

# The Internal Customers Perceptions Of A Multi-Campus University System In Zimbabwe. A Case Of Great Zimbabwe University.

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**Abstract:** Multi-campus university system is not a new approach in the developed countries but in developing countries the strategy has been adopted especially in Africa. This paper serves to determine the perception of internal customers regarding the adoption of a multi-campus at the Great Zimbabwe University in 2013 from the single campus university. As a new approach to the institution there is a mixed view about the strategy and it's important to measure it so that possible information gap can be filled. This paper focuses on internal customers' perception towards its impact on learning venues, institutional administration, learning and the library activities... A qualitative survey research was used which adopted a descriptive survey design to get in-depth understanding about effectiveness of the multi-campus system as compared to the single centralised system. A sample size of 140 respondents were used whereby it comprised of 100 students, 25 academic staff and 15 non-academic staff who filled questionnaires which were collected after a day or two since they all belonged to the university. A random judgemental sampling technique was chosen and (20) students respondents were chosen from each campus, 5 academic staff were selected from each campus and 3 respondents were chosen from each campus also.. Data analysis was done through the use of SPSS version 14.0 and mean and standard deviations were used to interpret the meaning of data analysed. The overall results were reflective of the fact that multi-campus system was accepted in Zimbabwean universities especially at Great Zimbabwe University because of a number of benefits that accrue to both students, academic staff and non-academic staff..

**Key terms:** Administration boards, Customer's Perception, Multi-campus challenges, Multi-Campus autonomy, organizational performance, Service delivery, Service quality, University system,

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to a Mega Multi-Campus University in Zimbabwe

The Multi-Campus University is not a new phenomenon in the world of education, it originated in the 1970s in United Kingdom and in America some years later. It was a system which was born from a number of challenges in the existing University systems. Lee and Bowen's seminal study in 1971 mentioned nine of the then-11 systems that could meet the definition of multi-campus governance, which included the use of well-co-ordinated management board to govern these institutions, that is "flagships with branches," and the community oriented multi-campus university models. After five years they (Lee and Bowen 1975) reported five additional systems which could fit their definition of multi-campus institutions. Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) is an educational institution based in Masvingo town, in Zimbabwe. The Great Zimbabwe University, was established as Masvingo State University (later changed to Great Zimbabwe University) through the recommendations of the Chetsanga Report of August 1995 which paved a way for Teachers' and Technical Colleges to offer degree awarding programs and eventually become universities in their own right. Originally the University administration and faculties of Education, Arts, Cultural Heritage, Natural Sciences and Electronic arts were housed at the Masvingo Teacher's College campus seven kilometres east of Masvingo town. The University was launched in June 1999 and operated a single campus system for about 10 years with a limited number of students due to limited student accommodation, shortage of lecture rooms, and also limited office space for lecturing staff which resulted in its small size for all those years.

College where the faculties of Commerce and Social Sciences were housed and still there were limited facilities for any meaningful expansion of the faculties. This university since its establishment owned very few infrastructure to accommodate its students, staff, lecture rooms as noted above. The slow growth of the student population and lecturing staff saw GZU renting classrooms from Paramount Academy for two semesters of the year 2011 and Shingirirai Centre (Roman Catholic training centre) buildings in the Muccheke high density suburbs in the same year and the use of Khan Centre, a private property in the city centre of Masvingo and some groups from the Faculty of Education had lectures in the Methodist Church vestry rooms. Since 2011, GZU had increased the number of courses and programmes such as Faculty of Culture and Heritage, the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Commerce, the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Sciences and in 2014 opened the Faculty of Law, and this added to its challenges due to lack of facilities and there was need for a new approach to create a more conducive learning environment. The coming of a new Vice Chancellor Zvobgo was the turning point of the University's direction when the new administration opened a new era of the Multi-Campus System as a strategy to eliminate the problems of student accommodation, lecturing and learning space, staff office space, library space, playing grounds problems and elimination of the scramble for these limited facilities by sister colleges (Masvingo Polytechnic and Masvingo Teachers' College). By the end of 2012 the administration had acquired several buildings around Masvingo as a move towards opening a multi-Campus University system namely, Muccheke Campus, City Campus, Asian and African Studies Centre, and leased Mashava Gaths mine complex to work as Mashava Campus for 20 years, all these added to the originally shared Masvingo Teachers' College and Masvingo Polytechnic campuses. This transition was the birth of a multi-campus system at GZU which enabled the boost of student population (with some 50 international students from Namibia joining the GZU in August 2013), and also increased in the academic and non-academic staff members due to increased workloads. Two garages were opened to cater for the transportation and movement required due to the management of several campuses as well as the increase of vehicles as the University grew in student numbers and the movement of workers to serve. This research study is meant to test the perception of internal customers regarding the introduction of a multi-campus university in Zimbabwe since it is preceded by confused spells of venue seeking and renting of venues everywhere in the city which had built a negative feeling and image of the University in the past. Do these internal people know the difference between a multi-Campus system and the previous practice of desperate looking for learning venues, student accommodation in

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the University, another University venue was the Masvingo Technical

high density areas and begging for playing grounds whenever the University had games? . The study intends to provide adequate accurate information about this perception so that administration can rectify and bridge the information gaps so that they spread positive word of mouth about the University.

## 2.0 LITERATURE

### 2.1 Multi-Site Campuses

The multi-campus universities systems are defined as institutions which have three or more geographically spaced campuses, which have the majority (60%) of their total student population housed at the largest campus. Another definition as given by Griffith University (2005), says that 'multi-campus' refers to having more than two university or college campuses none of which are just satellite campuses. Therefore a multi-campus is an approach in which colleges or universities are geographically departmentalised and can be classified into three categories namely (a) the single-campus university; (b) the university with a main campus and one or more small satellite campuses; and (c) the multi-Campus University which comprise a number of dispersed campuses, and each has a considerable student population. The multi-campus university model, decentralise its academic services, human resources and support facilities to the various campuses according to their specific needs but overall these resources are managed through a centralised system. (American Association of University Professors, 2006), (Harman & Harman, 2003); (French, 2003); (Willoughby, 2003). The Countries like South Africa saw a number of their universities merging into multi campuses, for example in 1994 when 36 of South Africa's universities merged to form only 21 universities and the major aim of their multi campus systems was to enhance the satisfaction of students. In America they adopted the multi campus system, for example the Arizona State University (ASU) has opened four geographically dispersed campuses

### 2.2 The Presence of Separate Administration Boards

In multi-Campus university systems the individual system composed of campuses must have their own management boards with limited powers so that they tailor make the institutional programs to suit local interests and address local issues. Some of the issues include dealing with physical plans, liaison role with local business, civic and local authorities and political figures in the local establishments. (Gade 1993) In a normal set up there is a possible conflict that may erupt between the jurisdiction of the campus boards and the overall governing boards of the university. (Johnston 1993). The business-oriented approach of institutional management in the late 1990s consider the devolution of power from university management boards and system administrations to local campuses governing boards. As a result, governing boards and central system staff can effectively manage the day to day activities by demanding excessive accountability on every activity being done regarding academic and curricular matters with a certain degree of freedom given to the campus management boards.

### 2.3 Campus Autonomy from Centralised Administration:

The individual campus, may operate fairly well with or without intrusion from the governing board, normally the policy for smooth operation is that a higher organization can impose directions to a lower organization and the campus must take such orders because some of the intrusions come from state laws or at times would have been imposed on the governor's office from the president's office but only seeming to the individual campus to have originated with the university governing board or with the vice chancellor. Institutional autonomy is an important concept that can be viewed as an unqualified good to the individual campuses, but it is quite important and essential in application, depending on the kinds and level of decisions over which the campus may or may not have power to decide. (Johnston 1993) There is a lot of evidence that small autonomous organizations have more operational flexibility, fast decisions and highly responsive to changes in the environment and therefore are more efficient than the larger single campus organization. (French, 2003), (Harman & Harman, 2003).

### 2.4 Role of Multi-Campus Systems

The Multi-Campus University experience is geared towards broadening students' horizons and giving them the tools to adapt to the changing business world. The researcher has noted that a number of highly specialised universities could co-exist with smaller number of large, and comprehensive universities (Green, 2006b)

### 2.5. Customer's Perception

Customer perception is the arrangements, identification, and decoding of sensory information as a way of interpreting the environment. According to the Farlex (2012) dictionary, perception may be defined as "a basis for understanding, learning, and knowing or for motivating a particular action or reaction." University students are an important group of people regarding the way they view an institution's performance. The negative perception affect the general company image and how their word of mouth affect potential students (Harman, 2006). Business firms apply customer perception models to test how their clients view them as well as their institutions. Universities and colleges now make use of perception analysis to know how their customers view them so that promotional programmes may be designed to change a bad perception and create a positive perception.

### 2.6. Multi-Campus System Performance.

The multi-campus governance system is a complex scenario of which its success depends highly on the charismatic leadership and aggressive management of faculties in different campuses. Historically the adoption of multi-campus system was gradual as authored by several writers, (Lee and Bowen 1971), pointed out that in 1971, 40% of all students attended multi-campus colleges and universities. Another research by Lee and Bowen (1975) indicated that nine multi-campus had 25% of students. Gade (1993) reports that by 1993 multi-campus institutions had over 50% of total student population. In addition to the above, Pickens (1999), highlighted that the effective

performance of the multi-campus university system, must be based on a number of factors namely:

1. **Set appropriate budgets:** Determine the amount of resources required to operate such an institution than to start running a project that flops before it matures. GZU administration managed to acquire a number of buildings to start a multi-campus system in Masvingo town, and had the finances to build new buildings such as the Herbert Chitepo School of Law. Renovations of student houses at Mashava Campus and modifying of buildings was done to suit learning situations.
2. **Start with the educational needs of the public customer:** The success of any educational institution must be based on customer needs so that a ready market is served profitably. Areas of study were identified in Masvingo town and programmes were started in the block release, conventional, parallel programmes, and the various faculties opened to satisfy the market needs identified.
3. **Allow cross-train among the faculty clusters:** A coordinated and well networked approach must be put in place to provide training in various operational areas between administrators and academic staff from all the faculties and campuses. Since each campus has a campus director and administration staff, there is need to work in the same way through harmonized training. Common courses such as Cultural heritage, Communication, and many others are taught at the same time by same lecturers as a cost reduction strategy for the university.
4. **Allow for 'in transition' campuses allowing for upgrading or downgrading:** There is need for having a smooth transition to take place for upgrading or down grading of campuses. This is so because each has its own growth strength and the governing board has to measure the rate of growth and upgrade fast growing areas and nurture slow growing campuses.

## 2.7. Service Quality

According to Gronroos (2001) a service can be defined as "an activity or series of activities of a more or less intangible nature than normal, but not necessarily, take place in the interaction between the customer and service employee and/or physical resources or goods and/or system of service provider which are provided as solution to customer's problems." Service quality is like beauty in the eyes of the beholder and hence a matter of perception (Rhoades and Waguespack, 2004). In education perception of service quality can affect the value of a service especially if the learner has a negative view of it. Some writers have noted that service quality can result in a firm, in this case a university having a long term competitive advantage. In the university situation, quality of services is the determining factor between its success and failure. There are three important factors that have affected the competitiveness of both manufacturing and service companies namely service quality, customer satisfaction and customer value. (Wang et al., 2004).

## 2.8 Management of Challenges for Multi-Campus Systems

### 2.8.1 Policy Issues:

There is need to have common policies that should govern issues across all campuses. In some instances multi-campus do not have common guidelines to ensure consistency. This lack of policies among campuses can lead to discord as to how same issues are handled in the same university for example smoking in campus. <http://www.pcc.edu/about/policy/tobacco/resources.html> Therefore at Great Zimbabwe University common policies exist to govern the day to day issues that affect the operations of the work such as rights of individual students in the residence rooms, possession of property, use of electric gadgets, visitations, pets and so forth.. At GZU policy papers are available to all stakeholders to ensure that there is uniformity in handling workers' issues, students' issues and academic issues. Every segment has its own operational policy which is used in all campuses.

### 2.8.2. Communication with Staff and Students:

Managing a multi-campus university system require a well-established communication network to ensure fast responses and quick decisions in university wide issues (Yeshin 1998) Both students and staff must have open two way communication avenues so that smooth operations are possible at each campus or in the whole institution. Failure to foster smooth flow of communication in the internal environment usually create unnecessary amount of suspicion, mistrust and rumour among faculties, administration and support staff alike (Hart 1999). At GZU the lines of communication are open and the use of e-mails, meetings, suggestion boxes, telephone, open door policy etc.

### 2.8.3 Support, Service, Resources, and Facilities:

The fair sharing of resources and support in the multi-campus situation is a tricky issue. The fact that campus sizes are different and workloads are varied normally make it difficult to fairly share the scarce resources (Gaither 1999). As the campuses operate one will become large and well-resourced than others. This may create competition among sister campuses and may finally lead to an 'us and them' feelings among staff and students. (Blythe, 2006), Professionals are objective and should handle resource issues in an objective manner depending to the criteria agreed based on facts. At GZU the above situation is not yet in existence but there may be a potential of a skewed resource allocations which must be managed before it become a crisis.

## 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to find the present perception of internal customers regarding the introduction and adoption of the multi-campus university system at Great Zimbabwe University in Masvingo Zimbabwe. The interest came as a fact that new concepts, or new offerings are suspected of bad results, therefore most people (except innovators) do not take news objects positively. The study takes a descriptive survey design because of its characteristics that it gives detailed answers to what benefits this system provides, who does what in the system,

when the system is aimed to yield good results, where the system is implemented, and how the multi-campus system solves the institution's problems. Thus it has the ability to yield conclusive information on the actual students' perception of the university's multi-campus system of GZU. The main data collection method used in this paper was the qualitative research design because its aim was to get a deep understanding of staff and students' perception of the newly introduced multi-campus system and also identify ways of correcting negative perception. The researcher used a questionnaire that contained the three scale Likert scale statements which was rated according to Disagree (1), Neutral (2) and Agree (3) as well as structured personal interviews using the same questions that were asked using questionnaires. A sample was selected from three main internal customers namely students (100), non-academic (15) and academic staff (25). Qualitative research was chosen due to its ability to create openness. Twenty students (20) were randomly selected from year four students from every campus as outlined in the table below, five (5) lecturers were selected from every campus and final

three (3) non-academic staff were selected also from the five campuses of Great Zimbabwe University.

### 3.1. Data Analysis and Discussions

The main focus of data analysis was to determine the present view of internal customers regarding the new approach to administering learning and teaching at Great Zimbabwe University since its introduction of the Multi-Campus system. The data was analysed through the use application of SPSS version 14.0 as shown in the results and analysis of data. The positive view of using the Multi-Campus University system may have been due to a vivid view of the benefits of managing the institution as separate geographically dispersed campuses as opposed to the previous centralised management system at the Teachers' college which hindered growth and effective learning. The researcher used the findings on the first, second, third, and fourth tables to process and interpret the data gathered on the perceptions of the three internal customers on the multi-campus University system in Zimbabwe

**Table 3.1: Composition of customer sample**

Campus	Students	Academic Staff	Non-Academic staff
Teachers' College	20	5	3
Mucheke Campus	20	5	3
City Campus	23	5	3
Polytechnic	20	5	3
Mashaba Campus	20	5	3
Total	100	25	15

#### Hypothesis Statements:

H1. Multi-campus University system positively influences adequate venues at GZU.

H2. Multi-Campus University system influences effective administration at GZU.

H3. Multi-Campus University system negatively influences learning standard at GZU.

H4. Multi-campus University system positively influences effective library operations.

## 4.0.: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 4.1 Perceptions towards learning venues in multi-campus system**

STATEMENT ON MULTI-CAMPUS	N	Minim	Maxim	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learning venues are adequate with multi-campus system	140	2	3	2.94	.233
Office space for lecturers is adequate in multi-campus	140	2	3	2.94	.233
Administration has adequate working space in multi-campus	140	1	3	2.77	.639
Multi-campus system is a venue solution for GZU	140	1	3	2.89	.466
Multi-campus system must continue going on at GZU.	140	2	3	2.94	.233
Valid N (listwise)	140				

In the past one of the main problems faced by students and lecturers alike is the issue of learning venues. The above results show that the multi-campus system has rectified the problem of learning and lecturers' office venues with a mean value of 2.94, and the standard deviation of 0.233.

This shows that respondents agreed that multi-campus system created venues for students. Again the respondents show that administration staff have got enough office space with a mean value of 2.77 and a standard deviation of 0.639 and this means that respondents agree that multi-

campus system solved the venue problem faced by the university. Generally it was agreed that multi-campus system be continued into the unforeseeable future. The results may have been caused by the learning venue problems which rocked the GZU because being housed at another institution which has own purpose and aims created clashes now and then. With this result the

researcher accepts the H1 which says that multi-campus university system positively influences venues at GZU. Both staff accommodation and student accommodation was a challenge which was eliminated through the multi-campus system. Therefore all internal customers felt the need of this system as it brought major change to the operations of the University.

**Table 4.2: Perceptions towards multi-campus administration**

STATEMENT ON MULTI-CAMPUS	N	Minim	Maxim	Mean	Std. Deviation
Resourcessharing is not faire with multi-campus system	140	1	2	1.11	.319
Administrationis effective with multi-campus system.	140	1	3	2.59	.777
Multi- Campusadministration helps solve issues faster.	140	2	3	2.89	.319
A multi-campus system is the best approach for GZU..	140	1	3	2.54	.845
Multi-campus system -must continue going on at GZU.	140	1	3	2.64	.602
Valid N (listwise)	140				

The second table was focused on the perception of customers regarding influence of multi-campus towards university business administration. Respondents shows that they disagreed with the statement that multi-campus system results in unfair resources sharing, with a mean value of 1.11 and they indicated that administration is effective with multi-campus system with a mean value of 2.59 It was noted that multi-campus system enabled administration to solve issues faster as shown by a mean value of 2.89, and standard deviation of 0.319 A general statement that Multi-campus system is suitable for GZU was agreed with and a mean value of 2.54 was achieved. Most respondents agreed with the statement that multi-

campus must continue and there was a mean value of 2.64. The above results may have been caused by the fact that instead of having a centralised administration at every campus there is now a Director of the campus, and his/her administrators to handle operational issues. Therefore the researcher also accepts the H2 which stipulates that the multi-campus university system positively influences the quality of administration at GZU. Instead of physically moving to the campus one would get issues solved from their individual campus. Students now register from their campuses instead of going to the main campus which creates convenience and time serving.

**Table 4.3: Perceptions towards learning in the multi-campus system**

STATEMENT ON MULTI-CAMPUS	N	Minim	Maxim	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reduce time wastage by students	140	3	3	3.00	.000
Multi-campus system enables growth of GZU	139	2	3	2.94	.234
Multi-campus affects learning standards positively.	139	1	3	2.54	.845
Multi-campus system improves learning	139	1	3	2.54	.845
Multi-campus system must continue at GZU.	139	1	3	2.64	.602
Valid N (listwise)	139				

The respondents all agreed with the statement that multi-campus system has closed loop holes of time wasting among students, (mean value 3.00) and a zero deviation was noted. It was also shown that multi-campus system enabled the university to grow (mean value 2.94) due to availability of venues, accommodation and other benefits. The majority also agreed that multi-campus system affects

learning positively as shown by a mean value of (2.54), and also agreed that generally it improves learning with same mean value of (2.54). Finally the majority agreed that multi-campus system must continue as benefits accrue to the institution. The general findings showed that learning improved with the new system. This could be that moving from one venue to the other had stopped. Time could be

fully utilised in learning not moving around looking for venue facilities. Again lecturers now have fixed aboard than when they had limited offices at the campus. Therefore the learning standard tend to improve as the environment of

learning improved and so with this result the researcher denies the H3 which says multi-campus system negatively influences the learning quality standard at GZU.

**Table 4.4: Perceptions towards multi-campus library facility**

STATEMENT ON MULTI-CAMPUS	N	Minim	Maxim	Mean	Std. Deviation
Multi-campus lib system reduces inconveniences.	139	2	3	2.87	.337
Multi-campus lib system makes others suffer	139	1	3	1.73	.906
Library staff work better in multi-campus than before	139	1	3	2.45	.861
Multi-campus library system must go on	139	3	3	3.00	.000
Multi-campus system must continue at GZU.	139	3	3	3.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	139				

The success of any learning process depends on the library and the GZU had several challenges in ensuring that students get library facilities. Respondents agreed that multi-campus system reduced inconveniences in library crowdedness, unplanned closures of the library by co-partners with a mean value of (2.87) and the library in multi-campus system do not make others suffers with mean value of 1.73 and standard deviation of 0.906. It was shown that staff work better in multi-campus system, (2.45) than the previous single campus system. All respondents agreed that multi-campus system must go on (3.00) and standard deviation of 0.00. This may have been caused by the inconveniences as a result of dual management whereby a librarian is controlled by supervisors from two organizations, for example in the Polytechnic library overall control was from the Poly supervisor and during holidays for Poly students the library would reduce working hours although GZU students would be there on campus. The multi-campus system opened more libraries and students could go where it is convenient. Therefore the researcher accepts the last hypothesis (H4) which supports multi-campus system as improving the library operations for the good of GZU staff and students.

## 5. FURTHER RESEARCH

The introduction of the multi-campus system in Masvingo is a new development which has many new issues to both students and staff. Therefore a lot may be studied to further the understanding of the new approach to university and college education. The research was focused on the perception of internal customers and further study may look at the perception of the public regarding the multi-campus system. University administration may design strategies to direct the perceptions of the people if need be.

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