

**THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT, STUDENT PERFORMANCE, AND
UNIVERSITY CURRICULA: A CASE OF SOCIAL
ECOLOGY IN ZIMBABWE**

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ABSTRACT

The importance of iterative learning has been considered in institutions of higher and tertiary learning worldwide. The study establishes linkages of the work environment, student performance, and the university curricula. It explores the influences of Work-Related Learning on curriculum development, particularly looking at the Social Ecology programme offered by the Great Zimbabwe University. It captures experiences and perceptions of students, work and academic supervisors, on the applicability of classroom learning and practical exposure in the workplace settings. Emphasis is given to the relevance of modules taught in the Social Ecology discipline, curriculum reviews made, challenges experienced as well as the performance of students in their final year of study. Both qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques were adopted. These allowed triangulation of data in order to ensure that concepts on the applicability of curriculum development, perception of students and lecturers as well as the impact of placement, would be explored fully. A target population of 500 final year students from Social Ecology was considered for the research. A total of 110 assessment forms filled in by the work and the academic supervisors were used for data analysis. The four members of staff in the department were interviewed as key informants. They provided detailed data on how information derived from the surveys were translated into reviews on the curriculum. Various secondary sources were also consulted. The study revealed that the expectations of work supervisors directly influenced the designing of the university curriculum as well as the module content to include contemporary issues. The implications of the research are that curricula need to be changed in line with industry requirements by including practical software packages that were used in industry such as Geographical Information Systems in environmental assessments and Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) for data analysis.

KEYWORDS: Work -Related Learning, Student Performance, Social Ecology & Curriculum