

Qualification, Award and Recognition Fraud in Higher Education in Zimbabwe

Evelyn Chiyevu GARWE

Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) Harare, Zimbabwe

E-mail: garweec@gmail.com OR eagarwe@zimche.ac.zw

Tel: 263-772-222-298/263-458-1994

Received: March 11, 2015 Accepted: April 26, 2015 Published: May 1, 2015

doi:10.5296/jse.v5i2.7456 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jse.v5i2.7456>

Abstract

This exploratory study was aimed at substantiating media reports regarding the proliferation of qualification, award and recognition fraud in Zimbabwe as well as identifying the attendant causal factors, consequences and deterrent measures. A mixed methodology approach including both qualitative and quantitative approaches was used. Documents, self-administered questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. In light of the sheer extend of the problem; the study was confined to the 15 registered universities and the quality assurance body, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE). The results showed that there was indeed an increase in credential fraud involving both academic and professional awards and recognitions. The demand for higher education credentials, high unemployment rate, credentialism, and the desire for recognition and success fuelled the fraudulent practices. Honorary degrees topped the list of fraudulently acquired credentials, followed by professorial awards, doctorate, masters, bachelor's degrees and secondary level certificates in that order. The sources of fraudulent documents included unregistered degree awarding institutions, degree mills, forgeries and corrupt officials. ZIMCHE put in place various measures to curb this scourge including registration, accreditation, assessment of foreign degree qualifications, compliance visits, audits and international networks. The study recommended the need to implement urgently the qualifications framework for Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Accreditation, Degree mills, Higher education, Credentialism, Qualifications fraud

1. Introduction

World-over, academic qualifications are held in high esteem; as such they are viewed as the reliable and trusted proxy for knowledge, competencies and skills of the bearers (OECD 2001). In view of this, the higher education sector in Zimbabwe makes every effort to produce highly qualified graduates who can assist in spearheading socio-economic development of the country. However, recent media reports suggest that this effort is being undermined by the proliferation of sub-standard, forged, fake and other invalid and fraudulently acquired academic and professional awards. Examples of the headlines in the media are as follows: 'Fake degrees institution not registered' (NewsDay Zimbabwe, 2014); 'ZIMCHE probes 'fake' honorary degrees' (NewsDay Zimbabwe, 2014); 'Ministers, top officials in fake degree scam' (The Zimbabwean, 2014); 'Academics dismiss Philanthropy doctorates' (The Herald, 2014); 'ZIMCHE taken to court over 'fake degrees' (The Zimbabwe Mail, 2014); 'Fake Zim 'Dr' reported to Zambian police for fake degrees' (Bulawayo24.com, (2013); 'Concern over fake qualifications' (The Chronicle, 2013); 'MBA programmes under scrutiny' (The Financial Gazette, 2013).

Employers require human capital capable of operating in a competitive business environment. Robinson & Baron (2007) define human capital as the aptitudes, competencies, and knowhow acquired by a person as a result of education, instruction or inheritance. Research has identified a positive correlation between educational attainment levels and employment, economic security and prosperity (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2004; Baum, 2014; Baum, Ma & Payea, 2013; Enders, 2010; Higgins, 2008; Rosenbaum and Jones, 2000; Vedder, 2011; Vernon, 2010; Wonacott 2000). Thus higher education qualifications are perceived as a valuable form of personal property which confers advantages over those without them by signifying the potential competence of the holder in employment situations (Marginson, 2004; Noah & Eckstein 2001). Unfortunately, some employers often fail to check the prospective employees' credentials. Indeed, Armour (2003) reports that employees in possession of fraudulent credentials often secure jobs in the whole gamut of critical areas such as health, psychology, engineering and education.

The question that boggles the mind revolves around whether the media reports are indeed a true reflection of the dent on quality, integrity and credibility of the higher education system in Zimbabwe or it is just the usual quest for the media to sensationalise trivial matters for marketing purposes. If indeed the prevalence of bogus qualifications is the true state of affairs in Zimbabwe as suggested by the media reports, this will have negative impact on higher education stakeholders, including legitimate higher education institutions, students, employers, graduates, legislators, the government and the society at large. Employing a person possessing fake credentials when discovered may result in lawsuits and affect the reputation of the perpetrator, the family, the employer and the higher education system.

Studies from elsewhere show that fraudulent degrees are now commonplace (Altbach, 2004; Aumann, 2006; Brown, 2005; Buckley, 2007; Lawnham, 2002; Matejkovic and Matejkovic, 2006). For example, Grolleau, Lakhali, & Mzoughi (2008) estimated that in the United States alone, over 2 million fake degrees and 300 unaccredited universities exist whilst Cohen &

Winch (2011) reported that the United States with 810 degree mills topped the list of countries with fake institutions followed by the United Kingdom with approximately 271 bogus institutions. In Australia, between 25 and 35 percent of candidates were reported to have either exaggerated or falsified their credentials to obtain employment (Healy 2005; Lucas 2004). The University of Dodoma in Tanzania discovered more than 200 bogus degrees submitted by prospective lecturers and professors from Kenya (Jamiiforums, 2009). The paucity of empirical research in the area in Zimbabwe prompted the researcher to carry out this study in order to substantiate the status of fraudulent qualifications in Zimbabwe and to explore further into the reasons leading to this state of affairs.

1.1 Types of Fraudulent documents

An academic qualification, award or recognition is deemed valid or genuine when it is conferred by an institution legally authorised to award such qualifications (Moore, 2009). In Zimbabwe public higher education institutions are granted authority to offer degrees and diplomas by an Act of parliament whilst private universities are granted a Charter. Authentic qualifications are conferred to a student who has satisfied the minimum requirements and expectations in a particular discipline, as certified by the university senate upon submission of assessments by qualified academics.

Decoo (2002) describes five major types of fraudulent documents as follows:

- *Degree or Diploma Mills:* These generate and sell bogus qualifications to clients who have not undergone the purported studies.
- *Fabricated or Counterfeit Documents:* These are fake documents designed to epitomise a legitimate or fictitious programme or institution.
- *Modified Documents:* Alterations such as omissions and additions are performed on official, legitimate documents. Changes may include name of candidate, enrollment and graduation dates, grades, course content and date of birth.
- *Produced in-house:* These are fake documents manufactured by institutional employees. They can either be modified or fabricated but appear on authentic paper complete with institutional seals, stamps and appropriate signatures. Grades are usually inflated, credits falsified and degrees awarded for incomplete programmes.
- *Translations:* These are documents inaccurately translated with the aim of misleading and falsifying them. Grades are often altered and course titles changed to match those in the receiving country.

1.2 Reasons for acquiring fake academic credentials

Fraudulent qualifications were detected ever since the 11th century (Murray, 2012). Before the internet era, Bear (1982) reported a figure of approximately 168 degree mills globally. By the year 2003 this figure had increased to over 400 degree mills and around 390 bogus institutions raking in estimated revenue of over USD500 million per year (Armour, 2003; Bear and Bear 2003). More recently, a report by Cohen & Winch (2011) identified 1,762 fake

institutions worldwide, and an additional 1,545 suspicious ones. Gollin, Lawrence, & Contreras (2014) aver that the nexus between education and job security drives the demand for higher education qualifications world-wide. As a result, institutions and individuals that specialise in selling fake credentials to gullible customers as well as crooks who are determined to acquire academic qualifications effortlessly flourish (Koepell 1998; Noah & Eckstein, 2001; Simonson, 2009). This availability of a ready market for bogus qualifications and the concomitant returns nurtured complex international networks of fake institutions masquerading as legitimate organisations (Epstein 2010; Gollin et.al, 2014).

The term degree mill refers to an individual or institution of questionable standards usually operating online and awarding degrees or diplomas in return for payment without requiring rigorous demonstration of learning competencies obligatory in authentic institutions (Cohen, & Winch, 2011; Phillips, 2000; Piña, 2010; Porter 1972; SnoNet, 2000; Spille, Stuart & Sullivan, 1997). These establishments differ in their *modus operandi*. Some may require prospective candidates to submit their profiles and allow them to select the qualification they desire and even to suggest the year the qualification was acquired. Others may give students some study material and assignments, without following the benchmarks on facilities, academics, learning rigor and duration of studies (Contreras and Gollin, 2009). Such establishments are usually not registered or accredited and lack state authority to grant academic credentials. However, they may claim to be recognized registered and accredited or they may craft their own accreditation body (Cohen & Winch, 2011). Whichever method is used, the bottom line is that the credentials awarded are worthless. Although Contreras & Gollin, (2009) distinguish between the terms diploma mill and degree mill, defining a degree mill as a fake establishment granting fake qualifications and a diploma mill as an establishment that provides fake qualifications purportedly obtained from genuine institutions, this paper uses the terms interchangeably.

1.3 The concept of credentialism

Many researchers have blamed the increase in bogus credentials on the increase in credentialism. The phenomenon of credentialism expresses the ideology of social selection in which academic qualifications are perceived as providing information on one's expertise, aptitudes or attributes necessary to perform tasks, to give status or occupy elite positions (Boundless, 2014; Brown, 2001; Collins, 1979; Dore, 1976; Marshall, 1998). Dore (1976) avers that employers ascribe more value to a certificate than to the skills themselves thereby culminating in a vicious circle necessitating the need for advanced degrees. This is because employers believe that education develops prospective employees such that by employing individuals with a more advanced degree than is really necessary, employers receive more value for their money.

The human capital theory states that employers rely on academic qualifications to screen, classify and assess the competency, efficiency and productivity of potential employees (Bills, 1988; Burdett, 1978). This philosophy is premised on the perception that the higher the level of academic qualification the greater the abilities, skills, expertise, reliability and dedication

(Brown, 2001). He argues that the job market requires academic credentials as a way of guaranteeing knowledge and skills.

1.4 The Zimbabwean context

The Zimbabwean higher education sector seeks to produce highly qualified graduates to spearhead national development. In order to achieve this feat, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) has proposed that a Master's degree should be the minimum requirement for lecturers taking undergraduate courses, whilst those taking postgraduate courses should have qualifications at least one level higher than the level they are teaching or supervising. This requirement as well as other societal pressures is thought to be one of the causes for the perceived increases in fraudulently acquired qualifications. ZIMCHE strives to protect the integrity of the higher education sector by guarding against fraud. The purpose of this study was to investigate claims of the proliferation of sub-standard, forged, fake and other invalid and fraudulently acquired academic and professional awards. In addition, the study was aimed at exploring the reasons leading to this state of affairs, the consequences and the deterrent strategies.

1.4 Research questions

The study explored the following research questions:

- 1.4.1 Does qualification fraud exist and if so to what extent?
- 1.4.2 Which documents are fraudulently acquired and from which sources?
- 1.4.3 What are the causes, motivations and forces behind qualification fraud?
- 1.4.4 What are the consequences of qualification fraud and the deterrent strategies?

2. Methodology.

2.1 Research Design

A mixed methodology approach (triangulation) including both qualitative and quantitative approaches was used. Mitchell (1986) describes methodological triangulation as an excellent way to gather data from different vantage points. Accordingly, the quantitative approach allowed the researcher to collect quantifiable information regarding the existence and extent of the problem whilst the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to obtain details of the perceptions, experiences, reasons, consequences and strategies to curb qualification fraud from respondents.

2.2 Study population and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study comprised of staff and students in higher education institutions, quality assurance personnel from ZIMCHE, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, government officials, legislators, legal practitioners, employers and members of the public. However, due to the extent of the problem of credential fraud and the size of the target population, this exploratory study was confined to the 15 registered universities in Zimbabwe and the quality assurance body,

ZIMCHE. The reason for commencing with these two categories arose from the fact that they represent the major stakeholders in determining the quality of teaching, learning and academic awards.

The study used the purposive sampling method as described by Miles & Huberman (1994) wherein the Registrar, five academics from each academic discipline and five percent of the student population were selected from each of the 15 registered universities in Zimbabwe.

2.3 Data collection tools

Data collection tools included documents, self-administered questionnaires and interviews. The documentary evidence was collected from the ZIMCHE database of academic disciplines and enrollments per university, newspaper articles and other literature available.

Holroyd and Harlen (1996) described the self-administered questionnaire as one that is distributed to the respondents by the researcher or trained officials after explaining the purpose of the study and then leaving the respondents to complete the questionnaire on their own. Oppenheim (1992) avers that since the respondents complete questionnaires at their convenience, this method results in good response rates, sampling precision, and minimises bias. The costs also tend to be lower other methods thus giving this method an economic advantage. The main shortcomings of self-administered questionnaires are the extended timelines and the requirement for respondents who are literate. The time disadvantage was minimised in this study by giving the responsibility of distribution and collection of questionnaires within stipulated timelines to internal officials. The respondents were university staff and students whose high literacy levels are well known.

The questionnaires were semi-structured, containing both open-ended and closed questions designed to capture the information to address the four research questions. The questionnaire comprised of two sections, the first one had closed questions for example, on the issue of whether credential fraud exists the respondents gave a yes or no answer. Regarding the documents being fraudulently acquired, the questionnaire provided a list of six documents and asked the respondents to select only one that they considered to top the list of faked documents. The second section contained open-ended questions requiring respondents to explain in detail the sources of fake documents, the underlying reasons and the consequences of faking credentials as well as giving any known cases of credential fraud and explaining the deterrent strategies to reduce this scourge.

Unstructured interviews were carried out for ZIMCHE staff members who were considered as key informants in line with their mandate as gatekeepers of quality in higher education and their role of verifying and assessing all higher education credentials whether locally or internationally acquired. This study found unstructured interviews to offer greater flexibility and freedom not only to pursue research questions but also to explore in greater detail the measures that the quality assurance body put in place to curb qualification fraud.

2.4 Procedure

The researcher used secondary data available in the ZIMCHE database to determine the number of questionnaires to be distributed to each university. The database pertained to the number of disciplines offered in each university and the student enrollments. The

questionnaires for the Registrar and the academics for each university were given to the Registrar to distribute and collect within a period of one month. The questionnaires for the students were given to the Dean of students. The questionnaire took an average of 15 minutes to complete.

Interviews were held with a total of eight key informants from ZIMCHE representing each of the three directorates. Three interviewees were from the directorate of Registration and Accreditation, three from Academic and institutional audits and two from the directorate of Human Resources, Administration and Finance. The interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes.

2.5 Ethical Issues

Although some respondents supplied the names of qualification and professional credential fraudsters, these were immediately blinded by the researcher due to the sensitive nature of the issues as well as their potential for causing defamatory harm. Access to staff and students was approved by the university management and each respondent participated voluntarily. No incentives were given for participation. As a way of assuring confidentiality and ensuring a high response rate, the questionnaire was deliberately devoid of respondent identifiers. In addition, the questionnaires were self-administered in the absence of the researcher. All efforts were therefore taken to ensure that the study was performed with due concern and respect for the dignity of both the respondents and the affected.

2.6 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics inclusive of percentages were used in the analysis of quantitative data. Analysis of qualitative data involved categorisation of information according to the research questions for presentation and discussion.

3. Results and Discussion

All the 15 Registrars completed their questionnaires. The quantity of questionnaires given and those that were completed fully per university with respect to students and academics are shown in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively.

Table 1. Number of questionnaires given to students and those that were completed fully per university

Institution	Enrolment	Sample (5%)	Completed	Response rate (%)
1	12273	614	331	54
2	7133	357	200	56
3	18966	948	375	40
4	8512	426	289	68
5	6405	320	166	52
6	5675	284	190	67
7	5819	291	111	38
8	2438	122	60	49
9	1821	91	60	66
10	2504	125	106	85
11	2751	138	98	71
12	2142	107	74	69
13	558	28	20	72
14	34	2	2	100
15	197	10	10	100
Total	77228	3861	2092	54

Table 1 shows that out of 3861 questionnaires that were distributed to students 2092 were successfully completed representing an overall response rate of 54%. However, the response rate differed from institution to institution ranging from 40 to 100 percent.

Table 2. Number of questionnaires given to academics and those that were completed fully per university

Institution	Disciplines	Sample	Completed	Response rate (%)
1	10	50	50	100
2	5	25	25	100
3	7	35	24	69
4	8	40	35	88
5	5	25	25	100
6	7	35	30	86
7	7	35	32	91
8	5	25	25	100
9	4	20	20	100
10	7	35	34	97
11	3	15	15	100
12	3	15	15	100
13	4	20	18	90
14	2	10	10	100
15	3	15	13	87
Total		400	371	93

Table 2 shows that the questionnaires that were distributed to five academics per discipline amounted to 400 and 371 were successfully completed. The overall response rate was 93%.

Overall, data from 2463 questionnaires and 8 interviews were analysed and presented. The results are presented according to each of the four research questions.

3.1 Does qualification fraud exist and if so to what extent?

There was consensus from all respondents that qualification fraud does exist in Zimbabwe. In terms of the extent of the problem, it emerged that large but unspecified numbers of Zimbabweans possessed fake academic degrees. Cases were given of several lecturers who were asked to resign during the years 2005 to 2008. This resulted from the realisation that these were in possession of degrees from institutions that had since been closed. In addition to these, there were many other people who were employed in universities or other organisations who were vouched to possess qualifications that were never earned. Some respondents claimed that they know of people who were holders of foreign degrees purported to have been earned through online study and yet they were obtained before the internet era.

Some Zimbabweans who left the country during the time of economic hardships were reportedly coming back with dubious degrees notably doctorates, taking advantage of the shortage of lecturers in universities and other professionals. This finding is similar to what happened in Tanzania in 2008 when the country's largest higher education institution, the University of Dodoma advertised for lecturers and professors. Jamiiforums (2009) reports that this massive recruitment need had arisen from the university's expansion plans which sought to increase student enrolment from 5000 to 40000. A higher number of applications

were received from Kenya prompting university officials to conduct interviews in Kenya. The interview panel detected in excess of 200 fake qualifications. Interestingly, the discovery came barely two months after the withdrawal of a degree certificate that had been awarded by the University of Dar es Salaam 20 years earlier to a staff member who had forged academic certificates required for entry into the degree programme.

3.2 Which documents are fraudulently acquired and which sources?

Table 3. The respondents perception on the proportions of certificates that were fraudulently acquired

Type of document	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ordinary and Advanced level	50	2
Bachelor's degree	80	3
Master's degree	156	6
Doctoral degree	280	11
Professorship	371	15
Honorary degree	1526	62
	2463	100

Table 3 shows that the perceptions of the respondents were to the effect that of all fraudulently acquired documents in Zimbabwe, honorary degrees topped the list (62%) followed by professorial appointments (15%) and doctoral degrees (11%). These results were not comparable to the findings by the verification service of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which revealed that the most faked qualification was the school-leaving certificate (41%), followed by degrees (32%) and lastly 13% for diplomas (Samuels, 2014). Presumably respondents felt that the honorary degrees were the most faked qualifications due to the sensationilisation of the issue in the press after two non-degree awarding institutions held two graduation ceremonies where they conferred honorary doctorates and professorships to eminent members of the society.

Interviews with ZIMCHE staff revealed that although they were aware of bogus credentials, their mandate was limited to assessing foreign degree qualifications upon request and payment of a fee. The assessment of certificates and diplomas was done by the Ministry of higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whilst Ordinary and Advanced Level certificates fell under the purview of the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC). It was therefore not possible for ZIMCHE to give a comprehensive estimate of fake credentials in the country. The interviewees were aware that there were plans to establish an umbrella body, the Zimbabwe Examination and Qualifications Authority (ZIMEQA) responsible for the country's qualifications framework.

The sources of the faked documents were unregistered degree awarding institutions, foreign degree mills, professional forgery establishments, and unprofessional staff from legitimate institutions who fake certificates or award credentials to non-deserving clients as well as legitimate companies without authority to award academic and professional qualifications. Interviewees indicated that there were some cases of Zimbabweans who return home

purporting to have attained professorship from foreign universities. However, the majority of the local cases were as a result of universities who used different promotion criteria. The quantum and quality of research required before award of professorship differed for different universities. The length of service and the academic requirements also differed among universities. In addition to satisfactory research, teaching and community service some universities insisted on an earned doctorate before promotion to professorial grade.

Interviewees bemoaned the mushrooming of fake awards and recognitions given mostly to eminent people in academia and industry. These were very conspicuous in the media when members of the public or the beneficiaries would splash these for all to see and admire. Unbeknown to some of the beneficiaries, some of these awards and recognitions were fake and required the recipients to pay some money to obtain them albeit indirectly. “These awards just pop up in the email and you are notified that you have received an award from a foreign country for being for instance the best university. Common sense should inform some of these beneficiaries that if the university does not even appear in the top 500 universities in Africa how can it be judged as the best?”

3.3 What are the causes, motivations and forces behind qualification fraud?

The major motivation behind faking qualifications was the desire to obtain employment. Johnson, (2006) also found unemployment to force some prospective candidates to fake qualifications. The situation is compounded by the fact that the high unemployment levels in Zimbabwe are forcing employers to demand higher qualifications even when they are not required, a phenomenon referred to as credentialism (Boundless, 2014; Brown, 2001; Collins, 1979; Dore, 1976; Marshall, 1998). Examples of two classic cases given are:

“Twenty years ago when I was an undergraduate student I aspired to become a university lecturer because at that time all lecturers had enviable lifestyles. When I graduated in 1997, the minimum qualification had risen to a Master’s degree. When I eventually completed my Masters I was informed that I needed a Doctoral degree to be appointed. Thank God I now have one but now that I am a lecturer I find nothing has changed. I could have fared very well with my Master’s degree.”

“A simple example is that of nurses. My mother was a very good nurse after eight years of school and a further two years of specialised training. Nowadays nurses have bachelors and masters degrees, requiring no less than fifteen years of schooling. Surprisingly, the benefits and the respect have plummeted!”

Interestingly, doctorate and professorial fraud was rampant among the already employed mostly among executives who were either keen to access higher packages or just for ego massaging and recognition. Some respondents were of the opinion that credential fraud was escalating mainly because the Zimbabwean employers have no uniform procedures to verify the authenticity of academic and professional credentials for prospective employees. The absence of a thorough verification process prior to engagement thus motivates some people to try their luck through presenting fake credentials. To some people it is an issue of time; they just do not have the patience to sweat for four years to obtain a doctoral degree when they can

get it in six months or less. Most respondents blamed the absence of funding and the general economic downturn as the major cause of qualification fraud. Some had this to say, “Higher qualifications for example doctoral degrees are required and yet there are no financial, material and human resources to support such studies. Who can blame anyone for cutting corners? ZIMCHE demands 35 peer reviewed publications for full professorship and yet there is no money for research - what a contradiction!”

Qualification fraud is intensified by the presence of increasing numbers of bogus institutions and degree mills locally and globally. With the advent of the internet and advanced economically accessible technology (for example colour printers, photocopiers and scanners), acquiring, forging or faking a genuine-looking certificate has never been easier. Authentic academic information and electronic signatures of key officials are easily accessed from institutional websites rendering fraudsters with all they need to fabricate and reproduce certificates that can easily pass the originality test. These findings agree with those by Eckstein (2003) that credential fraud is caused by subjective and objective factors inclusive of individual aspirations, circumstances, ignorance, criminal tendencies and demand certain qualifications.

3.4 What are the consequences of qualification fraud and the deterrent strategies?

Qualification fraud when discovered, devalues the institution where a qualification was obtained and it makes a mockery of bona fide graduates. If left undeterred it provides an appealing alternative to genuine students, since more people will be prone to lie about their qualifications. If tougher measures are not taken people begin to think that if others are getting away with fraud there will not be sufficient reason not to follow suit. Kuo (2005) also found what he described as a ‘me-too’ mentality to dominate in degree-hopefuls who are too keen on obtaining a qualification and not the education that underpins the process. The worst consequence is that professionals recruited on the basis of fake qualifications can cause damage to humanity and the environment. This finding augurs well with the assertion by Armour (2003) that employees in possession of fraudulent credentials often secure jobs in the critical areas such as health, psychology, engineering and education.

Interviewees reported that ZIMCHE had put in place measures to curb credential fraud. These included registration, accreditation, compliance visits and audits of all higher education institutions and programmes. ZIMCHE offers a service to employers of verifying and assessing degrees that are obtained from foreign institutions based locally or internationally. Recruitment, tenure and promotion criteria for universities had been harmonised to ensure that there was consistency. In addition, ZIMCHE works with other similar agencies world-wide to compare and share information to deter fraud.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The study was aimed at substantiating media claims regarding the purported proliferation of qualification, award and recognition fraud as well as identifying the attendant causal factors, consequences and deterrent measures. This was an exploratory study focussing on the 15 registered universities and ZIMCHE. The results showed that there was indeed an increase in

cases of credential fraud involving both academic and professional awards and recognitions. The demand for higher education credentials coupled with a high unemployment rate leading to credentialism as well as the desire to succeed fuelled the fraudulent practices. Honorary degrees topped the list of fraudulently acquired credentials. The other documents also affected were professorial awards, doctorate, masters, bachelor's degrees and secondary level certificates in descending order of prevalence. The sources of fraudulent documents included unregistered degree awarding institutions, degree mills, forgeries and corrupt officials.

Qualification fraud destroys the integrity and credibility of the Zimbabwean higher education sector and therefore it must be dealt with at a national and global level. Higher education credentials represent true currency that not only guarantees employment and mobility of students and human resources but are critical for individual, societal and national development. It is therefore imperative that strategies to deter credential fraud be put in place both at institutional, national and international level. To this end ZIMCHE put in place various measures to curb this scourge. These included registration, accreditation, compliance visits and audits of all higher education institutions and programmes. Key among these strategies is the impartial assessment of foreign qualifications for verification, comparability and recognition. In addition, ZIMCHE works hand-in-hand with other similar agencies world-wide to compare and share information to deter fraud.

Through its regulatory, advisory and promotional activities, ZIMCHE was fast creating a quality conscious higher education environment characterised by transparency, accountability and integrity. However, in order to fight academic fraud holistically, there was need to speed up the process of implementing a qualifications framework for Zimbabwe. Cognisant of the outcome based international developments in certification and accreditation the study recommends the need to urgently establish The Zimbabwe Examinations and Qualifications Authority (ZIMEQA) and implement the qualifications framework for Zimbabwe.

References

- Altbach, P.G. (2004). The Question of Corruption in Academe. *International Higher Education* 34, 7-8.
- Altbach, P.G., Reizberg, L., & Rumbley, L.E. (2009). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Amaral, A., & Magalhaes, A. (2004). Epidemiology and the Bologna saga. *Higher Education*, 48(1), 79-100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000033766.02802.92>
- Armour, S. (2003). Diploma mills insert degree of fraud into job market. [Online] Available http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2003-09-28-fakedegrees_x.htm
- Aumann, R., (2006). Dubious degrees. *Internal Auditor* 63(2), 83-89.
- Baum, S. (2014). *Higher Education Earnings Premium: Value, Variation, and Trends* [Online] Available <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/higher-education-earnings-premium-value-variation-and-trends>

- Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society *Trends in Higher Education Series* College Board [Online] Available <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>
- Bear, J. (1982). *Bonus report: Diploma Mills of the World*. Mendocino, Mendocino Book Company.
- Bear, J., & Bear, M. (2003). *Bear's Guide to Earning Degrees by Distance Learning*. Berkley, Ten Speed Press.
- Bills, D. B. (1988). Credentials and capacities: Employers' perceptions of the acquisition of skills. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 29(3), 439-449. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1988.tb01263.x>
- Boundless. (2014). The Credentialized Society. *Boundless Sociology*. [Online] Available <https://www.boundless.com/sociology/textbooks/boundless-sociology-textbook/education-13/the-conflict-perspective-101/the-credentialized-society-571-3192/>
- Brown D. K. (2001). The social sources of educational credentialism: Status cultures, labor markets, and organizations. *Sociology of Education, Extra Issue: Current of Thought: Sociology of Education at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 74, 19-34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2673251>
- Brown, G.M. (2005). Recognition and authentication of higher education qualifications in a transnational market: sorting the cyber wheat from the digital chaff [Online] Available http://www.proceedings.com.au/isana/docs/2005/papers%20%28pdf%29/fri_1400_brown.pdf
- Bulawayo24.com. (2013). *Fake Zim 'Dr' reported to Zambian police for fake degrees* [Online] Available bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-africa-byo-25101.html (2013)
- Burdett, K. (1978). The testing and sorting functions of higher education. *Journal of Public Economics*, 10(1), 117-122. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0047-2727\(78\)90009-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0047-2727(78)90009-9)
- Cohen, E.B., & Winch, R. (2011). *Diploma and Accreditation Mills: New Trends in Credential Verifile Limited and Accredibase™*
- Cohn, E., Kiker, B.F., & De Oliveira, M.M. (2002). Further evidence on the screening hypothesis. *Economics Letters*, 25(3), 289-294. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0165-1765\(87\)90230-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0165-1765(87)90230-8)
- Collins, R. (1979). *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. New York: Academic Press.
- Contreras, A., & Gollin G. (2009). The real and the fake degree and diploma mills. *Change*, 41(2), 36-43. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CHNG.41.2.36-43>
- Decoo, W. (2002). *Corruption plagues academe around the world*. In: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A32

- Dore, R. (1976). *The Diploma Disease*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Eckstein, M.A. (2003). *Combating Academic Fraud towards a Culture of Integrity*. UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning. [Online] Available <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001330/133038e.pdf>
- Enders, J. (2010). Higher education and the labor market. *International Encyclopedia of Education* (third Edition), pp 365-369. Enschede: University of Twente. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00827-7>
- Epstein, R. (2010). Academic Fraud Today: Its Social Causes and Institutional Responses. *Stanford Law & Policy Review*, 21, 135-154.
- Gollin, G., Lawrence, E., & Contreras, A. (2014). Complexities in legislative suppression of diploma mills. *Stanford Law & Policy Review*, 21(1).
- Grolleau, G. Lakhali, T. and Mzoughi, N. (2008). An Introduction to the Economics of Fake Degrees *Journal of Economic Issues*, 42(4), 1145-1158.
- Healy, G. (2005). Crackdown promised on fraudulent qualification rackets. *Campus Review*, 3.
- Higgins C., Lavin T., & Metcalfe O. (2008). *Health Impacts of Education: A Review*. Dublin: Institute for Public Health of Ireland.
- Holroyd, C., & Harlen, W. (1996). Primary Teachers' Confidence about Teaching Science and Technology. *Research Papers in Education*, 3, 323-335. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0267152960110308>
- Jamiiforums. (2009). Fake Kenyan teachers rushing for plum university jobs in Tanzania <http://www.jamiiforums.com/jukwaa-la-siasa/24159-fake-kenyan-teachers-rushing-for-plum-university-jobs-in-tanzania.html>
- Johnson, C. (2006). Credentialism and the Proliferation of Fake Degrees: The Employer Pretends to Need a Degree; The Employee Pretends to Have One. *Hofstra Labor & Employment Law Journal*, 23(2), 269-344.
- Koepell, D. (1998). Easy Degrees Proliferate on the Web. [Online] Available <http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/98/08/biztech/articles/02internet-degrees-educ.html>
- Lagorio, C. (2006). Diploma mill calling: continuing ed without the ed. [Online] Available http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/30/education/edlife/diplomamill.html?_r=1&ex=1189569600&en=898a63a18cf2b4c1&ei=5070
- Lawnham, P. (2002). Mail-order Bachelors. In: *The Australian I*.
- Leung, R. (2004). Diplomas for sale. [Online] Available <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/11/08/60II/main654319.shtml>
- Lucas, J. (2004). Taking the guesswork out of employment screening. KPMG: *Forensic Insight Advisory*, 3(6).

- Lumadue, R.T. (2006). When graduate degrees prostitute the educational process: degrees gone wild. *Christian Higher Education*, 5(3), 263-278. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15363750600688658>
- Marginson, S. (2004). National and Global Competition in Higher Education. *The Australian Educational Researcher* 31(2), 1-29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF03249517>
- Marshall, G. (ed). (1998). *Credentialism*. In *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford University Press: USA.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mitchell, E.S. (1986). Multiple triangulation: A methodology for nursing science. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 8(3), 18-26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/00012272-198604000-00004>
- Moore, M.G. (2009). A sad reminder that diploma mills are still with us. *American Journal of Distance Education* 23(4), 175-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08923640903356129>
- Murray, C., & Burns, T. (2012). *Coming apart: The state of White America, 1960-2010*. New York: Crown Forum.
- NewsDay Zimbabwe. (2014). *Fake degrees institution not registered*. [Online] Available <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2014/07/10/fake-degrees-institution-registered/>
- NewsDay Zimbabwe. (2014). *ZIMCHE probes 'fake' honorary degrees* [Online] Available <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2014/07/09/zimche-probes-fake-honorary-degrees/>
- Noah, H. J., & Eckstein, M.A. (2001). *Fraud and education: the worm in the apple*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- OECD. (2001). *The Well-Being of Nations: the Role of Human and Social Capital*, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, Paris.
- Oppenheim, A.N. (1992). *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*, London, Pinter Publishers.
- Phillips, V. (2000). *Distance Learning, College Degrees and Accreditation FAQ* [Online] available <http://www.geteducated.com/articles/dlfaq.htm#Q9>
- Piña, A. (2010). Online diploma mills: implications for legitimate distance education. *Distance Education*, 31(1), 121-26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01587911003725063>
- Porter, L. (1972). *Degrees for Sale*. Arco Publishing Company Inc, New York.
- Robinson, J.L., & Baron, S.W. (2007). Employment training for street youth: A viable option? *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 16(1), 33-57.
- Rosenbaum, J.E., & Jones, S.A. (2000). Interactions between High Schools and Labor Markets. In M.T. Hallinan (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 411-436). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Samuels, J. (2014). Promoting genuine qualifications in Africa through effective verification [Online] Available http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/news/2015/Post%20seminar%20article_v2%20final%20approved.pdf

Sinomson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M., & Zvacek, S. (2009). *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

SnoNet (2000). *Distance Learning: Frequently asked questions* [Online] Available [http://www.snonet.org/learning/dl.htm#What's a "degree mill"](http://www.snonet.org/learning/dl.htm#What's a 'degree mill')

Spille, H. & Stewart, D., & Sullivan, E. (1997). *External degrees in the information age: legitimate choices*. American Council on Education and the Oryx Press, Phoenix -Arizona.

Taubmann, P., & Wales, T. (1975). Education as an investment and a screening device. In F. Thomas Juster (ed.): *Education, income and human behavior*, pp. 95-122. [Online] Available www.nber.org/chapters/c3694.

The Chronicle. (2013). Concern over fake qualifications. [Online] Available www.chronicle.co.zw/concern-over-fake-qualifications/

The Financial Gazette. (2013). MBA programmes under scrutiny [Online] Available [www.financialgazette.co.zw › News › Opinions](http://www.financialgazette.co.zw/News/Opinions)

The Herald. (2014). *Academics dismiss Philanthropy doctorates* [Online] Available www.herald.co.zw/academics-dismiss-philanthropy-doctorates/

The Zimbabwean. (2014). Ministers, top officials in fake degree scam. [Online] Available <http://www.thezimbabwean.co/news/zimbabwe-news/72656/ministers-top-officials-in-fake.html>

The Zimbabwe Mail. (2014). *ZIMCHE taken to court over 'fake degrees'* [Online] Available <http://www.thezimbabwean.co/2014/08/01/zimche-taken-to-court-over-fake-degrees/>

Tyler, W. (1982). Complexity and control: The organisational background of credentialism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3(2), 160-170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0142569820030204>

Vedder, R. (2011). Too many PhDs and professionals? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. [Online] Available <https://chronicle.com/blogs/innovations/too-many-ph-d-%E2%80%99s-and-professionals/28236>

Vernon, J. (2010). Disaster strikes: The end of the public university in England. *Universities in Crisis -Blog of International Sociological Association (ISA)*. [Online] Available <http://www.isa-sociology.org/universities-in-crisis/?p=774>

Wonacott, M.E. (2000). *Credentials: One size fits all?* Columbus, OH: National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education. ED 447 275.