Critical Success Factors for Public-Private Partnerships in Higher Education: A Review of Literature

Kudakwashe Sithole[1], Sekai Noreen Gore[2], Kudzanayi Gondo[3]

Zimbabwe Open University, Faculty of Commerce and Law, Department of Management and Business Studies, Harare, ZIMBABWE

Abstract: **Public–private partnerships (PPPs) and university–industry linkages (UILs) in higher education offer potential for overcoming some of the critical challenges and for developing the higher education subsector in developing countries. This paper reviews of literature on PPPs, in higher education. The benefits and risks of PPPs in higher education are also reviewed. The paper also discusses mechanisms for promoting the success of PPPs in the education sector.**

Keywords: **Public–private partnerships (PPPs), university–industry linkages (UILs).**

1. INTRODUCTION

Public–private partnerships (PPPs) and university–industry linkages (UILs) in higher education offer potential for overcoming some of the critical challenges and for developing the higher education subsector in developing countries (Asian Development Bank, 2014). Given the limited budget allocation to the higher education subsector, promoting PPPs and UILs are critical to expand access of higher education, improve higher education programs in responding to the country's needs, and improve effectiveness of management and administration. Urgent challenges of higher education include diversification needs of higher education institutions (HEIs), boosting quality to improve competitiveness, building research capacities to foster innovation, strengthening and applying information and communication technology infrastructure in the higher education system, improvement of relevant postgraduate programs, and improving higher education sector management to ensure accountability and transparency. This paper reviews of literature on PPPs, in higher education. The benefits and risks of PPPs in higher education are also reviewed. The paper also discusses mechanisms for promoting the success of PPPs in the education sector.

2. METHODOLOGY

Data was gathered from books and journal articles. Studies, which were not empirical by the relevant data was basically excluded in the review process. The formulation of the review question was identified the focus and boundaries, and shapes all aspects of the review process, such as inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search strategy, extent of the literature reviewed, the quality appraisal, and synthesis of evidence. The review question was: What is the impact of PPPs in higher education? The search strategy was comprehensive and articles were collected from Google and Google Scholar published over the past 10 years (2007-2016). This study included only empirical evidence from various experimental or observational research, which included qualitative and quantitative research. However, this study did not include unpublished work. Selected articles were significant, reliable, acceptable, and empirically valid.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following factors were found to be critical for PPPs in higher education.

a. Active Partnership:

The equality of all partners (HEFCE, 2009) necessitates the active engagement of staff for effective partnerships (Sebalj et al., 2007). It was found that partners would like more active engagement and once created need to be nurtured and extended so that there exists a strong as well as sustainable HE and FE partnership system, which not only involves the active and participating HEIs and FECs, but a very broad group of stakeholders. These stakeholders will need to provide "peripheral support in terms of policy enhancement, sustainable streams of funding, etc. and opportunities for continuous improvement" (Fraser et al., 2009). This active engagement necessitates also the need for a definition and restructure of the roles and responsibilities of partners (McCray, et al., 2011). Enabling equal power distribution between the partners is also essential and requires commitment to collaborative working at all levels (HEFCE, 2009). By establishing commitment to collaboration, university leaders enable organisational networks to "mobilize support and overcome well-known barriers to sustaining collaboration" (Harris, 2010, p.32), which is the aim of this project.

b. Appropriate Skills:

Senior managers involved in HE in need to understand the strategic implications of current policy development and be appropriately equipped with "entrepreneurial, global management as well as change management skills" so that the boundaries of the system could extend beyond the UK (Fraser et al., 2009, p. 24-5).

c. Appreciation of partner's contribution:

It is important to have a "mutual respect for each other's areas of knowledge and expertise" (Briggs et al., 2007, p.27). If the wide range of HE in FE stakeholders want their expectations met and their support appreciated, then they need to "listen to these professionals and recognise the value of the contribution they make" (Benefer et al., 2009, p.44), and the priorities they want to pursue (Bosma et al., 2010). All categories of staff should be involved in some capacity (HEFCE, 2009). For Rogers et al., (2011), the key question is not about how to convince the partner organisation(s) of our capability, but rather, how the partner organisations together can improve their work. This requires mutual commitment and responsibility (Sigurdardottir, 2010).

d. A tailored leadership approach:

A "less painful approach to leadership needs to be found that is tailored to the needs of partnership working…..the Nexus Active Leadership Model offers such an approach….its foundations lie in the good practice and experiences of those that have worked with and within partnerships and have recorded their insights in publicly available case studies" (Lines, 2007, p.1). It "highlights and concentrates upon seven areas key to the effective leadership of partnership. These areas can be subdivided into three leadership approaches and four key supporting activities. Three leadership approaches: hub (or platform) leadership; leadership through dialogue; emergent leadership. Four key supporting activities: thinking about and analysing a partnership and its surrounding context as an open, evolving system; exploiting the entire place- time continuum of communication available to a partnership; pragmatically searching out and utilising potentially useful ideas and approaches from a very wide variety of sources; effectively evaluating the work and processes of a partnership" (Lines, 2007, p.2). Partnership needs time (Breault & Breault, 2010; Killion, 2011; McCray et al., 2011) to build relationships (Bosma et al., 2010), collaborative leadership, establish mutual trust (McCray et al., 2011) and develop partnership activity (Briggs et al., 2007), including the sharing of decisions (Bosma et al., 2010).

e. Clear communication:

Communication with stakeholders must be a part of the daily life of the organisation (Bosma et al., 2010; HEFCE, 2009), with well-developed communication routines and competence in using different methods to communicate with different stakeholder groups. All communication should be "clear; concise; has a clearly defined action plan; targets appropriate audience; allows constructive feedback; follow-up to determine effectiveness; acted upon; proactive rather than reactive, and follows agreed timeline". This also involves clarity of roles (HEFCE, 2009; Eddy, 2010).

f. Consistent approach and policy:

Understanding what is required for effective partnerships is important in determining when and how to engage in these collaborative arrangements (Amey, Eddy & Campbell, 2010). This requires the examination of the forces that foster its development and facilitate or challenge its implementation. It is also critical to determine the appropriate outcomes, measures of success, and forces that lead to continued collaboration (Hoffman-Johnson, 2007). At the partnership level there is a need for pragmatic 21st century solutions for partnership provision across "wide geographical areas and across busy cities; coherent systems and personalised support for learners to evaluate, take up and succeed in the opportunities open to them" (Briggs et al., 2007, p. 2).

g. Experience and expertise:

The emphasis should be on the right people to manage and operate the partnership (Waller, 2009). It is important to choose credible, experienced and expert teams and work to clear ethical guidelines (Bosma et al., 2010), but there is value in targeting credibility and different levels of seniority across organisations.

h. Flexibility and responsiveness:

It is important to be flexible and responsive (Bosma et al., 2010) and be willing to compromise (HEFCE, 2009). The need for flexible regulation within institutions to provide levers and incentives without being heavy-handed or constricting cannot be over emphasised. It is suggested that partnerships should focus on a limited number of key issues; initial concentration on practical issues should not result in the loss of a more strategic perspective; flexibility to respond reactively to changing external circumstances; an agreed mechanism for dealing with conflicts or disagreements (HEFCE, 2009).

i. Sharing of knowledge, vision and resources:

To make partnership effective, leaders should create a common vision (McCray et al., 2011). A characteristic of partnership at Ohio State University is a robust knowledge management solution that is transforming the ways the expertise and knowledge of faculty and staff are documented and shared (Cain et al., 2008). Partnership demands distribution of knowledge-power relations between the university and the host organisation (Choy and Delahaye, 2011). Clarity (HEFCE, 2009) and consensus about the purpose of the partnership is essential , although it is difficult to ensure that the visions are indeed common. Briggs et al., (2007, p. 2) highlighted the "alignment of purpose of partner organisations, and mutual understanding between partners; mutual benefit to partner organisations". Reciprocal benefits increase the capability of affiliated organisations (Killion, 2011). The sharing of resources is also key to the success of partnerships (Bosma et al., 2010).

j. Supportive structure and environment:

Structure means building on existing networks; some central co-ordination for partnerships; appropriate administrative support; creation of sub-groups and working parties, bringing together FE and HE staff around topics of mutual interest (HEFCE, 2009). To undertake their work effectively HE in FE, academic and support staff professionals in the colleges need the "space, freedom and infrastructure to work with each other and relevant collaborators across partnerships" (Benefer et al., 2009, p. 44). Other environmental conditions such as the creation of lateral and hierarchical communication channels, plus the provision of a supportive work environment were important for effective partnerships (Sebalj et al., 2007).

k. Sustainability:

Another important dimension of partnership is to make it sustainable (Eddy, 2010). Sustainable partnerships are based on being flexible to new inputs and adjusting accordingly. If partnership is seen as part of the organisation's academic processes and therefore longer-term, new ways of conceptualising and planning for the partnership need to occur, including considering how it will be sustained and institutionalized" (Amey et al., 2007, p. 12).

l. The role of champions:

The value of having a 'champion' and 'patron saint' (Bosma et al., 2010) was seen as very important in promoting community support and acceptance of public-private partnerships (PPPs) (Waller, 2009).

m. Transformed perceptions:

Beliefs regarding the centrality of interdisciplinary and collaboration for research universities can serve as a critical driver of institutional rhetoric and activity (Harris, 2010). In order to develop a "collaborative partnership, the conception of partnership must change from one based on exchange to one based on a common vision.

n. Transparency and accountability:

Implementing "transparency and accountability mechanisms for monitoring the partnership" is central to forming effective partnership. This includes fairness in sharing risk, openness, sound financing underpinnings (HEFCE, 2009), sound documentation, predictability and a clear understanding of performance requirements and clarity in what governments want and expect (Waller, 2009). Partnership should create real benefits for all partners, while keeping them informed of the costs of working in partnership (HEFCE, 2009). Indeed, the primary aim of most college and university partnerships is to support their affiliated institutions or systems (Bass, 2010).

4. CONCLUSION

The role of public private partnerships in higher education cannot be underestimated. Partnerships create a powerful mechanism for addressing difficult problems by leveraging on the strengths of different partners; they also package complex ethical and process-related challenges.

To ensure success of PPP, the public sector needs to have its aims clearly defined in any partnership with private providers. The public sector has to understand right from the start what it needs and what it wants to achieve. Then when it goes to the private sector there is a greater clarity around the purpose of the whole arrangement.

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