

# Open and Distance Learning Minimum Standards in TVET at a Glance: A Case of Zambia

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## INTRODUCTION

The government of the Republic of Zambia embarked on major reforms of the Technical and Vocational Education, and Training (TVET) to make it more responsive to the current training demands in the economy in the 1990's. In August 1994, the Minister of Science, Technology and Vocational Training appointed a widely representative national Task Force to review Government policy on technical education and vocational training and to recommend changes that would be necessary for the training system to meet new and emerging challenges in the national economy and society in general.

The Task Force submitted its recommendations in January, 1995 and soon after the Government issued a new policy on Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) by enacting a law, the TEVET Act No. 13 of 1998 read together with TEVET (Amendment) Act No. 11 of 2005 which led to the establishment of the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) whose responsibility is to interpret and implement the TEVET policy.

TEVETA's roles can broadly be defined as follows;

1. Curriculum development.
2. Training systems development and promotion.
3. Quality Assurance of learning environment and training institutions.
4. Assessment and certification of learning achievement.

Training systems development and promotion involves the development of operation standards and procedures to facilitate implementation of any curriculum, and there are five training and learning systems or pathways available in TEVET;

1. Training Institution Based.
2. Dual Based mode (TEVET Learnership Scheme – Workplace & Training Institution).
3. Open, Distance and Learning (ODL).
4. Workplace Based Learning.
5. School Based Vocational training.

Distance learning is an asynchronous mode of learning where the learner and teacher are separated by time and space, and the learning and teaching is facilitated by means of specified resources. In this mode of learning there is a great degree of flexibility in terms of pace of learning and study, which is structured and supported by a training provider.

ODL is perceived suitable in meeting the educational means for those who missed the opportunity at conventional institutions. However, pertinent issues in teaching underscore the fact that learner population possess unique characteristics and their contexts usually differ. In the development of training materials for ODL, there is need for content to be divided into units, which must be sub divided into sections and subsections, a summary, self-assessment questions, and further readings to be included.

There is need for proper planning, adequate financial resources and skilled teaching personnel that are trained in ODL pedagogy.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

ODL is also one of the major means of increasing access to education and training. However, this has only been narrowly adopted in the TEVET sector in Zambia. ODL appears to be more acceptable in non-science and less technological courses. Apart from heterogeneity of learners, we need to consider the issues or challenges of offering ODL in science and technology (courses that require intensive practical work). These include establishment of learning centres in each district, preparation of learning material and practical manuals for self-study, preparation of practical or home kits, and recruitment of mentors, tutors or resident teachers.

## **AIM**

This paper seeks to examine the minimum standards for training providers that are offering or wish to offer programmes through ODL. Further it examines what is being implemented currently in the TEVET sector as well as performance criteria at the institutional level, and what constitutes a code of good practice. In addition lessons will be drawn from international best practice from other countries.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To analyse the institutional capacity of training providers that wish to offer programmes through ODL.
2. To identify key factors required to improve performance criteria of training providers at institutional level in ODL.
3. Document the institutional best practices that must be implemented for effective delivery of ODL in TVET.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This paper will try to address and answer the following key questions:

1. What is the nature of the institutional capacity of training providers that wish to offer programmes through ODL?
2. What are the key factors that are required to improve performance criteria of training providers at institutional level in ODL?
3. What are the institutional best practices that must be implemented for effective delivery of ODL in TVET?

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The literature will look at:

- Quality in ODL
- Quality assurance systems in training institutions
- Institutional capacity to offer quality programmes through ODL

According to SADC CDE (2008, p.2);

*Many countries in the region are gradually realising the potential of ODL in realising the potential of ODL in expanding access at both secondary and tertiary levels. Whilst in the past ODL was offered as a second chance, and did not attract government attention in terms of planning and budget commitment this position is fast changing as many countries realise that it is the best option to address issues of access in cost-effective ways.*

The need to increase access to education and training sometimes tends to undermine the quality of education and training being offered, and that is why it is incumbent to bear in mind that quantity is as important as quality. "The quality of education is as important as the quantity offered" (SADC CDE, 2008, p.2). This implies that the adherence to set standards of offering programmes through ODL is one of the key hallmarks of institutional/training provider compliance to quality assurance demands.

Examples of this compliance include quality standards that will be applied to the curricula for the courses, and that will be applied to learning materials (COL, 2004). Therefore, availability of ICT infrastructure and electricity supply are key factors in ensuring workable learner support services. "On going professional development and training of staff is vital for the success of any dedicated ODL institution. Effective development and delivery of ODL programmes require appropriate systems of support for both part-time and full-time staff, and this at policy, materials and learner support levels" (COL, 2004, p.102).

This implores institutions that are offering or intend to offer ODL the need to develop robust quality assurance systems in their organisations to gain certification and seek accreditation for the courses that are to be pursued through ODL. The subject of quality assurance is very important in every sector of education and training but is even more indispensable in TVET due to the technological needs of offering practical subjects through ODL.

The following challenges must be overcome to ensure quality programmes to be offered through ODL.

- Availability of infrastructure for residential school is determined by academic sessional dates of full-time students.
- Lack of access to study centres or libraries.
- Lack of Information Communication Technology facilities and software for record keeping.
- High start-up costs.
- High lecturer to student ratio.
- Lack of tutors or mentors that might only be available during residential school.
- Lack of counselling and advisory services to learners.
- None or late delivery of learning materials.
- Lack of student manuals or prospectus.
- High costs associated with managing ODL.
- Difficulty in sourcing credible writers at affordable fees.
- Specialised personnel or expertise may be required for storage, handling, packaging, dispatching and inventory of learning material, and learner support services.

Plausible solutions to the above outlined challenges lie in the ability of effective mobilisation of institutional funds and other resources as well as accountability in the use of these resources.

Abrioux and Ferreira (2009, p.31) say,

*Given the high standards of management that are required, and the consequences of protracted decision-making processes and convoluted procurement procedures, it is probably best for an open school to have as much autonomy as can be arranged. Good governance can be assured through the appointment of an independent management committee or board with substantive powers to approve plans, review budgets and ensure that accounts are properly audited.*

Furthermore, there is need for annual institutional planning, clear ODL organisational structures, management/administrative support of ODL, and skilled teaching personnel who are equipped with ODL pedagogy. The planning must consider all cardinal aspects of ODL delivery and learner support mechanisms such as resident tutors or mentors in selected districts, institutional counselling & advisory services to learners, student manuals or prospectus, courier mechanism of learning materials to learners, and study centres and learning across the country.

According to COL (2004, p.63);

*Most ODL systems involve the production of learning materials and this results in high upfront capital costs. Because these costs have to be met before any students are enrolled, ODL can appear expensive. However, as more and more*

*students are enrolled, so unit costs fall. With careful planning, you can design ODL systems that utilise economies of scale to produce unit costs well below that of conventional education.*

Therefore, each institution that offers programmes through ODL must have a self-improvement institutional plan that is based on feedback from programme delivery and other training providers. This improvement plan will help the institution strive for better performance criteria and increased learner throughput rates. Even capacity building of lecturers, tutors, mentors, institutional management through orientation, and adjustment to new technologies and methods of teaching will be facilitated.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper used qualitative approach and where necessary quantitative data was conducted, and questionnaires and documentary analysis were employed to collect data.

## **FINDINGS**

Nine themes emerged from the analysis of the data for this paper. They include:

- Philosophy/ Policy and Objectives
- Admissions, Teaching and Learning
- Infrastructure
- Learning Resources and Instructional Material
- Academic Learner Support
- Assessment
- Curriculum and Instructional Design
- Management and Administration
- Monitoring and Evaluation

These broad themes of minimum standards are the basis of ensuring quality provision of ODL, which would assure the public that a qualification obtained through ODL is equivalent to the conventional qualification. These themes are outlined below.

### **3.1 Philosophy/ Policy and Objectives**

The institutional philosophy or policy and objectives on ODL must clearly spell out; increasing access to TEVET, enhancing flexibility and creating opportunity for life-long learning.

### **3.2 Admissions, Teaching and Learning**

All students enrolled in TEVET programmes on ODL must meet the minimum entry requirements for TEVET.

All lecturers/ Instructors, facilitators or tutors engaged in ODL must be qualified in their subject area, which is a level higher than the one they will be teaching as well as a teaching qualification, and skilled in ODL pedagogy.

### **3.3 Infrastructure**

The infrastructure must be adequate and appropriate for learners when they are in residential sessions, therefore, attention must be to special needs of learners due to disability or reproductive roles. This necessitates the putting up of ramps, grab rails, toilets that are accessible by people on wheel-chairs, and allocation of hostels for women with reproductive roles.

### **3.4 Learning Resources and Instructional Material**

Learning resources and instructional material should be adequate and appropriate for ODL; the learning material should enhance self-study and self-learning, and appropriate ICT is utilised. In addition, an institutional prospectus or an outline of the programme must be availed to the learners with the first set of course materials.

### **3.5 Academic Learner Support**

The following personnel can provide this support:

- part-time tutors;
- full-time academic staff;
- counsellors and advisers; and
- administrative staff.

Nevertheless, adequate student-tutor ratio for each programme has to be maintained, as well as a variety of methods of communication for counselling and guidance.

### **3.6 Assessment**

There has to be a system to monitor learners' progress or achievement in a particular programme. Therefore, records of students' continuous assessment should be updated regularly and stored securely.

### **3.7 Curriculum and Instructional Design**

Training providers offering ODL need to possess TEVETA approved curriculum, and utilise appropriate pedagogy to ensure that learning outcomes are met.

### **3.8 Management and Administration**

Operational planning about staff development, and support staff must be done well in advance on a yearly basis. The following skills areas could be considered for staff development; tutoring, writing, editing, counselling and advising.

### **3.9 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Effective Quality assurance strategies have to be formulated for ODL programmes; which entail the presence of a quality assurance committee, monitoring and evaluation (M & E) system, and changes being made based on results from M & E.

This led to the development of the following institutional checklist;

**OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) INSTITUTIONAL CHECKLIST OF**

.....

**ON**

.....**2013**

<p><b>Section- I. GENERAL INFORMATION</b></p> <p><b>1.1. Name &amp; Address of the Institution</b></p> <p><b>1.2. Year of Establishment:</b></p> <p><b>1.3. Year of Commencement of ODFL provision:</b></p> <p><b>1.4. Duration of ODFL provision</b></p> <p><b>1.5. Target qualification levels at the Institution (Numbers)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programmes/Courses offered</li> <li>• Level (certificate, diploma, etc.)</li> <li>• Number of Students; Male &amp; Female</li> <li>• Permanent Teaching Staff; Male &amp; Female</li> <li>• Permanent Support Staff; Male &amp; Female</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Section- II. ATTRIBUTE</b></p>	<p><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p>	<p><b>COMMENT</b></p>
<p><b>Policy &amp; Objectives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent with national policy on ODL</li> <li>• Clearly stated corporate objectives, which, are communicated through prospectus</li> <li>• Strategic goals and institutional actions are compatible with values in mission statement and objectives</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional mission statement is explicit about increasing access, or equity</li> </ul>	
<b>Admissions, Teaching &amp; Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All entrants meet the national minimum entry requirements for TEVET</li> <li>• Adequate qualified &amp; accredited staff and tutors.</li> <li>• All staff &amp; tutors are skilled in their subject, position &amp; ODL pedagogy</li> <li>• Faculty follow a variety of teaching approaches and learning styles. For example, summaries &amp; visual material such as hand outs, charts, posters</li> <li>• Learners are provided with course materials authored/developed by the faculty</li> <li>• Ensuring proper access &amp; equity during admission process</li> </ul>	
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated infrastructure/ department for ODL</li> <li>• Registered office</li> <li>• Production room</li> <li>• Study centres and learning centres in selected districts, where practical work can be conducted</li> <li>• Adequate and appropriate for learner needs when they are in residential sessions</li> </ul>	
<b>Learning Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient funds are available to ensure that each learner receives individual service</li> <li>• An outline of the course is provided with the first set of course materials</li> <li>• Clearly defined learning objectives in self-study course material or Self Learning Material (SLM)</li> <li>• SLM is appropriate for achieving the learning outcomes of the course</li> <li>• SLM is reviewed and updated at least once every</li> </ul>	

	<p>three years or when the curriculum is updated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SLM is suitable for ODL, therefore, they are interactive, accessible, comprehensive and engage the learner</li> <li>• The use of ICT to mediate learning, for example, radio, audio cassettes, printed workbooks, CD-ROM, videotapes, identified online resources, etc.</li> <li>• SLM help learners to develop study skills that are important for individual learners</li> </ul>	
<b>Academic Learner Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate tutor-student ratio for each academic programme</li> <li>• Tutors possess attitudes, knowledge &amp; skills required in ODL, and have ODL training</li> <li>• Guidance notes for tutors and meetings for tutors</li> <li>• A variety of communication channels, which, could be synchronous or asynchronous, for example, use of phone, fax, post, email, video conferencing</li> <li>• Marking and feedback on assignments and examinations within a time limit of 3 to 10 weeks</li> <li>• Resident tutors are stationed in selected districts</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation of tutorial service on a regular basis</li> <li>• Course materials are designed for a specific and clearly stated level of learner support, and suitable opportunities for such support</li> </ul>	<p>N.B.: Tutors must be aware that their work is being monitored</p>
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are measures or a system for monitoring learners' progress, which could capture the following information; number of residential schools attended,</li> </ul>	



	<p>number of assignments completed, average marks on each assignment, mark trend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintenance of a record of information on student progress such as marks, grades, records of all tutor-marked assignments, and awards made</li> <li>• Learners are informed of the criteria that will be used in grading their assignments, and what the examination grade will contribute to the overall grade of the course</li> <li>• Formative assessment and continuous assessment that enables learning through feedback, and the feedback must be frequent and complete</li> </ul>	
<b>Curriculum &amp; Instructional Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possession of a TEVETA curriculum</li> <li>• Appropriate courses matched with appropriate learning outcomes</li> <li>• Appropriate pedagogy to ensure that learning outcomes are met</li> <li>• Appropriate use of ICTs</li> </ul>	
<b>Management &amp; Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme monitoring and evaluation that enables comparison of learner academic performance to intended learning outcome</li> <li>• Best practices in Governance &amp; Leadership being followed</li> <li>• Regular training of faculty to enhance distance education pedagogy, which emphasises instructional strategies that foster interaction, conveying concepts and assessment of learners</li> </ul>	

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Accreditation for ODL Programmes**

To attain accreditation, a programme being offered by ODL must exhibit well established systems in each of the following key areas;

- Admissions, Teaching and Learning
- Learning Resources
- Academic Learner Support
- Assessment
- Management and Administration

### **2. Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Spider gram (Radar graph) will be an appropriate tool for the training institutions self-evaluation on level of attainment of the minimum standards of ODL.

The following 9 Standards should form the core features of the Spider gram:

- Philosophy/ Policy and Objectives
- Admissions, Teaching and Learning
- Infrastructure
- Learning Resources and Instructional Material
- Academic Learner Support
- Assessment
- Curriculum and Instructional Design
- Management and Administration
- Monitoring and Evaluation

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## TEVET Institutions Perspective of Achievement in ODFL Standards

