

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATION IN THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN EAST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION

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Abstract

Collaboration among institutions of higher learning is a current trend. Universities and colleges in various parts of the world are encouraged to cooperate in research, teaching, human resource development, technological innovations, development of academic programmes, and financial resources. The purpose of this study was to identify benefits and challenges of collaboration in institutions of higher learning that are run by the Seventh-day Adventist church in East-Central Africa Division. Six out of seven institutions of higher learning operated by the Church within the East-Central Africa Division participated in the study. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire from School Deans, Heads of Departments, Directors of Affiliations, and lecturers involved in collaboration in the six institutions, and some lecturers who were directly involved in collaborative partnership.. Thirty (30) respondents were given research instruments to respond to and 53.33% of them returned the duly filled-in questionnaires.

Data collected were coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 11.5, which generated descriptive statistics on variables including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Findings indicated that collaborating institutions did not benefit much out of the partnership, but respondents agreed that collaboration impacted them in human resource development, introduction of new programmes, and improving the already existing programmes. This means that collaborations did not develop new human resources but developed the already existing ones. The study further found out that the most challenging aspect in collaboration was budget implications and communication procedures on collaborative procedures. This means that institutions found it hard to keep up with the collaborations because of budgetary allocation constraints to the aspect of partnership and unclear procedures in the collaborative procedures and practices. Interpretations and implications for education practices are discussed.

Key Words: Benefits, Challenges, Collaboration, Innovations, Human Resource, Partnership, Technology.

Introduction

Collaboration in higher education is the teaming up of two or more institutions of higher learning to work together towards sharing educational and research dreams, achieving common goals, and enhancing collective effort in meeting educational needs in focus. Collaboration between institutions of higher learning has long been part of accepted practice (Read, 2010).

Hugonnier (2007) found out that collaboration of institutions of higher education was a result of global economic interdependence which expanded rapidly after the 1950s. The volume of merchandise exports grew by six percent a year. This took place

consistently for over fifty years. The collaborative trend in higher education, according to Hugonnier (2007), intensified in the 1980s when it was referred to as cross-boarder higher education through mobility of students, academic faculty, programmes, and exchange of professionals. According to Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki (2007), in the 21st century, collaboration in academia is becoming more common because policy-makers perceive it as a strategic way of meeting educational and economic goals of a state. Hugonnier (2007) emphasises that collaboration between institutions of higher learning offers increased opportunities for improving skills and competencies of students, and enhance the quality of national higher education system.



According to Brown (2005), technological development is another modern auto-catalytic power with which every innovation acting a trigger of change comes into contact whereby some of which is anticipated to happen. The material basis of higher education has shifted from being part of the public economy created by the state building nations with the aid of ever advancing technologies creating and destabilising institutions, power relationships, and worldviews. It is this gap, which according to Brown (2005), collaborative endeavours between institutions of learning are focusing on bridging.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify benefits and challenges of collaboration in institutions of higher learning that are run by the Seventh-day Adventist church in East Central Africa Division. The East Central Africa Division is an administrative sections of the world wide church organization that oversees eleven countries of East and Central Africa. Within this territory, the church runs seven institutions of higher learning which award certificates, diplomas, and degrees in various academic areas. One of them awards degrees up to the doctoral level. The study sought to identify whether these institutions do collaborate with other institutions, and whether they realise some benefits in collaboration. It also sought to identify the challenges they face as they work together in achieving their goals.

Statement of the Problem

The six institutions of higher learning that are run by the Seventh-day Adventist church in East-Central Africa Division share basic philosophical beliefs and values, and thus believed to be some sort of collaboration between them. Therefore this study sought to answer the following questions:

- (i) What are the benefits of collaboration in the institutions of higher learning in East-Central Africa Division? And
- (ii) What are the challenges of collaboration in the institutions of higher learning in East-Central Africa Division?

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant to institutions of higher learning, particularly to the following:

1. Institutional leaders:

- a) to create awareness of the need for existing collaboration and strengthening it;
 - b) to identify areas of challenges in collaboration and devise strategies to overcome them;
2. Future researchers in providing them some basic information on the status of collaboration, benefits and challenges among ECD institutions of higher learning
 3. Scholars in the field academia for knowledge creation by adding literature to the existing resources on collaboration in higher education.

Review of Literature

Collaboration in higher education is the teaming up of two or more institutions of higher learning to work together towards sharing educational and research dreams, achieving common goals, and enhancing collective effort in meeting educational needs in focus. Collaboration between institutions of higher learning has long been part of accepted practice (Read, 2010). Hugonnier (2007) found out that collaboration of institutions of higher education was a result of global economic interdependence which expanded rapidly after the 1950s. The volume of merchandise exports grew by six percent a year. This took place consistently for over fifty years. This type of trade became the starting point for globalization. For the world to continue with building a constituently growing world economy, it needed globalization of education, notably higher education to create a global human capital to propel global economy.

Schapper and Mayson (2005) explain that Australia was one of the countries whose universities offered scholarships to different countries of the British commonwealth in the 1950s through the foreign affairs initiatives and foreign aid programmes. By the year 2002, Australia was the third in rank in the countries of the world after the United States of America and United Kingdom to provide university education to overseas students. At that time only the European, American, and Australian states and countries could provide such type of educational services to their counterparts and third world countries.

Modern type collaborative efforts in higher education according to Hugonnier (2007) and Schapper and Mayson (2005) intensified in the 1980s when it was referred to as cross-boarder higher education. It was structured in such a way as to allow

and provide mobility of university students, academic faculty, programmes, and exchange of professionals among and across countries that had mutual agreements.

Benefits of Collaboration

Collaboration and team work among universities create an environment that allows the knowledge, resources and skills of each team member to flourish. According to Marinez-Moyano (2006), collaboration is an act executed by an organization, company or group of people to reach a common goal, which typically takes place on a larger scale than teamwork. Effective collaboration and team work require communication technology, definition of responsibilities and an encouraging culture. Teamwork and collaboration are most effective when team members are expressive and open to positive competition. A professional sports team that wins a championship is an example of well-executed teamwork. There are various areas in which collaboration is of benefit to institutions of learning (Marinez-Moyano, 2006). Some of them include human resources sharing and development, financial resources, university research, technological innovations, and development of academic programmes.

Human Resources Sharing and Development

According to Schapper and Mayson (2005), Australian universities provided travelling faculty to various countries in the British Commonwealth at the expense of sending universities and the ability to provide an international curriculum and instructional expertise. This also provided rich experience to the faculties and Universities involved. The process also enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of institutions involved. Both the sending and receiving institutions of higher learning learnt new approaches to university teaching, practice and evaluation. They also came up with new ways to develop industries by utilising students to research and report on industrial products, their demand and availability.

Financial Resources

Schapper and Mayson (2005), explain that collaboration done across borders and across institutions of higher learning increase institutional and national revenue collections, when they work together with academic institutions that supply new ideas and technologies. Marinez-Moyano (2006) emphasizes that

the supply of money, material and other assets assist institutions to function effectively. The essence of collaboration is resource sharing since organizational priorities and institutional pride are based in resource allocation and utilization. Resource sharing requires development and enhancement of relationships and commitment to achieve something through that relationship, which may not otherwise be achieved by individual institutions.

Research

Through international mobility of academic faculty and staff, according to Schapper and Mayson (2005), universities collaborated in research that shifted from mere academic exercise to modernising industrial products needed in the world market. It also sought for more markets for raw materials and finished products. Australian, British and American Universities enriched their countries' industrial productivity through research done across borders and across universities. It also assisted industries to increase their revenue collections and prestige.

Technological Innovations

Schapper and Mayson (2005) found out that collaboration in research assists to promote a shift from mere academic exercise to modernising industries and increasing products that are needed in market. It also enriches countries' industrial productivity through research done across borders and across institutions of higher learning. Industries increase their revenue collections and prestige when they work together with academic institutions that supply new ideas and technologies.

According to Brown (2005) technological development is another modern auto-catalytic power with which every innovation acting a trigger of change comes into contact whereby some of which is anticipated to happen. Technological development is and has been a by-product of the power relations inherent in human problem solving through the appropriation and reorganization of elements of the environment.

The material basis of higher education has shifted from being part of the public economy created by the state building nations with the aid of ever advancing technologies creating and destabilising institutions, power relationships, and worldviews. It is this gap, which according to Brown (2005) collaborative endeavours between institutions of learning



are focusing on bridging. It is believed that "...access to education would create a new informed democracy where the links between wealth, knowledge, and privilege, on one hand, and poverty, ignorance and exploitation, on the other, would be broken..." (Brown, 2005, pp. 174-175).

Development of Academic Programmes

According to Schapper and Mayson (2005) collaboration of institutions of higher learning which was initiated in Australia for universities within and outside the country, provided travelling faculty to various countries in the British Commonwealth at the expense of sending universities that had the capacity and ability to provide an international curriculum and instructional expertise. This also provided rich experience to the faculties and universities involved.

According to Van der Sijde and Rider (2008), institutional development of programmes in entrepreneurship in collaboration with industrial sector is instrumental in accessing university networks and training. It is very instrumental in identifying companies, developing realistic programmes and assisting students to come up with business enterprises that fit within the frame work of the abilities and means of management and development. Business companies identified in this manner are followed up after a number of operations, and managers link with the academic institution which assisted in developing the programme and the training of the personnel to advance the company. Business plans are written and revised in relation to the growth of the company. These companies are generally market oriented, financially viable, support entrepreneurship and assist people to become their own boss. Such business enterprises are run within the framework of the entrepreneur's ability and legal frameworks of the nations where it is conceptualised.

Challenges of Collaboration

According to Hugonnier (2007), the greatest challenge of collaboration between institutions of higher learning across countries is the difficulty in meeting the job market's changing demand for qualifications. Every country in the world sets its qualifications for specific jobs, which are not necessarily the qualifications needed in other countries. Therefore, it would require standardization of job market qualifications and standardization of industry operations, which may not be achieved easily and quickly. "This

new situation implies that curriculum, pedagogical practices and the organization of learning all need to be re-examined. Appropriate linkages and pathways should be developed to enable individuals to transition to and progress through various learning stages. Reallocation of education and training resources will be necessary, and ministries will have to cooperate with one another, as none will have the power to adjust the economy on its own" (Hugonnier, 2007, p. 140).

Wallance and Pocklington (2002) explain that a great challenge to collaboration of institutions of higher learning is to institutionalise a new order of educational provision that allows a more flexible and smooth collaborative ventures. The building of infrastructure, training of staff, and bridging cultural fragmentation would take more time than expected.

Another challenge lies in the capacity for educational systems to be equitable. This type of equitability has to have three levels, which include: access to education for all; equal access to quality education; and equality of education outcomes, so that the socioeconomic background of students has a minimal impact on their capacity to perform certain jobs. In other words, educational systems across the world should provide a high-quality education to more than just fortunate few and should avoid providing educational access to all at the expense of quality (Hugonnier, 2007). Although many countries have put wide-ranging policies to reduce some of the barriers to collaboration between institutions across countries, equitable access remains a challenge (Burnet, 2007).

There exists fragmentary quality assurance and accreditation systems focusing on national, domestic institutions that are nationalistic in nature and not flexible enough to accommodate needs across-boarders. There should be a system that develops appropriate procedures and frameworks to take into account foreign provisions of higher education in order to maximise its benefits (Hugonnier, 2007).

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design which sought to assess perceptions of institutional workers who are involved in collaborating with other institutions of higher learning in the area of human resources sharing and development. It also sought to identify the impact of collaboration and challenges faced during the process. The institutions

whose workers got involved in the study were: the Adventist University of Africa in Kenya, Adventist University of Central Africa in Rwanda, Bugema University in Uganda, Ethiopia Adventist College in Ethiopia, The University of Arusha in Tanzania, and the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton in Kenya. The Adventist University at Lukanga, in the Democratic Republic of Congo did not turn in the questionnaires given to them. Perceptions were assessed using a survey instrument.

Data were collected from School Deans, Heads of Departments, Directors of affiliations, and lecturers involved in collaboration in the six institutions, and some lecturers who were directly involved in collaborative partnership. Thirty (30) lecturers were given research instruments to respond to. Only 16 (53.33%) returned the dully filled questionnaires.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations whose computations were done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 11.5.

The self-constructed survey instrument was tested for its reliability using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The section of the human resource sharing and development was highly reliable at an alpha coefficient of 0.87, which means that the probability for this instrument to consistently measure aspects of human resource sharing and development was high at 87%. The benefits of collaboration had an alpha coefficient of 0.90, the challenges of collaboration had an

alpha coefficient of 0.85, the impact of collaboration had an alpha coefficient of 0.61, and the focus of the institutions collaboration had an alpha coefficient of 0.76. This means that the probability for the instrument used to collect data to consistently measure the variables of this study is between 61% and 90% which was minimal to very high.

Interpretation of results were based on the statistical analysis of data. The main variables were the benefits and challenges to collaboration of higher institutions of learning. Under benefits of collaboration, the following sub-variables were investigated: human resource sharing and development, research, technological innovations, financial resources, and development of academic programmes. Challenges to collaborative process were also examined.

Findings

Table 1 shows that six institutions of Higher Learning which are run by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the East-Central Africa Division had respondents to the research instrument. The University of Eastern Africa, Baraton had the highest number (43.8%) of respondents, the Adventist University of Central Africa, and the Adventist University of Africa had the least number (6.3%) of respondents.

Table 1

Institutions Involved in the Study

	Institutions of Higher Learning	Frequency	Percentage
1	University of Eastern Africa, Baraton	7	43.8%
2	University of Arusha	2	12.5%
3	Adventist University of Central Africa	1	6.3%
4	Bugema University	3	18.8%
5	Ethiopia Adventist College	2	12.5%
6	Adventist University of Africa	1	6.3%
	Total	16	100%

Table 2 indicates that majority (43.8%) of the respondents were Heads of Department, followed by lecturers (37.5%), and minority (6.3%) were directors of affiliations. These findings indicate that heads of

departments and lecturers were directly involved in collaboration between institutions of higher learning and were readily available with information to share with the researchers.



Table 2

Type of Respondents

	Type of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
1	School Dean	2	12.5%
2	Heads of Departments	7	43.8%
3	Director of Affiliations	1	6.3%
4	Lecturers involved in affiliations	6	37.5%
	Total	16	100.0%

Areas of Collaboration

In a summarised result presented in table 3, the findings on the areas of collaboration were as follows: business studies (M = 2.81, SD = 0.98), humanities and social sciences (M = 2.69, SD = 1.01), and educa-

tion (M = 2.69, SD = 0.95), respectively. Research and Science (M = 2.19, SD = 0.83) and technology (M = 2.13, SD = 0.81) were the least areas of collaboration, respectively.

Table 3

Areas of Collaboration

Area of collaboration	Mean	SD
Science and technology	2.13	0.81
Business	2.81	0.98
Health Sciences	2.50	1.10
Humanities and Social Sciences	2.69	1.01
Education	2.69	0.95
Research	2.19	0.83

Note: 1.0- 1.50 = Not very applicable, 1.51 - 2.50 = Not applicable, 2.51 - 3.50 = Applicable, 3.51 - 4.00 = Very applicable

Findings in table 3 show that the area of business studies which had a mean of (M = 2.81, SD = 0.98) followed by humanities and social sciences, and education (M = 2.69, SD = 1.01) and (M = 2.69, SD = 0.95) fall under the category of applicable. Research and Science and technology are considered to be areas that are not applicable for collaboration with (M = 2.19, SD = 0.83) and (M = 2.13, SD = 0.81), respectively. For the school of business, a mean of 2.81 implies that the school of business studies applies collaboration with other institutions. This further infers that the schools of business had collaborations which were functional and practical. The mean of 2.69 in humanities and social sciences and education, whose ratings were next to business studies showed that there was a degree of collaboration, but the collaboration is not strongly practical and functional. It seems to be carried out with a

some difficulties. The mean of 2.19, 2.13, and 2.50, which also fell under the lowest level of not applicable, indicate that collaboration in areas of research, science and technology and health sciences do not exist. This further means that Adventist Universities in East-Africa Division are not collaborating in areas of technological exchange and research work.

Focus of Collaboration

The main focus of collaboration is in training and continuing professional development (M = 3.00, SD = 1.03) followed by personnel exchange (M = 2.75, SD = 1.06). Library services is the least (M = 2.13, SD = 0.72) focus area in this section.

Table 4
Focus of Collaboration

Focus of collaboration	Mean	SD
Training and continuing professional development	3.00	1.03
Personal Exchange	2.75	1.06
Students internship	2.25	0.86
University Staff on board of directors	2.25	0.86
Use of University Research facilities	2.13	0.72
Library and other research related services	2.56	0.96
Research project licensing	2.41	0.89

Note: 1.0- 1.50 = Not very applicable, 1.51 - 2.50 = Not applicable, 2.51 - 3.50 = Applicable, 3.51 - 4.00 = Very applicable

Table 4 indicates that training and continuing professional development and personnel exchange are aspects in which Universities of the Seventh-day Adventists in the East-Central Africa Division collaborate with mean ratings of $M=3.00$ ($SD\ 1.03$) and $M= 2.75$ ($SD\ 1.06$), respectively. These mean ratings fell under the category of applicable. This means that respondents agreed that universities collaborate in training and continuing professionally developing their faculty in form of seminars, conferences, and symposium and do exchange personnel for the purpose of ensuring commonality.

The least aspect in which universities collaborate was research project with a mean rating of 2.13 and a standard deviation of 0.72. This mean rating of 2.13 for collaboration on research projects means that respondents disagreed that the institutions of higher

learning in East-Central Africa Division do collaborate in writing research or related projects. This further implies that institutions may not be involved in research work or related projects. If they do, each university struggles on its own to work on research projects without consulting or working with others.

Impact of Collaboration

Table 5 indicates that the impact of collaboration between Universities is most felt in assisting human resource development ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.86$) followed by helping in the introduction of new programmes ($M= 2.94$, $SD = 1.06$) and improving the existing programme ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.05$). The area in which the impact of collaboration was least felt is helping in the technological innovation ($M=2.23$, $SD = 0.72$).

Table 5
Impact of Collaboration

Impact of collaboration	Mean	SD
Helped us in introducing new programmes	2.94	1.06
Improved our existing programme	2.81	1.05
Helped us in development of new techniques/methods	2.44	0.81
Helped us in human resource development	3.25	0.86
Helped us in research and innovations	2.44	0.96
Helped us in technological innovation	2.13	0.72
Overall Mean	2.67	0.91

Note: 1.0- 1.50 = Not very applicable, 1.51 - 2.50 = Not applicable, 2.51 - 3.50 = Applicable, 3.51 - 4.00 = Very applicable

As indicated in table 5, the impact of collaboration is felt in the area of human resource development with a mean rating of 3.25. This is followed by helping in the introduction of new programmes with a mean rating of 2.94 and improving the existing programmes with a mean rating of 2.81. Although the three mean ratings (3.25, 2.94 and 2.81) are falling under the category of applicability to these services, this is an indication that some universities have been helped by other universities to develop programmes and improve the existing ones. The least mean rating of 2.23 on the technological innovations meant that universities do not assist each other in developing

advancing technological innovation.

Benefits of Collaboration

In a summarised result presented in table 6, collaboration assisted institutions involved to maintain momentum ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.86$). On the benefits that institutions attained from collaborations is maintaining momentum which was scored with a highest mean rating of applicability of 3.25, and the lowest mean of applicability of 2.56. This means that institutions gained momentum to start their own programmes when they started collaborating with each other and improved in serving customers.

Table 6

Benefits of Collaboration

Benefits of collaboration	Mean	SD
Participate with affinity groups	2.75	0.77
Rates on customer service would increase	2.56	0.96
Defines roles and responsibilities	2.88	0.89
Leadership involvement	2.88	0.89
Access to better information system	2.88	0.96
Better data integrity	2.63	0.89
More mission focused	2.75	0.86
More creativity and innovation across agency/function lines	2.63	0.72
Wider institutional and functional expertise knowledge	2.88	0.81
Maintaining Momentum	3.25	0.86
Overall Mean	2.81	0.86

Note: 1.0- 1.50 = Not very applicable, 1.51 - 2.50 = Not applicable, 2.51 - 3.50 = Applicable, 3.51 - 4.00 = Very applicable

Challenges Faced in Collaboration

Table 7 shows that the main challenges faced in the process of collaboration was budget implica-

tions and communication, which were scored with mean ratings of $M = 3.13$ ($SD = 1.09$) and $M = 2.81$ ($SD = 1.11$), respectively.

Table 7

Challenges Faced in Collaboration

Challenges faced in Collaboration	Mean	SD
Identifying common purpose/goal Setting	2.56	1.03
Trust	2.56	0.96
Training	2.56	0.89
Lack of leadership accountability	2.69	0.87
Budget implications	3.13	1.09
Lack of understanding of functions	2.63	1.02
Conflicting priorities	2.56	1.03
Communication	2.81	1.11

Note: 1.0- 1.50 = Not very applicable, 1.51 - 2.50 = Not applicable, 2.51 - 3.50 = Applicable, 3.51 - 4.00 = Very applicable

On the challenges of collaborations within the institutions of higher learning, respondents agreed that budgetary implications was the most difficult thing to deal with at a mean rating of 3.13. The second challenge of collaboration was communication with a mean rating of 2.81. Identifying common purpose, trust, training and conflicting priorities were the least challenging aspects with the mean rating of 2.56. This means that institutions found it hard to keep up with the collaboration because of budgetary allocations and lack of communication. There was no enough money allocated by universities to support collaboration among and between universities. Neither was there defined communication procedure within and between collaborating universities. But universities did not find many problems to have a common purpose, trusting each other, training workers and did not encounter much problem of conflicting roles among and between themselves. This further implies that institutions maintained the purpose for which they existed, they trusted one another, trained their personnel individually and focused on priorities they had already identified as individual institutions right from the start.

Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

It was found out that institutions benefited by gaining courage to maintain momentum to start their own programmes when they started collaborating with each other; Collaboration assisted institution to training and continue developing their faculty in form of seminars, conferences and symposium; the impact of collaboration also motivated institutions to develop and introduced new programmes which provoked them to develop their human whereby individual institutions sent their personnel to further higher degrees in order to run the programme they had developed.

The study found out that challenges faced in the process of collaboration included: Universities finding it had to maintain momentum in collaborations because of difficulties in budgetary allocations and communication. There was no enough money allocated by Universities to support collaboration among and between themselves; there were no defined and clear channels of communication on collaborations; and there were no collaboration in research projects, each university is struggling on its own to work on research projects and training of personnel without consulting or working with each other

Based on the above findings it is recommended

that:

1. The educational leadership of the East-Central Africa Division, should encourage institutions of higher learning within the territory to continue exploring avenues of collaboration in seminars, workshops, conferences and developing programmes;
2. Consult each other as they develop human resource, keep a personnel data base, and encourage exchange of human resource with out necessarily transferring them from one University to another;
3. When working on annual budgets, universities should increase the allocation on collaborations and most especially in research and technology;
4. Institutions of higher learning should communicate to their fellow administrators and lecturers on collaboration arrangements and procure within and without the institutions;
5. Universities should be open to each other while developing programmes and personnel in order to help each other source experts from among themselves and lift each other.

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