

Assessment in ODL: Practices, Opportunities and Challenges

By

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

1. Introduction

Open and Distance Education is a fast growing industry in the education sector and is a field of interest to many in society. In offering distance education and the community, assessment is an indispensable tool as it is instrumental in contributing to the overall quality of teaching and learning in ODL. Assessment can be done using traditional methods and e-assessment. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of assessment issues in ODL and share our experience on assessment-related practices operative at Zimbabwe Open University(ZOU) as perceived by students and the contributors in their work at ZOU Masvingo Regional Campus.

Background to the study

Open and distance learning has existed for about one hundred years in more developed regions and for one to two generations in developing years (Slater 2007 www.flaguide.org). For instance according to Moore et al (2002),in Zimbabwe ,the centre for Distance Education was established by the University of Zimbabwe in 1993 and in 1996 became the University College of Distance Education .The college received its university charter and transformed into a fully-fledged university known as Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU).Among other things, the university's mission is to adopt, develop and implement new

courses and programmes to meet the needs of a changing knowledge base, employment sector and socio-economic, political and international environment,(Moore et al 2002).

ODL has two aspects namely, distance and open learning. According to Zmeyov et al (1998:92, distance learning refers to the 'notion of providing instruction to students physically remote from the teacher and educational institution...' In addition, Zmeyov et al (1998),quoting Keegan (1986),say ,open learning refers to the system of admitting students and in other cases to the fact that instruction is widely disseminated over a large geographical area. According to www.tonybates.ca,the essential characteristic of open learning is the removal of barriers and the term 'openness ' has technology implications that all technologies that are available need to be used. This is a challenge most ODL institutions are facing in developing areas. ODL reflects both the fact that all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in time and space from the learner and that the mission aims to include greater dimensions of openness and flexibility whether in terms of access, curriculum or other elements of the structure(Slater 2007 and [www. saide.org.za](http://www.saide.org.za)).Basing on these general principles of ODL, Moses and Tladi (2006), in a paper presented at Nadeosa,10th Anniversary conference ,defined distance education as a method of teaching in which the students are not required to be physically present at a specific location or time during the term or semester. Instead, teachers and students communicate by exchanging printed or electronic media through technology that allows them to communicate in real time. ODL is about increasing access and educational choices,(Moore et al 2002) and Slater (2007).It is a force of contributing to development as it contributes directly to the realization of the fundamental right of all people to learning .For employers ,ODL offers high quality and usually cost effective professional development in the work place, while for the governments it means promotion of innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning(Commonwealth of Learning 2006).

In a bid to ensure quality, assessment is a critical tool in Open and Distance learning. Practitioners in the education community have different assessment strategies. Assessment strategies to be employed are determined by the delivery media, resources and the time available (Bailey 1998). Assessment at ZOU involves assignments, examinations, practicum and portfolios and research projects. Most ZOU programmes require students to write two assignments per course which are considered as coursework. Coursework marks account for 20% of the final examinations for undergraduate and 30% for Master's programmes. The course work is comprised of assignments in the form of essays and in-class tests. Some coursework (assignments) involving mathematics and statistics are really a challenge for a number of students. A good number of students do not have mathematics at ordinary level. As the assignment is done at a distance, such assignments can be done by relatives or hired people. This thus undermines the quality of the graduate produced by ZOU. In addition, students write examinations at the end of each semester. Courses such as practicum, teaching practice and research are forms of fieldwork done by students over a period of two semesters or more. Students produce portfolios while doing their practicum and dissertations for examining at the end of two semesters but in trying to do so some challenges are faced. For instance at times, ZOU fails to effectively and timeously supervise students doing practicum and research supervision by some tutors is not effective. It was against this background that the study was carried out.

Statement of the Problem

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 ODL, Zimbabwe Open University seems to face challenges in trying to ensure quality products through the assessment of learners' work. Zimbabwe Open University assesses students through coursework and examinations. Assessments through coursework present a challenge as there is a possibility of cheating by students. It is possible for students to have their assignments done by someone else. The study sought to examine assessment processes and identify opportunities and challenges faced at ZOU Masvingo Regional campus in assessing students work.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- ❖ What are strengths are associated with assessment processes or procedures at Zimbabwe Open University?
- ❖ What challenges are faced by tutors and students in the assessment of students?
- ❖ What improvements are needed in trying to make assessment beneficial and effective at Zimbabwe Open University?

Significance of the study

It was hoped that lecturers could use the study as a platform to reflect on assessment-related practices and that assessment-linked challenges could be addressed through efforts in the relevant departments and ZOU as an institution of Open and Distance Learning. It was also hoped that insights gained through the study might stimulate further study.

2. Research Methodology

Design

The qualitative design was employed to conduct the study. The study sought to establish student and lecturer conceptions on assessment processes in place at the Zimbabwe Open University. The research design was a descriptive survey. The survey design was preferred because it is the most appropriate design where perceptions of participants are sought (Neumann 2000 and Babbie 1997).

Sample

All students in their last or second last semester of their programme made up the population of the study as the researchers felt that these students had adequate experience to make some meaningful responses to the questionnaires seeking student views on assessment procedures at ZOU. Only twenty students were sampled through convenience sampling. The students were given questionnaires to complete as they came to the University to register. Only three lecturers were involved in the study.

Instruments

The researchers used questionnaires which were self administered. The questionnaire had closed and open ended questions which students were supposed to answer. The lecturers took part in the study by holding focus group discussions based on questions linked to the objectives of the study and this was done once in the second semester of 2010 and once again once in the first semester of 2011 . Exchange of opinions was based on lecturer observations of assessment practices at ZOU and analysis of documents such as research reports. The use of the questionnaire and focus group discussions enhanced methodology triangulation and some of the demerits of the questionnaire, such as being not able to probe responses, were minimized through the use of focus group discussions.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

Data were presented qualitatively using thick descriptions. Some tables and figures were used to aid researchers to present data. Data were organised according to research questions in the mind of the researchers.

Limitations

Since the study was just a case study of ZOU Masvingo regional campus findings cannot be generalised to other Universities although the picture maybe a replica of what obtains in the minds of students and lecturers elsewhere.

4. Conceptual Framework

The essence of the concept assessment in ODL

The word assessment is derived from the Latin word 'asseior' which means "to set" or "to settle". It involves collection, measuring and interpreting information and relating it to students' responses or performances to the process of instruction, (Curzon 1990). One can say that assessment is a process of gathering data about students in relation to the learning outcomes of the programme or course.

5. Types of assessment

Formative Assessment

This is some form of on going type of assessments which is designed to provide feedback to the student and tutor during the learning process, for instance, during the unfolding period of a semester. It is concerned with identifying learner and programme weaknesses during the process of learning. In ODL, formative assessment is a tool by which institutions monitor the learners' progress and the unfolding of curriculum and provides the basis for making appropriate changes to educational plans to attain the desired proficiency level. It is an on going activity to give and gain feedback on learners' ability and performance (Okonkwo). Formative assessment is a tool that influences teaching and learning.

Summative Assessment

Unlike formative assessment, summative assessment is terminal as it comes at the end of a learning experience, or the educational train. It usually comes at the end of a semester as is the case in ODL universities. Its results inform the learner, tutor, and ODL institution of learner and programme achievement at the end of a prescribed period of instruction (Souza :1996) Thus in ODL, summative assessment can be a tool for grading and making judgment about learners' and programmes achievement.

Traditional assessment

Traditional assessment refers to the known long-established or conventional forms of assessments such as written exams, assignments which do not use modern online technology such as the internet and computer in their design.

E-assessment

This is the modern way of assessment which has come on the scene as a result of the evolution of networks and computers. Although most of the principles that guide assessment procedures in traditional assessment still apply in e-assessment, e-assessment is largely characterized by on-line conference discussions which largely depend on technologies that assess communicative ability, demonstration of knowledge and understanding of a topic as well as the demonstration of aesthetic on-the-spot problem solving skills, (Osuji and Okonkwo).

Why do we assess?

Knowledge of types of assessments gives answers to this question. We assess to measure attainment, that is to determine if learning and programmes goals were achieved. We also assess to decipher root of students' problems in a course and to obtain some basis for the evaluation and improvement of teaching, learning and programme effectiveness.

Some assessment Tools in ODL

These fall into some two broad categories namely: traditional assessment tools and alternative assessment tools in Open and Distance learning.

Traditional Assessment Tools

These are the customary tools used for assessment in ODL. These may be written tests on examinations which may be objective and essay-based tests/examinations. True/False Items, multiple choice

completion and short answer items all are examples of objective items used in assessment in ODL. Objective items eliminate marker bias, are easy to mark and offer a wide coverage of topics and can be used to provide quick feedback on learner performance (Steyn et al 1983) but they are susceptible to guessing and suppress learner creativity and the principle of individualization is lost. Essay tests or exams, however minimize guesswork and can effectively measure higher cognitive skills and they promote application of the didactic principles of individualization as they give room for originality and creativity.

While it is a known fact that ODL students learn from corrected papers (McClusky 1934 in McKeachie 1999), marking essays is time consuming and feedback to students may not be as quick and timeous as necessary. In addition, essay items are difficult to mark reliability and become subjective with one single marking.

Alternative Assessment tools in ODL

Alternative assessment requires an active generation of a response that is observable either directly or indirectly via a permanent product (Dikli 2003). The nature of the task and context in which the assessment occurs is relevant and represents real world's problems and issues (Elliot 1995 quoted by Dikli 2003). These are product assessments which are direct, practical and learner centered. Oral presentations are examples of alternative assessment tools and these may be term papers which are presented orally by students after some in-depth study on a given topic of choice related to the leaving programme. They are analyzed by professors and teacher assistants. Alternative assessment tools involve utilization of higher order cognitive and affective and practical skills. These are usually followed by class discussions to further assess the presenter's level of grasp of content. Peer reviews which involve students assessing themselves and each other in some work done on some presentation and juried presentations like those used in art, music, architecture (McKeachie 1999) are other examples of alternative assessment tools. Portfolios also fall into the category of alternative assessment tools. A portfolio is a collection of evidence to demonstrate mastery of a given concept. Basically, portfolios include the students' presentation of work that has been accomplished over a period of time (McKeachie 1999). It is a purposeful collection of students' work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas. For instance, when teachers produce portfolios which include student participation in selecting contents, criteria for judging merit and evidence of student self-reflection (Dikli 2003) quoting Bailey 1998. Thus, portfolios require lots of student responsibility and input. Portfolios may be traditional or electronic (e-portfolios). The e-portfolio functions in the same way as the traditional one but is technologically based. It takes up far little space when compared with the traditional portfolio as information can be stored on DVD or discs, flash. Projects or researches also fall in this category of alternative assessment tools. These may be research reports produced after some field study.

Merits of performance assessments

Performance assessments replicate real world skills (Souza 1990), and they are "excellent for measuring higher order skills as of application and synthesis," and they promote demonstration of affective and psychomotor skills.

Demerits of performance assessments

Most performance tests do not allow for observation so it is difficult to authenticate products. They are vulnerable to plagiarism (Souza 1996) and they are time consuming.

Principles of Effective assessment in ODL

In order to increase effectiveness of performance assessment it is imperative to be guided by some principles. Selecting assessment tasks that are aligned clearly to what has been taught or to objectives/goals of a course (Souza 1996) is one of the key principles. Assessment should be reliable and valid. A valid tool of assessment measures what it is supposed to measure. It should do the job for which it is used. An assessment tool is reliable. Reliability deals with the dependability of assessment, that is, its

accuracy and the consistency with which it measures when used more than once (Duminy et al 1986). Sharing the scoring criteria for the assessment task is critical also. Students value unambiguous expectation. Assessments should be fair and use of marking guides is necessary and cross marking should be put in place. Effective assessment should provide effective, constructive and timeous feedback, (Thungu et al 2010) and it should develop skills like peer reflection. The other principle is that assessment should be real, practical and should present challenges to be taken seriously.

Some challenges in assessment in ODL

Some challenges present themselves in the process of assessing students. Failure to address learner diversity in assessment is one of challenges of assessing students. Most distance education programmes address highly diverse groups of learners in terms of age, race, and socio-economic status. Special needs students often fail to receive special needs provisions in their assessments including examinations (Thungu 2010 et al) The other problem is failure to provide timeous and effective assessment. Plagiarism is an issues in assessment in ODL. Most assessment tools require students to be away from the presence of tutor so there is no way to say with a degree of certainty that student work is actually original even in e-assessment, (Okonkwo).

6. Presentation of findings

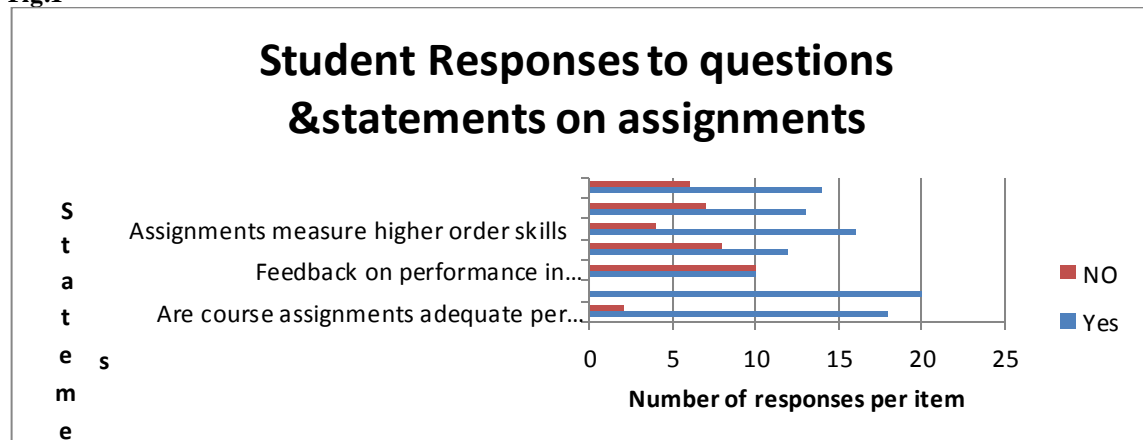
Questionnaire /Student data

Students were asked to indicate whether they agreed with given statements on the assessment tools and processes in place at ZOU. The responses were given on assignments, attachments, projects and examinations and these are presented in the tables and figures given below.

Table 1: Responses on questions /statements on assignments

Question/Statement	Yes	NO
Are course assignments adequate per semester?	18	2
Are assignment topics relevant to course goals?	20	0
Feedback on performance in assignments is quick	10	10
Marking of assignments is informative	12	8
Assignments measure higher order skills	16	4
Marking of assignments is constructive	12	8
Are you given assignment topics in good time?	14	6

Fig.1



Information in Table 1 and Fig.1 shows that 18 out of twenty students were of the view that coursework assignments were adequate while the other two thought otherwise. All the twenty students viewed assignments as relevant to course goals. Provision of feedback on performance was viewed as quick by

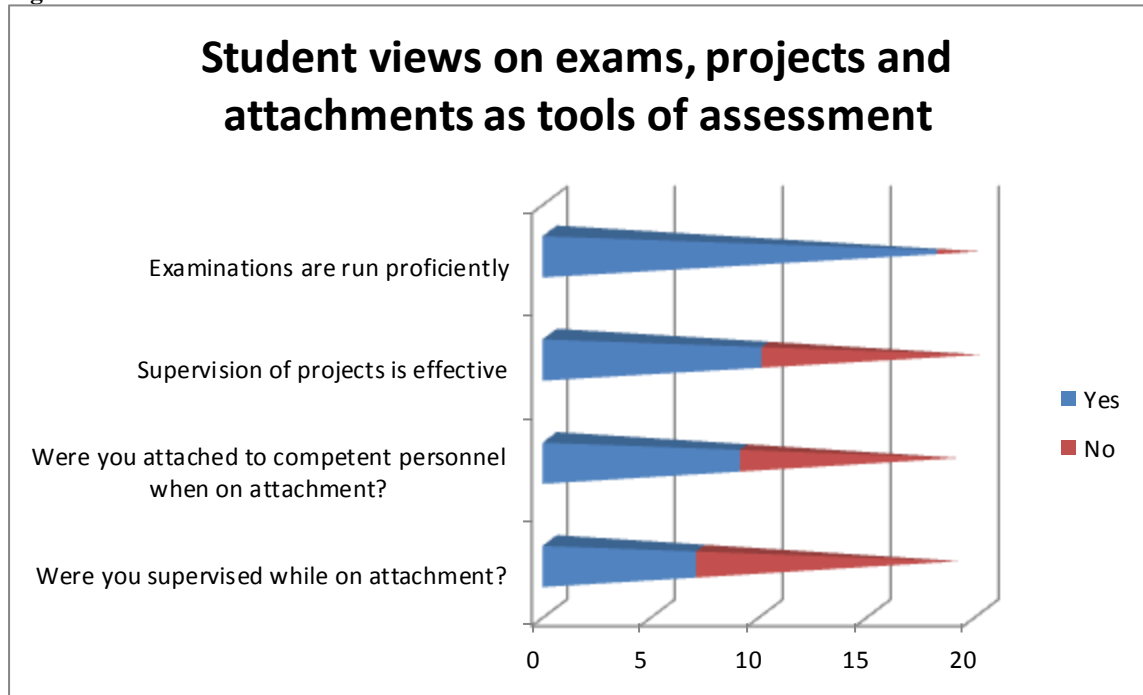
10/20 students. Marking was considered as constructive and informative by 10/20 in each case.16/20 were of the opinion that assignments measured higher order skills and 14/20 felt that assignment topics were given in good time.

When students were asked to state any other challenges faced in the use of assignments as a tool of assessment, only two expressed the opinion that there was the probability of students work not being original. One student expressed the view that s/he was not provided and familiarized with the ZOU criteria of assessment of assignments. Three students recorded none use of cross marking as a quality checking device. Another problem stated by two students was that course assignments did not cater for learner diversity.

Table 2: Responses on questions /statements on attachments/practicum, projects and exams

Opinion/Question	Yes	No
Were you supervised while on attachment?	7	12
Were you attached to competent personnel when on attachment?	9	10
Supervision of projects is effective	10	10
Examinations are run proficiently	18	2

Fig.2



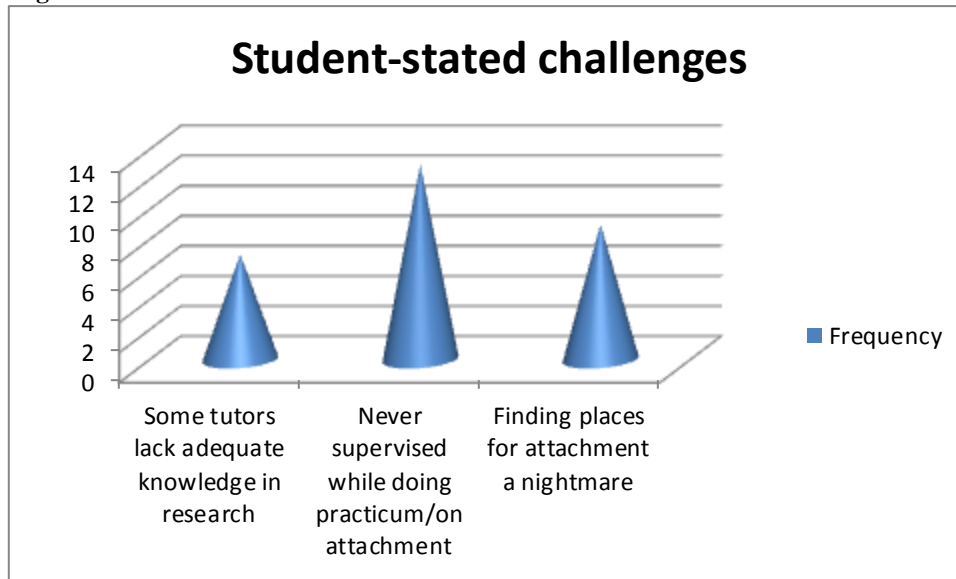
Data in table 2 and figure 2 shows that 18 out of 20 students were of the mind that examinations are run proficiently while the other two students were of a different view point. Only 50% of the students felt that supervision of projects or research was effective. Only 7/20 indicated that they were supervised while they were on attachment or doing their practicum while the other 13 were of a different opinion. Nine out of twenty students were of the mind that they were attached to competent personnel while they were on attachment.

When students were asked to state some problem faced in doing projects, attachment and in the running of exams their ideas were as is depicted in the table below.

Table 3: Stated challenges

Stated Challenge/Problem	Frequency
Some tutors lack adequate knowledge in research	7
Never supervised while doing practicum/on attachment	13
Finding places for attachment a nightmare	9

Fig.3



Lecturer data

Examination Process

In the focus group discussion held by lecturers, the general view was that Zimbabwe Open University’s examination process is of high quality by international standards and this view was also expressed by 18/20 (90%) of the students. ZOU examinations are mainly comprised of traditional assessment tools. The most widely used traditional assessment tools are multiple-choice tests, and essays. The lecturer observations and experience was that ZOU examinations are summative as they are written at the end of the semester. The examination accounts for 80% or 70% for undergraduate and post graduate degrees respectively. Candidates for the examinations are required to be physically present at the examination venue. Each candidate produces an identity card to ensure that registered students write and no one will be writing for someone else. Invigilators ensure that no cheating goes on in the examination. That is in line with ZOU’s vision of becoming world Class University. Nonetheless in their discussions, the lecturers in the department of Special needs education and in the Faculty of Arts and Education expressed the view that in their departments nothing in practice was done to address the needs of students with special needs.No special facilities were provided and the physically challenged wrote exams of the same duration with those without any physical challenges.This challenge was also pointed out by some two students.

Practicum/ Portfolios

ZOU students meet the following challenges when it comes to practicum/portfolios construction. Lecturers in the Special Needs Department reported that some of their students find it difficult to obtain suitable places for placement or attachment as some institutions refuse to offer students the opportunity

to practise at their places. The other observation by lecturers from the same department was that ZOU does not have contractual agreements with possible places for attachment to ease the process of attaching students to appropriate institutions. It was also reported that some of the institutions the students go to have under qualified or inexperienced people and so concept of mentoring students may be at stake. Some students find it hard to get vacation (study) leave to do their practicum away from their work places, so students end up doing practicum at their work places. In the discussions some lecturers especially those in the Special Needs department expressed the opinion that in the department there were no plans to carry out field supervision of students doing practicum. Nonetheless there was a clearly laid down policy that all students pursuing studies in the Teacher development department are to be supervised while on Teaching Practice although at times supervisions were delayed due to resource-related problems.

Projects/Dissertations

Most of ZOU students' projects are supervised by part time tutors. The lecturers reported the observation that some of the part-time tutors do not do a fair job for the institution. They do not supervise the students effectively as seen in the quality of some of the projects produced. Observations were that some projects had poorly worded topics, statements of the problem, among other weaknesses. These observations were based on some cross marking done by full time lecturers. It was also observed some students' project did not depict the general ability of some students as they were regarded too good to be their original work. The problem with ZOU part-time tutors is that most, if not all of them are full-time workers in colleges or universities with little time to spare. Random checks by full-time lecturers showed that some of the students supervised by part-time tutors experienced problems in having their projects completed. However a different picture was given by lecturers in the department of education as projects were said to be effectively supervised. May be this effectiveness of project supervision could be attributed to the experience the part-time tutors in this department have in research supervision, an activity which is also central at their full time places of work like teacher training colleges.

Coursework

Students write two assignments in each course per semester. In some faculties one in-class test and one assignment done away from the institution make up the coursework but in other faculties both assignments are done when the student is away from the station. All lecturers felt the coursework was adequate. However students hardly receive timeous feedback and at times they went on to write second assignments before getting feedback on their performance in the first assignment. The lecturers also made the observation that they could not rule out the possibility some assignments were not students' original work. This view was also expressed by 50% of the students. Some marking by some part-time tutors was said to be uncommunicative. In the focus group discussions, this problem was attributed to tutors who do not have a teacher training background. Lecturers highlighted some opportunities at ZOU that could make student assessment more effective. Four of the five lecturers pointed out all full time lecturers had the expertise necessary in the courses they were coordinating. Seven out of the ten of these full time lecturers had a sound teacher training qualification and that ZOU had some clearly laid down policies linked to assessment procedures. The lecturers pointed out that the Zimbabwe Open University had quality checking mechanisms in place such as cross marking or moderation.

7. Discussion

This study was guided by three questions and the discussion will be based on the first two questions while recommendations are based on the third research question.

Question: What are strengths associated with assessment processes or procedures at Zimbabwe Open University?

All lecturers and 18/20 (90%), expressed the mind that Zimbabwe Open University's examination process is of high quality by international standards. ZOU examinations are mainly comprised of

traditional assessment tools namely essays and multiple choice items. In some faculties students also write in class tests. The most widely used traditional assessment tools are multiple-choice items and essays and this is in line with (Dikli 2003) whose opinion is that these tools assessment are handy. The opinion held about the effectiveness of exam procedures in operation at ZOU could be attributed to effective mechanisms that are in place such as: candidates for the examinations being required to be physically present at the examination venue and each candidate being asked by exam regulation to produce an identity card to ensure that registered students write and no one will be writing for someone else. Invigilators ensure that no cheating goes on in the examination. Furthermore, participants expressed the opinion that assessment tools were related to broad course goals. All this is in line with ZOU's vision of becoming world Class University.

Although opinions were divided, some 9/20 students were of the view that while they were doing their practicum, they were attached to competent personnel. May be this depended on the department to which the student belonged. Supervision of projects was viewed as effective by 50% of the students. This opinion was also held by lecturers in the department of Education.

The adequacy of course work was conceived by all lecturers and by 90% of the students as adequate and clear relationship between coursework and coursework was acknowledge by most participants. Furthermore, 16/20 (80%) expressed the mind that assignments ere of were a higher order. These strengths could be attributed to clarity to coursework designers on the need apply principles of item construction one of which is the need to base items on course objectives. Souza (1996) assessment items should be valid. Some positive views were expressed on marking of coursework and supervision of projects as some marking was viewed as communicative and providing quick feedback by some students and some lecturers. These positive observations are in line with Thungu et al (2010) who are of the mind that effective assessment should provide effective, constructive and timeous feedback, However, once again opinions were divided and differences in opinion could be attributed to different variables operating in a given situation.

Question: What challenges are faced by tutors and students in the assessment of students?

Some challenges were stated by participants. ZOU students meet challenges when it comes to practicum/portfolios construction. According to 45% of the students, it was also opinioned that it was difficult to obtain suitable places for placement or attachment as some institutions refused to offer students opportunity to practise at their places, ZOU did not have contractual agreements with possible places for attachment. At some of the institutions students were attached to under qualified or inexperienced people. In their focus group discussions lecturers were of the thinking that students found it hard to get vacation (study) leave to do their practicum away from their work places and so students end up doing practicum at their work places. According to some lecturers, in their faculties there were no plans to carry out field supervision. Such challenges seemed to be associated with some faculties and not with others.

Some lecturers and students were of the mind that projects were not supervised effectively. Seven students expressed the opinion that some part-tutors lacked knowledge in research. Such challenges could be attributed to tutor experience and tutors' level of commitment. Some lecturers also expressed the concern that some projects were not students' 'original work. This opinion is in line with Okokwo in www.nou.ed.ng who says most assessment tools require students to be away from the presence of tutor so there is no way to say with a degree of certainty that student work is actually original even in e-assessment.

Students write two assignments in each course per semester. However students hardly receive timeous feedback and chances of plagiarism are high as students write their assignments away from the institution. That marking may not be quick enough is supported by McClusky 1934 in McKeachie (1999), who says while it is a known fact that ODL students learn from corrected papers marking essays is time

consuming and feedback to students may not be as quick and timeous as necessary . Some marking by some part-time tutors is not communicative. This problem seems to emanate more from tutors who do not have a teacher training background.

One student expressed the view that s/he was not provided and familiarized with the ZOU criteria of assessment of assignments. Three students recorded none use of cross marking as a quality checking device. There seems some contradiction between this view by students and the mind given by lecturers who stated that cross marking is in place at ZOU. Probably this difference in opinion could be attributed to the fact that practically it is not possible to cross mark all work only some sample of some work is possible. So maybe these students might not have any of their work being moderated. Another problem stated by two students was that course assignments did not cater for learner diversity and this view was also given by some lecturers in the focus group discussions in relation to examinations. Special needs students often fail to receive special needs provisions in their assessments including examinations(Thungu 2010 et al) This is problem experienced in most developing countries partly due to financial challenges.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

ZOU's vision to achieve world class status is a noble goal. Its coursework and examinations meet world class standards as they follow both traditional as well as alternative modes of assessments and doing so ZOU has some quality checking mechanism in place. Like any other ODL university, ZOU however faces some challenges in the area of assignments, practicum/portfolios and projects. In trying to help in its quest to meet the highest level of excellence, the researchers recommend that:

- ❖ Some assignments like those involving Mathematics and Statistics should be given as an in-class test so that students do not involve their relatives in writing for them.
- ❖ Projects should be supervised by full-time lecturers where ever possible to improve on quality.
- ❖ Student should do oral presentations of their projects before handing them in for examining to help check on their originality
- ❖ There is need for ZOU to identify and secure contracts with relevant institutions for students' placement during portfolio construction.
- ❖ Practicum/portfolio should be supervised in the field.
- ❖ Tutor workshops based on perceived weaknesses of tutors should be held as is necessary

References

- Curzon,L.B(1990). Teaching in further Education: An outline of Principles and Practices.London.Cassell Education Ltd.
- Dikli S,(2003). Assessment at a Distance; Traditional vs Alternative assessments. The Turkish Online Journal of Technology_TOJET July 2003 ISSN;1303-6521 Volume 2 Issue 3 Article 2.
- Duminy P.A and Sohng, (1986).W.F Didactics: Theory and Practice. Maskew Miller Longman ,Cape Town
- McKeachie,W.K(1999). McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research and Theory for College and University Teachers. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston.
- Neuman ,W.L(2000) .Social Research Methods .Needman Heights : Allyn and Bacon.
- Okonkwo C.A: Sustainable assessment and Evaluations Strategies for ODL.

Osuji,U.S.A, Okonkwo C.A Processes of examination and Assessment with Challenges and Prospects for Capacity Building accessed 3/2/2011 from www.nou.edu.ng/---/proceses%20of%20examination%and%20assessment%20

Souza J (1996).Learning and Teachers. What is it all about? :Classroom Tips and Suggestions for College Faculty Professional Development Continuing Education. Humber College of Applied Arts and Technology.

Steyn ,P.J.N, Badenhorst, D.C and Yale ,R.M(1983) Teaching Method . McGraw –Hill Book Company .Johannesburg.

Thungu,J,Wandera,K, Gachie,L and Alumande ,G (2010). Mastering PTE Education: Oxford University Press:Nairobi.

Websites

www.tonybates.ca accessed 4/3/2011