**Theme:** The Role of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Education for Sustainable Development

**Sub-Theme:** Capacity Building and Impact

**Topic:** Is there any prolific harvest from studying at a distance? The case of Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP) at BOCODOL.

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**Abstract**

This paper will explore how the programme, Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP) offered at BOCODOL has contributed to capacity development in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). The paper draws from recent experiences of the 2016 cohort, which comprised of both ODL practitioners and non-practitioners. The paper further evaluates and shares learners’ experiences as they navigated the MOODLE Portal and completed assignments for all the seven modules that comprise the CDEP programme. I have discussed learners’ views on the impact of this online programme through documentary analysis of their portfolio assignment, which required them to be reflective about what they have gained from the programme. In the portfolios the learners’ have reflected well on the impact of CDEP on their operations in their work/ODL environments and in general their capacity as distance education practitioners. The researcher also employed a qualitative approach through unstructured interviews of the learners, in order to corroborate some of the views stipulated in their portfolios.
1.0 Introduction/Background

Policy makers all over the world are committed to education by promoting alternative pathways that will widen the academic qualifications. BOCODOL has also shown its commitment by harnessing the potential of online learning in order to make it possible for the learners to overcome whatever barriers they encounter in accessing education. In 2012 with the inception of the CDEP programme, delivered only through the MOODLE Portal. BOCODOL had addressed the Information, Education and Communication Strategy (IEC) for ODL by Southern African Development Community (SADC) (2009).

By focusing on the SADC Protocol on Education and Training (2009:9) emphasis is that “The important roles of open and distance learning…are to improve access to education and training; work towards achieving universal literacy and numeracy; and reduce the cost of education and training by maximizing on the economies of scale offered by open and distance learning”. The IEC strategy (2009:10) also underscores that open and distance learning is one of the priority areas of the SADC Revised Regional Implementation Plan on Education and training. It aims at the improvement of the quality, delivery and effective placement of ODL in order to improve access to quality education and training. Moses (2013) in her unpublished paper presented at DEASA Conference 2013, reiterates that CDEP was started with the aim to bring together students from SADC member states to one E-Learning platform, the MOODLE so that technology is utilised effectively to enhance access to education.

2.0 The Related Literature Review

There are different ways of opening up access to education, and different researchers have discussed the experiences of integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) into the teaching and learning environment. Knightley (2007:265), discusses a survey that he carried out amongst Open University of United Kingdom adult learners. Where he points out the extent to which employing ICTs alleviates the barriers to accessing education by adult learners. Knightley’s study provides an
insight into the students’ experiences of studying online. This study highlights the motivations of the adult learners and the benefits that they have reaped from online learning. Knightley (2007:268) argues that “The appeal of online learning and E-learning for institutions and policy makers is that it frees learners from a rigid timetable of attendance at a College or other learning institution it enables self-paced learning and is purported to be more cost effective”. In my opinion, online learning through forum discussions and other different media like wassup, as was the case for the CDEP learners. Exposes the learners to an experience of an interactive learning environment that is devoid of intimidation, which is characteristic of the face-to-face tutorials.

In a different perspective, Bure (2006:1), explored the impact of ICTs on social changes. The study revealed how the uptake of ICTs impacted on the ‘homeless people’. Furthermore, it assessed “The implications and consequences of homeless peoples’ access, use and attribution of meanings of ICTs in relation to processes of social inclusion”. Bure also cites the different ways in which homeless individuals integrate ICTs into their lives. For instance, some access the internet to communicate through emails and chat rooms, others use it for entertainment purposes or as a source of information. The study data yielded the more use of mobile phones by homeless people than the internet. Bure (2006:4) emphasizes that “[c]ertainly not all homeless people are drug users, but for those who are, mobiles have been found to be useful tools for obtaining or dealing with drugs”. The study also revealed that utilization of mobile phones was also linked to committing crimes, for instant communication to either alert a partner about the impeding arrest or be used as a warning tool. This Digital inclusion by the homeless in a way guaranteed their social inclusion.
3.0 Problem statement
In contrast to learners studying in a conventional setting, open and distance learners mainly study in isolation and also have limited access to resources, such as libraries and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The enrolment history of CDEP since its inception at BOCODL in 2012 has never experienced a 100% completion rate. For example, the 2016 cohort at the beginning had 26 registered learners, but at the end of the minimum period of 12 months had only 16 (62%) who had managed to complete their studies. Is this programme achieving capacity development for its learners as was planned by BOCODOL?

4.0 Aims and Objectives
The following is the overarching question to clearly focus the problem investigated:

Is the CDEP programme effectively empowering the distance education practitioner?

The research questions:

a) What are the perceptions of the learners on the impact of CDEP at BOCODOL?

b) Is there evidence of development of career pathways from studying CDEP?

c) Are there any benefits that emerge from studying CDEP?
5.0 Research Methods
A qualitative approach was adopted for this study through a combination of documentary analysis and unstructured interviews. The document analysis made up the majority of this study, with the interviews serving in a supplementary capacity, and meant to corroborate data yielded by the documentary analysis of the participants’ portfolios. Qualitative analysis revealed a set of thematic issues that will be discussed in detail in the Findings and discussions section of this paper.

6.0 Findings and discussions
This study, with regard to all its areas of focus, has made a very significant contribution to the impact of the Certificate for Distance Education Practitioners (CDEP) on capacity development in the Distance Education field.

The qualitative data that was yielded from the documentary analysis of eight learners portfolio assignments has answered all the research questions stipulated in (Section 4.0) above. The participants have discussed the impact of this ODL programme in many different ways. These ranged from the impact of the programme by its nature of it according them flexibility in their studies. As it fitted well into their other commitments; the way in which they gained an insight on what learning by distance really meant. Some explicitly mentioned how they had always taken ODL for granted and as inferior to a conventional setting. This is what some learners had to say about distance education:
Distance learning is flexible as I am able to learn at any time. I am learning and at the same time working as a full-time lecturer. This has helped me to work when and where it is convenient for me without having to attend timetabled lessons.

It was months after enrolling into the CDEP program and by engaging in a reflective exercise that I started appreciating the unique qualities of ODL environment and that my previous experiences were not adequate for my current job. I began to appreciate that teaching in an ODL is demanding because it required me as an educator to be able to create a distance learning environment that mimics that of face to face student-teacher interaction, without distorting the ODL ethos.

Adults have a purpose for learning and so tend to be goal driven. I have since come to the realization that distance and adult learners enroll for school because there is a need to and sometimes they want to bridge a skills gap.

Other learners have pointed out how they have benefited more knowledge and are now grounded about the proponents of the Distance education field:

I feel confident to apply the skills and knowledge that I have learnt in this course “Certificate Course for Distance Education Practioners” at my work place. It has also improved the way I have been working especially when dealing with distance education learners.

The learners have also acknowledged experiencing development of career pathways from studying CDEP. This was attributed to the fact that they have gained improved management skills, equipped with skills and knowledge of selecting the best research methodology for an ODL setting.

I can do research. I can proudly produce a document worth interesting and I see myself being a Lecturer one day, teaching miners how a research is done.
One participant has emphasised that his studies have caused him to improve services to the adult learner having gained a better understanding on the qualities of a distance learner. “I have learnt to be patient and to inspire driver operators more, so that I understand better how they are and where they come from”.

This qualitative data from the CDEP portfolios have revealed the impact of this programme on the learners. All the participants have acknowledged how they have been effectively empowered as distance education practitioners.

The four learners that were interviewed shared the same sentiments as reflected in the portfolios. They also stated that the CDEP programme has adversely empowered them as distance education practitioners.

7.0 Conclusion
In the preceding sections of this paper, I have investigated the impact of the CDEP programme on the learners at BOCODOL. The findings have revealed the large extent to which the learners who participated in this study have acknowledged and appreciated their studies in the CDEP programme.

The driving force behind this study was to discover whether the CDEP programme is adequately achieving its aim of contributing to the capacity development of distance education practitioners. Since 2012 when CDEP was introduced at BOCODOL, the programme has never recorded a 100% completion rate. Therefore, there was need to evaluate the impact of the programme in the ODL space.

The data yielded a lot of appreciation from the participants, through their portfolios and the unstructured interviews. The CDEP programme has not only empowered the practitioners in their varied distance education environments. But it has also impacted on the other participants who were not even from an ODL setting. The programme has been an eye-opener to the participants on the proponents of ODL, with all its aspects but not limited to: characteristics of an adult leaner; quality instructional materials; financing and budget in distance education and research in distance education.
With regard to this research’s outcome, there is a prolific harvest from studying at a distance, and I can confidently advocate for the application of the participants perceptions depicted from this study’s data to the majority of the learners who have graduated from this programme at BOCODOL since 2012. This opinion is informed by the fact that the learners have been doing the same modules and all delivered online through the MOODLE portal.
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Bio – data

Dr Deborah Vimbwandu Sanoto, is one of the academic professionals at Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). She is a lecturer in the department of Teacher Education in the School of Education, coordinating programmes on Primary education. Her academic journey is traced back to her experiences as a teacher in secondary schools and a lecturer and Head of Department (English) at Tlokweng College of Education, Botswana.

At BOCODOL, Deborah has also been a Programme Development Co-ordinator for English and Moral Education, co-ordinating the production of the school equivalency materials on Junior Certificate and Botswana General Certificate on Secondary Education. She has taught English Language and Literature in English in Senior secondary schools and at tertiary level for thirty-one years to date. This without doubt, has certainly strengthened not only her linguistic and communication skills, but her editing and writing skills also.

Deborah is a writer too, who has published books, mainly academic, used in secondary schools. Two are currently included in the prescription list of Botswana Junior Secondary schools.
Abstract

Education has always been referred to as “a social and economic equalizer” perhaps because it can accelerate progress in people’s lives. Probably that could be the reason it has been placed at the centre of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and essential for the success of all SDGs. The realisation of the significant role education plays in our communities, nations, continents, and in the entire world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights education as a stand-alone goal (SDG 4). Kwame Nkrumah University, as one of the major providers of Open and Distance Learning education, therefore, stands a high chance of embracing and nurturing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This paper therefore addresses the question, “Is the ODL training translating into sustainable development for the beneficiaries and their environments?” The paper highlights the challenges and successes in capacity building in the areas of curriculum development, ICTs, Student support and Management. The research used the 5C Model as framework for evaluating Capacity building at Kwame Nkrumah University. Best practices on capacity building and strategies for building ODL practitioners’ capacity and interest in conducting research to inform practice have been highlighted in this study. The study concludes that there is enough room and a great opportunity for the institution to be ambitious and holistic in approach to matters of educational activities that can transform the lives of beneficiaries and their communities.

Keywords: Education for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Kwame Nkrumah, Challenges, successes, Capacity building, ODL.
1. Background

Education is the process of teaching, training and improving one’s taste…. (Chambers, 21st century dictionary. 1999:418). Every human being has the right to education, but sometimes, circumstances cannot allow for each and every learner to go for full-time learning because of space and other commitments. For instance serving teachers or the working class who need to upgrade their qualifications cannot leave their work unattended to because of every employee wishing to go for further studies on a full-time basis. In some situations, some employees are been threatened with dismissal(s) by their employers if they have to go for studies. They are asked to choose between their jobs and studies. Some employees are even asked to resign if they have to go for further studies. It becomes difficult for an employee to go for studies and acquire further knowledge which may benefit him or herself as an individual and also his or her community. Therefore, the role of Open and Distance Learning in Education for Sustainable Development is of great importance. If properly administered, Open and Distance Learning can play an important role in capacity building for sustainable development, can also accelerate progress in people’s lives and develop communities.
In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG4), education stands alone as a goal. Therefore, this paper looks at the question “Is the ODL training translating into sustainable development for beneficiaries and their environments?” However, we should not forget that the ODL training has its own challenges.

**Keys words:** Education for Sustainable Development, Capacity building, communities, ODL, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

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### 2. Literature review

Different scholars have carried out researches on the impact of capacity building in Open and Distance Learning for sustainable development.

Calvert (1986), suggests that Open and Distance Learning helps extend the market for education to Clientele who have not been previously served. He further observes that the problem of unsatisfied demand for education versus actual supply of educational services contributed to the acceptance, growth, and implementation of distance education programs in Nigeria as means to bridge the gap between demand and supply.

Ndunagu (2014), talks of the usefulness of the Open and Distance Learning system in meeting the Education For All (EFA) and to achieve this. He says there is need for capacity building of relevant manpower to effectively manage the ODL systems in order to achieve important goals.

Gulati (2008), states that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a mode of delivering tertiary education is relatively new in the west African sub-region and its purpose is to increase access to tertiary education in a situation worsened by an increasing population, limited places at conventional “brick and mortal” Universities coupled with a stagnant socio-economic.

The use of Open and Distance Learning for teacher education is therefore a crucial strategy when expansion or quality improvement is needed in the public education system. Distance education may play an increasingly important role during this decade in helping address the growing shortage of teachers, educational professionals. The advantage of distance is that it makes teacher preparation and professional development programs accessible to indigenous peoples and
others located in remote, rural arrears who do not have convenient access to higher education institutions (https://www.moij.com).

3. Problem statement

This study examines the impact of Capacity Building In Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development at Kwame Nkrumah University in Kabwe, Zambia.

4. Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this study are to examine how the impact of Capacity Building In Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development at Kwame Nkrumah University can be of great importance in developing individuals and how such growth can be translated into opportunities that can reshape and better individuals immediate lives and their communities and overall national development. Therefore, the question: Is the training translating into sustainable development for the beneficiaries and their environments?

5. Research design and methodology

No special tools were used to select students, lecturers, pupils and Head teachers alike. Participants were simply picked at random and interviewed since the researcher’s interest was only to hear the views of the participants. The study adopted a mixed methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods using a descriptive design. Unstructured interviews and questionnaires were used for data collection with a random sample of 90 out of 100 questionnaires which were given to participants.

6. Findings and discussions

A total of 90 participants responded and among them: 50 respondents were students (in-service teachers) and among these: 30 are still learning with Kwame Nkrumah University and 20 graduated from Kwame Nkrumah University and went back to their places of work (schools). 10 respondents were lecturers from Kwame Nkrumah University. 20 respondents were pupils from secondary schools around Kabwe where these students/teachers came from. And 10 respondents were Head teachers from Kabwe secondary schools where these students/teachers work.
The 50 students/teachers said that education is the key to human development and progress and Open and Distance Learning has helped in the development of capacity building for sustainable development. They also observed that Open and Distance Learning has a positive impact to the development of individuals and their committees.

The 30 students/teachers who are still learning with Nkrumah said that without disturbing their work (teaching) in their schools and leave their pupils unattended to, they are able to study with Nkrumah University through the ODL program. The 20 graduates (teachers) for them, through ODL, they managed to upgrade their qualifications without disturbing also their work. And their salary scale has been upgraded too. Their newly acquired knowledge is also been appreciated by their supervisors, pupils, and the community at large.

However, both the 30 and 20 respondents (students/teachers) mentioned a few challenges they encounter and encountered through ODL program like: struggle to access learning materials (modules), some lecturers never attended to them during their short period of residential school. They also complained about the registration procedures, poor feedback on their continuous assessment (assignments and tests).

The 10 lecturers also appreciated the ODL program as it is the response to high demand for higher education in Zambia and they observed that the future for ODL is indeed bright. Students are graduating in large numbers every year, therefore creating a high demand for admissions. However, looking at the input by the lecturers for this program to be more successful, they asked the University management to motivate lecturers so that the ODL program does not collapse.

The 20 pupils from schools around Kabwe also praised the ODL arrangement, saying that there are no disturbances in the school programs because their teachers are able to attend to them as well as upgrading their qualifications.

The 10 Head teachers said the ODL is a solution to so many challenges they used to face with a good number of teachers going for further studies on full-time basis and on study leave, paralyzing the running of schools by creating a shortage of manpower needed to attend to all pupils. They further said with ODL, teachers are able to upgrade their qualifications without going on study leave as this privilege was only for a few fortunate ones (teachers), leaving other teachers with lower qualifications because they could not all go on study leave.
References


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