



HEHD POLICY BRIEF

HIGHER EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE

An analysis of Education 5.0 policy to advance human development: a case study of one Zimbabwean public university

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About this brief

Zimbabwe's higher education system stands at a critical juncture where the need for transformation is urgent to ensure that it aligns with the country's broader goals of human development and national progress. As Zimbabwe faces economic challenges, social inequalities, and a rapidly changing global landscape, universities must evolve beyond their traditional role of knowledge transmission to become key drivers of sustainable development and the public good.

In Zimbabwe, higher education institutions have the potential to contribute meaningfully to national development by fostering innovation, addressing local challenges, and producing graduates who are equipped with both the technical skills and the ethical mindset required to lead in a complex world. This brief explores how Zimbabwean universities can better serve the public good, emphasising their role in addressing issues such as unemployment, poverty reduction, social justice, and environmental sustainability. By rethinking their curriculum, research priorities, and community engagement, universities can play a pivotal role in shaping a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future for Zimbabwe.

Research Problem

The rationale for this study stems from gaps identified in the literature concerning the potential value of higher education (HE) as outlined in Education 5.0 (Kufakurinani, 2022; Mamina & Maganga, 2019; MHTEISTD, 2018). While the Education 5.0 policy strongly emphasises innovation, industrialisation, and a focus on science and technology in universities as key drivers of economic development, this policy has largely concentrated on the economic dimension of development. Although this economic emphasis is crucial, it risks overlooking the broader contributions that higher education can make to human development. Scholars have long argued for a more comprehensive understanding of HE, extending beyond economic opportunities to include aspects such as well-being, social participation, equity, empowerment, sustainability, and efficiency (Boni & Gasper, 2012; Walker & McLean, 2013).

This gap underscores the need for a critical analysis of Education 5.0, particularly in its application at Zimbabwean universities, to evaluate whether the policy sufficiently supports holistic human development. By examining the experiences of students, staff, and other stakeholders, this study sought to understand whether the current policy framework advances broader developmental goals or merely addresses the economic needs of the nation. The study was grounded in the belief that a human development perspective – when applied to Education 5.0 – could provide a clearer conceptualisation of what an ideal 21st-Century university should look like, especially in the context of Zimbabwe and similar developing nations.

Ultimately, this analysis aims to inform policymakers and educationists about the broader social, cultural, and humanistic roles that universities must play in shaping a sustainable and equitable future, not just one driven by industrialisation and economic growth.

Research Aim

This study aimed to critically analyse the Ed5.0 policy as a mechanism for advancing or constraining human development among students and staff in teaching and learning at one Zimbabwean university. Human development is understood as integral to people's well-being and overall quality of life.

Objectives

1. To analyse how the Ed5.0 policy constrains/enables opportunities and freedoms for human development among students and staff in teaching and learning at one Zimbabwean university.
2. To examine how the economic outcomes emphasised in the Ed5.0 policy are taken up in teaching and learning at one Zimbabwean university for students' future access to decent livelihoods.

3. To assess the conversion factors and processes that enable or constrain the advancement of the five human development values and student and staff freedoms in the Ed5.0 policy implementation at one Zimbabwean university.
4. To analyse research findings in order to conceptualise a 21st-Century, human development-focused university in a context such as Zimbabwe.

Methodology

Following a human development and capability framework, the study employed a qualitative approach. A total of 58 participants (6 key informants, 11 lecturers, and 41 final-year students) were interviewed, purposively sampled from three selected faculties (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, and Engineering and Geosciences). Of the 41 students, 21 were interviewed individually and 20 formed a part of three focus group discussions from each of the selected faculties. Education 5.0 policy documents were also analysed to provide insight into student and staff voices on the public-good role of HE in Zimbabwe, as argued in the problem statement.

Key findings

The study proposes a list of capabilities that were extrapolated from the evidence presented by students and staff, as shown in table.

Summary of capabilities valued by students and staff

Which capability?	Description
Capability for knowledge and imagination	- Ability to gain knowledge in a selected discipline, profession, or subject
Capability to produce goods and services	- Opportunities to produce goods and services through innovation and industrialisation
Capability for work	- Self-employment/entrepreneurship
Capability for voice	- Ability to express one's concerns in collective decision-making
Capability for dialogue and deliberation	- Ability to be part of discussions aimed at enhancing innovation and industrialisation
Capability for academic freedom	- Ability to find, receive, and impart knowledge and ideas either in writing, orally, or through media
Capability for participation	- Participation of students and staff in policy implementation, sharing their values and political voices

Drawing on the human development and capability framework, as well as my proposed capability list, the research argues that a human development, future-focused university ought to promote and enhance the following aspects: 1) entrepreneurship knowledge and skills; and 2) democratic deliberation, participation, and empowerment fostered by sustainability, efficiency, and equity in terms of policy funding, assessment, and evaluation.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are summarised in the table below:

Responsible authority	Challenge	Possible solutions
The government as policymaker 1. Human resource planning	- Limited access of students and lecturers to policy planning processes	- Include students and lecturers in policy planning for shared vision, responsibility, as well as unity of purpose and direction
	- Limited opportunities for student and lecturer orientation and development	- Initiate development and orientation for students and staff in preparation for policy implementation
	- Lecturers' work overload	- Leverage capabilities of lecturers per pillar, not across all policy pillars
	- Mass exodus of lecturers from the university to greener pastures	- Ensure proper remuneration packages, good working conditions, and staff retention strategies
	- Constrained access of students and lecturers to industry to practise their skills	- Focus on other ministries such as agriculture and tourism to boost the labour industry
2. Financing	- Limited access of students and staff to equitable funding and facilities	- Government to mobilise resources to finance technological equipment and software, research, community engagement, assessment and evaluation procedures, and other programmes and processes in policy implementation - Government to emphasise other avenues of economic development, including but not limited to agriculture, mining, and tourism. This can boost industry so that students and staff can fully participate in industrialisation.
3. Human development aspects	- Absence of human development aspects in policy documents	- Include human development aspects in the policy and be specific as to how these can be operationalised at university level
The university as policy implementer	- Limited access of students and staff to equitable funding and facilities	- Establish a symbiotic relationship between universities and communities to leverage indigenous resources and knowledge in the implementation of Ed 5.0, rather than seeking external solutions beyond local means
	- Limited access to staff development and orientation initiatives	- Develop students and staff in relation to the policy and its implementation at university level
	- Human development aspects	- Orient staff members about human development aspects and its relevance in policy implementation - Accord students and staff voice, academic freedom, and dialogue and deliberation