Volume 16 Issue 12
Originally issued as G3

Global Journal of human-social science: G
Linguistics & Education
Volume 16 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2016
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Trends and Prospects of Instructional Material Development and Delivery at the University of Zambia

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GJHSS-G Classification : FOR Code: 130399

TRENDSANDPROSPECTSOFINSTRUCTIONALMATERIALDEVELOPMENTANDDELIVERYATTHEUNIVERSITYOFZAMBIA

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Trends and Prospects of Instructional Material Development and Delivery at the University of Zambia

Mr. Kasonde Mundende [α], Mr. Francis Simui [σ], Mr. Albert K Chishiba [ρ], Mr. Godfrey Mwewa [ω] & Boniface Namangala [¥]

Abstract- The major concern addressed in this study is why the University of Zambia (UNZA), despite being the first national University with so much vast experience in excellence and service as its motto is and being the first institution to offer distance education (DE) in Zambia, has not commensurately grown to competitive and comparative massive enrollment numbers, increased number of programmes and courses and development and delivery of instructional materials in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The need to introduce DE at UNZA, amongst many other compelling reasons could be attributed to the Lockwood Commission, whose report in 1963/64 recommended that degree programmes at the Institution should be available by distance study to suitably qualified candidates who might not be in position to attend the University education on full - time basis. This study is anchored on questions such as: (i) How does UNZA run distance education? (ii) How does UNZA develop instructional materials? (iii) How does UNZA deliver instructional materials to its distance students? (iv) What successes has UNZA scored in distance education mode of study? (v) Why is distance education at UNZA not expanding as expected? (vi) How best could UNZA deliver its learner support services to its distance students? The study employed descriptive design and document analysis review. It is largely qualitative in nature. The major findings of the study show that UNZA being a dual mode institution depends on lecturers from various teaching schools to service distance education students; Institute of Distance Education (IDE), the Unit of the University with sole responsibilities of administration, organisation and coordination of DE programmes depends on lecturers employed under regular mode of study to develop instructional materials, conduct face-to-face contact sessions during residential schools, prepare assessment and examinations and mark them. IDE experiences some degree of resistance from mainstream faculty members in executing and implementing its distance education mandate. Furthermore, UNZA distance education over-relies on print media. At times, students in remote rural areas do not receive their study materials in good time, thus, compromising the quality of learner support services to them. The other finding is that management of student records is mostly done manually. Furthermore, currently, there is only one functional industrial machine for mass production of study materials which from time to time breaks down due to large volumes of materials to be produced. The other challenge is very low staffing levels for IDE. Currently, there are five academic members of staff and 33 supporting staff against slightly above 8000 students. On a serious note, UNZA does not have ODL policy, though in advanced stage of having one. Despite the aforementioned challenges, UNZA has made greater strides in maintaining its leadership in DE. For instance, the Institution has for the past two years, students completing their education through distance learning (DL) mode which was not the case previously as they had to transfer to full-time for their last two years of study. UNZA is also the leading institution in providing training, consultancy and advisory services in education to various institutions of learning in Zambia as regards ODL (including the use of ICT in ODL). Additionally, UNZA, though on a slow pace, is using e - learning platforms and its distance students access various information through the same platforms. More so, in addition to the Art-based programmes, UNZA is offering science-based programmes from the Schools of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. Furthermore, UNZA, in collaboration with Zimbabwe Open University (ZoU), in 2014 introduced post graduate programmes at Masters and DPhil level in various fields of study. There are a lot of opportunities for UNZA to grow in terms of numbers and programmes as well as in providing quality distance education to its distance students. The Institution also has ICT infrastructure which is being supported by Zambia Research and Education Network (ZAMREN), and Centre for Information and Communication Technology (CICT) whose offices are housed at UNZA. In order for UNZA to realise its full potential in terms of capacity building, increase in programmes and courses, the researchers recommend the following: (i) UNZA-IDE should develop ODL Policy which will guide operations of DE, (ii) IDE should become more autonomous and employ lecturers solely to run DE and not depending on those employed for conventional/regular students, (iii) UNZA should decentralise its distance education operations so that registration processes and residential sessions/schools could

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be done in provincial centers, (iv) UNZA - IDE should strengthen ICT infrastructure to allow the provision of providing modern methods of delivery such as moodle, and (v) UNZA should have a separate DE calendar from the regular students' academic calendar.

I. Introduction

Distance Education (DE) is another mode of study. Countries world - wide have seen the benefit of using this mode of study to firstly increase the enrolment levels of those pursuing education. Secondly, it is a mode of study which provides education to qualified people who are already in either formal or informal employments and may not have time to attend a full time programme. Thirdly, it is a suitable mode of study for busy people who can still upgrade themselves, whilst working. It is referred to as flexible mode of study because it is pro – learner. With time, it gained another dimension of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Most ODL systems have a philosophy that aims to: remove barriers, and allow learners to study what they want, and when they want and where they want (Commonwealth of Learning (COL), 2005). ODL systems use technology to mediate learning such as printed workbooks, audio cassettes, radio and the web. By implication, there is no one method for providing ODL (COL, 2005).

Some American higher education administrators and state politicians recommended distance learning (DL) as one which would increase solve problems related to maintaining access to education, meeting increased demands to education and efficient use of technology amongst many other aspects (Basom and Sherritt, 1994).

a) Background to the study

The University of Zambia (UNZA) is the first state University in Zambia. It may be referred to as the 'mother' of all public and private Universities in the Country. It is also the first University to offer distance education to suitably qualified candidates since its inception in 1967. From inception, the institution has passed through various developmental stages. Right from the inception, the institution started running DE partly through the recommendation by the Lockwood Commission, whose report in 1963/64 recommended that degree programmes at UNZA should be available by distance study to suitably qualified candidates who might not be in position to attend the University education on full- time basis. In line with the Commission's recommendation, an autonomous Department of Correspondence Studies (DCS) was established in 1966. DCS was meant to coordinate distance learning (DL) programmes which were launched in March 1967, with about 200 registered students. In 1975, DCS became part of the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), which later in 1994, became the Directorate of Distance Education (DDE). With the expansion programmes on board, fifteen (15) years later in September 2009, DDE changed its name to Institute of Distance Education (IDE) and currently has about 8000 registered students. For now, the organisation, administration and coordination of DE courses at UNZA is the responsibility of IDE, but all tuition is delivered by members of academic staff of various Schools of the University. Members of staff of the Schools offering courses by distance teaching prepare all study materials and assignments in accordance with approved course outlines. From inception till about 2012, students were spending two years under distance mode and completed their other two years under full – time mode of study. This, to some extent, made some students drop out because their employers did not allow them to obtain leave for two years. Further, students were only taking four (4) courses and that made them to take longer than their counter parts in full – time to complete their study programmes. This is no longer the practice as of now because students are now completing their studies under distance mode and are taking at least 8 courses per academic year, just like their full – time counter parts. This development has been made possible because most third and fourth year study materials (modules) are now available in almost all courses, which was not the case before 2012. UNZA maintains excellence and service for its students both full – time and distance in that there is no significant difference between the quality of the two processes (Basaza, Milman and Wright, 2010). UNZA is a mixed institution with a total number of registered students of about 26000. With 48 years of existence and experience, one wonders why UNZA, has not been a leader in student enrollment numbers, programmes and courses in comparison with some recently established institutions locally and within the region.

b) Problem Statement

Although UNZA started offering distance programmes some 48 years ago, on comparison basis, with newly established institutions running distance programmes locally (Such as Kwame Nkrumah University, Kabwe) and within the region (Such as Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe), UNZA has not commensurately grown in terms of enrollment levels, increased number of programmes and courses as well as development and delivery of instructional materials. Kwame Nkrumah University commenced its distance education programmes in 2012, and by today it has grown to about 4 000 DE students. ZoU which started in 1995, has about 20, 000 DE students, whilst UNZA with 48 years of existence has slightly above 8000 students. The question under probe is despite 48 years of distance education existence, why is UNZA not greatly expanded in terms of number of student enrollment,

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programmes and courses as well as development and delivery of instruction materials?

c) Aim of the Study

The study aims at bringing out salient trends and prospects in the running of DE at UNZA. It also aims at how to turn challenges into opportunities so that UNZA can have quality massive enrollment levels as expected in ODL.

d) Research Questions of the Study

This study addresses the following questions:

- How does UNZA run distance education?
- How does UNZA develop instructional materials?
- How does UNZA deliver instructional materials to its distance students?
- What successes has UNZA scored in distance education mode of study?
- Why is distance education at UNZA not expanding as expected?
- How best could UNZA deliver its learner support services to its distance students?

II. Literature Review

There has not been a universally accepted definition of distance education, but a number of authorities have endeavoured to define the concept in various ways. Homberg (1995: 2) defines DE as being 'characterised by non – contiguous communication between the supporting organisation and its students'. Homberg further highlights that there are two modes of communication namely: one – way traffic and two - way traffic. In one - way traffic, which is also referred to as stimulated communication, pre – produced course materials are sent from the supporting organisation and involves students in interaction with texts, recordings and data bases. In two - way traffic, which is also called real communication, this is done between students and their supporting organisation, in writing, on the telephone, and by fax or mail. Keegan (1990:44) defines DE as 'the use of technical media – print, audio, video or computer to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course'. Keegan (ibid) further defines distance education as 'the quasi – permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process (this distinguishes it from conventional face to face education). 'By implication, DE has to do with offering education to qualified human beings, regardless of who they are, where they are, what they do, but are willing to learn, upgrade and still continue with their other responsibilities with minimum resistance and disturbance'.

DL world-wide offers promises, problems and possibilities. Horgan (1998:1) observes that "many Universities are feeling the pressure to control their costs, improve quality of instruction, focus on customer needs, and respond to the competitive pressures". DL technologies have the potential to assist in solving these problems. Basom and Sherritt (1994:4) surveyed higher education administrators and state politicians to find out what they thought would be the major problems facing American higher education in the next millennium. The answers they most often received were: "meeting increased demands at a time of decreased resources, increasing or maintaining access, using technology more efficiently, and sharing resources across state lines so that colleges won't have to be all things to all people". From their conclusion, DL seems to address all of these issues. Dibiase (2000) subscribes to Basom and Sherritt (1996) that Administrators hope that distance learning methods will help make higher education more cost-effective. Valentine (2008) outlines quality of instruction, cost effectiveness, misuse of technology, the role of the technicians, problems with equipment, attitudes towards DL as problems of DL. He further highlights promises of DL which include (i) class size increases while the overhead remains the same, (ii) through the use e-learning techniques, ability to reach those that would by any other means be unreachable. Countries like China use a radio and television delivery system to serve 1.5 million students, two thirds of which are in a degree program.

As regards the instructional design process in DL, there is no teacher because he/she is replaced by a combination of learning materials and expensive tutors. Due to the fact that tutors meet their students for a short period of time, learning materials themselves would among many other important aspects define what is to be learnt, provide information and give examples, equivalent to what a conventional teacher does in class (COL, 2005).

From the African education perspective, the long term aims of the Ministry of African Education have been to increase the number of Africans qualified to play a full part in administrative and social services, in industry and commerce and in public life generally (Kelly, 1999). The factors that led to the development of DE at the time of Zambia's independence included response to the country's need for human resource development at the time of political independence and the demand for this level of education from people who had got into employment without university education. DE was, therefore, identified as a means of expanding enrolment for university education (Siaciwena, 1988).

According to the University of Zambia's Strategic Plan (2001: 24), the distance education program was the means of

> Providing wider access to arrange of entrants through diversified
>
> and flexible formats of study, to cater for those unable to participate

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in regular schemes of study, and through the effective utilization

of the existing ICT infrastructure especially its use in DE

Being flexible and open to all (UNESCO.-org/edu/en; Commonwealth of Learning and Asian Development Bank, 1999), Zambia increased the number of its citizens who entered school at that time.

III. Research Methodology

The researchers employed the descriptive survey design. In educational research it is argued that descriptive survey is a method of research that describes what is seen over and beyond (Babbie, 1997). This method allowed researchers to get the rightful information according to what they have seen happening at UNZA as regards distance education operations since its inception. Descriptive studies result into fact finding, formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. Additionally, they involve measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data (Kombo and Tromp (2006). The study was largely qualitative and document analysis review was employed, using secondary data. It is believed that qualitative methods can be used to bring out what may be 'hidden' and what is little known (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The researchers reviewed various literature on the subject at hand. Data were collected from literature on UNZA activities as regards distance education operations. As for data analysis researchers used graphs as well as themes to interpret the information.

IV. Research Findings

The study brings out various results which comprise challenges and successes UNZA has experienced since its inception. Firstly, though UNZA started offering distance programmes some 48 years ago, on comparison basis, with newly established institutions running distance programmes in Zambia and within the region, the institution has been facing serious challenges as regards learner support systems largely in the development and delivery of the instructional materials.

a) *UNZA challenges in running Distance Education Mode*

According to Siaciwena (2000b), UNZA for some time has not been able to reach out to as many people as it would have potentially done due to, firstly, the capacity to handle an increasing numbers of students which exerts lots of pressure on material development and the need to provide an effective learner support service; secondly, the inadequate means of communication with students which has been largely on mobile phones to those who are accessible because some students are in rural Zambia where accessibility is difficult. Other forms of communication are through letters which are posted through Zambia Postal Services, which at times are slow and letters or study materials take long to reach and at times get lost along the way.

Secondly, being a dual mode institution, UNZA - IDE Unit does not have its own lecturers. The University of Zambia uses what Peters (2002) calls the mixed – mode of distance education. In this approach, courses are developed on the same principles as those for conventional face - to - face students so that distance students follow the same curriculum and are subjected to the same performance requirements as the conventional students. The Institute depends on the same lecturers from various teaching schools of the University, who are already overwhelmed with teaching loads from Regular, Parallel and Fast Track students. These are the same lecturers who develop instructional materials; provide guidance, conduct face-to-face contact sessions during residential schools; prepare assessment and examinations and mark them. This arrangement where same staff teaches both conventional and distance students could be strenuous on the part of the staff and it is likely that the staff may not devote equal time to distance teaching (Siaciwena, 2000b). At UNZA, as a matter of procedure, a program will not be offered under the distance learning mode, until it has been offered to conventional students for at least one year (Siaciwena, 1988; Chifwepa, 2006).

Thirdly, there is also a degree of resistance from mainstream faculty members. Some of them treat distance students as inferior and secondary to conventional students. This creates some 'stigma' to the prospective distance students who feel their degree qualification would be inferior to the ones obtained by their face – to – face counterparts.

Another finding is that UNZA - IDE over-relies on print - media at the expense of e - media. This perhaps is far less technological in comparison to what countries like China have ventured into, such as using a radio and television delivery system to serve 1.5 million students, two thirds of which are in a degree program (Valentine, 2008). Over relying on print – media has its own disadvantages in that, at times, students in rural Zambia do not receive their study materials in good time, mostly due to poor postal services challenges, thus compromising on the quality of learner support services on them. One major challenge facing UNZA is lack of an ODL policy for all these years, making it difficult to execute certain operations effectively.

The other problem has to do with inadequate academic and administrative staffing levels. As far back as the year 2000, UNZA has been having a skeleton staffing to administer distance education mode of study (Siaciwena, 2000b). Currently, the IDE has Thirty – Eight (38) permanent members, *five* (5) academic members of

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staff and *thirty - three* (33) support staff members against Eight (8000) registered students. This disparity causes much pressure on these few members in all spheres.

One more challenge has to do with management of student records. Largely, records and materials for distance students at UNZA have been maintained manually in the IDE (Siaciwena, 2000b, Chifwepa, 2006). The picture as observed by Siaciwena and Chifwepa some fifteen and nine years ago respectively, has not changed much for UNZA – IDE. Though there is a slight improvement through CICT, the general student record system of the University is inadequate in providing the type of the information that the IDE needs for the management of the distance education programmes.

Last but not the least, UNZA – IDE depends on one industrial machine to mass produce not less than seventy thousand (70 000) study materials for students, besides other productions made for the Unit. This one machine is ever overwhelmed and breaks down form time to time. This creates a shortage of study materials which are supposed to be issued out to students during their registration at the beginning of the academic year. Compounded by this, study materials are centrally distributed. As observed by Siaciwena some fifteen years ago (Siaciwena, 2000b), UNZA – IDE, still distributes its study materials to its students from the Great East Road Campus, Lusaka. With this 'gloomy' picture, there is need for UNZA to procure some more industrial machines to meet the increasing demands of enrollment levels.

b) *UNZA Successes in Running Distance Education Mode*

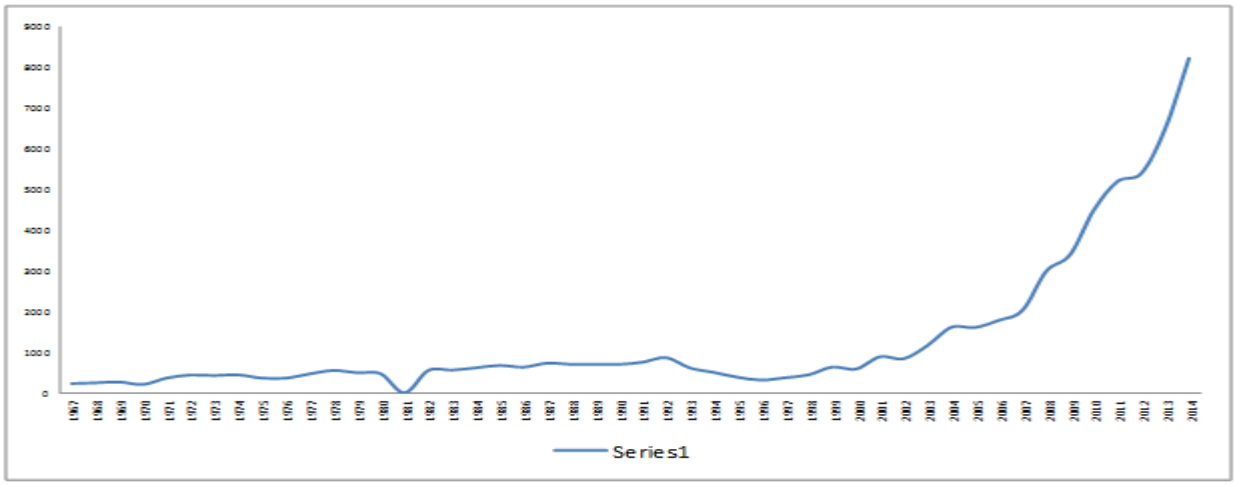
Despite the aforementioned challenges, UNZA has made greater strides in maintaining its leadership in DE. For instance, UNZA has for the past two years students who complete their education through distance learning mode which was not the case previously, as they had to transfer to full-time for their last two years of study.

Secondly, UNZA is also the leading institution in providing training, consultancy and advisory services in education to various institutions of learning in Zambia as regards ODL (including the use of ICT in ODL). This far, UNZA – IDE has facilitated in capacity building a total number of *twenty - four (24) institutions* across Zambia as well as in the management of ODL. The other area has been in equipping those who have been capacitated in Instructional Material Designing, Development and Production. This is besides an in – house training of UNZA lecturers in instructional designing and development, whose number currently reaches over *five hundred (500) lecturers*.

Thirdly, the University, though on a slow pace, is using e - learning platforms and its distance students access various information through this platform. To support e – learning, UNZA has ICT infrastructures which are being supported by Zambia Research and Education Network (ZAMREN) as well as Centre for Information and Communications Technology (CICT), whose offices are housed at UNZA.

The other finding is that in addition to Art-based programmes, UNZA is running science-based programmes by the Schools of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. Additionally, in 2014, UNZA, in collaboration with Zimbabwe Open University (ZoU), introduced Post graduate programmes (that is, Masters and doctoral programmes) in various fields of study.

The other development is, UNZA has increased in enrolment levels (Chifwepa, 2006). Fig 1. Shows how UNZA – IDE has grown in terms of numbers since its inception, 1967.



(IDE Statistics, 2015)

Figure 1 : Distance Education student enrolment trend analysis, UNZA

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V. Conclusion

The study on the *'Trends and Prospects of Instructional Material Development and Delivery at the University of Zambia'* concluded that UNZA has not grown as expected in enrollment levels, programmes and courses, development and delivery of instructional materials to distance students despite being in existence for the past 48 years. There are factors to that effect which border on: negative attitude by some academic members of staff from teaching schools which service IDE; over reliance on print materials by IDE and minimal use of ICT platforms by DE students, very low staffing levels in IDE Unit; banking on one industrial machine to produce over 70 000 study materials as well as having no ODL Policy as some of the major challenges impeding the expected expansion. The study also concludes that there are however, greater opportunities for UNZA to grow in terms of numbers and programmes as well as in providing quality distance education services to its distance students. Such opportunities include, ICT infrastructure such as ZAMREN and CICT housed within UNZA; increased number of courses taken by distance students from 4 to 8 courses; the completion period of 4 years, equivalent to their counter parts in the conventional face – to – face mode of study among others. The other opportunity is UNZA still commands its leadership in service and excellence in the provision of ODL programmes in the entire country. Last but not the least, the University Management supports the IDE expansion programmes. This fact is embedded in the UNZA Strategic Plan (2013 – 2017:37) which states that 'UNZA will provide Open Distance Learning as an Option for Mass Teaching, Learning and Research'. Currently, IDE was granted the status of being an admitting school, just like any other School in the University. What is required is for UNZA to work on its DE challenges, which authors believe the institution can do with minimal impediments. UNZA still commands excellence and service in the country and can soar above its challenges and maintains its leadership in distance education provision. There should be a deliberate move and policy by UNZA to expand its numbers all round, through distance learning mode. The University can not afford to lag behind in DE being the 'mother' of all Universities in the Country, facing various competitors in DE mode as well as being the first one to commence distance education programmes.

VI. Recommendations

In order for UNZA to provide the much needed learner support services to its distance students, and increase in terms of the needed human capacity through distance learning mode as expected, we recommend the following:

- UNZA should have an ODL Policy which will guide operations of DE,
- IDE should become more autonomous and employ lecturers solely to run DE and not depending on institution's teaching schools lecturers who are already overwhelmed with conventional loads.
- UNZA should decentralise its distance education operations so that registration processes, distribution of study materials as well as residential sessions could be done in provincial centers,
- UNZA should strengthen Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure to allow the provision of modern methods of delivery to its distance students, and
- UNZA should have a separate DE academic calendar from the regular students' academic calendar.

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