Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of Strategic Alliances in Zambia's Higher Education Markets

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits and challenges of strategic alliances among higher education institutions in Zambia. Literature on alliances is explicit and highlights the benefits of alliances as well as the challenges. The study was qualitative in nature utilizing purposive sampling. It was a case study focusing on the existing strategic alliances among three universities situated in the capital of Zambia: University of Zambia, University of Africa and Cavendish University. Sixty participants, 20 from each participating university were purposively selected to represent a rich demographic mix in terms of gender, level of education and experience. These were selected based on their knowledge and experience working in universities as well as their strategic positions in their universities. Data were qualitatively analysed using thematic analysis. Three major themes namely benefits of strategic alliances to universities, challenges faced by strategic alliances among universities and mechanisms to manage such challenges were identified and discussed. It was concluded that strategic alliances among universities benefited the Zambian higher education market better than competition. Challenges identified such as lack of commitment to the strategic alliances could easily lead to their failure and therefore appropriate strategies such as ensuring that contracts offered to staff clearly stipulated the boundaries of staff rights are needed to mitigate such failure.

Keywords: Strategic alliances, strategies, higher education, partnership, benefits

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the benefits and challenges of strategic alliances among institutions of higher education in Zambia. Strategic alliances occur when two or more organizations join together to pursue mutual benefits. Universities have their own public roles and expectations. They are mandated to create and disseminate knowledge for the broad benefit of society. They are also expected to make knowledge freely and widely available through education and publication as they may enjoy non-profit, tax-free status and receive public funding. On the other hand, other universities survive in contested market places where they compete for customers and investors. They need advantages over their competitors in order to provide growth and profits for their owners and for the employees. The need for competitive advantage extends to the institution's requirement for a relevant return from university research

investments that can, for instance, be effectively commercialized in the market place (Roth & Magee, 2002; Kock, Auspitz & King, 2000).

Co-operation between business entities is common in various forms of industries and ranges from loose alliances (Pucihar, Kljajič, Ravesteijn, Seitz, & Bons, 2018) to more formal strategic alliances (Riwo-Abudho, Njanja, & Ochieng, 2013). The strategic alliances created through mutual agreements can result in sharing of infrastructure, knowledge and expertise between the partners resulting in mutual benefits (Phene & Tallman, 2014; Riwo-Abudho et al., 2013; Hearld, Mittler, & O'hora, n.d.). Some of the most developed alliances can be seen in the airline and automotive industries. This advanced co-operation can be extended to educational institutions with the same objectives of aspiring to give the best education or service possible to students and other stakeholders (Gassmann, Zeschky, Wolff, & Stahl, 2010).

According to Hoang and Rothaermel (2016), a strategic alliance is a voluntary agreement between two or more business establishments wishing to benefit from the competitive advantage of other businesses while maintaining an individual distinct legal identity. This therefore, gives the participating partners access to research, technology and specialized expertise. For the education sector this could imply benefitting from mutual library facilities, lecturer expertise, student exchange programs, dual qualifications and collaboration in research (Kinyua, 2010; Kelly, Schaan, & Joncas, 2002). It can therefore be argued that a strategic alliance is an ideal model for institutions that are not intending to merge their businesses but are willing to share the expertise and other benefits (Lavie, Kang & Rosenkopf, 2011).

Needless to say, strategic alliances are not all a success, as they have their own challenges which can lead to a serious breakdown of the business relationships between the partners. These could be manifest in the form of an unequal contribution of expertise, inadequate funding for research and development and infringement of intellectual property rights. Lack of commitment by the partners has also been recognized as another challenge by other researchers (Zhao, 2014; Riwo-Abudho et al., 2013). When partners are not committed to an alliance, they benefit from it without contributing as expected thereby introducing tension in the relationship.

Zambia has seen an increased number of universities since 2011. The number currently stands at 66 universities (HEA, 2018). Most of these universities are new and still are building their infrastructure, experience, reputation and body of research as compared to the University of Zambia (UNZA) and the Copperbelt University (CBU) which are the country's two oldest universities.

The proliferation of private universities in Zambia has changed the landscape of tertiary education in the country and brought with it such unprecedented challenges to the higher institutions as securing suitable infrastructure and ensuring specialist expertise among academic staff. The increase in the number of universities also means that the market has become competitive where universities with more resources are likely to have better investment and by extension, better services (Hoang & Rothaermel, 2016). The competition for students and lecturers is therefore very high and could lead to detrimental effects if not well managed.

However, although competition can be deemed to improve quality of service (education) it can have detrimental effects as upcoming institutions with inadequate capital base could be forced out of the market (Hoang & Rothaermel, 2016). According to Albers, Wohlgezogen and Zajac (2013), institutions can benefit from the core strengths of other organizations if they are in a strategic alliance. Literature indicates that if properly implemented, strategic alliances can be beneficial to the stakeholders in educational institutions including students. This belief has, in part, resulted in universities in Zambia forming strategic alliances in an attempt to widen and better their services offered to the Zambian population. However, the benefits enjoyed and the challenges suffered by these strategic partnerships do not seem to have been evaluated before, hence the need for this study. This study was therefore guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the benefits of strategic alliances among institutions of higher education in Zambia?
2. What challenges do strategic alliances face in the Zambian higher education sector?
3. What strategies can be implemented to enhance alliances among institutions of higher education in Zambia?

Literature review

Co-operation has been recognized as one of the best models for improving service delivery in some industries where competition would harm the general welfare of the recipients and lower the efficiency. Strategic alliances are a form of co-operation between two or more institutions willing to voluntarily share their core competencies with the aim of improving service delivery through product development and reduced costs (Gaynor & Town, 2012). A strategic alliance is therefore a co-operation between institutions wishing to maintain their distinct identities in an endeavor to reach or achieve common objectives (Gassmann et al., 2010). Whereas different forms of strategic alliances exist, Vonortas and Zirulia (2015) explain that they all have a common thread of co-operation in many ways by putting the resources together for the benefit of the partners.

Strategic alliances therefore stand out as an alternative model to delivering quality higher education in resource constrained economies. This is partly because the universities and colleges have different levels of infrastructure development and lecturer expertise. Strategic alliances therefore, would allow the partner universities and the students to benefit from the mutual infrastructure and staff expertise (Kinyua, 2010). Strategic alliances depend on the markets where the partners operate (Heidtmann, 2011). Alliances can be between two or more companies that are mismatched in size and this disparity could be the feature attracting the partners to each other. Other than the mismatch in size, differences pertaining to the needs, capabilities and objectives of the partner firms also exist (Zineldin & Bredenlöw, 2003). Formation of an alliance as a partnership can therefore be influenced by other factors such as structure of the alliance, characteristics of partners and nature of specialization. Lavie *et al.* (2011) argue that these factors can also affect the maintenance, performance and consequently, the success of the alliance.

Firms can reorganize their market position by acquisitions, unions or alliances. The main purpose of all the different forms of strategic alliances is to allow the parties to the alliance to access the markets they would not normally have access to or would have to pay largely to break into (Bauer & Matzler, 2013). Further, alliances allow the partners to access the other partners' infrastructure and expertise at a lower cost than would be the case if they were to invest in the same infrastructure on their own (Ellis, Lamont, Reus & Faifman, 2015). It is therefore attractive for institutions to enter into a partnership to allow them to mutually benefit from their core competencies, infrastructure and technology that would be hard to achieve individually (Benito-Hernández, Platero-Jaime & Esteban-Sánchez (2016).

Alliances are even more beneficial for new firms wanting to break into new markets and innovations. This is because new firms would need a higher capital injection, innovation as well as expertise which would be readily available through an alliance with an established entity thereby saving colossal sums of money in research and development costs, especially in the context of higher education (Hoang & Rothaermel, 2016). This gives the new firm a better start than would be the case if there was no alliance (Bauer & Matzler, 2013). This argument holds well for higher education as well, where the level of infrastructure required to start up is modestly high and could easily lead to the immediate demise of the new institution in the absence of capital and expertise (Kinyua, 2010). Vuong, Ho, Nguyen and Vuong (2018) contend that alliances allow institutions to shorten their learning curve as they are able to learn and tap from the expertise of the well-established partners. These alliances can also be beneficial in higher education institutions where research, distinguished lecturer experience and infrastructure can be expensive to fund or take very long time to acquire (Li, Roberts, Yan & Tan, 2016).

Strategic alliances between universities can go a step further by engaging themselves in collaborative research, student exchange and possibly, duo qualifications. Duo qualifications have been awarded by some co-operating universities where students follow an agreed program (Li et al., 2016). In agreement, Albers, Wohlgezogen and Zajac (2013) state that strategic alliances make it possible for the partners in an alliance to not only share the knowledge and benefits but also to share the risks as well thereby cushioning the individual loss of the partners' strategic alliances and therefore are a useful vehicle for acquiring, sharing and enhancing the institutions' knowledge base at a minimized cost (Jiang, Bao, Xie & Gao, 2016; Phene & Tallman, 2014; Zhao, 2014).

Strategic alliances also carry some risks such as knowledge leaking, inadequate commitment and violations of intellectual property rights arising from some partners being opportunistic. These risks can be managed through signing adequate contracts and developing a health relationship between the partners (Riwo-Abudho et al., 2013; (Riwo-Abudho *et al.*, 2013; Rotter, Popa, Riley, Ellermann, Ryll, Burazeri, & Brand, 2012). This study therefore investigates on benefits and challenges of strategic alliances in Zambia's Higher Education Markets.

Methodology

This study was predominantly qualitative. Lusaka City was conveniently and purposively sampled because this is where most universities are situated in Zambia and it is where educational policies are formulated (Errasti-Ibarrondo, Jordán, Díez-Del-Corral, & Arantzamendi, 2018). The research design used was a case study design particularly conducted in three universities of Zambia; the University of Zambia (UNZA), Cavendish University (CU) and

University of Africa (UoA). Of these three universities, only UNZA is a public university whereas the other two are privately run. Case studies were used in this study as they provided an easy to use design for the in-depth examination and discussion of phenomena under study.

The sample was composed of both academic and non-academic staff. The rationale for the choice was that these groups of staff had the knowledge as they were involved in decision making or implantation of policies (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Bowling, 2009). A total of 60 participants (20 from each university) were selected using staff registers, those who qualified to participate in the study due to their experience of working at university level in various capacities (Sharkey & Larsen, 2005). This selection had potential for generating rich information given the diversity of expertise and experience and is consistent with purposive sampling in qualitative research (Gobo, 2016). The 60 participants consisted of the administrative registrars, deans of schools and heads of the various departments which were included purposively by virtue of their positions in their respective institutions. Data collection instruments included focus group discussion and in-depth and semi-structured interviews.

After synthesizing the qualitative data, a number of themes emerged and these were aligned to the study's objectives. Basic descriptive statistics were computed leading to the following demographic characteristics of the respondents. Forty-three respondents, representing a majority 71.7% were male and 17 (28%) were female. In addition, the majority of the respondents 66.7% (n=40) had 0-5 years' experience in their current position, 18 % (n=11) of the respondents had 6-10 years of experience, 10 % (n=6) had 11-15 years of experience while only 5% (n=3) of the respondent indicated that they had 16-20 years of experience in their current position. Further, the level of education of the respondents from the three Universities shows that 80% (n=48) had a Master's degree, 10% (n=6) had doctoral degrees while 10% (n=6) had Bachelor's degrees.

The majority (37%; n=22) of the respondents were lecturers, 25% (n=15) were Assistant Heads of Departments, 15% (n=9) were Heads of Department, 12% (n=7) were Administrators, 7% (n=4) were Librarians and 5% (n=3) were Registrars. Out of these respondents, the majority of the respondents 40% (n=24) were from the Department

of Education, followed by 30% (n=18) from Social Sciences, 17% (n=10) from the Department of Business, 8% (n=5) from the Department of Administration while 5% (n=3) came from the Library Department.

Consistent with qualitative research, data were analysed thematically and this entailed identifying major themes (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). This study therefore used the thematic analysis approach to analyze, classify and present themes that related to the data. The researcher also ensured that data transcription commenced as soon as data collection began in order to be familiar with the data that was collected; this allowed for follow-ups where collected data lacked clarity. The researcher read and re-read the data in order to have a thorough understanding of it. After understanding the data, the researcher categorized it into themes. The process of coding, categorizing and developing themes was repeated for each transcript or set of data. All entries with the same codes were merged into patterns by finding links and connections among categories and finally data was interpreted. Three major themes were identified in this case: Benefits of strategic alliances in universities, challenges of strategic alliances and strategies that can be adopted to maximize the benefits of these alliances. The results were presented according to these themes.

To ensure content validity, the content of the instruments were reviewed by peers so that appropriate questions were included in the interview schedules; thus in this study, face validity was ensured by making use of the comments from peers. The researcher made use of the literature as a secondary source of data, which supplemented the validation and the accuracy of the findings. To avoid ambiguity and leading respondents to a particular answer and thus ensure the reliability of the interview guides, each question was subjected to accurate and careful rephrasing. The interview guide was given to the researcher's colleagues with experience in preparing the final draft of the instruments. Then necessary amendments were made accordingly. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted in Lusaka District, by making use of participants similar to the respondents in the main study.

Analysis and Results

The researcher identified themes in relation to the research questions based on the opinions of the

study participants. Actual words said by respondents were used as much as possible in the descriptions.

RQ1: What are the benefits of strategic alliances between and among institutions of higher education in Zambia?

Research question number one sought information from participants on how they understood the benefits of strategic alliances in the participating universities. In order to implement strategic alliances, parties involved must understand their necessity for benefits. In this vein, respondents were asked to indicate their view on the benefits of strategic alliances to both students and lecturers. When asked if they agreed that alliances in universities were important 46 (76.7%) strongly agreed, 10 (16.7) agreed and 4 (6.7%) were undecided. Regarding their view of benefits of strategic alliances, the results indicated that 18(30%) strongly agreed, 37(61.7%) agreed while only 5 (8.3%) were undecided whether strategic alliances benefitted both lecturers and students in universities. The number in agreement representing 91.7% of the respondents suggests that majority of respondents perceived that strategic alliances lead to benefits for the universities involved. Regarding benefits that could be obtained from an alliance, one of the respondents, for instance, aired their views as follows: *Partners may provide the strategic alliance with resources such as products, distribution channels, manufacturing capability, project funding, capital equipment, knowledge, expertise, or intellectual property (UNZA "Participants 1, 3 and 4"; Cavendish "Participants 1, 10").* Other respondents had it that *"the alliance is cooperation or collaboration which aims for a synergy where each partner hopes that the benefits from the alliance will be greater than those from individual efforts. The alliance often involves technology transfer (access to knowledge and expertise), economic specialization, shared expenses and shared risk (Participants 11, 13, 15, 5, 14 and 17).*

RQ2: What challenges do strategic alliances face in the Zambian higher education sector?

In response to this question, numerous challenges were identified. Some respondents pointed to problems arising from poor strategy in the planning and implementation process as a cause of challenges in strategic alliances as follows: *Lack of a clearly defined strategy is a challenge in managing strategic alliances be it in corporate organizations or university alliances, hence there is need to have*

proper and clear strategies that will strengthen the alliance and for the benefit of all members (Participants 4, 6, 44 and 32).

Some participants pointed to the failure to uphold trust and lack of honesty among individuals working for partner universities as another possibility that could lead to the breakdown of the alliance. This concern was expressed thus: *upholding trust and honesty is one challenge of strategic alliances. As you may be aware, without a certain degree of trust and honesty, a partnership has no foundation to build on. It is therefore important for both parties approaching an alliance to set their expectations clearly and concisely before the partnership is solidified (Participants 2, 3, 14, 15, 17, 20 and 23).*

Some participants especially the lecturers and other senior staff lamented the lack of commitment from the partners as another possibility that could lead to the breakdown of the alliances. They pointed out that some lecturers had multiple employments with different universities which raised questions over their commitment towards implementing alliances as they were likely to suffer from divided loyalty. Particularly, they held that *one of the biggest teamwork challenges is lack of commitment. When teams lack commitment, it's an indication that the participants have not fully explored the issues. The idea is not for team members to reach a consensus, but to get buy-in even when some members have reservations and don't agree. Lack of commitment from top management resulted in failure of strategic alliances in some areas. Moreover, different management styles had been observed to be the contributory factor among others that have led to failure of strategic alliances (Participants 22 and 50).*

RQ3: What strategies can be implemented to enhance alliances among institutions of higher education in Zambia?

Arising directly from the challenges of strategic alliances presented in the previous section, respondents suggested certain strategies that they considered important to not only prevent the failure of strategic alliances, but also to ensure attainment of the highest level of benefits to participating universities. Maximizing the benefits of the alliance can be attained through having well worked out strategies at the point of commencing the alliance. Regarding the need for a strategy, respondents expressed the following sentiments; *we need to have a specified strategy to promote a learning environment and create regular contacts with the*

universities and engage most of the students in exchange programs that can increase their participation in the alliance (Participants 2, 3, 12, 15, 16 and 22). For the benefit of all, we need to ensure professional membership and engage in communication with those that are in other fields other than academic institutions both locally and internationally (Participant 9).

Another strategy highlighted by the respondents was the need for trust and honesty in the execution of the affairs of the alliance by members of the alliance. This was expressed as follows: *All participants in the strategic alliance must have that trust in each other and regard each member of the alliance as equal, having the same qualifications and also by creating a sharing coordinating office to help coordinate (Participants 1, 8, 10 and 23).* In addition, respondents indicated the need to ensure that individuals within partner universities were committed to the goals of not only their particular universities but also to the broader goals of the alliances. This was expressed as follows: *there is need to put strict rules/measures that must be followed and also electing a team to spearhead most activities for transparency to all members of the alliance …so that institutions of higher education cooperate and share ideals (Participant 11, 39, 40, 41 and 50).*

Discussion

The purpose of the discussion is to interpret and describe the significance of the findings in light of the research problem being investigated, and to explain any new understanding or insight about the problem. Hence, in this paper, the findings are discussed in relation to research questions.

Benefits of strategic alliances

The study established a positive response in the importance of strategic alliances by respondents and further affirmed the necessity of their existence in the higher education sector. There was a general agreement in support of alliances with only 8.3% undecided on this issue. This is a strong indication that the participants agreed that the alliances represented forward thinking that could help the universities to grow, improve their capabilities by taking advantage of the partners' established infrastructure (Kinyua, 2010) and thereby leading to improvements in higher education. The attitude and views of major players in the implementation of these alliances is vital as established by this study.

As alliances can be beneficial for participating universities in general and lecturers in particular in many ways, the majority in this study agreed that strategic alliances benefited universities. Particularly, the study revealed that strategic alliances between and among universities in Zambia aim at building synergies where each partner hopes that the benefits from the alliance will be greater than those from individual efforts. This agrees with the position taken by Isoraite (2009) that many firms are knowledgeable in some areas especially their core business areas and lack expertise in other areas. Forming a strategic alliance can therefore lead to access to knowledge and expertise in an area that a particular university lacks.

In addition, the information, knowledge and expertise that a university gains can be used for other projects and purposes. This is especially true in a resource constrained environment like that of Zambia where a single university may not be able to subscribe to a wide variety of reading materials such as journals. Likewise, lecturers would benefit from the expanded library access as it would enable them to access more journals. Lecturers would also benefit from more access to the mutual facilities and this would not only improve their wellbeing but can also expand and sharpen their skills (Mumelo, 2012). According to Cyert and Goodman (1997), success in running a university is often measured in terms of the number of new products, publications, patents, students trained and students hired. In agreement with the views of Zhao (2014) and Propper, Burgess and Green (2000), this study demonstrated that Zambian universities could benefit from building synergies which would amplify the individual efforts and improve service delivery for the benefit of the stakeholders.

Indeed, each partner provides the other(s) with vital resources and uses the partnership to extend its skills set into new areas. As this study established, when partners in an alliance cooperate, for example, on a research project, they exchange skills. Lecturers would be able to enjoy collaboration in research with their colleagues from partner institutions. Such collaboration, according to Ho and Wang (2015), would offer easier and faster identification of skills and matching of expertise. This would be beneficial in that inexperienced lecturers in specific disciplines could easily receive mentorship from colleagues at partnership institutions. This would allow for coordinated knowledge exchange which ultimately would not

only benefit the universities involved but also the nation as a whole as there would be more quality research and innovation. This position supports the views of Ervin *et al., (*2002) and Phene and Tallman (2014) who posit that the university academic staff uses basic research to work towards contributions to knowledge generation. This collaboration in research would avoid an unnecessary competition and promote co-operation which enhances knowledge sharing. Similarly, a partner in a university alliance might possess technological expertise that helps partner institutions to keep pace with technological advancements.

This study further observes that strategic alliances bring about access to resources. This was evident from the majority of respondents who affirmed that through strategic alliances they gain access to resources from other universities be it infrastructure, computer laboratories et cetera. These findings are in tandem with the resource based theory proposed by Peteraf (1993) and Barney (1991) who highlighted the critical role played by resources. The scholars contend that strategic alliances are considered as a means to access unavailable resources and develop jointly new ones. Universities decide to form or enter into a strategic alliance to benefit from a wide pool of resources which they share with partners. This resource based view identifies complementary resources as s key factor for alliance success.

More so, the study reveals that strategic alliance has helped in providing the much needed information and thereby, improving university relationships. This is in agreement with Chan and Wong (2012) who argue that companies enter into strategic alliances to acquire strategic capabilities rapidly which are needed for global competition. Global competition needs global scale efficiencies, local responsiveness and worldwide learning simultaneously. A firm cannot single-handedly possess all these resources and strategic capabilities.

Challenges Faced
In strategic alliances, several reasons abound for their under-performance and failure. The findings of this research indicate that respondents largely felt that poor strategy was a major challenge that led to failure of strategic alliances. This revelation amplifies what Elmuti and Kathawala (2001) found that 70 percent of strategic alliances fail due to poor strategy and that top management needs to articulate a clear link between expectations of

where the industry's profit pools in the future will be, how the alliance will capture a larger share, and how the alliance fits in the plan. It is therefore important for all parties approaching an alliance to set their expectations clearly and concisely before the partnership takes off. Ineffective communication between partners may lead to dissolution of an alliance resulting from mistrust or doubt between parties. On the contrary, effective communication will build and maintain relationships in strategic alliances (2014).

This study also discovered that failure to uphold trust and honesty between and among participating partners is one of the challenges of strategic alliances. This is not a new issue as it has been identified by other researchers on strategic alliances. Zhao (2014) and Riwo-Abudho *et al.,* (2013), for instance, posited that the importance of honesty in an alliance cannot be over-emphasized because the partners will have access to some privileged information and infrastructure which they would otherwise not have access to. According to Schweitzer (2014), the success of the strategic alliance rests on its ability to create trustworthy relationships and manage any conflict that may arise. Failure to uphold trust and honesty contradicts the principles and values of strategic alliances and greatly interferes with the foundation on which to build a viable alliance. In a similar study conducted by Aalbers and Beckhoven (2010), trust is assumed to lower transaction costs mainly in an uncertain environment.

The study further reveals that one of the biggest challenges in a strategic alliance is lack of commitment. The results are similar to those of Schweitzer (2014) who revealed that alliance leaders have impact on how the teams interact and their effort of working together towards achieving the objectives and goals of the alliance.

Strategies for Enhancing Alliances
Given the arguments for strategic alliances and while there are natural synergies in university alliances, there are also areas of likely conflicts as discussed in the preceding section. It is therefore imperative to identify methods of overcoming such challenges, otherwise the higher education alliances would be unproductive. In probing what approaches would be ideal to exploit benefits of alliances, it is clear that respondents were of the view that the solution to the problems of alliances rests in having specific strategies to govern operations such as

clearly written contracts and well defined strategies that stipulate the responsibilities, expectations and boundaries of the parties. Some participants in this study suggested that to be successful, there was need to establish a central office to co-ordinate the alliances. The officers in such an office should manage the strategic alliance portfolio and be pivotal in communicating mutual decisions of the alliances. This observation is consistent with prior research on strategic alliances (Riwo-Abudho *et al.*, 2013) where it was observed that building learning relationships and communication would be one of the strategies that can help to maximize the benefits of the alliance. The study further showed that there is need to create regular contacts. Literature suggests that knowledge creation in the organization would depend on the mechanisms or techniques designed and used to acquire learning (Beamish & Berdrow, 2003; Hamel & Prahalad, 1994).

Another prominent view by respondents was that strategic alliances must excise trust and honesty among each other. These results were similar to that of the study conducted by Lewis (1992) who contended that many alliances have failed due to the lack of trust causing unsolved problems, lack of understanding and despondent relationships. Therefore, alliances need to form and enhance trust between individuals in the alliances.

Regarding the role of commitment in ensuring the success of an alliance, the results of this study agree with Bauer and Matzler (2013) who pointed out that numerous studies identify lack of commitment as one of the factors why strategic alliances fail. The universities working together should therefore ensure congruity in their goals and objectives, should review the highlights of the alliance on a regular basis and should have clear channels of communication. Similarly, literature by Hamel and Prahalad (1994) suggested that for an alliance to be effective and function well, there is need for developing a learning relationship as it should involve the commitment of the top management in the alliance in order to ensure the success of the learning process and the alliance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section gives the conclusions of the study and then comes up with corresponding recommendations as follows:

Conclusions

While some institutions enter into strategic alliances to become more competitive especially in the global scene, the study concludes that the Zambian higher education market needs strategic alliances to be able to deliver to the highest standards expected of them by the public and the globe at large. In all of these strategic alliances, institutions will benefit from the competitive advantage and good will of another university. Arguably, strategic alliances serve as the best alternative to improving higher education in Zambia as this would attract the resources together rather than disintegrating them.

It is also concluded that universities enter into strategic alliances mainly to take advantage of new market opportunities. The benefits from the strategic alliance come in many different forms such as shared research ventures, technology and technological equipment and access to information, among others. Given the capital investment required in setting up universities, it can be concluded that strategic alliances would help newly established Zambian universities get off their feet more easily than is currently the situation. In a developing country like Zambia, lack of strategic alliances could lead to unnecessary and unhealthy competition among universities plagued with limited resources. This could ultimately hinder their development and contribution to the higher education sector. It is likely that without these alliances, competition might lead to a slump in the standards of university education as most of the universities are new and may struggle to survive competition in resources and expertise.

It was also concluded that alliances would be a better option to competition in the Zambian higher education market considering that it was just emerging as a sector. It is clear from the study that strategic alliances face numerous challenges, which if not addressed are likely to result into the failure of these strategic alliances. Without strict measures to govern their operations, strategic alliances could become operational and financial liabilities.

Recommendation

In view of the results of this study and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made. In relation to the achievement of competitive positioning through various types of strategic alliances, the study recommends that universities should consider entering into strategic alliances with both local and international

universities so as to reap maximum benefits. Furthermore, to ensure commitment to strategic alliances, moonlighting by academic staff from one university to other needs to be seriously regulated. Finally, the progress of the strategic alliance has to be constantly monitored and evaluated to ensure that the challenges are addressed before they lead to failure.

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