevated to degree status.

The establishment of institutions such as GZU, Midlands State University, and Chinhoyi University of Technology owes much to Dr. Mudenge's fore-sightedness. On 12 October 1994, he issued terms of reference to the Committee on the Devolution of the B. Ed and B. Tech Degree programmes (Maravanyika, 2006). According to Professor J. Chetsanga, the Committee's task was to develop a national blueprint for the expansion of higher education, with a specific focus on the potential devolution of teacher training colleges into degree-granting institutions (Chetsanga, 2006).

Dr. Mudenge instructed the Committee to evaluate the state of higher education at the time and to recommend a strategic framework for future development. As noted by Maravanyika (2006), the objective of the devolution process was to transform Zimbabwe's higher education landscape in a manner unprecedented in the country's history.

The whole concept of devolution was based on the realisation that higher education had developed tremendously since independence such that not all 'A' Level graduates were being absorbed by the country's two universities, namely; the University of Zimbabwe and the National University of Science and Technology. There was also the need for the already qualified teachers to upgrade their qualifications. In addition, in line with the government's

policy of democratising education, this devolution intended to spread university education to areas that had hitherto been peripheral. This devolution was seen not only as cost effective but was also going to ensure the creation of relevant curricula that would respond to the local needs and conditions (Maravanyika 2006). The UZ was mandated to oversee this devolution in order to guarantee that high standards were maintained.

In 1995, the Chetsanga Commission Report proposed the devolution of Teachers' and Technical Colleges into degree awarding institutions that would eventually become universities in their own right. The Chetsanga Commission had the purpose of expanding higher education through the devolution of the B. Ed and B. Tech degree programmes offered at the University of Zimbabwe to selected teachers' colleges and technical colleges which would eventually become universities in their own right (Chetsanga, 2006). The commission, therefore, earmarked Gweru Teachers' College, Masvingo Teachers' College and Chinhoyi Teachers' Technical College to be upgraded into degree awarding institutions. To speed up the process, implementation committees were set up by the then Ministry of Higher Education and Technology to recommend modalities for devolution. In the same vein, the Chetsanga Commission Report also suggested the establishment of some universities as university colleges of the University of Zimbabwe.

From the Masvingo Degree Programme to Masvingo State University

Following recommendations that implementation committees be established to facilitate the devolution of higher education programmes, a committee was formed in November 1997 to oversee the upgrading of Masvingo Teachers' College into a degree-awarding institution and, ultimately, a fully-fledged university. Although the committee was initially set to be chaired by Justice Simbi Mubako, his appointment as Zimbabwe's Ambassador to Washington led to the appointment of Professor Obert Edward Maravanyika as chairperson. The committee's primary recommendation was the devolution of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree in Primary Education from the University of Zimbabwe to Masvingo Teachers' College. This initiative aimed to strengthen primary education by producing graduate-level primary school teachers and lecturers. However, the committee noted that there was a significant infrastructural shortcoming at Masvingo Teachers' College, which was then only 55% complete and that it lacked the capacity to serve both its existing mandate and that of a new university. This would cause serious administrative problems for both institutions in the event that they continued as separate entities.

Faced with this challenge, the committee proposed that the planned university should also utilise the nearby Masvingo Technical College, particularly in the event that it establishes a Faculty of Engineering. The vision was to accelerate the institution's growth through some kind of a dual-campus model whereby the Teachers' College would host the Faculties of Arts and Education, while the Technical College would accommodate the Faculties of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Commerce and Social Sciences. This was the set up that was followed and it worked for the better part of the early days of the university.

The long journey toward the establishment of Great Zimbabwe University began in June 1999 with the launch of the Masvingo Degree Programme under the auspices of the University of Zimbabwe. The programme initially enrolled one hundred and twenty (120) students in a two-year in-service Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree (GZU, 2009). Professor Obert Maravanyika was appointed as the University of Zimbabwe's Acting Pro-Vice Chancellor

responsible for overseeing the programme. In this capacity, the University of Zimbabwe tasked him with developing a concept paper outlining the long-term vision for higher education in Masvingo. This document was intended to guide the transition from a degree programme to a university college, and ultimately to an independent university. The concept paper reinforced earlier committee recommendations advocating a dual-campus model, utilising both Masvingo Teachers' College and Masvingo Technical College to house the emerging institution. The proposed university would carve a unique niche by focusing on the creative arts and culture—an area largely neglected within Zimbabwe's higher education landscape.

In 2001, the Masvingo Degree Programme was officially upgraded to become the Masvingo University College of the University of Zimbabwe. As a result, the inaugural cohort of one hundred and eighty (180) students, initially enrolled under the degree programme, transitioned to become part of the new University College directly affiliated with the University of Zimbabwe. During this dispensation, the admissions would be done at the UZ as well as registration. Everything would be done through the oversight of the UZ administration.

In an effort to increase the enrolment into the new degree programme, Masvingo Teachers' College was instructed to halt the recruitment of new students in 2001. This directive was met with resistance from the Teachers' College, where concerns quickly emerged that many lecturers might lose their jobs, as they did not possess the required master's qualifications to teach at university level. However, this did not stop some lecturers at Masvingo Teachers College from enrolling with the University. One informant recalled that in anticipation of the integration into the university, many college lecturers enrolled in the newly introduced Master of Education programme at Masvingo State University to align themselves with the expected university teaching standards. A lecturer from the college, who initially the university's arrival, shared her enthusiasm at the time:

> I was one of the first students to enroll in the Masvingo Degree Programme. I remember going to the Masvingo Teachers' College administration office to buy my application form for the master's programme. I was so happy because, after completing it, I believed I would become a lecturer at the new university.

One of the teething challenges the new institution had to contend with, which later informed its policy towards infrastructural development was the acute shortage of space. Since the institution did not inherit any buildings like other universities, it had to share with Masvingo Teachers College the limited spaces that were available. One informant, a lecturer vividly described the problems associated with sharing infrastructure:

> Despite being separate institutions, the University continued to rely heavily on infrastructure owned by the Teachers' College. Lecturers' offices were located in Mutirikwi Hostel, while students resided in Mbuya Nehanda Hostel. Lectures were conducted in Michael Kapararadze Hall and in the common rooms of hostels. At times, we even had lectures under trees due to space clashes with the College. We had to share the library, lecture theatres, Wi-Fi, generator, and sports facilities. Even in the library, there were designated sections—one for the university and another for the college.

In spite of this, steps towards having a university continued with Dr Mudenge ordering a change from the Degree Programme into a wing of the University of Zimbabwe. Thus, the new institution was renamed Masvingo University College of the University of Zimbabwe in 2001. Examinations were set by lecturers seconded to the college by the Department of Education at UZ. However, the processing of these examinations would be done at the UZ from departmental stage until they were eventually published. Furthermore, the certificates and transcripts were also produced by the UZ, bearing its logo. Interviews for lecturers were chaired by the Vice Chancellor of the UZ. Registration was also done by UZ staff led by the Deputy Registrar, Academic. The flagship programme was the Bachelor of Education majoring in such subjects as Shona, English, History and Philosophy. To ensure the academic integrity of the programme, the University of Zimbabwe insisted that the curriculum standards align with those of the parent institution.

With time, it was agreed by the Ministry of Higher Education that a state university with its own charter and ordinances be set up. In 2002, Masvingo State University was established through an Act of Parliament, and Professor Maravanyika was subsequently appointed Acting Vice Chancellor. It took about ten years for GZU to evolve from the Masvingo Degree Programme (1999) of the UZ, and Masvingo University College of UZ (2000), into the Masvingo State University (MASU) in 2002, and then finally into GZU in 2007. In July 2007, the Masvingo State University Amendment Act (2007) was passed by parliament following announcement by President Mugabe, to traditional chiefs gathered at the Great Zimbabwe Monuments in 2004 that government wished to have a major University established close to the national shrine to reclaim and preserve the national cultural heritage. Masvingo State University was given the task to plan for the proposed Great Zimbabwe University, into which it was later renamed. Great Zimbabwe University inherited the name that was formerly used by a private university owned by the Reformed Church. In 2004 the Reformed Church of Zimbabwe had been granted a charter to set up the Great Zimbabwe University (*The Herald*, 29 May 2011). However, this new institution suffered a still birth as it was accused of running degrees that were seen as sub-standard. As a result, the university was closed down as its law degree was deemed inadequate by the Law Society of Zimbabwe. The students enrolled in the law programme were taken over by the UZ, while those in other faculties were absorbed by Masvingo State University. The Great Zimbabwe University would start its own law programme towards the end of 2014.

In July 2007, Masvingo State University was renamed Great Zimbabwe University following approval by Cabinet. According to *The Herald* 'the inaugural graduation of the university's first batch of students had been stalled as the institution had to effect the name change from MASU to GZU in line with recommendations that there be an institution of higher learning in Masvingo with a bias towards cultural studies' (*The Herald*, 10 July 2007).

Conclusion

The establishment and growth of Great Zimbabwe University reflects not only the evolution of a single institution but also the broader trajectory of Zimbabwe's higher education development in the post-independence era. From its beginnings as a provincial initiative under the University of Zimbabwe, GZU's transformation into a fully-fledged university is a testament to deliberate state

policy, strategic leadership, and persistent institutional effort. The roles played by key figures such as Dr Stan Mudenge and Prof Obert Maravanyika were pivotal in translating national goals of educational decentralisation into a functioning and competitive university.

This chapter has demonstrated how the early vision of GZU was anchored in the need to provide accessible, regionally grounded, and nationally relevant higher education. Despite early challenges, the institution managed to carve out a distinct identity, eventually earning its reputation as the "University of Choice." As GZU continues to expand in physical infrastructure and academic offerings, its story of origin offers valuable insights into how universities can emerge, evolve, and contribute meaningfully to national development. The foundation laid in its formative years continues to shape the university's mission and relevance in Zimbabwe's educational and socio-economic landscape.

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CHAPTER 2
The Making of the University of Choice: The Legacy of Rungano Jonas Zvobgo at Great Zimbabwe University

Vongai Zvidenga Nyawo, Anderson Tawanda Chipatiso & Sylvester Dombo

Abstract

This chapter explores the leadership vision and legacy of Professor Rungano Zvobgo and his pivotal role in transforming Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) from a modest institution into what is now widely regarded as the *University of Choice*. Appointed in 2012 as the second vice Chancellor of a fledgling institution, Professor Rungano Zvobgo has masterminded the growth of the University in the last decade to greater heights, notwithstanding the challenges faced. This chapter traces the evolution of his vision and leadership style, evaluating how he has contributed to the University's rapid growth in infrastructure, academic programmes, and national relevance. The chapter draws on personal reflections of Professor Zvobgo and institutional documents. The chapter focuses on Professor Zvobgo's tenure of office, which has prioritised inclusive education, innovation, multi-campus expansion, and alignment with national development goals such as Education 5.0 and the Vision 2030. The chapter gives us a window through which we can understand what it means to lead an institution of this magnitude in an unstable environment.

Key words: Multi-campus system, University of choice, vision, national development goals, Professor Rungano Zvobgo

Introduction

In 2012, Professor Rungano Zvobgo took the helm as Vice Chancellor of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), inheriting an institution with untapped potential and infrastructural challenges that had stunted its growth. Fast forward over a decade, GZU has transformed into the University of Choice, a shining testament to Prof Zvobgo's visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to growth. This chapter chronicles his remarkable tenure, tracing the evolution of his leadership style and the profound impact on the University, the Masvingo Community and beyond. It highlights his key achievements in infrastructure development and academic programming, which have propelled the University to national prominence. The chapter focuses on Prof Zvobgo's tenure of office, which has prioritised inclusive education, innovation, multi-campus expansion, and alignment with national development goals such as Education 5.0 and the Vision 2030

The chapter argues that higher education institutions (HEIs) in resource-limited contexts require visionary leadership capable of mobilising scarce resources towards sustainable development (Owusu-Agyemang, 2019; Kiplangat, 2024). The case of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) provides a notable example of such transformation under the leadership of Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo. This chapter offers only snippets into the achievements of Prof. Zvobgo, as all the other chapters in the book provide greater detail and academic rigour on other facets of his leadership at GZU.

The Vision is laid: The Appointment of Prof Zvobgo as the Second Vice-Chancellor of GZU

The name Rungano, meaning "story" in Shona, belies the scale of the transformation he has led. Appointed Vice Chancellor in October 2012, Professor Zvobgo's installation on 19 October before a crowd of over 4,000 people, including the then Chancellor of Great Zimbabwe University, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, marked the public unveiling of his bold *Journey towards a Multi-Campus Approach*. Initially dismissed by some as impractical amid a national liquidity crisis and the drying up of government grants to tertiary institutions, this Vision became the blueprint for an unprecedented era of institutional regeneration.

When Professor Zvobgo assumed office, Zimbabwe's economy was facing severe liquidity shortages, currency instability, and declining public expenditure on higher education (Tsverukayi, 2024). Many universities adopted a defensive posture, delaying expansion plans in the hope of increased state funding. In stark contrast, GZU adopted a proactive growth strategy aimed at repositioning the institution as an internationally recognised university, centred on its niche of arts, culture, and heritage studies (Zishiri *et al.,* 2024). In instances where the economic situation is highly volatile, leadership in higher education becomes a key determinant of institutional effectiveness (Bryman, 2007; Hay, 2006). Transformational leadership, marked by vision casting, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, has been linked to innovation, resilience, and improved organisational culture (Bass, 1985; Kiplangat, 2024).

African universities face chronic underfunding, infrastructural deficits, and talent loss (Teferra, 2013). However, some have achieved growth through innovative funding models, partnerships, and community engagement (Materu, 2007). Leadership alignment with continental frameworks, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, has proven critical (AU, 2015).

The appointment of Professor Zvobgo as the second Vice-Chancellor of Great Zimbabwe University came as no surprise to him, not only due to his academic and professional credentials, but also because he believed the role was divinely ordained. Reflecting on his appointment, Professor Zvobgo remarked:

> This is a job that I have prayed for in earnest for many years. If there was ever a time when I prayed most unusually, it was this year, and I thank God for His answer to my prayer.

Beyond what he described as the will of God, perhaps the most compelling factor behind Professor Zvobgo's appointment was his impressive academic and professional résumé. According to the then Chairman of Council, Simplicius Chihambakwe, Professor Zvobgo was appointed as:

> An accomplished academic with vast experience in managing higher education institutions, and having spent the last 13 years as the Pro Vice Chancellor at Midlands State University under the leadership of Professor Ngwabi Bhebe, Professor Zvobgo is undoubtedly a supremely competent captain of the Great Zimbabwe University ship, which carries a pivotal mandate in the advancement of Zimbabwean and indeed African heritage and culture in higher education. As the

> Great Zimbabwe University Council, we do not doubt that with the installation of Professor Zvobgo as the second Vice Chancellor of the Great Zimbabwe University, the University enters a new era of inspired Vision and wisdom.

Although the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor approached his role with humility and a measured sense of confidence, he possessed the conviction and leadership charisma necessary to meet the challenges ahead. In his acceptance speech, Professor Zvobgo pledged to dedicate himself fully to advancing Great Zimbabwe University, aspiring to transform it into a premier institution, *the University of Choice*. Outlining his Vision for the University, he stated:

> I hope to rise to the occasion and do my best to ensure that, through commitment and the engagement of key stakeholders, Great Zimbabwe University becomes the *University of Choice*, a centre for research and debate on issues of culture, heritage, and the arts. I take exceptional pride today in becoming the key driver in this institution and wish to thank Your Excellency and all those assembled here for this special honour. Most people often miss opportunities because they are often disguised as work. I am aware that this job has many challenges. However, I accept this job with humility, knowing that I will be judged by the successes this institution achieves in the future. Indeed, the road to success and the road to failure are almost the same. When obstacles arise, you change your direction to reach your goal, but not your decision to get there.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Great Zimbabwe University began as a modest institution, initially operating within the limited facilities it uncomfortably shared with Masvingo Teachers' College. From the outset, it was clear that the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor had to act assertively and implement transformative strategies to steer the University onto a new path of growth and development. While innovation and forward-thinking were essential, the logical point of departure was a critical reflection on the past by drawing insights from the foundational efforts that had catalysed the establishment and early development of the institution:

> I do not tire of referring back to the aims and achievements of the international conference held in January 2006 at the Great Zimbabwe Hotel, under the theme "Reclaiming National and Cultural Heritage in Higher Education: Situating culture, the humanities and creative arts in the local contexts". Indeed, a lot remains to be done to ensure this University complies with the Government's mandate and raises it to the greater heights envisioned by its founding father.

As Professor Zvobgo commenced his tenure as Vice-Chancellor, he did so with a clear understanding of Great Zimbabwe University's founding mandate. Eight years earlier, on 6 May 6 May 2004, the then Chancellor of the University, President Robert Mugabe, had laid the philosophical and ideological groundwork for the institution during a meeting with traditional leaders at the Great Zimbabwe Monument. At that historic gathering, the President articulated a vision for establishing a state-funded institution of higher learning near the iconic national heritage site. This institution, he asserted, was to serve not only as a centre for academic excellence but also as a symbol of national unity and a vessel for projecting Zimbabwe's cultural identity and aspirations for the future:

> First, there is a need to establish a school of heritage and cultural studies, which will serve as the flagship of the University. The School will offer both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the area of heritage and culture. The School should become the centre for studies in African culture and heritage, not only in the sub-region but across the continent. I intend to ensure that every student who goes through this University is exposed to a heavy dose of culture and heritage studies through an arrangement which makes this aspect of the curriculum compulsory and thus requires that the modules on offer in culture and heritage are core modules which have to be passed in order for one to graduate. Without abandoning the development of other disciplines, a vast percentage of the University's resources shall be channelled towards the School, which shall be the core of the institution's programmes and shall reflect the identity of who and what Great Zimbabwe University stands for.

Similar sentiments were forcefully articulated by the then-Chairman of Council, Mr Simplicius Chihambakwe, who viewed Professor Zvobgo's appointment as a significant milestone in the University's journey. He described it as marking "greater strides in our march towards establishing a Great Zimbabwe University that is a truly African university and deeply rooted in African thinking, values, and culture, and pushing the African agenda." While acknowledging the foundational work undertaken by the previous administration, Mr Chihambakwe candidly observed that progress in transforming GZU into a centre of excellence in heritage reclamation through the integrated study of arts, culture, and technology had, until that point, been relatively slow. Nevertheless, he expressed strong optimism that Professor Zvobgo's leadership would inject renewed momentum into the University's efforts to realise its nationally ordained mandate fully.

The Vision grows: Institutional Regeneration under Prof Zvobgo

Having acknowledged and built upon the foundational Vision of the University, Professor Zvobgo now faced the task of leaving his own imprint on the regeneration and growth of Great Zimbabwe University. A key area of concern that required immediate attention was infrastructure development. It had become increasingly clear that any meaningful increase in student enrolment would be impossible without a corresponding expansion in physical facilities and academic spaces. To address this challenge, Professor Zvobgo championed a bold and uncharted strategy: implementing a multi-campus model. This ambitious Vision sought not only to decongest existing facilities but also to decentralise the University's presence across various locations, thereby enhancing accessibility, academic diversity, and regional impact.

Multi-Campus Expansion

One of the key achievements of the Zvobgo leadership was the crafting and consummation of the multi-campus expansion programme. As highlighted in the previous chapter, GZU had an uneasy relationship with Masvingo Teachers College, as they had to share and often compete for space to conduct their daily business. Prof Zvobgo came up with a vision to tremendously expand the institution by acquiring buildings that were eventually developed into campuses in their own

right. One of the notable achievements of Prof. Zvobgo's leadership was the acquisition of the Mashava Campus, formerly a mining town that had been in rapid decline after the closure of the Gaths mine. He summarised his achievements thus:

> During my tenure, significant efforts have been made to reinvigorate the Mashava Campus. We have made substantial progress in infrastructure development, and I am pleased that this campus is now positioned to become a central hub for medical, agricultural, and engineering research, as well as a critical part of the University's rural industrialisation efforts. The proposed state-of-the-art University Hospital at Mashava is a pivotal component of this strategy, which will help enhance healthcare education, research, and services in the region.

The hospital would enhance access to advanced healthcare for the surrounding communities (Prof. Tagwira, Permanent Secretary, MHTEISTD, Strategic Workshop, 11 November 2024).

In less than a decade, GZU evolved from a zero-facility institution to a multi-campus university with facilities that rival the best in the region. To date, the institution has seven campuses: The Main Campus, Mucheke Campus, Julius Nyerere Campus, Robert Mugabe Campus, Simon Mazorodze Campus, Mashava Campus, and City Campus. This is a testament to the able leadership of Prof Zvobgo. The MHTEISTD praised Professor Zvobgo's brevity in implementing the multi-campus system at GZU as an exemplary model for establishing a new university, particularly the strategic placement of Great Zimbabwe University campuses and how their integration within the Masvingo community fosters practical and meaningful engagement. The Mashava Campus was described as "the most exciting campus and an amazing place," with particular emphasis on how it transformed perceptions of disused mining sites, demonstrating their potential as viable spaces for university development. The Ministry further commended the institution as a valuable case study for the Government's plan to establish five new universities.

That GZU had become the University of Choice was further cemented by the Ministry's commendation for the institution's innovative growth strategy, particularly its approach of acquiring existing buildings across the city and repurposing them into functional teaching and learning spaces. This is how the Herbert Chitepo Law School evolved into a first-class facility. Other facilities that grew out of this unique strategy include the Mucheke Campus, Mazorodze Clinic, the Centre of Gender and Cultural Studies, the Schools of Social Sciences, Education and Heritage, Medical and Health Sciences, GZU Campus Radio Station, the Main City Campus Library, the Department of Works and Estates in Masvingo, and the Mashava Campus.

The Vision expands: GZU in the broader national development discourse

Universities worldwide are partners with governments in national development. Zimbabwe has adopted the Education 5.0 heritage-based philosophy, which emphasises a transformational approach to higher education which produces well-rounded graduates equipped with skills and knowledge to drive socio-economic development and address the challenges of the 21st century. GZU has performed remarkably well in achieving the NDS 1 and Vision 2030 goals by aligning its strategic plans with the country's national priorities and government programmes. Under Prof Zvobgo's leadership, GZU has not only contributed to national development but has also positioned itself as a key player in the future of higher education in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 policy, with its focus on teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation, demands resourcefulness from HEIs (Zishiri et al., 2024). Persistent economic volatility necessitates internal revenue generation and unconventional operational models (Tsverukayi, 2024). GZU's trajectory under Zvobgo embodies these adaptive strategies, and the following successes were scored:

• **Establishment of the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences:**
One of the significant milestones achieved during Prof Zvobgo's tenure was the establishment of the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences. This has been a significant step in addressing the critical shortage of healthcare professionals in the country, positioning GZU as a major contributor to national health education and development. The School has already begun offering high-quality medical programmes, with plans to expand and introduce new programmes that align with Zimbabwe's health priorities.

• **Innovation Hub and ICEDA:**
Another important achievement was the establishment of the Innovation Hub, which has become a beacon for research and innovation within the University. Through the hub, we have launched several promising projects in the fields of agriculture, technology, and healthcare. The work at the ICEDA (Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture) has already begun to yield impressive results, particularly in agro-innovation and community engagement, addressing some of the nation's pressing socio-economic challenges. These initiatives have empowered our students with practical, future-ready skills while creating pathways to market-based solutions.

• **Additional milestones:** Campus Radio Station (2020) and the University Hospital (2024). The School of Gender and Cultural Studies expanded the University's intellectual footprint, while a central library and digital learning resources enhanced academic access across all campuses. Some of these milestones have been discussed in greater detail by scholars elsewhere in this book. However, it is essential to acknowledge that all these and other achievements reflect the strategic thinking and leadership skills of Prof. Zvobgo. What makes these achievements more satisfying is that they were attained during a time when the country was reeling from the negative impacts of economic sanctions.

Curriculum Transformation

Under Prof Zvobgo's leadership, GZU repackaged three-year general degree programmes into honours degrees, aligning them with the University's cultural and heritage niche. In justifying the changes, Prof Zvobgo said:

> Another critical area of curriculum development that requires urgent attention is the general degrees offered by the University in some cases. This area needs to be revisited to ensure that all our graduands can compete effectively with those from other local universities in the sub-region and beyond, who hold honours degrees. In this regard, we intend to bring the matter before the Senate for urgent debate, scrutiny, and consideration, with a view to phasing out the general degrees before presenting it to the council for approval. We are further considering revisiting our teaching methodologies to ensure that our students have opportunities to interface

> with the workplace through our work-related programme. Students must be exposed to the demands of the workplace in their areas of expertise so that, upon completing their studies, they are already familiar with the expectations of employers.

New degree offerings were introduced, subject to approval by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), ensuring alignment with national quality standards. GZU therefore introduced honours programmes for the entire University in 2015, along with a work-related component that is completed during the third year.

Resource mobilisation and construction model

Complementing government funding, GZU financed infrastructure projects through internally generated revenue, which was primarily executed by in-house technical staff, military engineers, and apprentices. This drastically cut costs and became a model for other universities, with delegations visiting to learn from GZU's approach (Mpofu et al., 2024). The Ministry expressed its complete confidence in the University's strategic direction, noting that GZU had a "quiet visible plan" and affirming its status as the University of Choice. Vice Chancellor Professor Rungano Zvobgo attributed the institution's remarkable growth over the years to teamwork, innovation, and determination. Despite financial constraints, Professor Zvobgo highlighted that GZU had adopted resourceful strategies, including the purchase and renovation of buildings across Masvingo to support teaching and learning. At the same time, plans for developing the Main Campus remain a long-term goal.

Future Vision and Strategies for GZU

As GZU heads towards its third decade of existence, the Vice Chancellor points out that it remains focused on embracing cutting-edge technologies, increasing internationalisation, and contributing to national development. The following are key areas that he has identified as needing attention for the institution to maintain its status as the University of Choice:

• Creating a Distinct Identity for the Main Campus:
While significant work has been done to expand the University's reach, it is essential that we also focus on giving the Main Campus a distinct identity. The Main Campus will be a cutting-edge centre that serves as the heart of GZU's academic and research endeavours. To achieve this, we will focus on modernising facilities, improving campus infrastructure, and creating a vibrant, innovative environment that reflects the aspirations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The campus will serve not only as an academic hub but also as a dynamic centre for innovation, collaboration, and technological advancement.

• Transformation of Mashava Campus to a University Town:
A primary goal for the next phase is to establish a university town in total at the Mashava Campus. This will include the development of student accommodation, research facilities, community amenities, and other infrastructure that will support the academic, social, and cultural life of the University. The Mashava Campus is uniquely positioned to serve as a model for rural

industrialisation, and establishing a university town will provide a self-sustaining environment where innovation, education, and community development intersect.

• Further Integration of AI and Technology in the Curriculum:
The future of education is inextricably linked to the advancement of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). To ensure that GZU remains at the forefront of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an integrated strategy will be adopted to incorporate AI and digital technologies into our curricula. This will include expanding AI-focused programmes across disciplines, offering AI certification courses, and ensuring that all students are equipped with digital literacy and data analysis skills. This approach will prepare our graduates for the rapidly evolving job market, where tech skills are increasingly in demand.

• Strengthening the Role of GZU as a Regional Hub for Innovation and Collaboration:
Our efforts to foster international collaboration and partnerships will remain a cornerstone of GZU's future strategy. The Innovation Hub will play a central role in establishing GZU as a regional leader in innovation, particularly in areas such as agro-tech, medical research, and renewable energy. Expanding these partnerships with both local and international institutions will not only enhance GZU's academic reputation but also strengthen its position in the global academic landscape. However, it will also enable us to commercialise research outputs and create market-driven solutions for societal challenges.

• Building Financial Sustainability and Third-Stream Income:
This includes commercialising research and innovations, expanding our digital education offerings, and engaging alums in fundraising efforts.

• Staff Development and Retention: The success of any institution lies in the strength of its staff. GZU will continue to prioritise staff development by providing opportunities for continuous professional growth and ensuring that faculty members are equipped with the skills necessary to teach in the digital age.

Conclusion: Leadership Lessons from the Zvobgo Vision

Professor Zvobgo's leadership is a shining example of transformational leadership in a resource-constrained environment. His approach integrated vision articulation, inclusive governance, and strategic resource mobilisation. By blending intellectual ambition with practical execution, he transformed GZU from a small institution into a competitive regional university, ultimately establishing it as the University of Choice. GZU experience demonstrates that in low-resource settings, institutional growth depends on innovation, internal capacity building, and strategic partnerships (Owusu-Agyemang, 2019; Kiplangat, 2024). Importantly, it shows that resilience in higher education is cultivated through adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and pragmatic use of available resources.

The *Zvobgo Vision* demonstrates how visionary leadership can turn economic adversity into an opportunity for renewal. GZU's expansion into multiple campuses, introduction of flagship academic programmes, and infrastructural development underline the importance of adaptive leadership for HEIs in the Global South. What began as a "small story" has become a narrative of

national and regional significance, placing GZU firmly on the higher education map. The experience offers valuable lessons for universities navigating economic crises: clarity of Vision, inclusive governance, and unconventional resource strategies can catalyse lasting transformation.

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THEME 2: THE GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC BRAND

CHAPTER 3
Mainstreaming Heritage: Great Zimbabwe University Academic Brand and the Heritage Niche

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Abstract

Initially established as a university specialising in the arts, culture, and heritage, and now anchored in science, technology, innovation, and industrialisation, Great Zimbabwe University has one of the most attractive academic brands. This builds from the realisation that heritage is our very being, and at the heart of it are the arts, culture, science, engineering, and technology. Our symbol of inspiration, the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site, is not just history and a bygone culture, but an engineering and architectural masterpiece that demonstrates innovation, human resilience, and adaptation. Heritage also includes all our natural, cultural, and social endowments as a country. It is therefore logical that the Great Zimbabwe University curriculum in the arts, humanities, and sciences is built on a heritage foundation, where the deep past provides inspiration and reflection in the various fields, with the intention to unlock Zimbabwe's rich natural and cultural endowments to propel national development and modernity.

Key words: mandate, Great Zimbabwe monuments, science, technology, endowments, university-wide modules, heritage

Introduction

The role of universities, especially in Africa, is undergoing a transformative shift, as more often than not, they are anchoring their vision, mission, and niche within the cultural, historical, and natural contexts from which they emerge. In Zimbabwe, for instance, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), the only University to be named after the iconic Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site, singularly stands out as a model of this paradigmatic approach. Originally established in 1999 and rebranded in 2007 with a primary focus on the arts, culture, and heritage, the University has since expanded its academic scope to embrace science, technology, innovation, and industrialisation. Nevertheless, the University has remained firmly rooted in its foundational identity, one that perceives heritage not as a relic of the past, but as a living, generative force central to knowledge production and pedagogy as well as a driver and enabler of economic development.

The heart of GZU's symbolic and intellectual mission is its namesake and geographic anchor, the Great Zimbabwe Monuments and World Heritage Site. In embracing this unparalleled heritage site as both inspiration and philosophical core, the University projects an academic brand that transcends disciplinary boundaries. It adopts a holistic heritage-based framework, where disciplines across the sciences, humanities, and creative arts engage with the past to inform contemporary realities and future possibilities. This approach resonates with global calls for the decolonisation of education and the repositioning of African indigenous knowledge systems at the centre of academic inquiry (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). It also aligns with Zimbabwe's national

vision to integrate heritage, innovation, and education through policy frameworks such as Education 5.0, which emphasises teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, 2018). Within this landscape, GZU emerges as a pioneering institution that demonstrates how heritage can be mainstreamed into academic identity, curriculum development, and institutional philosophy.

This chapter interrogates the conceptual, historical, and institutional logics behind GZU's academic brand as a heritage-centred University. It explores the symbolic and practical significance of the Great Zimbabwe Monument within the University's intellectual tradition, the integration of heritage into curricula across disciplines, and the fusion of cultural identity with science and technology in ways that contribute to national development. The chapter also reflects on the broader implications of this model for higher education in Africa, particularly in relation to sustainability, decoloniality, and community engagement. It further unpacks the institutional mandate of GZU, curriculum innovations, the interface among heritage, science, and technology, and concludes with critical reflections on the challenges and opportunities of heritage mainstreaming in higher education.

Institutional Origins and Heritage Focus

Great Zimbabwe University, previously known as Masvingo State University (MASU), was established in June 1999, through the Masvingo State University Act [*Chapter 25:24*] of 2002. In 2007, MASU was renamed Great Zimbabwe University following the suggestion by the then President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Chancellor of all State Universities, R.G. Mugabe, of having a state tertiary institution in the name of the Great Zimbabwe Monuments (Great Zimbabwe University Strategic Plan 2014-2018). As explained by Mugabe, the institution was supposed to draw a leaf from the symbolic interpretation of the national shrine in carving its unique niche with its programmes prioritising heritage studies, arts and culture, but also prioritising other areas of study necessary for holistic national human capital development. The renaming to Great Zimbabwe University marked a critical milestone in aligning academic identity with national heritage. Furthermore, the renaming was part of a deliberate policy initiative by the Government of Zimbabwe aimed at integrating the country's cultural and historical assets into the frameworks of public institutions (Chirikure, 2013). By adopting the name Great Zimbabwe, the University signified its commitment to heritage, both as a source of identity and as a field of academic inquiry. This symbolic shift paralleled Zimbabwe's broader aspirations of decolonising its educational system and reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems that had been marginalised under colonial rule. As a result of this rebranding, GZU began to position itself not only as a site of academic excellence but also as a custodian of cultural memory. The University quickly established heritage as a central theme in its strategic development plans, embracing curricula that emphasised cultural studies, archaeology, indigenous knowledge systems, and heritage education. This transformation was in line with global trends in higher education that advocate for the contextualisation of knowledge production, particularly in formerly-colonised nations (Smith, 2006). In this regard, GZU became a flagship institution demonstrating how universities can respond to calls for the Africanisation of knowledge.

Heritage at GZU is not treated as an abstract or purely academic subject but as a living practice embedded in local realities. The University's proximity to the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage

Site provides a unique learning environment for students and staff alike. Through field-based modules, internships with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), and collaborations with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), students engage directly with the cultural landscape. These partnerships have elevated GZU's heritage programmes to regional prominence, positioning it as a hub for heritage-based research, training, and policy engagement. The Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education, established as a flagship faculty within GZU, embodies the University's vision of fusing heritage with educational innovation. The school offers programmes that bridge history, language, musicology, archaeology, and development studies, allowing students to examine the intersection of culture, identity, and societal change. Importantly, this interdisciplinary model responds to the demands of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 policy, which emphasises teaching, research, innovation, community service, and industrialisation. GZU's heritage orientation is, thus, not nostalgic but forward-looking and designed to harness cultural capital for socio-economic transformation. Furthermore, the University's identity is visibly expressed in its branding, ceremonies, and public discourse. From the architectural designs inspired by stone masonry to graduation rituals and symbols derived from precolonial traditions, GZU has incorporated heritage into its institutional culture. This embodiment of heritage extends to staff recruitment, student orientation, and marketing strategies, which often foreground the University's connection to the Great Zimbabwe Monuments. Such visible branding reinforces the idea of heritage not as peripheral, but as central to the institution's mission and values.

The Symbolic and Intellectual Heritage of Great Zimbabwe Monument

The Great Zimbabwe Monument, constructed between the 11th and 15th centuries, stands as one of Africa's most iconic heritage symbols, embodying the material and spiritual accomplishments of precolonial African societies. Far from being an isolated expression of cultural achievement, the site served as a major political, religious, and commercial hub, connecting interior Zimbabwe to Indian Ocean trade routes. As such, it represents not only a historical legacy but also a symbolic anchor for African pride, epistemological sovereignty, and national identity. The intellectual significance of the Great Zimbabwe Monuments extends beyond their physical structures. It is a site of knowledge production and philosophical inspiration, representing resilience, innovation, and adaptation traits essential for contemporary education systems. As Fontein (2006) notes, the Great Zimbabwe Monuments are a "living site" whose meanings are continuously negotiated by various stakeholders, including traditional leaders, academics, spiritual communities, and the state. In the postcolonial context, the site functions as a political and ideological resource for reasserting Zimbabwean identity and challenging Eurocentric historical models. The monument has, therefore, become a "symbolic curriculum" for Great Zimbabwe University, influencing its academic mission, institutional ethos, and pedagogical approaches. Rather than treating heritage as a discrete academic discipline, the University draws on the symbolic richness and scientific legacy of the site to inform teaching across architecture, engineering, archaeology, tourism, business, and even environmental science.

The appropriation of Great Zimbabwe's symbolic capital into higher education reflects broader efforts to re-Africanise the university landscape, aligning with decolonial and postcolonial theories of knowledge transformation. The dry-stone walls, granaries, and spatial planning of the monument offer case studies in indigenous sustainability, resource management, and aesthetic

design areas often neglected in standard university curricula dominated by Western models. At GZU, these elements are being reinterpreted not merely as heritage, but as templates for curriculum innovation at a symbolic level. Great Zimbabwe Monuments operate as a "foundational myth" for the University, much like how classical Athens or Renaissance Florence serve Western intellectual traditions (Chakrabarty, 2000). It informs not only academic content but also institutional rituals, visual identity, and branding. The University's logos, ceremonial attire, public discourse, and strategic plans all reflect a conscious invocation of the monument's grandeur and philosophical depth. In doing so, the University resists the alienating effects of colonially-inherited educational models and repositions itself as a site of epistemic reawakening. The monument, thus, becomes both a literal and figurative citadel for knowledge creation, one that is proudly African, spiritually resonant, and globally relevant. This strategic repositioning aligns with wider continental calls to reclaim Africa's intellectual heritage and reconstruct universities as drivers of culturally-grounded and development-oriented knowledge.

Great Zimbabwe University and the Heritage Niche

In the interest of its newfound niche of promoting African culture and heritage, Great Zimbabwe University and the University of Venda (UNIVEN) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in October 2007, which saw UNIVEN providing lecturers for the teaching of Bachelor of Arts Degrees in Venda and Shangani at Great Zimbabwe University in March 2008 (Great Zimbabwe University Strategic Plan 2014-2018). In furtherance of the niche, on 9 October 2008, the Dzimbahwe Arts Festival (DAF), a unique multi-disciplinary festival that showcases performances and productions in visual, literary, culinary, and performing arts, research, and academia, hosted by the Great Zimbabwe University annually, was launched. As more demand for in-depth culture and heritage-related curricula and research grew from stakeholders and in light of the University's quest for relevance, the Institute of Cultural Heritage Studies was established in January 2010. The Institute was established as a non-faculty cluster of departments, centres, and schools mandated to engage in research, teaching, training, and outreach activities in areas of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Central to GZU's institutional mission is the belief that heritage is not simply an object of academic inquiry, but a foundation for educational philosophy and national development. This orientation aligns closely with Zimbabwe's national policy on higher education reform, most notably the heritage-based Education 5.0, which emphasises five pillars: teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialisation. GZU's response to this call has been distinctive; rather than viewing heritage and innovation as oppositional forces, the University interprets them as mutually-reinforcing dimensions of a knowledge system rooted in local realities but with global applicability. For instance, innovations in agriculture, climate change adaptation, and architectural design are increasingly being grounded in indigenous technologies and environmental wisdom derived from Zimbabwe's heritage landscapes.

A core innovation in GZU's model is the institution-wide compulsory Heritage Studies module. The university-wide module, now mandatory across all faculties, introduces students to the historical, socio-cultural, and political dynamics of heritage in Zimbabwe, thereby mainstreaming heritage as both method and content in higher education. Beyond Heritage Studies, GZU has introduced interdisciplinary modules that mainstream heritage into faculties such as natural sciences, business, engineering, and education. For instance, in agricultural sciences, indigenous land-use practices, drought-resistant crops, and community-based

conservation methods are examined not merely as historical practices but as ecologically sustainable alternatives (Mawere, 2014). Similarly, business and entrepreneurship programmes have begun incorporating cultural economics and creative industry modules, which draw on traditional crafts, indigenous intellectual property rights, and heritage tourism models to stimulate local economic development (Mataga, 2018).

This pedagogical move reflects a larger philosophical shift where heritage is no longer a discrete field of study, but a transdisciplinary foundation that informs the sciences, humanities, arts, and professional fields. GZU actively integrates cultural heritage into its teaching and research by embedding elements such as indigenous knowledge systems, traditional medicine, African philosophy, archaeology, museums, heritage studies, music, and local languages into its curriculum. This interdisciplinary and Afrocentric approach facilitates the transmission of intangible cultural heritage through formal education (UNESCO, 2003). This curriculum model also recognises and embraces the oral, performative, and embodied dimensions of African knowledge systems, which are often excluded from formal education. Through performances, storytelling, community dialogues, and field immersion programs, students encounter heritage as a lived and evolving phenomenon. Pedagogically, this reflects a shift away from lecture-dominated instruction towards participatory, experiential learning approaches grounded in local realities (Mhiripiri & Chari, 2017). For example, students in the Visual and Performing Arts departments collaborate with traditional musicians and artisans in surrounding communities, producing contemporary works inspired by traditional genres, thereby reinforcing heritage as a living and dynamic force in both culture and education. Moreover, assessment tools have been diversified to include ethnographic reports, creative portfolios, and community project evaluations, thereby validating non-textual and practice-based knowledge.

The integration of heritage into the curriculum is also reinforced by GZU's strategic partnerships with local communities, traditional leaders, and heritage practitioners, which inform the development and review of course content. These partnerships ensure that community voices and indigenous authorities are not relegated to peripheral consultation but are embedded within the academic process as co-educators and knowledge custodians (Ndoro & Wijesuriya, 2015). This collaborative model mirrors the co-management approach advocated in heritage conservation discourse and aligns with SDG 4, which calls for inclusive and culturally sensitive education. It also addresses the epistemic violence wrought by centuries of colonial knowledge production, replacing extractive educational models with dialogical, locally embedded curriculum frameworks.

Science, Technology, and Heritage Innovation

Great Zimbabwe University's deliberate fusion of heritage with science and technology represents an innovative reimagining of how universities in Africa can shape futures rooted in ancestral wisdom while simultaneously driving forward-looking innovation. Contrary to the historically Eurocentric notion that science and heritage operate in separate domains where science is seen as progressive and objective and heritage as nostalgic and static, GZU has reframed this dichotomy by illustrating that heritage itself is a site of scientific ingenuity and technological resilience. Under the Education 5.0 model, GZU seeks to cultivate a new cadre of scientists, engineers, and technologists who are not only technically competent but also culturally literate and socially responsive. At the University, heritage is a catalyst for innovation rather than a constraint. For instance, researchers in engineering and material sciences are currently engaged

in studying ancient construction materials and design models used at the Great Zimbabwe site for application in sustainable housing solutions (Nhamo & Mupfiga, 2021). This work has implications for contemporary challenges such as climate change adaptation, low-income housing, and environmental conservation. In agriculture, the University has promoted research on traditional seed varieties and water harvesting techniques used by indigenous communities, adapting them into contemporary agroecological models for food security and resilience in the face of climate variability (Chin'anga et al., 2022). Similarly, environmental science students and faculty are exploring community-based conservation practices and indigenous ecological ethics as sustainable alternatives to top-down environmental management models. These efforts reflect broader debates in African scholarship that call for the integration of endogenous knowledge systems into mainstream scientific practice.

In the field of medicine and health, GZU has begun integrating traditional healing practices and ethnopharmacology into biomedical research. This is not done uncritically, but through rigorous scientific validation and ethical community engagement. Such efforts are a practical response to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), while also respecting the epistemological validity of indigenous medical knowledge, often transmitted orally and experientially across generations. In doing so, GZU challenges the scientific hegemony that historically dismissed non-Western knowledge systems as unscientific or anecdotal.

Importantly, the University has embedded this philosophy in its technological innovation hubs and incubation centres, where students and faculty co-develop heritage-inspired solutions to contemporary problems. Projects under development include bioplastics derived from indigenous plants, mobile applications for cultural tourism, digital repositories of oral history, and design software inspired by vernacular aesthetics. These initiatives reflect not only technological ingenuity but also epistemic innovation, as they valorise African design sensibilities and historical contexts within cutting-edge innovation. The creation of cultural-tech start-ups further links heritage and industry, aligning with the African Union's Agenda 2063 goal of leveraging Africa's cultural assets for development. Moreover, GZU's integration of digital technologies in heritage preservation and education is especially significant in the wake of increasing threats to cultural landscapes from climate change, urbanisation, and globalisation. The University's partnership with national and international heritage institutions has enabled the digitisation of cultural archives, 3D documentation of archaeological sites, and the use of AI for linguistic preservation of endangered local languages (Mataga, 2023). These digital humanities projects not only safeguard heritage but also democratise access and participation, reflecting SDG 17's emphasis on partnerships for sustainable development.

Thus, by positioning heritage as a generator of knowledge and innovation, Great Zimbabwe University is forging an academic path that collapses the boundaries between the ancient and the futuristic, the local and the global, the scientific and the cultural. The university's science and technology initiatives are not alienated from its heritage mission; instead, they are mutually reinforcing pillars in a broader epistemological shift towards Afrocentric, socially rooted education.

Discussion

The adoption of a heritage-based academic model at GZU presents important implications for higher education policy and curriculum transformation in Zimbabwe and the broader African context. Central to these implications is a rethinking of what constitutes relevant, inclusive, and transformative education. By embedding heritage, both tangible and intangible, into the curriculum across disciplines, GZU challenges the Eurocentric foundations that have long shaped African universities since the colonial era. This marks a radical shift from models that prioritise imported knowledge systems to frameworks grounded in local epistemologies, histories, and socio-cultural realities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). In practical terms, this shift requires policy reforms at national and institutional levels to formally recognise heritage as a foundational pillar of education and innovation. The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), for instance, would need to revise curriculum accreditation standards to make space for indigenous knowledge systems, traditional technologies, and local languages as legitimate and accessible knowledge areas. Such a move resonates with global calls under SDG 4 for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Keane and Deneulin (2015) have emphasised the value of culturally responsive education in promoting human capabilities and agency, particularly in postcolonial societies.

Moreover, the GZU model emphasises interdisciplinarity and the dismantling of rigid disciplinary silos. A curriculum inspired by heritage enables engineering students, for example, to study ancient architecture and construction at Great Zimbabwe Monuments, while business students can explore traditional economies and indigenous models of resource stewardship. This pedagogical approach facilitates a more holistic understanding of development, combining humanities, science, and technology in ways that are both locally relevant and globally competent. As Jansen (2017) argues, curriculum reform must be underpinned by transformative pedagogies that embrace complexity, plurality, and sustainability.

The institutional implications also include a redefinition of academic success, research excellence, and innovation to include community impact, cultural regeneration, and the preservation of national identity. Metrics used to assess universities must go beyond research output and graduate employment to include indicators such as community partnerships, indigenous knowledge documentation, and participation in cultural revival initiatives. The incorporation of University-Wide Heritage Modules at GZU is an example of how curriculum design can actively promote civic consciousness and cultural citizenship. This also aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, which emphasises the role of culture and heritage in achieving "The Africa We Want." Furthermore, this model has important implications for the training of educators and researchers. Lecturers must be equipped not only with academic expertise but also with the cultural competence to navigate diverse heritage contexts. This necessitates ongoing professional development, field immersion, and collaborative teaching with local knowledge holders such as traditional leaders, artists, and craftspeople. The recognition of these individuals as co-educators and research partners helps to decolonise classroom spaces and create more dialogic, participatory learning environments.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how GZU has positioned heritage not merely as an academic theme, but as the philosophical and practical foundation of its academic brand and institutional identity.

Through its bold reimagining of curriculum design, GZU presents a pioneering case of how African universities can align teaching, research, and community engagement with the continent's deep past, cultural wealth, and indigenous knowledge systems. The model underscores heritage as both a resource for innovation and a lens for sustainable development, placing it at the centre of Zimbabwe's higher education transformation agenda. As demonstrated throughout, GZU's integration of heritage across the arts, humanities, sciences, and engineering reshapes how knowledge is produced and applied. It challenges the conventional binaries between tradition and modernity, science and culture, and academic and local knowledge. The deliberate use of heritage as an intellectual and development tool ensures that graduates are not only employable but are also culturally grounded, critically aware, and capable of contributing meaningfully to national development. This holistic model resonates with Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDGs 4, 11, and 17), and with wider continental aspirations, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The implications for higher education across Africa are profound. Universities must reorient their missions to reflect the socio-cultural contexts of the communities they serve. This requires moving away from inherited colonial curricula and embracing indigenous epistemologies that are both historically rich and developmentally potent. GZU case shows that mainstreaming heritage can be achieved not through tokenism, but through institutional commitment, curriculum-wide integration, and multi-stakeholder collaboration involving students, lecturers, traditional leaders, and policy actors. Mainstreaming heritage in higher education is not only a reclamation of Africa's intellectual sovereignty but also a strategic response to contemporary development challenges. As GZU demonstrates, when heritage is embraced as a living resource for learning, it opens new pathways for academic excellence, societal transformation, and the cultivation of empowered, culturally-anchored graduates for the 21st century and beyond. Ultimately, GZU experience offers a replicable model for curriculum transformation in other African universities seeking to reconcile academic excellence with cultural relevance. It suggests that higher education must not only produce employable graduates, but also culturally grounded citizens capable of critically engaging with their histories, communities, and environments. Such a transformation is not only an academic necessity but a socio-political imperative in postcolonial Africa.

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CHAPTER 4
Great Zimbabwe University Academic Disciplines

Talknice Saungweme, Xavier Poshiwa & Emily Ganga

Abstract

Great Zimbabwe's monuments stand as a testament to African intellectual heritage, their stone walls echoing the silent philosophies of a civilisation that interwove art, architecture, economics, and governance into a seamless epistemic tapestry. Contemporary academic disciplines under the name Great Zimbabwe reflect this multidimensional legacy, spanning the humanities, education, social sciences, law, agriculture, engineering, medicine and health sciences, business sciences, and natural sciences. Rooted in indigenous knowledge systems while embracing global frontiers, these disciplines interrogate both visible and unspoken structures shaping society. The humanities unearth nuanced ontologies of identity and culture; education nurtures transformative pedagogies; social sciences engage with practical development challenges to advance social justice and inclusive growth; law elucidates normative frameworks underpinning social order, human dignity, and protection of animals and the environment; agriculture and engineering synergise to drive food security and industrial transformation; medicine and health sciences advance human well-being through integrated biomedical and public health research; business sciences generate innovative solutions catalysing national development; while natural and applied sciences spearhead inventions and innovations for industrialisation. Together, these disciplines proffer real-life solutions and drive sustainable community development. Thus, Great Zimbabwe's academic project is not mere preservation but perpetual reimagining, forging intellectual sovereignty that is local, continental and universal.

Key words: academic disciplines, humanities, education, social sciences, law, agriculture, natural sciences, business sciences

Introduction

Just as the builders of Great Zimbabwe once laid each granite block with precision and purpose, today's scholars and students are laying the intellectual foundations for a different kind of fortress, one built not of stone, but of ideas and knowledge. Centuries ago, the Great Zimbabwe civilisation became a centre of architecture, trade, governance, and cultural exchange, crafting its own systems of knowledge to interpret the world (National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe/NMMZ, 2024). It did not look elsewhere for validation; it defined its own priorities and shaped its own destiny. In the same spirit, modern universities in Africa stand as gateways to self-determined futures. They are not only transmitters of inherited wisdom, but also crucibles where new knowledge is forged to serve the needs of their own people. In a globalised academic arena where the flow of knowledge is often unbalanced, with the Global South too often consuming theories and frameworks shaped in distant contexts, far removed from its own realities, the call for intellectual sovereignty is urgent.

Intellectual sovereignty, therefore, becomes indispensable in Zimbabwe; it entails the right and responsibility to define our own questions, pursue our own research paths, and tell our own stories in our own voices, while driving innovations, fostering industrialisation, and shaping our

social, cultural, economic, political, and technological trajectories to advance holistic and sustainable national development. Without this sovereignty, education risks becoming an act of mimicry, a polished repetition and advancement of other people's ideas, interests and visions, rather than a tool for economic, social and political liberation.

A university deeply rooted in its society can convert lived experience into applied knowledge, ensuring that solutions emerge from, and are suited to, the environment in which they will be implemented. *Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo / Ilizwe lakhiwa ngabanikazi balo*. This means Zimbabwe is built and sustained by its own citizens. In this context, universities must function as engines for the mass production of goods and services that improve local livelihoods, leveraging research, technological innovation, and industrial processes to convert ideas into high-value outputs that advance socio-economic development and strengthen national self-reliance.

Thus, to foster intellectual sovereignty is to empower students to think critically without detaching from their heritage; to innovate without erasing tradition and to engage globally without losing one's voice in the conversation. It implies curating curricula that honour indigenous knowledge alongside modern science, encouraging research agendas that speak to national priorities, and building scholarly networks that do not rely solely on the validation of faraway academic gatekeepers (Ayeni, Afonja & Faloju, 2025).

Great Zimbabwe University's academic project is woven into this broader African journey, the pursuit of an education system that is both globally conversant and locally grounded. Its mission is not just to graduate students, but to cultivate thinkers, leaders, and creators who can stand confidently on the world stage without abandoning the rhythms, textures, and histories that shaped them. Forging intellectual sovereignty is, in many ways, like constructing the stone walls of Great Zimbabwe itself: deliberate, enduring, and shaped to withstand the tests of time. Each research project, innovation, lecture, or/and community partnership is a block in that wall, strengthening the foundation of a knowledge system that belongs to us, speaks to us, and works for us. This chapter tells the story of what shapes the deliberate academic choices, the epistemic struggles and the enduring vision that define Great Zimbabwe University's contribution to the African knowledge landscape.

Great Zimbabwe University Academic Disciplines

Great Zimbabwe University offers a wide array of academic disciplines across various schools. These include the School of Natural Sciences, Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences, Munhumutapa School of Business Sciences, Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering, Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education, Herbert Chitepo Law School, and Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences.

School of Natural Sciences

The School of Natural Sciences is mandated to serve as a dynamic catalyst for sustainable development that accelerates the country's vision toward industrial transformation and societal advancement. The school is inundated with advancing cutting-edge Science, Technology, and Engineering deeply rooted in Zimbabwe's rich heritage. Through pioneering scientific inventions and applied innovations, the School drives industrialisation by transforming local knowledge into practical solutions that propel economic growth, enhance technological capacity, and foster

resilient, future-ready industries. The School is composed of two departments offering a broad spectrum of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that respond directly to both global trends and local priorities.

First is the Department of Physics, Geography and Environmental Science, which offers degrees in Renewable Energy, Physics, Chemical Technology, Applied Biosciences and Biotechnology, and Geography and Environmental Science. Each programme reflects the urgent need to harness natural resources sustainably while promoting technological advances that honour the wisdom embedded in Zimbabwe's landscapes and ecosystems. Second is the Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences, which offers programmes in Computer Science, Mathematics, Statistics, and Operations Research. These fields equip students with analytical, computational, and problem-solving skills vital for thriving in the modern data-driven world.

Research at this School is focused on climate change and sustainable development, renewable energy, water and air quality, artificial intelligence and mathematical modelling, forensic science and bioremediation, as well as earth observation and health reform. Community engagement and innovative projects include biogas production, fumigation services, wetland mapping and rehabilitation and water quality monitoring, among others.

Munhumutapa School of Business Sciences

The School of Business Sciences is committed to delivering multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary education and research that promotes sustainable industrial growth, harnesses emerging digital technologies, and supports the creation of competitive enterprises capable of thriving in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. By integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, the School aims to cultivate visionary business leaders and entrepreneurs who can transform local and global economies. The School of Business Sciences comprises three departments: the departments of Accounting, Economics and Finance, and Department of Management and Hospitality. Its degree programmes cover diverse fields, including Business Management, Marketing, Economics, Financial Engineering, Finance, Accounting, and Business Support Systems.

Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering

The Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering integrates agricultural sciences and engineering principles to create powerful synergies that help ensure food security and industrial transformation. By combining innovative agricultural techniques with engineering solutions, the School fosters sustainable farming practices, enhances mechanisation and develops technologies that increase productivity and reduce post-harvest losses.

The School is made up of three departments. First is the Department of Soil and Plant Science, which focuses on understanding soil health, plant nutrition, and crop production. It conducts research and training in sustainable land management, soil fertility, and innovative crop improvement techniques to boost agricultural productivity and ensure long-term food security. Second is the Department of Livestock, Wildlife and Fisheries which focuses on the study and management of animal agriculture, wildlife conservation and aquaculture. This department trains students in livestock production, animal health, fisheries management and sustainable wildlife utilisation to support biodiversity and improve rural livelihoods. Third is the Department of

Engineering which applies engineering principles to agricultural and industrial challenges. This department specialises in agricultural mechanisation, irrigation systems, infrastructure development, and the design of technologies that enhance efficiency in farming and related industries, driving industrial transformation in Zimbabwe.

Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences

The Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences of Great Zimbabwe University, commissioned by His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, on 21 October 2022, stands as a strategic pillar in the transformation of Zimbabwe's healthcare landscape. Its establishment responds directly to the vision of the country that is, building a robust, self-reliant health system that can meet the needs of both local communities and the broader national population.

The School offers a three-year Bachelor of Biomedical Science degree, which is an essential foundation for the subsequent three-year Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery Honours degree. The School's focus, in addition to the general medical requirements, designed its curriculum to reflect GZU's heritage-based philosophy, focusing on traditional and herbal medicine. This strategic blend ensures that graduates emerge with dual competencies in both conventional medicine and indigenous medical knowledge, positioning them as uniquely skilled practitioners in Zimbabwe, the region and internationally.

The School's contribution to national development and community well-being is multi-dimensional. Through the Mashava Teaching and Specialised Hospital, the School serves as a training ground for health specialists, nurses, and other medical professionals, directly addressing the national shortage of skilled healthcare personnel. The specialised facility will also provide advanced services such as laparoscopic surgery and thoracoscopic surgery, alongside hands-on training in these minimally-invasive techniques, expanding surgical capacity in the province and beyond. Working in close collaboration with public health institutions, including Masvingo General Hospital and other district facilities, the School enhances service delivery, strengthens referral systems and improves the overall quality of primary and specialist healthcare in Masvingo Province.

In addition to training and service delivery, the School is advancing research in local medicines, investigating the efficacy, safety and integration of traditional remedies within modern clinical practice. This approach not only preserves Zimbabwe's rich indigenous medical heritage, but also fosters innovation in the development of affordable, culturally-relevant healthcare solutions.

By linking education, research, and clinical practice, the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences is actively transforming the Masvingo health system and contributing to Zimbabwe's long-term goal of achieving universal health coverage, reducing dependency on foreign-trained doctors, and promoting industrialisation within the medical and pharmaceutical sectors. It is, in essence, a centre of excellence where heritage meets modern science for the betterment of communities and the nation at large.

Herbert Chitepo Law School

The Law School produces legal professionals who combine technical competence with a deep understanding of Zimbabwe's socio-political context and heritage. The School currently offers

the Bachelor of Law (LLB), whose curriculum is crafted to meet the standards of the Council for Legal Education and is continuously updated to reflect changes in legislation, judicial practice and global legal trends. Students are equipped with strong foundations in Constitutional Law, Human Rights, Commercial Law, Criminal Law, Environmental Law and Customary Law, thus enabling them to operate effectively in diverse legal settings.

Beyond academic instruction, the Herbert Chitepo Law School makes significant contributions to national development and local community empowerment. It plays a critical role in training lawyers, prosecutors, magistrates, policy analysts and legal researchers who serve in both public and private sectors. The School fosters a culture of public interest lawyering through its legal aid and community outreach programmes, which provide free or affordable legal services to underprivileged members of society, thereby promoting access to justice and strengthening the rule of law.

The School also engages in policy research and legal reform advocacy, working closely with government ministries, civil society organisations and international bodies to align Zimbabwe's legal framework with constitutional principles, sustainable development goals and regional integration commitments under SADC and the African Union. By conducting research on land rights, natural resource governance, human rights, and customary law systems, it contributes to evidence-based policymaking and the resolution of legal challenges rooted in both local realities and global dynamics.

Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences

The philosophy of the School of Social Sciences is anchored on the core values of *ubuntu/hunhu,* upholding human dignity, as well as inclusiveness, innovation, and creativity. The School comprises five departments namely; Human Resource Management, Rural and Urban Development, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology and Social Anthropology as well as one centre i.e. the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies. Established in January 2015, the Centre works to transform unequal gender relations in society while empowering both males and females with knowledge and skills for social transformation.

The School offers a broad spectrum of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including Masters and DPhil degrees, which advance understanding of society, governance, human behaviour and development. Its programmes prepare graduates to contribute directly to local and national priorities such as poverty reduction, social justice, gender equality, mental health, disaster preparedness, and conflict resolution.

Through applied research, community outreach and strategic partnerships with local authorities, civil society organisations and international agencies, the School plays a critical role in evidence-based social policy formulation and local development initiatives in Masvingo and beyond. By training social scientists grounded in both cultural heritage and contemporary realities, the Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences ensures that social transformation is informed, inclusive, and sustainable, contributing meaningfully to Zimbabwe's broader development agenda.

Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education

The Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education offers a curriculum that integrates socio-cultural, scientific, technological, artistic, business, and research skills, all designed to respond to

contemporary societal and national needs. In line with Great Zimbabwe University's niche in arts, culture, and heritage, the School develops human capital by training educationists and heritage practitioners capable of operating across all levels of the national curriculum. The School comprises six departments:

1. The Department of Inclusive and Special Needs Education, which focuses on training educators to address diverse learning needs and promote inclusive education.
2. The Department of Science and Technical Education, focusing on preparing students for careers in STEM teaching and applied education.
3. The Department of Languages, Media, and Communication Studies whose niche is developing skilled communicators and media practitioners.
4. The Department of Ethics, Philosophy, Religion, and Theology which focuses on cultivating critical thinking, ethical reasoning and moral leadership.
5. The Department of Heritage, Historical and Sustainable Development, meant to promote the preservation, management, and sustainable use of cultural and historical resources.
6. The Department of Educational Foundations and Curriculum Development, whose focus is equipping educators with foundations of knowledge and skills to design and implement effective curricula at all levels including research.

Beyond academics, the School actively engages in community development through its centres and business units, offering students practical opportunities to contribute to national development while studying. These initiatives foster innovation and experiential learning, allowing students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world challenges.

The School also maintains extensive collaborative partnerships with UNESCO, ICCROM, the African World Heritage Fund, UNICEF-Zimbabwe, among others. These collaborations provide students and staff with a transformative learning experience, equipping graduates to become innovative, culturally aware, and socially responsible leaders in education, heritage, and the arts.

Great Zimbabwe University Interweaving Heritage and Innovation

Great Zimbabwe University stands as an institution that seamlessly integrates indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary academic frameworks. Named after the iconic Great Zimbabwe ruins, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that epitomises Africa's pre-colonial brilliance, GZU serves as a testament to the harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity. By engaging with global academic trends while preserving local heritage, employing indigenous research and teaching methodologies and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, GZU has positioned itself as a leader in decolonising education and advancing sustainable development in Africa.

Balancing Global Academic Standards with Local Heritage

While operating within a globalised academic environment, GZU remains deeply rooted in Zimbabwean and African traditions. The university's curriculum incorporates international best

practices while ensuring local relevance. For example, its archaeology and heritage studies programmes leverage the historical significance of the Great Zimbabwe ruins, combining global archaeological techniques with indigenous conservation approaches (Pikirayi, 2013).

Additionally, GZU's language and literature departments prioritise the study of Shona, Ndebele, and other indigenous languages alongside English, promoting linguistic diversity in academia (Makaudze & Mutasa, 2020). This multilingual approach aligns with UNESCO's advocacy for culturally inclusive education, reinforcing GZU's commitment to preserving African heritage while engaging with global scholarship.

Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into Research and Teaching

A defining characteristic of GZU's academic model is its emphasis on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in research and pedagogy. African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) are actively integrated into various departments and programmes at GZU, challenging the predominance of Western epistemologies. Within the Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education, the importance of AIKS in its curriculum and research is emphasised.

Great Zimbabwe University's teaching methodologies also emphasise experiential and community-based learning. For instance, agriculture students collaborate with local farmers to study drought-resistant indigenous crops, integrating modern scientific research with time-tested farming techniques (Mugabe, 2021). This approach not only enhances academic learning, but also empowers communities by revitalising sustainable indigenous practices.

Fostering Interdisciplinary Collaboration for Holistic Solutions

Interdisciplinarity is central to GZU's academic vision. The university actively promotes collaborative research across disciplines such as history, environmental science, and development studies. The Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site Research Cluster exemplifies this synergy, uniting archaeologists, anthropologists and tourism experts to explore heritage conservation and economic development (Ndoro & Pwiti, 2018).

Furthermore, GZU's innovation hub facilitates partnerships among science, technology, and indigenous knowledge. Initiatives like the digitisation of Shona folklore demonstrates how modern technology can preserve and disseminate cultural heritage (Mberi & Ndlovu, 2022). Such interdisciplinary efforts ensure comprehensive solutions to societal challenges, reinforcing the university's role as a hub of knowledge production.

Great Zimbabwe University exemplifies how higher education can effectively merge tradition and innovation. By embracing global academic advancements while valuing indigenous wisdom, incorporating participatory learning models, and encouraging interdisciplinary research, GZU provides a blueprint for African universities striving to decolonise knowledge and promote sustainable development. As the institution evolves, its dedication to harmonising the past and the present will continue to shape a distinctly African academic identity, setting a benchmark for others to follow.

Great Zimbabwe University as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development

Great Zimbabwe University stands as a compelling example of how higher education institutions can catalyse sustainable development (Tilbury, 2011). By bridging academic research with community needs, promoting multidisciplinary problem-solving, and redefining education as a tool for empowerment, GZU has positioned itself at the forefront of Zimbabwe's developmental agenda (GZU Strategic Plan, 2020-2025). As the university continues to innovate and expand its impact, it offers a model for other institutions seeking to align academic excellence with social responsibility and environmental sustainability (Leal-Filho et al., 2018).

In the evolving landscape of higher education, universities are increasingly expected to serve not only as centres of academic excellence but also as engines of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2021). GZU exemplifies this transformative role by integrating academic research with community needs, embracing multidisciplinary approaches to real-life challenges, and positioning education as a tool for empowerment and societal transformation (Mugoni et al., 2022). Through its strategic initiatives and alignment with national development goals, including Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1: 2021-2025), GZU has emerged as a vital institution in the country's pursuit of inclusive and sustainable progress (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020).

Bridging Academic Research and Community Needs

One of the defining features of GZU's contribution to sustainable development is its commitment to aligning academic research with the practical needs of local communities (Mbereko et al., 2021). The university's seven Schools, Innovation Hub and Research and Innovation Department, have prioritised heritage-based research that addresses pressing issues such as food security, rural industrialisation, and public health (GZU Annual Report, 2023). For instance, research initiatives on small grain production and indigenous poultry farming have provided rural communities with sustainable agricultural solutions that enhance nutrition and economic resilience (Matsa et al., 2022). These efforts align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (United Nations, 2015).

However, a study by Mugoni et al. (2022) revealed that while GZU schools engage with the SDGs, there is a need for a university-wide framework to better integrate national priorities with institutional and individual research efforts. This finding underscores the importance of structured policy support in maximising the impact of academic research on sustainable development (Cloete et al., 2015). By fostering researcher-community partnerships, GZU is gradually transforming academic inquiry into actionable solutions that improve livelihoods and promote environmental stewardship (Zvobgo and Musingafi, 2020).

Multidisciplinary Approaches to Real-Life Problems

Addressing complex societal challenges requires a departure from disciplinary silos and a move toward integrated, multidisciplinary research (UNESCO, 2021). GZU has embraced this philosophy through platforms such as the Dzimbahwe Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, which encourages collaboration across diverse fields, including agriculture, law, education, and social sciences (GZU Research Bulletin, 2022). This approach has enabled the university to

generate holistic solutions to issues ranging from climate change adaptation to poverty alleviation (Chikodzi and Nyoni, 2021).

Secondly, recognising that complex development issues require interdisciplinary solutions, hence GZU has promoted cross-school collaborations. For example, its Institute of Development Studies integrates Economics, Environmental Science, and Social Policy to address poverty and climate adaptation (GZU Annual Report, 2023). Such approaches resonate with the findings of UNESCO (2021), which highlight the necessity of breaking down academic silos to foster innovation in sustainability education.

Another notable example of GZU's multidisciplinary engagement is the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA) in Chivi (Nhamo and Mjimba, 2020). This initiative combines Environmental Science, Agronomy, and Community Development to enhance climate resilience and rural productivity. By integrating Indigenous Knowledge systems with scientific research, GZU has contributed to the development of sustainable agricultural practices tailored to Zimbabwe's semi-arid regions (Ajayi et al., 2022). Such efforts demonstrate the university's capacity to translate academic expertise into tangible benefits for marginalised communities, reinforcing its role as a developmental university (Cloete et al., 2015).

Central to GZU's developmental mission is its adoption of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 philosophy, which expands the traditional university mandate to include research, innovation, industrialisation, and community service (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020). This paradigm shift aims to produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also equipped to drive socio-economic transformation (Zvobgo and Musingafi, 2020). GZU's Strategic Plan (2020-2025) reflects this vision by emphasising the cultivation of critical thinkers, innovators, and industry-ready professionals (GZU, 2020). The university's Integrated Community Economic Development Approach exemplifies how education can serve as a vehicle for empowerment (Chikoko et al., 2021). Through this initiative, students engage directly with local communities, applying their knowledge to real-world problems and fostering mutual learning. Such experiential education not only enhances student competencies, but also empowers communities to become active participants in their own development.

Intellectual Sovereignty in Local, Continental and Global Contexts

Intellectual sovereignty refers to the right and capacity of a people to produce, control, and disseminate knowledge rooted in their own epistemological and cultural frameworks (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). For Great Zimbabwe University, this concept holds profound significance, as the institution stands at the intersection of historical legacy and contemporary knowledge production. Situated near the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe, a testament to African innovation and statecraft, GZU embodies the potential for epistemic reclamation and intellectual self-determination. This section explores intellectual sovereignty across local, continental and global dimensions, emphasising the reimagining of African knowledge futures, the dismantling of colonial epistemologies, and Zimbabwe's contributions to universal knowledge systems.

Reimagining African Knowledge Futures

The future of African knowledge systems must be re-envisioned through a decolonial lens that prioritises indigenous epistemologies (wa Thiong'o, 1986). Great Zimbabwe University, given

its geographical and symbolic proximity to one of Africa's greatest pre-colonial civilisations, is uniquely positioned to lead this intellectual resurgence. There is a growing realisation that African universities must transcend their historical role as passive consumers of western knowledge and instead become dynamic producers of endogenous knowledge that responds to local realities (Makaudze, 2020).

To foster intellectual sovereignty, GZU has taken deliberate steps to integrate Shona and Ndebele cosmologies, indigenous scientific practices and oral traditions into its curriculum and research agendas. A prime example is the study of *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy, which provides an alternative ethical framework that challenges Western individualism and promotes communal well-being (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). By revitalising these knowledge systems, GZU is not only reclaiming Africa's intellectual heritage, but also contributing to a broader Pan-African movement that seeks to reposition the continent as a key player in global knowledge production.

Deconstructing Colonial Epistemologies

Colonialism entrenched Euro-centric knowledge systems that systematically marginalised African ways of knowing (Quijano, 2000). At Great Zimbabwe University, decolonial scholarship is actively interrogating and dismantling these epistemic hierarchies. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues, decolonisation is not a superficial exercise of replacing western content with African content; rather, it requires a fundamental restructuring of knowledge production itself.

GZU is critically reassessing its pedagogical approaches to ensure that disciplines such as History, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy and STEM fields incorporate indigenous methodologies. For instance, pre-colonial Zimbabwe was renowned for its advanced metallurgical techniques (Pikirayi, 2001), yet these contributions remain largely absent from mainstream academic narratives. By challenging these omissions and integrating indigenous knowledge into its teaching and research, GZU is playing a pivotal role in reclaiming Africa's intellectual sovereignty and dismantling the lingering legacies of colonial education.

Contributions to Universal Knowledge from a Zimbabwean Epicentre

Zimbabwe has a rich history of contributing to universal knowledge, from the architectural ingenuity of Great Zimbabwe to the profound philosophical insights of *hunhu/ubuntu*. Great Zimbabwe University is amplifying these contributions by fostering research that addresses both local and global challenges. As Mamdani (2018) emphasises, African universities must cultivate "organic intellectuals", scholars who engage deeply with societal issues while simultaneously contributing to global academic discourse.

One notable example is GZU's research at the Innovation Centre of Excellence for Dryland Agriculture in Chivi, which merges indigenous farming techniques with modern agro ecological science to combat food insecurity (Shizha, 2013). Additionally, Zimbabwean scholars such as Stanlake Samkange have made significant contributions to global philosophy by articulating *ubuntu* as a universal humanistic ethic (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). By positioning itself as an epistemic hub, GZU ensures that Zimbabwean knowledge is not merely preserved in archives but actively shapes contemporary thought and innovation.

Intellectual sovereignty is indispensable for Africa's epistemological liberation. As a custodian of Zimbabwe's intellectual heritage, Great Zimbabwe University has a critical role to play in reimagining African knowledge futures, deconstructing colonial epistemologies, and asserting Zimbabwe's contributions to universal knowledge. By centring indigenous knowledge systems and advancing decolonial scholarship, GZU is laying the foundation for an intellectually sovereign Africa that engages with the world on its own terms and reclaims its rightful place in global knowledge production.

Conclusion

Great Zimbabwe University exemplifies the integration of indigenous knowledge with global academic excellence, serving as a transformative institution that bridges tradition and innovation. Rooted in Africa's intellectual heritage, GZU promotes intellectual sovereignty by challenging colonial epistemologies and advancing indigenous philosophies like *hunhu/ubuntu*. Through its diverse disciplines, the university fosters interdisciplinary research, community engagement, and sustainable development, addressing critical challenges such as food security, climate resilience and healthcare. Aligned with Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 philosophy, GZU emphasises innovation, industrialisation, and real-world impact, ensuring locally relevant yet globally competitive scholarship while empowering students and communities for socio-economic progress.

Looking ahead, Great Zimbabwe University must continue strengthening its institutional frameworks to maximise its impact. This includes further integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into its research agenda, expanding partnerships with industry and global academic networks, and deepening its engagement with indigenous knowledge systems. By doing so, GZU will not only preserve Africa's intellectual heritage but also shape a future where African scholarship drives global progress. In the spirit of *nyika inovakwa nevene vayo* (A nation is built by its own people), GZU exemplifies how higher education can be a force for self-determination, cultural pride, and sustainable transformation. As the University evolves, its legacy, like the enduring stone walls of Great Zimbabwe, will stand as a testament to the power of knowledge rooted in heritage, innovation, and unwavering commitment to the advancement of Zimbabwe and the African continent.

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CHAPTER 5
Operationalising Education 5.0: The School of Natural Sciences as a Synergistic Engine for National Development

Talent Mawere

Abstract

The School of Natural Sciences at Great Zimbabwe University stands as a cornerstone of the institution's identity and its strategic vision to become the *University of Choice*. This chapter analyses the School as a seminal case study in operationalising Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 paradigm and advancing the university's strategic goals. It argues that the School's distinctive model of fusing Education 5.0 into a synergistic engine for national development is a primary driver of this institutional ambition. The analysis demonstrates how a curriculum rooted in research-led, experiential learning, coupled with strategic research clusters that tackle pressing national challenges, creates a unique value proposition for students and partners. This is evidenced by a graduate employability rate exceeding 90% and a portfolio of community-driven innovations. The chapter concludes that by translating the Education 5.0 philosophy into tangible outcomes, the School of Natural Sciences not only contributes to GZU's identity but is also fundamental to its claim as the *University of Choice*, offering a replicable blueprint for universities seeking to align their mission with national development.

Key words: Education 5.0, School of Natural Sciences, Research-Led Teaching, Innovation Ecosystem, Community Engagement, Institutional Evolution.

Introduction

The contemporary mandate for universities in the Global South extends beyond the generation of knowledge to its direct application in solving pervasive developmental challenges (Luis Medina-Bueno et al., 2024). In Zimbabwe, this mandate is crystallised in the Education 5.0 philosophy, which calls for the integration of five core missions: Teaching, Research, Community Engagement, Innovation, and Industrialisation (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, 2018). Nestled in the heart of a region rich in biodiversity, cultural heritage, and untapped potential, Great Zimbabwe University has carved its identity as an institution deeply connected to its environment and community.

Central to the realisation of this mission and GZU's ambition to become the *University of Choice* is the School of Natural Sciences. This chapter posits that the School functions as the university's epistemic core, where the philosophy of Education 5.0 is translated into practice. By consciously engineering a model of synergistic integration, the School moves beyond treating teaching, research, and innovation as separate endeavours, instead fusing them into a dynamic engine of scientific inquiry. It is through this integrated framework that the School directly confronts pressing global and national challenges, from climate change and food security to the frontiers of artificial intelligence, thereby solidifying its role as an indispensable pillar of the university's identity and purpose.

We examine how the School has not only adapted to the evolving landscapes of science and education but also how it has actively shaped them, producing graduates who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and leaders in their respective fields. Through examining its innovative teaching, impactful research, and community engagement, this chapter argues th at the School of Natural Sciences is integral to realising GZU's vision, transforming the nation's raw potential into a sustainable and prosperous future.

Grounded in its mission to strive to produce graduates who are innovative through quality teaching, training, and research, the School endeavours to meet national and global challenges through technologically based research for solving real-life problems, as envisaged by Sharp (2014). The vision is to be a world-class School in research, innovative teaching, training, and community service (School of Natural Sciences, 2025).

Historical Foundations and Vision

The story of the School of Natural Sciences is inextricably linked to the very identity of GZU. However, it did not start that way. At the inception of the University, established through an act of parliament following the recommendations of the Chetsanga Commission of August 1995 (Mapako et al., 2012), the School of Natural Sciences initially operated as a department under the Faculty of Education. Later on, as the Faculty expanded, a new faculty, the Faculty of Sciences, was established under the guidance of Dr. Nyanga. The Faculty had two departments: one focused on the social sciences and the other on the natural sciences. As the University continued to grow, the Faculty was disbanded and two new Faculties, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Natural Sciences, were established in 2010. Mr. Akim Munthali was mandated with the task of leading the Faculty of Natural Sciences in an acting ca pacity at its establishment.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences had two departments: The Department of Physics, Geography, and Environmental Sciences, led by Dr T. Murwendo, and the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, led by Dr E. Chikodza. It began with a clear and urgent mission to produce a new generation of scientists, researchers, and educators who would tackle the developmental challenges of a young nation. What started as a small department under the Faculty of Education, offering foundational courses in the core sciences, has today blossomed into a comprehensive School, a transformation spearheaded by its pioneering leaders.

As already alluded to, the School has witnessed numerous transitions since its formation. The Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, at that time, offered three-year general degrees in three main subjects: Computer Science, Mathematics, Statistics, and Operations Research. It also provided special fourth-year honours degree programs in the mentioned programs. Likewise, the Department of Physics, Geography, and Environmental Science also offered three-year general degree programs in the fields of Geography and Environmental Sciences, as well as Physics. It was possible to pursue any subject that students deemed necessary for their career, as long as it was offered within the Faculty.

The first Dean (Acting), Mr. Munthali, alongside a dedicated cadre of founding lecturers, including Dr. Murwendo, Professor Chikodzi, Professor Mapira (the late), Dr. Chikodza, Dr. Manjeese, and others, laid the cornerstone of academic rigour and practical relevance. They envisioned a faculty where the rich natural laboratory of the Masvingo region would become an

integral part of the curriculum. Key structural decisions reinforced this trajectory. For instance, the 2012 university-wide shift to four-year honours degrees, initiated by Professor R. J Zvobgo, to incorporate work-related learning, was a pivotal moment that formally integrated practical experience into the core curriculum. Subsequent leadership under Dean Mufandaedza was explicitly tasked with expanding pure science programs while simultaneously building the laboratory infrastructure necessary for applied research, thereby closing the gap between theoretical learning and practical experimentation, a task that he and his team diligently managed with generous funding from the University management under the leadership of the Visionary Professor R. J. Zvobgo. Two world-class laboratory facilities, including a micro lab, were the result of the outstanding work. "We were not just building a faculty; we were planting a seed," reflects Dr Murwendo, one of the first appointees. "Our vision was to create scientists deeply connected to their environment, who could use their knowledge to solve real problems from the ground up." From these humble beginnings in the Garikai Block, with limited laboratory equipment, the school has grown into a beacon of scientific inquiry, its evolution mirroring the nation's own journey toward progress and self-reliance.

The School of Natural Sciences was never conceived as an ivory tower, isolated from the nation's pressing needs. From its inception, its mission has been to harness the power of scientific inquiry for tangible community and national development. This commitment is embodied not just in its curriculum, but in the daily work of its students and staff. Early research successes, such as grants for climate change initiatives and nutritional gardens, demonstrated a pre-existing culture of seeking external funding for community-based problems, laying the groundwork for the later formalisation of innovation and industrialisation as core pillars. For example, in 2010, the school, led by project coordinator Dr. F. Simba and team, successfully secured a substantial grant from the research board to address climate change initiatives. Dr. T. Murwendo and his team received a grant from Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) for nutritional gardens for people living with HIV and AIDS. Dr. L. Chapungu and his team secured support for the construction of a biogas digester as part of a project aimed at containing the outbreak of water hyacinths in the Shagashe River. Since then, research focus areas have expanded with multiple faculty members attaining doctoral degrees.

In 2017, the School of Natural Sciences and the School of Agriculture were merged at the prompting of Prof. R. J. Zvobgo as part of a restructuring exercise. The initiative was a government policy directive aimed at creating a lean management structure. Under this arrangement, the school continued its growth trajectory with the introduction of new programmes, including the BSc in Chemical Technology, BSc in Renewable Energy, and the BSc in Applied Biosciences and Biotechnology. The most remarkable achievement of the School is creating graduate students whose expertise is in demand in the market, with an employment rate of over 90% within six months after university.

However, the marriage between the two schools did not last long. In 2018, the School of Agriculture and Natural Sciences was disbanded to form separate schools. Dr. Chikodza initially led the School of Natural Sciences in an acting capacity before being officially appointed as the head of the School. Today, the School of Natural Sciences is a dynamic hub of learning, structured around a robust academic framework designed for the 21st century. It still comprises the two departments discussed earlier, each a centre of excellence in its own right. Its potential is ever-increasing, and recognition of this is evidenced by University management’s confidence in

awarding the School the opportunity to incubate new schools and centres, including the School of Mining and Engineering Sciences and the Centre of Computational Intelligence. However, in line with its growth trajectory, the School is harbouring ambitions of several departments, including:

- Department of Biological Sciences
- Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
- Department of Computer Science
- Department of Geography and Environmental Science
- Department of Mathematics and Statistics
- Department of Physics and Engineering Sciences

The general academic portfolio direction is to strategically evolve from foundational general degrees in science to include innovative and responsive programs such as a BSc Honours in Biotechnology, BSc in Data Science, and a BSc in Environmental Management and Sustainability. This evolution is a direct response to national priorities, including those in the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS 1) (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2020) and global trends, ensuring that graduates possess the skills demanded by the modern economy.

Academic Architecture: Pillars of Teaching and Learning

The School's pedagogy is the primary engine of its integrated model. It operates on a principle of research-led, experiential learning where the boundaries between the classroom, the laboratory, and the field are deliberately blurred (Kolb, 1984). A hands-on, research-led approach described by Canniffe et al. (2025) characterises pedagogy within the school. Students spend a significant amount of time in modernised laboratories and in the field, conducting experiments and gathering data from their immediate surroundings. This commitment to experiential learning is a key differentiator. "The field trips to the Mutirikwi River system were not just excursions; they were our first real lessons in applied ecology," shares Mr X, a recent graduate now working as a Water Quality Analyst. "That practical experience gave me a decisive edge in the job market." Mr Y, a graduate from the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science with a B.Sc. in Computer Science, now a Data Science Manager at BDO, UK had this to say on how the Department curved him for success:

> The Department of Computer Science played a key role in shaping my career; transforming me from a beginner with no computer knowledge into a confident and skilled IT professional. The strong academic and practical foundation I gained continues to make me feel more confident and capable in my work, especially in systems development and Data Analytics, where I am currently employed by one of the world's leading audit firms. I am proud to be a Great Zimbabwe University graduate.

Research and Innovation: Generating Knowledge for Impact

Research is the lifeblood of the School, driving innovation and contributing significantly to the university's growing reputation. Research efforts are strategically clustered around themes of local and global importance:

- Climate Change Adaptation and Water Security
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Drug Discovery
- Renewable Energy and Materials Science
- Data Analytics for Social Good
- Artificial Intelligence and big data analytics (School of Natural Sciences, 2025).

The Education 5.0 model finds its ultimate expression in the School's focus on innovation and industrialisation. The establishment of centres like the Centre for Computational Intelligence and Actuarial Science is not an add-on but a structural mechanism to channel integrated knowledge into tangible outputs. These centres act as hubs where Faculty research, student talent, and industry needs converge. The securing of a grant from Old Mutual for computational modelling is a direct result of this nexus. It is research designed with application and partnership from the outset. Furthermore, the work of several students and faculty members is currently under incubation at the University's Innovation Hub, awaiting commercialisation into real-world, marketable products. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school played a crucial role in the manufacturing of sanitisers, a product that reached all corners of Masvingo province and beyond.

The establishment of specialised centres, such as the Centre for Computational Intelligence and Actuarial Science, provides a structured platform for this impactful work. Such centres foster collaboration, attract external funding, and ensure that the school's research outputs, from high-impact publications to policy briefs, translate into tangible benefits for society.

Community Engagement and National Development

Fitzgerald et al. (2012) remarked that community engagement and industry partnerships should not be peripheral outreach activities but should be placed as central to the process of knowledge creation. True to its founding vision, the School of Natural Sciences measures its success not only by its publications but by its societal impact. It maintains deep and mutually beneficial partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders. Collaborations with organisations such as the Postal and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), and Old Mutual, among others, have led to impactful research agendas, special guest lectures, academic conferences, and research symposia.

This symbiotic relationship completes the Education 5.0 loop:

1. Community/Industry identifies a problem.
2. The School fuses Teaching and Research to investigate it.
3. The findings are translated into an Innovation or commercial product.
4. The solution is deployed back to the Community/Industry, while also enriching the curriculum for future students.

This approach ensures that the School's work is constantly validated and refined by real-world needs, fulfilling the community engagement and industrialisation mandates of Education 5.0. Beyond industry, the school runs extensive science outreach programs, inspiring the next generation by participating in primary and secondary school science fairs and teacher workshops.

The Path to *University of Choice*: Strategic Positioning

The School of Natural Sciences is playing an important role in making the GZU the *University of Choice*. It attracts top students because it offers a unique value proposition: a world-class scientific education deeply rooted in the African context. Students choose GZU not just for a degree, but for the opportunity to engage in meaningful, impactful work from their first year.

Additionally, the School provides support to all other schools within the university, servicing all science-related modules, including Introduction to Information Technology and Communication, to ensure that students learn directly from scientists. It is now common cause that Zimbabwe's entire science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) agenda has been re-engineered to the new Education 5.0 paradigm. Inspired by the heritage-based thinking, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, national strategic intent and desire to increase the availability of specialist skills for industry, commerce and public sector, the School strives to be a pre-eminent centre of high-quality teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, industrialisation and consultancy services in the STEM and STEAM disciplines. The goal of the School is to deliver Education 5.0 that matches the communities' quality, quantum, and relevant benchmarks. The School's strategic goals are ambitious and forward-looking. Key priorities for the next decade include:

- Launching pioneering postgraduate programmes, such as a Master's in Artificial Intelligence, Master of Science in Data Science, among others.
- Establishing a School of Mining and Engineering Sciences to address critical mining engineering gaps.

The ideal graduate emerging from the school is more than a scientist; they are a problem-solver, an innovator, and a leader, equipped with both technical expertise and a profound sense of social responsibility.

Conclusion

The journey of the School of Natural Sciences is a microcosm of the Great Zimbabwe University story. It is one of resilience, growth, and an unwavering commitment to excellence with a purpose. From its foundational vision, it has built a vibrant academic community that is pushing the frontiers of knowledge and applying it to the most pressing challenges of our time. The School has seamlessly integrated teaching, research, and community engagement to produce not ordinary graduates but agents of change. As it continues to grow and innovate, the School of Natural Sciences stands as a powerful beacon on the role of science in national development. Through systematically fusing its core missions, the School has transcended the limitations of a conventional academic unit to become a dynamic and responsive engine for national development. Its success is not measured solely by isolated metrics of publications or graduate numbers, but by the synergistic impact of these outputs: employable graduates who are problem-solvers, research that leads to innovation, and partnerships that drive industrialisation. The School stands not as one pillar among many at GZU, but as the integrated pillar, a unified, synergistic force that is indispensable to the university's claim of being the *University of Choice* and its broader contribution to forging a sustainable future for Zimbabwe

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CHAPTER 6
The Role of Great Zimbabwe University in Pioneering Change and Licensing of Campus Radio Stations in Zimbabwe

Last Alfandika, Golden Maunganidze, Anderson Chipatiso & Sharai Muonwa

Abstract

Great Zimbabwe University has played a pioneering role in reshaping Zimbabwe's media and higher education landscape through its advocacy for the licensing of campus radio stations. Against a backdrop of state-dominated broadcasting and limited media pluralism, GZU emerged as a transformative actor, driving policy reforms that culminated in the promulgation of Statutory Instrument 39 of 2020. The central research objective of this chapter is to examine how GZU's strategic interventions influenced national broadcasting policy and advanced experiential learning in higher education. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews with policymakers, media regulators, and university administrators, complemented by archival research and policy document analysis. Findings reveal that GZU's persistent advocacy not only secured the first-ever campus radio license in Zimbabwe but also repositioned media education as integral to the nation's Education 5.0 framework. The establishment of GZU Campus Radio has since become a living laboratory for hands-on media training, community engagement, and cultural expression. Beyond academia, the initiative has contributed to youth empowerment, professional media development, and the democratisation of communication spaces in Zimbabwe. GZU's leadership has thus demonstrated how higher education institutions can function as engines of social innovation, shaping both national policy and cultural narratives.

Key words: Great Zimbabwe University, Campus Radio, Media Pluralism, Education 5.0, Broadcasting Policy.

Introduction

In the long and complex journey toward media pluralism and educational innovation in Zimbabwe, a few institutions have played a transformative role as Great Zimbabwe University. Situated in the ancient city of Masvingo near the ruins from which it draws its name, GZU has become not only a hub of intellectual activity but a vanguard of technological and media innovation. Central to this modern transformation was its relentless advocacy for the legal recognition and licensing of campus radio stations, culminating in the landmark promulgation of Statutory Instrument 39 of 2020.

This chapter focuses on the historical journey and policy shifts that led to the legalisation and licensing of campus radio stations in Zimbabwe, with a particular emphasis on the pivotal role played by Great Zimbabwe University. The chapter aims to narrate the road to the legal amendment, examining the complex interplay among GZU, the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, and other stakeholders that led to the formulation and passage of the Statutory Instrument 39 of 2020.

The study adopts the qualitative research methodology, employing semi-structured interviews with key policymakers involved in the legislative process, including representatives from the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, members of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), and university administrators. In addition to interviews, the research uses archival analysis and content review of relevant policy documents and prior legislative frameworks governing broadcasting in Zimbabwe. Findings suggest that Great Zimbabwe University played a crucial role that positively changed the broadcasting industry in Zimbabwe, a huge milestone in media diversification, driven by both institutional persistence and political will at the government level. The introduction of GZU Campus Radio became a game changer for broadcasting training in Zimbabwe, facilitating a new landscape for educational media that encourages the development of local talent and promotes diverse voices within the media space.

Contextual Background

The establishment and licensing of campus radio stations in Zimbabwe, especially the pioneering role of Great Zimbabwe University, must be understood within broader scholarly discourses on media pluralism, education reform, and experiential learning (Mhiripiri 2018). Historically, Zimbabwe's media landscape has been dominated by state-controlled broadcasting institutions, leaving limited space for alternative voices and grassroots media initiatives (Alfandika, 2019; Mano, 2016; Ruhanya, 2014). In this challenging context, campus radio emerges not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a significant form of democratised media, offering new avenues for civic participation, youth expression, and media literacy (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020; Kellner & Share,2007). The literature on campus radio in Africa emphasises its potential to enhance practical media education, support community engagement, and diversify the public sphere (Bosch, 2010; Banda, 2009). Campus radio stations are often conceptualised as "living laboratories" that allow students to gain hands-on experience while addressing local issues, thereby aligning educational outputs closely with societal needs (Nansen, 2024). This perspective aligns with Kolb's (2007) Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that knowledge is generated through active experience and reflective practice. At GZU, this theoretical approach has been operationalised through live broadcasting, real-time production, and student-led editorial processes, further reinforcing the institution's commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive media environment.

GZU's Footprint in the Zimbabwe Media Policy Framework Transformation Journey

The transformation in Zimbabwe's higher education policy framework from Education 3.0 to Education 5.0 provides a compelling context for understanding the rationale behind GZU's media innovation. Education 5.0 calls for universities to go beyond teaching, research, and community service by integrating innovation and industrialisation into their mandates (Babu, 2024). This new educational paradigm emphasises not only academic excellence but also the importance of aligning higher education with the needs of a rapidly-changing economic landscape. Media and communication disciplines, long considered peripheral in development planning, are now recognised as pivotal to achieving Vision 2030, which aims for a transformed economy that leverages technology and innovation for sustainable growth (Mano, 2016). Thus, GZU's initiative to establish and license a campus radio station reflects a strategic alignment of

media education with national development imperatives, showcasing the institution's commitment to fostering a vibrant media ecosystem that supports socio-economic advancement.

A Vision beyond the Classroom: The Intersection of Media Pluralism, Experiential Pedagogy, and Higher Education Reform in Zimbabwe

Furthermore, advocacy for policy change, such as the formulation of Statutory Instrument 39 of 2020, explicitly aligns with scholarly frameworks on institutional change and regulatory reform in state-media- controlled environments, emphasising the critical role of adaptive governance in the digital age (Mano, 2016). Scholars have emphasised the importance of policy entrepreneurship, where visionary leaders within institutions actively engage with regulators, frame compelling narratives, and mobilise support for legislative change, thereby fostering an environment conducive to innovation and reform (Alfandika, 2019). Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo's leadership exemplifies this model of academic activism, as his insistence on moving from simulation to real-time broadcasting not only positioned campus radio as a pivotal policy issue but also as a vital democratic imperative. Moreover, media education scholars have increasingly called for pedagogies that integrate theory with practice, especially in rapidly digitising environments, thus reinforcing the need for educational frameworks that adapt to contemporary media landscapes. GZU Campus Radio case resonates profoundly with this pedagogical reorientation, offering a template for how universities can effectively bridge the oft-reported gap between classroom learning and professional practice, illustrating a transformative approach to media education. Importantly, the licensing of campus radio in Zimbabwe also contributes significantly to the decolonisation of education and media, creating essential platforms for indigenous knowledge systems, local languages, and culturally-grounded narratives, thereby promoting inclusivity and representation in media discourse. Thus, GZU experience is situated at the intersection of media pluralism, experiential pedagogy, and higher education reform. It not only affirms the role of university-led broadcasting in nurturing professional talent but also underscores the power of institutional advocacy in transforming restrictive regulatory landscapes, showcasing the multifaceted impact of educational innovation on social change.

Unpacking Professor Zvobgo's Living Laboratory Dream and the Praxis of Media Education

The story begins, as many do in institutional reform, with an idea, one that was as audacious as it was practical. In 2019, Great Zimbabwe University invested in state-of-the-art broadcasting equipment for the training of students enrolled in its Media and Cultural Studies programme. Initially, the acquisition was viewed as an important step in aligning the university's teaching tools with global standards. Yet, to the mind of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo, the use of these facilities merely for mock training exercises was insufficient. Professor Zvobgo, a man renowned for his blend of academic foresight and pragmatic activism, believed that a proper education in media could not be confined to the four walls of a lecture hall nor simulated through rehearsed practice. To him, the production of knowledge was not merely a theoretical exercise but an active engagement with the real world, a stance echoed in research highlighting the need for practical exposure in media education. He was deeply influenced by Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 policy, a transformative model that reoriented the nation's higher education philosophy from a focus on teaching, research, and community service (Education 3.0) to a more expansive model that included innovation and industrialisation (Education 5.0)

(Alharbi, 2023). In an interview with one academic staff member at a local university, he indicated that, "This shift called for institutions of higher learning to become engines of economic development through the production of goods and services, thereby realigning curricula with national development priorities articulated in Vision 2030" (Personal Interview, July 2025, Masvingo).



In the picture, Minister of State for Masvingo Provincial Affairs Hon. Ezra Chadzamira and Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Mr. Nick Mangwana visit GZU studios in August 2019.

This shift called for institutions of higher learning to become engines of economic development through the production of goods and services, thereby realigning curricula with national development priorities articulated in Vision 2030. In Professor Zvobgo's view, this policy directive was not just about engineering or manufacturing; it extended to the creative and communication industries as well, reinforcing the critical role that media plays in fostering national development, democratic engagement, and cultural expression. In an interview with a media and cultural studies lecturer, he avers that;

> Professor Zvobgo believed that the traditional pedagogical reliance on classroom lectures, studio simulations, and textbook theories failed to equip students with the adaptability, innovation, and entrepreneurial mindset needed in a fast-evolving digital media ecosystem, a premise supported by current discourse emphasising experiential learning in media studies. Instead, he envisioned a praxis-oriented approach where students would learn by doing producing live broadcasts, engaging with community issues, responding to breaking news, and experimenting with formats like podcasting. (Interview with Media and Cultural Studies Lecturer, August 2025, Masvingo).

What better way to prepare media students for the rigours of national service and creative enterprise than by placing them in a live, functioning radio station with real audiences and real stakes! Thus, Professor Zvobgo championed the establishment of campus-based radio stations as living laboratories for media education.

Mobile Journalism: A New Era in Campus Broadcasting

This approach resonates with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which argues that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2007). Campus radio, in Zvobgo's vision, became not only a training ground but also a civic platform where students honed their technical skills while grappling with the ethical, cultural, and social dimensions of journalism and media production. It served as a model of applied learning aligned with the objectives of Education 5.0 and as an incubator for entrepreneurial talent in broadcasting, public relations, content creation, and media management. Zvobgo's efforts were instrumental in advocating for the legislative and policy frameworks that enabled the licensing of university radio stations in Zimbabwe, a major breakthrough in a country where broadcasting had long been a state monopoly (Mano, 2016; Chiumbu, 2009; Moyo, 2003). One respondent indicated that,

> Zvobgo's legacy is not only pedagogical but also structural: he helped to reshape the media education landscape in Zimbabwe by bridging the gap between the classroom and the newsroom, between theory and practice, and between education and production (Personal Interview, July 2025, Harare).

However, a formidable legal barrier loomed large, as the Broadcasting Services Act made no provision for campus-based radio stations. This legislative omission rendered any university-based broadcasting efforts technically illegal, despite the educational merit they might hold, leading to a paradox where the institutions meant to cultivate knowledge and expression were stymied. Universities, although vibrant intellectual hubs, were not recognised as eligible licensees under the then prevailing regulatory framework. This meant that even the most-carefully conceived campus radio initiatives could not operate within the bounds of the law, stifling the innovative aspirations of students and faculty alike.

It was within this legislative lacuna that Professor Zvobgo's next chapter of advocacy unfolded. Recognising the potential of campus radio as both a pedagogical tool and a civic platform, he began mobilising academic and administrative voices, framing the need for reform not merely as a technical adjustment but as a democratic imperative. He engaged policymakers, regulatory authorities, and fellow educators in sustained dialogue, making the case that excluding universities from the broadcasting space was anachronistic in a rapidly-evolving media landscape, a sentiment echoed by youth activists using social media to contest political narratives in regions like Zimbabwe (Mare et al., 2016). Through white papers, position statements, and consultative forums, Professor Zvobgo challenged the status quo, arguing that campus radio could enhance media diversity, foster media literacy among youth, and contribute to nation-building, thereby aligning with broader aspirations for civic engagement.

The Vice-Chancellor, accompanied by senior members of his team, embarked on a sustained campaign to engage with the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services. Numerous journeys to Harare were made. Delegations presented both oral and written submissions. On more than one occasion, government officials were invited to Masvingo to see, first-hand, the scale and sophistication of the campus radio studio GZU had built. It was not

uncommon for officials to be met with a student-run production already in session, illustrating the pedagogical potential and community value of the endeavour. Professor Zvobgo's efforts were instrumental in shifting public and political discourse, paving the way for eventual legislative revisions. Thus, the fight for campus radio became not just a question of media policy, but a broader struggle for academic freedom, youth expression, and institutional innovation in Zimbabwe's broadcasting terrain.

One such visit proved decisive. On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, the then Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Honourable Monica Mutsvangwa, was invited to deliver a public lecture at Great Zimbabwe University. She toured the radio facilities and was interviewed by a student journalist, Tavita Natasha Mpala (the late), live on-air. It was not only a symbolic moment, but also a political turning point. Standing before students, academics, and the press, Minister Mutsvangwa declared:

> We are fully cognisant that there is need to license this state-of-the-art radio station to regularise its operations… GZU Campus radio station stands as a colossal testimony of the role that academic institutions ought to play in the social transformation agenda of our nation, indeed through social innovation (Interview, Honourable Minister Monica Mutsvangwa, Masvingo) reflecting not only a shift in policy but also recognition of the central role of youth in shaping national narratives.



The then Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Hon Monica Mutsvangwa with Ms. Tavita Mpala, Dr Last Alfandika and an intern Ms Agness Mutanho.

According to *The Herald* of 3 May 2019, Minister Mutsvangwa was thoroughly impressed by GZU studios and declared that she was going to push for the amendment of the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) to allow for the licensing of both Campus and Community radios (*The Herald*, May 3, 2019). The Minister went on to underscore how university radio stations would enhance professionalism in the media sector, serving as vital incubators for talent in a media landscape that had, in some respects, strayed from its ethical and intellectual moorings, particularly in light of the challenges faced by journalists and media practitioners in Zimbabwe, which have been characterised by state-owned broadcasters. This situation reflects a broader context where media activism has historically been crucial in advocating for free expression and media freedom, especially in post-conflict environments where restoring ethical standards is paramount (Mare, 2016).

The Birth of Statutory Instrument 39 of 2020

After months of extensive policy consultations, well-documented position papers, and in-depth stakeholder dialogue, the Government of Zimbabwe issued Statutory Instrument 2020-039, which outlines the Broadcasting Services (Community and Campus Radio Broadcasting Services) Regulations, 2020. Gazetted on 26 May 2020, this significant regulatory shift not only marked a historic moment for media education in Zimbabwe but also represented a broader movement towards media democratisation in the region (Alfandika and Akpojivi, 2020). For the first time in the country's history, it became legally permissible to establish and operate campus-based radio stations under a formal license, thereby providing opportunities for educational institutions to contribute to the media landscape and empower students.



GZU Campus Radio Director Dr. Golden Maunganidze and Director of Information and Public Relations Mr. Anderson Chipatiso carry Campus Radio Application forms outside BAZ offices in Harare in March 2020. This was four days after the authority issued a call for campus and community radio license applications

Great Zimbabwe University's Ground-breaking Achievement: President Uses GZU Campus Radio to Talk to Masvingo

Exactly thirty days after the historic call for campus radio license applications, on 26 June 2020, Great Zimbabwe University made history by becoming the first university in Zimbabwe to receive an official broadcasting license for a student-run campus radio station. This ground breaking achievement marked a pivotal moment not only for GZU but for the entire higher education sector in Zimbabwe, signifying a bold step toward democratising media access within academic spaces (Alfandika and Akpojivi 2020). GZU Campus Radio, already operating in a pilot phase prior to licensing, immediately transitioned into full-scale operations, broadcasting content that was conceptually, editorially, and technically produced by students under the academic guidance of seasoned lecturers. Operating across three key frequencies 90.0 FM in Chiredzi, 89.5 FM in Masvingo, and 100.4 FM in Mashava and its surrounding communities, the station quickly evolved into a dynamic living laboratory. It provided hands-on training in journalism, broadcasting, and media production for students in media and communication disciplines, while simultaneously acting as a platform for student expression, civic engagement, and local storytelling.



GZU Campus Radio Producer Ms Tavita Mpala interviews His Excellency President E.D. Mnangagwa on GZU Campus Radio making this historic as GZU becomes the first radio apart from the national broadcaster to interview the President live. Vice President Constantino Chiwenga and the then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education Professor Amon Murwira look on.

The station's programming agenda closely aligned with Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 framework, a transformative policy model introduced by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development. This framework mandates institutions of higher learning to go beyond teaching and research to embrace community service, innovation, and industrialisation (Alharbi, 2023). In keeping with these pillars, GZU Campus Radio curated content that addressed real-world issues and served public interest. Programmes ranged from public health campaigns particularly timely during the COVID-19 pandemic, to youth innovation showcases, entrepreneurship profiles, heritage preservation discussions, and inclusive social dialogues.



Mask On: Unpacking government policy during COVID-19 pandemic. Minister of Finance and Economic Development Prof. Mthuli Ncube visits GZU Campus Radio for an interview.

Importantly, GZU Campus Radio also became a medium through which local knowledge systems and grassroots voices were amplified. For instance, cultural heritage segments featured local historians, artists, and elders, contributing to the decolonisation of media content and promoting the preservation of intangible cultural assets. In this way, the station did not merely reflect university life but became embedded in the social fabric of the communities it reached. By centring students in the creation and dissemination of media, the station became a tool of pedagogical transformation. It blurred the lines between classroom and community, between theory and practice, and between university and society embodying the ideal of the university as a civic institution.

Great Zimbabwe University's National Influence on Broadcast Training

In 2023 and 2024, Great Zimbabwe University extended its influence beyond the licensing of its own campus radio by emerging as a national hub for broadcast training and media development, aiming to address significant inadequacies recognised within the media sector (Alharbi, 2023). Recognising the skill gaps within newly-licensed community radio stations across the country, GZU initiated structured training programmes targeting volunteers and personnel from these outlets, thereby fostering capacity-building in community media (Itaza, 2019). Through a series of short courses covering journalistic ethics, fact-checking, content production, and station sustainability, the university equipped over 20 broadcasters from 14 community stations with foundational skills, thereby enhancing the overall quality and reliability of local media outputs. GZU's national outreach in media training aligned with the government's broader agenda to liberalise Zimbabwe's broadcast landscape and implement Education 5.0, which emphasises community engagement and skills development (Itaza, 2019). By providing formalised, university-led instruction to grassroots broadcasters, most of whom had little or no previous media training, GZU helped to professionalise the emerging community radio sector while fostering inclusive media access.



GZU Vice Chancellor Prof Rungano Zvobgo hands-over certificates of completion to community radio presenters from all the 14 Community radios while Chief Bonface Musara and Director in Minister of State's Office Mr. Chingwara look on (November 2024). This was the second training where GZU trained the presenters and hosted second edition of Radio Festival in rural Masvingo where traditional chiefs applauded the University for being practical in training radio personalities.

Government leaders, including Information Ministry officials, praised the university's contribution to strengthening ethical reporting and information dissemination at the community level, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of educational institutions in media development (Matsilele, Maunganidze & Ruhanya, 2021). With plans to repeat and expand the training annually and to build a national Centre of Excellence in Journalism and Broadcastin g, GZU firmly positioned itself not just as a campus-based media innovator, but as a key national actor in shaping the future of Zimbabwean broadcasting.

Conclusion: Legacy in the Making

In the annals of Zimbabwean higher education, the licensing of campus radio will likely be remembered as one of the most significant reforms of the 2020s. But it did not happen spontaneously; it was made possible through vision, persistence, and institutional courage led by Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo and sustained by an amalgamation of educators, students, and policymakers who believed in the transformative power of broadcasting education. Besides, being the first University to run a campus radio station in Zimbabwe, GZU literally hand-held several Universities that made numerous consultation trips to learn how to also establish their own radios. Universities such as Midlands State University, National University of Science and Technology, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe Open University, Lupane State University and Bindura State University made several consultation meetings and trips as they sought knowledge on how to also establish their platforms. Even the first community radio to get license in Zimbabwe, *Avuxeni FM,* made several trips to GZU for learning before they also applied for their own licenses. GZU made physical trainings at *Avuxeni FM* and *Lotsha FM* as part of its community service – thanks to the Vice Chancellor's visionary leadership in that regard.

Great Zimbabwe University's pioneering role is, thus, not merely a story of administrative triumph or technological acquisition; it is a chronicle of what happens when higher education aligns itself with national development, when advocacy meets opportunity, and when innovation is given room finally to speak on air. This is a story without an ending as GZU continue to rise beyond expectations, from being number one with licence to hosting festivals, graduating students who are now dominating broadcasting industry in Zimbabwe and now launching the AI presenters. The success show goes on as another innovative surprise may not be far from the horizon.

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CHAPTER 7
Constructing Institutional Identity through Place Names: Unpacking Onomastic Practices at Great Zimbabwe University

Mickson Mazuruse & Irene Tavengwa

Abstract

This paper explores Great Zimbabwe University's quest for intangible cultural preservation through deliberate naming of its learning centres and its faculties, among others after iconic figures and locations. Drawing from critical toponymy, the study examines how these naming choices function as tools for reshaping collective narratives. The study utilised interviews and document analysis to gather data. By naming its places after liberation icons and pan-African thinkers, GZU projects an institutional identity rooted in anti-colonial struggle, gendered resistance, and economic leadership. The research further analyses the symbolic and linguistic dimensions of the chosen names, illustrating how they reflect and reinforce cultural pride and national memory. This onomastic practice is situated within a broader postcolonial effort to decolonise academic spaces and challenge colonial-era naming conventions. The study highlights how educational institutions serve as place-making agents that encode memory by including figures spanning political, legal, economic, gender, and regional dimensions. That illustrates GZU's attempt to craft a richly layered institutional ethos grounded in both national and pan-African heritage, underscoring the transformative potential of naming in asserting indigenous values and decolonising public spaces.

Key words: Institutional identity, Cultural Memory, Decolonisation, Toponymy

Introduction

Great Zimbabwe University named after the iconic Great Zimbabwe Monuments, is a prominent institution of higher learning in Zimbabwe whose institutional identity is strongly reflected through its strategic place-naming practices. Place-naming, also known as toponymy is a powerful symbolic act used globally in academic institutions to express identity, assert ideologies, and preserve cultural memory. By using onomastic practices, Great Zimbabwe University has cultivated a brand identity that distinguishes it from other institutions. The university's strategic naming of its faculties, buildings, and streets serves as a powerful tool to reinforce its core values and showcase its unique brand. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how GZU's toponymic practices serve as a strategic tool for constructing its institutional identity and ideological orientation, with the rationale grounded in the need to determine the extent to which these naming practices act as a deliberate strategy for reinforcing GZU's core values.

Historical Background of Place-naming at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU)

This section explores the historical trajectory of GZU's naming practices, their entrenched meanings, and their broader symbolic and educational roles. According to Nyoni (2023), the renaming of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) from Masvingo State University in 2007 was driven by presidential and parliamentary acts, explicitly linking the institution's identity to national heritage and political recognition of the region's historic significance. The renaming

was a deliberate move to connect the institution with the historical and cultural significance of the Great Zimbabwe National Monument, which is located nearby, and is a symbol of African civilisation and sovereignty before colonialism. The *Campus Naming and Identity Policy Document (2019)* by Great Zimbabwe University provides a framework for naming physical and symbolic spaces within the institution by emphasising principles of transparency, inclusivity, relevance, and historical sensitivity. The policy aims to preserve institutional memory, foster pride and belonging in the university's landscape, while outlining procedures for proposing, reviewing, and approving names. This approach aims to decolonise the legacy of colonial-era names that often symbolise oppression and foreign domination, replacing them with names that honour local heritage, liberation struggles, and cultural icons (Nyoni, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This research is situated within the field of onomastics, the formalised study of names and naming, and draws on critical toponymy theory. Critical toponymy demonstrates how GZU strategically shapes identity, heritage, and cultural affirmation through place-naming as part of post-colonial nation-building. By establishing a narrative of national history and development through its name-scape, GZU strengthens its institutional identity and unites collective memory around common values in an effort to create "Ubuntu Graduates." Critical toponymy posits that naming places is an act of identity formation, commemoration, and contestation, reflecting and shaping societal values, national narratives, and institutional ethos. Critical toponymy is an analytical framework that goes beyond the surface function of place names by interrogating the power dynamics, ideologies, and socio-political processes embedded in naming practices. Rooted in post-colonial, decolonial, and critical geography perspectives, critical toponymy explores how place names are part of broader struggles over identity, heritage, recognition, and resistance (Rutkowski, 2021).The critical toponymy perspective demonstrates that GZU's naming practices directly connect with identity preservation and African knowledge system promotion within Afrocentric and decolonial frameworks at the university. Naming at GZU functions as a deliberate cultural and political action which shapes memory and profiles identity and power dynamics. Through this framework, researchers can examine which historical accounts get maintained and which get erased, while promoting naming procedures that involve active participation from diverse groups.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research approach and case study research design to investigate Great Zimbabwe University's (GZU) place-naming practices. Data were collected using document analysis of official GZU records like university policy documents and strategic plans. Key informants, such as lecturers, GZU management, faculty administrators, and a chosen group of students, were interviewed in-depth to learn more about the significance, motivations, and ramifications of place names on GZU campuses. In order to determine how naming practices reflect and construct GZU's institutional identity, values, and heritage, the data were subjected to a thematic analysis guided by onomastic and semiotic frameworks to identify recurring patterns and meanings in naming practices. The qualitative research approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the meanings, values, and symbolic representations embedded in Great Zimbabwe University's (GZU) place-naming practices (Creswell & Poth 2018). Qualitative lens enable the researcher to capture the subjective, cultural, and ideological implications behind naming decisions thereby generating rich, descriptive data. The case study design is particularly

applicable because it allows for a focused and context-specific investigation of GZU as a single bounded system. According to Yin (2018), the case study design allows for an in-depth understanding of how naming practices reflect institutional identity, values, and cultural heritage within a real-life educational setting. Thus, both the qualitative approach and the case study design are well-suited to capture the complex and context-dependent nature of GZU's onomastic practices.

Presentation and Discussion of GZU's Toponymic Practices

Great Zimbabwe University's toponymic practices reveal distinct thematic categories that unpack the institution's identity. The names of GZU's schools and campuses are not arbitrary but they are carefully selected to embody the institution's commitment to Zimbabwean and pan-African values, history, and development. Data are presented using thematic categories on Great Zimbabwe University's toponymic practices allowing for a systematic analysis of the university's onomastic choices, highlighting its cultural, historical, and educational values.

Historical Identity and Cultural Heritage References

This category focuses on place-names derived from historical figures, events, and cultural landmarks of Zimbabwe. These names, which are emblems of identity creation, cultural pride, and the decolonisation of schools, are drawn from Zimbabwe's precolonial past and cultural icons. According to Mlambo and Mlambo (2019), the names act as "historical museums" preserving socio-historical information and collective memory. Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) is linked to Zimbabwe's cultural legacy and sense of national identity by being named after the Great Zimbabwe National Monuments. Constructed from granite, *'dzimba dzemabwe'*, meaning 'houses of stone', it represents a highly-developed ancient civilisation, history and national pride. GZU's niche of supporting national development while promoting heritage, the arts, and culture in education is reflected in its naming practices. Scholars such as Fontein (2006) argue that invoking "Great Zimbabwe" in institutional identity is a deliberate act of heritage reclamation and national pride. The university's very name reflects an ideological repositioning that centres indigenous knowledge, culture, and history.

Beyond its name, GZU has adopted a deliberate place-naming policy for its campuses, buildings, lecture rooms, and centres that draws from local languages, historical figures and sacred sites. According to Mashingaidze (2017), such naming practices serve as mnemonic devices that localise knowledge production and symbolise resistance to epistemic imperialism. As noted by Kadenge and Mugari (2015), the deliberate selection of indigenous and historically significant names fosters a sense of cultural ownership and continuity.

Naming its Commerce school, the **Munhumutapa School of Commerce,** after the historical Munhumutapa Empire, a powerful and influential kingdom that once thrived in the region, connects the school to contemporary business and economic education (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019). The name symbolises a legacy of economic power, trade, and sophisticated governance, emphasising rich cultural and indigenous historical roots and continuity with the pre-colonial past (Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2014). According to Nyoni (2023), the rationale for this name is from the commercial exploits of the Mutapa Empire which resonate with the mandate of the School of Commerce's unique programmes that give accent to indigenous business models which are distinct.

The **Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies** is named after Mbuya Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, the revered spirit medium and heroine of the First Chimurenga. Nehanda is not only a historical figure but also a cultural and spiritual icon with a legacy deeply embedded in indigenous knowledge systems, African spirituality, and oral traditions, aligning with the Centre's cultural studies mandate. This name holds profound symbolic significance rooted in Zimbabwean history, gender identity, and cultural heritage. Established in January 2015 under the Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences as a proponent for gender justice, the name symbolises the power of women as leaders, agents of change, and protectors of their people and culture. The Centre is anchored on Great Zimbabwe University's core values of restoration and preservation of culture and endeavours to transform unequal gender relations that are prevalent in society today (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019). In keeping with GZU's objective to preserve African heritage and advance African-centred, decolonial studies, the name "Nehanda" represents female strength, resilience, and emancipation. According to Nyoni (2023), the commendable tendency to associate Mbuya Nehanda with gender issues shows GZU's conscious effort at recognising and uplifting women as worthy partners for men in the national project. The university centre then becomes a forum for critical discussion of gender, culture, and history, and pledges to use research, activism, and community involvement to combat inequality and promote social change.

Simon Muzenda School of Arts and Heritage Studies was named in honour of Simon Muzenda, a prominent Zimbabwean liberation leader, politician and former Vice President of Zimbabwe. According to Mashingaidze (2017), Muzenda, who was also a poet and cultural activist, was known as the "Soul of the Nation" for his deep commitment to Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, cultural pride, and heritage preservation. Naming the school after Muzenda symbolically aligns GZU's mission in arts, culture, and heritage, with his lifelong dedication to safeguarding indigenous traditions, nurturing national identity, and promoting patriotism. Nyoni (2023) contends that this naming serves as a tribute to Muzenda's legacy as both a political leader and a custodian of Zimbabwean culture, thereby linking the institution's focus on preserving cultural pride and inspiring national consciousness.

The **Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education** is named after the late former President of Zimbabwe who was a key leader in the liberation struggle and a staunch advocate for education as the tool for national development in Zimbabwe's post-independence era. Nyoni (2023) contends that the Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education represents the university's alignment with post-independence education reforms, Africanisation of the curriculum, and the valorisation of indigenous knowledge. The school's name symbolically aligns its mission with Mugabe's vision of using education to empower citizens, preserve cultural heritage, and promote national identity rooted in African pride and self-determination.

Geographical and Environmental References

This theme analyses names drawn from the local geography, natural environment, and topography of the region surrounding the university. By using these names, the university anchors itself to its physical location, establishing a sense of place thereby showcasing the university's connection to its immediate environment and the broader Zimbabwean landscape. The University's multiple campuses are situated in locations that reflect local socio-economic realities. The **Main Campus** is situated near the Great Zimbabwe National Monument, physically connecting the academic institution symbolically to the cultural heritage site and to

the country's historic roots. The name reflects its role as the epicentre of the university, which is a core of its academic and administrative life connecting the university physically and symbolically to the heritage site (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019). As the institutional heart, foundation, and the focal point from which knowledge, innovation, and cultural pride radiate to all other campuses, it signifies continuity and coherence in the university's mission. Thus, it symbolises unity, authority, and the convergence of the university's vision from which other campuses and faculties branch out. The Main Campus of Great Zimbabwe University carries symbolic weight as the central hub representing the university's core identity, drawing inspiration from the monuments' legacy of architectural genius, political organisation, and cultural heritage (Nyoni, 2023).

Mucheke Campus is named after Mucheke, one of the oldest high-density suburbs in Masvingo City thereby linking community education with urban localities. Mucheke is known as a vibrant cultural hub where diverse ethnic groups have coexisted for decades, fostering resilience, solidarity, and grassroots identity. By naming a campus after Mucheke, GZU symbolically acknowledges the suburb's contribution to Masvingo's socio-cultural heritage, honours its role in the city's growth, and affirms the university's connection to local communities and everyday lived experiences of the people. This campus within Masvingo city reflects the university coexisting with the local socio-economic environment of Masvingo supporting community-based educational outreach (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019).

Mashava Campus's name is derived from the mining Mashava town, located 40km west of Masvingo town and it denotes the industrial and economic linkage to the local environment. This campus hosts arts and business faculties and has a student village, emphasising local community ties. It symbolises the integration of academia and local development, recognising the mining town's contribution to national industrialisation and resource extraction and links to local industry and community life (Nyoni, 2023). Mashava holds significance as a site of industrial heritage, economic contribution, and community building, having attracted diverse populations during the mining boom. By naming the campus after Mashava, GZU symbolically preserves the town's legacy, acknowledges its role in regional development, and reimagines the former mining hub as a centre for knowledge production, innovation, and socio-economic transformation beyond extractive industries.

Ideological Messaging, Institutional Branding and Academic Identity

The naming conventions in this section are firmly established in the decolonisation debate, with the renaming of spaces and institutions affirming African agency and challenging colonial place-naming history. Within this framework, this category highlights place-names that reflect the academic mission and educational values of the university. These names recognise extraordinary academics, ideological messaging, academic fields, or invoke ideas of knowledge and learning. Data in this section would illustrate how the university's onomastic choices reflect its commitment to an ideology, intellectual pursuit and academic excellence (Nyoni, 2023).

The **Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences** is named after Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the founding president of Tanzania, renowned Pan-Africanist, philosopher, and advocate of African unity, social justice, and self-reliance. Julius Nyerere was a key figure in the pan-African movement and his name symbolises his educational philosophy and principles of social justice, self-reliance and pan-Africanism (Nyoni, 2023). By naming a social sciences

school after him, GZU reinforces its commitment to African-centred scholarship reflecting the school's mission to address social issues within a local and regional perspective (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019). Julius Nyerere valued education as a tool for empowerment and societal transformation and his emphasis on equality, fairness, and the eradication of poverty resonates with the school's focus on understanding and solving societal problems. His philosophy of *Ujamaa* (familyhood), a form of "African socialism", represents community-oriented development, cooperation, and human dignity, aligning with the social sciences' concern for human welfare. Nyerere's philosophy emphasised that development should come from within a nation, rather than through dependence on foreign aid or investment and a school bearing his name would therefore likely focus on local and indigenous solutions to social problems, promoting a sense of national pride and a belief in the ability of African people to shape their own future. The political and educational vision of the Tanzanian leader makes him an ideal partner for a university that seeks to interrogate and foster a vivid understanding of people's histories, cultures and heritage (Nyoni, 2023).

The **Herbert Chitepo Law School** was named in honour of Herbert Chitepo, a key figure in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and the country's first black barrister. Chitepo's legacy as a legal scholar and freedom fighter provides a powerful symbol for students of law, encouraging them to use their legal knowledge for the betterment of society and to uphold justice, symbolling the law as a tool for decolonisation and social transformation. The name links the law school to this history of fighting for freedom and national independence and naming the Law School after him aims to inspire students to uphold values of dignity, equality, human rights, and the rule of law. Chitepo's career was marked by defending marginalised people under oppressive colonial laws and fostering national justice and accountability and the law school bearing his name thus embodies a commitment to producing lawyers who defend constitutional democracy and human rights with vigour and integrity (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019). Chitepo used his legal skills not just in courtrooms but in the broader struggle for freedom and the name reminds students that law can be an instrument for social and political transformation (Mashingaidze, 2017). Chitepo was known for his intellectualism and could have chosen a life of privilege within the colonial system but instead chose to align himself with the nationalist movement and hence his name represents intellectual courage and a dedication to service and the nation's liberation. According to Nyoni (2023), GZU transcends the narrow, ethnic and provincial tendencies by adopting Chitepo's ideological clarity of taking a global approach to combating imperialism, capitalism and injustice, hence his suitability as a role model for students in the Law School.

The **Jairos Jiri Centre for Inclusive and Special Needs Education** is named after Jairos Jiri (1921–1982), a renowned Zimbabwean philanthropist and humanitarian who dedicated his life to improving the welfare of persons with disabilities. The Jairos Jiri Association's philosophy is based on fostering dignity, skills training, and social inclusion for the disabled, values that continue to inspire Zimbabwe's approach to special needs education. The inclusion of "Inclusive and Special Needs Education" in the Centre's name directly reflects this legacy, emphasising the organisation's mission to provide education and foster a sense of belonging for all (Great Zimbabwe University, 2019). Naming the Centre after Jairos Jiri reflects a recognition of his foundational role as the first black person to establish support services and special schools for people with disabilities in the country and aligning the school with his legacy of service, empathy, and commitment to equality. Linking Jiri's name with inclusive and special needs education symbolises the breaking of barriers in access to education for learners of all abilities

and signals a commitment to ensuring no child is left behind due to disability or special learning needs. According to Nyoni (2023), the establishment of the Jairos Jiri Centre for Inclusive and Special Needs Education within the School of Education is a befitting tribute to the man and reflects a paradigm shift in the treatment of disability and the belief that society thrives when it uplifts its most vulnerable members.

The **Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering** at Great Zimbabwe University is named in honour of Gary Magadzire, a celebrated Zimbabwean agriculturalist and academic who made significant contributions to agricultural education, research, and rural development in Zimbabwe. Gary Magadzire was renowned for advancing modern, sustainable farming methods and promoting agricultural productivity and naming the school after Magadzire symbolises GZU's commitment to excellence in agricultural sciences. His leadership and advocacy were pivotal in empowering black commercial farmers during and after the colonial era, often under difficult and unequal conditions (Nyoni, 2023). By invoking a figure who dedicated his life to agricultural innovation and education, the name serves as motivation for students to contribute meaningfully to Zimbabwe's agricultural transformation. It immortalises Magadzire's legacy, ensuring that future generations remember his role in shaping agricultural policy, education, and practice in Zimbabwe. As an institution deeply rooted in Zimbabwe's cultural and socio-economic realities, the choice of name embodies GZU's mission to produce graduates who can blend traditional agricultural knowledge with modern science for sustainable development. The school, inspired by Magadzire's values, emphasises research and innovation tailored to Zimbabwe's specific agricultural challenges and aims to equip students with practical and entrepreneurial skills.

The **Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences** is named after Dr. Simon Mazorodze, one of the first Black doctors in Zimbabwe and a prominent politician. Simon Mazorodze was a pioneering Black medical doctor from Masvingo and a national hero who was instrumental both as a medical practitioner and as a key figure in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and naming the school after him immortalises his contribution to public health and national service. Mazorodze's deployment, therefore, serves as a symbol of progressive thinking amongst African nationalists that recognised the importance of merit (Nyoni, 2023). GZU Simon Mazorodze School of Medicine and Health Sciences carries symbolic meaning tied to a dedication to serving the health needs of the community and inspires students to be leaders in the medical field. The name serves as a motivational emblem for medical students, reminding them that the profession is not only about technical skill but also about moral courage, resilience, and commitment to social justice. The institution emphasises a unique combination of conventional medicine with traditional and herbal medical knowledge, in line with Zimbabwe's heritage-based education approach.

The **Kwame Nkrumah Centre for African and Asian Studies** is named after Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, who is widely recognised as a founding father of African independence and pan-Africanism. According to Nyoni (2023), Nkrumah left an enduring legacy on the continent as a leader of Africa and for that reason, he serves as an inspiration for African academics who believe in decolonising the African academy. Nkrumah recognised the importance of intellectual decolonisation and the Centre, therefore, symbolises a commitment to this project of intellectual self-assertion and the development of knowledge for and about Africa, free from colonial biases. It also highlights the intellectual and historical

connections between Africa and Asia, reflecting Nkrumah's support for Afro-Asian solidarity, emphasising the importance of reclaiming and preserving Afro-Asian culture, heritage, and intellectual traditions. The Centre's name symbolises a commitment to fostering intellectual and cultural connections between these two continents, which were both profoundly affected by colonialism and share a common goal of self-determination and development. By embracing African and Asian perspectives, it reflects Nkrumah's call for solidarity beyond national and continental borders and symbolises GZU's openness to learning from and contributing to scholarship across the Global South.

Conclusion

At Great Zimbabwe University, place-naming is not merely administrative but a symbolic act of cultural affirmation, historical remembrance, and ideological positioning that inspires excellence, unity, and self-determination among students and staff. These place names ground the university's identity by drawing on iconic sites, notable figures, and the cultural, historical, and geographical heritage of Zimbabwe. Through this, the university strengthens its mission to uphold national values, honour history, and maintain a lasting connection to the Great Zimbabwe ruins. GZU's toponymy, thus, creates a narrative framework that reflects its core values and situates it within the national story, serving as a tool for shaping collective memory, institutional character, and a shared vision rooted in Zimbabwean identity. In essence, the symbolic meanings of these names are deliberate acts of preserving and celebrating Zimbabwe's legacy, while empowering future generations through culturally relevant education.

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CHAPTER 8
Leveraging Linguistic Diversity in the Use of Indigenous Languages at Great Zimbabwe University

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Abstract

This chapter examines how Great Zimbabwe University leverages linguistic diversity by promoting indigenous languages within its academic and institutional settings and beyond. It highlights the integration of these languages in teaching, learning, and cultural identity reinforcement showing how multilingual instructional approach is employed rather than relying on English alone. The multilingual instructional approach brings about a deeper engagement with academic content. The chapter further gives brief historical developments in the introduction of a number of indigenous languages at the university in partnership with the University of Venda and later with UNICEF and the Zimbabwean government. Great Zimbabwe University's commitment is demonstrated through its lecturers' involvement in translation projects of national and institutional documents, for instance, the National Constitution and Strategic plan respectively, reflecting efforts to preserve linguistic heritage. Additionally, the chapter explores how indigenous languages are used in marketing strategies to enhance the university's unique identity as a pioneer in embracing local languages. The chapter is anchored within the qualitative paradigm with data gathered through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Analysing achievements and ongoing initiatives, this study presents Great Zimbabwe University as a leading example of how indigenous language promotion can foster inclusive education, cultural preservation and academic excellence.

Key words: Indigenous languages, linguistic diversity, cultural preservation, higher education, Great Zimbabwe University

Introduction

Great Zimbabwe University has been at the forefront of promoting linguistic diversity and elevating indigenous languages within Zimbabwe's higher education landscape in line with its mandate as given in the University Act, promotion of culture and heritage (Lantern, 2023). This aligns well with the requirements of the Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment No. 20 (2013), which officially recognises sixteen languages, taking on board indigenous languages such as Shona, Ndebele, Nambya, Kalanga, Xhosa, Sotho, Tonga, Venda, Ndau, Koisan, Shangani, Chewa, Barwe and Tswana. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to examine how Great Zimbabwe University leverages linguistic diversity by promoting indigenous languages within its academic and institutional settings and beyond.

Background

The vital role of indigenous languages for national development and unity cannot be overemphasised. All nations which have economically transformed have done so on the basis of using their own language. Hence, Great Zimbabwe University, in sync with its vision and mission of providing a learning environment which is a centre of excellence in creative arts and culture, cannot ignore the promotion of indigenous languages which makes it distinctive. There was no consensus among universities on which medium to use for teaching indigenous

languages. While other universities were teaching indigenous languages in English, Great Zimbabwe University started teaching Shona in Shona, Ndebele in Ndebele and so on (Mazuruse and Mberi, 2012). GZU has broadened the scope of African languages, moving beyond Shona and Ndebele to include languages like Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Sesotho, ChiTonga, Tji Kalanga, ChiNambya, and Xhosa. Great Zimbabwe University, thus, became a pioneer when it comes to using indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the teaching of indigenous languages. Mazuruse and Mberi (2012) supporting the then called "Great Zimbabwe University Project", viewed it as a way of empowering the indigenous languages since they had been down-graded to informal and unofficial spheres in both colonial and postcolonial eras. This was aimed at leading to the indigenous languages assuming functions previously not assigned to them, such as being mediums of instruction, government administration, media, and business. The broadening of the scope of African languages at GZU was made possible by its implementation of the Teacher Capacity Development Programme, which fulfils the government's agenda on languages. This contributed to the decolonisation of languages and the overall project to reject western epistemes and forms of knowledge.

Methodology

Data for this chapter were gathered within the qualitative paradigm since it allows an insider perspective, capturing of the participants' inner voices (Denzin & Lincoln 2013; Creswell 2013). In-depth interviews were carried out with ten purposively selected participants. The participants are members who teach indigenous languages. Five of these were involved in crafting and implementation of the Great Zimbabwe University Project, two are former chairpersons, two coordinators of sections and one coordinator of the UNICEF Teacher Capacity Development Programme (to do with empowerment of previously marginalised indigenous languages of Zimbabwe since they had become officially recognised in the new Zimbabwean Constitution 2013 amended). Document analysis was also deemed appropriate since it allows for data gathering in a non-interactive way, thereby eliminating bias from the participants (Magwa & Magwa, 2015). Among the interviewees, four of them have researched and published on language raising and revitalisation with regards to Zimbabwe's indigenous languages. The documents analysed include Great Zimbabwe University strategic plans (past and present) where its vision and mission were critically analysed, reports on the then Great Zimbabwe University Project, Shona Language and Culture Association reports as well as minutes and reports by the National Constitution Translation Committee.

Discussion

Partnerships, Curriculum Development and Teacher Training

This section discusses partnerships and community engagement efforts which led to curriculum development and teacher training in a number of indigenous languages. Great Zimbabwe University has taken a series of initiatives aimed at developing culturally-appropriate teaching materials and training teachers proficient in indigenous languages. These efforts are designed to ensure that education is both inclusive and reflective of the country's linguistic diversity. In order to achieve this, some partnerships were forged between GZU and other higher learning

institutions and organisations, such as the University of Venda (UNIVEN), UNICEF, and the Government of Zimbabwe.

GZU-UNIVEN MOU

In support of the promotion of indigenous languages, an MOU was signed in 2007 between GZU and UNIVEN to see the introduction of Tshivenda and Xitsonga at Great Zimbabwe University. (Zoutnet, 2010). Part-time lecturers were sourced from the University of Venda' MER Mathivha Centre in 2008. The programme started with 25 students as follows: 9 for Tshivenda and 16 for Xitsonga. Several students graduated at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels between 2012 and 2018. By the end of 2013, 95 students specialising in Tshivenda and Xitsonga managed to graduate with a Bachelor's degree at Great Zimbabwe University. Out of these numbers that graduated at UNIVEN, six of them have been appointed as Tshivenda and Xitsonga lecturers at Great Zimbabwe University. This was a result of collaboration between two universities, with the aim of promoting cross-border language communities. In achieving this, prior research needs to be conducted by academics to see the needs of the communities (Haley et al., 2022). Great Zimbabwe University was only too willing when Venda and Tsonga language associations requested it to intervene in the promotion of previously marginalised languages. It further hired its own lecturers so that there is continuity in the teaching of indigenous languages.

This collaboration has helped it to add more languages to its curriculum, on top of Shona and Ndebele, to make them four. As its mandate to promote culture, Great Zimbabwe University took further steps by adding more languages through the support of the Zimbabwean Government' s Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE).

Government's Teacher Capacity Development programme at GZU

The Zimbabwe Government's Teacher Capacity Development Programme aligns with Great Zimbabwe University's brand and niche in advancing inclusive, indigenous, and transformative education by capacitating teachers, particularly in underrepresented areas such as Indigenous Languages and Sign Language, which are core to the university's mandate of promoting cultural heritage and educational parity. The university was established with a mandate to focus on heritage studies, indigenous knowledge systems, arts, and local culture as core elements of its curriculum and identity. This includes the integration of culture and heritage modules in all undergraduate programmes and regular cultural events, making the University a hub for cultural and heritage education in Zimbabwe (Sibanda and Maposa, 2012).

Despite the 2013 Constitution officially recognising sixteen indigenous languages, minority languages in Zimbabwe have remained marginalised in the education system, overshadowed by dominant languages such as English, ChiShona and IsiNdebele due to the absence of a comprehensive language policy to support effective implementation. It is in this context that the Zimbabwean government introduced the Teacher Capacity Development Programme in 2014, in collaboration with the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) as a technical implementing partner providing funding support. For the programme, Great Zimbabwe University was mandated to primarily develop and capacitate teachers from marginalised languages, hoping to improve teacher efficacy in these previously side-lined languages, in sync with its niche of heritage and culture. This is in line with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's mission statement of upholding core values such as inclusivity, equity, fairness,

diversity, and mutual respect. It is the state's role, as outlined in Item 6 of the founding provisions of the constitution, to "promote and advance the use of all languages in Zimbabwe, including sign language and create conditions for the development of these languages" (Constitution Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC), 2013:22). According to Mazuruse (2022), the programme plays a key role in strengthening human resources to support effective curriculum implementation and innovation, which aligns with the government's priority to transform Zimbabwe's education system by ensuring equitable and accessible quality education for all. A ten-year Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Great Zimbabwe University in 2014. The MOU had two objectives, namely; to provide adequate and properly qualified teachers for all the officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe, and to create conditions necessary for the development of all the officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe (Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya, 2018). This MOU demonstrated that the need to develop and promote all Zimbabwean languages equally is imperative to ensure their functionality across all sectors of the country.

The implementation of the Teacher Capacity Development Programme which started in 2015 is expected to inculcate critical foundation skills in teachers. Teachers recruited to study under the programme were admitted to train in indigenous languages like Sign Language, Nambya, TjiKalanga, SeSotho, Xhosa, Tonga, XiTsonga and Tshivenda for a Bachelor of Education Honours Primary In-Service degree and the Bachelor of Education (Honours) Secondary In-Service degree. They are sponsored by the government right from tuition fees, food, and accommodation. This enables some teachers on the programme to undertake undergraduate studies in education as a way of upgrading them in order to enhance their teaching competencies thus improving their ability to reach out to learners in schools. All the languages are taught in their respective vernacular forms by qualified lecturers who are specialised in the specific language areas. These language experts are expected to be responsible for producing teaching materials. Ordinarily, the University admits Bachelor of Education students holding a Diploma in Education majoring in the target languages but due to few or no graduates yet in these indigenous languages, the University waived this requirement and accepted diploma holders in other indigenous languages but who are speakers of the target languages. The Teacher Capacity Development Programme was overwhelmingly embraced by students, reflecting strong enthusiasm and support for its implementation. The table below provides a detailed overview of the initial enrolment numbers recorded each year from 2015 to 2022, highlighting trends and patterns in student intake over the specified period:

Language	Year 2015	Year 2016	Year 2020	Year 2021	Year 2022
Tonga	12	25	18	17	65
Nambya	18	21	12	12	17
Kalanga	22	5	5	5	29
SeSotho	Not yet implemented	45	5	5	27
Sign Language	49	112	176	163	121
Xhosa	Not yet implemented	Not yet implemented	1	1	9
TshiVenda	30	14	0	0	52
Xitsonga	23	12	3	3	19

Table1: Enrolment numbers 2015 to 2022. Source: Great Zimbabwe Information Office

The above table shows the commitment of the Zimbabwean government in acknowledging and promoting linguistic pluralism and inclusivity in education. Great Zimbabwe University has taken serious steps in implementing the 2013 constitutional provisions by training teachers from eight marginalised languages to support their official recognition and use in education, as mandated by the Constitution. The partnership between Great Zimbabwe University and the Zimbabwean government addresses a historical deficiency in Zimbabwe's education system, where minority languages were often marginalised in favour of Shona, Ndebele, and English. Mazuruse (2022) concurs that the Teacher Capacity Building Programme is an integral part of the transformation to capacitate human resources for successful curriculum implementation and innovation. The University's participation in the programme, therefore, strengthens its brand as a premier institution for culturally-responsive and heritage-focused teacher education in Zimbabwe. Phiri (2022) agrees that the Teacher Capacity Development Programme amplifies GZU's mission by providing institutional backing and resources to expand indigenous language education, making GZU a national hub for the empowerment and development of Zimbabwe's linguistic diversity.

GZU's mandate specifically focuses on promoting, preserving, and teaching indigenous languages at degree level, using these languages as mediums of instruction and examination. According to Lantern (2023), this language acquisition strategy is aimed at getting more people to use the languages and become experts in the languages concerned. This creates a pool of qualified educators who can teach these languages, a crucial step for their preservation and for empowering students to learn in their mother tongue during the early years of schooling. Graduates of the Great Zimbabwe University from the Teacher Capacity Development Programme are actively implementing their specialised knowledge to revitalise and integrate indigenous languages across both educational and broader societal contexts. Beyond the

classroom, these educators are serving as cultural ambassadors, creating new materials, and collaborating with local communities to preserve and document intangible cultural heritage thereby contributing to the intellectualisation and standardisation of previously under-resourced languages, empowering them to become vehicles of communication and knowledge in domains such as science, technology, and administration.

The implementation of those MOUs was one effective strategy and practice of leveraging linguistic diversity, language raising and empowerment. This resulted in the inclusion of previously-marginalised languages in academia at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This is GZU's unique model for indigenous language instruction. Riding on this has caused academics to embark on multilingual initiatives such as terminology development, translation units, cultural festivals and being involved in national language committees which deal with language policy issues.

National Constitution and Institutional Documents Translation by GZU Lecturers

Great Zimbabwe University has become an institution synonymous with gallant efforts aimed at promoting the teaching and learning of not only African culture but also African languages and their use in all spheres of national life (Magwa, 2019; Gondo, 2019). When it came to the translation of the Zimbabwean Constitution into its fifteen indigenous languages, many of its African Languages lecturers were involved. A memorandum of understanding was signed involving six state universities from which a National Constitution Translation Committee was set up. Members from GZU served in portfolios such as secretary, treasurer, coordinators and translators. In total, Great Zimbabwe University provided fourteen (14) members involved in the constitution translation process. Some of these members were also involved in the final editing and type-setting process held at Chishawasha, which came up with the clean document finally launched at the Harare International Conference Centre.

Participation of GZU lecturers in this mammoth national project was made possible through support from the Great Zimbabwe University management, who acknowledged the expertise of its members and felt it had to be utilised in line with the university's mandate for the benefit of the nation. Furthermore, lecturers in the Department of Languages, Media and Communication Studies, who are members of the Centre for Language Research and Development (CLARD), have taken duties to carry out some translations of documents for the institution. They have translated the Strategic and Annual Plan documents into indigenous languages offered at Great Zimbabwe University. They also translate some documents for other organisations on behalf of the University.

Benefits of Leveraging Linguistic Diversity

Leveraging linguistic diversity has a number of benefits. Teaching in various indigenous languages has advantages of making students understand better and enables them to have problem solving skills. This improves their academic performance as well (Huynh, 2022; Vanessa, 2022).

Inclusion of different languages ensures that no one is left behind and this gives a true reflection of the country's diverse cultures. Promotion of a variety of languages also ensures cultural preservation. This is also promotion of inclusivity (Vanessa, 2022). This means there is no

dominant language which will be promoted at the expense of other languages. Everyone from different linguistic background is catered for and this will prevent extinction of languages of the minority groups.

Languages can be a source of economic empowerment since trained linguists from different languages can apply their skills for financial benefits in language jobs such as translation, interpretation, content creation, localisation and language teaching (Ndungo and Githinji, 2025). This also increases chances of employment for multilingual graduates from Great Zimbabwe University even beyond borders.

Challenges and Opportunities

The move by Great Zimbabwe University to promote linguistic diversity through the teaching of minority languages has its own challenges. First and foremost, the language-in-education policy in many African countries, including Zimbabwe, has created language barriers that go beyond the classrooms. Research has indicated that the language barrier is a fundamental problem. For example, the erstwhile recognition of only 3 languages in the language-in-education policy in Zimbabwe has created language barrier problems. Moyo (2018) observes that having no clear language policy in Zimbabwe has caused people to feel that they can learn only those languages they feel can be helpful in life. As Trudell (2016) observes, better attainment in education is guaranteed if the child's home language is used in education compared to when they are made to learn in a language that they are still learning. In the Zimbabwean situation, some languages may be "included" in the language-in-education policy, but in reality, they are excluded. For example, Shangani is officially recognised but in Mhindu's (2016) study, it was established that it was never used; instead English and Shona were used in the elementary schools as media of instruction in areas where Shangani is the dominant first language.

Resource limitations are one of the major challenges in the promotion of local languages. There are limited human and material resources. Trained teachers in some of these indigenous languages are needed for the implementation of the language-in-education policy. Of late there has been a drop in the enrolment of students due to financial constraints and this has affected the number of teachers who wish to train in these languages. GZU implemented the Teacher Capacity Development Programme as a way of mitigating this challenge. Tarugarira (2015) found that there is scarcity of indigenous languages textbooks and materials, thereby inhibiting effective delivery of instruction in these languages. Coombs (1985) observes that the infrastructure in the schools' system is based on English as a medium of instruction. This study has established that a number of GZU alumni who trained in local languages are contributing in producing materials to be used in schools.

Sibanda and Maposa (2012) are of the view that colonial policymakers who practised unbalanced literacy campaigns to the detriment of some indigenous languages still pose a challenge in the quest to develop these languages. They say that the use of the tag 'minority languages' is ideologically-charged. It is prejudicial and carries conceptions of the centre-periphery dichotomy. This dichotomy is a form of linguistic marginalisation. These challenges offer a fertile ground for GZU's academics to carry out some research and come up with innovative ways of advancing the University's brand.

Policy and Pedagogical Recommendations

The solutions to the challenges identified in promotion of local languages require a critical approach. Moyo (2018) is of the view that the Zimbabwean government needs to further develop its language education programmes so that indigenous languages are on an even plane with English. There should be pressure from the government to enforce compliance. The use of power to implement policies is a key idea of critical theory in education (Cummins, 2000). The political will to enforce compliance and fund human and material resources such as teaching materials, teacher training, supervision and monitoring agencies must be in place.

Viriri and Viriri (2014) note that for local languages to be meaningfully promoted, particularly in the domain of education, it is not enough to simply have language policies that allow for the use of these languages in this domain, but there must be willingness on the part of the government to make a deliberate effort to increase the market value of Shona as a language. Thus, graduates in the minority languages must be employed, thereby motivating others to come and enrol at Great Zimbabwe University to train as teachers in these languages which were overlooked before. Alexander (2000) says that there must be an articulated programme of job creation and employment on the basis of indigenous language proficiencies as part of the affirmative action.

Sibanda and Maposa (2012) recommend that African universities and colleges should proactively revise their admission policies on indigenous languages to facilitate the advancement of education by those who are talented but have no aptitude in the English language. As fountains of knowledge and information, Institutions of Higher Learning (Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) should consider how reading and writing in indigenous languages could be harnessed effectively in order to open up the socio-cultural futures across Africa and the world at large. Fostering collaboration between universities, communities, and government to support indigenous language initiatives will also boost the promotion of indigenous languages uptake.

Research in indigenous languages is of paramount importance in advancing the mandate of the University, that of promoting local languages. A comprehensive institutional multilingual language policy will see the promotion of use of indigenous languages in the media and other public domains.

Conclusion

Great Zimbabwe University plays a pivotal role in promoting linguistic diversity in Zimbabwe and beyond. It has through strategic partnerships with institutions such as UNIVEN, the Government of Zimbabwe' Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and UNICEF actively contributed to teacher capacity development programmes which focused on the teaching of Zimbabwean indigenous languages. These initiatives are instrumental in strengthening the teaching and learning of local languages, thereby enhancing educational access, inclusivity, cultural and identity preservation.

The involvement of GZU goes beyond education into national service, with its language lecturers playing a significant role in the translation of national and institutional documents. This work has ensured broader accessibility to critical information in indigenous languages, supporting linguistic rights and making sure there is inclusivity in public communication.

The far-reaching benefits of leveraging linguistic diversity reflected by the university's efforts include enhanced learners' academic outcomes, improved cultural identity and pride, greater social cohesion, and increased economic opportunities through language entrepreneurship. Issues such as limited funding, inadequate resources for language development, and insufficient policy support have been identified as challenges that may hinder progress.

This chapter recommends that GZU strengthen its resource base, deepen collaborations with stakeholders, and advocate for stronger language policy frameworks at national and institutional levels in order to address these challenges. Great Zimbabwe University, through its leadership in leveraging linguistic diversity, has not only contributed to academic excellence, but also to national development, cultural preservation, and the empowerment of Zimbabwe's multilingual communities.

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CHAPTER 9
Reimagining Legal Pedagogy: The Herbert Chitepo Law School as an Engine of Social Justice

Emerge Masiya, Douglas Musebenzi & Nkosana Maphosa

Abstract

Globally, 1.4 billion people cannot meet their daily civil and administrative justice needs (World Justice Project, 2019). Zimbabwe is also privy to the deficiency (Maraire, 2024). This chapter examines the unique and extensive role of the Herbert Chitepo Law School (HCLS or Law School) in advancing social justice in Zimbabwe. The HCLS' current social justice efforts transcend conventional legal pedagogy (Krannich, et al., 2008). Through its innovative Law Clinic, the HCLS has emerged as a critical vanguard in public legal awareness, community legal education and the provision of essential legal aid in Masvingo (Munguma, 2022).The Law School's initiatives was compiled through analysing the school's archives, which house data about the school's initiatives and their impact on the surrounding community. This chapter seeks to answer the fundamental question: What specific role can the Law School play in engendering social justice within Masvingo Province and across Zimbabwe? The contribution highlights the HCLS's ground-breaking achievements, such as pioneering Zimbabwe's first legal "edutainment" television program, establishing the inaugural Environmental Law Clinic Unit, establishing the ingenious Artificial Intelligence initiative and securing strategic academia-industry collaborations. Therefore, the chapter reflects broadly on the effort, challenges and future direction of the HCLS to pioneer innovative, community-based and heritage-based education.

Key words: justice, legal awareness, community development, legal aid, legal pedagogy

Introduction

Great Zimbabwe University's Herbert Chitepo Law School was founded to honour the legacy of national liberation war hero Herbert Wiltshire Pfumaindini Chitepo [15 June 1923–18 March 1975] (The Herald, 2014). Herbert Chitepo was former Southern Rhodesia's first Black lawyer, leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) (Marmon, 2024) and the first Attorney-General of an independent Tanzania (The Herald, 2014). In 1954, he challenged the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which barred all Blacks from owning property, and established his law firm in Salisbury (The Herald, 2014). He advocated justice and equality. He is recorded to have been formally connected to Capricorn and purported to have stated that he would "put all his efforts into making the multi-racial programme of the Capricorn Africa Society succeed" (Marmon, 2024, p.76). Consequently, this social justice, rule of law and egalitarian-oriented legacy drives the Law School's legal education. The Law School embodies the ideals of Herbert Chitepo through its pursuit of legal justice, community empowerment and legal awareness programmes. Thus, law students have the same spirit and ethos that underlined Chitepo's work via clinical legal education and other initiatives offered via the Law Clinic. The following section situates the discussion in its suitable context.

Moot Court Successes at the Herbert Chitepo Law School

The legal imprint of Herbert Chitepo fuels the legal footprint of the Law School. Currently, the Law School is ranked as one of the best law schools in Zimbabwe. These rankings are evidenced by the victories of the Law School in various moot competitions thus solidifying its position as one of the best law schools in Zimbabwe. Moot competitions are court simulation competitions that evaluate student legal prowess. Over the years, the Law School has won a number of competitions against other Law Schools in Zimbabwe as well as in Africa. These achievements exemplify the University's commitment to Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 philosophy, which emphasises teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation. Through moot court platforms, GZU law students have not only demonstrated academic excellence and legal reasoning, but also showcased critical thinking, advocacy, and problem-solving skills essential for real-world impact. The School's continued success in these competitions affirms its role in producing industry-ready graduates equipped to contribute meaningfully to national development through legal innovation and justice delivery. The following table reflects some of the various competitions that have been won over the years:

MOOT COMPETITIONS	**POSITION**	**Other Prizes**
Zimbabwean Lawyers for Human Rights 2025	First Place	Best Orator Prizes
Fiscal Justice & Economic Development Moot Court Competition 2024	First Place	Best Orator Prizes
All Africa International Humanitarian Law 2023	First Place	Best Orator Prizes
Transparency International Zimbabwe Moot Competition 2022	First Place	Best Orator Prizes
Anti-Corruption and Human Rights Moot Competition 2020	First Place	Best Orator
Anti-Corruption and Human Rights Moot Competition 2020	First Place	Best Orator
White and Case International Law Philip C Jessup Moot Competition 2019	First African Team in the Top 20	

From Traditional Legal Instruction to Social Engagement

Legal education in Zimbabwe has been characterised by a model disengaged from the socio-economic realities of the communities' law, which is meant to serve (Rusi and Melo, 2025). In response to societal needs and the National Vision 2030, Zimbabwe's Higher Education system emphasises the production of graduates with practical skills (*The Herald*, 2024). The HCLS has emerged as a pioneering legal pedagogy that responds to society's needs. The evolution of legal pedagogy at HCLS marks a shift from doctrinal legal instruction to socially-responsive legal education. The Law School has embraced the community engagement and social justice legal education model. This pedagogical approach has changed students from passive legal knowledge

recipients to active justice agents. Law schools are not only pedagogical tools but also engines of social justice (Rusi and Melo, 2025). Thus, the HCLS has redefined the role of legal education as a vehicle for societal transformation.

Rise of Clinical Legal Education at Herbert Chitepo Law School (HCLS)

The emergence of Clinical Legal Education (CLE) marks a paradigm shift in legal pedagogy, moving from theoretical instruction to practical legal education (Thao, 2025, p.40). The general trend in legal education focuses on the practical application of substantive law (Du Plessis, 2015). Law Clinics are the hands-on experience most students have in Law School (Wasilczuk, 2023). CLE can be offered in an environment where law students will gain new insights from their prior knowledge of the law and how that relates to society (Du Plessis, 2021). This shift has gained impetus, resulting in the establishment of law clinics focusing on providing legal services to disadvantaged community members. An ideal clinical legal education programme incorporates practical training and community service (Swanepoel and Bezuidenhout, 2012).

The HCLS was established in 2012 as part of Great Zimbabwe University's commitment to legal innovation and community development. In line with this vision, the Great Zimbabwe University Law Clinic was launched in 2019, marking a paradigm shift in Zimbabwean legal education (Munguma, 2022). The Law Clinic was designed to serve a dual function: to enhance legal training and bridge the access to justice gap by providing free legal aid services (Du Plessis, 2015, p.65). The Law Clinic model has students learning law through guided legal practice by engaging with real cases of indigent people without access to legal counsel (Armstrong, Mar and Sheldon, 2022, p.371).

Legal Aid as Pedagogical Tool and Moral Obligation

In Zimbabwe, legal illiteracy and inaccessibility to legal institutions have left several people without legal recourse (Law Society of Zimbabwe, n. d). CLE is a social tool that improves access to justice for the most marginalised citizens (Lozanovska *et al*., 2024, p.20). At HCLS, legal aid is central to student learning. Traditional teaching methods prioritised rote learning and hypothetical case analysis, while the CLE model provides students with live-client work (Kisubi and Hiriye, 2022, p.4). Live-client work provides students with critical lawyering skills such as client interviewing, legal drafting and problem-solving (Du Plessis, 2015, p.72).

The integration of legal aid in CLE at HCLS produces graduates with the technical skills to practice law and the ethical skills to transform their communities. This approach is consistent with the emphasis on legal empowerment and the engagement in governance and human rights protection mechanisms (Olomola, Olaleye, and Bamgbose, 2012, p.33). The two-pronged roles of legal aid as pedagogy and moral obligation position HCLS as a leading institution in the approach to a justice-centred legal education in Zimbabwe.

Early Case Studies and Landmark Outreach Efforts

Since 2019, the Law School has integrated classroom learning with hands-on legal practice in marginalised communities. This initiated an ambitious outreach programme through rural

community legal education initiatives, school visits, prison visits, traditional leaders training seminars, radio sessions, and help desks. All these initiatives buttress the notion that law should be a tool for public empowerment (Nchaga, 2025, p.66). The HCLS Law Clinic aided indigent persons in criminal matters, inheritance disputes and maintenance and eviction cases. The following are some of the early cases the HCLS law clinic handled. The law clinic successfully applied for bail pending appeal for the appellants in the case of *Taurai Mausa and Maxwell Maisa v State* in 2021 at the Masvingo High Court. The law clinic also successfully represented an indigent widow for the appellant in *Tsvakirai Chiramba v Karukai Kwevera* at Masvingo High Court. The law clinic has conducted the following outreach programmes:

Children and the Law Outreach Programme

The Children and the Law Outreach programme was launched in 2022, targeting rural secondary schools in Chiredzi, Bikita, Zaka and Chivi districts. The programme aims to equip secondary school learners with practical legal knowledge and an understanding of their rights, empowering them to confront issues that affect their communities (Great Zimbabwe University Newsletter, 2025, p.12). The HCLS students conducted interactive legal education sessions, focusing on children's rights, domestic violence, child marriages and drug and substance abuse. More than 7200 learners have been reached in 33 schools, with some intending to form student-led rights and constitutional clubs. The following table shows the number of students who have been visited:

Number of Female students	**Number of Male Students**	**Total**
3916	3220	7236

Prison Legal Aid Project

The Prison Legal Aid project was initiated in 2021 and targeted all eight prisons in Masvingo Province. The prison visits programme enabled HCLS law students to visit and offer legal education and representation to incarcerated indigent inmates. One impactful case involved three women held on remand due to their inability to afford bail. HCLS students intervened by filing a bail application, resulting in their release. The following table shows the number of inmates assisted to date by HCLS law students;

Prison	**Females**	**Males**	**Juveniles**	**Persons with Disabilities**	**The Elderly**	**Sub Total**
Mutimurefu	25	5	7	25	4	66
Chiredzi	22	21	9	-	2	54
Zaka	4	4	-	1	1	10
Mwenezi	1	6	-	3	-	10
Chivi	7	4	1	-	-	12
Bikita	-	5	3	-	-	8
Gutu	1	4	-	-	1	6
Grand Total	**60**	**49**	**20**	**29**	**8**	**176**

Rural Community Legal Education Programme

The rural community legal education programme was initiated in 2020. The Law School deployed mobile legal aid clinics to rural villages in Chiredzi, Gutu and Masvingo districts. Operationally, HCLS students are supervised by practising lawyers who conduct one-on-one consultations with deserving indigent persons. The students were also provided with basic legal education to access justice on inheritance and customary law, as well as domestic violence and maintenance. The rural community legal education programme embraced the use of cultural norms and indigenous dispute resolution methods as a way of enhancing the effectiveness of legal education. Community members who had never seen a lawyer expressed newfound trust in the justice delivery system. The following table shows the number of community members who received basic legal education and one-on-one consultations:

District	**Females**	**Males**	**Total**
Chiredzi	156	85	241
Gutu	906	389	1295
Masvingo	709	436	1444
Total	**1771**	**910**	**2980**

Traditional Leaders Seminar Programme

Recognising the importance of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe's plural legal system, the HCLS engaged traditional leaders in dialogue workshops. The seminars discussed the interface between customary justice and constitutional law. Traditional leaders were also empowered on basic legal education covering environmental, children's, and women's rights and wildlife law. These engagements demystified formal legal frameworks and empowered traditional leaders to resolve disputes more equitably. Therefore, law clinics should indigenise pedagogies to create reflective and critical spaces for decolonising the mind (Klein et al., 2022, p.157). Embracing traditional leaders in the plural legal system is a positive step toward indigenising legal pedagogies. Legal clinics' pedagogical approaches should question colonial framings of law (Klein et al., 2022, p.158). A total of 47 traditional leaders were trained in Masvingo District with six of them being female.

Community Legal Literacy Radio Sessions

In 2021, the Law School launched weekly radio sessions on the Campus Radio Station. Each episode addressed practical legal topics, including domestic violence, children's rights, women's rights, bail application, inheritance and maintenance. The sessions featured student-led question and answer segments, enabling listeners to phone in and ask legal questions. Radio sessions bridged the legal literacy gap for rural listeners. Students are encouraged to engage in the sessions using their indigenous languages, including Shona, Ndebele and Shangani.

Magistrates' Court Help Desks

The HCLS established a legal help desk at the Masvingo Magistrates' Court in 2021 to assist unrepresented indigent litigants. Mobile legal help desks were mounted at Chivi, Zaka, Gutu and Bikita Magistrates' Courts in the same year. Students aided in drafting small claims summons, completing maintenance forms and interpreting court procedures and deadlines, among others, to indigent persons at the magistrates' courts. The legal help desk initiative supported hundreds of indigent litigants, primarily women and the elderly. The following table shows the number of indigent persons assisted by the legal help desks:

Nature of Case	**Number of cases**	**Female**	**Male**
Maintenance Application	823	801	22
Maintenance Application	823	801	22
Maintenance Variation	516	482	34
Maintenance Enforcement	160	160	-
Protection Orders	280	230	50
Peace Orders	88	64	14
Divorce	2	2	-
Eviction	2	2	
Debt Collection-Small Claims Court	202	164	38
Administration of Estates	3	3	-
Property Sharing-Unregistered Customary Law Union	6	5	-
Assault Damages	3	3	-
TOTAL	**2085**	**1927**	**158**

Signature Initiatives and Juridical Innovation
The Legal Edutainment Television Programme

Robert Heyman first suggested Edutainment from the American National Geography Academic Union through the film of game-type education, which he titled 'Education by Entertaining' (Aksakal, 2015). Edutainment with TV programmes is not only about education topics on a school level but also teaches the target audience knowledge via film and TV series (Aksakal, 2015). Teaching should not only centre on the quality of the knowledge imparted, but also the educator should primarily increase the quality of students' teaching experience (Aksakal, 2015). In light of this, the Law School re-imagined public legal literacy through performative media by creating the first Legal Series on television in Zimbabwe, called "Just Legal". Just Legal was created to equip

students with practical courtroom experience and educate the Zimbabwean populace about the law. The programme saw HCLS efforts extending beyond the borders of Masvingo Province to the rest of Zimbabwe.

Environmental Law Clinic Unit

The Law School, in line with Herbert Chitepo's legacy, aimed to imprint a spirit of public service and help young law students to confront the uncertainties and challenges of problem-solving for clients in fora that often challenge precepts regarding the rule of law and justice (Barry, Dubin and Joy, 2000). The establishment of a ground-breaking Environmental Law Clinic unit is a testament to the Law School`s response to everyday realities of the community. The Law School's appreciation of environmental law and climate change prompted the unit's establishment. The unit facilitates environmental law, legal awareness, and legal advice on environmental protection, wildlife law, and climate change law, among others. Various outreach programmes and radio programmes on environmental awareness have already been initiated. Though there is a need to collaborate with more stakeholders like the Zimbabwe Republic Police, Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and ZimParks, these relationships already exist in other law clinic units.

Artificial Intelligence and Digital Legalism

Due to the widespread application of legal artificial intelligence technology, the demand for legal practitioners has shown a downward trend (Ma and Hou, 2021). Legal education must thus cultivate legal professionals who can adapt to the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The presence of virtual classes used by part-time and full-time lecturers at HCLS and AI-infused technology, like using subtitles during online classes, reflects its embracing of AI and technology. Virtual classrooms are ideal for students and practitioners with busy schedules or who live in remote areas (Mustapha, 2024). Thus, the HCLS has also reimagined legal education using AI -powered software such as EndNote and Mendeley. It has also established an AI and Law Working Group to equip its students with knowledge and practical skills in AI and the law. This initiative builds on the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for Legal Education, which was established in 2017 and is still running.

The School as a National Actor
Academia–Industry Partnerships and National Impact

The goals of HCLS and its stakeholders are to achieve social justice through their community outreach programmes and development programmes that equip students with the necessary skills. For example, yearly, HCLS, in collaboration with Raoul Wallenberg Institute and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, host a Winter School on Human Rights for students from the University of Zimbabwe, Midlands State University, Great Zimbabwe University, Africa University, Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University and the University of Zambia. Universities and community partnerships assist students with translating knowledge into real-world practice (Rudes, Viglione, Lerch, Porter and Taxman, 2014). Also, civil society organisations and other partners funded various initiatives like providing legal aid, mobile legal clinics, and outreach programmes under HCLS. For example, the International Court of Justice donated a van and office furniture for the HCLS Clinic.

The creation of collaborative partnerships is only the first step, as successful collaborations require durable or sustainable relationships through MOUs (Rudes et al., 2014). Through the HCLS, Great Zimbabwe University has various MOUs with the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, Raoul Wallenberg Institute, an organisation based in Switzerland, and various pending MOUs with institutions like the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association. It is through these strategic partnerships that various community-based projects and events are achieved.

Envisioning the Next Chapter of HCLS

Despite the existing strides, and the attendant challenges, HCLS students with such versatile talent will be more sought-after in the profession as a result (Chen, 2020). AI utilisation and social justice education can lead to better decision-making and efficiency in the workplace, and it should be welcomed by all students, employees, managers, and human resources professionals (Ellis, 2024). To achieve this seemingly unattainable pursuit, there is a need to bolster the ranks of academics and professionals who not only understand the technology but can inspire and produce a new generation of professionals (Ma and Hou, 2021). Staff development programmes should be directed at AI and the Law, Cybersecurity and Climate Change Law. Integrating innovative approaches and digital mediums into educational frameworks, such as digital storytelling, virtual reality and augmented reality (AR), has demonstrated its efficacy in elevating student engagement (Sobaih and Mrahimi, 2024).

The Law School is poised to revolutionise legal education into the digital era by gamifying legal education and including modules that speak to today's issues. This trajectory falls squarely in the Law School's Strategic Policy Proposal (2025-2030), which has thirty-two pillars on the way to make the Law School a dynamic force in the 21st Century. Under the leadership of its current Executive Dean and endowed with an interest in emerging frontiers in context-sensitive legal education and practice, the Law School can potentially direct the sails for all law schools in Zimbabwe and beyond. The establishment of an AI and Law Working group led by students and lecturer advisers, the launch of the Environmental Law Clinic and plans to establish a course in AI and Cybersecurity, among other initiatives, are all aimed at catapulting legal education at the Law School and contributing to socio-economic development nationally, regionally and internationally.

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Herbert Chitepo Law School

CHAPTER 10
Great Zimbabwe University Curriculum Revamping for Upper-Middle-Income Society

Martin Musengi & David Chikodzi

Abstract

In an era of rapid globalisation and economic transformation, universities play a pivotal role in equipping graduates with the skills and competencies needed to drive national development. As Zimbabwe strives to attain upper-middle-income status, the fitness-for-purpose of Great Zimbabwe University's curriculum revamping processes are put under the spotlight in this chapter. Using auto-ethnographic methodology, the chapter explores how the institution's curriculum reform aligns with broader national socioeconomic goals, focusing on the integration of industry-relevant competencies, technological advancements, and interdisciplinary approaches to meet labour market demands. The chapter analyses challenges and opportunities encountered during curriculum redesign, including overcoming of resource constraints and increasing stakeholder collaboration. Key themes discussed include the shift from traditional lecture-based models to competency-based and experiential learning, the incorporation of digital literacy and soft skills, and the role of public-private partnerships in curriculum co-creation. Further, the impact of accreditation requirements and international benchmarking in ensuring quality are discussed. Findings suggest that successful curriculum revamping is being supported by strong institutional leadership, continuous stakeholder engagement, and agile frameworks amenable to evolving economic needs. The self-study anchoring this chapter offers recommendations for academic leaders seeking to modernise higher education in developing economies, emphasising the need for balancing local priorities and global competitiveness.

Key words: globalisation, economic transformation, institutional leadership, stakeholder engagement

Introduction

In an era of rapid globalisation and economic transformation, higher education institutions play a pivotal role in equipping graduates with the skills needed to drive national development. This chapter examines Great Zimbabwe University processes of curriculum revamping as Zimbabwe strives to achieve upper-middle-income status. GZU, one of Zimbabwe's premier higher education institutions, plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's human capital. As the nation strives toward becoming an upper-middle-income society by 2030, the need for a robust, dynamic, and industry-relevant curriculum has been identified as paramount. This need clearly requires that the current education system must evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing global economy, technological advancements, and innovative problem-solving. Using auto-ethnographic methodology, this chapter explores the first author's 20-year sojourn at GZU in order to provide perspectival analysis of experience of efforts to align curriculum reforms with broader socioeconomic goals, focusing on the integration of industry-relevant competencies,

technological advancements, and interdisciplinary approaches to meet labour market demands. Specifically, the chapter explores the multidimensional and layered aspects of curriculum revamping at GZU, focusing on widening and deepening academic scopes to produce graduates equipped to deliver an upper-middle-income economy. To this end, the chapter discusses the GZU background and evolving state of the university's curricula in order to provide context, before discussing the importance of curriculum revamping in alignment with national imperatives, with emphasis on widening and deepening the scope and agility of curricula. The chapter then analyses benchmarking and stakeholder engagement used to ensure curriculum agility and ecological validity for upper-middle-income societal needs.

Methodology

The chapter is informed by an auto-ethnographic study which allowed the turning of research lenses inward and letting the researcher's voice be heard as supported by Gearing (2004) who pointed out that no single truth exists, and it is improbable for any researcher to be totally objective. This study employed an analytical self-narrative (Anderson, 2006; Pace, 2012) which recognised the self as empirical data for systematic analysis (Chang, 2008). This means that although the first author is an insider whose 20-year personal experiences at GZU are the empirical data, he relied on analytic reflexivity and traditional analytical methods especially content analysis to analyse this auto-ethnographic work. In practice, the collection of auto-ethnographic data involved the use of personal memory. Chang (2008) states that 'recalling' in auto-ethnography is no different in principle from its practice in other ethnographies. The difference is that auto-ethnography utilises and openly values the personal memory of a researcher whereas other ethnographies rely on informants' personal memory and the researcher's recent memory of what was heard and observed in the field (2008, p. 71). Despite its precariousness, personal memory taps into the wealth of information on self, allowing what is extracted from memory to be written down as textual data.

To facilitate recollection of data from personal memory the first author followed advice by Chang (2008) to employ interactive introspection, inventorying techniques as well as creating an autobiographical timeline. This timeline includes entry into university work as a junior lecturer, promotion to associate professor, later assignment as chairperson (head of department) and current assignment as university director responsible for quality assurance and academic planning. The main activities which triggered recollection and introspection on curriculum revamping were interactions with GZU programme coordinators, peer reviewers for the accreditation of 63 programmes and Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) secretariat in 2025 programme accreditation exercises at GZU. These interactions were compared and contrasted with autobiographical timeline of both authors as curriculum implementers and developers in the earlier outlined capacities and as Pro Vice Chancellors at GZU. Chang (2008) explains that listening to the stories of others through conversations with them in order to respond to their self-narratives is an auto-ethnographic data collection technique. Immediately after the conversations in the programme accreditation exercises, the first author would make notes in a field journal highlighting similarities and differences with the second author on current and previous curricula emphases. Ellis (1991) calls this 'interactive introspection' and said it is a situation where the researcher's interaction with others helps to recreate and describe recollection of pertinent experiences. In order for these experiences to resonate with the reader and for the whole chapter to be understood in context, some background data

about Zimbabwe's legal and policy framework as well as developmental aspirations are briefly examined in the next section.

Zimbabwe's Legislative Framework and National Imperatives

The Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) is the foundational legal framework for education, including higher education and it emphasises access, equity and quality. Section 75 of the Constitution guarantees the right to education, including tertiary education and obligates the state to take measures to achieve this. Similarly, the Education Act (1987, Amended) has several key provisions as it establishes the legal framework for tertiary institutions, accreditation and quality assurance while the Manpower Planning and Development Act (1996) regulates skills development and aligns higher education with labour market needs. More specifically, the ZIMCHE Act (2006) establishes the ZIMCHE as regulator for higher education, providing for accreditation of universities and degree programmes, monitoring and evaluation of institutions as well as general quality assurance in higher education.

The foregoing legal provisions are operationalised through various lower level policy frameworks. The first of these is the National Higher Education Policy (2019) which provides the nation's strategic vision for higher education. Its key focus is on access and equity, quality assurance and relevance, research, innovation and industrialisation, funding models and internationalisation of higher education. The second is the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF, 2018) which standardises qualifications across institutions for recognition and mobility from certificates to doctoral degrees. It facilitates mobility by recognising prior learning and enabling credit accumulation and transfer from institution to institution. Thirdly, there is a Zimbabwe National Industrial Development Policy (2019) which links higher education with industrial and economic development. It promotes science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, innovation hubs and university-industry linkages. The fourth policy is the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Policy (2020) which expands access to higher education through flexible learning and provides guidelines on online education, e-learning standards and accreditation of ODL programs. Great Zimbabwe University is guided by the foregoing national policies and therefore ensures relevant, accessible and equitable provision of teaching, community engagement, research, innovation and industrialisation. GZU's blended learning model aligns closely with ODL policy guidelines and facilitates greater access for diverse groups of students. Furthermore, in line with the National Industrial Development Policy, GZU has established innovation hubs in Masvingo and Mashava and is establishing strategic partnerships with players in industry. GZU also ensures that all its qualifications are standardised according to the ZNQF. The institution is guided by these policies which are in alignment with its founding act, the Great Zimbabwe University Act. The Great Zimbabwe University Act [*Chapter 25:24*] establishes the institution and provides for its governance and operations. The act specifies how the university should advance knowledge through teaching, research, and community service, as well as how it should contribute to national development. For this latter function, the institution is also guided by the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS 1: 2021-2025) which national policy integrates higher education into national development goals with a focus on infrastructure development, skills development for economic growth and innovative research for industrialisation. This focus on industrialisation and economic growth is not fortuitous, as Zimbabwe is currently classified as a lower-middle-

income country following an upgrade from lower income country in 2019 (World Bank, 2024). The overriding national aspiration is to upgrade to upper-middle-income economy by 2030 and is called Vision 2030. Vision 2030 strives to attain this status and centres around respecting human rights, promoting freedom of expression, association; strengthening rule of law and addressing economic challenges, attracting investment, improving livelihoods and re-engaging with the international community.

The legislative and policy documents collectively shape Zimbabwe's higher education landscape, emphasising quality, access, relevance, and innovation. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development oversees implementation, with ZIMCHE ensuring compliance and standards in universities such as GZU. GZU program offerings are accordingly regulated by ZIMCHE. All GZU efforts to widen and deepen curriculum are therefore regulated by ZIMCHE through regular program accreditation requirements as well as institutional and academic audits, so that the institution's curriculum has constantly been subject to review as the initial arts and humanities offerings expanded to STEM, applied and social sciences. The institutional thrust has increasingly been on having well-rounded, balanced curricula that include a wider cross-section of Zimbabwean society. The next section outlines the extent to which the transformative and inclusive knowledge-base that undergirds Zimbabwe's national imperatives is being addressed by curricula at GZU.

Curricula at Great Zimbabwe University

GZU, established in 1999 as an Education-focused college of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), has grown significantly to become a comprehensive university, offering diverse programmes in humanities, social sciences, commerce, law, medicine and other applied sciences. The first author was recruited to teach undergraduate Educational Psychology and Research Methods to students of Education in the Educational Foundations Department of the institution in March 2005. By the end of that year, the curriculum had expanded to warrant Special Needs Education becoming a stand-alone department separate from Educational Foundations Department. Secondary school-teacher education followed closely on the heels of Special Needs Education. Experts in the various disciplines in the institution continuously craft curricula in line with evolving social demands. GZU participated in the 2018 to 2020 discussions and ensuing development of national Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills (MBKS) constituting 80% core standards with 20% left as space for institutional innovativeness, adaptation and regional nuances. All GZU programmes are therefore, now MBKS-based and ZIMCHE-accredited through a peer review process in which the regulator acts as a secretariat.

Curriculum and Peer Review Process

For the 20% space reserved for local content in all programs, GZU reassesses its curriculum at least at the end of every program cycle. It is taken into consideration that program regulations should not be changed mid-stream unless there are serious circumstances warranting the changes and agreed to by all stakeholders, particularly the registered students. The mainstay of this re-assessment is usually the cumulative recommendations made by students in module evaluations that are conducted at least once every semester. Program coordinators liaise with academic staff and departmental chairpersons to consider suggested improvements based on 360-degree

evaluation of the program, that is, evaluations from various individuals involved in or impacted by the program for example students, faculty, non-teaching staff and alumni. These multiple perspectives provide a holistic view of the program's strengths and weaknesses with the intention of identifying areas for improvement and enhancement of the overall program quality. Recommendations for improvement of the 20% component are made by Department Heads (Chairpersons) to School Planning Committees for onward consideration by the Deans Committee and the Academic Board sitting as a Curriculum Committee. Once the Academic Board is satisfied, it recommends the suggested changes to Senate which has the final say on whether to authorise the changes or not. This whole process is usually initiated and completed within a semester so that immediately after Senate has approved the improvements, changes are effected into the regulations and program quality is enhanced the very following semester. However, if the suggested improvements involve a change in program nomenclature, GZU internal quality assurance unit has found it prudent to submit the proposed changes to the regulator to be treated in the same way as major changes in excess of 20%. This stance has been justified by the observation that program names that are changed at institutional level are likely to lack recognition by the regulator thereby posing future challenges for the graduates.

Since around 2018, GZU has therefore offered a balanced curriculum model which has core national norms and standards (80% MBKS) with room for institutional adaptation (20% GZU local content). The core national norms and standards are negotiated and designed by a cross-section of experts from universities offering the disciplines targeted for review. Once the discipline experts from the various universities agree on the core standards, these are adopted and regulated by the ZIMCHE as constituting 80% of the curriculum in the discipline. Universities intending to offer qualifications in the particular discipline then apply for accreditation of the program by submitting their own 20% of the curriculum to the ZIMCHE as the higher education sector regulator. Typically, ZIMCHE then identifies discipline experts to act as peer reviewers whose mandate is to ascertain the completeness of the proposed program offerings.

GZU vigorously engages in all the foregoing to foster skills and competencies that drive productivity, innovation, and global competitiveness in line with Zimbabwe's economic transformation agenda. In line with the thrust of integrating industry-relevant competencies and keeping abreast of technological advancements, program coordinators, chairpersons and deans have acted as thought leaders constantly initiating new programs. The practice that new programs initiated at GZU are submitted to ZIMCHE so that the regulator convenes at least two, suitably qualified and experienced peers at sister institutions is commendable as it allows for independent review and further refinement for the benefit of Zimbabwean society. Peer reviewers thoroughly assess proposed MBKS and ultimately entire programs starting from program nomenclature, philosophy, rationale, duration and the extent to which proposed credit loads matches the standards for particular levels of the ZNQF. Facilities and resources are also assessed against the stated available financial resources to support the proposed programs, human resources, classrooms, chemicals, laboratories, workshops, libraries, ICT hardware and software and any relevant attendant teaching and learning resources that are program-specific. Very high standards are set in order for graduates to be globally competitive and relevant for local industry, which means that the latter play a pivotal role in the curriculum development process. GZU linkages with industry are oriented by the co-design approach to curriculum-

making as a relational practice, as there is growing evidence showing it can improve pedagogical quality and stakeholder involvement through a collaborative ethos that breaks through constraints of individual imagination and assumptions.

Multidimensional Curriculum Revamping: Teleology, Width and Depth

Curriculum revamping at GZU has been strongly guided by three foci: teleology, width and depth. In the context of curriculum, teleology refers to the purpose, aim, or goal of education. GZU has been redefining what education is for, what it seeks to achieve, and what outcomes it intends to produce in light of the need to innovate, industrialise and modernise society. Essentially, it's the philosophy that guides the selection of content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies within a curriculum. Increasingly the goals of education at GZU have been to foster close collaboration between the university and industries to ensure that academic research translates into real-world applications. GZU is establishing partnerships with corporations, government agencies, and international organisations to facilitate internships, joint research projects, and curriculum development. These collaborations help the institution stay updated on industry trends, allowing it to tailor its programs to market demands. Furthermore, there is potential for industry-sponsored research to lead to technological breakthroughs, boosting productivity and economic growth. Based on the realisation that a knowledge-based economy thrives on research and innovation, GZU is investing in cutting-edge research facilities and encouraging faculty and students to engage in ground-breaking studies. Government and private sector players are providing funding and grants to support research in priority areas such as healthcare and agriculture. By aiming to commercialise research outputs through patents and start-ups, GZU intends to contribute to national GDP growth while solving pressing societal challenges. As industries evolve, continuous upskilling becomes essential. GZU is offering flexible learning options, including online courses, micro-credentials, and executive education programs, to cater to working professionals. Digital education platforms are democratising access to quality education, enabling lifelong learning and workforce adaptability. This approach ensures that even mid-career individuals can acquire new competencies, enhancing overall productivity.

GZU is further widening its curriculum offerings beyond traditional disciplines to align with the needs of a dynamic economy. Emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, biotechnology, and data science which are critical for industrial growth and innovation are being introduced. By introducing specialised programs in these areas, GZU intends to produce graduates equipped with relevant skills for high-value industries. Additionally, vocational and technical education is being integrated into university curricula to bridge the gap between academia and the labour market, ensuring that students are job-ready upon graduation. The other dimension is that the complexities of modern economies require professionals who can think critically across multiple disciplines. GZU is promoting interdisciplinary studies by encouraging collaborations between science, engineering, business, and social sciences. For instance, combining technology with entrepreneurship can spur start-up ecosystems, while integrating environmental science with economics can drive sustainable development. University-wide courses in these crucial areas are constantly being added to the program offerings. Such an approach not only enhances students' problem-solving abilities but also fosters creativity and adaptability key traits for an upper-middle-income workforce.

In the context of curriculum, depth refers to the extent to which a specific topic is explored and understood, rather than simply covering a broad range of topics superficially. GZU academic departments emphasise deeper learning and understanding of concepts, encouraging students to make connections, infer, and seek solutions. There is a noticeable shift from traditional lecture-based models to competency-based and experiential learning, with digital literacy and soft skills incorporated into programs. The increasing recognition of the role of public-private partnerships in curriculum co-creation has been driving this shift towards greater curriculum depth.

Summary of Key Findings

- GZU is modernising its curriculum to meet economic demands.
- STEM funding is being increased despite funding constraints.
- University industry partnerships are being strengthened.
- Blended learning approaches are being adopted.
- There is a shift from traditional lecture-based models to competency-based and experiential learning.
- International benchmarking and rigorous accreditation requirements are ensuring increasing quality.
- Highly focused and strong academic leadership is yielding continuous improvement of systems.
- Successful stakeholder engagement emphasises local priorities which is being balanced with international benchmarking for global competitiveness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The chapter has analysed the challenges and opportunities encountered during curriculum redesign, including overcoming resource constraints, and increasing stakeholder collaboration. It has highlighted the importance of aligning academic programs with national development plans, employer expectations, and global educational trends to enhance graduate employability and innovation capacity. Key themes discussed include the shift from traditional lecture-based models to competency-based and experiential learning, the incorporation of digital literacy and soft skills, and the role of public-private partnerships in curriculum co-creation. The chapter also addressed the impact of accreditation requirements and international benchmarking in ensuring quality and relevance. It presented findings suggesting that successful curriculum revamping is being supported by strong institutional leadership, continuous stakeholder engagement, and flexible frameworks that adapt to evolving economic needs. Recommendations for policymakers and academic leaders seeking to modernise higher education in developing economies, have been made, emphasising the balance between local priorities and global competitiveness. Ultimately, the chapter has argued that strategic curriculum reform is essential for fostering human capital development and sustaining progress toward upper-middle-income status. It has been argued that, by integrating technology, entrepreneurship, and industry collaboration, GZU will continue to produce graduates who drive national development.

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CHAPTER 11
From Ideas to Impact: The Case of the Great Zimbabwe University Innovation Hub

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Abstract

This chapter explores the unique role of the Great Zimbabwe University Innovation Hub (GZU iHub) as a heritage-driven catalyst for innovation and industrialisation under Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 Policy. Unlike conventional innovation hubs that focus narrowly on technology transfer, the GZU iHub integrates science, technology, and indigenous knowledge systems to generate solutions rooted in cultural identity and local needs. This distinct approach positions the hub as both a centre for creativity and a bridge between academia, industry, and communities. The chapter draws on case studies to illustrate the iHub's achievements in nurturing student-led start-ups, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and transforming research outputs into market-ready products. It highlights the hub's emphasis on entrepreneurial mentorship, partnership building, and resource accessibility, which collectively promote a culture of innovation across the university. Lessons learned regarding sustainability, institutional support, and funding are also examined. Ultimately, the chapter underscores the GZU iHub's role as a model of context-driven innovation, demonstrating how higher education institutions in heritage-rich regions can contribute to inclusive economic transformation through culturally grounded and community-responsive innovation practices.

Key words: Creativity, incubation, entrepreneurship, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, mentorship

Introduction

Endeavouring to bridge research and industrialisation, Zimbabwe revitalised its higher education system between 2018 and 2019, shifting from education 3.0 to education 5.0. The former focused on teaching, research and community engagement, which resulted in knowledge generation with limited innovation and industrialisation. In addition to these three, Education 5.0 also focuses on innovation and industrialisation resulting in knowledge generation, its application and industrialisation culminating into economic development and employment creation among other notable gains (MHTEISTD, 2021). In order to turn the already existing rich deposits of research into innovations, an enabling space for the process was indispensable. As such, the innovation hub concept to support the objectives of Education 5.0 was adopted. The innovation hub concept had already been embraced by the private sector prior, with several hubs around Zimbabwe having made substantial and lasting impact in the community. Notable private sector hubs include Impact Hub, iZone Hub, Eight2Five and Tech Village among others (UNDP, 2023). Thus, the innovation hub concept in Zimbabwe serves as a platform to foster creativity, entrepreneurship, and technological development. Dzingirai (2025) asserts that hubs provide collaborative spaces where innovators, researchers, start-ups, and industry players co-create solutions to local challenges. They support youth-led innovation, digital skills development, and product commercialisation.

The Great Zimbabwe University Innovation Hub (GZU iHub)

Through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MHTEISTD) six state universities including Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) were awarded grants to establish functional innovation hubs between 2018 and 2019. These centres align with Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) by promoting a knowledge-driven economy and industrialisation through research and development (MHTEISTD, 2021).

Named *Centre for Creative Thinking,* the majestic GZU innovation hub (iHub) was constructed between 2018 – 2023 and was officially commissioned on the 28th of October 2023 by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Chancellor of all State Universities, Dr Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, (www.gzu.ac.zw). It represents a distinctive model of innovation in Zimbabwe and Africa, one that integrates academia, community, culture, and commerce. Similar to other institutions of higher and tertiary education, the GZU iHub is mandated to deliver goods and services through education, science and technology development and, promote entrepreneurship ((MHTEISTD, n.d.). Its structure under the Research and Innovation Department ensures coherence across research, incubation, and commercialisation. Its incubation programme nurtures culturally grounded enterprises; the IPTTO protects indigenous and modern innovations; and the Grants Office mobilises resources to sustain this ecosystem. Through this integrated framework, the GZU iHub is not merely a technology hub, but a transformative driver of inclusive innovation and cultural industrialisation, aligning with the principles of Education 5.0 and the broader vision of a knowledge-driven Zimbabwean economy. Styled with design excellence, the three storey GZU iHub has capacity for over ten multidisciplinary innovation laboratories that can house over a hundred innovators.

The vision of GZU iHub is '*to be a leading centre of excellence in heritage-based research and innovation, empowering communities and industries to create sustainable and transformative solutions for a better world*.' Its main goals are to foster a vibrant ecosystem where students, staff, community members, and industry partners converge to co-create sustainable and impactful solutions; and produce knowledge and innovations that make a meaningful difference locally and globally.

Materials and Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach comprising a systematic literature review, desk-based research, key informant interviews, and document analysis. The combination of these methods facilitated a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the research problem, thereby enhancing the validity, depth, and reliability of the findings. A structured review of academic journals, scholarly books, policy documents, and credible online databases was conducted to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for the study. Desk research complemented this process by synthesising secondary data from institutional reports and national frameworks relevant to the study context. Purposive sampling was employed to identify and engage key informants with expert knowledge and practical experience in the subject area. Semi-structured questionnaires were designed to elicit in-depth qualitative responses and stimulate

reflective discussion. Document analysis was further utilised to corroborate data obtained from other sources, ensuring internal consistency and accuracy. The reviewed documents included government policy papers, institutional strategic plans, organisational reports, and official records. The integration of these methods provided a robust framework for analysing the subject matter from multiple perspectives, thereby enabling nuanced interpretation and evidence-based conclusions.

Operational Framework

The Great Zimbabwe University Innovation Hub (GZU iHub) operates under the Research and Innovation Department (RID), which serves as the central engine driving innovation and applied research across the institution. Unlike conventional university innovation hubs, the GZU iHub is deeply rooted in the university's heritage-inspired philosophy, blending indigenous knowledge systems, cultural heritage, and modern technology to produce innovations that are not only commercially viable but also socially and culturally grounded. As part of the RID, the GZU iHub supports the innovation agenda within GZU's academic schools and departments, directly contributing to a model which is anchored on teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation. The RID's structure consists of four main offices: Innovation, Grants Management, Ethics Compliance, and Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer (IPTTO). In driving industrialisation and rural transformation, RID performs six core functions:

1. Managing intellectual property (IP) emerging from both academic and community-based research.
2. Incubating innovations that reflect local needs and global opportunities.
3. Facilitating technology transfer and licensing between the university, local industries, and communities.
4. Promoting collaborative research between GZU, industry, and government.
5. Administering research grants and external funding opportunities.
6. Ensuring ethical compliance in innovation and commercialisation processes.

Through partnerships with Research Coordinators in each School, RID identifies and accelerates promising ideas from conception to commercialisation. This integrated approach ensures that the iHub's work remains connected to both the academic and socio-economic priorities of the Masvingo region and Zimbabwe at large. The GZU iHub therefore stands out as an innovation ecosystem where academic research, indigenous heritage, and community entrepreneurship converge to produce tangible, transformative solutions.

Incubation Programme
Bridging Heritage, Innovation, and Enterprise

The GZU iHub Incubation Programme is a dynamic platform that nurtures start-ups and innovative projects emerging from students, staff, and community innovators. Its uniqueness lies in combining entrepreneurship development with cultural innovation. Its key functions include:

- *Business Development Support:* Start-ups receive mentoring on strategy, market research, and sustainable business modelling tailored to the realities of Zimbabwe's emerging economy.

- *Access to Resources and Facilities:* The GZU iHub provides access to laboratories, fabrication workshops, and co-working spaces equipped with digital tools and internet connectivity, especially critical in the semi-urban context of Masvingo.
- *Funding Assistance*: Through partnerships with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, and local industry players, the GZU iHub facilitates access to grants, venture capital, and seed funding.
- *Training and Workshops:* Tailored entrepreneurship and innovation courses strengthen competencies in design thinking, intellectual property, and product commercialisation.
- *Market Validation and Pilot Testing:* Innovators test prototypes in real-world contexts—such as local agribusiness, arts, and tourism sectors to refine their solutions.
- *Networking and Partnerships*: The GZU iHub connects innovators with industry experts, cultural institutions, and community leaders, fostering collaboration between academic research and traditional industries.

By integrating indigenous knowledge with modern innovation processes, the GZU iHub's incubation programme uniquely supports the creation of enterprises that are economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.

Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer Office (IPTTO): Protecting Cultural and Scientific Innovations

The GZU IPTTO is central to safeguarding and commercialising innovations emerging from both scientific research and cultural heritage-based knowledge. It assists researchers and innovators in securing patents, trademarks, and copyrights, while also respecting traditional knowledge systems that form part of the region's intellectual wealth. Its key functions include:

- assisting innovators to translate research outputs into market-ready products.
- establishing public-private partnerships for technology licensing and commercialisation.
- developing institutional IP policies that balance protection, access, and benefit-sharing, particularly in community-based innovations.
- representing the university in national and regional IP forums, strengthening GZU's role as a key player in Zimbabwe's innovation ecosystem.
- promoting awareness of IP management among students, researchers, and local innovators.

By recognising both modern and traditional forms of knowledge ownership, the IPTTO underscores GZU's distinct identity as a heritage-driven innovation university.

Grants Office: Enabling Research-Driven Innovation

The Grants Office at GZU iHub plays a pivotal role in sustaining the university's innovation ecosystem. It actively identifies and pursues funding opportunities aligned with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1). The office provides:

- *Grant Sourcing and Proposal Support* - helping faculty and innovators identify funding agencies and craft competitive proposals.
- *Compliance and Financial Management* - ensuring accountability in the use of funds.
- *Collaboration Facilitation* - linking researchers with industry partners and international funders.

- *Monitoring and Evaluation of Funded Projects* - ensuring alignment with national innovation and industrialisation goals.

Unlike many grant offices, GZU iHub's model prioritises projects that merge scientific innovation with local community development, for example, technologies that improve dryland agriculture, climate resilience, or cultural tourism in Masvingo Province.

Outcome and Impact

GZU iHub stands as a significant and largely successful embodiment of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 philosophy. The Education 5.0 model is be used to evaluate the outcomes and impact of the GZU iHub in this section. Moving beyond the traditional triad of teaching, research, and community service, Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 philosophy introduces innovation and industrialisation as core pillars, demanding that universities become engines of economic growth and societal problem-solving. Within this transformative framework, GZU iHub has emerged as a critical test case. It operationalises the Education 5.0 philosophy through its structure and mission, focusing on Heritage-Based Innovation that blends traditional wisdom with cutting-edge technology. Some of the projects incubated at the iHub are tabulated below.

Table 1: Key GZU Innovation Hub Projects Aligned with Education 5.0 Pillars

Project	Description	Education 5.0 Pillar Addressed	Heritage/Technology Nexus
Wezhira Wines	Processing indigenous fruits (baobab, *hute*) into commercial wines	Innovation & Industrialisation	Utilises local biodiversity; Value-addition
ICEDA Programme	Integrated Community Econ. Dev. (Free-range poultry, grain support)	Community Service & Industrialisation	Empowers rural farmers; Market linkages
Traditional Grains Value Chain	Contract farming with local farmers; Establishing milling plants	Industrialisation & Community Service	Enhances food security; Processes local produce
Modular Bird Deterrent	Laser-based, solar-powered system to protect crops	Innovation & Industrialisation	Addresses agricultural loss (Quelea birds); Tech
Mobile Mental Health Clinic	Providing accessible mental health services	Community Service & Innovation	Addresses underserved needs; Tech-enabled delivery

GZU iHub actively translates research into commercial ventures and local industrial capacity. Under rural industrialisation, the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA) programme has demonstrably transformed livelihoods in districts like Chirumanzu and Chivi. By providing resources, guaranteed markets, and processing infrastructure (milling plants) for traditional grains and free-range poultry, the ICEDA programme enables sustainable income generation for rural households, fostering decentralised economic growth. Projects at the hub are tailored to substitute imports and create employment. Emphasising value addition (e.g. fruit

processing to reduce waste, grain milling), the Hub tackles post-harvest losses and increases the economic return from agriculture, a critical sector for Zimbabwe.

GZU iHub`s design prioritises direct community impact and sustainable practices. Processing indigenous fruits and vegetables tackles waste and malnutrition, addressing food nutrition and security. The traditional grain programme improves resilience against climate shocks like drought, directly enhancing local food sovereignty. Together with the bird deterrent, research into climate-resilient crops exemplifies innovations addressing environmental challenges. The iHub is pivotal in realising Education 5.0`s goal of producing work-ready graduates and entrepreneurs. Table 2 provides a summary of this. Innovator students gain hands-on experience in projects like community development, renewable energy, and agro-processing. This moves beyond theory to applied problem-solving. The iHub also provides infrastructure and mentorship for students to develop business ideas. This fosters the entrepreneurial mind-set central to Education 5.0, preparing graduates to launch start-ups rather than solely seek employment. Additionally, students develop crucial technical skills alongside soft skills like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking through interdisciplinary project work tackling real-world problems.

So far, the Innovation hub has managed to incubate over 20 innovators and secured local and international funding, such as a grant from the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) for the Smart Poultry Project. It has also had representation at prestigious events such as AWS reInvent, Deep Learning Indaba, and the Mandela Washington Fellowship, showcasing GZU's innovation capacity on global platforms. The iHub has also initiated IP registration processes for key innovations, encouraging a culture of patenting and protecting original work among students and researchers. Over 15 IPs have been registered in 3 years, including 15 registered trademarks and filing for 3 patents. Innovators participate at various platforms such as Zimbabwe International Trade Fair, agricultural shows and innovation expos.

Table 2: Impact Summary of GZU Innovation Hub through the Education 5.0 Lens

Education 5.0 Pillar	iHub Contribution	Key Evidence / Outcome
Teaching	Enhanced curriculum via experiential learning	Student hands-on projects, Skill development for employability
Research	Applied research solving local problems	Bird deterrent; Food processing tech; Climate-resilient agriculture projects
Community Service	Direct empowerment of rural communities	Mental health clinics; Traditional grain support
Innovation	Development of novel products/processes	Wezhira wines; Modular bird deterrent; Heritage-based value addition technologies
Industrialisation	Creating rural enterprises & value chains; Import substitution	Milling plants; Commercial wine production; Potential local manufacturing (e.g., bird deterrent)

Future Directions: Forging a Uniquely Zimbabwean Future

The GZU iHub is charting a future that transcends the conventional model of a university incubator. Its vision is to become the central catalyst for a distinctly Zimbabwean innovation ecosystem, one that is deeply rooted in our national priorities yet globally competitive. The University is building more than a hub; it is building a networked engine for national transformation. By evolving into a key node within a countrywide system aligned with Education 5.0 and the NDS1 and NDS2 (MoHTESTD, 2019; ZIMCHE, 2022), the GZU iHub will uniquely leverage its position to bridge our nation's rich indigenous resources with the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This translates into a focused, dual-pronged strategy: first, to pioneer smart heritage by transforming sectors like agriculture and mining through IoT and AI, while simultaneously adding value to indigenous resources and herbal medicine through advanced processing and research (GZU, 2021). Second, it will fuel a home-grown digital revolution by cultivating digital arts, gaming, and financial technologies tailored to Zimbabwe's informal and mobile-driven economy (Zhou & Bhebhe, 2020). This is not a generic tech transfer; it is a mission to build a self-sustaining, smart economy from the ground up. To attain this in a sustainable manner, the iHub will secure long-term viability through collaborations with government, corporates, and development partners for funding, mentorship, and infrastructure through PPP arrangements (World Bank, 2021). The iHub will also turn academic research into viable commercial products, enhancing revenue generation and relevance (GZU, 2021). Further, the centre will put more emphasis on eco-innovations such as clean energy, recycling, and climate-smart solutions that align with global sustainability trends (UNDP, 2020). Continued training of innovators, researchers, and SMEs will be embarked on to ensure a sustainable pipeline of talent and innovation (MoHTESTD, 2019). GZU iHub looks into expanding support for tech-enabled agriculture and processing of indigenous resources for food security and export (Nziramasanga, 2020). Additionally, it envisions providing infrastructure and policy frameworks to nurture financial innovations suited to Zimbabwe`s informal and mobile-based economy (RBZ, 2021). Promoting medical research and technology for public health solutions, including herbal medicine and diagnostics will form part of the expansion plans of the hub. The iHub also seeks to encourage 4IR technologies (e.g., IoT, AI, robotics) for local industry competitiveness while supporting digital arts, animation, gaming, and content creation as a new frontier for youth employment (Chikodzi & Nyoni, 2021).

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Innovation Hub
"Centre for creative thinking"

CHAPTER 12
Gender Mainstreaming at Great Zimbabwe University: Major Achievements and Key Lessons Learnt

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Abstract

The chapter tracks developments in women's empowerment at GZU from 2013 to 2024 focusing on student recruitment, staff recruitment and appointment of women in leadership positions. The researchers employed a mixed method approach, and made use of literature reviews and key informant interviews. Findings from this research show that GZU has made significant strides in mainstreaming gender in almost all areas since 2013. Key achievements include the creation of two gender policies, (the Gender Policy, Gender-Based Violence Prevention Policy) and the establishment of the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies. Efforts to mainstream gender in the recruitment of both students and staff have resulted in positive changes. Over the years, the number of female staff members has increased although the University still falls below 50-50 representation of gender; and GZU has more female than male students - however most students are concentrated in Social Sciences, Arts, Education and Law with few students in Natural Sciences, Agriculture and Medicine. The chapter recommends that GZU continue encouraging female students to take up STEM subjects and also pursue post graduate degrees programmes.

Key words: Gender, Gender mainstreaming, Women empowerment, Gender-based-violence, Gender Policy

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming remains a key strategy for achieving gender equality and social inclusion in institutions of higher and tertiary education (IHTE). The 21st century has seen increased interest by IHTE, universities in particular, to mainstream gender into their core functions of teaching, research and administration. Gender mainstreaming (Alvarez, Ong and Abocenjo, 2017) takes a systematic account of the differences between the conditions and needs of both women and men in all policies and actions during the post-industrial society. Gender mainstreaming incorporates the fundamental principle that women and men experience different conditions and opportunities in life, have different interests and needs, and are affected in different ways by social, political and economic processes (Ochieng 2014; African Union, 2004). Gender mainstreaming in universities involves integration of gender perspectives in all aspects of university life, including programmes, policies, and practices. This ensures that concerns and needs of both women and men are addressed, thereby fostering an inclusive, equitable and conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Gender mainstreaming interventions include: deliberate affirmative action measures such as quotas, gender responsive budgeting; programming and implementation of strategies for gender equality such as policy and institutional reform to interventions to achieve equality. While all genders are targeted by interventions of this nature, gender mainstreaming seeks to uplift women as they remain a marginalised group in IHTE. Women continue to face barriers to pursuing

research and academic careers than men, their needs are not addressed and they continue to face insecurity and harassment in IHTEs (Saadat, Alam and Rehman, 2022; Gollifer and Gorman, nd.). Gender inequalities in IHTE are mainly due to the absence of pro-gender policies, poor implementation of policies, and detrimental social norms (Saadat, Alam and Rehman, 2022). Women continue to be constrained by family expectations and their role as mothers, wives and carers - these roles limit their effective participation (Gollifer and Gorman, nd.) and if left unchecked, gender barriers perpetuate discrimination, create an unconducive environment for learning, and negatively impact on national development goals.

In an effort to enhance gender equality, IHTE in Zimbabwe such as the Great Zimbabwe University are expected to reform their policies and implement programmes for gender equality and social inclusion. GZU has therefore embarked on varied gender mainstreaming initiatives. This contribution is an effort to document these initiatives. It is therefore important that the efforts made by GZU in gender mainstreaming be critically evaluated to assess the progress made, and challenges thereof. This chapter critically documents and evaluates the efforts of GZU in gender mainstreaming since 2013.

The researchers employed a mixed method approach making use of literature reviews (of books, articles, institutional reports and stories, and updated related gender mainstreaming literature in IHTE); key informant interviews – people interviewed include those working under the gender and social inclusion focal areas. The chapter comprises four sections - the introduction, followed by the global and national normative framework for gender mainstreaming. The third section discusses how GZU has mainstreamed gender in all its facets, starting with structures, such as the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies, and policies put in place to deal with gender disparity. The article ends with a conclusion and recommendations section.

Global and National Normative Framework for Gender Mainstreaming

The efforts to mainstream gender in IHTE can be traced back to 1975 when the United Nations declared that year as the International Year for Women, making important changes in women's history (Ilagan, 2019). The above-mentioned UN declaration prompted countries to put gender mainstreaming on national and international agendas. For example, after the UN declaration, the Philippines established a Commission for Women in 1975 and amended its constitution stipulating that Philippine women and men were regarded as equal partners in development (Ilagan, 2019).

The United Nations also promulgated a number of instruments to address gender disparities. One such key gender instrument remains the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979), which advocates non-discrimination of women in all spheres. Under Article 10, CEDAW focuses on non-discrimination in the Education Sector, including in IHTE. Key clauses under this article include equal conditions for career and vocational guidance, access to studies in educational establishments, including higher education, access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard, school premises and equipment of the same quality, and the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging co-education. CEDAW also calls for the government and its institutions to prioritise policies and practices that largely promote non-discrimination in all spheres, including IHTE. In Article 10,

CEDAW focused on creating conducive learning environment for both students and university employees.

Another key instrument is the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action 1995 (BDPfA), which places gender mainstreaming at the centre of global strategies for promoting gender equality in all spheres. Key sections in BDPfA include the critical Area 2 on Education and Training of Women, section 80-88 emphasises gender mainstreaming as an essential tool for achieving the goal of equality, development and peace. The instrument further provides for key strategic objectives for gender equality, which include ensuring equal access to education and improving women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education (BDPfA, 1995).

In terms of policy, the UN mooted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, replacing the Millennium Development Goals. With the mantra to leave 'no-one behind', the SDGs framework has 17 goals to spearhead inclusive sustainable development. Key goals for this chapter include SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 4 (quality education). SDG 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDGs, 2015), thus addressing inequalities and promoting gender equality in the education sector. Under SDG target 5.9, governments and their agencies, including universities such as GZU, are mandated to 'adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels' (SDGs, 2015). While SDG 5 explicitly focuses on women empowerment and gender equality, the goal unequivocally recognises gender equality as fundamental to the success of all 17 SDGs.

At regional level, the African Union adopted the African Charter of Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), also known as the Maputo Protocol. Article 10 of the Maputo Protocol is dedicated to the right to education and training in Africa, and directly speaks to IHTE and policymakers in the sector. Among other issues, the clause calls for elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, as well as equal opportunity and access in the sphere of education and training, the protection of women from all forms of abuse, including sexual harassment in educational institutions and for sanctions against the perpetrators of such practices (Maputo Protocol, 2003). In addition, the clause provides for access to counselling and rehabilitation services to women who suffer abuses and sexual harassment, and integration of gender sensitisation and human rights education at all levels of education curricula (Maputo Protocol, 2003). In the same way as the Maputo Protocol, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (1997) emphasises the 50:50 gender balance and the elimination of gender-based discrimination in all facets of life.

As a state party to CEDAW, Maputo Protocol and the SADC Gender Protocol, Zimbabwe has made some strides in policy reform and practice for gender equality. The Zimbabwe 2013 Constitution calls for gender equality (Section 3g) and gender balance (Section 17). Read together with Section 80 (rights of women), these clauses support gender equality and full gender balance in the Zimbabwean society, particularly the promotion of the full participation of women in all spheres of the society on the basis of equality with men. The Constitution further calls for state institutions and agencies, including IHTE, to ensure that all genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at all levels.

In terms of institutions, the Constitution further created the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC), operationalised through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act [*Chapter 10:31*], to conduct research and mainstream gender in the country. ZGC reported that IHTEs lacked gender balance particularly in leadership positions. ZGC also carried out successful gender mainstreaming activities in 2024, including public awareness programmes which were conducted to educate the public on gender matters, the first male engagement symposium which reached out to 1213, and commemorative events like International Women's Day (ZGC Annual Report, 2024). Efforts by the Government to mainstream gender in IHTEs have largely been promulgated through policies, institutions, enacted laws and the mandated commission.

In addition, the National Gender Policy (2025) calls for multi-sectoral actors (state and non-state) to take appropriate actions to address gender inequalities within their areas of mandate, in line with this policy. With regard to IHTE, this means, among other things, the development of sector-specific gender policies aligned to the National Gender Policy, integrating gender perspectives in planning, curriculum, employee policies, programme designs, monitoring and evaluation, and pursuing collaborative partnerships where necessary, to achieve equality. The policy also calls for elimination of discrimination and enhancing equal access to education and training for men, women, girls and boys. It further calls for removal of systemic barriers to equal participation of women and men in education settings. With respect to education, the policy objective is to ensure access to education by women, and their retention at all levels.

Gender Mainstreaming Efforts at Great Zimbabwe University

This section presents the efforts by GZU in gender mainstreaming since 2013. It starts by discussing the policies put in place to address gender disparities, the creation of the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies, and finally the key achievements made in gender mainstreaming in all spheres, including student and staff recruitment and the appointment of women in leadership positions.

Gender Policy Reform

GZU strategic plan outlines several strategies for supporting gender-related initiatives and is the anchor for the GZU Gender Policy, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention Policy, GZU Affirmative Action Policy and the Sexual Harassment Policy. GZU Gender Policy sets guidelines on the recruitment of staff and students and the composition on various University Committees, whilst the GBV Prevention Policy sets guidelines on how GBV cases and any other complaints should be handled, and outlines the consequences for perpetrators of GBV.

The Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies

GZU created the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies (NCGCS) in January 2015 to spearhead gender mainstreaming at the university. To date, the Centre has entered into partnerships with government and non-state actors to implement gender mainstreaming activities in communities. Key activities of the Centre include:

- giving expert views and assisting the wider community with expertise around gender issues. This has been through capacity-building on communities and staff of non-state actors around varied gender topics, including gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming.

- raising awareness through radio and roadshows on the need to recognise and protect women's rights. The Centre participates in the commemoration of key events like the International Women's Day.
- raising awareness on the rights of women and girls within the university system and beyond.
- advancing gender justice and mainstreaming through teaching and production of experts with knowledge and skills in the field. The Centre offers an MSc degree in Gender and Policy Studies and a BSc degree in Gender Studies. The first group of MSc Gender and Policy Studies students graduated in October 2016 and to date, more than one hundred students have graduated with an MSc degree in Gender and Policy Studies. From 2020 to 2025, a total of 361 students have graduated with a BSc degree in Gender Studies

Gender mainstreaming through university wide modules for all students

GZU also introduced Gender Studies as a university-wide module for all university students Gender, Culture and Heritage Studies). The module combines culture and heritage and is taught to first-year undergraduate students throughout the university. The module equips students with a comprehensive understanding of feminist theories and their contribution to the understanding of gender issues. Students learn about gender inequalities in the developing world using theoretical and empirical approaches. The gender section in the module opens discussion on existing unequal societal gender relations and other disparities which prevent women and girls from access, control, and ownership of resources and often exclude them from fully participating and benefiting from development initiatives. The intersection of gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and religion is explored so that students can better appreciate the social location of individuals and groups.

Gender Mainstreaming through the Student Affairs Department

GZU Student Affairs department works with various partners across the country in supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for universities, including the National AIDS Council, Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council, SAYWHAT, and UNESCO's O3 programme. The department also supports sports and recreation and theatre/arts, encouraging students of both genders to participate in recreational activities. The arts programmes also serve as a vehicle for raising awareness on gender inequality issues, furthering the University's efforts at mainstreaming gender across all of its divisions.

Gender Mainstreaming in Student Recruitment from 2018 to Date

During the period 2018 to 2024, GZU has enrolled more female students (55.17%) compared to the males (44.83%) when all fields are combined (**Table 1**). However, the proportion varies across fields (**Table 1**, **Figure 1**).

Table 1: Total Number of GZU Students by Gender from 2018-2024

Name of School	**Male**	**%**	**Female**	**%**	**Total**
Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering	2898.00	63.41	1672.00	36.59	4570.00
Herbert Chitepo Law School	1038.00	33.30	2079.00	66.70	3117.00
Arts and Heritage Studies	8625.00	36.06	15292.76	63.94	23917.76
School of Commerce	20924.00	51.69	19555.00	48.31	40479.00
School of Education	33485.00	46.45	38598.76	53.55	72083.76
Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences	15775.00	37.73	26035.00	62.27	41810.00
School of Natural Science	2504.00	59.88	1678.00	40.12	4182.00
Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences	28.00	65.12	15.00	34.88	43.00
Total	**85277.00**	**44.83**	**104925.52**	**55.17**	**190202.52**

Please note: In 2023 and 2024, the School of Heritage and the School of Education were merged into one school and from 2024, the School of Commerce became the School of Business Sciences

Source*:* University records

GZU's largest schools, Commerce/Business Sciences, Social Science, Arts, and Education, are female-dominated. During the period under review, these schools comprised above 90 percent of the student population. The Herbert Chitepo Law School had the highest proportion of female students (66.70%) compared to the male students, followed by the School of Arts and Heritage Studies (63.94%), followed by the Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences (62.27%). The school with the least proportion of female students is the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences (34.88%) (**Table 1**, **Figure 1**).

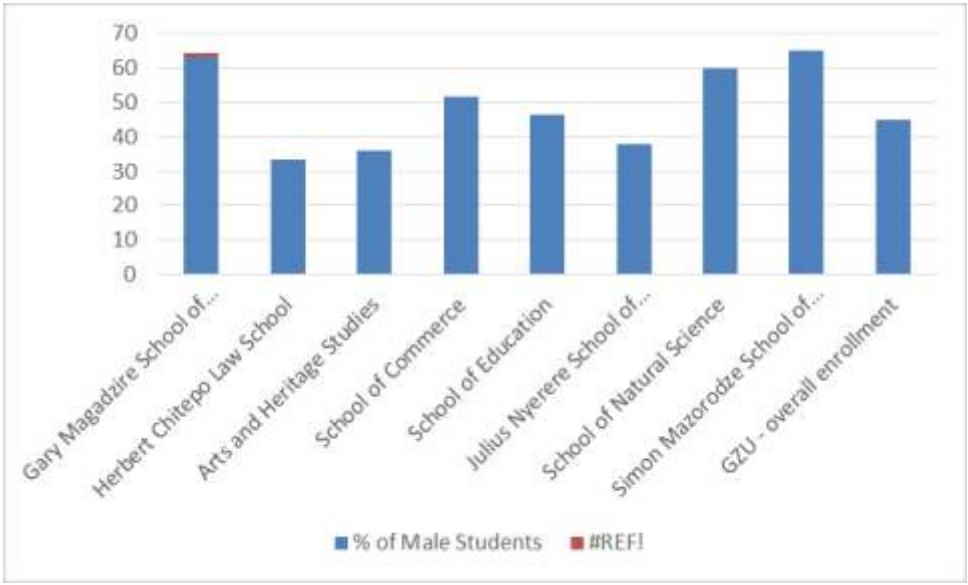

Figure 1: Percentage of GZU students by Gender from 2018-2024

From 2018, to 2024, the proportion of female students enrolled at GZU has increased from 48.61% in 2018 to 62.04% in 2024 with all field combined **(Table 2, Figure 2**).

Table 2: Proportion of Male and Female Students in all Schools Combines from 2018-2024

Year	**Males**	**%**	**Female**	**%**	**Total number of Students**
2018	12171.00	51.39	11512.00	48.61	23683.00
2020	11270.00	36.54	19571.67	63.46	30841.67
2024	7812.67	37.95	12774.00	62.05	20586.67

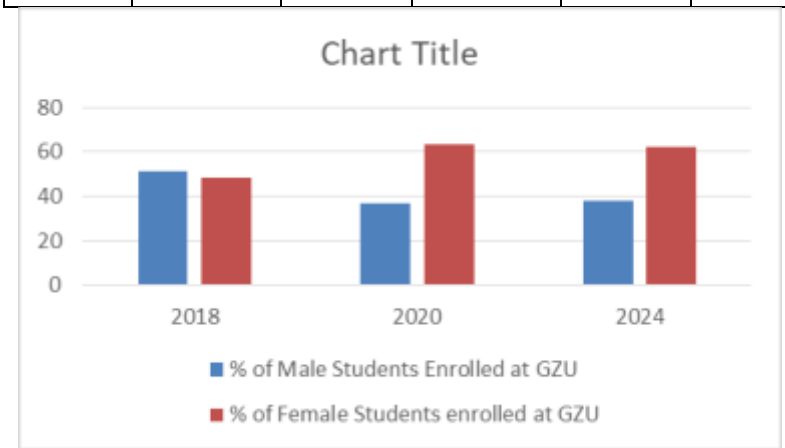

Figure 2: Percentage of Male and Female Students enrolled at GZU from 2018-2024

Tables 3 to **5** indicate that the STEM schools have had the lowest proportion of female students compared to male students from 2018 – 2024. In 2018, the Herbert Chitepo School of Law had the highest proportion of female students (72.06%) and Gary Magadzire School of agriculture had the lowest proportion of 35.6% of female students (**Table 3, Figure 3**). In 2020, Robert Mugabe School of Education had the highest proportion of female students (77.91) – (**Table 4, Figure 4)**, whilst Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture had the lowest proportion of 32.98% (**Table 5**). In 2024, the School of Arts and Heritage Studies had the highest proportion of female students (71.37%), whilst the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences had the lowest proportion of female students (28.57%).

Table 3: Proportion of Male and Female Students in Various Schools in 2018

Name of School	**Males**	**%**	**Females**	**%**	**Total**
Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering	720.00	64.40	398.00	35.60	1118.00
Herbert Chitepo Law School	126.00	27.94	325.00	72.06	451.00
Arts and Heritage Studies	1165.00	39.75	1766.00	60.25	2931.00
School of Commerce	3136.00	57.18	2348.00	42.82	5484.00
School of Education	3548.00	60.18	2348.00	39.82	5896.00
Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences	2845.00	42.51	3848.00	57.49	6693.00
School of Natural Science	631.00	56.85	479.00	43.15	1110.00
Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences	0.00		0.00		0.00
Total	**12171.00**	**51.39**	**11512.00**	**48.61**	**23683.00**

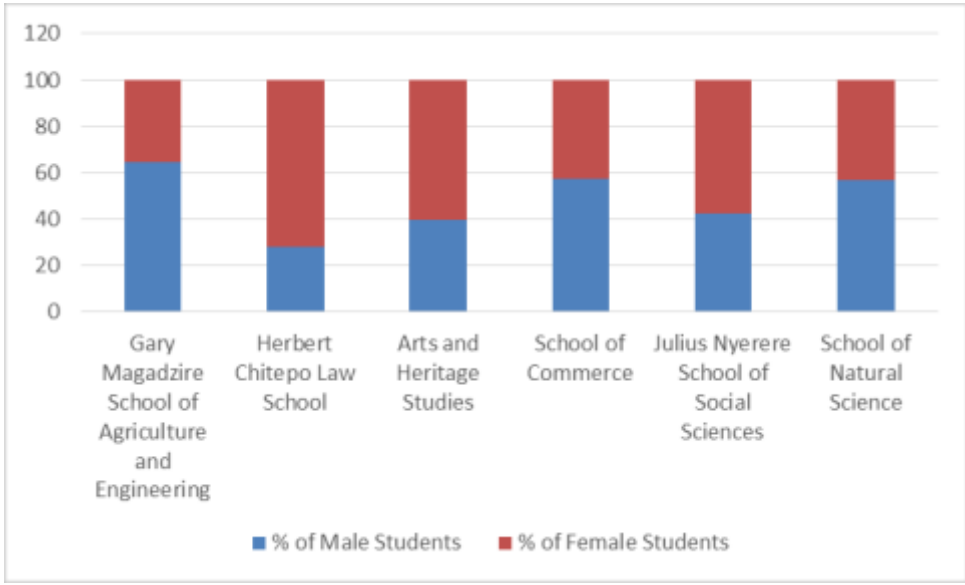

Figure 3: Percentage of Male and Female Students in Different Schools in 2018

Table 4: Proportion of Male to Female Students in Various Schools in 2020

Name of School	**Males**	**%**	**Females**	**%**	**Total**
Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering	254.00	67.02	125.00	32.98	379.00
Herbert Chitepo Law School	149.00	33.04	302.00	66.96	451.00
Arts and Heritage Studies	1131.00	36.76	1946.00	63.24	3077.00
School of Commerce	4108.00	53.80	3527.00	46.20	7635.00
School of Education	2004.00	22.09	7070.00	77.91	9074.00
Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences	2993.00	32.83	6122.67	67.17	9115.67
School of Natural Science	631.00	56.85	479.00	43.15	1110.00
Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences	0.00		0.00		0.00
Total	**11270.00**	**36.54**	**19571.67**	**63.46**	**30841.67**

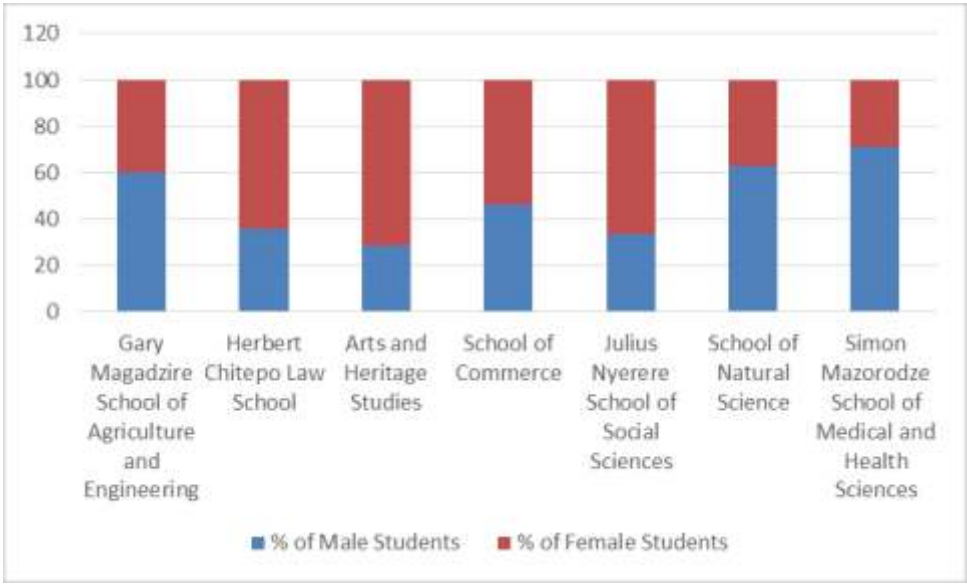

Figure 5: Percentage of Male and Female Students in Various Schools in 2024

Representation of students by gender differs when looking at postgraduate students only. Though the overall statistics for the university show that women graduate at higher rates than men, the number of women enrolled at GZU decreases as education level increases. In 2022, the graduating class statistics were disaggregated between undergraduate and postgraduate students. For undergraduates, women were 64% of the graduating students. However, that decreased significantly to 53% for postgraduate students (**Table 6**).

Table 6: 2022 Graduates by Level of Education

Level of Education	**Male**		**Female**		**Total**
	N	%	N	%	N
Undergraduate	1214	36.22	2138	63.78	3352
Postgraduate	555	47.23	620	52.77	1175
Total	1769	39.08	2758	60.92	4527

The proportion of female students decreases further when analysing the doctoral students. 2023 and 2024 graduating student statistics provide the number of graduating PhD students. Only Social Sciences managed to have gender parity, with both genders represented at 50% for students attaining a PhD in 2023. Half of the students from the School of Heritage and Education were women in 2024, giving the school an overall percentage of 45% of its PhD graduates being women (Table 9).

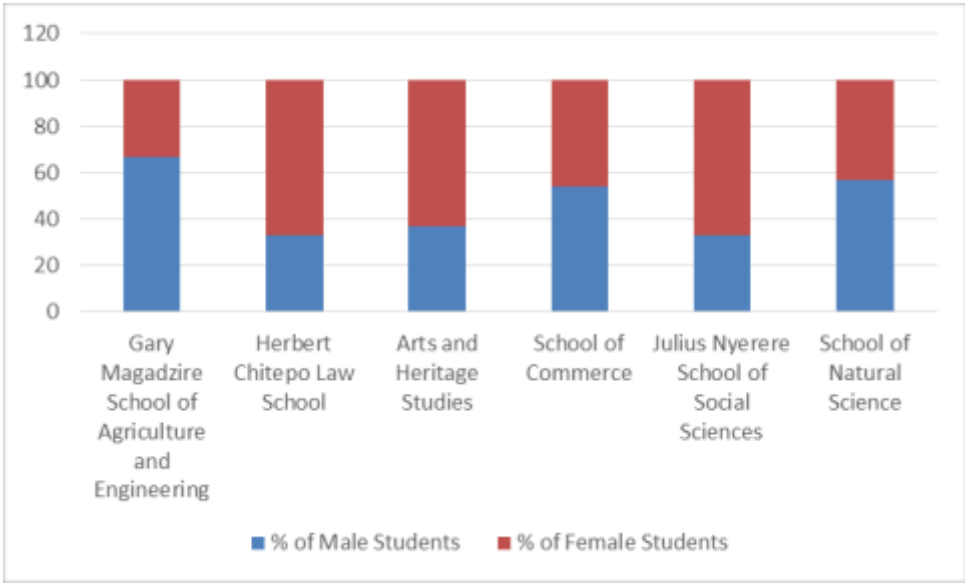

Figure 4: Percentage of Male and Female Students in Various Schools in 2020

Table 5: Proportion of Male to Female Students in Various Schools in 2024

Name of School	**Males**	**%**	**Females**	**%**	**Total**
Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering	319.00	60.08	212.00	39.92	531.00
Herbert Chitepo Law School	232.00	35.75	417.00	64.25	649.00
Arts and Heritage Studies	1866.00	28.63	4651.00	71.37	6517.00
School of Commerce	2712.00	46.14	3166.00	53.86	5878.00
School of Education	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences	1988.00	33.39	3966.00	66.61	5954.00
School of Natural Science	563.00	63.05	330.00	36.95	893.00
Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences	15.00	71.43	6.00	28.57	21.00
Total	**7695.00**	**37.64**	**12748.00**	**62.36**	**20443.00**

Table 7: PhD Graduates by School

School	Year	Male Graduates		Female Graduates		Total
		N	%	N	%	N
Social Sciences	2023	1	50	1	50	2
Commerce/ Business Sciences	2023	1	100	0	0	1
	2024	3	75	1	25	4
Heritage and Education	2023	2	66.67	1	33.33	3
	2024	3	50	3	50	6
Agriculture and Engineering	2024	1	100	0	0	1
Total		11	64.71	6	35.29	17

In 2024 and 2025, four schools, Social Sciences, Business Sciences, Heritage and Education and Agriculture, produced 17 doctoral graduates. Of those, 11 were male (65%) and 6 were female (35%). When looking at the overall student population, Agriculture is the only school in 2024 to have more male students than female students (see Table 3). Arts and Heritage students are more than 70% female, Social Sciences is over 65% and for Commerce, it averages 53% for 2023 and 2024. The large disparity in the population of women at undergraduate level and at postgraduate level needs further investigation to uncover the reasons why mainstreaming at postgraduate levels has not reached the same levels as at undergraduate levels. The World Economic Forum (2025) has found that only 0.2% of Zimbabwean women, compared to 0.7% of men, are PhD holders. As the gap in GZU PhD graduates is smaller than the current gap of PhD holders, it is a step toward not only increasing the number of female PhD holders, but also reducing the gap between male and female educational attainment.

In its effort to mainstream gender during enrolment of students, the university deliberately employs affirmative action. Affirmative action employs a body of policies and procedures designed to eliminate discrimination against marginalised groups, including women. In the academic setting, affirmative action was implemented by lowering university entry levels for female students in highly sought programmes such as STEM and law programmes. GZU has been deliberately lowering points for girls to be admitted in Law and Medicine so as to achieve gender equality. While some scholars are against this action (Mareva, 2014), this initiative has seen an increase in female university students in these highly sought programmes.

Gender Mainstreaming in Staff Recruitment from 2018 to 2024

Mainstreaming at GZU also occurs in staff recruitment. While there were changes in some areas, others have remained the same or have deteriorated. Different levels of recruitment and the changes over time are discussed separately below.

Permanent Staff by Gender

Gender parity has not yet been reached in the hiring of permanent staff at the university. The percentage of women recruited as permanent staff at GZU (academic and non-academic) has remained lower compared to men from 2014 to 2024. Although the percentage of women employed increased from 37.71% in 2014 to 40.06% in 2022, it declined to 38.22 in 2024 (see **Table 8** and **Figure 6** below).

Table 8: Percentage of Permanent Staff by Gender (2014-2024)

Gender	**2014**		**2018**		**2019**		**2020**		**2021**		**2022**		**2023**		**2024**	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	545	62.29	917	65.69	617	59.27	663	62.49	635	59.12	642	59.94	699	61.26	734	61.78
Female	330	37.71	479	34.31	424	40.73	398	37.51	439	40.88	429	40.06	442	38.74	454	38.22

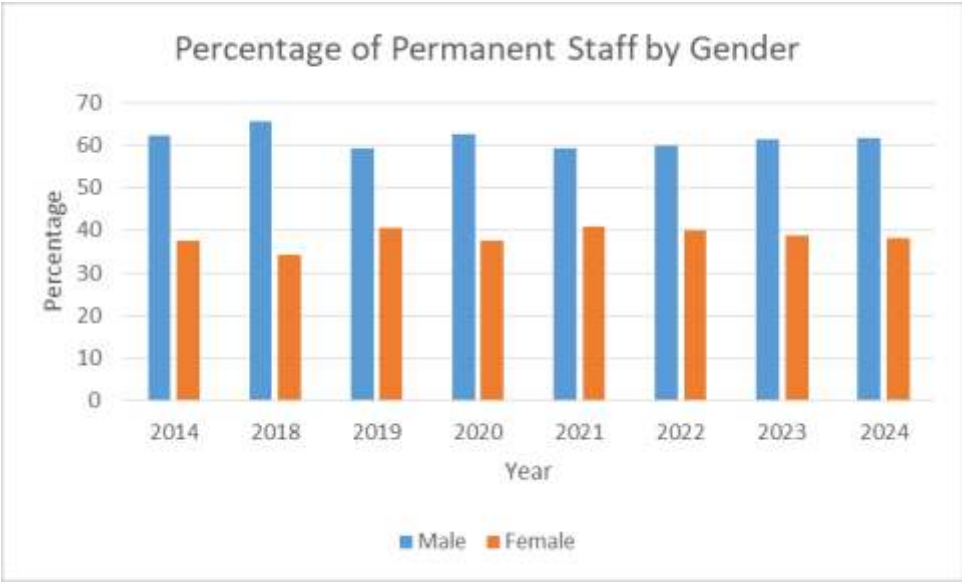

Figure 6: Percentage of Permanent Staff by Gender (2014-2024)

Academic Staff by Gender

Academic staff constitutes a significant proportion of the workforce employed by GZU. The number of women on the academic side is low. Between 2014 and 2023, the percentage of female staff has yet to exceed 31%, falling far below the 50 percent goal of guiding instruments. There has been an increase in the number of women hired as academic staff - in 2014, women constituted 26% of lecturers but that number increased to 31% in 2023 (See **Table 9** and **Figure 7**).

Table 9: Academic staff by Gender (2014-2023)

Gender	2014		2015		2019		2023	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	208	74.29	243	73.86	265	69.19	276	69.00
Female	72	25.71	86	26.14	118	30.81	124	31.00
Total	280	100.00	329	100.00	383	100.00	400	100.00

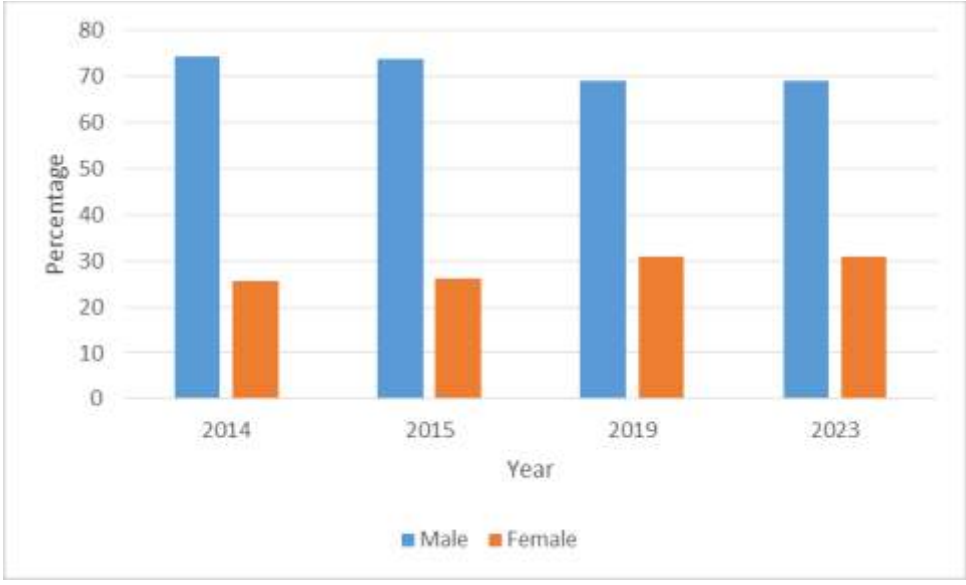

Figure 7: Percentage of Academic Staff by Gender (2014-2023)

Non-Academic Staff by Gender

Non-academic staff comprise the majority of university employees, providing essential services ranging from cleaning and catering to various administrative functions. The goal of reaching gender parity is closer amongst non-academic staff. Between 2014 and 2023, the percentage of

female employment has not dipped below 42%, which is 11% higher than the percentage of academic staff. The percentage of women employment was highest in 2019 when it reached nearly 47%. However, it declined to 43 percent in 2023 (See **Table 10** and **Figure 8**).

Table 10: Proportion of Non Academic Staff by Gender (2014 2023)

Gender	2014		2015		2019		2023	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	337	56.64	357	57.86	352	53.50	423	57.09
Female	258	43.36	260	42.14	306	46.50	318	42.91
Total	595	100	617	100	658	100	741	100

Figure 3: Non-Academic Staff by Gender

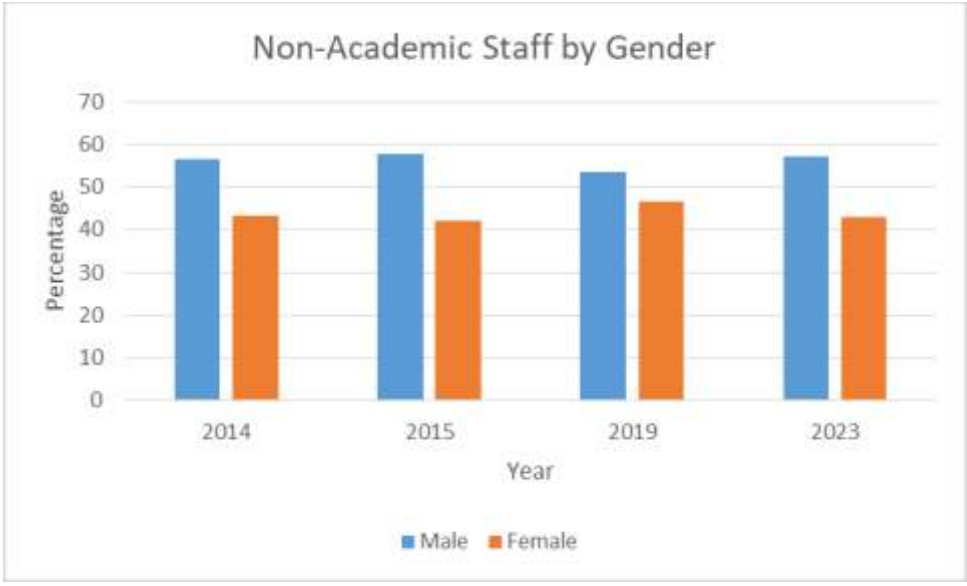

Figure 8: Percentage of Non-Academic Staff by Gender (2014-2023)

In 2024, the university reached the goal of 50 percent representation of both genders in some grades, namely Grade 7. Women outnumber men in only three grades: 11, 15, and 16. Grade 11 includes people employed as secretaries, where women are 66% of the staff. It is worthwhile to note that at the higher Grade 10, which is the position of senior secretary, the female representation decreased to 43%, a difference greater than 20% (See **Table 11**). Further investigation is needed to establish whether women are not being promoted to higher positions.

Table 11: GZU Staff by Grade in 2024

Grade	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	1	100	0	0	1	100
2	2	100	0	0	2	100
3A	3	75	1	25	4	100
-3B	16	84.21	3	15.79	19	100
4A	22	75.86	7	24.14	29	100
5A	75	79.79	19	20.21	94	100
6A	196	66.44	99	33.56	295	100
7	7	50	7	50	14	100
7A	37	66.07	19	33.93	56	100
8	16	51.61	15	48.39	31	100
8A	24	51.06	23	48.94	47	100
9	16	88.89	2	11.11	18	100
9A	13	56.52	10	43.48	23	100
10	32	53.33	28	46.67	60	100
11	20	34.49	38	65.52	58	100.01
12	11	78.57	3	21.43	14	100
12A	1	100	0	0	1	100
13	161	65.18	86	34.82	247	100
13A	3	75	1	25	4	100
14	52	54.17	44	45.83	96	100
15	3	37.5	5	62.5	8	100
16	23	34.32	44	65.67	67	99.99
Total	734	61.79	454	38.22	1188	99.99

In leadership, gender parity is yet to be reached, with most positions being held by men. Some positions have been held by men only. The following section breaks down appointments by gender for leadership positions, namely Deans and Principal Officers.

Deans by Gender

From 2019 to 2024, the percentage of female Deans has remained very low (below 20%). Between 2019 and 2023, two women, one from Education and the other from Commerce, served as deans but their terms did not overlap so there was only ever one woman in the Dean's Committee. In 2024, the situation worsened to 0% when no women were in this particular leadership role (See **Table 12** and **Figure 9**).

Table 12: Percentage of Deans by Gender (2019-2024)

	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
Gender	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	5	83.33	5	83.33	5	83.33	5	83.33	6	85.71	6	100.00
Female	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	14.29	0	0.00
Total	6	100.00	6	100.00	6	100.00	6	100.00	7	100.00	6	100.00

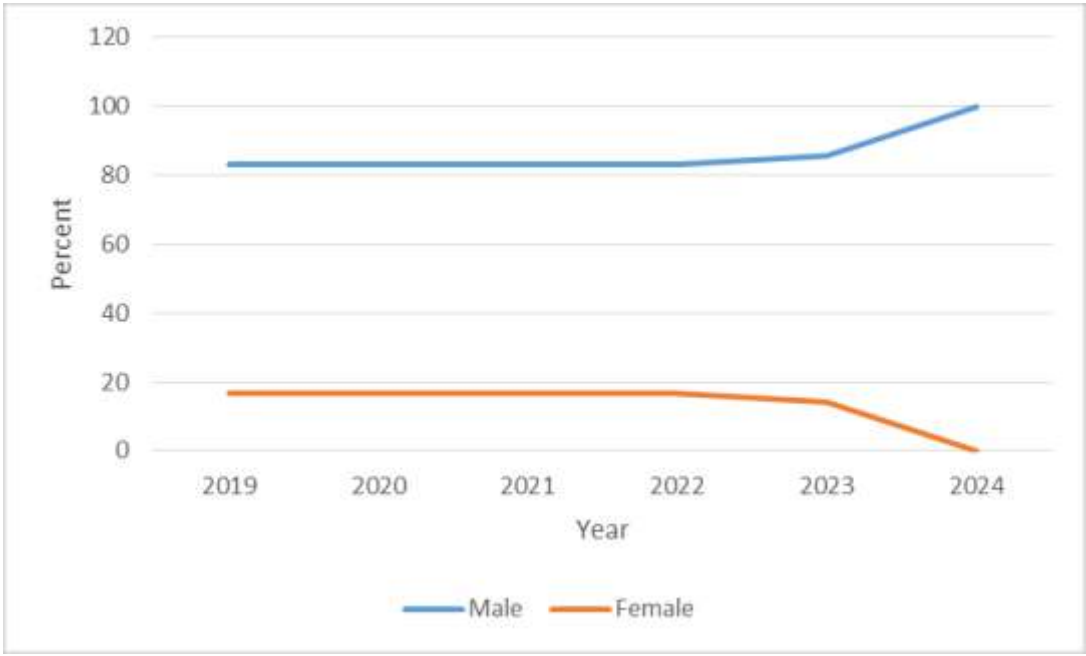

Figure 9: Percentage of Deans by Gender (2019-2024)

Principal Officers by Gender

A similar situation is present for the Principal Officers. During the period 2019 to 2024, the percentage of women Principal Officers has remained low (16.67%) compared to men (see **Table 13** and **Figure 10**). One woman, the Registrar, has served as a principal officer for the period under review. This is not unusual for Zimbabwe, where women in top leadership in Higher Education is not yet common. For example, only two women have been appointed as Vice Chancellors for the twelve major universities (Tsverukayi, 2023). In 2025, the university appointed a woman as Pro-Vice Chancellor for the first time in the University's history (GZU, 2025). She joins the Registrar as another woman in upper management, raising the percentage of female Principal Officers to 33.33%.

Table 13: Percentage of Principal Officers by Gender (2019-2024)

Gender	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Male	4	80.00	5	83.33	5	83.33	5	83.33	5	83.33	4	80
Female	1	20.00	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	16.67	1	20
Total	5	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	5	100

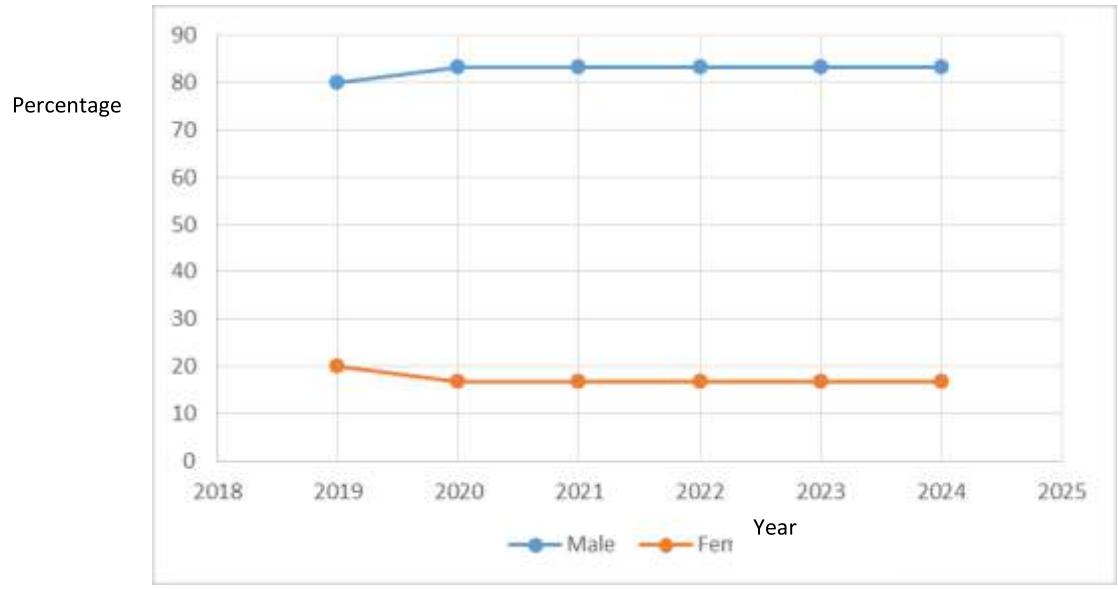

Figure 10: Percentage of Principal Officers by Gender (2019-2024)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The University has made significant strides in mainstreaming gender since 2013. These include the creation of the Gender Policy, Gender-Based Violence Prevention Policy and the Establishment of the Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies. All students in the University receive a basic introduction into contemporary gender issues through the AGCH 101 (Gender, Culture and Heritage Studies) module, a university-wide module taken in the first year that includes a component on gender.

Recruitment efforts have resulted in majority female graduates at undergraduate levels though the proportion of female students decreases as students pursue postgraduate studies. In recruitment of staff, the number of female staff members has also increased although the University still falls below 50-50 representation of gender. The following recommendations are made to further the agenda of gender mainstreaming at GZU:

The University should make increasing efforts at encouraging female students to pursue STEM fields, while also enrolling men in the fields that are and have historically been dominated by women. In student recruitment and enrolment, GZU has more female than male students, which reduces the gap in the level of education by gender that has long existed in the country. However, most of the students are concentrated in Social Sciences, Arts, Education and Law with few students in Natural Sciences, Agriculture and Medicine. The gap in education has been larger in the latter fields and the continued overrepresentation of men in those fields maintains that gap.

Efforts toward encouraging female students to pursue higher degrees should be made. The dominance of women at undergraduate level starts to wane as education level increases, leading to more men with PhD and Master's degrees than female students.

A final recommendation is the use of gender-inclusive language in University communication and policies. This includes changing language such as 'chairman' to 'chairperson', as the use of 'man' creates the impression that some positions are the domain of men only. In terms of policy, the University has two policies on gender. Another policy that would further gender mainstreaming, especially in research and innovation, a key component of Education 5.0 philosophy, would be one on gender inclusion in research. This policy would be one that includes guidance on team composition, research methodologies, participant selection, and other topics which would make gender, and other intersecting identities a key component of the research produced by staff and students.

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CHAPTER 13
From Crisis to Catalyst: Great Zimbabwe University's Experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

Viola Machingura & Dianah Chengeta

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to higher education institutions globally, disrupting traditional learning models and administrative operations. This chapter explores the transformative journey of GZU before, during and after the pandemic. Drawing on data collected through surveys involving alumni, lecturers, and students, the chapter examines GZU's adaptive strategies, resilience, and innovation in response to the crisis. A key differentiator in GZU's response was the transition from using Google Classroom, WhatsApp and email to deploying its customised e-Kampus Learning Management System (LMS), ensuring academic continuity and inclusivity. GZU's experience underscores how adversity can drive innovation, positioning the institution for sustainable growth and offering valuable lessons for other universities.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, e-Kampus Learning Management System and Institutional resilience, Traditional Learning Models, Google Classroom

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to higher education institutions worldwide, including Great Zimbabwe University. The sudden shift to remote learning forced institutions to rethink their pedagogical approaches, leveraging technology to ensure continuity of learning (Nayer and Stanley, 2015). This chapter explores the Great Zimbabwe University's experience in adopting blended learning before, during and after the pandemic, highlighting the challenges, opportunities, and lessons learnt.

The Pre-Pandemic Context

Before the pandemic in 2020, Great Zimbabwe University, like many other institutions in Zimbabwe, relied heavily on traditional face-to-face instruction. While some lecturers used technology to supplement their teaching, blended teaching and learning was not an official practice. In 2019, the then Teaching and Learning Centre approached three schools: Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education, Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences and the School of Natural Sciences for a trial run of Google Classroom (GC) for eLearning to supplement conventional face-to-face teaching and learning. GC, is a free blended learning platform, developed by Google for educational institutions. It simplifies the process of creating, distributing and grading assignments, allowing lecturers to manage classes efficiently (Stein, and Graham, 2014). The idea of using GC was well received by the three schools and the trial run began in earnest in the first semester of 2019. However, before the trial run could be verified and evaluated by the end of the year, COVID-19 struck.

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The COVID-19 Crisis

The global COVID-19 pandemic, (also known as the coronavirus pandemic), caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2), began with an outbreak in Wuhan, China in December, 2019 (Singh, et. al., 2024). It spread to other areas of Asia, and then worldwide in early 2020. It turned into a global health crisis due to the rapid spread of the viral disease and claimed the lives of more than seven million people globally (Alizadeh, Et al., 2023). This had a disruptive and catastrophic effect on all world activities, including in higher education. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, and a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Alizadeh, et al., 2023). The Government of Zimbabwe issued a statement to officially close all learning institutions (GZU included), on 24 March 2020. A directive was further issued that institutions were to ensure academic continuity despite the forced closure (Mavengano, Marevesa and Jakaza 2023).

At GZU, an urgent Management meeting was called at which the Teaching and Learning Centre made public the GC trial that had been on-going. A resolution was, thus, arrived at in the meeting to adopt GC as the platform of choice for virtual teaching and learning and to combine it with E-mail and WhatsApp for ease of communication and support of the platform, in what popularly became known as the "Combo". It was generally agreed that this was the in-thing in modern higher education world-wide, whereby eLearning and m-learning are now the in-thing (Nayar and Stanley, 2015). Students and staff manuals were quickly worked on by the Teaching and Learning Centre in conjunction with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Department to provide step-by-step access to course materials, make virtual submission of assignments, and engage in live participation in class discussions on Google Meet. Both staff and students were availed data to assist with connectivity to bring the platforms of choice to life. For the first time in the history of GZU, the adoption of the Combo, reflected a strategic embrace of digital transformation positioning the institution within the international community of universities that champion flexible, inclusive and technology driven teaching and learning environments,

Chapter Intent

This chapter aims to critically examine how the COVID-19 pandemic, with all its catastrophic effects served as a powerful catalyst for the rapid adoption of blended learning at GZU leveraging digital communication tools such as those in the Combo. It showcases how these platforms unlocked new opportunities to sustain educational continuity, enhanced engagement and innovative pedagogical practices driving the institution forward into a more connected and flexible learning future. It explores the opportunities these platforms provided for maintaining educational continuity, as well as the challenges they posed in terms of accessibility, engagement, and pedagogical effectiveness.

By focusing on the experiences of educators and learners at GZU, the chapter sought to:

- Highlight the adaptive strategies employed during the crisis to sustain learning, particularly those initiated by GZU's academic community.
- Analyse the strengths and limitations of the platform of choice in supporting blended learning within GZU context.
- Draw lessons for future educational planning, especially in resource-constrained environments like those faced by GZU and its surrounding communities.
- Advocate for inclusive and context-sensitive digital education models that build on the innovations sparked by the pandemic and reflect the realities of institutions such as GZU.

Data collection and analysis of results

To explore the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the adoption and evolution of blended learning at GZU, this chapter employed the qualitative approach embedded in the interpretivist research paradigm. This approach was chosen for its strength in capturing the depth and complexity of staff and students' experiences, particularly in times of disruption and adaptation caused by COVID-19 (Morrisson, 2003). The goal was to understand how staff and students navigated the sudden shift to blended learning, what challenges they faced, and how their perceptions evolved throughout the crisis.

Data collection was conducted through online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as well as focus group discussions targeting a purposive sample of GZU university lecturers and students. The sample consisted of 49 participants 14 lecturers (2 per school) and 35 students (5 per school). The use of online tools for data collection was both a practical necessity and a reflection of the digital environment being studied.

The questionnaires were designed to elicit open-ended responses, allowing teaching staff to express their views on the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of blended teaching and learning. Interviews provided them a deeper layer of insight through elaboration of views, enabling researchers to probe into specific experiences, attitudes, and reflections (Morrison, 2003). The focus group discussions were specifically for students to allow democratic dialogue where every participant could confidently participate.

Analysis of the qualitative data involved coding responses and identifying recurring patterns and themes. Key themes that emerged included the following:

- Widespread use of platforms like WhatsApp and Email to the exclusion, in most cases, of Google Classroom. There was resistance to what was perceived as complicated digital tools in the form of GC due to the limited time afforded for training coupled by the belief that COVID-19 was temporary, heralding a return to the face-to-face mode of teaching that lecturers were accustomed to.
- The conversations with lecturers also revealed not only the logistical and technological challenges of blended learning such as limited internet access and lack of technical support but also the emotional and pedagogical shifts that occurred during the pandemic period. A few lecturers who embraced blended teaching and learning saw opportunities in it for innovation and flexibility in time that allowed them to do research and other

obligations of Education 5.0. The rest felt that after COVID-19 everything would return to "normal".

- The students seemed to embrace blended learning more than their lecturers due to the perceived flexibility in learning time, access to vast resources and opportunities for student to student and lecturer to student collaboration showing a desire for continued use of blended learning post-pandemic with improvements. Students, while appreciative of the convenience, highlighted issues of digital fatigue and unequal access to resources.

- The qualitative approach allowed for a rich, narrative-driven understanding of how blended learning was not merely a stopgap measure, but a catalyst for rethinking pedagogy in higher education with Education 5.0 in mind. The findings suggest that while the pandemic exposed deep structural inequalities, it also opened pathways for more inclusive, flexible, and resilient teaching and learning models (Nayar and Stanley, 2015). This chapter, thus, contributes to the growing body of literature that views COVID-19 not only as a crisis but as a turning point in educational transformation.

Challenges

This new normal was not adopted with ease; it obviously brought with it challenges such as the fact that not all teaching staff had the skills and experience to design and deliver online courses, and not all students had access to devices or reliable internet connectivity. This also exacerbated existing inequalities among the student population and made the adoption to change to this new normal rather slow due to unfamiliarity with the new teaching and learning platforms and the unforeseen resistance to change by mostly staff and some of the students. The COVID-19 pandemic, thus, exposed significant challenges in the digital transformation of higher education at GZU. Chief among these was the digital divide, which severely limited students' access to online learning. Many came from rural or low-income backgrounds and lacked reliable internet connectivity, electricity, or digital devices (Litchfield et al., 2021; Katz et al., 2020). The cost of Wi-Fi and mobile data was prohibitive for many, making remote learning inaccessible despite the university's efforts to zero-rate platforms and provide data subsidies (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Another major obstacle was the lack of ICT gadgets. Students often relied on shared mobile phones or outdated devices, which hindered participation in virtual classes and assessments (Bazimaziki, 2020). Faculty and students alike faced steep learning curves with unfamiliar platforms such as Moodle and Zoom, highlighting the need for comprehensive user training (Simplilearn, 2025) where training was often rushed or insufficient.

Resistance to change also emerged as a barrier. Some educators (who claimed to have been born before technology "BBT") and a few of the students were reluctant to embrace online learning, preferring traditional face-to-face methods (Kumar, 2023). For the students, this was compounded by the diverse backgrounds of some of them ranging from urban elites to rural learners whose varying levels of digital literacy and home environments affected their ability to adapt (Aucejo et al., 2020).

Together, these challenges underscored the urgent need for inclusive digital policies, infrastructure investment, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure equitable access to education at GZU in future crises.

Lessons Learnt and Opportunities Gained

In response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges of implementing blended teaching and learning cited above, GZU implemented a range of strategic interventions aimed at mitigating educational disruption and safeguarding student welfare. Among these were data subsidies negotiated with local telecom providers to reduce the cost of internet access for students, enabling broader participation in online learning platforms. The University also initiated device partnerships with ICT gadget providers and distribution programs, prioritising staff and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lecture rooms to integrate modern technological tools for teaching and learning creating a more conducive environment for blended and digital teaching and learning experiences. A pilot phase was implemented starting with the Simon Mazorodze School of Health and Medical Sciences, where state of the art classrooms were created as a demonstration for all future classroom construction. Curriculum reforms were also introduced to accommodate asynchronous teaching and learning, modular delivery, and continuous assessment methods, allowing students greater flexibility in managing their academic workload. Blended learning models combining online instruction with limited face-to-face engagement were piloted across schools, particularly in programmes requiring practical components such as in education, engineering, agriculture, and the health sciences. These innovations, though born out of crisis, laid the foundation for a more resilient academic framework.

The pandemic underscored the critical importance of digital inclusion, equity, and institutional preparedness. GZU recognised the need to invest in robust ICT infrastructure, including expanding Wi-Fi coverage on campus, upgrading servers, and training staff in digital pedagogy. To this end a more flexible, customised Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) called eKampus, was introduced in 2022. Flexible other academic models were explored, such as rolling admissions, extended registration periods, and hybrid examination formats, to accommodate diverse student circumstances. Ultimately, the crisis compelled GZU to reimagine its role in a rapidly-evolving educational landscape embracing innovation, inclusivity, and adaptability as guiding principles. By institutionalising these reforms, GZU aims to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and student-centred higher education system that can withstand future disruptions while promoting academic excellence and social equity.

Research practices evolved as well, with GZU exploring virtual collaborations and COVID-19 related studies, opening new avenues for interdisciplinary inquiry and international engagement (Gore and Kanyangale, 2022). The University also began leveraging digital platforms for conferences and academic networking, reducing costs and increasing accessibility. Financial pressures prompted GZU to reassess its revenue models and governance structures, encouraging diversification and strategic planning (Tsverukayi and Poshai, 2024). Finally, the pandemic catalysed institutional reform, pushing GZU to prioritise equity, sustainability, and innovation in its long-term vision for higher education (Ndlovu and Pasipamire, 2021; Zeleza, 2021). These opportunities, though born out of crisis, offer a blueprint for a more inclusive, future-ready university system. The COVID-19 pandemic, while disruptive, catalysed several transformative opportunities for Great Zimbabwe University. One of the most significant was the accelerated

adoption of digital learning technologies. The urgent need to continue education during lockdowns pushed GZU to invest in e-learning platforms and digital infrastructure, laying the groundwork for long-term blended learning models. This shift not only modernised teaching methods but also expanded access to education for students in remote areas (ACCORD, 2020; Research Gate Study on Zimbabwean Universities).

The crisis also prompted curriculum innovation. GZU revised its academic programmes to include more flexible delivery modes, continuous assessment, and asynchronous learning, which better accommodate diverse student needs. These reforms are aligned with broader trends across African universities, which are now rethinking pedagogical approaches to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Zeleza, 2021).

Another opportunity was the strengthening of institutional resilience and preparedness. GZU began developing contingency plans, diversifying revenue streams, and enhancing staff capacity in digital pedagogy. Teaching staff received training in online instruction, which not only improved teaching during the pandemic but also equipped educators with skills for future disruptions (University of Pretoria, 2020).

The pandemic also highlighted the importance of mental health and student support services. GZU responded by expanding counselling services and wellness initiatives, fostering a more holistic approach to student well-being. This increased awareness and investment in mental health is a positive legacy of the crisis.

Furthermore, the pandemic encouraged innovation in research and collaboration. Although traditional research activities were disrupted, GZU explored virtual research partnerships and COVID-19 related studies, opening new avenues for interdisciplinary inquiry and international engagement. The university also began leveraging digital platforms for conferences, workshops, and academic networking, reducing costs and increasing accessibility.

Finally, the pandemic served as a catalyst for institutional reform. GZU, like many African universities, was compelled to reassess its governance structures, financial models, and strategic priorities. This introspection has led to a renewed commitment to equity, sustainability, and innovation in higher education (The Elephant, 2021).

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for Great Zimbabwe University's adoption of blended learning. While challenges remain, the benefits of increased flexibility, improved access, enhanced engagement, and personalised learning make blended learning an attractive option for the University's future. By leveraging the lessons learned during the pandemic, Great Zimbabwe University can create a more sustainable, inclusive, and effective learning environment for its students.

Recommendations

1. Continued investment in infrastructure: The University should continue to invest in digital infrastructure to support blended teaching and learning, bench making on international standards to make our graduates marketable and internationally competitive.

2. Ongoing staff development: The University should provide ongoing training and support for lecturers to develop their blended pedagogical skills.

3. Quality Assurance: The University Quality Assurance Department should implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that blended teaching and learning consistently meets academic standard, promote continuous improvement and deliver an engaging effective learning experience for all students.

By embracing blended learning, Great Zimbabwe University has created a more resilient and adaptable learning environment, better equipped to respond to future challenges.

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CHAPTER 14
Great Zimbabwe University Strategic Student Recruitment: Building and Sustaining the University of Choice

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive higher education landscape, recruitment strategies have become central to the survival and growth of universities. Great Zimbabwe University has distinguished itself as the University of Choice through its dynamic and innovative student recruitment initiatives. This chapter adopts a qualitative review of experience, practices and literature to unpack the university's ability to sustain a robust student recruitment process. The chapter explores how the recruitment philosophy gave rise to the 'University of Choice' status of the institution. The authors explore strategic recruitment initiatives implemented at Great Zimbabwe University to enhance its status as a premier institution of choice for prospective students. The chapter postulates that the University's continued expansion revolves around visionary student recruitment approaches. The chapter argues that strategic recruitment is a critical component in establishing GZU as a leader in higher education, and reinforcing its commitment to academic excellence and community engagement. The chapter recommends sustained commitment to aggressive, yet inclusive, national and international recruitment campaigns.

Key words: student demographics, student-centric recruitment, University of choice, Strategic recruitment, Institutional branding.

Introduction

Student recruitment is a core function for all higher education institutions globally (Nwedu, 2019). In today's competitive landscape, student-centric strategies have become essential for institutional growth and sustainability. Great Zimbabwe University has developed innovative, research-informed recruitment initiatives tailored to the needs, aspirations, and demographics of diverse student populations. Where effective recruitment strategies are absent, teaching and learning are directly impacted (Nwedu, 2021). Recruitment has evolved beyond management and marketing into an empirical research domain that guides GZU's strategic direction. This aligns with global trends where data analytics inform targeted campaigns and improve conversion rates.

Understanding the Great Zimbabwe University Recruitment Landscape

Academic reputation remains a cornerstone of student choice. Students prioritise institutions with strong academic records, research output, and a history of successful graduates (James & Derrick, 2019; Nafukho, 2020). Rankings and institutional branding also heavily influence perceptions (Hung & Yen, 2022). GZU has strengthened its recruitment through first-rate scholarship and a clear brand identity that highlights academic programmes, faculty expertise, and campus culture.

The university has built a strong reputation in key disciplines such as Heritage and Education, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Law, Health Sciences, Business Studies, as well as

Agriculture and Engineering. Its emphasis on research, quality education, and community engagement enhances its appeal to students seeking academic excellence.

The recruitment landscape in Zimbabwe blends traditional and modern methods. GZU recognises the need to adapt to tech-savvy, well-informed prospective students who value not only academic rigour but also supportive environments and opportunities for growth (Rai, 2024; Konyana, 2023; Ndofirepi, 2020). Strategic recruitment, defined as a proactive approach involving branding, community engagement, and targeted outreach, is essential in positioning GZU as a preferred institution (Hung and Yen, 2022; Smith and Jones, 2020). These efforts have contributed to increased enrolment and an enhanced institutional reputation, as reflected in the table below on GZU's enrolment data from 2012 to 2025.

Table 1: GZU enrolment trend

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
2012-June	1842	2063	3905
2012-November	2266	2014	4880
2013-June	2277	2556	4833
2013-November	2869	2779	5648
2014-June	3920	3844	7764
2014-November	4571	4942	9513
2015-June	6579	5592	12171
2015-November	6209	7464	13673
2016-June	8023	6209	14232
2016-November	5871	8348	14219
2017-June	8298	5608	13906
2017-November	5639	8689	14328
2018-June	8999	5634	14633
2018-November	5876	9331	15207
2019-June	9862	6071	15933
2019-November	6264	10259	16523
2020-June	5434	8894	14328
2020-November	5864	9366	15230
2021-June	5440	8875	14315
2021-November	4005	6837	10842
2022 –June	4969	8118	13087
2022 -November	4915	8092	13007
2023 –June	4589	7526	12115
2023 -November	4287	6897	11184
2024 –June	7048	4185	11233
2024-November	5763	3426	9189
2025-June	5848	3426	9274

Source: Mygzu, 2025

Enrolment Trends and Data-Informed Adaptation

Great Zimbabwe University has strategically monitored enrolment metrics and student feedback to refine its recruitment approaches continuously. Between 2012 and 2019, enrolment grew significantly from 8,800 to 16,523, driven by programmeme diversification, flexible learning pathways, and a strengthened institutional reputation. Although economic challenges moderated growth, the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) caused declines due to health concerns and shifts to online learning. From 2023, enhanced digital infrastructure, student support, skills-based education, and targeted outreach facilitated gradual recovery. Demographic changes were also evident, with female enrolment reaching 63% by 2025, reflecting institutional and national commitments to gender parity.GZU employs a multifaceted recruitment strategy encompassing academic excellence, open days, campus tours, digital engagement, inclusive infrastructure, roadshows, and cohort programmemes.

Campus tours and open days form a core element of GZU's student-centric approach, creating early connections with schools and communities. These tours provide immersive exposure to facilities such as lecture halls, labs, and social spaces, while facilitating interaction with current students. High-interest facilities like the Herbert Chitepo Law School and Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences reinforce perceptions of quality and a modern student experience.

Grounded in services marketing theory, these tours leverage the physical campus environment, aesthetics, facilities, and vibrancy, to signal quality and shape perceptions (Booms and Bitner, 1981; Vu Travis, 2021). First impressions strongly influence enrolment choices (Perkins and Neumayer, 2014). The tours blend experiential and cognitive engagement, and collaboration with high school career guidance departments supports seamless educational transitions (Thomas, 2012). School-based workshops, career fairs, and mentorship, especially in underserved areas, build trust and aspiration. Feedback confirms improved perceptions of GZU, aligning with broader community-oriented branding.

A hybrid recruitment model merges traditional and digital channels (Maringe, 2006; Vu Travis, 2021) to ensure consistent messaging and accessibility, enhancing institutional visibility and brand coherence (Dembereldorj, 2018). Inclusive facilities and financial aid promote diversity, while ongoing student monitoring supports success. Industry partnerships align programmes with labour market needs, and internships or work-integrated learning improves employability. This integrated strategy, combining early engagement, funding, mentorship, and industry ties, creates a sustainable enrolment model that supports both institutional resilience and broader socioeconomic development.

Leveraging Digital Platforms

GZU has embedded digital technology as a core component of its recruitment strategy, expanding its presence across platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok. These channels facilitate interactive engagement with younger, digitally-oriented audiences, supporting relationship-building and participatory branding (Constantinides and Zinck Stagno, 2011).

This approach adheres to Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) principles, maintaining message consistency and multisensory engagement across all platforms (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Data analytics track key metrics such as follower growth and engagement rates, enabling evidence-based strategy refinement (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009). Personalised communication, exemplified by dedicated WhatsApp groups for enrolment inquiries, addresses increasing expectations for individualised support.

As of mid-2025, GZU's social media metrics demonstrated strong reach, as shown below:

- Facebook: 2.6 million+ views (June 2025)
- LinkedIn: 19,830 followers
- Instagram: 5,600 followers
- WhatsApp: 6 active support groups
- TikTok: 2,990 followers, 12,000 likes (launched 2024)

(Source: GZU Annual Report, 2024)

Digital initiatives help overcome geographic and socioeconomic barriers, improving information access in underserved communities (Selwyn, 2012). Regular virtual tours, updates, and interactive content enhance institutional visibility, with analytics confirming a positive correlation between digital engagement and application rates, particularly among younger demographics (Brown et al., 2019).

An omnichannel strategy combines digital tools, including AI chatbots, targeted campaigns, and virtual tours, with traditional outreach, ensuring relevance across diverse demographic and regional preferences. Investments in mobile-friendly applications, online counselling, and virtual reality campus experiences further reduce accessibility barriers, demonstrating institutional commitment to equity.

Mainstream Multi-Media Advertising

Complementing digital efforts, GZU utilised mainstream media, airing five prime-time television advertisements on ZTV and twelve radio spots on Star FM's Morning Drive. These channels reach approximately 3.5 million television viewers and 2 million radio listeners nationally.

This blended approach extends reach to populations with limited internet access (Maringe, 2006), while traditional media advertisements reinforce institutional credibility through showcasing campus facilities (Naudé and Ivy, 1999). Integrated traditional and digital media ensure consistent brand visibility and relatability across demographic segments.

Leadership Branding

Leadership branding forms a critical element of GZU's institutional positioning (Preece, 2011; Scott, 2015; Blanchard, 2020). The appointment of Professor Rungano Zvobgo as Vice Chancellor in 2012 introduced a charismatic, student-centred leadership style that became symbolic of the university's progressive identity.

Research confirms the importance of leadership in shaping institutional reputation (Bryman, 2007) and stakeholder perceptions of stability and authenticity (Parmentier et al., 2013). Professor Zvobgo’s public presence, including media engagements and recognitions such as Vice

Chancellor of the Year (2015) and the African Leadership Medal of Honour, embodied the university's values, enhancing prestige and reinforcing credibility. This alignment with the concept of "institutional charisma" (Endres and Weibler, 2017) contributed significantly to GZU's brand equity and enrolment appeal.

Infrastructure as a Strategic Enrolment and Branding Tool

GZU has strategically utilised physical infrastructure to redefine perceptions of educational quality, moving beyond intangible metrics (Harvey and Green, 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1985). Since 2012, the university has undertaken significant development, including modern campuses at Mucheke and Mashava, a student village, and new facilities for Law, Heritage and Education, Social Sciences, and Medical and Health Sciences. Largely self-funded, this expansion set a new standard among Zimbabwean public universities.

These developments align with Booms and Bitner's (1981) "service-scape" concept, where physical environments serve as tangible quality indicators. GZU's infrastructure not only boosts capacity and accessibility but also projects a narrative of innovation and progress (Kotler and Fox, 1995; Keller, 2003), directly supporting recruitment.

Roadshows

GZU repurposed roadshows, traditionally commercial tools, into impactful recruitment drives across urban and rural areas. These events demystify higher education, increase local visibility, and facilitate direct engagement in community settings, reducing psychological barriers to entry.

This strategy echoes Kotler and Fox's (1995) call to proactively "go to the market", especially among underserved groups. Roadshows build emotional connections and loyalty through personal interaction (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007), embodying a stakeholder-responsive market orientation (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993) and advancing inclusive education goals (Trow, 2006).

Cohort Programmes and Satellite Campuses

Cohort-based initiatives at GZU provide clear pathways to higher education, cultivating belonging before enrolment. Satellite campuses increase accessibility for non-traditional students, fostering local partnerships with schools and businesses that enhance recruitment (Kakungulu, 2024).

Programmes tailored to regional needs attract students desiring practical, relevant education. Reduced costs, from lower living expenses and local work options, improve affordability. Geographic expansion diversifies the student body and enriches institutional culture, strengthening both recruitment and brand presence.

Personalised Communication and Talent Pipeline Development

GZU has made talent pipeline development a strategic priority to secure qualified students and meet future workforce demands. The university proactively partners with secondary schools, technical colleges, and community organisations to identify and nurture potential students early.

These structured collaborations ensure smoother transitions to tertiary education while improving student preparedness and retention (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

The university specifically extends these efforts to remote and underserved communities through targeted outreach, career workshops, and scholarship opportunities. This aligns with Zimbabwe's national vision of inclusivity and is supported by research confirming that localised interventions increase enrolment among disadvantaged groups (African Development Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2021).

Need-based scholarships further reduce financial barriers, improving participation rates among low-income students (Ngcwangu, 2022). These initiatives support both Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4, promoting inclusive education as a catalyst for progress (UNDP, 2023; IMF, 2023).

Recent studies highlight the importance of early university engagement in addressing inequality (Marginson, 2021). Mentorship and preparatory programmes enhance readiness among rural and low-income students (Wang and Wickersham, 2022), while systemic approaches like financial aid and community partnerships form "equity-driven talent pipelines" (Jones and Nichols, 2023). Aligning academic offerings with labour market needs also improves graduate employability (Zajda and Rust, 2021).

Personalised communication, through tailored emails, phone calls, and responsive inquiry management, ensures prospective students feel valued and supported (Widarni and Bawono, 2023). This individualised attention often proves decisive in student enrolment decisions.

Flexible Payment Plans

Acknowledging widespread financial constraints, GZU has introduced flexible payment options and expanded scholarship and financial aid programmes. These resources promoted during recruitment events and online, significantly improve accessibility for underprivileged students. The availability of financial support is a key factor in enrolment decisions (Cosentino et al., 2019; Nwedu, 2019), with many applicants highlighting scholarships and payment flexibility as decisive reasons for choosing GZU.

Alumni Engagement and Testimonials

GZU strategically involves alumni as brand ambassadors in its recruitment activities. Graduates share authentic success stories at events and through digital platforms, offering relatable insights into the value of a GZU education. These testimonials have measurably increased application rates and positively influenced prospective students' decisions.

Word-of-mouth referrals and personal recommendations from alumni and current students strongly impact enrolment choices. Positive accounts of academic quality, campus life, and career outcomes enhance institutional reputation and attractiveness. Research confirms that supportive learning environments and co-curricular activities increase student satisfaction and organic promotion (Martinez and Lee, 2020).

Collaboration with Industry

GZU has built strong partnerships with local industries, providing students with internships and hands-on learning experiences. These collaborations are highlighted during recruitment to emphasise the University's focus on employability and practical skills. As career outcomes become increasingly important to students, industry connections strengthen GZU's appeal and reassure prospects about their future employment options.

Expanded community engagement, including mentorship programmes and career workshops, strengthens ties with high schools and local organisations, creating clearer pathways to higher education (Hung and Yen, 2022). These efforts enhance institutional visibility and attractiveness, especially among students seeking applied, relevant education.

Reflection on Recruitment Strategies

GZU's recruitment strategies integrate traditional and modern approaches, each with distinct strengths and limitations:

- Open Days and Campus Tours: Provide direct interaction and immersive experiences but are costly and locally focused.
- Digital Marketing Campaigns: Offer broad, cost-effective reach with measurable engagement but require compelling content and constant management.
- Partnerships with High Schools: Build early, meaningful connections but may exclude marginalised communities.
- Scholarship Programmes: Attract high-achieving and disadvantaged students but strain budgets and may not ensure academic fit.
- Social Media Engagement: Effectively reaches youth audiences and enables real-time communication but demands careful management to mitigate reputational risks.
- Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation: Are essential to address challenges such as budget constraints and variable engagement levels.

Adapting to Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic forced GZU to rapidly pivot to online recruitment, which expanded participation and demonstrated resilience. Flexible admission criteria accommodated disruptions in pre-university education. Looking ahead, GZU plans to extend recruitment internationally, targeting students from neighbouring countries through partnerships that enable exchange programmes and joint degrees, further enhancing its global appeal.

Conclusion

Great Zimbabwe University's multifaceted recruitment strategy, combining targeted outreach, digital innovation, personalised communication, financial support, alumni involvement, and industry collaboration, reflects a sophisticated understanding of modern higher education dynamics. By continuously refining these approaches, GZU is well-positioned to sustain enrolment growth, enhance its reputation, and remain a leading choice for students in Zimbabwe and beyond.

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THEME 3 INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 15
Infrastructure Development: Creating Conducive Spaces through Strategic Resourcefulness

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Abstract

Infrastructure is critical in determining the quality of university education. It enhances learning environments, supports effective pedagogy, and enhances overall student experience. When Great Zimbabwe was established through an Act of Parliament, it had no physical infrastructure of its own. In contrast, other universities established during the same time as Great Zimbabwe University were able to inherit and fully occupy existing colleges in their respective cities. This allowed them to operate independently on inception and build on existing structures. Great Zimbabwe University had to share office space, accommodation, teaching, learning and recreational facilities with a Teachers' College and a Polytechnic in the city of Masvingo while resources were being mobilised for infrastructural development. This created challenges related to adequacy, suitability, compatibility and institutional autonomy. Anchored in a transformational framework, this chapter examines the progress and challenges faced during the development of the needed infrastructure and strategies deployed to mitigate them. The chapter employs a case study method using document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. It highlights key lessons learned from the experience of developing modern infrastructure under resource constraints, offering insights that may benefit institutions in comparable contexts.

Key words: university infrastructure development, conducive learning spaces, institutional autonomy, transformational framework, modern educational infrastructure, do it yourself model.

Introduction

For the past two decades, there has been intense debate among academics and key stakeholders in higher education on the role of physical infrastructure in enhancing quality education and producing graduates who possess specialist skills relevant to commerce, industry and the public service. This issue has been on the radar throughout the globe (Iqbal et al 2024; Diene 2024; Omodan, 2024, Wilkins, et al 2024; Nyanga 2019; Radberg, 2024). Studies by Nyanga (2018) and Radberg (2024) confirm that the physical infrastructure for higher learning institutions significantly influence the quality of education and the socio-economic growth of a nation. Universities have thus been compelled to construct suitable physical infrastructure. To ensure that the matter received the fullest attention, most countries have established statutory bodies which oversee that all higher learning institutions have the requisite physical infrastructure. To this end, Zimbabwe established, through an act of parliament, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE). This statutory body oversees the operations of higher education in Zimbabwe. One of its roles is to ensure that all universities have adequate and appropriate

physical infrastructure. In full compliance with the requirements of ZIMCHE, Great Zimbabwe University embarked on a physical infrastructure development programme, which aimed at providing adequate and appropriate teaching/learning, accommodation, social and recreational spaces for students and staff.

This chapter aims to explore how Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) developed suitable university infrastructure in a resource-constrained environment. While other universities established at the same time as GZU were able to inherit and fully occupy existing colleges in their respective cities, GZU had to share office space, accommodation, teaching, learning and recreational facilities with a Teachers' College and a Polytechnic in the city of Masvingo while resources were being mobilised for infrastructural development. This unusual situation had its inherent challenges linked to institutional identity, compatibility, adequacy, appropriateness, image and reputation. It was thus urgent for GZU to develop its own suitable and adequate infrastructure. The major challenges the university faced included availability of ground/stands to build on, funding, labour and time. To its credit, the university navigated the web of challenges and developed suitable infrastructure in the shortest possible time. The chapter highlights key lessons learned from the experience of developing modern infrastructure in the face of resource constraints, offering insights that may benefit institutions in comparable contexts.

Theoretical framework

The chapter is anchored in the Transformational Leadership theoretical framework. Bass & Riggio (2006) define transformational leadership through four dimensions, namely idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) focuses on the leader's ability to inspire, motivate, and empower followers to achieve organisational goals and emphasises the leader's role in creating a vision, fostering a sense of purpose, and promoting positive change. TLT is applicable to physical infrastructure development since it helps to explore how leaders in resource-starved environments create a compelling vision for infrastructure development, inspiring stakeholders to work towards a common goal. It also helps to investigate how leaders empower stakeholders, including employees, community members, and partners, to contribute to infrastructure development efforts. TLT is useful in examining how leaders in resource-constrained environments use innovative problem-solving strategies to overcome infrastructure development challenges. It can also be used to analyse how leaders create a sense of purpose and meaning among stakeholders, motivating them to invest in infrastructure development despite resource constraints.

Using Transformational Leadership Theory as a theoretical framework helps to gain insights into the leadership styles and strategies that are effective in resource-constrained environments; determine the key factors that contribute to successful infrastructure development in resource-

constrained environments; and provide practical implications for leaders and policymakers seeking to develop infrastructure in resource-constrained environments.

The importance of suitable physical infrastructure in modern universities

Notwithstanding digital advancements, the relevance of physical assets in modern universities remains incontestable (Omoda, 2024). These tangible spaces include teaching and learning spaces; discipline-specific facilities; digital infrastructure; library and study spaces; research spaces; innovation hubs and incubators; recreational facilities and open spaces; common areas, student centres, and cafés; campus housing and canteens/dining services (Tabish & Syed, 2015).

In terms of teaching and learning spaces, conducive lecture theatres, lecture halls and seminar rooms boost effective teaching and learning (Yue & Selvaratnam, 2025; Aithal & Aithal, 2019). They promote engagement, focus, and knowledge retention. Discipline-specific facilities like laboratories, studios, simulation centres, and workshops cater to specialised pedagogical needs. Digital infrastructure characterised by strong internet connectivity and digital tools expand learning beyond the lecture hall, supporting hybrid and remote engagement, thus making them crucial in shaping academic excellence (Aithal & Aithal, 2019).

Libraries and study centres support research and independent learning while technology integration such as smart boards and Wi-Fi access modernises education and bridges digital divides. Research and innovation infrastructure, laboratories, studios, and workshops facilitate hands-on experimentation thereby fostering breakthroughs and practical skill-building (Omodan, 2024). Innovation hubs and incubators support interdisciplinary collaboration and entrepreneurial ventures. Recreational facilities and open spaces nurture mental health, social interaction, and physical fitness. Common areas, student centres, and cafés encourage interaction, collaboration, and a sense of belonging (Duarte et al., 2010) while campus housing, canteens/dining services, healthcare services and counselling support offer comfort, safety, physical and mental wellbeing and community. To ensure equitable participation for students of all abilities, accessible design (ramps, signage, inclusive bathrooms) is critical (Thompson, 2025).

Physical assets constitute the solid foundation on which the ethos of a university is built (Omoda, 2024; Berkel and Homburg, 2023). The physical infrastructure symbolises tradition and a sense of continuity. It also fosters a distinct institutional identity (Omoda, 2024). The physical campus facilitates a sense of belonging. Students and lecturing staff congregate and enjoy serendipitous interactions and collaborative endeavours (Alsawaha, 2021; Robertson et al., 2019). The ambience of spaces such as the library (solemn atmosphere) and student centres (collaborative buzz) plays a pivotal role in shaping the holistic student experience that encompasses academic and extracurricular facets (Wilkins et al., 2022). Clearly, digital tools cannot fill the place of the nuances, intricacies, and richness of learning that physical spaces offer (Robertson et al., 2019; Musa & Ahmad, 2012).

Like academic reputation, suitable university infrastructure shapes institutional image (Duarte et al., 2010). A visually appealing, functional campus boosts credibility, confidence, and competitiveness. It helps in marketing and branding. That is why it is often featured prominently in brochures, websites, and social media (Omodan 2024; Ogunnaike & Ibidunni 2014). Visuals effectively promote recruitment and recognition. State-of-the-art facilities can promote public engagement through hosting public events, conferences, and exhibitions, thereby promoting knowledge sharing. Universities with modern infrastructure can also foster partnerships with industry, government, and community organisations, thus enhancing community engagement/impact (Andersen and MoldStud Research Team, 2025; Baporikar 2024; Bagnall et al 2019). Community integration and collaboration can also be boosted by infrastructure that invites public engagement, partnerships, and industry linkages through open venues, innovation hubs, and event spaces (Baporikar, 2024; Bagnall et al., 2019).

Iconic architecture and well-maintained buildings create a sense of gravitas and legacy, especially among prospective students, faculty, and donors (Scandone, 2017; Bean, 2009; Fall, 2022). Strong infrastructure also attracts international collaborations, donor investment, and community trust. Institutions with suitable infrastructure often attract top talent in terms of high-achieving students, faculty, and researchers and qualified educators thereby ensuring academic excellence and innovation (Andersen & MolStud Research Team, 2025). In brief, suitable university infrastructure is essential for academic excellence, student experience, institutional reputation, operational efficiency, and community engagement.

Infrastructure quality is also an important factor in accreditation and ranking assessments. In brief, suitable university infrastructure is essential for academic excellence, student experience, institutional reputation, operational efficiency, and community engagement.

Challenges associated with developing suitable university infrastructure under pressure

Project deadlines can result in rushed planning, compromised design quality, poor safety standards, and compromised long-term functionality (Tabish et al., 2015; Teixeira et al., 2019). Compressed timelines often lead to construction delays, cost overruns, and logistical bottlenecks. Due to limited funding, universities under pressure may lack sufficient capital to execute comprehensive projects (Mlambo, et al., 2021). Emergency spending may divert resources from other critical programmes, for example scholarships and academic development (Andersen & MoldStud Research Team, 2025). Compromised stakeholder involvement is another challenge which must be guarded against.

Time-sensitive decisions might exclude faculty, students, and community input, reducing long-term buy-in and effectiveness. Misalignment with strategic goals can occur if infrastructure decisions are made reactively rather than vision-driven. Governance and accountability challenges arise. Accelerated procurement processes may lead to opaque contractor selection, reduced oversight, or ethical concerns (World Bank Blogs, 2019). Pressure can result in shortcuts

that undermine compliance with educational standards or building codes (Andersen & MoldStud Research Team, 2024). Temporary arrangements (e.g. mobile classrooms or remote learning) can hinder student engagement and performance. Challenges associated with sustainability and long-term viability are likely to arise. In rushed developments, eco-friendly designs and energy efficiency may be deprioritised. Without future-proofing, facilities quickly become obsolete, leading to additional investment requirements. Balancing urgency with strategic vision can be problematic. The greatest challenge is maintaining educational integrity and institutional identity while responding to immediate needs. All these challenges need to be kept in mind while developing infrastructure under pressure so as to forestall them.

Methodology

The chapter employs the qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach was opted for because the researchers intended to get detailed information from key stakeholders. The researchers decided to use the qualitative approach because its interactive nature which encourages discussion and dialogue between researchers and participants and also among participants; which in turn leads to more insightful and appropriate data. The approach also helped researchers to capture non-verbal cues from participants. A case study method using document analysis, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews was utilised to carry out the study. A case study allows for an in-depth examination of a specific infrastructure development project or initiative, providing rich and detailed insights. It can capture the complexities and nuances of a particular context, including the social, economic, and environmental factors that influence infrastructure development. It can also provide practical lessons and recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on infrastructure development projects. While case studies may not be generalisable to all contexts, they can provide valuable insights and lessons that can be applied to similar situations. By using the case study method, the paper can provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of infrastructure development and its complexities, offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.

The researchers opted to use triangulation in data collection because they intended to collect data in a balanced fashion. The use of various sources of collecting data helped researchers to cross-validate findings, which consequently increased the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, triangulation in collecting data helped in providing researchers with a multidimensional view, which consequently led them to capturing the detailed data about the subject under investigation. The decision to used diverse data collecting method was based on Creswell and Path (2017) who argued that gathering data from diverse sources aids in reducing prejudices related to specific times, places, or populations. This study focused on a specific population and place; that is GZU community. The use of different data collection tools also helps researchers to uncover inclinations and disparities across different settings, thereby providing deeper intuitions into dynamic phenomena. Creswell & Poth (2017) further argue that data the use of diverse data collection methods also reinforces internal validity in qualitative study by enabling cross-

comparisons among various datasets. Data was analysed using thematic data analysis approach. Themes and sub-themes were developed during and after the collection of data.

Discussion of findings

Strategies for creating conducive spaces in a resource-constrained environment

Sharing infrastructure with other institutions

The study established that in 2012 the university had inadequate infrastructure to meet its purpose. It relied on the infrastructure shared with a Teachers' College and a Polytechnic. As Participant 1 remarked,

> The teaching and learning venues that were availed to the university by the teachers' and poly-technical colleges were not enough to cater for the needs of both students and staff.

Participant 3 further remarked,

> The sharing of facilities had serious challenges that adversely affected the smooth operation of the university; hence there was need for the university to move swiftly and construct its own teaching and learning venues.

Participant 11 added,

> In 2012, the university administration, having observed an increasing shortage of office and teaching spaces, negotiated and got more teaching and office spaces from the teachers' and poly-technical college administrations, which temporarily eased the pressure.

The university leadership's short term strategy was to negotiate for more teaching and office spaces so as to reduce the pressure for teaching venues and office space. The university received a significant number of additional teaching venues and office spaces which in a way assisted in promoting quality education.

The findings are consistent with Yariv & Coleman (2005) who argue that one of the methods of dealing with shortage of teaching space is to hire teaching space. However, when hiring teaching space, administrators should ensure that the hired space approximates the required university standards. Mahmood & Iqbal (2018) also indicate that one of the major challenges faced by academics include dealing with poor and inadequate physical infrastructure. The problems of inadequate infrastructure could in the short term be dealt with using rented facilities and sharing space with the community and other sister organisations. The university's short-term strategy significantly reduced congestion and pressure for teaching and learning venues. However, the persistent inadequacy of infrastructure in the face of increasing applications from prospective students stifled the expansion of the university and also limited the range of qualifications that it

was offering. Figure 1 shows the infrastructure occupied by GZU at the Teachers' College campus.



Figure 1: GZU property in 2012

Source: Author

Transitioning from rented infrastructure to own infrastructure

The transition from hired infrastructure to own infrastructure required transformational and visionary leadership capable of inspiring, motivating, and rallying management and staff towards an appealing vision (suitable and adequate university infrastructure). That kind of leadership was found in full measure in Professor Zvobgo who joined the university in 2012. His dedication and relentless pursuit for the development of conducive spaces inspired all stakeholders to deploy their best efforts in support of the clearly articulated vision. The long-term plan for the university was to develop its own internationally accepted and recognised physical infrastructure. Under the leadership of Professor Zvobgo, the university witnessed unprecedented growth of its physical infrastructure. As Participant 4 remarked,

The University is applauded for moving with tremendous speed in acquiring land for the development of the physical infrastructure for the university. For example, the university acquired land where it built the law school, the school of education, innovation hub and the medical school.



(a) Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education



(b) Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences

Source: GZU Information and Publicity Department

University documents confirm that, apart from developing new infrastructure, the university also renovated and transformed some buildings at its newly established campuses, upgrading them to meet world class university teaching and learning standards. This is particularly the case with GZU Mashava Campus which was transformed from a disused mining ghost town with collapsed social amenities into a modern university town in Zimbabwe. Old and unsafe buildings were demolished and replaced by new ones while solid buildings were converted to suitable teaching and learning spaces. The works also included modernising the water purification and reticu lation system. The university also established a student village by renovating and upgrading formerly mine employees' houses to modern housing units accommodating more than 2000 students (with the potential to raise the number to 5000 students in subsequent phases) and staff accommodation for over 400 employees. Figure 3 shows the Mashava Campus Student Village 1 before and after the renovations by GZU.



a. 2009



b. 2025

Source: Google Earth

The Mucheke campus also went through a similar metamorphosis from an old hotel to a vibrant modern teaching and learning facility hosting the school of hospitality and tourism. The campus accommodates 360 students and members of staff in modern purpose-built garden flats (Figure 4 below).



a. 2009



b. 2025

Figure 4: Mucheke campus (a) before renovations and (b) after renovations by GZU
Source*:* Google Earth

Following the Vice Chancellor's visionary leadership and indefatigable efforts, staff rallied behind his clearly articulated vision and worked tirelessly together as a team to support the department of works in developing infrastructure suitable for higher education. Due to limited resources from the government, the university heavily relied on locally generated funds for its infrastructural development. It dispensed with expensive private contractors and adopted the 'do-it-yourself' model.

The 'do-it-yourself' model pioneered by GZU in the Higher Education sector in Zimbabwe saw the university employing its own construction employees, procure construction equipment and also mould its own bricks in order to reduce costs. University documents confirm that the university also forged partnerships with other government departments such as Industrial Training and Trade Testing (ITTT), an upskilling arm of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, Innovation and Technology Development, as well as the Department of Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) of the Ministry of Justice in developing the university infrastructure. The advantage of this strategy was manifold. Firstly, it drastically reduced costs. Secondly, some skilled prisoners provided free labour and the unskilled ones worked as assistants doing jobs that did not require professional skill. Thirdly, the local youth were employed and received on-the-job training, thus acquiring skills in trades like bricklaying, plumbing, carpentry and electrical fitting. The acquired skills were to be certified by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, Innovation and Technology Development through ITTT. This proved to be supportive of the economic development of the country through the development of critical skills. Also included were apprentices and practitioners who wanted to be upskilled and trade-tested. The aggregate effect of the multi-facetted strategy was the rapid development of fit-for-purpose, modern university infrastructure.

The innovative transformational leadership which forged the said partnerships and inspired hard work facilitated the speedy and quality development and construction of the much-needed teaching and learning, student accommodation, staff accommodation, office, social and recreational spaces. Within a period of ten years the university managed to construct several state-of-the-art buildings on a progressive basis, which were assessed and approved by ZIMCHE as standard teaching and learning venues for a higher learning institution. University documents also confirm that some local universities visited GZU to share experiences on infrastructure development in a resource-starved environment. Discipline specific spaces such as the Moot Court, the Campus Radio station and the iconic Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education attracted the interest of virtually all state universities, thus attesting to the high quality of these teaching and learning spaces.

To ensure a strong alignment between infrastructure decisions and the strategic goals of the university, regular internal and external stakeholder engagements were done (as shown in minutes of various meetings). This ensured that any challenges would be managed in the shortest

possible time to prevent construction work stoppages. It also promoted stakeholder buy in. University documents confirm that regular evaluation meetings were held by management with the Department of Works and Estates, the University Building Committee, the Procurement Directorate and the City of Masvingo. All the infrastructure decisions were therefore vision-driven, well planned and well executed. No shortcuts which could compromise quality were countenanced. The findings are consistent with Aithal & Aithal (2019) who affirm that the development of world-class physical infrastructure is taxing and that physical infrastructure plays a key role in promoting quality education and in promoting the image of the university. Table1 summarises some of the infrastructural development projects accomplished by GZU from 2013 to 2024.

Table 1: GZU infrastructure developed from 2013 to 2024

Infrastructure developed	**Location**
Mucheke Campus Garden Flats	Mucheke, Masvingo
Mashava Campus Student Village	Mashava
Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education	Westview Campus
Innovation Hub	Westview Campus
Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences	Westview Campus
Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences	Westview Campus
Munhumutapa School of Business Sciences	Mashava Campus, Teaching & Learning Centre
GZU Hospital	Mashava Campus
GZU Mashava Clinic	Mashava Campus
Mucheke Clinic	Mucheke Campus
Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA)	Chivi Research Centre
Herbert Chitepo Law School	City Campus
Nehanda School of Gender and Cultural Studies	City Campus
Computer labs and internet centres	All campuses
GZU Campus Radio	City Campus

GZU Stadium	Mashava Campus
GZU Training Center	Mashava Campus

Source*: University documents*

The infrastructure development journey travelled by GZU is consistent with Omodan's (2024) affirmation that physical and digital infrastructures are essential tools that enhance academic excellence and ranking positions of universities. Tabish & Syed (2015) also argue that physical evidence in terms of infrastructure and other facilities often serve as major attractions to the end user. This implies that if GZU had not developed world-class infrastructure it could have faced challenges of attracting high class academics and a huge student population. The growth and integrity of many higher learning institutions heavily rely on the infrastructural facilities it has. Omodan (2024) in their research on redefining university infrastructure for the 21st century observed that there was interplay between physical assets and digital evolution of institutions. Ogunnaike & Ibidunni (2014) also argue that there is a link between physical quality of universities, customer satisfaction and education marketing. This therefore, implies that in spite of challenges in developing infrastructure, the university did remarkably well in developing conducive spaces that are consistent with world-class standards.

Funding challenges meant that the university faced monumental constraints to execute multiple comprehensive projects. There were inevitable time overruns in respect of some projects. As one participant remarked,

> One of the challenges which the university faced in developing its physical infrastructure was lack of adequate funding. Some projects took long to be completed because there were limited financial resources to procure the required building materials.

To address the problem of inadequate funding and additional to the strategies mentioned earlier on, the university, with the approval of the university council, diverted and redirected funds from less critical areas to infrastructure development. The University Council had identified infrastructure development as the most essential area which needed to be addressed; hence they made it a critical expenditure centre. This is consistent with Andersen & MoldStud Research Team (2024) who advocate for prioritising investments in the most critical areas. Students and staff educational trips, scholarships and other less critical cost centres were either reduced or suspended so as to direct more resources towards the development of infrastructure. Care was taken to ensure that such actions would not unduly negatively impact academic excellence.

The other challenges faced were some construction delays and logistical bottlenecks due to compressed timelines and labour fatigue. This was addressed by creating work shifts, where workers would do shifts so as to create rest time for them. The university managed to maintain the required educational integrity and institutional identity while it was responding to the immediate need for the development of infrastructure. It made short term arrangements with the

business community to provide it with teaching facilities on a rent to buy arrangements or renting facilities. Furthermore, due to pressure, the university faced the risk of taking shortcuts which had the potential of undermining compliance with educational standards or building codes. To address the potential challenge, the university ensured that all key personnel such as architects, engineers and qualified craftsmen were deployed to their respective areas and intentionally (not ritualistically) supervised all works taking place (as confirmed by university documents).

Moving forward towards Vision 2030, the university is focusing on implementing its master plan for the Mutare Road Campus. This entails the construction of its 'face' (the main administration block), the science park, a modern mega-library and the convocation hall. These projects will be a big step in the university's endeavour to contribute towards the industrialisation and modernisation of the Zimbabwean society through heritage-based teaching, research, innovation and industrialisation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that world-class university education is reliant on the availability of appropriate infrastructure to support teaching and learning processes. It acknowledges that GZU defied the odds by developing world class infrastructure at the shortest possible time with very limited resources. The study also concludes that developing suitable university infrastructure in resource-starved environments requires transformational leadership which inspires, motivates and rallies stakeholders behind a clearly formulated and attractive vision. It also requires transparent and innovative ways to overcome constraints and obstacles. Meaningfully engaging stakeholders ensures that everyone has a sense of ownership of the multi-facetted project (infrastructure development) and works in concert with everyone else. The study also concludes that clearly articulated standards should be meticulously observed so as to prevent urgency from eroding quality. This is the responsibility of every stakeholder guided by designated experts.

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The Main Library

CHAPTER 16
Research Infrastructure at Great Zimbabwe University

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Abstract

Research infrastructure at a university is crucial as it provides essential tools, facilities and resources that enable high-quality research and development across disciplines. The infrastructure encompasses physical and virtual resources, equipment, as well as services that support research, such as libraries, resource centres, laboratories, research hubs, and access to expertise. Great Zimbabwe University continues to be steadfastly positioned as a hub for research and academic excellence. The development of a robust, inclusive and sustainable research infrastructure has been and remains increasingly critical, especially with evolving scholarly communication trends. The chapter outlines GZU the experiences and core components of this infrastructure, which incorporate research commons, scholarly communication practices and digital research tools. The university deliberately set the tone for such by applying various interventions that enable research credibility, discoverability, and visibility. These interventions have propelled GZU to be a leader in research. The chapter highlights the critical role played by the library, research departments, and other key stakeholders in initiating strategic and innovative solutions that sustain the research infrastructure and their contribution to a broader research infrastructure discourse at GZU. Additionally, global south challenges, which are characterised by limited resources, funding constraints, digital literacy gaps and policy development needs are discussed.

Key words: Research infrastructure, High-quality Research, Scholarly Communication, Digital Library, Academic Excellence

Introduction

Great Zimbabwe University has positioned itself as a hub for research and academic excellence. Research is one of the five pillars under the Heritage Based Education 5.0 policy that drives education in Zimbabwe (the policy is discussed in detail under Theme Two of this book) (ZIMCHE, 2022). This educational philosophy, implemented in Zimbabwe, emphasises a holistic approach to learning that integrates teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation (MoHTEISTD, 2019). Research encourages students and faculty to engage in research activities that contribute to national development and address societal needs. Research initiatives at universities, involving both students and faculty, are increasingly encouraged to focus on projects that contribute to national development and address societal challenges (Abo-Khalil, 2024). This shift is driven by a growing recognition of the university's role in societal progress and the need to connect academic work with real-world problems, to directly and positively impact the community and the nation. Thus, research infrastructure at a university needs strategic alignment to national development priorities and goals, and then resource allocation to directly fund and support those projects that address key national challenges.

In pursuit of academic excellence, innovation and industrialisation, GZU has put research infrastructure in place, beginning from the office of the Vice Chancellor, who sets the

institutional tone, to the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Research and Innovation. While other sections of the University support research, the University Library, Research and Innovation, Postgraduate and Publications, Quality Assurance and Academic Planning, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Schools are directly mandated to deliver on the research pillar (GZU, 2021). These units are part of the physical structures enable research to take place. The units are also responsible for tools, services and platforms that are used to further this cause. Thus, GZU regards research as a core university activity, and is committed to promoting and building research capacity, as a strategy, to address local, national and regional needs, that is, Masvingo province, Zimbabwe and SADC. Since the turn of the decade, GZU is fostering a culture that values and rewards research that contributes to national development and addresses societal needs. Subsequently, the university has been seeking ways to engage in a critical dialogue with partners to build research in areas which complement the University's historical niche as an African university whilst ensuring internationally recognised excellence.

Research conducted using robust research infrastructure can lead to new technologies, products, and services that drive economic growth and improve quality of life, thereby promoting economic growth. Research infrastructure at a university is crucial as it provides essential tools, facilities, and resources that enable high-quality research and development across disciplines. The infrastructure encompasses physical and virtual resources, equipment, as well as facilities, and services that support and enable research activities, such as libraries and resource centres, laboratories, and access to expertise and support staff (Omodan, 2024). The development of a robust, inclusive and sustainable research infrastructure has been and remains increasingly critical, especially with evolving scholarly communication trends. Research infrastructure at GZU includes equipment, libraries, resource centres, laboratories, information databases, archives, and specialised facilities such as the research and innovation hub, all of which are crucial for both individual researchers and collaborative projects. Additionally, there are processes that make the research effort seamless, such as publishing and research press, scholarly communication processes, which include but are not limited to research data management, open science, and research discovery and dissemination. These key components of the university research infrastructure are vital for advancing knowledge, fostering innovation, and maintaining a competitive edge in research. GZU research infrastructure is continuously being refined in order to keep abreast with contemporary research trends.

Research at Great Zimbabwe University

Publishing infrastructure

Parameters for best practices in research are set and monitored by the Quality Assurance section. At GZU, the quality, originality, relevance and impact of research that is carried out in the seven Schools are monitored closely. Research by students and staff is published in school-based journals as well as in the *Dzimbahwe Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, which is university-wide and is run from the Postgraduate and Publications unit. Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences runs the *Humanities Southern Africa Journal*. The Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education is responsible for the *Journal of New Vision in Education* (JoNVER).

Munhumutapa School of Business Sciences hosts the *Research Journal of Economic and Management Studies* (RJEMS). Three schools run journals, and all the journals in the University are accredited by ZIMCHE. The remaining Schools are in the process of setting up their journals.

Accreditation by ZIMCHE means the running of the journals is above board, considering their editorial boards, publication policy and frequency of publication. As such, articles published in these journals are reputable. Digital library services were enhanced to support the ever-growing digital library landscape and increased researcher appetite for digital inclusion library services. The Library embarked on a digital project to host all university journals on an Open Journal System (OJS). OJS is a solution for managing and publishing GZU's scholarly journals online, which helps to manage all aspects of journal publishing, from submissions to online publication and indexing. It's a widely used platform, with over 10,000 journals utilising it globally. The OJS enhances the visibility, discoverability and accessibility of GZU journals, as it allows free sharing of university research around the world with no restrictions or paywall. It also ensures efficient management of research at every stage of publication, offering a seamless publishing experience. Additionally, OJS is equipped with statistics and analytics tools for enhanced insights, covering crucial metrics like acceptance rates, submission review times, and the popularity of published articles. This is supported by the University's ever-growing Institutional Repository, which is a full-text digital collection of staff research (journal articles and book chapters), student dissertations, and theses.

Information infrastructure

Information and knowledge are keys to research, innovation, industrial development and economic growth. GZU Library is the heartbeat of the university's research infrastructure, facilitating the creation, management, evaluation for quality, dissemination and preservation of knowledge and scholarly works, and boasting a hybrid library with products and services. The Library has, over the years, tailored its information processes by effectively acquiring, processing and disseminating information and knowledge, anchored on information literacy skills, to spur innovation and industrial development in Zimbabwe. In line with the Education 5.0 mantra, since 2021, the library embarked on a transformation journey to mirror the University's efforts towards the same. Thus, the library strategic objectives are divided into four areas, namely supporting, teaching and learning, innovation, industrialisation, and community services engagement, under programme 2 of the university strategic plan, code-named: skills training and development, outcome 2, code-named: improved access to quality, equitable and inclusive education, and key strategy of increasing provision and access to scholarly communication and literature.

GZU Library reflects the rapid growth rate of the University, both in the physical provision and in the range, format and volumes of library resources acquired in support of evolving academic and research programmes. Its mission is to support the teaching, learning and research needs of the university by acquiring and organising access to information resources in a variety of formats and by equipping the university's community with skills to exploit these resources. GZU has, over the years, made it a policy for one campus, one library. To this end, the university operates seven physical libraries and resource centres, and online through the electronic library, accessible 24/7 from any location with internet access through off-campus authentication platforms. These

have made researchers from all walks of life able to access extensive information resources for research from their doorstep, be it Masvingo city centre, Mashava, and other locations such as Law and Medical Schools. In the physical infrastructure, the Library is endowed with physical resources that span all disciplines at GZU. Through its digital presence, the university library subscribes to global databases and repositories to ensure equitable access to the most current research. Open Access databases also ensure that information resources are accessible to all researchers.

To further strengthen the research infrastructure, GZU Library conducts regular information services and research clinics to capacitate researchers with the requisite research skills and tools. A range of information services offered to support clients throughout the knowledge life-cycle, which include information access and retrieval service, selective dissemination of information (SDI), current awareness (CAS), and instructional programmes such as information literacy skills (ILS), and user education. The instructional programmes are designed to support the research needs of the university community, and include one-on-one assistance, scheduled or on-demand group sessions, course-related instruction, and research skills workshops. On the other hand, the research tools offered by the Library include Turnitin plagiarism detection software used to uphold academic integrity, SubjectPlus subject and research guide, and Google Docs collaborative writing tools. Additionally, the research clinics equip researchers with information literacy skills, digital skills and reference management skills. Capacitation also facilitates for the discoverability, findability, impact and bibliometric evaluation of research by GZU researchers.

Research infrastructure digital devolution

In line with the evolving landscape of the 21st century, GZU is also at the forefront of re-imagining its infrastructural identity to align with the modern learning paradigm. This transformative shift in university infrastructure focuses on the harmonisation of tangible physical assets and the expanding world of digital evolution, integrating digital platforms with the brick-and-mortar structures to rapidly redefine the academic landscape and optimise cutting-edge research experiences (Omodan, 2024). GZU Library digital support services are a critical pillar and part of the university's research infrastructure, seamlessly integrating information with technology, access, discovery, and data-driven work. The services facilitate institutional repository metadata, university journals hosting, indexing, archiving and preservation of research content online. This is aided by maintaining and securing user access to digital repositories, academic journals, and licensed databases through advanced catalogue systems, authentication protocols, and intuitive search platforms. The Library also assists users with using our electronic platforms, account customisation, remote access through EZproxy, and with live online support. The main platforms managed by the Library for the preservation, distribution and promotion of the university research include the library website page, an Institutional Repository, an Integrated Library Management System, and a proxy server, among other platforms.

The Library aids in the faculty's research journey by article and journal hosting, preservation and archiving. Additionally, the following research infrastructure is maintained to ensure quality research data: Institutional Repository metadata, ISSN/eISSN, ISBN/eISBN Registration, Indexing, customising the university's research hosting platforms, uploading, and verifying that scholarly work is correctly recorded online. Through the research infrastructure established, the

Library ensures that there is a strong compliance with Open Access policies that enable researchers to share their work widely, linking them to their ORCID, Web of Science, and Science Direct research accounts. The Library also, among other things, ensures that it avoids or tackles legal barriers that may affect the visibility of a researcher's work. Furthermore, the department is tasked with the duty of ensuring user education through research clinics, training on the use of researcher platform accounts, marketing research output, and providing accurate and up-to-date information to both the internal and external GZU community. This includes creating platforms that can harvest or develop analytical or statistical data that can be used for decision-making systems. Through usage analytics and impact matrices and the integration of these applications to the existing Library platforms, the library users, along with management, are able to see the research impact, among other things.

Scholarly communication

GZU library has evolved into a dynamic knowledge hub that fosters scholarly communications. Additional Library services were operationalised in close liaison with faculty, school departments, Postgraduate and Publications and Research and Innovation to boost research excellence at GZU. One such service was Scholarly communication services, which include the following areas: research data management, research discovery and dissemination, IP and copyright, and data collaboration. Scholarly communication is the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use (Moulaison-Sandy, Million & Hudson-Vitale, 2020). The Library provides services that support the research-intensive needs of the research communities, which include students and staff. Research data management brings in services and programmes related to managing and planning research data, including its subsequent data acquisition, data organisation, data sharing, and long-term data preservation and stewardship. Research discovery and dissemination scope includes services and programmes related to research visibility, discoverability and impact, and research publishing credibility. Plans for research commons, which are dedicated library research spaces equipped with research facilities and a conducive research environment, were initiated.

On the other hand, data collaboration entails services and programmes related to open access, open science and open data. It includes enabling infrastructure for open research at GZU through digital tools, training opportunities for research tools and practices, collaboration opportunities on data science projects, special events and advocacy. Intellectual property (IP) and copyright support researchers and users of research through openly discussing copyright, fair use and IP issues. Various scholarly communication research clinics have been hosted in response to an ever-changing academic landscape to keep the academic community current on scholarship, publishing trends, and developments. This includes Visible or Vanish/Publish or Perish Research Clinics targeted at the scholarship community, which includes postgraduates and doctoral students, and academic staff in all Schools. These research clinics fulfil the commitment to increase provision and access to scholarly literature and communication, providing services, tools and methodologies that foster academic integrity and fairness and strengthen the Institutional Repository.

The ever-growing physical and electronic library collection continues to be the foundation for research excellence and significantly improved access to research resources by the university community. Various electronic databases of electronic books and journals were subscribed to through various partners, which has increased access to electronic books and journals by providing access to over 20 electronic databases through subscription, free and open access arrangements. Information resources from online databases, digital archives, libraries, and other resources, such as equipment and specialised software, provide the impetus for access to research data, publications, and other relevant information. These infrastructures enable students and staff to conduct research, experiments, analyse data, and collaborate effectively, ultimately fostering innovation and scientific advancement. Additionally, the Institutional Repository (IR) articles and book chapters continued to expand. The Library continued to boost the university's research discoverability, visibility and accessibility through indexing and archiving them on the IR open-access platform. Knowledge management services continue to be enhanced to improve finding aids, align with international metadata standards and link to electronic holdings. This enabled the offering of additional standardised content and metadata to the university community. Anti-plagiarism services were offered to the university community through the Turnitin platform to ensure the research integrity of the research output of our students.

GZU Institutional Repository (IR) is an electronic database representing the total publicly available research and scholarly output of the University that promotes the archiving, preservation and management of research. The purpose of GZU IR is to provide a research infrastructure which collects, disseminates and preserves the intellectual effort and research output of staff and students of the institution. This ensures that the University contributes to the global body of knowledge and maximises the exposure of GZU research, thereby raising the profile of the institution. GZU IR is accessible from http://ir.gzu.ac.zw:8080/xmlui/, and hosts such information as:

i. Any journal article, research report, conference paper, poster presentation, creative work, book or book chapter produced through the assistance of funds provided by the University's Research Board or any other academic or administrative unit of the University.
ii. Theses and dissertations produced by duly registered students of Great Zimbabwe University in partial or total fulfilment of any academic programme offered by the University
iii. Public and inaugural lectures
iv. Papers from conferences hosted by the University
v. Creative literary, artistic or musical works
vi. Ancillary research material such as data sets, statistics and surveys
vii. Journals produced by the University's Schools.

Research provides the foundation of modern society. Researchers benefit from depositing their works with GZU's IR by having the widest possible audience for their research output. It brings increased visibility, citation, usage, greater public engagement, faster impact, wider collaboration, and increased interdisciplinary conversation for their work. In an era where the number of articles being published is skyrocketing, open access can help an article become more discoverable online. And ultimately, an increased number of readers can convert into an increased number of citations for the author.

Research author support infrastructure
Research Board, Conferences and Empirical research

At GZU, articles, chapters and other works that get published are a product of conferences, seminars, empirical research and collaborations that happen in Schools and beyond. Examples of conferences that have been hosted by GZU are the Munhumutapa School of Sciences conference of September 2023, themed 'Strengthening sustainable economic development through entrepreneurship, business development, science, innovation and industrialisation', and the SMAWOP Languages conference of November 2023. The School of Natural Sciences held the first Computational Conference under the theme 'Promoting Industrialisation through Computational Intelligence, Simulation, Statistical and Mathematical Modelling,' and hosted its second conference on 30 and 31 July 2025, themed 'Unlocking the Potential of the 4th Industrial Revolution in Knowledge Work.' GZU also hosted a conference in collaboration with UNESCO on 29 August 2024 under the theme 'Interventions to Prevent and Tackle Gender-Based Violence, Drug Abuse, STIs and Unwanted Pregnancies in Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province.' This conference attracted presenters and participants from 16 institutions of higher learning in Masvingo and beyond. Out of the conference came a book that was launched by GZU Vice Chancellor, Prof Rungano Jonas Zvobgo, on 22 July 2025. More books are on the way on the same theme which addresses current and disturbing issues in higher and tertiary education.

GZU conferences have, among other things, brought stakeholders together, the industry has been part of research at GZU, and communities have been active in the research to ensure that the research is relevant to the needs of stakeholders. Conferences hosted at GZU premises have resulted in improved research and conferencing infrastructure, while those conferences taken out of GZU spaces to places such as Victoria Falls have provided exposure to GZU staff and students, improved GZU research visibility and made GZU Brand competitive. The exposure, collaboration and visibility have sharpened GZU research over time. As a result, more journal articles are produced by staff per year, with some surpassing the two articles per year per member policy. GZU research has also made the institution known for collecting accolades in research competitions nationally and beyond.

At the height of GZU research are the Vice Chancellor's Professorial Lectures. These lectures are held per semester to give a chance to Professors in the institution to interrogate topical issues in the environment. A sample of such lectures, their titles and presenters is given here:

- Prof B. J. Siyakwazi, 'An Examination of the Philosophy of Grand Trinity of Unhu / Ubuntu in Education within the Zimbabwean context;'
- Prof M. Manyanga, 'The Past in the Present: Situating Zimbabwe's Archaeological Resources in the National Development Agenda;'
- Prof K. Chinyoka, 'Poverty: A Hindrance to the Holistic Development of Girl Learners in Zimbabwe;' and
- Prof E. Ganga, 'Re-discoursing the Concept of Vulnerability in the Era of Innovation and Industrialisation.'

Professorial as well as Public lectures have acted again as spaces where stakeholders meet and share ideas. The non–GZU community gets a chance to mingle with the literate of Masvingo and discuss big issues in the knowledge economy. The impact has been that there is improved

attraction to enrol, collaborate and compete with GZU. Everything put together, GZU brand keeps improving. GZU Research Fairs and Postgraduate Days have also made a similar impact, attracting universities beyond Zimbabwean borders to exchange ideas and research. Examples of Research Fairs of 2021 under the theme 'Heritage Based Education, Research and Innovation for Modernising and Industrialising Zimbabwe,' and 2022 themed Heritage Culture for Industrialisation,' are signs of how GZU research infrastructure is diversified. Postgraduate Days for 2022 under the theme 'Reframing the Role of Research and Innovation in National Development in the Context of Education,' as well as for 2023 themed 'Forging Economic Growth and Stability Through Strong Partnership between universities and communities,' demonstrate the involvement of GZU's most senior students in research.

GZU prides itself in leaving no one and no place behind in providing research opportunities to all staff and all students, and as a result, policies are in place that aims to guide the research space. These include the Research Policy, Postgraduate Policy, Publications Policy and Intellectual Property Policy. The policies are meant to ensure best practices and international standards, and to level the playing field for all researchers. There are also clear paths to follow when carrying out research under a School, from the Dean who has the School Research Agenda, to the Research Chair who is the custodian of guidelines, the don'ts and dos, of research per School, to Research Representatives who assist with Research Board matters to the researcher, who is always on the look-out for research and funding opportunities. More opportunities and guidance also come from the Research and Innovation through the Grants Office. A lot of impactful researches are carried out in the form of grant writing exercises that go on in multidisciplinary collaborations.

Research and Innovation

The research findings at a university should inform and result in knowledge transfer, where findings are expected to be translated into practical applications and solutions that benefit the nation, ushering in research and innovation discourse. At GZU, research and innovation are key drivers of research infrastructure development. Research and innovation are key in the generation of new knowledge, ideas, or approaches that lead to the development of something novel or significantly improved. It encompasses both the research process itself and the application of research findings to create something new and valuable, whether it's a new product, service, process, or a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. GZU research innovation hub is a physical as well as virtual space that brings together researchers, innovators, and creators to foster collaboration and develop new ideas into impactful products and services. The research innovation hub is a focal point within the university that serves as a catalyst for creative solutions and drives innovation. GZU has established laboratories, innovation hubs, and digital systems that support multidisciplinary research and align with Education 5.0 goals, which promote teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation (MoHTEISTD, 2019). Capacity-building initiatives have enhanced the skills of academic staff and postgraduate students, improving research output and funding opportunities (GZU Strategic Plan, 2021). Applied and heritage-based research further informs context-relevant infrastructure, particularly in agriculture, climate resilience, and indigenous knowledge systems (Nziramasanga, 2020). Through partnerships and innovation, GZU also attracts external funding, supports pilot projects, and strengthens industrial linkages that expand physical and digital infrastructure (ZIMCHE,

2022). These developments position GZU as a key player in advancing national development priorities and global goals such as the SDGs, as well as NDS1.

Importance of Research Infrastructure at GZU

Advancing research at GZU

Adequate research infrastructure is essential for conducting cutting-edge research, making new discoveries, and contributing to the advancement of knowledge. Among other things, it enables scientific discovery, supports multidisciplinary research, and fosters innovation. Research infrastructure provides the tools and resources necessary for researchers to conduct experiments, analyse data, and publish findings in various fields by enabling scientific discovery. Modern research often requires collaboration across disciplines. Well-equipped research facilities facilitate this by bringing together diverse expertise and resources through supporting multidisciplinary research. Research infrastructure can spur innovation by providing the environment for researchers to test new ideas, develop prototypes, and translate research into practical applications through fostering innovation.

Attracting researchers and funding at GZU

Universities with well-equipped and supported research infrastructure are more likely to attract top researchers and secure research funding. GZU has created a competitive edge through enhanced research infrastructure outlined above. Universities with strong research infrastructure are more attractive to funding agencies, researchers, and students, giving them a competitive edge in attracting resources and talent. Additionally, GZU has embraced international collaboration through the signing of various research-based MOUs. World-class research infrastructure can facilitate collaboration with researchers from other institutions and countries, leading to broader impact and knowledge exchange. GZU continue to align itself for economic development through an elaborate research infrastructure that can attract investment and contribute to regional economic development by supporting innovation and the creation of new industries.

Fostering research collaboration at GZU

Through the elaborate research infrastructure, GZU often facilitates collaboration between researchers from different departments, institutions, and even countries. This has helped to solve societal challenges, especially in Masvingo province, such as climate change, disease outbreaks, and food security. GZU research infrastructure has also helped to train the next generation of researchers by providing them with access to advanced research facilities, providing valuable training opportunities for students, and preparing them for careers in research and innovation.

Conclusion

Access to advanced research infrastructure provides valuable training opportunities for students and early-career researchers. By supporting research and development, university research infrastructure plays a vital role in driving innovation and contributing to economic growth. Research infrastructure is a critical component of a modern university, enabling researchers to

conduct high-impact research, train future generations of scientists, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge and innovation. Research infrastructure is a vital component of a thriving university ecosystem. It empowers researchers, drives innovation, and contributes to societal progress. The development of a robust, inclusive and sustainable research infrastructure has been and remains increasingly critical at GZU, as evidenced by various interventions employed by the university to attain research excellence. Investing in and maintaining robu st research infrastructure is essential for the university to remain competitive and fulfil its role as an engine of discovery and knowledge creation.

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Simon Mazorodze School of Medical And Health Sciences



The Executive Dean of the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical And Health Sciences, Professor Jacob Mufunda (sitted right) poses with the first intake of the school.

CHAPTER 17
Infrastructure towards Universal Health Coverage: The Masvingo Experience

William Pote, Herbert Zirima, Richard Makoni, Noel Ralph Zulu, Johannes Marisa, Shamiso Chowe, Julian Chazovachii, Benson Karongo & Jacob Mufunda

Abstract

Zimbabwe's journey toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030 hinges on strategic health infrastructure expansion and workforce development, particularly in underserved regions like Masvingo. This chapter examines how Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), guided by a presidential directive to decentralise health training, catalysed regional transformation through the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences and critical hospital upgrades. A US$40 million, four-phase overhaul of Masvingo Provincial Hospital will convert it into a 400-bed teaching facility by early 2026, enhancing outpatient, intensive care, maternity, and specialist services. Simultaneously, the revamped Mashava Specialist Hospital will deliver tertiary care locally, epitomising the "new abroad" concept by retaining patients and specialists within the province. GZU's Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences, with its integrated biomedical sciences curriculum, supports local health workforce expansion, while partnerships with institutions like College of Surgeons of East Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA) strengthen specialist training pathways. Anchored in the WHO's six health system building blocks service delivery, health workforce, information systems, medical products and technologies, financing, governance and reinforced by functional utility infrastructure, these interventions advance Masvingo's capacity to deliver accessible, quality health services with minimal out-of-pocket costs. The chapter showcases how regional infrastructure, academic innovation, and policy alignment can position Masvingo as a replicable model advancing Zimbabwe's UHC goals.

Key words: Universal Health Coverage (UHC), Health infrastructure, Masvingo, Great Zimbabwe University, Teaching hospital

Introduction

Zimbabwe has committed to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030 under the Sustainable Development Goals. In line with *Vision 2030* and other national strategies, the Ministry of Health emphasises expanding services and workforce across all regions. The government has launched a Health Workforce Strategy (2023–2030) "to transform the country's human resources for health… ensuring the highest quality of life for all Zimbabweans by 2030". In this context, Masvingo Province (population ~1.6 million) one of Zimbabwe's oldest settlements is strengthening its health infrastructure. Traditionally underserved, Masvingo's health indicators have lagged, but recent investments in health training and facilities aim to close the gap and make care both accessible and affordable.

The presidential directive to decentralise health training has been a catalyst. President Mnangagwa, as Chancellor of all state universities, has encouraged each university to train health professionals. Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) responded by establishing a new

medical faculty and upgrading local hospitals. These initiatives align with Zimbabwe's UHC commitments: for example, the nation's UHC service coverage index was 54 in 2021 (above the Sub-Saharan Africa average), and the Ministry now targets raising this to at least 80 by 2030. Key infrastructure projects in Masvingo described below illustrate this vision, promising to extend quality care to rural communities and reduce out-of-pocket costs.

Great Zimbabwe University's new medical school building in Masvingo (Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences) is a modern facility to train health professionals. Commissioned in 2022, it embodies the university's role in transforming local healthcare.

The major recent infrastructure developments in Masvingo include:

- Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences (SMSMHS) – GZU (Masvingo): In October 2022 President Mnangagwa commissioned GZU's medical faculty. The inaugural class of a 3-year BSc in Biomedical Science (pre-clinical programme) enrolled in March 2023. Eighty percent of the curriculum follows national medical standards, while 20% is unique to GZU's heritage focus (integrating traditional/herbal medicine). By training doctors locally, SMSMHS directly expands the health workforce and brings medical expertise to Masvingo. The school's leadership notes that it "is poised to massively transform the healthcare system in Masvingo Province and [address] the nation's current need".

Impact of the construction of the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences in Masvingo Province

The school's construction which came as a strategic response to longstanding healthcare challenges in Masvingo, including the lack of modern referral hospitals will have long standing influence directly and indirectly on the infrastructural landscape of Masvingo healthcare landscape. It is expected to transform the health delivery system in the province and contribute to Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 goals of becoming an upper-middle-income society.

As the training of medical students continues to progress, it is anticipated that it will directly lead to the development of Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital which is the nearest psychiatric centre. The School already has formal and informal agreements with the psychiatric hospital aimed at developing the infrastructure of Ngomahuru Psychiatric Hospital so that it will be better positioned to accommodate students in terms of their training and accommodation while at the hospital. This will have a direct impact on the improvement of provision of psychiatric services to Masvingo province and the nation at large.

It is anticipated that as the training of students continues, the other direct impact will be on the construction of students' residences in Rural District Hospitals around Masvingo. These residences will be necessary to accommodate students when they will be on their rural attachment. Currently, students struggle to get accommodation as the available accommodation in district hospitals was meant for nurses who will be on training. The University and the

Ministry of Health and Childcare currently have plans to construct such student residences across selected rural hospitals.

The Medical graduates from the school will be dual-competent in both conventional and traditional (herbal) medicine, making them uniquely equipped to serve diverse communities. This may in future lead to the development of infrastructure best suited for traditional medical practice if (as is expected), graduates from the school conduct their practice in Masvingo province.

- Mashava Specialist Hospital (100-bed upgrade): GZU's Mashava Campus Hospital (a 100-bed facility) is being fully refurbished as a university teaching and referral hospital. Once reopened, it will offer specialist services (laparoscopic surgery, advanced radiology, obstetrics/gynecology, dentistry, etc.) that were previously available only in Harare or Bulawayo. This means Masvingo Province's residents can access high-level care locally. Professor Jacob Mufunda (Executive Dean of Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences) explains that "specialist equipment [for] laparoscopy… and advanced radiology" is being installed, so patients "who were having to pay more to travel to big cities… will only have to go to Mashava and also pay affordable hospital fees at our institution". In effect, this reduces out-of-pocket expenditures for rural patients. Vice-Chancellor Zvobgo emphasises that the Mashava upgrade embodies the government's "leave no one and no place behind" philosophy. Importantly, Mashava Hospital will serve as the principal clinical training site for GZU medical students (the first cohort is due for clinical rotations in 2026). In reviving a former mining-town hospital, GZU also contributes to the local economy, "breathing life into this town" after its decline.
- Masvingo Provincial Hospital (400-bed upgrade): The provincial referral hospital in Masvingo city is being upgraded into a state-of-the-art facility, with US$40 million devoted to a four-phase expansion. Crucially, it is being readied as a teaching hospital for GZU's medical programme. In early 2023 the first 20 students began studies in Masvingo, and they are due to start clinical training at the provincial hospital in 2026. Masvingo Hospital serves over 1.6 million people, and in 2023 President Mnangagwa directed its urgent rehabilitation. By mid-2025 upgrades to junior doctors' housing, water systems, wards and a new drug storeroom were already ~65% complete. These improvements mean that more specialists will serve the province locally, and more students can train thereby reducing the need for patients to travel (and pay) out of province.

Together, these projects expand coverage and accessibility. Masvingo's roughly 1.5–1.6 million residents will now have local access to doctors in most specialties. Services that once required a trip to Harare (or even South Africa) – from advanced surgery to diagnostic imaging – will be available in Masvingo Province. This geographically extends care and aligns with UHC's goal of reaching underserved populations. At the same time, the commissioning of Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences, and use of local hospitals is rapidly increasing the health workforce: each graduating cohort will add dozens of trained professionals to Masvingo's health system. (The National Health Workforce Strategy notes the need to nearly double medical

training outputs by 2030.) As more doctors and nurses are trained and retained in Masvingo, patient-to-provider ratios will improve and quality of care will rise.

These developments also reduce out-of-pocket costs. By situating care locally and as part of public institutions, user fees can be kept lower. Professor Mufunda highlights that patients "will… pay affordable hospital fees" at the upgraded Mashava Hospital. In general, bringing services closer to home cuts travel, lodging and ancillary costs for patients. Zimbabwe's National Health Strategy explicitly aims to expand domestic health spending (toward the Abuja target of 15% of the budget) and ultimately establish a National Health Insurance scheme to reduce financial barriers. Masvingo's infrastructure upgrades dovetail with these financing plans, by providing the facilities where expanded insurance and government funding can be effectively used.

In summary, Masvingo's infrastructure build-out is on course to advance Zimbabwe's UHC goals. The new SMSMHS medical school in Masvingo, the refurbished Mashava Hospital, and the upgraded provincial hospital collectively represent a quantum leap in regional health capacity. They ensure that Masvingo will play its part in the national "leave no one behind" drive. If successfully implemented, Masvingo's residents will finally "realise the quality health care services they need, at minimal out-of-pocket expenditure," fully contributing to Zimbabwe's vision of universal coverage by 2030.

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THEME 4 MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENTS



His Excellency, President Emmerson Mnangagwa hands over the award of the Most Outstanding Innovation for 2024 to GZU represented by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Rungano J. Zvobgo and the Registrar, Dr Sinikiwe Gwatidzo



His Excellency, President Emmerson Mnangagwa hands over the award of the Most Outstanding Innovation in Agriculture for 2024 to GZU represented by the Executive Dean of the Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering, Dr Xavier Poshiwa

CHAPTER 18
The Great Zimbabwe University as a Catalyst for Rural Industrialisation: ICEDA's Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Dryland Agriculture

Xavier Poshiwa, Clarice Princess Mudzengi, Michael Mubvuma, Everson Dahwa & Charity Pisa

Abstract

The Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA) is a flagship programme of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), located in Chivi District, Zimbabwe. The centre focuses on developing agricultural practices and technologies that optimise the use of locally available epistemic and material resources, thereby reducing vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change and variability while increasing the productivity of drylands. This initiative is grounded in the understanding that agriculture is the backbone of Zimbabwe's economy, serving as the foundation of national wealth and a catalyst for rapid industrialisation, starting with rural industries and fostering the growth of a rural middle class. This chapter begins by outlining the establishment of ICEDA in collaboration with development partners, aiming to operationalise Education 5.0. The centre's commitment to strengthening research and development (R&D) in dryland agriculture is demonstrated through the socio-economic impact of selected case studies, such as those in the indigenous chicken and traditional grain value chains. Additionally, ICEDA's role in fostering innovation, technological advancement, and entrepreneurship in dryland farming is highlighted through its development of mechanised equipment, traditional grain processing, improved crop varieties, animal feeds, and ethno-veterinary medicines.

Key words: Agricultural productivity, Climate change adaptation, Dryland agriculture, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA), Rural industrialisation.

Introduction

Drylands cover over 40% of the earth's land surface and are home to more than 2 billion people, playing a pivotal role in global food security, biodiversity conservation, and livelihoods (UNCCD, 2017). These regions support 44% of the world's cultivated systems and contain 1.1 billion hectares of forests, more than a quarter of the global forest area (FAO, 2019). Additionally, dryland rangelands sustain 50% of the world's livestock and serve as critical habitats for biodiversity (IPBES, 2018). However, climate change is intensifying pressures on these fragile ecosystems, disrupting rainfall patterns, increasing temperatures, and exacerbating agricultural productivity losses, pest outbreaks, and food insecurity (IPCC, 2022). Small-scale farmers in Zimbabwe and across Sub-Saharan Africa are particularly vulnerable due to the region's semi-arid conditions, where low crop yields, recurrent droughts, and land degradation perpetuate cycles of poverty, malnutrition, and economic instability (World Bank, 2020).

Despite these challenges, drylands are far from unproductive wastelands. For centuries, communities have thrived in these regions by adapting to environmental variability through indigenous knowledge, resilient farming systems, and innovative water management practices (Mortimore & Adams, 2001). Recognising this untapped potential, Great Zimbabwe

University, in partnership with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MHTEISTD) and the Non-Aligned Movement Science and Technology Centre (NAM S&T Centre, India), established the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA). This initiative seeks to bridge heritage-based solutions with modern technologies to enhance food security, climate resilience, and rural industrialisation.

Aligned with Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 model, which prioritises innovation, industrialisation, and research-driven development (Government of Zimbabwe, 2021), ICEDA underscores the critical role of agriculture as the backbone of Zimbabwe's economy. By transforming drylands into hubs of sustainable productivity, the initiative aims to spur rural industrialisation, create jobs, and foster a thriving rural middle class.

The Agro-Innovations in Drylands Programme at ICEDA leverages climate-smart agriculture, water-efficient farming, and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies such as precision agriculture, drought-resistant crops, and sustainable land management to enhance productivity while preserving ecosystems (World Economic Forum, 2020). This approach aligns with Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and its vision of achieving middle-income economy status by 2030 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2020).

By integrating indigenous knowledge with scientific innovation, drylands can transition from regions of vulnerability to centres of agricultural prosperity, contributing to global food security and sustainable development. This chapter highlights the importance of dryland agriculture in Zimbabwe and explores the strategies, innovations, and alternative solutions being pioneered at ICEDA to secure food systems, empower communities, and drive economic resilience.

The Agro-innovations in Dryland Agriculture (AID) Programme

The Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture is committed to strengthening innovation, research and development in dryland agriculture. Innovation and technological advancement in dryland areas is crucial for improving agricultural productivity, enhancing sustainability, and addressing the challenges posed by climate change. However, it requires a multifaceted approach that combines research, community involvement, and sustainable practices. By implementing these strategies, it is possible to enhance resilience, improve livelihoods, and promote sustainable development in these challenging environments. ICEDA has adopted various strategies to achieve this under AID, with funding from the MHTEISTD. These include research and development programmes focused on drought-resistant crop varieties and animal breeds, techniques for improving soil fertility and moisture retention, agroforestry practices, climate-smart agriculture, precision agriculture, capacity building and training, indigenous knowledge systems etc.

AID is a flagship initiative of ICEDA, and is housed in the Gary Magadzire School of Agriculture and Engineering. Its overarching goal is to cause industrial development in rural dryland regions of Zimbabwe (Bikita, Buhera, Chiredzi Chivi, Chirumhanzu, Gutu, Masvingo rural, Mwenezi and Zaka). AID is structured around eleven interlinked research pillars:

1. *Heritage-based indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) for mitigating impacts of climate change in dryland areas.*

This sub programme promotes the use of heritage based IKS in mitigating the impacts of climate change in drylands.

1. *Production of new traditional crop varieties (sorghum and millets) from parent crop landraces.*

This sub programme focuses on development of new drought tolerant traditional crop varieties (sorghum and millets) from parent traditional crop landraces of sorghum and millets that were found in the old Great Zimbabwe State and other ancient civilisations.

2. *Establishment of soil management and conservation strategies appropriate for dryland ecosystems*

The focus of this sub programme is development of novel methods and strategies of soil management and conservation for sustainable agricultural production.

3. *Development of new sustainable production systems of apiculture, cuniculture and other lesser livestock in drylands.*

This sub programme focuses on apiculture and production of lesser livestock such as rabbits.

4. *Integrating aquaculture in farming systems of dryland areas.*

The focus of this sub programme is to demonstrate the feasibility of fish and crocodile farming, as well as encourage small scale fish farmers with a long term goal to overcome fresh fish scarcity and overcome poverty.

5. *Development of novel feed products from pastures, rangelands and other forage crops*.

This sub programme promotes production of livestock feeds such as home-based livestock rations using locally available rangeland resources like browse and grasses; forage crops and cereal and leguminous crop residues.

6. *Promotion and authentication of traditional herbal medicines in dryland areas*

The sub programme focuses on promoting traditional herbal medicines for use in agricultural production and productivity.

7. *Generation of novel foods from traditional grains, indigenous fruits, wild mushrooms and vegetables, and edible insects (food processing and value addition).*

This sub programme focuses on promotion of food technology through development of appropriate technologies for processing and value addition of traditional grains, wild mushrooms and vegetables, and edible insects.

8. *Development of sustainable water harvesting and management strategies in dryland areas.*

This sub-programme focuses on development of appropriate water harvesting techniques that can be used in dryland regions so as to improve water availability for both domestic use and agricultural production.

9. *Development and promotion of novel methods in precision agriculture for adoption in Dryland agriculture*

This sub-programme employs precision agriculture technologies to achieve agricultural sustainability. Digital technologies such as satellite based positioning systems, GIS and remote sensing and drone technology will be used to support optimised decision making in agricultural production.

10. *Business development and marketing of dryland agricultural products*.

This sub-programme focuses on markets and market dynamics in dryland areas. Producers of agricultural goods need to be linked to the markets. Farmers should be able to get their products to markets and receive favourable and equitable prices across the whole marketing spectrum. Strategies to strengthen existing markets as well as establish new ones locally, regionally and internationally will be developed.

Fostering Innovation and Technological Advancement

The following case studies illustrate research and innovation outputs of the AID programme:

Organic Based Fertilisers for Sustainable Crop Production: The Future of Agriculture

This project focused on development of an organic based fertiliser through recycling industrial wastes (sugarcane filter cake and vermiculite) via simple aerobic composting process, which can be applied to a variety of crops such as maize, traditional cereal crops and horticultural crops. The benefits of the fertiliser are: better moisture retention, reduced nutrient leaching, improved crop yields, better root development, supply macro (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium), meso (calcium and magnesium) and micronutrients (zinc, copper, iron and manganese), reduced reliance on inorganic basal fertiliser and reduction in import costs. Findings from the organic fertiliser trial showed that use of sugarcane filter cake has great potential for improving soil moisture availability, nutrients availability, nutrient uptake and plant growth and yield in sand and sand clay loam soils common in the drylands (Manyanga et al 2025). The introduction of organic manures for traditional grain (TG) production in the drylands offers significant environmental conditions of improving soil health, water retention in light soils, and nutrient cycling by reducing the reliance on synthetic fertilisers which have been reported to damage soil by reducing soil biodiversity and pH consequently affecting soil health. Synthetic fertilisers tend to kill soil macro, meso and micro-organisms responsible for nutrient cycling. This in turn reduces nutrient availability, negatively affecting plant growth. Organic fertiliser use contributes to more sustainable and resilient agricultural systems, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions where water conservation is crucial. Application of crop residues, manures and composts improves soil organic carbon content resulting in improved water and nutrient retention and thus making nutrient available for plant growth. Soil structure is also improved allowing for high infiltration which reduces surface runoff and soil erosion.

Traditional grains breeding project

Research on drought tolerant traditional grains had five objectives: (1) to identify farmers' selection criteria for sorghum varieties, their challenges, and coping strategies in dryland farming systems of Zimbabwe, (2) to determine breeding gains in yield and associated traits in sorghum

cultivars over four decades of selection in Zimbabwe, (3) to determine the potential of remote sensing for phenotyping and selection of sorghum genotypes under field conditions, (4) to identify and select climate-resilient sorghum genotypes that are suitable for drylands using a modelling approach and (5) to assess varietal potential optimisation of sorghum genotypes through allocation across Southern African environments.



Fig 1 White Sorghum Crop at Desmondale Farm, GZU

Source: Author 08 May 2022

The breeding research project under AID managed to identify sorghum varieties most suited to the selected semi-arid and arid regions that is Chibwedziva, Mwenezi and Gutu. The sorghum hybrid (*Sorghum bicolor* var rakodzi) and 2 open pollinated varieties (*Sorghum bicolor* var macia) and (*Sorghum bicolor* var shirikure) were seen to be most adapted to areas with limited rainfall. However, *Sorghum bicolor* var rakodzi was most adaptable to heavier soils while *Sorghum bicolor* var shirikure performed well in lighter soils making it more suitable for Gutu and Buhera. *Sorghum bicolor* var macia was seen to be a short season variety doing well in any of the soils and more resilient to drought conditions unlike *Sorghum bicolor* var rakodzi. This study highlighted that variety selection is important for attainment of high yields. It was observed that when farmers selected the right variety the yield of sorghum increased from 0.5t ha^{-1} to 1t ha^{-1} for open pollinated varieties (OPVs) and 2t ha^{-1} for hybrids (Chidoko et al 2025). The stalks of *Sorghum bicolor* var shirikure, a medium to long term variety, were observed to be good for livestock feed. An increase in biomass yield contributed to increased livestock production as crop residues were used as animal feed. Soil fertility was also improved as more residues were left in the field and this improved the soil organic content which in turn enhanced the soil structure and retention of both water and plant nutrients. Production of semi-arid and arid regions of Zimbabwe increased due to use of resilient OPVs, improved soil fertility, seed availability and access, diversified farming and improved skills. This in turn, enhanced food and

nutrition security, improved livelihoods, reduced household conflicts and ensured a health population for continued productivity.

Traditional grain industrial processing innovation

Researchers at ICEDA assembled rural communities, academia and industrial partners to form a strong research and innovation team that was able to design a manufacturing plant that can successfully mimic the Zimbabwean traditional ways of processing millets. Several disjointed processes such as winnowing, roasting and grinding were combined into a single unit industrial processing plant capable to produce up to 50 tonnes of sorghum or millet flour per day (24 hours). The grain processing plant is designed to process raw sorghum and millets through the stages of cleaning, winnowing, dehulling, roasting, milling and packaging. The plant's robust design produces a product that is uniform, grit free, good textured and capable of returning the traditional aroma and quality that has been preserved and ensured over centuries in Zimbabwe. In addition, the plant is designed with automatic grain dust sucking system that minimises air pollution and reduces carbon footprint.

Development of mechanised equipment

Harvesting and processing of traditional grains has several challenges, such as being labour intensive, poor handling that results in the presence of soil and stones in the final processed product, and time consuming. This AID project designed and developed equipment used for threshing (*kupura*), dehulling (*kusvuura*), and roasting (*kukanga*) the traditional grains. Thus, the designed machinery was largely focusing on post-harvest processing of traditional grains. (Fig 2 & 3). The equipment is intended to vary in size for household to industrial use. The portable equipment at household level are the cheapest, while the industrial type will serve a large community, such as the ward level.





Fig 2 Traditional grains dehuller Machine **Fig 3** Traditional grains roaster machine

Fish production project

Fish feed is an important factor in determining productivity of the fisheries sector. The study highlighted the importance of fingerling and fish feed quality in influencing technical efficiency in dryland fish farming (Gwazani et al., 2022). Prototypes for fish feed from traditional cereal

grains and legumes were developed. The study also highlighted the importance of pond size, experience of staff, age of employees and training as some of important factors that affect performance of fish farming in dryland farming (Gwazani et al., 2022), as well as the constraints to fish production in drylands (Gwazani et al., 2022).

Apiculture Project

The project's thrust was on value addition of hive products through increasing the supply of organic honey which has a high demand in the international market. Value addition enhances food security and improves ecosystem resilience in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Zimbabwe has vast diversity in terms of existence of herbal and medicinal trees that are foraged by bees hence imparting on the medicinal properties of honey harvested (Muli et al. 2007). Miombo honey from the vast Miombo woodlands is rich in antioxidants and has a dark colour compared to light coloured honey (Hraná et al. 2022**)**. Globally there is high demand for eucalyptus honey because of its unique and medicinal properties. Zimbabwe has the ability to produce eucalyptus honey in large quantities. Miombo honey is said to be rich in phytochemicals and rich in antioxidants in a comparable or even better percentage than eucalyptus honey (Manyi-Loh et al. 2011**)**.

Value added herbal medicines

Traditional herbal medicines offer an avenue for potential new drug discovery due to its untapped potential, vastness, diversity and inferred efficacy that has been generated through its use for centuries. Traditional medicines are also more acceptable, from a cultural and spiritual perspective. The development of local herbal products for chronic inflammation management reduces the import bill thus promoting use of indigenous resources for health improvement. This innovation value-adds herbal remedies traditionally used for management of chronic inflammation with special focus on COVID-19 and its related symptoms. The value-added herbal prototypes from these projects include essential oils, herbal teas, snacks, bath salts and beverages. The different herbal remedies were developed using appropriate techniques, based on experimental lab tests and literature review on historical usage, pharmacology and in vivo validation of selected medicinal plants.

Ethnoveterinary medicines for use in poultry production

The ethnoveterinary medicines project focused on promoting traditional herbal medicines for use in poultry production. The studies reported thirty-two plants from twenty plant families that had medicinal properties for use in poultry in the dryland regions of Zimbabwe (Gobvu et al., 2024). The study also reported that farmers in drylands are already using several medicinal plants against poultry diseases (Gobvu et al., 2022). Most prominent plant species that are being used by farmers in poultry production include *Aloe* and *Lippia* species. This project showed the potential of developing ethnoveterinary medicinal drugs for poultry production in dryland regions of Zimbabwe (Gobvu et al., 2022; 2023 and 2024).



Fig 4 Poultry project at the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture, Chivi, GZU

Rural Industrialisation

Projects on value addition and processing of finished products from traditional grains also developed poultry feeds. These feeds were used to run a community indigenous poultry programme, where farmers were trained in poultry production and poultry feed production. In addition, a contract poultry farming programme was piloted in Buhera Chiredzi and Chirumhanzu (Fig 4). The contract package included farmers being provided with between 50 to 100 birds per farmer and 10kg feed that farmers would use at early stages of the birds before the farmer could manufacture their own feed. The contract farming project also had a capacity building component in which farmers received free training on poultry production and feed formulation traditional grains. Great Zimbabwe University also provided the market for the birds when they reached 14 to 16 weeks.

Impact and Outcomes

Impact of Economic benefits to farmers and the economy

Improved Dryland agriculture ensures enhanced food security, income diversification for farmers, and potential for increased exports. Traditional grains like sorghum and millets are more resilient to drought and harsh conditions than maize, making them a reliable food source, particularly in drier regions. Diversifying into these crops can also help farmers reduce risks associated with climate change and improve their overall livelihoods. The introduction of interventions that increased traditional grain production by Great Zimbabwe University Agro-innovations programme promoted a reduction in food shortages and improved the availability, access, utilisation and stability of food (food security), particularly during times of drought. Increased production also offered farmers an additional income stream, reducing reliance on a single crop like maize. By producing more of their own food, Zimbabwe reduces its reliance on imported grains, saving valuable foreign currency and strengthening its food security. The availability of GZU market ensured that farmers had access to profitable markets for traditional grains and free-range chickens which is crucial for commercialisation and improving farmer livelihoods. Adoption of dryland farming interventions increased productivity which was measured by the increase in flock size of free-range chickens, hectarage under traditional grains,

yields and income generated. Farmers have been reporting an increase in income from the traditional grain and free-range chicken production which also brought changes to how they spend money. Increased yields from agricultural enterprises, emanated from effective farming operations which farmers have attributed to the training they have received from GZU under the agro-innovations programme. Training was offered of soil fertility management, variety selection, agronomic practices and post-harvest handling of produce. There was significant increase in hectarage which gives enough room for surplus and thus farmers had more disposable income and can now afford to buy clothes and other household wares more often.

The entire agricultural value chain, from production to processing and marketing, can create employment opportunities, especially in rural areas. Farmers cited opportunities to tap into traditional grains value chains such as feed manufacturing and value addition of food products and this has significantly contributed to rural industrialisation and development. Beekeeping provides an alternative source of income through honey and other bee products beeswax and propolis.

Through engagement with rural communities and industry, GZU managed to mimic and mechanise traditional grain processing by erecting a 25-50t/ day traditional grain processing plant at the ICEDA. This processing centre serves the whole of Masvingo Province and the country at large, producing grit free flour from finger millet, pearl millet and sorghum. Mass processing at the centre ensures that healthy traditional grain meals are available at an affordable price consequently improving their consumption. Increased consumption of such enables a healthy and more productive population. An increase in the number of meals per day ensured a healthy population and thus increased production.

Social benefits to farmers

Harnessing dryland agriculture in Zimbabwe had significant social impacts with food security having the greatest impact. Food security contributes to social stability and reduces vulnerability to poverty and conflict. Farmers adopting interventions for semi-arid and arid regions which improved their yields and consequently disposable income were happy as they attributed the decline in many social problems to financial stability. Many families struggled to cope, with school-going children often missing classes due to unpaid fees and inadequate food at home, exacerbated by limited financial resources, which led to significant discord within the families. As productivity rose and food security improved, households enjoyed more financial stability, resulting in decreased tensions and conflict. Farmers indicated that agricultural projects reduced gossip within communities as farmers were forced to stay home to take care of their chickens. A farmer in Buhera said;

"Ndinoda kutenda shamwari yakanaka GZU takadzidza zvizhinji, ruzivo pakupfuya zvipfuyo. Zvakatibatsira, chekutanga, kugara pamukova huku, huku inoda munhu pedo"

("I want to thank our good friend GZU, we learnt a lot of skills in animal production. Rearing chickens allowed us to stay home and attend to our chickens on a daily basis")

Intervention in the drylands increased families' resilience. Embarking in the different enterprises, traditional grain and free-range chicken production plus aquaculture increased alternatives for

income, food and nutrition. This helped overcome environmental shocks such as droughts and floods. With the introduced agricultural enterprises farmers have managed to expand other farming enterprises.

A female farmer in Buhera Ward 19 explained how the poultry project introduced by GZU enabled farmers to increase their flock, buy cattle and goats from proceeds from selling free range chickens:

> "Takabatsirika zvizhinji. Pakutanga takapiwa huku gumi, vakauya kuzodzitenga nemitengo yaifadza. Takarangana semadzimai, tikatenga sheche dzembudzi dzakatanga kuberekana. Tichizopiwa huku dzakatiwandei, ini seumwe mudzimai akaona kunakidza pakupfuya huku, ndakaendesa huku dzangu zvekare ndakazokwanisawo kutenga mombe yangu tsiru. Ndichitarisirawo kuti ichabereka kuti dzigowanda. Parizvino kubudikidza neshamwari yakatisimudzira GZU muchurugu chembudzi ndanadzo, kudanga mombe ndanayo. Ndinotenda takasimudzirwa munzvimbo yekwedu neshamwari yakanaka GZU"
>
> *We benefited a lot. In the beginning, GZU gave us ten chicks which they later came back and buy at fair prices. As women we bought does that began to reproduce. We later received more chickens. I sold my chickens and I was able to buy a cow and I am looking forward to it reproducing. Through GZU which empowered us, I now have goats and a cow.*

Resilience also came through capacity building, livelihood diversification, market intelligence and scaling up of production units. The Agro-innovations programme was influential in addressing issues related to rural to urban migration by creating an environment in which the people staying in the rural areas saw gainful employment within their agricultural activities. The youth in Bikita, Buhera, Chibwedziva, Gutu, Masvingo rural, Mwenezi and Zaka, farmers felt they were doing much better producing traditional grains, raising free-range chickens and farming fish than being employed in towns and did not feel the need to be employed. The diversified activities ensured they were getting income throughout the year and thus had no need to seek employment in towns.

Farmers indicated that increased productivity brought about infrastructural development at household level. The agro-innovations programmes managed to build 100 fowl runs for farmers in Chirumhanzu with a capacity of 100 birds each. Farmers who did not get these at their homesteads were encouraged to erect their own and be part of the free-range chicken project and this developed their homesteads. From the proceeds of selling grain and chicken, farmers managed to build fowl runs, toilets, houses, tuckshops, and granary with others renovating old buildings. Wells and boreholes were also drilled to improve water availability for household use and irrigation. In Ward 2 of Buhera Central, one widow, Mrs X managed to use proceeds from the sale of 2.5t of pearl millet to GZU in the 2024/25 season, to renovate her kitchen, put steel doors on her bedroom and build a new blair toilet just a year after losing her husband. During the 2022/23 season the family managed to buy goats from the sale of traditional grains to GZU.



Fig 5: Mrs X's renovated kitchen and newly built blair toilet (August 2025). She managed to remove thatch roof and place iron sheets. Picture taken by Mrs X.

The agro-innovations programme is therefore crucial in ensuring sustainable production of traditional grain, free range chicken and livestock feed to ensure farmers have both food and nutrition security. High productivity enabled farmers to harvest enough food to sustain their families for a year, while also generating surplus crops for sale, providing a steady income to cover school fees and household expenses. When farmers produce sufficient food, the country reduces its reliance on maize imports, resulting in lower national expenditure of food imports. Contract farming and the availability of a ready market for traditional grain and free range chicken has greatly promoted agricultural productivity in marginalised areas and this will greatly improve the country's GDP from these so called 'low production areas'. GZU interventions have promoted rural development and industrialisation contributing greatly to country's Vision 2030 "*Towards a prosperous and empowered upper middle income society by 2020, with job opportunities and higher quality of life for its citizens*".

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the pivotal role that the Great Zimbabwe University Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture plays in transforming the economic landscape of dryland regions. Through innovative agricultural practices, sustainable resource management, and community engagement, the Centre demonstrates that arid environments can be harnessed for significant economic development. Key findings highlight the potential for improving food security and livelihoods by adopting advanced agricultural technologies and practices tailored to the unique challenges of drylands. The collaboration among local communities, researchers, and policymakers fosters an environment of knowledge sharing and innovation, leading to resilient agricultural systems. Moreover, sustainable practices not only enhance productivity but also preserve the delicate ecosystems of dryland areas. As we move forward, the emphasis on

education and capacity building will be crucial in ensuring that these initiatives are sustained and expanded.

ICEDA serves as a beacon of hope, illustrating that with the right strategies and commitment, drylands can be transformed into productive landscapes that contribute to both local and national economies. This chapter reaffirms that innovation and collaboration are essential for ove rcoming the challenges faced in dryland agriculture, paving the way for a more sustainable and prosperous future.

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CHAPTER 19
From Theory to Practice: Nurturing Student Entrepreneurs at Great Zimbabwe University

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Abstract
In an effort to implement Zimbabwe's new education philosophy, Heritage based Education 5.0, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) partnered with the Zimbabwe Agricultural Development Trust (ZADT) to develop students' entrepreneurship skills through innovative and novel initiatives. Students drawn from different academic levels were selected using a highly competitive process. They received funding to implement their businesses using GZU incubation facilities. The student projects focused on various agricultural value chains, including: Primary production: Horticulture, aquaculture, apiculture, and broiler and layer production; Value addition: Production of mushroom-based products (e.g., dried vegetables) and other processed goods; and Agricultural support activities: Drone production for farming applications. This experience has been transformative for the students, mainly equipping them with essential business skills and enabling them to produce business profits. This initiative demonstrates a viable model for higher and tertiary education institutions to adopt if they aim to produce graduates who create employment rather than merely seek employment after graduation. By integrating practical entrepreneurship training into academia, universities are developing "thinker-Doers" who are positively contributing to national development through the provision of relevant goods and services. Heritage based education 5.0 is transforming and impacting on livelihoods, promoting self-reliance and economic growth.

Key words: Higher and tertiary education institutions, heritage based education 5.0; Student entrepreneurship, national development, skills, impact, economic growth

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is increasingly being considered a vehicle for economic growth and poverty alleviation. At the beginning of the 20th century, Joseph Alois Schumpeter developed a profound model of entrepreneurship and the model still holds great interest today (Mehmood *et al*, 2019). Schumpeter's model is considered dynamic and is associated with innovations, new products and processes. According to Schumpeter, economic development is a function of land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship and these are used in the production of various goods and services. The goods and services produced constitute gross domestic products of nations. According to Schumpeter, entrepreneurship is the most dynamic factor of production making it an engine of economic growth. Schumpeter therefore considers financing entrepreneurs and their enterprises and innovations as financing economic growth (Schumpeter 1934).

Schumpeter's theory (and other theories) of economic growth, have made entrepreneurship education (EE) a vital component of contemporary learning as it equips students with essential 21st-century competencies that enable them to navigate an increasingly complex and unpredictable job market (World Economic Forum, 2020). More than just fostering business skills, this form of education instills a proactive, opportunity-driven mindset, empowering learners to develop innovative solutions and contribute to broader socio-economic progress

(Obinna, 2022). As traditional career trajectories grow more uncertain, EE provides the resilience and self-efficacy needed for individuals to succeed across diverse professional environments (Hisrich & Peters, 2002).

EE has therefore gained popularity and has been considered a priority for many countries the world over (Warhuus et al, 2017). Many governments have increased their efforts to promote EE to foster innovation, create companies, develop human capacity and stimulate economic growth. So far, different models for entrepreneurship education have been used in literature. In Finland, they call it 'Enterprise Ownership Programmes' and the focus is on developing the knowledge needed for one to create new businesses. In Ireland and Britain, they are called 'Enterprise Education' and their focus is on building individual capacity. In the USA and many other countries, the programmes focus on developing individual abilities and skills needed to establish and run businesses (Gangi, 2012). Despite the diversity of models used, there is a general agreement that EE programmes lead to increased enterprises and develop entrepreneurship skills and behaviours (Galviao et al 2018)

Universities are increasingly taking a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial ecosystems by serving as dynamic incubators of innovation, offering experiential learning and mentorship (Etzkowitz, 2008). Globally, higher education institutions are increasingly recognised as engines of economic growth, fostering ecosystems that nurture creativity, leadership, and sustainable enterprise (Audretsch, 2014).

In Zimbabwe, the introduction of Heritage-Based Education 5.0 marked a transformative shift in pedagogical philosophy, expanding the traditional university mandate of teaching, research, and community service to include innovation and industrialisation (Zimbabwe Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, 2019). This model emphasises the production of goods and services, positioning graduates as job providers rather than mere job seekers (Mugabe, 2021). By integrating cultural relevance with STEM disciplines, Heritage-Based Education 5.0 supports Vision 2030, aims to build an empowered, upper-middle-income society through human capital development (Chikomba et al., 2020). Together, entrepreneurship education, university-led innovation, and heritage-based curricula form a triad of progress—empowering individuals, transforming institutions, and driving sustainable national development. As economies worldwide evolve, these educational paradigms will remain critical in shaping resilient, innovative, and globally competitive societies.

In a country such as Zimbabwe that is facing challenges of unemployment and poverty, fostering entrepreneurship education can help students to develop essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for starting and running successful businesses. When equipped with these skills, student entrepreneurs can: create employment opportunities for themselves and others, contributing to the country's economic growth; and developing innovative solutions to real-world problems, driving innovation and entrepreneurship in various sectors thus contributing to Zimbabwe's economic growth and development.

Recognising the urgent need to develop a new generation of agricultural entrepreneurs, Great Zimbabwe University established a strategic partnership with the Zimbabwe Agricultural Development Trust to address a critical gap in youth agribusiness development. The programme

provided access to finance, mentorship, and financial literacy training for scalable agricultural ventures. Through targeted funding opportunities and comprehensive business training programmes, the initiative empowered students to transform innovative agricultural concepts into sustainable commercial enterprises. Beyond enriching academic curricula with practical, real-world applications, this partnership was an attempt to stimulate economic growth in Zimbabwe by nurturing and growing student entrepreneurs.

This chapter describes the process of nurturing student entrepreneurs by GZU and ZADT, the key outcomes realised and the key lessons learnt. Key questions that the paper will address include: how did GZU nurture student entrepreneurs? What are the key successes achieved? What challenges were encountered? and; what are the key lessons learned?

Student Entrepreneurship

A student entrepreneur is a person who starts a business while being enrolled in school. Student entrepreneurs usually work their student life and entrepreneurial spirit into their daily schedules – they attend classes and still find time to pursue their business ideas. Student entrepreneurs are different from adult entrepreneurs; they are young and engage in business ventures while pursuing their academic studies; they have high levels of enthusiasm and creativity.

Student entrepreneurship programmes provide students with valuable experience, help them develop business skills and enable them to put creative ideas into practice. They help students to: learn what it takes to become business owners or managers; understand all aspects of running businesses; and understand how it is like to be 'your own boss.' These programmes help students to: gain hands-on experience in all aspects of running businesses; develop valuable business skills such as planning, marketing, finance, and management to explore their interests and potential career paths; earn income while studying; and finally foster creativity and the development of innovative solutions (Marchand and Sood, 2014). Student entrepreneurship programmes take various forms including (a) school-based businesses that students help to set up and run; (b) curricula that guides students through the process of creating business plans; (c) making students work with local entrepreneurs and other community resources to plan and run enterprises; and (d) a combination of these activities (Marchand and Sood, 2014). These entrepreneurship programmes are undertaken both on and off campus and are part of the school's course work considered for academic credit.

Universities, the world over have increasingly focused on instilling entrepreneurial mindsets in students by encouraging them to become innovators and creators of enterprises (Fernandes et al., 2024). Many universities have put in place strategies to develop entrepreneurship skills and competencies and meticulously designed their curriculum to cultivate these skills and competencies. Students are increasingly being encouraged to embrace creativity and innovative abilities, and are given all support and training to enable them to establish new enterprises by turning their ideas into economically rewarding actions. Universities have since played critical roles in supporting student entrepreneurs through a range of initiatives designed to help them succeed including:

- Offering entrepreneurship courses, degree programmes extra-curricular support activities, seminars, and trainings that teach students to think like entrepreneurs (Walter et al. 2013; Bergmann et al. 2016; Morris et al. 2017; Sendouwa et al. 2019).
- Encouraging creativity and innovation.
- Providing students with formal mentoring programmes, training workshops, and business incubation opportunities.
- Encouraging start-up creation, university-industry partnerships, licensing, and patenting (Grimaldi et al. 2011) leading to the implementation of mechanisms to support start-ups by both alumni and current students (Wright and Mustar 2019).
- Giving students opportunities to showcase their business ideas in various platforms that connect them with potential investors and customers.

Several examples of student-led startups exist and have developed into big businesses that generate huge profits. These include, Facebook, Google and FedEx express, just to mention a few. Facebook was developed by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates in 2004 as a social networking site for Harvard University students (Tan, 2022). The network rapidly expanded to other universities and the global public and now, houses billions of users. The network has evolved with time, embracing new features, and has been rebranded in 2021 to Meta. Google, started as a research project by Larry Page and Sergey Brin at Stanford University in 1996 (Brandt, 2009). Their project, aimed to improve how information was found on the internet; and lastly FedEx Express was founded in 1971 by Frederick W. Smith, who developed the concept while studying at Yale (Searls, 2022). The company revolutionised the shipping industry by pioneering overnight package delivery with a focus on speed and reliability. FedEx has continued to innovate and expand, developing new services and technologies to meet the changing needs of its customers, including initiatives focused on sustainability and network optimisation.

These successes have stimulated institutions of higher and tertiary institutions to increasingly promote entrepreneurship skills among students - who may be holding the keys to the societal puzzles.

Bridging the Gap: Moving from Theory to Practice: GZU and ZADT partnership for nurturing student entrepreneurs under the ZADT CAUSEWAY Project

CAUSEWAY Project Background

The Zimbabwe Agricultural Development Trust initiated the Creating Adaptive Unique Systems for Financing Entrepreneurial Women and Youth (CAUSEWAY) Project on the 25th of July, 2024 to address longstanding financial inclusion gaps affecting women and youth in rural and peri-urban communities across Zimbabwe. These groups, despite representing a significant portion of the population and demonstrating potential in agriculture and entrepreneurship, continue to face systemic challenges such as limited access to appropriately structured financial services, low financial literacy, lack of collateral, and exclusion from mainstream market systems. The CAUSEWAY Project was therefore conceived as a strategic response to these challenges.

The Project sought to improve access to finance for youth and women in peri-urban and rural Zimbabwe to undertake and implement projects that improve and increase their household incomes and food security. The project targeted women of ages 36 to 65, out of school youth aged 18-35 years and in-school youth in tertiary agricultural education institutions to run commercially viable and credible businesses to attract private capital for development of their business ventures.

The expected impact of the CAUSEWAY Project was multifaceted. At its core, the project aimed to improve household incomes and food security for more than 11,000 youth and women by expanding their access to finance and entrepreneurship opportunities. However, beyond individual economic benefits, the project sought to catalyse change within the broader financial and agribusiness ecosystems in Zimbabwe. This transformation was being driven through a systems-based approach that incorporated financial literacy training, technical assistance, tailored business development services, startup grant facilities, co-investment models, and formal linkages with banks and microfinance institutions. Additionally, the project aimed to build the capacity of financial institutions to better serve these previously underserved demographics, creating lasting institutional change. Through this comprehensive model, CAUSEWAY not only addressed immediate financial constraints but also laid the groundwork for long-term sustainability and systemic inclusion of women and youth as key players in national development.

In its approach to developing entrepreneurship skills among students at GZU, the CAUSEWAY Project adopted an innovative incubation model aligned with the Zimbabwe Education 5.0 curriculum. This model deviated from conventional internship structures by allowing students to become active participants in entrepreneurship through the establishment and management of their own agribusiness ventures. Supported by competitive startup grants, technical mentorship, and institutional backing, students received practical, hands-on experience in enterprise development while still enrolled in school. This experience not only enhanced their business acumen and problem-solving skills but also enabled them to begin building a banking and credit history-an essential step towards improving their creditworthiness in the eyes of commercial financial institutions.

GZU-ZADT partnership

GZU together with nine other tertiary institutions, partnered with ZADT in implementing the incubation program for students. The university joined the initiative in early 2024 during the first call for proposals and continued to benefit from subsequent calls. 45 GZU students received a total of USD 22,612.64 in the three Rounds (Table 1):

Table 14: Start up grants received by students under the different rounds of funding by ZADT

Proposal	**No of Students**	**Value Chain**	**Amount USD**
Round 1			
1.	5	Poultry – broilers	2294.96
2.	10	Horticulture	4500
3.	5	Aquaculture	2021

4.	2	Apiculture	950
Total for Round 1	**22**		**9765.96**
Round 2			
1.	5	Fish Production	2496.68
2.	3	Horticulture	1500
3.	3	Poultry – Layers production	1500
Total for Round 2	**11**		**5496.68**
Round 3			
1.	4	Mushroom processing	2000
2.	4	Drone production for agriculture	3350
3.	4	Fruits and vegetable preservation	2000
Total for Round 3	**12**		**7350**
Grant total			**22,612.64**

After receiving their grants, the students implemented agribusiness projects in aquaculture, apiculture, horticulture, poultry production, food processing and drone production, leveraging university infrastructure and receiving mentorship from their lecturers. This model offered a real-world platform for students to develop and test ideas, manage risks, and navigate market dynamics while under the guidance of industry and academic professionals. The CAUSEWAY Project aimed to not only prepare students for the job market but to groom them as entrepreneurs with the knowledge, experience, and credit history required to attract private investment and grow sustainable agribusinesses beyond graduation. Through this approach, the CAUSEWAY Project aimed to nurture a new generation of agri-preneurs equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools for success.

Methodology

The research made use of qualitative survey design. It started with a literature review to understand the developments in the field of entrepreneurship, and was followed by the qualitative survey – data was collected electronically using the Kobo toolbox. Participants in the survey included GZU students involved in the ZADT CAUSEWAY project, their mentors, and the ZADT implementing staff. A total of 17 people participated in the survey, 8 women and 9 men (**Table 2**).

Table 15: Participants of the qualitative survey

	Gender	**Number**	**%**
Students	Males	5	
	Females	3	
Subtotal		**8**	**47.06**
Mentors	Males	3	
	Females	4	
Subtotal		**7**	**41.18**
ZADT Staff	Males	0	
	Females	2	
Subtotal		**2**	**11.76**
Grand total		**17**	**100%**

Data analysis was done using Excel Spreadsheet (for quantitative data) and thematic content analysis for qualitative data.

Implementation of the CAUSEWAY Student Projects at GZU

Students implemented their projects at various GZU locations depending on their focal areas including: Desmondale farm, the Innovation Hub and the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA). When implementing their projects, the students allocated roles (e.g. treasurer, secretary etc.) to each other. When asked about how they organised themselves to implement their businesses, one student said:

> each member was involved in daily practices such as land preparation, weeding … we produced butternuts, tomatoes, cabbages and onions and marketed them to Chitima and GZU canteens.

While some students focused on production, others were given the task to market their products. The students used various strategies to market their products including online platforms, WhatsApp platforms, GZU campus radio station, GZU shop, Facebook, face to face, social media platforms and direct marketing.

Mentoring students during their business implementation

Students worked with their mentors, and the ZADT Business Development Officer, as they implemented their projects. Different mentors used different strategies to mentor the students as seen from their responses in table 3.

Table 16: Methods used by mentors

Methods used by mentors
▪ I used online communication (WhatsApp) to mobilise the students, then had a physical meeting to brainstorm the business idea and we developed a business concept note ▪ We met with the students physically when they first started their project. Wanted to ensure they were following all the crucial procedures ensuring the success of their first batch. After that most of the meetings were virtual. Ensuring they were feeding the birds properly, vaccinations, slaughtering and marketing the final produce. ▪ Everyday physically ▪ Meeting with students for activity planning and implementation. Meeting were both physical and virtual. Visits to project sites for monitoring and evaluation of project progress ▪ Monthly reporting, routine planning meetings, financial checks ▪ Blended mentoring -physical visits were done to assess on implementation of agreed activities and virtual mentoring was often used as it was easy and cheap for the students to ask on anything whenever they needed assistance. ▪ I was meeting the students after every two weeks to deliberate on the project progress, challenges and solutions on face to face basis. In some circumstances I was meeting them virtually depending on the urgency of the issue to be discussed.

Monitoring students during implementation

To monitor their progress, students were encouraged to diligently keep records of their production figures (e.g. planting dates, fertiliser application dates, yield etc.), cost incurred, sales and so forth. This helped them check if they were making progress or not and calculate their costs and profits. An example of how the students used their records to calculate their profits is shown below from the Zim Broilers Group. From these figures, the students made profit for the three broiler batches that they produced: they made a profit of 306.50USD from the first batch of 400 birds, USD780 in their next batch of 500 birds and USD562 in their third batch of 500 birds (table 4)

Table 17: Profit made by the Zim Broilers Group in three batches of production

	Batch 1 (400 birds) - USD	**Batch 2 (500 Birds) - USD**	**Batch 3 (500chicks) – USD**
Income			
	2106.5	2580	2182
Expenses			
Feed and chicks	1600	1600	1420
Transport Hiring	200	200	200
Total expenses	1800	1800	1620
Profit	**306.5**	**780**	**562**

In addition, ZADT field officers, together with the mentors also conducted regular visit to monitor progress with implementation. These visits were crucial and helped with troubleshooting.

Key challenges faced during implementation

Students faced various challenges as they implemented their businesses ranging from inputs supply; to production challenges; and finally, marketing challenges. A selection of responses given by various stakeholders with regards to challenges faced are provided in table 5.

Table 18: Implementation challenges identified by students and other stakeholders

Implementation challenges identified by various stakeholders
▪ My team mates have other things to attend to and balancing farm work and sales is a bit challenging. I am however getting more help from GZU sales person at Radio Station and the Farm Manager for transport to town. In the past weeks the lay rate was decreasing due to the atmospheric temperatures and because i had had changed my feed supplier trying to find cheaper feed ▪ We faced market challenges when the people we were to sell our seedlings to faced water crisis

- Low colonisation rate which led to the transfer of some beehives from Chivi ICEDA to Desmondale Farm
- Marketing our product as people were not convinced that we were selling pure honey
- Management
- The major problem we faced was with the marketing process, the Masvingo market is a small market, of which we weren't in the capacity to go beyond because of certain factors like lack of transportation.
- Market and transport for carrying our products from the farm to the market
- Despite their overall success they faced challenges in marketing their products resulting in selling on credit and dealing with delayed payments. This impacted their cash flow and production cycles.
- Determined, focused, hardworking, team players
- They performed well on the production side but were a bit lacking on the marketing strategy and hesitant to adopt suggestions made resulting in delays of payment from the one supplier who would have collected all their stock. However, they adapted with time and are now better informed when it comes to marketing.
- The students tried their best in ensuring the success of the project but the outcomes of their harvest was not pleasing at all. However, a lot happened from the onset of the project implementation which include but not limited to failure of supplier to deliver the right quantities of fingerlings and feed as per the invoice.
- Challenges were mainly on marketing the products and ways of reaching the market. However, the students also managed to broaden their marketing strategies which includes using GZU Radio Station to market their products
- During the first round, had challenges with suppliers not providing the bought items in time. Market, students mostly relied with GZU canteen

Mentors also lacked resources (e.g. transport) for them to visit the students regularly and provide mentoring support hence mentoring support was mostly virtual. The students were therefore mostly by themselves, and received support from the Farm Manager who was based at the farm.

Strategies to deal with identified challenges

When asked to suggest strategies to deal with identified challenges, stakeholders suggested many strategies including the following.

- Aggressive marketing of products so as to increase the customer base
- Locating the student businesses in areas close to towns for accessibility and transportation to the markets
- The need for students to start by identifying a market before rushing to produce.
- The need for students to undergo entrepreneurship training and also take basic marketing courses so that they are equipped with essential knowledge before they begin.

Outcomes of the entrepreneurship activities

Even though student performance varied from one group to the other, overall, the programme managed to instill business skills and expose the students to the business world. The students learnt various aspects of doing business and gained understanding on how to run businesses.

When asked if they were planning to do business after completing their education at GZU, 75% of the students said 'yes'. Besides developing student's business and entrepreneurship skills, some students managed to make profits that they used for their own personal use – purchasing computers and paying their own school fees.

Some students went beyond mere production to developing new products – for instance, the **Busy Hand Apiculture** Group explored packaging and branding and experimented on the production of infused honey.

Table 19: Student responses when asked about the key lessons learnt from implementing their businesses

Lessons Learnt by Students in implementing their businesses
▪ Doing business requires seriousness and is about taking risks and weighing risks ▪ It needs consistency and documentation ▪ The apiculture business has given me exposure to local and international markets and I should aim to increase supply to meet market demand. I gained experience in pitch presentation in the Zimtrade Eaglesnest Agri-challenge which enhanced my skills in communication and marketing skills. ▪ Not everything goes according to the plans, just trust the process and learn from your mistakes ▪ Working as team is important ▪ In the car called business, the heart at the back seat and brain on the driver's seat. Most importantly, no risk no reward ▪ Business requires some risks, I also learnt that if you are doing a business you need to have a serious market ▪ I learnt that business project requires constant and close supervision and management ▪ I have learnt the importance of conducting an effective market research that is understanding the target market and developing effective marketing strategies. Mitigating financial risks, like the risks selling on credit and to have strategies to mitigate those risks. To be able to be adaptable and responsive to challenges that arise in business. The value of mentorship in guiding the students to successfully run their business. ▪ Speak your idea ▪ Importance of hands on training, frequent monitoring and ownership ▪ Establishment of start-ups, project planning, monitoring, evaluation ▪ One needs to stick to the proposed budget or initial plan and biblically follow the steps to be successful, markets need to be sourced before the product is ready, projects need commitment and they are doable, profitable. ▪ The success of business is guaranteed if partners share same goals and vision.

All students (except those in Round 3 who were just starting with their implementation) who were interviewed said that their businesses made profit (see table 7)

Table 20: Profit made by students in their businesses

How many production cycles did you implement?	Value Chain	How much profit did you make per production cycle (USD?)	How much of the profit did you receive from the project per cycle of production (in USD)?	Total Profit Received by the students from their businesses (USD)
12	Apiary	53	25	300
4	Broiler Production	780	200	800
2	Horticulture	200	100	200

The students used their individual profits in various ways – ploughing it back into the business, paying for their school fees; buying their smartphones, laptops.

Will students continue with their projects after completing school?

When asked if they were given an opportunity to go back in time, would they decide to enter into this business again, the bulk of the students (75%) said 'yes'. This shows the huge impact that the project had on developing student interest in business. Students who responded with a 'no' were mainly from crop production – they made profit in the first cycle of production but made huge losses in the next cycle mainly because of crop failure due to changes in temperatures.

Table 21: Reasons why students would want to continue doing business after school

Reasons why students want to continue doing business after school
▪ It's so much benefiting and I would find other team members who are determined or who take this as an opportunity ▪ I think it has a lot of potential and is actually providing for what the farmers really need ▪ I really wish to grow the business and venture into queen bee rearing for export markets ▪ Because l fell in love with beekeeping and the conservation of the environment as this opens my mind about things which are happening around us ▪ It's very helpful and good for growth and development ▪ I gained a lot from the project ▪ I realised I can be in the same field but doing a different thing, I have tried diverse sectors in agriculture and I think in comparison I would opt for poultry side because for you to attain profits in crop production you really need vast space. ▪ There are many risks in crop production I would rather venture into poultry section because it requires less inputs and labour ,also poultry double its profit

When asked what they were going to do after completing their studies at GZU, 100% said they would start their own businesses. Reasons why they will do this are given in table 9:

Table 22: Why students would like to start their business after completing their studies at GZU

Why students would like to start their business after completing their studies at GZU
▪ I already have money to start my own business ▪ I believe entrepreneurship is the way to go in Zimbabwe and it's actually more adventurous than the latter ▪ I now have the knowledge and skills and need to refine and research more on beekeeping at the same time getting an income and creating employment ▪ I am already doing business so would rather employ people as the business grows ▪ I want to be an entrepreneur and create jobs ▪ I now have the capital to start ▪ The entrepreneurial seed was sown and well cultivated in me ▪ I am now able to manage my own business because of experience I got from the ZADT funded project

Discussion

From the results presented above, we see interesting positive developments with students gaining business skills, while some students made profits. Overall the Masvingo community also benefited from the consumption of the produced goods and employment created – almost all students hired labour to assist them when they were busy with their classes. In this section, we will discuss critical factors for enhancing student entrepreneurial success and the key lessons learnt from GZU/ ZADT attempt. Factors to be discussed include: the role of mentors in student entrepreneurial activities; the role of universities, industry and the local communities; sustainability of such ventures. The section ends with the key lessons learned.

The Role of mentors in enhancing student entrepreneurship success

Mentoring students is a supportive and guidance-driven process that helps them achieve their academic, personal, and professional goals. Mentorship can be described basing on the following points.

- Building rapport and trust: establishing a positive and comfortable relationship with the student.
- Identifying goals and needs: understanding the student's strengths, weaknesses, and objectives.
- Setting expectations: clarifying the mentoring relationship's scope, boundaries, and expectations.
- Regular meetings: scheduling regular sessions to discuss progress, challenges, and strategies.
- Active listening: paying attention to the student's concerns, ideas, and feelings.
- Guidance and advice: sharing experiences, expertise, and insights to help the student navigate challenges.
- Encouragement and motivation: fostering confidence, resilience, and motivation.
- Feedback and evaluation: providing constructive feedback and assessing progress.
- Networking and resources: introducing students to relevant networks, opportunities, and resources.

- Empowerment: helping students develop self-awareness, self-reliance, and decision-making skills.

The first issue on building rapport with the students was not a problem as mentors were teaching these students in class – they already knew each other and this made the process smooth. Having mentors who were also lecturers provided opportunity for the students to continue discussing their business with their mentors even in class. Because of their knowledge of the students, the mentors also had an understanding of their weaknesses and strength, making it easier for them to provide mentoring support.

However, critical issues still need to be addressed going forward in terms of the selection of mentors – what should their qualities be? Can someone who has not run a business successfully mentor the students? Is it possible to get mentors with both technical knowledge and business skills?

The Role of Universities, Industry, and the Local Community

Entrepreneurship is an important driver of economic growth and innovation, and its cultivation requires a collaborative effort among Universities, industry, and the local community (Kurotimi et al., 2017). While each of these plays a distinct part, they have an interconnected role in fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem through creating an environment that supports creativity, innovation, and the practical application of entrepreneurial skills.

Universities are the foundational building blocks that nurture entrepreneurial mindsets. Entrepreneurship education helps instill the necessary skills and attitudes in students from an early age, hence exposing them to concepts such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and risk management. Universities also facilitate exposure to entrepreneurship through extracurricular activities such as clubs, competitions, and workshops. These initiatives encourage students to explore their interests, collaborate with peers, and engage with successful entrepreneurs as mentors. By fostering a culture of innovation, Universities help students recognise their potential as future entrepreneurs, thereby planting the seeds of entrepreneurship early in their educational journey.

Industry plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Businesses can contribute by providing internships, mentorship programmes, and resources that enable students to gain real-world experience. Collaborations between universities and local companies can lead to tailored programmes that align educational outcomes with industry needs, ensuring that students acquire relevant skills. Moreover, industry partnerships can facilitate networking opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs. Events such as hackathons, pitch competitions, and business incubators allow students to interact with professionals, receive feedback, and develop connections that may lead to future collaborations. By engaging with industry leaders, students gain insights into market trends, consumer behaviour, and the realities of starting and running a business, preparing them for the challenges they may face as entrepreneurs.

The local community serves as a critical support system for nurturing entrepreneurship. Community organisations, non-profits, and local government can provide resources, funding, and mentorship to aspiring entrepreneurs. By creating a supportive environment, communities can help entrepreneurs navigate the challenges of starting a business, offering guidance on regulatory requirements, financial management, and marketing strategies. Furthermore, community engagement in entrepreneurship initiatives fosters inclusivity and diversity. Programmes that target underrepresented groups or marginalised populations can empower individuals who may not have access to traditional resources. By providing training, access to capital, and networking opportunities, communities can help level the playing field and promote a more equitable entrepreneurial landscape. Local businesses also play a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship by supporting initiatives that promote local economic development. Collaborating with universities and community organisations to sponsor programmes or events demonstrates a commitment to nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. This symbiotic relationship fosters a sense of belonging and encourages a culture of innovation within the community.

Sustainability of Student Entrepreneurship Projects

The sustainability of entrepreneurship projects within Great Zimbabwe University is crucial for fostering long-term innovation, economic growth, and community engagement. Sustainable entrepreneurship initiatives not only enhance the academic environment but also contribute to local economies and societal well-being. Key factors that influence sustainability of these projects include strong institutional support, curriculum integration, community and industry partnerships, access to funding and resources focus on social and environmental impact and continuous evaluation and adaptation.

Great Zimbabwe University, in this case provided strong institutional support to the student`s entrepreneurship projects by availing its infrastructure and student mentorship support by faculty staff. This enabled students, who lack productive resources like land, to experiment in a safe environment with all the support they needed.

The University has also incorporated entrepreneurship content in all programmes in an effort to implement the Education 5.0 philosophy. Integrating entrepreneurship into various academic disciplines enhances its relevance and reach and allows students from diverse fields to engage in entrepreneurial activities, fostering a culture of innovation across the university. Additionally, experiential learning through incorporating hands-on experiences, such as internships, workshops, and real-world projects, helps students apply theoretical knowledge. This practical exposure increases the likelihood of successful entrepreneurial ventures and encourages ongoing engagement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We learn a number of lessons from GZU-ZADT efforts in nurturing student entrepreneurs. These include: the need to provide finances to resource constrained students to implement their projects; mentorship and access to facilities go a long way in helping the students, with proper and timely interventions from the mentors, the students are set up for success; and the need to provide factors of production e.g. land and provide opportunities for students to experiment under safe environments with mentorship support. GZU case also raises critical questions on the

qualities of effective mentors for student entrepreneurs, and there is need for further research in this area. Lastly, GZU case also shows that, entrepreneurship skills can indeed be learnt if students are given an opportunity to experiment.

Key recommendations from this study include the following:

For the sake of stimulating entrepreneurial skills in students, it should be mandatory for students in higher and tertiary education institutions to attend entrepreneurship and business courses so that they gain basic knowledge on how to start and run businesses successfully. This makes it easier for them to implement their knowledge in practice. It is important to note that many students are not exposed to the business world before entering higher and tertiary institutions - these institutions should therefore play the critical role of *birthing entrepreneurs and nurturing them*. Furthermore, in projects such as CAUSEWAY, student entrepreneurs need to be linked to both domestic and external markets during the incubation period so that they establish their markets earlier for success. In addition, supporting students for only a year as happened in the CAUSEWAY project may not be adequate to develop student entrepreneurship skills. From GZU experience, it is vital that students be supported for at least three years so that they are set for success. This requires projects such as the CAUSEWAY to target students in the first or second year of their studies so as to give them a chance to establish their businesses and gain crucial skills and experience needed before incubation period ends. When this happens, the student entrepreneurs would have been set for success.

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CHAPTER 20
Integrating Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine into Medical Education: The Great Zimbabwe University Experience

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Abstract

Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) exemplifies a heritage-driven model of integrating traditional medicine into higher education, aligning national strategies with international directives. Across Africa and the world, traditional therapies remain central to primary healthcare – roughly 80% of African communities rely on them – prompting WHO and the Lancet Commission to urge that medical curricula address local health needs and indigenous knowledge. The African Union has similarly promoted such integration: by 2023, 25 AU member states had incorporated traditional medicine into health sciences curricula, with most also creating formal training programs for traditional practitioners. GZU's strategy is rooted in its heritage-based Education 5.0 philosophy. Its new medical school (2022) devotes 20% of the curriculum to herbal and indigenous healing. Postgraduate MPhil/DPhil tracks in natural therapies foster research on local remedies. The institution's mission explicitly aims to produce graduates with dual expertise in biomedicine and traditional practice, contributing to Zimbabwe's health goals and sustainable community well-being. By marrying ancient Karanga healing wisdom with modern science, GZU advances AU and WHO objectives (e.g. SDG3, Agenda 2063) and offers a replicable blueprint for culturally informed, innovative medical education.

Key words: Traditional Medicine; Indigenous Knowledge; Curriculum Innovation; Medical Education; Sustainable Healthcare.

Introduction

Traditional medicine remains a cornerstone of global health, especially in Africa. The World Health Organisation notes that roughly 80% of people in many developing regions rely on traditional remedies for primary healthcare. Recognising this reality, WHO has for decades advocated policies to *"strengthen the role traditional medicine plays in keeping populations healthy."* Its 2014–2023 strategy urges member states to develop proactive regulations and action plans integrating traditional, complementary and integrative medicine (TCIM) into health systems. In parallel, global education reformers stress that medical curricula must be competency-based and tailored to local needs. The Lancet Commission (2010) famously called for health professions education that is community-oriented and culturally relevant. Thus the international consensus is clear: health professions training should embrace indigenous knowledge and local healing practices. This global context provides the backdrop for Great Zimbabwe University's pioneering initiative.

At the continental level, these imperatives have translated into concrete policies. The African Union (AU) has enthusiastically promoted traditional medicine. In its 2024 African Traditional Medicine Day statement, the AU Health Commissioner observed that 25 member states had

already integrated traditional medicine into their health sciences curricula, and 20 had developed training programs for both traditional healers and biomedical students. Indeed, the WHO Regional Office for Africa reported in 2022 that 25 African countries had embedded traditional medicine into medical education, and nearly all (39) had established frameworks to regulate traditional health practitioners. These trends align with AU Agenda 2063's health goals and the 2024 AU theme on education, which explicitly calls for involving indigenous knowledge holders in policymaking and setting curricular standards for training traditional practitioners. In other words, Africa's leaders see bioscientific and indigenous medicine as complementary. They are forging partnerships between traditional and conventional health systems to strengthen Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and honor cultural heritage (AU Commission 2024).

Zimbabwean policymakers share this vision. Zimbabwe's development strategy (NDS1) and higher education reforms encourage innovation that draws on local heritage. Great Zimbabwe University, named for the renowned stone city of the Karanga-Shona, has made "heritage-based education" its hallmark. According to GZU's strategic plan, the university is mandated to implement a "heritage-based Education 5.0 philosophy," emphasising teaching, research, community engagement, innovation and industrialisation. In practice, this means GZU explicitly links its academic programs to Zimbabwe's cultural legacy and developmental aspirations. For example, during 2022–2024 GZU constructed a state-of-the-art teaching hospital at its Mashava campus and opened the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences. This aligns with NDS1's priority to train more doctors and improve health services. By co-locating a hospital and medical school, GZU has built infrastructure for practical training and patient care that will also serve as a hub for traditional medicine research and outreach.

Critically, GZU has carved out curricular space for traditional medicine. The new medical school, inaugurated in late 2022, admits a Bachelor of Biomedical Science and an MBChB program. By national accreditation rules, 80% of the curriculum must follow a standard biomedical syllabus (to align with all Zimbabwean medical schools). However, GZU dedicates the remaining 20% of "branding" to heritage content. This portion intentionally covers herbal pharmacology, traditional diagnostics, and the principles of indigenous healing. The school's official mission and vision statements reiterate this integration: GZU seeks to produce physicians with "dual expertise in conventional medicine and an appreciation of traditional and herbal medicine," aiming to be a regional leader in "authentication and application of traditional and herbal medicine". In effect, GZU is producing graduates who speak both the language of modern science and that of Zimbabwe's ancestral health traditions.

Beyond the undergraduate curriculum, GZU has launched dedicated postgraduate programs in natural therapies. The university's Simon Mazorodze School now offers MPhil and DPhil tracks in Herbal and Traditional Medicine. These research degrees are already yielding scholarly outputs: faculty and students are publishing case studies, laboratory analyses of medicinal plants, and even developing prototype herbal formulations (for example, test products to manage diabetes and COVID-19 symptoms). Table 1.0 and Figure 1.0 show herbal prototypes that have been developed as part of scholarly outputs from Mphil and Dphil studies. This research orientation echoes continental priorities. WHO's analysis of ATM development notes that many African countries have established research institutes and university programs for traditional medicine.



Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences students in the laboratory

Table 1.0 Innovative herbal prototypes developed by postgraduate students at GZU

Product Category	Prototype Name	Key Herbal Ingredients	Primary Use Case & Benefit
Herbal Bath Salt	**Lippia Soak**	Ginger, Lavender, Lemon Bush, Resurrection Bush essential oils	**For sore muscles, arthritic pain, and stress-related inflammation. Can be used for steaming too.** Benefit: Eases muscle tension, relieves chest pains, fever, soothes joint pain, and calms the nervous system.
Scented Candle	**Serenity Flame**	Lavender, Lemon, Lemon Bush, Resurrection Bush essential oils	**For creating a calming environment to reduce stress.** Benefit: Lowers anxiety and mitigates the pro-inflammatory effects of chronic stress.
Tincture	**Star Elixir**	Ginger, Resurrection Bush, Lemon Bush extracts	**For whole-body inflammatory support.** Benefit: Provides a concentrated dose of antioxidants and anti-inflammatories for daily management.
Vapour Rub	**Rubit Balm**	Lemon Bush essential oils	**For nasal and bronchial congestion.** Benefit: Gently clears airways, soothes inflamed nasal passages, and eases breathing without harsh chemicals.
Car Perfume	**GZU Clear Drive**	Lemon Bush, Lavender	**For reducing stress and improving focus while driving.** Benefit: Promotes alert calmness, making drives less stressful and inflammatory.
Herbal Tea Bags	**Star Tea**	Ginger, **Resurrection** Bush, Lippia, Lemon peels	**For daily maintenance of inflammatory balance.** Benefit: Supports cardiovascular health, digestion, and overall cellular protection against oxidative damage.

Product Category	Prototype Name	Key Herbal Ingredients	Primary Use Case & Benefit
Ice Tea / Beverage	**Hibiscus mocktail**	**Hibiscus:** Rich in anthocyanins, vasodilatory effect. **Ginger oil:** Aids digestion and adds spice.	**For daily hydration and antioxidant support.** Benefit: A delicious, refreshing way to fight systemic inflammation and support cardiovascular health (to manage hypertension).
Home Diffuser	**Aura Mist Diffuser**	Lemon Bush, Lavender, Resurrection Bush	**For environmental management of respiratory infections.** Benefit: Continuously reduces airborne pathogens and personal stress levels throughout the day.
Body Massage Oil	**Soothe & Restore Massage Oil**	Lavender Essential Oil, Lemon Bush Infused Oil, Baobab seed oil	**For targeted relief of muscle and joint pain.** Benefit: Relieves soreness, reduces muscle stiffness, and calms inflammation in specific areas like the neck, back, and joints.
Essential Oil	**Lippia essentials**	Lemon Bush, Ginger, Eucalyptus	**For versatile aromatic and topical application.** Benefit: Can be diffused to purify air and reduce stress or diluted for massage to relieve muscle aches.

The development of local herbal products such as presented in Table 1.0 potentially reduces the national import bill, thus promoting use of indigenous resources for health improvement. In addition, diseases are easily managed at affordable cost as the raw materials required for manufacturing are accessible. The innovative products introduce therapeutic mitigating measures in addition to the public health interventions and vaccination programs employed by the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) to tackle communicable and non-communicable diseases. This is in light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3.B. Moreover, value addition of herbal remedies is a fulfilment of NDS1 and will result in creation of employment, improvement of livelihoods and restoration of health of the general public.



2024 Presidential innovation fair in Harare by Cephas Mawere, a DPhil student from Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences



Showcasing GZU herbal products

In fact, Zimbabwe has contributed notable findings: researchers at the University of Zimbabwe developed a herbal anti-HIV remedy ("gundamiti") that reportedly achieved up to a 97% reduction in viral load without harming renal or liver function. Such examples demonstrate that homegrown phytomedicines can be both culturally resonant and clinically valuable. GZU's emphasis on evidence-based research ensures that its curriculum innovation is matched by scientific validation.

Integral to GZU's model is valorising indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). The university is located in southern Zimbabwe, the traditional homeland of the Karanga people. Karanga healing practices – passed down through generations of village elders and herbalists – form part of the local intellectual heritage. According to anthropological studies, the Karanga system of therapy treats illness through rituals and plant remedies deeply embedded in community life. GZU's academic programs draw on this heritage by including content on local medicinal flora and cultural approaches to health. For example, classroom modules cover the Karanga herbal pharmacopeia and case studies from Shona healing contexts.

In doing so, the university ensures that curricula are not only medically sound but also culturally meaningful to students from this region. This approach directly responds to African Union guidance: policy-makers have urged educational institutions to involve traditional knowledge holders in curriculum design and to formalise standards for training indigenous practitioners. By partnering with traditional healers (for guest lectures and validation of herbal formulations), GZU helps integrate community wisdom into its science programs.

Great Zimbabwe University's dual-focus education has important implications for sustainable healthcare. Training a new cadre of clinicians who appreciate both biomedicine and traditional medicine can expand access and trust in the health system. In Zimbabwe's rural areas where hospitals and doctors are scarce traditional healers often serve as first-line caregivers. By giving future doctors competence in herbal therapies, GZU bridges that gap. This aligns with the people-centred primary health care envisioned by WHO and the Sustainable Development Goals: health workers who respect patients' cultural beliefs can deliver more effective, holistic care (Kasilo et al., 2019). GZU's innovation also supports sustainable livelihoods: the university is exploring cultivation of medicinal plants on campus farms and collaborating with local communities to preserve biodiversity. An innovation centre under construction for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA) will complement this work by developing agro-industrial processes for herbal products. All of these initiatives contribute to national goals on rural development and science-technology application.

Moreover, GZU model exemplifies regional and global best practice in education. It resonates with the Lancet Commission's call to transform medical education so that it is competency-based, evidence-informed, and socially accountable. By re-examining curricula to emphasise research and innovation, GZU prepares graduates not only as clinicians but as healthcare innovators. Its strategy of reserving institutional branding for context-specific content reflects a best-practice approach in curriculum design. Other Zimbabwean schools have offered only limited, elective courses on traditional medicine; in contrast, GZU's fully integrated model is unique in Southern Africa. Early analyses of this approach suggest that it could serve as a blueprint: the commentary literature on medical education highlights GZU's model as a potential case study of sustainable, culturally responsive training.

In summary, Great Zimbabwe University's integration of traditional medicine into its academic programs is both forward-looking and rooted in heritage. It responds to WHO and AU policy directives by embedding TCIM in curricula and research, it advances Zimbabwe's national development and health strategies, and it empowers students with the cultural competence needed for community-oriented care. As AU Commissioner Cessouma emphasised, *"by embracing our rich traditional knowledge and combining it with modern science, we can unlock the full potential of traditional medicine in achieving health and well-being for all."* GZU's experience shows what that vision can look like in practice: graduates adept in both medical science and indigenous knowledge, an expanding evidence base of herbal treatments, and strengthened ties between the university and its community. In doing so, GZU contributes to the sustainable health of Masvingo Province and Zimbabwe at large, offering a model of originality and impact that can guide other institutions on the continent.

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CHAPTER 21
Implementing Education 5.0 through Community Engagement by Great Zimbabwe University Employees from 2018-2025

Prosper Muzambi, Sinikiwe Gwatidzo, Ephraim Gwaravanda & Trust Makwinja Asima

Abstract

Having entered the academic scene as Masvingo State University (MASU), and now under the internationally renowned Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), both the teaching and non-teaching staff have immensely contributed to national, regional, continental, and international development. Using interviews, questionnaires and drawing from archival, documentary and primary evidence, this book chapter examines how GZU has become a reputable institution in Zimbabwe through its committed workforce whose strategic skills and expertise have become a sought-after commodity in State Enterprises, Parastatals and Non-Governmental organisations in Zimbabwe. The chapter thus profiles both present and past GZU members of staff who served or are currently serving on boards of State Enterprises, Parastatals and Non-Governmental organisations in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the chapter explores how these are contributing to the governance and management of State Enterprises Parastatals and Church related organisations that play a crucial role in promoting socio-economic development through provision of essential services like food, water, electricity, and healthcare.

Key words: Board membership, Community engagement, development, GZU employees, strategic skills

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) employees in public sector management through board membership. The study focuses on the involvement of these members in parastatals, state enterprises, Non-governmental organizations and Commissions. Board membership is part of community engagement under Education 5.0[1] although community engagement has several other dimensions that include community projects, technology transfer, skills development, outreach programmes and sustainable development, among others. The university governance system that allows for committee membership in addition to the qualifications and experience of members facilitates their appointment into the various boards. The gap that this study attempts to fill is largely empirical in terms of statistical evidence relating to the nature and extent of board membership, gender diversity involved and disciplinary

[1] The year 2018 saw a new shift and emphasis in the Higher and Tertiary Education sector. Education 5.0 came to the fore. In addition to the traditional Education 3.0 deliverables, which are teaching, research, and community engagement, it introduced and emphasised the innovation and industrialization components. This chapter contends that applying Education 5.0 to a period prior to the year 2018 should not be read as an anachronistic approach to this study. Research and community engagement are by nature imbedded with elements of innovation and industrialisation. This chapter acknowledges that indeed Education 5.0 brought renewed focus to innovation and industrialization and further built on the existing initiatives and policies that aimed at promoting technological advancement through research in Higher and Tertiary Education.

considerations. The requirement for board members are clearly spelled out in the Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (2018) and the study shows that GZU members meet the criteria stipulated in the Act. While documentations exist in terms of minutes and lists of board membership, no elaborate study has been undertaken in relation to GZU employees' involvement in board membership. The research attempts to show how GZU has become a University of choice in regards to it being a source of personnel for both the state and non-state sectors.

Previous studies on this subject include board structure (Mangena and Tauringana, 2008) and performance (impact of experience and age of board members in state enterprises and parastatals (Maibvisira et al, 2022) comparative analysis of public and private universities governing boards (Garwe and Gwatidzo, 2015), corporate ethics in boards (Mukusha, 2012; Sandada et al, 2014; Maune, 2015) board diversity (Mazikana, 2023). The existing literature does not refer directly to GZU, hence the relevance of this study.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides a conceptual framework to the study by tracing the meanings and types of community engagement. The second section discusses the methodology used in the study. The third section provides statistical and qualitative analysis of findings in an attempt to demonstrate the scope, diversity and depth of community engagement by GZU employees through board membership. The fourth section discusses the findings made in the study.

Conceptual Analysis of Community Engagement

Several justifications can be made for conceptual analysis of community engagement. Firstly, the term "community engagement" is often vague and used inconsistently across disciplines and contexts. A conceptual analysis clarifies precisely what aspect or model of engagement (e.g., consultation, collaboration, empowerment, service-learning) the research employs, setting clear boundaries for the study (Silka et al., 2008; Jacquez et al., 2013). Secondly, conceptual analysis prevents conflation. Engagement is easily conflated with related but distinct concepts like "participation," "outreach," "involvement," or "knowledge translation." Analysis disentangles these, ensuring the research focuses on the specific relational, power-sharing, and action-oriented dimensions implied by "engagement" rather than passive involvement (Cornwall, 2008).Thirdly, analysis locates the research within specific theoretical traditions (e.g., participatory action research, community-based participatory research (CBPR), critical pedagogy, empowerment theory, asset-based community development). This provides a lens for interpreting findings and understanding the why behind the engagement approach (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). Fourthly analyzing the concept ensures that data collection and analysis methods align with the nature of the engagement being studied (e.g., co-design methods for collaborative engagement vs. surveys for consultative engagement. Fifthly, conceptual analysis is prerequisite to developing valid indicators and evaluation frameworks specific to the type and goals of engagement operationalised in the research (Drahota et al., 2016).

The concept of community engagement can be traced back to the history of the development of universities from elitist knowledge institutions to participatory civic partners where knowledge is co-created between universities and communities. Bringle & Hatcher (1995) contend that community engagement is a collaborative process between universities and communities to address societal issues through teaching, research, and service. This understanding recognises the mutual benefits for the universities and the communities and it integrates academic work with

real-world problems through strategic thinking. However, the idea of service appears to lack long-term sustainability in the engagement process. To bridge the sustainability weakness, Holland (2001) maintains that community engagement is a sustained interaction between universities and communities to co-create knowledge and solutions. This view emphasizes long-term commitment and promotes knowledge exchange, not just service delivery. However, the perspective overlooks immediate community needs. For Watson (2007) community engagement involves the university's responsibility to contribute to the public good through reciprocal relationships. This understanding emphasises responsibility and it aligns to communal values such as Ubuntu. The view, however, fails to address institutional barriers such as funding and bureaucracy. Fitzgerald et al. (2012) argue that engagement is a scholarly activity that connects university resources to community priorities. This definition connects CE to academic rigor (e.g., research, publications) thereby blending theory and practice for community development and not just skills application. However, this understanding overlooks non-academic stakeholders (e.g., local chiefs, farmers) in the decision making process. Sandmann (2008) argues that community engagement is a process through which universities democratise knowledge by actively involving communities in research, knowledge production, and institutional decision-making.This view focuses on equality, fairness and inclusivity in shared governance. This approach is difficult to implement in hierarchical institutions. Boyer (1996) argues that community engagement means connecting academic work to societal challenges. This broadens the definition of scholarship beyond publications but it lacks clear operational guidance. For Museva (2018), community engagement is partnership where universities and communities jointly define problems and solutions. This perspective promotes equity in decision-making but it requires significant trust-building. For Munyaradzi and Bozkurt (2025) a transformative decolonial approach that power dynamics, culture, language and identity is required for community engagement.

Research Methodology

The researchers utilised the Mixed-Methods Approach, which combines the qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem ((Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The justification for the qualitative approach stems from the fact that GZU employees are involved in a variety of fields of a social nature. Merriam (2000:1) contends that "education, health, social work, administration, and other arenas of social activity are considered applied social sciences or fields of practice precisely because practitioners in these fields deal with the everyday concerns of people's lives." While the study was comprehensive and richly descriptive (qualitative), it also made precise and numerical presentations derived from pie charts and graphs (quantitative). The information for the latter was a result of a carefully designed set of questionnaire on a google form.

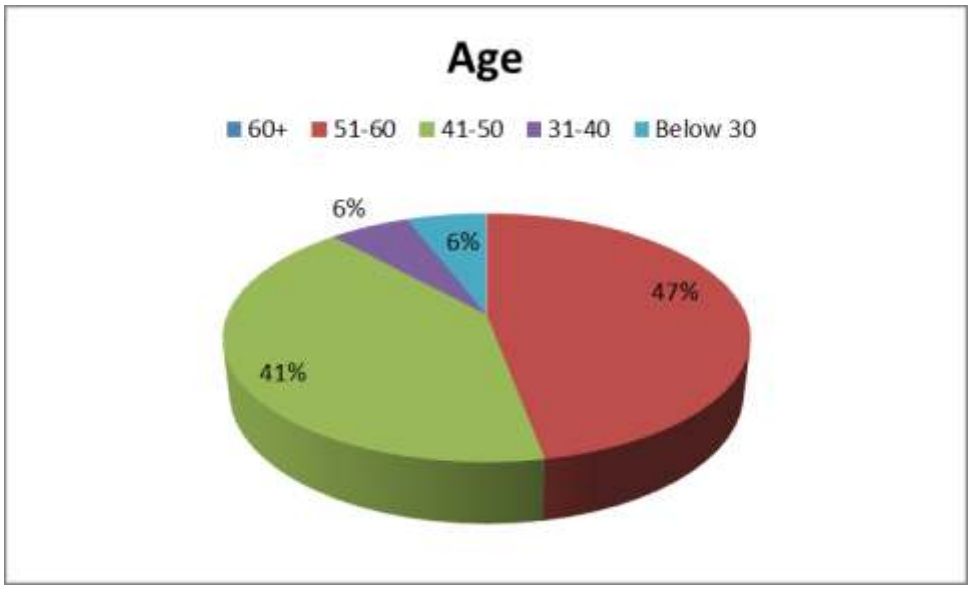
The research further made use of the convenient sampling procedure, which is a type of non-probability sampling. "Convenience sampling describes the data collection process from a research population that is effortlessly reachable to the researcher" (Golzar, et al, 2022:73). As such, the researchers reached out to GZU employees known to them who have sat or are currently sitting on various boards. Furthermore, and as informed by Bhardwaj (2019:161) who expresses that snowball sampling is "also known as chain sampling or sequential sampling and used where one respondent identifies other respondents", this research benefitted from identified

participants who referred the researchers to other respondents thereby recruiting "participants via other participants" (McCombes 2023)

With regards to ethical considerations, the introductory remark on the google form clearly obtained informed consent from participants before the collection of data. It thus ensured participants' privacy and confidentiality. The participating individuals were also assured of anonymity in the research. Triangulation through utilisation of multiple data sources and methods was also applied to the research so as to ascertain validity, credibility and reliability, (Denzin & Lincoln 2011).

Data presentation and analysis

Based on the electronic google form questionnaire which was filled by 17 members, the following results were obtained to show the demographic details of GZU board members, types of boards served, nature and depth of service as well as lessons drawn from such high level service. The research results provide insights into how employees of Great Zimbabwe University perceive their roles as board members in parastatals, state enterprises, and NGOs. The data reflects their self-assessment regarding ethical conduct, the transfer of academic skills to board oversight, innovation application, and problem-solving contributions. This expanded dataset provides deeper insights into how GZU employees perceive their impact as board members in parastatals, state enterprises, and NGOs. The responses highlight their views on networking, problem-solving, academic influence, governance challenges, and institutional reforms. Below is a critical analysis of the findings:

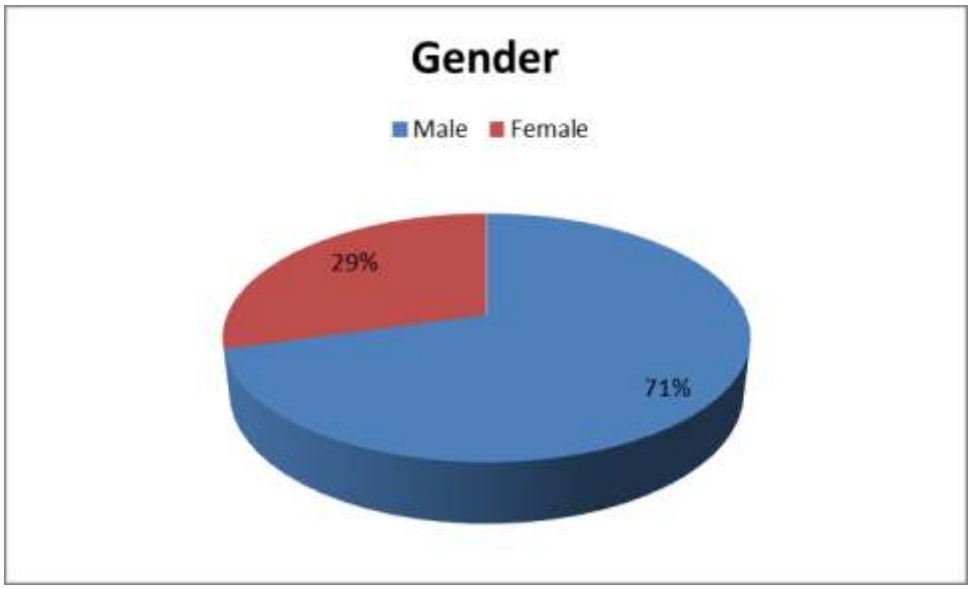


Pie chart 1: Age of participants

Source: Author

The majority (88%) of board members are middle-aged (41-60), with minimal representation from younger age groups (<40). Three implications can be drawn from the analysis; firstly this may show that experience and seniority may be prioritised over youth in board appointments.

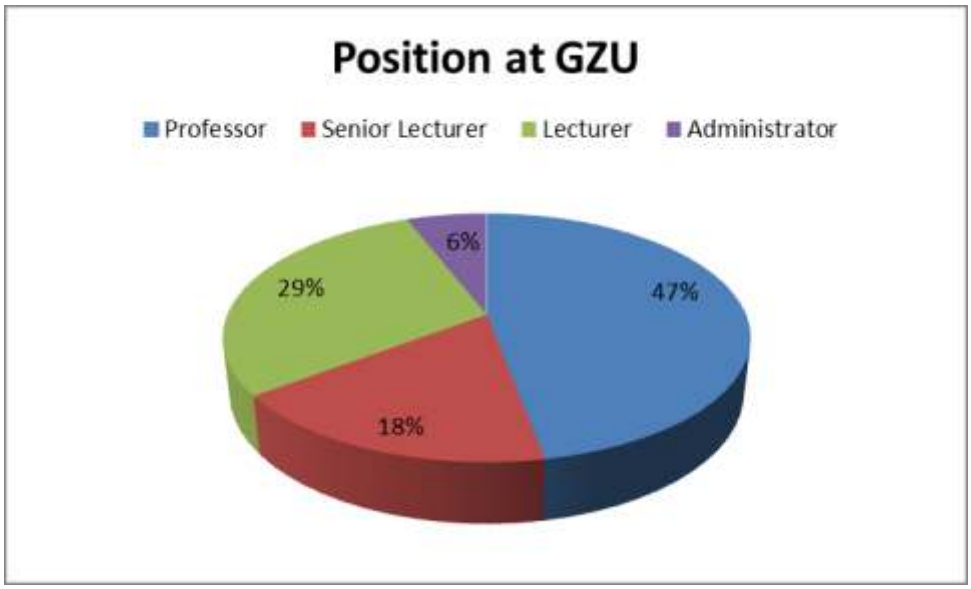
Secondly, lack of generational diversity could limit fresh perspectives and lastly younger academics may face barriers to entry (e.g., lack of experience or networks.



Pie Chart 2: Gender of participants

Source: Author

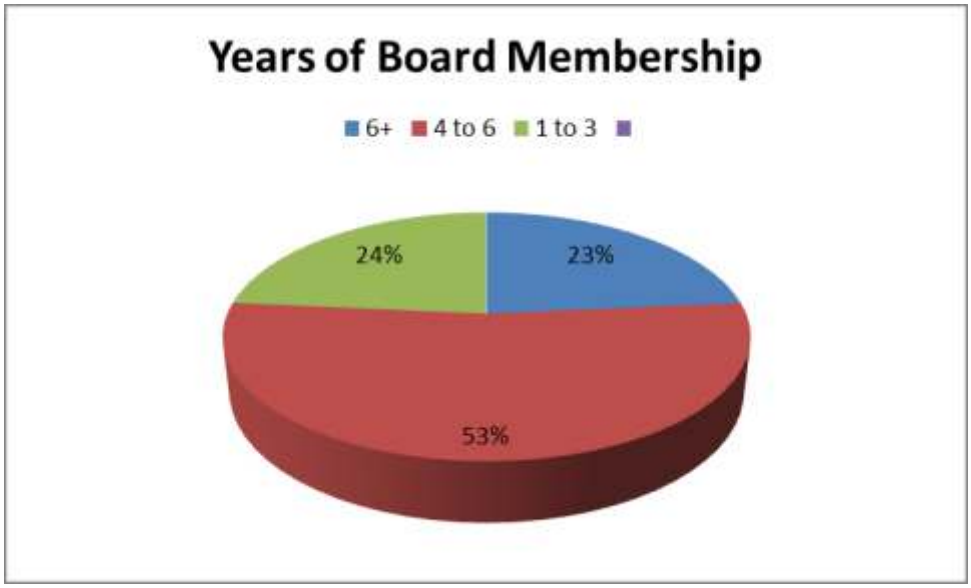
The above gender analysis shows 71% male and 29% female. Males dominate board membership, though female representation is notable (31.2%). The implication is that external board membership by GZU employees reflects broader gender disparities in leadership roles although females are not entirely excluded. At GZU female leaders are on the fewer side with less than 33% as leaders. On the ground the majority of female employees are in the lower grades and this reduces the chances of them being appointed into state enterprises, parastatals, commissions and NGO boards.



Pie Chart 3: Positions of participants at GZU

Source: Author

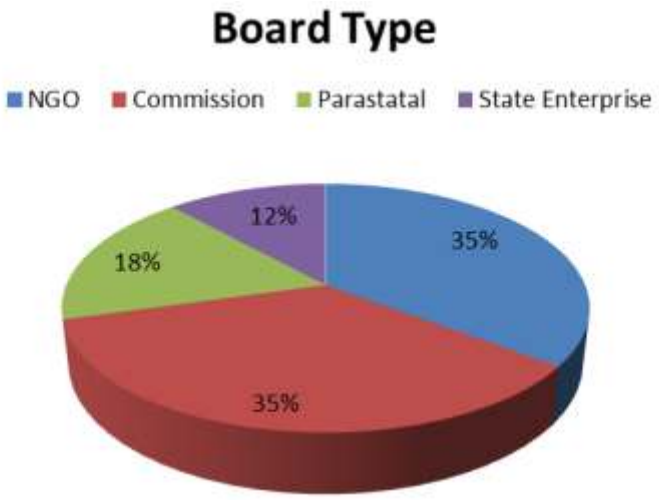
The above pie chart shows that more professors are appointed into boards highly represented while administrators are rare. Academic seniority (professors) is likely a key criterion for board appointments. Lecturers (mid-career) still participate significantly, suggesting merit-based inclusion. Administrators' low representation may indicate a focus on academic expertise over operational experience.



Pie chart 4: Years served in board by participants

Source: Author

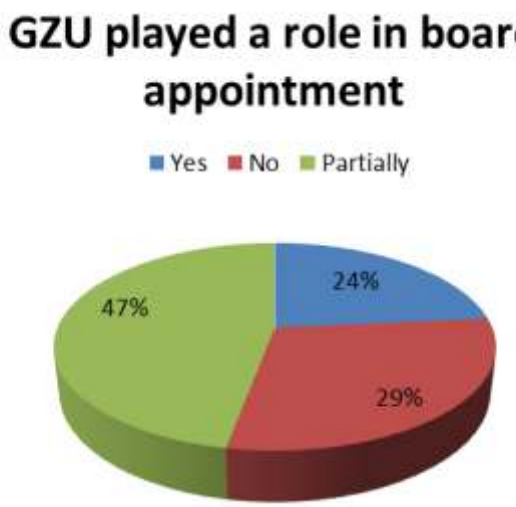
The majority of participants have served for 4 to six years and this is a likely indication that the members are serving in their second terms. This indicates a trust in Great Zimbabwe University employees board performance. The over 6 years of service category of 23.5% reinforces the probability of efficient service by board members. The below 3 years category of 23.5% is a likely pointer to members of staff who have been recently appointed to public entities boards.



Pie Chart 5: Board type

Source: Author

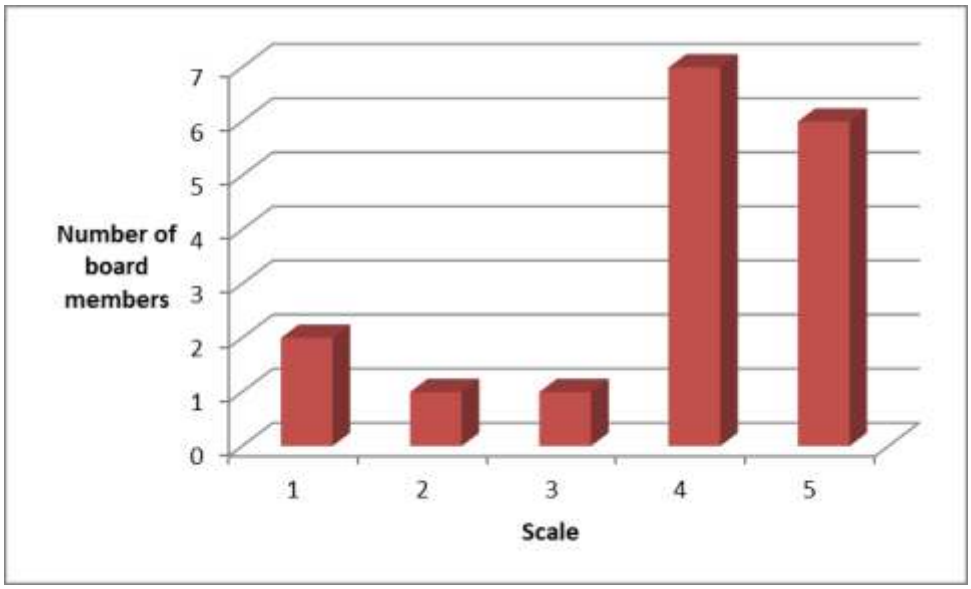
The results indicate that more members of Great Zimbabwe University are in Non-Governmental organisations and Commissions and this is a likely indication that academic skills are highly sought in independent organisations. Representations in state enterprises and parastatals is likely as a result of traceable political affiliations which most academics may lack.



Pie Chart 6: Role played by GZU in member's appointment in board

Source: Author

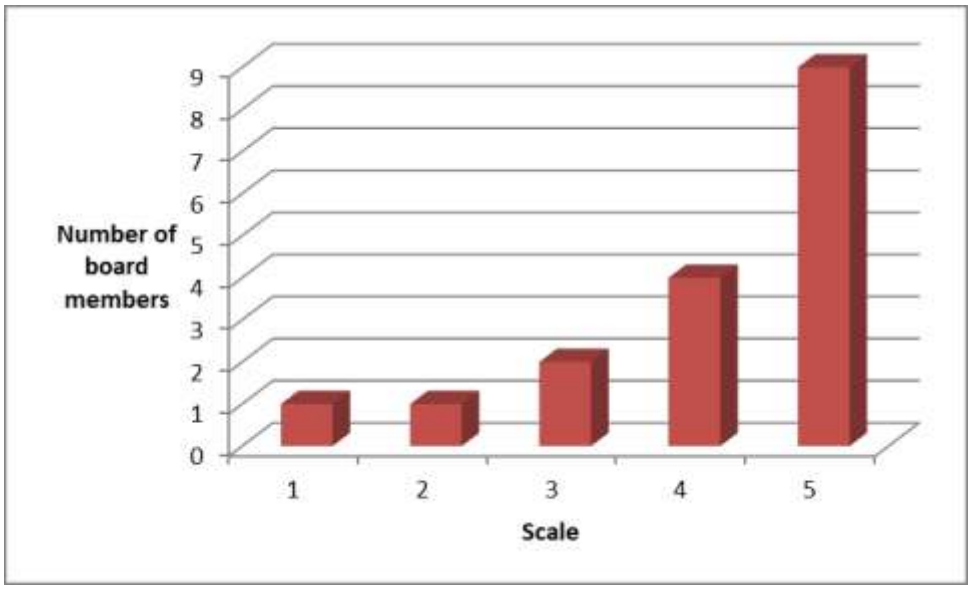
The majority of participants 47% feel that GZU affiliation could have partially influenced appointments into their current boards. This may show that there are more other factors that may be considedred including political and religious views and therefore a combination of factors may come into play. However, affiliation to Great Zimbabwe University may come in as an added advantage.



Graph 1: Role of GZU academic leadership in boards

Source: Author

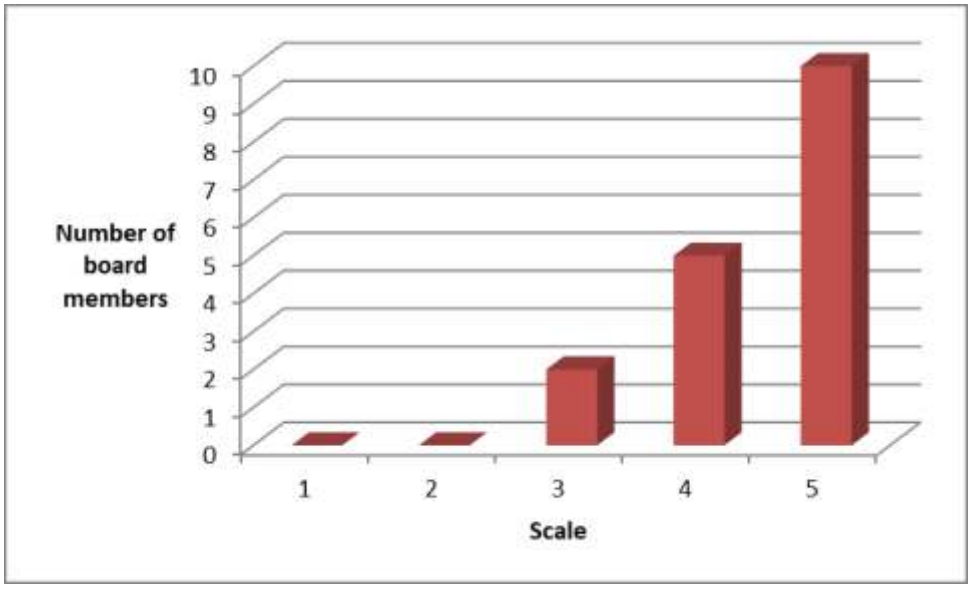
The graph above shows that most participants believe their academic role highly prepared them. This could be an indication that academic skills such as critical analysis, evidence based reason ing; creativity and innovation are perceived as transferable to governance.



Graph 2: Role of GZU Committee experience in boards

Source: Author

There was strong consensus that university experience enhances board performance. Internal governance experience is highly applicable to external boards. Dissenters (1/5) may perceive university committees as bureaucratic or irrelevant.



Graph 3: Applicability of GZU strategic planning to external boards

Source: Author

The applicability of GZU Strategic Planning to External Boards (58.8% rated 5/5; 29.4% 4/5; 11.8% 3/5). Most participants see high applicability, but a minority are neutral (2/5). GZU's strategic frameworks may align well with external boards, especially NGOs/commissions. Lower ratings could reflect mismatches that indicate that state enterprises prioritize industry experts over academia.

Name of State Enterprise or Parastatal	**Name of Non-Governmental Organisation**
Airports Company of Zimbabwe	CARITAS- Masvingo
Consumer Council of Zimbabwe	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
National Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee	Christian Care
Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust	Health Commission – Roman Catholic Diocese of Masvingo
Forestry Commission	Ndau Festival of the Arts (NDAFA)
National Languages Advisory Committee	TellZim
National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
Zimbabwe Media Commission	
Allied Health Practitioners Council of Zimbabwe	

Fig.1: Public Sector Institutions with Great Zimbabwe University Employees on Board

Source: Author

Critical reflection on findings

Board membership is a way of representing community perspectives because board members actively seek out, listen to, and advocate for the diverse needs, concerns, and aspirations of the broader community (local, regional, industry partners, alumni, prospective students) within board discussions and decision-making with Non-Governmental Organisations representing the marginalized and excluded members. By grounding board decisions in community realities, members ensure the university's mission, programs, and initiatives remain relevant and responsive to societal challenges, workforce needs, and community priorities. Board members serve as crucial connectors between the university and the community. Their active engagement fosters mutual understanding, breaks down town/gown barriers, and builds essential trust and goodwill. They champion transparent and accessible communication channels, ensuring the community understands the university's direction and challenges, while also bringing community feedback directly into the boardroom. Informing Strategic Community insights gathered through

engagement (needs assessments, partnerships, feedback) provide critical data for the board to develop strategic plans that align institutional goals with community well-being and development. Understanding community needs helps boards make more informed and ethical decisions about resource allocation (budgets, facilities, programs) and holds the university administration accountable for its community impact. Insights gained help boards guide policies that make the university more attractive and accessible to local students, diverse talent, and community members seeking continuing education or cultural resources. Board members demonstrate ethical leadership by ensuring community voices, especially marginalised ones, are heard and considered, promoting inclusive governance that reflects the community the university serves.

Critiques of the concept of community engagement indicate that universities extract local knowledge for academic prestige without reciprocating benefits (Bhambra, 2022). Board members might exploit cultural knowledge without co-authorship or community benefits. Western academia marginalises indigenous knowledge systems (Santos, 2018) and this may be perpetuating exclusion of such knowledge systems in board decisions. Marginalized communities are over-researched without tangible outcomes (Tuck & Yang, 2014). GZU's repeated heritage studies near Great Zimbabwe may strain local trust if no economic benefits follow. Universities frame community engagement as apolitical service avoiding structural critique (Mitchell, 2008). GZU employees on boards may avoid boards that require political affiliation and prefer those boards that seek research and analytic skills. Project-based community engagement lacks sustained commitment to systemic change (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002) and board-term limits (3–5 years) may encourage "quick win" engagement over decadal partnerships. Boards are considered as ignoring the role of women in strategic thinking (Mohanty, 2003) and this is indicated in low female participation in boards. The use of information and communication technology in the form of online board meetings excludes communities with limited technology access (Couldry, 2020). Board membership that requires digital engagement initiatives may marginalise rural partners thereby increasing marginalisation and exclusion.

Conclusion

The research findings on Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) employees serving as board members in parastatals, state enterprises, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reveal critical insights into governance dynamics, institutional effectiveness, and the intersection of academia with public and private sector leadership. The study examines both strengths and gaps in current board appointment practices, emphasising the need for structural reforms to enhance inclusivity, ethical standards, and strategic governance. The underrepresentation of youth and women in board positions suggests a missed opportunity for diverse perspectives. Research in organizational behavior confirms that age and gender diversity improves decision-making and innovation. By institutionalising policies such as youth internship programs and gender quotas, GZU can contribute to more dynamic and equitable governance structures. The overreliance on political affiliations rather than academic and professional qualifications undermines board effectiveness. Evidence from corporate governance literature indicates that merit-based appointments lead to better organisational performance.

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CHAPTER 22
Becoming a Global Partner in Education: Great Zimbabwe University International Collaborations, Institutional Affiliations and Associations

Benjamin Mudzanire & Gift Gwindingwe

Abstract

The higher education landscape is increasingly becoming a system of intricate synergies subsisting among educational institutions themselves, commercial and, other local and global partners. Institutional affiliations and associations have become pivotal in propping brand visibility, unlocking subsidiary revenue streams and the overall developmental trajectory of any university. Respectively, Great Zimbabwe University has tremendously, and continues to benefit from its associations with global institutions such as UNICEF, UNESCO, among others. Cognisant that the memoranda of understanding so signed are not just bureaucratic formalities bereft of any tangibles, this chapter critically evaluates the intended, missed and realised benefits accruing from such strategic interactions. For its perspectives, the chapter twins the Institutional Theory and the Relational/Social Network Perspective which integrate key concepts from organizational sociology, institutional theory, and social network analysis to understand the scope of these interactions. The chapter uses archival records and interviews to gather data. A systematic examination and analysis of primary source materials, such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), letters, and other relevant materials is done to secure bases for evaluation of these associations. Findings indicate that not only has Great Zimbabwe University gained in its enrolment but has made great strides in brand distinguishability, unlocking subsidiary revenue streams and research collaborations

Key words: MOU, MOA, affiliation, partnerships

Introduction

The traditional culture of universities standing out as sacred repositories and generators of knowledge secluded from the rest of the community is a practice borne out of obliviousness. Gutierrez, Fox and Clifton (2024:1101) observe that **"**in this era of knowledge-intensive and innovation-focused economies, university missions are pivoting". They are considering new and varied ways of working, including developing "key partnerships, collaborations, and engagements with various stakeholders and end users". For Great Zimbabwe University, henceforth GZU, institutional affiliations and associations have become pivotal in propping brand visibility, unlocking subsidiary revenue streams, quality benchmarking and the overall developmental trajectory of the institution. This chapter critically explores how Great Zimbabwe University has transformed towards becoming a notable global educational partner through synergies with local and global institutions, in keeping with its mission statement steeped towards "the industrialization and modernization of society through heritage-based teaching, research, and innovation".

Conceptualising University Partnerships

It is important to properly delineate the nuances around university affiliations and associations in order to come up with a clear understanding of the forms of association between Great Zimbabwe University and other institutions. The Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation HIVO (2025) defines a university partnership "as a strategic alliance established

between universities to foster cooperation and achieve common objectives. These partnerships are typically based on a mutual understanding of shared values, objectives, and goals". Partnerships are multifaceted and can include both formal and informal collaborations. They could be affiliatory, regulatory or associative.

A *Memorandum of Affiliation (MoA)* is designed to establish and promote partnerships with quality assurance/accreditation bodies, higher education providers, higher education associations and governments world-wide. (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2022). They are regulatory.

Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is a written document describing a cooperative relationship between two parties wishing to work together, while detailing the obligations and commitments of the parties, and minimizing each party's risks (American University, 2022). It reflects the parties' commitment to advance toward a more formal contract (Kenton 2025, University of Pittsburg, 2025).

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a "statement of agreement indirectly with respect to its relationship with other agreements, either verbally or in writing" (Suhardin and Flora, 2021:96). However, MoUs are not legally binding as Muis, Amin and Rahman (2024:1) clarify; "an MOU is not usually a legally binding contract and is unenforceable by law unless the clauses in the MOU state otherwise. It is a crucial step for any prosperous partnership. … an MOA is a legal instrument between two or more parties for the purpose of specific collaboration, intended to be legally binding and enforceable by law". While an MOU is generally not legally binding, its ultimate enforceability relies on the specific intent and language included.

Theoretical Framework for University Institutional Associations

This chapter anchors on the Institutional Theory and the Relational/Social Network Perspective to explore how Great Zimbabwe University has morphed into a global partner through synergies with global affiliations and associations in research and innovation. Kenis and Oerlemans (2007:289) postulate that the *Relational or Social Network* perspective looks at "the joint activities of, and continual exchanges between, participants in a social system." Further to this postulation, Viry et al. (2022:217) unpack how the Social Network perspective "relates to issues of social inclusion and social participation …across a wide range of research fields…." It is against this background that we delve into the issues of inclusion and participation in innovation and research at Great Zimbabwe University and in the global community and assess the challenges that the institution has faced and the opportunities that have been harnessed in this "interplay between space, place, and patterns of connections between actors" (Viry et al. 2022:217; see also Small & Amp; Adler, 2019; Ye & Amp; Liu, 2018). Indeed, there has been a louder call to move away from "considering fixity and propinquity as the norm and pay more attention to issues of space, place and mobility (Viry et al. 2022:218 and Urry, 2012). The theory sees wider social engagement as deriving significant dividends for universities.

The Relational perspective has been employed alongside the *Institutional Theory* that helps this study to underscore how GZU has been influenced by shared norms, regulations, values, and expectations in their wider environment, leading to isomorphism (homogenisation) in structure and behaviour (neo institutionalism) and how it has also benefited from Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) that see how universities operate in arenas where actors with varying resources seek advantage. The Institutional Theory foregrounds the "rules and requirements to which

organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy" (Lammers and Garcia, 2017: 195). Furthermore, Chowdhury (2015: 49) advanced that Institutional theory is a broader theory "which encompasses other theories", such as the System Theory which views "a system is a set of interrelated and interdependent parts arranged in a manner that produces a unified whole". This argumentation foregrounds the point of departure in this study that seeks to locate Great Zimbabwe University as an imbedded part of the global research and innovation system to advance national development.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative research paradigm and a case study design where interviews with critical persons are deemed essential for a fair coverage of the issues that help locate Great Zimbabwe University as part of the league of academic institutions that promote research and innovation through synergies with various organisations and institutions, governments and captains of industry. Qualitative research is known for its rich data gotten through case study designs and interviews (Yin 2011; Creswell 2015). Data was obtained from document sources such as existing MOUs and MOAs in the University. Key persons, especially Chairpersons and Deans from the respective schools were also conducted for interviews to get their insights on the operational benefits of MOUs and MOAs in their respective departments and schools. Thematic data analysis was adopted after unitisation of the same. This was aimed at obtaining clear cut emerging issues for drawing proper valid and reliable conclusions about the existing local and global academic synergies.

Findings and Discussion

Great Zimbabwe University institutional affiliations are a strategic mechanism for the university to enhance its core functions, expand its reach, and achieve sustainable growth in a competitive global education landscape. The university associates with a number of institutions in a number of work relationships and engagements from curriculum development, financial assistance associations, student and staff development, and academic excellence.

Munhumutapa School of Business Sciences

The school maintains strong collaborative relationships with institutions such as the Chartered Governance and Accountancy Institute in Zimbabwe, the Chartered Accountants Academy, and ZimTrade, among others (GZU ICT 2024). These partnerships help the school align with its vision of providing a professional and cultural environment that stimulates the highest standards of excellence in modern management sciences.

GZU and the Chartered Governance and Accountancy Institute in Zimbabwe (CGI)

The two institutions entered into a collaborative agreement to jointly work to produce graduates who meet the Institute's requirements for admission as Grad.CG upon successful completion of the Master of Commerce degree (M. Com) in Professional Accounting and Corporate Governance. The Collaborative Programme is structured in such a way as to allow the Institute to award Grad.CG status to students upon successfully completing the programme, subject to passing the CGI Zimbabwe's Integrative Case Study. In order to proceed from Grad.CG to membership, candidates must satisfy the Institute's requirements regarding work experience and demonstrate that they are a "fit and proper" person.

Under this agreement, the CGI Zimbabwe appoints an External Assessor to monitor the Collaborative Programme, whose role will be to ensure that the CGI Zimbabwe's requirements and standards are satisfied. Above that, the Institute actively participates in the appointment of manpower for the M. Com programme by identifying and recommending potential lecturers from the Institute membership body (subject to meeting requirements of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education – ZimCHE). This measure safeguards best practices and professional standards within the university. GZU's ties with The Chartered Governance and Accountancy Institute in Zimbabwe (CGAI) facilitates both research and industry collaboration (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022), thereby strategically positioning GZU in the web of both research and industry, for enhanced "problem-solving ability" (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022:1, See also Lawson 2004). This strategic partnership does not only put GZU at a proper institutional pedestal, but also positions it at a vantage point to further collaborate internationally since the Chartered Governance and Accountancy Institute is an international institute.

Memorandum of Understanding between GZU and Trust Academy[2] (2025)

GZU and Trust Academy have a formal partnership, specifically an Associateship relationship, as secured from an interview with the office of the registrar. In a landmark move to enhance academic collaboration and foster educational excellence, GZU and Trust Academy have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), solidifying their commitment to cooperative educational initiatives. (Linkedin.com). This means Trust Academy offers diplomas in collaboration with GZU, which are recognized by ZIMCHE. The partnership allows for the offering of programmes in various fields, including business and occupational health and safety, as well as those related to the Confederation of Tourism & Hospitality. The agreement will see Trust Academy offering seven diploma programmes under GZU's professional guidance and supervision (Linkedin.com). The registry also indicated that the partnerships boost enrolment as well as generating income through subscriptions. Sharma and Kaushik (2022:5) call this type of partnership an "academic collaboration" that has "students/faculties upgradation" and "knowledge exchange". It is within this realm of collaboration that GZU brand is projected.

Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education MOUs

The school has struck a number of memoranda with various institutions locally and regionally as follows: Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education (In conjunction with UNICEF- there is a whole chapter on this in this volume), Institute of Capacity Development (ICD, Namibia), Diaspora Networks, Nzeve Deaf Centre, Mutare, Fojo Media Institute, Linnaeus University, Sweden, Masvingo City Council, KG IV Memorial School, among others. The memoranda bolster the school's goal of empowering people through research, innovation and industrialization. For the sake of space, only a conservative sample of some high impact MOUs has been considered for discussion here as follows;

Fojo Media Institute, Linnaeus University, Sweden and GZU Campus Radio (2023-2026)

The memorandum is one of GZU's international partners that raise the global visibility of the institution. On this partnership, guest lecturers help in manpower training and a digital platform

[2] Though discussed under the Munhumutapa School of Business Sciences, Trusty Academy has an affiliate relationship with Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education in the Development Studies section.

for students is availed for them to access news and other relevant content. Student clubs such as press clubs, fact-checking clubs, et cetera and outreach projects and conferences are among other benefits. From GZU Campus Radio Director's desk it emerged that: "This is one of the best MOUs we ever had, it has helped us a lot in the Media Innovation Programme (MIP) for community radio training and radio festival". In addition, mentors come from Sweden, UK and Kenya to train Campus Radio staff. Media students get training on online journalism. There are also staff exchange programmes with GZU staff members going to other universities in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda and Ghana.

The agreement offers in-house training, mentoring and a possible cash-grant focused on assistance to a specific development project. In addition, there are workshops for media managers and editors to gain new knowledge and exchange of experiences. In line with this type of collaboration, GZU aims for international collaborative goals of "employability skills, talent development and research opportunities" among other goals (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022:4). The international collaboration exhibited through this MOU speaks well to Kenis and Oerlemans' (2007) Relational or Social Network Perspective that lays emphasis on the combined activities of, and recurrent interactions between, participants in a social arrangement.

Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) and Institute for Capacity Development (ICD)

The Memorandum of Understanding between GZU and ICD (Namibia) remains one of the biggest international associate/affiliate relationships GZU has realised since its inception. The centre trains teachers under the stewardship of GZU which provides professional guidance and supervision to the Affiliate institution. GZU assesses teaching materials, examinations and human resources credentials. The partnership acts an additional income stream through affiliateship subscriptions. Beside this, these services market the GZU as a leading university in the region in terms of human capital development (training teachers).

GZU-UNESCO International Partnership Agreement (2023-2024)

GZU partners UNESCO in the implementation of the Great Zimbabwe Development Project (November 2023 - December 2024). Milestones include the development of an interpretation and storytelling framework for Great Zimbabwe Site, development of a tour guide training manual for Great Zimbabwe, training of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe tour guides and community youths on tour guiding at Great Zimbabwe and coordinating restoration of the drystone walls at Great Zimbabwe

GZU hosts the UNESCO Chair on African Heritage which was renewed in 2024. There are a number of objectives the Chair is supposed to deliver on which include involvement of local communities The University, through the UNESCO Chair on African Heritage, has been working to strengthen the Cultural and Creative Industries. This project involved visual artists who are involved in wood and stone sculpturing around Mashava as a starting point. The UNESCO Chair has been working with Mashava Arts and Craft Association (MACA), a community of more than 200 visual artists, to establish an open-air gallery for sculptures and to market their products. The Chair hosted the Mashava Export Awareness Seminar programme on the 1st of March 2023. This Seminar was co-organised with ZimTrade and the National Arts

Council of Zimbabwe and helped in building understanding of Export Procedures and fostering of business as well as promoting of Intellectual Property (IP)

Herbert Chitepo Law School MoUs

The following MOUs are currently active and continue to offer both practical and strategic benefits to the Law School as training ground for ethical, innovative and globally competitive legal professionals;

Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law; which funds community outreach activities that focus on human rights education, support for winter schools that allow students to engage deeply with human rights and humanitarian law topics. donation of library books and academic resources. Besides that, the partnership strengthens the Law School's research and learning infrastructure. The programme is making significant strides in raising legal awareness across Masvingo District and beyond.

Memorandum of Understanding between GZU and Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2023)
There is collaboration in advancing gender equality and constitutional rights awareness, joint programming and technical support for gender justice legal clinics and public legal education. Other benefits are; active collaboration on the protection and promotion of human rights and opportunities for student involvement in constitutional advocacy and human rights monitoring projects.

The MoUs established by the Herbert Chitepo Law School represent a strategic vision for transforming legal education into a tool for social transformation, global relevance, and academic excellence. These partnerships have enabled the Law School to extend its impact beyond the classroom into communities, policy circles, and international legal discourse to promote both national and international collaborations (Suhardin and Flora, 2021). This is cemented by the dictates of the The Institutional Theory that, according to Lammers and Garcia (2017:195) foregrounds the "rules and requirements to which organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy". Through collaborative legal aid programs, human rights education, gender justice initiatives, and upcoming innovations in environmental and space law, the Law School continues to position itself as a pioneer of socially responsive and globally connected legal education in Zimbabwe and the region. This achievement is a testament to the broader success of Great Zimbabwe University in championing inclusive, progressive, and community-centred higher education.

Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences

Aligning with its social thrust anchored on the core values of ubuntu/hunhu, inclusiveness, innovation and creativity, the School has entered into a number of MoUs with local and global partners which have significantly raised the stature of the school

MoU between Friendship Bench and Great Zimbabwe University (2022)

GZU signed a MoU with an NGO, Friendship Bench which offers support students studying for BSc Honours degree in Psychology and helps in operations of the Mobile Psychology Clinic. The NGO takes 30 students for attachment every year, to equip them with requisite skills and align them with work expectations after graduating. They have also donated computers to the psychology department for use in research. In addition, Friendship Bench offers free mental

health services and counselling to the university student body which is a fundamental input to student psychological wellness, a pre-requisite of learning and social interaction of the students within the university set up. Friendship Bench also installed designated benches on campus for confidential counselling sessions.

Agreement of Cooperation between School of Social Sciences of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India) and the GZU Nehanda Centre for Gender and Cultural Studies (2015-2018)

The agreement caters for joint cultural programmes and collaborative research, lectures and symposiums. These exchange programmes brighten the image of the two institutions and their nations' identities. This collaboration between Jawaharlal Nehru University and GZU is what Suhardin and Flora (2021) call an international type of partnership. Joint cultural programmes and collaborative research facilitate "social development benefits" and knowledge exchange (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022:1) between the two institutions.

School of Natural Sciences

Stimulated by the heritage-based thinking, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, national strategic intent and desire to increase the availability of specialist skills for industry, commerce and public sector (GZU ICT 2024), the school has benefited tremendously from its association with industry. Partnerships include, but are not limited to the following:

MoU between GZU and Old Mutual Zimbabwe: National Centre of Excellence for Computational Intelligence and Actuarial Science (2024)

To reflect the paradigmatic shift towards the contemporary discourse of artificial intelligence, the school has been supported by a leading corporate, Old Mutual to establish The National Centre of Excellence for Computational Intelligence and Actuarial Science. This cements the "university-industry innovation collaboration" as espoused by Rajalo and Vadi (2017) and promotes national collaboration goals of knowledge/skills acquisition and personnel exchange (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022; Suhardin & Flora 2021).

In an interview with the office of the registrar, it was revealed that the partnership has "contributed financially towards the setting up of the centre and research in the area". Supporting this argument, Bizeki (2024) notes that Old Mutual injected in seed funding for the establishment of the National Centre of Excellence for Computational Intelligence and Actuarial Sciences.

Furthermore, the Group Chief Executive Officer, Mr Matsekete remarked that, "We at Old Mutual pledged to work with Great Zimbabwe University and other universities to promote research that is targeted at specific areas identified by industry and commerce. We believe this is one way to demonstrate that we respect the role that universities and other Institutions of Higher Learning play." (TellZim News March 2024). This was done in apparent realisation that institutions of Higher Learning play an important role in coming up with new ideas. The corporate giant promised to fund research that can "take us forward whilst setting in motion the collaboration between universities and industry" (TellZim News, March 2024). Such agreements serve as catalysts for university growth and overall visibility. These partnerships are vital for increasing a university's academic and research footprint, fostering innovation, and adopting

global best practices. These synergies endeavour to take head on national and global challenges through technologically based research for the solving real life problems

University of Kwa-Zulu Natal School of Nursing and Public Health (2022)

Signed in 2022, the MoU aims to facilitate educational, research and good practices collaborations between GZU and UKZN School of Nursing and Public Health, amongst staff and students, based on the principles of mutual benefit. The two institutions agreed on collaborati ve research and innovation, mobilizing resources and investments for the advancement of innovative research, teaching and learning, and business development in the context of harnessing natural resources, sharing of skills and enhancing lifelong learning e xperiences for staff and students and facilitating student and staff exchanges and collaboration.

Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences

This is a budding school that has attracted the attention of several partners, from funding to regulatory ones as it seeks recognition nationally and regionally as an institution of excellence in the authentication and application of traditional and herbal medicine in the treatment of medical conditions.

Great Zimbabwe University and University of Zimbabwe (MoA)

As a standardisation measure at inception, the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences is currently under the tutelage of the University of Zimbabwe Medical School. The MOA for mentoring the school is fully operational as GZU is currently running under the University of Zimbabwe Biomedical Sciences Degree programme. This means the college follows the curriculum and regulations guiding studies at the UZ. This is a move meant to ensure the right standard for medical training is sustained thro ugh benchmarking against recognised peer programmes in established universities. It is bound to enhance institutional impact and allay fears of half-baked medical graduates

Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Provincial Hospital (MoU) (2023)

The MOU enables use of Masvingo Provincial Hospital as a teaching centre for the medical students' clinical years. The ministry has commenced to upgrade the hospital to develop it into a teaching hospital for GZU medical students. The founding dean of the school, Pr ofessor Mufunda informed that, "the school will work in partnership with Masvingo Provincial Hospital where students will go for clinical attachment…the development will help the community of Masvingo" (TellZim, 2024). The partnership answers to the Second Republic's Education 5.0 call to pivot institutions of higher learning into becoming hot spots for solutions to challenges affecting local communities. There is also a human capital dimension to the partnership. According to Dr Pote who chairs the Department of Medical and Health Sciences, "we have specialists who are teaching here (Simon Mazorodze School of Medical & Health Sciences) but are working at Masvingo Provincial Hospital…" (The Herald 2023) Besides this, GZU medical students will do their clinical studies at the referral facility will augment the existing pool of doctors and specialists.

The University has also benefited from government support. “We have partners we are working with to open a super specialist services (medical) centre in Mashava that we call the “new abroad” which basically means that our people will no longer have to travel to far off countries like India for complex medical procedures because we will be doing them at our teaching Hospital in Mashava” (The Herald, 2023). The government has purchased the required equipment. The opening of a super specialist facility in Mashava would reduce significantly, the cost of accessing medial help due to affordability of fees, locally availability of drugs and short travel distances

The two partnerships between GZU and University of Zimbabwe and Masvingo Provincial Hospital are a sample of collaborations that have net gains of research, academic and industry collaborations (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022). Research collaboration involves “joint research publications, research training programmes and research and technological exhibitions” and academic collaborations focus on, among other things, “seminar, webinar, workshops and conferences” (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022:5). Industry collaborations involve “value added training programme, internships, resource sharing” (Sharma and Kaushik, 2022:5). As an emerging School, Simon Mazorodze School of Medicine & Health Sciences stands to benefit immensely from these collaborations, for example, accessing facilities from Masvingo Provincial hospital for practice.

Awards in support of academic excellence

Over the years, corporate partners and individuals have been associated with brand GZU thereby supporting excelling graduands from different faculties in the university. Both as a corporate social responsibility gesture and acknowledgement of GZU standards, many partners have located awards as an opportunity to market themselves and associate with the institution.

In recent years, the university has received financial support from the following partners; Dr Marisa (Marisa Merit Award), AFC Commercial Bank, BonVie Medical Aid Scheme, Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe (CBZ), Chancellor’s prize, Chartered Accountants Academy, Gain Cash and Carry, Great Zimbabwe Realtors, His Excellence and Chancellor, Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa, Law Society of Zimbabwe, Masvingo City Council, Nicoz Diamond, Old Mutual, Prof. Pilot Mudhovozi Family and Friends, Zimbabwe Bank, Zimbabwe Economic and Social Policy Research Institute (ZESPRI), Zimbabwe Insurance Brokers and Zimbabwe Manpower Development Fund (Interview with the office of the Registrar)

The awards range from trophies, shields to monetary ones. GZU Newsletter (April 2025) informs that “The Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences has officially launched the Dr Marisa Awards; a prestigious initiative aimed at recognising outstanding Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Sciences students. The awards, generously sponsored by philanthropist, medical practitioner, and lecturer at the School, Dr Johannes Marisa, are designed to reward academic excellence and exemplary conduct within the Biomedical Sciences programme. Special emphasis is placed on students who demonstrate outstanding academic performance as well as ethical and professional behaviour” GZU Newsletter (2025:6). In the same newsletter, the Vice Chancellor, Professor Rungano Zvobgo described the $10,000 award fund as a “prestigious and impactful contribution” to Great Zimbabwe University.

Awards are important in that they continue to speak as evidence of aptitude, years after their attainment. Chung and Khandhadia (2024:1) argue that; "These accolades signify recognition and bolster the perceived competence and social status of recipients". They help the students maintain exemplary personal conduct throughout their career and life

Conclusion

The foregoing exploratory discussion on GZU partnerships reveals the power of synergies to propel the university into a global brand. This has been made possible through engaging both national and international collaborations for strategic positioning between both industry and academic institutions. The partnerships are not empty fellowships but pragmatic acquaintances borne out of social and industrial needs.

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Dzimbahwe Arts Festival 2018

CHAPTER 23

Heritage milestones: Unpacking Great Zimbabwe University's research and conservation initiatives at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site

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Abstract

Great Zimbabwe University has a collaborative research arrangement at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site, where it has partnered UNESCO, Universities of Oxford and that of Cape Town in running research, conservation and interpretation programmes. This chapter features these flagship programmes at the site, which have contributed to its sustainable utilisation and conservation. We present our efforts at replacing a eurocentric and biased interpretation of one of Africa earliest centres of civilisation with a decolonised and multivocal narrative. We also reflect on our contribution to the conservation of the structural fabric of Great Zimbabwe through the restoration programme. All these initiatives demonstrate the importance and power of collaborative engagement in the management and conservation of world heritage, a model that has earned international acclaim with Great Zimbabwe being used as a model for international best practice.

Key words: Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Sites; decolonised, management, interpretation, capacity building, community engagement

Introduction

Universities, by definition, are institutions of higher education that offer a wide range of academic programmes and degrees and play a critical role in shaping an individual's intellectual and personal growth. However, several calls have been made for universities in the 21st century to break the 'ivory tower' and bridge the gap between university and community (Boyer 1996; Burkhardt and Lewis 2010; Gibson 2006). These calls urge for the evolution of university roles from a focus on teaching and research towards an enabling, partnership role with industry, government and communities in their proximate spaces. The 21st century University has been urged to transform from being an isolated entity which is elitist and disconnected in nature to being institutions that deal with practical matters and provide solutions to their communities. As Gibson (2006) argues, meaningful advances in knowledge tend to occur when human beings consciously work to solve the central problems confronting their society.

One such call for universities to be engaged with their communities was made in 2009, during the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. This call promoted the leading role of universities in generating knowledge to address global challenges and defined universities as public goods that have responsibilities to all of their stakeholders. Heading these calls, universities have largely taken up this challenge since the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals by contributing strategies to advance sustainable development globally (Nhamo et al. 2024; Agusdinata 2022). Scholars have demonstrated the important contribution universities are making in pioneering both local and global solutions in the attainment of the SDGs across the world (Agusdinata 2022).

As an institution whose niche is heritage, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) has played a leading role in breaking the 'ivory tower' by engaging with various stakeholders in heritage related issues. This chapter discusses the important role that Great Zimbabwe University has played in promoting heritage conservation, interpretation and research at the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site. The site, located 25km from the City of Masvingo is important in the understanding of the development of precolonial African civilisations (Garlake 1973; Chirikure 2021). Great Zimbabwe was the capital of a precolonial state by the same name that exerted its influence over southern Zambezia extending to the Indian Ocean where it was a key player in the trade and exchange between Southern Africa's east coast and its hinterland (Garlake 1973; Chirikure 2019; 2021). It gave its name to the country at independence from colonial rule in 1980. Consequently, the Great Zimbabwe brand has become part and parcel of the nation's iconography (Pikirayi 2006; Thondhlana et al. 2021). The government of Zimbabwe named its state university in the City of Masvingo after the stone-walled centre.

Heritage Place Lab Project at Great Zimbabwe WHS

In 2019, Great Zimbabwe University hosted a UNESCO conference on World Heritage and Higher Education Institutions in Africa. This stemmed from the realisation that higher education institutions are crucial to the long-term preservation of World Heritage. As the number of World Heritage sites grows, there is an urgent need for qualified professionals to manage these. UNESCO, thus, called upon universities to leave their 'ivory towers' and go beyond their traditional role of teaching and research by contributing more to society. Among other recommendations, the conference urged institutions of higher and tertiary education to serve their local communities and, in return, benefit from stronger societal connections, increased support and enhanced opportunities for collaboration.

Within the framework of the joint UNESCO and higher education institutions collaboration, GZU was awarded for the first and only time the UNESCO Chair of African Heritage in the year 2021. The UNESCO Chair's Programme promotes international inter-university cooperation through twinning and other linking arrangements among higher education academics and institutions throughout the world. The programme aims to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge-sharing, collaborative work and increased faculty and student mobility. Through the UNESCO Chair, GZU collaborated with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) in the pilot Heritage Place Lab project, an initiative of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Heritage Leadership programme. The Heritage Place Lab aimed at developing synergies between research institutions and site management authorities at World Heritage Sites (Ishizawa and Jo 2024). The project foresaw the co-creation of innovative, inclusive, and holistic solutions for the management of World Heritage properties.

During the Heritage Place Lab project, a research team from GZU collaborated with the site management at Great Zimbabwe WHS to form a research-practice team which identified challenges and opportunities for collaboration in terms of research and management issues at the world heritage site (Thondhlana *et al*. 2023; Mukwende *et al*. 2024). This project was the first step towards bridging the gap between research trends and practices at the site. The research-practice team identified a range of management issues at the site under four overarching themes namely local values and intangible heritage, heritage governance, climate change and

environmental sustainability as well as local knowledge systems in heritage conservation and interpretation.

The first range of management issues, identified under the theme, Local values and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), was motivated by the realisation that traditionally, cultural heritage management was closely linked to land, and regulated by traditional and religious leaders through local know how and experiences in managing their heritage. With the advent of colonialism, heritage management took a scientific approach and once the site gained a national monument status, traditional practices and ceremonies were restricted (Ndoro 2005). It is against this background that GZU-NMMZ team recognised the need to restore ICH in the reading and understanding of Great Zimbabwe. The team explored the nature of ICH values around the site and how these can be promoted together with the tangible attributes (see also Matenga 2011). It is important to note that since then the Government of Zimbabwe has gone on to develop a spiritual centre at the site to cater for the intangible needs of the local communities around Great Zimbabwe and the wider communities that frequent the site for various reasons. The team went a step further to explore how derived economic values are escalating conflict at the site and how these can be reconciled with ICH.

The second range of management issues, identified under the theme, Heritage governance at Great Zimbabwe, was motivated by the fact that most formal heritage management governance structures have been found to be discriminatory with tendencies of excluding particular groups from fully exercising their rights at heritage sites (Ndoro and Wijesuriya 2014). In the case of Great Zimbabwe, the team recognised that although efforts are being made to engage with local communities, there is no policy which guides the nature of this engagement hence leaving current community engagement practices rather ad hoc. This motivated the team to question how traditional leaders, local communities and civil society can actively participate in the management of the site as well as the kind of systematic frameworks than can be instituted to ensure harmony.

GZU-NMMZ team acknowledged that climate change and environmental sustainability has become an issue of concern in areas in and around the site because of invasive species, erratic weather patterns, increased human population, encroachment as well as seasonal bushfires among others. To this effect, the team sought to understand the impacts of extreme climate variations on the physical fabric of the site as well as the level of awareness on climate change issues among local communities. In a bid to decolonise climate action, the team also sought to understand indigenous approaches to climate action, possible ways of controlling invasive species as well as fire outbreaks within the site. Resulting from this appreciation of the impact of Climate change on World Heritage sites, Great Zimbabwe University partnered with Africa World Heritage fund and ICCROM to host the 7th African World Heritage Youth Forum in 2024 which was running under the theme, 'Engaging youth in climate Action for World Heritage in Africa. This Forum took a hybrid form with several sessions happening online and a physical workshop hosted by the institution at Bulawayo Rainbow towers in March 2024. Over 20 African countries were represented by youths who were proposing innovative climate action interventions at World Heritage sites across the continent.

One of the topical issues within the heritage discourse in the 21st century is the decolonial agenda. In line with this, the research-practice team recognised that conservation and interpretation approaches at the site need to take into account local knowledge about the site. The

team sought to understand how indigenous philosophies, ontologies and epistemologies can contribute to the dynamic use and interpretation of the site. This stemmed from the realisation that local communities have an enduring relationship with the site hence the need to incorporate their narratives and knowledge systems in the reading of Great Zimbabwe (Thondhlana *et al*. 2023; Mukwende *et al*. 2024; Tevera 2024).

This research-practice collaboration between the Great Zimbabwe University and the NMMZ marked the initial steps by the institution in contributing to the process of decolonising knowledge production practices at Great Zimbabwe WHS. The Heritage Place Lab experience functioned as an incubator of practice-led research agendas and this led to another collaboration, this time with the participation of UNESCO in a project funded by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). The AFD funded Great Zimbabwe Development Project offered an opportunity to address some of the challenges identified at the world heritage site. Other partners in the project included the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the traditional leadership around Great Zimbabwe.

GZU – UNESCO Partnership in the Great Zimbabwe Development Project (2023-2024)

In December 2023, GZU signed an implementation partnership agreement with UNESCO-ROSA to cooperate in the implementation of the Great Zimbabwe Development Plan at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site. The Great Zimbabwe Development Project, aimed at improving the quality of life of the communities living around Great Zimbabwe National Monument WHS through the diversification of the local economy and the promotion of income-generating and employment opportunities. In doing so the management of the world heritage site was central hence the development of activities aimed at ensuring the world heritage site is properly managed based on good practice.

The implementation agreement was based on three activities:

i. The production of and inclusive and holistic interpretation and Storytelling Framework for Great Zimbabwe National Monument WHS.

ii. Coordinating the restoration of terraced sections of the site through skill transfer to young heritage leaders.

iii. The training and certification of NMMZ Tour Guides and community members in a certificate-level heritage interpretation course.

Production of an inclusive and holistic interpretation and storytelling framework for Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site

The interpretation and presentation of Great Zimbabwe WHS has for a long time been based on colonially inspired narratives about the site (Mahachi and Ndoro 1997; Chirikure 2020; Sinamai 2020). Local narratives and stories about the site and its people were marginalised in favour of biblically inspired narratives such as those that linked the site with legends of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Gayre and Gayre 1972). The Great Zimbabwe Development Project sought to remedy this by decolonising the interpretation and presentation of the site. Taking advantage

of its research partnership at the site in collaboration with the University of Cape Town (2014-2019) and University of Oxford (ongoing) GZU partnered in developing a holistic and locally-inspired interpretation and storytelling framework. Other collaborators in the initiative included the International Centre for the Interpretation and Presentation of World Heritage Sites (WHIPIC), a UNESCO centre based in South Korea, in this initiative.

A thorough review of existing interpretation of Great Zimbabwe was carried out. This was important in outlining the weaknesses of the current interpretation and thus provided a springboard for developing new ideas on the development of a new interpretation framework. The baseline study was also important in conceptualising the consultative workshop that was carried out at Great Zimbabwe Hotel in November 2023. In addition to reviewing the existing interpretation, a snap survey was carried out to understand visitor perceptions on the interpretation of Great Zimbabwe. As with the review of existing literature the visitor survey showed that the existing interpretation of the site was seriously one sided and lacked the diverse and multiple local narratives that some visitors were interested in hearing. The final draft of the framework was approved by UNESCO in March 2024 and validated by all stakeholders, including NMMZ and local communities (represented by their traditional leaders) at a stakeholder's workshop held in Masvingo in May 2024.

The primary goal of the framework is to provide strategic guidance to ensure that narratives about the site connect with diverse communities and resonate effectively with visitors (Mukwende et al. 2024). Its development was based on an inclusive and participatory process that involved academics, community leaders, creatives, and heritage interpretation experts. The framework, available at https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/great-zimbabwe-national-monument-world-heritage-site-interpretation-and-storytelling-framework, comes at a time when there is renewed public interest in Great Zimbabwe, providing the much-needed conceptual basis for reimagining the interpretation and presentation of the site and integration of digital technologies in the presentation of both its local and universal values (Thondhlana et al. 2023; Kiwa et al. 2023).

Dry-stone wall conservation and knowledge transfer

The second component of the GZDP involved conservation works on Wall 31 (see fig 1) on the western terraces of the Hill Complex. It is part of a series of terraces that have been progressively collapsing due to various factors such as animal action and uncontrolled vegetation growth. The component was also conceptualised within the framework of a skills transfer initiative where University students studying heritage as well as youths from local communities were inculcated with the experience and expertise of drystone wall conservation. The project mirrored a similar initiative at Khami World Heritage Site, where students from institutions of higher learning and youths from various local communities contributed in annual conservation projects from 2000 to 2013 (Chirikure et al. 2016). Condition monitoring carried out by the NMMZ had identified wall 31 as demanding urgent attention to arrest structural decay precipitated by plant and animal actions.



Figure 1: Wall 31 before and after restoration and stabilisation

Source: Author

Standard drystone wall conservation protocols that have been applied at the site were employed. These include vegetation clearance, diagnosis of the structural challenges affecting the walled structure, documenting its state of conservation, excavating the collapse debris, systematic wall dismantling and the eventual rebuilding while addressing the previously noted structural issues (Matenga 1996; Ndoro 2005). These were augmented by international instruments such as the World Heritage Convention of 1972 and its Operational Guidelines, the Venice Charter of 1964, the Burra Charter of 1978 and the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity. These are important in ensuring the observance of the authenticity of the place

The conservation works at Great Zimbabwe bolstered students and community youths' participation in conservation efforts at the site. Student participants came from GZU, University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) and Midlands State University (MSU). A total of 16 students were selected with equal representation of both genders. In addition, a further 16 local community youths participated in the project. These were seconded from the four Chieftaincies around Great Zimbabwe i.e. Chiefs Mugabe, Nemamwa, Murinye and Charumbira.

As noted earlier the conservation project also sought to develop the capacity of future generations of heritage managers. Capacity building is a crucial element that ensures the sustainability of conservation practices at places such as Great Zimbabwe. To this end, the project involved the students from the local universities studying heritage conservation and local youths to expose them to the practical intricacies of drystone walled structures maintenance (see fig 2). The capacity building was led by the Great Zimbabwe University based heritage conservators as well as the site management team at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site based on their vast collective experience in dry-stone conservation at the site and similar other sites across the country. The major areas of focus were decision making on conservation areas, documentation of areas to be conserved, mapping the target area, excavations and management of artefacts in the field.



Figure 2: student and local youth participants working on wall 31

Source: Author

Developing the capacity of Tour Guides at Great Zimbabwe

Tour guides are the key front-line players in the heritage tourism industry as they are the ones who interact with visitors and help deliver the interpretation and storyline of these spaces (Ap and Wong 2001). They have a responsibility to not only disseminate correct and precise information, but to interpret their respective sites using different interpretation and storytelling techniques. Tour guides should therefore be highly knowledgeable about their sites and should be well versed in research trends at these sites.

Traditionally, tour guiding at Great Zimbabwe WHS was influenced by the site's colonial legacy as tour guides presented a storyline that glaringly excluded local voices and narratives in favour of the colonially inspired narratives. Following the development of a holistic and locally-inspired interpretation and storytelling framework of Great Zimbabwe WHS, the next third component of the GZDP project was therefore to develop the capacity of tour guides. This activity was aimed at ensuring that current and future tour guides at the site are able to deliver a decolonised and inclusive storyline of the site to its visitors.

In line with this component, GZU team developed a training manual on tour guiding at Great Zimbabwe WHS. This manual serves as a comprehensive learning package and consists of nine sections which are all geared at giving an introductory orientation to tour guiding at Great

Zimbabwe for current as well as future guides. The format of the manual is such that it becomes the first reference point for future guides at the site in terms of understanding its narratives but also providing good practices in terms of guiding and visitor management. This manual is available open access at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390398.locale=en .

Using this Tour Guiding training manual, GZU went on to conduct a 5-day training workshop which targeted existing tour guides as well as youths from the local communities aspiring to be tour guides. These youths were drawn from local communities with an equal representation from each of the four chieftainships who are considered to be the immediate local communities at Great Zimbabwe (Mugabe, Charumbira, Nemamwa and Murinye).

The training workshop was guided by the Tour Guiding Training manual and combined both theory and practical, allowing for interactive discussions, role playing exercises and hands on activities in an attempt to reinforce key concepts and practical skills outlines in the manual (see fig 3). A total of thirty-five tour guides comprising of sixteen youths from the local communities as well as nineteen tour guides already employed at the site.



Figure 3: Participants following proceedings during the tour guide training workshop

Source: Author

Coordination and Hosting of the World Heritage in Africa: Processes and Strategies Forum (WHAPS)

In March 2025, GZU hosted the inaugural World Heritage in Africa: Processes and Strategies (WHAPS) forum. This was made possible due to GZU's long-standing collaboration with the ICCROM. The forum was conceived by the Ministry of Culture in Italy and coordinated by the School of Heritage in Rome under the same ministry. The official launch was graced by high profile delegates which included Italian Ambassador to Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Culture in Italy, Zimbabwe National Commission for UNESCO, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Ministry of Culture Italy, Africa World Heritage Fund, NMMZ and Traditional Leadership among others (See fig 4)



Figure 4: GZU Vice Chancellor, Professor Rungano Jonas Zvobgo, posing with WHAPS dignitaries on the side-lines of the official launch.

Source: GZU Information and Public Relations Department

The WHAPS Forum aimed at capacitating site managers from world heritage sites in Africa. A total of thirty site managers representing twenty-nine countries participated in the capacity building programmes co-curated by ICCROM and the School of Heritage in Rome. The forum was also punctuated by the participation of representatives of the local communities around Great Zimbabwe WHS in the spirit of engaging and involving community representatives in world heritage processes (Thondhlana et al. 2023). A visit to Chief Mugabe's court capped the forum programme to allow participants an opportunity to engage with local narratives and perspectives. (See fig 5).



Figure 5: WHAPS participants at Chief Mugabe's traditional courtyard

Source: Author

Discussion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of collaboration between institutions of higher learning and heritage agencies in the management of world heritage sites. Such collaborative initiatives are enhanced by the participation of local communities. This is meant to draw local communities, particularly the young closer to their heritage sites and hopefully eke out a living from various activities such as tour guiding or craft production and selling. While it is still too early to take stock of the initiatives undertaken by GZU at the Great Zimbabwe WHS preliminary indications paint a positive image of the activities on the part of youth participants, something that is meant to improve the sustainability of management and presentation efforts at the site.

A major drawback of the initiatives is the unavailability of mechanisms to ensure such projects are sustained for a foreseeable future thus creating a bigger impact on the local youth populations. Indeed, at Khami the annual Khami Restorations Youth Volunteer Camps were held from 2000 to 2013. The net effect of such a long conservation programme is that there is a visibly marked change in terms of the state of conservation of the walled structures at the site (Chirikure et al 2016). For instance, the terraced sections of the Hill Complex were all restored and are now a major area of visitor interest. It is thus important to have long-term sustainable conservation programmes that have the potential to change the state of conservation of the site.

As reservoirs of knowledge, institutions of higher learning are always called upon to lead in research that responds to community needs and aspirations (Findler et al., 2019; Mancini et al. 2022). This is normally done within the context of the third mission of the university, which is community engagement. The government of Zimbabwe has also added two other pillars in higher education. These are innovation and industrialisation. The experience with the Great Zimbabwe Development Project has demonstrated the complementarity of innovation and

industrialisation with community outreach. The project also demonstrates the potential of universities to bring industrialisation to rural settings in non-manufacturing sectors such as tourism development. The training of NMMZ guides and community youths as tour guides was meant to bring greater efficiency and standardisation amidst a large pool of expertise at the disposal of the NMMZ.

However, a number of scholars have noted that such community engagement activities receive little institutional support in comparison to teaching and research (Hart et al. 2023; Popoola et al. 2025). This therefore impacts the lengths that universities could go in terms of community engagement. Within the context of the GZDP project support was received from UNESCO to resource the various activities. The challenge, going forward, is to ensure that the practical collaboration with NMMZ at the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site is maintained and grows into veritable and sustainable projects that make a positive contribution to local communities as well as enhancing the outstanding universal values of the site.

Conclusion

Great Zimbabwe University has a presence at the Great Zimbabwe Monument where it runs research, conservation and interpretation programmes. That way, the university gives back to society and helps creates a knowledge economy. Through the work of its staff, students and partners, the university plays a key role towards a decolonised, comprehensive and inclusive research, conservation and interpretation of the site. The university take pride in maintaining the fabric of the monument through restoration of collapsed walls and clearing of evasive plant species like *lantana camara*. The impact of Great Zimbabwe University at the monument is far reaching and Great Zimbabwe World heritage site is widely used as a model for international best practice in archaeological research, heritage management, capacity building and community engagement.

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CHAPTER 24
Great Zimbabwe University's Contribution to the transformation of Masvingo

Talknice Saungweme & Bernard Chazovachii

Abstract

Since independence, Zimbabwe's education reforms have evolved from expanding access to promoting innovation and industrialisation under Education 5.0. Within this national vision, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) has emerged as a transformative anchor for socio-economic development in Masvingo Province. Guided by the principles of Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy 1, the University integrates teaching, research, innovation, and community engagement to foster inclusive growth, food security, and rural industrialisation. Through the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture, GZU spearheads climate-smart agriculture, traditional grain processing, and contract farming that strengthen local value chains and resilience against drought. Economically, the institution stimulates Masvingo's growth through employment creation, business linkages, property investment, and service demand, embodying the Keynesian multiplier effect. The University's ambitious Mashava transformation project is reshaping a former mining settlement into a modern smart university town, promoting urban renewal and investment.

Key words: agricultural transformation, rural industrialisation, Masvingo, economic stimulation, Dzimbahwe Arts Festival

Introduction

Since attaining independence in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe has deliberately and strategically reformed its education system to respond to the country's economic, social, political, technological, environmental, and cultural needs, in pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development. In the early post-independence era, the transformation was driven by the urgent need to dismantle a small, elitist education system inherited from the colonial period, replacing it with a mass education system that prioritised inclusive growth, equity, and universal access. This foundational phase, marked by rapid expansion in school enrolments and teacher training, laid the groundwork for the human capital base necessary for national development.

In 2018, Zimbabwe's education policy shifted to meet the demands of a modern, globally competitive economy. The renewed focus is on achieving economic self-sufficiency through a transformative education system that prioritises research, innovation, technological advancement, and industrialisation, consistent with the principles of the Heritage- Based Education 5.0 (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science, and Technology Development, 2018). This approach is closely aligned with the National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025), and Vision 2030 which outlines sixteen critical national priorities including economic growth and stability; food security and nutrition; governance; value addition and structural transformation; human capital development; environmental protection; climate resilience and natural resource management; housing delivery; ICT and digital economy; health and well-being; transport, infrastructure and utilities; image building and international engagement; social protection; youth, sport and culture; and devolution (Government of

Zimbabwe/GoZ, 2020a). Within this comprehensive framework, the Government's vision as articulated in Zimbabwe Vision 2030 aims to transform the country into an upper-middle-income economy by 2030, a goal requiring sustained growth, innovation, and inclusive development (GoZ, 2020b).

Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) acts as a transformative agent in advancing national priorities, focusing particularly on science parks, innovation hubs and industrial parks; agricultural research and development; strengthening national strategic institutions; value addition through indigenous trees, herbs, and grasses for food processing; and ICT infrastructure and development (Great Zimbabwe University (2024a; 2021). Therefore, GZU, together with other higher education institutions, plays a pivotal role as a strategic catalyst, producing skilled graduates, advancing research-led innovation, fostering industrialisation, and empowering Masvingo communities in ways that directly support the socio-economic pillars of the country.

The foundation for this GZU role was laid by the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999), which recommended the establishment of state universities in every province to accelerate socio-economic development and promote research and community engagement grounded in heritage-based education philosophy (GoZ, 1999). This policy recognises the interdependence between national economic performance, provincial development trajectories, and the welfare of local communities. It aligns with the national development mantra *"Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo / Ilizwe lakhiwa ngabanikazi balo"*, reinforcing the principle that Zimbabwe is built and sustained by its own citizens – clearly laid out in the National Development Strategy 1 and Vision 2030 policy documents (GoZ, 2020a; 2020b). Thus, GZU was deliberately established and positioned to drive the socio-economic transformation of Masvingo Province while contributing to the broader national agenda of leaving no one and no place behind (GZU, 2021). This chapter explores these contributions in depth, demonstrating how GZU's initiatives are not only transforming Masvingo Province but are serving as a provincial engine and springboard for national development.

Agricultural Transformation, Food Security, Rural Industrialisation, and Development

Masvingo Province is characterised by a semi-arid climate with low and erratic rainfall patterns in some districts, typically ranging between 450mm to 650mm annually (United Nations Development Programme/UNDP, 2020; Mugandani et al, 2012). The province frequently experiences prolonged dry spells, recurrent droughts, and rising temperatures, which collectively exacerbate water scarcity. These climatic stresses pose significant challenges to agricultural productivity, food security, and rural livelihoods, especially for smallholder farmers who depend heavily on rain-fed subsistence farming (UNDP, 2020). The vulnerability to climate variability also limits crop diversification and intensifies poverty in rural communities.

Great Zimbabwe University recognises that agricultural transformation, food security, and rural industrialisation require more than academic research alone. Accordingly, the university has taken a proactive role in addressing the adverse effects of climate change by spearheading innovative research, capacity building, and collaborative community partnerships (GZU, 2024a). These efforts are strategically focused on fostering provincial food self-sufficiency, enhancing the agricultural sector's contribution to the Masvingo economy, and reducing poverty in the region. Through this integrated and networked approach, GZU empowers farmers and rural

enterprises to build climate resilience, increase productivity, and drive sustainable economic growth throughout the province (GZU, 2024a).

Specifically, recognising the adaptive advantages of indigenous crops, free-range chickens, and fish, the university prioritises research into traditional grains such as millet, sorghum, and cowpeas, and indigenous chickens, which are naturally drought-tolerant and better suited to the region's harsh climatic conditions. Research efforts focus on developing improved seed, free-range chicken, and fish varieties, optimising agronomic practices, and enhancing post-harvest processing techniques to boost yield, nutritional value, and marketability. By promoting these climate-smart crops, free-range chickens, and fish, GZU is helping communities diversify food sources and diet, and strengthen the resilience of local farming systems against drought and erratic weather, while also preserving traditional crops, free-range chickens, native fish varieties, values, and culture.

In line with the national priorities of rural industrialisation, the university established the Innovation Centre for Dryland Agriculture (ICEDA) Agro-Industrial Park and Traditional Grain Processing (GZU, 2024a; 2021). This flagship project is located in the Chivi district, and it includes a state-of-the-art traditional grain processing plant, which is currently at 95% completion (GZU, 2024a). This facility is designed to add value to locally grown traditional grains by processing them into market-ready products, thus enhancing shelf life and opening access to broader markets. The park serves as an innovation hub that integrates research, agro-processing, enterprise development and rural industrialisation in Zimbabwe.

Following this model, GZU works closely with local communities through contract farming schemes, where farmers receive comprehensive training and are equipped with climate-smart agricultural practices such as conservation agriculture, water harvesting, and pest management. This training is critical in improving productivity and ensuring sustainable land use. Once farmers meet quality and quantity standards, their produce is purchased through formal contracts, providing them with reliable markets and stable incomes.

Through its comprehensive training initiatives targeting both small-scale and commercial sugarcane farmers, Great Zimbabwe University has significantly elevated the status of sugarcane as the "white gold" of Masvingo Province and Zimbabwe at large. The University's sugarcane research and training programs have transformed sugarcane production, positioning sugar as a major contributor to the provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (GZU, 2024a). The cumulative impact of these efforts includes increased production of sugar and sugarcane by-products, expanded employment opportunities in sugarcane farming and related industries, enhanced household incomes, promotion of environmental conservation practices, development of educational infrastructure, and the provision of scholarships to support local students.

Economic Stimulation and Local Enterprise Development

After 1995, the decentralisation of higher education in Zimbabwe became part of a broader government strategy to promote economic development, equity, and efficiency (GoZ, 1999). Across Africa, interest in the regional and local impacts of universities had been steadily growing since the early 1990s, focusing on how institutions influence local economies and societies through their purchasing of goods and services, housing demand, and recruitment of students and staff. This shift in thinking aligned with Zimbabwe's own expansion of mass higher

education in 1999, which required new infrastructure and institutions beyond Harare and Bulawayo (GoZ, 1999). The establishment of provincial universities, such as Great Zimbabwe University in 1999, recognises their potential to stimulate interconnected systems within their host provinces (Makoni, 2022). These systems include economic growth, infrastructure development, cultural vitality, educational advancement, political participation, demographic change, and overall social well-being.

Economically, Great Zimbabwe University functions as a powerful engine and catalyst for Masvingo's urban and provincial economy. Its operations inject substantial expenditure into the local system through staff salaries, procurement of goods and services, capital projects, and the daily spending of thousands of students. Consistent with Keynesian multiplier theory, each initial injection of university-related income triggers successive rounds of expenditure, thereby amplifying local economic activity. Staff salaries circulate through supermarkets such as Pick n Pay, OK Zimbabwe, and N. Richards, while students sustain robust demand for ICT gadgets, stationery, groceries, and clothing, supporting both formal retailers and informal vendors. This consistent purchasing power has stimulated the emergence of numerous micro- and small enterprises, including eateries, photocopying and printing services, salons, laundries, and vending stalls, especially around campus precincts and high-traffic student zones.

Transport services, from formal commuter omnibuses to the ever-present *mushika-shika* and *zvipipipi* operators, have flourished under steady patronage as staff and students commute between campuses, residences, and the city centre. Similarly, GZU's annual graduation ceremonies and cultural events, such as the Dzimbabwe Arts Festival, generate cyclical demand for hospitality, catering, tailoring, and photography services, fostering short-term entrepreneurial opportunities and seasonal income spikes for local businesses.

The rental and construction sectors have equally thrived under GZU's economic gravity. Suburbs such as Mucheke, Rhodene, Rujeko, and Zimre Park have witnessed soaring demand for student and staff accommodation, creating reliable income streams for landlords and stimulating a vibrant property market. Formal contractual arrangements between GZU and property owners have helped reduce transaction costs and behavioural uncertainties, thereby improving the ease of doing business in Masvingo's housing sector. This sustained demand has also attracted diaspora investment, as Zimbabweans abroad channel remittances into residential construction and real estate purchases, expanding the city's housing stock while driving job creation in construction, carpentry, plumbing, and allied services.

In addition, special events, especially graduation ceremonies, bring short bursts of intense economic activity. Hotels and lodges in and around Masvingo, from Regency Hotel Chevron and Urban Lifestyles to smaller guesthouses, just to mention a few, are booked to capacity. Local restaurants, tailors, florists, beauty parlous and photographers enjoy brisk business, while fuel stations and intercity bus operators also record spikes in demand as visitors travel in for the celebrations.

In Mashava, GZU is spearheading the transformation of a former mining town into a vibrant, modern university town. The institution is implementing a master plan that integrates academic infrastructure with sustainable urban renewal, envisioning a self-contained "smart city" featuring advanced teaching, research, and skills development facilities alongside essential amenities such as a modern hospital, shopping malls, recreational parks, and residential zones (GZU, 2024a).

Drawing inspiration from successful university towns like Grahamstown and Alice in South Africa, the Mashava project is set to stimulate local commerce, attract new investment, and boost property values, while creating employment opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled workers in construction, healthcare, retail, and hospitality. Through this transformative initiative, GZU is positioning Mashava as a regional hub for education, enterprise, and inclusive economic growth, extending its influence far beyond the classroom and reinforcing its central role in the Masvingo province economic ecosystem.

Integrated Community Empowerment Approach

Great Zimbabwe University plays a transformative role in uplifting communities through a holistic approach that blends legal empowerment and awareness, healthcare innovation, and mental health support through its law clinics, mobile psychology services, and medical training initiatives. The University also drives cultural preservation and creative industries through the Dzimbahwe Arts Festival, positioning Masvingo as a hub for artistic and cultural expression. Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how GZU operationalises Education 5.0 to deliver tangible socio-economic and cultural transformation, uplifting livelihoods, fostering innovation, and building resilient communities across Masvingo Province and beyond.

Through the Herbert Chitepo School of Law, GZU operates vibrant law clinics and rights awareness campaigns, offering free legal advice in provincial courts. Beneficiaries include widows facing inheritance disputes, informal traders navigating licensing challenges, and victims of gender-based violence seeking justice. Community law awareness outreaches in Zaka, Bere, and Zimuto further extend legal literacy, helping citizens understand their rights and responsibilities. These initiatives safeguard vulnerable groups, promote lawfulness, and strengthen civic responsibility, thus advancing the Governance and Rule of Law pillar of the NDS1 and supporting Vision 2030's commitment to justice and equality.

On the health front, the Simon Mazorodze School of Medical and Health Sciences is training biomedical professionals who, on completion, will go on to serve in provincial and district hospitals, as well as rural clinics, thus addressing critical staff shortages (GZU, 2021). The emergence and manifestation of the Simon Mazorodze has led to the transformation of Masvingo district hospital into provincial and teaching hospital with specialist medical practitioners locally available for community of Masvingo province. Specialist medical facilities under construction at the school's Mashava hospital will enhance provincial healthcare capacity and attract patients from across Zimbabwe, further stimulating local economic activity. Research into traditional medicine, such as the use of indigenous herbs for treating common ailments, preserves cultural heritage while expanding affordable healthcare options in the province and the country, in line with Vision 2030's universal healthcare goal.

Great Zimbabwe University's Mobile Psychology Clinic extends vital socio-psychological support to communities across Masvingo Province, particularly in underserved rural areas. The clinic offers free counseling services to individuals and groups dealing with trauma, stress, and mental health challenges, such as survivors of gender-based violence, youths struggling with substance abuse, displaced communities and families affected by bereavement. By bringing mental health care directly to the people, the initiative reduces stigma, promotes emotional well-being, and strengthens the province's overall social fabric.

Knowledge sharing is another pillar of GZU's community engagement. Through its University radio station and public outreach programs, the institution delivers educational content on practical topics. These topics include agribusiness tips for smallholder farmers, climate change adaptation strategies for rural communities, addressing drug and substance abuse, gender based violence, and entrepreneurship training for youth and women (GZU, 2024a). Short courses offered to locals range from basic financial record keeping for market vendors to modern farming techniques, project planning, monitoring, and evaluation, equipping participants with marketable skills that enhance both employability and entrepreneurial capacity.

Great Zimbabwe University continues to play a significant role in strengthening the well-being and human capital of Masvingo Province and Zimbabwe at large through its expanding academic output and programme portfolio. At the 18th graduation ceremony in 2024, a total of 4465 students graduated, including 11 doctoral graduates, 1229 postgraduates, and 3225 undergraduates (GZU, 2024b). Of these, 2849 were female and 1616 were male. Furthermore, in 2025, the University introduced 22 new accredited programmes; 9 at undergraduate level and the rest at postgraduate level – with an additional 41 programmes pending approval (GZU, 2024b). This expansion has created broader opportunities for specialised training in fields aligned with national development priorities. By producing graduates ready to contribute in critical sectors such as education, health, governance, business, and technology, GZU is addressing skills gaps while fostering socio-economic growth and improved service delivery in Masvingo and beyond.

GZU and the Dzimbahwe Arts Festival

Great Zimbabwe University initiated the Dzimbahwe Arts Festival, which has had a significant impact on the promotion of local talent, preservation of cultural heritage, and stimulation of economic activity in Masvingo (GZU, 2024a). The festival provides a national platform for artists from the province to showcase their skills, gaining recognition and opportunities beyond the local context. Notable performers, including Abel Mauchi, Dzimbahwe Poets, and Uncle Jahunda, have leveraged the festival to access wider markets and participate in high-profile events such as *Chibuku Road to Firm* hosted by National Breweries. In addition to enhancing visibility, the festival generates employment for local artists, technicians, and support staff, while attracting visitors and investment to the province, thereby contributing to the local economy (Masvingo Arts Assembly, 2023).

Beyond its economic role, the festival fosters cultural exchange and appreciation, highlighting Masvingo's rich heritage while simultaneously promoting contemporary artistic expressions (Zimbabwe Culture Fund, 2023). Its implementation demonstrates the value of partnerships between universities, cultural institutions, and funding agencies, as evidenced by collaboration among GZU, the Zimbabwe Culture Fund, and the Masvingo Arts Assembly. These partnerships support capacity building for artists, cultural managers, and arts administrators, empowering communities to strengthen their cultural identity and develop entrepreneurial opportunities within the creative sector. Consequently, the Dzimbahwe Arts Festival has contributed to the professionalisation of the arts industry in Masvingo, creating a network of culture brokers and fostering sustainable avenues for artistic expression and local socio-economic development.

Conclusion

Great Zimbabwe University has firmly established itself as a transformative driver of socio-economic development and community well-being in Masvingo Province. By aligning its programmes and initiatives with the principles of Education 5.0 and the goals of the country's Vision 2030, the university has gone beyond its traditional academic mandate to embrace research, innovation, rural industrialisation, healthcare, legal empowerment, cultural preservation, and community development. Its initiatives not only address food security, agricultural productivity, and economic stimulation but also safeguard and advance the country's cultural heritage through the promotion of indigenous knowledge systems, traditional medicine, local languages, and heritage-based education. By doing so, GZU strengthens identity and pride while positioning culture as a driver of modern innovation and creativity. Importantly, the university has become a provincial hub whose influence resonates nationally, shaping human capital, promoting resilience, uplifting livelihoods, and advancing both social and cultural well-being.

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CHAPTER 25
Student Experiences at Great Zimbabwe University: An Exploration of Opportunities and Challenges

Trust Makwinja Asima, Daniel Madzanire, Prosper Muzambi, Munyika Sibanda, Emerge Masiya, Onismo Simbo, Pauline Chiripanhura and Delight Masocha

Abstract

The life of students at Zimbabwean state universities in general has been beset with a unique set of opportunities and challenges that shape their academic, social, and personal lives. This chapter explores the daily experiences of students navigating the complexities of higher education in an environment coloured by various currents of life. Through a qualitative approach, this chapter highlights the resilience and adaptability of students as they strive to achieve their academic goals despite facing challenges such as limited resources, economic hardships, and infrastructural constraints. The study also examines the role of student organisations, peer support networks, and university initiatives in fostering a sense of community and promoting student success. By delving into the life of a student at Great Zimbabwe University on both the pre and post Education 5.0, this research aims to inform policy and practice that supports the growth and development of the next generation of leaders by preparing them to meet the demands of both the local and global environments.

Key words: Great Zimbabwe University, student life, challenges, opportunities, education 5.0.

Introduction

Higher education in Zimbabwe has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from a system historically dominated by a few elite institutions to a more inclusive sector characterised by expanded access and the establishment of diversified universities (Marginson, 2018; Gukurume, 2019). Despite these developments, students continue to face persistent challenges, including economic crises, inadequate funding, political influences, and institutional constraints, all of which significantly shape the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of the student experience (Flinchbaugh, Luth, & Li, 2015; Jones, 2010). These challenges are compounded by societal pressures and the need for students to adapt to rapidly changing technological, social, and industrial landscapes (Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2012; Ntshwarang, Malinga, & Losike-Sedimo, 2021).

Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), founded with a heritage-based philosophy, has emerged as a key player in advancing Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 agenda, which seeks to integrate teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation (Ahmad et al., 2023; GZU Student Handbook, 2025). By embedding culture and heritage into its educational framework, GZU provides students with a distinctive learning environment that emphasises holistic development, creativity, and civic engagement (Garwe, 2017; Mashininga, 2022). The university also encourages student activism and peer engagement as mechanisms for quality improvement, resilience-building, and personal growth, reflecting a broader recognition of student voice in higher education policy and practice (Hodgkinson, 2019; Reyes et al., 2015).

Within this context, this chapter examines the experiences of students at GZU, focusing on how the University's approach to Education 5.0 impacts academic performance, social adjustment, and

overall well-being. The study highlights both the opportunities and challenges faced by students, providing insights into strategies for enhancing learning outcomes, fostering resilience, and promoting active participation in higher education in Zimbabwe.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it advances understanding of student life at Zimbabwean state universities by documenting the everyday experiences of students at Great Zimbabwe University. Through an examination of the opportunities and challenges students encounter, the study provides empirical evidence on how economic constraints, resource limitations, and institutional conditions shape academic and social life. In alignment with the chapter's focus on support systems, the findings highlight the role of student organisations, peer networks, and university initiatives in promoting resilience, engagement, and academic persistence. These insights are valuable for university administrators and educators seeking to strengthen student welfare mechanisms and enhance learning environments. An analysis of student experiences before and after the implementation of Education 5.0 contributes to policy discussions on higher education reform by assessing how this framework is experienced at the student level. The findings can inform institutional practices and policy interventions aimed at aligning Education 5.0 with student needs, while preparing graduates to respond effectively to local and global development demands.

Theoretical Perspectives on Student Life

Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory and Tinto's (1993) Model of Institutional Departure provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding how student development is shaped by academic and social integration within higher education. In practice, studies show that students globally face challenges such as financial constraints, mental health concerns, and difficulties in social integration, while also benefiting from opportunities for leadership development, innovation, and global networking (Roberts, 2015; Douwes, Metselaar, Pijnenborg, & Boonstra, 2023). Within the African context, universities have historically been characterised by activism, limited resources, and vibrant student movements that often extend beyond campus to influence national sociopolitical discourses (Mlambo, 2013; Hodgkinson & Melchiorre, 2019). For example, the Soweto uprising and the Fees Must Fall movement in South Africa illustrate the catalytic role of students in addressing broader societal issues. In Zimbabwe, student activism has similarly been both a response to and a product of economic and political turbulence (Hwami & Kapoor, 2012; Negombwe, 2012). Gukurume (2019) demonstrates how Zimbabwean students have resorted to *kujingirisa*, innovative survival strategies such as informal trade and part-time work, to navigate economic crises while pursuing higher education. These dynamics show that while activism and resilience are central to student life, institutional responses are equally important.

At Great Zimbabwe University, the heritage-based philosophy and the national policy shift towards Education 5.0, which integrates teaching, research, community service, innovation, and industrialisation, represent an attempt to redefine student experiences and reposition higher education as a driver of socio-economic transformation (Ahmad et al., 2023; Garwe, 2017). Student organisations such as the Student Representative Council (SRC), health-focused clubs, chaplaincy services, and peer support networks play a vital role in mediating challenges and fostering holistic development (Mapuranga, Musingafi, & Zebron, 2015; Hove & Dube, 2024). However, despite these institutional mechanisms, gaps remain in the scholarly understanding of

how GZU students experience and interpret their university life, especially in relation to Education 5.0. Most literature focuses broadly on Zimbabwean higher education or on student movements at the University of Zimbabwe (Mlambo, 2013; Makunike, 2015), leaving the lived experiences of GZU students underexplored. Addressing this gap is critical for advancing knowledge on how institutional identity, cultural philosophy, and policy frameworks converge to shape student life in Zimbabwean universities.

Methodology

A qualitative case study design was adopted to capture rich insights into student life at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), which operates across multiple campuses in Masvingo Province. The target population comprised both undergraduate and postgraduate students across various faculties, with purposive sampling used to select student leaders and peer educators, while randomly selected participants' ensured diversity. Data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of student experiences. A total of 24 students participated in the study. The sample included 18 undergraduate students drawn from first to final year, and 6 postgraduate students enrolled at master's level. This categorisation enabled a comparative understanding of student experiences across different levels of study and stages of academic development. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the study, and all participants provided informed consent, with confidentiality assured throughout the research process.

Findings

The findings address the study's objectives by examining the academic, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of student life at Great Zimbabwe University. They respond directly to the research questions on challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support systems. Together, these results provide insights into how GZU's unique philosophy and Education 5.0 framework shape student experiences.

Academic Experiences of Students

The academic life of students at GZU is shaped by both opportunities and constraints. On the one hand, students benefit from the adoption of heritage-based pedagogy, which embeds cultural relevance into the curriculum and makes learning more relatable. Exposure to innovation hubs further enhances creativity, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving skills, aligning with the national Education 5.0 thrust. Most of the students reported that these hubs provide platforms for collaboration with industry players and the chance to develop prototypes for real-world challenges.

However, despite these positives, many participants highlighted challenges that undermine their academic success. Overcrowded classrooms remain a major barrier, making interaction with lecturers difficult and reducing opportunities for active participation. Limited digital infrastructure and uneven access to online resources further disadvantage students, particularly those from rural or economically vulnerable backgrounds. Some reported that access to e-learning platforms is unreliable due to unstable internet connectivity, affecting their ability to keep pace with modern learning methods. These challenges collectively create disparities in academic achievement among students.

Social and Cultural Life on Campus

Beyond academics, social and cultural life at GZU plays a significant role in shaping student experiences. Cultural festivals are highly valued, as they provide platforms for students to showcase their talents, celebrate diversity, and engage in inter-cultural dialogue. Chaplaincy services contribute to spiritual nourishment, while sports activities enhance physical fitness and social bonding.

Friendships and peer mentoring were described as central to the student experience, helping students navigate academic and personal challenges. Communal living, especially in student residences, fosters resilience, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. However, students also acknowledged that balancing social life with academic demands can be difficult, and peer pressure sometimes contributes to risky behaviour, particularly substance abuse and unsafe sexual practices. Despite this, the general consensus is that the vibrancy of social life enriches student experiences and strengthens campus cohesion.

Economic Realities and Student Livelihoods

The economic realities confronting students emerged as a critical theme. With the high cost of living and limited financial support, students often engage in *kujingirisa* (survival strategies) to sustain themselves (Gukurume, 2019). These include informal trading, vending, tutoring for postgraduate students, and part-time work in the local community. For some, such strategies provide resilience and sharpen entrepreneurial skills.

However, these activities also come at a cost. Many students reported that engaging in survival work compromises study time and leads to fatigue, which can negatively affect academic performance. Financial stress was also linked to increased vulnerability to exploitation, particularly for female students who sometimes resort to transactional relationships for survival. The findings reveal that economic struggles are not just individual burdens but systemic issues that shape the overall quality of student life.

Health, Wellness, and Student Support Systems

Health and wellness are supported through various university initiatives, including HIV and AIDS awareness clubs, peer counselling networks, and chaplaincy services. These provide both preventative education and psychosocial support. Students noted that peer counselling was particularly effective in addressing mental health concerns, as it offered confidentiality and relatability.

Nonetheless, risky behaviours persist, with substance abuse (particularly alcohol and drugs) cited as a growing problem. Some students also highlighted the stigma around accessing mental health services, which discourages many from seeking help. The findings suggest that while structures exist to support wellness, more robust and coordinated interventions are needed to address underlying causes of poor health outcomes among students.

Infrastructure and Campus Facilities

Students' experiences of the physical environment at GZU are marked by both inadequacies and opportunities. Accommodation shortages are a recurrent concern, with many students forced to

live off-campus in substandard conditions, exposing them to insecurity and long commutes. Limited study spaces, overcrowded libraries, and inconsistent internet access also undermine the learning environment. At the time of the study (2025), Great Zimbabwe University had a total student enrolment of 8,467 students, comprising 3,094 male and 5,373 female students. In contrast, the university's total on-campus accommodation capacity stood at 1,678 students. This capacity was distributed across Mashava Residence (1,338 students), Mucheke Residence (300 students), and ZIMDEF Residence (40 students).

These figures indicate that only approximately 19.8% of the total student population is accommodated on campus, while about 80.2% of students reside off campus. The substantial disparity between student enrolment and available on-campus accommodation explains the persistent accommodation challenges reported by students, including overcrowding in surrounding residential areas, exposure to insecure and substandard living conditions, and long commuting distances to and from the university.

On the other hand, students acknowledged some positive developments. The provision of subsidised meals has eased food insecurity for the most vulnerable, while the library, though sometimes overcrowded, remains a valuable academic resource. The presence of innovation hubs and laboratories was also mentioned as a step toward enhancing hands-on learning. However, the consensus was that infrastructural investment needs to be scaled up to match the growing student population.

Gender and Inclusivity in Student Life

The findings show that GZU is making strides toward inclusivity, but gaps remain. Affirmative action policies have increased enrolment of female and rural students, contributing to gender balance and broader access to higher education. At present (2025) GZU has 62% female students against 38% male. Initiatives such as the Disability Resource Centre provide crucial support for students living with disabilities, including assistive devices and learning accommodations. Similarly, the promotion of indigenous language pedagogy was commended for affirming cultural identity and diversity in academic spaces.

Despite these positive developments, female students reported that gender-based harassment, stereotypes, and unequal participation in leadership roles remain challenges. Students with disabilities also highlighted the need for better physical access to buildings and more specialised academic support. Thus, while GZU demonstrates commitment to inclusivity, further structural and cultural changes are necessary to achieve genuine equity.

Discussion

The discussion interprets the findings on student experiences at Great Zimbabwe University, highlighting key academic, social, economic, and wellbeing dimensions. It examines how heritage-based pedagogy, innovation hubs, and campus life shape learning and resilience. The section also considers the challenges students face, including infrastructural limitations, financial pressures, and health-related concerns.

Academic and Social Experiences

Students at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) experience a holistic educational environment that

blends academic rigor, cultural engagement, and innovation-driven learning. Heritage-based pedagogy promotes cultural identity and contextualised learning, enabling students to connect academic content to local realities (Garwe, 2017; Mapuranga, Musingafi & Zebron, 2015). Innovation hubs and project-based initiatives align with Education 5.0 principles, enhancing creativity, problem-solving, and industry readiness (Ahmad et al., 2023; Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). Socially, engagement in cultural festivals, sports, and peer mentoring fosters belonging, resilience, and psychosocial well-being (Astin, 1984; Mwale, Mwanza & Meene, 2024). These experiences collectively demonstrate that GZU supports holistic student development, though structural challenges limit full participation.

Challenges in Infrastructure and Resources

Despite these benefits, infrastructural limitations hinder optimal learning. Overcrowded classrooms, limited chairs, inadequate study spaces, and inconsistent internet connectivity constrain access to digital resources and reduce opportunities for active learning (Hall & Winn, 2010; Ntshwarang et al., 2021). Students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately affected, highlighting persistent equity gaps (Jones, 2010; Gukurume, 2019). These challenges indicate that institutional investments in physical and digital infrastructure remain crucial to enhancing academic engagement and outcomes.

Economic Pressures and Student Wellbeing

Economic hardship compels students to adopt *kujingirisa* strategies, including informal trading and part-time work, which while fostering entrepreneurial skills, often compete with academic responsibilities (Gukurume, 2019; Jones, 2010). Health and wellness concerns persist, with substance abuse, mental health challenges, and stigma around support services reported by students (Julia Pointon-Haas et al., 2024; Masvaure, 2010). Peer counselling and HIV/AIDS support programs provide critical assistance, but these services need further integration and systemic support to be fully effective.

Uniqueness and Institutional Implications

GZU's distinctive combination of heritage-based education, innovation, and student activism sets it apart in Zimbabwean higher education (Trinity, n.d.; Garwe, 2017). Inclusivity initiatives targeting female, rural, and disabled students further strengthen equity and participation (Great Zimbabwe University Newsletter, 2025; GZU Student Handbook, 2025). Policy implications include expanding digital and physical infrastructure, increasing financial aid, and institutionalizing wellness programs to address academic, economic, and psychosocial challenges comprehensively (Ahmad et al., 2023; Julia Pointon-Haas et al., 2024). GZU demonstrates the potential of a holistic, culturally responsive, and innovation-driven approach to higher education. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the need for coordinated interventions to ensure that all students can fully engage with academic, social, and innovation opportunities.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance student experiences and outcomes at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU):

Strengthen Digital and Physical Infrastructure

Investment in reliable internet connectivity, modern e-learning platforms, and expanded study and library spaces is essential to support Education 5.0 objectives and ensure equitable access for all

students (Ahmad et al., 2023; Ntshwarang et al., 2021). Addressing overcrowding in classrooms and student residences will not only improve academic engagement but also reduce stress and promote a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, upgrading laboratories and innovation hubs will enable practical, hands-on learning that complements theoretical instruction.

Enhance Financial Support Mechanisms

Provision of scholarships, bursaries, and structured work-study programs can mitigate economic pressures that compel students to adopt survival strategies (*kujingirisa*), allowing them to devote greater attention to academic and extracurricular activities (Gukurume, 2019; Jones, 2010). Targeted financial support for students from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds will also promote equity and reduce disparities in academic achievement.

Institutionalise Health and Wellness Programs

Mental health services, peer counselling, HIV and AIDS awareness initiatives, and substance abuse prevention programmes should be systematically integrated into a coordinated student support framework. Such holistic interventions will address psychosocial challenges, strengthen resilience, and support overall wellbeing, thereby enhancing student retention and academic success (Julia Pointon-Haas et al., 2024; King & Simmons, 2018).

Promote Inclusivity and Diversity

Although female students constitute a numerical majority at Great Zimbabwe University, accounting for approximately 62% of the student population compared to 38% male students, numerical dominance does not necessarily translate into equitable access, participation, or outcomes. The emphasis on strengthening policies and programmes for female students in this study is therefore not based on enrolment figures alone, but on the persistence of gendered challenges that affect students' experiences differently. Qualitative evidence from the study indicates that female students, particularly those from rural backgrounds and those with caregiving responsibilities, continue to face structural and socio-cultural barriers, including financial vulnerability, safety concerns, limited access to accommodation, and underrepresentation in student leadership and decision-making spaces. These challenges are often compounded for female students with disabilities, whose experiences reflect intersecting forms of marginalisation despite overall gender parity in enrolment. Within this context, the call to strengthen and monitor policies supporting female, rural, and disabled students aligns with a broader understanding of inclusion under Education 5.0, which prioritises equity, participation, and empowerment rather than numerical representation alone. The findings suggest that institutional effectiveness should be assessed not only in terms of access but also in terms of the quality of student experiences and opportunities for meaningful engagement across diverse student groups

Encourage Experiential and Innovation-Based Learning

Expansion of innovation hubs, project-based learning initiatives, and community engagement opportunities will enhance practical skills, problem-solving capabilities, and alignment with Education 5.0 principles (Ahmad et al., 2023; Garwe, 2017). Integrating these experiential activities into the curriculum can improve employability, stimulate creativity, and foster socially responsible graduates who contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Foster a Supportive Campus Culture

Strengthening mentorship programs, student clubs, and platforms for activism can enhance social

cohesion, amplify student voice, and encourage civic engagement (Garwe, 2017; Trinity, n.d.). Creating spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and peer support will contribute to holistic development and reinforce a sense of belonging, which is critical for academic persistence and personal growth.

Overall, a multi-dimensional and integrated approach that addresses infrastructure, finances, wellness, inclusivity, and innovation is essential to improving the quality of student life, academic outcomes, and the overall university experience at GZU. Implementing these recommendations will position GZU as a model for culturally responsive, inclusive, and innovation-driven higher education in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

This study examines the multifaceted experiences of students at Great Zimbabwe University, encompassing academic engagement, social and cultural life, economic realities, health and wellness, and inclusivity. While heritage-based pedagogy, innovation hubs, and Education 5.0 principles contribute positively to learning and personal development, infrastructural limitations, financial pressures, and psychosocial challenges hinder optimal outcomes. The findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach to student support, integrating robust infrastructure, targeted financial assistance, comprehensive wellness programs, and initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and experiential learning. By addressing these interrelated dimensions, GZU can enhance student resilience, academic performance, and overall wellbeing, creating a supportive and innovation-driven campus environment. The study provides evidence-based insights that can guide institutional policy, inform resource allocation, and strengthen strategies aimed at fostering an inclusive, dynamic, and high-performing higher education experience in Zimbabwe.

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CHAPTER 26
The Evolution of Sport and Recreation at Great Zimbabwe University

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Abstract

This chapter explores the evolution of sport and recreation at GZU for both students and staff. The study examines their strategic role of sports in shaping institutional identity, promoting podium performance, and enhancing physical health, mental wellness, and social cohesion among students and staff. The central research problem interrogates how sport and recreation can be more effectively integrated into university development to maximise both individual and institutional benefits. Using a qualitative approach comprising in depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the chapter presents compelling evidence of the transformative impact of sport on university life. Key findings highlight increased physical fitness, improved mental well-being, stronger social bonds, and a growing sense of institutional pride. However, challenges such as limited infrastructure, inadequate funding, and a shortage of trained personnel persist. The chapter argues that strategic investment and policy support are essential for the full realisation of sport and recreation as developmental tools. Ultimately, the study positions sport as a catalyst for holistic education and institutional excellence at GZU.

Key words: Sport, Recreation, wellbeing, health, community

Introduction

This chapter examines the evolution of sport and recreation and their strategic role in promoting podium performance, health and wellness, community cohesion, and institutional identity at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU). The chapter highlights the vital role of sports in enriching university life for both students and staff. Through structured surveys, focus group discussions, and analysis of university and policy documents, the study reveals that participation in sports contributes significantly to physical fitness, mental well-being, social integration, and a sense of pride in the institution. To enhance the impact of sport and recreation at GZU, the chapter encourages continued investment in infrastructure, increased funding, and the development of skilled personnel to support the expansion of programs and activities. The chapter concludes by positioning sports as a transformative force that can reinforce the university's mission of holistic education and institutional excellence.

Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) has experienced significant growth in recent years, expanding its academic programs and infrastructure. As the university evolves, there is a growing recognition of the importance of sports in fostering a holistic educational environment. Sports play a crucial role in promoting physical health, mental well-being, and a sense of community among students and staff. Integrating sports into university life aligns with national development goals, such as Zimbabwe's Vision 2030, which emphasises the importance of health and well-being in achieving sustainable development. The integration of sports into higher education institutions is essential for promoting wellness, community engagement, and institutional identity. Sports at Great Zimbabwe University have significantly contributed to making it a university of choice for both students and staff by fostering a vibrant campus life,

promoting physical and mental well-being, and providing opportunities for talent development and competitive excellence. This dynamic sporting culture enhances the university's appeal, creating a balanced environment that supports both academic and personal growth. This study chapter employed qualitative data collection methods. It specifically used in-depth interviews with both students and staff who engage in sporting activities at the institution. Specifically, the chapter drew from interviews with athletes, coaches, and university administrators to gain deeper insights into the role of sports at GZU.

A Historical Overview of Sport and Recreation at Great Zimbabwe University

The University's sporting culture traces back to the University's inception as a fully-fledged institution. Back then the University was based at one campus (at Masvingo Teachers' College) where all the students and staff were at one place. The University was sharing the few sport and recreation facilities at its disposal with Masvingo Teachers College, which at that time owned nearly all the facilities. The main facilities at the disposal of both the students and staff at both institutions were a soccer pitch, a netball court and volleyball court on hard surface and two tennis courts. Most of the sporting programs, activities and interactions were largely planned for students while staff were left to pursue their own sporting and recreational needs on their own and at their own free time. There were only two Sports Administrators (the Sports Director and the Assistant Sports Director) to manage the entire sporting and recreational needs of the University which were largely student oriented. The University drew most of its participants from the then Faculty of Education where there was a big chunk of students who were training as ordinary teachers and a few were specialising as Physical Education teachers. This small group was targeted for podium performance. The University teams were largely for traditional games such as football, netball, volleyball and a few elite ones like rugby and cricket. Elite sport and podium performance was a preserve for a few athletes. A few of the then active teams and individuals participated at some provincial, national and international events. It is important to note that at that early stage of growth, the University had a Football Club playing in the Division Two League. However, female student participation in sport was notably limited during that period.

There was a gradual change in sporting culture with time. The hosting of Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA) national tournament in 2010 ignited a high sporting culture and zeal to pursue sport and recreation in the entire University populace. It also changed some members' mindsets that sport comes last amongst University programmes and activities. An increasing number of students began joining the few existing clubs while also establishing new ones. Staff members likewise formed formal clubs to engage in sport and recreational activities.

The sport and recreation programmes and activities for both students and staff are managed by the Sport and Recreation Section under the Student Affairs Department whose full mandate is to promote sport and recreation at the University. The Section is guided by a policy developed through benchmarking against national and international universities, and harmonised with national sport and recreation frameworks. The vision, mission and strategic goals for the University sport were developed in light of the University's strategic plan document for 2021 to 2024 and also the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) for 2025. The University is committed to refining its strategic goals, vision, mission, and policies in response to internal strategic reviews and the unpacking of the National Development Strategy 2 (NDS 2).

Continuous benchmarking with some reputable universities sport and recreation policies shall also be done to keep abreast with current trends in sport and recreation programming.

GZU sport and recreation just like in other universities, is run through a Club system. The sport and recreation Clubs are established by students and staff with a common sporting zeal. Currently the University boasts of twenty - three (23) and fifteen (15) vibrant student and staff sport and recreation Clubs respectively. The University also boasts of gender inclusivity as all of the Clubs have both male and female teams and there are several Paralympic Clubs such as Blind Football, Goal ball and many other individual Paralympic events.

The National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) advocates for promotion of increased participation in sport and recreation activities and promotion of podium performance. In an effort to realise this goal, the University has come up with various categories sport and recreation programs interactions namely; *Varsity Sports* (for competitive sports teams/clubs which represent the University in national and international competitions). These are the flagship sports of the University which assist in marketing the brand of the University nationally and internationally apart from creating a platform to identify and nurture talent for podium performance; *Intramural Sports* (recreational sports leagues and tournaments for students and staff). The activities for these sports are organised and run in different formats and versions and meant to promote a sport and recreation culture, physical health and wellness. To adequately resource these activities, the University partners with other organisations so as to avoid relying much on the student's sports levies); *Club Sport*s (student and staff- led sports teams that compete against other colleges and clubs on invitational basis). These interactions, apart from creating platforms for knowledge exchange also promote physical health and nurture talent. Some competitors from these interactions eventually join varsity sports); and *Recreational Programs* (Dance groups, fitness classes such as aerobics and Zumba, sports clinics and other programs meant for recreation. These programs promote social interaction, apart from offering entertainment and promoting health and wellness).

Currently, three full time Sports Administrators (the Director of Sports, Assistant Sports Director and the Sports Officer) plan and implement the programs and activities in liaison with the University Sports and Recreation Committee, Staff Sports Committee, part-time coaches and the Minister of Sport (who is a Student Executive Council member) who oversees all sport and recreation club activities. As of 2025, there were 23 clubs at the university. For Health and Wellness programs and activities, the Human Resources work with the Sports Directorate and the Staff Sports Chairperson and his / her committee to plan and run the events.

The University plays a central role in the resourcing of both staff and students' sport and recreation programs through the staff and students' Sports and Recreation votes. The institution is also central in securing sponsorships and donations. Capital projects like facilities development, refurbishments and procurement of vehicles to service the sporting and recreation clubs are also supported by the University. For funding of student sport and recreation activities, the students pay a sports and recreation levy each semester. These levies are managed by the Sports and Recreation section in liaison with the Bursary department. The levies are also used to procure equipment and kits needed by the student team teams as well as hiring facilities that are not available at the University. As a result of this set up, students are able to attend their sport and recreation facilities each semester.

Milestone Achievements in University Sport and Recreation

GZU has scored a number of successes since the coming in of Professor Zvobgo as the Vice Chancellor. Under his visionary leadership since 2013, vast achievements were realised in the University's sport and recreation and the following are some of the achievements:

Facilities Acquisition and Refurbishments

The coming of Professor Zvobgo with his multi-campus model of running the University saw the decentralisation of sporting activities to Mashava campus. The acquisition of Mashava Campus came as a great achievement in this regard since the mine boasted of having several sporting facilities such as the recently renovated and the majestic Gaths mine stadium. As a result, athletes from Mashava no longer had to travel to Masvingo for sporting activities. This mitigated the *distance decay* challenge that was being experienced by several sportspersons hence an increased uptake and participation by several University stakeholders especially at the Mashava campus. To date, GZU has hosted prestigious sporting galas such as the Zimbabwe Chancellor of State Universities Staff Games (CZSUSG) in 2016, Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA) Paralympic Games in 2019 and several Health and Wellness activities. The Gaths mine stadium is now the home ground for the Great Zimbabwe University Football Club which is playing in Division One Eastern Region Soccer League games. The various sporting facilities have also contributed to Education 5.0 through revenue generation from hire of the facilities. Some recreational centers have also been established at various learning and residential centers in City campuses to promote student and staff's sporting and recreational activities.

Outstanding Performance by Varsity Teams

The University has a proud tradition of outstanding performances from students and staff who have excelled in national and international competitions. Great Zimbabwe University student and staff teams have raised the university's flag very high at various national universities tournaments winning gold, silver or bronze medals in different competitions. For example, the students' female Pool team and staff Traditional Dance group have been gold medalists in 2022 to 2024 in universities competitions. The students Pool team has brought home two pool tables as prizes apart from being the best tertiary Pool team nationally (in 2023 and 2025 respectively). The University also boasts of being the first to introduce a vibrant Boxing Club which has churned international light weight boxers like Denes Brendon. Several sportspersons from Athletics, Paralympics and Football have also done the University proud by representing it at international tournaments.

The good sporting culture and performance has seen the University being affiliated to a number of competitive leagues. Currently the University boasts of being one of the only three universities whose football teams are playing in the Division One league while the basketball, pool, Handball and Volleyball teams are also affiliated to provincial leagues.

Health and Wellness Initiatives

GZU also runs a very vibrant health and wellness programs in partnership with various health service providers and other partners. The University, through its Human Resources department and Sports and Recreation section and Staff Sports Committee has come up with health and wellness events which are run quarterly. The events apart from creating a platform for staff to

engage in physical activity, creates a safe space for screening of ailments amongst staff by health service providers partnered during the running of events.

Provision of Sport and Recreation Expertise and Training

The University has also contributed greatly to the development and growth of sport and recreation in the province and the nation at large through provision of expert training of sports administrators (in liaison with national sport regulatory bodies such as Sports and Recreation Commission and National Sport Associations) and Physical Education and Sport teachers (through its School of Education and Heritage where Physical Education and Sport is one of the core programs of study. The University has also provided expert captains and leaders in the sports and recreation industry nationally and internationally. For an example, GZU Director of Sports (Mr. Guvuriro) holds important posts in provincial, national and regional sport and recreation organising bodies as a Sports Management/Administration Tutor under the Sports and Recreation Commission (SRC), President to the Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sports Union (ZTISU), Vice Secretary General to Confederation of University and Teachers' Colleges Sports Association (CUCSA), Councillor to Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) and the Sports and Recreation Commission. Currently Mr. Guvuriro is the President of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA) apart from being a part- time lecturer with several institutions in Physical Education and Sports Management programs. Some lecturers of Physical Education and Sport have also contributed immensely to the growth of sport and recreation nationally through teaching and researching thereby promoting sport and recreation programs and activities in the university. Others are also specialist instructors and coaches in various sport and recreation disciplines.

Students and Staff Perceptions on Sport and Recreation at GZU

The discussion on the benefits of sports at GZU has generated interesting responses from both students and staff alike. Generally, workers widely acknowledge and appreciate that sporting activities have enhanced their physical fitness and mental well-being. A number of staff credits these sporting programs for reducing stress, especially given academic and administrative workloads they undertake. Others have pointed out that even though they are not part of the University teams, they look forward to Wednesdays when they knock off early for practice sessions. One informant has pointed out the impact of sports on his well-being saying;

> I was recently diagnosed with a condition that needs me to embark of physical exercises. While I try to do that at home after work, I am now utilising Wednesday afternoons to complete some exercises. During the week I finish work at 1630hrs and will be mostly exhausted. I thank the University for its policy on sports.

Such positive comments were also expressed by students. Students also perceive significant health benefits. Given the pressures of academic life, especially during exams and assignment deadlines, physical activity is seen as a healthy outlet. Sports are appreciated not only for fitness but also as a way to relieve anxiety, build confidence, and encourage discipline. However, some students noted the lack of accessible facilities and overemphasis on competitive rather than recreational sports as barriers to increased participation in sport and recreation and programs. A

few have also lamented that lecturers don't value sporting activities. One student recalls a scenario when she almost failed her coursework and alluded;

> I attended the ZUSA games and so I missed my tutorial presentation. I was supposed to submit my assignment on the same day. I was told that I would get a fail so for non-fulfillment of coursework. The lecturer said that I should choose between sports and academic work. It was difficult for me.

Coalter (2005) asserts that participation in sport and recreation programs offer students and staff a myriad of opportunities to meet one another, interact and establish life-long relationships. Thus, sporting activities have also been credited for community building and social cohesion in the university community. Most university employees are divided between academic and non-teaching staff. The participation in sport and recreation events by both staff and students across campuses has contributed to the breaking down of this division as all staff members actively interact and form teams comprising both teaching and non-teaching staff thereby creating a sense of oneness. With GZU having many campuses, sporting activities have evidently built trust and communication among colleagues from diverse roles and campuses. Informal interactions during events have fostered a sense of belonging which has improved working relationships. The same arguments have been noted from the students' perspective. Sporting activities at GZU has promoted peer bonding and create inclusive spaces for socialisation. The multi-campus system division has been actively broken by sporting activities and tournaments that have allow students from different disciplines (Heritage and Commerce is based in Mashava while Education and Social Sciences is based in Masvingo) to collaborate and compete in a friendly environment. Some students have alluded that more regular events and enhanced support for sporting activities can also contribute to the fight against the scourge of drug and substance abuse that has been on the rise in Zimbabwe's tertiary education when they said;

> We feel sporting activities, especially for recreation must be actively encouraged at GZU. As students we suffer from academic pressures, we need an outlet. We need to embark on sports for leisure so that we don't succumb to peer pressure which may result in drug abuse. Sports give us valuable time away from books.

Furthermore, sport and wellness initiatives have become a permanent feature at GZU and have become symbols of institutional pride. Staff expressed enthusiasm about representing GZU in inter-university competitions and believes these engagements uplift the university's profile nationally. In the same vein, students also echoed this view, noting that participating in sport not only builds individual confidence but also contributes to a shared sense of pride in GZU's image. Wearing university-branded kits or competing externally instills loyalty and boosts morale. One student expressed pride in representing GZU and boasted;

> It is a great honour to be part of GZU team. Arriving at other universities with our bus, wearing GZU branded kits is something I greatly admire. In addition, seeing our pictures on GZU Facebook is a delight for me, I can't ask for more. I will tag my friends and I particularly enjoy the comments. Even my parents are proud of my achievements.

Against the above perceptions, the University has deliberately integrated sport and recreation as well as health and wellness programs into orientation programs as a way of marketing efforts to promote a vibrant institutional sporting culture from the outset.

The Future Outlook and Strategic Priorities for GZU Sport and Recreation

The following are core strategic priority areas the University endeavours to embark on to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes physical activity, health, wellness and community engagement;

Facility Development and Maintenance

Dalgarn (2001), June (2006), Lindsey and Sessoms (2006) assert that today university campuses have become the equivalent to small cities, complete with state-of-the-art recreational facilities, multiple dining facilities, and student and staff unions equipped with coffee shops and storefronts. In light of this, the University endeavours to develop, upgrade and ensure regular maintenance of a myriad of state-of-the-art facilities to ensure adequate and safe facilities for use by the University stakeholders and the community at large. The facilities will also assist in generating revenue through hiring them out. Top priority is to establish well-furnished state of the art gymnasia at the two main campuses.

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Inclusivity and Accessibility

Provision of programs and facilities that cater for diverse populations, including People Living with Disabilities (PLWD), seniors and underserved communities, ensuring facilities are accessible and welcoming to all users and a Staff Sports Association to formalise staff sport and recreation activities

Innovation and Technology

The University must leverage technology to enhance user experience such as electronic training/coaching and officiating devices, online booking systems and mobile apps on accessing sport and recreation products and services.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The University is encouraged to forge Private and Public Partnerships (PPPs) with local schools and other colleges, sports teams and clubs and community organisations to promote the University sport and recreation centres and their services.

Health and Wellness Programs and Community Engagement

Offering programmes and services that promote physical activity, mental well-being, and overall health. The University may also consider partnering with health care organisations to provide resources and support for users as well as local organisations and businesses to promote University and community events.

Establishment of a Sports Academy

To promote Talent Identification (TI) and nurturing talent for podium performance, the University endeavours to establish a Sports Academy to identify talent and nurture it as well as upskilling training of sports coaches and administrators.

Recognition and Awarding of Outstanding Performance

Awarding of accolades and prizes to outstanding sports and recreation persons as a way to motivate them through Annual Sports Awards ceremonies, exposure of outstanding performers to higher level tournaments and events nationally and internationally such as ZUSA, ZTISU, Confederation of Universities and Colleges Sports Association (CUCSA), African Universities Sports Federation (FASU) and International Universities Sports Federation (FISU) (for students) and Zimbabwe Universities Staff Sports Association (ZUSSA), Chancellor of Zimbabwe State Universities Staff Games (CZSUSG) and Southern Africa Universities Sports Staff Association (SAUSSA) (for staff and the introduction of the Best Graduating Sportsperson of the year prize.

Conclusion

Sports play a vital role in enhancing community, health, and identity at Great Zimbabwe University. By promoting physical well-being, fostering social connections, and strengthening institutional pride, sports contribute to a vibrant and cohesive university environment. To maximise these benefits, GZU should prioritise the development of sports infrastructure, support for athletes, and the integration of sports into its strategic objectives. Such efforts will not only enrich the university experience for students and staff but also position GZU as a leader in holistic education in Zimbabwe.

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The GZU Ladies Hockey Team

THEME 5 BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

CHAPTER 27
The Future of Great Zimbabwe University: A Vision Anchored in Policy

David Chikodzi & Marian Tukuta

Abstract

The Great Zimbabwe University has been a catalyst for transformational heritage based development since its inception. Given the complex challenges the world is facing coupled with rapid technological advances brought about by the 4th industrial revolution, the role of universities has transformed beyond academia. This chapter aims at strategically reimagining GZU as a dynamic engine catalysing national and regional development. A futures thinking scenario planning approach was employed in the study to collect data. Findings highlight that the university is prioritising digital transformation, has to embrace artificial intelligence, upscale provision smart class rooms, enhance blended learning and digital literacy. The curriculum at the university needed to be responsive to the needs communities, industry and commerce. The university is also committed to the inclusive access to education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and gender equity. The institution is fostering a culture of intentional leadership development across all its divisions through institutionalising mentorship programmes as well as placing partnerships at the centre of achieving its vision.

Key words: Vision 2030, digital transformation, quality education, artificial intelligence, trans-disciplinary innovation

Introduction

The adaptability of universities to local and global changes determines the capacity of a nation to produce graduates that are relevant to the nation's development needs and aspirations (Schwab, 2013). As the development trajectory of a country changes, higher education also needs to constantly evolve in response to the shifting demands of both society and stakeholders (Beynaghi et al. 2016). Throughout history, universities have changed their mandates, governance systems and structures to suit the evolving needs of society. Futurist universities need not only envision and interpret the future but also play a leading role in creating it (Chikoti, 2018). It therefore takes visionary leadership to create policies and strategies that can guide universities to produce graduates that are relevant to the future needs of industry and the public sector.

Sheldon et al. (2008) argue that university programmes need fundamental retooling and redesign in order to remain relevant to the future needs of any country. They advocate for a paradigm shift in curriculum design in order to re-examine what is being taught (redefining skills set) and how it is being delivered. Chiu (2024) is of the view that in the era of the 4th industrial revolution, universities need transformation in order to prepare graduates to be future-ready, especially for workplaces that are powered by artificial intelligence. In order to achieve this, new learning outcomes that combine AI literacy, digital skills, transversal skills, interdisciplinarity, as well as hands-on activities will need to be developed. Orr et al. (2020) encourage universities to nurture graduates with multiple skills that could be harnessed simultaneously and to also develop authentic learning with established links to future workplaces. Further, rapid changes in the labour market imply that employees will have to commit to lifelong learning in order to remain relevant. To match this need, universities need to have more flexible learning models such as

modular learning, micro-credentials and credits. These models will allow people to upgrade their skills alongside their careers.

Higher education and the workplace environments are rapidly changing, driven by sustained technological disruption, AI and automation. This makes planning for the future uncertain. In Zimbabwe, however, human capital development, innovation and industrialisation remain important pillars driving the nation's socio-economic progress. The Great Zimbabwe University is a relatively new higher education institution that has made tremendous contributions to the country's transformational development agenda and aspirations. The vision of GZU is to be "an exceptional Pan African institution championing heritage based scholarship, modernisation and industrialisation", now and in the future. For the vision to endure, the university needs to not only anticipate and plan for future changes to the needs of the country but to also play an active role in shaping that future. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to unpack the strategies that the Great Zimbabwe University has to put in place to continue making impactful contributions to the development needs of Zimbabwe and the African continent in pursuit of its current vision and in the future.

At inception, the mandate of the University was to offer degrees in Education, the Arts and Culture, and Heritage Studies. The mandate was later expanded to include other disciplines in the area of Natural Sciences, Agriculture, Engineering, Medical and Health Sciences, Law, Commerce, and Social Sciences. These changes are in sync with Beynaghi et al. (2016) who argue that higher education institutions constantly change over time in response to the shifting demands of key stakeholders.

The next section looks into the main frameworks providing context to the formulation of an enduring vision for Great Zimbabwe University.

Casting the vision

As noted in Proverbs 29:18, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish,' a statement that underscores the importance of clearly defined goals in guiding decision-making and preventing organisational failure. GZU is conscious of its obligation to play a strategic role in pursuance of the national vision. In this chapter, the future of the University is envisioned through local, regional, continental and global frameworks and strategies. Figure 1 depicts the local documents informing the vision of GZU at present and in to the future.



Source: Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development

Cumulatively, these national documents endeavour to transform Zimbabwe into an upper-middle income economy by 2030, deliberately using education as a launch pad of the national development agenda.

Figure 2 shows the regional, continental and global development agenda documents that informed the future GZU's vision and strategy in the study.



Figure 2: Regional, continental and global agenda informing GZU vision

Table 1 summarises the frameworks guiding the future GZU vision and policy direction beginning now and into the future. These include the Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 National Development Strategy, the Education 5.0 Philosophy, the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF), the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Education and Training, Africa 2063 Agenda, and the Global Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 1: Frameworks Guiding the Envisioned GZU

Framework	Relevant provision
Zimbabwe's Vision 2030	▪ The 10-year Zimbabwean national strategic plan puts education at the centre to spearhead the achievement of this vision. ▪ The Vision acknowledges the need for globally competitive, quality education and training facilities. These will be achieved through the development of education curricula that speaks to the requirements of industry. ▪ It also promotes increased skills development in the country, putting more emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.
Education 5.0 philosophy	▪ It is Zimbabwe's national strategy that has transformed the higher education ecosystem to focus on five key pillars. ▪ These pillars include teaching, research, community outreach, innovation, and industrialisation. ▪ The philosophy shifts academic learning to focus more on practical, hands-on approach that can contribute directly to national development and economic growth. ▪ Emphasises the importance of universities to focus on collaborating with industry and society in order to cater for their needs. ▪ The philosophy led to the development of innovation hubs and industrial parks.
The Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF)	▪ Was developed to harmonise qualifications across universities. ▪ This ensures a consistent approach to the quality of education, which is a major step in achieving globally recognised qualifications.
The Southern African Development Community Protocol on Education and Training	▪ Acknowledges that education and training have the capacity to adequately equip member states with skills required now and in the future. ▪ Established seven areas of co-operation which are: policy for education and training, basic education, intermediate education and training, i.e. certificate and diploma levels, higher education and training, research and development, life-long education and training,

	publishing and library resources.
Africa 2063 Agenda	▪ Endeavors to develop quality education on the African continent that can drive its development aspirations. ▪ Advocates for improved linkages among higher education institutions and industry with a view to improve their skills profile, employability and entrepreneurship. ▪ Calls for increased investments in universities, science, technology, research and innovation. ▪ Promotes the harmonisation of education standards and mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications across the continent.
The Global Sustainable Development Goals	▪ Goal number 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Sources*: MHTEISTD (2018, 2019); SADC (1997); United Nations (2015); African Union (2015)*

The next section provides the methods that were used in the collection and analysis of data.

Materials and methods

The chapter relied on an open-ended questionnaire in the collection of data. The questionnaire was deemed the best tool because of its flexibility. The tool allowed the participants to freely articulate the future they envisioned about GZU, using their expertise and knowledge of the institution. Envisioning the future of GZU was guided in the questionnaire by broad themes derived from the document analysis of the main guiding frameworks stipulated in the previous section. This flexible approach eliminated the constraints of pre-categorised answers where participants discussed future uncertain scenarios. A futurist thinking scenario planning approach was employed to guide participants on the possible futures in their area of expertise. The targeted participants of the research included members of the School Planning Committees constituted in each school, or academic directorate. These were led by an Executive Dean or Director. These members were deemed to be the best participants since they were currently at the centre of strategic planning for their respective schools and in the future. The purposive sampling technique used in the study got 20 respondents from across the nine schools and academic directorates. The 20 participants were from diverse backgrounds and were thus deemed sufficient to reach the point of saturation in the responses. The collected qualitative data were analysed using qualitative techniques such as fine grain analysis, descriptions and word clouds.

Findings

Envisioned Transformative Changes

The Great Zimbabwe University will continually evolve to consolidate its place as a centre of excellence in the training and nurturing of future industry-ready graduates equipped with world-class scientific knowledge. This can only be achieved if the institution becomes more dynamic

and is responsive to the needs of the national, regional and global economies. The university's research direction should increasingly be aligned with national priorities, such as industrialisation, innovation, governance, and inclusive growth. This is needed for alignment will also inform our curriculum and innovations. The institution will take a leading role in shaping change rather than merely being responsive and receptive of technological changes diffusing from other countries. GZU vision is anchored on embracing interdisciplinary innovation and programming, micro-credentials and flexible lifelong-learning. Some of the key transformative changes that the university envisions include:

- Digital transformation and business technology, that includes business analytics and data science, Artificial Intelligence in business, fintech and digital finance, E-commerce and digital marketing, block-chain and crypto-economics, cyber-security for business;
- Sustainability, environmental, and social governance covering areas such as sustainable business strategy, green finance and investment, ESG reporting and impact measurement and corporate social responsibility;
- Entrepreneurship and innovation: This will cover areas such as startup management and venture capital, innovative strategy, social entrepreneurship, and business model innovation, and
- Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI), coding robotics, earth observation technologies and big data analytics as effective aids in the acquisition of scientific knowledge.

GZU School of Medical and Health Sciences' key future plans include plans to revamp clinical services in the direction of providing up-to-date services currently not available in Masvingo Province. The school envisions scaling-up futuristic services such as organ matching for organ transplantation, cardiac catheterisation for angioplasty and Artificial Intelligence in areas such as individualised patient care and robotic surgery. Curriculum advancements in the school will be enhanced to include focus on authentication of putative functions of herbal extracts and purification of the active ingredients for industrialisation and commercialisation.

GZU Innovation Hub envisions increasing outputs in the following areas:

- Integration of Emerging Technologies
- Focus on Sustainability and Social Impact
- Enhanced Academic Programming
- Data-Driven Decision Making
- Innovation Ecosystem Development
- Expanded Partnerships, which involve the increased collaboration between disciplines such as engineering, humanities, and social sciences to solve complex global challenges.
- Co-creation Spaces: Development of physical and virtual spaces for collaborative projects, fostering innovation across fields.
- A growing recognition of innovation's role in addressing societal challenges which will involve tapping into transformative innovation from Intellectual Property Databases
- Upscaling IP and entrepreneurship education programmes for each of the University's faculties and the community.

Figure 3 below summaries the transformative changes envisioned by research participants in this study. At the top of the pack is the realisation that the university needed to be artificial-intelligence-ready and compatible for it to remain relevant in the fast changing world. Other key findings included the need for digital transformation as it was no longer optional but a strategic imperative in order to provide graduates with the relevant skills for industry and the public sector.



Figure 3: Envisioned Transformative Changes.

Positioning the University within National and International Networks

Participants observed the need for the university to expand its partnerships to facilitate diffusion of innovations, research and development. The partnerships need to have a thrust towards solving community challenges, skills training, exchange programmes and industrialisation. Participants observed the need to strengthen strategic partnerships with industry leaders, public sector agencies, non-profit organisations, and international institutions. The university also needs to strengthen its community footprint by expanding its Work Related Learning (WRL) framework and community engagement models to ensure that students and staff co-create solutions to challenges together with the affected societies.

Additionally, the university will actively seek opportunities through research consortia, staff and student exchange programmes, funded collaborative projects, and innovation hubs. These networks will facilitate access to grants, internships, applied research platforms, and entrepreneurship incubators, enhancing our relevance to society, visibility, and impact nationally and beyond. The university will also continue to encourage staff to have their contact visits and

sabbatical leave with corporate entities in order to help bridge the gap between academia and industry.

Figure 4 below shows the envisioned pathways to creating national and international networks for the university. The most important identified factor was improving alliances with industry, which would cement partnerships with leading companies in relevant sectors to facilitate research collaboration, internships, and job placements for students. There was also an observed need to engage in collaborations with other universities and research institutions nationally and globally to share knowledge, resources, and best practices. The Research and Innovation Hub at the university needs to create innovation clusters. These would bring together academia, industry, and government to tackle specific challenges such as climate change or public health. GZU's Innovation Hub needs to be a Technology Innovation Support Centre (TISC) in collaboration with Zimbabwe Intellectual Property Organisation (ZIPO) and World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). This will make it an IP management centre facilitating all national, regional and international IP processes. The University also needs to be scaling up its collaboration with various stakeholders in grant proposal writing so as to develop novel and innovative solutions to many problems that our society faces. It is also expected that the University increases its subscription to donor platforms so as to be well informed about grant funding.



Figure 4: Pathways to Creating National and International Networks

Role of Technology and Digital Infrastructure

Technology will continue to be a cornerstone of the University's transformation and the means with which it attains its aspirations. Supported by technology, GZU will continue to provide a blended and flexible learning environment, supported by robust learning management systems.

For all GZU schools, digital transformation is no longer an option but a strategic imperative. GZU's Hebert Chitepo Law School views digital infrastructure as the architecture upon which modern education should be built. Digital integration is more than just a technological upgrade but also the launch pad for reimagining how knowledge is created, accessed and applied. For the Medical School, digital and technological advancement are key to the advancement of the School's focus, both clinically and in biomedical-engineering pursuits. The learning is and will continue to focus on practicalities of phytochemical options and pharmacognosy for medicinal products extraction.

The University is developing AI assisted instructional tools. These tools will enhance continuous learning and increase enrolment due to increased accessibility and investment in these technologies. This will have a long-term run cost reduction impact and improve the University's service delivery. Digital technologies will foster data analytics capabilities, provide collaborative platforms that support interdisciplinary, and data-driven inquiry. Through digitising the university operations, and integrating digital research tools, the institution will build a more agile, inclusive, and innovative academic ecosystem. Upscaling the adoption of new technologies and digital infrastructure will enliven lectures; enhance students' in-class presentations, which may ensure the production of technologically savvy graduates for the twenty-first century and beyond. These tools shall enable the upgrading of GZU's teaching laboratories to become modern theatres for commercial mineral, soil and water characterisation and analyses.

From the point of view of the University's Innovation Hub staff, improved technologies and digital infrastructure will assist in the collaboration and networking of researchers and innovators in the use of:

- Virtual Collaboration Tools: Platforms that facilitate remote collaboration between researchers, industry partners, and students, breaking down geographical barriers.
- Global Research Networks: Digital infrastructure that supports the formation of international research networks, enabling collaborative projects on a global scale.

For innovation and experimentation, improved technologies and digital infrastructure may assist in:

- Simulation and Modelling Software: Use of advanced simulation tools for prototyping and testing ideas in a virtual environment, accelerating the innovation process.
- Research Labs: Digital laboratories equipped with cutting-edge technology that allow for remote experimentation and real-time data collection.

Figure 5 below depicts the role of technology and digital infrastructure as envisioned by the participants. Provision of smart classrooms, blended learning, enabling of real-time assessments and the development of digital literacy and learning management systems stood out from the responses given.



Figure 5: Role of Technology and Digital Infrastructure

Embedding Sustainability, Equity, and Inclusion

As GZU develops and grows, it continues to subscribe to the need for inclusive access to education, ensuring that gender equity, disability inclusion and socio-economic diversity are respected. The University will continue to promote inclusive teaching and learning by ensuring access to academic resources and digital platforms for students with disabilities and those from marginalised backgrounds**.** All our learning facilities will ensure accessibility by students with disabilities. All the University's academic units need to incrementally include students in research and grants writing, work for fees programmes and scholarship funds in order to improve their financial position. There is need to deliberately target those students from humble backgrounds in the strategies.

In terms of embedding sustainability, the University will have to integrate sustainability, equity, and inclusion into its mission statement, and ensure that these values guide all activities and decisions. There is also need to establish specific, measurable goals related to environmental sustainability and social equity, aligned with the university's strategic vision. The university endeavors to ensure diverse leadership by ensuring that the filling of key management posts reflects diverse backgrounds and perspectives and promotes equitable decision-making. The University has to have a committee which advises on sustainability and social equity. This implies that GZU has to be more efficient and equitable in resource allocation. The University has to ensure that resources and opportunities are distributed fairly, prioritising underrepresented groups. GZU's grant application proposals will continue to be hinged on enhancing sustainability, equity and inclusion. Without incorporating these elements, it becomes difficult to get donor funding.

What Leadership Development Strategies

GZU is fostering a culture of intentional leadership development by institutionalising mentorship programmes, peer-learning platforms, and leadership academies for both academic and administrative staff. Special emphasis will be placed on early career support, research capacity development, and pedagogical innovation. Cross pollination of ideas will be fostered through increased school/ department based organised exchange visits, seminars, conferences, boot camps and training programmes. Inviting experts from industry, successful innovators, esteemed motivational speakers could induce positive energy in our staff and students. Specific examples from the Medical School shows that the School has embarked on an aggressive staff development programme where on average more than fifteeen (15) staff members under the age of thirty (30) have been recruited in diverse areas of specialisation such as biomedical sciences and clinical areas. These young academics shall be the anchor for the sustainability of the future training programmes in the school's clinical research areas as well as innovation and commercialisation.

Mentorship programmes in the university must include structured mentorship, which establishes formal mentorship programmes pairing experienced staff with emerging scholars to provide guidance on academic and professional development. Peer to peer mentoring is also encouraged where junior scholars can support each other, share experiences, and collaborate on projects. There is also the need for succession planning where clear pathways for advancement within the university are well-defined, outlining the skills and experiences required for various leadership roles. There is also need for talent identification where high-potential individuals are identified for leadership development opportunities, ensuring a diverse pool of candidates for future roles.

Conclusion

As the Great Zimbabwe University embarks on its journey as the *University of Choice*, its vision is informed by both national and international frameworks including Vision 2030, Sustainable Development Goals and the Africa Agenda 2063. The Great Zimbabwe University as a futuristic university will make sure that its graduates continue to have significant impact on the current socio-economic development of the country and in the future. For the University to continue realising its vision, it has to prioritise digital transformation, be Artificial-Intelligence-ready and compatible. This will involve the provision of smart classrooms, enhance blended learning, and enable real-time assessments as well as the development of digital literacy and learning management systems. The curriculum at the University should be tailor made to satisfy the needs of industry and society, focus on trans-disciplinarity, and provide micro-credentials for lifelong learning. The university will also continue to subscribe to the needs for inclusive access to education, gender equity, disability inclusion and socio-economic diversity. Currently, the institution is fostering a culture of intentional leadership development across all departments through institutionalising mentorship programmes for the identified talent. The University also considers partnerships and collaboration with communities, industry, the public sector agencies, non-profit organisations, and international institutions as key to the achievement of the University's vision and futuristic ambitions. Improving alliances with industry will cement partnerships with leading organisations in relevant sectors in order to facilitate research collaboration, internships, and job placements for staff and students.

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CHAPTER 28
Rethinking the Future of Higher and Tertiary Education in Zimbabwe: A Normative and Institutional Framework for the Age of Intelligent Transformation

Nkosana Maphosa & Emerge Masiya

Abstract

This chapter examines the future of higher education in Zimbabwe and considers the broader changes occurring in Africa and across the world. Higher education is vital for development, but its existing policies and institutions are falling behind the challenges of digital systems, interdisciplinary knowledge and inclusive innovation. The key question is not whether Zimbabwe's universities can adjust but whether they can be changed into future-ready institutions, serving as public goods that can mastermind societal changes instead of just following them. While current models like Education 5.0 and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa offer valuable guidance; their impact can be constrained by challenges related to implementation, financial instability and institutional adaptability. In this context, the chapter proposes a "Triadic Futures Framework," based on three interconnected pillars: a new understanding of educational purpose and knowledge ownership; the ability of institutions to adapt in governance, financing and connections with society and leadership for transition focused on ethical, intellectual and transformative guidance. The analysis uses a legal and normative approach, combining national, regional and international frameworks to provide a forward-looking plan for reform. In the end, the chapter asserts that authentic leadership, grounded in context and responsibility shape the future of African higher education.

Key words: Education futures, higher education reform, institutional leadership, knowledge sovereignty, policy innovation

Introduction

African universities are envisioned to move beyond merely following global models or reacting to government policies (Crow & Dabars, 2025; Rachmad, 2025; Benoit, 2025). They will become key places for shaping the continent's future (Arnould *et al*, 2025), which will be technologically advanced, knowledge-driven, fair and profoundly human (Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024, African Union (AU) Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030), Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want). To achieve this vision, the continent's higher education institutions must rethink their roles, structures, purposes and leadership (Hassan *et al*, 2025; Zlotnikova & Hlomani, 2025; Khan, 2025). This chapter addresses that urgent need for change (Alqahtani & Wafula, 2025). Universities are more than just teaching centres for Zimbabwe and the broader African context (Marevesa, 2025; National Development Strategy 1; Education 5.0). They are vital development institutions where the continent's future choices are made and growth opportunities can be opened or closed (Mutongoreni & Mbohwa, 2025; Sustainable Development Goal 4). In a world increasingly influenced by innovative technologies, environmental challenges, demographic changes and shifting global power, a critical question arises: what kind of university does Africa need to survive the 21st century and lead it? (Maimela & Mbonde, 2025). This chapter argues that the future of African higher education will not be shaped by technology alone or donor interests or government orders (Moremi, 2018; Brock-

Utne, 2003). Instead, it will rely on the vision, courage and creative thinking of leaders willing to transform universities into nimble public institutions that can foresee changes, redefine their purposes and guide knowledge systems toward inclusive growth (Msila, 2022). The key question is not whether Zimbabwe's universities can be ready for the future, but whether they can redefine themselves as essential institutions in a self-governing and intelligent Africa (Guvhu *et al*, 2025).

Consequently, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) is not just a footnote in Zimbabwe's higher education story but a key player in the Masvingo-Great Zimbabwe knowledge corridor (GZU Annual Report 2022; 2024). The current book project celebrates GZU's milestones and carefully shows how the institution could represent the future we ambitiously envision in this contribution. The University's closeness to the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site gives GZU a unique responsibility to turn heritage into living knowledge, jobs and leadership (Denman, 2005). This responsibility is not about nostalgia. It is practical and looking ahead. We believe GZU can transform cultural assets into modern value through language technologies, creative industries, sustainable tourism, farming innovations and community-based entrepreneurship. The reason is that a university earns the future when it turns place into purpose. Therefore, this chapter shifts the argument that national change needs specific institutions. GZU is one of those institutions.

Methodology

This study uses a focused desktop methodology for in-depth analysis and strategic thinking (Helms, 2018). The methodology draws insights from a variety of documents, including policy instruments, strategic plans, academic literature and continental agreements from Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 framework to the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024) and the UNESCO Futures of Education Report (2021). A thoughtful and interpretive approach is used, particularly when analysing governance documents and regulatory frameworks (Walsham, G. (2006). By engaging with international, continental and national documents, including the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030), the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and various AU reform reports, this chapter positions Zimbabwe's universities not only within national development plans but also as key parts of a broader continental change effort. Using a desktop methodology in this chapter goes beyond simple description. It is a strategic and normative approach that allows for a critical analysis of current governance views and proposes a bold new institutional framework called the "Triadic Futures Framework". This original concept combines the need for norm changes, institutional flexibility and transformative leadership. Through this lens, the chapter examines the policies, regulations and knowledge infrastructures required to make Zimbabwe's higher education sector a global model.

Disruptions and Megatrends

By 2075, Africa's population will exceed 3.5 billion, with 67% working age (ISS, 2025). This presents both an opportunity and a pressure on higher education (Yeganeh et al., 2025). Universities must rise beyond colonial legacies to become centres of empowerment (Adan et al., 2025; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Furthermore, AI, quantum computing and bio-digital convergence reshape knowledge (Abdelgaber & Nikolopoulos, 2020). Thus, universities must not remain consumers but become ethical co-creators of technology (Bekele et al., 2023; Dlamini & Ndzinisa, 2025). Moreover, Southern Africa faces severe droughts and water stress (Verma et al., 2025). Hence, universities must pioneer climate resilience and carbon-neutral campuses.

Additionally, global knowledge flows remain arguably colonial, with the North producing and the South consuming (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Consequently, the future universities must reclaim epistemic sovereignty (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025). Finally, digital acceleration risks existential alienation (Kellner, 2006). Resultantly, universities must remain sanctuaries for wisdom and belonging.

The Triadic Futures Framework

Importantly, universities must reclaim their role as public goods, advance knowledge sovereignty and embed African philosophies and languages (Moscardini et al., 2022; Marevesa, 2025). Essentially, rigid bureaucracies are obsolete. Therefore, agile institutions of the future should embrace interdisciplinarity, flexible financing, and community co-creation (Menon & Suresh, 2020; Ul Hassan et al., 2025). Future-ready universities require visionary leaders, ethical, courageous, and imaginative, who are capable of guiding institutions through crises and mentoring the next generation of leaders (Sabwami, 2025; Mbembe, 2021).

Strategic Imperatives

Curricula must combine *Ubuntu* ethics, AI fluency, and sustainability. GZU can pioneer suitable innovation pathways. Challenge-based ecosystems must replace disciplinary silos, with impact judged by policy and practice conversion (Mutongoza, 2025). Universities need diversified and ethical financing: innovation trusts, diaspora endowments, and open-knowledge monetisation (Ul Hassan et al., 2025). Equity in access is non-negotiable. Zimbabwe must champion a Pan-African Digital Commons (Zlotnikova & Hlomani, 2025). True prestige will come from solving local problems and shaping global debates, not mimicking Northern universities (Crow & Dabars, 2025). A regulatory reset is needed to align performance with foresight and public purpose (Guvhu et al., 2025).

Projecting into the Future

The university of the future that leads Africa and earns global respect will not be the one with the tallest buildings or the highest rankings. It will redefine higher education regarding human dignity, planetary ethics, and knowledge sovereignty. The authors imagine such an institution which will be a university with the highest level of transformative leadership, knowledge justice, and institutional innovation. Importantly, five qualities will define the leading African university of 2075:

1. *Ubuntu* as ethos marked by relevance and dignity over replication (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).
2. Public intelligence platform which provides foresight and citizen science hubs (Luckin, 2025).
3. Sovereign AI on African languages and ethics shaping technology (Dlamini & Ndzinisa, 2025).
4. Campus as commons in the context of carbon-negative, civic, and accessible (Verma et al., 2025).
5. Governance as foresight, inclusive, transparent, and mission-driven (Kezar, 2023).

Nevertheless, the main criticism of visionary chapters like this is that they risk coming off as manifestos. To mitigate, we adopt a structured approach and substantiate our arguments through careful verification. Phase 1 (18 to 24 months) should be dedicated to finalising the mission compact; establishing initiatives such as the Public Interest Innovation Clinic; publishing the first Open Curriculum Packs; and conducting two local procurement pilots that prioritise student and community suppliers with strict ethics. Phase 2 (24 to 48 months) will involve launching the Living Archive; setting up the innovation and futures trust; modifying two municipal or provincial policies using ecosystem research outputs. Phase 3 (48 to 72 months) will expand the signature degree pathways; formalise the Knowledge Diplomacy Consortium; publish an annual "GZU Impact Ledger" with verified indicators on learning, research uptake, jobs, and ecological benefits. If progress stalls, we pause and make corrections. Vision without verification is just vanity. These are just examples and not exhaustive projects.

Conclusion

The African university stands at a turning point, not just for institutional change, but for broader potential. In a century marked by global crises, artificial intelligence, and shifting power dynamics, higher education cannot be limited to job training, degrees, or economic goals. It must become the centre of transformation, justice, and hope. In this new era, universities should not settle for just surviving but must become strategic spaces for reinvention, where futures are not predicted, but created. This chapter argues that to build universities capable of leading Africa in 2075, we must begin with a fundamental shift in purpose, structure, and leadership today. We must reject the leftover colonial mindset that views our institutions as copies of those in the North or as factories for economic growth. Instead, we should focus on independence, adaptability, and ethical vision, a Triadic Futures Framework that places education as a positive force for humanity and the planet. The African university of the future will be assessed not by the size of its financial resources or its ranking in global charts, but by its ability to produce truth in a world of manipulation, healing amid trauma, cooperation in times of division, and courage in moments of decline. It will be a haven for wisdom, a driver of innovation, and a supporter of the Africa we deserve. However, this future will not come about by chance. It requires bold leadership, not held back by bureaucratic delays or lured by status, but driven by a strong commitment to African futures. It needs Vice Chancellors who shape systems, Deans who create networks instead of maintaining divisions and public intellectuals who engage beyond academic journals. It needs you. Let it be said, 50 years from now, that when the world was on the brink of irreversible crisis, it was not the wealthiest nations or most prestigious institutions that led the way. Instead, a new vision emerged in the southern province of Masvingo, at a once young but determined university. Leaders arose who recognised that education is not about imitation, but about renewing the world. A university chose to teach what should be and what should be. The future demands leadership and GZU stands ready to provide it at such a critical moment.

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The story of the Great Zimbabwe University is a story of the expansion of higher education in Zimbabwe. For many years, Zimbabwe had only one higher institution of learning, the University of Zimbabwe, which was formed during the colonial period in 1955. It was not until 1991, over a decade after independence, that the National University of Science and Technology, a university with a strong focus on science and technology, was established in Bulawayo. NUST was formed at the behest of the Williams Commission, which recommended that, based on manpower requirements for economic growth and the rise in the number of well-qualified 'A' level school leavers, university expansion had become a necessity in the country. The university was closely tied to the University of Zimbabwe. The establishment of NUST put in motion events that would culminate in the birth of state universities in every province in the country.

In 1994, the then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Dr Stan Mudenge, set up the Chetsanga Commission, whose mandate was to identify educational institutions that offered diploma programmemes that could be converted and upgraded into degree-awarding universities. It is in this context that visions for the origins of the Chinhoyi University of Technology, Midlands State University and the Great Zimbabwe University were laid. The Chetsanga Commission developed a national blueprint for the expansion of higher education in Zimbabwe, which was anchored on the devolution of Teacher Training Colleges to degree-granting status. Through the commission, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Technology degree programmemes from the University of Zimbabwe were devolved to select Teachers' Colleges and Technical Colleges, with the thrust of them growing into fully-fledged universities in the future. The Chetsanga Commission identified Gweru Teachers College, Masvingo Teachers College and Chinhoyi Technical Teachers College. It is in this context that Great Zimbabwe University was born.

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