

Regional Expansion of Higher Education Offerings in Namibia

About the Author

Lukas Shikulo works for the Namibia University of Science and Technology as head of campus for the Eenhana Satellite Campus in Ohangwena region, Namibia. He has worked in the field of education both basic education and higher education for 20 years. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from the University of Namibia, specializing in mathematics and Science, a Master's and Doctoral degree in education management from Midlands State University, Zimbabwe and the University of South Africa respectively, and Master of Business administration (MBA) from the University of Applied Sciences in Germany. His research interests include academic and administrative support services, school and university management, stakeholder engagement and distance education among others.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The public, ministry of higher education and institution of higher learning who demand, access to tertiary education, relevant and quality education and training that contribute to the development of a strong human capital for any country. The construction and expansion of tertiary institutions to remote areas has many positive externalities to the communities. The aim of this research was to understand the public views on higher education expansion to the second densely populated region of Ohangwena in Namibia.

FUNDING

The author did not receive funding for this research.

ABSTRACT: The offering of higher education was not distributed in accordance with regional population and as such the second populated region in Namibia did not have a university campus until 2021. One year after the first institution of higher learning campus was officially opened in 2022 and another private university, the International University of management had a groundbreaking ceremony in the same region, it was necessary to understand the process of conceptualizing the idea which culminated into the actual operation of the first university campus in the region. The central aim of this study was to explore the public views on expanding higher education to Ohangwena region from the stakeholders' perspectives with regards to their expectations, created opportunities, and their engagements with the university. The study used a qualitative research design adopting the interpretive paradigm to explore and understand the above concepts from the stakeholders' perspectives who were involved from the conception of bringing higher education to the region to the realization of the first university campus. A sample of 6 stakeholders was purposively selected as research participants using semi-structured interviews to collect the requisite data and few documents were consulted to augment the established facts. The collected data was qualitatively analyzed by coding and categorizing them into themes for ease interpretation. The study revealed many expectations and opportunities with potential to change the economy of the community. Stakeholders applauded the government for bringing higher education to Ohangwena region, a long overdue decision. In addition, stakeholders expressed their position on their engagement with the top university management. The study provided some recommendations to the identified shortcomings while adding value to the existing literature.

Key terms: Higher education, stakeholder engagement, access to education, expectations, conflict resolution, positive externalities.

I. Introduction and Background

This study highlighted and explored the regional expansion of higher education in Namibia using the case of Ohangwena region. While the impact of universities in host communities is a giveaway, the dynamics of establishing and bringing higher education to remote areas, operations and successes are permeated by the support of the stakeholders based on their expectations and involvement. Ohangwena region welcomed the first university in 2022 and one could only expect improved access to education which translates to social upliftment.

Namibia is divided into fourteen regions to cover a geographical space of 824294 square kilometers with a population of 3 million. Windhoek which is the capital city of Namibia is in Khomas region and houses the main campuses for all the universities in Namibia namely, The University of Namibia (UNAM), Namibia

University of Science and Technology (NUST), International University of Management (IUM), Welwitchia Training Institute (WHTI) and other private colleges. In line with the national decentralization policy, institutions of higher learning have been expanding and decentralizing their offerings in different regions of Namibia to promote access to education especially in the densely populated regions.

Since Namibia independence in 1990 until 2021, the two public institutions of higher learning such as UNAM and NUST, the privately owned IUM and WHTI have established campuses or centres across Namibia in all 12 regions excluding Ohangwena region which is the second densely population region in Namibia with a population of over 330 000 people. It is unfortunate that a region with so many people only had a vocational training centre with a limited intake capacity and offers vocational qualifications up to N3 certificates. By implication, all high school leaving learners from Ohangwena region seeking university education had to travel to the capital city or other regions to access education, an exercise considered by many to be expensive in terms of accommodation, travelling expenses and upkeep for the students. Some years presiding 2021, national calls to establish university campus in Ohangwena region took centre stage propelling universities to consider setting up campuses in Ohangwena. It is a known fact that setting up a campus requires public support, stakeholders' involvement and both human and financial investments. The news of establishing a university campus or campuses gained momentum at the beginning of 2021 with NUST as the first to possibly arrive in the region.

A consultative meeting to finalize the concept of establishing a NUST campus in Ohangwena was attended by the Ohangwena regional government, various stakeholders such as the ministry of urban and rural development and the NUST management in October 2021. It was at this meeting that a concrete resolution to confirm the opening of a NUST campus in 2022 was passed. The idea of opening a university in Ohangwena was considered by all as a pivotal step towards bringing development to the densely populated region, provide access to school leavers and foster community-based opportunities to do business according to the Staff reporter (New Era, 2021). It should also be noted here that IUM also had a groundbreaking ceremony for their new campus in Eenhana town that will possibly open its doors for operation in 2025. To have two universities arriving in Ohangwena within a space of 2 years apart is testimony that the Namibian government considers educational expansion as central towards addressing access to higher education.

Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) is a public university, which started as the Polytechnic of Namibia and established by act of parliament, Act No. 33 of 1994. The Polytechnic of Namibia grew in terms of qualifications offerings, transformed, and established itself within a period of 14 years to become an institution of great repute with internationally accredited qualifications. The Polytechnic of Namibia was then renamed as the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) in 2015 (Act No. 7 of 2015). The university's main campus and head offices are in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia and has ten (10) regional centres to cater for distance education students across Namibia except in a second densely populated Ohangwena region, a region with a population of above 330 000 but for long without a tertiary or institution of higher learning above a vocational training centre.

The Namibia University of Science and Technology implemented a new 2021 -2025 strategic Plan under the vibrant new Vice-Chancellor, Dr Eroid Naomab. Goal one of the strategic plan: Building a vibrant and Engaging Learning Environment commits the university under strategic objective number 4, to maintain the local presence, extend national footprint and international reach. This is the same strategic objective which puts in context the regional expansion strategy from 2021 – 2025 to establish at least three NUST satellite campuses by 2025. The university regional expansion plan came at an opportune time especially when some baseline studies were already concluded, calls to open a public university in Ohangwena and a decision was taken to open a NUST Satellite Campus in Eenhana town, Ohangwena region. Establishing a public institution campus is a national project hence, the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, and Ohangwena Regional Council as a host had to identify a temporary facility from which NUST would operate while the university infrastructure is under construction. Billy William Mwaningange Rural Development Centre (BWMRDC) was found suitable for the university activities.

The RDC centre is located 18km outside Eenhana town and does not have student accommodation. A cabinet resolution was passed to allow NUST to use the RDC infrastructure rent free, a resolution that was received with mixed understanding by the Ohangwena Regional Council with a demand of a rental fee. The university had to invest financial resources on transforming the facility into a conducive teaching/learning environment, bring internet fiber cable for a strong and reliable internet connection and pay for utility bills with a pledge to maintain the infrastructure among many activities. Besides an outstanding signed lease agreement between NUST and Ohangwena Regional Council, the campus with a population of 436 students was officially opened by the Namibian prime minister, Minister of Higher Education, Minister of Urban and Rural Development, Speaker of the national assembly, the former president of Namibia and patron of the new campus as well as the university top management and other key stakeholders. The long-awaited lease agreement was then only signed in February 2023, following almost 15 months long uncertain period between the university and Ohangwena Regional Council.

II. Problem Statement

While the Namibian government prioritized funding education to improve access and quality of education, the second densely populated region in Namibia never had an institution of higher learning since 1990. The establishment of the first university campus in the region presents great opportunities and benefits to the public especially the four northern regions and the neighboring countries such as Angola and Zambia which came to fruition in January 2022. Chan (2021: 12) submits that universities must get the full support of the stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of most initiatives and plans. Namibia University of Science and Technology as the first university in Ohangwena region operates at Billy Willy Mwaningange rural development centre (RDC), a centre that is managed by Ohangwena regional Council. Understanding the regional expansion strategy of establishing a university campus in the community, the nature of challenges, and the causes of these challenges will serve as a practical case study towards stakeholder engagement in establishing other campuses in different communities. This study explored the stakeholders' views on the establishment of the new university campus in Ohangwena region and their engagement towards supporting the successful operation of the university in the region, the following guiding question was formulated: What are the stakeholders' perceptions and views on establishing an institution of higher learning in a densely populated region?

III. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents an analysis of some concepts with respect to the regional expansion of higher education in any community. Furthermore, the stakeholders' expectations were highlighted to point out their effects on the successful implementation of university activities. The benefits of having a university in a community was highlighted to understand the views of the stakeholders through the research questions. It also provided an account of negotiations and conflict management for a win – win situation as well as the management of the stakeholders, an imperative to use on negotiations. Management of company reputation is also included as it relates to the management of public entities such as a public university amidst stakeholders' individual differences.

a) Regional expansion of higher education

Just like any country globally, expansion of higher education serves a great general purpose for the masses and the industry alike and Namibia is no exception. Scholars such as Schlegel, Pfister and Backes-Gellner (2022, pp. 1874-1875) links the expansion of tertiary education to regional form development. This means education transforms economies and social standards of people living in the remote areas. While many developed countries have seen expansion of educational opportunities especially in rural areas to capacitate and build their human capital, Namibia only followed the same trajectory after independence in 1990. Accordingly, higher education in Namibia is relatively young as the country only had two public universities and private university in 2014 (Matengu, Likando and Kangumu, 2014, p. 83). It is however an achievement that the country boasts many university campuses in almost all corners of the country except in Ohangwena region.

Expanding higher education should not just be a national objective without serving the purpose but rather a project to alleviate inequalities and shape economic standards. David and Gbollie (2014, p. 139) emphasize the importance of aligning expansion and quality of higher education. They subscribe to the quality of education which propels economic growth and development. The element of quality should consider the involvement of stakeholders to facilitate implementation to ensure excellence as an output.

It is generally understood that education is key to many closed doors and provides everyone with equal opportunities of employment. Liu, Green and Pensiero (2016, pp. 1-2) confirms that education reduces inequalities of opportunities. That means the son or daughter of a peasant can confidently compete with the children of an elite. In this context, expanding higher education to the most remote or rural areas presents an opportunity to all qualifying students to acquire the much-needed education.

A study by Shu, Jianing and Rui (2019, pp. 87-87) highlights the importance of expanding higher education in terms increasing the enrollment of the university students which ultimately translates to an educated human capital. Some institutions have more students and offer qualifications that are not relevant to the society. It is therefore imperative that the community has a say in terms of advising the university about the much-needed training or capacity building activities in the community which is one the responsibilities of the stakeholders.

b) Stakeholders' Expectations

Stakeholder's inclusivity and engagement are some of the pivotal elements in the overall performance of any organization especially when they catalyze the processes of achieving general objectives. This is true when it comes to expanding higher education offerings in different regions considering various geographical, social, and technological factors. Morgan and Taschereau (1996, p. 10) define stakeholders as individuals or groups whose primary objectives and participation are to influence implementation of strategies towards tangible achievements. Stakeholders are resourceful and should be reliable when it comes to providing relevant

information needed in the process of implementing strategies towards the business performance. These can be internal and external stakeholders who share the vision of an organization and are more results oriented besides their possible different individual's expectations. In the context of the current study, a stakeholder committee was established few years before the new university campus was finally opened in 2022. Active members of the stakeholders' committee were then given a new mandate as advisory committee members reporting to the university vice-chancellor after the campus was officially opened.

It is critical that management understands the expectations of the stakeholders to avoid conflicts and disagreements in the process of implementing strategic decisions aimed at enhancing organization's performance. One can argue that understanding the expectations of the stakeholders might be a process, but these can be drawn empirically from the decisions taken by different stakeholders during strategic deliberations. It is worth noting that if differing expectations are not managed efficiently, conflicts and disagreements can potentially manifest which can delay the implementation of strategies.

According to Thomlison (2000, P. 178), individual expectations are part of interactions related to interpersonal, intragroup and/or organization-stakeholder relations which can hardly be separated but to be managed in line with common goals. This study concentrates more on organization-stakeholder relations to understand all aspects related to the implementation of strategies and university activities in Ohangwena region. People will always have expectations in line with their understanding and interests hence the importance of managing these differences. Literature links stakeholder quality of relations with business success because it is believed that meeting their expectations promotes greater satisfaction and understanding for the organization's operations which in turn leads to decision ownership (Inglis & Minahan, 2001). The importance of understanding stakeholders' expectations cannot be overemphasized, hence involving them in the planning of achieving major objectives is key for them to own the decisions taken. Once their expectations are well understood or met, their support is almost guaranteed which can be extended to new initiatives.

c) Stakeholder Management

It is unequivocal that the support from stakeholders is pivotal towards the successful implementation of any organizational growth, initiatives, and expansion of their programs. Stakeholders can have divergent views on various organization's initiatives hence Chan (2021, p. 12) implores organizations to develop strategies which leads to successful management of stakeholders with differing, supporting and/or neutral views on a variety of issues. While there exists literature on stakeholder management in other sectors such as oil and gas (Waritimi, 2012, p. ii), public/private partnerships etc., there is paucity of research data on stakeholder management strategies in the higher education sector in Namibia. It is pleasing to note that before the regional expansion strategy which led to the establishment of the NUST campus in Ohangwena, a stakeholder committee was established in Ohangwena to catalyze the process towards setting up a university campus in the region.

Stakeholder management emerges from the stakeholder theory which is more detailed by Edward R., Freeman in 1984. Accordingly, stakeholder theory assumes that organizations can potentially be effective and productive when more people such as the shareholders and people with various interests are satisfied (Freeman, 1984, p. n.d). In nutshell, the success of an organization should not only depend on profit maximization but equally important, it should attend to the needs and expectation of different stakeholders. In the context of the university, one should strive to meet the expectations of the university mandate, stakeholders that support university projects, students as beneficiaries for training and transformation and the community.

Donaldson and Preston (1995, pp. 66-68) in their stakeholder model present the two-way process of communication between the organization and various stakeholders. Stakeholders could include investors, political groups, customers, communities, employees, government ministries, suppliers, and trade associations with a specific interest in the university affairs. Understanding these relationships, implementing the right model of stakeholder engagement which should incorporate stakeholders' opinions is key towards improving decision-making processes which ultimately facilitates the alignment of the organization and the society (Kivits, 2011, pp. 318-321). The stakeholder model is practical and applicable to the successful establishment and implementation of NUST campus activities in Ohangwena region. This is because the expansion of higher education in terms of establishing a new campus in the rural areas requires physical resources, financial resources, and the support from the community towards fruition.

d) Conflict resolution and negotiations

Bringing higher education closer to the regions requires physical space to set up the building infrastructure, renting in some existing facilities, putting up investments to make the rented facilities serve the purpose and negotiating the contracts with service providers. NUST was also involved in the process of signing the lease agreement to operate the university activities at Billy William Mwaningange Rural Development Centre (BWMRDC) which took the whole year to be completed. This delay impacted the operations of the university to a certain extent in the 2022 academic year. The two government line ministries namely, the ministry of higher education, technology, and innovation under which NUST falls and the ministry of Urban and rural development under which BWMRDC falls reached a unanimous consensus for NUST to rent free the rural

development Centre while the NUST new campus is under construction in Eenhana town. Ohangwena regional council which is responsible for the BWMRDC resolved to charge NUST a monthly fee which sparked several engagements, communications, and consultations for all to defend their position.

While there were many role players such as the ministry of urban and rural development, the ministry of higher education, technology and innovation who all agreed in principle for NUST to be allowed to operate from BWMRDC rent free, the actual negotiation for the lease agreement terms and conditions was left in the hands of the two namely the Namibia University of Science and Technology and Ohangwena Regional Council. Fowler (1986, p. 4) define negotiation as an interaction between two or more parties such as NUST and ORC with different objectives who should reconcile and resolve their differences for a mutually acceptable solution.

Ohangwena Regional Council had different objectives when it comes to the operations of BWMRDC namely community development however, the Namibia University of Science and Technology viewed its operations at BWMRDC and in Ohangwena region as adding value to the Centre objectives. Literature has it on record that universities stand to promote community development, drive rural development, and support the development of priority sectors in the rural area (New Era, 2021). Negotiations in the context of Fowler's definition could speed up the completion and signing the lease agreement for NUST to operate at the BWMRDC but it took them longer than expected to come to conclusion.

Real-life negotiation scenarios can be facilitated by various approaches and models to get things done or take a collective decision towards settling negotiations. Negotiations are necessitated by disagreements between parties, conflicts or at times lack of information on a subject under discussion. In the context of ORC and NUST, one would ask if all information was presented to all the parties involved. It is imperative that negotiating teams understand the end results which preferably should be satisfactory to all and/or effects of the negotiation outcome on other dynamics. One can engage into some fact-finding study as to why the lease agreement between NUST and ORC could not be concluded within a short period of time considering that both are public institutions. Negotiations should be objective, result oriented and result in a win-win solution for all involved.

Many scholars define win-win solutions from different backgrounds. Naris et al (2018, p. 2) defined win-win solutions as a single mutual outcome when the parties involved must reconcile their differences. This definition talks to putting aside personal differences and focus on commonalities. NUST as a service provider could be of interest to ORC as beneficiaries in terms of community development hence the two could be complementary. Furthermore, Fujita et al. (2017, p. 1) refer to win-win outcomes as solutions which satisfy both parties in terms of what they mostly want. It means, involved parties should put their interests on the table for reconciliation purposes using averages. This type of solutions promotes the greatest happiness to the majority of those involved in the negotiations. Effective negotiations permeate collaboration which is a critical ingredient towards a common objective especially when parties are working on national projects such as the establishment of Namibia University of science and Technology satellite campus in Ohangwena region.

Besides many scholarly definitions of win-win negotiations, Fisher and Ury (2002, p. 6) present another version of win-win negotiation termed as "principled negotiation". According to them, several stages are included in a principled negotiation process such as separation of people from the problem; focusing on interests and not positions of individuals involved in the negotiations; the use of objective criteria and invention of options for mutual gain. Very important to this type of negotiation is that it should improve and not damage the relationship between the parties involved. It should also be noted that in a successful negotiation, everyone is a winner because the objective is an agreement and not necessarily a victory. Once again, this type of negotiation should suspend personal or egocentric entitlements to promote national or public interests. When it comes to negotiations, one should be cognizant of negotiation impasses. According to Schweinsberg et. al (2021, p. 6), negotiators tend to self-serve and promote their positions in a self-centered manner. One argues that problems should be separated for the negotiators to address problems and not the personalities of the negotiators. It is a common practice to maintain a rational, goal-oriented frame of mind when negotiating for public projects which affect a significant number of people. A question would seek clarity as to what extend was the NUST advisory committee members involved in resolving the disagreement between NUST and ORC towards signing the lease agreement?

e) **Company Reputation Management**

For venerable institutions such as the Namibia University of Science and Technology to remain relevant, the management of corporate identity, corporate image and corporate reputation are key. While regional expansion of higher education is a national agenda, NUST as a public institution was chosen as a case study especially that a new campus was the first one for the second densely populated region. Considering the lengthy process of disagreements on the details of the lease agreement against the impact of the new campus in Ohangwena region, it is imperative that the public perceptions about NUST was kept intact if not enhanced through right tools of promotion. Dacko-Pikiewics (2022, pp. 20-22) submits that the reputation of any company is significant towards building long-term competitive advantage and public perception about the organization. It

is also true that managing the reputation of the company is complex in nature which presents a serious and difficult challenge to managers. The inability to reach and conclude on the signing of the lease agreement had a potential to dent the image of NUST and ORC but thanks to those involved, there was less negative publicity in the media. One can argue that the companies' image and identity were shielded from the public scrutiny for the sake of their reputations.

Dacko-Pikiewics (2022, p. 9) emphasizes that reputation management is cemented by controlling the sources of information or what type of information goes to the public more especially in the world of internet and social media. While internet can be a source of reliable information, one should acknowledge the fact that the same platforms can be used to spread untrue information which can potentially damage a good reputation if no strategy is employed to consistently provide credible information to the public. It is factual that building a good reputation take years of practice, but a single incident can destroy it. A good reputation does not only yield tangible benefits to the company, but it is the responsibility of managers to implement practices that promote good reputation with the public. Fombrun (2018, p. 5) implores managers to invest in building and maintenance of good relationships with all the stakeholders in terms of meeting their expectations. Furthermore, companies are expected by their stakeholders and customers to deliver as per their mandate and live up to their public commitments. During the NUST organized capacity-building workshops, career fairs and other projects, the public response in terms of attendance and/or support is testimony that the good reputation that NUST has built for many years is still solid and the public has high confidence for the services.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Research methodology as outlined by Kothari (2004, pp. 1-2) dictates the techniques employed in the study to answer the research questions. There are three common research paradigms namely positivist methodology, interpretivism and the critical theory. This study is qualitative in nature which employed interpretivism paradigm to explore and understand the expectations of NUST stakeholders, challenges experienced during the opening of the first university campus in the region and finalization of the lease agreement, and stakeholders' engagement with the university. Kumar (2014, p. 5) provides an understanding about qualitative approach on why and how things unfold and affords people involved such as stakeholders an opportunity to interpret their positions and provide an in-depth understanding of their own views. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, pp. 33-34), interpretivism assumes the position that everyone is involved in an interactive nature whereas both the researcher and respondents interact, discourse, read, question and record data during the process. This paradigm is centered around understanding the views of stakeholders for the new university campus and interpret what they say and mean in their individual or group context. Accordingly, interpretivism considers participants as social actors hence understanding people in their context is key to our interpretations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 478). In this context the researcher remains empathetic during the interpretation of the participants' point of view. The chosen paradigm was able to get the interpretations within the right organic context from people that have lived in Ohangwena region before and after independence and are involved in the process of bringing higher education to the region.

The study targeted a population of 16 Eenhana NUST stakeholders namely: NUST Ohangwena steering committee members, Ohangwena regional council, NUST Management team, Eenhana town council and community members. These people have common characteristics as pointed out by Cresswell (2014, p. 183-187). A sample of 6 stakeholders was purposively selected for their expertise, active involvement and experience in education within the Namibian context for interviews on certain aspects of higher education in Ohangwena region. The selection of the sample is in line with Tracy (2013, pp. 99-100) who argued that qualitative researchers adopt purposeful sampling as it fits the type of research at hand. All ethical procedures were followed to interview and record the respondents.

Data acquired from six (6) NUST Eenhana campus stakeholders was transcribed from the voice records, summarized, and cleaned to formulate coded themes. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the meanings of the collected qualitative data, but also considering the facts from the analyzed documents. The researcher's subjective experience was at the center of interpretation of the collected data to infer conclusions of realities on the ground. Clarke and Braun (2013, p. n.d) warn the researchers not to fall for a pitfall of using the main research question as a theme. It is in this context that themes were formulated from the collected data and analyzed accordingly to arrive at solid conclusions.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

All selected six stakeholders were successfully interviewed and recorded for a thematic analysis. The respondents constituted of five males and one female who all university qualifications ranging from honors level to masters' qualifications. The collected data was transcribed, cleaned and arranged under different themes for easy interpretation. Due to the nature of collected data, McMillan, and Schumacher (2010, pp. 23-24) submit that qualitative analysis follows an inductive process of organizing data into categories and themes.

Accordingly, three themes namely; expectations of higher education in the region, challenges facing the new university, and stakeholder engagement, were formulated.

a) Expectations of higher education

It emerged from the interview that stakeholders had many expectations and hope for the second densely populated region upon learning that an institution of higher learning campus would be established in the region. Ohangwena region as a second highly populated region in Namibia with over 330 000 residents never had a university which justifies their excitement. All six interviewees were involved in the consultation process for the establishment of the university, fundraising activities towards the new university campus and now serve in the advisory role of the newly established campus. All the six interviewees indicated that having a university in Ohangwena region will address access to higher education and reduce financial burden on the parents and guardians of the students. Before an institution of higher learning came to the region, parents had to send their children to the capital city miles away from home to access higher education which came at a high cost in terms of accommodation, transportation, and expensive cost of living in the city. On the question of what the stakeholders expect from the new university campus in Ohangwena, they had the following to say:

Respondent 1: *“Many qualifying students of the rural areas will have access to higher education while living and still getting support from their families.”*

Respondent 2: *“Not only that the population of Eenhana town will grow but economic activities such as house rental, trading business and other services are expected to boost.”*

Respondent 3: *“Many people will be employed through the provision of services, construction of the new campus and enhances small and medium enterprises (SME) development.”*

Respondent 4: *“The university will assist in resolving some social challenges through research and training of the community members.”*

Respondent 5: *“The university will offer relevant courses to the residents and also have some special entry requirements for the marginalized groups or learners from remote schools who might not qualify through the normal entry requirements.”* Respondent 1 and 4 also shared similar expectation as stated above.

Respondent 6: *“The university is expected to have community engagements which will add value to the way they manage their community projects.”*

It is clear from the stakeholders' views that the establishment of a university campus in Ohangwena is not only expected to respond to some existing challenges but more bringing the much-needed development to the region. It is public knowledge that education plays a critical role on liberating people towards full understanding of many developmental, economic and technological aspects of the country. In line with the expectations, the university is then expected to offer relevant courses to the population and create employment opportunities for the graduates. It was also evident from the stakeholders that the university should employ inclusivity when it comes to entry requirements to university studies considering the poor high school background of many youth in the region. The population therefore expects the university to provide capacity building workshops, public lectures and training in different areas of development.

b) Challenges facing the new university

Respondents pointed out a few challenges that might hinder the expected success of the new university, however they also believed that with the support of the community, the university will succeed. All six (6) respondents alluded to the fact that funding for a capital project such as the new construction of the university heavily relies on the government funding which is currently crippled by the national economic hardships. NUST is a government or public institution and as such, the government will fund most of the construction activities. The university does own its building infrastructure hence operating from a government infrastructure under the ministry of urban and rural development. Education is a public good, hence the government through the ministry of urban and rural development should accommodate the university in the existing infrastructure while mobilizing funds to construct the university infrastructure in Eenhana town. The challenge is that government funding is not enough to accelerate the construction of the university campus. Respondents had this to say on challenges facing the new university in Ohangwena region:

Respondent 1 concurred with respondent 5 on the shortage of accommodation and had this to say, *“accommodation for both students and staff remains a big challenge for a small and growing town of Eenhana. The accommodation problem is expected to persist as the university population grows.”*

Respondent 2: *“Eenhana town does not have a library for students to study and do research when they are off campus.”*

Respondent 3: *“As the new campus grows on student enrollment and the construction of the new campus might take time, the current venue might become smaller for the student population which can be a challenge if nothing is done.”*

Respondent 4: *“While many students reside in Eenhana town, operating outside town can be challenging in terms of transport for many students that wish to go to campus on weekends for the library and internet.”*

Respondent 6 had an unexpected view on the marketing of the new campus and the understanding of the remote people, *“marketing the campus to people without good understanding of different curriculum and exposure can also be a challenge.”*

Respondents 5 and 1 referred to many young high school leavers opting for institutions in towns and away from their villages which can dent the enrollment numbers for the new campus. Additionally, respondent 5 stated that *“the construction of another university campus in town might attract more students as they will not need transport to campus.”*

From these responses, it is clear that availing some services in Eenhana should not be left to the ministry of higher education and/or the university but rather a call to government through different ministries and the private sector to upgrade and/or decentralize services to Eenhana town especially now that the population of the town will grow rapidly.

c) Stakeholder engagement

The full understanding of value created from stakeholder engagement and their contributions to an entity remains a challenge for many organizations globally (Makhosana, 2016, p. i). The competency to include stakeholders in the planning and execution process depends on the understanding, knowledge, and skills of the senior management of the organization. Involving stakeholders in the execution of the strategies does not only benefit the organization but importantly, stakeholders energize the masses to support the organizational strategies. All the participants in this study were key stakeholders in the establishment of first institution of higher learning, the NUST campus in Ohangwena region.

The stakeholders have pointed out that somehow their roles in the operation strategies of the new campus are not clear or explicitly indicated now that the campus is operational as compared to the period before the campus opened its doors to the public. They further claim that they are mostly informed through the stakeholders' committee of what the university has done but not entirely involved to influence the operations however, they remain ready to assist the new campus to grow. It was however noted that their participation in the local activities or programs such as workshops when hosted by the campus is well on track. The stakeholders are well informed and involved through the office of the new campus director. When it comes to stakeholders' engagement through the established committee, the participants responded as follows:

Respondent 1: *“I am basically playing a role of promoting the new university campus at different gatherings and platforms to succeed.”*

Respondent 2: *“Seeing that the new campus is under construction and needs financial capital, if given the opportunity I will advise the top management on how to mobilize resources.”*

Respondent 3: *“In the aspect of relevance in the community, we promote the university to the community members to approach the university for capacity building activities.”*

Respondent 4: *“we are more of information consumers as we are not given the platform to cultivate or share our ideas with the university.”*

Respondent 5: *“To me, stakeholder engagement is limited because we are not consulted to advise but rather to be informed. If stakeholder engagement is strengthened, the support will be more which leads to the success of the campus.”*

Respondent 6: *“we were quite active during the first fundraising activity held in Ohangwena for the establishment of the campus but when the campus opened its doors, we merely became spectators as our roles were not explicitly indicated on the terms of our appointment. I do believe we could play a role on collecting funds pledged during the fundraising activity and the process of signing the lease agreement.”*

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of the study was to explore and understanding the stakeholders' views on the regional expansion of higher education in Namibia with a particular focus and interest in the first university in Ohangwena region. The establishment of a university in Ohangwena region is long overdue considering the size of the regional population. The construction of the new public university campus in the region should not be left to government alone but a collective approach is needed. It is therefore a call on the private sector to come on board and fund the construction of the student hostel, student transport solution and library to meet government halfway. In the same vein, and with the involvement of stakeholders, fundraising projects which should engage international partners can be explored as viable strategies to complete the construction of the university campus. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to promote benefits of higher education in the region and reduce associated challenges:

- a) **Hosting capacity and training workshops for the community:** There should be many workshops organized for different groups such as leadership workshops, Business management workshops, Information technology, and project management workshops among many others. Literature proposes that universities should know what the youth and students expect from them to provide the needed services and training (Gorgodze, Macharashvili & Kamladze, 2019, p. 42). In this context, the university should be

engaging the youth at schools and out of schools to meet their expectations. In the world of technology, the university can play a role in improving technology literacy for the community which potentially can enhance their performance in other various projects.

- b) **Developing courses for targeted groups:** The university plays a crucial role of developing talents, building capacity for specific groups, and educating the community on various projects hence forming partnership through established committees should be pivotal towards making an impact in the community. Short courses that address skills shortage should be offered to capacitate some professionals. Medved and Ursic (2021, p. 80) support the university-community partnership as co-producers of knowledge which augments book knowledge to integrate theories into practice. In this context the NUST Eenhana should engage the community to establish the type of content needed for training while senior students can practice within the community activities
- c) **Renewal of the lease agreement between NUST and ORC:** NUST management and Ohangwena Regional Council (ORC) should start the process of renewing the contract to extend the rental agreement at William Billy Mwaningange Rural Development Centre for additional five years. There is so much that NUST and ORC can achieve together as public entities by using the available resources. Fijita et al. (2017, pp. 70-80) submits that win-win outcomes are solutions that provide both parties most of what they want. It is in this context that NUST and ORC should renew the lease agreement on time to avoid disruptions at the end of the current contract in 2025. The ORC and NUST can work together on many projects and training for community developmental purposes.
- d) **Transportation to campus and accommodation for the students:** This study proposes that NUST engages the public transport service providers to cater for transport service to the university community. The transport will be used by both the students and staff to even access the library and internet facilities on weekends which Eenhana town does not have at present. Equally important, another expression of interest for accommodation facilities in Eenhana town should be explored. Accommodation for students plays a major role for support and fellow students networking. As an alternative, the university can acquire a 65-seater bus through sponsorships to transport the university population at a fee. This will not only reduce the current spending, but the university gets to own a bus that can be used for many years.
- e) **Funding for the construction of the new campus:** Expecting the central government to fund the capital project of a university campus size will not be fully realized in the current economic downturn. The gala dinner as a fundraising activity might raise money but might not even make a dent on the actual cost of construction. While NUST is a public institution, funding should be sourced from private sectors and international donors. This study proposes that private sectors such as mining industries, telecommunication companies, business community, Green Hydrogen, and international donors should be approached to fund the construction of the new campus. If sufficient funding is mobilized, the key phases of the campus can be completed within a period of two years before the year 2027. NUST should also empower and assign catalytical roles to the stakeholders especially when it comes to negotiations, promoting NUST image to the locals, community engagement, and mobilization of resources at the grassroots level.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Chan, G. (2021). Stakeholder Management Strategies: The Special Case of Universities. *International Education Studies*; 14(7), pp. 12-26.
- [2]. Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- [3]. Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- [4]. Dacko-Pikiewicz, Z. (2022). *Reputation Management and Family Business*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, New York.
- [5]. Donaldson, T. & Preston, L. E., (1995). The stakeholder theory of corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of management Review*, 20(10), 65-91.
- [6]. Du Plessis, D. & Keyter, C. (2019). Capacity Building Through Public Institutions of Higher Learning: A Case Study of Namibia. *AJPSDG*2(1), 70-81.
- [7]. Fisher, R. and Ury, W. (2002). Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 47(1), 6.
- [8]. Fombrun, C. J. (2018). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image* (2 ed.) Harvard Business School Press.
- [9]. Fowler, A. (1986). *Effective Negotiation*. Institute of Personnel Management, Wiltshire.
- [10]. Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman Publishing Inc.

- [11]. Fujita, K., Ito, T. and Klein, M. (2017). Enabling large scale deliberation using ideation and negotiation-support agents, IEEE 37th International Conference on Distributed Computing Systems, pp. 360 – 363.
- [12]. Gbollie, C. and David, N. M. (2014). Aligning Expansion and Quality in Higher Education: An Imperative to Liberia's Economic Growth and Development. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(12), 139 – 150.
- [13]. Gorgodze, S., Macharashvili, L., and Kamladze, A. (2019). Learning for Eraning: Student Expectations and Perceptions, *International Education Studies*, 13 (1), 42 – 53. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v13nlp42>
- [14]. Inglis, L. and Minahan, S. (2001). Stakeholders and Strategic Planning: experiences of an Australian non-profit organization 1993-2001. Unpublished manuscript, Caulfield East.
- [15]. Lii, Y., Green, A. and Pensiero, N. (2016). Expansion of Higher Education and Inequality of opportunities: A cross-national Analysis. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, (3), 1-28.
- [16]. Kivunja, C. and Kuyini, A. B. (2017). Understanding and Applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), 26-41.
- [17]. Kivits, R. A. (2011). Three component stakeholder analysis, *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 5(3), 318-333.
- [18]. Kothari, C., R., (2004). *Research methodology, methods and techniques*. New Delhi: New Age.
- [19]. Kumar, R. (2014). *Research Methodology*. London: SAGE Publications.
- [20]. Makhosazana, T. (2016). Stakeholder engagement – the implementation and determination of value creation. Unpublished master's Thesis. University of Pretoria.
- [21]. Matengu, K., Likando, G., and Kangumu, B. (2014). Governance and Coordination of the higher education system in Namibia: Challenges and Prospects. *Forum for International Research in Education*, 1(2), 83 – 97.
- [22]. McMillan, J. H. and Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in Education. Evidence-based inquiry*, 7th edition. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- [23]. Medved, P., and Ursic, M. (2021). The Benefits of University Collaboration Within University-Community Partnerships in Europe. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. 25(2), p. 79-94.
- [24]. Morgan, P. and Taschereau, S. (1996). Capacity and institutional assessment: Frameworks, methods and tools for analysis, Prepared for CIDA Policy Branch. <http://www.acdicida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/CapacityDevelopment>.
- [25]. Naris, D., Schultz, A. and Pastukhov, A. (2018). The bamberg trucking game: A paradigm for assessing the detection of win-win solutions in a potential conflict scenario, *Frontiers in psychology*, 9(138).Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00138
- [26]. Namibia University of Science and Technology Ohangwena Campus to Open next year: 2021-10-12. New Era. Pg 10.
- [27]. Republic of Namibia. (1992). University of Namibia Act, Act 18 of 1992. Namibia: Government Printer.
- [28]. Schlegel, T., Pfister, C. and Backes-Gellner, U. (2022). Tertiary education expansion and regional firm development, *Regional Studies*, 56(11), 1874 – 1887. [Hts://doi.org/10.108/00343404.2021.2010695](https://doi.org/10.108/00343404.2021.2010695).
- [29]. Schweinsberg, M., Thau, S. and Pillutla, M. M. (2021). Negotiation Impasses: Types, Causes, and Resolutions, *Journal of management*, 48(1), pp. 49-76. DOI: 10.1177/01492063211021657
- [30]. Shu, C., Jianing, M. and Rui, S. (2019). Higher Education Expansion Policy, Educational Attainment and Urban Income Disparity: Evidence from China. *Advanced in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 351, pp. 1 – 10.
- [31]. Sparks, E. and Jo Waits, M. (2011). Degrees for what jobs? *Raising Expectations for Universities and Colleges in a Global Economy*. NGA Center for Best Practices.
- [32]. Theofanidis, D., and Fountouki, A. (2019). Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative nursing (GORNA)*, 7(3), 155 – 162.
- [33]. Thomlison, T. D. (2000). An interpersonal primer with implications for public relations. In J.A. Ledingham & S. D. Bruning (Eds.), *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice and practice of public relations* (pp. 177 – 203). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- [34]. Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. United Kingdom, Wiley-Blackwell Publication.