

Chapter 10

Emerging Economy Institutions of Higher Education Sustainability Initiatives to Solve Wicked Environmental Problems

Comilla Laban

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Nigel Chiweshe

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7757-211X>

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher learning are integral players on matters regarding sustainable development. Institutions of higher learning have incorporated sustainable development not only into their curriculum but also into their operating environments. The sustainability of higher education institutions provides a platform for mutual prosperity in the long run and therefore warrants the interrogation of sustainability at institutions of higher learning. Despite this importance, most of the research has been in the northern hemisphere. Very little research has been conducted in the Southern hemisphere, particularly in Africa. This chapter draws insights from a qualitative study. The findings revealed that UKZN had implemented several sustainability initiatives to manage energy and water. The institution also faced numerous challenges in the management of sustainability initiatives such as municipal services, staffing problems, poor communication, lack of knowledge and skills, poor infrastructure, no written policies, and weak collaborations with businesses.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the several challenges faced by humankind today, the impact of economic growth on the environment is one of the greatest paradoxes (Amaral, Martins, & Gouveia, 2015). Economic growth provides welfare to populations and on the other hand, aids in environmental degradation and resource depletion (Amaral et al., 2015).

Sustainability has become a global challenge in the 21st century, and many higher education institutions are facing internal and external challenges in terms of managing sustainability. Some of the external challenges are global competition, innovative technology, economic volatility, declining sources of income and student demands, which can impact on-campus management services (Byrant, 2013).

Globally, there has been some research conducted on sustainable initiatives managed by higher education institutions. In the African context, very little research has been covered on sustainability initiatives led by the University campus services. A survey carried out revealed that African universities had not promoted sustainability initiatives due to the lack of funds, lack of human resource skills and lack of awareness (Mohamedbhai, 2012).

Several higher education institutions have identified that sustainability needs to be addressed in various ways; otherwise, this will have negative consequences for the institutions (van Weenen, 2000; Byrant, 2013).

BACKGROUND

Research carried in Canada on 50 Canadian high education institutions identified that issues around sustainability need to be addressed in different portfolios (Vaughter 2016). The sustainability dialogue has become universal which has seen these conversations being critical in workshops, seminars, conferences and various other fora (Er & Karudan, 2016). UKZN is one of those institutions where the curriculum has been aligned to address issues on sustainability. Conferences hosted in collaboration with international partners have also incorporated sustainability discussions.

Research has proved that higher education institutions are best equipped to address issues on sustainability and to find solutions to the problems, but the challenge of sustainability in higher education institutions continues (Shriberg 2002; Alshuwaikhat and Abubaker 2008; (Abubakar, Al-Shihri, & Ahmed, 2016).

Even though higher education institutions have recognised that education at all levels can be a powerful tool to promote sustainable development and this led to the concept of 'education for sustainable development', higher education institutions are still faced with internal and external challenges (Mohammedbhai, 2015).

Some of the external challenges are global competition, innovative technology, economic volatility, declining sources of income and student demands, which can have impact on the campus management services (Byrant 2013). It is possible for campus management to manage the internal challenges, but the external problems are challenging to manage due to forces beyond one's control.

Higher education institutions have more challenges than corporate businesses as they have to incorporate sustainability to all areas of campus administration, which becomes an operational challenge (Krizek, Newport, White, & Townsend, 2012).

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