

Assessment in ODL: Practices, Opportunities and Challenges

By

¹Ngara, R., ²Ngwarai R. and ³Mhute, I.

¹Lecturer & Programme Coordinator, Department of Education, Zou Masvingo Region
rosemaryngara@gmail.com

²Lecturer & Programme Coordinator, Department of Disability Studies & Special Needs Education
Zou Masvingo Region richardngwarai@gmail.com

³Zimbabwe Open University, Box 1210, Masvingo, Zimbabwe, imhute@classicmail.co.za

Abstract

Zimbabwe Open University's vision is to become a world class open and distance learning university. In trying to dedicate itself to the highest level of excellence, creating an innovative culture and adhering to highest ethical standards, due to the openness nature of Open and Distance Learning,(ODL) Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) faces a myriad of challenges in trying to ensure quality products through the assessment of learners work. The paper examines ZOU-linked practices in the light of opportunities provided as well as the challenges to quality assurance associated with the assessment methods such as assignments, examinations, practicum / portfolios and research projects. The originality of students' work such as assignments and projects is at stake whilst their practical work is hardly monitored in the current setup. Students can have their assignments and projects done by relatives and slip away with it in the current setup resulting in a ZOU graduate who is like a half baked cake. There is no way of combating this possibility. The objective of this study was to analyze the assessment processes in place at ZOU and identify opportunities or things that are in place that could enhance the quality of assessment procedures at ZOU and also identify challenges that are being faced in assessing students' work. A case study of Zimbabwe Open University was conducted involving lecturers and students. Data was obtained through analysis of documents, observations focus group discussion of assessment practices at ZOU by the lecturers who undertook this study and a questionnaire administered to twenty students. The study established that there were problems associated with practicum and portfolios and projects or researches and these were related to financial issues and some lack of cooperation presented at some institutions where students were supposed to be attached. By and large the study was able to determine that participants were satisfied by the way examinations were run and used as a tool of assessment. Among other things, the study recommended supervision of practicum and portfolios while students are still in the field.

Keywords: Open and distance learning, Assessment