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ILLUMINATING THE ACADEMIC AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF INADEQUATE BOARDING FACILITIES AMONGST STUDENTS IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

BY

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Abstract

This study investigated the socio-economic challenges arising from the acute shortage of accommodation at the University of Zambia. With analytical focus on un-accommodated students at the institution's Great East Road Campus, the study employed a mixed method approach to illuminate the implications of inadequate lodging facilities at UNZA and the resultant effects of such shortages on the academic and social wellbeing of the students. Snapshots of these realities are presented here and recommendations for their amelioration are also proposed.

1. Introduction

The University of Zambia (UNZA), the country's flagship institution, was established in 1966, by the University of Zambia Act of 1965 and officially commenced operations on July 12, 1966 (UNZA, 2012). The creation of the institution was inspired by the need to develop the higher-level human resources for the newly independent country. At the time the university was created it had only 312 students (Chipindi, 2009). This contrasts sharply with the size of the student body that has been witnessed at the institution in the latter years. For instance, with the ever-increasing demand for higher education coupled with rapid expansion of Zambia's youthful population, the student body at UNZA is, presently, estimated to number approximately 25,000 (UNZA, 2015). This escalation in the number of admitted students imposes strong demands on the institution's physical infrastructure such as lodging facilities, library space or lecture space. Chipindi (2009) for instance, reports that the biggest lecture theatre at the institution had a seating capacity of only 205 students. Mwelwa (2014) similarly reports that in 2014, the institution's bed space capacity was around 3,400. This has left a number of students admitted to public tertiary institutions without accommodation. As such students survive by squatting, which means sharing a bed space with a colleague, friend, relative or sibling who is fortunate enough to receive accommodation at admission or during the course of their studies, or by renting bed spaces both on and off campus. The socio-economic and academic implications of the acute shortage of accommodation at UNZA, for the un-accommodated students, have not been studied closely. Therefore, a gap exists in the body of knowledge on higher education in Zambia in this regard. Our study sought to fill in this gap, by attempting to illuminate the challenges that arise from this state of affairs. Accordingly, our study sought to: 1. Illuminate the covert and manifest implications of the inadequacy of boarding facilities for students at UNZA; 2. Explore students' socio-economic challenges arising from the insufficiency of boarding facilities; 3. Unravel the ways in which the accommodation shortfalls could affect the students' participation in academic activities; and 4. Propose measures that could be put in place at University of Zambia to overcome the accommodation challenge for

students. It is hoped that the findings of the study have brought out the seriousness of the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by UNZA students due to inadequate lodging facilities on campus. The study also makes suggestions towards the short and long term solutions to the accommodation problem at UNZA.

1. Methods

Using a mix methods approach, the study employed a survey design to explore the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by students who were not accommodated on campus at University of Zambia. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate as it is often concerned with the study of the conditions and relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, efforts that are evident or trends that are developing (Bryman, 2012). This design was thus more appropriate to collect data about the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by the students at UNZA due to insufficient boarding facilities from a larger sample at a short period of time. The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized to collect data from a purposively sample of 200 (n200) students from the University of Zambia. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS to generate statistical tables and charts, while qualitative data was analysed thematically.

2. Preliminary Findings

Analysis of the data revealed that expanded enrolments at UNZA occasioned negative social, financial and academic implications for both un-accommodated and accommodated full time students at the institution. Students were compelled to spend extra money to rent boarding houses near campus. Other students rented bed-spaces within campus at prices beyond the accommodation allowance given by the Bursaries Committee for one term.

The convert implications of the accommodation crisis, brought to light the gendered dimensions of the problem. For instance, there was comparatively stronger preference for on-campus *squatting* among male students than among their female counterparts. This opens up new questions about the pull and push factors that might account for this preference. We theorize that female students may be more comfortable in a lodging facility that guarantees their privacy and access to clean sanitary conditions, which conditions are compromised in crowded on-campus lodging facilities.

We found that the privacy and security of students and their property was compromised due to overcrowding both in campus-based hostels and the surrounding boarding houses. Some of the off-campus student-respondents indicated that they could not use the university library and other research facilities at night for safety reasons and got to lectures late due to prohibitive distances and traffic congestion and thus, not surprisingly, performed poorly academically. Owing to the aforementioned preference for off-campus housing among students, we aver that the acute shortage of accommodation does not affect the male and female students similarly.

Additionally, un-accommodated students bewail the compromises they have had to reluctantly make, which impinge on their academic pursuits. Some respondents indicated that they were forced to forfeit their participation critical co-curricular and other on-campus activities that were critical for their socializations into their various disciplinary and academic communities. Other respondents bemoaned the material and financial sacrifices they made, to make-up for the lack of accommodation. For instance, 84% of the respondents said they have had to divert money intended

for the purchase of books and reference materials towards the payment of exorbitant off-campus lodging fees. As the table below shows, the fees for off-campus lodging facilities ranged from Zambian Kwacha (ZMK) 3,600 and 5,400 (at approximately ZMW 10 to 1 US dollar) per academic year for males and 4,500 and 7,200 per academic year for females. The academic ramifications of this could be grave for the un-accommodated students.

Table 1: Lowest and Highest Cost of Alternative Accommodation Per Term

| Mode of Accommodation | Cost of Accommodation | |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------|
| | Male | Female |
| Renting Bed space on Campus | K3000 - K4000 | K4000 - K5000 |
| Squatting on Campus | K800 - K 1000 | K1200 - K1500 |
| Renting in Boarding House | K1200 - 1800 | K1500 - K2400 |
| Staying home within Lusaka | K10-k20 Transport money to and from the University daily | |

Source: Field data

3. Conclusions

In the light of these findings, we recommend among other things that the university management should offer affordable transport and decent accommodation facilities for off-campus students by engaging in public-private partnerships with private transport and hospitality businesses. We also propose that government should increase the accommodation allowance for the un-accommodated students to rent conducive boarding facilities tailored to academic pursuits. In the wake of increased demand for tertiary education, it appears prudent to recommend that the government consider adequately financing and expediting the construction of accommodation facilities at the main campus as well as establishing new campuses in other provincial towns to decongest the Great East Road Campus of the University of Zambia. Finally, we recommend that further research be undertaken, to amplify our understanding of the efficient, cost-effective and equitable way of managing both on and off-campus accommodation in higher education institutions.

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