

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Ascending or descending the ladder? A View of Great Zimbabwe University students on higher education as a vehicle for vertical social mobility

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The article was an attempt to unravel the assorted sentiments of Great Zimbabwe University students regarding higher education as a vehicle for upward social mobility. The researchers became enthusiastic to undertake this study after detecting a steady increase in the number of students enrolling for higher education amid a diversity of militating variables. A sample of 50 students comprising 20 males and 30 females was selected using the stratified random sampling method. The phenomenological research design was used and data was gathered using questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Psychological theories of Maslow, Herzberg and Erikson were crucial in interpreting the findings. The study revealed that the students strongly believed that higher education provides a gateway to a financially stable social life, albeit the expenses to be incurred. The researchers also established that some students pursued higher education for other reasons apart from financial and social benefits. The researchers recommended, among other things, that interested researchers should conduct allied longitudinal research studies in which cohorts of respondents are monitored over a long period of time in a bid to establish the extent to which attaining higher education guarantees vertical social mobility.

**Key words:** Vertical social mobility, hygiene factors, satisfiers, generativity versus stagnation, diploma disease phenomenon, self-actualisation, Great Zimbabwe University.

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous reasons for embarking on higher education have been given by various students in different parts of the world with the most popular one being increased earning potential (<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Educationandlearning/UniversityandHigherEducation/WhyGoToUniversityorCollege/DG-4016998>). Pollard et al (2008) indicate that many adult students believe that going to university improves employability and career prospects as well as aiding personal development. Moreover, some students believe that attaining higher education qualifications entitles an individual to high remuneration packages, which can improve one's living

conditions because the individual will be able to afford housing and health costs, among other things (<http://education-portal.com/articles/why-I-Higher-Education3%F.html>). However, Altbach et al. (2009: IV, X) warn that cost remains an enormous barrier to accessing higher education in both developed and developing countries. The researchers embarked on this research study in a bid to establish the extent to which students viewed higher education as an agent of upward social mobility especially when one considers the financial expenses, which one has to incur during higher education.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture in Zimbabwe (2007:1) indicates that Zimbabwe has undergone rapid expansion in educational opportunities since independence, which yielded positive results as confirmed by the 2002 national census. Kariwo (2007:45)

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reiterates that higher education in Zimbabwe witnessed a rapid expansion in 1999 largely in response to the demand, which commenced in 1980. The abrupt demand for higher education can be attributed to the fact that the students who had benefited from the floodgates of educational opportunities introduced soon after independence in Zimbabwe had then reached the higher education tier. However, the increase in the demand for higher education to some extent strained the government's ability to sufficiently fund the higher education expenses of all the students (CARA/IOM, 2010:18). While university fees were heavily subsidised by the Zimbabwean government especially in the first decade after independence, 1980 to 1990, the changes in the economic arena, among other things, have virtually altered the complexion of the situation in universities. , Nevertheless, Kariwo (2007) comments that, despite some spells of economic turmoil which sometimes bedevil Zimbabwe, the demand for higher education has tremendously increased in the past few years. It was this paradoxical phenomenon of a significant increase in demand for higher education in Zimbabwe amid an equally significant rise in the accompanying expenses that caught the attention of the researchers.

According to CARA/IOM (2010:5), "A major challenge facing Zimbabwe's higher education institutions are the heightened fees for both tuition and accommodation." Altbach et al. (2009: x) further emphasise that students are increasingly responsible for shouldering the burden of paying tuition fees and meeting other allied expenses. Kariwo (2007) claims that there is still a recognisable chasm between the post-qualification earnings of higher education students and the fees they pay to undergo higher education. One is then tempted to wonder if the expenses incurred during one's pursuit of higher education will not lead to relatively enduring financial doldrums, which will cast their long shadows for a long period of time during one's post-qualification employment.

The 'diploma disease' concept, which was initially explored by Dore in 1976, was found to be quite relevant to the exploration of students' reasons for embarking on higher education when there are so many financial hurdles to be cleared. According to Dore and Whittaker (2001: 13) as well as Dore et al. (2003: 286), the 'diploma disease' phenomenon, which is also called qualification escalation or credentialism, is a situation whereby students exert great effort to attain higher qualifications not for the pleasure of learning, but for more qualification earning geared to ultimately facilitate job attainment. Jain and Jain (2005: 4) view qualification escalation as a ritualistic and tedious exercise characterised by anxiety and boredom, which can eventually lead to low curiosity and imaginative power. Chillias (2010) allude to the prevalence of credentialism whereby students nurse the belief that a first degree needed to be supplemented with postgraduate qualifications in order to succeed in the

labour market. Vaitilingam (2009: 21) reiterates that the acquisition of high-level skills through participation in higher education is fundamentally important for combating professional obsolescence due to under-qualification. While Dore analysed qualification escalation in countries such as Japan, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Britain, the researchers focused on students in Zimbabwe.

Universities UK (2010: 50) highlights a research study in the United Kingdom, which revealed that there is adequate evidence to show that students are increasingly choosing subjects in which there is a high probability of post-qualification lucrative employment. Hicks et al. (2009: 6) report of a research study, which revealed that the incentive to study for foundation degrees was anchored on the argument that participation in higher education would enable the students to develop a career and maximise future employment opportunities.. Universities UK (2010: 18) confirms that there has been a pronounced increase across the United Kingdom in the number of students aged at least 25 years who seek higher education for the sake of being strategically positioned to combat the prevailing or anticipated future economic difficulties. Nevertheless, a research study of Teaching Assistants studying for a foundation degree by Woolhouse, Dunne and Goddard (2009) in Hicks et al. (2009:30) revealed that attaining foundation degrees does not automatically translate to career achievement and financial prosperity. It was upon meditating on such conflicting research findings that the researchers felt primed to explore the views of students regarding higher education as a vehicle for upward social mobility.

A research study conducted by the UK HECSU (2005) with applicants to full-time UK Higher Education courses revealed that the students gave gender-related reasons for embarking on higher education. More male than female students disclosed that their decision to embark on higher education was principally influenced by the desire to have better employment opportunities (<http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/assets/documents/researchreports.html>). Reay (2003), who researched on the experiences of mature female students, established that students were more influenced by process motivators of completing the course, than by outcome motivators or subsequently career achievements. Time was also taken by the researchers to figure out if there were any differences between the view of male and female Zimbabwean students regarding the role of higher education in facilitating vertical social mobility.

Altbach et al. (2009: X) emphasise that higher education students and their families are increasingly becoming responsible for paying tuition and other fees. According to Universities UK (2010: 35, 51), a research study conducted in the United Kingdom established that some students work on part-time or full-time basis while studying principally to help to pay for the essential living expenses and meeting study costs rather than for gaining work-related experience. Pollard et al. (2008) admit that

higher education is expensive and there is a possibility that some students will run into debt as they try to meet some higher education expenses. Such a financial set-up is suggestive of the view that undergoing higher education is a financial adventure, which is tantamount to descending the economic ladder as one's social status deteriorates due to debts and limited affluence.

Different countries have adopted different approaches to meet the demand for higher education in a cost effective way. According to Altbach et al. (2010: IV), income-contingent loans where repayment plans are tied to post-qualification earnings have gained popularity in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Court (1999) indicates that the University of Makerere has responded to declining government subventions by charging economic fees for private students, raising 40% of its revenue in the process. Chile has introduced a new loan programme that targets students from low-income families (Altbach, 2010: IV). The research study focused on the students in Zimbabwe who were being affected by different financial pressures as well as unique terms of fees payment schemes. Moreover, the geographical, methodological and contextual differences between the outlined research studies and the current study arguably justify the undertaking of this study since the possibility of unearthing novel findings could not be ruled out.

### Theoretical framework

The main psychological theories which were instrumental in the discussion of the research findings include Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Erikson's psychological theory and Herzberg two-factor theory. Maslow postulates that human beings can only endeavour to achieve higher needs if the basic needs such as physiological needs and security needs are reasonably met (Szarkowicz, 2006: 85). By virtue of being a humanistic psychologist, Maslow believes that human beings have an inherent quest for self-actualisation, that is, being the best they can be (Atherton, 2011: <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/motivation.html>). According to Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010: 449), self-actualisation is, 'the sense that one is fulfilling one's potential and doing what one is suited for and capable of.' The researchers made reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs in a bid to explore whether higher education was pursued by the respondents for mere professional self-actualisation or for the sake of ascending the social ladder.

Erik Erikson posits in his psycho-social in which a particular crisis has to be resolved at each stage (Meggitt, 2006: 162; Bee and Boyd, 2004: 15). Of importance in the research study was the generativity versus stagnation stage to which the majority of the research participants belonged. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2010: 102) posit that generativity refers to the dedication by middle-aged adults to the provision of skills,

resources and creativity principally to enhance the quality of their societies. According to Santrock (2004: 71), generativity focuses on, among other things, one's ability to garner material possessions, accumulate qualifications or have children so as to leave a legacy for the next generation (Meggitt, 2006:163). The researchers were to some extent zealous to figure out if the desire by students to obtain higher education qualifications was in any way linked to Erikson's psycho-social theory, or to other factors having something to do with social mobility.

Herzberg's two-factor theory which is also called the motivation-hygiene theory, claims that job satisfaction and motivation are usually brought about by the intrinsic variables called motivators while job dissatisfaction is normally attributable to external factors called hygiene factors (Sapru, 2006: 213; Naidu, 2005: 124). Examples of motivators entail recognition at work, responsibility, profession growth and advancement, (Schermerhorn, 2008: 348). On the other hand, examples of hygiene factors include salary, security, working conditions, company policy (Robbins and Coulter, 2002: 427). The motivation-hygiene theory claims that, while addressing hygiene factors leads to a reduction in job dissatisfaction, it does not translate into job satisfaction (Schermerhorn, 2010: 299; Naidu, 2005: 124). Instead, job satisfaction is brought about by addressing motivators. This means Herzberg believes that variables, which yield job satisfaction and the factors which lead to job dissatisfaction are mutually exclusive (Robbins and Coulter, 2002:428). Some of the views of the respondents were analysed relative to the motivation-hygiene theory as well as the quest for vertical mobility.

### Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does attaining higher enhance the quality of one's social life?
2. What are some of the financial challenges which students contend with during higher education?
3. Which variables motivate students to embark on higher education apart from the anticipated financial benefits?
4. Does any association exist between the reasons for embarking on higher education and gender?

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The researchers adopted the phenomenological research design. According to Groenewald (2004:44), "the phenomenologist's are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspective of people involved". A phenomenological researcher delves into the lived experiences of those who are

participating or who at some point took part in the subject or situation under scrutiny (Maypole and Davies, 2001; Groenewald, 2004). Chilisa and Preece (2005: 142) indicate that phenomenological studies focus on studying people's experiences in a bid to gain finer details of their social lives. The researchers opted for the phenomenological research design because it enabled them to gather the views and sentiments of the experientially involved students pertaining to the role of higher education as a vehicle for vertical social mobility amid a multiplicity of militating variables and uncertainties. As a form of methodological triangulation, the researchers also subjected some of the research findings to a chi-square test at both 10 and 5% significance levels.

### Data Gathering Instruments

Questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect the relevant data from the respondents as a form of methodological triangulation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2010:173). Due to the respondents' high levels of literacy, the researcher deemed it appropriate to make use on questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted in a bid to capture some non-verbal forms of communication among other things. Haralambos and Holborn (2008: 827) back the use of individual interviews by saying, "It may be easier to establish rapport, confidentiality can be ensured, and the respondent is not distracted or influenced by the presence of other interviewees". Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010: 208) define a focus group discussion as, "a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment." Morgan (2006) in Haralambos and Holborn (2008: 828) argues that focus group discussions are more appropriate when the group members have a shared interest or area of expertise and this was quite applicable to the research study. Moreover, Wilkinson (2004) in Haralambos and Holborn (2008: 828) contends that focus group discussions significantly mirror social reality as they are more naturalistic than one-to-one interviews.

### Population

The target population was made up of 150 Bachelor of Education Degree students, comprising 90 female students and 60 male students, who had at some point graduated from teachers' college with a Diploma in Education or a Certificate in Education. Their ages ranged from 25 years to 45 years while their teaching experience ranged from 3 years to 20 years. These students came from virtually all the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe, thereby increasing the degree of generalisability of the research findings.

### Sample and Sampling Method

A sample of 50 respondents was selected using the gender-based proportional stratified random sampling method. Chilisa and Preece (2005: 103) view proportional stratified random sampling as sampling procedure in which a sample is randomly selected in such a way that it is proportionally a representative of each stratum. The sample comprised 30 female students and 20 male students and the respondents had a mean age of 37.4 years and a standard deviation of 5.29 years. Moreover, the sample members had an assortment of attributes relative to factors such as teaching experience, age, socio-economic background and career ambitions.

### Ethical Considerations

The researchers coded the names of the students using both letters

and numbers in an attempt to observe the ethical principle of anonymity (Chiromo, 2006: 11). Male students were identified with the letter M and the numbers 1 to 20, that is, M1, M2 up to M20. Similarly, female students were identified using the letter F and the numbers 1 to 30, that is, F1, F2 up to F30. The other ethical principles which were observed include informed consent, confidentiality and the right to privacy. The students also benefitted through empirically witnessing how data is collected during the research process using questionnaires, individual interviews and focus group discussions, hence the principle of beneficence was also observed.

### Research Findings

The following are the research findings which emerged when the researchers analysed the contributions of the research participants:

1. 80% (40) of the respondents believed that higher education qualifies as one of the chief agents of upward social mobility.
2. Facilities such as bank loans, credit sales, hire purchase and insurance policies were cited by the respondents as the lucrative benefits of embarking on higher education which subsequently enables one to ascend the socio-economic ladder.
3. 86% (43) of the research participants admitted that financial resources for meeting expenses such as fees, accommodation, food and stationery among other things, were a serious challenge since they were on a half-salary scheme with no housing and transport allowances.
4. 62% (31) of the sampled students admitted that they had to sell some of their assets to supplement their half salaries.
5. The respondents unanimously agreed that the benefits of attaining higher education were in most cases unable to offset the expenses incurred during training within a few years of post-qualification employment.
6. The prospect of teaching in and around urban areas was singled out by more female respondents than males as another key reason for enduring the challenges of undergoing higher education.
7. Fear of professional obsolescence was mentioned by 78% (39) of the respondents as a credible reason for embarking on higher education despite the countervailing circumstances.
8. The chi-square test employed to explore if there was an association between gender and factors such as vying for promotions, becoming knowledgeable and enhancing one's chances of branching into a new career domain while holding other variables constant revealed that the reasons for embarking on higher education were dependent on gender at 10% significance level. However, no association was found between the reasons for embarking on higher education and gender at 5% significance level.
9. 82% (41) of the respondents expressed the view that they were nursing the hope of reaping the benefits of attaining higher education when the economic climate in the country improved.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Assorted sentiments were expressed by the 50 students who constituted the sample. Firstly, 80% (40) fervently indicated that higher education remains the chief gateway to a better social life especially in countries where skills and qualifications are properly considered. The research participants highlighted that attaining higher education qualifications usually brings about a myriad of benefits, which will enhance the quality of individual's social life. They stressed that higher education graduates normally enjoy facilities such as bank loans, credit sales and hire purchase agreements as well as insurance policies and funeral policies by virtue of being formally employed.

Therefore, it can be argued that the sentiments of the respondents to a large extent agreed with those of students in the United Kingdom regarding the role of higher education as an agent of upward social mobility (<http://education-portal.com/articles/why-I-Higher-Education-3%F.html>). According to the research informants, such facilities definitely enhance the quality of the social lives of the beneficiaries thereby enabling them to ascend the social ladder.

Furthermore, the respondents intimated that attaining a higher education qualification usually liberates an individual from a variety of barriers. They pointed out that the negative effects of limiting factors such as poor socio-economic background or being an orphan can all be diluted and minimised by attaining higher education qualifications. 35 out of the 50 respondents argued that the negative effects of variables such as gender differences or whether one hailed from a rural or urban background could be evened out through undergoing higher education. The researchers also gleaned that the respondents believed that attaining higher education qualifications usually enables one to get a job in which one would be earning a reasonably high regular salary, which makes one more affluent. They further elaborated that earning a regular salary would enable one to carry out strategic planning pertaining to the various social developmental projects one would be interested in. Such planning, the respondents argued, would most probably lead to a better social life, hence vertical social mobility.

72% (36) of the respondents indicated that they somehow nursed the dream of teaching in urban schools where the quality of their lives would improve significantly through using amenities such as better transport facilities, electricity, tap water and some cheaper commodities. More female respondents than males were found to be particularly passionate about working in and around urban areas. Of the 36 respondents who indicated that they embarked on higher education to enhance their chances of working in and around urban areas, 23 were female. Moreover, it came to the attention of the researchers that the students believed that working in urban settings was somehow strategic for vertical social mobility since one would stand a better chance of

benefitting from housing schemes which are rarely accessed by those based in rural settings. The respondents claimed that teaching in urban schools would increase their probability of eventually procuring valuable properties such as houses and cars. The respondents believed that there were many social role models in towns whom they could emulate and eventually ascend the social ladder all because of having attained higher education qualifications.

Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents admitted that undergoing higher education was not cheap. 43 out of the 50 respondents (86%) acknowledged that a lot of financial resources were required when one is undergoing higher education. This confirmed the claims by other previous researchers that higher education in Zimbabwe is relatively expensive to a significant proportion of the students (Pollard et al., 2008; CARA/IOM, 2010:5; Kariwo, 2007). Apart from fees, the respondents indicated that they need money for meeting accommodation expenses, transport costs and for purchasing food and stationery. The students indicated that their financial plight as students was exacerbated by the fact that some of them had children who also needed school fees, food, clothes and other basic necessities. This is in partial agreement with the sentiments of Altbach et al. (2010: x) who established that students and their families usually bear the brand of exorbitant university fees. Some of the respondents indicated that they were habitually battling with the feeling that they were actually being impoverished in their quest to become degree holders. They pointed out that they sometimes felt as if they were sinking into a financial pit where they were likely to remain trapped for a significant period of time, if not forever. However, some students, while admitting that sometimes attempting to attain a higher education qualification was almost tantamount to descending the social ladder, they were still entertaining the hope of ascending the social ladder through the use of their such qualifications.

The researchers learned from the respondents that the fees which were required were significantly exorbitant and difficult to rise to a sizeable number of students. During the data collection phase, the university fees were far much higher than the salaries of most public service employees. In some cases, the fees were more than three times the salaries of the generality of the public service employees. The research informants revealed that various means were used to raise the required university fees. While 62% (31) of the respondents pointed out that they raised part of their fees through selling some of their assets such as furniture items and some electrical gadgets, other students talked of selling precious beasts such as cattle and goats in a bid to make sure that their fees were paid. Respondent M7 pointed out that he sold all the bricks which he had originally purchased for constructing a house. Apart from selling such valuable assets for the sake of raising fees for their

**Table 1.** Contingency table showing gender and some reasons for embarking on higher education: n= 50.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Promotion</b>	<b>Pursuing other career lines</b>	<b>Becoming knowledgeable</b>	<b>Total</b>
Female	6 (9.6)	16(12.6)	8 (7.8)	30
Male	10 (6.4)	5(8.4)	5 (5.2)	20
Total	16	21	13	50

tertiary education, 40% (12) of the female respondents revealed that they engaged in cross-border trading as a way of meeting some of the expenses. This tallied with the findings of Universities UK (2010: 35, 51) which established that students actively attempted to tackle the challenge of exorbitant university fees. While the students in the United Kingdom engaged in part-time or full-time employment, the research respondents raised money through disposing some of their assets. Somehow, the majority of the respondents admitted that if one only considered the financial turbulence associated with undergoing tertiary training, one could view this as an impoverishing adventure which leads to a downward social mobility.

A significant proportion of the respondents acknowledged that they were quite aware of the fact that the post-qualification remuneration packages on offer were to a large extent not sufficient to immediately offset the losses they would have incurred during training. Some students admitted that it was possible to ultimately fail to recover some of the assets which they had sold for the sake of attaining higher education qualifications. They indicated that if the economic terrain suddenly becomes highly inflationary, one may encounter difficulties in re-procuring valuable assets such as pieces of furniture and electrical gadgets. Hence the students conceded that there was a chance of descending the social ladder due to higher education expenses and probably remaining trapped in a worse off position after matriculation.

The respondents' confidence to take the financial gamble was based on the fervent hope which most of these students seemed to be nursing. 82% (41) of the sampled students confidently indicated that they strongly believed that the situation would improve in future. Despite admitting that the financial resources required for tertiary training were substantial enough to put them in financial doldrums, thereby descending the economic ladder, most respondents generally did not show any signs of despair. They maintained that they were entertaining the hope of living in a world where those with better higher education qualifications would get satisfactory remuneration packages. The sample members pointed out that they were not alarmed by the meagre notches which were being used in the existing grading system. More than 72%(36) of the students banked their confidence of benefitting at some point in future on the fact that the economic situation in Zimbabwe as a country was steadily stabilising and improving due to a variety of factors, which included the dollarization process which

had occurred.

The researchers also found out that some students embarked on higher education for other reasons apart from simply enhancing the quality of their social lives. 78% (39) of the sample members pointed out that they were pursuing higher education primarily to insulate themselves from sinking into professional obsolescence and redundancy as established by Vaitilingam (2009: 21). They dreaded being declared under-qualified or unwanted at their work places as a result of there being other people with better qualifications and skills. Such sentiments confirmed the presence of the qualification escalation phenomenon which Dore identified in countries as Japan, England and Kenya (Dore and Whittaker, 2001: 9, 13).

Apart from the anticipated financial benefits of better higher education qualifications, variables such as becoming eligible for promotions, being knowledgeable and enhancing one's chances of venturing into a new career field were cited by some respondents. The researchers conducted two chi-square tests to establish if there was any association between the three aforementioned variables and gender using the contingency table shown as Table 1 on page 26. At 10% significance level, the researchers found an association between gender and reasons such as the desire to be promoted, being more knowledgeable and being better positioned to pursue a different career line. This means that male and female respondents advanced difference reasons for pursuing higher education relative to the three variables. More male respondents indicated that pursuing higher education would enable them to undergo vertical professional mobility in the form of promotions to become school heads, deputy school heads, education officers and senior teachers as well as college or university lecturers. On the other hand, more female respondents cherished the dream of using their higher education qualifications to seek employment in other career domains apart from the education fraternity. However, when a more stringent significance level of 5% was used, no gender differences were found.

Some respondents pointed out that they were pursuing higher education for the sake of enhancing their professional efficiency and effectiveness. They argued that attaining higher education qualifications would boost their social and professional self-esteem. 28 out of the 50 sample members (56%) declared that their quest to embark on higher education was fuelled by the desire to subsequently gain professional recognition and job



enlargement and not only for financial mileage. The researchers ascribed such sentiments to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory which emphasises that recognition, professional growth and enhancement are satisfiers which lead to job satisfaction while financial benefits are hygiene factors which only serve to minimise job dissatisfaction without necessarily acting as, motivators. The research findings were to some extent similar to those of Ruthankoon and Ogunlana (2003: 333) who established that Herzberg's two-factor theory is applicable in the job setup although more variables need to be manipulated to enhance employee motivation and job satisfaction.

Some research participants also made reference the issue of realising one's potential as a convincing reason to endure the financial challenges which are associated with attaining higher education qualifications. 64% (32) of the sample members categorically indicated that they were pursuing higher education principally as a way of trying to be the best they could be professionally. The researchers attributed such remarks to Maslow's hierarchy of needs which postulates that the desire to self-actualise is an inherent attribute of human beings. The researchers also interpreted the respondents' views by making reference to Erik Erikson's psycho-social theory, which postulates that people in the generativity versus stagnation stage are zealous to be productive in many ways including attaining a number of education qualifications so as to find something show their peers and those in the next generations was also considered (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2010: 102). Hence from this point of view, higher education was pursued for potential realisation and generativity while financial gains were probably a welcome by-product.

## Conclusions

On the basis of the collected data, the researchers established that a significant number of respondents strongly believed that higher education is an agent of vertical social mobility. However, the same respondents acknowledged that one has to endure the attendant financial hardships before one can meaningfully enjoy the benefits of higher education. Some gender differences were also identified pertaining to the motive of embarking on higher education. The researchers arrived at the conclusion that the quest to embark on higher education was heavily anchored on the unsubstantiated hope to reap the lucrative rewards of higher education qualifications at some point in the indefinite future. The generality of the respondents were prepared to descend the economic ladder hoping to ascend the very same ladder at some point in the future.

The study also established that sometimes the quest to embark on higher education was not entirely fuelled by the desire to reap financial rewards at some point in the future. Variables such as the intrinsic desire to self-

actualise or to amass qualifications as a means of averting professional obsolescence coupled with boosting one's professional self-esteem were found to be strong justifications for embarking on higher education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the views and sentiments of the research participants regarding the extent to which higher education qualifies as a vehicle for vertical social mobility, the researchers came up with the recommendations outlined below.

1. Tertiary institutions such as colleges and universities should somehow endeavour to charge fees which are relatively affordable to the generality of the students. Alternatively, such tertiary institutions should come up with payment schemes which will ensure that the financial circumstances of the students are considered while simultaneously ensuring that the full fees are eventually paid with a given time period.
2. Colleges and universities should aim to offer more programmes which are meant to lighten the financial burdens of the students. This can be done by offering the programmes on block-release basis. Alternatively, higher education institutions can embark on outreach programmes in which the college and university lecturers will visit strategic centres within the students' localities to conduct lectures. This will reduce accommodation and transport expenses on the part of the students. Such a development can increase the number of students who attain higher education qualifications and subsequently become positioned to undergo vertical social mobility if what the respondents' views are anything to go by.
3. Future researchers may undertake allied research studies with variations in the factors such as research methodology, geographical and theoretical framework as well as the gender distribution of the respondents. Moreover, other researchers may conduct longitudinal research studies in which respondents belonging to a particular cohort are challenged to evaluate their socio-economic status over a given period of time well after attaining higher education qualifications.

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