

*Full Length Research Paper*

# University lecturers' and students' views on mass education: A case study of Great Zimbabwe University

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**The study focused on university lecturers' and students' views on mass education at university level. The inquiry employed both a qualitative and quantitative research design in which twenty lecturers were purposively sampled and interviewed using semi-structured interview guides. A semi-structured questionnaire was also administered to fifty students. The investigation found that while some students and lecturers view mass education as a noble venture which augurs well for the country's socio-economic development, others view it as a negative venture which, among other demerits, lowers educational standards and is unsustainable due to failure to match such expansion with the requisite learning resources and space. The paper recommends that, in light of the fact that mass education per se is not a bad idea because it opens up opportunities for higher education to a large population, the Government should prioritise infrastructural development and resource provision at universities, so that quality is not compromised by quantity.**

**Key words:** Mass Education, Education For All (EFA), Infrastructural Development, Sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

This study, which sought the views of lecturers and students on mass education, was carried out at Great Zimbabwe (GZU) in 2011. The inquiry was both qualitative and quantitative in nature in that it employed a semi-structured interview guide for twenty lecturers and a semi-structured questionnaire for fifty students. The research was spurred by an interest to support ongoing government efforts to make education available to all people of Zimbabwe.

## Background of the study

When the government of Zimbabwe announced free education for all in September 1980, primary school enrolment soared from 819 568 to 2 251 319 within the first eight years of independence. Secondary school education also saw enrolment explosion as numbers rose from just 66 215 at independence (1980) to 604 652 in 1987 (Zvobgo, 1986). It can be argued that by providing mass education to almost all children of school-going age in Zimbabwe, a higher output of those who qualify for university intake is yielded (Zindi, 1998). The study's focus is on lecturers' and students' perceptions on mass education in Zimbabwe, using Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) as a case study. GZU is made up of lecturers and students from various parts of the country and of various backgrounds. It was felt that the results would be generalisable to all universities, lecturers and

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students in Zimbabwe.

Education is valuable to every human being. Education for all is an aspiration and desire to create a universal society of enlightened persons, persons with understanding, feelings and an attitude of co-operation, helpfulness, sharing and many other traits (Shulka,1996). Therefore, one of the aims of education is that human beings should attain a certain level of development where conflicts and wars that are due to differences in caste, creed, religion, language and nationality are replaced by human values and oneness of all persons (Shulka, 1996). Education leads to individual creativity and improved participation in social, economic, cultural and political life of the country. These can lead to more effective contributions to human development. Education is believed to be a natural pre-requisite for human development. Shulka also noted that in Nigeria, the Government strongly believes education is a strong tool with which a country's goals can be achieved (Igbinewaka and Adeyemi,2004). Personal and social benefits to derive from education are immense. Livelihood improves, and families are better nourished and become healthier. Education is valued and civic responsibility is enhanced.

It was because of the recognition of the value of education that the Government of Zimbabwe implemented several policies at independence and thereafter, to widen access to education, for example, free and compulsory primary education and expansion of secondary schools, especially in rural and resettlement areas. Enrolment at university level, was also expanded so as to produce critical professional skills for the nation. Following some of these policies, considerable achievements have been made as far as the expansion of secondary education is concerned. The number of secondary schools rose from 177 in 1979 to 730 in 1982 and higher enrolments were projected for the periods from 1991 to 2000 (Zvobgo,1996) as shown in [Table 1](#)

[Table 1](#) above reveals that between 1982 and 1991, Form1 enrolment was expected to rise from 95 000 to 415 000, Form 2 from 80 000 to 400 000, Form 3 from 26 000 to 411 000, Form 4 from 16 000 to 429 000, Form 5 from 5 000 to 10 000 and Form 6 from 2 000 to 10 000. Overall, an increase of 86% was expected from 1982 to 1991. Given this estimation, the implications of this expansionist policy would be wide, notably an unprecedented expansion of university education to provide for the tertiary educational needs of Form 6 graduates. All these well-intentioned expansions in education were not sufficiently met by corresponding increase in professional expertise, adequate infrastructure and teaching-learning resources. This investigation, therefore, aims at finding the merits and attendant problems of this expansionist approach to

education basing on Great Zimbabwe University lecturers' and students' views.

The introduction of free primary education and the removal of bottlenecks for entry into secondary education at independence in 1980 meant that there was increased pressure on higher education. The pressure on higher education increased as each year, 300 000 students from secondary schools entered the system. To alleviate this pressure, the university system had to expand from one to nine universities by the year 2000. The increase in the number of universities led to an overall increase in enrolment as shown in [Table 2](#)

Expansion of the university system in Zimbabwe was mainly in response to the ripple effects created by massive expansion of the primary and secondary education at independence in 1980. The Ministry of Higher Education and Technology (1997) notes that of the 825 210 students who completed 'O' Level and 'A' Level from 1991 to 1995, only 61 265 were able to enrol at available tertiary institutions under the Ministry. However, the number of 'O' and 'A' Level school-leavers continues to rise as reflected in [Table 3](#)

The number of candidates seeking university places far exceeded available places, even after all faculties had increased their intakes to near-capacity, particularly for the University of Zimbabwe. This, therefore, explains the need for more universities to accommodate more students. [Table 4](#) illustrates the pressure that faced the University of Zimbabwe in 1995.

Most of the applicants who were rejected (74%) would actually qualify to undertake university studies if granted places (Nherera, 2000). Faced with the increased demand for university places, in 1994, the Government of Zimbabwe set up The Chetsanga Commission of Inquiry to consider the possibility of devolving some of the degree programmes from the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) to teachers' training colleges which would increase the number of places for degree studies while at the same time relieving mounting pressure on the UZ. This was in line with the need to shift emphasis from quantitative expansion to the improvement of quality in education and training (Nherera, 2000). By providing more universities, the country would have higher level human resource base to spearhead its economic development. The Chetsanga Report (1995) recommended the devolution of some of the undergraduate courses from the UZ to these training colleges, resulting in massive numbers of students at state and private universities such as The National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Midlands State University (MSU), Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), Bindura University, Africa University, Solusi University, Catholic University, Lupane University and Bulawayo

**Table 1.** Projected secondary school enrolment (in 1000s).

Year	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4	Form 5	Form 6	Total
1982	95	80	26	16	5	2	224
1983	152	95	80	26	6	4	363
1984	167	152	95	80	7	6	507
1985	187	167	152	95	8	7	616
1986	228	187	167	152	9	8	751
1987	360	228	187	167	10	9	961
1988	429	360	228	187	10	10	1 224
1989	411	429	360	228	10	10	1 448
1990	400	411	429	360	10	10	1 620
1991	415	400	411	429	10	10	1 675

Source: C.E.O. Planning Paper, Ministry of Education (1981) in Chombo (2000)

**Table 2.** Summary of universities enrolment statistics 1980-98.

Year	U.Z	N.U.S.T	Solusi	Africa	Bindura	Total
1980	2240	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2240
1981	2525	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2525
1982	3091	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3091
1983	3620	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3620
1984	4131	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4131
1985	5162	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5162
1986	5843	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5843
1987	6722	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6722
1988	7385	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7385
1989	9073	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9073
1990	9017	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9017
1991	8635	256	256	N/A	N/A	8891
1992	8385	293	293	N/A	N/A	8678
1993	7231	534	534	64	N/A	7829
1994	7199	1119	1119	89	N/A	8858
1995	10606	1268	1268	99	N/A	12 442
1996	11 378	1 359	1 359	396	125	13 795
1997	11 203	1359	1359	396	176	13 664
1998	9 582	2 129	2 127	927	364	13 779

NB: N/A shows that the particular university was not yet in existence, hence could not enrol. SOURCE:Chombo (2000).

College of Health Sciences. The expansion was mainly a response to the pressure by the secondary school system whose output had reached maximum capacity. However, as stated before, the enrolment figures have remained high. The study, therefore, wishes to investigate the perception of students and lecturers on mass education at tertiary level particularly at Great Zimbabwe University's (GZU) faculties of Commerce, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Art and Education. Mass education is bound to have its merits and demerits.

The most pertinent question that could be asked is, is mass education sustainable?

### Objectives

The study sought to:

- (a) Establish the views of lecturers and students on mass education at university level;

**Table 3.** Projected 'O' and 'A' Level graduates 1996-2000.

Year	'O' Level	'A' Level	Total
1996	137 612	10 293	147 905
1997	153 289	9 809	163 098
1998	157 070	9 507	166 577
1999	160 802	10 590	171 392
2000	164 624	10 853	175 477
TOTAL	773 397	51 052	824 449

Source: Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (1996) in Chombo (2000).

**Table 4.** Undergraduate applicants to the University of Zimbabwe in 1995.

Undergraduate	Male	Female	Total	%
Applicants	6 825	2 928	9 573	100
Accepted	1 741	799	2 538	26
Rejected	5 084	2 131	7 215	74

Source: Ministry of Higher Education and Technology (1997) in Chombo (2000).

- (b) find the reasons for the lecturers' and students' views on mass education at university level;
- (c) assess to what extent mass education is sustainable at university level in Zimbabwe.
- (d) proffer suggestions on the way forward regarding mass education in Zimbabwe.

## Literature review

Since the resurgence of the human capital theory, several studies have revealed that investment in education is both profitable to the individual who undertakes to invest in himself and the society as a whole (Ulemo and Ubengu,1990).Education is, therefore, a major factor in national building, in consolidating national independence and sovereignty, in generating and fostering the cultural identity of people and promoting social and economic progress. Education, particularly in developing countries, must help the people to better understand their conditions and enable them to take action necessary to improve these conditions (Amadou,1986). Mugabe (1986) believes that no society can exist without a relevant educational system. Education, the process of preparing individuals to meet the requirements of their existence as members of functioning communities, is the responsibility of all societies. Bloom et al. in Katecha (2008) argue that higher education can produce both public and private

benefits. In particular, Bloom, et al note that higher education has a key role to play in enhancing economic development through technological catch-up. These views in the human capital literature have given rise to an increase in investment in the educational sectors for most countries, especially in developing countries.

In Zimbabwe, where the number of primary schools has increased from less than 2 500 at independence in 1980 to 4 500 in 1990 ( Chikombah, Mupawaenda and Mlambo, in Chikombah, 1999), the availability of physical facilities such as teachers' houses, classrooms, classroom furniture is very important, particularly in rural schools. The above educational growth has seen further growth in secondary school and university enrolments. The focus of this study is on university education, which contributes high level manpower and knowledge through research, as well as skills in science, technology and resource management to the national economy.Chikombah (1999) believes that in most countries of the world, the economy depends more on university and higher education for the production of skilled human resources to propel development and modernise industry. Consequently, in the last three decades, demand for higher education has risen as demand for high level manpower on the job market has increased. For the government of Zimbabwe, the increase in the number of secondary school leavers and the demands of the economy to respond with relevant and appropriate technologies led to the development of universities such as The National University of Science and Technology(NUST), Bindura University of Science, Midlands State University, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Africa University and the Great Zimbabwe University (Chombo,2000). However, it seems these universities were not enough, as mass education proliferates at all these institutions.

Although sustainable development requires high levels of literacy and numeracy, the rate of educational expansion has several implications for education and national development (SADC, in Katecha, 2008). Governments are increasingly seeking to foster economic and social development by, among other strategies, improving education levels and increasing knowledge production. Since higher education institutions are in the business of knowledge production, the sector has major contributions to make to national, regional and international economic development (Maasen and Cleote, 2002; Machin and McNally, 2007; Oced, 2007a, 2007b in Katecha, 2008). For example, the World Bank has developed a knowledge economy framework. It argues for sustained investments in education (at all

levels, but particularly tertiary education), innovation, information and communication technologies and economic and institutional environments conducive to an

increase in the use and creation of knowledge needed to drive economic production, and ultimately growth (Chen and Dalman in Katecha, 2008). Thus, in the context of a global knowledge economy, the role of education is increasingly attracting attention and being accorded more and more responsibility to support economic development.

Education suffered considerable strain with regard to financial and human resources in terms of size and provisions to be made to employ future graduates who leave school each year (Zvobgo,1986). Expansion has seen an increase in the education vote to cover salaries, per-capita grants, cost of stationery, library books, consumable materials for science and other subjects .Studies by Zindi (1988) found that by expanding the education system you resolve disharmony among ethnic groups, politicians, scholars and the clergy because each group has the freedom to build its own university. If a country has more trained teachers, doctors, qualified engineers, accountants, agriculturists, greater returns can be achieved. Mushoriwa (1988) believes that because of huge costs, plans and strategies should be adopted to ensure a positive return for the state by generating essential manpower and promoting national development. Besides, a more informed and knowledgeable population would be created. Providing equal access to education and improved facilities is a moral, social and political obligation which government has to fulfil (Mushoriwa, 1988). Apart from these benefits, there is considerable saving of forex on those pursuing university education outside Zimbabwe. According to Mugabe (1983), the Government of Zimbabwe was spending over \$163 million every year, paid to foreign institutions such as University of South Africa (UNISA) by Zimbabwean students who found it difficult to enrol at local universities. In addition to this problem, the chances of those who go abroad coming and working in Zimbabwe are diminished as they complete their studies. The problem of brain drain has been often associated with overseas training, particularly when the duration of training or study is long (Mabiya-Nkomo, Ishumi and Wells, 1992, in Zindi, 1998). It is, therefore, argued that locally-trained students will most likely seek employment locally on completion of their studies. From an economic perspective, it is argued that expansion of universities compels administrators to utilise facilities and human resources that are available more efficiently. Given the cost recovery measures, more students mean more tuition fees will be collected for the benefit of lecturing staff and non-academic staff.

University education is heavily subsidised by Government, (including students in private universities) through grants and loans to pay for their studies. It is, thus, argued that University education takes a lot of

money from the tax payer and that university education should only be a privilege for those who can afford to pay for it. Another argument against mass education is that standards will be lowered and that the quality of graduates will be compromised. As more students are enrolled, the criteria for selection is lowered, faculties find it difficult to make a proper screening of students. Because of large numbers, marking of assignments becomes an almost impossible task. Examination results may consequently become unreliable while staff find it difficult to cope with large numbers (Zindi, 1998). Mass produced graduates are often ill-prepared to make any significant contribution to the fast changing economic and technological aspects of Zimbabwe's industry. For example, most graduates leave university before they have acquired any knowledge on how to use a computer or how to access internet and e-mail due to shortages caused by economic constraints (Zindi,1998).Knowledge has become one key 'driver' of productivity and economic growth, therefore, there is greater emphasis on the role of information and technology in economic performance (Kapor and Crowley cited in Katecha, 2008). Pasi (1994) found that poor funding of higher education has also seriously affected the provision of teaching equipment and materials. Scarcity of foreign currency meant that Government has not been able to allow for all necessary equipment and books to be bought from outside the country and this crisis has been worsened by the fact that donor agencies now consider economic aid to Africa as wasted effort. At Makerere University, the inadequate allocation of resources has been singled out as being the reason for critical shortages of teaching material, spare parts, chemicals, library resources, workshop and office equipment, yet these are essential for the effective operation of the university (Kajubi,1990;Pasi,1989; Tiboramba,1989). Pasi (1994) further observes that over the years, university resources for students have declined mainly because of the decline of the economy and because of the substantial increase in enrolment to meet the social demand for higher education and manpower needs of the economy. University education in Uganda is going through a crisis of resources manifesting in lack of textbooks, library and teaching materials, rundown teaching rooms and laboratories, overcrowded student residence and poor material conditions for students, low wages and inadequate benefits for teachers and staff, all indications of under funding of the University (Pasi,1994). Zindi (1998) observes that many universities already operate with a shortage of staff, which in itself creates a problem for expansion as staff are compelled to take on extra students for no extra compensation. This often results in low morale, lack of motivation and minimised ability to conduct any research on the part of staff.Thus, this study sought to investigate the views of university

lecturers and students on mass education, an important issue of sustainable development, vis-à-vis the related literature.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Population and sample**

The targeted population for this study was all lecturers and students at Great Zimbabwe University. Since these came from different parts of the country, the results from the case study were considered to be generalisable to the views of students and lecturers at all other universities in Zimbabwe. Twenty lecturers (four from each of the four faculties of Arts, Education, Commerce, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences) and fifty students (ten from each of the five faculties named above) were purposively sampled. The idea was to have lecturers and students from all programmes offered represented in the sample. It was felt that four lecturers per faculty could provide a fair sample, given the small size of the university.

### **Data collection procedure**

In tandem with the flexible nature of qualitative research, in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide were used. Twenty lecturers were interviewed and their views were audio-taped. Where necessary, follow-up questions were asked, for clarification.

A semi-structured questionnaire was also administered to fifty (50) students. The questionnaire was semi-structured so as to allow the students to air their views without being unduly fettered. The end of the questionnaire allowed students to say anything else they felt needed to be said which may not have been covered in the semi-structured questionnaire.

### **Data analysis**

The data from both the interviews and the questionnaire were analysed qualitatively by categorising them into emerging themes for presentation and discussion.

### **Findings**

This study, which explored qualitative dimensions (an emergent and involving paradigm) has yielded quite conflicting results which have reinforced the idea that large class instruction – mass education – is a complicated process that is affected by numerous instructional and administrative dimensions. An important aspect of understanding these dimensions resides in a consideration of students' and lecturers' perspectives. This section of the research study summarises the major dimensions of students' and lecturers' perceptions of the sustainability of mass education in a developing country like Zimbabwe.

### **Findings from questionnaire for students**

The research has found it prudent to begin by analysing the positive perceptions. Forty-five students (90%) found mass education a worthwhile government endeavour which opens doors to everyone who meets the minimum university requirements (at least 2 points in at least 2 'A' Level subjects or professionals who have attained at least 35 years of age) regardless of race, class or gender. These students also hailed the mushrooming of "parallel" and "block release" programmes at state universities in Zimbabwe, for they promoted "diversity" of study in various fields of education, medicine, health, industry, commerce, arts and humanities. Some common responses were:

"it (mass education) improves the general literacy levels of the wider population in a country, which has positive implications on economic development;"

"mass education caters for the vulnerable and the marginalised members of the society. Consider the number of potential students affected by HIV/AIDS scourge."

The respondents saw mass education as providing more skilled manpower to boost the economic activities of Zimbabwe, a developing country hit by serious brain drain to the Diaspora. They said it led to "less dependence on costly expatriate labour ." They also observed that those who were not fortunate enough to be absorbed in the formal employment sector would find some informal trade to engage in through their acquired ingenuity- only possible with an enlightened individual with requisite skills.

Respondents also hinted at the opportunity provided by mass education policy for individuals to " advance themselves while on full-time employment in order to meet the qualification challenges that arise in most employment situations, e.g promotion purposes or competition from young school leavers equipped with the latest technological skills." Thus, mass education in Zimbabwe is seen as providing education for self-motivation and skills and knowledge for self-employment and entrepreneurship in a country with high unemployment levels.

It was also noted that besides mass education's numerical advantage and its enrolment of the vulnerable and marginalised, it brings with it personnel diversity in various fields because universities compete to attract students by providing a wide range of relevant programmes in this contemporary world of technology. One means to survive in such a highly competitive environment is to offer a unique and diversified consortium of programmes in Education, Engineering, Social Sciences, Commerce, Natural Sciences, Medicine and others. Respondents think graduates would be

equipped with skills to solve the various socio-economic challenges faced by the country. However, the same respondents were not blind to the numerous challenges presented by such a scenario in developing countries like Zimbabwe. One interviewee observed that while mass education formulates, "a nation of graduates and opens wider opportunities for them since they may get scholarships (the government cadetship scheme) to pursue bachelors' degrees, it is not complemented by developments in industry and commerce that would ensure that a sizeable percentage of graduates is absorbed, on completion of university education."

The five respondents (10%) who were generally critical of mass education raised a number of interesting points. One problem associated with mass education the respondents noted was that the workload for lecturers becomes so high that they may not be able to fully assist students to ensure quality graduates. They also cited limited learning and accommodation space for students. They added that these challenges were further compounded by the unavailability of time for tutorials. As a result, they said, students become passive learners since the lecturer-student ratio is very high. One wrote, "Imagine a class of 150 students for faculty-wide courses like Communication Studies, Research Methods and Statistics and Information and Communication Technology and a computer lab with only fifty computers catering for more than 1500 students!" Noise and distractions were also cited as major hindrances. The students lamented that their learning was hindered by the inevitable noise and movements associated with large classes engendered by mass education.

Another respondent observed, "There will be high unemployment for graduates due to limited job opportunities in a developing country like Zimbabwe. The unemployed would engage in high profile crime and other vices like drug trafficking for survival."

### **Findings from interviews with lecturers**

The twenty (20) lecturers interviewed, like the students, also had conflicting perceptions on mass education. They also echoed students' perceptions and provided added dimensions to these. There was consensus by the lecturers that mass education was necessary on humanitarian grounds since it creates opportunities for all, including the "marginalised", the vulnerable and the orphaned (particularly through HIV/AIDS) This is echoed by Zvobgo (1986) who alludes to the bottleneck education system of colonial Rhodesia). The lecturers agreed that as more people are enrolled, "regardless of race, class or gender" chances are given to those with the minimum entry requirements. Another

observation by an interviewee was that " Even those already at work would have the opportunity to advance themselves academically and professionally through 'block release' programmes, thereby increasing the national human resource base." Such is the empowerment which may help eradicate poverty, by producing educated people who are better equipped to deal with it through enhanced employment opportunities and entrepreneurial skills.

Fourteen lecturers (70%) also said that mass education has "positive implications on employment, for more people are employed as 'A' level teachers, lecturers, administrators, secretaries and other support staff - even the not-so-educated as groundsman and cleaners!" Even where unemployment is rife, they said, a country may export its skilled labour to its advantage, for instance, Zimbabwean teachers, doctors and nurses working in South Africa and the Diaspora.

These lecturers also argue for the moral health of an educated nation, summed up by one who said, " An enlightened population is not difficult to govern and control. Because of high literacy and numeracy levels, government programmes can be sold to a more receptive population which would make informed decisions to participate in them, hence societal challenges are addressed relatively amicably." They cited participation in the cholera campaign in 2008 and the current constitution-making processes (2011) as examples of such programmes.

From the above findings, it is clear that lecturers found mass education a desirable government policy. However, the question of sustainability courted very interesting responses. All the twenty lecturers decried infrastructural challenges given the astronomical lecturer-student ratios (at GZU, for example, a Communication Studies lecturer teaches a class in excess of 200 students) and works longer hours because of the many courses to be offered. Individual tutoring has become poor or untenable, hence compromising quality education since limited interaction between lecturer and individual students prevents rapport between them, and learning becomes unsustainable, with serious implications on tuition. The lack of personal touch between lecturer and student in a large class was also cited, a situation where less able students fail to cope. They expressed fear that the quality of tuition is compromised and "half-backed" graduates are produced who would not stand the stiff competition on the job market, locally and internationally. Worse still, some students even fail to get places for attachment programmes since the industry is not that robust.

One interviewee said, "More students would, naturally, need more resources, lecturers and more and bigger lecture rooms. Unfortunately, this may not be feasible in

Zimbabwe since infrastructure development has not matched enrolment at universities.”

All lecturers agreed that universities in Zimbabwe are “poorly equipped” and resources are thus strained. They cited GZU where there is serious congestion since there are many students from Masvingo Teachers’ College (conventional teacher trainees and those on bridging courses (supplementing ‘O’ level, mainly Maths, English and Science) and the thousands from the university, sharing the same facilities initially built for primary teacher training programmes. As a result, lecturers said, most students would fail to access relevant books and internet services such as e-learning and consequently produce substandard assignments. This point is echoed by Zindi (1998) who bemoans the fact that most university graduates in Zimbabwe are computer illiterate. Most students are unable to pay for private internet services. The lecturers said some students perform dismally in the examination, which impacts negatively on the quality of the product (graduate) at the end of the respective programmes. Such a scenario could be worsened by the fact that the call for mass education has led to the lowering of entry points and, consequently, lowering of standards where the grading system is largely a case of bargaining or negotiated settlement.

The lecturers also alluded to serious challenges with regards to student accommodation. They expressed concern that such problems could drive the economically underprivileged to engage in all sorts of vices, for example prostitution. This impacts negatively on students in this era of HIV/AIDS.

They also agreed with students that the resultant mismatch between manpower development and job creation causes flooding on the job market. Such a scenario leads to high unemployment. And in the words of one interviewee, “The more skilled unemployed youths a country may have, the higher their chances of engaging in highly sophisticated crime.” They cited the spate of armed bank robberies (rampant in Zimbabwe today), and embezzlements in financial institutions which led to banks being put under curatorship by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe in 2008. One respondent had this to say, “high unemployment is a bitter recipe for unrest in most countries and Zimbabwe is no exception.”

## **Discussion**

From the foregoing, it has emerged that there are mixed and conflicting perceptions about the sustainability of mass education in a developing country such as Zimbabwe. Both lecturers and students have realised the value of mass education, most evident in its liberalisation of higher education, creating opportunities for all, catering

for linguistic and cultural diversity and for learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of those in support of massification of education in Zimbabwe have stressed that Zimbabwean tertiary institutions, universities in particular, have been able to offer high quality programmes and produced well-sought-after graduates using minimum infrastructure and stretched human resources. Respondents’ views have buttressed the general notion that graduates from Zimbabwe’s various training institutions are envied worldwide, are on high demand on the global job market and have proved their mettle. Locally, mass education has been perceived as providing more skilled manpower to boost the economic activities of Zimbabwe’s fledgling economy, hit by serious brain drain to the Diaspora. Respondents note that mass education addresses the problem of dependence on costly expatriate labour, for instance, health and education personnel from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cuba. Speaking on the importance of education in national development in Sub-Saharan Africa, Bamgbose (1991:7) observed that, “literacy liberates untapped human potential and leads to increased productivity and living conditions” whereas illiteracy correlates highly with poverty. It can, therefore, be argued that mass education’s sustainability is positively linked to the improvement of the Zimbabwean economy. That high numbers of both lecturer interviewees and student respondents hailed the high recruitment drives of the tertiary institutions under their conventional programmes and also the recently introduced “parallel” and “block release” programmes indicates that the institutions are doing a commendable job. Interviewees noted the added value of “diversity” provided by such moves which opened opportunities for thousands of previously disadvantaged Zimbabweans to study in various fields, ranging from medicine, health, industry, commerce to education, humanities and arts. Such responses have been cognisant of the fact that while conventional programmes had catered for higher-scoring younger students, more and more qualifying students were being left out, especially those from remote rural areas, very low pointers, the physically challenged and the impoverished. As one interviewee has noted, mass education has been a timely intervention because, “mass education caters for the vulnerable and the marginalised members of the society” and has put on board “a number of potential students affected by the HIV/AIDS scourge.” New millennium research in India has also shown that mass education has improved opportunities for disadvantaged children, street and working children, women and youths, improving livelihood and environmental co-ordination and networking among the small players and initiatives through training and capacity building activities (<http://masseducation.com>).



In addition, respondents have acknowledged that mass education has accommodated the working population, who, because they could not secure study leave, were normally being left out. That is why interviewees support mass education as summed up in a statement by one interviewee: " Mass education creates opportunities for many people to learn and go to work at the same time and addresses the ever-changing demands for qualified personnel in industry and commerce, health, education and the arts." However, while such responses show excitement at availed opportunities for access by all and diversity of programmes, they ignore the question of sustainability from the point of view of the overloaded lecturer. They also tend to gloss over the limited individual student-lecturer exchange time which apparently bears on the quality of the graduate produced.

The socio-economic benefits of mass education, to the country as a whole, have also been highlighted in the interviews. The social impact is that a large number of the population is exposed to education and they end up all participating in the overall development of the nation as teachers, technicians, lawyers, entrepreneurs and the like. Both lecturers and students have also stressed the edifying nature of education in general by noting that a well-educated populace has an improved social status and is easy to manage and delegate, especially in the promotion of governmental developmental projects, diffusion of innovations, health awareness campaigns or political administration and participation. This, therefore, means that it is in the interest of the state to promote mass education. However, there is need for the state institutions of higher education to improve the conditions under which this education is being provided to prevent compromising its efficacy and to guarantee its sustainability in a world where more and more universities are emerging and the world is turning into a technological village.

The economic sphere has proven the need to appreciate and support mass education for economic sustainability. Respondents are of the view that an abundance of people with high literacy, numeracy, technological and cognitive skills is a good breeding ground for positive competition in the various sectors of Zimbabwe's economy, be it education, industry or commerce which in turn improves the quality of service delivery in those sectors. This idea of a healthy competition can also spill into institutions of higher learning whereby institutions compete to provide relevant programmes and produce highly skilled graduates. The link between mass education and development has been recognised in rapid manpower development which a country can export to needy countries the world over, thereby gaining "foreign currency", investment opportunities in the exporting country and infrastructural

development. In that way, people previously incapacitated could build houses, support their families back home, drive better cars and partner in setting up businesses, hence partake in national development.

Although it is desirable and highly commendable as both a national goal and in pursuance of the global Millennium Development Goals, mass education should either be strictly controlled or heavily subsidised by government and the corporate world to enhance quality education through mobilisation of resources, both financial and human, and development of infrastructure. Apparently, in Zimbabwe today, recruitment of multitudes of students is not matched with infrastructural development, personnel recruitment and development and resource procurement such that institutions risk producing half-backed graduates, who, during the course of tuition, had very limited access to the library or internet, limited tutorial attention per student and some who might have faced challenges of securing attachment posts on time since the industry has shrunk in the hyper-inflationary environment of the 2007-2009 period. Both lecturers and students have bemoaned the pressure for physical and material resources needed for fruitful and gratifying teaching and learning where great numbers of students are involved. One summed their fears thus: "There is a scramble for the limited resources, especially accommodation, learning space, library books, internet points for research and hard-to-come-by attachment opportunities."

Not until resources are harnessed and channelled towards this noble cause would we realise the advantages of mass education to the fullest. It is, however, heartening to note that at Great Zimbabwe University, like at other universities, there has been some corporate assistance in and promotion of some of the university programmes. Though the students going on attachment have faced problems because of their large numbers, they have been well-received and commended in various commercial and service industries where they have been attached. In particular, institutions such as banks, municipal councils, government hospitals, Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA), Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) and non-governmental organisations such as CARE and ACTION FAIM have facilitated the induction of these attachees in order for them to gain job-related skills. It is only hoped institutions do not preoccupy themselves with quantitative rather than qualitative learning. Indications are also that, continued mass education will only flood the nation with unemployed or unemployable graduates some of whom might turn to sophisticated crime.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

From the above sentiments, it is clear that students and

lecturers view education as a human right which, in independent political establishments like Zimbabwe, should no longer be treated as a preserve of a few privileged individuals. Literacy and numeracy, both indices of development, should be prioritised since they are positive attributes of a meaningfully developing country.

While it has been observed that mass education gets rid of bottlenecks of colonial Rhodesia through opening opportunities to diverse members of the Zimbabwean community, the conditions under which it is conducted leave a lot to be desired. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents noted how students learn under cramped, unhealthy and underresourced conditions. As for the lecturers, participants noted that their schedules are always packed, the few lecturers trying to cover the syllabuses for several courses in the recommended 60 hours per course, per semester University requirement. It can be conjectured that under such conditions and also under the current semesterisation whereby students sit examinations in their various courses every semester, quality delivery is hardly sustainable. It is the researchers' wish that a nation benefits fully from its educational policies but it is also feared that if the nation delays in building and putting in place conducive infrastructure commensurate with modern education, relevant and adequate human personnel and conditions, it would not be long before Zimbabwe's touted quality education becomes a thing of the past.

It is, therefore, recommended that the responsible authorities (the government, and the financiers of private universities, and the corporate world) prioritise infrastructural development and resource provision at these institutions of higher learning to ensure quality tuition, and to maintain the existing university enrolment levels in order to produce graduates who remain competent and competitive regionally and internationally.

Though mass education at university level apparently gives many people access to higher education, the study recommends that it should, at the same time and from

time to time, be reviewed such that the numbers enrolled at a time are enough to ensure high quality service delivery. Therefore, higher education institutions should be encouraged to desist from recruiting students for financial benefits at the expense of producing quality graduates who are marketable and competitive on the job market.

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