

Towards Achieving Quality Distance Education, Challenges and Opportunities: The Case of the Zimbabwe Open University

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ABSTRACT In the knowledge based global economy of coming decades, quality distance education will be a cornerstone of broad based economic growth and social empowerment. Without strategies to improve the quality of education, Zimbabwe may not be able to take advantage of the technological developments. High quality education is the most important investment for making progress towards achieving the country's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for 2015. It is against this background that the current study set out to establish the major challenges faced by the Zimbabwe Open University in its effort to provide quality distance educational programmes to its learners. The qualitative study used employees of the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) based at its ten regional centers and the National Center members of staff. Cases were chosen from the Zimbabwe Open University staff, former students, and students-representative committee members. A total of ninety-six respondents were selected for the study. The study established that the lack of resources and quality management mechanisms at regional centers were among the major factors affecting the provision of quality education. The study recommended that among other issues there is need to provide for well coordinated capacity-building programmes for both ZOU leadership and staff on quality assurance, development and enhancement.