

Challenges Faced by Public Colleges in Eswatini: Implications for Eswatini Institute of Management and Public Administration

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Abstract

Tertiary institutions throughout the world face many challenges. The majority of these institutions are underfunded, which compromises their ability to attract qualified personnel, deliver quality programmes, and accommodate increasing student demand. Consequently, qualified students are often excluded from tertiary education, either due to limited capacity in public colleges or the unaffordability of private institutions—negatively impacting national productivity. This study investigated the unique challenges faced by three public colleges in Eswatini. An insight into the challenges faced by public colleges provides a basis for strategies that EIMPA can adopt to minimize their negative impact on national productivity, increase participants' enrolment, and improve service delivery across government ministries. A qualitative research approach using semi-structured questionnaires was administered to college principals. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, a method acknowledged for its limitations in generalizability. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed member checking and triangulation of responses. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying and interpreting recurring patterns and issues. Findings revealed that public colleges faced unique challenges such as lack of autonomy, limited budget, limited government scholarships, student riots, limited access, staff demotivation, and shortages. The study concluded that some challenges were persistent and structural, requiring long-term reform. It recommends that public colleges lobby for more autonomy to diversify income sources and develop partnerships with other higher education institutions. Flexible payment options were also recommended for students without scholarships.

Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of national development, serving as the foundation for a skilled workforce and sustained economic growth. Contrary to prevailing assumptions in many developing countries, it is not foreign investment or natural resources, but rather human capital that plays the most crucial role in driving progress. Research consistently affirms that investment in education significantly outpaces the developmental benefits of capital or land. As Eswatini aspires to become a prosperous nation, massive investment in education, especially at the tertiary level, is essential to achieving this goal (Eswatini Government, 2023).

The researcher, drawing on thirteen years of experience in Eswatini's public college sector, observed recurring institutional constraints that limit the capacity of these institutions to meet student demand and deliver quality education. Public colleges frequently face budget shortfalls, which restrict infrastructure expansion, the procurement of teaching resources, and recruitment of qualified staff. Despite high applicant numbers, admissions remain limited due to insufficient

capacity, excluding many deserving candidates from affordable training opportunities, especially as private institutions remain financially inaccessible for most.

This paradox reveals a dual crisis in Eswatini's higher education and labour systems: while many potential students are excluded from tertiary education due to financial constraints, certain professional fields face an oversupply of graduates struggling to find employment. Over the past decade, Eswatini has experienced a notable influx of graduates in specific professional fields, particularly in education, nursing, and law. This surge has led to an oversaturation in these sectors, resulting in qualified professionals facing significant employment challenges. For instance, secondary school teachers, once readily absorbed into the education system, now find themselves without relevant jobs, with some relegated to primary schools, often at lower grades and with diminished responsibilities. This misalignment not only undermines their specialized training but also affects the quality of education delivered at both primary and secondary levels.

The nursing profession mirrors this predicament. Despite the country's pressing need for healthcare workers, with a reported shortfall of over 10,000 health professionals in 2022, more than 900 qualified nurses remain unemployed (Human Resources for Health Strategic Plan, 2019 – 2023). This paradox is further exacerbated by fiscal constraints, such as the government's hiring freeze implemented under Circular No. 3 of 2018 (Majola, 2023), aimed at managing the wage bill. Consequently, many nurses are compelled to seek employment in the private sector or even abroad, intensifying the strain on Eswatini's public health facilities. This situation presents a perplexing contradiction: while professional staff associations consistently decry acute staff shortages in public institutions, many qualified professionals remain unemployed, particularly within government sectors that are reportedly understaffed.

In what appears to be a government response aimed at controlling this influx, significant scholarship cuts were introduced, shifting the country toward a cost-sharing model. These budgetary measures, implemented since around 2011, drastically reduced public funding to public tertiary institutions, with the University of Eswatini being the hardest hit. The reduction of first-year government scholarships from 1,500 to just 500 students led to a two-thirds drop in tuition income, undermining institutional operations and limiting access to higher education for many prospective students (Dube, 2020). This severe reduction in funding led to severe financial instability, hindering the university's ability to fulfil essential financial obligations, including timely payment of staff salaries and maintenance of infrastructure.

The resulting demoralization among educators prompted many to seek employment elsewhere, compromising the institution's educational integrity and threatening its foundational stability. To this day, the University of Eswatini has not fully recovered from the financial instability triggered by these funding cuts. The institution continues to grapple with delayed salary payments, leading to recurrent protest actions by lecturers. For instance, in March 2023, members of the Association of Lecturers, Academic and Administrative Personnel (ALAAP) and the National Workers Union in Swaziland Higher Institutions (NAWUSHI) embarked on a joint strike action, demanding salary notch increases that had been withheld due to the university's financial constraints (Sikhondze, 2023).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are systemic challenges affecting public colleges in Eswatini, such as financial instability, declining enrolment, and constrained government funding, which are also evident, though in distinct form, within EIMPA. When colleges operate under a limited budget, it restricts both the frequency and scope of their course offerings. As a result, many students are unable to access timely and relevant learning opportunities.

Additionally, in Eswatini public institutions in general, face staff shortages stemming from a broader public sector employment freeze, where public officers who exit the system are not replaced. This has weakened institutional effectiveness for many ministries and departments. Public colleges, who rely on the government for human resources were not spared, and to this day, some vacancies still remain unfilled.

It was against this backdrop that this study was undertaken. The study examined the structural and operational difficulties confronting public tertiary institutions and assessed their implications for EIMPA. Through this investigation, the research identified key underlying causes and proposed practical, evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the capacity and relevance of public training institutions in supporting national development and effective public service delivery.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the key challenges confronting government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini and to examine the implications of these challenges for the Eswatini Institute of Management and Public Administration (EIMPA), the country's primary in-service training provider. By understanding the institutional, financial, and operational constraints faced by public colleges, the study aimed to inform strategies that could enhance the effectiveness of EIMPA in fulfilling its mandate of public sector capacity development.

The study pursued the following objectives: (1) to identify key challenges faced by public colleges in Eswatini; (2) to assess the impact of these challenges on institutional performance; and (3) to propose strategies for mitigating these challenges, including how colleges support students affected by them.

To guide the investigation, the study addressed four research questions: (1) What challenges do public colleges face? (2) How do these challenges impact their performance? (3) What strategies can be implemented to overcome them? (4) And how do colleges help students cope with these difficulties? The research was self-funded, with the researcher covering all associated costs.

Literature Review

This literature review examines existing studies on challenges facing public tertiary institutions, with a focus on global contexts and those similar to Eswatini. The review is structured around the three research objectives of this study, this allowed for a focused analysis aligned with the study's aims and provided a basis for interpreting the findings.

Objective 1: Challenges faced by public colleges in Eswatini and comparable contexts

Internationally, government-owned colleges and state-funded universities continue to grapple with structural and financial challenges that affect the ability to deliver high-quality education to their students. In the United Kingdom (UK), continual budget cuts and tuition hikes have led to concerns about the sustainability of public tertiary education and student indebtedness (Universities UK, 2023). In the United States, a decline in public investment has resulted in

increased reliance on tuition fees, straining access for low-income students and intensifying inequality in higher education (Weiss, García, & Allegretto, 2022).

In the global south, challenges facing public colleges are even more pronounced. Some Sub-Saharan African countries face a combination of rapid student population growth, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate public funding. African universities are often burdened with large class sizes, aging facilities, and limited access to modern research tools (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). These challenges are particularly acute in public colleges, which cater to the majority of students from low and middle income families.

In the Southern African region, South Africa's higher education sector experienced mass student protests in 2015 and 2016, led by the "Fees must fall" movement. The movement highlighted issues such as underfunding, unaffordable tuition, and colonial academic structures (Booyesen, 2016). In Zimbabwe, public tertiary institutions have faced deteriorating teaching conditions due to hyperinflation and low government expenditure on education (Thondhlana & Garwe, 2023). Botswana's public colleges struggle with the implementation of e-learning programmes, which is worsened by the lack of adequate skills from both students and instructors. Internet connection also poses as a challenge in this initiative (Moakofhi, Leteane, Phiri, Pholele, & Sebalatlheng, 2017).

Objective 2: impact of challenges on institutional performance

The institutional performance of public colleges is closely tied to resource availability, staff retention, and student support systems. There is strong evidence globally that the challenges identified above have a significant impact on institutional performance. Underfunding leads to outdated facilities, poorly motivated staff, and reduced programme quality. In Tanzania, public colleges suffer from poor staff-student ratios, underfunded research programs, and weak administrative systems, which in turn affect educational quality and institutional credibility (Ishengoma, 2007). Similarly, in Malawi, limited infrastructure and overcrowded lecture halls undermine both teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes (National Council for Higher Education, 2019).

In Kenya, the underfunding of public universities led to declining academic standards, overcrowded classrooms, and limited research output (Kamere & Sifuna, 2019). Furthermore, inconsistent disbursement of operational budgets has weakened planning and service delivery. Public colleges mid-year cash flow crises, affect everything from facility maintenance to student support services. These conditions threaten not only educational outcomes but also the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021).

Objective 3: Strategies for Mitigating Challenges and Supporting Affected Students

In response to these persistent challenges, many countries have adopted a range of strategies to strengthen the resilience of public colleges. In Zambia, higher education institutions have diversified revenue by introducing evening and short courses to generate income independently of government funding (Masait, 2015). Namibia has adopted public-private partnerships (PPPs) to upgrade infrastructure and increase student accommodation (Warasthe, 2017). South Africa's National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) represents a large-scale effort to improve student access, despite its operational challenges (Booyesen, 2016).

Studies also point to the importance of structured institutional frameworks that support students at risk of academic failure or dropout. These include systems for academic advising, mental health services, and comprehensive financial aid (Madiba, 2021). Regional policy research further recommends stabilizing core funding, introducing performance-based financing, investing in staff development, and enhancing internal governance structures (Global Partnership for Education, 2022). Strengthening stakeholder participation in governance is also

cited as a critical element in improving institutional accountability and responsiveness (Brummel, 2023).

While few studies directly address the Eswatini context, the literature offers transferable lessons that may inform context-specific strategies in similar settings within the SADC region.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the challenges faced by public colleges in the Kingdom of Eswatini. The qualitative approach was selected to capture the views, perceptions, and lived experiences of college principals regarding institutional performance and constraints. The target population consisted of five public colleges in Eswatini, which are under the Ministry of Education and Training, excluding university-level institutions. The study focused on three government-owned colleges located within the Mbabane - Manzini corridor. These were selected using convenience sampling, based on their accessibility and the availability of key informants within the data collection timeframe.

Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions focused on identifying institutional challenges, their impact on performance, and existing or proposed mitigation strategies. The tool was administered directly to college principals. To ensure a timely response and reduce transport costs, the researcher delivered the questionnaires in person, waited for them to be completed, and collected them the same day. This approach also enabled clarification of any ambiguous questions. After collecting the completed questionnaires, responses were reviewed and manually coded. Data analysis involved the identification of recurring themes and patterns which were then grouped into thematic categories. The findings were presented in narrative form and aligned with the study objectives.

To ensure credibility, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their responses were captured accurately and in detail. The same questionnaire was used across all three colleges to promote consistency. Dependability was addressed by maintaining a detailed record of data collection procedures. Peer debriefing was done with a colleague to cross-check thematic interpretations. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the relevant academic committee. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by ensuring that no personal identifiers were included in the analysis or reporting. Respondents were assured that the data collected would be used strictly for academic purposes.

Findings

Findings reveal that the challenges faced by Eswatini public colleges are; budget constraints, low student enrolments, lack of accreditation, inadequate resources, lack of partnerships for continuity, lack of research, limited scholarships, lack of autonomy, competition, poor quality systems, lack of sound monitoring and evaluation frameworks, dilapidated and limited infrastructure, student riots, inadequate staff, poor terms and conditions of service.

Challenge 1: Budget constraints

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

A universal concern expressed by all three college principals was the chronic inadequacy of financial resources. Despite rising enrolment and increased operational demands, government funding remains insufficient, severely limiting the institutions' ability to maintain

infrastructure, attract qualified staff, and deliver quality programmes. Principals reported that while government policy strongly supports universal primary and secondary education, tertiary education appears neglected in fiscal planning.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

The financial constraints were perceived to have direct and far-reaching effects on institutional performance. Participants noted that while the government actively promotes universal access to primary and secondary education through initiatives such as the “getting every child in school” policy, tertiary education has been relatively neglected in budgetary planning. This neglect hampers the ability of these institutions to maintain infrastructure, retain qualified personnel, and deliver quality education, thereby undermining their overall performance.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

In response to these challenges, institutional leaders have adopted several coping mechanisms. These include reducing the scope of certain programs, postponing infrastructure maintenance, and seeking donor support to supplement limited government funding. Additionally, some colleges have explored cost-sharing initiatives and formed informal networks for sharing resources. At a broader level, principals have also begun questioning the long-term sustainability of current national education policy, assuming a more strategic and advocacy-oriented role in public discourse.

Challenge 2: Limited engagement in institutional research

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

An additional challenge identified by college principals is the limited engagement in institutional research, which is critical for informed decision-making and service improvement. While research is a general expectation of faculty at the tertiary level, participants revealed that it is not actively supported or prioritized within their institutions. Three main constraints were highlighted: lack of funding for research activities, low staff motivation to undertake research-related tasks and the absence of incentives for conducting research.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

The lack of institutional research significantly undermines the colleges’ ability to remain responsive to evolving labour market demands. Without research-driven insights, curriculum development remains static, failing to reflect the skills and qualifications currently needed in the economy.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

In response to the limited engagement in institutional research, public colleges have made only modest efforts to adapt. While government support occasionally comes in the form of strategic initiatives, such as targeted scholarships in high-priority sectors, institutions themselves have struggled to respond effectively. Principals reported that adapting academic programs to align with labour market demands remains difficult due to the complex nature of curriculum review, staff recruitment, accreditation, and program marketing. In some cases, colleges have attempted informal internal reviews or stakeholder consultations to explore potential adjustments, but such initiatives are often sporadic and under-resourced. These limited and ad hoc responses highlight the structural rigidity and resource constraints that hinder more proactive institutional coping strategies.

Challenge 3: Deficit in educational resources

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

Public college principals reported a serious deficit in educational resources, which directly hamper the teaching and learning process. Among the specific challenges cited were outdated

learning materials, limited computer laboratory facilities, obsolete library collections, and restricted internet access.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

The lack of adequate teaching and learning resources has significant implications for pedagogical practices and learning outcomes. Principals observed that resource constraints often force a shift from learner-centred to teacher-centred approaches, as it is more practical to deliver content through lectures than to expect students to apply knowledge independently in the absence of practical tools. This undermines efforts to promote active learning and skills application, which are essential components of quality tertiary education.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

In response to resource deficits, public colleges have made limited and fragmented efforts to cope. Principals reported isolated attempts at forming partnerships with universities for specific academic programmes, although such collaborations remain the exception rather than the norm. Most public institutions continue to operate in silos, with minimal inter-institutional collaboration or coordinated resource sharing. Despite the growing number of private institutions in the country, competition rather than cooperation characterises their relationship with public colleges. This lack of a sector-wide collaborative approach has constrained innovation, limited the pooling of scarce resources, and weakened the collective capacity to advocate for systemic support. The few existing partnerships illustrate potential coping mechanisms that, if expanded, could contribute to improved resilience and performance in the face of ongoing resource challenges.

Challenge 4: Lack of formal accreditation

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

The issue of institutional accreditation emerged as a significant challenge across all public colleges. Principals reported that most public colleges lack formal accreditation from the Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC), which undermines their credibility and institutional development.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

College principals expressed concern that the absence of accreditation negatively affects both academic progression and the recognition of qualifications. They reported that, without accredited status, many public college qualifications are not recognized by higher-level institutions, which limits student mobility and opportunities for further study. According to the principals, this leaves graduates confined to a single qualification tier, reducing their competitiveness in both academic and employment contexts.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

Public college principals have made modest efforts to initiate accreditation, but progress remains slow due to systemic constraints beyond their control. The absence of institution-specific governance frameworks limits the ability of colleges to demonstrate the quality and accountability structures required for accreditation. Some principals expressed frustration with the lack of continuity in programme offerings, attributing it to their inability to gain formal recognition for qualifications or to expand academic programmes in response to student and labour market needs.

Challenge 5: Limited availability of government-sponsored scholarships

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

An additional challenge identified by all of the public college principals is the limited availability of government-sponsored scholarships. This constraint significantly restricts the

number of students that colleges are able to admit each academic year, even for programmes that do not require extensive practical equipment or specialised infrastructure.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

According to the principals, the restriction on scholarships has a direct impact on student enrolment and institutional viability. Public colleges rely heavily on government-sponsored students for their revenue streams and programme sustainability. A decline in scholarship allocations therefore translates into lower student intake, underutilisation of academic resources, and in some cases, financial instability. One principal expressed frustration, highlighting that even soft-skills programmes, which are cost-effective, face low enrolment simply because funding caps prevent more students from being admitted.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

From the perspective of college principals, the shifting of scholarships to private institutions has prompted feelings of betrayal, especially given the government's foundational role in establishing these public colleges. However, public colleges have limited options for responding to this trend. While there have been calls for increased student self-funding, principals acknowledged that most aspiring students come from low-income households, making it unrealistic for them to cover tuition costs independently.

Challenge 6: Student riots

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

Student unrest emerged as a serious and recurring challenge affecting public colleges. Principals reported that student riots occur unpredictably, often sparked by a wide range of issues, some unrelated to academic matters. The culture of student solidarity across institutions exacerbates the situation, as students may engage in protests in support of grievances originating elsewhere.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

Frequent student protests disrupt the academic calendar, leading to lost instructional time, delays in assessments, and an unstable academic environment. College administrators noted that the most common trigger for student unrest is the delayed disbursement of student allowances, a matter typically managed by government and not within the immediate control of institutional leadership.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

"Faced with student unrest, institutional responses remain largely reactive" said one principal. The closure of campuses is a commonly used strategy to contain the situation and avoid physical damage or escalation, and permission must be granted by the Ministry. However, principals observed that this approach does not address the underlying causes and often results in further academic disruption. Efforts to engage student leadership in dialogue are frequently undermined by external political influences and systemic issues beyond college control.

Challenge 7: Staff shortages

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

All public college principals cited staff shortages as a persistent and critical challenge affecting operations. The issue spans across teaching departments and support services, with some positions remaining unfilled for extended periods. Participants noted that the government has been slow in addressing staffing gaps, with some vacancies left pending for years. The situation worsened following the government wide implementation of an employment freeze in 2018, which placed a moratorium on new hiring in the public sector.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

College principals highlighted that the shortage of qualified staff has a direct impact on both the quality of teaching and overall institutional efficiency. They observed that lecturers are often overburdened, teaching multiple courses with limited preparation time, which diminishes opportunities for academic innovation and reduces student engagement. Principals also noted that the inability to attract or develop highly qualified academic staff compromises the standard of programme delivery, particularly in fields that require technical expertise or research-informed instruction.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

Institutional efforts to address staffing challenges have been constrained by government policies. Attempts to redistribute workloads or offer internal training are hindered by both the scale of the shortages and the narrow specialisations of staff. As one principal summarized, “We are expected to deliver world-class education with limited people, outdated skills, and no support to improve, yet the expectations keep rising.”

Challenge 8: Limited autonomy

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

A recurring theme in the accounts of public college principals is the overarching influence of government policy in the governance and operations of these institutions. Public colleges are described as products of political decisions, with limited autonomy to determine their own direction. They are expected to adhere strictly to government policies, many of which impose rigid ceilings on institutional decision-making. This limited autonomy was described by one principal as “a form of dependency that weakens rather than strengthens institutional leadership.”

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

All the principals were of the view that the rigid governance structure severely limits the ability of public colleges to respond effectively to institutional needs or strategic opportunities. There are delays in the implementation of essential reforms, which creates frustration among staff and students alike. Colleges find it difficult to enter into collaborative agreements, as potential partners are deterred by the cost and complexity of upgrading physical facilities. Thus, stagnation continues not only in governance but also in academic growth and external linkages.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

Principals reported that public colleges have limited influence over government policy, which is often imposed without sufficient consultation. In response, college leaders make informal attempts to adapt within bureaucratic constraints, but their efforts are restricted by limited autonomy. This leaves staff and students to adjust to externally driven changes, reinforcing a sense of powerlessness.

Challenge 9: Uncompetitive terms and conditions of service

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges facing government-owned tertiary institutions in Eswatini

Another major challenge highlighted by college principals is the uncompetitive terms and conditions of service for staff employed in public colleges. Compared to regional and international standards, the remuneration and benefits offered by the Eswatini government are viewed as inadequate, leading to widespread staff demotivation. Principals reported that this has contributed to low morale, poor commitment, and in some cases, unethical use of institutional resources for personal gain. One principal cited an instance where their ministry instructed the college to cease operations after hours, due to suspicions that staff members were using college facilities to offer private services for income supplementation.

Objective 2: To examine how these challenges affect institutional performance

The lack of competitive compensation has a direct impact on the motivation and productivity of college staff. According to principals, staff members often prioritise personal income-generating ventures over their institutional responsibilities, thereby affecting service delivery and the overall learning experience of students. The resultant low morale also breeds internal conflicts, undermines teamwork, and contributes to a general sense of apathy within the institutions.

Objective 3: To assess institutional responses and coping mechanisms

Despite their awareness of these challenges, principals acknowledged their limited capacity to influence employment terms, as these are centrally determined by government policy. This lack of institutional autonomy renders college leadership unable to offer performance incentives or adjust staff benefits to boost motivation. However, principals indicated that one of the few strategies available to them is adopting a participatory management style, which they believe can foster a sense of inclusion and purpose among staff. By involving staff in decision-making and maintaining open lines of communication, principals hope to mitigate the negative effects of demotivation on staff well-being and academic outcomes.

Conclusion

This study confirmed that public colleges in Eswatini face distinct and persistent challenges, such as limited autonomy, underfunding, staff shortages, student unrest, and restricted access, which compromise institutional effectiveness and student outcomes. While some issues require long-term structural reform, colleges can adopt practical internal measures, including participatory management, flexible payment options, and strategic partnerships. These approaches can help buffer students from the worst impacts and support broader goals like improved enrolment and public sector performance.

Recommendations

1. **Institutional Autonomy:** Advocate for reforms that grant public colleges greater autonomy in budgeting, staffing, and programme design, enabling them to respond more effectively to institutional needs and emerging opportunities.
2. **Staff Development and Retention:** Increase government investment in professional development, including scholarships, upskilling programmes, and improved employment conditions to attract and retain qualified personnel.
3. **Infrastructure and Technology Upgrades:** Lobby for targeted infrastructure investments and enhanced digital capacity to support blended learning, especially in underserved areas.
4. **Sustainable Funding Models:** Introduce performance-based and core operational funding mechanisms to stabilise institutional operations and improve long-term sustainability.
5. **Strategic Partnerships:** Encourage public colleges to form partnerships with other HEIs, industry, and international donors to pool resources, improve curriculum relevance, and increase resilience.
6. **Student Financial Support:** Develop flexible tuition payment schemes and institutional bursaries for students unable to access government scholarships.
7. **Enhanced Student Engagement:** Strengthen student representation structures and communication channels to reduce unrest and foster a more inclusive institutional culture.
8. **Accreditation and Quality Assurance:** Work closely with regulatory bodies to fast-track programme accreditation, ensuring academic qualifications are recognised nationally and regionally.

Implications for EIMPA

The challenges faced by public colleges in Eswatini have direct implications for EIMPA. Struggles such as inadequate funding and staff shortages weaken the pipeline of potential EIMPA trainees entering the civil service, thereby affecting the effectiveness of capacity - building programmes and the broader goal of improved public service delivery. EIMPA must therefore view these institutional weaknesses as interconnected with its own training mandate and long-term sustainability.

In response, EIMPA could pursue strategic interventions such as partnering with public colleges on joint capacity development initiatives, supporting applied research to address institutional bottlenecks, and aligning short courses with the specific needs of ministries. Additionally, EIMPA can leverage its policy advisory role to advocate for reforms aimed at its recapitalization, including enhanced autonomy, improved funding mechanisms, and broader access. By positioning itself as a centre of excellence, EIMPA can strengthen national productivity and help ensure that government ministries are staffed by well - prepared professionals.

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Conflict of Interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper or otherwise.

Authors' Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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