

## STRATEGIES USED BY CHURCH-RUN TEACHERS' COLLEGES TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT IN ZIMBABWE

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### ABSTRACT

*The study sought to examine strategies used by church-run teachers' colleges to promote effective institutional management in Zimbabwe. This study adopted a multiple case study research design to allow for an in-depth study of phenomenon and gives a platform to study subjects in their natural settings. The interpretivist paradigm which is located in the qualitative approach guided this study. The paradigm was the most suitable for the research where meaning oriented methodologies such as interviews and focus group discussions were used. Three cases were involved in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select three principals, three student representative councils, three Church Education Secretaries and three human resources (HR) officers to participate in this study. The study exposed that the existence of governance structures namely Education Boards, advisory councils, church main councils, the University of Zimbabwe and the Ministry responsible for tertiary institutions influence institutional management at the church-run teachers colleges. Findings also revealed that policy formulation is also used as a strategy to promote effective institutional management in Zimbabwe. However, findings also show that there is lack of involvement of some stakeholders in governance structures. The study concluded and recommended engagement of all stakeholders including the student body in the management of church-run teachers' colleges*

**Keywords:** strategy, governance structures, effective, management

### INTRODUCTION

Managers of church run teaches colleges across the globe face a number of challenges as they grapple with day to day running of the college business. The study explores management strategies used by church-run teachers' colleges to promote effective institutional management in Zimbabwe.

#### Background and context of the study

Successful institutions are a result of good management systems. Turnbull (2015) sees management as the act or skill of controlling and making decisions about an organisation. On the other hand, Sabandar, Tawe and Musa (2018) see management as a process of implementing policies, teachers' allocating resources and giving direction to the stakeholders to achieve the goals of an organisation. In this study management implies influencing achievement of institutional goals through leadership and implementation of good policies. The college managers in church run colleges employ a number of strategies to address challenges encountered in running the institutions.

Globally, private-run educational institutions are increasingly experiencing management challenges which are disturbing the smooth flow of managing these institutions. This is evidence in studies done globally. For example, studies in America revealed that ownership, funding sources, value structures, and politics are the four major factors involved in shifting governance patterns (Fioke and King, 1982, Wilner, Christopoulos and Alves, 2017). It is important for this study to explore management strategies used by church-run teachers' colleges to promote effective institutional management in Zimbabwe

Governance in five (5) Canadian small, tertiary institutions revealed that many principals experience management challenges emanating from issues of governance such as accountability, transparency, which inherently cut across boundaries in respect to roles and responsibilities of managers and administrators which impact on privately-run institutions (Lang, 2016). Although, Lang (2016) did not research on CRTCs his study pointed on issues of governance. This study examined strategies used to address issues of responsibilities, accountability and transparency as they affect management of CRTCs in Zimbabwe.

Onderi and Makori (2013) closely assessed challenges in leadership management on church-run secondary schools. Among the issues that have been cited in this study include: undue interference with the day-to-day running of the school; harassment and intimidation, and promotion of unnecessary transfer of school principals. The study looked at the institutional challenges on secondary schools in Kenya while the current study focuses on governance issues on church-run teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. Studies in Kenya and Uganda found out that differences in perspective on mission, goals and strategies between the shareholders and management affects good corporate governance of church run institutions (Murray's, 2010. Okisai and Karanja, 2015). However, this is indicative of how much favourable management strategies are required in church-run teachers' colleges. On the same note in South Africa it was noted that effective school governance exists when the school governors present an environment that ensure clarity of vision, philosophy and strategic direction (Van Wyk, 2007, Schwartzman, 2010). The study was done focusing on university institutions, whilst the underway study is concerned with the effect of corporate governance practices on effective institutional management in church-run primary teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. Universities and primary teachers' college governance structures and faculties are inevitably different. However, these researchers did not come up with strategies to assist in the management of (CRTCs).

In Zimbabwe specifically, private teachers colleges fall under the purview of the churches, but the college principals being government employees. The college principal is answerable to church and government policies hence adhering to government policies that are contradicting church policies will end up creating conflict between church and college principal in the management of the church-run teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. Conflicts arise when teachers' colleges' owners (church) perceive the teacher education college managers (principals) not to be managing the teacher education colleges as expected (Wilner, Christopoulos and Alves, 2017).

In Zimbabwe, Kurisa (2015) investigated the dialectical relationship between catholic-run schools and the Government of Zimbabwe. The author revealed that catholic-run schools have reservations on some of the government policies. What stuck out conspicuously are the recruitment and promotion procedures and most of the provisions of SI 87 of 1992. Ironically, most of the catholic schools do not have written down policies to guide them on these issues of concern. Of course, these findings, to some extent, cover some governance issues

especially policy related issues but there is need to broaden the scope by exploring strategies for effective management of church run teachers colleges among others.

Garwe (2014) studied on quality assurance challenges and opportunities faced by the Reformed Church University (one of the six private universities in Zimbabwe). The study showed that financial constraints and poor corporate governance were the major factors leading to failure by private universities to uphold high quality standards. Unlike the current study which focuses on management strategies in church-run teachers' colleges, Garwe's study partly discussed corporate governance and focused much on quality assurance. Accordingly, such issues as challenges, strategies and framework for effective governance were not explored in-depth. Above all, institutional differences (university versus teachers' colleges) translate into management differences resulting in the likelihood of differences in research outcomes.

Ncube and Tshabalala (2014) researched on the contribution of private colleges to the provision of education in Zimbabwe's secondary school-sector. The researchers established that the teacher-pupil ratio was higher than that stipulated by regulations, most students enrolled for less than five subjects, there was shortage of textbooks, there was little participation in sports, teachers were not competent in most subject areas and most pupils were dissatisfied with the education they were receiving from these colleges. These issues revealed by the research may not be similar in the context of tertiary education where recruitment of teachers is done by the government of Zimbabwe resulting in reduced chances of recruiting unqualified teachers and minimal participation in sport since there is a stand-alone department in charge of sport. Of course, the researcher appreciates that the aforementioned issues are indicative of poor governance in such colleges but she is of the feeling that there is need for an in-depth and independent analysis of management strategies especially in church-run teachers colleges.

Corporate governance practices identified above include, among others, issues of interference by churches during student enrolment, staff recruitment and disciplinary cases. UMC Education Policy (2016) further stipulates that at least 2/3 of the teaching staff should be UMC members whilst the Government, through Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development (MoHTESTD), University of Zimbabwe Department of Teacher Education (UZ-DTE), Public Service Commission (PSC) states that eligible candidates shall be considered equally on merit by fair competition under procedures which safeguard against individual bias (The Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013). Additionally, UMC Education Policy (2016) demands that all principals and vice principals be full and respected members of the UMC and the Bishop appoints the principal and vice principal. On the other hand, the Government of Zimbabwe employs principals and vice principals through interviews without considering denominations. Such contradicting views may cause disharmony if good strategies are not put in place.

Another case was at a church-run teachers' college in Mashonaland East where a principal was accused by the church over issues of governance such as lack integrity, transparency and accountability ((2002, response letter from Principal to church)). In all cases cited above, the responsible authorities demanded that the principals be removed from their institutions, accusing the office bearers of lack of efficiency, transparency and accountability. They established that there was lack of accountability and transparency in the way business was done in the institutions because the principals were paying allegiance to the government instead of the church. It is therefore clear there are serious governance issues in Zimbabwe's

private-run institutions, which require investigation, to establish good strategies for effective management of church-run teachers colleges.

### **Statement of the problem**

Zimbabwean principals of CRTCs are government employees, yet they also have to uphold the standards of responsible authorities (church). Governance principles of the government and those of the churches have points of departure which principals have to handle. It needs no emphasis that principals encounter management challenges particularly when the governance issue at hand is not synchronized. In Zimbabwe, there is too much conflict between and among the church and institutional management hence this study sought to develop a governance framework for effective management of church-run teachers' colleges. Against this background, college managers do employ strategies for effective institutional management.

### **Research Questions**

1. What institutional management challenges do church-run institutions face as a result of corporate governance practices at the institutions in Zimbabwe?
2. What strategies can be used to improve corporate governance in church-run teachers colleges in Zimbabwe?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical framework**

The study was guided by two theoretical frameworks which are the agency and the stakeholder theories. The agency theory states that an organisation has principals (owners) who employ agents (managers) to run the business. Therefore, there is separation of ownership and control. On the other hand, the stakeholder theory gives credence to accountability of the organization. The theory commits stakeholders towards fulfilment of organisational goals.

### **Agency Theory**

The agency theory states that an organisation has principals (church owners) who employ agents (institutional managers) to run the business. The theory emphasises separation of ownership and control (Eisenhardt, 1989). Shareholders (owners of the organization) employ the services of an agent and entrust him/her with the day-to-day running of the business thus, the segregation of ownership from control creates the agency problem (Copeland and Weston, 1992, Warsono, 2009). Separation of control from ownership implies that agents manage businesses on behalf of the principals (Kiel and Nicholson, 2003).

In this context, institutional owners (churches) appoint institutional managers (principals) to manage colleges on their behalf. From the agency theory this arrangement is likely to cause conflict. In the context of the proposed study, conflict arise when principals (church owners) perceive the agents (institutional managers) as not managing their business (colleges) as they expect. Principals (church) focus on their values and profits while the agents (college principals) on the other hand pursue national interests for example the church would want their members staffed in their institutions while the college principals will be implementing government policies that discourages segregation.

According to (Donaldson and Davis, 1991), managers will not be able to effectively contribute maximum returns to owners of institutions unless appropriate governance

structures are set up to safeguard the interests of owners. The agency theory proposes that the aim of corporate governance is to reduce the potential for college managers to act contrary to the interests of college owners. Some college managers may safeguard their interests like giving themselves incentives. Accordingly, the agency theory enables the researcher to explore differing governance practices by the churches which cause some management challenges and undermine pillars of corporate governance such as accountability, transparency and integrity.

This theoretical framework was used as a lens to explore the types, nature and practices of corporate governance conflicts that arise between institutional management and church owners in the three CRTCs. Finally, the researcher intends to develop a governance framework for effective management of church-run teachers' colleges (CRTCS) in Zimbabwe

### **Stakeholder Theory**

This is a theory of organizational management and business ethics that addresses morals and values in managing an organization. Historically, the theory was mooted by (Mitroff, 1983) in his book "Stakeholders of the organizational mind". The theory was later further developed by (Freeman, 1984). The basis of choosing this theory is amplified by the fact that the research primarily revolves around key stakeholders namely; the churches (United Methodist Church, Roman Catholic and Reformed Church in Zimbabwe) which are the owners and the college government employed principals who manage the colleges. Both parties should observe pillars of corporate governance or professional ethics namely transparency, honesty and accountability.

Stakeholder governance is based on the identification of interest groups which should be involved in institutional governance to secure a balanced system where all important interests are voiced (Bittner, 2016). Governance and management of tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe involves stakeholders: government, church, students and principals from diverse backgrounds with interests to be voiced.

The Stakeholder theory promotes a practical, efficient, effective, and ethical way to manage organizations in a highly complex and turbulent environment (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, Harrison and Wicks, 2007). It is efficient because stakeholders that are treated well tend to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organization. It is effective because it harnesses the energy of stakeholders towards the fulfilment of the organization's goals. In this context, both the church owners and principals should work towards fulfilment of colleges' goals. In this case college goals are to fulfil national values, church values, promote hunhuism, inclusivity and moral values. However, these goals may not be achieved due to conflict between church owners and college principals.

This theoretical framework was used as a lens to see the types of barriers that stakeholders encounter in their efforts to achieve corporate governance goals in the three CRTCs. Using the stakeholder theory, the researcher collected information from churches, principals and SRC students who are key stakeholders and believed to be knowledgeable of management issues in their institutions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm which is basically located in the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014). The interpretivist paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from experiences of participants. The interpretivist paradigm aims at finding reasons for participants' actions; thus, the researcher has to interpret meaning from actions. The paradigm is the most suitable for this current research where meaning oriented methodologies such as interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis are used to extract meaning from management and governors of CRTCs. Qualitative approach enables the researcher to focus on reports of experience or other data which cannot be adequately expressed numerically for example opinions of administrators with respect to ethics, responsibility and governance of CRTCs. Qualitative research is extremely useful when a subject is too complex to be answered by either a yes or a no as in this study.

For this study qualitative research method was chosen because of its ability to extract information from participants who are on the ground in the management of CRTCs versus corporate governance practices. In this study, qualitative research sought to answer questions on strategies being used for effective management of CRTCs in Zimbabwe. Qualitative research has been opted for because of the data to be collected, a description of a natural setting without much emphasis on numerical figures (Creswell, 2014, Lave, 2016). For example, opinions of governors and managers with respect to governance and management of CRTCs. For this reason, the study opted for a qualitative methodology owing to its ability to unearth issues in participants' natural settings (community of practice) which are the teachers' colleges and church head offices.

## RESULTS

### **What strategies do church -run teachers colleges use to deal with corporate governance challenges and promote effective institutional management in Zimbabwe?**

To answer research question three, three (3) themes were identified from responses of participants as follows: strategies for institutional management and support, governance and ownership structures, and stakeholder interests and relations. What follows are the resultant responses on the nature of strategies that are in place to counter the myriad governance challenges that disturb effective management of church-run institutions.

#### **Strategies for institutional management and support.**

One sticky challenge for institutional management and support was a clash of interest. The ministry and the responsible authority have vested interest in the running of the institution. With the inherent different interests from the two parties, there is need to reach a compromise because if not properly managed the interest of each part can be a cause of conflict that affect institutional management with regards to different approaches to institutional management between the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and churches, participants had this to say:

*Management ensures that students, lecturers and management have to abide by ministry policies although at times against the church. For example, the zero tolerance to corruption is one such policy. New lecturers and students are all oriented to the policy upon recruitment. (CHR3)*

*The church in most cases do not agree with the ministry who impose policies they consider important to institutional management and*

*management have to abide by that but it did not go well with the church who think management now sides with the government. (CPI)*

The researcher noted, from the responses, the importance of institutional support systems in church-run teachers' colleges. According to authorities, institutions that have good management support usually are effective in their governance issues. On that issue, the response was that:

*“Dual policies i.e., from the government and from the church are giving challenges to management of church-run teachers colleges, thus conflict of interest” (CHR3)*

CSRC3 blamed the RA for interfering with management roles by saying:

*The church confuses us as they want to talk about academic issues which they are not sure of, instead of allowing the principal to do that. Academic issues should be dealt with by academic personnel.*

On the other hand, CS1 and CS2 cited government interference during staff recruitment, fees structures and disciplinary processes. CS1 said:

*On fees we hold consultative meetings with other stakeholders before we announce it to the clients. We have accepted that the government regulates the fees issues.*

Conflict of interest among stakeholders usually impact negatively on the management who are implementers of the policies. If policies differ the manager becomes confused of who to follow hence the conflict extends to management. To manage the conflict, managers follow the ministry policies ahead of church policies as CSRS1 noted when they said “*We are told college policies are in line with the country’s constitution as well as the labour laws*”. Notwithstanding the new rules and regulations in some church-run institutions are drafted in liaison with the constitution of the country and labour laws as stated below:

*Yes, when we came, we were oriented to the rules to be followed at this institution. So, if we are here, we do as the Romans do. We attend Sunday services as said and attend our lectures as said in the orientation (CSRC1).*

On morality and accountability CP2, CP3, CHR2, CHR3, CSRC1 and CSRC2, CSRC3 noted that moral principles are being taught in colleges hence the refusal on use of contraceptives. The church has values to maintain. On implementation of management decisions CP2, CHR1 and CS1 noted that the board makes all decisions and passes them on to management for implementation without consulting other stake holders. CP2 said: “*We are just told what to do. We are not listened to by RA. We expect to be consulted before implementation of decisions from both the church and management*”.

On the other hand, CP3, CHR2 and CHR3 indicated that management formulates policies which they implement with consultation with the church. CHR2 agreed with CHR3 that responsible authorities are not clear of their roles in institutions. CHR2 had this to say:

*RA is not quite clear, but the way I see it is that they come to an understanding through discussion and come up with a way forward.*

From the responses in preceding paragraphs, one can notice that orientation plays a critical role in ensuring that church-run institutions are in line with corporate governance principles. This was seen as a critical support system in church-run teachers' colleges, which enabled

institutions to monitor progress of daily activities, and at the same time taking stoke of what happens. Another response read:

*We also have workshops where we invite personnel to come and address both students and staff on issues of corporate governance, including conflict resolution strategies (CHR3).*

CP2 and CP3 blamed RA for a lack of effectiveness in the running of colleges due to delays in decision making. The RA is also said to be using logic in decision making in place of facts.

### **Governance and ownership structures**

Participants CP2, CP3 and CSRC1 argued that although there are Education boards, their decisions do not matter much as emphasis in these colleges is on ownership. The implication is that what owners want is what always prevail. Although, the church is represented in the board whose composition is guided by the government, resolutions of a board meeting cannot be implemented before the church executives approve or disapprove. This means that the board recommends whilst the RA approves. In the light of this, there is likelihood of a simmering conflict. CSRC1 raised the concern by saying:

*There is an education board but then it's not everyone who is well versed with its role and functionality. We are also not well versed with who they are in terms of composition. Sometimes this causes power struggle which affects management of church-run institutions.*

However, CP2 noted that there is the existence of a governance and ownership structure mandated with the responsibility of running college business. Meanwhile CP3 said,

*We have the Education Board which is the overseer of the education system in the church. And also, we have an advisory council where the RA also has a stake.*

The responses show that there are two boards running parallel in the governance of church-run teachers colleges in Zimbabwe. These are The Board of Education and The Advisory Council. These boards are meant to ensure these colleges are smoothly run. The church structure is where the principal reports to the education board through the Education Secretary. That is the normal structure from the RA side.

### **Stakeholder interests and relations**

Four sub-themes were identified in this theme as follows: different religious beliefs, student support, student to management interaction and involving guardians when faced with problems. On different religious beliefs CHR3 and CSRC3 noted that RAs do not discriminate on religious grounds whilst CSRC1, CSRC2 and CS1 claimed that there was intolerance of different religious beliefs at teachers colleges. CS1 said:

*We make sure institutional leaders are members of our church*

From participants' responses, there was evidence of institutional efforts to support students. However, CSRC2 and CSRC3 felt there were times when some student issues were ignored by the RAs. CSRC2 had this to say regarding student support system:

*The Dean of Students stands for us when there are serious issues reported to him. The issues are solved well regardless of who has brought them. However, some issues are heard whilst others are ignored*



CS2 and CSRC3 suggested improved interaction between students and management. CSRC3 noted that students are not always initiators of the interaction process. Interaction involves mediating the interests of the student body to the institution's management by relating to management, engaging with the structures and engaging in management's policy networks. In support of the above, CSRC3 maintained that:

*Students are given the opportunity to meet and pray. Yes, the Principal listens to us. For example, when we asked for a Tracksuit Day and the Principal approved that.*

From the responses, it follows that students in church-run teachers colleges get support in different forms so that they would comfortably do their day-to-day activities with limited hindrances.

The findings, shows that college managers in this respect, principals, try by all means to be accountable to both ministry and responsible authority in all aspects be it academic, financial or social endeavours as a strategy for effective management of institutions. This dual responsibility on accountability goes a long way to bring quality outputs and will ultimately positively affect the quality of work and a wellbeing of the institution at large. If there is conflict of interest during the process it will be resolved following the MOU provisions. If college principals adhered to the set down procedures and protocols, the institutions will function well and the opposite is true as noted by Wilner, Christopoulos and Alves, (2017) who argue that if a college principal opt not to be accountable, such a scenario heightens chances of conflicts if the church feels they are not recognised by the principal. The study unearthed a number of challenges and the strategies employed by church run institutions to address the challenges.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

It emerged from the study that church-run institutions experience funding challenges. The church-run teachers colleges are in precarious financial situations, fighting for survival, as their only source of funding is from students' fees. Currently the financial challenges are further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the study further avails that, institutions are in dire financial challenges due to a multiplicity of challenges as indicated in the data presentation and analysis chapter. The issue of having adequate finances to run colleges is very important for the effective management of church-run teachers' colleges.

Furthermore, the study outlines that in church-run teachers colleges, government funding is only in the form of lecturers' salaries. However, it is further noted that in an inflationary environment such as the Zimbabwean 21 century economic realities, lecturers' salaries are not enough to sustain them. Thus, college managers have to incentivise lecturers if continuous smooth operation of colleges is to be realised. Harris (2000) concurs in relaying similar observations of the United States of America private Catholic institutions where the teachers received little government funding, and the institutions were forced to fund to sustain the payment of salaries primarily through parish subsidies and fundraising activities.

Findings further reflects management challenges caused by poor corporate governance practices. However, the study shows that church-run teachers college management have strategies they employ to avert these challenges for effective management of these institutions. As college managers grapple with the issues of accountability, they find themselves in a tight situation of trying to satisfy the accountability requirements from the responsible authority and ministry respectively. This is echoed by (Fariss, 2014, Hoye et al., 2006, Al Mamun et al., 2015) who asserts that accountability is an increasingly important element in the

management of tertiary education systems. Although the agency theory argues that owners of an organisation have different interests to those of the management, RAs should always seek ways to promote stakeholders' interests in decisions concerning the operation of their organization.

Results of this study show that church-run teachers' colleges have a problem of multiplicity of offices for the principal to report to. Instead of reporting to the education secretary, the principal reports to various boards and committees. If boards are many for example, management board, advisory board, education board, academic board, board of examiners and board of studies, decisions made may not be the same resulting in confusion. This may negatively affect effective management of institutions. So, sometimes the principal is caught in between. This is a cause of concern, as the college principal is at times faced with two superiors who expects allegiance and compliancy.

Effective management of institutions is improved when roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated in a program charter, memorandum of understanding, or partnership agreement (Shin, 2010). It therefore, relates to the extent to which assignment and exercise of responsibilities between governance and management is appropriate to corporate governance. Role confusion in institutions where duplication of responsibilities by management and RA representative may end up resulting in conflicts. Management is caught in-between and that causes conflict in terms of governance, in terms of running the institute. With the inherent interests from the two parties, there is need to reach a compromise because if not properly managed the interest of each part can be a cause of conflict (Mulenga, 2019).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Institutions that have good corporate governance practices usually are effectively managed. However, the findings of the study revealed lack of good corporate governance practices in church-run teachers' colleges. The study revealed strategies used in church-run teachers colleges that includes but not confined to: use of boards and committees, involvement of all stakeholders in decision making, policy formulation and implementation according to the dictates of the MoU. From the discussion it was clear that there is conflict between responsible authority and the responsible ministry due to dual policies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. The MOU between the parent ministry and the responsible authority must be constantly updated so that it addresses the issues obtaining on the ground
2. The code of conduct instrument in church run institutions must be crafted in line with the supreme law of the country (constitution) and be registered with the courts.
3. Managers in church run institutions ought to regularise their operations taking cognisance of the ministry position and church aspirations
4. In terms of recruitment be it student or staff recruitment, all critical stakeholders ought to be represented for the avoidance of doubt.
5. College managers in church run institutions should consult the ministry and the responsible authority on matters of protocol and procedure.
6. Both parties in the MOU must know their terms of reference and allow college managers to run the institutions to realise their mandate.

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