

**FACTORS THAT AFFECT STUDENTS' PROGRESS AND THE COMPLETION RATE IN THE RESEARCH
PROJECT: A CASE STUDY OF RESEARCH STUDENTS AND THEIR SUPERVISORS AT THE ZIMBABWE
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

The question of why some distance education students in the Department of Education at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) successfully complete their studies while others do not is becoming increasingly important as distance education moves from a marginal to an integral role in the provision of higher education. In order to unravel this issue and initiate some academic debate, the Department of Education at the ZOU mounted a national survey between June 2008 and July 2010 aimed at ascertaining the reasons for low completion rate among research students studying for the Bachelor of Education in Educational Management (B.Ed.-Educational Management). A survey of 100 research students was undertaken. Respondents were asked to identify and explain institutional and student-related factors that affected their progress and success in research projects. Major factors found to impact negatively on students' progress included financial problems, lack of books and journals, poor communication and poor supervision by some tutors. Personal and domestic factors found to impact negatively on students' success included the following: financial problems, distance between the student and the Regional Centre and lack of technology. The present study recommended that ZOU needs to decentralize its operations to district centres so as to reduce distance between students and supervisors. Project Supervisors need thorough training for them to effectively assist students to throughout the project. The Library should offer inter-net facilities, relevant and recent book and journals.

Key words: Open University, distance education, Zimbabwe