

# Leveraging on staff to deliver quality in an ODL university

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**Abstract—** This study examined ways in which ODL universities can leverage on staff to deliver quality in an ODL university. It recognised that quality is one of the main concerns among institutions and stakeholders today. It should also be like that in institutions involved in open and distance learning (ODL). The study was qualitative in nature, informed by a purposive sample of 53 full time and part-time lecturers in the Zimbabwe Open University. It used open-ended questionnaires, interviews and autobiographical accounts to collect the qualitative data. The findings of the study appear to point out that should ODL universities want to benefit from its staff, there is dire need for staff support, staff induction, staff development, caring for workers, lighting fires inside workers and not outside them and employ results based incentives. Staff also cited competencies in, positive attitudes towards and commitment to the philosophical underpinnings of open and distance learning as factors contributing to quality in an ODL university. The study among other things recommended that a quality improvement framework, which is more adaptable to individual contexts, must be developed as institutional policy and strategy for continuous improvement of ODL staff if ODL universities can leveraging on staff to deliver quality in an ODL university. Further research could be done with more institutions and using a different sample in different contexts to those in this study.

**Index Terms—** Open and Distance Learning (ODL), distance education, leveraging on staff, delivering quality, and quality frameworks.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This research sought ways of leveraging on staff to deliver quality in an ODL university on the understanding that distance education has played a significant role in education and continues to do this going into the 21<sup>st</sup> century considering that the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) is

central to the teaching task. It has been like this for over 25 years (Bates1999). In Africa, the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE) has been mandated by the African Union (AU) to ensure the continent is not left behind but also benefit from development in distance education. This is an important policy. What appears missing is the role that has been assigned to staff so that this critical group can be used as a tool to deliver quality education to the door steps to individuals. In Southern Africa, Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) is working tirelessly to ensure distance education is availed to SADC citizens. Despite all these good efforts at both continental and regional levels, research on ways in which ODL universities can leveraging on staff to deliver quality in an ODL context remains thin on the ground and this research is an effort to narrow this seemingly widening gap.

The Zimbabwean higher education landscape is not very far from what is happening in Africa and the Southern African region. Research on ways of leveraging on staff to deliver quality in an ODL context remains thin in spite of the fact that ODL has been transformed since the establishment of the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in 1993 initially as the Centre for Distance Education (CDE) of the University of Zimbabwe. Since its inception in 1993 ZOU has grown to a point where it currently offers many varied academic programmes in six Faculties of Arts and Education, Commerce and Law, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences Agriculture and Information and Communication Technology. One can be led to believe that such developments will persuade authorities in ODL to think seriously on ways of leveraging on the strengths of their staff so that they can deliver quality education in an ODL context. Bates (1999) is of the opinion that the third generation distance education is leading to new types of organisation. Such a new type of organisation is sufficiently well place dot deliver quality education since it has technology at its disposal that will assist to attain this goal. Third generation distance learning to which the Zimbabwe Open University seem to belong is also characterised by quality issues. Tagoe (2008) defines quality in higher education as specifying worthwhile learning goals and

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enabling students to achieve them. It also involves articulating worthwhile learning standards to meet:

- Society's expectations,
- Student's aspirations
- The demands of the government, business and industry; and
- The requirements of professional institutions (Gola 2003: pg 25-31.)

These are critical areas that any university worth its salt must address. Zimbabwe Open University appears to be in the right footing considering that it is the first university in Zimbabwe to establish a quality assurance directorate in a university in 2007. These are valuable pointers that need to be upheld. However, staff should be at the centre of all this good effort in a distance education university. Chakanyuka and Chiome (2008) say that these lecturers need support for them to be able to deliver quality service in an ODL context.

One of the key characteristics of distance education that Keegan (1996) believes is important in the context of ODL is the physical and temporal distance between the learner and tutor. This distance can be a hindrance to quality delivery if important issues are not addressed. This shows the centrality of this research in a context in which staff work where there are no lecture rooms; no classrooms and learners study at their own pace (Holmberg 1995). It is central in that for ODL to take place there is a lecturer who plans the programme, produces learning materials and manages the programme so that students who are operating at a distance, can benefit from these materials and the programmes that are put in place. This argument is ably supported by Willis (1993:2) who is of the opinion that "the success of any distance education efforts rests squarely on the shoulders" of its academic staff. Whatever media is the dominant delivery mode, there is a lecturer/tutor for each course who plans the programme, produces learning materials and manages the programme. For these and other reasons, Ibrahim and Silong (1997) found that the tutor was an indispensable learner support in distance education.

The role of the tutor in an open and distance education context is thus indispensable. This stance has been taken by Berge and Collins (1995) who argue that the roles of the lecturer as comprising pedagogical, social, management and technical aspects of the learner's experience are critical to the success of ODL endeavours. As Mupondi (2005:1) states, the roles can be broken down into "preparing for tutorials, conducting tutorials, setting and marking examinations and returning them to students timorously". Jackson in Moore (1976) explains that there are two phases to teaching in distance education- the pre-active phase

where the distance education lecturer sets objectives and designs the relevant curriculum and instructional; strategies for the learner. Jackson in Moore (1976) further explains that this phase takes place away from the learner. The second phase is the interactive phase where the learner and lecturer meet face-to face in tutorial sessions. In this phase the lecturer provides verbal stimulation, explanations, asks questions and provides guidance for the learner.

There were several studies that have been undertaken in the Zimbabwe Open University that point at the need for efforts to improve quality in the university. Chief among them are Majoni and Chidakwa 2004; Chabaya and Chiome 2008; Nyota 2004 and Pfukwa 2001). These are discussed here. An prominent study conducted in the Zimbabwe Open University was on factors affecting completion of research projects at the Zimbabwe Open University (Majoni and Chidakwa 2004). This study among other things, found out that:

- The students did not have adequate reading materials.
- Students did not consult their supervisors regularly.
- Students had difficulty in selecting the research topic.
- Supervisors did not guide students adequately in research work.

It appears these findings point at the lecturer/supervisor in one way or another. This being the case, it means the need for a quality tutor/supervisor in an ODL context appears prominent from this research. A related study was undertaken by Chabaya and Chiome (2008) in which they found out that there is culture decay in the university that was hampering the research process. This was happening because there were no systematic efforts put in place to inculcate a culture of quality in supervision of research projects. Nyota (2004) also found out that ZOU has mature students who are focused. Their only disadvantage is that they are scattered all over the country making it difficult to reach them and delivery quality service to them. It means the role of the tutor is indispensable in this regard. A study by Pfukwa (2001) on teamwork approach in ODL study material production among other things revealed that when modules are produced using the participatory process, quality and standards are assured. However, the study further revealed that:

- Open and Distance Learning environment is full of exciting challenges and all the key actors must adopt a proactive approach in their activities.
- All key actors in ODL environment must be extremely innovative and flexible.

- Actors must not be afraid to come forward with innovations that initially look frightening but are actually brilliant ideas when implemented.

These studies all appear to point at some of the pitfalls of neglecting the role of the tutor and how ODL institutions can leverage on their staff and work to deliver quality to their students. This prompted this study.

## II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study examined ways in which ODL universities can leverage on staff to deliver quality in an ODL university.

## III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to AAU (2008), some institutions of higher education existed in colonial Africa, with clear objectives to produce graduates that would facilitate colonial administration. This has been changed since African countries gained independence and saw the need to significantly increase the number and quality of personnel required to drive the machinery of the new independent administrations, as well as provide structures for national development. According to AAU (2008), the universities consequently increased, in numbers, and courses offered. Despite this hard work and conscious efforts by universities in Africa, it appears ODL universities still have a long way to go in pursuing excellence (Chakanyuka & Chiome 2008).

## IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

The study then sought to answer the question, what are the perceptions of lecturers on ways in which ODL universities can leverage on staff to deliver quality in an ODL context?

## V. METHOD

### *Research Design*

The researchers used mostly qualitative research strategies (Watt 2007). Qualitative research has the advantage of allowing the researcher to study a phenomenon in-depth from the lived experience of people involved in it (Merriam 1998; Watt 2007). The key aim of this study was to understand the views of lecturers on ways in which ODL universities can leverage on staff to deliver quality in an ODL context. The study was also influenced by a philosophical assumption embracing a post positivist belief (O'Leary 2004 and Denzin 1997) underlining the need to view knowledge and reality as both subjective and objective and thus obtainable through multiple methodological approaches based on the concept of triangulation (Flick 2002).

### *Population*

According to Best and Khan (1993), the term 'population' refers to any group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. Population refers to the whole group from which a sample is chosen. The population for this study consisted of all the 1500 part time and full time lecturers in the Zimbabwe Open University.

### *Sample and Sampling Techniques*

Purposive sampling was used to select 53 fulltime and part time lecturers who participated in this study. The subjects were chosen during the November/December 2013 examination marking session.

### *Instruments*

The population of this study was complex and heterogeneous hence the need for methodological integration. This was achieved through a self administered questionnaire answered voluntarily by 53 lecturers; focused and narrative interviews (Flick 2002) and personal accounts. The interviews were given prominence because they unite a high degree of openness and non-directivity with high level of concreteness and the recoding of detailed information: Hence they appear superior to other interview variants (Hopf 2004). Data was also collected through autobiographical accounts (Thorne 2000). Armstrong (1987) argues that personal accounts are useful instruments for collecting data because they assign significance and value to a person's own story and the interpretations s/he places on his/ her experiences. In addition the personal accounts document the inner, subjective reality as constructed by the individuals. The personal accounts in this study placed value on the lecturers' own perceptions of the factors contributing to quality and how these could be addressed in an open and distance learning context. The researchers decided to adopt the multiple method approach of data collection to triangulate data in line with Rossman and Rallis's (1998) assertion.

### *Design*

A descriptive survey design was used in this study. It was considered the best method for collecting original data for purposes of describing a population too large to observe directly, as was the case in this study (Leedy 1997). This method allowed lecturers to freely express what they felt about staff related factors that contribute to quality. Borg and Gall (1989) view descriptive surveys as excellent vehicles for the measurement of attitudes and orientations prevalent in a large population, as was the case in this study.

### **Data analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis is carried from the beginning of the study to make sense of what the researchers saw, heard and read. In this study the bulk of data analysis was carried out after all data had been collected. Because qualitative data analysis is iterative in nature (Holliday 2007), the researchers separately read through the data from questionnaires first aggregating the data and drawing out common themes. Then the researchers read through the personal accounts and drew out themes from these and then compared them with those from questionnaires and interviews. There was constant review of and reflection on the original data to ensure that all data was used in the final themes common to data from questionnaires, interviews and personal accounts. By using different data collection instruments, the researchers felt that they would establish the ways in which ODL universities can leverage on staff to deliver quality in an ODL context.

## **VI. FINDINGS**

We present below the staff related factors that ZOU lecturers indicated contributed to quality in open and distance learning.

### **Assemble the right team**

An important finding in this study was that an organisation sends a clear message through the recruitment and selection policy. They content that the right team must be selected and assembled in the first place. Some supporting statements were:

*'Loyalty only does not make a candidate the best person for the job.'*

*'Mediocrity breeds mediocrity-setting off an organisational chain reaction of underperformance. This must be guarded against at all costs.'*

*'Avoid the one size fits all approach in recruitment and selection.'*

The findings in this study appear to suggest that the leader's personnel selection policy is the ultimate message for quality. Few managers could single-handedly accomplish the desired tasks without the help of a dedicated, competent, committed and enthusiastic team. Thus, assembling a shared-responsibility team sets the tone for quality in any organisation particularly in open and distance learning.

### **Commitment to the philosophical underpinnings of open and distance learning**

One issue that emerged from this study was that lecturers must be competent in and committed to the philosophy driving distance education. Some excerpts supporting this issue are:

*'There is need to embrace the concept of open and distance learning.'*

*'Staff must share the ZOU vision and mission.'*

*'The right people for quality are those who believe in the ideology deriving distance education.'*

It would appear that ZOU is not doing enough to train lecturers in open and distance teaching rationale, yet recruits are mostly from conventional institutions. Dickinson et al (1992:2) argue that in spite of their crucial roles, new lecturers are often "required to begin teaching distance education learning classes with little preparation". Without adequate induction lecturers fail to appreciate the needs of open and distance learning. Besides, developing personnel in line with the vision, mission and philosophical underpinnings of an institution is important in a university setting.

### **Positive attitudes towards open and distance learning**

A key factor that came out of this study and was also raised by Clark (1983) in a study of American higher education institution is the attitudes of the teaching staff towards quality initiatives and towards the philosophical underpinnings of distance education. Statements below point out this issue:

*'There is need to change preconceptions about distance education.'*

*'There are conservative people amongst us whose attitudes must change otherwise quality will not be attained.'*

*'There is the tendency to employ conventional methods that can undermine quality in a teaching environment.'*

*'Attitude overrides all other competencies.'*

The attitudes of teaching staff were seen as a stumbling block to quality in the Zimbabwe Open University. Hefferlin in Knapper and Cropley (2000) agrees that loyalty to the discipline is generally presented as of more importance than teaching. Lecturer resistance to change often reflects a general conservative stance among the professions. There is a tendency to prefer known methods. Thus lecturer attitudes towards an innovation like a quality initiative can be inhibiting to someone who wishes to experiment with an open and distance approach.

### **Ownership of the vision for quality**

One important finding from this study was the ownership of the vision for quality. The lecturers in this study pointed out that participation and involvement in conceptualising the vision and mission for quality will increase their ownership and acceptance of the vision. The following excerpts bear testimony:

*'Stop top- down policy initiatives.'*  
*'The vision and mission for quality must be ours not imposed on us.'*  
*'Allow us to chart our way forward as a team of professionals.'*

These findings on ownership of the vision for quality appear to support Garlick and Pryor (2004)'s assertion that the top-down imposition of quality initiatives on an institution is likely to lead to staff members responding to the letter rather than to the intent of the process, thus undermining the purpose of the activity.

#### **World-class skills for world class performance**

Chakanyuka and Chiome (2008)'s findings that staff development is critical to departmental excellence in the Zimbabwe Open University were also embraced in this study. Lecturers in this study indicated that there was a need for skills upgrading to keep abreast of world trends in open and distance learning. Supporting statements were:

*'I need world-class skills to produce world-class results.'*  
*'Training and development must be a continuous and never ending process.'*  
*'Further training in higher order research skills is a must'*  
*'Module writing skills must be imparted to all lecturers in open and distance learning.'*  
*'I need to improve programme management skills, communication skills and quantitative techniques.'*  
*'I need to be skilled in accessing Internet information.'*  
*'Workshops on research and other important aspects of teaching/lecturing should be a continuous process'*

From these excerpts, we note that lecturers felt that they needed continuous training in computers and computer related technology, research, module writing and programme management. All these are crucial aspects of open and distance learning. Effective lecturers have to be competent in each area. ZOU may be offering some of these services but there is need for sustained effort to ensure that all lecturers are adequately trained and staff developed to meet the dynamic conditions of open and distance education. Creech in Ncube (2007) sums it up when he says training of people extensively and at every level, plays a vital role in transforming an organisation. Ibrahim and Silong (1997:10) recommend provision of "adequate training and development opportunities for staff that is linked to the achievement of standards". In the ZOU Department of Education lecturers and tutors are pivotal to the achievement of high standards in the university. Clay (1999:1) underscores the need for training of distance education lecturers and tutors when she argues that "a well-planned, proactive distance training and support

program will result in distance instructors" who are "confident and hopeful of the new possibilities for teaching and learning ahead of them". Thus, it can be argued that without adequate training and development facilities, lecturers in open and distance learning cannot effectively accomplish their goals and the goals of the institution.

#### **Caring for the workers and staff retention strategies**

One of the major themes that emerged from this study was the wonders of caring for the workers for them to produce quality results. Here are some supporting excerpts from the accounts and interviews:

*'People work hard if they feel cared for by the organisation.'*  
*'Along with hard work comes loyalty if one is recognised for the efforts.'*  
*'One must feel more fulfilled and be more willing to go the extra mile.'*

It is important to note that the ZOU lecturers in this study at times felt uncared for. The issue of recognition of effort comes up even in other researches undertaken in ZOU, as Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2007) pointed out. The large class sizes and thin academic staff levels place heavy burdens on lecturers which inhibit their effectiveness and ability to fulfil such duties as research and community service. On this note, lecturers may feel neglected and overburdened at the same time. Dillon (1989) also found out that success of distance education was linked to the rewards available to the distance educators and argued that absence of recognition and tenure could negatively affect the effectiveness of distance educators. The lecturers in the study went further to suggest staff retention strategies as shown in the following excerpts:

*'Retain staff to promote continuity.'*  
*'Staff mobility affects quality in many ones.'*  
*'The university must see that strategies are put in place to attract and retain the best brains for distance education.'*

The issue of staff retention appear to be a hot issue in the Zimbabwe Open University. Chabaya and Chiome (2008) found out that one reason for failure to submit research projects on time is the issue of culture neglect and culture decay in the university. Continuity is affected by staff exodus due to various challenges and has been cited as a factor in this research.

#### **Lecturer support services**

Chakanyuka and Chiome's (2008) findings that lecturer support services were a missing link in distance education were collaborated in this research as exemplified by these views from the lecturers:

*'We need a lecturer support centre.'*

*'Provide enough resources for an open and distance lecturer.'*

*'Provide a one stop lecturer support centre and reap the results of quality.'*

The quotations above indicate that for lecturers, especially part time tutors, the cost of offering tutoring services should be shared with the institution. Such support as internet, research, typing, communication facilities and provision of computers and computer related facilities would boost the morale of lecturers and part time tutors. The views of Melton (2002) and Isman et al (2004) that an effective distance education programme must be supported by relevant materials appear to be confirmed by this research.

### ***Nurturing a research culture***

In universities, one key role of lecturers is to research and publish. It emerged that lecturers need to be nurtured on this critical role of the university so that they can research and publish distance education material, as shown in the statements below:

*'A university stands or falls on its research and publication'*

*'Organise tours that familiarise lecturers with places of publishing.'*

*'Promote a research culture.'*

Most universities demand that for lecturers to be promoted, they need to research and publish. When lecturers do not have access to computers and Internet facilities, they are inhibited in this respect. This observation appears valid considering that students and staff at the University of Otago (2006) are well supported by a wide range of academic, electronic, recreational, and welfare services in their quest to satisfy their clients. This therefore, should be the same with every service delivery institution, ZOU included. Besides Chakanyuka and Chiome (2008) found that without requisite information and communication technology resources, ZOU's Department of Education would be inhibited in its desire to develop into a department of excellence. Zhao (2002) also confirm that new research supervision arrangements to supplement the conventional ones must be established especially in open and distance learning. This may call for an overhaul of the process of research to respond to the dictates of open and distance education (McAdam and McCreedy 1999).

### ***Monitoring and assessing performance***

It emerged from this study that monitoring and assessment are key aspects of staff related factors

contributing to quality. Some supporting statements were:

*'Information critical to the shaping of policy and quality strategies can be collected through performance assessments.'*

*'The key to achieving quality lies in the link between results and the actual goings on, on the ground.'*

*'A built-in ongoing monitoring process must be put in place to ensure quality efforts are on track every time.'*

The finding on monitoring and assessment as cornerstones of quality appear to collaborate Carr and Harries(2001)'s ideas that the bottom line for all stakeholders involved in education is that collecting data on what is happening in the classroom-monitoring and assessing performance- comprises an essential part of the effort to achieve quality in education.

### ***Instituting knowledge management practices***

One common finding mentioned by the lecturers was that the emergence of the knowledge management concept has profound implications for transforming the quality of education and training in universities where knowledge business dominates. A focus on knowledge is helping many organisations improve their performance. Significant bottom line cost savings, faster time to market for new products and improved customer service are some of the benefits that are regularly reported as a result of knowledge management (Skyrme 2001). Knowledge management is concerned with the exploitation and development of the knowledge assets of an organisation with the view to furthering the organisation's knowledge (Rowley 2000:327). Supporting statements to that effect are:

*'Prioritise knowledge management in open and distance learning.'*

*'Promote achievement of quality and relevance through knowledge management in open and distance education.'*

*'ZOU must not sit idle when the winds of knowledge-based economy and society calls for a fundamental shift in the processes and objectives of distance education.'*

*'There is need to look after the intellectual asserts of the university.'*

Knowledge management has been confirmed as important in open and distance learning. Nelson, (2002) argues that while knowledge management has been widely employed within the parameters of the business world, it has profound implication for education and training in universities as well. McShane and Glinow (2000) also confirm that knowledge is replacing infrastructure as an important asset of an organisation. Hence the primary goal of an open and distance

learning institution is supposed to be the development of both lecturers and students as competent knowledge workers.

***Encourage best teaching practices that enhance the quality of teaching and learning***

Lecturers in this research felt that best teaching practices are important factors contributing to quality in open and distance learning. Some of the supporting statements were:

*'If you are teaching adults, then you need to be at your best.'*

*'Quality must start in the teaching and learning arena.'*

*'Consider the needs of adult learners.'*

*'Employ best practices in teaching.'*

Professional effectiveness and proficiency in the teaching arena were seen as important factors that contribute to quality. Best practices have been seen as crucial factors that can contribute to quality.

***Collaboration with other distance education universities***

The lecturers in this study were of the opinion that collaboration with other open and distance learning universities will enhance quality. They suggested that information sharing forum must be put in place in order to advance the need for mutual collaboration. The ideas of Koul and Kanwar (2006) that institutions must learn from each other by sharing and communicating best practices and benchmarks were supported in this research. Some substantiating statements are:

*'We need a forum for sharing knowledge with other open and distance learning institutions.'*

*'The idea of twinning faculties, departments and individuals must be pursued.'*

*'A forum for sharing and comparing notes with other open and distance learning universities must be established.'*

The need for information by lecturers in this study came at the backdrop of findings by Mukeredzi and Ndamba (2007) that communication between central and regional centres with tutors and students was unsatisfactory. The lecturers in this study want to go beyond their institution for increased contact and information sharing in support of lecturers.

***Adequate funding of quality initiatives involving lecturers***

Funding appeared to be a prominent issue in this study as lecturers felt that it contributes to quality in an open and distance learning context. Some supporting statements were:

*'World class payment for world class services,'*

*'Pay peanuts and attract monkeys.'*

*'Little funding for little quality'*

The funding aspect was also supported by (Belawati and Zuhahiri 2007) in a case of the Indonesia Open University they found out that quality could only be assured when there is adequate funding and commitment.

***Results based incentives***

Aligned to funding is the need for results based incentives. Staff in this study needed incentives that are aligned to results. Thus a result based appraisal system that will motivate them to meet particular targets and be rewarded for their efforts was preferred. The following expressions exemplify the lecturer perceptions:

*'My efforts must be recognised and rewarded at the same time.'*

*'There is a strong need for achievement, but must be accompanied by incentives.'*

*'You may institute a result based management approach for quality.'*

*'If you know you are going to get rewards for excelling, then you are motivated.'*

The need for quality is very much alive in the lecturers in this study. Nevertheless, they need to be rewarded for the effort. (Mukeredzi and Ndamba 2007; Nyota 2004) were also of the opinion that ZOU must pay a reasonable package that attracts competent staff members.

**VII. CONCLUSIONS**

The study found out that staff related factors contributing to quality include assembling the right team with the necessary competencies and adequate distance education orientation who share the vision for quality. There is need for adequate funding, collaboration with other distance education institutions, results based incentives, best practices in teaching and learning and continuous development of Open and Distance Education lecturers in the Zimbabwe Open University to keep abreast with world trends in open and distance learning.

Library, on-line services and teaching resources are core to the work of distance education lecturers. There was also need for information flow, knowledge sharing and knowledge management practices in the Zimbabwe Open University. Another important finding was that world class performance must be matched to world class remuneration.

Research and publication support is at its lowest ebb and can prove to be a stumbling block for quality in the Zimbabwe Open University. In addition, there is need

for monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the services currently offered by the Zimbabwe Open University measure up to the rigours of distance education.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study we make the following recommendations:

- There is need for a well-structured recruitment policy that sends a clear message of quality from the onset.
- More funds should be made available to provide on line services for distance education lecturers so that they network with their students and colleagues. This will ensure that as the university adopts advanced technology for pedagogical purposes, lecturers are up to date with such developments.
- There is need for the exploitation and development of the knowledge assets of the organisation with the view to furthering the organisation's objectives. Systems are required in the Zimbabwe Open University for the creation and maintenance of knowledge repositories, and to cultivate and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and organisational learning.
- An effective monitoring and assessment system must be put in place to enable information dissemination and knowledge sharing within each region, inter region and national centre and regions. Quality needs to be monitored and assessed against set performance indicators and time frames to ensure that all lecturers are not isolated in the regions.
- Research and publication support must be put in place to enable lecturers to survive in university education. Lecturers need computers and access to library resources and Internet facilities.
- There must be put in place systems for continuous improvement of the competencies of lecturers. Some universities have established learning centres where lecturers continuously receive training to keep them abreast with developments in technology and the skills required to manage the open and distance learning multimedia delivery modes.
- A quality improvement framework, which is more adaptable to individual contexts, must be developed as institutional policy and strategy for continuous improvement of ZOU staff.
- Further research could be done on the organisational factors contributing to quality and an appropriate quality framework for ZOU.

- There is also need to find factors that can contribute to staff retention in an open and distance learning institution.

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