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SUSTAINABLE FACTOR OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: WHY PUBLIC RELATION MATTES MOST

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ABSTRACT: *Private and public higher education institutions have had the problem of financial un-sustainability in recent years. United Kingdom and European Union have instituted programs to work on financial sustainability of higher education as reported by Browne et al. (2010) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). To achieve financial sustainability of higher education, institution needs to increase its internally-generated income or funds, which needs to be flowing on a regular basis for its operation, without compromising the future of its sustainability. This paper is to establish legitimacy for future work needed for the variables to pursue further research. Quantitative research study was research design and instrument of higher educational institutions across the globe. Results have opened opportunity for discussion on financial sustainability in higher educational institutions. The study explored theories behind financial sustainability and establishes possible correlation between the public relations that is sustaining the financing of higher education institutions. The outcome have help develop variable for predictive model in the development of financial sustainability for higher educational institutions.*

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, Institutions, Public Relation

INTRODUCTION

The sustainability movement thrive around many communal ideas of helping each other in our 1)environment, 2) communal responsibility, 3) what can help the whole community to survive in the future and 4) and to create a foresight that can be envisage as acceptable branding for the future. This calls environmental and communal responsibility which leads to sustainability of the society. In this case a communal stakeholders holder groups comes together and with trust and reciprocity designed an institution that has a public image that lead to organizational sustainability programs, which in turn creates a synergy that generate trust and reciprocity that bring a good will (Corner, 2006). Through this sustainability and public relations, social, and governance factors are seen as "public interest that affect human, societal, and environmental well-being and that are increasingly relevant to business and finance operations" (Cherneva, 2012, para. 10).

With the above in mind sustainability can be looked at as an institutional and institutional' supply management. In an expanding economy, companies do well to invest in common good growth initiatives, and these expenditures often pay off and promote a perception of financial stability.

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(Interdonato, 2012). To lead the economy or institutions into economic sustainability positive public relations become increasingly important.

One of the most recent trends is interpreting sustainability initiatives which is appreciated and recognized the challenges of organizational change initiatives. Thus, organizations sustainability potential must be prepared to overcome major barriers such as luck of trust, loyalty, abuse of power and greed associated with organization- wide culture change

Sustainability can be framed as internal resource management. In an expanding economy, companies do well to invest in growth initiatives in the form of public relations, and these expenditures often pay off and promote a perception of good public relations stability. Positive public relations: The economic component of environmental protection and ecological sustainability is increasingly important. Consumer demand has begun to take into account external sustainability. Public relations campaigns recognize this and promote their organizations as “green” or ecologically conscientious. (Bateh, Horner, Jr, Broadbent, Fish, 2014).

There is little disagreement that public reactions sustainability matters, but one of the key questions is how sustainability initiatives can be successfully implemented. One of the most recent trends is interpreting public relations sustainability implementation in the context of organizational change. Put differently, sustainability initiatives are recognized as complex and challenging as any other organizational change initiatives that are prompted by change in external factors. Implementing a sustainability program also has organizational public relations implications which produce accompanying resistance to change. Thus, organizations that consider meeting their sustainability potential must be prepared to overcome major barriers such as employee resistance and eccentricities associated with organization- wide culture change (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast,& Broadbent, 2013).

Current reality of higher educational institutions

Since the 21st century, the challenges facing the AHEIs have been growing. In 2005, the Review and Herald published a College was planning to close its doors due to financial un-sustainability. This is the longest serving higher educational institution that the church has. Apart from the problem of not finding enough qualified Adventist professors, Osborn (2000) said the institution refused to take the approach of “system thinking as a discipline for seeing wholes” (p. 34). The challenge called for ways to tackle and solve problems. Osborn (2000) continued to say that there was a need “for a framework for seeing inter-relationship rather than things” (p. 34).

Six years later, the Review and Herald in August 2011, reported the closure of the said College. Senge (as cited in Osborn, 2000) took this idea further when he said that church related colleges and universities have neglected the “power of cooperation, collaboration, collectivity, networking, public relations and long-term financial sustainable growth” (p. 34). Senge (1990) calls AHEI administrators to change their perspective from “seeing parts to seeing whole” (p. 34). This will reveal the true reality about Adventist higher education institutions and their condition.

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CONCEPTUAL LINKAGES OF FACTOR PUBLIC RELAATION FOR FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Though the church has established more and more higher education institutions, there were challenges that the church faced in the past 60 years. Specifically, these challenges are the high cost of living, the rising cost of education, the economic melt-down around the world and the neglect of public relations. These challenges has taken their toll on AHEIs in terms of high cost of tuition that leads to low enrollment, low revenues, and the requirement for higher appropriations which the church in many instances is not able to give.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004) reporting on financial sustainability of higher education, revealed that "the main challenge for those who lead, govern, and manage higher education institutions is to manage the [institutions] to secure [their] financial and academic sustainability at a time when the funding" (p. 9) was becoming much more competitive and challenging. As such, the OECD (2004) report suggests that attention should be focused on systems of "governance and management of higher education with particular reference to their impact on the financial viability of higher education institutions" (p. 7). It provided a crucial initial amount of information on the "current status and changing objectives of policies, governance, funding, public relations and management of higher education institutions in these countries" (OECD, 2004, p. 7). This statement suggests five key fundamentals in administration for financial sustainability. The elements are (a) a strategy for direction, (b) sustainability by recovering all costs, (c) generation of income by using networking and public relations, (d) investment that maintains the appropriate level of productive capacity, and (e) managing risk appropriately to avoid potential problems. These elements are indicators that can be used to "assess how well an institution is managing its own sustainability" (OECD, 2004, p. 7).

The United Kingdom—realizing the importance of financial sustainability in its higher education institution—appointed a special committee on funding and students finance on higher education to work on "securing sustainable future for higher education" (Browne et al., 2010, p. 3). The committee was challenged to find out ways of making HEIs more sustainable and yet remain accessible to every potential student that needs an education. Likewise, in this study, I hope that ways could be developed based on the findings that can help AHEIs to be more sustainable financially and also ease the appropriation burdens that the unions and divisions are mandated to provide.

Financial Sustainability

This study is focused on the financial sustainability of organizations. It looks at the ability of institutions to identify and analyze full cost, and the potential to diversify their income and non-income sources to obtain financial sustainability. Such non income sources is the Public relations of the institutions.

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The obligation of meeting current and future mission is the main challenges for higher educational institutions of the 21st century (European University Association, 2008, p. 12). Thus the aim of financial sustainability is to ensure an institution's goals are reached by guaranteeing "sufficient income to enable it to invest in its future academic and research activities" (European University Association, 2008, p. 16). To fulfill this aim, higher educational institutions need to pursue sustainable growth especially in terms of their finances.

Sustainable growth can be defined as the "rate at which an institution can grow while keeping its profitability and financial policies unchanged" (Soppe, 2006, p. 24). It is a financial planning model that focused on stable risk and returns for the institutional owners and for that matter for nonprofit it is reinvestment of internal funds if there is excess of income over expense. In other words, the higher educational institutions must find a way to cut cost of institution based on its own resources and see that its public image can generate more funds through students' enrolment. Sustaining this ability to internally supply for the school needs is the challenge and brings to the light the importance of financial sustainability (European University Association, 2008).

According to Pickett (2008), institutions need to develop relationships between sustainable growth and other public relations factor that will lead to the maximization of overall institutional value. As such, sustainable growth should be embedded into sustainability. This means that institutions must be able to operate with internal funding from its excess of income over expenditure and its public relations in the long term. According to Woller, Dunford, and Woodworth (1999), financial self-support and public relations are a necessary condition for higher education institution's financial sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Olusegun (2006) stated, Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting consequences, counseling organizational leaders as well as planning and implementing a program of action that will serve the interest of not only the organization but also that of its publics. (p. 9) Again, public relations provide as a "cost-effective way of getting the institutional message out, while leading effective news releases and building a relationship with the relevant media will, in time, pay dividends in the form of exposure and prestige" (Rose, 2008, p. 2). In the end it leads an institutions' long-term benefit that contributes to financial sustainability which in turn costs less than a single advertisement.

It is to an institution's advantage to find a way to let the public know why the institution exists and also to let the public know that it is to their advantage to know why they exist so as to work with them as for societies benefit (Rose, 2008). Institutions which believe that public relations are important should review and practice strategic management and leadership by communication through their officers (Nudd, 2001).

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As Rose (2008) suggested, the "concept of mutuality . . . makes public relations person an intermediary between an organization and its publics" (p. 2). By convention, it "attempts to put the broad interest of the public first before the special interest of the organization" (p. 2). In this way it leads to "mutually beneficial relationships between [higher educational institution] and its publics are indispensable for their success depends on the cordial relationship between the two" (Rose, 2008, p. 3).

Public relations create public awareness that allow the public to participate in the business or service of the institution which in turn builds sustainable growth that leads to future sustainability. Institutions then need to come to appreciate public relationship and relates to it in a mutual way so that both institution and the community benefit from the collaboration. It is from such a relationship that the institution will be successful in its sustainability (Nudd, 2001)

To perform its job satisfactorily, public relations "monitors, surveys, and researches issues and happenings in the environment to offer a service" (Olusegun 2006, p. 3). For as an educational institution, exposure creates awareness. Thus the essential ingredient of public relations is to capitalize on any medium to make public aware of what an institution offers, and what it does (Olusegun 2006). Thus it behooves public relations officers to help institutions in offerings to their best advantage (Rose, 2008) and thus contribute to its being financially sustainable.

Nudd (2001) indicated that corporations and profit conglomerates "spend millions of dollars to enhance images" (p. 9). This leaves not-for-profit organizations asking the question "how can we compete?" The avenue left for the not-for-profit-oriented companies is to "nurture positive perception" (Nudd, 2001, p. 9), which is an invaluable asset for sustainability.

Public Relations and News Media

News media refers to the "ways people read or hear about the news including newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet" (Rose, 2008, p. 1). To make sure the write-ups are in the news media is the job of the editors who see to it that the information on the stories did appear in the newspapers, magazines, websites, or broadcasts (Thieke, 2007).

Higher educational institutions public relations officers need to see to it that information is disseminated through the campus events and brochures, and maintain ties with alumni, staff, and students. The solicitation of "donations from foundations, alumni, federal and state governments ,and special interest groups are one of the major reasons for not-for-profit institutions to engage in public relations" (Olusegun 2006, p. 23). Therefore, institutions need to put in place all the best approach that will enhance its image because donations would increase the institution's financial sustainability.

Public Relations and Sustainable Growth Rate

Public relations structures are needed to address sustainability questions across and in collaboration with the community partners (Bertels et al., 2010). Thus, an adequate balance

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between public relations and sustainability is eminent (Park & Pavlovsky, 2010). Considering the connection of public relations and sustainability, without reservation, Beringer, Wright, and Malone (2008) reveal that research and scholarship are among the public relations structures needed to address sustainability. Epstein (2007) followed up that there is a need for institutional public relations for sustainability, which is essential but should not be seen only core to sustainability in an attempt to provide effective outcomes. The long term goal of any successful public relation activity is to encourage positive perceptions of the institution. Public relations and financial sustainability are compatible to lead an institution into future prosperity.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF FACTORS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The review of literature for this study was based on theory and research that brought together the predictors of sustainability used in this study. Achieving financial sustainability should not be optional, but it should become necessary for not-for-profit institution to ensure its capability to carry out relevant missions. Since many studies on sustainability for profit organization and business have been conducted (Puckett & Rockland, 2006), this study is centered on not-for-profit financial sustainability.

The variable public relations have not been separately studied in its relationship with sustainability (Geis & Geis, 2001). Integrating it with other variables into one model will increase the understanding of the relative strength of each variable and tell how each variable influences the sustainable growth rate. It should be noted from this review of literature that even though public relations affects sustainable growth rate, it has not been studied as a combination of variables to find out if it really affects sustainable growth rate (Fonseka et al., 2012). Networking also is said to predict sustainable growth rate. Some of the studies that researched the impact of networking expected positive outcomes on sustainable growth rate (Duin & Baer, 2002). However, studies taking into account networking in direct relation with sustainable growth rate appear to be limited (Davis, 2001).

Based on the changing and multifaceted competitive environment in which educational institutions operate in the 21st century, there is a need to test new variables in the study. The purpose is finding new ways to improve sustainable growth rate and to focus on finding the important drivers that enhance financial sustainability (Marcus, 2012). In doing this study, the five contributing factors pulled from the literature may help identify better ways of improving the financial sustainability of the organizations.

Financial sustainability works well when its perspective is long term and involves representatives of integrated institutions with determine activities and institutional performance. Thus integrating sustainability to “business decisions, (both internally and externally) impacts services, processes, and activities” (Marcus, 2012, p. 49).

The Purpose of the Study

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It is for these reasons the researcher set of to explore and develop a predictive model of financial sustainability for the world-wide higher educational institutions. The following are the variables: (a) sustainable growth rate as the dependent variables (y) and (b (3) public relation (x3), The study seeks to focus on factors that lead the HEIs to meet the challenges of financial sustainability. The main purpose of the study is to develop a model to predict financial sustainability of higher educational institutions.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

This research explored how the factors (authentic leadership, organizational culture, public relations, investment portfolio, and networking) explain the variation in the institution's financial sustainability. In order to do this study, a quantitative approach was necessary and this will be discussed below.

A survey research design was employed in this study. There are two survey research designs: "cross sectional survey and longitudinal survey" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 179). A cross sectional design involves "the collection of data once: the phenomena under study are captured during one period of data collection" (Polit & Beck, 2008, pp. 207, 208). A longitudinal survey represents several points in time whereby surveys are frequently given on same issues whereby one can measure across different points in time (Polit & Beck, 2008).

Since data was collected at one point in time from a predetermined population, the design of the study fitted a cross sectional survey (Creswell, 2005). In this cross sectional survey design, a questionnaire was used to collect data via online means, emails, and a collection of financial documents was obtained from the statistical body of the GC of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This design is appropriate for the study because it seeks to test a predictive model which is made up of the above-mentioned factors: authentic leadership, organizational culture, public relation, investment portfolio, and networking, and financial sustainability.

Data Gathering

I sought the assistance of the GC education directors (refer to Appendix C) to encourage the participation of the administration of the AHEIs from these 104 institutions in filling out the instruments of the study. The presidents, vice presidents for academic and for finance of the AHEIs were assumed to be qualified respondents, who have good knowledge about the reality of how the institutions have been managing the issue of sustainability.

The returned research survey comprised of 87 surveys out of the 104 institutions. However, after subjecting these to various statistical analyses in order to explore reliability and validity (among other things, see data screening section), 15 were discarded. Hence a total of 72 survey results were considered to be included in this study. These 72 surveys were collected from 50 institutions. Hence there was a 48% of response from the total population of the study with individual institutional percentage. It was an issue struggling to collect data from the respective heads of the

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institutions. Even with the letter from the education director of the GC encouraging administrators to answer questionnaire and provide their financial documents, more than 50% of institutions did not provide the necessary documentation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The present study sought to answer four research questions regarding (a) descript-tion of the characteristics of the institution that responded (continental grouping on page 70, educational level, and accreditation status); (b) description of the contributing factors (authentic leadership, organizational culture, public relations, investment portfolio, networking); (c) the differences in the contributing factors in term of institutional characteristics and the differences in the sustainable growth rate in terms of institutional characteristics; and (d) the contributing factors as predictor of higher education institutions financial sustainability (sustainable growth rate). As it had been discussed earlier this study was to examine the contributing factors referred above in the determination of an equation to predict financial sustainability as represented by the sustainable growth rate:

$y = a + \beta_{AL} + \beta_{OC} + \beta_{PR} + \beta_{IP} + \beta_{N} + e$, where
y = Sustainable growth rate,
β_{AL} = Authentic Leadership,
β_{OC} = Organizational Culture,
β_{PR} = Public relations,
β_{N} = Networking ,
β_{IP} = Investment Portfolio,
e = Error, a = Constant

The factors (authentic leadership, organizational culture, public relations, investment portfolio, and networking) in the equation were used to predict the sustainable growth rate. As such, this chapter will present the results as follows:

1. Description of institutional characteristics
2. The best predictive model for financial sustainability. Multiple Regression was used in this section.

Research Question

The descriptive method was used to describe the institutional characteristics of the participating institutions. This included continents where the institutions are located, as well as the educational level, and accreditation status.

Of the 104 accredited Adventist colleges and universities that were contacted to participate in this study, 50 institutions responded (48.1% responses). Table 7 represents the number of institutions within each region and the number of institutions that responded to the survey. The 48.1% response rate is satisfactory in studies such as this (Sakaran, 2003).

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Of the 50 higher education institutions which participated in the present study, the breakdowns are seen with Africa 78.6%, Asia 59.3%, South America 48.0, Europe 44.4%, and North America 18.8%. Institutions from the South Pacific initially responded on the perceptions survey, but due to the inability to access their financial statements from GC, they were removed from the analysis. Table 8 is a summary of the educational level of the administrators in the institutions that responded as well as the accreditation status of the institutions themselves. The administrators (president, vice president finance, and vice president academic affairs or vice chancellor, bursar, and deputy vice chancellor depending on the educational system) from the 50 institutions were asked to participate. From some institutions, all three offices participated, and from others, only one or two of the officers participated. As such, the 72 (*N*) represents the number of administrators that responded from the 50 institutions that the study was addressed to. In terms of educational level 51% of the institutions that responded offer undergraduate programs only, 7% run graduate programs, and 42% offers both undergraduate and graduate programs.

For accreditation, 3% of the institutions had national accreditation; while 21% had AAA recognition. The other 76% had both national and AAA accreditation recognitions. It is also important to note that in the framework, I was supposed to show the student to faculty ratio and include it in this analysis. Unfortunately, the responding officers from the 49 institutions did not provide sufficient information to answer this question. Thus it was removed from this analysis.

Descriptive Results for the Public Relations

In terms of public relations, the administrators were asked to determine: whether their faculty has published at least one book; published in journals; have on campus newsletters; whether they have regular television commercials; and radio advertising coverage. These results are described in Table 1 in terms of the means and standard deviation derived from their responses. The data seem to suggest that the public relations in our institutions is somewhat lacking, as indicated in Table 1. The higher the mean, the closer it is to two which means that the public relations as measured in the scale is not being done in the schools that responded to the study.

Nudd (2001) asserted that maintaining positive media relationship leads to financial sustainability. Further, Beringer et al. (2008) posit that collaboration with community in research helps achieve public relations leading to sustainability. With this in mind, the survey suggests that our institutions are somehow on the middle ground in relating to the public in a positive way and as such could have negative impact on their financial sustainability.

Table 1 Descriptive Result for the Public Relations

Items	*M*	*SD*	Total
One faculty book publication	1.49	0.50	72

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One published research journal	1.44	0.50	72
On-campus quarterly news letter	1.39	0.49	72
Regular television commercials coverage	1.79	0.41	72
Regular radio advertising coverage	1.50	0.50	72
Statistics for subscale	1.52	0.48	72

Note. Public relations questionnaire scale: 1 (*No*) and 2 (*Yes*).

Public Relations

The null hypothesis (there is no difference in public relations based on the institutional characteristics of continent, educational level, and accreditation) was tested using ANOVA. It was found that there were no significant results for continents, educational level, and accreditation ($p > 0.05$). This is summarized in Table 2 it is significant and we must reject the null hypothesis. However, all *p*-values are greater than 0.05 hence we do not reject the null hypothesis.

Table 2 ANOVA Results for Public Relations

Institutional characteristic	*Df*	*F*	*P**	Significance
Continents	4.66	1.164	0.335	Did not differ
Educational level	2.68	2.476	0.092	Did not differ
Accreditation	2.68	0.046	0.955	Did not differ

Note. * If *p*-value < 0.05,

Public relations as a predictor of sustainable growth rate ($\beta_{PR} = 0.174$) in not- for-profit Adventist higher educational institutions globally. This finding reveals that public relations have a strongest impact on sustainable growth rate. People who consider public relations will consider a stronger linkage between sustainable growth rate and financial sustainability. Public media relationship leads to successful public relationship that leads to successful public relations leading to financial sustainability (Rose, 2008).

Administrators and finance people for-not-for profit institutions should be more receptive to public relations and sustainable growth rate as is well-grounded resulting in higher financial sustainability. This study confirms the related study done, where public relations had been described as having effect with sustainability. Rose (2008) observes that higher institution should never underestimate the value of public awareness, thus should always inform the public and industry about what they offer and how they can meet community needs. This study shows direct link between public relation and sustainable growth rate.

The only difference is that it was conducted in the context of not-for-profit educational institutions. Which follows what Nudd (2001) asserted that maintaining positive media relationship leads to successful public relations also leading to financial sustainability. Further Beringer et al. (2008) posit that collaboration with community in research helps achieve public relations leading to sustainability. With this in mind, the survey seems to indicate that institutions that are able to

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produce books by the faculty, publish journals, produce on campus quarterly newsletters, do radio or television coverage are taking steps toward improving its better public relations that will eventually lead to effective financial sustainability.

SUMMARY

To recap, the main objective of the study was to build a predictive model based on the five factors (authentic leadership, organizational culture, public relations, investment portfolio, and networking) to explain the variation in the financial sustainability of AHEIs. I worked as an administrator at various levels of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and at different educational institutions with 15 years of experience before coming to Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies. One of the greatest challenges is how to sustain our institutions financially, given the fact that we are not a profit oriented organization. Hence the desire to learn more about the problem of financial sustainability and how to intervene to better the institution's sustainability has led to the writing of this dissertation.

The Predictive Model

The purpose of the study was to find a predictive model that can be used to explain the variation of financial sustainability. There were three factors that were found to be significant and were included in the model, authentic leadership, public relations, and investment portfolio. Hence the equation ($y = a + ß_{PR} + ß_{IP} + ß_{AL}$) for financial sustainability is as follows:

$y = -3.367 + 0.174(ß_{PR}) + 0.163(ß_{IP}) + 0.111(ß_{AL})$

Whereby y = Financial Sustainability, PR = Public Relations, IP = Investment Portfolio, and AL = Authentic Leadership. This equation explains 20% of the variation in financial sustainability. The implication for administrators is clear, should they want to improve financial sustainability, they must improve these three factors—authentic leadership, investment portfolio, and public relations. It is critical that administrators consider their investment portfolio, their public relation activities and their leadership styles for it impacts upon their institution's financial sustainability.

Contribution to scholarship

From the findings of this research, we can draw a conclusion that financial sustainability is a key to institutional sustainability which has been summarized in terms of the following findings. Firstly, in particularly, the use of public relations is in good relationship with the above mentioned sustainability. Secondly, results indicate an association between public relations, and investment portfolio authentic leadership and correlation on financial sustainability. The model for financial sustainability is what β coefficients created for the following equation for financial sustainability, y = a + bx3+bx5+bx1: Sustainable growth rate, y = -3,581 +0.190 public relations + 0.160 investment portfolio + 0.122 authentic leadership. This the contribution of this work th scholarship.

APPLIED IMPLICATION

This is even more interesting given that the institutions in different continents have certain strengths that others may not be as strong in. Such strength need to be observed and share as best practices for the benefit of AHEIs. The major implication of this is that administrators should be aware of what their organization's strengths and weaknesses are in terms of financial sustainability. Thus, an understanding of inherent strengths and weaknesses can help administrators to determine how to best go about shoring up the strengths while combating the weaknesses so as to better the financial sustainability of the institutions.

An additional implication of this finding is that the groupings are by continents and not individual institutions. Why do institutions with regards to the financial sustainability based on geographical area are similar in their practices? The implication of this is to find out the reason for similarity in practices across continents. The answers can help administrators beyond the AHEIs to implement financial sustainability practices at the continental level rather than the institutional level. This can lead to reduction of the challenges that institutions are facing with regard to financial sustainability. In other words, this finding suggests that there can be workable solutions that can be implemented for institutions at the continent level.

LIMITATIONS

It is belief that there are other variables that were not capture for the research, and this for a reason that it was a time bound work and one could not capture all variables. As such I did concentrate on the limited variable used.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several other indicators that were not capture in this work. It is expected that future research can consider adding such indicators to research work.

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