

## **Marketing: A New Strategy for State Universities in Zimbabwe**

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*The study explores strategies universities in Zimbabwe are implementing to wade off competition. There are currently fourteen universities, excluding non-university institutions. With stiff competition, institutions' survival is reliant on enrolments. This paper discusses universities' marketing strategies to attract and retain both students and staff. Through the RATER Model the research rates service quality in four selected universities. Findings reveal that competency of staff, efficient service delivery, accommodation, and availability of staff to assist students, all enhance rating of university's service quality. The study recommends continuous monitoring and improvement of service quality in a bid to make for competitiveness.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Zimbabwe's higher education has grown at a fast rate since the country's attainment of independence in 1980 to date (2013). There are 14 universities of which six are state owned and the rest are private owned. At independence, Zimbabwe had one state university namely University of Zimbabwe. From the name one can infer that there were no plans for having another state institution. The major aim of the new government when it came into power in 1980 was "education for all" from primary level to higher education. The drive was supported by building of primary schools as well as polytechnics in each province. Later in the 1990's the government shifted to increasing the number of Universities. The justification for the increase in universities was to have skilled and professional workforce and hence improve productivity in the country. Like in other countries, the increase in numbers of universities has not matched government financial support (Jongbloed 2003). Considering the current numbers (as shown

in Table 1 below) of universities, teachers' colleges and polytechnics in Zimbabwe, competition has become fierce as they fight for the same "A level" school leavers. This fight has resulted in brand names in the educational sector being the basis for university's ability to attract prospective students. This has imperatively led to Zimbabwe's higher educational sector acknowledging Keller's (2004) assertion that there comes a time when organisations now realise that brand names are a valuable asset making the services and products they offer to be linked with their brand names. The same notion is supported by Whilsman (2008) who suggests that to create strong brands organisations should deliver and maintain what they promise. Furthermore Foster and Hemsley (2001) also note that most universities are investing in marketing departments to try and get recognition of their brands. The marketing of higher learning services has been supported by Brown and Oplatka (2006) who have conclude that the marketing of universities is now a global phenomena. The high level of marketing in universities has also been experienced in other countries such as Australia and the UK, (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003 ); Holland, (Jonbled,2003 ) and a number of countries in Africa (Ivy, 2001; Maringe and Foskett, 2002). The authors of this paper note that the benefits of marketing efforts in universities and their role in attaching students to their brands have not been fully explained. The purpose of this study is to therefore analyse the level of emotional marketing in state universities in Zimbabwe. The higher education sector in Zimbabwe has seen high growth rate. Table 1 below shows the establishment of universities which has been increasing year after year. The list shows even the latest upcoming universities like Gwanda and Mutare.

**TABLE 1**  
**ESTABLISHMENT OF UNIVERSITIES IN ZIMBABWE**

| <b>Year of Establishment</b> | <b>Institution</b>                            | <b>Status</b> |
|------------------------------|---|---------------|
| 1894                         | Solusi University                             | Private       |
| 1955                         | University of Zimbabwe                        | State         |
| 1988                         | Harare Institute of Technology                | State         |
| 1991                         | National University of Science and Technology | State         |
| 1992                         | Africa University                             | Private       |
| 1996                         | Bindura University                            | State         |
| 1999                         | Great Zimbabwe                                | State         |
| 1999                         | Catholic University                           | Private       |
| 2001                         | Chinhoyi                                      | State         |
| 2002                         | Women University                              | Private       |
| 2005                         | Lupane  | State         |
| 2012                         | Gwanda State                                  | State         |
| 2013                         | Mutare  | State         |

Of the selected universities are Midlands State University (MSU) established in 2000, but now boasting of more than 15000 students on record, followed by University of Zimbabwe (UZ) which has an estimated number of 8611 students which is 5389 less than that of MSU, a fairly new institution. UZ's enrolment has not been on the rise in the past years although lower than that of some of the fairly newly established universities despite it being the first state university in the country. National University of Science and Technology (NUST ) and Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) have a total of 10018 which is 3982 less than that of MSU alone as at 2011 enrolment statistics. This study basing on the enrolment estimates would want to assess the level of emotional attachment of both students and staff to the brands of the different state universities in Zimbabwe.

**TABLE 1.2**  
**ESTIMATED ENROLMENT STATISTICS OF FOUR SELECTED ZIMBABWE'S STATE**  
**UNIVERSITIES**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Chinhoyi University of Technology</b> | <b>Midlands State University</b> | <b>National University of Science Technology</b> | <b>University of Zimbabwe</b> |
|-------------|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 2000        | -  | 1736                             | 2049   | 7335                          |
| 2005        | 2268                                     | 10508                            | 4749   | 6521                          |
| 2006        | 2598                                     | 11348                            | 5503   | 7132                          |
| 2007        | 3352                                     | 10733                            | 5531   | 5784                          |
| 2008        | 2493                                     | 10495                            | 5070   | 4827                          |
| 2009        | 3135                                     | 8458                             | 4924   | 5241                          |
| 2010        | 4079                                     | 9616                             | 4549   | 7425                          |
| 2011        | 4594                                     | 14000                            | 5424   | 8611                          |

The differences in enrolment figures demonstrate the need to differentiate one university from the other as competition intensifies. Based on these figures the researchers make an effort to establish if emotional attachment to a brand contributes to the university that students and staff would want to be associated with.

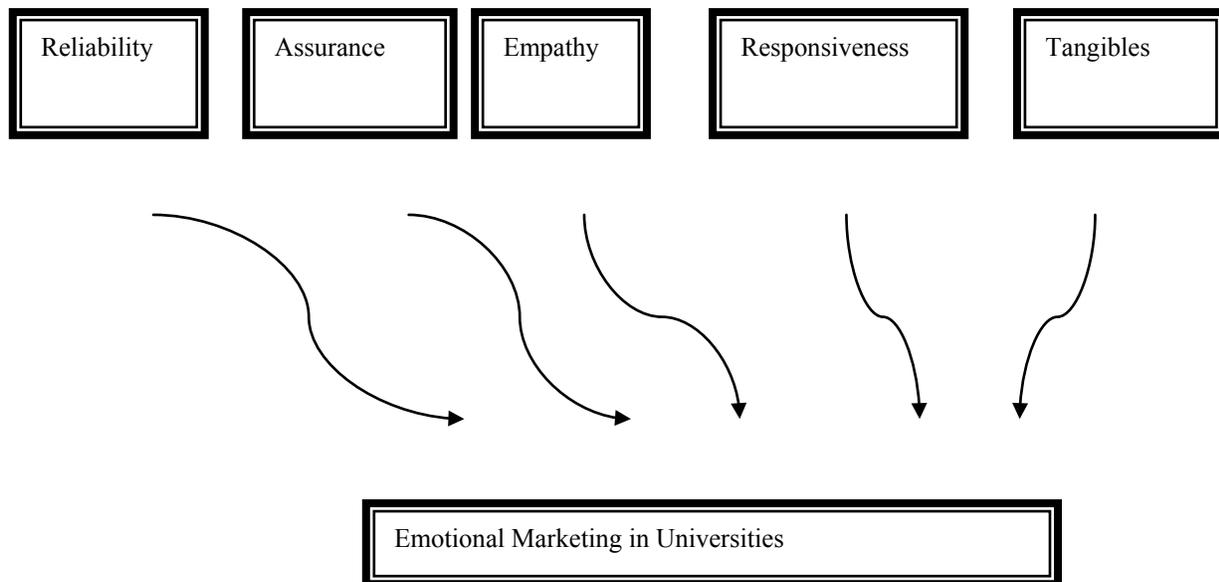
The need to create more distinct brand identities is emphasised by Durkin et al (2012). Foskett & Brown (2001) also note that most Universities are investing in marketing departments. However, Frank and Cook (1995) support the need for marketing activities in universities when they express that higher learning is now a business. Furthermore, the authors explain that small differences in brand perceptions give rise to enormous differences. The small differences could be a result of emotional marketing.

Arguments on the impact of marketing on the performance of universities have been put across by Baldwin and James, (2000). At the same time benefit of universities equipping themselves with information that gives them a competitive advantage has been expressed (Binsardi and Ekwulogo, 2003). It is the assumption in this study that emotional marketing is an important strategy to equip state universities with a competitive advantage. The basis for reputation has been linked to physical facilities which is quite developed in developed countries and might not be an important factor in less developed countries like Zimbabwe.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Universities by their nature are in the service industry and service encounters somehow have an impact on the way customers would perceive a brand. The way service providers are reliable, empathetic; respond to customers, give assurance of the quality of service to be received and the tangibles complementing the service being provided play a role in determining how customers will see a brand. Stakeholders therefore, develop emotional attachment based on the attributes of service quality by Zeithaml and Parasuraman (2006) which are reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness and tangibles.

**FIGURE 1  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**



## **EMOTIONAL MARKETING**

Kohls (1998) says emotional marketing is the highest level of marketing, it is to win and occupy the hearts of customers, and yet Gaski (2004) views the concept as an organization's effort to add one element to its marketing strategy and having confidence it would differentiate to brand from competitor. These company efforts are supposed to lead to make customers loyal and increase profits, (Hunt, 2007). Emotional marketing has been widely linked to trading goods and not services; this has been a limitation of literature. Bejon (2005) argues that students must be considered just like any other customer, implying that emotional marketing must also be extended to institutions of higher learning. Moreover, the need for emotional marketing in higher education is emphasized by Emery et al (2003) who propose that the contract between universities and students is not that of a one off purchase but is a lifetime contact. The authors of this paper here argue that while students might not become customers per se but in a way they are. This is because of the fact that Universities existence is influenced by the availability of students. From this basis it becomes important for institutions to ensure emotional marketing exists and is practised.

Kotler and Fox (1995) and Domino et al (2006) note the importance of marketing in universities for the purpose of making students loyal; but do not outline the marketing strategy to be utilised. The explanation seems to imply that students remain in universities forever like loyal customers. Durkin, McKenna and Cummins (2012) suggest that the issue of marketing is relatively new but they highlight the common marketing activities as; open days, advertising campaigns through various media, alumni events, engaging corporate, interfacing with international academic world, website development, outreach programs, newsletters, newspaper supplements and brochures. All these events are undertaken in order to ensure there is customer engagement. Thus universities are going out of their way to market their institutions. The heavy investment in various activities comes at a continuous cost thus it requires continuous / sustainable income. This can only be done through admission of students who are prepared to pay. However Emery et al ( 2003 ) say students should never be treated like customers who when they buy the price is linked and attached to value. Clayson and Haley (2005) also argue that after paying

students should anticipate receiving higher grades in relation to what they would have paid. If students are considered as consumers of experience as suggested by Yunker and Yunker (2003) then universities should make efforts to make the experience a memorable one and thus create feature value for universities. This is supported by Scott , Grebennikov and Shah ( 1998 ) who say that special experience at a university gives the institution an edge over others. This suggests that challenges are always there with service provision (Palmer 2008, Assel 1985, Blankson and Kalatatis 2007).

## **MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY IN UNIVERSITIES**

The quality of service experienced by university students can be measured through the use of service dimensions as suggested by Zeithmal (1990). The five dimensions are reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness.

**Reliability** – it's when the firm provides its customers with the right services at the right time and without mistakes from the beginning.

**Assurance** – the customers believe in the firm and feel safe with the service provided. The employees are service minded and professional with sufficient knowledge.

**Empathy** – the firm tries to solve its customer's troubles in the best way and always acts in the best interest of its customers.

**Responsiveness** – the firm gives its customers proper service and is always service minded.

**Tangible** – the physical evidence of an institution.

Briggs ( 2006 ) and Choudbury et al ( 2008) believe that the service quality attributes build the reputation of a university, thus determining whether the university is good or bad.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants and Setting**

This study is based on Zimbabwe's higher education sector. Both staff and students' experiences during interaction with different institutions selected namely MSU, UZ, CUT and NUST. The research participants were former and current students as well as former employees and current employees as these were easy to locate. Moreover, due to the nature of the higher education product, that is, it is a voluntary step as most Zimbabweans do not go beyond the secondary education level. In this research staff members are defined as an individual or individuals that work or worked for any state university in the past eleven years. The students also include both masters and under graduates in their final year because these would have been with the institution for at least more than 12 months and have used almost all the facilities in the institution and have interacted with different university staff members during their learning period. Another argument for targeting post graduate students was that the probability for the group to have used same university facilities during undergraduate studies and coming back to the same institution for the post graduate studies thus making it possible for them to compare their university experiences. This would make the data obtained from the research reliable.

To complement the data from the university staff, the researchers also narrate their own experiences with universities they have or are working for.

Universities were chosen as the case portfolio for the research. These are MSU, UZ, CUT and NUST; employees were also selected to participate in the interviews that the researchers conducted.

### **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

A total of 410 students responded to the questionnaire, whilst interviews were conducted with 16 university non academic staff and 80 academic staff. Judgmental sampling was initially used in selecting the universities. The criterion for selection was the estimate enrolment figures of universities. This technique was preferred because 14 universities were considered in the initial population. However, some of the universities had low enrolment numbers and were fairly new in the market thus staff members were also assumed to be new in the system so such participants were not part of the sample frame for this study. Snowball sampling was adopted when selecting staff participants. Researchers relied on references from chairpersons from various departments to select University Staff to participate in the research. Chairpersons had knowledge of those employees who had been at the university for a period of more than a year. The researchers made use of the departmental data base to identify undergraduate and postgraduate students. Convenient sampling was used to select these participants because those that were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study finally constituted the research sample.

### **Instrumentation**

This paper is based on both quantitative and qualitative data derived from questionnaires distributed and in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out with 16 non academic employees and 80 academic staff. The study used a collective case study approach, which investigated, through a questionnaire completed by students and discussions with university employees, the students' service experiences in universities.

The questionnaire was the major instrument in this research. The researchers adopted a questionnaire developed by Kandampully et al (2001) and adapted it in line with the objectives of the study thus allowing the researchers to measure levels of service quality in state universities in Zimbabwe. The instrument had 44 items addressing the 5 attributes of the RATER Model by Parasuraman, (1988). The questionnaire was divided into section A and section B. Section A measured the students' expectations of service delivery, whilst section B measured students' perceptions of the service delivery in the higher education sector. Interviews with staff were held as a follow up to getting clarification from the responses that students had provided through the questionnaires.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Content analysis was used to analyze data from the interviews. Interviews were also analyzed to the attributes of the RATER Model. SPSS was used to analyse quantitative data from the questionnaires.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Below is a summary of findings from the research:

### **Students' Experiences of University Emotional Marketing During Interaction**

To analyse the higher education sector's students experiences the researchers determined the gap in emotional marketing. This enabled the researchers to clearly articulate the level of emotion that was being experienced by both staff. The results therefore, first present students expectations of the higher education sector, then the students' perceptions of the sector during interaction under the 5 attributes of modified Emotional Marketing by Parasuraman, (1988). Students ranked questionnaire items on a scale of 1-5 where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Using the Service Networks model by (Ghosh and Craig 1986) the emotional marketing gap is determined. We are accustomed to thinking about service providers individually. Nevertheless, in many service scenarios, an entire network of service providers is required to provide the complete service that the customer requires model modified to rate the level of emotional marketing.

*Responsiveness*

Responsiveness of staff was measured in terms of staff’s knowledge to answer students’ enquiries; university’s operational hours, staff having students’ best interest and their ability to understand students’ needs. The table below gives the students’ responses with respect to these staff characteristics.

**TABLE 3  
RESPONSIVENESS OF STAFF AT AN EXCELLENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

|      | Staff Have Knowledge to Answer Students | University Has Convenient Hours to All Students | Staff Have Best Interests of Students at Heart | Understand Specific Needs of Students |
|------|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| Mean | 4.3905                                  | 4.4905  | 4.3429   | 4.4190                                |

The means for the four characteristics; staff knowledge, convenient operational hours, staff having students’ best interests and understanding students’ needs were 4.3905, 4.4905, 4.3429 and 4.4190 respectively giving an average mean of 4.410725. Students’ expectations of responsiveness are highly rated.

The respondents’ perceptions of the same attribute during interaction were different. The mean scores for the four characteristics give an average mean of 2.42855 (see Table 4 below). The findings from the discussions reveal that students would not always get a service any time only at specified times, but even during those specified hours staff might not be available or busy with something else. Other interviewees noted that “you find notices by the door- busy now” The majority of the chairpersons interviewed indicated that unavailability of staff was because of several responsibilities that are given to lecturers among them supervision of dissertation, work related learning students, actual teaching, research, resulting in staff that were available being overwhelmed by the amount of work that was available at the time.

**TABLE 4  
RESPONSIVENESS OF STAFF DURING INTERACTION AT STATE UNIVERSITIES**

|      | Staff have knowledge to answer students | University has convenient operational hours to all students | Have best interests at heart | Understand specific needs of students |
|------|---|---|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Mean | 2.4619                                  | 2.5619  | 2.3190                       | 2.3714                                |

Furthermore, the interview results showed that staff was unable to respond to their requests satisfactorily and in some instances would tell them that the person that could attend to their queries and requests was unavailable. The interests of the students were not prioritized by staff. Some state universities have no adequate lecture rooms resulting in congestion and failure to give individualised attention. Consequently some interviewees pointed out that they had to do use outside shade rooms for discussions as students among themselves.

*Assurance*

Staff behaviour, courteousness when serving students and the students’ feelings of safety when transacting with state universities, were the metrics that we used to determine the level of service

assurance that students expect from universities. The respective mean scores were; 4.5; 4.6 and 4.3 suggesting that university students highly value this attribute in university service delivery (Table 5). The students' service experiences, during interaction, with respect to the different constructs of service assurance were contrary to their expectations. From the interviews held with the students, it was found that students were not safe transacting with university staff. This construct had a low mean score of 1.9. The interviewees expressed concern over the pricing of different modes of entry despite writing the same examination. They strongly felt that the prices charged for services were rather too exorbitant. Fees changes were noted every semester, items like ancillary fees did not satisfy the students.( building, medical aid, general purpose fees). The university staff mentioned that the fees levels were meant to compensate for government failure to fund timely or failure to fund during different semesters. It was therefore only through varying ancillary fees than to vary tuition fees which is government controlled.

**TABLE 5**  
**SERVICE ASSURANCE FROM STAFF AT EXCELLENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

|      | Behaviour of staff instils confidence in students | Students feel safe in their transactions | Staff consistently courteous with students |
|------|---|--|--|
| Mean | 4.5048  | 4.6429                                   | 4.3857                                     |

Moreover, interviewed students noted that their valuables and personal belongings were not safe at state university premises. Staff also confirmed these misfortunes that befell their students but indicated that the composition of the student body is so varied from the poorest to the richest hence the problem persist. To try and mitigate the thefts some state universities had secured services of security who have become localised to make them part of the university family.

The above students' experiences explain the ratings of the constructs displayed in table 6 below.

**TABLE 6**  
**SERVICE ASSURANCE FROM STAFF DURING INTERACTION WITH STATE UNIVERSITIES**

|      | Behaviour of staff instil confidence in students | Students feel safe in their transactions | Staff consistently courteous with students |
|------|--|--|--|
| Mean | 2.5095   | 1.9190                                   | 2.3048                                     |

*Tangibles*

Students' expectations of state university equipment, physical facilities, staff grooming and any other university materials were rated as shown in the table below.

**TABLE 7**  
**STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS OF STATE UNIVERSITY TANGIBLES**

|      | Modern looking equipment | Physical facilities visual appealing | Staff appear neat | Materials associated with service |
|------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mean | 4.7381                   | 4.8762                               | 4.8857            | 4.5381                            |

The mean scores for the four characteristics ranged from 4.5381 and 4.7381. The high rankings by research respondents show the importance that university students place on the construct of physical evidence.

Table 8 gives the mean scores of students' perceptions of their encounters with the four constructs of physical evidence we used to determine their experiences during interaction with state universities

**TABLE 8**  
**STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF TANGIBLES DURING INTERACTION WITH STATE UNIVERSITIES**

|      | Modern looking equipment | Physical facilities visual appealing | Staff appear neat | Materials associated with service |
|------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mean | 2.7714                   | 2.5857                               | 2.8048            | 3.0952                            |

The mean scores are above 2.5 for all the four variables. The appearance of buildings, equipment, staff and other university materials were mediocre. During interviews the interviewees highlighted that the some buildings were still in good condition but lacked maintenance, besides most of the buildings were being over stretched to accommodate large numbers yet they were meant originally to accommodate fewer students. The outside appearances were good around the administration blocks and poor in the rest of the premises. The lawns were now brown in colour; where there were air conditioners were not working and broken tiles on floors. Some students said some universities had been turned into mini schools as they were now accommodating students who were on bridging programmes. Other interviewees highlighted that the power outages resulted in dark hallways and rooms. One respondent noted that "candle lit" studies had become common in Zimbabwe because of the power outages.

*Empathy*

An average score of 4.45 was calculated for students expectations with respect to empathy (see table 8) whilst that for perceptions of whether university staff was empathetic during interaction was pegged at 2.26 (see table 9 under appendix)

**TABLE 8  
STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS OF EMPATHETIC STAFF**

|      | Tell exactly when service will be offered | Give prompt service to students | Staff always willing to help students | Staff never too busy to respond | Staff give individualised attention | Staff give students personal attention |
|------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Mean | 4.4667                                    | 4.6952                          | 4.7048                                | 4.3619                          | 4.2810                              | 4.1905                                 |

The mean figure for time service would be offered to students was the lowest at 1.65. This poor service experience also emerged from the interview results. “You would place an appointment for dissertation supervision and wait forever” narrated one respondent. Another respondent indicated that on one occasion he telephoned for work related learning supervision only to get supervision when his contract had expired.

*Reliability*

Ratings of students’ expectations for service reliability were rated high at above 4 (see table 10 under appendix). However, students’ experiences during interaction were rated as shown in table 11. Students’ perceptions had an average mean score of 2.10284

**TABLE 8  
STUDENTS EXPECTATIONS OF EMPATHETIC STAFF**

|      | Promises to do something by a certain time | Show genuine interest in solving problems | Perform service right first time | Provide services at the time promised | Insist on error free service |
|------|--|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Mean | 2.0857                                     | 2.1952                                    | 1.9571                           | 2.1524                                | 2.1238                       |

Findings from the interviews showed that many service errors were observed from university staff. Students were served reluctantly promises to deliver service at a certain time and as promised were not honoured.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the scores of the five attributes used to rate emotional marketing: Responsiveness (2.4) Assurance (1.9), Tangibles (2.5) Empathy (1.65), Reliability (2.10), giving an overall rating of 2.11 level of emotional marketing is still low in state universities, this is in line with Bunzel (2007) that some universities can be viewed as complacent when it comes to enhancing their brand image. However with the ranking of institutions which gives the push for brand recognition and brand visibility higher learning institutions need to initiate positive emotional rating through their staff. State universities equipment and matching with times and numbers thus there is need to use part of the fees to improve lecture rooms and accommodation facilities in order to improve the learning environment.

Whilst universities are making students pay for medical improvements a required in the general physical facilities, thus adequacy, availability especially accommodation to ensure d that good hygienic standards are maintained, whilst this was not a health research health concerns were expressed interviews.

It was concluded that communication was poor at some state universities resulting in students not getting service at the required or specified time.

The researchers recommend that

- Emotional marketing should be prioritised as advised by Oliva and Sterman (2001) who propose that service delivery depends heavily on employees' level of experience hence staff should be developed in this area.
- Tone of all staff need to be worked on as the tone affects the listener hence reducing the level of emotional marketing.
- The sense of caring should be found on all staff members, this might really need to be taught like in most service organisations.( banks , insurance companies do that )
- For staff to be confident in their service delivery continued self development is needed so that level of knowledge keeps improving this applies to both academic and non academic. Customer care refresher course would be very relevant to keep reminding all staff the importance of being good to students.
- Equipment and materials should meet global standards, this can be done through engaging the private sector for example a company can build and maintain a hall of residence or a block of lecture rooms.
- When accommodation is being allocated transparency should be exercised this can be done through an e learning soft ware which shows the available rooms and left after transacting.
- Communication should be improved through the use of all possible means, notices, e learning, and announcements.
- Workshops on the usage of e resources need to be frequent to ensure both staff and students keep abreast with trends.
- Students should also have a chance to communicate back for maybe through their e learning forum, through their class representatives and individually.
- Clear programmes and time tables need to be followed

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