

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING CONCEPTS AND THEIR APPLICATION TO THE ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS: By Dr Sikhanyiso Duke Ndlovu Founder Zimbabwe Distance Education College, Chancellor Designate Zimbabwe University Without Walls

Paper prepared for the Pan Commonwealth Forum on Open and Distance Education Durban, South Africa July 29 – August 2, 2002.

Zimbabwe at Independence in 1980, had a population of 6 million. There was only one formal university with 1 500 students mainly whites.

With the increase in population which now is 14 million, and increase in primary and secondary schools, there has also been a marked increase in tertiary educational institutions. There are six state formal universities and one state Open University.

The Zimbabwe University Without Walls is the first Indigenous Private University initiative. In 1980 the first private Zimbabwe Distance Education College was established, with a vision to increase educational access to Zimbabweans. This educational development in Zimbabwe became an influence in the similar developments in South Africa after apartheid as Keith Harry and Hilary Parraton state that “the end of apartheid illuminated the need for South African education to catch up with the outside world in its institutions as well as its philosophy. The new legitimacy given to the private sector activities in the 1980s is still washing over education.

The most powerful winds of change in education have been propelled by the Open and Distance learning concepts. In Zimbabwe the founder of the Zimbabwe Distance Education Group of colleges in 1980 has been part of the development of Open and Distance learning and the designing of the new upcoming Zimbabwe University Without Walls as its chancellor designate.

In 1979 this author presented a paper on the “Development of Distance Education Universities a guide for developing nations” at the first African Conference on Distance Education organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the German Foundation for International Development and the African Association for Correspondence Education. Otto Peters, Borje Holmberg, Greville Rumble contribute a great deal in the definition of distance education. Otto Peters talked of distance education in the more industrialised societies using technology. At that time internet and fax machines were not in the vocabulary of distance educators. Borje Holmberg talked of distance education as non contiguous learning meaning the separation between the learner and the teacher. Since the 70s Open and Distance learning concepts and definitions have been unfolding leading to the establishment of many open and distance learning departments of Universities using the dual mode and independent Open and Distance Education Universities and agencies world wide.

The International Council for Open and Distance Education and the Commonwealth of learning have continued to spearhead and support Distance Education Institutions.

The development of the new Zimbabwe University Without Walls comes as a result of many years of Open and Distance learning conceptualisation and share of ideas with colleagues such as John Daniels, Keegan, Holmberg, Raj Dhanarajan, Paerer et al and the World Bank’s education sector assistance strategy for the Africa Region which stresses the need to increase access to education. The World Bank states that “solutions are sought in distance education information and communication technologies to spark educational development and reform (Enhancing learning opportunities in Africa The World Bank – March 2002)

The University Without Walls is based on the vision that distance and open learning can become highly effective modes of teaching and learning as they are easily adaptable to the dynamics of educational

information and communication technology. According to Keegan (1980, 1983, 1986) Distance Education is characterised by

1. The quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process; this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education.
2. The influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student support services; this distinguishes it from private study and teach yourself programmes.
3. The use of technical media; print, audio, video or computer to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course.
4. The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue; this distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education.
5. The quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialisation purposes. (Paulsen 1990, 12)

Otto Peters (1973, 1983) looks at Distance Education as an industrialised form of education as it involves such industrial processes as

1. Rationalisation
2. Division of labour
3. Mechanisation
4. Assembly lines
5. Mass production

6. Planning and preparation
7. Standardisation

However Garrison and Shale (1989) propose a less restricted definition of Distance Education

1. Distance education implies that the majority of educational communication between (among) teacher and student(s) occurs non-contiguously.
2. Distance education must involve two-way communication between (among) teacher and student(s) for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process.
3. Distance education uses technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication.

Paulsen (1990) states that Distance Education in essence involves the democratization of education due to its capacity to provide education on a mass scale. Barriers that affect conventional education such as shortage of educational infrastructure in terms of buildings, the employment of learners, disability and inadequacy of qualified staff can to a large extent be overcome through Distance Education. In Distance Education; Education comes to you, rather than the other way round. For example, according to Chambers and Rae, by using computer technology and computer mediated communication it is possible to bring the classroom to every student's computer, in their chosen place of study. This is supported by Birchall when he states that; technology offers just-in-time delivery of complete customised programmes, so that the individual has access to learning opportunities anyway and anytime.

Interactive multi-media communication, worldwide electronic information highways and new computer managed learning and data retrieval systems will further revolutionarise academic, professional

and vocational education creating an international virtual classroom. However, as the number of delivery options increases, so do questions about the effective use of the available array of technological resources and the capacity for technologists to come up with new relevant and appropriate technological soft and hardware. Distance Education has a special appeal particularly in Zimbabwe where resources in form of physical educational infrastructure, library materials and academic expertise are in short supply. It is also highly attractive as it creates opportunities for academic and professional self advancement to learners in the comfort of their homes.

In addition, it is flexible enough to accommodate the learner's commitments such as family, business and others. That is, it enables lifelong education to take place.

Though the print media remains the most predominant communication tool between distance educators and their clientele, other various educational technologies will also be used. The radical improvements in reprographic technology through the introduction of highly efficient computers and high volume copiers have resulted in the rapid production of large amounts of educational materials to cater for thousands of learners in Zimbabwe nationwide. The development of the Zimbabwe postal and curio network will ensure that learners receive their education packages in time and are therefore able to complete the tasks assigned to them within the stipulated period.

The university Without Walls recognises that telecommunications provide a wide range of media which can be used creatively for instructional purposes.

In collaboration with Africom a network solutions provide the University Without Walls will set up distance and open learning centres in each of the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. Interactive video conferencing equipment and internet are being established. The university hopes to link up with other distance education providers in the commonwealth.

The university will provide innovative approaches to open and distance learning by introducing the interactive electronic classroom as well as individual interactive learning. In line with Guelph Waterloo and McMaster educational linkages the university without walls will provide telematics for such linkages within Zimbabwe and with external universities. Rather than reinvent the wheel, various degree programmes will be accessed through the internet and our own designed degree programmes will also be made available to other institutions and directly to students via the internet.

The Readers of this paper are also referred to the video presentation of the University Without Walls.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Daniels John** -Mega Universities
- Harry Keith and parraton Hilary** - in Higher Education Through Open and Distance Learning, The Commonwealth of Learning – London & Newyork 1999
- Josh Lla -Transmission for Higher Education: a case study in India, Pan Commonwealth Forum, Brunei, March 1999.
- Keegan D - On the nature of Distance Education. Hagen Fern Universitat 1985
- Lockwood Fred -Activities in Self Instructional Texts, Kogan page, 1992
- Ndlovu S D. -Development of University Distance Education, a guide for Developing nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa & German Foundation for International Development, Adis Ababa, Ethiopia. 1979
- Ndlovu S D -Development of Distance Education at University Level University Without Walls, some issues for consideration by Developing nations. 4th International Conference on new concepts in Higher Education, by the International Council of the University Without Walls at the Royal National Hotel London. May 1985
- Paulsen M-F & Rekkedal -The Electronic College
- Parer Michael -Unlocking Open learning Monash University, Centre for Distance Learning. 1994

Stewart D

-One World Many Voices Quality in Open and Distance Learning, International Council for Open and Distance Education, Birmingham. 1995

The World Bank

-Africa Region Human Development paper Series. Enhancing Learning Opportunities in Africa. Distance Education and Information Communication Technology for Learning, March 2002