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# CAUSES OF LOW STUDENT ENROLMENT AT THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY'S HARARE-CHITUNGWIZA REGION FOR THE PERIOD 2008-2013

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## ABSTRACT

The focus on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has given people an alternative to acquiring and developing skills in areas of their choice especially those related to their jobs. While its introduction was met with different responses, it could be noted that in some cases ODL has been viewed with scepticism and in others it has been received with excitement and hope. Such euphoria and hope has in some instances contributed to an increase in enrolment in higher institutions of higher learning that offer the ODL model. However, these high enrolments have not been sustained in the case of the Zimbabwe Open University, Harare-Chitungwiza Region. There has been a decline in enrolments over the past five years.

This study sought to identify the causes of low student enrolment at the Zimbabwe Open University's (ZOU) Harare- Chitungwiza Region was conducted. The study used the qualitative research methodology, guided by the grounded theory paradigm as it sought to answer the questions about 'why'. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires, interviews, participant observation and through the social medium. The data were collected from current students, inactive students and alumni. Data were analysed through open coding and axial coding. The study concluded that there was a causal relationship between student enrolments at the Zimbabwe Open University's Harare-Chitungwiza Region and a number of causal factors and conditions. The main causal factors were knowledge about ZOU and the Region, the ODL mode of delivery, the ZOU image, policy changes on payment of fees and negative media reports about ZOU. The study recommends strategies that would help improve the ZOU image.

Keywords: Enrolments, Open and Distance Learning, Causal conditions

## INTRODUCTION

The advent of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980 brought with it policy changes and reforms in many areas. In education such changes and reforms occurred in both lower and higher education. This was in keeping with two strictly related general guiding philosophies in education and development, that if a country were to be competitive in the knowledge economy it needs to take seriously expansion in higher education (Saint et.al., 2003), and

that a country that wants to be on trek to a successful knowledge economy needs to work on its ability to become a learning nation (Sharma, 2009). Zimbabwe became part of an ongoing global process that Rye (2009) calls the 'massification of higher education' especially in developing countries experiencing transition from the colonial elitist academic institutions that promoted bottle-neck education systems. In higher education, the bottle neck system which limited the number of students who were expected to enrol at university was abolished.

There was only one university in Zimbabwe at the time of independence, the University of Zimbabwe. With the expansion of the education system at both primary and secondary school, it was envisaged that relying on one university for the human resources development needs of Zimbabwe was not viable. The need for another university other than the University of Zimbabwe resulted in the establishment of the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo. However, this did not take care of the adult population that had already left formal school and were working. To cater for such a target group there was need to establish an Open and Distance University in Zimbabwe. The Centre for Distance Education was established in 1993 at the University of Zimbabwe, under the Faculty of Education. The centre offered degrees in education to teachers who had acquired certificates and diplomas in education. The first group of students was about 700. In 1996 the Centre for Distance Education was transformed to the University College of Distance Education and a variety of other degree programmes were introduced. This saw the enrolment increasing to about 3500. In 1999 the University College of Distance Education was further transformed to become the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). The Zimbabwe Open University was established by an Act of Parliament, The Zimbabwe Open University Act Chapter 25; 20, Number 12/98 (ZOU, University General Information and Regulations, 2007). It had the mission to empower people from different walks of life by developing their skills and full potential without disrupting their family and working life, through open and distance learning.

The Zimbabwe Open University became a fully fledged university in 1999, offering degree programmes in the fields of Science and technology, Business Management and Law, Humanities and Social Sciences and Health Sciences. Since the university now offered a variety of degree programmes, the student enrolment significantly increased to the extent that by 2007, the Zimbabwe Open University had become the biggest university in Zimbabwe in terms of student enrolment. For example in 2007 the total student enrolment at the Zimbabwe Open University was 19 676 against the country's total university student enrolment of 41 000 (http://www.sarau.org/?q=uni_Zimbabwe Open University). In that respect, by 2007 the Zimbabwe Open University accounted for about half of university enrolment in Zimbabwe's nine state universities.

This factor of student growth and other related factors in higher education had an impact on the higher education political playing ground whose effects are probably beginning to be felt at the ZOU currently. Green (1994) noted a number of factors influencing higher education especially in developing countries experiencing the massification of education that include the rapid expansion of student numbers against the backcloth of public expenditure worries and increasing competition within the educational 'market' for resources and students. Perraton (2007a), Gulati (2008) and Czerniewicz and Brown (2009) confirm that Green's observation painted a reasonably accurate picture of what ensues in the education 'market' once higher education is 'massified' as the nation is fast becoming a learning nation. This

study raises two strictly related questions: first, how did the rapid expansion of students at ZOU influence and, or, relate to public expenditure worries and second, to what extent did the rapid student enrolment at ZOU influence competition for resources and students in the education 'market'? This study insinuates that these two factors were probably primarily at play in the drop in student numbers at ZOU from 2008 to 2013. At the time of conducting this study the total student enrolment was just about 10 000, thus about half of what it was in 2007. The table below shows the student enrolment statistics from 2008 to semester 1, 2013 sourced at Harare/Chitungwiza Region.

**Table: 1**
**Harare-Chitungiza Region Student enrolment 2008-2013**

| Year | Semester 1 | Semester 2 | TOTAL |
|------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 2008 | 5771 | 3598 | 9369 |
| 2009 | 4223 | 2203 | 6426 |
| 2010 | 2246 | 2530 | 4776 |
| 2011 | 3117 | 3032 | 6149 |
| 2012 | 2911 | 2390 | 5301 |
| 2013 | 2328 | ------- | (2328) |

Source: ZOU Harare-Chitungwiza Region Data Base, 2013.

The second semester for 2013 is not included in the table as at the time of the study registration was in progress. In 2008, the total enrolment for the two semesters was 9369. The enrolment continued to decline from 2009 up to 2013. In 2009 student enrolment at Harare/Chitungwiza Region decreased by 31% when compared to the 2008 student enrolment. The 2010 student enrolment of 4776 represents a decrease of 49% and the 2011 enrolment of 6149 demonstrates a decrease of 34% when compared with the 2008 student enrolment. Similarly, the 2012 total enrolment of 5301 represents a decrease of about 43%. Whilst the 2013 enrolment figures are for the first semester only, it can be noted that they are far below the enrolment for semester 1, 2008. The enrolment for semester 1, 2013 represents a decrease in enrolment of about 60%, when compared with the enrolment for 2008, semester 1.

Similar drops in student enrolment in other institutions of Open and Distance learning (ODL) globally have been noticed. For instance, Numan, et. al. (2007:51) noted that, Bangladesh Open University (BOU), which like ZOU is the only university in Bangladesh that provides mass ODL, experienced increase in student enrolment in only four out of twenty of its programs while there was a rapid decline in student numbers in the rest of its programs. In its School of Education, on average there was a drop in student enrolment from 6000 in 1992-1993 (at its inception) to below 2000 in 2005. Numan, et.al. (2007:57) noted about five contributory factors to the decline in student numbers in the schools given as examples above. First, the delivery system to support students was not effective. Second, the programs were not necessarily on the job demand list. Third, there was no proper co-ordination between academic and administrative staff. Fourth, there were unnecessary delays in publishing the examination timetable and publication of results. Last, there is lack of motivational activities broadcast to reach distant viewers. Of interest to this study are the following questions: are these factors unique to BOU, or they also prevail at ZOU? What lessons can ZOU and any other ODL institution learn from these experiences at BOU? This

study investigates all five factors from the BOU experiences in a bid to explore the extent to which these factors influenced, and are influencing, student enrolment at ZOU.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Government of Zimbabwe has made a tremendous investment in the establishment of institutions of higher learning as a way of creating opportunities for all citizens who meet the basic entry requirements to advance their knowledge by acquiring knowledge and skills through different modes of learning that are convenient to them. That was the essence of establishing an Open & Distance Learning institution such as the Zimbabwe Open University. The responses to the degree programmes offered by ZOU have been positive as demonstrated by the enrolments figures of 2007.

The major problem is that from a high enrolment of about 20 000 students in 2007, the Zimbabwe Open University is now struggling to reach the 10 000 student enrolment figure. Similarly, student enrolment at ZOU Harare-Chitungwiza region had gone by almost half of what it was in 2008 by the end of 2012. The problem is therefore stated in question form: What are the factors that have influenced low enrolment levels at the Zimbabwe Open University, Harare-Chitungwiza Region?

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Despite phenomenal increases in student enrolments since its inception in 1999 from late 2008 onwards ZOU has experienced a decline in student enrolments. The purpose of the study is therefore to identify and analyze the factors contributing to the low student enrolment levels at the Zimbabwe Open University's Harare/Chitungwiza Region.

Objectives of the study:

- ➢ To identify the factors influencing low student enrolment levels at ZOU's Harare/Chitungwiza region.
- ➢ To code the factors into common analyzable units.
- ➢ To detect common and uncommon trends, correlations and relationships among the factors.
- ➢ To analyze the factors and their trends, correlations and relationships in a bid to arrive at recommendations for improving the student enrolment levels at ZOU.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Letseka and Maile (2008) made a number of observations about the high university drop-out rate in South Africa. They noted that of the 120 000 students who enrolled in South African universities in 2000, 30% dropped out in their first year, 20% dropped out in their second year and only 22% graduated within the specified three years for the Bachelors' degree programmes. They noted that the most affected students were from black families with low economic status. Some of the students noted that they had to drop out of college to augment their low financial resources, and that they felt stressed, which contributed to low performance in their studies.

On a similar note, Murdoch, the executive director for teaching and quality at Monash South Africa noted that the graduation rate at South Africa's 23 public universities ranged from 15 percent to 20 percent. Among the reasons identified for the low graduation rates were lack of funding to see them through their courses, lack of academic preparedness and lack of support from their universities, hunger and academics who were not adequately skilled to teach (Mtshali, 2013). In the case of South Africa, as noted above, the major causes of low enrolment and high drop-out rate in institutions of higher learning are very much related to the economic status of the parents or guardians responsible for the payment of fees. The Director-General of UNESCO Kouchiro Matsuura noted that whilst higher education enrolment in Africa had risen by 66% between 1999 and 2005, the average enrolment rate in Africa was still at 5% (http://www.universityworldnewa.com/article.php).

On a similar note, the Open University of Malaysia (OUM) was established in 2000 (Latif and Fadzil, 2007:1). It offers open and distance learning and it is the biggest ODL institution in Malaysia with a current enrolment of 51 319 students. Its mode of delivery in teaching and learning is very much similar to the ZOU mode. It includes the use of modules and other printed materials, face-to-face interaction at regional centres and online learning (Latif and Fadzil, 2007:2). Malaysia has expanded its operations to different regions within and to other countries. In the case of OUM, studies by Latif and Fadzil (2007:3) observed that student retention was an issue that had to be addressed through a coordinated effort. Such coordination included the academic staff and tutors working with the Centre for Student Management. Despite these efforts they found out that the attrition rate of 21.5 % was still high. The major factors attributed to this high attrition rate were poor time management by students, problems related to work, poor study skills and lack of quality support services.

Of particular interest to this study are two reports, the 2010 report and a 2012 report, from North Carolina University's Community College of Distance Education, about student enrolment figures in the years 2010 to 2012. Miller (2010) noted in the report that when distance education first became common around 1997 completion rates were around 50% but findings presented by F. Lokken, dean of Meadows Community Web College in April 2010 at the American Association of Community Colleges' annual convention showed that the percentage had gone up to 72% which was just 4% below that of conventional learning. From 2007 to 2008 student growth doubled from 11% to 22% and according to Miller (2010) major contributory factors were three: first, economic down turn; second, new enrolment efforts; third, students hunting for jobs were attracted to the flexibility associated with ODL.

However, in its 2012 enrolment report published in January 2013, the University of North Carolina noted a 10.4% decrease in the number of students enrolled in distance education for the semester in question while the annual decline was 26.2%. The report attributes this decline primarily to policy changes at North Carolina University. The ZOU has experienced a number of policy changes in terms of fee payments, registration deadlines and many policy changes to this effect. The critical question in this regard is what bearing have these changes had on the decline in student numbers?

The pieces of literature reviewed agree in principle that the rapid expansion of student numbers in universities has a bearing on public expenditure and this tends to increase competition within the educational 'market' for resources and students. This study is interested to explore whether or not the decline in student enrolment at ZOU's Harare

Region can be understood within this stated competition. Further, the pieces of literature agree that the delivery system to support students, suitable programs on the job demand list, proper co-ordination between academic and administrative staff, publishing of the examination timetable and results and motivational activities like broadcasting and, or, adverts in the print media to reach distant viewers or clients are very crucial factors that influence student growth in ODL institutions. This study explores these and other factors that came out of the data collection efforts during the study at ZOU's Harare/Chitungwiza region.

## METHODOLOGY

We opted for a Qualitative Methodology because of the nature of the subject and time allocated to do the research. We are cognisant of the various debates surrounding Quantitative and Qualitative methodologies respectively. For that reason we take it as prudent to do two strictly related things: first, we define what we mean by Qualitative methodology and second, we state the particular distinction between what we are referring to as Qualitative methodology and Quantitative methodology in this study.

By Qualitative Methodology we follow Strauss and Corbin (1990) who define it as any kind of research that does not produce findings or that does not make discovery through statistical procedures or any other means of quantification. Quantitative Methodology does the reverse. Quantitative Methodology makes discovery through statistical procedures and, or, any other means of quantification ( Aligia and Gunderson, 2000:3). This does not mean in our current research we did not have quantifiable data. We do have quantifiable data but ultimately when we draw meaning from the data we do not attach statistical significance to quantities of the variables selected for study.

The rationale for our option was two-fold. First, the time allocated to do the research meant that we could not distribute enough questionnaires to a desirable sample big enough to represent our target population of students whom we placed in four categories namely: prospective students, existing students, alumni and inactive students. While we refer to some statistics our sample is best described as non-statistical (See Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). We classified the research as high priority and therefore, there was need to make sense out of data gathered in a way that is reliable enough to inform and hopefully direct policy. A type of Qualitative Methodology referred to as grounded theory was chosen to help us arrive at a well-constructed grounded theory that meets for central criteria for judging the applicability of theory to the phenomenon of low student enrolment levels at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region.

The second reason why the methodology was chosen has to do with the nature of the subject of study and therefore, the type of material gathered. We set out to study whether or not a relationship existed between low student enrolment at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region and several variables which we discuss in detail below. In Quantitative Research numbers or quantities are important in so far as they prove the statistical significance of the variables and therefore their worth in terms of drawing meaning from them. We argue that this makes a lot of sense in research involving inanimate objects and that involves decisions about space, particularly where reality is imposing itself upon individual consciousness from without. A Quantitative survey design suits such a study because its basic aim is to tell us how many members of a population have a certain opinion or characteristic or how often

certain events occur together or are associated with each other (Oppenheim,1992). In such a study enumeration, accurate description and representativeness are key to any meaning that may be arrived at from the research. So, questions about 'how many' take centre stage in terms of drawing meaning from research.

However, where human beings are involved as part of the reality investigated, what is usually important is whether or not a relationship exists between the variables and the subject under investigation. The questions that take centre stage in this type of research are questions about 'why' so that the answers to those questions may guide policy soon enough before the associations of causality affects more human beings in the group or institution where they belong. Qualitative Research becomes suitable for this kind of study because it is less oriented towards representativeness and more towards finding associations and explanations, less towards descriptions and enumeration and more towards prediction (Oppenheim, 1992). Thus, it seeks more to answer questions about 'why' than questions about 'how many' even though usually the two types of questions may be related in that questions about 'how many' may often lead to questions about 'why'( Oppenheim, 1992).

Indeed, controversy surrounds how much interpretation of data there should be in Qualitative Research with three alternative positions coming to the fore. The first position is that data should not be analysed per se; rather the researcher must simply gather and present data as honestly as possible in a manner that the 'informants' or the 'observations' made by the researcher speak for themselves without undue influence from the researcher (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:21). Apart from a problem that the informants' views about reality may not represent the 'truth' about what there is, this position fails to recognize the fact that there is no data collection and there is no data presentation without redaction. The researcher chooses what data to collect and chooses the appropriate manner to present this. Those choices are made in the light of the researcher's editorial interests. This process in itself is interpretation. The same weakness goes for the second position that advocates for just an accurate description in the 'analysis' and 'presentation' of findings (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:21). The position recognises that not all the data on a subject can be presented, so the principle is to present an accurate description of what is being studied. Again there is redaction and therefore, interpretation in reducing and ordering data.
In any case, what is the purpose of research if it is not to interpret findings in a way that brings reality to light?

In this study we agree with the third position that is primarily concerned with building a tightly woven explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents and the conviction behind this position is that the development of theoretically informed interpretations is the most powerful way to bring reality to light (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:22). It is precisely for this reason that we opted for grounded theory to build a well-constructed grounded theory inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon or group of phenomena that it represents. The methodology here does not begin with theory and then prove it but rather begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area of study is then allowed to emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:23).

Data were collected systematically through questionnaires, structured interviews, participant observation (members who are little known or not known at all by the students stood and talked casually with students in queues as they collected their results or application forms or as they made inquiries of whatever nature) and 167 inactive students

were contacted through whatsapp and out of 167, 104 responded (a 62% response). Questionnaires were administered personally through clerks and some were posted on the ZOU website. We also collected data through studying relevant policy documents like regional and national administrative and academic regulations.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Data Analysis Methods

Once data were collected they were then analysed and interpreted. The analysis and interpretation comprised the processes of coding data, discovering, developing and provisionally verifying our theory. The study utilized a combination of open and axial coding respectively. We are cognisant of the fact that in grounded theory selective coding helps the study to reach a desired level of conceptualisation and abstraction. For our purposes here the former two types of coding suffice.

Open coding is a process of analysing data where happenings, events and other instances of phenomena are given conceptual labels, compared against one another in a bid to see whether or not they pertain to a similar phenomenon and ultimately then classified into categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:61). The categories are further conceptualised in terms of their properties. Properties are attributes or characteristics pertaining to a category (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:61). Once the properties of a category are identified each property is then located within a continuum in a process referred to as dimensionalizing; that is, breaking down the property into its dimensions (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:61). The properties and dimensions were noted down in the form of code notes.

Axial coding is a process of making connections between categories through an analysis of the causal conditions and, or, context of the events, happenings or instances of phenomena under study as well as the perceived consequences and interactional strategies in the given dimensional range (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:96).
Selective coding involves analysing the code notes and comparisons of categories to come up with a story. A story is a descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon of the study (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:116).

The story is then conceptualized into a story line and the story line becomes the core category; that is, the central phenomenon around which all other categories are integrated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:116).

Indeed, throughout the three steps to ensured theoretical sensitivity stated by Strauss and Corbin above were taken to give the study the desired rigour.

### Results from Open Coding
### Concepts
From the data gathered we came up with the following conceptual labels:

> - Knowledge about ZOU
> - Knowledge about ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region
> - ODL as a mode of delivery
> - Teaching and Learning at ZOU
> - Teaching and Learning at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region

> ➢ **Learner support at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region**
> ➢ **ZOU image**
> ➢ **The image of ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region**

**Conceptual Properties:**
*Properties of concepts 1 and 2*
**Properties of this conceptual label were derived from ways either a prospective or existing student or alumni got to know about ZOU in general and ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region in particular:**

> ➢ **Print media**
> ➢ **Non-print media**
> ➢ **Other media**
> ➢ **ZOU website(s)**
> ➢ **Friends**
> ➢ **ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region Alumni**
> ➢ **Grape vine**

*Properties of concept 3*
> ➢ **Convenience**
> ➢ **Fashionable programs**
> ➢ **Ready modules**
> ➢ **reliability**
> ➢ **Accessibility**
> ➢ **Efficiency**
> ➢ **Affordability**

*Properties of concepts 4, 5 and 6*
> ➢ **Fees**
> ➢ **Degree programs**
> ➢ **Tutors**
> ➢ **Tutorial venues**
> ➢ **Tutorial contact hours**
> ➢ **Modules**
> ➢ **Assignments**
> ➢ **Library**
> ➢ **ICT**
> ➢ **Practical subjects**
> ➢ **Remediation**
> ➢ **Other student experiences at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza region**

*Properties of concepts 7 and 8*
> ➢ **Identity**
> ➢ **Print media reports**
> ➢ **ZIMCHE**
> ➢ **Stereotype**
> ➢ **Marketing**
> ➢ **Internal systems**

**Categorising Properties**

It may be noted that in the process of identifying properties we already categorised them under related conceptual labels.

*Property Dimensionalizing*

*Dimensionalizing Knowledge about ZOU and Harare-Chitungwiza Region*

- ➢ **Print media – interest here was on several dimensions that came up from the data namely the print media ZOU popularly publishes its adverts as compared to others, frequency of adverts and types of adverts. The trends were that ZOU normally uses the Sunday Mail and calls to use other newspapers especially private newspapers. The use of the print media is not that frequent and ZOU usually uses the print media to advertise such events like conferences and start of semesters and almost rarely publishes names of students who would have been accepted. Respondents favoured putting up names of students who would have been given places to study with ZOU.**

- ➢ **Non-print media – whether or not ZOU uses non-print media like the radio and TV, types of programs and impact. ZOU rarely uses these types of media. Respondents favoured using radio and TV shows to boost ZOU image.**

- ➢ **Other media – ZOU uses other social media like face-book and twitter and officially does not use whatsapp. Its members of staff have phone allowance and frequently use sms and voice calls from their cell phones. Respondents commended communication through sms and voice calls especially as they are informed about registration, tutorials and examinations. An interesting dimension was that while this works well for existing students it remains almost private communication which does not help to make ZOU's presence felt by the general public.**

- ➢ **ZOU website(s) –several dimensions were looked at including new versus returning visits, Browser and observer status, frequency and recency, engagement (time taken on the site) overview of devices used and location. The statistics are given in the attachments. Interesting properties include visits to the site that reach 48 000 and above with 13 670 viewers having visited the site during the period of study; broad range of viewers from countries like Zimbabwe (10 541), South Africa (643), Botswana (503), USA (418), Japan (219) and UK (196); Harare-Chitungwiza students who visited the site to check results and therefore had access to the questionnaire were about 1 100; engagement 7 172 had an engagement of 0-10 seconds and 364 (11-30 seconds), 572 (31-60 seconds) 1 433 (61-180 seconds) and 2 158 (181-600 seconds); browser and operating system data shows that 3 591 of the viewers used either desktops or laptops.**

- ➢ **Friends–The percentage of respondents who got to know ZOU was surprisingly significant, 31%, and therefore, it was inevitable to dimensionalize this property even though it was very difficult for lack of specificity. The study discovered that the respondents did not specify what type of friends these were but from some responses it would seem these were friends at work places and in our analysis we took work places as the context of this property. It was not even clear whether or not these friends were ZOU's Harare region alumni because the property, former students, scoring a surprisingly low 4% and those that were not specific 8%. An interesting dimension in this regard was whether or not former students belonging to a**

particular early period were advertising ZOU and why. Could be that the 31% are actually existing students?

➢ **ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region Alumni** – dimensions identified and studied in this regard include current employment whether Government, Private, NGO, self or not employed, challenges faced while studying with ZOU and therefore what they thought were possible push-away factors for existing and prospective students; major attractions and other experiences related to student enrolment.

➢ **Grape vine** – this property was considered because it featured in 3% of the responses and logically from this sudden appearance and very low score it was difficult to dimensionalize. However, the study considered it a very important property because what happens in the grape vine may build or destroy an institution. Important dimensions would be the specific circumstances and sources of the grape vine because these determine how juicy and therefore attractive the grape may be.

### *Dimensionalizing Properties of concept 3*

➢ **Convenience** - the study looked at this property in terms of dimensions that also apply to accessibility, namely flexibility in terms of studying while the student earns and anywhere at any time, weekend tutorials and managing one's own time in one's home or work environment.

➢ **Fashionable programs** – when we got to analyse dimensions of this property focus shifted a bit to include on-the-job training in that most respondents studying with ZOU are furthering their education in areas where they are already employed and as such their studies become equivalent to on-the-job training or further sharpening of skills. The dimension that is strictly related to this property is the participation of already employed practitioners in module writing and content review thereby blending academic and professional experience in the modules making the programs fashionable.

➢ **Ready modules**-the study looked at what point modules are availed, their quality and their relationship with other properties like adequacy in addressing students' challenges in assignments and examinations.

➢ **Reliability**-dimensions in this regard were analysed together with those that relate to efficiency and these included how well established is the mode of delivery in ensuring coverage of desired knowledge, the modules and tutorial contact hours.

➢ **Accessibility**-This has already been covered above.

➢ **Efficiency**-This has already been discussed above.

➢ **Affordability**-the fee structure as a dimension was considered elsewhere under a different conceptual label. Here the dimension considered included sponsoring self because one is already employed, the possibility to pay in self-determined staggered payment scheme, paying half the fees and getting modules and assignments as a result and finally, deferring and, or, postponing studies within a study period of 8 years and the related consequence of allowing students to study only when they can afford and finally, affordability relative to other responsibilities as family people.

*Dimensionalizing Properties of concepts 4, 5 and 6*

- Fees-whether or not they are high, comparison with other institutions of higher learning offering the same programs as ZOU, the availability or lack of terms of payment, direct deductions from one's source of income, availability or lack of ZOU scholarships (full or part).
- Degree programs – quality, variety, relevance and, or market oriented, new and exciting, impartation of survival skills and fecundity to breed employers and not employees.
- Tutors – assistance from tutors, presence and punctuality at tutorials, depth of knowledge, allows and encouraging student participation, accessibility and professional handling of student queries.
- Tutorial venues – distance from town and general dimensions of accessibility, appropriateness, size of rooms and distance from shops.
- Tutorial contact hours – adequacy, frequency in terms of tutorial contact and how much must be covered.
- Assignments-relevance and relationship to modules, clarity in terms of task, marking, adequate, useful and fair comments, timeous return.
- Examinations-administration of exams, publication of time-tables, venues, invigilation, level of difficulty of examination questions, processing of results in terms of duration and publishing of results in terms of efficiency and accuracy.
- Library-distance from region and public transport picking and dropping zones, availability of up-to-date books and other relevant library (especially online) resources, assistance from librarians and opening times and days.
- ICT–assistance from lab technician, time to use the lab, distance from student's place of employment or home and how this affects frequency of visits and engagement, availability of modern gadgets, breadth and depth in terms of coverage and variety of internet uses, bandwidth and speed of internet and variety of service providers.
- Remediation-availability of counsellors/academic advisors, quality of solutions offered, availability of trekking mechanisms for drop-outs (real or potential) and tracer studies for alumni and record of lessons learnt from them, mechanisms of according students opportunities to raise complaints.
- Other student experiences at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza region—with this property, it was difficult to come up with specific dimensions because it was necessitated by responses that were not easily grouped under the conceptual category in question but all the same important to teaching and learning at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza region. For example, a dimension concerning practical subjects came up from the data in terms of introduction and feasibility of teaching these in an ODL set-up, as well as rate of attraction and marketability. Judging from the peak of visits on the ZOU website, most visits were during the period when examination results had been published and so, students responded to our questionnaire that we published on the web while checking results. The consequence of this was that some dimensions came out of anger and, or, frustration with what they saw. During this period too at Harare- Chitungwiza region there was an unfortunate incident where student results were withheld subject to confirmation of payment and during the first two days long queues could be seen at accounts office.

*Dimensionalizing Properties of concepts 7 and 8*

- **Identity-distinctive features of ZOU and ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza region, mission and goals, point of departure from other institutions of higher learning, unique programs.**
- **Print media reports-what print media has been and are saying about ZOU, effect on ZOU image, responses to media reports and impact.**
- **Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE) – This property was necessitated by the specific circumstances of suspended programs so the dimensions looked at were specifically the impact of the suspension, communication and interpretation of the suspension by stakeholders, ZOU reaction to the suspension and remedial action taken.**
- **Stereotype-this property is related to the above three properties and therefore dimensions identified under the above three properties were deemed applicable to it. However, a slightly different dimension was the long standing uninformed attitudes towards ZOU coming from people who just look at any unfamiliar thing to them with suspicion and their suspicion is spread until it generates stereotypical views about the unfamiliar thing; along these lines the study looked at treatment of stereotypical views or lack of it.**
- **Marketing-the dimension looked at was the availability of marketing strategy or the lack of it, to counter all the above, resources poured into marketing by the region and frequency of marketing tours.**
- **Internal systems-dimension like protocol and how it either promotes or impedes positive development, bureaucracy and how it frustrates students in their search for service at the region, efficiency on the part of processes and office bearers in service delivery.**

## Data Analysis Based on Axial Coding

At this stage of axial coding the data above were regrouped in new ways and categories and sub-categories were linked in a set of relationships denoting causality and a resultant phenomenon, the context of that causal relationship as well as intervening conditions, action and perceived consequences or interactional strategies to form a paradigm that allowed us to think through the data systematically.

## The Central Idea Coming from the Data (Phenomenon)

From our axial coding we observed that all our data referred to student enrolment at Harare-Chitungwiza region. In our coding this became the phenomenon, which according to Strauss and Corbin (1990:100) is the central idea about which a set of actions/interactions is directed at managing. It was observed that student enrolment stood at a causal relationship with the following concepts and their related dimensions:

- **Knowledge about ZOU; Knowledge about ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region**
- **ODL as a mode of delivery**
- **Teaching and Learning at ZOU; Teaching and Learning at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region**
- **Learner support at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region**
- **ZOU image at large and the image of ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region.**

### Context of the Phenomenon

The dimensions mentioned above were taken in their totality to represent the context of the identified phenomenon and context according to Strauss and Corbin (1990:101) refers to a specific set of properties that pertain to the phenomenon.

### Intervening Conditions

These are part of the paradigm that denote broad and general conditions with a bearing on action taken or interactional strategies and these include time, space, marital status, economic status, career, gender, culture and history (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:103).

These we obtained from section A of our questionnaires. The data gathered from that section were analysed in the context of the paradigm formulated through axial coding to see what bearing specific properties in this section had on the phenomenon. For example, marital status gave us an indication of the challenges in time management on the part of the student.

### Action/Interactional Strategies

It is precisely because of the goal of this stage of axial coding that we particularly chose grounded theory as our methodology. This study aims at coming up with appropriate action/interactional strategies directed at managing the phenomenon of student enrolment at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza region. This stage and the following stage in the research are thus crucial because it is at these two stages that we begin this important exercise. For this reason we go through this stage in some depth.

This stage of the research was carried out in a bid to fulfil four properties about our phenomenon mentioned above. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:104) action or interaction is processual and evolving in nature. By this they imply that it can be studied in sequences, movement or change over time. Second, it is purposeful. By being purposeful Strauss and Corbin mean action is done to fulfil an identified goal and the goal is either to respond in some way to, or to manage, a phenomenon. Therefore third, whenever action or interaction occurs, it does so through strategies and tactics.

## CONSEQUENCES, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the paradigm discussed above of verifying statements against the data, the study arrived at the consequences below that are forming the basis of our conclusion here. The study concluded that student enrolment at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region stood at a causal relationship with knowledge about ZOU and about the Region, ODL as a mode of delivery, teaching and learning at ZOU's Harare-Chitungwiza Region and ZOU image at large. Also, policy changes and co-ordination between administration and academic staff had a bearing on the student growth. Another factor that surfaced but could not be verified empirically as we could not interview authorities outside ZOU were the alleged negative use of ZIMCHE and the media by some members who were leaders of some universities competing with ZOU for public resources and students. However, the study showed that either way, improvement of ZOU internal structures discussed above would counter any negative manipulation of both ZIMCHE and the media. As such the study makes the following recommendations:

- The Region needs to mobilize funds to advertise its programs in the state and private media including publishing names of students admitted for various programs.
- The Region needs to come up with a specific strategy for alumni to advertise ZOU and the Region.
- The website needs to be utilized broadly and deeply to include regular highlights of regional activities in the form of a bulletin; changes in policies and advantages of those changes to the students and any data regarding ODL.
- The Region needs to double efforts to purchase a centre of its own to have control on tutorial venues, house own library and ICT onsite.
- The Region needs to join arms with marketing to target even high school graduates and learn from the Malaysia Open University model of face-to-face interaction at regional centre in a bid to increase tutorial contact hours.
- The region needs to come up with student-friendly fee payment plan including direct debit from student salaries and, or, bank accounts.
- The region needs to align changes in the academic calendar from registry with tutorial dates and where there have been delays in registration both parties work out a plan to accommodate the delay.
- More up-to date books and library resources to this effect be purchased especially in programs that were introduced later.
- The region needs to process results efficiently and timorously and produce transcripts as soon as students finish their degree programs and pass.
- There is need to work on building our public image through efficiency in our systems and offering quality service. The region needs to encourage and cooperate with ongoing institutional efforts at seeking ISO certification and ZIMCHE performance standards from time to time.

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