AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM MODEL FOR TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Presentation outline

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Introduction

Growing expectation of students, researchers and parents on the transformation of the educational systems to respond to the needs of society describes the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. Significantly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 8, 9, 13, 15 and 17 are directly linked to the activities of higher education institutions (HEIs).
Introduction (contd)

Higher educational institutions (HEIs) are widely considered as major stakeholders in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those that affect teaching and learning, research and community development. In order to realise this aim, there have been calls for HEIs to incorporate sustainable practices in their operations and this remain high on the agenda of international organizations and countries.
Introduction (contd)

In the wake of global concerns for the integration of sustainable development practices in the operations and curricular of HEIs, there seem to be either a slow rate of adoption and integration into mainstream HEI activities the growing (Jorge, Madueño, Cejas and Peña, 2015) or an indifferent approach to embracing sustainable development practices. Although researchers in HEIs continue to find solutions to the growing sustainable development needs and the transformation of HEIs, there are several bottlenecks in the achievements of these objectives. However, any response by HEIs to structure their institutions to meet this global call will require significant shifts and alignments by way of transformation.
The seeming gap between global expectations of HEIs towards the development of structures to support the SD agenda calls for different strategies to be developed and implemented to ensure that HEIs respond to the emergent global call.

In line with the objectives of the study, the integrated system model was designed to highlight four key factors that could support the transformation of higher education institutions and the development of sustainable practices.
Research question

In order to address the issues with regard to the integration of sustainable development practices in the transformation of HEIs, three major questions were developed to guide the study: Research Question (RQ).

RQ1: what are the existing challenges with the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive sustainable development system that supports the transformation of HEIs? Research Question

RQ2: what is the relationship between the basic system model, sustainable development practices and the transformation of higher education institutions? Research Question

RQ3: how can an integrated system model that incorporates SD serve to transform HEIs and yield the desired results?
Methods

This study adopts a multi-dimensional theoretical review process by gathering relevant data from different articles and reports on sustainable development in higher education institutions. Using different databases namely: Scopus, Google Scholar and EBSCO, a systematic process of selecting relevant articles in relation to sustainable development in higher education was followed.
Integrated system model
Integrated system model

A brief description of the four major factors that could support the transformation of higher education institutions are presented. First, it allows for the adoption of sustainable development policies to be formulated and implemented alongside the structures of HEIs. Secondly, it defines the relationship between the input, process, output and outcome factors of HEIs in relation to sustainable development practices. Thirdly, the model allows HEIs to follow a transformation process that is directly linked to the sustainable development goals. The fourth factor is that, it allows HEIs to evaluate their policies and practices by benchmarking them against international standards and best practices.
Integrated system model (factor 1)

The HEIs structures explain the various administrative units and departments, research centres and academic departments that are expected to incorporate SD activities into their operations. Therefore, when institutional strategies are developed to inform decisions by the various units, departments, and faculties, it allows for the implementation of uniform policies and directives that are aimed at transformation.
The input, process, output and outcome factors that guides the operations of HEIs in relation to sustainable development practices adds value to the products of the institution who are its students. Therefore, when students are admitted into the university, the structure and operations of the university system must align to the goals of sustainable development. The expectation is that, staff of HEIs will adopt practices that are aimed at promoting sustainable development.
Integrated system model (factor 3)

The third aspect of the model is the integration of the operational activities of the university and sustainability practices that is expected to lead to transformation of students, staff and the HEI. It is therefore important for HEIs to develop a transformational space by connecting the different departments and research centres/institutes to the different sustainability projects as well as the operations of the departments.
Integrated system model (factor 4)

The fourth factor in the integrated model is benchmarking. Benchmarking in sustainability practices is necessary in higher education because it allows universities to compare their performances in the various sustainability aspects in relation to best standards and practices in the industry. An example is the indicator framework (INDICARE) that represents one of the most important models for measuring sustainability projects in HEIs.
Conclusion

This study sought to design an integrated model that links the policies and practices of universities with sustainable development programmes. The proposed model shows that, when universities identify the input, process, output and outcome aspects of the institutional system cycle, it supports the identification and mapping of individual activities with the operations of the university to the sustainable development objectives. This subsequently enhances the smooth integration of unit and department activities with the SD policies and practices of the university. The model also identifies the role of institutional culture to the uptake of sustainability practices.
Conclusion

Although several models and systems have been proposed to promote the development of sustainability policies and practices in universities, there seem to be a wide gap between the expectations of international organisations and universities. Therefore, this model focused on a four-stage model that integrates universities operations with the sustainability practices. The relationship between the basic system model, sustainable development practices and the transformation of higher education institutions provides another perspective for researchers and practitioners to attempt to incorporate sustainability practices with the transformation agendas of universities.
Conclusion

Although this study was framed along a design model, I must emphasise that, one of its limitation is that, it has not been tested in any university setting and so I cannot claim that it is the perfect solution to several challenges confronting universities in the uptake of SD practices. Secondly, the design model was not contextualised and so it cannot assume any specific identity in relation to the structure, operations and practices of a particular university. Future studies could explore the plausibility of implementing this model in a university setting.
References