

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES IN AN ODL INSTITUTION: A CASE FOR THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Several studies done elsewhere have indicated and concluded that a gap really exists between the quality of graduates produced and what the market demands (Mpairwe, 2010). For this and other reasons, training institutions and employers have accepted the need to seek mitigatory steps to bridge the gap. Among other steps, institutions of learning have introduced internship programmes also referred to as field attachment in some of their degree and non-degree programmes. There has also been the realisation that imparting the relevant practical skills is a partnership between the training institution and the prospective employers through student internships. However, despite these positive intentions, interns on field attachment have faced serious challenges among which are insufficient time and lack of funding for the programmes. It is behind this background that the present study sought to establish the benefits and challenges faced by student interns at the Zimbabwe Open University. The study focussed on two of the university's faculties: the Faculty of Science and technology and that of Applied Social Sciences. Most of the students on internship were from these faculties. Being quantitative in nature, the study employed the use of the questionnaire to solicit data from the 50 respondents chosen through convenience sampling. Results showed that the majority of the students preferred the attachment programme because it exposed them to the real expectations of the world of work. However, a number of challenges militated against the effectiveness of the programmes. Challenges include some fulltime employees being reluctant to disclose important information to students. A number of supervisors are too busy to provide effective supervision. Current duration of attachment is not sufficient for all the disciplines. Moreover, some employees regard interns as a threat to their position and in some cases some supervisors possess inferior qualifications than the student interns.

Key words: Challenges, Internship programmes, Open and Distance learning.