

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

J. G. Mugadzaweta

Regional Coordinator
University of Zimbabwe College of Distance Education
Mashonaland West Region
CHINHOYI
Zimbabwe

AND

T. Benza

Regional Coordinator
University of Zimbabwe College of Distance Education
Mashonaland Central Region
BINDURA
Zimbabwe

Introduction

Zimbabwe is one of the SADC countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa. It has an area of 390,757 square kilometres (Km²) and at the last national census in 1992 it had a total population of over 12 million people of whom 49 percent were male and 51 percent were female.

Zimbabwe has three official languages; English, Ndebele and Shona. Ndebele and Shona are the official languages of instruction in those areas where they are the predominant languages during the first three years of primary education, after which English becomes the official medium of instruction. English is also the language used in commerce and business and the main language of communication in government.

Zimbabwe acquired its political independence in 1980 and independence was followed by an unprecedented expansion of the education system of all levels. Thus the first task of the new government of independent Zimbabwe was to dismantle the inequalities which had characterized the colonial education system. To accomplish this task, and to keep good faith with its electorate, the Zimbabwe government declared education to be a basic human right and with the help of local communities, set out to expand access to primary and secondary education within the frame-work of a unified and non-racial system of education.

Primary school enrolments increased from 1,235,815 in 1980 to 2,476,575 in 1995; an increase of 100,4%. The number of primary schools increased from 3,161 to 4,633 during the same period. The number of teachers too rose from 28,500 in 1980 to 64,184 teachers in 1995.

Secondary school enrolments increased from 74 321 in 1980 to 711 094 in 1995; an increase of 857%. The number of schools increased from 197 to 1,535 during the same period. The number of teachers too increased from 3,736 in 1980 to 27,320 in 1995. These quantitative achievements that were made in expanding the whole education system were indeed spectacular by third world standards. This massive expansion has often been referred to as Zimbabwe's "Education Miracle" because through this process Zimbabwe moved closer to the achievement of Universal Primary Education.

However, while Zimbabwe was able to address most of its problems in the provision of primary and secondary education, problems were still abound with regards to the provision of tertiary education. At independence in 1980 only one university, the University of Zimbabwe in Harare existed.

It was not until after 1990 that other universities came into being. These included the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo, Solusi University in Bulawayo and Africa University in Mutare.

To enter a University in Zimbabwe, a candidate was required to have at least 2 'A' level passes of the University of Cambridge Examinations board, the University of London Certificate at advanced level or the AEB.

Despite all this, since the attainment of independence in 1980 the number of candidates seeking places at the University of Zimbabwe has been increasing. This demand for places was not matched with supply (Chivore

1995). As illustrated in table 1 below between 1990 and 1994, 25,900 candidates passed with at least 2 'A' levels and they qualified to be enrolled at all the Universities in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately only 9,403 (36.3%) managed to get places to do undergraduate studies. 16,497 (63.7%) candidates failed to get places to do their undergraduate studies. This vividly shows how demand for university places outstripped supply.

Table 1: First year student Registration of University of Zimbabwe,

| 1990 - 1994 | | | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|--------|
| | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | TOTAL |
| No. of students who qualified | 4350 | 5093 | 5555 | 5221 | 5681 | 25,900 |
| No. of students registered | 1937 | 2133 | 1689 | 1773 | 1871 | 9,403 |
| No of students who had qualified but were not registered | 2413 | 2960 | 3866 | 3448 | 3810 | 16,497 |

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Statistics Unit

In addition to the above, this demand for university education comes from two other main sources namely mature students and college graduates.

Mature Students

After working for several years many adults begin to feel the need to improve themselves through university education either at first-degree level or at postgraduate level. This is because of the competition they face or are subjected to at the work place from better-qualified new recruits from colleges and universities. In addition, new technologies are coming to the work place at an ever-increasing rate. These create new threads and challenges to the older workers. Also the rate for promotion demands suitable qualified and experienced personnel some of which through part-time studies have obtained new qualifications enabling them to enter the university easily, work place, education experience and exposure have made some of the workers ready to benefit from university education, although they do not possess the required 'A' level passes.

College Graduates

Zimbabwe has more than 155 registered private colleges. These do offer courses ranging from certificate, national, diploma and higher national diplomas or their equivalents. These qualifications are offered in the fields of business and commerce, education, science and technology, medical and paramedical areas and different engineering disciplines.

Every year more than 10 000 students graduate from these colleges. Some of these graduates pass with distinctions and would like to proceed to university for further studies. It is unfortunate that these graduates have not been assisted to fulfill their desired goals. The Genesis of Distance Education at the University of Zimbabwe. Several studies including commissions were set-up to determine the feasibility of introducing distance education at the University of Zimbabwe. These included the following:

- the University of Zimbabwe Act of 1982
- the University of Zimbabwe feasibility study of 1986
- the Williams Commission of 1988
- the 1991 University of Zimbabwe
- Senate Minute 114, and
- the Zimbabwe Second Year National Development Plan 1991 to 1995.

All these studies and commissions provide the policy context for the establishment of distance education programs at the University of Zimbabwe. In addition the Commonwealth of Learning and British Columbia Ministry of Education and Training implementation report of 1991 and the Commonwealth of Learning report on Distance Education and Open Learning in Zimbabwe, 1992, also assisted in providing the policy context for the development of Distance Education in Zimbabwe. (Report on further development of Distance Education in Zimbabwe. 1995)

All the studies and commissions mentioned put forward recommendations which include the following:

1. The University of Zimbabwe should introduce Distance degree programs from 1992, working on a dual model basis whereby the same courses available face to face on campus would be offered at a distance.
2. A strong specialist distance education centre should be established at the University of Zimbabwe, with the task of supporting the delivery of distance education programs and to serve as a national centre for distance education.

Aims and Objectives of the Distance Education

In addition to the above recommendations the studies and commissions included the following as aims and objectives of distance education in Zimbabwe:

- To develop an efficient, equitable cost-effective and high quality alternative tertiary education and delivery system.
- To contribute to substantial savings to foreign exchange through offering locally developed degree and non-degree distance education.
- To increase the capacity of the country in the production of educational training materials and textbooks for university level courses.
- To significantly increase access to educational opportunities at the tertiary level in Zimbabwe.
- To increase tertiary educational opportunities to females.
- To increase economies of scale so as to make the distance education programs sustainable and self-financing in the long term.
- To develop an accessible, affordable delivery system of tertiary education that is responsive to the human resources development objectives of Zimbabwe as a developing nation.

The Dual Model of Distance Education

The dual model of the delivery system of distance education at the University College of Distance Education is guided by the following principles.

- that there is parity between modes of study in both curriculum and assessment requirements between students on distance education mode and students on campus.
- that there is a wide university involvement in distance education by all academic faculties at the University of Zimbabwe.
- that there will be adequate resource provision.
- that there will be flexibility for students to move between off-campus and on campus study modes without encountering any major administrative and academic complications.
- that the system would be responsive to demand.

The advantage of a dual model would include the fact that there would be recognizable credit transfer between the off-campus and on campus modes.

The Programs and Students Enrolments at the University College of Distance Education. Table 2 below shows the programs that are currently on offer at the University of Zimbabwe College of Distance Education. The table also shows the student enrolments numbers.

Table 2: Programs on Offer at the UCDE and Student Enrolments.

| Program | Intake | Number |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 1 | 485 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 2 | 1 456 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 3 | 299 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 4 | 846 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 5 | 1 181 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 6 | 1 186 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 7 | 476 |
| BEd. (EAPPS) | 8 | 679 |

| | | |
|---|------------|-------|
| BA (English and Communication Studies) | 1 | 700 |
| BSc (Agriculture Management) | 1 | 569 |
| Diploma in Classroom Text and Discourse | 2 | 119 |
| Diploma in Applied Accountancy | Part 1 & 2 | 240 |
| Total | | 8 236 |

Source : UCDE Registry, 1998.

Other programs that are to be offered in the near future at the UCDE include the following:

- Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Statistics.
- Bachelor of Science in Geography and Environmental Science.
- Bachelor of Commerce.
- Bachelor of Education in Special Education.
- Bachelor of Nursing Science.
- Bachelor's Degree in the Hospitality Industry.
- Diploma in Guidance and Counselling.
- Bachelor of Health and Physical Education.
- Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies.
- Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages (French and Portuguese).
- Master of Education in Educational Administration.
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education.
- Master of Business Administration.
- Ph.D. (EAPPS)
- Master of Science in Manufacturing Technology.

Student Characteristics

The following characteristics apply to most students that are currently studying at the University College of Distance Education in Zimbabwe.

- More than 75 of the students in each program are males.
- Their average age is between 35 and 45 year.
- The majority are married.
- Their highest academic qualification is 'O' Level.
- The majority have a professional qualification and are working.
- Most have their studies competing with their work and family responsibilities.
- Most work under extreme isolation with no contacts or access to support services such as a library.

Research studies will be needed in the future to ascertain the motivation, the study conditions, attitudes and expectations of the students studying at the UCDE including their drop-out-rates.

The Delivery System at the University College of Distance Education

The main mode of instruction at the UCDE is print based on open learning materials. Face-to-face tutorials, radio broadcasts and audio-cassettes support the print materials. UCDE and Ministry of Higher Education have been studying the use of satellites for use at the UCDE.

Administration and Organisational Structures at the UCDE

The University College of Distance Education in Zimbabwe has a highly decentralized structure where in addition to a National Centre in Harare, there are 10 Regional Centres based in each of the provinces and in the cities of Harare and Chitungwiza and Bulawayo. Further more district centres are being set up to cover remote areas of the provinces. A Pro-Vice Chancellor who is assisted by four Deputy Directors heads the National Centre. The four Deputy Directors are in those of These are, Administrating and Finance, Materials and tutorial Services, Academic Affairs and Student Support Services.

The role of the National Centre is that of coordinating and facilitating to:

- Develop or adapt, in close liaison with academic faculties, degree and non-degree distance education programs for which there is a demand.
- Administer, organise, direct and coordinate distance education programs and support systems through out the country.
- Develop or adopt a wide range of instructional media, which include printed materials, audio and videocassettes, radio programs, computer assisted learning materials etc.
- Teach course through the distance education mode and examine students who have studied at a distance.
- Establish and manage Regional and District study centres throughout the country for the delivery of distance education programs and for the provision of tutorial services.
- Processing of examination results and awarding of qualifications.
- Conduct research and training to support the distance education learning mode.
- Assist the University of Zimbabwe Faculties, which desire to apply distance education technologies in their programs or offer some of their programs at a distance.

Regional Centres are headed by Regional Coordinators. The functions of the Regional Centres are to:

- receive, process and forward applications to the National Centre.
- with the assistance of the Academic Registry, Register students
- with the assistance of Academic Registry, arrange for examinations venues and the conduct of the examinations.
- provide tutorial services including guidance and counseling.
- collect fees and other income and bank it in the Centre's account.
- maintain proper student and financial records.

The Student Support Services

Adult students, like their young counterparts on campus need and want help in setting their goals, planning their programs, defining their objectives and improving their study and planning skills. Student support Services constitute an important component of any distance education system. Learning at a distance requires protracted and continuing support, advice and encouragement in order to sustain interest and motivation of students in their studies (Nyirenda, 1989, and Siaciwena, 1988).

At the UCDE, students have access to the main University of Zimbabwe library and laboratories for practical work. In addition administrative services have been established in the provinces for the registration of students, payment of fees, distribution of study material s, handling of assignments and conducting examinations as well as maintaining accurate records of course work marks. Thus most of the student support services have been decentralised and their major goals are to promote the development of student's ability to plan their lives, careers and education, so that they are able to set realistic goals and study effectively.

Key Factors

- To foster among all staff and students a sense of belonging to the academic community.
- To increase awareness of the UCDE in the Region
- To raise local employers' awareness of the UCDE's education and training provision.
- To liaise with other local providers of educational services.

According to the 1998 Zimbabwe Open University strategic plan a SWOT analysis of distance education at the University College of Distance Education would reveal the following key factors as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths

- Capacity to provide face-to-face tuition in the Regions during Weekend Schools.
- Affordable programs which are cheaper than those offered by our major competitors.
- Multi-disciplinary nature of programs.

- Lower opportunity costs for our students and in some cases employers.
- Market oriented and relevant programs which are introduced after thorough needs assessment.
- Use of existing infrastructure in the Regions which are rented or hired for specific activities.
- Greater accessibility of our programs through decentralisation of administration, recruitment, examinations and teaching strategies.
- Availability of suitable and experienced local leadership and staff. In particular, use of highly qualified and experienced employed specialists to tutor on part time basis.
- Flexibility of our programs which allows diverse entry qualifications and flexible exit and re-entry arrangements with no loss of accumulated credits.
- Highly decentralised delivery structures through Regions which use multi-media approaches including the use of print, audiocassettes and videocassettes.
- Highly dedicated leadership and staff.

Weaknesses

- Finance
 - Lack of financial autonomy
 - Under funding of University College of Distance Education activities
 - Inability to attract external funding
 - Unattractive conditions of service for staff
- Decision Making
 - Lack of autonomy in decision making as major decisions are still being made by the University of Zimbabwe Committees where University College of Distance Education is, at best, not adequately represented.
- Human and Material Resources
 - Human
 - ⇒ inadequately staffed.
 - ⇒ most staff lack relevant qualifications in distance and open learning.
 - ⇒ quality of staff have no higher degrees such as doctorates.
 - Material
 - ⇒ inadequate Library resources, teaching equipment and Information Technology.
 - ⇒ inadequate transport and physical infrastructure
- Organisational Culture
 - Poor communication of admission, notification of results and supplementary examination arrangements.
- Research
 - working with no research base.
 - no funding to promote research.
 - no external linkages and research partnerships.
- Management of programs
 - slow pace of Module production.
 - Radio programs poorly slotted.

Opportunities

- Demand for university education among youth and adults is high in and around Zimbabwe.
- Demand for life-long/continuing education is high among adults who prefer distance and open learning.
- Downsizing in public sector-retrenchments has increased numbers of people wishing to acquire new skills and knowledge.
- Potential for Donor funding is reasonably high.
- Access to other organisations' infrastructure keeps operation costs down.
- Instabilities in the conventional systems to cope with the demands for higher education or to offer flexible learning opportunities.
- Perceptions of a superior product from distance and open learning systems.
- Downward fluctuation in exchange rates makes programs from non-Zimbabwean competing institutions more expensive.

Threats

Environmental factors external to the organization threatening UCDE viability would include:

- Technology
 - inability to procure up to date Information Technology.
 - modern technology such as satellite systems increases competition from all over the world.
- Competition
- Vulnerability to economic crises and economic decline.
- Skepticism about qualifications offered by UCDE.
- Unfavourable demographic shift.
- Decline in government funding.

Conclusion

This presentation has shown that inspite of the limitations being experienced in terms of resources and new technologies, distance education in Zimbabwe is poised for further and greater developments to meet the manpower needs and demand for university education for its nationals. Further studies and researches will be required to establish what would be needed in terms of effective student support services for both Open Learning and Distance Education in Zimbabwe.

References

- Chivore, B.R.S. (1998). *Private Tertiary Education in Zimbabwe: Current and Future Trends*. Mambo Press. Gweru, Zimbabwe.
- Machingadze, T., Pfukani, L. and Shumba, S. (1998). *The Quality of Primary Education in Zimbabwe: Some Policy Suggestions Based on a Survey of Schools*, Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Nyirenda, J.E. (1989), *Organization of Distance Education at the University of Zambia: 'An Analysis of the Practice'* *Distance Education Vol. 10, No. 1, 1989*. 148 - 158.
- Sewart, D.and Daniel J.S. (1988). *Developing Distance Education*. ICDE, Oslo, Sweden.
- Siaciwena, R.M.C. (1988). *Distance Education and National Development: The Zambian Case. Developing Distance Education*. ICDE, Oslo, Sweden.
- U.N.I.C.E.F. (1996). *Zimbabwe Basic Facts on Education*, Harare, Zimbabwe.
- University College of Distance Education (1998), *Zimbabwe Open University Strategic Plan*, Harare, University of Zimbabwe.

University of Zimbabwe, (1993) , *A Project Proposal for the establishment of the Centre for Distance Education at the University of Zimbabwe*. Harare, University of Zimbabwe.

University of Zimbabwe, (1995) *Report of the Committee for the Further Development of University Distance Education*, Harare, University of Zimbabwe.